

ACLE 3: Meryl Jennings

A further thread in the weave: private education for the public good

As I noted in the abstract for this paper, Lutheran schools are private education providers and, as such, have often been included in the condemnatory references to elite, rich, exclusive institutions which are taking funds away from public education. In this session I want to indicate the shift in thinking that has been occurring away from that view of private education—and emphasise the valuable contribution that independent schools, especially the faith based schools like Lutheran schools, are making and can make to Australian education and society.

‘Private schools should be included in announcements about the quality of education in the state’, said the AISSA executive director in an *Advertiser* front page story this year. Garry Le Duff’s was a bold statement considering the history of private and public education in this country and the debates that have raged about funding and equity and so on. For some time in this country there has been a war of words related to the private or public provision of education and the related issue of government funding for independent schools.

Yet, as we know, independent schools, specifically religious schools, were part and parcel of Australia’s colonial settlement:

As a British colony, early educational endeavours in penal New South Wales were based on the English practice of leaving the schooling of the young Europeans to the religious societies and private institutions.

While the state provided money for teachers, orphanage schools and church schools, it was not until 1848 with the introduction of the National School System that the state became a major player in the education of its children. The fears of the churches about potential loss of funding led to the creation of a dual system of Education Boards. The national school model was later adopted by South Australia and Queensland, with the legislation in South Australia prohibiting any public funds use for church schools. Victoria and New South Wales subsequently replaced their two boards with a single education board. The centralising and strengthening of each state’s educational administration continued and developed from that point. Private education, however, continued to be provided by denominational schools with mixed effect and success:

Most denominational schools experienced the effects of mixed religious enrolments, many of them faced difficulties in obtaining and retaining suitable teachers, most were chronically short of resources and all of them found it increasingly difficult to survive in competition with the national schools and with one another. Yet, despite these shared characteristics, there were differences in educational attitudes from one denomination to another, and even within a particular denomination conflicts or shifts in attitudes to education sometimes occurred.

According to Cleverley's definitive work, *Half a million children: studies of non-government education in Australia*, by the beginning of the twentieth century:

The new pattern of denominational interest in education had been firmly established. With the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, all denominations had virtually withdrawn from the field of primary education and had begun to limit their endeavours to establishing and maintaining a system of socially select secondary schools. As in the denominational elementary schools of the middle period of [the nineteenth] century, the populations of these schools have not remained religiously homogeneous, and, as in those schools, too, this mixing has no doubt had its effect on their denominational distinctiveness.

Lutheran primary schools were another exception to that withdrawal—other than the forced closure of the 'German schools' at the time of World War 1—with school numbers steadily growing during the last century. The growing reputation of Lutheran schools for excellence in facilities and programs continued to attract parents, with student enrolments increasing to the point where, in 2008, over 33,000 students attend the 83 Lutheran schools throughout Australia, while a further 3,200 children are educated and cared for in more than 30 Lutheran early childhood centres around the nation. The teaching staff in Lutheran schools and centres across Australia numbers 2,850.

The funding of public and private education

This growth was considerably helped by the injection of government funding into private education. Capital grants for science laboratories and school libraries initially in the mid 1960s, and then recurrent funding towards the end of the decade provided improved educational facilities which attracted students from a wider range than the Lutheran community. Additional fees from students added capacity for further improvements in buildings and equipment, as well as improved salaries and conditions for teachers

The issue of choice

One of the consistent issues for the independent school sector in Australia has been the level of financial support that should or could be expected from the government. Consequently much of the writing about private education has debated the matter of government funding for non-government schools. In presenting their arguments, writers on this issue stressed the rights and freedom of choice of parents to select the type of education they desired for their children. One writer, back in 1960, for example, used fundamental principles of the rights of parents, equality of citizenship, freedom of religion and freedom of the pluralist society to argue that the two systems of schools—departmental and independent—should share the community's expenditure for education.

More and more parents have been willing to pay for what they perceive as value added education in the private education sector, but more and more appeals are made for more

equitable funding for all schools. So the funding debate has become linked with the issue of choice of educational provision, with notions of equity and also accountability for government funding.

Reasons for choice of independent schooling

ACER conducted a survey in 2004 of over 600 parents relating to their reasons for choosing the school for their children. While the teaching of religious and moral values was a factor for parents with children in catholic and independent schools, “parents attach greatest importance to the quality of teachers in the school. They also look for schools that are safe, secure and that provide quality student care. These are top priorities for parents regardless of the type of school they are considering”.

In another study of parents’ selection of the school for their children parents were asked to comment on what is different about particular schools, the strengths and weaknesses of the school selected, and the particular reasons for selection.

Of all respondents, 100% of State school parents, 92% of Independent school parents and 90% of Catholic school parents categorized ‘care of students’ as ‘absolutely essential’.

The issue of equity in educational provision

Australian politicians and people continue to articulate issues and concerns about the growth of the private schooling sector supposedly at the expense of public schooling. Questions are raised about inadequate funding to public education and excessive grants and support for independent schools from the government. The quality of teaching and learning in state schools, it is suggested, suffers as parents increasingly choose a private education for their children and teachers seek employment in the well-resourced private sector.

Opinion appears to be moving towards equitable provision of funding for all schools. Some indication of the trend can be seen in these comments:

Caldwell (2003):

Observers from Britain, Hong Kong, the Netherlands and New Zealand and most other nations would be puzzled, for in these places, there are few distinctions in public funding on the basis of who owns and operates the school. In the Netherlands, for example, it is unconstitutional and therefore illegal to do so. In Britain, most schools classified as non-government in Australia are part of the public system. Divisive debates about public and private schools have largely disappeared in these nations, and there should now be a determined effort to achieve the same outcome in Australia (p. 2).

Warner (2006):

Governments need to ... move away from the divide of private versus public, wealthy private versus the rest and look at how we should be part of an urgent networking priority to create schooling relevant to the 21st century and its young people (p. 163).

From Stephen Lamb on Selective-entry schools: the need for a re-think:

The challenge we face in the future is to promote a high general standard of learning and achievement for all, not just the selected few ... We cannot do this if we operate a network of selective schools separating children from one another. Rather it will be necessary to ensure all schools are equipped with the resources and programs to enable them to deliver high quality teaching and learning.

Initial statements on education from the current Australian federal government indicate a movement towards such an outcome. Deputy prime Minister Gillard said this year: "It's time we got beyond the public versus private divide that has blighted our education debates for so long and replaced it with a debate about the quality of education and how we can guarantee that every child, no matter how rich or how poor, gets the best education possible." And she reiterated "the Government's support for the full right of parents to choose the school that best meets the needs of their child."

The expanding independent schools sector in Australia continues to challenge state and federal governments with the issues mentioned, and their implications, both fiscal and educational. At the same time, independent schools, and Lutheran schools among them, need to engage in ongoing evaluation of their contribution to the education of Australian students.

Lutheran schools in the independent sector

Lutheran schools make up a distinctive grouping within the independent faith based schools in Australia. Lutheran schools have joined the various state associations for independent schools, whose membership comprises a wide range of denominational, non-denominational and experimental non-government schools.

The statistics on independent schooling in Australia issued by ISCA indicated for 2007 a total of 1,078 schools with a full time equivalent student population of 490,772. It was noted also that 85% of all independent schools had a religious affiliation and that the category 'Lutheran' had 6.4% of students in the independent sector. At the same time independent schools employed about 15% of all teachers in Australian schools. Of the independent schools' sources of income, 59% was from private sources, mainly parents, with all government sources accounting for the remaining 41%.

Lutheran schools and government funding

At various periods of their history Lutheran schools have expressed misgivings about receiving government funding, received it reluctantly or welcomed it for the developmental opportunities it provided. The Lutheran position on government funding, which has informed the current attitude to significant financial support for Lutheran schools, was clearly stated in the position paper written at the time of the High Court challenge to State Aid to independent schools in the 1970s. There it was argued that Lutheran schools contributed to Australian society in ways which justified their receipt of funding and indicated their inclusivity as educational institutions in that society:

- by strengthening and maintaining the quality of life of the nation. As the quality of life of people is dependent not only on technological skills, but also on cultural excellence and common moral values, and as cultural and ethical values have their roots in a belief system, Lutheran schools contribute towards quality of life by strengthening that religious faith which has formed and undergirds our culture and value system, namely, the Christian Faith.
- by allowing for plurality in our society, and thus safeguarding the element of freedom and inhibiting the progress of a totalitarian philosophy of life and therefore also of education.

The aims of general education and the policies and practices flowing from those aims were then spelled out, indicating that Lutheran schools shared with the State the responsibility of general education and the commitment to do that as effectively as possible for the well-being of the individual and of the State.

Contributions of faith-based schools to education—and through education to society

There is a growing body of literature that emphasises the contribution that independent church-related schools make to the educational and social context of a nation. This may arise from their Christian concern for individual persons within political communities, as Knight (1998) suggested:

The Christian churches have too often been viewed as conservative bastions in society, when in actuality they should be seen as agents for recreating both individuals and societies in terms of the spiritual values of Christianity. Both the church and its schools, in the lineage of the prophets, will stand for social justice and the appropriate forms of activity for maximising the chances of that justice becoming a reality.

The idea of the ‘prophetic’ role—a counter-cultural reminder, if you like—is another interesting aspect of education for the ‘common good’.

The very nature of the Christian school with its underpinning theology presents both a critique of modernity's assumption "that knowledge is not only certain (and hence rational) but also objective" (Grenz, 1996, p. 4) and a challenge to aspects of post-modernity, such as its rejection of a "transcendent centre to reality as a whole" (Grenz, 1996, p. 6). Yet the forces of social modernity (McLaren, 1995, p. 41)—in particular, the market economy—have affected independent schools. Ironically, some have argued, in the twentieth century they became conformed to a world view which denied the very epistemology underpinning their nature and purposes (Henderson, 2001; Beare & Slaughter, 1993, p. 61; Schmidt, 1978). To counter this trend, Schmidt (1978) contended, is the "prophetic role of Christianity": "The awareness of the prophetic conscience is the primary task of Christian education in this decade" (p 418).

Christian schools are places where critique of society can occur, with the aim of alerting students to the value systems operating within it, so that human and humane values may be promoted and upheld. Such critique might well tackle Gandhi's:

Seven Social Sins

Politics without principles
Wealth without work
Pleasure without conscience
Knowledge without character
Commerce without morality
Science without humanity
Worship without sacrifice

-Mahatma Gandhi, 1925

Contribution to citizenship education

One area in which the faith based school can play an important role in contemporary society is in *citizenship education*. The literature demonstrates a consistent linking of education for effective citizenship with both values education and the moral dimension of education. The title of Halstead and Pike's book on the subject of citizenship (2006) encapsulated these related concepts: *Citizenship and moral education: values in action*. The authors argued that:

children need opportunities to learn not only political and civic values but also personal moral values if they are to become mature moral citizens, capable of meeting the moral challenges they face in their ordinary lives. Moral education is therefore a necessary supplement and counterbalance to citizenship education, and indeed it provides a basis from which the ethical appropriateness of laws and political decisions can be judged.

A special issue of the *British Journal of Religious Education* in March this year was devoted to religion, human rights and citizenship. The editorial listed four critical contexts in the relationships between religion, politics and education:

- a persistent and renewed importance for religion in political public life
- increasing recognition within the United Nations of the international significance of religion for a stable world order
- increasing recognition of the importance of religion in citizenship and human rights education
- growth of interest in religious education in political matters it has historically sidestepped (Gearon, 2008)

Within the same edition of the journal it was argued that:

RE can contribute to citizenship by ‘providing opportunities for pupils to see how individual, group and political choices, policies and actions, eg human rights, are inextricably linked with and influenced by *religious and moral beliefs, practices and values*’.

Within the literature linking citizenship education and religious education there is also “debate about the extent to which faith based schooling prepares children for life in contemporary society” and “what children in Christian schools should learn about the liberal, plural and secularised society in which they live”. Not only faith based schools but all schools, it is suggested, by reintroducing or expanding religious education in their curriculum, are enabled to contribute to “the understanding and attitudes necessary for cross-cultural literacy and harmonious living in the multicultural and multi-faith society”.

Lutheran schools can point to a consistent concern for education for both church and state going right back to Luther himself. Luther stressed the common benefits gained by an educated citizenship, and his curriculum suggestions were broad. His clear understanding of God’s twofold governance of creation led him to such views as the affirmation that “even if there were no heaven or hell, schools still would be necessary for life on earth”. Luther’s concern was for education for service of one’s fellow humans in churches, but also in the civic and economic order. He was not above recommending leaders of the German cities to establish and maintain schools using the “quietly utilitarian argument that schools would be an asset to cities by providing useful and obedient citizens”—and an additional argument often used in modern times:

If it is necessary, dear sirs, to expend annually such great sums for firearms, for roads, bridges, dams, and countless similar things, in order that a city may enjoy temporal peace and prosperity, why should not at least some money be devoted to the poor needy youth (as cited in Elias, 2002, p. 87).

Luther’s *Sermon on keeping children in school* stressed the necessity of education for both the religious and the secular life: parents who did not send their children to school

were “with-holding from the state and from the church the gifts that God had given them in the form of future pastors, teachers, statesmen, and civil servants”.

Luther’s persuasive powers certainly contributed to the establishment of schools in the German cities—and education of the young continued to be a significant feature of German culture. Not surprisingly then the German settlers in Australia brought this concern for education with them—and even the earliest Lutheran schools in Australia offered a curriculum which included subjects designed to educate for informed and responsible participation in the wider community.

Emphasis on the *personal and community* for the future of education

Writers, like Hedley Beare and Richard Slaughter, commenting on the kind of education required for the future, have demonstrated a growing emphasis on the ‘personal’ and ‘community’ for the future of education, challenging a predominantly economic focus on education in terms of employment oriented competencies and outcomes. In the world of turn-of-the-millennium Western education an influential document has been the 1996 report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty First Century, ‘Learning: the treasure within’, the Delors report. The report provided a common language for describing education, as can be seen in current phrases like ‘life long learning’ and the widely quoted ‘four pillars of education’:

- Learning to know
- Learning to do
- Learning to live together
- Learning to be

It is possible to see the more recent development of education within Australia in terms of specific emphasis on one or other of these pillars at particular stages. Writing in 2002, Collard traced “the journey of Australian educational policy makers” in relation to the Hobart and Adelaide Declarations on goals for schooling, 1989 to 1999, and implications for the future of Australian schooling. The rhetoric of the Declarations quoted by Collard reflected the concepts embedded in Delors’ four pillars: “active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society”; “reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians”; “potential life roles as family, community and workforce members”; and “stewardship ... and ecologically sustainable development”. Implicit in the four pillars also was a recognition of the values based nature of education. The Australian government’s *National framework for values education in Australian schools* acknowledged the need for schools to build into their curriculum and ethos those common values which enable us to *learn to be* and *learn to live together* in our multi-cultural society. References to the *knowledge nation* and a growing emphasis on vocational education at government ministerial level in Australia can also be seen as reflecting the aims of *learning to know* and *learning to do*.

In April last year Peter Cole prepared A Rough Guide to a National Curriculum for the Curriculum Standing Committee of the National Education Professional Associations.

After listing seven key areas of skills and knowledge school leavers need, he asked, 'What are the implications of that list?' His answer was a quotation from Brady's *Why thinking 'outside the box' is not so easy*: "School finally isn't about disciplines and subjects, but about what they were originally meant to do—help the young make more sense of life, more sense of experience, more sense of an unknowable future".

Australian faith based schools are well placed to contribute to the education of young people in this contemporary context, particularly in terms of its personal and communal aspects, its emphasis on values and relationships. Church-related schools provide a place to explore values and spirituality and to see them in practice.

The Lutheran contribution to education in a pluralist society

Lutheran theology provides the grounding for an approach to education which is concerned with both the nurturing of the faith of the children of the church, and the holistic development of all young people as responsible citizens of the state. The growth of Lutheran schools in Australia suggests that parents value the education provided, with its emphasis on the pursuit of excellence in the interests of serving the wider community as well as pastoral care for all in the school community. Expressions like the following representative examples have appeared in school brochures and on school web sites:

From representative Lutheran school brochures

- a distinctive education in a safe and caring environment
- extensive and diverse programs which cater for the individual abilities of students in both the curricular and co-curricular spheres
- a holistic approach which encompasses the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, social and cultural domains of the child
- the Christian education of the Lutheran Church is widely respected for the traditional values it teaches ... equipping students to be citizens of value for the future
- our aim is to provide quality education including the teaching of Christian values in a nurturing environment that supports and encourages students as individuals

From representative Lutheran school web sites

- our dedicated and caring Christian staff are keen to support students and establish a tradition of excellence
- our aim is to nurture the growth of young people into responsible citizens enabling them to serve others in a fulfilling manner
- students experience a caring Christian community which nurtures in them a growing relationship with Christ which promotes individual excellence, learning and responsibility, for life
- a safe and dynamic environment where each person is valued and accepted as a child of God—all are challenged to discover, develop and use their gifts and abilities for a life of service to others

- a caring Christian community nurturing in students a growing relationship with Christ, promoting individual excellence, learning and responsibility, for life
- an education [which] gives students the opportunity to grow in confidence and intellect and develop values, taught within the context of a Christian community, which will equip them for life's journey in the 21st Century

These expressions are representative of Lutheran schools nation wide, as consistently reiterated and exemplified in the reporting of school programs and activities in the regular LEA publication *SchoolLink*. They are consistent, too, with such LEA brochures as *What makes a Lutheran school distinctive?*, *Caring for Kids: The Lutheran Church of Australia supporting Early Childhood Services*, *Lutheran schools connecting to a global family* and *Teaching in Lutheran schools*.

In 2007, August Fricke, discussing core values of Lutheranism wrote of:

our single-minded focus on the freeing Gospel of God's grace ... It is this openness that is Lutheran—an openness that applies to many issues, like church, law, government, the worship debate, modern versus traditional. Once the Gospel is the sole focus of the church, many things we argue and get upset about will fade away like the morning mist”.

It is this *freeing* nature of Lutheran theology—an unfearing openness to God's grace for all—when applied to education and the exploration of God's creation, which allows for the inclusion of non-Lutherans and non-Christians within enquiry based religion classrooms in Lutheran schools. As the school population expanded beyond children of the Lutheran church and embraced students from other Christian denominations and also other faiths, as well as those with no religious affiliation, the curriculum and pedagogy in the area of Christian Studies also moved towards an inclusive, educational enquiry model. Students are enabled to study religion and the religious impulse in humanity for the knowledge and understanding this may give them about their fellows and the histories of human societies. Similar movements have occurred nationally in other faith based school systems and also internationally. Promoting an informed and critical awareness of the nature and impact of religion in society, past and present, in the nation's future citizens, is a significant contribution that Lutheran schools can make to contemporary Australian education.

The concept of service

A significant thread which is woven into the tapestry of contemporary Lutheran schools is the concept of service. LEQ's recent *Service-Learning Rationale* document is a culmination of thinking about service as it has been developing in our schools.

In the document, service-learning is defined as the intentional connection of classroom instruction with community service—a linking of head, heart and hands. It has the potential to sensitise students to social, moral and ethical issues in the local and global community.

The notion of unconditional service to others, as a response to God’s serving of us in Christ, may represent the greatest contribution our schools can make to the public good.

So, in summary, these are significant areas of Lutheran education for the public good:

- Excellence in curriculum offerings
- Preparation for responsible citizenship
- “Prophetic” role
- Attention to the religious and moral dimension of schooling—values and spirituality
- Emphasis on community and individual service within and to community

Authentic Lutheran education, to borrow Tom Christenson’s adjective, is a valuable contributor to a liberal democracy since it is an inclusive education based on a cohesive worldview and with a strong values base. It allows for exploration of various kinds and aspects of spirituality, and its curriculum supports an investigation into and understanding of current issues within the global multi-faith community. As a private provider it fosters choice and diversity in the educational market place and, as a partly government funded system, it is accountable to the public through its excellent education for responsible citizenship. The dominant metaphors which have articulated the nature and purpose of Lutheran schools over their history remain significant descriptors of Lutheran educational aims in contemporary society: care for the students in the schools—growing out of the initial construct of ‘nurture/ministry’, and invitation to the community to investigate their underpinning philosophy with its theological base—stemming from the initial ‘outreach/mission’ interest. At the same time ‘service’ has become another commonly held descriptor of the contribution of Lutheran schools to the community, both local and global. Undoubtedly, the ‘private’ education offered by Lutheran schools is for the public good—and is a strong thread in the contemporary Australian educational weave.

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