

CONNECT EPORTFOLIO

This ePortfolio documents my participation, learning and thinking journey throughout the *Connect* program at Luther College in 2019/20.

I have chosen to structure the portfolio discretely around the 3 outcomes, considering an enduring understanding of the Lutheran faith and a guiding question within each. My reflections and elaborations include some interwoven notes from the sessions to demonstrate engagement and thinking, however my complete notes are appended at the end of the document.

OUTCOME 1

ARTICULATE HOW YOUR LEARNING IN CONNECT HAS INFLUENCED YOUR UNDERSTANDING, PRACTICE AND CONTRIBUTION TO LUTHER COLLEGE.

For the purposes of demonstrating this outcome I will focus on the following enduring understanding:

- God's grace as revealed in Jesus is central to a Lutheran understanding of spirituality.

And the following guiding question:

- In what ways might the concept of grace shape Lutheran education communities?

My learning in the connect sessions has helped me to clarify my own views and reaffirmed my Christian-informed humanist outlook, values, and compass. While I do not feel that any major shift in belief has occurred, the sessions have helped me to reflect on my own spirituality, my perceptions of people and the world around me and how these are informed by many traditionally Judaeo-Christian teachings. It has certainly prompted some shifts in thinking. Prior to joining the Luther College Community and my participation in the connect program I had begun having serious misgivings about the role of organised religion in my life, especially as I witnessed the erosion of trust in many religious organisations in Australia and abroad. This has been disheartening and prompted some soul-searching after being brought up in a Christian setting, and I have been seeking a way to reconcile these tensions with my own faith and experiences. The connect program has provided me with an opportunity to think, share and discuss how our work in a Lutheran setting can respond to these challenges and equip not just our young people, but each other in our vocation.

In a localised context at Luther College, my experiences in daily chapel worship have provided welcome opportunities to pause and reflect on my own faith journey and consider my role in the spiritual and faith journeys of those in the school community, not just academically but pastorally. One sentiment that has resonated with me this year is *kindness*. As discussed with colleagues and in Luther College chapel services, it has been interesting to consider how this can sometimes mean having difficult, yet kind discussions with students, colleagues and community members that make them accountable for their actions while maintaining integrity and valuing the whole person. At Luther, this is embodied by our focus on restorative practices and pastoral care. This focus links with the overarching concept of *Grace* as it is considered central to Lutheran spirituality. The following excerpts from my session 1 reflection provide some insights into my understanding of what it means to respond with grace:

Responding with Grace

"To respond with Grace means to accept each person as they are, without judgement or repression of spirit, actions, convictions or belief. It is to believe in their inherent value and to show love, compassion, kindness, and respect for one another as human beings. Grace can be seen through restorative justice, in upholding standards and through fair and kind dealings which do not degrade, impose or punish unnecessarily."

I consider the concept of *Grace* to be a foundational in my role as a member of the college community. *Grace* reminds me to be kind and accepting in my dealings with those around me and can be observed in the discussions I have with students about their learning, their wellbeing, their choices, and their actions. In summary, the connect program has allowed me to consider how the revelation of God's Grace through Jesus Christ can, and continues to influence daily practice and dealings with students and college community member; *Grace* is a pertinent reminder to be mindful of one's words and actions. Most importantly, I have also come to consider my work and engagement beyond the classroom is an integral part of building a healthy and vibrant community where Christian underpinnings are core and have sought out further service opportunities both within and beyond the college community in 2020. My involvement in the Luther Journey Camp and Rite Journey programs has enabled me to contribute by guiding students as they explore their faith and encounter new physical challenges, and my extra-curricular involvement as choral leader within the school music program has provided opportunities to engage and support students pastorally. Beyond this, my connection with service organisations such as the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre offer a way to give back to the community.

Fundamentally, the connect program has made me cogniscent of the need to continually seek out ways to serve the school community and further entrenched my understanding that meaningful teaching goes beyond sound classroom practice. Meaningful teaching must value relationships and find opportunities to build them. Meaningful teaching must also involve inspiring students to be involved through leading by example. This does not and should not be expected to occur in a classroom silo.

OUTCOME 2

ANALYSE AND DESCRIBE THE WAYS LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES CAN SHAPE PRACTICE IN A SCHOOL OR CLASSROOM.

For the purposes of demonstrating this outcome I will focus on the following enduring understanding:

- Lutheran education is centred in the belief that God invites all people to join God in ongoing creation and care for the universe.

And the following guiding question:

- How does creation theology inform the why and how of Lutheran education?

Connect has provided scope to consider the theological underpinnings of the 'why and how' of Lutheran education. These underpinnings were made particularly clear by the Lutheran Lens outlined on page 7 of the Lutheran Education Leadership and Formation Framework document *Growing Deep*¹, which situates the work of school leaders, teachers, and community members alike within the lived reality of key theological concepts such as:

- Grace
- Sharing in and living the Good News of Jesus Christ
- The Holy Spirit
- The Relationship between the individual, God, and others in the community
- The Importance of Hope, Love and Forgiveness
- God as creator and His invitation to join in the ongoing creation and care of the universe.

In responding to the guiding question "*How does creation theology inform the why and how of Lutheran education?*" I reflect on the discussion of the final point, creation theology. I found the opportunity to discuss how creation theology can sit along side scientific understandings of the world to be particularly thought-provoking. Reflecting on my own faith journey prior to the commencement of *Connect*, I had some misgivings about how my faith, especially within organised religion can be reconciled with the state of the world we see around us today. I had become critical of those who use excuses such as 'God's plan' to legitimise inaction on key world issues such as poverty, climate change and human rights such as the right to asylum. Understanding how creation theology expects active contribution and shared responsibility in caring for ourselves, each other,

¹ Growing Deep – Leadership and Formation Framework – Lutheran Education Australia

and the world around us reminded me that is important to lead by example and be the change we want to see in our communities. It also reminded me that the actions of individuals within any one faith or institution must not be considered representative of an entire faith. Importantly, the reflection enabled me to shine a light on whether my emerging dissatisfaction with world events was in line with the capabilities and attitudes espoused in the *Growing Deep* framework. As I begin to reflect on my thinking in 2019, a shift has occurred as I begin to view creation theology as a living practice which requires us to be the change we want to see. In session two, I reflect that on creation theology today:

Recognition of continual co-creation as members of community cannot ignore the obvious relationship with service and vocation. Indeed, these concepts are also fundamental to the Lutheran understanding of our place

Creation Theology – What does it mean today?

“That God continues to create by using us to provide for ourselves and one another. It has meaning through co-creation. The practicalities of all being 'sinners' means that we should be cogniscent of others making mistakes and respond as God would... with love, acceptance, and grace. This does not mean absolving ourselves or others of responsibility but rather reflecting, accepting and carving out a 'path of least harm' as we move forward.”

in the world around us. The notions of service and vocation were further explored in *Connect* through the Pathways handout reading *Vocationally Thinking*². I found this article resonated with many ideas I hold about the world, reaffirming my belief in contributing to a system of education which values service and community above, but not to the exclusion of individual achievement. In particular, the following quote struck a chord with me:

“Lutheran schools also have to deal with the challenge in contemporary educational thinking which links education closely with preparation for the workplace but with emphasis strongly on individual benefit rather than service to society”

The *Connect* sessions have provided scope for me to consider how my current thought processes and responses serve me, but more importantly whether they serve those in the community around me. This thinking has reaffirmed the importance of my journey in education and in life not as work, but as a ‘vocation in service of others’. Below are some further reflections from *Connect* session two on vocation:

How am I fulfilling God's work in my life? What do I bring to Luther College?

How does my calling at Luther College serve others?

1. Role: Teacher

Key duty: to educate, nourish and support

Peopled served: students, families, colleagues

2. Role: Partner

Key duty: support and cherish

People served: my partner

3. Role: son and brother

Key duty: love, care, support

People served: family

4. Role: committee member and volunteer (Association of German Teacher Vic, Polyphonic Voices, Asylum Centre Resource Centre, Local Hills Environment Group)

Key duties: agitate for change, share resources and expertise, contribute to successful running of choir and teacher association

People served: community, humanity, German teachers, public

² Pathways Handout Number 4 – Mission and Ministry in a Lutheran School

OUTCOME 3

IDENTIFY AND CRITICALLY REFLECT ON QUESTIONS THAT WILL INFORM A PLAN FOR FURTHER LEARNING THAT WILL ADVANCE MY UNDERSTANDING, PRACTICE AND CONTRIBUTION TO LUTHERAN EDUCATION.

For the purposes of demonstrating this outcome I will focus on the following enduring understanding:

- God has created us for relationships and Christian spirituality finds expression in love, service and our vocations.

And the following guiding question:

- Why does Lutheran education value community?

Although most education institutions “subscribe to the broad purposes of education [such as the] acculturation of young people into society, preparation for the world of work and personal formation”, the Lutheran education community is distinct in that it values community and “service for the glory of God”. It is this central idea, detailed in the document *A Vision for Learners and Learning in Lutheran Schools* which has become key to my understanding of why Lutheran education places such high value on community.

My involvement in the *Connect* sessions has provided a welcome opportunity to engage with many of the enduring understandings central to Lutheran education. I have found discussion and readings to be engaging and thought-provoking and admittedly, the sessions have given me cause to evaluate some of my own faith barriers. I have identified strongly with the notions of service and vocation espoused in the readings from the Pathways handout series available on Padlet.

It is evident to me that there is much room for growth as I continue my faith journey as a member of the Luther College community. I would like to deepen my involvement with the Luther College’s service program and work with students to encourage their involvement in extra-curricular programs. I have also identified the following areas for personal growth:

- continuing to build genuine, trusting relationships with students, colleagues and community members
- nurturing and utilising beyond school networks
- outward projection of positivity and resilience in times of high stress

I consider inspiring students to lead active, community focused lives both during and beyond their school-lives as a key responsibility of a Lutheran educator. Although *Connect* has renewed my commitment to this goal, I remain unsure how this is best approached by me within the Luther College community. Although I recognise the potential to have influential and meaningful conversations which model Lutheran values exists in my daily contact with school community members, I am unsure how to approach the task of combating the pervading individualism present in our society. I have a desire to continue my professional learning in this area, engaging with community projects and change on a larger scale. Since engaging in the *Connect* program I have made some progress in working towards my identified areas for growth. I have become a more active contributor to the network of German Language teachers in Victoria and have joined a music outreach program for Youth at Risk in the Yarra Ranges Shire. I believe that the experience, insights and learnings gained through my involvement in these programs will equip me to better serve the needs of both Luther College and the broader community of which it is a part.

APPENDIX – SESSION NOTES

SESSION 1 - 7TH OCTOBER 2019

What is Luther education about?

Lutheran education is about acceptance of background and experiences. It is an invitation to all.

YOUR BELIEFS AND PURPOSE

- *What has brought me to the school?*
I was attracted by the focus on pastoral care and the reputation of the language program. By way of association, I was curious about the links between the German language and heritage and the lived experience of students/staff in a Lutheran setting.
- *What is important to you?*
Above all I value acceptance, independent, critical thought, kindness and respect for others and the world around us. I consider myself a humanist and I hope to encourage those around me to be open-minded, critical thinkers irrespective of religion, background, value or opinion.
- *What experience/expectations do you have about working in a Lutheran school?*
My experiences are limited thus far. I expected a rather rigid, conservative atmosphere. This expectation has been both accurate and inaccurate, largely depending on those with whom I have been involved.

WHAT DO WE (LUTHERANS) BELIEVE?

Exploratory Videos

Video 1 - the Reformation was a revolution of faith in 16th century. Humanism (Erasmus) during the renaissance cause. Martin Luther questioned the churches practices and abuse of power. Challenged the pope as the ultimate source of power. Did not believe money could be exchanged for salvation (absolution). Luther nailed 95 theses in Wittenberg. Luther was declared a heretic. The reformation gained traction. He relied heavily on the development of the printing press. Christianity was split into Catholic and Protestant (protest). The bible was translated from Latin into German, English and French, making religion more accessible. Prior to the Reformation, people were dependent on the upper-class nobility. During the Reformation, people were somewhat empowered to decide their own fate.

Video 2 - German settlers established schools and places of worship in Klemzig, Hahndorf. 'Schools' for indigenous. Cataclysm is an explanation of the Lutheran beliefs. Early schools offered in instruction in German and were fiercely independent. Many Lutheran schools were closed during WWI owing to fear and hatred of the German language and culture. Lutheran schools accepted government funding in 1972.

Video 3 - Lutheran schools have experienced high growth since 1995 employing nearly 3000 full time staff across the country. In 2015, there were 84 Lutheran schools. Lutheran schools are funded 60/40 by state and parents respectively.

HOW DO WE LIVE OUT OUR BELIEFS?

Staff participation in spirituality courses. Daily worships and devotions (whole school and classroom based). Students participate in Christian studies (much broader). Christian service (outreach) program.

Differences between chapel at Luther and church-based worship.

- No presupposition of faith, baptism, involvement in congregational worship, biblical literacy, however attendance is compulsory.

A 'BBQ CHAT' ABOUT LUTHER COLLEGE

Luther College is an independent, faith-based school founded on the teachings of the Lutheran (protestant) church. It encourages students to explore their spirituality and relationship with God, and this informs the day-to-day lived and designed experiences for students. There is a strong focus on pastoral care and relationships in conjunction with growth of the whole self. The school engages in daily worship and emphasises the importance of service to community.

SESSION 2 - DECEMBER 5TH 2019

REFLECTIONS ON THE YEAR...

The year has been fulfilling... A satisfying year of teaching and forming new relationships with students and colleagues. A change in context has provided me with greater work-life balance and overall happiness. I have enjoyed having supportive colleagues and resources to do my job well. My biggest challenge has been reconciling some of my views with those around me. I have wondered about what the world will look like for future generations amid a political landscape marred by inaction and a failure to unite around key issues (e.g climate change). I worry about the politics of secrecy and division that are coming to the fore once more and a 'race to the bottom' concerning refugees.

MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Identify some things that have helped and hindered my spiritual journey:

Helped: connection with others, being out in nature, wonderment and awe at the world around, the good deeds of others.

Hindered: ostracisation, erosion of trust in institutions, one-sided views. The conviction of some that there is only one 'God' and a 'right' way to live and; demands for conformity. The interference of religion in secular politics. The abuses of power occurring in some religious institutions.

THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

In my words:

Grace should be seen through an acceptance of each child as they are, without judgement or repression of spirit, actions, convictions or belief. It can be seen through value, love, kindness and respect for all for one another as human. It can be seen through restorative justice when standards are not upheld and through dealings with do not degrade, impose or punish unnecessarily.

CREATION THEOLOGY

What does it mean? that God continues to create by using us to provide for it.

The practicalities of all being 'sinners' means that we should be cogniscent of others making mistakes and respond as God would; with love, acceptance and grace. This does not mean absolving ourselves or others of responsibility but rather reflecting, accepting and carving a 'path of least harm' forward.

VOCATION

After reading the articles on Padlet, consider the callings in various aspects of your life.

Role: Teacher

Key duty: to educate, nourish and support

Peopled served: students, families and colleagues

Role: Partner

Key duty: support and cherish

People served: my partner

Role: son and brother

Key duty: love, care, support

People served: family

Role: committee member (Greens, AGTV, PV)

Key duties: agitate for change, share resources and expertise, contribute to successful running of choir

People served: community, humanity, German teachers, public

SESSION 3 - WEDNESDAY 26TH FEBRUARY 2020

Presenter: Gary Jewson

PRE-SESSION REFLECTION:

Prompt: *How has your learning to date influenced any of your attitudes / practices / beliefs in your role at Luther. This could be in regard to your own internal thought/spiritual processing, your interaction with other staff, or your interaction with students, or*

The connect sessions have helped me to clarify my own views and reaffirmed my Judaeo-Christian humanist informed outlook and moral compass. The sessions have helped me to reflect on my own spirituality, my perceptions of the people and the world around me and how these are informed by many traditionally Judaeo-Christian teachings. Prior to coming to Luther College I had begun having serious misgivings about the role of some organised religion, especially as we witness the severe erosion of trust in organised religious organisations in Australia and abroad. This has been disheartening and prompted some soul-searching after being brought up in a Christian setting, and I am seeking a way to reconcile this with my faith.

Experiences in chapel have provided welcome time to pause and reflect. One sentiment that has resonated with me this year is *kindness*...which can sometimes include having difficult, but in the long-term kind discussions with students.

REFLECTION - KEY LEARNINGS IN ACTION AT LUTHER COLLEGE

From Session 1: How do we live our beliefs - the lived daily beliefs at Luther can be seen through our chapels or devotions in extended homegroup.

From Session 2: The principles of grace can be seen in Luther College's approach to restorative justice. The behaviour management guidelines of the college emphasise maintaining student/staff dignity and acting with kindness.

THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & CHRISTIAN STUDIES

What is the role and purpose of CE?

Christian Education seeks to promote the values, morals and teachings of the bible so that students may take their place as informed, compassionate, accepting respectful and contributing members of society. It is embedded in the lived experience of the school and how students teach and learn.

What is the role and purpose of Christian Studies?

To introduce students to how the word of God informs the values, attitudes and learnings of the school community. It equips them to tackle questions of spirituality, consider their role with micro (school) and macro communities (society). Through their understandings of God's word and teachings, Christian studies allows students to explore, reflect, challenge and contribute. For example through the building bridges.

What is the place of worship / devotion in Christian Education and Lutheran Schools?

The purpose of worship and devotion is fundamentally about building relationships and community and providing opportunities to pause and reflect on how God's words can help us make sense of current events and the world around us.

HOW DOES GOD REVEAL HIMSELF TO US?

Personal Bible reflection:

Genesis 15:1 Modern English Version (MEV)

The Abrahamic Covenant

15 After this the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying,

“Do not fear, Abram.

I am your shield,

your exceedingly great reward.”

Key reflections: God is revealed in visions (and word). In this passage he is revealed as protector, reward and refuge.

Assessment rubric

Name: Exemplar

School: Luther College Croydon Hills

| Outcome | Exceeds expectations | Meets expectations | Not yet meeting expectations | Comments |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Articulate how your learning in Connect has influenced your understanding, practice and contribution to your Lutheran school or early childhood service</p> | <p>Detailed evidence of engagement with and critical reflection on your learning through <i>Connect</i>. Descriptions and discussion of how the learning influences your practice is analytical, contextualised, insightful and supported with reference to readings and professional conversations.</p> | <p>Evidence of engagement with and critical reflection on your learning through <i>Connect</i>. Descriptions and discussion of how the learning influences your practice is clear and supported with reference to readings and professional conversations.</p> | <p>Evidence shows little engagement with and reflection on your learning through <i>Connect</i>. Descriptions and discussion of the how the learning influences your practice are limited.</p> | <p><i>Clear evidence of engagement with readings and discussions through Connect.</i></p> |
| <p>Analyse and describe the ways Lutheran theological perspectives can shape practices in an early years' service, school or classroom.</p> | <p>Demonstrates in-depth understanding of a theological concept with astute analysis of ways it can shape practice with specific examples from your context.</p> | <p>Demonstrates understanding of a theological concept with analysis of ways it can shape practice in your context.</p> | <p>Demonstrates minimal appropriate theological understanding with general description of the ways a theological concept can shape practice.</p> | <p><i>Insightful reflections on the implications of Lutheran theology for your work with students and also the ways in which the school approaches learning and teaching in community.</i></p> |
| <p>Identify and critically reflect on unresolved issues or remaining questions to develop a plan for further learning that will advance your understanding, practice and contribution to Lutheran education.</p> | <p>Insightful discussion of identified unresolved issues or remaining questions and how they inform further learning. Detailed description of how learning plan will advance your understanding, practice and contribution to Lutheran education.</p> | <p>Discussion of identified unresolved issues or remaining questions and how they inform further learning. Logical description of how the learning plan will advance your understanding, practice and contribution to Lutheran education.</p> | <p>Minimal identification and discussion of unresolved issues or remaining questions and how they inform further learning. Limited information about how the learning plan will advance your understanding, practice and contribution to Lutheran education.</p> | <p><i>It has been a delight to read of your learning journey through Connect. It is clear that you are a thoughtful and reflective teacher who will continue to deepen your understandings of Lutheran education and the theology that underpins it.</i></p> |