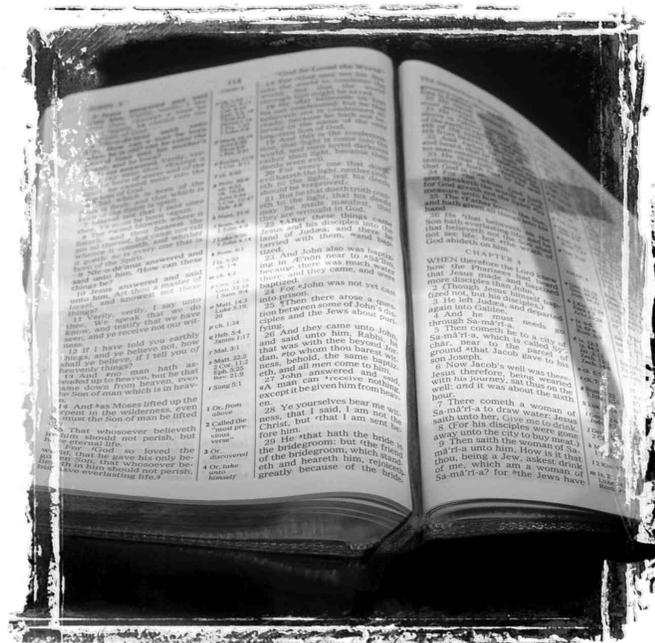


VOLUME 46
NUMBER 1
OCTOBER 2005

The Lutheran Educator



The WELS Education Journal



FOR the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of god.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

The Lutheran Educator

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of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
edited by faculty of Martin Luther College

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Education through the Ages: Early Childhood Education

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn” from it. (Pr. 22:6) This portion of Scripture forms the base for Christian education. This year our editorials will follow a theme centering on education through the ages.

Christ’s command to “feed my lambs and sheep” encompasses people of all ages. The WELS has made education a priority in its endeavors to assist families in raising their children in “the fear of the Lord.” Sunday schools were followed by Lutheran elementary schools and high schools. More recent history has seen congregations incorporate a variety of types of early childhood ministries. During the past school year early childhood ministries served 8,445 children and their families. What an exciting time! Where else do we see so many opportunities to minister to families? People are bringing their children to our schools for care and education.

The benefits of early education are long lasting. Children involved in high-quality educational programs before age five show increased intellectual and academic gains. They stay in school for more total years and are more likely to graduate from college. High-quality programs are not limited to academic preparation. A temporary gain in academic performance may be made at the expense of a long term gains in social-emotional skills. Educators realize the importance of teaching the whole child. We want children to be decision makers and problem solvers possessing the necessary social skills to be competent members of society.

Society, too, reaps the benefits of early education. Taxpayers can benefit from public investments in preschool education. Preschool participants were less likely to cost taxpayers money in the long term for services such as grade retention and special education services, receipt of welfare benefits, or of being jailed (Barnett 2003). Public policy may be catching up with research as more states move toward universal pre-K. The idea that learning begins at age five is no longer valid. Learning begins at birth. A look at recent national goals illustrates this point. Goals 2000 stated all children will come to school ready to learn and when children were not properly prepared for kindergarten, this thinking shifted to leaving no child behind. What we choose to do or not do affects a child’s success in learning.

Public policy can highlight many benefits of early education in meeting the needs of the whole child but the most important domain is missing. WELS early childhood ministries can meet spiritual needs by providing the “one thing needful,” the only benefit with eternal results.

Barnett, W.S. & Hustedt, J.T. “Preschool: The Most Important Grade.”

Educational Leadership ASCD 2003.

CAL



The Extra Mile

John Schultz

If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Matthew 5:41

How much of your time are you to spend at your work as ministers of the Gospel? Are you to work eight hours a day? ten? twelve? Are you to work five days a week? six? seven? How much of your energy are you to give? How much of your talents or gifts? What is to be the *underlying principle* for your work in God's kingdom to which you have been called? I would suggest the answer to these questions is found in the words of our LORD quoted above, taken from his Sermon on the Mount.

This section of the Sermon on the Mount frequently quotes Jesus as saying "it was said — but I say unto you. This contrast is not between the Old Testament and his teaching. He established the validity of the Law by saying, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Matthew 5:18. Rather, Jesus contrasts the Pharisaic application of Jewish tradition with his correct interpretation of the Law.

Our text is one of three teachings our LORD made in connection with his discussion of the Pharisaic misuse of the Jewish penal code. He begins, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' Matthew 5:38. The Pharisees took this part of the penal code meant for justice in the Jewish courts and applied it as the *underlying principle* to regulate human relations. But God had given an entirely different principle by which his people were to interact with others. God established the law of love, as expressed in the second table of the Law. Jesus gave us three teachings of how the law of love is to be put into action when He says in contrast to "You have heard —," "But I tell you —if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles Matthew 5:39-41.

In each case the law of love moves the individual to do the extra. If you are, even as Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus, compelled to carry a load a mile, cheerfully go the extra mile.

How much of your time, energy, talents—how much of yourself—should you give in serving as ministers of the Gospel? Let the *underlying principle* be the “extra mile.” Is it possible to determine the average number of hours a Lutheran principal puts in each week as he administers, counsels, guides, and leads? Is it possible to determine how much energy a Lutheran teacher expends in the ministry of shepherding children and young people? Is it possible to categorize the gifts and talents one should use in the congregation or high school association? If these averages were available, they would never do as your service. For you are to serve the “extra mile.” God himself gives the

motive for that “extra mile.” The apostle Paul tells us, “*For Christ’s love compels us.*” 2 Corinthians 5:14. We go that “extra mile” because Christ’s love for us on Calvary’s cross holds us in its grasp.

Read some more: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Dear Heavenly Father, through Word and Sacrament may your Spirit fill our hearts with a huge measure of the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, so that we may always serve you in the spirit of the “extra mile.” Amen

John R. Schultz served as principal/administrator of Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School. He is currently retired and living in New Ulm, Minnesota.

MARTIN LUTHER
COLLEGE

COMING EVENTS AT MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

September 23-24	UMAC weekend at MLC
October 7-9	Homecoming Weekend: Talent Show, Parents Days, Sacred Concert
October 28-29	MLC Musical: <i>Man of La Mancha</i>
November 4-6	MLC Musical: <i>Man of La Mancha</i>
November 11-13	National WELS Choral Fest at MLC
December 2-3	Readers Theater: <i>Screwtape</i>
December 10-11	Christmas Parents Weekend
December 11	Open House, Christmas Concert, Donor Appreciation Reception
December 15	Midyear Graduation Service

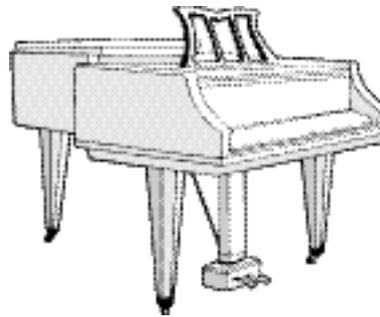
How Can You Afford NOT to Have a Piano Course?

Roger Fenner

HOW DO we train up a generation of church musicians and classroom teachers with keyboard skills? Waiting until they are of college age will not work and is not working. At that age the development of skills is slower and less fruitful. A better way is to begin keyboard instruction at an earlier age. That is what we have undertaken. Our hope is that instruction in piano at the elementary level will help the Lutheran church remain the “singing church” and that it will help WELS retain its rich heritage of hymns.

At our school we decided to change that decline several years ago. We started a piano course in the school for the children of grades 2-8. This course is not required, but is elective and paid for by the participants.

When we first presented this idea to the Board of Education, we thought we would be met with some reservation. The idea, however, passed, and we were on our way. The parents of the school thought this was a wonderful thing. Previously, parents often found it hard



to find qualified piano teachers and then fit lessons into the afterschool schedule with sports and other activities. The Board of Education, faculty, and parents found this to be a better way to help the music programs in our church and school, and also to give background in musical keyboard to the students who will go on to MLC and someday be the classroom teachers of the synod.

We decided that the lessons would be offered to the children of grades 2-8 with the older grades receiving priority. We also decided that the lessons would be offered during the school day, just as our band program operates. The instructors are members of the WELS, but they are not necessarily teachers in the school. They are members of our

congregation or from another nearby congregation. The piano instructors would communicate with the classroom teacher as to when would be a good time for the student to have the 25 minute lesson. Teachers have found that this is no problem, and students come back knowing that they have to do extra homework because piano is like an extra-curricular activity such as band, sports, and choir.

The parents must pay in advance for a semester. Our fees for this last year were \$115 per semester. \$105 went to the instructor (\$7 X 15 lessons) and \$10 to the piano fund for the tuning and upkeep of the pianos, and purchasing special music each semester. (This rate is subject to change.) The instructor gets paid with taxes withheld once a semester through the school. A contract is signed between the instructor and the school. Teachers must provide a minimum of 15 lessons per semester. There are no refunds given if a child would decide to quit, but we have never had that happen. The parent's signature and payment binds the contract between the teacher and the child. All who sign up seem to enjoy the lessons and continue the following semester.

Our course consists of all the basics of piano. Instructors speak of music theory and music history, but one thing we insist on is that the children begin using the hymns and hymnal as soon as they can. The children must keep record of their practice times, and the parents are responsible to sign off on these practice books. The children find great joy in playing a hymn and having others join

in singing along. It doesn't seem to take too long and the children are accompanying in classrooms. Now that our program is several years old, we have some students that were able to accompany classes when they sing in church and also play pre-service music at times.

Each semester we have the children perform. At Christmastime the local mall invites us to come and play on a particular Saturday. This gives the children an opportunity to show the com-

*If you are like we were
and have noticed a
decline in school and
church music, start a
piano program.*

munity their God-given talent and also creates exposure for our school. The piano teachers also schedule recitals for their students and the congregation is invited to attend. In these recitals we use both secular and religious music. Part of the recital is similar to a children's service, but all the music and songs are led by the students. All piano students in grades 5-8 are expected to play a solo in the Fine Arts Fair Competition at our local Lutheran high school. They may also prepare a duet for this competition. Advanced students this year were capable of accompanying other students from the band in the

Fenner

Fine Arts Fair competitions. What a benefit for them, but also a great help to the teachers on staff who in the past did all of the accompaniments.

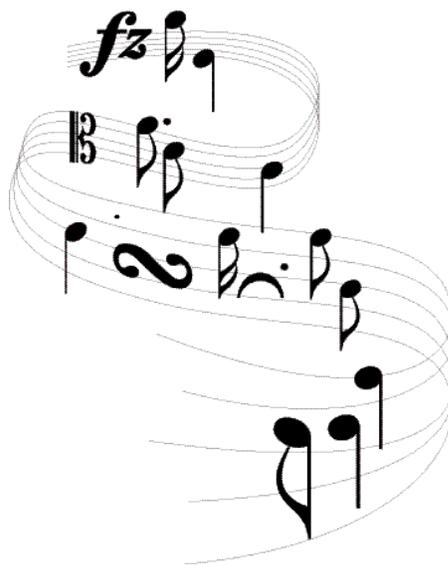
The Lord has truly blessed our efforts to increase the piano abilities of our students. We now have 45 piano students enrolled. Lessons are taught by two instructors, and we now need to have lessons each day of the week. At times we have had a waiting list of people who want to play the piano. What a joy it is to hear the songs being played in the school throughout the day. Our students hear hymns and songs throughout the school day as they pass through the halls. This, in addition to our classroom hymn tune classes allows the children to put the words of the songs with the melodies. They recognize the tune, know the words, and think of Jesus and his love for them. What a blessing for the students and teachers to musically hear Jesus all day as they walk about. Visitors come through the school and are amazed to hear students playing so well. Truly these students will be equipped to play the pianos and organs of our churches and schools in the future.

To every story of success there is also a downside. At one time we had a large band program in our school. Since the piano program was started, the band program has diminished. We still have a great band, but the numbers are smaller. We feel that this is connected to the number of people that have chosen piano over band. They feel that piano is more of a lifetime benefit, while band is for now and high school. A few of our

students are enrolled in both programs. Even with this sad note, the lasting benefits of this program compel us to continue.

So if you are like we were and have noticed a decline in school and church music, start a piano program. The results that you see after a few short years will amaze you. Give your children a chance to become part of the musical portion of the worship in church and school. Let your children learn the heritage of music in the Lutheran church. "Sing to the Lord a New Song."¹⁵

Roger A. Fenner is principal and teacher at St. Stephen's Lutheran School, Beaver Dam, WI



“Being Told What to Do” Deliberating on a Divine Call

David Kolander

OUR LONG-STANDING WELS procedure of providing calls for our pastor and teacher candidates is by telling them what to do. We assign them to their first congregation or school.

I myself have always been thankful for that. It took away the pressure of having to think about the situation in which I felt I would best serve the Lord. It also removed the temptation of putting my own desires ahead of what my Lord desired for me to do. There was, I remember, a feeling of thankfulness that people who loved me and knew me—and, more importantly, who knew and loved their Lord—would ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance to place me where they felt it was best for me to serve God and his people at that time.

I think most people would agree that this practice has served our synod well. It certainly is not without fault, of course, but it has been used by the Lord to give great blessings to our called workers and to our churches.

For example, men and women who may have never imagined themselves

being in the situation to which they were assigned have matured and even flourished in that situation. Whether it was through baptisms under fire, or opportunities for extra personal Bible study, or demands to function in ways which were not consistent with their personal interests, or in coming to an honest assessment of their weaknesses and strengths, God’s called workers have gone through important—and often humbling—spiritual journeys by being told what to do on Assignment Day.

Maybe you are in such a situation right now. If so, may God bless your ministry with the knowledge that you are serving where your dear Savior wants you to be at this time in your life.

The thought of “being told what to do” can also be important to keep in mind when deliberating on a call, which you have been given a choice to accept or decline. Our church’s procedure is to assign a candidate the first time (more than once in the case of a tutor or other temporary calls), and then to have a calling body extend a call to him

Kolander

or her thereafter.

Sometimes it may seem that the choice on a call like this is totally up to you. In a certain sense it is up to you. No other person can make the decision for you, no matter how much you might appreciate someone telling you what to do. Still, it really is not up to you. As you deliberate on the call you have received, you above all want to ask God to tell you what to do. You want the Lord of the Church to make it clear in what part of his church on earth he wants you to serve.

In the February 2005 issue of *The Lutheran Educator* the revised “The WELS Calling Process for Teachers” was presented. This article reviewed how the process of calls is carried out. In this article I would like to share a few comments about deliberating on a divine call, once you have received one.

Especially today when calls are not as common as they have been at other times, it is a good idea to go through some spiritual reflections, so that we can be a little more prepared for the time the Lord may choose to extend another call for us to consider.

One thought to keep in mind is that it is another call to consider. You presently are serving in a calling, which demands your full attention. Now the Lord is giving you the opportunity to consider whether you should follow a different calling, which will then demand your full attention.

One piece of advice, which has been very helpful to me in this regard, is to simply note how God directs your “mental energy” during a call deliberation.

If, for example, you find yourself experiencing an extra sense of purpose and a dose of energy in making plans for the new call you have received, it may be a good indication that the Lord is leading you to serve him elsewhere. This attention to your new call is often accompanied by an internal realization that the lambs in your present classroom or people in your present church aren't the people God will be asking you to serve in the future.

If, on the other hand, you find that it is hard to concentrate on the new calling, it may very well be that the Lord is simply confirming you in your present one. Sometimes a called worker will even experience feelings of guilt during this kind of a situation. He might be tempted to think that he is short-changing the group which extended the call to him. While we do have to be very careful to thoroughly and thoughtfully reflect on a call, there are times when the calling just is “not there.” Perhaps the Lord is preparing someone else to receive that call at a more appropriate time in his or her ministry.

This attempt to determine where your heart and mind are focusing their attention can only be trustworthy if you are asking God to rid your mind and heart of any false motives. It is for this reason that deliberating on a call is a very humbling process. To be blunt, it is simply very easy to allow feelings of discontent or self-pity or an inflated sense of our own value to become part of our thought process when determining whether we will accept or decline a call.

As a result, deliberating on a call can

be an intensely meaningful spiritual experience. It takes you “one on one” with the almighty God. God’s holy standards compel you to acknowledge your sins and your sinfulness. God’s wondrous forgiveness through Christ works in you an increased appreciation for his grace and mercy. God’s call to service to Christian living, in general, and to the calling of the public ministry, in particular, fills you with a sense of awe—the Lord God allows me to be involved in unveiling the mysteries of God!

If you find that it is hard to concentrate on the new calling, it may very well be that the Lord is simply confirming you in your present one.

Sometimes I must admit that I think one of the chief purposes of the Lord allowing us to consider a call is for us to have a very specific reason to consider our Christian calling as his children. Where we serve him in the public ministry is secondary to how we serve him in our ministry as the saints of God through the blood of Jesus. It is, after all, our desire to serve others by encouraging them to serve him who served

them with his holy life and innocent death, which gives us any reason at all to serve in his holy ministry.

This also can be helpful to keep in mind when we reach a point where we feel we just cannot make a decision on a call which we have received. Unless someone from whom you seek advice points out a flaw in your thought process, coming to this point would normally mean that you are to continue in your present calling. That is the calling you have accepted, and it is the calling in which you are serving. To accept a call elsewhere means that you believe the Lord is leading you to another situation. That leading from the Lord should result in a firm conviction that this is God’s will for you and for his church.

Keeping in mind that our call deliberations are also to benefit the church at large is helpful in considering how to publicize and present calls that we receive. Part of our calling as ministers of the gospel is to assist our members in better understanding the call process and the types of spiritual considerations involved in deliberating on a call. In addition, allowing the members to be part of your process will allow them to express prayers that you may never know are spoken and to provide insights that you may not have considered yourself.

Publicizing a call that you receive will usually depend on the custom of your congregation. I believe the most common procedure is to have the call announced on a Sunday morning, either through a verbal announcement after church or in the weekly bulletin.

Kolander

This is probably the most practical vehicle by which to get the message out, especially if your congregation requests or requires that all calls be discussed at a board and/or council and/or voters meeting. Meetings need to be scheduled and planned for.

I myself have always felt more comfortable announcing a call in written form, so that people can read carefully chosen words, rather than having to try to remember details that are spoken. While the Sunday bulletin may be the most efficient of way of doing this, it can also be done through the monthly newsletter or in a special mailing. It may, for example, be worthwhile to consider a newsletter article or a special mailing, if you or your principal or pastor feels that a Sunday call announcement might disrupt the members' preparation for or participation in worship that day.

It can also be helpful to provide your fellow members with a basic presentation of the facts of the call and a reminder about what is involved in making a decision on a call. At the end of this article is one example of how this can be done. It is called an "Information Sheet on a Current Call".

Perhaps a week or two after you have received your call, you could make this sheet available for people to pick up at church. On the opposite side of the sheet you could then list some basic details of the call itself, the location of the calling body, and particular needs or challenges that this call entails, which would be appropriate to share. In this way, your brothers and sisters will be

better able to pray for you and to talk to you. They also will be able to identify better with another group of fellow believers in a different part of our synod.

Working through the points on the "Information Sheet" can also lead to a natural and matter of fact announcement of your call decision. Again, you or your pastor or principal will have to decide the best forum for making this announcement. What you will say or write, however, will make it evident that you have been led to the firm conviction that this is what God wants you to do for the benefit of his kingdom.

There are many pieces of advice, which can be helpful in deliberating on a divine call. All of them are meant to be spiritual tools in the quest to have God "tell you what to do" when you are deciding on where he would have you serve at that time in your ministry. "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this" (Psalm 37:5).

Information Sheet on a Current Call General Information

One of our called workers, under the auspices of our Synod's Conference of Presidents, has received a call to another area of kingdom work. He is now faced with the task of determining whether the Lord wants him to remain in his present calling or to accept the call to this new area of service. To assist in determining the Lord's will, a called worker will make use of various guidelines for introspection. Four of them are listed below for your study and benefit.

1. *Needs at the places involved*

While the gospel ministry is essentially the same in every situation, local situations often have special needs or desires at a particular time (e.g., evangelism, administration, team ministry, discipline problems, musical work, etc.). Because of this, the called worker will need to make comparisons between the needs, plans and goals of each congregation or school. "What do we desire to do under God?" and "What needs and functions are high priorities among us?" are appropriate questions to be asked.

2. *Personal Gifts of the person being called*

The Lord has promised to supply needed gifts and abilities to all believers, called workers included. At the same time, it is also true that the Holy Spirit has given specific gifts in different measure, gifts which may be better or more fully used at some places than at others. A public minister, therefore, must be very honest in asking God if his gifts match the stated needs of the congregation or school which has extended the call. "Where would you have me serve, Lord, with the abilities you have seen fit to give me?" is the prayerful question which awaits our Lord's answer.

3. *Counsel from fellow believers*

Members of a congregation may know more about the congregation's

needs and desires than the called worker does. They also have witnessed the public minister's abilities and characteristics. For these reasons, the advice of fellow believers, including some outside the local congregation, is sought and desired. This provides the opportunity for everyone involved to consider the work of the church in its wider setting. "What is best for the church at large?" is the question members will prayerfully consider in honesty and love.

4. *Inner Conviction given by God*

The key factor, when all is said and done, is the inner calling which the Holy Spirit leads the public minister to act upon. While this ingredient is very difficult to define or express, it is very real. It has been referred to as a tug at the heart which simply won't "let go." "Dear Lord, let me know in my heart where you want me to serve at this time in my public ministry" is the intense prayer which flows regularly to God's throne of grace when the person is deliberating on the divine calls he holds (the one in his present location and the other from the new calling body). Fellow believers serve best in this area by being prayer warriors and seeking God's will alongside the called worker. It is hard work but vital for what we ultimately seek. ✠

David Kolander is the pastor at Christ the Lord, Brookfield, WI.

Assessing the Mission Statement of Martin Luther College from a Student Affairs Perspective

Jeffrey L. Schone

IN THEIR BOOK, *Involving College: Successful Approaches to Foster Student Learning and Development Outside the Classroom*, George Kuh, John Schuh, Elizabeth Whitt and their associates assert that “for involving colleges, no factor is more powerful in promoting student involvement in learning than the institution’s mission and philosophy.”¹ The authors define the mission of a college as its broad, overall, long-term purpose and refer to the institution’s philosophy as the values, assumptions, and beliefs about human potential, teaching, and learning which guide the school’s policies and practices. In essence, mission defines what a college does as an institution and philosophy guides how a college does its work. In their study, the authors identify five characteristics common to the mission/philosophy of schools which exemplify the successful involvement of students in learning and developing. Such schools operate with missions/philoso-



phies which ...

- are relatively clear and coherent
- support high, but reasonable, expectations for student achievement undergirded by an ethic of care
- determine and legitimate distinctions among individuals and groups
- enable multi-racial and multi-cultural communities
- provide a unifying focus for all members of their communities

Martin Luther College has completed ten years of work as our synod’s ministerial training school and during that time has operated according to a Mission Statement which reflects the school’s unique purpose. It’s an interesting and beneficial exercise to examine MLC’s mission/philosophy according to the criteria listed in *Involving College* and obtain an understanding of our school’s operation from this partic-

ular viewpoint. As the Vice president for Student Life at Martin Luther College I certainly endeavor to follow our institution's mission in my daily work as well as my long-range planning. What useful observations can be made by examining the MLC Mission Statement through a contemporary student affairs lens? To aid in this examination, the Martin Luther College Mission Statement follows:

Mission Statement of Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College exists to serve the ministerial needs of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)

- by preparing students for pastoral training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and
 - by preparing students for service as teachers and staff ministers in the Synod's churches and schools
- so that the WELS may be served by candidates both qualified and competent to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions in the *Book of Concord*

Objectives

To fulfill this mission, Martin Luther College carries out all instruction and programs of student life according to the gospel as revealed in the inspired Word of God. Through its programs the college desires

- to strengthen the student in a consecrated spirit of love for God and his Word;

- to educate the whole person for faithful, capable, intelligent citizenship in today's world;
- to assist the student in acquiring the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed for service in the church and for lifelong learning; and
- to encourage the student in developing and demonstrating a heart for service in the church, community, and world.

Function

Consistent with its mission and objectives, Martin Luther College

- encourages, recruits, and admits men and women qualified to undertake appropriate programs of study at Martin Luther College;
- offers courses of study which qualify students for entrance into Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, where they will continue their preparation for the pastoral ministry of the WELS;
- offers courses of study for the preparation of qualified educators for the teaching ministry in the preschools and elementary and secondary schools of the WELS;
- offers courses of study for the preparation of qualified staff ministers for the congregations of the WELS;
- awards appropriate degrees, certificates, and diplomas to those who successfully complete the prescribed courses of study;
- serves students and synodical constituency with educational leadership in the instruction of MLC students, through the professional develop-

Schone

ment of MLC faculty, and with programs in continuing education for teachers and staff ministers.

(a) Clear and coherent

If MLC's mission is anything, it is clear and coherent. MLC is a single purpose school and its mission statement reflects this specificity. The unique mission of MLC is to prepare men and women for service in the public ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In fact, the mission statement becomes even more specific when it defines the offices of the public ministry for which the college offers training as those of pastor, teacher, and staff minister. The focus of the mission statement is decidedly institutional, and institutional need—the needs of congregation, school, and synod—are noticeably at the center of MLC's purpose.

For this reason, perhaps, the mission statement emphasizes the school, its program and its product and, as such, may seem impersonal and even mechanical in comparison to the mission statements of other colleges and universities. The mission statement does not refer to students in a personal way and does not mention their individual needs² *per se*. Certainly, the mission statement speaks about students, but when it does, the focus is not on the student as a developing individual in his own right, but as a future worker in the church. Students are mentioned in the section of the mission statement labeled "Objectives," but the students don't appear to be the objective in and of

themselves. MLC's objectives focus on what a trained and educated student will do. Perhaps I'm being less generous than I should be, but the primary concern expressed in the stated mission seems to be for product and outcome with people and individuals taking a position of secondary importance.

On the other hand, Kuh explains mission by calling it "the one thing to all people" characteristic of a school. There is no question that the purpose of MLC is clear and it does, in fact, define the curriculum, focus the faculty, motivate the student body, and serve the needs of the synodical constituency. At the same time, I can say from observation and experience that faculty members and administrators are involved with students on an individual and personal level. In fact, I wonder if the level of personal attention given to the individual student at MLC is matched at many other undergraduate institutions of higher learning. After eight years of observation I can say with certainty that while the prayer and goal of the faculty is to produce competent pastors, teachers, and staff ministers the faculty's *modus operandi* to take care of young people according to their needs, paying considerable attention to them as whole persons with a variety of abilities, concerns, issues, strengths, weaknesses, tasks to accomplish, goals to meet, etc. It is not unusual for students to list this characteristic as a noteworthy strength of Martin Luther College. Perhaps this focus could be affirmed in the stated mission of the college.

(b) Supports high but reasonable expectations for student achievement, undergirded by an ethic of care

MLC's mission statement makes scant reference to expectations for student achievement. The word "qualified" is used a number of times in regard to students and "competent" makes its way into the document once. This is revealing. MLC does not place overt emphasis on high academic achievement. History and experience reveal that academic

*Attitudinal
expectations and
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academic
performance.*

excellence does not, in and of itself, translate into pastoral or ministerial excellence. When the Apostle Paul outlined qualifications for those who serve in the Christian ministry, he mentioned that ministers should certainly be "apt to teach," yet explained that the most important quality of a minister is "faithfulness." MLC encourages students to be faithful with the talents and abilities God has given them. This means that everyone is encouraged to strive and persevere and use their abilities to the fullest. At the same time, the faculty rec-

ognizes that not every student will excel academically in an objective or standardized sense, and not every student who enrolls at Martin Luther College will possess the academic and intellectual abilities necessary for the teaching and preaching ministry.

As I write this, however, I am reminded of the regular reaction of students who transfer to MLC from other colleges. Many transfer students relate that the academic rigor at MLC is greater than that of their former school or program and they experience the need to put more time into their studies than they were used to doing. In addition, both my own memories of being a pastoral student and my observation of the current pastoral studies track indicate that academic achievement is a cherished value. In the same regard, licensure standards, portfolio requirements, and test score benchmarks have highlighted the importance of academic preparation and achievement in the teacher track program.

It should also be noted that attitudinal expectations and social skills are as important at MLC as academic performance. I believe that the "Objectives" section of the mission statement makes this clear. The student who lacks social skills and cannot communicate well with peers will not fare well in a congregational setting. In the same way, those with well-polished egos or those who are rigid and inflexible in their approach to people will not do well. Faculty and staff, according to my observation, expend considerable time and effort helping students grow in maturity,

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responsibility, flexibility, and carefulness.

With this in mind, I can point out that MLC does operate with an ethic of care. You do not find this ethic enunciated in the mission statement, but it is apparent in the day-to-day operation of the school. As stated above, individual professors and faculties as a whole understand their responsibility to care for their students as whole persons with individual backgrounds, aptitudes, and aspirations. I cannot say why this vital part of the college's work is not stated more clearly or more directly in our mission document. Again, perhaps it could be.

(c) Determines and legitimates distinctions among individuals and groups

What the authors of *Involving Colleges* are talking about when they discuss this characteristic of an institution's mission/philosophy are relationships—not interpersonal relationships necessarily, but institutional relationships which foster and strengthen students' involvement in their education. What is the nature of the relationship between teachers and students?... between administration and students? Are the relationships fostered on campus of an egalitarian nature? Is there a meritocracy intended to motivate students and faculty? Is the human infrastructure of the institution hierarchical to the extent that it diminishes student involvement? Kuh, *et al.*, cite the example of a college that has dispensed with the traditional titles of “professor” and “student,” and

instead refers to individuals on campus as “senior learners” and “junior learners.” While this practice may seem somewhat strained or artificial to some, it is a striking communication of a particular institution's dedication to the principle of student involvement and engagement in the task of learning.

What does the MLC mission statement offer in this regard? On the one hand the mission objectives focus attention on what the college gives to the student and does for the student. This is a useful emphasis at our ministerial school where learning the Scriptures is not so much a matter of “discovery” as it is receiving the truths of God from trustworthy teachers (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2). On the other hand, the mission objectives also underline the importance of “assisting” and “encouraging” students to apply God's truths to their individual lives and work. Here's an interesting thought: What sense of the institutional relationships at Martin Luther College would you have if in its mission objectives the phrase “future colleagues” were substituted for the word “students”? And what effect might such a perspective have on faculty interaction and student engagement on our campus?

(d) Enables multicultural and multiracial student sub-communities

MLC is challenged by the realities of a multicultural and multiracial society. Our church body was organized by German Lutheran immigrants over 150 years ago. Some of those immigrants remained in cities like Milwaukee, but

many scattered to small towns and farming communities across the upper Midwest. Serving multicultural communities is a relatively new challenge for the WELS. MLC, as a consequence of its history and constituency, does not have multicultural or multiracial communities—if “communities” connotes a significant number of individuals. It is not entirely surprising that the school’s mission statement does not address these issues directly. Nevertheless, the need to take up these matters is recognized by

What sense of the institutional relationships at Martin Luther College would you have if in its mission objectives the phrase “future colleagues” were substituted for the word “students”?

everyone and efforts to recruit students of many cultural backgrounds are ongoing. It’s safe to say, however, that from a human perspective this work will proceed slowly because it will run parallel with the work that congregations of the

synod carry on themselves. As the membership of our congregations becomes more diverse, the enrollment at MLC will also become more diverse. Of course, the Lord declares that he can do more than we hope or imagine and he assures us that the uncountable multitude which will stand before his throne will include individuals from every nation, tribe, people and language!

Secular institutions attempt to cultivate and motivate multicultural and multiracial sub-communities by highlighting cultural differences, teaching and promoting tolerance, and enforcing equal opportunities. Martin Luther College is blessed with more effective tools than these. We have the love and forgiveness of God, proclaimed through the means of grace, then planted in hearts and placed in hands by the power of the Spirit. For Christ’s sake we rely on the Lord to forgive the hatred and unwillingness of our past and to overcome the hatred and insensitivity we carry into the present. Can God make the MLC campus a comfortable home for students of many cultures? Can God establish an MLC family of many colors and hues? Can God bring about in our midst, on our campus, the unity of diversity he will enjoy in heaven? God answers these questions with one of his own: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14)

(e) Provides a unifying focus for all members of the community

The specificity of MLC’s mission is also its most potent unifying factor.

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From an objective point of view, everyone at MLC understands why they are there. Students come to MLC knowing they will not study business or nursing or law but will prepare themselves to be ministers of the gospel. Faculty members have all been called, not hired, to prepare men and women for Christian ministry and do so with a passion. The administration's goal is to provide the church body with qualified and competent candidates it can rely on. Morning and evening chapel services often focus on the challenges and joys of the ministry. Each year the service learning coordinator sends several hundred students to parishes and schools across the country to gain practical, hands-on ministerial experience. Proclaiming the good news about Christ and sharing the love of Christ and holding out hope in Christ—this is the essence of the Christian ministry and MLC's *raison d'être*. In this regard the mission statement serves the college, its students and its constituency very well. For if it is true that "no factor is more powerful in promoting student involvement in learning than the institution's mission and philosophy," then what mission could be more engaging than MLC's mission to train those who will carry the promise of Christ Jesus to the world.✠

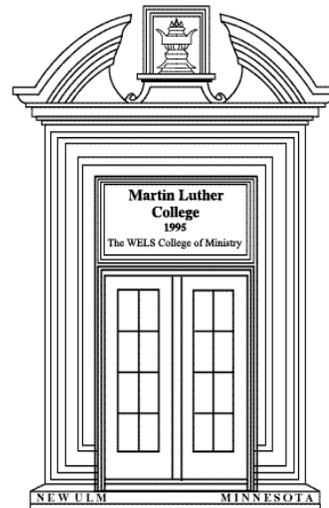
END NOTES

¹ Kuh, G., Schuh, J., Whitt, E. & Associates (1991). *Involving Colleges: Successful Approaches to Fostering Student Learning and Development Outside the*

Classroom. 41, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

² Several theorists have attempted to describe the developmental needs of traditional college age students. Chickering, for example, outlines the psychosocial development of college students along seven "vectors" – (1) Developing Competence, (2) Managing Emotions, (3) Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence, (4) Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, (5) Establishing Identity, (6) Developing Purpose and (7) Developing Integrity.

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“Go and make disciples of all nations.” Evangelism Emphasis at MLC

Lyle Lange

BEFORE HIS ascension into heaven, Jesus said to his disciples, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Christians are witnesses for Christ. Sharing with others the good news of all Jesus did for our salvation is something which flows naturally from a Christian’s faith. As Peter and John said to the rulers and elders of Israel, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Sharing the gospel with others is our way of saying “thank you” to Jesus for all he did to save us.

Sharing the good news about Jesus is the mission Christ gave to his church. Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20). Training future ministers to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ is the purpose of Martin Luther College (MLC), the Wisconsin Synod’s (WELS) college of ministry. MLC exists to equip men for entrance into pastoral training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and to train men and women

for the teaching ministry (early childhood, Lutheran elementary schools, and Lutheran high schools) and for staff ministry.

In order to assist students for their work as “gospel sharers,” MLC will join with the WELS Commission on Evangelism and the Commission on Parish Schools to present an annual “evangelism emphasis” day for all students and faculty in January of each year. The planning for this program came in response to an October, 2003, resolution of the WELS Board for Ministerial Education (BME). The resolution directed “that...MLC modify current and/or develop new educational approaches to improve the outreach capabilities of the Synod’s ministers.” The MLC administration appointed a task force for North American Outreach to carry out the resolution of the BME. The task force met regularly from December of 2003 through May of 2005 to carry out its work.

In carrying out its work, the task force did the following:

- Took a faculty survey to determine the level of outreach training which is already taking place at MLC;
- Surveyed the MLC Student Senate to

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gain student input into the committee's planning;

- Consulted with the MLC Curriculum Oversight Committee to receive advice from them;
- Met several times with the administrators from the WELS Commission on Evangelism and the WELS Commission on Parish Schools;
- Conducted listening sessions with the faculty to obtain faculty input;
- Forwarded its plan to the MLC Administrative Council for their consideration;
- Presented the task force's proposal to the MLC faculty for approval.

The MLC faculty approved the task force's plan. Beginning with January 18, 2006, an annual evangelism emphasis day will be conducted. It will present a curriculum designed to provide encouragement and guidance for future called workers of our church to fulfill their calling as evangelists for Christ. The curricular components of the plan are as follows:

Freshmen Building relationships, small talk, and listening skills. Starting a spiritual conversation.

Sophomores Preparing a personal witness. Various witness methods: Bible study, using a tract, give an answer, come and see.

Juniors Biblical leadership. Facilitating Change in a Congregation/School to do more outreach.

Seniors Welcoming people to our churches and schools. Strategies for congregations and schools to reach the unchurched.

These components will be presented

to the MLC campus family in various workshops conducted throughout the day.

The day will begin with a worship service which will focus on the starting point for evangelism: a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The sermon will serve as the keynote address for the entire day. A plenary session will focus on planning and preparing for witnessing opportunities. Electives dealing with various evangelism topics will also be presented. Campus family members will be free to attend the elective of their choice. The day will conclude with students meeting with their advisers to discuss what the events of the day mean for them in their personal witnessing and their future ministries.

We pray that this training will be of service in further preparing the future generations of WELS ministers to be "sharers of the good news about Jesus," who gave his life for us that we may live with him in heaven. May the Lord of the church bless these efforts to the glory of his name and for the salvation of those to whom we are privileged to proclaim the good news of all that he did to save us.✠

Lyle Lange is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN and serves as committee chairman for the Task Force for North American Outreach.

“I Love Reading:” Fifth and Sixth Graders’ Reaction to Literature Circles

Steven Witt



“I love reading for the first time! I used to just fake that I read the book. I love when we have literature circles,” said Joshua, 12 years old.

This comment came on the second day of literature circles in my 5th and 6th grade classroom. Joshua is a struggling 6th grade reader who does not read at grade level. He seems unmotivated in most classes and has a generally poor attitude toward learning, except when we have literature circles. Literature circles are an arena for students to explore literature together. Literature circles in my classroom have sparked motivation, fostered communication skills, encouraged a deeper understanding of literature, and have provided a chance for students to use higher level thinking skills in an authen-

tic conversational manner. Literature circles have my students excited about reading.

According to Harvey Daniels (2002) literature circles are small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group’s assigned portion of the text (either in or outside of class), each member takes notes to help him contribute to the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with ideas to share. Each group follows a reading and meeting schedule, holding periodic discussions on the way through the book. When a group finishes a book, the circle members may share highlights of their reading with the rest of their class. Then new groups may be created and new books are selected and students move into a new discussion (Daniels, 2002).

Over the past fifteen years, the use of literature circles (also called book clubs, or literature groups) has exploded (Calkins, 2001). Literature circles arose partly in response to traditional, teacher-led discussions in which students often assume passive roles. Traditional whole group instruction has followed an IRE (initiate, response, evaluation) sequence. The teacher initiates the

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question. The students respond to the questions only when the teacher calls on them. The teacher then evaluates the answer. The students are not actively involved in their learning process.

Literature circles are an arena for students to take control of the discussion and explore literature with friends. I realize that as teachers, we cannot assume that after simply handing a book to children they will be able to discuss literature in depth, make connections, have insights into the author's style, and be able to interpret and understand the story. Before children are set off in literature circles they need to be exposed to a wide variety of literature. They need to know how to interact in discussion groups and they need to have ideas about what they should talk about.

In my classroom we have reading workshop daily for about sixty minutes. Students are reading a lot of different types of genre daily. I believe this immersion in reading helped my students develop quality literature discussions. I began the school year by immediately introducing literature circles to my students during reading workshop. I shared with the students how much fun it is to walk out of an exciting movie and talk about what you saw with your friends. Through student collaboration we developed a list of guidelines that we thought would help our circles and conversations work effectively. I then spent several class periods modeling and discussing the purpose and function of literature circles.

I modeled how to discuss literature using daily read-alouds. I read aloud a

short story and would then ask, "Well what do you think?" Other than the initial prompt I didn't ask many questions about the story. I also allowed the students to speak with out raising their hands. This helped to build the conversation format. To help initiate and model discussion after a read-aloud, I would have the students turn to someone sitting next to them and comment

Literature circles are an arena for students to take control of the discussion and explore literature with friends.

on the book or a prompt I had given them like, "What do you think will happen next?" This pair and share activity allows more students to have a voice and talk about the book. This also allows the shy student a chance to have a conversation with a partner. After we pair and share we come back as a whole group, and the students share with the whole group interesting comments that they heard.

The most powerful way my students grew in their understanding of what goes into a good discussion was to observe one in action. I used a common cooperative learning technique — a "fishbowl" — to model good discussion strategies for the rest of the class. The day prior to the "fishbowl" activity I

chose four students with strong discussion skills to participate in the demonstration. I had them reread a chapter of a book that I had been reading aloud to the whole class. I gave them a prompt, "Look for something to talk about that stood out for you." For the "fishbowl" demonstration, the group gathered chairs in a circle at the front of the room and began to talk. Although understandably self-conscious at first, the students quickly forgot the audience and engaged in an interesting discussion of the book's ending.

To set the students on their way in literature circles I did a short book talk on the various fiction books that students could choose from. I intentionally chose books at different reading levels. Students ranked their top three choices and later that night I placed the students into four heterogeneous groups. There were approximately four to five students in each group. I placed the children in their groups primarily by their book choice, but I also took into account student reading level, behavior, and social issues. With their top choices most of the students seemed to migrate towards books that were at their independent reading level. Literature circle groups met twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 15-20 minutes during our reading workshop time slot.

After each literature circle meeting we held a short debriefing session. This session was guided by me. I would simply ask a question "What went well and what do we need to work on?" This debriefing session allowed the students to learn how to see what made the cir-

cles productive and what caused problems.

Through the process of implementing literature circles it was obvious through the active discussions that my students were having that they did learn to function independently within literature circles. This was obvious from the beginning of the circles as I saw the students jump into the discussion. The students loved to have literature circles. Every morning at least one student would begin their day by asking me if we were going to have literature circles today. It was very easy and natural for me to sit outside of the circles and observe and record student responses and behaviors.

In my classroom of 14 students I divided my students into four groups. At the beginning of the study I had two literature circles going on at the same time, but I soon discovered that two discussions occurring at the same time created a distraction to both groups. I quickly adjusted and had only one circle discussion at a time. This allowed both the group and me a chance to focus on the discussion at hand. The students not participating in the circle were reading independently.

As we continued on our journey into literature circles I began to notice some major themes. These themes revolved around the kinds of talk and content of the talk that occurred when my fifth and sixth graders discussed literature. The major themes that I found included an increase in reading motivation, reading attitude, and the expanded use of reading comprehension strategies

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such as predicting, inferring, and the use of personal connections. Literature circles also helped the students develop communication skills. Students learned to listen to others and express opinions. They learned to sustain a discussion by building on the ideas of others. They considered more than one side of an issue. They looked back into the text to reaffirm or change their opinion. They found ways to agree or disagree with others. They were having quality literature discussions.

The increase in students' motivation was one of the first major benefits that I noted throughout my study of literature circles. Joshua, a sixth grade student, is a struggling reader who doesn't read at grade level. I have been Joshua's reading and writing teacher for the past two years. His positive attitude shift that I noted throughout the study was remarkable.

In the past Joshua lacked a desire to complete most reading assignments, especially those that involved reading a number of pages. He would often simply avoid doing the assigned reading or simply guess on oral or written questions. Joshua was in a group that was made of five sixth grade students. They were reading and discussing *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. This is an exciting book that can be challenging because the author uses many different literary devices. However, from the onset of literature circles, Joshua took a leadership role in discussions.

The example in the excerpt is the beginning of a circle discussion. Joshua begins the discussion and likes to ask

questions about the book.

Joshua: What surprised you so far in the story?

Lee: The whetherman

Joshua: Why was it a surprise?

Lee: I thought at first when they said whether I was so into the story I thought he meant weather forecast and I looked back and read w-h-e-t-h-e-r.

Joshua: What did you expect?

John: I expected for it to be a whole lot more confusing but it wasn't really that confusing.

Joshua is guiding the discussion through questions. He then probes deeper and asks Lee to support his answer. Joshua would often ask questions and use a follow up question. I believe that because Joshua is a struggling reader this leadership role helped to instill confidence in his understanding as a reader. He felt comfortable and safe in this conversational setting which allowed him to ask questions without fear of being graded or judged. This confidence then led him to be motivated to read actively outside of the literature circles.

In a personal one-on-one interview with Joshua after six weeks of using literature circles, you can clearly see through the interview transcript that his motivation towards reading has increased.

"Do you like literature circles?"

"Yes because I have time to share with my friends. I like to tell them stuff that they didn't get, or they tell me stuff that I didn't get. We can help each other

out.

“How have literature circles helped you grow as a reader?”

“They help me like we’ll discuss something and if that’s something that I didn’t get they show me where it is, and I can reread it.”

“Is there anything bad about literature circles?”

“Not at all! Besides if it’s bad it’s because someone didn’t read.”

I have been Joshua’s reading teacher for the last three years, and it is amazing for me to see the increased enjoyment and positive attitude Joshua has towards reading now that I have implemented literature circles. I believe that through the non-threatening environment of literature circles Joshua is more comfortable and draws on his peers to help him understand the text.

Fountas and Pinnel (2001) state that good readers make connections to text, personal knowledge, and world knowledge as they read. They also say that readers reread for understanding, ask for clarifications, summarize, analyze, and criticize. In this typical example of a literature circle discussion on the book *Phantom Tollbooth* we see my students using these reading strategies as they socially construct an understanding of the text.

Joshua: I think I kind of skipped it but how did the dog get to the boy?

John: He just started running and all of the sudden he appeared because he was not at the Leathargians.

Paul (correcting the pronunciation): Lethargians.

John: Yeah for not doing something

Lee: But like the dog I think is right now, I would think he is the principal of all that place. He is like the big leader knows how to get everywhere just like that.

Joshua: And then also when the dog can talk to him, like, like we were talking about; he likes to go on the cars. He goes, “Can I go with you?”

Lee: He got happy right away.

Joshua: Yeah, and then also he goes when they start fighting just a little bit. Then he goes the alarm clock always goes off when they are fighting. That was weird.

Karl: I think it’s funny their schedule and all day they have naps and something that doesn’t do anything at all and they’re either relaxing or sleeping.

Notice how Joshua again begins this portion of the discussion. He is not sure if he completely understands what he has read. So he asks for clarification on how the boy got the dog. This example shows us that it is okay for children to realize that they might not always understand what they read. John answers Joshua with a quick concise answer. This helps clarify Joshua’s understanding of the text.

The students then spend time summarizing what they have read. According to Fountas and Pinnel (2001) summarizing helps students reconstruct meaning from what they

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had read and create sense out of what was read. Notice in the above transcript that the students are summarizing the story in a logical and sequential order. They are continually building on what the person before them has said. This continuity in the conversation is helping the children understand the basics of appropriate human conversations. One person speaks while the others listen and wait for their turn to respond.

Throughout the reading of this novel I used various mini-lessons to teach the students literacy concepts such as homophones. In this next, brief portion of the discussion John is drawing on his understanding of homophones.

John: It was funny how they used the homophones with like the whether-man when, umm, Milo says “if you’re the weatherman can you tell me what the weather will be?” and the whether-man says “not the weatherman—I’m the whether-man. I tell you whether this or that will happen, not whether it will rain or shine.”

During my research on literature circles I also noticed how students are guided by their interpretation and that of their peers. This seems to help them consider and explore a variety of perspective interpretations as they read. The example below shows how the students are trying to determine the age of the main character, Milo.

Lee: It is hard to tell if he is in college, high school, or in middle school.

Joshua: Because he has a car.

Lee: Because he has a car he

thinks very differently and he seems like he would be an older kid.

Joshua: Yea...and for all we know he could be 13 and not have a care because nobody cares about much at 13.

Lee: And it could be just a book that since he’s already going through a tollbooth it could be realistic fiction, oh no, not even fiction.

Paul: The tollbooth looks as tall as him it seems like he is a kid. It looks like a kiddy car one of those kid ones.

Lee: But as you can see the artist like overdoes things also like he’s got his own room.

Paul: He’s an only child.

Lee: It seems like he’s like a depressed 21 year old.

Notice how Lee, Joshua, and Paul have different opinions on the age of Milo. Lee and Paul both use the text and the illustrations to try and determine Milo’s age. Because of the car in the picture, Lee is unclear as to how old Milo is. Paul is confident that Milo is a young boy. The readers do not come to consensus on the age of Milo. The intended outcome is for each member of the discussion to come away with a greater understanding of themselves and the literature being read (Karolides, 1992) not necessarily agree on their opinion.

This is an excellent example of back and forth discussion and negotiation. This is often what goes on in a reader’s head as he is negotiating the text as he reads for understanding (Fountas and Pinnel, 2001).

In reading we must have a strong understanding of the vocabulary as we make meaning of the words. In the discussion below the group is working together as they build on their knowledge of words and how the author uses words in *The Phantom Tollbooth*

Joshua: And they also used a bunch of different other weird words like Eric said it's like a dictionary.

Lee: Dictionopolis

John: It was funny when the watchdog came he said, "What do you think you're doing?" and Milo just says, "Sitting down," and the watchdog goes, "Exactly, exactly I'm here to make sure that you don't do that," and so Milo was asking how he got there and the watchdog was, "You shouldn't be here; you should be thinking," and Milo just doesn't want to think.

Joshua: And also I just found something that goes with, "What are you doing here?" growled the watchdog. "Just killing time," replied Milo. "You see, killing time," roared the dog so ferociously

Lee: Also like Eric said a dictionary. It is kind of confusing to get to dictionopolis because he doesn't know the way and the whether-man wouldn't help him. And the whether-man confused me by saying if you find my way bring it back to me.

The students are noticing various literary terms, such as homophones, and literary devices, such as clichés and play on words. Of course, the students

learned these concepts through direct instruction by the teacher. The use of literature circles demonstrated that the students were able to understand and apply the concepts in their self-directed literature conversations. This reinforced my understanding that I can step away from the literature discussions and allow my students to engage in quality literature circles independently.

It should be noted that during my

Literature circles gave me the opportunity during reading class to step out from the focus of the children while allowing the literature, author, and reader a chance to take center stage.

daily reading workshop classes I continually model and teach the very reading strategies that my students are drawing on and using literature circles. My reading workshop class consists of daily silent reading and a small group mini-lesson on an instructional level book. I believe a key component that helps the student apply these skills is the motivational opportunity of peer discussion of a book in a safe environment

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Of course, my classroom is not perfect and neither were our literature circles. There are times when I, as the teacher sitting on the outside of the circle, must step in and clarify, redirect, or move the discussion along. These interventions were isolated and did not happen often.

Literature circles gave me the opportunity during reading class to step out from the focus of the children while allowing the literature, author, and reader a chance to take center stage. I believe that the modeling and direct instruction that I used helped the students conduct quality literature circles. These literature conversations sparked motivation in all of my students. It especially seemed to motivate the typically underachieving student like Joshua. The circles also fostered communication skills as the students learned to understand conversational rules and proper ways to respond while not always agreeing with an interpretation. These discussions encouraged a deeper understanding of literature as students were not worried about the teacher's approval or lack of approval. I was amazed at the excitement in my students' voices as they discussed the books they were reading. The students were more engaged than if I simply directed the students towards one right teacher-led understanding.

After a full year of using literature circles in my classroom, I simply wonder now why I didn't use literature circles earlier. Will your students benefit from using literature circles? Step into my classroom and see the excitement in lit-

erature circles. Students enjoy reading and they love to talk about what they have read. I invite you to step back and let your students read and discuss. Watch your students grow in their conversations about the books they are reading. See students excited about reading. You might have a student say "I love reading for the first time." ❖

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REVIEWS

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Adams, David, Kalisha Davis, Jerry Finn, Jennifer Griffin-Wiesner and Amanda Seigel. *An Asset Builder's Guide to Youth Leadership*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999. 64 p. \$12.95.

Youth are not merely an audience within the church. They are assets to the church. This is the lesson one can glean from *An Asset Builder's Guide to Youth Leadership*. Seeing youth as assets to be developed is key to their spiritual health and the health of the communities/congregations in which they live.

I have made my opening remarks quite a bit more spiritual and church-oriented in tone than is the book itself. Search Institute, the publisher, has some ties to Lutheranism through a Thrivent grant for the Healthy Communities–Healthy Youth program. However, the aims of Search Institute are mostly sociological in character. This book seeks to reach program planners in various organizations, from church youth groups to YMCAs to civic clubs, etc. Of the forty “developmental assets” identified by the Institute as “essential to raising successful young people,” only one is specifically religious. Asset #19 points to the importance of “religious community” – that a “young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.” That is sufficiently bland to be acceptable to anyone of any faith. Other identified assets can be

interpreted spiritually, such as “positive values” of “caring ... integrity ... honesty” ... or the “positive identity” asset (that the young person reports, “My life has a purpose”). However, the same features might be used to describe a non-religious young person who is dedicated to helping at a homeless shelter. So this is not a book to consult if you are seeking strong biblical backing regarding issues in youth ministry.

Nevertheless, we can apply points from this guide to our approach toward youth ministry. “Too often, the focus of youth work ... is on solving or preventing problems,” the authors say. “The asset approach concentrates on bringing out and building on the best in young people.” Is that true in our churches? Do we do youth ministry largely with a negative goal—to keep youth from falling away? Ideally, our focus for youth is predominantly positive—to build them up in Christ and equip them to serve in Christ’s kingdom.

Service is a strong emphasis of *The Asset Builder's Guide*. Youth become leaders by serving. The question is, do we let them serve and engage them in our organizations? The authors challenge us to rethink the role of youth worker or educator—to play more of a background role and to give youth themselves more power to plan and do. Some sample bits of advice:

“Take young people’s input seriously.”
“Form personal alliances between youth and adults.”
“Learn to cooperate and balance power.”
“Build trust between youth and adults.”
“Ask youth for their help.”
“Avoid tokenism. . . Youth leaders must have real roles that are important and valuable to an organization.”
“Give them opportunities to try out lower-risk, short-term leadership experiences that can help prepare them for more significant contributions in the future.”
What this book lacks is a spiritual

foundation. What it has are tidbits of practical advice that might spark our thoughts on issues of youth involvement in the church. (For instance, how about having a delegation of teens serve as an advisory committee to the church council?)

I don’t know if I’d pay \$12.95 for *The Asset Builder’s Guide to Youth Leadership* but if some grant-funded agency near you is giving away copies, it might be worth your time to browse for ideas.✪

David Sellnow