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LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL: SUPPLEMENT

LTJ seeks to encourage and challenge its readers — chiefly the pastors, teachers and lay members of the LCANZ, and the teaching staff and students of theological colleges in Australia and overseas — by keeping them abreast of recent developments in the primary areas of biblical, theological, historical, educational and pastoral studies. It also provides a forum for students of theology to publish the fruits of their research.

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A rhombicosidodecahedron is a solid with 62 faces, 60 corners and 120 edges. Schools and early childhood services (ECSs) are also shaped by many faces, points of intersection and paths of connection but what makes Lutheran schools/ECSs solid is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This supplement explores eight of the many facets of Lutheran education and how Lutheran theology informs all dimensions of what a school/ECS is and does. These are not position or policy papers but instead provide an opportunity to investigate an angle of one element of life in the school/ECS context. The range of papers highlight the complexity of school and ECS life.

The authors come from the national and regional Lutheran education offices, schools and ALC and we are very appreciative of their time, effort and expertise in writing these papers. Behind the scene was also the collaborative effort of reviewers. While the *LTJ* is not a peer-reviewed journal, in this case we used an informal peer review process to provide constructive feedback for authors and bring the insights of reviewers into the article writing process. Thank you to the following reviewers: Andrew Dewhirst, Adam Yeager, Anne Dohnt, Anthony Dyer, Athalie McArdle, Corinne Salmon, Daniel Hausler, Derek Bartels, Dianne Eckermann, James Winderlich, Jane Mueller, Kaye Mathwin-Cox, Kimberley Pfeiffer, Kimberley Powell, Kylie Duyzer, Nick Schwarz, Stephen Pietsch, Sue Kupke, Thomas Böhmert, Thomas Pietsch, Tim Kotzur. Thank you also to the *LTJ* editorial team for this opportunity.

The reality is that fees keep schools open, parents shop around for schools and schools compete in the enrolment marketplace. In the first article Andrew Jaensch has us thinking about the challenges and opportunities for Lutheran schools seeking to be faithful to the theology of the cross within the education marketplace. The final paper brings another management consideration into focus—managing underperforming staff. This paper follows on from Shane Paterson's EdD thesis on this topic which showed that principals apply their understanding of Lutheran theology so that their strong sense of responsibility to the school is coupled with a desire to care for and support a teacher through the process of addressing underperformance.

Curriculum and pedagogy are the foci of two papers. Lutherans' theologically informed anthropology aligns with student agency as explained by Anna Nürnberger. Science educators may be interested in the Lutheran Education Australia paper about how a shared receptive spirit underlies science and theology as both disciplines seek truth.

Lutheran schools and ECSs are communities that recognise that God has intentionally created each person and that each person is uniquely gifted to live in relationship with God and others. They educate and care for all students and each child is accepted and supported according to their particular needs. Parents of children with complex needs may choose a Christian school for many reasons and Kerrin Huth's paper explores the opportunities and tensions this may bring. Dianne Eckermann and Stephen Haar's papers look at how students experience their gender identity or sexuality in the context of the

school community. Many factors may affect students' wellbeing and Tim Jarick has shared the insights and experiences of one school's journey with positive psychology and the explicit articulation of the intersection with Lutheran theology. The overriding theme of this group of papers is summed up by Huth, 'Above all, when we value the richness each individual brings to our community and love them as God loves them, we live out our theology in action.'

I hope that these papers provide a launch pad for discussion and debate within school and ECS communities and that dialogue informs local practice and decision making. Theology is what we do so that love and learning come to life through the schools and early childhood services of the LCA/NZ.

Lisa Schmidt
Guest Editor, and Executive Director Lutheran Education Australia

Nice Lutheran schools? Glory or cross in the education marketplace

Andrew Jaensch

Brooklyn (US) public school, I.S. 293 (now known as the Boerum Hill School for International Studies) is a confronting example from the 1960s of how commendable educational aspirations can fail. The *New York Times* podcast series *Nice white parents* reflects on the history of a single building with a succession of names over its years and with a series of educational institutions within its walls over that time.[1] Yet I.S. 293 is a school in which much the same story has played out again and again.

The podcast traces the efforts of a group of idealistic white parents to promote racial integration in a proposed local public school. Towards the end of Episode 1 we are whisked out of the humble school in an economically disadvantaged and racially diverse area into a swish gala in Upper Manhattan. Few of the guests have any attachment to I.S. 293. Most have been invited because they are wealthy, potential supporters of a new dual-language French program attached to the school, promoted as something of value to the whole student body. The program ends up being all but irrelevant for those in the school who need the most support. The idealistic push for racial integration in I.S. 293 by 'nice white parents' had somehow taken a turn to a quite different destination. Many had previously lobbied their Board of Education through a letter campaign declaring they did not want their children to be part of some 'small, white, middle-income clique.' They wanted the proposed new school in their neighbourhood to be racially integrated. Of those writers, none ended up enrolling children in I.S. 293.

Nice white parents offers sobering insights about a range of issues: public vs private education, the disproportionate influence of powerful parent groups on educational priorities, the question of who really knows what is best for different minority and racial groups, and the real versus imagined value of racial integration for learning. What piqued this writer's interest most, though, was how fundamental and honourable educational intentions can be left unrealised, and how that story of I.S. 293 can be easily replicated in Lutheran schools when it comes to honourable intentions about faithfulness to their Lutheran identity. When these schools find themselves competing with other school systems in the marketplace of education, it takes more than good intentions to resist the temptation to put aside core beliefs in order to appeal to the marketplace.

The particular core belief in mind here is the theology of the cross. What follows is first an explanation of the nature of the theology of the cross and why it matters, and then a consideration of the challenges and opportunities for Lutheran schools seeking to be faithful to that theology within the education marketplace.

1 Serial Productions, a New York Times Company, *Nice white parents*, podcast (July–August 2020), accessed 2 March 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/01/22/podcasts/nice-white-parents-podcast.html.

The theology of the cross and why it matters

It was at the Heidelberg Disputation in April 1518 that Martin Luther first publicly presented his theology of the cross. This was only a short time after publication of Luther's *95 Theses* in October 1517. It is this earlier event which is most commonly regarded as the starting point of the Lutheran Reformation, but the theology Luther outlined at Heidelberg was much more ground-breaking than what was in the *95 Theses,* such that it '...astounded its hearers in 1518 and has not ceased shaking the world's foundations since'.[2]

So what is Luther's theology of the cross? The theology of the cross is not exclusive to Luther and Lutheran theology, but for the sake of both clarity and brevity Luther's foundational explication of it is what this article is working with.

It is crucial to recognise first of all that the theology of the cross is paradoxical to the core, not something one can make logical sense of. St Paul (1 Cor 1) declares the cross to be both offensive to human thinking and also his only possible message and focus. Bartsch describes it as 'a distinctive way of understanding theology; it provides a lens or filter through which all theology is viewed'.[3] It is not simply the cross (or crucifix), though crosses and crucifixes point us to it. It is not the theology of the atonement (Christ died to pay the penalty for human sin), though it is certainly linked to that. For the purpose of this article, it will suffice to think of Luther's theology of the cross as a way of seeing how God works, recognising that the way God works is not what humans naturally expect, and finally recognising that how God works is of the utmost importance for being fully human. That is why Theses 19 and 20 (of the 28) from the Heidelberg Disputation can be regarded as expressing the crux of this theology and so they are quoted in full here, and it is on these that we will focus our attention:

> (19) That person is not worthy to be called a theologian who thinks the invisible things of God are observable from events which have actually happened (Rom 1:20; 1 Cor 1:21–25).
>
> (20) Conversely, a person is worthy of being called a theologian who understands the visible and ordered things of God after fixing his sight on the passion and cross of Christ.[4]

By 'events which have actually happened' (Thesis 19) Luther is referring to 'earthly stuff'.[5] What Luther means is that if we think we can grasp who God is and how God works by observing 'earthly stuff', we will end up with a god of our own fabrication. To illustrate, by studying microbes through a microscope lens, people can draw some preliminary and potentially valid conclusions about the possibility of an astonishingly clever creator god; but if we shift our microscopic attention to the Covid-19 virus, for example, we could

2 Caleb Keith and Kelsi Klembara, eds., *Theology of the Cross: Luther's Heidelberg Disputation and Reflections on Its 28 Theses,* transl. Caleb Keith (Irvine, CA: 1517 Publishing, 2018), 1.

3 Malcolm Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts: Theology for Teachers in Lutheran Schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), 119.

4 Keith and Klembara, *Theology of the Cross*, 19–20.

5 Keith and Klembara, *Theology of the Cross*, 6.

find ourselves drawn to the conclusion that this same god has either lost control of the natural world, or is detached from it, or is even malicious. Luther instead would counsel the microscope users to first learn to grasp who God is and how God works by fixing 'their sight on the passion and cross of Christ' (Thesis 20). Then they will be better able to understand 'the visible and ordered things of God' which make up the world in which we live. This example alludes to the core role of schools in supporting learners in their exploring of all aspects of the world through science, the arts, literature and everything else.

The visible world includes humans. It was stated above that recognising that how God works is of the utmost importance for being fully human. That is because to see ourselves through the cross is to recognise ourselves honestly as sinners who need God to reach out to us through Christ and the cross. This is to see ourselves as we really are, and to leave us open to the gospel declaration that through Christ we are 'made whole'. This points to the role of all education and schools in supporting learners in their exploration of what it means to be human and to belong to society as well as the natural world. But more about educational implications in the next section of the article.

This brings us to the matter of theologies of glory, referred to in Thesis 21 where Luther states that 'A theologian of glory says that evil is good and that good is evil. A theologian of the cross says that a thing is what it is.' The theology of the cross and the theology of glory 'are not complementary theologies which we must keep in proper balance and tension. They are, rather, mutually-exclusive, opposing, antithetical theologies'.[6] Bartsch comments that 'Theology of glory finds difficult the idea of suffering and weakness as seen in the suffering and crucified Jesus Christ but concentrates rather on examples of the power of God. It…can also lead people to rely on their own "good works" to contribute to their status with God rather than relying wholly on the grace of God.'[7]

So theologies of glory dangerously misguide people in their quest to discern how God works by focusing not on the passion and cross of Christ, but on 'earthly stuff'. Recall the microscope example from earlier. Wonderful insights for life are achieved through the work of scientists, philosophers, writers, artists, and others who are not attempting to comprehend God through their disciplines. However, for an understanding of who God is and what the world and humans are about, the cross is where the focus must be to begin with.

The marketplace challenge and the opportunities for Lutheran schools

The term 'marketplace' implies a need for schools to appeal to consumers and with it the temptation to sacrifice a school sector's core beliefs in order to appeal to the marketplace. This temptation is less likely to influence how schools present themselves formally through a website or a prospectus than it is through ongoing operational choices. This is not easy for Lutheran schools as they grapple with the financial realities of student enrolments and the associated need to provide an education program which attracts and retains those

6 John G. Strelan, 'Theologia crucis, theologia gloriae: a study in opposing theologies,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 23, no. 3 (Dec 1989): 99.

7 Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts*, 121.

enrolments. Christenson sympathises with this challenge when he asserts that 'Lutherans see God's love for a sinful humanity in the cross. When God embraces us and our sinful world, that embrace takes the form of the cross. We might wish it were otherwise but that is the reality of it. *An ad agent might advise Christians to choose a new logo, but this is the one the suffering and dying God chose.*'[8] The dilemma could be depicted as a stark choice between being completely faithful to the theology of the cross or disregarding it completely. However, the church and its schools are called to strive to be faithful to the cross as well as to acknowledge and address their shortfalls.

What is helping schools in that is the participation of marketing consultants who identify with Christian beliefs and are skilled at marketing Christian environments. Consider also the many families seeking educational environments that are overtly and unapologetically Christian. Add to that Covid-19 along with other challenges to Australian society's sense of security which have chipped away at human hubris and self-reliance, and the theologies of glory which are associated with them.

The Australian government charges all schools with the responsibility of helping young Australians to become successful learners who 'are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are'.[9] In terms of the Lutheran theology of the two kingdoms, secular schools are demonstrations of God's left-hand care for the world in the way they help learners to explore the 'visible and ordered things of God'. As schools of the church, though, Lutheran schools are charged with not only that same responsibility but also the responsibility of being agents of God's right-hand care for the world. Using the language of the theology of the cross, this right-hand care is to help students to explore and understand 'the visible and ordered things of God after fixing (their) sight on the passion and cross of Christ' (Thesis 20), i.e. to help them towards being 'able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are' by inviting them into a cruciform perspective of the world and themselves. This process requires everything that secular schools do, but to go further: to challenge learners to recognise the crucial difference it makes to see the world and themselves in the light of the cross. What they come to see is that they are sinners, yes, but also loved and redeemed, and freed for service in the world.

Lutheran schools will do that in many and diverse ways alongside of but distinct from (e.g.) the science and humanities programs, and sometimes integrated with them. Far from distracting Lutheran schools from what some regard as the real and important educational tasks, the theology of the cross enriches and deepens that learning by affirming 'that the same God who is the author of creation embraces that creation in a cruciform way that includes suffering, humiliation, and death', and what this means is that 'To worship God on the cross is to be willing to take our place there, to see the world and ourselves from that

8 Tom Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 53 (emphasis added).

9 Education Council, 'Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration,' December 2019, accessed 2 March 2021, http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/Alice-Springs--Mparntwe--Education-Declaration.aspx.

point of view. That is not a world-negating view but a world-transforming one.'[10]

If they choose to 'market' this, Lutheran schools engage in a risky and daring venture: inviting young people and their families to meet a God who comes to humans in suffering and weakness, and so challenging them to engage with a transforming view of the world and themselves. This is risky for schools because it may deter many in the education marketplace from enrolling. And it entails a risk for those who do accept the invitation and find themselves taking up the challenge of adopting and living out that transformed view of the world and themselves.

So far this consideration has not gone beyond the implications of the curriculum (narrowly understood) in Lutheran schools in adopting education goals and practices that have the cross at their core. But *everything* in a Lutheran school is affected by the cross. LEA's *Growing deep* declares that

> The foundation of Lutheran education is the gospel of Jesus Christ (which) informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities [The LCA and its schools, 2001]. The Lutheran lens identifies key theological concepts that underpin Lutheran education. The lens provides a way of seeing and being in Lutheran education.[11]

To illustrate this point, consider how the subject of every other article in this publication might be viewed and responded to in a cruciform way. To highlight just a few: teacher underperformance, support of transgender students and students with complex needs, the intersection of science and theology. There is insufficient space in this short paper to tease out examples like these, in part because a cruciform view of things does not and ought not to lead all schools in different sets of circumstances to look for the one 'right' response. Knowing this can liberate schools from the fear of not 'getting it right', and can also excite them with the potential for theologically and practically imaginative responses to each issue. The tempting alternative is to put this challenge aside as too complex and difficult, and head down a track very much like that taken by Brooklyn's I.S. 293.

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10 Christenson, *The Gift and Task*, 54.

11 Lutheran Education Australia, *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2016), http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/.

Student agency through the Lutheran lens

Anna Nürnberger

What is student agency and why is it important?

While no unanimous definition for 'student agency' exists, and while its interpretations vary depending on culture and context, it is generally agreed that student agency as a concept in 21st-century education encompasses the notion of learners playing an active role in their education. It is a pedagogical stance that views learners as agents who are capable and willing to 'actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning',[1] to positively influence their own lives and sensibly affect the world around them for the better, and to become accountable for their own actions. Student agency can thus be defined as 'the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change. It is about acting rather than being acted upon; shaping rather than being shaped; and making responsible decisions and choices rather than accepting those determined by others.'[2] In short, agentic learners have voice, choice and ownership for their own learning.

The growing call for student agency testifies to the continuing shift from traditional understandings of education in which learners were seen as the objects of teaching with the expectation of rote mastery and absorbing facts presented to them, to an all-encompassing and authentic learner-centred pedagogy. Based on the work of pioneers in constructivist learning theory such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, pedagogical approaches in which learners are seen as the subjects, or agents, of the teaching-learning interaction emphasise that 'the power to learn is firmly in the hands of the learner and not the teacher.'[3] This is critical, as research suggests that for something to be truly learned, passive reception and regurgitation for assessment only is ineffective. Learning happens through discovery, dialogue and self-reflection, and when individuals construct their own meaning from their experiences.[4] Learner-centred interactions lead to an improvement of the quality of learning experiences and also academic achievement.[5]

1 James P. Lantolf and Aneta Pavlenko, '(S)econd (L)anguage (A)ctivity theory: understanding second language learners as people,' in *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research*, ed. Michael P. Breen (London: Longman, 2001), 145.

2 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019), 32, http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_Concept_Note_Series.pdf.

3 Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon, 'From andragogy to heutagogy,' in *ulti-BASE In-Site* (December 2000), 20, accessed 25 February 2021, https://epubs.scu.edu.au/gcm_pubs/99/.

4 Sharan B. Merriam and Laura L. Bierema, *Adult Learning: Linking Theory and Practice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 36; Joel Michael, 'Where's the evidence that active learning works?', *Advances in Physiology Education* 30 (Dec 2006): 160–162.

5 Chin Reyes, Marc Brackett, Susan Rivers, Mark White and Peter Salovey, 'Classroom emotional climate, student engagement, and academic achievement,' *Journal of Educational Psychology* 104, no. 3 (August 2012): 700–712. Doi.org/10.1037/a0027268.

The willingness and capability to make responsible decisions, to engage in the world around them, to meet the challenges of tomorrow and to shape a better future, clearly depends on learners' constructing their own knowledge. However, in order to exercise one's agency, to become a life-long learner and to realise one's full potential, students need more than well-informed content knowledge and basic literacy and numeracy skills. They need core knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which are essential to them thriving in a 21st-century world, such as data and digital literacy, transformative competencies, physical and mental health, and social and emotional skills.[6]

The importance of such values, skills, and competencies, including the need to further shift our educational focus away from the teacher and the content presented towards student agency, has recently been stressed by Andreas Schleicher, Director of the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills:

> Education is no longer about teaching students something alone; it is more important to be teaching them to develop a reliable compass and the navigation tools to find their own way in a world that is increasingly complex, volatile and uncertain. Our imagination, awareness, knowledge, skills and, most important, our common values, intellectual and moral maturity, and sense of responsibility is what will guide us for the world to become a better place.[7]

This provides the rationale for 'student agency' having been incorporated into the OECD Learning Compass 2030 as an essential concept for the future of education. Designed as an 'evolving learning framework that sets out an aspirational vision for the future of education', the OECD Learning Compass has been informed by observations from scholars and practitioners across the globe, emphasising the need to foster skills, competencies and qualities in our students which enable them to become agentic, life-long learners and to thrive personally and professionally, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, inquiring, questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions, creating and reshaping traditions, and risk-taking.

In light of this, let's turn our attention towards education in Lutheran contexts. How does student agency align with the Lutheran lens on students and learning? In what ways are we already implementing voice, choice and ownership of one's learning in our educational institutions and what can we learn from each other? These are important questions to spend some time asking.

Student agency as a 21st-century concept through the Lutheran lens

The learners and their learning

Empowering learners to become self-determined, creative, proactive, and reflective—not just reactive—depends on the underlying conviction that learning is innate to our

6 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 25.

7 Andreas Schleicher, Presentation at the Forum on Transforming Education, Global Peace Convention, Seoul, South Korea, 2019, quoted in OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 5.

humanness and that every learner is capable of growing and fulfilling their potential.

At the heart of learner-centred education is the recognition that human beings have a natural propensity to learn, and that we learn from birth by exploring, inquiring, testing hypotheses we make, trialling and failing, using reason and a variety of senses, playing or working with others.[8] In current systems that place the learner at the centre of the learning experience, education is regarded as an ongoing, life-long process based on continuous inquiry, trial-by-error and reflection, 'with a broad acceptance of failure as a critical means for learning'.[9] Hence, approaches that advocate for student agency view every learner, by implication, as having the critical foundations to learn and grow, to solve problems and think critically, to develop a sense of responsibility for their learning and for the effective use of their voice as they aim to influence their environments in a positive way. At the same time such approaches recognise that every learner has different needs, prior knowledge, skills and talents, as well as idiosyncratic attitudes and values, and, therefore, may learn differently.[10]

In our Lutheran context, these presuppositions are echoed in key documents produced by Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) such as *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools:* a *framework for Lutheran schools*, which clearly states our beliefs about learners:

- All learners have the ability to learn and learn best when …[t]hey take responsibility for their own learning [and they] can work both independently and collaboratively.[11]

And in outlining the goal of Lifelong Qualities for Learners, LEA extends a vision for learners, students and adults alike, as

- self-directed, insightful investigators and learners
- discerning, resourceful problem solvers and implementers
- adept, creative producers and contributors.[12]

These beliefs not only reflect current understandings about learning and learners but also flow from the Lutheran foundational, ingrained belief that 'each person is a unique creation of God and a person loved by God'.[13]

Current learner-centred approaches differ greatly from traditional educational paradigms of conformity, standardised progression, and compliance, especially with regard to their

8 Stewart Hase, 'An introduction to self-determined learning (heutagogy),' in *Experiences in Self-Determined Learning*, ed. Lisa Marie Blaschke, Chris Kenyon and Stewart Hase (Oldenburg: Center for Open Education Research, University of Oldenburg, 2014), 15, 18–21.

9 Lisa Marie Blaschke and Stewart Hase, 'Heutagogy and digital media networks: Setting students on the path to lifelong learning,' *Pacific Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning* 1, no. 1 (June 2019): 2.

10 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 11–12.

11 Lutheran Education Australia, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), iv, www.lutheran.edu.au/teaching-and-learning/a-vision-for-learners-and-learning.

12 Ibid., 2.

13 Ibid., iv.

respective underlying anthropology. Whereas traditional pedagogies saw the need for discipline and control, hesitating to allow learners to explore and inquire, systems that encourage student agency recognise the potential gifts in every learner to be recognised and developed. Learner-centred approaches view learning as a life-long process and aim at allowing space for trial and error in learning, enabling learning from mistakes and approaching challenges as learning experiences.

Student agency and Lutherans' theologically informed anthropology

This understanding of humans as continuous learners aligns well with Lutherans' theologically informed anthropology. Martin Luther's understanding of the human being as *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time justified and sinful) and his view of Image of God theology provide the underpinnings that enable the facilitation of education as a dynamic activity which empowers students to become agents of change and teachers to become the facilitators in this process:

> Being made in the image of God, humans are capable of cultural innovations that are good. At the same time, as fallen people, all human actions and thoughts are corrupted by sin. Humans may be entirely in need of redemption, but they are not entirely evil. Human cultures, as products of human thought and action, are both good and evil, reflecting both God's image and also human sinfulness. As such, instead of despairing about the changes happening around us, we are called to grapple with the changes [of a world shaped by globalisation] realistically and hopefully in order to facilitate better teaching and learning.[14]

Another paradox that relates to Luther's understanding of the human being is the idea of Christian liberty, encapsulated in a pair of statements at the beginning of Luther's *Treatise on Christian Liberty*: 'A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all.'[15] Simply put, this couplet points to a notion of liberty which emphasises that the human being has 'perfect liberty to choose and act in any way he or she believes is in keeping with God's coming kingdom' as nothing can separate us from the saving grace of God.[16] At the same time, the human being 'must make choices and take actions that serve others both temporally and eternally. Christian liberty, then, is the liberty both to take action and to serve.'[17] This emphasises an understanding of responsible freedom that is the opposite of our modern understanding of autonomy (i.e. the freedom to do what I want, whenever I want, to pursue whatever goal best serves my own selfish needs or self-interest without any personal accountability), but one that ends where my neighbour's freedom begins and that liberates me from concerns about my own

14 Peter Vethanayagamony and F. Volker Greifenhagen, 'Introduction,' in *Lutheran Pedagogy for a Global Context*, ed. P. Vethanayagamony and F. V. Greifenhagen (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2015), 9.

15 LW 31:343.

16 Russ Moulds, 'Key reformation themes for Lutheran teaching,' in *The Pedagogy of Faith. Essays on Lutheran Education*, ed. Bernard Bull (St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 18.

17 Moulds, 'Key reformation themes for Lutheran teaching,' 19.

salvation and preoccupation with myself so that I am free to serve others.[18] It highlights an idea of the human that is seen as capable to be an agent of one's own actions and decisions without having to worry about the consequences of failing, and at the same time choosing and acting in a way that serves others and cares for God's creation. Applied to an educational context, this idea can be seen as compatible with the concept of student agency as outlined in the OECD Learning Compass, which accentuates that the term student agency should not to be understood as a synonym for 'student autonomy', 'student voice' and 'student choice' but is more than that: 'Acting autonomously does not mean functioning in social isolation, nor does it mean acting solely in self-interest. Similarly, student agency does not mean that students can voice whatever they want or can choose whatever subjects they wish to learn.'[19] Rather, 'student agency implies a sense of responsibility as students participate in society and aim to influence people, events and circumstances for the better.'[20]

When learners are seen as capable, as innate life-long learners who already are agentic in their learning and doing, and when opportunities are offered for learners to grow in their beliefs as capable, this can improve learning environments built on mutual trust that enable safe and supported, inquiry-driven deep learning that acknowledges each individual's difference in background, prior knowledge and previous experiences. When learners know that their individual backgrounds and needs are recognised, that their talents, voice and choice are valued, and when they recognise that all people, including their teachers and parents, are learners, they are more likely to exercise their agency and grow to fulfil their potential.

Such beliefs about learning are consistent with the paradigms espoused in the LEA Educational Framework,[21] particularly within the *Beliefs about learning*, built on the Lutheran ethos including its valuing of the uniqueness and worth of each person and God's gifts of knowledge and learning, which emphasise that

- Learning occurs in a context and is driven by curiosity, need and inquiry;
- Learning builds on previous knowledge, experiences and understanding.

The aforementioned principles enabling student agency also align with LEA's *Beliefs about learning communities*, particularly in relation to the convictions that 'All people are learners' and that 'Safe and supportive learning environments facilitate active learning'.[22]

LEA recognises the importance of developing an authentic identity, values and basic human capacities to empathise and care for others which are derived from Lutheran

18 Jeffrey Silcock, 'Christian freedom and responsibility,' in *Introduction to Lutheran Ethics*, ed. Michael Press (Sabah, Malaysia: Lutheran Study Centre, Sabah Theological Seminary, 2014), https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1777/1/Christian_Freedom_and_Responsibility.pdf.

19 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 34.

20 Ibid.

21 LEA, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools*, iv.

22 Ibid.

beliefs. They are clearly discernible in the *Lifelong Qualities for Learners*, where it is stated that 'Lutheran schools seek to nurture individuals who are aware of their humanity… while [l]iving in community and reflecting characteristics of God through core values, especially love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, service, humility, courage, hope, quality and appreciation'.[23]

'Having compassion is being loving and attending to people's innermost needs. It is exercising the ability to reach out, to walk in another's shoes, to be open and responsive to the needs and concerns of others and being active in caring for others (Philippians 2:1, Hosea 11:4, Matthew 5:44, John 15:17, Romans 12:9-13, Colossians 3:12–15).'[24] The emphasis on care and compassion together with the focus on education for agentic 'citizenship' is consistent with Lutheran tradition and theology, specifically the Lutheran doctrine of vocation. According to Martin Luther, vocation is much more than a job; it is a calling from God to serve those around us through our God-given abilities which are developed through education and applies to the work and duties of *every* person. We are, because of our special gifts, called to care for God's creation, to be stewards of the world around us, as we are part of a larger community of creatures. 'Thinking, inquiry, the pursuit of truth have always been linked, for Lutherans, to service and transformation of the larger society and culture.'[25]

What does this mean in practice?

1. In order to build a strong sense of agency, learners need to first and foremost learn how to learn and how to think. That is, not only content needs to be part of the curriculum but also methods on how to learn as a skill to be employed throughout life, including the understanding and ability to utilise meta language surrounding learning, and the interdependent aspects at play in the learning process, such as cognitions, volitions, emotions and personal character traits.

2. Students need to be aware of their leaders' and teachers' belief in them to be capable learners who can grow to reach their individual potential. They need to know that their agency is valued, that is their voice, choice, and input, and that those around them are willing to listen attentively. As facilitators in their learning process, we encourage self-determined learning when we provide learners with opportunities to be curious and inquisitive, devise and solve problems, give reasons for choices, argue logically, learn from evaluative assessments and provide constructive feedback to their peers and teachers. Learners also need to know that risking failure is ok, that 'I don't know' is an acceptable answer, and that the use of trial and error can make for effective learning experiences. Student agency occurs when our classrooms and schools cater for opportunities that enable participation and the enactment of democratic values. Choosing individual pathways of how to learn and in what ways to demonstrate knowledge, skills and competencies, learning circles, teamwork and collaborative

23 LEA, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools*, 2.

24 Ibid.,14.

25 Tom Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 34.

inquiry-driven projects can also communicate our beliefs in our students' capability as change agents and foster a well-developed sense of student agency.

3. As agency can be exercised in nearly every context (moral, social, economic, creative),[26] Lutheran education strengthens student agency when it develops learning experiences for students to think critically and to trial their decision-making skills in relevant contexts. Christian Studies in particular lend themselves to opportunities where moral agency can be tested and developed, as this learning area appears especially apt for questions such as 'What should I do? Was I right to do that?',[27] and for providing the space to solve ethical dilemmas to enhance personal qualities connected to moral agency, such as critical and lateral thinking, problem solving, making life choices and becoming responsible for their actions. Research also suggests that modelling moral agency is important for encouraging others to engage their own moral agency in the best interests of all.[28] The *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework* accommodates for the development of moral agency, for example when it stresses the importance of '[o]pportunities for reflection and refinement of personal beliefs, values and life choices, and application of knowledge and understanding to the breadth of life—intellectual, emotional, personal, relational, spiritual' which 'challenge students to consider the role and contribution they can make towards creating a more just, harmonious and compassionate world.'[29]

4. Within all curriculum areas in general but also within Christian Studies in particular, content needs to be connected to our learners' interests, passions, and burning life-questions, as articulated within the *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, particularly in *The Pedagogy of Christian Studies* section.[30] Voice, choice and ownership of one's learning is promoted, for instance, when students work in small groups, possibly even across schools, to research real-life problems and propose solutions in pitches before a panel of experts. Some schools foster self-directed learning by beginning the school year with student-teacher symposia in which the students and teachers explore their learning needs, set realistic goals that can be achieved and co-create units in line with the specific curriculum framework that connect key ideas to the learner's world.

5. Martin Luther himself rejected the model of cloistered and detached learning that was common at his time. He saw the need for universal education that even extended into

26 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 36; see also Leadbeater, *The Problem Solvers*, 6–7.

27 Questions such as these have been proposed by student agency advocate and pioneer in the 'Dynamic Learning Movement' Charles Leadbeater to exercise moral agency, see Charles Leadbeater, 'Student Agency' section of Education 2030—Conceptual learning framework: Background papers (Paris: OECD, 2017), http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Conceptual_learning_framework_Conceptual_papers.pdf.

28 Sabre Lynn Cherkowski, Keith D Walker and Benjamin Kutsyuruba, 'Principals' moral agency and ethical decision-making: Towards transformational ethics,' *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership* 10, no. 5 (September 2015): 1–17.

29 Lutheran Education Australia, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2015), https://www.lutheran.edu.au/download/cscf-2015/.

30 LEA, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, esp. 7.

the households, as can be discerned from his statement above each major section of the *Small Catechism* 'as the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household'. Martin Luther also aimed at applying theology to practice. He used the question 'What does this mean?' throughout his *Catechism* to explain the meaning of the fundamental teachings of the evangelical Christian faith and to connect it to the lives of his contemporaries. While the original intention of rote learning doesn't necessarily align with our modern understanding of how to inform young people about the Lutheran faith, Christian Studies facilitates student agency when adopting the principles of relevancy to the learners' daily lives and provision of examples, as ways to enable deep learning of relevant content.

Learning communities

We know that learning and growing doesn't happen in a vacuum. Rather, everyone learns, develops and exercises their agency in social contexts. Peers, parents, teachers, leaders, and the school as a whole shape the individual's learning environment, influencing a learner's sense of agency and enabling everyone to learn how to learn and to become a responsible citizen of the world. Hence, an effective learning environment is built on 'collaborative agency' or 'co-agency', i.e. where students, teachers, parents and the community work together,[31] pooling their knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as providing mutual support to achieve what they cannot accomplish on their own:

> People's shared beliefs in their joint capabilities to bring about desired changes in their lives are the foundation of collective agency. Perceived collective efficacy raises people's vision of what they wish to achieve, enhances motivational commitment to their endeavors, strengthens resilience to adversity, and enhances group accomplishments.[32]

When learners have agency, the teacher and the student become partners, or co-creators, in the teaching-learning interaction. This means moving away from traditional hierarchical understandings of the teacher-student relationship with its focus on instruction and one-sided control towards an educational model where learning is enabled rather than delivered. The quality of teacher-student interactions as well as the quality of learning for both parties involved improves when mutual feedback is valued and acted upon.[33] John Hattie's research into which factors influence learning success in schools, highlights this interaction: 'What is most important is that teaching is visible to the students, and that the learning is visible to the teacher. The more the student becomes the teacher and the more

31 Charles Leadbeater, 'Student Agency' section of Education 2030—Conceptual learning framework: Background papers (Paris: OECD, 2017), http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Conceptual_learning_framework_Conceptual_papers.pdf.

32 Albert Bandura, 'Adolescent development from an agentic perspective,' in *Self-efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents*, ed. F. Pajares and T. Urdan, vol. 5 (Greenwich, CT: IAP - Information Age Publishing, 2006), 5.

33 State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training), *Amplify. Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership* (2019), 11, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Amplify.pdf.

the teacher becomes the learner, then the more successful are the outcomes.'[34]

In a system that encourages student agency, peers, parents and the wider community also play key roles as co-agents of students' learning. Especially at an age where peers increasingly become the most important influence, young people seek support and guidance from their friends and schoolmates. Hence, peers influence each other's agency. Students also learn from and with their parents. They benefit from their parents' or caregivers' active involvement in their education, not the least in relation to their academic achievement, social skills and pro-social behaviour.[35] As school is not the only place where learning occurs, the wider community shares in the responsibility to educate each other, and this has mutual benefits: 'When the community is also involved in children's education, children can learn about the opportunities for their future and also how to be engaged, responsible citizens, while the community can learn about the needs, concerns and views of its younger members.'[36]

What does this mean in practice?

1. Since learning doesn't only happen in classroom settings and since one of the most powerful ways of learning is by observing others,[37] parents and teachers who are effective models of the behaviour they want to see in their children/students, can foster students' agency. Self-determined learning and doing is aided when we, the facilitators of learning, model agency and continuously ask ourselves:
   - Do I display self-efficacy in my own learning and purposeful implementation of my skills and talents?
   - How do I foster independent decision-making?
   - Do I model how to cope with failure and impasses, demonstrating the way to recognise errors, reflect on them and how to overcome these?
   - Do I provide a safe learning environment where there is space for attentive listening and where learners are allowed to find and express their voice?
2. Martin Luther might also serve as a model for many of the qualities and characteristics nowadays associated with student agency: He was agile and passionate, informed and visionary, critical and questioning yet firm in his beliefs and grounded in his conscience. He was set on changing the world around him for the better, rather than accepting the status quo. He actively reshaped his environment and connected theology to real life. He valued education as such and advocated for citizenship. Other Lutheran forebears

34 John Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 25.

35 Pamela Davis-Keen, 'The influence of parent education and family income on child achievement: The indirect role of parental expectations and the home environment,' *Journal of Family Psychology* 19, no. 2 (July 2005): 294–304.

36 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 38.

37 Cf. Albert Bandura, 'The power of observational learning through social modeling,' in *Scientists Making a Difference: One Hundred Eminent Behavioral and Brain Scientists Talk about their Most Important Contributions*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg, Susan T. Fiske and Donald J. Foss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 235–239.

might equally provide for models of agency that could be explored by learners. How did Soren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Dorothee Soelle, for example, participate in society, commit themselves to a posture of *semper reformanada* (always reforming) and enact social transformation?[38]

3. Student agency is promoted when teachers become facilitators in the learning process who encourage learner action and experience in a supportive environment, when they learn to 'let go' and view themselves as co-learners and co-constructors in the teaching-and-learning process. This can be achieved when meaningful support structures are established, 'including in initial teacher education and through professional development, in designing learning environments that support student agency.'[39] In order to gradually release responsibility, i.e. to equip learners with what they need to be engaged, self-determined and self-directed, collaborative practices such as peer support, observation, feedback and sharing with others can be beneficial.[40]

4. With regard to the learning area of Christian Studies, and in light of the growing diversity of students' knowledge, faith backgrounds and worldviews within Lutheran schools, teachers empower their students when they not only respect and value this wide range of faith, life and spiritual understandings and experiences present in their classrooms, but also when they encourage learners to express their diverse views and beliefs and to inquire about Lutheran theology as well as each other's experiences and spirituality. This is facilitated in a learning environment built on mutual trust and open for reflection. These principles, consistent with theories of student agency and dynamic learning, are outlined in the *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, particularly in *The Pedagogy of Christian Studies* section,[41] for example when highlighting that both teaching and learning

   - are inclusive of the diverse needs, backgrounds and worldviews of students and teachers,
   - create quality relationships between all learners—teachers and students, and
   - invite, challenge, support and empower students to construct meaning, grow in spiritual maturity and be transformed in their relationships with self, others, the environment and God.

5. As a recent Capstone Project on 'Creative agency for dynamic learning in the Christian Studies classroom in a Lutheran school' suggests, Christian Studies teachers can view student questioning and agency as a threat due to their own lack of knowledge in the curriculum area and due to fears of allowing students to be active inquirers.[42] If

38 Cf. Jason A. Mahn, ed., *Radical Lutherans / Lutheran Radicals* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).

39 OECD, *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. OECD Learning Compass 2030. A Series of Concept Notes*, 38.

40 State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training), *Amplify. Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership* (2019), 20.

41 LEA, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, 7.

42 Stephanie Falcon-Harvie, 'Creative agency for dynamic learning in the Christian Studies classroom in a Lutheran school,' Australian Lutheran College, Capstone Project student paper (2019).

present, this lack of teacher confidence can be addressed and countered by providing educators with opportunities to learn more about the Lutheran faith, the pedagogy underlying Christian Studies, and how student agency can be implemented within this learning area. Reminding educators of the changed expectations in relation to their role might also prove helpful: authentic and self-directed learning is facilitated when teachers view themselves less as top-down instructors in Lutheran faith principles and more as co-learners and co-agents in the teaching-learning process who are open to the influence of the Holy Spirit and who go on a journey of discovery together with their students, exploring 'a range of religious and non-religious perspectives they encounter in an increasingly pluralistic…society, determin[ing] the source of their own beliefs and values and understand the role religion plays in society.'[43]

6. Schools support agency and foster self-efficacy when they include the whole learning community in their endeavour. As student agency theories suggest, co-agency can be enacted when the goals of education are broadened to include education for citizenship, that is, to foster learning to care for the well-being of the learning communities and the planet itself.[44] By embedding values like service, love and compassion that underpin such an education within the vision and mission of Lutheran schools, and by actively communicating and realising these inside as well as beyond the classroom, school communities are enacting the purposes of LEA's *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* which views everyone as a leader empowered to lead in their sphere of influence.[45] Consequently, everyone is given a voice: students, principals, educators and parents alike. This is facilitated when principals, leaders and teachers model such values. Some schools create co-administrative bodies that actively encourage input and agency from students and parents, such as committees formed by those in care of the well-being of students that are given a voice in decisions surrounding relevant teaching-learning interactions. Other examples include bodies of student representatives at a year or school level that enact democratic values. Such members of student councils act as spokespeople for their peers, having a say in how the school as a whole could work together in creating opportunities to choose pathways towards learning for citizenship, and to form initiatives to foster co-agency. Opportunities for increased participation by all members of a school community also include strategic planning based on mutual feedback at the beginning of the school year, or cooperative involvement in the process of teacher employment, in budget spending, or in planning school functions—measures many schools are already

43 LEA, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*, 6. For the connection between student agency, inquiry and authenticity see Kath Murdoch, 'Keeping it real: inquiry and authenticity,' (blog June 2, 2019), accessed 1 March 2021, https://www.kathmurdoch.com.au/blog/2019/6/2/keeping-it-real-inquiry-and-authenticity.

44 Cf. Ingrid Schoon, 'Section 1: Conceptualising student agency: a socio-ecological developmental approach,' in *Education and Skills 2030: Conceptual learning framework. Draft Papers supporting the OECD Learning Framework 2030*, 7th Informal Working Group (IWG) Meeting 14–16 May 2018, Paris, France, esp. 13, https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Draft_Papers_supporting_the_OECD_Learning_Framework_2030.pdf.

45 Lutheran Education Australia, *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2016), http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/..

successfully implementing.

7. In order to foster passion-led, deep learning and a sense of efficacy to change their environments for the better, schools, including Lutheran educational institutions, enact co-agency when they enable learning about serving and learning through serving. LEA emphasises the rationale behind this concept, known as service learning, as such:

> Service is faith active in love. Service involves the selfless giving and loving of others, making a difference in their lives by responding to their needs, and acting without expecting recognition or reward. A Lutheran school challenges students to grow in their understanding that service is not only a personal response to God's love but a broader response as part of one's humanity for the sake of justice for all.[46]

Many Lutheran schools already implement 'first-hand' service learning experiences[47] and understand that service is a way of living and learning rather than an activity that is in isolation from the rest of their lives.

Conclusion

While student agency has many more aspects that could be analysed in relation to their alignment with the Lutheran lens on learners and learning, the focal points together with their practical implications chosen for this article might be sufficient to demonstrate that Lutheran education and theology support the notion of student agency. Informed by the Lutheran faith, educators at Lutheran schools continue to aim at empowering students to use their voice and enact their freedom to choose whenever possible, to educate for wholeness, humanness and citizenship, to facilitate deep learning that links in with our students' world and to co-create learning experiences that enable students to find their vocation and to fulfil their potential. In addition, facilitators of life-long and self-determined learning in Lutheran educational contexts persist in asking what education should be like to ensure that learners emerge from schooling as confident, able, responsible agents of change. Authentic Lutheran education remains a 'gift' and a 'task'[48] that can only benefit from further exploration into the concept of student agency for a successful and holistic education now and in the future.

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46 LEA, 'Service learning in Lutheran schools. Rationale, vision and guiding principles,' retrieved from http://www.lutheran.edu.au/service-learning-introduction/, accessed 28 April 2021.

47 Cf. example stories of service learning at http://www.lutheran.edu.au/some-stories-of-service-learning/, accessed 28 April 2021.

48 Cf. Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*.

Competing interests and the inclusion of children with complex needs

Kerrin Huth

Lutheran schools and early childhood services in Australia are increasingly catering to students with diverse needs. This is reflective of our Australian society, with each school reflecting to some extent the diversity of their local community.[1] The very nature of the Lutheran school population has changed over time, however despite this, one thing remains constant—what we believe about the nature of our learners.

The inherent beliefs of the Lutheran schooling system in Australia are based on the underlying premise of the theology of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand, and these theological understandings underpin the decision-making principles of our schools including those regarding the inclusion of all learners. We need policies such as enrolment, inclusion and behaviour management to manage the day-to-day running of the school and meet the requirements of legislation and governing bodies. Our policies and practices rely on our theology to stand firm on biblical principles, with many schools adopting scriptural passages to support their policy documents. They reflect our understanding and beliefs about learners based on how God sees them. We view our learners through the eyes of Christ. Key systemic Lutheran Education documents such as *Growing deep*,[2] *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools: A framework for Lutheran schools*[3] and the *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*[4] outline our beliefs, values and actions. We are part of 'God's continuing creation therefore…every individual life has meaning and purpose.'[5] Scripture emphasises that as humans, we are God's special creation and therefore we need to value every learner as God sees them, as a great masterpiece of creation and therefore deeply loved. Because we believe that 'each person is a unique creation of God and a person loved by God', we value 'the uniqueness and worth of each person' and therefore in our schools we see 'each member of our school community as

1 Mark McCrindle, 'Welcome to Australia Street: population trends and demographic snapshot of Australia,' McCrindle Research 2013, accessed 20 January 2021, https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blogarchive/welcome-to-australia-street-population-trends-and-demographic-snapshot-of-australia-infographic/; Lani Florian, 'Teacher education for the changing demographics of schooling: inclusive education for each and every learner,' in *Teacher Education for the Changing Demographics of Schooling: Issues for Research and Practice*, *Vol. 2: Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity*, ed. N. Pantić and L. Florian (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 9–20.

2 Lutheran Education Australia, *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2016), http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/.

3 Lutheran Education Australia, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), www.lutheran.edu.au/teaching-and-learning/a-vision-for-learners-and-learning.

4 Lutheran Education Australia, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2015), https://www.lutheran.edu.au/download/cscf-2015/.

5 Malcolm Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts: Theology for Teachers in Lutheran Schools* (Adelaide, SA: Open Book Howden, 2012), 52.

someone in relation to God' and help them to develop in all aspects of living this out in our community.[6]

These key Lutheran Education documents also advocate that our schools provide a safe and supportive learning environment in which learners are actively engaged. With this in mind, we are faced daily with living out our theology in practice in a Lutheran school. As we value each individual, we aim to provide an environment in which all learners can thrive and provide opportunities for them to be included in all aspects of education.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a term which is increasingly used internationally in a broad sense, more than simply referring to the inclusion of people with a disability.[7] In this way, it is reflective of Lutheran theology in which each learner is valued for who they are as their 'worth is not diminished by illness, handicap, age, or failure of any kind, nor does it have anything to do with race, colour, gender, distinctive characteristics and abilities, or anything else that distinguishes one human being from another.'[8] If we consider it in terms of education, inclusion in a broad sense does not merely focus on the excluded; instead it considers the education of all learners together.[9]

Inclusive education is defined by Rayner as 'as set of values and processes which nurture all students' sense of belonging and connection to place, people and purpose.'[10] It is more than just access to education; it requires an inclusive ethos which provides flexible curriculum and classroom management underpinned by empowerment, equity and emancipation.[11] Inclusive education is complex, intricate and multi-faceted, requiring unwavering courage and conviction[12] and involves responding to diversity in positive ways.[13] The ultimate goal is a shared understanding and commitment to inclusion within all schools, system wide, with learners, school staff and community working together.[14]

6 LEA, *A vision for learners and learning*, 4.

7 Lynn Richards, 'Power, inclusion and diversity,' in *Contemporary Issues in Childhood: A Bio-ecological Approach*, The Routledge Education Studies Series, ed. Zeta Brown and Stephen Ward (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 117–126.

8 Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts*, 62.

9 Florian, 'Teacher education for the changing demographics of schooling.'

10 Christopher Rayner, 'Inclusive education: What does it mean for Christian learning communities into the future?', *The Christian Teachers Journal* 26, no. 1 (2018): 19.

11 Vassilios Argyropoulos and Santoshi Halder, 'Introductory chapter: Disability within contemporary inclusion dynamics: a global point of view,' in *Inclusion, Equity and Access for Individuals with Disabilities*, ed. V. Argyropoulos and S. Halder (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 2.

12 Gordon Porter and Deidre Smith, 'Challenges and barriers to inclusion,' in *Exploring Inclusive Educational Practices Through Professional Inquiry*, ed. G. L. Porter and D. Smith (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2011), 141–172.

13 Vicky Plows and Alison Baker, 'On the edge? Counter-practice in flexible learning programs,' in *Inclusive Education: Making Sense of Everyday Practice, Innovations and Controversies: Interrogating Educational Change*, ed. V. Plows and B. Whitburn (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2017), 77–94.

14 Porter and Smith, 'Challenges and barriers to inclusion.'

Parents of children with complex needs choose a Christian school for many reasons, including the caring environment, Christ-centred education, acceptance and love of the child for who they are or to foster social inclusion.[15] However, at times we see barriers to the inclusion of some learners, and we must consider what this means for all learners. Additionally, the definition of 'complex needs' is varied, however Tuersley-Dixon and Frederickson suggest it refers to individuals who have both 'a depth and also a breadth of need…including intellectual or physical disabilities where there are additional difficulties, for example, with daily living skills'.[16] The consideration of these complex needs adds further complexity to the issue of inclusion.

Barriers to inclusion

There are many different barriers to inclusion with the impact on individuals occurring to varying degrees. Some of the wider systemic barriers encountered include varying attitudes towards difference, systemic policies and support, lack of training for staff, and the curriculum itself. Within each school, barriers encountered may include personal attitudes (of the learner, peers, staff, parents, school community); physical barriers (for physical needs); inaccessibility to an appropriate curriculum, and possibly unrealistic expectations of the school and families. There may also be concerns around funding and support available both in the classroom and for families. Teacher attitudes may stem from a lack of specific training or having little confidence in managing complex needs, and despite inclusion policies and practices, negative attitudes are a major barrier to social inclusion.[17] Further complications in the classroom may include disruption to class routine and learning, time needed to manage complex needs, misinformation around needs, and managing difficult behaviours.

In 2020 the Coronavirus pandemic raised issues and challenges for inclusion as schools continued to offer on-campus learning for those who could not learn at home, yet at the same time created an environment which engaged learners from home. According to Rayner, for some learners during this time, social distancing and remote learning provided flexibility and had indeed been liberating. Yet for others, limited digital access, lack of school routine or meaningful support, were barriers to learning.[18] In our Lutheran schools, we saw school communities in partnership with parents, work towards creating an environment which was inclusive and reflective of our Christian education.

15 Judy Chesson, 'What's special about special education in Christian schools?' *The Christian Teachers Journal* 26, no. 1 (2018): 24–27.

16 Louise Tuersley-Dixon and Norah Frederickson, 'Social inclusion of children with complex needs in mainstream: Does visibility and severity of disability matter?' *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities* 62, no. 2 (2016): 89.

17 Boon Siong Tan, Erin Wilson, Robert Campain, Kevin Murfitt and Nick Hagiliassis, 'Understanding negative attitudes toward disability to foster social inclusion: an Australian case study,' in I*nclusion, Equity and Access for Individuals with Disabilities*, ed. V. Argyropoulos and S. Halder (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 41–65.

18 Christopher Rayner, 'Inclusive education: Opportunities for a new normal,' *The Christian Teachers Journal* 28, no. 3 (2020), 4–7.

Exclusion and tough decisions

While inclusion of all learners is our aim, there are times when some learners may be excluded from education. Exclusion may be defined differently in different contexts, such as exclusion through suspension, inability to access programs or facilities, or merely removal from the classroom.[19] Although there are differing circumstances and a range of types of exclusion, they all affect the learner. A recent South Australian report on the impacts of exclusion claims: every child has a right to an education; managing behaviours needs to be restorative rather than punitive with exclusions causing harm with possible long-term negative effects; and that disconnected students are likely to experience exclusion. School culture and environment significantly influence the practices of the school.[20] The report's exclusion rates and case studies can paint a dismal picture of what we might see in many Australian schools. Similarly, Plows and Baker note that there is often an intersection of social, economic and educational disadvantage in disengaged youth undertaking a flexible learning program within or outside of a mainstream school.[21] Social inclusion is often difficult when challenging behaviours affect the safety of the learner or others around them. These challenging behaviours not only affect the child, but the families and school community members as well.

Although the South Australian statistics are not for Lutheran schools, we must still ask ourselves to what extent these statistics are reflected in our schools. We may not face exactly the same difficulties, yet as a Lutheran school there may be times we have to ask the difficult question '*At what point do we decide a student needs to be excluded*?' While the focus of schools is to include all learners and to provide a valuable and rich education for all, there are competing interests within the classroom from various stakeholders. Availability of resources or facilities, levels of staffing and specific training are just some of the issues we seek to understand. The needs of all concerned (the learner, the family, staff and the other learners) are important elements in the conversation. These competing interests need to be thoroughly considered and at times tough decisions must be made in order to seek a solution. There may be times where all options have been explored, solutions exhausted, and mutual agreement reached that we may not be able to meet all of their needs or expectations. All efforts must be undertaken first however, to overcome the barriers to inclusion.

Overcoming barriers

Rayner raises three important points to consider: being inclusive is integral to Christian Education; teaching all learners can benefit others; inclusion is part of a broader educational reform.[22] Keeping these three points in mind can inspire us to find the best possible

19 Helen Connolly, Commissioner for Children and Young People SA, 'The blame game—the perspectives from South Australian children and young people on the causes and impacts of education exclusion and why we need to stop blaming children for system failure' (October 2020), https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Screen-The-Blame-Game-Report-Low.pdf.

20 Connolly, 'The blame game.'

21 Plows and Baker, 'On the edge?'

22 Rayner, 'Inclusive education: What does it mean for Christian learning communities into the future?'.

solution for each learner and work towards overcoming barriers to inclusion. If we consider inclusion as integral to Christian Education, it will be forefront in all we do and is indeed reflected in our beliefs about learners. While teachers may work to overcome barriers within their classroom, a collective approach from the whole school community can work together to address systemic barriers. A considered and collective approach from school communities, teachers, leaders and systemic leaders can contribute to broader change.

The suggestions from young people in the South Australian report are worthy of consideration when aiming for inclusion in our schools. The report highlights what young people regard as important in education. They value relationships; behaviour management; training for teachers to assist them to be proactive when something is wrong. They further suggest a supportive school environment that can support difficult home environments is desirable alongside actions that do not humiliate and isolate. Mental health support and support for general learning and well-being were also valued. Furthermore, they suggest ways for overcoming the barriers to inclusion as understanding the challenges in learners' lives; providing support for learning and wellbeing; offering relevant and flexible education options; offering inclusive and comfortable learning environments.[23] Each of these considerations warrants further discussion beyond their mere introduction in this paper. These deeper conversations need to engage key stakeholders and investigate site-specific options to explore how to meet the needs of the whole school community in a relevant way.

Inclusion aims to overcome barriers and equip students with skills they can use both inside and outside of school. Inclusion allows all students, with or without disabilities, to learn together through differentiated instruction.[24] Porter and Smith suggest that removing barriers to inclusion 'requires collaboration, mutual understanding and respect.'[25] Understanding the needs and experiences of learners can inform our attitudes and shape how we view our students, leading to ways of effectively addressing issues. According to Murphy, we can target specific opportunities for developing relationships to improve social inclusion.[26] Plows and Baker also suggest celebrating the 'little victories' can make learners feel valued, and a focus on strengths and achievements allows all learners to reframe their thinking and empower them as they make choices.[27]

A combination of inclusive education, appropriate training for teachers, and student awareness programs that are well resourced and sustained, are effective in changing attitudes.[28] Deppeler emphasises the importance of teacher education on best-practice teaching for students with disability, as beneficial for all students.[29] This is also reflected

23 Connolly, 'The blame game.'

24 Argyropoulos and Halder, 'Introductory chapter: Disability within contemporary inclusion dynamics.'

25 Porter and Smith, 'Challenges and barriers to inclusion,' 141; Richards, 'Power, inclusion and diversity.'

26 Glynis Murphy, 'Challenging behavior: a barrier to inclusion?,' J*ournal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* 6, no. 2 (2009): 89–90.

27 Plows and Baker, 'On the edge?,' 84.

28 Tan et al, 'Understanding negative attitudes toward disability to foster social inclusion.'

29 Joanne Deppeler, 'Navigating the boundaries of difference: using collaboration in inquiry to develop

in the recommendations of the 2016 Commonwealth of Australia report into access to real learning.[30] Networking, teacher dialogue, celebrating success, feedback and critical discussion are important for sharing knowledge, along with humility in knowing that we do not have all of the answers, yet are willing to seek help and build partnerships.[31] Villegas, Ciotoli and Lucas offer a framework of six interrelated characteristics of inclusive teachers which serve as a guide for developing inclusive classrooms. The characteristics of the inclusive teacher are:

1. Sociocultural consciousness
2. Affirming views about diversity and students from diverse backgrounds
3. Commitment to acting as change agents in schools and advocates for students
4. Understanding how learners construct knowledge
5. Knowing about students' lives
6. Using insights into students' lives to help them build bridges to learning[32]

These six characteristics include both an orientation towards diversity, and pedagogical practices and perspectives, which are a necessary element of teacher education.

Inclusive curriculum and pedagogy aim to provide rich learning opportunities for all, making provision for most learners, yet offering something additional or different for some learners identified as having particular needs.[33] In order to be an inclusive school, we need to get to the heart of the matter. Getting to the root of the barriers may lead to greater success in finding a resolution. We need to know our students as individuals, building relationships as we try to understand their unique needs and work towards providing the best possible outcome for them. We must love the learner as a child of God.

Loving the learners: theology in action

While we work within the regulations and decision-making processes of policies and procedures, we do so in love. We can also learn from the research—a supportive school environment goes beyond the mere provision of access to education. It supports, nurtures, engages, provides alternatives, and values the individual learner. How we see our learners

teaching and progress student learning,' in *Teacher Education for the Changing Demographics of Schooling: Issues for Research and Practice, Vol. 2: Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity*, ed. N. Pantić and L. Florian (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 149–165.

30 Senate Education and Employment References Committee, 'Access to real learning: the impact of policy, funding and culture on students with disability' (Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016).

31 Chesson, 'What's special about special education in Christian schools?'; Deppeler, 'Navigating the boundaries of difference.'

32 Ana Maria Villegas, Francesca Ciotoli and Tamara Lucas, 'A framework for preparing teachers for classrooms that are inclusive of all students,' in *Teacher Education for the Changing Demographics of Schooling: Issues for Research and Practice, Vol. 2: Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity*, ed. N. Pantić and L. Florian (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017): 136.

33 Kristine Black-Hawkins, 'Understanding inclusive pedagogy,' in *Inclusive Education: Making Sense of Everyday Practice, Innovations and Controversies: Interrogating Educational Change*, ed. V. Plows and B. Whitburn (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2017), 13–28.

shapes what we do for them. Plows and Baker found a common experience for young people with complex needs was being known for their problems or having a 'bad history'.[34] To change this perception they need to be empowered to reimagine their story or recast themselves, allowing for new relationships to develop and a new self-identity to emerge. At times learners with complex needs come to our schools to make a fresh start. When we see them through the eyes of God and love them as He does, we allow them to create a new identity in Christ.

Fostering meaningful relationships is fundamental to inclusion. Knowing our learners and their families helps us to understand their individual circumstances. Valuing all people for their uniqueness and individual worth provides a basis for developing caring relationships to support the individual's needs.[35] We listen to their stories with heartfelt empathy—stories of each school, of each class, of each family, of each learner. All are unique; all have their own intricacies; and each is important. When we view 'difference' as something that relates to all learners, rather than some as having different needs; it changes our approach. When we value each learner as an individual and see each of them as a unique creation of God, we are living out our theology and working towards education for all, not just modification for some. It sees our human diversity in a new light.[36] Our common aim as Lutheran schools is to minister in the most effective way possible, working in partnership to achieve the best possible outcome for all. Building and maintaining relationships is important. Working together is important. Our theology in action is important. Above all, when we value the richness each individual brings to our community and love them as God loves them, we live out our theology in action.

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34 Plows and Baker, 'On the edge?,' 83.

35 Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts*, 51–64.

36 Florian, 'Teacher education for the changing demographics of schooling.'

Bringing love to life: the inclusion of transgender students in Lutheran schools

Dianne Eckermann

Schools are often at the forefront of social change. There are expectations of schools, including Lutheran schools, that they educate and care for all students and that each child is accepted and supported according to their particular needs. In recent years increasing numbers of school aged students have questioned their image of themselves and have disclosed that they do not feel comfortable with their gender; they are identifying as transgender people. For many, this is the beginning of an ongoing struggle, not just with their sense of identity, but with those in the broader community who offer a wide range of opinions, advice, information—some of which may even be helpful.

Bartsch comments that: 'While the Bible provides many important insights relating to education, it is not a text book of education.'[1] If we were to turn to the bible hoping to find clear understanding on how to work with transgender students we will not find any specific insights; we cannot turn to the bible for answers that are not there. However, we do find that we have been created to be in a relationship with God and it is God who comes to us to build that relationship.[2] Jesus tells us through the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son the extent to which God will go to bring us into a relationship with Him. Through His actions Jesus also demonstrates how He meets and builds relationships with people who are often marginalised by society. Lutheran schools, therefore, value all learners for who they are and recognise that all deserve respect.[3]

In exploring the topic of transgender students in Lutheran schools I will use a broad definition of transgender as a term for the many ways in which a person experiences their gender identity differently from people whose gender identity is congruent with their biological sex. I will also focus on what we can learn about inclusivity from Jesus; from documents that already exist in Lutheran education and on the lived experience of some schools through case studies. One of the first points to make is that this is a rapidly changing place. Appropriate language and terminology are part of that rapid change and I ask for understanding if I have unintentionally used terms that are no longer acceptable. Transgender young people are also in a changing medical, social and legal landscape. In Australia there may be fine differences in law from one state to another so it is important that each school is aware of any legislative requirements that may apply. Much of the

1 Malcolm Bartsch, *A God who Speaks and Acts: Theology for Teachers in Lutheran Schools* (Adelaide, SA: Open Book Howden, 2012), 9.

2 Rom 5:5–6; Ps 139:13–18; John 14:23; 1 John 4:7–8.

3 Lutheran Education Australia, *A framework for Lutheran schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), https://www.lutheran.edu.au/download/a-framework-for-lutheran-schools/.

literature available on this topic comes from the United States where medical and legal situations differ significantly from Australia, for example formal changes of name or gender currently cannot be made in Australia until a young person reaches eighteen years of age. It is therefore wise to be familiar with the Australian context as much as possible, while also being aware of trends emerging in other parts of the world. The focus of this article is to view the support of transgender students through the lens of pastoral care. It is not intended to be an in-depth theological exploration or an account of what it means to be transgender.

The 2019 Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) Ministry Conference addressed the ways in which practical theology[4] can be used in Lutheran schools by addressing questions of gender identity in Lutheran schools through Theological Action Research (TAR) methodology.[5] Society, including our schools, is increasingly aware of the needs of transgender people as there has been an increase in the number of people identifying as transgender. Attitudes towards those who have often been marginalised are changing to become more inclusive. By exploring what we believe (normative theology), what we say (espoused theology) and what we do (operative theology) we are able to map a pathway to hear the stories of transgender students and to provide what they need to be educated and supported spiritually in a caring, Christian community. When we are engaging in conversations about transgender students, we need to be aware that our own pre-conceived ideas affect how we listen to the conversation. We also need to be aware that while others in the conversation may be in different places in their knowledge and understanding of transgender people, all are encouraged to listen with a pastoral heart. This is not just pastoral care; it is theology in action. God loves each transgender person and wants to be in relationship with them but if we, in our schools, want young transgender people to come to know the God who loves them, the ways in which we love, accept and respect all students will be critical to their loving relationship with God.

The Lutheran schools' *A vision for learners and learning*[6] places God at the centre of what we believe, what we value and what we do. This informs our beliefs about learners, learning and our school communities. According to our ethos we believe: 'each person is a unique creation of God and a person loved by God.' We therefore value: 'the uniqueness and worth of each person and therefore see: each member of our school community as someone in relation to God and help each student grow in the assurance of their God-given worth and purpose.' A quick search of Lutheran school websites shows that our schools use words and phrases such as: welcoming; caring; safe; nurturing; supportive; inclusive; every child matters; open to all students; each person is valued and accepted as a loved child of God. These all portray Lutheran schools as places which aim to welcome, nurture and support everyone because of our belief that 'each person is a unique creation

4 LEA, Practical Theology, https://padlet.com/LuthEdAus/practicaltheology, accessed 28 January 2021.

5 Susanna Wesley Foundation, 'Quick guide to Theological Action Research (TAR)' (2017), https://susannawesleyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Quick-guide-TAR-2.pdf.

6 Lutheran Education Australia, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), www.lutheran.edu.au/teaching-and-learning/a-vision-for-learners-and-learning.

of God and a person loved by God.' Therefore, as this is what we believe and also what we say, we will respond to the needs of transgender students and their families in a caring and inclusive manner when they seek to enrol or continue their education. Each transgender child is created and loved by God.

In addition, *Growing deep*[7] reinforces that 'God has intentionally created each person and that each person is uniquely gifted to live in relationship with God.' This means that as a Christian community we intentionally build relationships to support those who are vulnerable. An LCA/NZ pastor and chaplain explains how Jesus radically 'invested himself in whatever it took to foster a living relationship with the people He encountered'.[8] When it came to relationships, Jesus did not recognise the cultural norms of His time and deliberately embraced the marginalised which included women and children. The gospel provides us with a number of His radical encounters, from the tax collector to the pharisee, or the woman at the well to Pontius Pilate. Even rebuking the disciples who tried to prevent parents from bringing their children to Jesus was radical. Unlike humanity, which is quick to judge, to exclude and to misunderstand difference, Jesus deliberately embraced the marginalised, spending time with humanity in all its diversity. We too can follow this example in what we do and how we do it. This does not mean that supporting transgender students is radical; it is the extent of Christ's love that is radical.

'Lifelong Qualities for Learners', embedded in LEA's *A framework for Lutheran schools,*[9] describes how school communities reflect the characteristics of God through 'core values, especially love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, service, humility, courage, hope, quality and appreciation.' Schools who may be considering the need to develop a policy and procedures to support the enrolment and ongoing support of transgender students might find it useful to audit existing policies in the light of these core values to determine if there is a need for a policy specifically for transgender students. Such a policy, together with its procedures, could develop into a long list of expectations applying to all transgender students, ignoring their individuality. Following set policies and procedures may become legalistic and lack the flexibility required to work with the individual by assuming all transgender students have identical needs. Sprinkle comments: 'If you've met one transgender person…you have met one transgender person.'[10] Therefore, in schools it is important that each transgender student is respected as an individual in the same way that all students are respected as individuals.

7 Lutheran Education Australia, *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2016), 7, http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/.

8 An LCA/NZ pastor and chaplain, 'For such a time as this: a theological response to sexual identity and gender orientation in Lutheran schools and aged care communities,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 53, no 3 (Dec 2019): 152.

9 Lutheran Education Australia, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), 3, www.lutheran.edu.au/teaching-and-learning/a-vision-for-learners-and-learning.

10 Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2021), 52.

Instead, it may be worth turning to existing policies, particularly those applying to student wellbeing or pastoral care. A wellbeing policy may be more generic but in doing so it can be applied to varying needs and be as unique as each transgender student, adaptable to their individual needs. A wellbeing or pastoral care policy considers the unique needs of all individuals. It is neither prescriptive nor legalistic but inclusive and supportive. It is about relationships with students. In a recent conversation with Dr Stephen Haar from ALC, he commented: 'Relationships are not nurtured on rules but openness, vulnerability and a willingness to cross lanes to meet where people are at.'[11] The LCA webpage is also about building relationships: 'whoever you are, whatever your story, you are welcome here with us.'[12] This, therefore, is the why of what we do. Our concern then, is how this works in practice in our schools.

Even if there is not a transgender student currently in a particular school, it is worth considering what the barriers are to those who are exploring their gender identity. For example, is there a unisex school uniform option? Are there any single sex classes and if so, is that the only way to teach the subject? Are gender stereotypes reinforced by things such as always asking girls to form one line and boys to form another? When it comes to sport, at what age can boys and girls compete together? How do external sporting associations make provision for transgender students? How can we support students on camps or in boarding schools? How might our existing policies impact on transgender students? How will a potential new student who is transgender be greeted on their first arrival at the school?

In addition, the school may be called upon to support parents and any siblings of a transgender student who may also attend the school. By the time parents engage with the school they are probably already coming to terms with the daughter they thought they had but who is now identifying as their son, but there may still be moments of confusion and even grief over the change they are experiencing.

Clearly bullying is a potential issue and it may be appropriate to review the strength of harassment policies and procedures and to plan in advance how to work through any bullying that is directed at the students, their siblings and their friendships groups.

There are many voices to be heard in transgender conversations, some accepting, some judgemental, some confused. Some of those voices use scripture in a legalistic manner; some ignore it altogether. One important voice our schools need to hear is the voice of the student, particularly when developing an understanding of the needs of transgender students. It is important that before any decisions are made, schools listen to the student, their parents and any professional opinions from doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists or other relevant professionals. The role of the school is to understand the extent of their expertise and to follow advice from professionals who are working with the student. It is not the role of school leaders or teachers to make decisions about the gender of a child and if asked to do so, they should refer to experts. The role of the school is to support a person

11 Stephen Haar, interviewed by author regarding acceptance of LGBTI students in Lutheran schools, Adelaide, 20 January 2021.

12 Lutheran Church of Australia, www.lca.org.au, accessed 27 January 2021.

presenting with a reality and the ways in which this person is cared for and included can have significant impact on their wellbeing, including their spiritual wellbeing.

Case studies

The following case studies provide examples of some of the ways in which school leaders have supported transgender students in Lutheran schools by aiming to provide a safe environment where all students can be educated and nurtured spiritually.

Case study one: a female student in a large school socially transitioning to male

In this instance the student preferred to use the term 'recognising' as male rather than transitioning. He was an only child and an existing student at the school with an existing and supportive peer group.

The school principal and the leadership and counselling team worked together as they planned this transition and kept in close, continuous contact with the student and his parents. Initially the student and his parents approached the school counsellor who was described as warm and welcoming. No decisions were made without consultation with the student and his parents. The appointment of a staff member, who was intentionally not the child's teacher, as a contact person for the student and his parents proved to be valuable in sharing information with both the school and the family.

Considerable time was also taken by the school to make sure they got it right and kept all who needed to know informed at the right time. In this case the school worked for over a year to put in place all that was needed to help this student to be recognised as male.

There were some existing practices in the school which made the student feel comfortable. The school already had a unisex uniform option. In addition, there were no single gender classes. Existing policy in the PE curriculum was that team sports were not segregated according to gender. Change rooms were also not an issue as students were permitted to wear sports uniform to school on days when it was required. The school was therefore already reasonably welcoming for a transgender student but there were still a number of decisions to be made.

Training of staff and building awareness of transgender students was important. In this case the school used the expertise of Headspace. While well known for its work in youth mental health, Headspace also provides support for student wellbeing and sexual health and is active in the transgender space.[13] It is also a national body and easily accessible in capital cities and major regional centers.

Informing other students was also important. In this case the student decided he felt comfortable enough to tell his class personally, with a teacher ready to support as needed. A letter home to inform parents of other students in the class was discussed, however his class peers felt confident that they were able to inform their parents and couldn't really

13 Headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation, 'Understanding gender identity–for family and friends,' accessed 24 February 2021, https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/understanding-gender-identity-for-families/.

understand why the school might want to write home. This acceptance and support from the class members had the effect of normalising the situation. Similar support from other students has been noted in other schools, particularly in the senior school age group.

Decisions were shared with staff about the preferred pronoun to be used. While the student's legal name could not be changed, except by deed poll which was not chosen as an option, his preferred name was able to be added to the school data base and became the name he was now known by. The use of appropriate toilets was resolved as the student chose to use a disabled toilet, despite some misgivings from the school that this could label the transgender student as disabled. As this was not an issue for this particular student the school respected his decision.

Case study two: three female students in middle school identifying as male

Again, the school had a sensitive approach in supporting the students and parents through a nominated staff member. Staff training was considered to be very important as not all staff were sympathetic to the needs of the students. In this instance it was presented by an existing staff member who raised awareness of gender diversity in the community and who was open about the importance of school values in including all students. The school also made allowances in what had previously been a strict uniform policy to meet the needs of the students. A unisex toilet was also made available for the students. Where one of the students was in a single sex classroom a letter was sent home to the parents of students in that class to explain what was happening. Teaching and learning in the class continued smoothly.

Case study 3: sharing information—a school supporting three transgender students

This case study involved significant information gathering to understand how best the school could and should support transgender students. From the very beginning their position was clear: transgender students were not a 'problem to be solved' but each had their own story which needed to be heard and responded to appropriately for each individual.

The school board was provided with a significant amount of information including legal advice and recommendations; information from the state based independent schools' association and the regional Lutheran Education office; theological insights from the *LTJ* and LCA/NZ. This allowed the school to fully understand its obligations and to identify best practice in supporting transgender students. It guided the school to review all internal policies to identify areas where transgender students might be impacted. This enabled the school to make a strong and informed commitment to ensure all students, particularly transgender students, were in a safe school environment.

Communication was also an important factor throughout this process. Students were heard; teachers were informed and educated; the school board was actively involved.

Conclusion

These three case studies identify some of the different ways in which Lutheran schools are already supporting and caring for transgender students. Each has approached their work with transgender students in different ways, but all have aimed to stay true to their beliefs about the importance of each individual as a precious and loved child of God. All of the case studies demonstrate the work of Lutheran schools in caring for children academically, pastorally and spiritually, yet each has undertaken this journey in a way that best suits their community and in particular the transgender students in their care. School is a significant part of a child's life and those schools who celebrate the God-given diversity of their students are well placed to support all who come to them to live in relationship with their Lord and Saviour.

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Supporting same-sex attracted students in Lutheran middle and secondary schools

Stephen Haar

An unprecedented national postal survey on marriage equality in August 2017 gave unstoppable momentum to pass into Australian law historic social reform. In December 2017, Australia's parliament passed legislation, almost unanimously, to allow two people, regardless of sex, to marry.

This full-recognition of same-sex relationships has had flow-on effects in the wider community; not the least being in schools and other places of learning. The removal of discrimination has promoted wider acceptance and celebration of diversity, particularly among young people. These changes in legislative, regulatory, and community environments—in relation to gender identity and sexual preferences—have direct impacts on and implications for Lutheran schools. Among these is the issue of same-sex attracted students.

In January 2019, the Department of Education (SA) approved policy that mandates *supporting gender diverse, intersex and sexually diverse children and young people.*[1] The policy gives expression to national early childhood, primary and secondary education understandings of inclusive education; a commitment to providing safe and supportive learning environments for all students. This includes: developing and promoting 'inclusive practices' to ensure that children and young people who may experience marginalisation feel safe and supported;[2] following '*Gender diverse and intersex child and young people support procedure(s)* to support gender diverse and intersex children and young people to safely affirm their gender identity within their education environment';[3] and compliance with legislative requirements pursuant to the *Sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status Act* 2013 (Cth).[4]

1 Department of Education (SA), Supporting gender diverse, intersex and sexually diverse children and young people: https://www.education.sa.gov.au/; Compare: Department of Education (VIC) LGBTIQ Student Support policy: https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/; Department of Education (QLD) Diversity in Queensland schools: https://education.qld.gov.au/; Department of Education (TAS) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex: https://www.education.tas.gov.au/; Department of Education (NSW) Culture and Diversity: https://education.nsw.gov.au/.

2 Department of Education (SA), Supporting gender diverse, intersex and sexually diverse…people (1.2.4).

3 Department of Education (SA), Supporting gender diverse, intersex and sexually diverse…people (1.2.10).

4 Australian Government, Sex discrimination amendment (sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status) Act 2013, https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2013A00098.

In its foundational documents on educational philosophy,[5] including its *Vision for learners and learning,*[6] Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) identifies the development of a clear sense of personal identity and worth as being core to student experience in a Lutheran school community. This outcome reflects widely held beliefs that quality education environments and learning experiences set a trajectory of lifelong outcomes for children and young people that impact personal achievements, health, wellbeing, and life opportunities throughout adulthood.[7]

The issue of same-sex attraction and relationships[8] is both complex and controversial within the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), and its institutions. LEA does not establish positions on matters such as same-sex attraction and relationships. Rather, it is responsible for operating within the guidelines of state and federal law as well as official church positions.[9] Lutheran schools are committed to doing so responsibly and compassionately: distinguishing clearly between the expectations which the LCA might have for schools, and what schools are as educational institutions serving both church and state.[10]

Lutheran theology views the role of the state in education as growing out of the responsibility of parents for education.[11] The role of the state is to provide for its citizens the education

5 Commission on Theology and Interchurch Relations (CTICR), *The Lutheran Church of Australia and Its Schools,* Lutheran Church of Australia, Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions, Volume 2, Section J,Church-School Issues (2001):1, https://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/; Lutheran Education Australia, *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2016), http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/; LCA, The Lutheran school as a place of mission and ministry (2016), https://www.lutheran.edu.au/download/the-lutheran-school-as-a-place-of-ministry-and-mission/?wpdmdl=1057&refresh=6098829d1772e1620607645.

6 Lutheran Education Australia, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), 3, www.lutheran.edu.au/teaching-and-learning/a-vision-for-learners-and-learning.

7 Deloitte Access Economics, The socio-economic benefits of investing in the prevention of early school leaving (2012); Government of South Australia, Supporting gender diverse, intersex and sexually diverse children and young people [Policy] (Adelaide, SA: Department of Education, 2019), 3.

8 This paper acknowledges the diversity of GLBTTIQQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, questioning and queer) but focusses on same-sex attracted school students.

9 Commission on Theology and Inter-church Relations (CTICR), *Human Sexuality: Three Key Issues* (Adelaide: Lutheran Church of Australia, 2014). From time to time, the LCA produces statements that reflect its own understanding of various contemporary issues in the life of the church or society. The Commission on Theology and Inter-church Relations oversees this area of the LCA's work. At the request of the College of Bishops or the General Convention of Synod, it prepares statements for information and adoption. The theological statement with pastoral consideration, *Human Sexuality: Three Key Issues,* was released as a study document for the guidance of the church. The statement was not presented and adopted by a LCA General Convention of Synod; in this sense it does not represent an official teaching of the church. Its three-fold focus on marriage, being single, and homosexuality, means that significant areas of human sexuality and social realities of the 21st century are not addressed. Furthermore, the emphasis on 'homosexuality' in the document comes from the fact that the document initially arose from widespread desire in the LCA to update the 1975 statement on homosexuality (adopted in principle by the General Synod, 1975 Convention).

10 Malcolm Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts: Theology for Teachers in Lutheran Schools* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2012), 193–206. Bartsch provides teachers with an accessible and relevant discussion of two ways God works in the world: ways that need to be distinguished but not separated.

11 Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, trans. Friedemann Hebart, in *Luther's Large Catechism: Anniversary*

required for them to develop as individuals and to take their place in society and fulfil their responsibilities within society. Bartsch comments, 'Lutheran schools accept that such education must be relevant to the pluralistic nature of contemporary society, in spite of the difficulty of determining common values on which to base such education.'[12]

The LCA views its early childhood education and care services, primary schools, middle and secondary schools, as agencies through which it carries out its ministry and mission to the people of Australia and New Zealand: making available to its members and others in the community 'a formal education in which the gospel of Jesus Christ informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities in the school.'[13] The church continues to operate its schools under government requirements, provided that meeting these requirements does not bring the church into conflict with the word of God and the teachings of the church.

This paper identifies needs and concerns in regard to same-sex attracted students in middle and secondary schools. Its focus is on inclusive education, child development, and respectful consensual relationships: how schools can respond in a consistent, responsible, and compassionate manner to the needs of students within Lutheran school communities.

The contribution of consensual relationships in adolescent development

Perhaps many remember their early adolescence attractions and romances as being short-lived, tinged with awkwardness, and lacking depth. On some levels such an assessment may have an element of truth. Yet the characterisation of adolescent relationships as fleeting and superficial is demonstrably incomplete. For over fifty years, researchers and theorists have explored and further developed Erikson's writings[14] on identity, published in his landmark book *Identity: Youth and Crisis*.[15] Erikson identified the key developmental task of adolescence as the development of identity: developing a sense of themselves with their mothers, fathers, friends, romantic partners, and others.

Relationships are central in adolescents' lives. They are an ongoing topic of conversation, involving both real and fantasised relationships.[16] Also, rather than being trivial or ephemeral, research agrees that having any relationship experience in adolescence is consequential for young adult partnerships. As young people move from early and late adolescence, they develop psychologically and physically. This is when young people

Translation and Introductory Essay by F. Hebart (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Publishing House, 1983), 141–142.

12 Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts*, 196.

13 CTICR, *The Lutheran Church of Australia and Its Schools*, section 1.2 and 7.3.

14 Elli P. Schachter and Renee V. Galliher, 'Fifty years since "Identity: Youth and Crisis": a renewed look at Erikson's writings on identity,' *Identity. An International Journal of Theory and Research* 18, no. 4 (2018), 247–250. Doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2018.1529267.

15 E.H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

16 C. Feiring, 'Concepts of romance in 15-year-old adolescents,' *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 6 (1966), 181–200; C. Feiring., 'Gender identify and the development of romantic relationships in adolescence,' in *The Development of Romantic Relationships in Adolescence*, ed. W. Furman, B.B. Brown and C. Feiring (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 2000), 175–200.

experience and explore feelings, behaviours, and an evolving sense of sexual identity.[17] Throughout this time, however, sexual attraction and feelings are not always aligned. Teenagers who primarily may be attracted to girls may also be attracted to others, who may or may not identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, or asexual.[18] This fluidity is reported more frequently by girls.[19]

It is natural and common for adolescents to express their sexuality to others, but not all conversation or behaviours are wanted or welcome. Unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes another person feel offended, humiliated, or intimidated is considered as sexual harassment.[20] The experience of unwanted sexual behaviours can impair the development of healthy relationships and is also related to symptoms of depression and anxiety.[21]

Teachers and parents in Lutheran schools want children to have an education that gives them the best start to a happy, healthy and fulfilling life. The introduction of respectful, consensual relationship education in all government and non-government schools—a program supporting students to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to strengthen their sense of self, and build and manage safe and respectful relationships—is promising to deliver such educational and personal outcomes; leading to positive change in students' academic outcomes, their wellbeing, classroom behaviour, and relationships between teachers and students. Further, the respectful relationships initiative aims to support schools in building a culture of respect and gender equality, by looking at their practices and policies to drive meaningful change.

A key conclusion of the *Sixth National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2018*, was that both community and school can play a pivotal role in providing a supportive environment for the development of awareness, knowledge and skills to engage in healthy sexual relationships.[22] In Lutheran schools same-sex attracted students ought to have the same claim to a safe education and caring environment as

17 Ann Meier and Gina Allen, 'Romantic relationships from adolescent to young adulthood: Evidence from the national longitudinal study of adolescent health,' *Social Quarterly* 50 (2009), 308–335.

18 Diana Warren and Neha Swami, 'Teenagers and sex,' in *Growing Up in Australia—The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) Annual Statistical Report 2018*, ed. G. Daraganova and N. Joss (Melbourne, VIC: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2018), 48.

19 Francisco Perales and Alice Campbell, 'How many Australians are not heterosexual? It depends on who, what, and when you ask,' *The Conversation*, 11 June 2019, accessed 4 March 2021, https://theconversation.com/how-many-australians-are-not-heterosexual-it-depends-on-who-what-and-when-you-ask-118256.

20 Australian Human Rights Commission, 'A bad business—Fact sheet: Legal definition of sexual harassment,' Sydney: AHRC, 2003. Retrieved from www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/bad-business-fact-sheet-legal-definition-sexual-harassment.

21 Mons Bendixon, Josef Daveronis and Leif Kinnear, 'The effects of non-physical peer sexual harassment on high school students' psychological well-being in Norway: Consistent and stable findings across studies,' *International Journal of Public Health* 63, no. 1 (Jan 2018), 3–11.

22 Christopher Fisher, Andrea Waling, Lucy Kerr, R. Roz Bellamy, Paulina Ezer, Gosia Mikolajczak, et. al., *Sixth National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2018*, ARCSHS Monograph Series 113 (Bundoora, VIC: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University, 2019). DOI: 10.26181/5c80777f6c35e.

other students.

Sexuality, inclusion, and theology

Historically, Christian churches and their agencies—including Lutheran schools—have held strict if not restrictive views on sexual beliefs and behaviours. Sexual mores have been considered fixed, final, and absolute; despite the conclusions of medical and social sciences that there is more than one way of viewing sexuality and more than one way of being sexual.

To further complicate efforts by schools to provide quality education environments and learning experiences for sexually diverse students, is an evident confusing of sexuality and sex within the Australian community; especially when 'sex' carries the connotation of intercourse—as in to 'have sex'. This misunderstanding is unhelpful because it narrows down the 'very complex and many sided physical-psychological-social-religious-political aspects of being human to questions about the "how-where-when-why-with-whom" of sexual intercourse.'[23] The confusion of sexuality with sex is responsible for spreading the false assumption that being sexual involves being in a genital-sexual relationship: an assumption that excludes many people, including those whose life-circumstances, commitments, or disability prevents them from having a sexual partner. Again, such a narrow view gives little consideration to the personal-psychological dimension of sexuality, related to particular stages of emotional development as individuals, and the impacts of social and cultural backgrounds.

It is important for Lutheran schools, in their commitment and efforts to support same-sex attracted students, to encourage an informed awareness of what Christian theology has to say and to consider what wisdom that tradition has to offer for establishing faithful and pastoral responses. Further, it is important to bring theological tradition into conversation with contemporary knowledge and experience in order to foster—perhaps rediscover—Christian understandings of sexuality.

Traditionally, theological discussion about humans as sexual beings begins with Genesis 1–2.[24] Yet, throughout history, the questions, 'What is human?' and 'What is the image of God?' have been answered differently. For centuries theologians connected the image of God with subduing or having dominion over the earth—a conclusion that has come to be known as the functional view of the 'image of God'. Others looked behind the functionality of humans to consider what made the subduing and dominion possible; and they concluded this was human reason located in the soul. This came to be known as the substantive or structural view of the image of God. The soul was believed to be made of the same substance as God and as such was also the source of human capacity to love and pursue holiness. Much less often have theologians considered 'being fruitful, multiplying, or filling the earth' as linked to the image; even less so being created male or female—although a number of them have believed males more closely reflect the image of God because they

23 Stephen Barton, *Life Together: Family, Sexuality, and Community in the New Testament and Today* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 72.

24 CTICR, *Human Sexuality*, 4.

considered them more rational and more suited to being rulers.

It was not until the 19th and 20th centuries that some theologians began to challenge the traditional understandings of the image as the soul's ability to reason, or the responsibility to rule over creation. Karl Barth looked at the creation of Adam and Eve as a symbolic picture, an image of the Trinity. In Genesis 1, God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image,' and then what does God make? Not one but two; a man and a woman who are to become one flesh. Just as God is a plurality and unity, three in one, so humankind created in God's image exists as two who are called to be one. This has come to be known as the social or relational view of the image of God.

So, contemporary Christian theology about sexuality begins in a surprising place: God as Trinity. The relationship between the persons of the Trinity is described as desire for unity with each other; a relationship of love and mutuality that is characterised also as faithfulness, interdependence, and trust that overflows into the creation and redemption of the world. The desire that humans have for connection and union with another—solidarity, friendship, tenderness, love, joy, intimacy, consensual sexual intercourse—is a desire that expresses our nature as divine creatures. While some in history have argued a sharp distinction between *eros* (sensual human love) and *agape* (divine love), there are other traditions—including the Song of Solomon—that claim 'where love is, there is God' (*ubi caritas et amor, ibi Deus est*).[25] Sexuality is a means for humans to glorify God and to share God's good gifts with others.

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.

(Song of Solomon 8:6)[26]

In writing to Christians living in Corinth, the apostle Paul addresses questions of sexuality and sexual behaviours more than once. At the heart of this teaching was Paul's response against those who claimed that true reality was entirely 'spiritual', and, had nothing to do with human embodiment; therefore, it did not matter what you did with your body—that was a matter of no consequence. In response Paul gives the positive instruction: 'Glorify God in your body' (1 Cor 6:20). Paul's advice puts sexuality in its rightful place—namely, how we build one another up in relationships of love to the glory of God. This is the place

25 '*Ubi caritas*' or '*Ubi Caritas et Amor*' is a hymn of the Western Church, long used as one of the antiphons for the washing of feet on Maundy Thursday. Its text is attributed to Paulinus of Aquileia in 796AD.

26 An allegorical reading of the Song has given it meaning for countless generations of Jews and Christians, which reminds us that the biblical texts function as living word in a variety of times, cultures, and unexpected ways. Still, the best reading today is the literal one, assuming that the book is what it appears to be: poetry celebrating human love and sexuality, which biblical faith regards as good gifts of God in creation. The Song takes unbridled delight in the bonds of love, even while recognizing the pains and turmoil they can bring along the way toward their fulfilment.

where Christian theology has spoken also about the gift of marriage, as well as providing some reflection on the vocation of celibacy (1 Cor 7:1–9, 32–35). Paul's advice is also the place for equally rich theological reflections concerning the nature of friendships, such as the biblical examples of David and Jonathan,[27] Ruth and Naomi.[28]

Paul's overall concern in teaching about human sexuality is the building up of human community, bringing healing and transformation to peoples' lives, and so to bring glory to God. Paul does not focus on sexual matters for their own sake, but for their God-given purpose of creating an ordered, holy, life-giving community. There is wisdom here for our thinking about sexuality: sexuality as God's good gift enabling us to nurture one another in our life together. As we learn from God, and the people of God, disciplines, virtues, and skills for expressing our sexuality appropriately, we build one another up and give glory to God.

Providing safe education and a caring environment inclusive of sexually diverse students

While historic legislative exemptions have allowed faith-based educational institutions in Australia to discriminate against students, teachers and staff, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and other attributes covered by the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984,* these exemptions are currently the subject of review and increasing challenge.

How prepared are Lutheran schools to respond to such challenges? In all likelihood, there is no one response that will satisfy all stakeholders in this matter—even not thinking of broader Australian society and culture but just the Christian community. A not uncommon faith-based voice in the discussion asks 'Where do we draw the line? At what point do we say, "We must obey God rather than any human authority"?'[29] Yet other voices respond, 'Must our faithful response necessarily result in drawing lines of *exclusion*? In what ways is this challenge that faces us about our learning how to draw lines of *inclusion*?' Further, 'How might Lutheran schools respond with faithfulness and integrity—from the core of their educational philosophy and vision for learners and learning—to provide learning communities characterised by welcome, inclusion, and hospitality; from the heart to the fringes?'

The following three propositions highlight some key points for ongoing conversation raised within schools regarding the provision of safe education and a caring environment inclusive of sexually diverse students. Each proposition is accompanied by observations from either scripture, theology, educational philosophy, or pastoral care, to encourage further informed discussion and responsible decisions.

27 1 Sam 18:1–3.

28 Ruth 1:16–18, 22.

29 Acts 4:19, 5:29.

1. *To provide quality education in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for same-sex attracted students, there is a need for Lutheran schools to have a renewed appreciation for wisdom in Christian theology that informs thinking about sexuality as God's good gift enabling us to nurture one another in our life together, and to give glory to God.*

   This wisdom emerges not merely from isolated biblical texts and commands, but from the whole witness of scripture.

   It is not the purpose of this paper to critically engage the biblical texts and arguments regularly included in discussions of human sexuality. Readers are invited to study the extensive and conservative treatment these texts receive in the CTICR background paper on human sexuality.[30] The focus of this paper, however, is on how Lutheran schools on the one hand can respond in consistent, responsible, and compassionate ways to students, while at the same time avoid bringing the church into conflict with the Word of God and the teachings of the church.

   There are two common approaches within the LCA, including schools, for interpreting and applying what the bible has to say about sex. First, an approach that focuses on those texts that are claimed to refer explicitly to embodied human sexuality and sees the bible as a guidebook on sex. Second, an approach which views the bible as a narrative about connection and intimacy, understanding sexuality as one moment within other expressions of relationship.

   Those who read the bible as a guidebook view what they read as offering clear laws about sexual behaviour: as a 'how-not-to' guidebook, although the bible also provides some general principles for understanding God-pleasing expressions of human sexuality. One fundamental belief about sexuality, according to this viewpoint, is that sex is a gift when used in proper contexts and dangerous when practiced in the wrong context. One basic model for the practice of Godly-sex occurs in the creation stories.[31] The model of Adam and Eve is understood as God providing the template for rightly ordered sex: without shame, with restraint, shared with one other person (of the opposite sex) in marriage. Anything that deviates from this pattern is viewed as questionable.

   Another approach to interpreting what the bible has to say about sex focuses on reading it as a narrative on connection, intimacy, and relationship. The bible tells the stories of relationships: creation's relationship with God; human relationships with one another; God's election of a nation for a particular relationship, and, of the extension of that covenantal relationship to the world in Jesus Christ. As the bible narrates these relationships, which focus on episodes of grace and incidents of sin, the reader encounters their place in the grand story of scripture and God's invitation into further layers of connection, intimacy, and relationship. Read in this way, many of the bible's supposedly non-sexual texts have much to say about sexuality.

30 CTICR, *Human Sexuality* (see footnote 9 for the full reference).

31 For example, Gen 2:24–25.

One example is in the response of Jesus to the question: 'Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest?' Jesus said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mat 22:36–40; Mk 12:28–34; Lk 10:25–37). We need the full witness of scripture to teach us what love for God and love for our neighbour look like in practice. Another example from the gospels is when Jesus is portrayed as one who regularly preferred the table—community of the poor, the sinners, the tax collectors, and prostitutes—welcoming those who were traditionally excluded by barriers of physical, cultural, and sexual purity regulations. On one occasion, in defence of his associations with tax-collectors and sinners, Jesus said to his accusers, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners' (Matt 9:12–13).

This challenge of Jesus is a challenge to us also. There exists a tension between sacrifice and mercy today in conversations about the need for *inclusive* learning environments in schools. *Sacrifice*—the purity impulse—defines a zone of holiness, admitting the clean and expelling the unclean. *Mercy*, by contrast, crosses boundaries. Mercy blurs the distinction, in bringing clean and unclean into contact. For Jesus, the presence of God's kingdom was evident by inclusive wholeness more than exclusive holiness. God's command for his people 'to be holy as God is holy' included, at its core, hospitality toward the vulnerable—the poor, the alien, the deaf, the blind, the widow, the orphan.[32] When applied to the question of what stance should be operant in Lutheran schools in regard to same-sex attracted students, what foundation do we have for concluding that the norm of hospitality does not apply to sexually diverse children and young people?

2. *To provide quality education in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for same-sex attracted students, there is a need for Lutheran schools—operationally and as a wider community—to have a critical appreciation of research into sex and gender, and to be able to cope with the disclosure of gender dysphoria and same-sex attraction among students who experience it.*

The provision of a safe, supportive, and inclusive school environment includes having the courage to share what students are going through: the experience of an evolving sense of sexual identity during the stages of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual development. In doing so, school leaders, teachers, chaplains, and other staff within their various areas of responsibility are called to serve students to the best of their ability. Far from making judgements about the complex realities of students' lives, the school will continually seek to follow the example of Jesus in his dealings with those who experienced marginalisation and sanction within their community.[33] Pastoral care values and commitments will bear in mind what Jesus said to his disciples when

32 See: Lev 19:33–34; Ezek 16:49–50; Matt 25:31–46; Lk 14:12–14; Rom 12:13; 15:7; Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 3:12; Heb 13:2; Jas 2:5,14–26.

33 For example: Lk 19:1–10; Jn 8:2–11.

their first consideration in relation to a blind man was 'who is to blame?' Jesus saw this situation as an opportunity for the work of God to be seen in the man's life.[34]

Often leaders, teachers, chaplains, and other staff in Lutheran schools will live in creative tension as they fulfill their various vocations: respecting the requirements of education and state authorities, while at the same time living and working under God—as witnesses to the gospel and as those who bring care and compassion to those in need. Among the characteristic features of Lutheran schools provision of caring, safe, supportive, and inclusive school environments, will always be the prayers of staff for students in the school. Such prayers will be inclusive of asking God for their protection when tempted to sin, for discernment in making choices, for friendships that are mutually encouraging and give glory to God, to desire respectful and consensual relationships.

Identifying and discussing what is understood by a safe and inclusive learning environment will undoubtedly expose needs for change and growth within the school, as well as points of contention. For students it will regularly mean recognition, acceptance, support, and celebration. For the wider school community it will encompass—to varying degrees—policy and facility limits, social and religious values and morality, as well as affirmation of heterosexual practices.

3. *To provide quality education in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for same-sex attracted students, there is a need for Lutheran schools to create inclusive policy with the goal of allowing students to focus on their education; and, to identify best practice in providing sensitive pastoral care.*

The development of policy that allows students to express and value their identity, needs to be appropriate, safe, intentional and inclusive. Policy needs to consider matters such as:

- Do staff use chosen names and pronouns?
- Does the student dress code account for all gender expressions?
- Are options for bathrooms, change rooms, and other traditionally gendered spaces accessible to and safe for students of all gender identities?
- Who are students allowed to bring as guests to formal events and dances?
- The provision of educational curricula that aim to ensure students feel included, valued, and learn what they need to progress in life, needs to consider:
- Does health and/or sex education include different reproductive options?
- Is safe sex for non-heterosexual relationships covered?
- Are students learning about community attitudes towards GLBTTIQQ people, including marginalisation and violence?
- Are students learning about the positive contributions of GLBTTIQQ people?

34 Jn 9:1–3.

The provision of quality education in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for students in same-sex relationships, needs to consider how diversity and inclusion are represented:

- Do promotional materials and visuals throughout the school represent diversity and different family compositions?
- Are different identities and life scenarios incorporated in lessons?
- What clubs, groups, and other social opportunities exist for a range of student identities, beliefs, or interests?
- What actions can be taken to celebrate differences and minimize the effects of bullying?

The provision of quality education in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, will ensure best practice in sensitive pastoral care that considers:

- How is the connection between student and school being cultivated?
- Do students know where to turn to and feel comfortable asking for help?
- What systems are in place for identifying students in need of interpersonal support?
- What systems are in place for meeting students' needs for interpersonal support?
- How can the school provide opportunities for students to build relationships and have meaningful interactions with their families? People and systems in their lives? The wider community?

Closing comments

This paper gives focus to the question of how Lutheran schools can respond in a consistent, responsible, and compassionate manner to the needs of same-sex attracted students within their school communities. At first glance, some may consider this topic too narrow in focus given perhaps other pressing issues related to sexuality that impact a greater number of students in Lutheran schools? Other readers, however, may appreciate how the paper provides fresh starting points for discussion in schools about safe education in a caring environment inclusive of sexually diverse students, evident in the attempts to integrate matters of inclusive education, child development, schools policies and structures, with traditional biblical and theological considerations.

The provision of safe inclusive education for sexually diverse students is an important and ongoing discussion that deserves more than local consideration. As communities of practice, it would be beneficial to share local questions and reflections with others in regular and intentional ways. While this paper does not provide answers, it does attempt to articulate the characteristics of a consistent, responsible, and compassionate response to the needs of same-sex attracted students in schools.

Consistency of response by schools to the needs of same-sex attracted students is evident through ongoing informed dialogue between the very complex and many sided physical-psychological-social-religious-political understandings of human sexuality, and the expectations the LCA has for schools, and what schools are as educational institutions

serving both church and state.

A responsible response by schools to the needs of same-sex attracted students is evident in renewed appreciation for the wisdom in Christian theology and tradition that informs thinking about sexuality as God's good gift enabling us to nurture one another in our life together, and to give glory to God.

A compassionate response by schools to the needs of same-sex attracted students will be evident in the courage to share with students the complex realities of their lives; the development of policy that allows students to express and value their identity; the provision of educational curricula that aim to ensure student inclusion and preparation for respectful and consensual relationships at home, work, and the wider community; and by the provision of best practice in sensitive pastoral care.

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Positive psychology—flourishing within a Lutheran school?

Tim Jarick

'*When schools flourish, things go well...*'[1]

This was Martin Luther's view of the importance of education, when he gathered around the table with friends. In his context of the Reformation in Germany, Luther believed that when schools flourish, humanity flourishes, and in the broader quote, the church flourishes. In recent decades positive psychology has indeed flourished. It has developed as a social science with research into what makes for human flourishing and wellbeing. In educational circles, government and independent schools have taken on the positive psychology, positive school's movement. Two notable Australian private schools in Adelaide and Geelong have been leaders in the field,[2] while some Lutheran schools have embraced the learnings of positive psychology, especially after a positive presentation on it at the 2013 ACLE in Brisbane.[3] As with any educational trend, how we dialogue is critical, especially as a sector of faith-based schools informed by Lutheran theology. Questions Lutheran schools rightly ask as they venture into positive psychology are: is the school watering down its Christian focus in an effort to adopt positive psychology? Can a Lutheran school, where the gospel is to inform educational practice and relationships,[4] engage with and critically use positive psychology? In pedagogy and pastoral care, how do children and teenagers learn the reality of sin and existence of evil in the world while remaining positive and hopeful of transformation?

For a number of years, Pacific Lutheran College has been on a journey of asking these questions and wrestling with answers. The college has engaged the positive schools movement and continued a journey of learning for the whole community. This article traces our college's involvement with the movement, and how we have found connections between it and Lutheran theology. Character formation is a critical focus, and I offer tips for schools as they continue to think intentionally on how their theology informs their educational practice.

1 Martin Luther, 'Table Talk no. 5557,' *Luther's Works* 54:452. The wider quote in context is this: 'When schools flourish, things go well...and the church is secure. Let us make more doctors and masters. The youth is the church's nursery and fountainhead. When we are dead, where are others (to take our place) if there are no schools? God has preserved the church through the schools. They are the preservers of the church.'

2 St Peter's College Adelaide was one of the founding schools of the Positive Education Schools Association (PESA) (https://www.stpeters.sa.edu.au/life-at-saints/wellbeing-pastoral-care/) and Geelong Grammar has developed its own Institute of Positive Education (https://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/Institute).

3 Stuart Traeger and Mark Worthing, 'Positive psychology in the school—What does Lutheran theology have to say?' *Australian Conference on Lutheran Education 4* (Brisbane, 2013), https://www.lutheran.edu.au/?wpdmdl=3657.

4 Commission on Theology and Inter-church Relations (CTICR), *The Lutheran Church of Australia and Its Schools*, Lutheran Church of Australia, Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions, Volume 2, Section J, Church-School Issues (2001), https://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/.

Pacific's background with positive psychology

For some years, Pacific has been working with the goal of enhancing student wellbeing through the integration of Lutheran theology and PERMA[5] as well as strengthening pastoral care practices that foster the academic, spiritual, and social-emotional growth of each child. Embedding restorative practices within the college was a major point which led to introducing positive psychology. Several other key markers that have shaped our journey so far include:

- Principal and Director of Students discuss how positive psychology aligns with Lutheran theology and school ethos.
- Theological audit of positive psychology by the College Pastor.
- Director of Students and Staff visit Geelong Grammar.
- Staff members form a Positive Schools Group to roll out the PERMA model across the college.
- College Pastor expands the devotional threads of the college with learnings from positive psychology, particularly stillness, meditative exercises, prayers based on the Values in Action (VIA) character strengths.
- Roll out of the character strengths amongst staff and students who undertake surveys in staff gatherings and Personal Development and Rite Journey subjects.
- Students develop and create a visual representation of how positive psychology fits into the overall culture and programs of the school (see Figure 1).
- Students encourage their peers at assemblies and other gatherings through the Pastoral Care Action Group and Teacher.
- Head of Senior College and Director of Staff undertake post graduate studies in positive psychology and lead the college's Positive Schools Group. Staff receive professional development and attend positive schools' conferences.

Figure 1: Student-created visual

5 The acronym PERMA stands for Positivity, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment or Achievement. It is a wellbeing model development by one of positive psychology's founders Martin Seligman. Some schools also add Health to the acronym PERMAH.

Integration with Lutheran theology

When Pacific Lutheran College first considered positive psychology, the then college pastor, Paul Smith undertook a theological audit with the college's pastoral care team. He mapped the congruence and divergence of five core Lutheran theological principles against seven key components of positive psychology.

The Lutheran theological principles used were:

1. We sin against God and against each other.
2. God is always gracious and merciful.
3. We are uniquely created.
4. We are created for relationships.
5. God's purpose is for peace and justice.

The seven components of positive psychology used were:

1. Relationships (we cooperate in activities, share personal feelings and the quality of relationship matters, not quantity)
2. Caring/giving (people who volunteer or simply care for others on a consistent basis seem to be happier)
3. Spiritual engagement (faith, prayer, social support, community service, cultural tradition, friendship and commitment)
4. Flow (activities that help us to work towards meaningful goals)
5. Health and wellness (regular exercise = improved mental wellbeing)
6. Optimism (reacting to a problem with confidence and high personal ability)
7. Being thankful for what we have.

In the mapping of these theological principles against components of positive psychology much congruence was found. Like any modern psychological theory, sin and original sin is not a part of its philosophical framework. Indeed, positive psychology stems from the concept that,

> psychology has placed major attention on human pathology and what can go wrong with human nature…this has meant that our understanding of human nature, from a psychological perspective, is a model that sees the human being as fundamentally lacking in positive qualities. As such, the emphasis in psychology has been to fix the deep pathology that sits within each individual and to repair 'damaged habits, damaged drives, damaged childhood, and damaged brains.' Positive Psychology places the emphasis on the positive aspects of human nature such as our strengths, virtues, capacity for altruism and our search for meaning.[6]

Where does this leave a Christian worldview where fallen human nature needs redemption? Where does this leave the Lutheran school where our theology of sin informs our educational practice?

6 Theo McCall, Lea Waters and Matthew White, 'Finding similarities and points of connection between Positive Psychology and Christianity,' *Dialogue Australasia* 27 (May 2012): 18.

We need to be clear and transparent that in the positive psychology approach the concept of sin does not play an active role.[7] For Christians sin is an accurate and necessary picture of the human condition. Sin is more than a psychological flaw that needs to be fixed. Sin is an unavoidable part of our human nature. Original sin is our condition before God. It is a state of un-flourishing, shriveling, wasting away and rotting like a healthy plant that has been cut off from its roots and source of wellbeing; the triune God. Malcolm Bartsch writes 'each person from conception and birth is in a state of sin…the sinful nature we inherit from our parents is not just neutral towards God; it is actively opposed to God.'[8] In the Augsburg Confession, a Latin term is used to describe the sinful human nature; 'concupiscence'. Concupiscence is defined as a constant inclination toward evil that is within every person from birth as a result of original sin. The *Augsburg Confession* states:

> our churches teach that since the fall of Adam all who are naturally born are born with sin, that is, without fear of God, without trust in God, and with the inclination to sin, called concupiscence. Concupiscence is a disease and original vice that is truly sin. It damns and brings eternal death on those who are not born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.[9]

For some, reading this confession might make one think that Lutheran theology is very pessimistic about human beings. However, Mark Worthing who researched positive psychology for Lutheran Education Australia, argues that Christian theology has a fundamentally optimistic as well as a realistic view of human nature.[10] As Tom Christenson puts it, a Lutheran epistemology operates from 'a hopeful realism'.[11]

Without an acknowledgement of the depth of our human condition and how that affects every relationship we have, there's no need for God's grace and the person and work of Christ. Acknowledging this in schools, in life, and in faith is essential. It is important because it sets the scene for the paradox of existence, of being sinful and inclined to selfishness, but also capable of great good and service to others. We are simultaneously saint and sinner. Worthing writes,

> On the one hand we know we have been redeemed, made holy and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Christ-like, but on the other hand, we forever have a sinful nature that wants to curve in on itself. Paul's struggle in Romans 7:14–25, where he wants to do good, but the sinful nature leads him to do evil. Whilst this may appear to be the very opposite of wellbeing, it is because of this ongoing struggle that we are drawn back to God, his word, the sacraments, prayer, worship and strengthened to become

7 Mark Worthing, 'Positive psychology and the Christian doctrine of sin; Are they compatible?' Paper as Senior Researcher, Australian Lutheran Institute for Theology and Ethics, Australian Lutheran College, Adelaide, 1–2.

8 Malcolm Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts: Theology for Teachers in Lutheran Schools* (Adelaide: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), 77.

9 *AC* 2 (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader's Edition to the Book of Concord,* ed. Paul T. McCain [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005], 57–58).

10 Worthing, 'Positive psychology and the Christian doctrine of sin,' 11.

11 Tom Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 130.

> more Christ-like in our daily life.[12]

This Lutheran theological distinction is foundational for our appreciation of positive psychology in the school setting, and in particular our use of the movement's character strengths as we also focus on the spiritual development of young people.

While noting the positives of positive psychology's take on sin, Worthing also suggests,

> the Christian, embracing the many good elements within positive psychology, must be careful that the focus on self (which is not entirely wrong) does not supplant the focus on others and their wellbeing, and on God as the ultimate source of our wellbeing, the ultimate source of which each individual 'self' is able to achieve.[13]

Wellbeing programs which focus only on caring for and improving the individual self are detrimental and only highlight the self-centered world-view.[14] Younger generations are born into a 24/7, digitally connected world. Luther expounding on Augustine writes,

> Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, (being) so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them (as is plain in the works-righteous and hypocrites), or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.[15]

A realistic view of our sinful human nature and awareness of the curved-in nature of the self, is a critical point of dialogue with positive psychology's focus on mindfulness and individual wellbeing. Together with LEA's strong focus on community and service learning, the focus beyond the sinful self is present and practiced in a Lutheran school. A final word of caution from Worthing:

> there is much to affirm in the focus on what we can and must do to achieve wellbeing…A baptized version of PERMA will regularly point us to the importance of the wellbeing of others and will not forget that God is the ultimate source of our wellbeing and achievements. It will remind us that when we begin to believe that our human programmes or our own individual, unaided self can achieve these things, then we have abandoned the theology of the cross and taken up a theology of glory.[16]

Authentic alignment

There is a clear divergence between our Lutheran theology of sin and positive psychology. How do we work with the positive school's movement so that it authentically aligns with

12 Worthing, 'Positive psychology and the Christian doctrine of sin,' 16.

13 Ibid., 13.

14 Meaning turned or curved inward on oneself.

15 From his lectures on Romans 5:4. For a slightly different translation see *Luther's Works* 25:291.

16 Worthing, 'Positive psychology and the Christian doctrine of sin,' 14. Suffering is a core reality in Lutheran schools so the theology of the cross is another critical point of tension between positive psychology and Lutheran theology that needs further exploring. See: Stephen Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort: Martin Luther's Letters to the Depressed and their Significance for Pastoral Care Today* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016), 189.

who we are as a Lutheran school where our theology informs our practice? The staff goal at Pacific is to enhance student wellbeing through the integration of Lutheran theology and the PERMA model of wellbeing, through pastoral care. A first step for working towards this goal has been to develop the devotional threads of the worship life of the college,[17] a common language and framework used in chapels, daily prayers and devotional activities. We supplement this with written communications by the principal and college pastor to parents and families in the weekly school newsletter. In our context, much convergence has been found between the character strengths of positive psychology, the values of Lutheran Education and the biblical themes found in Lutheran theology. An example of this is in term two of each year of our three-year cycle of threads, where our college focuses on our Lutheran values as a school. These ten values include humility, compassion, service, hope and forgiveness amongst others. Most of these Lutheran Education values correspond directly with the VIA Character Strengths. And of course, each of these values/character strengths are concepts taught in the bible specifically from Jesus' ministry and life as described in the gospels and explained further in the epistles of the New Testament. The sweet spot in the middle of these three areas as highlighted in Figure 2 is where this convergence is articulated in our college's devotional threads.

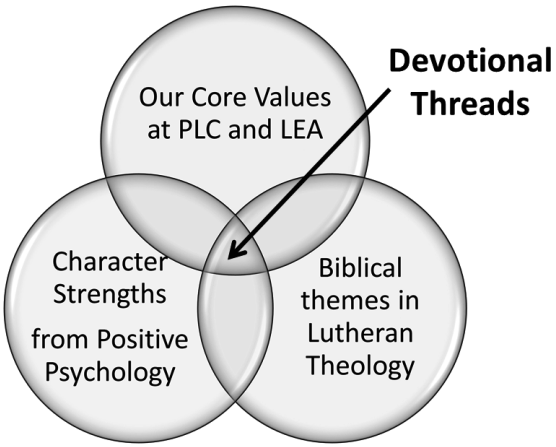

Figure 2: The convergence between values, character strengths and biblical/theological themes

Pastoral care groups and class devotions make connections between biblical texts as the threads are unpacked with students through quotes, activities, discussion points, media, and meditative and stillness practices. In daily prayers, we give thanks to God for the strengths he has given to us as we ask the Holy Spirit to grow in us his gifts to us. In chapel, we look at the biblical stories of our thread cycle through the lens of the character strengths of the characters in the text. Another major avenue for alignment between our theology and elements of positive psychology has been through weekly whole staff devotions by the college pastor. These devotions which mainly focus on the devotional thread are another opportunity for staff to unpack biblical virtues, the character strengths

17 The devotional threads at Pacific are a deliberate framework originally created by Paul Smith that guides the worship life of the college. It is a three-year cycle of readings and themes for a school context. The threads largely come from the Developmental Assets of the Search Institute in the United States. The individual threads are repeated fortnightly and accompanied by bible readings, explanations, quotes, prayers, reflective activities, YouTube and internet links, children's story books and other devotional material.

of positive psychology, and our gospel theology that God comes to us from outside of ourselves. This material also includes content for students to experience times of Christian meditation and stillness in the busyness of school life. The work of the founding college pastor Rick Zweck has also been instrumental in setting an openness to the contemplative side of Christian spirituality, including Christian meditation and using the labyrinth in our and other Lutheran schools.

Character formation

The character strengths research from positive psychology has much to offer Lutheran schools, whilst providing a Christ-centered education which helps form character in students. Forming a Christ-like character is what a Christian school and learning organisation is all about. For Christians, Christ-like character is formed when the fruit of the Spirit is grown and developed in people. Paul also writes in Romans 5:1–5 that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character and that results in hope. For Lutherans, Christ-like character happens when the gospel, as distinguished from the law, informs all learning, relationships, and practices. From the time of the reformation, Martin Luther and his co-reformer Philip Melanchthon devoted themselves to reforming schools as well as local congregations. Their emphasis was always on the pastoral and educational needs of the common people, so that they were not robbed of Christ and the power and grace to change people's lives and transform their character.

Fast forward to our current context; the positive psychology movement has birthed the VIA Institute, a non-profit organisation which is dedicated to bringing the science of character strengths to the world through supporting research, creating surveys of character and developing practical tools for individuals and practitioners.[18] Character strengths are viewed as our positive personality in that they are our core capacities for thinking, feeling, and behaving in ways that can bring benefit to us and others. Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson worked with many scholars and practitioners to devise a classification of twenty-four character strengths and six categories of virtues and ways of measuring them. Their eight hundred and fifteen-page volume, *Character Strengths and Virtues; A Handbook and Classification* is the result of this work. Seligman and Peterson's handbook is focused on psychological health, i.e. the character strengths that make the good life possible. They believe it is a necessary correlative to the diagnosis of psychological illness as articulated in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.[19] The VIA Character Strengths survey measures an individual's character strengths and was initially developed as a study for positive individual traits of teenagers. It soon emerged as having a much wider brief for adults as well as having the potential of identifying institutions that enable good character.[20] Over six million people have completed the VIA Character Strengths survey. Many schools like Pacific use this strengths-based inventory with students, staff, and leadership.

18 From the VIA Character Strengths Mission as found on their website as accessed 21 June 2018; http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character.

19 Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3–4.

20 Ibid., 5.

Character strengths in the life of a Lutheran school

Character strengths and virtues have had a long history through Christian tradition. Lutheran theology has sometimes been critiqued for not having a substantive articulation of Christian virtues. In this area, American Lutheran theologian Joel Biermann outlines a Lutheran framework for character formation while maintaining a faithful expression of justification by grace alone in his work *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. Biermann presents writings of the Lutheran Confessions which highlight the importance of character development in the justified Christian. He argues Luther originally wrote the catechisms in order to help shape and form people. Through exhortations, examples, scriptural threats and promises, repetition and memorisation, the catechisms were intended to grow Christian character in Christians.[21] Luther had high regard for the spiritual habits that contribute to the formation of Christian character especially as directed to the neighbour rather than the self. In his *Small Catechism*, he explains each of the Ten Commandments in a positive way, that details succinctly how to live out the prohibition. In his *Large Catechism* commenting on the second commandment, Luther encourages the repetition of practices which form habits that in turn shape character.[22] He writes,

> Children should be constantly urged and moved to honour God's name and to have it always upon their lips...This is also a blessed and useful habit and very effective against the devil...It is also useful that we form the habit of daily commending ourselves to God...Look we should train our youth this way in a childlike way and playfully in the fear and honour of God.[23]

In the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, regarding the invocation of the saints, Melanchthon acknowledges the need for ongoing training, formation and exercising of the faith. He writes, 'our Confession approves honouring the saints in three ways [including]... the strengthening of our faith…[and] the imitation, first of faith, then of the other virtues. Everyone should imitate the saints according to their calling.'[24] This is what Aristotle and current virtue ethicists would call 'habituation'. Biermann describes habituation as the practice of virtuous acts and the cultivation of pious habits.[25] For the Lutheran this is always directed in service of the neighbour. Also, in the *Apology* regarding the monastic life and Luther's idea of vocation, Melanchthon writes,

> if we follow this logic, monasticism will be no more a state of perfection than the life of a farmer or mechanic. For these are also states in which one acquires perfection. All people, in every vocation, should seek perfection, that is, growth in the fear of God, in faith, in love toward one's neighbour, and similar spiritual virtues.[26]

In the *Formula of Concord*, the first generation of Lutherans writing on God's eternal

21 Joel D. Biermann, *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 95.

22 Biermann, *A Case for Character*, 97.

23 *LC* 21,70–76 (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Paul T. Mc Cain, 366–367).

24 *Ap* 21,4–7 (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Paul T. Mc Cain, 228).

25 Biermann, *A Case for Character*, 93.

26 *Ap* 27,37 (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Paul T. Mc Cain, 269).

foreknowledge and the elect 'therefore, believers, too, should not be idle, much less resist the work of God's Spirit. They should practice all Christian virtues, in all godliness, modesty, temperance, patience and love for one another.'[27]

The *Lutheran Confessions* don't shy away from how virtue and character are developed by the Holy Spirit in the life of a person. Our Lutheran theological tradition does give permission for Lutheran schools to pursue character formation, including tapping into the research, wisdom and advice on developing character strengths from the positive education movement. If God is part of and central to positive psychology practices within Lutheran schools, the work of the Holy Spirit will be highlighted in terms of the development of character traits and strengths within students.

Conclusion and tips

This article describes some of the journey Pacific Lutheran College has had with elements of positive psychology. Our school acknowledges that there is scope for positive wellbeing models with a Lutheran educational worldview that is acutely aware of original sin. There is opportunity for dialogue with positive psychology's character development within Lutheran schools. With this in mind, here are some tips and questions for fellow Lutheran schools who are interacting and conversing with positive psychology.

- Complete a theological audit with your pastor, principal, deputy and unpack it with your pastoral care/wellbeing staff/leaders, then revisit this again and again.
- How do staff, students and the wider school community learn of the reality of sin and evil in the world? And how do school leaders and staff provide opportunities for students to use their God given strengths and abilities for acts of service to others?
- How does your school's wellbeing programs and interventions acknowledge God as the source of all wellness and wholeness?
- Tap into mindfulness practices through the lens of scripture and Christian meditation.
- What language and systems do you provide for a coherent framework for the worship life of your community that integrates Lutheran theology and character formation?
- Spend time with the passionate drivers of positive psychology in your school and beyond to encourage critical theological thinking, especially around an appreciation of original sin, the tension between saint and sinner and the theology of the cross.

While this paper focuses largely on the theological tensions within a Lutheran understanding of sin and positive psychology, other fruitful avenues for exploration would be the role of suffering and pain in a Lutheran school.[28]

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27 *FC,SD* 11,73 (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions,* ed. Paul T. Mc Cain, 642).

28 For a critique of positive psychology and a Lutheran approach to suffering see Stephen Pietsch, 'Luther's theology of suffering and pastoral care,' a paper given to the NSW Pastor's Conference of the LCA, May 2017. Also, for a wider Christian view of positive psychology. See: Peggy L. Kern and Susan D. Benecchi, 'Intersections of positive psychology and Christianity' [white paper], (2019). Available from http://www.peggykern.org/publications.html.

Science and theology within Lutheran school communities

Lutheran Education Australia*

Preamble

Science and theology share a receptive spirit. Both disciplines seek to receive, digest, interpret and even proclaim the world around us and in us. Unlike magic and technology which seek to manipulate the world according to human ideas, science and theology both seek to discover the world as it already is. Rather than stand over the world, they seek to 'under stand' the world. That process of discovery is not purely neutral, and both science and theology find that certain paradigms arise which provide frameworks in which to observe and process reality. Newtonian physics and the Lutheran Reformation are both examples of paradigms that have helped people apprehend reality, even if the former paradigm has since given way to a different paradigm.

Because science and theology share this spirit, their relationship is an important one, not least within the context of Lutheran schools. Teachers and students of goodwill in Lutheran schools, who are seeking to grow in their understanding of the world, will soon become interested in the relationship between science and theology. If both disciplines seek the truth, how are they different? If each discipline has seemingly different methodologies, how can they be integrated? Need they be integrated?

Key guiding principles

1. Lutheran schools as part of the mission and ministry of the Lutheran Church of Australia have as core to their identity the Lutheran confession of faith. This involves both the confession that

   a. the Holy Scriptures are 'the divinely inspired, written and inerrant word of God, and the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life' (LCA Rite of Ordination), including in the Lutheran school; and the confession that

   b. these scriptures proclaim at their heart that the one Lord Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human, and that by His suffering, death, resurrection and ascension people are justified by grace through faith.

2. Lutheran schools do not determine their own theological position on issues such as the relationship between science and faith but work under the publicly stated theological positions of the LCA. The most prominent statement the LCA has officially adopted relating to a science and theology issue is the 1972 statement 'The Theses of

* This paper has been developed by a series of authors commissioned by Lutheran Education Australia over years and multiple iterations. As such, it does not wholly reflect the views of any one author and is therefore attributed to Lutheran Education Australia.

Agreement and Inerrancy' which has a concluding section on 'evolution' [see Appendix 1]. The 2015 statement *Human Sexuality: Three Key Issues* also has some bearing on science and theology.

3. The Lutheran school serves both the church and the state as it carries out God's work in the world. God works both through the church ('right hand kingdom') and the secular order ('left hand kingdom') and the Christian lives and works within both.

4. The Lutheran school serving God through the 'left hand kingdom' recognises the right of the state to set benchmarks concerning the teaching of key learning areas such as foundational areas of history, literature, literacy, maths and the natural sciences, while also recognising that all truth is subject to God.

Ways of relating theology and science

There are four primary ways of relating science and faith which have been identified in recent literature.[2] Educational leaders need to be sensitive to these different ways of relating science and faith as these approaches, or assumptions, often have more bearing on the potential for conflict and misunderstanding than the specific view taken with regard to any particular issue that may arise in the science and theology discussion.

1. Science and theology are fused so that they cannot be meaningfully distinguished. This view was common in the ancient world among the Egyptians, Persians, Greeks and others. It is still to be found in cultures such as India, which are dominated by polytheistic religious views, and also among many proponents of New Age thinking. In this view there is little to distinguish mathematics and magic, astronomy and astrology, physics and metaphysics. Nature is all that there is, and yet nature itself is magical, mysterious, divine. In the educational context, where this view arises, there is the risk of confusion between disciplines as well as the tendency toward views that may be seen as superstitious or incoherent.

2. Science and theology are separated so that they ultimately have nothing to do with each other. This perspective arose in the early modern era and was influenced, among others, by the work of Francis Bacon. He argued in his 1695 book *The Advancement of Learning* that there are two books in the world: the book of God's word and the book of nature. These two should not be mingled together or confused. In many ways this was a reaction to the ancient unitary worldview which was reflected in Bacon's time with astronomers (including even Galileo) doing astrological readings. Bacon's two books, or two worlds solution was intended to give each discipline, theology and natural science, its own identity and space and avoid any potential for conflict. Practitioners of both disciplines, then and now, have found this independence tempting and alluring. In the school context the apparent advantage of this view is that it creates a barrier of separation between theology and science that seeks to maintain peace

2 Cf. Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (United Kingdom: SCM Press, 1990), 3–30; Mark Worthing, 'Science and theology: a brief history,' in *God and Science and Classroom and Pulpit*, ed. G. Buxton, C. Mulherin and M. Worthing (Melbourne, VIC: Mosaic Press, 2012), 86–99; Paul Tyson, *Seven Brief Lessons on Magic* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 8–18.

through denial of any common ground of interest. The problem is that this way creates a disconnection between God and the world. God is no longer the God who created and continually creates the heavens and the earth. Christianity is reduced to 'feelings'. And science is no longer concerned with the created world, but rather with a kind of 'pure nature', or raw materialism devoid of any origin, meaning, or purpose. It also renders meaningful dialogue between science and theology pointless,[3] and has led historically to our third model.

3. Science and theology are in fundamental conflict. If science and theology have nothing to do with each other, God becomes functionally superfluous to the world. And if superfluous, then any discussion of God the Creator becomes a threat to the independence of science. This is in some ways a logical and historical step from the previous position of separation. In the words of one contemporary writer: 'It is no surprise, then, that a culturally maturing science could decide it was time to leave home, renounce its theological mother and kill its divine father.'[4]

   Historically, this view emerged in 19th-century anti-Christian writers like Draper and White. They produced histories of science and faith that argued that the two had always been at war with one another.[5] Between them they invented the still popular, but false myths that the church once believed the earth was flat, that Copernicus delayed publication of his theory about the Sun being the centre of the solar system until after his death out of fear of the church, and that the main issue in the case of Galileo was the church's desire to supress his support of the Copernican theory. In this context, the rise of the theory of evolution led some like T.H. Huxley to argue that this new theory gave an explanation for life that replaced the need for God. Some Christians then and now felt that Huxley was right, and that only a rejection of Darwin's theory could save Christianity. Both sides considered the claims of science and theology to be in conflict.

   Within Lutheran schools this issue plays out most often, but not exclusively, in the debate about evolution. A science teacher who does not believe in God, for instance, might believe that the theory of evolution demonstrates irrefutable proof of God's superfluity to the world and teach accordingly. This is clearly problematic within the context of a faith-based school. By the same token, a science teacher who believes all evidence of an old earth must be rejected if Christian faith is to be maintained, might express hostility to readily observable data out of a fear that it will undermine faith. This is clearly problematic within the context of a curriculum of genuine scientific enquiry.

4. Science and theology are necessarily reconcilable as the heavens and the earth are created by the one God. This model has ancient pedigree in the early and medieval

3 On the theological side Karl Barth, in the mid-20th century, was a supporter of this view. Among scientists the view has been advocated by Gould. See: Stephen J. Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

4 Tyson, *Seven Brief Lessons on Magic*, 14.

5 John Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 1875); and Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 1896).

church. But again, in recent decades an increasing number of theologians and scientists have been engaging in active dialogue about matters of common interest to science and faith, starting from an assumption that both theology and science are concerned with the truth about human beings and the world, in a way that is ultimately complementary without being subject to homogenisation. The rationale behind this way of thinking comes from our confession of faith in the first article of the creed. Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg explained it well when he wrote:

> If the God of the bible is creator of the universe, then it is not possible to understand fully or even appropriately the processes of nature without any reference to that God. If, on the contrary, nature can be appropriately understood without reference to the God of the bible, then that God cannot be the creator of the universe, and consequently He could not be truly God…[6]

This final perspective has much appeal for Lutheran schools, which seek to do pedagogical justice to science-based aspects of their curriculum within the faith commitment of the schools that the scriptures do not lie. Without determining beforehand what the answer or solution is to any particular question, it assumes that both theology and science are concerned with receiving the truth, and that the truth of the world is not ultimately fragmentary or contradictory, but unified in Christ Jesus 'by whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him' (Col 1:16). So, this model also sees that the conversation between theology and science is not only possible, but necessary.

To take one example, hormones are certainly involved in love, but love cannot be understood fully by scientific processes alone, just as love in theology cannot be fully understood without reference to biological processes. The same could be said about beauty, friendship, justice, evil, and truth, to saying nothing of God Himself. This approach can require more effort, given how common it is to separate or bring into conflict the disciplines of theology and science. Thus, it requires wider reading and thinking on the part of both teachers and students. It also requires a humility, and an attentiveness to mystery, for we don't create the truth of the world, but rather stand under it and receive it.

In a 1988 letter to the director of the Vatican Observatory, Pope John Paul II wrote: 'Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish.'[7] Students and teachers in Lutheran schools might do well to unpack and interpret this remark, as they consider how science and theology can work together, without becoming indistinguishable.

6 A. Peacocke, ed., *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 4.

7 John Paul II, 'Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Reverend George V. Coyne, S.J. Director of the Vatican Observatory' (Vatican, 1 June 1988), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19880601_padre-coyne.html.

In order to assist this conversation, some remarks on creation and evolution are in order, recognising that while this issue is not the only point of conversation between science and theology, it is the most common one to arise in the school context.

Creation and evolution in science and theology

1. For Martin Luther, biblical interpretation centred on Jesus Christ and the gospel. Luther's lecture on Genesis 1 does not treat the chapter as a modern scientific account of the origins of the world and life, but focuses on the Holy Trinity, the power of God's Word, and the creation of the world. At one level a 'plain reading' of the Genesis creation story provides a straightforward account of the relationship between the creator and creation. At another level, reading Genesis in light of its historical context with an awareness of the temporal knowledge held by the people at the time of its writing, draws attention to the theological realities of the creation story—that the earth is God's temple, that heaven and earth are full of the glory of God, and that the primary truth about humankind is that we are created in the image of God. It is this gift of relationship to God, given to us through scripture, that is primary for Lutherans for it is through faith that we understand scripture and receive God's grace. A genuinely literal interpretation of God's word, therefore, refers to God's activity in the heart of the hearer through the work of the Holy Spirit.[8] In this example, science can perhaps be protected from idolatry and false absolutes by seeing that the most foundational truth about humans and the world is that we are created.

2. The doctrine of creation is drawn from various parts of Scripture—Genesis, the psalms, Proverbs, Job, the prophets, the gospels and the epistles. God has both created the world out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) and is continually creating and upholding the entire cosmos (*creatio continua*). Thus God is both beyond creation (transcendent), and present within creation, preserving and redeeming (immanent). So the world that we can touch and see is ultimately derived from and dependant on a higher reality. In the previous section, the first model we looked at considered God to be only immanent to creation, never beyond. The second model considered God to be only transcendent to creation, never relevant to creation. While the third model is hard to pinpoint, only the fourth model of harmony sees God as both immanent in creation, yet also transcendent, with creation having its origin and ongoing life from beyond itself. In this way, Christ stands at the centre of creation, He who is both truly God, eternally begotten of the Father, and truly human, born of the Virgin Mary in a stable in Bethlehem.

3. Some have given the analogy of characters on a stage. Just as characters on a stage interact to create drama, so too science is often concerned with the interaction of different substances, including elementary particles, and the effects they produce. In a somewhat similar way, some creation myths concern the interaction of gods and the resulting effects on the world. The Christian doctrine of creation, by contrast, is fundamentally concerned not with the interaction of the characters, but with how

8 See Gene E. Veith Jr., *The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals* (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 2010).

the stage and characters came to be there in the first place. The atheist scientist Richard Dawkins is thus correct to dismiss the idea of a flying spaghetti monster as incomprehensible. That would simply be adding one more being to the cast. Dawkins is incorrect, however, when he likens this to Christian belief,[9] which is not in one more being, however great, but rather in being itself—God who is the ground of all being. In this example, religion can perhaps be protected from error and superstition by the help of science.

4. Since the 1972 statement on evolution [see Appendix 1] the LCA has made it clear that it will neither endorse nor reject the scientific theory of evolution, nor will it declare that those Christians who accept that God may have created through some process of evolution are in fundamental error. At the same time, it does clearly reject interpretations of evolution that are anti-Christian or attempt to make the theory into an all-embracing world-view, which regards the universe as self-existing and self-explanatory, that is to say, which leaves no room for God. In coming to this position, there is an acknowledgment in the LCA statement that while all of life has a dimension of mystery, the beginning of creation, like the end of creation, is mysterious, and that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are 'hidden' in Christ (Col 2:3). Whether Christians take a young earth or old earth position, with differing degrees of evolution, questions will remain. For example, if Adam and Eve were the only human family, how could Cain marry a wife and found a city (Gen 4:17)? On the other hand, as death came into the world through sin (Rom 5:12), how can theistic evolutionists consider death arising before sin? While people have posited responses to these questions, a spirit of humility before the mystery of creation ought to remain.

5. Given this position with regard to the specific question of evolution, it is inappropriate to purposely exclude any person (teacher, student or parent) from a Lutheran school community on the basis of their views on whether or not God made use of evolution in the process of creation. It is also inappropriate to exclude from the teaching curriculum positions which may vary from that of other teachers and school leaders solely on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of evolution and the science that lies behind it. Some behaviours and positions, however, are inappropriate, and need to be avoided:

   - Making evolution or any scientific theory a self-sufficient explanation of reality, pretending that it comprehends the whole of reality in all its dimensions.
   - Assuming that if we understand how something works or how it came to be formed, that this leaves no room for God.
   - Belief that science and faith are not compatible and putting students in a situation where they feel they must choose one and reject the other.
   - Misrepresenting data or disparaging those with whom one disagrees in an effort to build up one's own case.
   - Teaching that Christians must hold to one view of the age of creation, whether long or short.
   - Teaching the key science curriculum areas because it is required, but then telling

9 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London, UK: Bantam Press, 2006), 53–54

students it is wrong and that they can simply ignore this information and these theories.

6. As the issue of creation and evolution can be a sensitive one, teachers should ensure that no stumbling block to faith is placed before students. Ignoring or rejecting the scientific record can lead students to falsely imagine there is a choice between scientific observation and the confession that Christ is Lord. Teaching the theory of evolution as an account of the origin of reality and life can do likewise. Sound teaching in this matter will pay attention to the dynamic of the quotation mentioned earlier. Believers wary of science may fruitfully consider how science can help free their faith from error and superstition. Those interested in science while wary of faith may fruitfully consider how Christianity can help free their scientific studies from idolatry and false absolutes.

7. Ultimately teachers do well not to impose that which sits outside the bounds of what we believe and confess as a church. While individual Lutheran educators may hold more detailed specific beliefs about the 'how' of creation at a personal level, working within a Lutheran School should inform their responsibility as they teach within the framework of a confessional Lutheran church. The challenge for educational leaders within Lutheran schools is to moderate fairly these disputes, to see that all voices are heard, to discourage misrepresentations, and to ensure that all parties are helped to identify and build on the points they share in common under the framework of theology and science both seeking to receive the truth of the world, albeit in different ways. In this light, teachers may wish to present the four ways or models of relating theology and science, as a way for students to work with both science and faith content, as well as for the avoidance of conflict among staff, between staff and students, and between staff and parents.

Appendix 1: LCA statement on evolution

The 1972 LCA statement on evolution distinguished between (1) evolutionism, which is an all-embracing philosophical worldview that seeks to find an explanation for everything apart from God, (2) evolution itself, which refers to the 'development, by natural processes, of all forms of life,' including humans, and (3) micro-evolution, which refers to genetic changes and development within species. The statement makes it clear that there is no issue with the existence of micro-evolution, as it deals with 'indisputable facts and poses no problem for Christian faith.' Evolutionism, which seeks to find an interpretation for all existence that leaves no room for the Christian confession of the first article of the creed, 'I believe in God the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth,' is clearly to be rejected by Christians.

The issue, then, as the statement says, concerns the concept of evolution itself, understood as the theory explaining the development, by natural processes, of all forms of life. The statement recognises that this can easily morph into an anti-theistic form of evolutionism and warns against this. Yet, significantly, the document recognises that many Christians do not find difficulties with the fact that God may have created all things through some sort of process of evolution and that these views cannot simply be rejected by the church, nor regarded as a basis for not working together in Christian fellowship.

Significantly, the statement advises:

> Scripture says very little about the mystery of the 'how' of creation, and where scripture is silent the church cannot dogmatize. If in such areas Christian thinkers suggest the possibility of some forms of aspects of evolution as God's means of creating, then differences of opinion about such views should be treated as non-doctrinal and therefore not divisive of church fellowship.

Appendix 2: Luther's understanding of God as Creator from the *Small* and *Large Catechisms*

The *Small* and *Large Catechisms* are particularly important for educators in Lutheran schools because it is in these documents that Luther sought not only to express the faith, but to indicate also how it should be taught. Luther's focus was not on how God created. Instead, Luther saw in the confession of the first article of the *Apostles' Creed* the expression of a relationship with God and a relationship with all the many good things God created. The physical world is valued because of who made it just as we are valued because of who made us. These are the central pedagogical points of Luther's *Small* and *Large Catechism* teachings on God as creator.

In his *Small Catechism*, with regard to the question 'What does it mean to believe in God, the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth,' Luther answers simply:

> I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life.

> God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.'[10]

Similarly, in the *Large Catechism* Luther writes:

> 'I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth…' This is the shortest possible way of describing and illustrating the nature, will, acts, and work of God the Father…What is meant by these words or what do you mean when you say 'I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator, etc?' Answer: I hold and believe that I am God's creature, that is, that he has given me and constantly sustains my body, soul and life, my members great and small, all my senses, my reason and understanding, and the like; my food and drink, clothing, nourishment, spouse and children, servants, house and farm, etc. Besides, he makes all creation help provide the benefits and necessities of life—sun, moon, and the stars in the heavens; day and night; air, fire, water, the earth and all that it yields and brings forth; birds, fish, animals, grain, and all sorts of produce. Moreover, he gives all physical and temporal blessings—good government, peace, security. Thus we learn from this article that none of us has life—or anything else that has been mentioned here or can be mentioned—from ourselves, nor can we by ourselves preserve any of them, however small and unimportant. All this is comprehended in the word 'Creator'.[11]

Both the *Small* and *Large Catechisms* provide excellent boundaries in how we present a Christian perspective that surrounds such a complex topic. In his *Large Catechism* Martin Luther states simply yet profoundly:

> If you were to ask a young child: 'My dear, what kind of God do you have? What do you know about him?' he or she could say: 'First, my God is the Father who made heaven and earth…' [F]or the young pupils it is now enough to indicate the most necessary points, namely, as we have said, that this article deals with creation. We should emphasize the words 'creator of heaven and earth'.[12]

Given that Luther lived five hundred years ago when creation science was still at its infancy, his words take new shape today. The importance of Luther's theology, however, that restrains itself from making scientific judgment, serves as an excellent guide on how to approach teaching on creation today, especially when science has such a greater influence in the development of young people than it did in the 16th century. Keeping the focus on the '*who'* and not on the '*how'* allows for the scope needed for young people to hear what is most important. In a 2012 publication, *God and Science: In Classroom and Pulpit* Mark Worthing states the following:

> I think sometimes we run through confessions of faith like 'I believe in…the maker

10 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 354–355.

11 Ibid., 432–433.

12 Ibid., 432.

> of heaven and earth' without really thinking about them. If we take our confession of God seriously, then we should not be afraid of studying the natural world or of what we might learn about it…The fact that we do not understand or agree how God created is a minor point. The major point is that everything that exists is dependent for its existence upon God and nothing exists apart from God. If God did it in six days, or six day ages or over a process of billions of years, it is no less remarkable and no less God's world.[13]

Appendix 3: Science and faith and the Australian national science curriculum

Curricula and textbooks have long been on the front line of science and religion debates. From the perspective of questions relating to science and faith the following observations can be made about the Australian science curriculum.

1. It has a strong focus on inquiry. This is built into the curriculum from the earliest primary years and can be seen as aligning with the Lutheran tradition of critical questioning. A science curriculum structured around asking questions and finding things out should also be open to asking wider questions about the world and whether there is more to the world than simply the material reality with which science deals.
2. There has been a reasonable amount of attention given to the history of science. Some of this would appear to be included especially to make room for discussions of contributions of groups often overlooked in the history of science, e.g. Islamic, Chinese, aboriginal, etc. This is meant to demonstrate that science as inquiry about the physical world is more than just a western, European phenomenon. As much of the impact that Christianity has had upon science (and vice versa) is generally looked at under the history of science, the curriculum's forays into this field present positive opportunities to mention contributions to science by those arising out of a strong Christian context (for example Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, Maria Cunitz, Isaac Newton and Caroline Herschel).
3. There is no formal recognition of science and faith issues within the curriculum. This area has been fairly carefully avoided. Bringing these issues into the curriculum needs to be well thought through so as to justify where and how this is done. Within a Lutheran school context this would be fairly easy to accomplish so long as an explanation can be given for why it has been included where it has been done. One possibility is talking about the nature of belief and its role in scientific thinking. Chiappetta and Koballa, in *Science Instruction in the Middle and Secondary Schools*,[14] include a discussion of beliefs and whether or not scientists have them as part of the understanding of what science is. There would certainly be room here to talk about such issues as what is a religious belief versus what is a scientific belief, whether these are really always different, and also to challenge the idea that science is only about facts while religion is

13 Mark Worthing, *God and Science: In Classroom and Pulpit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 37.

14 Eugene Chiappetta and Thomas Koballa, *Science Instruction in the Middle and Secondary Schools*, 6th ed. (Houston, TX: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall, 2006).

only about beliefs. Australian editors Grady Venille and Vailee Dawson, in their widely used *The Art of Teaching Science*[15] talk about the importance of bringing controversial issues into science teaching, focusing mainly on ethical issues in a chapter by Van Rooy. There is a lot of scope for inclusion of ethical concerns that arise out of the Christian tradition. Also, a chapter by Venville on integrating science and other learning areas demonstrates a need to connect science to other areas, and ethical and religion studies should be included in this.

4. While the national curriculum writers have steered away from obvious science and faith issues, they actually do occur within the curriculum. This happens with the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. It is positive that the world views of these peoples are integrated into the curriculum, with a focus on ways in which they understood and worked with the natural world. But in arguing for the importance of recognising cultural and even religious worldviews, the ground is broken for pointing out the significance that other worldviews, including Christian, have played in the development of science.

5. Major scientific theories like evolution and big bang cosmology only appear in comprehensive form from Year Ten. We must recognise that whatever our own views, these two theories traditionally have raised most concerns among some segments of the Christian community and are the most likely points at which students may raise these concerns. The fact that they appear when they do should relieve pressure to confront these topics earlier (though from a science perspective alone one might wonder whether it is good to leave such foundational theories until so late in the curriculum). It also suggests, however, particularly within the Lutheran school context, that Year Ten is the time when these issues will likely arise and we should have a plan as to how to deal with the possible controversy among Christians. It is probably unwise simply to wait and see whether the questions arise within the classroom and then respond off the cuff. It is advised to be prepared, having thought through strategies to address the issues, keeping in mind the requirements of the curriculum, the teacher's own perspective, the official stance of the LCA (cf. Appendix 1), the likely range of views that exist among students and their parents, and the desired outcome of such discussions.

Appendix 4: Science and faith in the *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework*

The *CSCF* (2005)[16] identifies Christian Studies as a key learning area within Lutheran schools at all year levels. Within the *CSCF* students are encouraged to explore faith in the context of their lives and various worldviews. Within the four strands of the *CSCF* the strands of 'Christian Beliefs' and of 'Christianity in the World' are the ones in which science and faith issues arise most clearly, across all six bands, representing all age levels.

15 Grady Venille and Vailee Dawson, *The Art of Teaching Science* (Melbourne, VIC: Allen & Unwin, 2004).

16 Lutheran Education Australia, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2015), https://www.lutheran.edu.au/download/cscf-2015/.

The Christian Beliefs strand:

- Key idea 1: 'Christians believe that God is one God: father, son and Holy Spirit.' Concerning the nature and existence of God we see that traditional arguments for the existence of God are closely connected to our understanding of the physical world, and the nature of God is understood also in part through God's connection to the physical world. Also within this key idea is the teaching about creation. Especially in the later bands (D and E) there is a strong focus on questions relating to evolution and big bang cosmology and how these may impact upon our understanding of God as creator.
- Key idea 2: 'The person and work of Jesus the Christ is central to Christianity.' In this area the incarnation and the full humanity of Jesus are discussed. The incarnation is a key doctrine showing God's concern and link to the physical world.[17]
- Key idea 3: 'A Christian worldview is shaped by the biblical teaching of sin and grace.' Here the creation of human beings and issues such as free will and human sinfulness are addressed. All of these areas have clear links to scientific understandings of human origins and human nature.

The Christian Living strand:

- Key idea 3: 'Christians have a responsibility in and for the world.' Here questions of ecology, sustainability and environmental stewardship arise.

The Christianity in the World strand:

- Key idea 1: 'Religious beliefs and ideas shape people's thinking and actions.' Especially in the later strands questions about the nature of truth, the connection between faith and reason, and philosophies of science arise.
- Key idea 3: 'People make decisions using a range of religious perspectives and ethical frameworks.' With the discussions of ethics and decision-making making, issues related to bio-ethical issues and issues arising from science-based technology arise.

Appendix 5: Advice for classroom teachers concerning science and faith issues

1. Teachers need to be willing to talk about controversial issues at the science-theology interface, even though this may potentially generate controversy and disagreements. The teacher must be willing to support those who come under attack within discussion, whatever point of view they advocate. Teachers need to be well aware that speaking openly about science and faith issues—especially if they are seen to touch upon the creation and evolution debate—will produce opposition, whatever the viewpoint or approach taken. Teachers can take some comfort in the fact that at the very least many students (as well as their parents and other staff) have a genuine interest and passion in this topic!

17 Cf. Mark Worthing, 'Some brief reflections on Christology and the natural sciences,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 47, no. 1 (May 2013): 4–9.

2. Questions posed by the natural sciences provide some of the best possibilities for talking with young people about faith and values. Advances in genetic engineering, stem cell research, cloning, etc. provide very fertile discussions about values and decision-making, and that for Christians moral absolutes come from God alone. Evolutionary theory can raise questions about human origins, what is unique about humans, and what Christians actually mean by 'creation'. Big Bang cosmology, along with the obvious beginning of the world questions, raises interesting questions about the possible end of the world. These theories can often lead to discussions about meaning and purpose as well as Christian (and other religions) visions of the end of the world. Atheist conceptions of science such as that of Hobbes, for instance, have rejected any purpose to nature, and that our desires are subject to no demands other than what we choose. Search for extra-terrestrial intelligence (SETI) projects raise questions about the place of humanity in the universe and provide some great hypotheticals about the role of Christ and just how far this might extend. The mysterious world of quantum mechanics raises questions about determinism, and chaos theory and the second law of thermodynamics are great springboards for discussions about the nature of evil. Recent discussions in neuroscience raise issues about what is mind and spirit, where does will and belief come from, etc. In short, the sciences are brimming with opportunities to talk about realities that transcend the material world. Educators, especially those involved in religious and values education, should not avoid discussion of these issues out of fear of controversy and opposition.

3. Teachers are advised to identify areas in their curriculum in which controversy is most likely to occur and to tread wisely. Awareness and appreciation are to be shown as to why some students may have negative views of organised religion, or of why others may have negative views of science. Students who feel that the teacher has some understanding and appreciation of their own views and concerns are much more likely to be willing to listen to what that teacher and others have to say.

4. When dealing with hard-line points-of-view, from whatever perspective, it should not be the goal of the teacher to try to convert the student to a different perspective. Ways can be found to challenge students (or parents) to see value in other perspectives. In the case of anti-evolutionist Christians, for instance, rather than trying to convince them that evolutionary theory is correct, they could be challenged to consider that there are those who accept the basic tenets of this theory and still are genuine Christians who believe God created everything that exists, as is the official position of the LCA (cf. Appendix 1). Similarly, in the case of the atheist or agnostic student who views evolution as a counter to the truth claims of Christianity, a tit for tat dispute is unlikely to produce positive results. Instead, such students can be challenged with the existence of a number of leading scientists who support the theory of evolution but are also strongly committed to the Christian faith, or that how something could come from nothing is a question beyond the understanding available to scientific inquiry.

5. When faced with a specific controversial issue, the teacher could consider taking an historical approach. Rather than immediately presenting the arguments from each side, students can be given some 'neutral' background information about how and why

the controversy began and how it may have shifted focus over time. There are usually enough surprises in easily confirmable historical facts to cause many to rethink their own perspectives on the issue.

6. Try to avoid coming across as superior or arrogant. It can be frustrating as an educator to be presented year after year with what is perceived to be the same weak or misinformed arguments: for instance, God cannot exist because there is evil in the world, or religion is responsible for all the world's wars and suffering, or scientists or God are rigging the data to make the earth look old. Young people often believe what they have heard from sources they trust as credible. It is important not to give the impression that someone is naïve or uneducated simply for disagreeing with one's own position. If a student senses this attitude they will in most instances harden their own stance and make the learning process even more difficult.
7. Finally, at the senior school level, consider allowing students with very strong views on a particular issue to make their own presentation to the class. This prevents them from claiming no other view but that of the teacher or textbook was allowed to be heard. If the question and task is framed well, it can require the student to look at more than one side of the issue in order to make a credible presentation. The ensuing discussion, however, may have to be heavily moderated.
8. It is important to address issues of science and religion when they arise and not to avoid dealing with them. Do not assume or hope that someone else further down the track will deal with these issues. In all likelihood, as the teacher in the classroom, you will be the best hope your students will have of getting a specific and healthy discussion on how science and faith can constructively inform one another and live together.

The lens of Lutheran theology on managing teacher underperformance

Shane Paterson*

Managing teacher underperformance is a task which all principals will deal with over their careers. An exploration of this issue[1] highlights that managing this phenomenon is one of the highest causes of stress in the work of the principal.[2] While exploring the reasons behind this stress for my earlier research, it was apparent that Lutheran theology impacts on the manner in which principals in Lutheran schools address this phenomenon.[3] The original research focused on principals and their construction of teacher underperformance. This article, however, acknowledges that other senior leaders in the school may also deal with this issue and the findings of this research may be relevant to any work they also undertake in this area.

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss teacher underperformance *per se* and the impact this has on principals, but more importantly explore the application of Lutheran theology by principals when managing this phenomenon. The first part of this paper will briefly explore underperformance before proceeding to discuss the use of theology to address this.

Addressing an issue of underperformance is seen as part of the role of the principal: 'principals are relatively accepting of the fact that they are required to deal with cases of underperformance, and that it is only one part of their role which can cause pressure or stress.'[4]

There is a lack of clarity around defining underperformance in the literature. It is, however, important to provide a brief understanding of underperformance in order to then discuss the importance of the use of Lutheran theology in managing this phenomenon.

* This article is based on research undertaken for a doctoral thesis, to investigate the question, 'How is teacher underperformance constructed by principals of Lutheran schools?' It explored how principals identified teacher underperformance, the process used and the impact of Lutheran theology in responding to this phenomenon.

1 Philip Riley, 'The human cost of school leadership,' *Independence* 37, no. 2 (2012): 46–51; Philip Riley, et al., *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey*, 2019 Data (IPPE Report) (Sydney: Institute for Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University, 2020); Mark Worthing and Shane Paterson, 'Principal Health and Wellbeing in Australian Lutheran Schools,' accessed 28 April 2021, www.lutheran.edu.au/download/principal-health-and-wellbeing-in-australian-lutheran-schools/.

2 While the research focussed on the work of the principal, the findings are applicable to any members of the leadership team who deal with this in the school.

3 Shane Paterson, *How Is Teacher Underperformance Constructed by Principals of Lutheran Schools* (EdD thesis, Flinders University, 2016).

4 Paterson, *How Is Teacher Underperformance Constructed*, 137.

Teacher performance

Various researchers including Hattie,[5] and Jones, Jenkins, and Lord[6] cite such practices as: holding high expectations, monitoring learning and providing feedback, having a positive attitude, having a variety of teaching strategies which influence outcomes, in defining satisfactory or effective teaching performance. This is reflective of much of the research in this area.

There is, however, less clarity around the definition of underperformance. Wragg et al., in their seminal work, would argue that underperformance is not defined by one characteristic but is displayed in 'clusters' of evidence,[7] while Jones et al. argue that to arrive at a precise meaning of 'underperformance' one must first define 'good performance'.[8] This, they say, is gauged by both student behaviour and student outcomes.

Several researchers, including Jones et al, and Rhodes and Beneicke, have offered as common indicators of underperformance such indicators as: complaints from parents, students and colleagues; poor classroom discipline; lack of student progress and/or underachievement; lack of lesson planning and preparation; poor subject knowledge; low expectations of students; lesson delivery that does not capture interest or enthusiasm; and curricula that are not adjusted for learning abilities.[9]

The South Australian Department for Education and Child Development (DECD), defined underperformance as occurring when, 'an employee is not performing the duties of their role to the required standard or otherwise is not performing in a satisfactory manner'.[10] While the New South Wales (NSW) Government Department of Education and Communities, defined underperformance as, 'Generally, unsatisfactory performance means not meeting agreed tasks, or timeframes or standards of work.'[11]

These statements require senior leaders to determine 'agreed tasks' or 'the duties of their role.' Such statements raise the following questions: What are the agreed tasks and duties of the teacher? How does a teacher exhibit satisfactory performance in the carriage of those duties and tasks? Without clear answers to these two questions, it is difficult to be

5 John Hattie, 'Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?,' *Australian Council for Educational Research. Annual Conference on Building Teacher Quality*. Auckland: University of Auckland (October 2003), 5.

6 Jeff Jones, Mazda Jenkin and Sue Lord, *Developing Effective Teacher Performance* (London: Paul Chapman/SAGE, 2006), 6.

7 Edward C. Wragg, Gill S. Haynes, Caroline M. Wragg, Rosemary P. Chamberlin, 'Managing incompetent teachers' (British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Sussex, Brighton, 1999), 1–40.

8 Jones, Jenkin and Lord, *Developing Effective Teacher Performance*, passim.

9 Christopher Rhodes and Sandra Beneicke, 'Professional development support for poorly performing teachers, challenges and opportunities for school managers in addressing teacher learning needs,' *Journal of In-Service Education* 29, no.1 (2003): 123–140. DOI: 10.1080/13674580300200205.

10 Department of Education and Child Development, 'Managing unsatisfactory performance guidelines,' http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ManagingUnsatisfactoryPer.pdf.

11 New South Wales Government, 'Guidelines for the management of conduct and performance,' https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/staff/staff_perform/conduct_perfor/pd20060335.pdf, 35.

clear about the system definitions of underperformance.

It is apparent that to settle on an 'absolute' definition of the phenomenon of underperformance is difficult. However, senior leaders in Lutheran schools have the experience to trust and back their judgement. 'The findings of this research suggest that principals tend to rely on their experience to identify a teacher who is underperforming. Once this perception has been recognised, a process of validation occurs to confirm that their perception is correct. During this process of validation, evidence is collected by the principal, and their perception is either confirmed or dismissed.'[12]

Having briefly defined underperformance and recognising an acceptance by principals in Lutheran schools to manage this, the question arises: how does Lutheran theology inform the way in which this phenomenon is handled in Lutheran schools?

Lutheran schools

Lutheran schools in Australia, because they are schools of the Lutheran Church of Australia, are faith-based schools and therefore this is a point of difference when compared with other schools and school systems. This difference, according to Bartsch, is exemplified in a set of core values and beliefs which do not change or are compromised, irrespective of the current educational context.[13] Christenson takes this further when he discusses a specific Lutheran anthropology and epistemology, 'we are Lutheran by means of our educational vision, a theologically informed orientation that manifests itself in what we do as we learn and teach together and our understanding of why we do it.'[14]

It is therefore essential that principals of Lutheran schools have an understanding of these fundamental and core values and beliefs and that they have a theologically informed orientation that guides their practice. The Lutheran church has set theological expectations through its various policies for its leaders: they are to 'uphold the teachings of the church'[15] and to 'have a clear understanding of the mission of the Lutheran school'.[16]

Primarily our schools are communities, upheld by the church and through whom the Holy Spirit works for witness and service. In 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV) we read, 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.' Christians working in Lutheran schools, and also as members of the 'priesthood of all believers', share God's love as they live in relationship with all those they are called to serve. In

12 Paterson, *How Is Teacher Underperformance Constructed*, 146.

13 Malcolm Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts: Theology for Teachers in Lutheran Schools* (Adelaide: Lutheran Education Australia, 2013), passim.

14 Tom Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 28.

15 Commission on Theology and Interchurch Relations (CTICR), *The Lutheran Church of Australia and Its Schools*, Lutheran Church of Australia, Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions, Volume 2, Section J, Church-School Issues (2001), accessed 30 April 2021, www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/.

16 Lutheran Education Australia, 'Staffing policy for Lutheran schools,' 1, accessed 13 October 2015 http://www.lutheran.edu.au/publications-and-policies/policies-and-guidelines/.

these relationships God is at work guiding us and revealing His saving work as we lead and manage all manner of issues, including underperformance. Our interactions with others are based in the knowledge of God's love for them. A concept underpinned by our understanding of the doctrine of creation, whereby humans are identified as created in God's image.

> The fostering of positive relationships between all individuals in the Lutheran school is fundamental to establishing and maintaining the school as a caring, supporting community. This provides the basis for pastoral care and for dealing with situations where relationships break down between individuals or within the community.[17]

In managing teacher underperformance (along with a broad array of other responsibilities), one is carrying out his/her vocation. It is the principal's responsibility as part of his/her vocation, as a leader in the school, to preserve God's creation so His purposes can be fulfilled. It is through our vocation and the 'mask' of leadership that we strive for good order.[18] This may mean a difficult conversation or action needs to occur for good order in the classroom and the school.

> Vocation relates to God's continuing creation and preservation of the world as He uses human beings as stewards within creation to carry out His purposes.[19]

The foundation of Lutheran education is the Gospel of Jesus Christ which informs all teaching and learning, all human relationships and all activities, and as such the view of underperformance and the manner in which it is handled should clearly be informed by the relevant theological teachings of the church.[20] Three of these doctrines are identified as being essential in dealing with this phenomenon: creation, the two kingdoms and grace.

Creation

In Genesis 1:27 we read that humans were created in the image of God. While our perfect relationship with God was fractured due to sin, each individual has worth and value in the eyes of God; we are unique and have distinctive characteristics, gifts, and abilities. Lutheran teaching thus emphasises that we are valued for who we are as God's children, not our utility.[21] Recognising our vocation, or the service we undertake for others, is part of the Lutheran understanding of God's continuing creation where we use our gifts and talents to serve the needs of others.[22] Such a belief emphasises the way members of a Lutheran school community are viewed and treated.

As leaders who reflect God's love in all our dealings with others, we continually need to remind ourselves that everyone matters because of God's love for them, not because of any inherent quality of their own. In dealing with an underperforming staff member,

17 Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts*, 64.

18 Ibid., 66.

19 Ibid., 66.

20 CTICR, *The Lutheran Church of Australia and Its Schools*, 1.

21 Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts*, 62.

22 Ibid., 69.

we recognise that teacher underperformance is evidence of the human brokenness that goes with a fallen creation and points to Jesus Christ as the one who restores God's creation through his own life, death and resurrection (Revelation 21:5). In dealing with underperformance, we deal with the whole person because it is the whole person who underperforms.

The two kingdoms

A uniquely Lutheran perspective, the two kingdoms, or the two hands of God, provide a framework for understanding the two ways God works within the world. The left hand, the realm of justice, ensures that peace and good order are kept within the world (and in this context the school). It is recognised that there are accountabilities to governments and civil authorities and consequences for failing to follow these. From a school perspective, there are regulations to follow, curricula to be taught, teaching standards to be met, and behaviours to manage as the school serves the community and society.[23]

The right hand is often depicted as the realm of mercy, where God operates through the church, the community of Christians, with the gospel of forgiveness. It is within this context that Christian practices (e.g. worship, confession, absolution) occur within Lutheran school settings.

For a principal, an understanding of the two kingdoms provides a lens on the dual vocational role and responsibilities under God. On the one hand there are pastoral responsibilities to the individual staff member with whom you are dealing, with justice and mercy: the right hand. This is, however, coupled with the need to address performance issues and enact appropriate consequences to support good order and respond to the needs of the community: the left hand.

Grace

As Christenson emphasises in discussing an understanding of grace, 'if anything is the central theme of Lutheranism it is this: we are justified by grace through faith.'[24] Put simply, Lutherans believe that there is nothing they can do to earn God's forgiveness for their sin; it has already been given through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are called to receive this through faith. Within the school community it is recognised that, while all people in the eyes of God are sinners, they have freely received this forgiveness.[25]

As Christenson explains when speaking of church theology, 'grasping the Lutheran understanding of these gives an adequate view of what the Lutheran theological tradition is and how Lutherans think about things.'[26]

As schools of the Lutheran Church of Australia, it is expected that all decisions and all actions are based in the gospel to make available, 'a formal education in which the gospel

23 Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts*, passim.

24 Christenson, *The Gift and Task*, 45.

25 Bartsch, *A God Who Speaks and Acts*, 86.

26 Christenson, *The Gift and Task*, 37.

of Jesus Christ informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities in the school'.[27] It is then essential that principals in our schools have a clear understanding of and are able to subsequently apply these doctrines with compassion and certainty when handling teacher underperformance. A further role of the principal in a Lutheran school, that of spiritual leader, is acknowledged in the context of staff underperformance.

Spiritual leadership

While the principal works in the left-hand kingdom, managing and leading a school, the principal is also seen as the 'spiritual leader' of that community and therefore also works in the right-hand kingdom.[28] The application of Lutheran theology can manifest itself in a number of ways when dealing with underperformance.

In the research undertaken there was a strong correlation between managing underperformance, once identified or constructed by the principal, and the application of Lutheran theology. Two of the themes identified were relationships and motivation.[29]

Relationships

Relationships with underperforming staff are seen as an important aspect in managing this phenomenon by principals and are grounded in the understanding of grace and creation. 'Although principals did stay in relationships with underperforming staff members, feel positive emotions such as being pastoral and supportive, and support underperforming teachers in their endeavours to change their behaviour, principals also felt that this came at a cost.'[30] I called this 'costly discipleship'. This term is based on the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's understanding of the use of grace in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*.[31] In this book (first published in 1937) Bonhoeffer speaks about costly grace.

The emotional cost to the principal can be great, as they, as a disciple of Christ, graciously offer support and care for an underperforming teacher. At the same time, the principal operates with an understanding of another key Lutheran teaching, the two kingdoms. This teaching expects that the principal, while caring for the teacher who is underperforming, must ensure that the underperformance is attended to, so that good learning and order continue in the school. Living as a disciple of Jesus becomes costly (costly discipleship) to the principal, as dealing with underperformance and working towards an outcome can be perceived by the community as showing either weakness or harshness in leadership.

Motivation

The reasons a principal deals with an issue of underperformance and the attitudes which they display in doing so, were clearly expressed during the interview stage of the

27 (CTICR), *The Lutheran Church of Australia and Its Schools*, 1.

28 Bartsch, 'The principal as spiritual leader in the Lutheran school' (Lutheran Education Australia discussion paper 2014), accessed 28 April 2021, http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/assets/Principal-as-Spiritual-Leader.pdf.

29 Paterson, *How Is Teacher Underperformance Constructed,* 127–129.

30 Paterson, *How Is Teacher Underperformance Constructed*, 137.

31 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 2015).

research.[32] While they identified a responsibility to the community to address the issue of underperformance, principals also expressed their desire to support the teacher who was underperforming so that they can flourish in both kingdoms. The Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, where, on the one hand, there are civil accountabilities and, on the other, the spiritual work of God is carried out, underpinned the principals' thinking on this theme.

This strong sense of responsibility to the school, however, was coupled with a desire to care for and support the teacher through the process of addressing underperformance, thus showing the right hand of God at work. Principals of Lutheran schools during this research spoke about having a responsibility to care for underperforming staff as they are children of God, but also to maintain standards and expectations of the school community.[33]

Conclusion

The Lutheran church has strong and defined doctrinal statements that can inform the way we live our vocations. Principals of Lutheran schools, as spiritual leaders of their communities, have a wonderful opportunity to use these to guide and direct their leadership practice, not only when dealing with underperformance, but in every area of their leadership.

The three identified doctrines used in this article are considered useful in managing underperformance in staff. Research appears to show that many principals in Lutheran schools understand these doctrines and through relationships and a desire to care for the other apply them at some cost to themselves known as 'costly discipleship'.

It is imperative that we continue as a system of schools to train our principals in the theology of the church. This training needs to be coupled with continual rich and deep discussions on the intersection of theology and the school context. This will ensure that we will remain true to our system of schools and our Lutheran faith. As Nev Grieger reminds us, 'Part of the whole leadership expectation of a Lutheran school principal, is to ensure authenticity of our system; to ensure that the gospel and the theology are reflected through our daily operations.'[34]

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32 Paterson, *How Is Teacher Underperformance Constructed*, 102–115.

33 Ibid., 128.

34 Neville Grieger, *Fuelling the Fire* (Adelaide: Lutheran Education Australia, 2020), 63.

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