

# Lutheran Education Australia

## *Pathways* focus groups

Dr Mark Worthing and I met with 22 principals and 9 school pastors or chaplains from a range of schools types to conduct focus groups in each of the regions. The focus groups provided the opportunity to explore more deeply people's perceptions and use of *Pathways*. The following information was gathered.

### Purposes of *Pathways*

- Formation works well when it is connected to school life and the people of the school community.
- *Pathways* is considered to be vital in immersing staff in the spirituality and culture of the school. Principals see the value of the course in developing the heart and culture of the school.
- *Pathways* is critical for relationship building.
- *Pathways* has a message or understanding about faith and life. It also leads staff into an experience of faith and spirituality in the school community.
- *Pathways Spiritual* is ideal for opening up discussions and developing relationships.
- *Pathways* provides a focus on story sharing.
- Scenarios provide for the connection of theology to the school context.
- "Why can't we have a uniform staff induction across all schools?"
- *Pathways Vocational* is disconnected from school community.
- How do our school policy documents give witness to our theology?
- How can we commence formation with the young people in our schools to develop future teachers and ministry personnel?

### Training and delivery

- The success of the course depends on the presenter. Principals value the *Pathways* but find that the demands on their time make it difficult to prepare and deliver it well. Principals also commented on the significant cost of releasing teachers to meet the requirements of the current accreditation processes.
- The school pastor delivers *Pathways* in larger schools or the principal together with the congregational pastor in smaller schools. The pastors are drawing upon a range of resources from the revised TOPS, the Luther movie resources through to *Pathways; theological focus*. The sessions are in the form of staff in-service days, after school Bible study sessions, weekly morning devotion and discussion sessions and release time during the school day.
- The majority of principals and pastors shared they had limited training in the *Pathways* materials with over 62% of principals new to the role. Principals also expressed interest in having the opportunity to learn about and share ways of nurturing staff spirituality. Pastors and chaplains said they would highly value the opportunity to gather and share ideas around the use of *Pathways* in schools.
- Principals of larger schools where there is a school pastor have greater level of contentment with delivering *Pathways* than principals of smaller schools. However the diversity of staff in

the larger schools means that more varied resources are needed to cater for the diverse needs and prior knowledge of staff. There also needs to be flexibility with delivery. How can electives or options be built into the course?

- 'The easier you can make it for people to deliver the better.'
- How do we engage when teachers and staff come with compliance in their minds?

### Suggestions

- *Pathways* has to mirror the pedagogy we want for our classrooms. It has to be best practice in pedagogy.
- *Pathways* needs to be invigorated with DVDs in the style of 6 Challenges and 6 Mysteries and Rob Bell and a range of interactive multimedia. It needs to be multi-sensory and multi-layered. The use of video is important as after school teachers struggle to read theological articles. However DVDs need to be more than a talking head.
- The theology needs to be connected to issues that are relevant to their work in the school such as creation and science, sexuality, ethical issues, life and death. The theology needs to be practical.
- However the theological depth needs to be varied for those teachers new to Christianity through to those with theological degrees. Teachers want to engage in robust discussions.
- Can *Pathways* be inclusive of all staff and not just teachers?
- *Pathways* is ideally conducted with the pastor and principal sharing the delivery. This shows the strength of relationship and interconnection between school and church.
- Induction resources were seen as highly valuable.
- The strength lies in the discussions and developing resources that facilitate robust discussion needs to remain a focus.
- As discussion is central to *Pathways*, it can be challenging when working with individuals or pairs of new teachers. How can this be addressed through the resources or through option for delivery?
- In Victoria the question was raised as to whether LEA can become a registered training authority so courses like *Pathways* and Equip can count towards their registration.
- Can we explore AITSL as another means for supporting them in their work as teachers?
- Can *Pathways* contribute to some greater qualification through ALC such as a Certificate in teaching and ministry? 'What is the currency of the qualification beyond LEA?'
- Can *Pathways Vocational* be incorporated into school based sessions and have a final day/half day in regional offices for a special focus and celebration with certificate giving?
- Teaching teachers to think theologically is a whole different way of thinking.
- Really need to recognise the low base of theological knowledge of most staff. Some staff have high level knowledge but these are the minority, especially in the secondary context. Need options so facilitators can choose for a range of staff needs.
- The *Pathways Theological* trails are often too complex for planning. Teachers get lost or use the option of multimedia trails to do emails.
- Developing deep knowledge comes over time and cannot be achieved through current sessions heavily laden with huge theological concepts. 'We are trying too much in too little time.' Do not condense. At the same time, the three year process does appear to be too drawn out.

- Deep knowledge comes from deep experience and it is hard to replicate the intensive and intentional year of LTC. Spiritual retreat approaches may have depth but the hectic life in schools means it can be a challenge to make these a priority.
- The expense of releasing and equipping staff is great and thought needs to be given to ways schools can avoid time release costs.
- Pastors and principals really like the idea of a smorgasbord approach so that an approach can be tailored to the school context and the needs of individuals.
- The focus needs to be on inviting staff to an encounter with Christian community, the relationships between staff are vital and resources need to include opportunities for sharing stories of faith. However building community is challenging as the demands on teachers' time means that the fellowship is increasingly becoming an optional extra.
- The resources need to be flexible enough and updated often that they can meet the needs of new staff and existing staff who may have done this before.
- What happens if teachers don't maintain their accreditation?
- Time and resources need to be directed at developing chaplains, senior school leadership and CS leaders so that they can be actively engaged in developing the spiritual culture of the school so that teachers experience and 'live it' on a daily basis.

## Recommendations

1. Formation cannot be reduced to a course. It is a lifelong process of deepening knowledge and experiences. It occurs through being in the school and a part of the rich spiritual life and experiences of the school such as, staff devotion and worship, staff study of theology or 'Bible studies', staff retreats, leading devotions and worship with students, serving in school community. There is a need to develop a common understanding and system definition of formation. It will also be important to identify important elements in the ongoing formation process. There is a need to change the mindset that formation equates to accreditation and is a 'once-off' Lutheran 'tattoo'.

The Staff Formation Working Party develop:

- a Formation framework to define formation and what it looks like in a Lutheran school context.
  - a strategic plan and timeline for the review and reinvigoration of existing formation programs and develop new resources for the ongoing formation of staff
2. Principals were unsure how they developed knowledge around nurturing the spiritual culture of the school and also shared that it was not a part of their learning in principal days. It is a recommendation that principals have the opportunity to share and collaborate on ways of strengthening the spiritual culture and experience in the school.

The Staff Formation Working Party coordinates the development of resources:

- to help principals understand their role as spiritual leaders and the features of a vibrant spiritual school life. Such resources would include materials for principal induction and the aspiring leadership programmes such as LDP and be delivered annually.
  - for school leaders (principals through to middle management and aspiring leaders) to help them engage their community with the Formation framework and that will broaden the concept of formation beyond the accreditation process.
3. Principals and pastors expressed a need for quality resources that assist them work with staff in developing staff understanding of; how does Lutheran theology inform what it means to be a Lutheran school? Principals and pastors see great value in regularly engaging the whole staff in theological study and reflection beyond accreditation requirements.

The Staff Formation Working Party:

- explores ways *Pathways* can be reconfigured in ways that make it more manageable for all schools to deliver.
- review *Pathways: spiritual focus* to support schools with induction of teachers with key experiences such as worship, class devotions, behaviour management.
- review *Pathways: vocational focus* to explore ways it can be more connected to the school experience and at the same time provide exposure to the wider school system.
- oversee the development of resources that support the delivery of the theological components of the accreditation courses. The resources need to be highly engaging utilising multimedia and the pedagogy we desire for classrooms.

- establish a schedule for the ongoing review and development of resources for the spiritual nurture of staff that supports the ongoing formation of staff. These resources need to:
  - mirror the pedagogy expected in today's innovative classrooms.
  - be readily adaptable to a different modes of delivery, eg staff retreat day, after school sessions, weekly devotion discussions.
  - cater for different levels of theological knowledge
  - facilitate deep thinking and robust discussions
  - connect theology to the life of the school