

The Outcomes of a Missional Approach in Christian Schools *An Asia-Pacific Perspective*

Introduction

Mission involves being sent to do something. In a Christian context it means being sent by Jesus to obey his commission.

Matthew 28:18-20

- Mission is at the very heart of the Gospel and involvement in mission is, I believe, a good indicator of whether or not an organisation is truly Christian
- In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus first announces. His kingdom has come!
- The commission also indicates the nature of his kingdom community.
 - a going community,
 - an incorporating people
 - a teaching community
 - an indwelt community

If we call a community such as a school “Christian” it should share these characteristics.

A Going Community

Jesus, in his great commission said literally, “*Going* make disciples of all nations”.

Matthew 10:1, 6-7

Acts 1:8

Matthew 10:8

- the good news his disciples were to preach was that the kingdom of God had come
- the instruction to heal, raise, cleanse and drive out remained a valid and necessary part of the proclamation was demonstrated by the early Church disciples. (Acts 3:6-7; 5:12-15)
- See what Jesus said the scriptures spoke concerning his ministry. (Luke 4:18-19)

An Incorporating Community

- Although a Christian school should not view itself as “a Church” yet as a Christian community it is a ministry of the Church, the Body of Christ.
 - It will recognise and receive all members of the school as equally valuable parts of the Body, gifted to serve the Body (Ephesians 4:7).
 - Its teaching will specifically address the issue of living lives worthy of the calling to be the people of God and growing in spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:1, 11-13)
 - it will recognise what Fowler (2004 p 120-121) calls the “office” of each person in the community and will seek to equip and empower each to use their God given gifting for the good of the whole community (Ephesians 4 15-16).
- Most Christian schools are based on the western paradigm of education that Westerhoff calls “The schooling-instructional paradigm” (Westerhoff 1976 page 6-7), (Quote)
- If we grow schools that are part of Christ’s mission they must be Christ-centred learning communities that share in his mission. A Teaching Community. But not all members will be Christians (Matt 13:24)

A Teaching Community

- Schools are not mandated by Scripture but they are an effective means for training and preparing people for their vocation. (*vocation* in its broadest sense of a person's calling to serve as one of God's people Ephesians 4:1)
- To prepare students for their vocations involves them understanding the world from a Christian mindset, or if you prefer from a Christian Worldview. (Ephesians 4:21).
- Paul, in Ephesians 4:15, gives us guidance about how to understand education in this sense.
- The Biblical understanding of truth is seen in the person of Jesus (John 14:6, Ephesians 4:21). It is truth that is found in community under the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Palmer explains this sort of a community of learning as a "circle of trust. (See quotes)
- What Palmer calls "our own inner teacher", I would call the Holy Spirit. (See quote)

Palmer's (1993 page xii) definition of teaching, "To teach is to create space in which the community of truth is practiced," provides a fair summary of what Paul is saying in Eph 4:15

An Indwelt Community

- A Christian missional teaching community, as I would understand a Christian school to be, must be an indwelt community, for Jesus said, Matthew 18; 20,
- Such a community must be led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14) as it is the Spirit of Truth himself who reveals truth to his people. (John 16:13 NIV)
- "truth", refers not to a cognitive knowledge (doctrinal knowledge) so much as a personal knowledge of "the truth that is in Jesus" (Ephesians 4:21) that is gained where truth is practiced in love. (Ephesians 4:15)
- Only if they are communities empowered by God's Spirit through faith and prayer can Christian schools undertake their proper role of equipping their students to stand (Ephesians 6;10-11) in the warfare in which they must be engaged.

Outcomes of a Missional Community

- The Great Commission summarises only the more important outcomes of being a missional community. not the practical outcomes that come from being involved in cross cultural endeavour (Frisken 2004)
- In a school where all that is taught and learnt is focussed on Christ and where the truth is practiced in love an authentic missional community will be found.
 - Firstly, God's creational purposes in the Great Mandate (Genesis 1:28) are still relevant so a missional school not only is concerned with preaching the gospel but also in doing what God put people on earth to do; to live obediently and faithfully as God's people. – western individualism God's communal goals to goals for personal advancement
 - Secondly, Van Brummelen speaks of the Great Commission, which we have already looked at in detail. This calls us to be involved in making disciples but it also involves, as we have seen, much more than simply preaching or witnessing
 - Finally, in what he calls the Great Community, Van Brummelen speaks of what Paul refers to when he speaks about us being incorporated into the people of God by faith (Ephesians 1:13 and 2:13-16). This purpose must be central for schools which would aspire to be truly Christian.
- Living faithfully as God's people will profoundly influence the world as students and teachers live lives worthy of their calling (Ephesians 4:1).

An Asia-Pacific Perspective

- NHI was formed to encourage and support the development of Biblically based Christian schooling based on this new paradigm of a school as a Christian learning community that was missional in its character and practice.

A network of mission aware schools

- a network of schools that would support and practice a missional approach to their schooling. Currently,
- NHI has MOU with Christian Schools Australia, the Christian Parent Controlled Schools in Australia and the New Zealand Association for Christian Schools and with groups of Christian schools in other countries
- It also conducts training seminars in schools or in national or state Christian schools conferences when invited to do so.
- It promotes and facilitates the formation of sister school relationships between schools in different countries,
- assists in arranging mission visits from one school to a school or schools in another country and
- each year runs one or more “Mission Challenge Visits”

While all these have proved helpful it soon became obvious that more was needed.

An education for the less developed nations

Christian schools in Australia have been working with Churches and schools in the Pacific region since 1988. During this time a number of issues have emerged as central to the future of these island nations.

- Much of the instability and tension that has plagued the region has been brought about, at least in part by the loss of the Christian values that once provided a unifying influence in the countries.
- The approach to education used in these countries is problematical as it has been designed on a Western model that is individual centred. See Letter from Kevin and Rosalie Bell at Wapenamanda
- the welfare of these nations is affected by the low level of development in most rural areas.
 - few health services available,
 - lack of sanitation is often a major problem,
 - villages are isolated and cut off from the world and
 - the majority are still basically involved in a subsistence or semi-subsistence life style.
- An educational approach designed to make a difference is needed based on Christian values and is part of the Christian mission.
- NHI primarily works through cooperation with Christian churches in these nations and seeks to harness the interest, financial support, and skills available through the Christian schools in Australia, and New Zealand to aid these Churches.
- NHI works in a number of ways to achieve its vision of “Bringing hope to people through education and community development”.

Creating Awareness of needs of people in under developed countries

- through talks and seminars at conferences and
- through its Webpage www.newhopeinternational.net.
- Through Mission Challenge visits.
- By facilitates and assists schools that wish to send mission teams to overseas countries.
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Mobilising Action

To meet specific needs in poorer countries, NHI will launch appeals to its network of schools to provide financial assistance. These projects usually have an educational focus such as providing text books or equipment for schools or in assisting in the repair or construction of school buildings.

Undertaking training of personnel in under-developed countries

- NHI devised a program to train trainers, preferably the principals of community schools or rural training centres, to teach their staff and at the same time to provide support for them in this task by the provision of training material designed specifically for teachers who speak English as a second or third language. See attachment Educating For Change 1. Effective Teaching
- The training program that was developed is being offered to other churches in the SI and in PNG in 2007 and it is likely that pilot programs will be commenced in Africa and India in 2007-8.
- A key concept in this approach is the changing of the current educational paradigm towards an approach that understands schools as learning communities that involve all ages and members of a local community and see the school becoming a focus of community development.

Developing people who will be agents of change

- As students come through the schools with changed understandings of how they should live as Christian citizens it will be important to mobilise their thinking and encourage groups of young people to take leadership in bringing change to their nations.
- The Church provides the ideal way of doing this so NHI will seek to work with Churches to encourage them to work together to develop groups of well educated and articulate young people who can take leadership in bringing change to their country

Bringing Hope

In a world where there seems little hope for real development of the poorest countries, where the dream of the elimination of poverty has dimmed, if it has not been extinguished and where to talk of developing countries has a hollow sound, the Christian church needs to bring the hope that is expressed in the mission of Jesus: (Luke 4:18-19).