

SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION: MORE THAN JUST A COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT

Elliott Eisner suggests that schools have three types of curriculum; explicit, implicit and null. An explicit curriculum includes the texts, unit plans, lessons, teaching and learning activities that schools list as their subject or course offerings. He states that an implicit curriculum is the teaching that goes on because of the kind of place the school is. In this curriculum are those things that teach implicitly such as the patterns of decision making and the structure of the school day. The null curriculum teaches because it does not exist and includes all things in the school that are ignored or passed over. I believe this provides an excellent framework for reflecting on what is taught about social justice through each of these curriculums in Lutheran schools.

The Explicit Curriculum

It is important for all educators to examine their explicit curriculum documents in terms of what they include and teach about social justice. What do the students in our school learn about social justice from the junior to senior years? The goal of such curriculum offerings is that students will develop from an awareness of a range of social issues to a concern for action. Educating for peace and justice involves methodology,

experiences and content. It cannot be crammed into a single unit or community service project. The learning needs to provide a comprehensive exploration of issues from the early years through to the senior years. Starting with issues that speak to students' own needs, eg, focussing on conflict resolution at home or how to cope with materialism or violence and moving towards focussing on a limited number of issues that enable students to delve into the causes of problems as well as data about the problems. Students need to help determine those issues that are studied. The content developed through the years will assist students to:

- explore the human consequences of their and other people's decisions
- be more critically aware of the gospel-culture contrasts in society
- be conscientious decision-makers. Students need to be encouraged to think for themselves, to see and evaluate alternative positions on various issues, to formulate their own questions and articulate clearly the reasons for their position
- explore why evil and injustice exists
- consider the biblical basis and church teaching for social justice. Students need to develop an awareness of social issues as they are placed in the context of the Christian faith
- develop an awareness of how social change takes place
- nurture their inner wholeness through regular moments of contemplation and stillness

Most research has shown that to bring about a change in

attitudes, knowledge has to be linked to some experience with representatives of different cultural and social groups. Students need a structure in which the values are actually lived and experienced and not just talked about. Direct personal encounters can be powerful learning experiences and assist students to overcome fears and stereotypes and provide a counter model to culture. Encounters might include:

- participating in peace and justice groups or in group actions where students are in regular contact and sharing with people who work for peace and justice
- hearing the experience of a hungry person or a victim of racism
- becoming part of pairing project with a group or mission such as Australian Lutheran World Service in the third world
- direct action needs to focus on local as well as global issues, however, local issues permit more concrete and personal actions.
- critical reflection needs to be a vital part of any social justice learning experience as it provides the opportunity for students to explore issues at greater depth. Our classrooms need to be places where critical reflection and discussion flourish.

The Implicit Curriculum

Students will also learn about social justice through what they experience in the school environment. Explicit teaching about social justice will be undermined if students have little opportunity to be involved in decision making or if women do not hold positions of authority. [Ryan, Willmet Brennan]. Schools need to consider questions such as: In



A community service visit by a student from Faith Lutheran Secondary School, Tanunda SA

what way does our total Christian Education program witness to the importance of social justice and social action? How best can schools prepare teachers with the skills, knowledge and competencies so that they can work collaboratively with students to contribute to a socially just society?

The Null Curriculum

Schools also need to consider what they do not teach as it may teach students as powerfully as what they do teach. Some choices can never be made because they are never considered in the school environment. It may be useful to discuss and survey students to consider what they believe the school communicates by what it does not teach, ignores and neglects.

Mike Middleton suggested at ACLE that social justice was an area for development in Lutheran schools. I believe it is vitally important for Lutheran schools to ensure that the total curriculum provides opportunities for working towards a vision of a more open and accepting society in which prejudice and injustice is recognised as unacceptable.

Anne Dohnt
Christian Studies
Coordinator



*Christian Living in the Community
Students from Faith Lutheran
Secondary School, Tanunda SA*