

Christian schools and chocolate cakes: An ‘excursion through my heart-space.’¹

Emma King

Education Student, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW

Why do we teach?

Why do you teach, Christian teacher? Have you ever stopped to ponder why? Maybe you were inspired by a really good teacher. Maybe you really love kids and enjoy hanging out with them. Maybe you like the pay and all those holidays! (Wait, what holidays?) Maybe you had a terrible teacher in school and want to make it better for the next generation of students.

These are some of the many reasons I’ve heard as to why people get into teaching. Trust me, I’ve thought all of these myself! However, I seem to think we don’t really become teachers for any of these reasons. I believe there is a far greater and grander reason why we teach. I think, however, many of us have missed it or at least misplaced it. We’ve lost the true meaning of why we Christian teachers teach in the first place. We are being seduced by how education is ‘done’ elsewhere.

I didn’t always know that (after the fall of the Roman Empire) the first schools were church run. Christianity and education have been closely associated for a long time. But now, when I peek inside Christian schools I see stressed teachers, piles of paperwork, and a plethora of programming. In this blog I want to rediscover the reasons why we teach. I suspect they are nothing to do with ourselves, but everything to do with our Creator GOD!

My “Ah Ha” moment

Today I learnt something that no textbook could ever teach me. I’ve been doing a school placement and one of my lecturers was scheduled to visit me. As I prepared for the visit, questions about how it would result filled my head like a swarm of bees buzzing around a beehive. I was so busy planning to impress that I forgot my God-predestined purpose in being there.

That afternoon, the children in my class had

written stories about their families. One student bullied another student about their story and right then the Holy Spirit urged me to bring these precious children back to the everlasting promises of their Heavenly Father. I pointed out the beautiful promise of Jeremiah 29:11 and assured them everyone’s story was God-ordained and wonderful, because God had created it. The child responsible for the bullying then asked, “So my dog dying was part of God’s good plan?” Whoa! My heart was beating and I had a gospel moment lurking right in front of me. I assured the children of God’s sovereignty when we face difficulties.

Then other children spoke about deaths in their families. I struggled with what I was hearing. Like water from a tap, these kids were pouring out their hearts to me. I realised that they were dealing with real heart-wrenching issues and they were only in Year One! I also recognised the remedy. It was for them understanding and accepting God’s love and salvation and being resurrected from spiritual death to life.

I discover the real purpose of teaching

This is the lesson I learned that day: Teaching, foremost, isn’t about being impressive. It’s not about getting a good grade or being judged a “great teacher” by The National Standards for Teachers. It’s neither about making children “good and competent” citizens for society and the workforce, nor is it about the pay check. It’s not even about fulfilling our passion of working with children. It’s not actually about us. It’s about helping *every child* realise they are created in the image of God and understanding that they have a God-given purpose. It’s about helping them discover their God-given abilities and talents. Most importantly, it’s about helping them to discover God’s eternal and

¹ This is an adaptation of a free choice Blog that was written as part of an English unit in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) program.

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beautiful salvation. It's about helping them come face to face with the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, made possible when they can see Him as soon as they look directly at you. It's about serving and honouring God.

We tend to joke as teachers that we are nurses, doctors, counsellors, cooks, mothers, and fathers. Realistically we are servants. God's servants. The children in our classrooms need us to tell them that there is something grander than themselves. I was ever so wrong that day on my school placement when I tried to impress. I lost my focus on Jesus, but God through his mercy helped me refocus, so the twenty something little children in front of me could experience the grace and love of Jesus in the midst of their tragedies.

Exploring a higher purpose for education

God has placed each of our students in front of us. He wants us to teach them about Him. Do they need to be taught how to count? Absolutely. Do they need to be taught how to read? Absolutely. Do they need to learn about our world and how it functions? Again, absolutely. However, they also need to be taught about the One who ordered the numbers. They need to be taught about the One who created words and about the One that brought everything in our world into existence. Just by speaking, He created!

Our students need to learn because God inspired the writer of Proverbs 1:7 to proclaim, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." These children need to trust us but at the end of the day we are only human, not God. I'm not trying to diminish the importance of what we are doing because we endeavour to do worthwhile and sometimes even accomplish wonderful things that are making a difference. However, we cannot save our students from everything. Only God can save a child from their sin and perform a miracle. God is the one working through us doing all the work. So when our students look at us we must have them thinking that we can't do it all but that's OK, because we, with them, are trusting in the God of the Universe. God is the one who is really behind all the wonder.

The Christian classroom

What does the Christian classroom look like? I guess most of us think of displayed Christian posters with nice Christian sentiments and truths. While these are helpful and admirable things we should have in our classrooms for our students, the Christian classroom is more than this. Ultimately it is our mission field. Also, we cannot just save

the 'God stuff' for our Bible classes. In Matthew 10:33 Jesus says, "But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven." When we save God for the set 'Bible times' in our classrooms, it is as if we are denying that He exists when we are teaching any of the Key Learning Areas. God should be at the centre of our classrooms and at the centre of each subject. Because He created everything, He deserves first place in our life.

Once when I was on placement at a Christian school, I was teaching my students about the different properties of materials in a science lesson. We discussed why God made different materials with different properties. One student intelligently spoke about how God had made different materials with different properties because He made them for different purposes. He said "It's a good thing God made cornflakes brittle and not stretchy so we can eat them!"

Worldviews!

Our lecturers consistently challenge us on the topic of worldviews, what they are, and how our worldview impacts everything we do! My worldview is impacting on the words you are reading right now! So, how are you bringing Christ into your classroom? Is all our lesson material supported by a Christian worldview, or does it ignore a Christian worldview or promote another?

One of our lecturers taught us that every textbook has a worldview and how to identify them. Are our storybooks teaching a Christian worldview or neutralising it? Are we giving our students the wrong ideas or the right ones? It actually frightens me how important the Christian teacher's role is. I thought for the first two years of my course that all I had to do was teach students how to write, spell, and count and all that other educational 'stuff'.

Then we discussed how some Christian schools might be like a chocolate cake; immaculately decorated on top but when you cut into the middle, it is bland. These schools have the Christian name attached, but do they integrate the Christian worldview throughout their curriculum? Our schools need to be like a chocolate cake where both the outside and inside are delightful and where a Christian worldview needs to be evident in everything we plan and do. To do all this, however, we need to be equipped with an understanding of God's word, regularly attending Church, praying daily, reading the Bible, reading inspiring Christian literature and speaking with other Christians. These are spiritual disciplines that will enable us to effectively teach God's Word. If we don't

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Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

understand it, how will our students? Thus a teacher must also be a learner.

Reward and punishment

One of the ‘fierce’ debates we often have in our teacher education classes is about rewards and punishments. I have formed my own personal opinion about these. I have realised that many of the behaviour management systems used in Christian classrooms are not *biblical* because we are *bribing* instead of *teaching* the children to do the right thing.

Observe any classroom that uses behaviour management systems and what you will identify is children doing the right thing the instant their teacher offers an incentive. I once had a boy cry because he didn’t get a ‘Happy Ticket’ from me. When students do the wrong thing, rebellious and cheeky reactions may occur. Shouldn’t they obey, I ask myself, because they respect us and because God commands it? As Romans 13:1 says, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” It then continues, “those who don’t obey will be punished.”

Now here is what I am *not* saying. I’m not saying that we cannot reward children. Rather, I am proposing we should reward them when they don’t know it is coming. Tokens and little merit awards need to be destroyed. I know that sounds tough, but do we want to mould our students into the image of a dog begging for a treat or into the image of God? If you reverse the letters in ‘God’ you get the word ‘dog’. I think some of us may be guilty of this.

Warfare in the classroom

Let me finish. Every year we are going to have twenty plus children sitting in front of us. It’s up to us to be Jesus to them. You may get tired from the workload. You may get frustrated with that one child who always calls out or with the one who is out of their seat, refusing to work. In those moments you may want to give up and wonder why you began this journey. In those moments remember that Satan is attacking you because you are trying to expand God’s kingdom in your classroom. Jesus won on the cross and so you can win in your classroom for Him because He is the chief cornerstone that holds you up. God uses and sustains you in the process.

Imagine if you gave up just before a child decided to commit their life to God! I know all the stress will be worth it when I see just one child come to Christ. One Christ-like word or action is all it can take.

Teaching is a 24/7 calling. Those twenty plus students, every year, are relying on **you** and **me** —

us — to be God’s faithful servants. In the bad times remember, “Why do we teach?” But, but ... “How do we do it to achieve our why?” *Pray* and keep on praying that God will use you mightily and help you do what He wants you to do. Is it impossible? No, it certainly isn’t. Luke 1:37 declares, “**NOTHING** is impossible with God.”

Conclusion

I think reflecting on why we teach is a valuable exercise for Christian teachers. Perhaps we do it too infrequently. On such excursions through our personal heart-space we may often come face to face with the One who first inspired us to join Him and who *continues* to accompany us on every step of our journey as His servants.

I still have so much to learn. So much has to take place as I commence my final school placements. Yet, when I am a qualified teacher, learning will still continue. Through reflection comes value for every teacher. Values emerge, confronting our practice. So, every day, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our excursions in personal heart spaces, we will continue to learn and change our thinking, choosing to walk in step with our Lord. Then the One who first inspired us to join him will say,

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”²

What eternal fulfilment if I could also see Him turning to each student to share the same commending declaration!

² Matthew 25:23 NIV



Daniel Reynaud presents a copy of his book, *The Man the Anzacs Revered*, to William McKenzie’s great-grandson Stephen Hansen and partner Josephine Bibby. Photography: Etienne Reynaud.

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