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The Lutheran Educator

The WELS Education Journal



MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

The Lutheran Educator

The education journal
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edited by faculty of Martin Luther College

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Standing on the Promises

As I pen this page, student pages for the 2007 WELS Convention are just beginning their work, stuffing pages of information into three-ring binders for the delegates. By the time this editorial is published, the summer's convention will be two months past in the pages of history. (Such is the dilemma of deadlines for a publication like *The Lutheran Educator*.)

Since God has not gifted me to foretell the future, I'm not making any predictions here about what the synod in convention will have said or done.

Since God has gifted us all with solid, unchanging promises, I will say this: God is with us. That fact will not have changed—regardless of the number of prep schools we continue to operate, notwithstanding any budget shortfalls or other struggles we may face. If there are still any number of us who gather together in the Lord's name, wherever that is, he is with us (cf. Matthew 18:20). If we are in any way engaged in the work of making disciples, baptizing and teaching among the nations as Christ commissioned us, our Savior remains with us always, to the very end of the age (cf. Matthew 28:19,20).

Many congregations and schools currently are facing financial pressures and other problems. Our difficulties on the national level are a reflection of issues affecting us on the local level too. All across the synod, a regaining of confidence is in order, along with renewed dedication to our most basic purpose. Our future as a church depends, ultimately, not on any committee decisions we make nor on any institutions we create nor on any brick and mortar we construct (or later deconstruct). Our future as a church rests on our communication of God's gospel promises to the generations to come.

You, the readers of *The Lutheran Educator*, are communicators of Christ's promises. You are teachers of the next generation. In whatever context you carry out that ministry—and even when the context of ministry changes all around you—communicate God's promises eagerly, earnestly, urgently.

The church's tomorrow is anchored in the promises of Jesus which you share with children and young people today.

We will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
- Psalm 78:4

DDS



...and others

Sow for yourself righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you. But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors,... Hosea 10:12-13

When gardeners plan their plot they don't ask, "What seeds would I like to plant?" They plan their garden by asking, "What crops would I like to harvest?" Nor do they ask, "Which is easiest to sow?" Grass seed is easy to plant, but it doesn't taste very good on a sandwich. Nor do they think it doesn't matter what I plant, whatever comes up, comes up. Good gardeners think first about the harvest and then plan backwards.

The prophet Hosea summarizes Israel's sin by writing that they planted wickedness. They built and worshipped at pagan altars. They committed sinful acts at their high places of wickedness. They had forsaken the Lord. They had planted disobedience. Now they would reap evil and destruction. But it didn't have to be that way. If they would have sown righteousness and unfailing love to God and each other, they would have

Planning in Reverse

John R. Schultz

reaped what Hosea calls showers of righteousness from the Lord.

We too plant seeds throughout our lives. When we sow according to the sinful nature which encourages disobedience, we deserve destruction. "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction," Galatians 6:8a. That is harsh law which threatens damnation. Thank God the principle of sowing and reaping also applies positively, "The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life," Galatians 6:8b. We look ahead with a vision that focuses on the blessed life that we will enjoy in our inheritance in the "kingdom of God." (Galatians 6:21).

Does this have anything to do with running a school? planning a classroom lesson? counseling a student? a parent? As a smart gardener thinks about the harvest before he plants, so we in our ministries focus on the end result as we plan whatever happens in our school.

Today most Lutheran educators would agree that the end result of our educational program is the eternal life of our students as disciples of Christ. In the long term we pray that the Holy Spirit would bless the Word used in every aspect of our school to bring our students to membership in God's eternal kingdom. In the short term we have a vision focusing on "disciple of Christ"

and plan in reverse every aspect of our school's planting to achieve it. What is a disciple of Christ? What characteristics does Scripture give to identify a disciple of Christ? What "seed" must be sown to reach the "harvest"?

The principal examines every function of the school and with others culls out that which is negative planting and promotes positive planting which is rooted in the Word. School and classroom discipline, for example, is viewed not only as a preserver of order but above all as training, as discipling. In planning and implementing classroom instruction, the teacher is aware of the effect of what is being planted. In religion class, we ask ourselves how we might properly apply Law and Gospel to contribute, under the Holy Spirit, to the spiritual development of disciples of Christ.

We pray that the Lord would give us a clear vision of what the harvest should be and the wisdom to plan in reverse to achieve it under His blessing.

Read some more: Ephesians 4:11-16

Prayer:

Your Word alone, great God of power,
Can feed our soul and spirit.
Christ's love gives strength for every hour
Without our deeds or merit.
Grant schools that teach
And men who preach
True Christian education.
Let youth grow strong
By Word and song
In every land and nation. Amen

CW 511, v. 4

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

Upcoming MLC events

Wind Symphony	November 18, 3:00pm
Christmas Concert (LSC)	December 16, 3:00pm
Focus on Ministry visits	November 15-17
Musical: Wizard of Oz	October 26-27, 7:30pm
Wizard of Oz	October 28, 2:00pm
Readers Theater: Three Christmas Plays	December 7-8, 7:30pm
Lyceums All in WCC unless indicated	
Think Fast Game Show	September 14, 7:30 pm
The Divers	October 11, 7:30 pm
Marcoux Corner	November 9, 7:30pm
Laser Crystal Imaging	December 3, all day in LSC
Women's Health Seminar	October 9
Joint Reformation Service	November 4, 2:30pm
Campus Advent Celebration	December 1, 7:30pm tentative
Donor Dessert Reception	December 16, after concert
December graduation service	December 19, 9:30am
Christmas recess	December 20 – Jan.10

The Hiddenness of God

Mark Lenz

GOD ALWAYS COMES in ways people least expect. He came to this earth, not in grandeur and glory, but hidden in the person of the lowly man from Nazareth. He came hidden in this man's suffering and death. God remains hidden behind history as a mask. His ruling scepter in the world and the universe remains hidden. Though he is preserving and directing all plants, animals, human beings, governments, and the very universe itself, he is hidden to such a degree that it appears that the laws of nature govern things and that man is the master of his own fate. God comes in the preaching and witnessing of sinful human beings. He comes in an imperfect church. He comes in a suffering church. He comes in the crosses that individual Christians bear. He comes in the witness of a lowly church, an institution the world considers to be outside the realm of power, influence, and control. God comes in an ancient book called the Bible. He comes in earthly elements of water, bread and wine.

This is the way God always deals with mankind. He does not come visibly in glory, majesty and power, but hidden in lowliness, humility and weakness. He comes in the commonplace, in the things of our world and our existence.

God's glory was hidden beneath Christ's humanity.

Luther spoke about God as the God who hides himself even when he reveals himself. God was hidden when he revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. No one looking at Jesus would have suspected that he was also God. The prophet Isaiah said concerning the Messiah, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Is 53:2). By his appearance, Jesus did not stand out from the crowd. When the people of Nazareth saw him, they asked, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22) He looked like anyone else. He lived and acted like the other people of his day and age. If anything, his life was humbler than most.

God still comes to man in lowliness to win him.

As God came in hiddenness and lowliness in the person of Jesus Christ to carry out mankind's salvation, so he still comes in lowliness to win mankind. In the centuries since the Son of God walked the face of the earth, luxurious cathedrals and churches have been built, vast outward ecclesiastical organizations have been created, and powerful Christian kingdoms have ruled

immense areas, but God's true work of winning mankind has always remained hidden in the preaching of the gospel and the mystery of faith. God does not rule his church from a magnificent throne in a beautiful palace somewhere. He does not thunder his messages from the skies nor send his angels to proclaim his word in dramatic fashion. He is hidden in an imperfect church, in a human word, and in earthly elements. Only the eyes of faith can discern his presence.

God is hidden in an imperfect church

The congregation at Corinth was filled with problems. There were divisions in the church. Some said they followed Paul, others Apollos, others Cephas, and still others Christ. The congregation had allowed a case of sexual immorality to exist in its midst, and some in the congregation had begun to think of the gratification of sexual appetites as little different from the satisfaction of hunger for food. Some Christians were taking their fellow believers to court. There were misunderstandings about celibacy and marriage. Some were abusing their Christian freedom and causing the weak in faith to fall. Worship services were disorderly. The Lord's Supper was not being celebrated properly. Spiritual gifts were not being appreciated and used as God intended. Many had misunderstandings about the resurrection of the dead and the purpose of life in this world. Corinth was a church filled with problems. However, even before Paul

begins to mention these problems in his first epistle, he says, "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge" (1 Cor 1:4-6). Corinth was an imperfect church, but through its witness, people were led to the faith and strengthened in the faith. That happened because God was hidden in this imperfect church. The same is true for every church before and after Corinth. Churches in every age are plagued with hypocrites, divisions, erring brothers, self-serving people, etc. There never has been, nor will there ever be, a perfect church. Nevertheless, God proclaims the gospel through such churches.

God is hidden beneath human witnesses

As God came to earth as a man, so he uses human beings to proclaim the message of the gospel to other human beings. Rather than appearing and speaking directly to people in dreams, visions or revelations, God speaks to people through sinful, weak human witnesses. John the Baptist realized that he was such a witness as he pointed to "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). He understood that he was simply a sinful human being whose privilege it was to testify about Jesus. He said, "But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry" (Mt 3:11).

Jesus' disciples were not the movers and shakers of their society nor were they the great scholars or intellects of

their day. Rather “they were unschooled, ordinary men” (Acts 4:13). They no doubt had gone to the synagogue school as young boys, but then they had become, for the most part, blue collar workers such as fishermen. Yet, they were the most zealous and energetic witnesses for the gospel there perhaps have ever been. That was because God was hidden in their witness. God chooses “the foolish things of the world to shame the wise... the weak things... to shame the strong” (1 Cor 1:27).

The apostle Paul did not fancy himself a great orator. Judging from the reaction of some people in Corinth his self-assessment was accurate. Yet, Paul was notably successful because God was hidden in his witness. Even Jesus was considered a common, ordinary man from whom little could be expected. When Philip found Nathanael he told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). “Nazareth!” Nathanael responded. “Can anything good come from there?” (v 46) As God was hidden in the man Jesus, so God is still hidden in the witness of common, ordinary people.

God is hidden in a human Word

The Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, but it is also the word of men written by approximately forty authors over a period of several centuries to and for various people with unique concerns and problems living in a variety of coun-

tries and cultures. In other words, the Bible did not fall from heaven whole and complete but came about in the context of history. Certain men wrote the books of the Bible at a certain time in history to specific people for special purposes. Each book of the Bible consequently needs to be understood in the context of the time and place in which it was written and the purpose for which it was written. Although all 66 books of the Bible were written by men, God controlled the process so that all 66 books are one in message — that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save the world from sin by dying on the cross and rising again from the dead.

God is hidden beneath the earthly elements of water, bread and wine

The earthly element in Baptism is water. John the Baptist baptized with water (Jn 1:33). Philip baptized the man from Ethiopia with water (Acts 8:36). Peter baptized Cornelius with water (Acts 10:47). Paul speaks of Baptism as “the washing of water” (Eph 5:26). Christ says we must be born again of water (Jn 3:5). The water of Baptism is just that—water. However, God is hidden beneath this earthly element. He commands that we baptize with water, and he promises wonderful blessings when we do. He says that in the water of baptism our sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38), that our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), that by means of baptism we are clothed in Christ’s merits (Gal 3:27), that in baptism we are sanctified and cleansed (Eph 5:26), that with the filth of our sin

washed away in Baptism we have a good conscience before God (1 Pet 3:21), that new spiritual life is worked in us in Baptism (John 3:5), and that we are saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost in Baptism (Titus 3:5).

The earthly elements in the Lord's Supper are bread and wine. Christ used the bread and the wine that were present at the Passover meal which he and his disciples were eating. He told his disciples to eat the bread and drink the wine. It seemed on the face of it to be common, ordinary, unleavened bread such as that eaten at every Passover meal since the departure from Egypt. And it was. The same with the wine. It was no different from the wine the people of that time were accustomed to having with their meals. Nevertheless, God was hidden in that bread and that wine. As Jesus gave the bread to his disciples he said, "Take it; this is my body" (Mark 14:22). As they drank from the cup of wine, Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (verse 24). In a mysterious and wonderful way, Christ was giving them his body to eat and his blood to drink for the individual, tangible, certain assurance that his body and blood were given for them and their sins.

This hiddenness of God is totally contrary to what people want or expect. They like their deities visible. A myriad of idols has been created through the millennia because people want to see the gods they are worshipping. Although idols of wood and stone have gone out of fashion, there still is a temp-

tation to create visible gods of various kinds, even by those who are convinced they are the best of Christians. People like to associate their god with the splendor of a church building or with the influence and power of a vast ecclesiastical organization. They like to see the glory of their god in the number of people in their congregation and in their own personal prestige as fine, upstanding members of the congregation. They are in awe of high church officials, and if they actually are such church officials, they often expect and enjoy the special honor that is accorded them. They sometimes view the Bible with an awe and reverence that borders on bibliolatry. They view the water of baptism as a mysterious, magical substance and the elements of the Lord's Supper as the sacred body and blood of the Lord which require their worship. They pride themselves in being able to point out specific examples of how God has acted in the history of the world to govern men and nations or how God has directed their own individual lives in specific ways. All this is the theology of glory. It is religion on man's terms. It is God in man's image. Wherever such things are found, it is evidence that Luther's theology of the cross, with its emphasis on the hidden God, is not understood. However, where, in spite of this, the gospel is still proclaimed, it is evidence that Christ is hidden in an imperfect church among imperfect Christians. ❖

Mark Lenz teaches at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

Memorize Bible Verses?

Paul Scharrer

Yes! for Edna's sake!

I met Edna in the nursing home. She was unchurched. I had the privilege of visiting with her and asking her, "If you were to die today, would you be sure of where you would be?"

She answered, "Yes...in hell."

A bit surprised, I asked, "Why do you say that?"

"The Bible says, 'You cannot serve both God and money.' My husband and I served money, so I will be going to hell," she responded.

Again I asked, "Why do you say that?"

She explained: "My husband and I lived right across the road from the Lutheran church. The pastor would come over and invite us to come to church. My husband would answer, 'We milk cows. We work 7 days a week. We have no time for church.' So, we served money. I'll be going to hell."

Before I could respond, Edna's roommate came up and said, "Well when I die, I'm going to heaven!"

Once more, I asked, "Well, why?"

The roommate said, "Because of my good works!"

Before I could respond, Edna piped up, "No you're not! The Bible says, "By

grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast!"

My jaw dropped to the floor. I was so surprised! I asked, "Edna, how did you know that?"

She said, "I learned it."

I said, "When?"

She said, "In pastor so-n'-so's confirmation class. When I was 13 years old."

I replied, "Edna, just believe the words you just shared. Jesus died to save you from the sins of serving money. By grace, forgiveness and eternal life are yours, God's gifts for Jesus' sake!"

I share Edna's story with every confirmation class. It's my hope and prayer that every student would remember his Bible verses like Edna did. Continue to teach memorization for "Edna's sake!" May all your students remember them, as Edna did.

Yes! for David's sake!

David was a strong willed child. Already at age 3, he had received many spankings.

It seems that it was out of desperation that David's mother taught him the 4th

Commandment. “Thou shalt honor thy father and mother, that it may go well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

This made a great impact on David. He didn’t discuss the meaning of this commandment with anyone. But, he concluded that he would NOT be living long on the earth. He also concluded he would not be going to heaven. At the age of 4, he became afraid of God, afraid of death, and afraid of Judgment Day.

In second grade in his Lutheran school, David thought, “If anyone were going to heaven, it would be a pastor or a teacher. Maybe if I try to be one of those, it would be possible for me go to heaven.” So, planning to be a Lutheran school teacher, David began to take piano lessons.

In 8th grade, the Lord sent a new pastor to his congregation. David was impressed by his new pastor. The Lord used this to move him to consider being a pastor instead of a teacher. In fact, after his teacher took him and his two classmates to tour Michigan Lutheran Seminary, he decided that that prep school was the high school for him.

It was during his junior year at MLS that the Lord put the question in David’s mind, “Where would you be if you died?” This question had brought great anxiety in the past. This is very surprising because God had given David priceless gifts, parents who took him to church every Sunday, a Lutheran school education, and Sunday school as well.. On top of all this, at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, he had morning and evening

devotions every day along with the Bible classes offered during the day. In spite of all these blessings, David had no idea where he would be if he died. All that came to his mind was the reference, John 3:16. At the time, he didn’t even know what this passage was.

He took out his Bible and looked it up. Here was God’s wonderful Gospel promise, “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” David read these familiar words over again. He noted there was no “maybe” in the verse. It was a promise from God. He believed in Jesus as his Savior. He had the gift of eternal life too! For the first time in his life he could go to sleep that night and not worry about not waking up in the morning.

It was the memorization in his Lutheran school which kept the numbers in David’s head so that the peace and comfort of the Gospel could finally, like the pieces of a beautiful jigsaw puzzle, all fit together.

Yes, continue to teach memorization of God’s Word, for “David’s sake.”

Yes! for Joe’s sake (and for his children’s sake too!)

As we all know, we teach. The fruit of whether the child remembers it or not, or lives by it or not, lies in the hands of the Holy Spirit. We want to guide precious souls to heaven. Only the Holy Spirit using God’s holy Word can accomplish that. Only with God’s blessing will the children remember what

Scharrer

they have learned and hold on to it.

Recently the example of Joe was shared with me. I had been praying for Joe that the Lord would bring him back to church. Joe, for the most part, has not been in church for years, ever since confirmation. He now has a wife and family of his own. Here his wife wants their children to attend Lutheran school. She said, "Whenever we talk about the issues of life, Joe will say, 'That's not in the Bible. That's not right.'

She grew up in a church where they didn't memorize God's Word. She wants her children to have that same sure foundation and knowledge of God's Word that her husband has. We pray that as his wife and children grow closer to our Savior through God's

Word that Joe will be led back to church and strengthened in faith to be a true spiritual leader in his family.

For Joe's sake, *and* for the sake of Joe's children, keep on teaching memorization of God's Word!

God bless you, dear teacher, as you guide Jesus' little lambs to memorize precious gems, more valuable than gold, in God's holy Word. May those gems ever become more precious to you. Through you, may Jesus' precious lambs be blessed eternally, as the Psalmist puts it:

Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble. Psalm 119:165 🕊

Paul Scharrer is pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Fort Atkinson, WI

New Logo for MLC (See the front cover)

Bill Pekrul

Martin Luther College is adopting a new logo that clearly communicates our mission to a widening audience. Symbolically, Luther's seal represents our distinctive heritage and our service to the church; the Old Main spire represents our campus and the work we do here; and the globe represents the local and world community we've been commissioned by Christ to reach. All these elements are united by the cross of Christ, for "we preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Red, black, and white continue to be our primary school colors, and we've adopted a green and a blue as secondary colors.

The familiar MLC seal, designed by Dr. John Lawrenz, has served us well since 1995. With its beautiful imagery, Latin wording, Roman numerals, and Greek letters, it will continue to be used in formal applications. The new logo will be used in letterhead, signage, website, apparel, and other applications.



Response to Intervention (RTI)

Alan Spurgin

Introduction

Something is new in the air concerning the identification and remediation of children with learning disabilities. Children who possessed an average or above average cognitive ability (IQ), yet were significantly behind in one of the major areas of learning were considered to have a significant learning disability. Often the discrepancy between ability and achievement began to surface early, but identification of the learning disability did not show up until third grade. Recent federal legislation, PL 105-17 (The reauthorization of PL -101 476 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act -IDEA) and PL 108-446 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act - IDEIA) contained language which provided a different pathway to determine eligibility for a learning disability in children. In section 614 of IDEIA it states: "In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local education agency may use a process that determines if a child responds to scientific, research bases intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures" (Kame'enu, 2007). Therefore the con-

cept of response to intervention (RTI) was born. One of the main drivers of RTI has to do with the growing number of children who fit the category of LD and the cost involved in identification and remediation of the disability. When PL 94-142 (Education of all Handicapped Children's Act) was enacted in 1975 and implemented in 1976, two percent of all children were determined to have a learning disability. That number has jumped to six percent by the year 2000 and continues to rise (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The cost of serving children with learning disabilities rose along with the number of individuals with leaning disabilities. For the school year 1999-2000, the school district of New York spent 1.67 billion dollars on special education, including a large population of children with learning disabilities (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2006). The RTI model is proposed to address these two big issues in learning disabilities. This article will address a number of ideas connected with RTI: a look at the old model of determining LD, the RTI initiative and rational, the basic framework for RTI, and the effects of the RTI model on the Lutheran Elementary School.

The old model for determining learning disabilities

Beginning with PL 94-142, the determination of a learning disability was accomplished by calculating the difference between cognitive ability and achievement. A significant discrepancy between cognitive ability and achievement resulted in classifying the child as having a learning disability. Cognitive ability was usually measured by an assessment tool such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children (WISC III) or the Woodcock Johnson Cognitive Ability Test. The achievement part of the discrepancy formula was an achievement test such as the Woodcock Johnson Achievement Test or a specific area test such as the Key Math or Woodcock Johnson Reading Mastery Test. The discrepancy model for determination of a learning disability was reaffirmed in subsequent legislation up to PL 105-17 passed in the late 1990's.

The actual numerical value of the discrepancy has and is somewhat arbitrary and set by a variety of agencies, including the local education agency (LEA) such as the school district. Often the determination of eligibility was set at two grade levels behind peers. Sometimes the determination was based on standard deviation such as one and one half standard deviations between ability and achievement. No wonder many children were not eligible for LD services until age eight or nine or in third grade. This is when the achievement gap widened appreciably and the child fell significantly behind fellow

classmates. Two other key factors also drive the proposed change in eligibility determination for LD: the importance of early intervention and the cost of services for children with learning disabilities. However, LEAs have the option to continue the discrepancy determination or go to a newer concept and model called response to intervention (RTI).

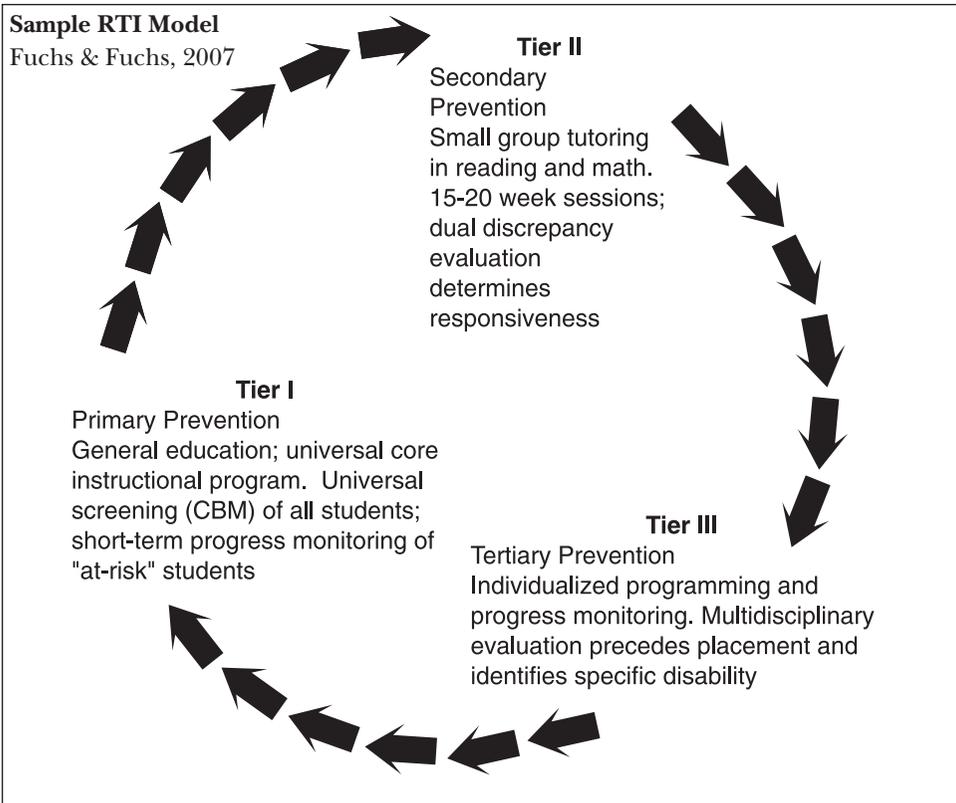
The RTI model

The RTI Model was born in order to have an alternate way to identify children with learning disabilities beyond the assessment of cognitive ability and achievement, the child's history, and/or the caregivers' observation of the child (Bradley, Danielson & Doolittle 2007). For RTI to be effective it needs to be based on researched interventions and adequate measurement tools to determine if the child is making significant progress toward specific goals. Schools have been receptive to the RTI model because intervention for a learning disability may begin at a much earlier age. No longer did the teacher have to wait for the significant gap between ability and achievement. For children who were not learning commensurate to their peers, intervention could easily begin in first grade. In addition, the RTI conceptual framework is based on the idea of prevention of failure as well as being centered on instruction based on children's strengths (Peck & Scarpati, 2007). This distinct paradigm shift is not a minor matter. It means walking on new ground with the model taking many shapes and forms (Bradley,

Danielson & Doolittle 2007).

On the forefront of RTI are a team of researchers from Vanderbilt University, Lynn and Douglas Fuchs. They propose a model of three tiers:

instructional program (see Tier I). An assessment program is utilized to determine if adequate progress is being made by using tools such as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills



Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) propose identification of at-risk students based on a variety of factors including a close look at students' performances from previous educational opportunities as well as current assessments. Once the students are selected, educators monitor how they respond to general education. The at-risk students are provided general education in a core universal

6th Edition (DIBELS) (Good & Kaminski, 2002). Should the students respond adequately to the general universal core instruction plan, they would continue in the program with appropriate monitoring.

If the students do not show adequate learning at tier one, they begin to receive instruction in the second tier. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) propose an

increasing intensity of instruction by

- a) using a more teacher-centered, systematic and explicit instruction,
- b) conducting it more frequently,
- c) adding to its duration,
- d) creating smaller and more homogeneous student grouping, or
- e) relying on instructors with greater expertise.”

Of special note is the emphasis on instruction. RTI is instruction based; therefore, educators look at the way they teach as the mitigating factor and not the deficits in the learner. A problem solving approach in collaboration with other educators is proposed to help the child succeed.

Within the second tier, a variety of instructional strategies and programs may be utilized to help the child learn. Following the early literacy example by using DIBELS as the assessment tool, a program like Read Naturally (<http://www.readnaturally.com/why/default.htm>) may be used to help the child learn. Small group tutoring and increased instruction time would also fit the tier two model (see Tier II).

If the students do not respond to the interventions and instructional changes in Tier II, they are moved on to Tier III. Tier III is considered special education (SPED) where special education and related services are brought to bear to help the child succeed. In Tier III, the students are provided with individualized programming and progress monitoring (see Tier III). Multidisciplinary evaluation precedes placement and identifies the specific learning disability. Often a complete psychoeducational

evaluation is utilized at this time to look at the etiology of the students’ deficits. Once the problems are found, specific intense interventions are employed to address the deficits. Once again, using the literacy example, Read Naturally or Reading for All Learners (<http://www.iseesam.com>) may be employed to provide the intensified instruction to help the learner with his or her specific learning disability. The three tiered model may be carried out in other areas such as mathematical calculation, mathematical reasoning, oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, or reading comprehension (Kame’enue, 2007).

Much more could be said about RTI and the three tiered model and how it may look in individual settings. However, the purpose here is to serve as an introduction to RTI and to peak the interest of those who seek further information concerning the topic. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has drafted experts in the field of learning disabilities and has much information on their website at www.cec.sped.org. The CEC journal, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, dedicated much of its May/June 2007 to the topic of RTI.

Implications for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) Lutheran Elementary School (LES)

How RTI will play out in the WELS schools remains to be seen. The RTI initiative is still in its infancy; therefore the LES may have a grand opportunity to

learn as RTI takes many shapes and forms in the school throughout the nation. It will be interesting how the local educational agency chooses to look for and serve children with learning disabilities. If the LEA chooses to implement RTI, this would provide the LES with a chance to see how RTI grows in the local public schools. It may be good for the LES teacher(s) to interact with the local schools to see how RTI fits in the community. No matter what the public school decides, it still needs to provide services (especially assessment) for the LES. To take this opportunity one step further, teachers in the LES could actually implement RTI in their classroom. What an exciting prospect for educators to look to response to appropriate instruction to help the children grow in their knowledge and faith in the Master Teacher. 🍀

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Fear and Art, A Lutheran Perspective

Jim Matson

THERE IS A CURRENT fear of public art in America. Recently in Milwaukee, WI, a public proposal by Dennis Oppenheim was rejected by the county government because of grass roots opposition to the theme of the piece, the "Blue Shirt." Residents did not want to be seen as a working class town, hence the fear of a blue shirt (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/editorials/dec02/105527.asp>). The American public is more likely to raise opposition to the visual arts than any other art form. There is seldom a public outcry over bad architecture, music, film, literature, or dance.

This resistance to art has current dynamics but its roots can be traced back to Martin Luther and the Reformation. The first Lutherans arrived in America in the 1600s and with each successive wave of immigration they brought with them the beliefs and traditions from their home countries. With them they also brought a resistance to the arts that has become a part of American culture.

Today this fear of art raises a unique problem to educators. On the one hand, the art world rejects religion, and on the other the church is afraid of

modern art. As a teacher I encourage my students to pursue a career in the arts but I cannot easily teach them how to blend a life of faith with their God-given talents. In the 21st century there is no direct connection between the arts and the church. Unlike the art leading up to the Renaissance, when all artists worked for the glory to God, today's artists are relegated to a sub-culture. Christians who pursue art as vocations have an uncomfortable fit in the world of the church and at the same time are looked at as odd in the world of American art.

Throughout the history of Christianity the arts have played a dynamic role in our communal praise to God. Paintings, sculpture, mosaics, glass, tapestries, and architecture were interpreted in terms of the Gospel and intended to inspire and illuminate. As we look at the development of western art and church architecture, we may marvel at the inspiration that filled these artists, but at the same time we must be mindful that this was intellectual work. For all the great works of art that fill the history books and museums, sometimes the need to illustrate the Gospel and its miracles through art led down peculiar roads. The financial cost

of supporting great art also created abuses, namely the sale of indulgences, and this was a core complaint of Martin Luther and his followers. By the time the Lutheran church reached America, it arrived with a predisposition to avoiding art.

At the time of Luther and the Reformation the entire notion of the church as a building and its art changed. In addition to many scriptural problems, art was being misused and abused. The iconoclasts, in response, destroyed many churches, smashing the windows and sculptures. Luther took a varying stance on religious art. In his lectures from 1516 he stated, "to build churches, to adorn them with images ... all these are shadows of things worthy of children" (Michalski 1993, 5). Luther did not have a difficulty with art in the church as much as others did. The primary problem fell to the debate over the importance of "good works." "In his Sermon on Good Works Luther states that through endowing churches or images or through 'running to images' believers were only trying to buy their way into heaven (Michalski 1993, 7). Zwingli and Carlstadt were both vocal in their opposition to all forms of art in the church. "The beginning of the actual removal of painting and sculpture in a public sense dates from about 1521 in Wittenberg, while Luther was hiding in Wartburg (Dillinberger 1999, 174). Luther had argued that "Practical and clear sermons hold an audience. The real adornment of the church is godly, practical, and clear teaching, the godly use of the sacraments, ardent prayer,

and the like. Candles, golden vessels, and ornaments like that are fitting, but they are not the peculiar adornment of the church" (Tappert 1976, 259-260).

Things got out of hand during his exile, and he raced on horseback to stop the destruction. He made several sermons to defend the arts, "for whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water when I look into it. If it is not a sin but good to have the image in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes? This is especially true since the heart is more important than the eyes, and should be less stained by sin because it is the true abode and dwelling place of God" (Tappert 1976, 99-100). As a general rule, after the Reformation sculpture and painting were minimized in Lutheran churches, stained glass remained popular with images of law and gospel, Christ with the little children (infant baptism) and Christ the teacher (the Word) being common themes.

A hundred years later, as America is settled, the church as a building initially returns to the form of a house, plain and unadorned. Congregations were relatively young and financially limited, but their churches were built with care and thought, often placed on a hill with a tall steeple reaching upward. It is a key concept in understanding America that the first settlers came here seeking religious freedom. Within the realm of the artists of today (not to mention Americans as a whole), this evolved into

a strong belief in personal freedom and individual expression. As the people and churches spread across America, the styles and tastes in church architecture developed along individual lines.

The entire history of art since the Reformation leading up to Modernism is one of artist and the church moving further apart from one another. As the government took on the role of supporting the Arts, the problem only increased. Today we have reached a crisis in defining our support for the Arts.

At Moorhead University in 1993, "officials wouldn't allow students to include a fish in their mural on their dormitory wall because the fish was an early Christian symbol" (Schmidt 1997, 150). Since 1995 the United States Post Office can no longer put up signs that say "Merry Christmas" (Schmidt 1997, 148). Our nation as "one nation under God" is under attack. The Ten Commandments will no longer be found in public buildings. While the chipping away goes on, the arts in America undergo an ever-increasing separation, and it moves farther and farther away from its ability to have any sense of authenticity in its ability to serve the Gospel or the church.

Two contemporary American artists stand out as pivotal in the tearing down of the public perception of the moral value of art and the reinforcement of the belief that art is dangerous and something to fear. The work of these two artists has severely cut back on support for the National Endowment for the Arts funding, not to mention private support for the visual arts. In 1987

Andres Serrano, a lapsed Catholic, presented a photograph that he called *Piss Christ*, showing a crucifix submerged in urine (Schmidt 1997, 151). When the National Endowment for the Arts sponsored an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's photography in 1989 at the Corcoran Museum, the opposition to Shock Art that was clearly in opposition to Christian values reached the Congress in vocal debate, and government funding for the Arts was severely curtailed, both in support and scope. By 1989 the NEA was embroiled in the 'culture wars' that appeared to have replaced the Cold War. Sharply attacked by representatives of the religious right for supporting exhibitions that featured Serrano and Mapplethorpe, the NEA became the object of a politics of diversion that used art as an easy target to blame for the country's problems (<http://www.studiolo.org/CIP/VARA/TiltedArc.htm#t09>).

As a student at a state university and then later as a professor, I first experienced, and now take part in the standard practice of teaching art. First we teach how to make it, techniques and materials, then we teach design principles: red is hot, blue is cool, "form follows function." Then we teach history, breaking it into periods and movements. We look at what the great ones did and when, but seldom the why. We pigeon hole everything into tight rational groupings and engage in the endless "isms" of what we make. Endless discussions take place in the classroom and the literature to connect the form of the art to philosophy; in the post-modern

sense we deconstruct the object to get at a personal and/or cultural truth. We have sacrificed inspiration for philosophy.

Artists do not enter the life of the artist with a promise of material wealth. Artists are driven by an inner need to create things and find themselves, to search for beauty and truth. Where once the guild system trained artists to serve the church, we now have a system where art schools train students to serve their "inner selves." The loss, created by our fear of art, is that we approach modern art with great resistance, and art students at the earliest stage of discovering their gifts feel alienated. The challenge facing arts education today is how do we, equipped with the language of design and a knowledge of history, nurture the arts in a way that gives meaning to our lives?

How have we reached a point where artists are the odd ones? What I see as the key problem pervading our current culture in the arts is a climate of fear. Art can be dangerous, there are many examples of this, but it can also be a positive and invigorating force. To understand this culture of fear, it is helpful to take a look at how we arrived here.

In the history of the early church we have several important references to the visual arts and a good starting point for understanding the current problem. The biblical problem with art begins with the Old Testament. Initially God created the world, and there is some tension about taking his honor and glory away by delving into creativity.

After coming down from the mountain Moses told the artists that God had commanded them to use all the crafts to make objects of beauty, "All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded" (Ex 35:4). In this passage God has called some to be artists and to use their gifts to make his place of worship a place of beauty.

In the commandments, God decrees that we shall not worship idols. "You

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shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down or worship them" (Ex 20:3-4). This commandment has been used to ban all representational objects, but it is clearly a law against the worship of objects, not the creation of art.

The earliest Christians did not have a dedicated church building; they hid in

their houses and the catacombs. There are no images of Christ left from his lifetime. The earliest Christians used the symbol of the fish to mark their presence. The earliest paintings and sculptures we do have of Christ depict him as the “good shepherd.” The crucified Christ doesn’t appear until much later. Crucifixion was so common in Rome that it was a derogatory image, while the good shepherd was more easily connected to Scripture. In Ezekiel, after God condemns Israel he says, “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, who will be prince among them” (Ez 37:27).

As the church grew, its art and its architecture developed by appropriating from the styles of the time. The first churches were modified from the Roman basilica, a long open space with aisles along either side. As church and state became joined under Constantine, the Byzantine style emerged for church architecture and art.

The crusades and the mass of pilgrims moving across Europe required the need for many more churches. Many of these churches had some kind of relic that the pilgrims came to see (and of course left money behind). At St. Foye, a Romanesque church laid out in the shape of the cross, worshipers came to see a sculpture containing the relics of the saint herself who was put to death in the 3rd century for refusing to worship pagan gods. Relics are fascinating in and of themselves, but they present the problem of art delving into magic.

When we look at the sale of indul-

gences, a good starting point is Ghirlandaio’s “Christ on the road to Calvary” from 1505. It’s a good composition by artistic standards and useful in understanding the development of understanding the religious commercialization of art. In the foreground a procession of characters accompany Christ on the road. Christ, being the central figure, holds his cross that divides the composition into diagonals. Kneeling by Christ a woman holds a cloth that has an image on it. As the story goes, Veronica, a pagan virgin, wiped Christ’s face with a cloth. Miraculously his face appeared on the cloth. Yet oddly the artist has added a contemporary figure with a rifle on the left side, looking right at us and, on the right side, there is a man dressed in the style of the 1500s and a nun. If we wish to understand how the image of Christ changes based on cultural attitudes, we have only to compare this image to Mel Gibson’s “Passion.”

Albrecht Durer, a friend of Luther, printed his “Two Angels Holding the Veronica” in 1513 for a guidebook to Rome. Durer is one of the first artists to understand the profit potential in the printing press and its ability to make mass-produced images.

The “Shroud of Turin” is an interesting object that may or may not be factual. Nevertheless, it is worth consideration as an object. The “Shroud” first appeared in the 1300s and attracted many pilgrims. The cloth is one piece, 14 feet long and has several holes from a latter fire. It did not come to wide attention until a photographer looked

at it as a negative in 1898. As a reversal, the image becomes clearer and the wounds on the face, hands, feet, and side are easily read. Photography then was only 50 years old. In 1670 it was placed in a special shrine in Turin. The Council of Indulgences granted an indulgence “not for venerating the cloth as the true shroud of Christ, but for meditating on the Passion” (Finaldi 2000, 103).

After the Reformation, art doesn’t completely leave the Lutheran church as it does in some Protestant groups, yet it is used in restraint, and its main focus is on architecture and stained glass. The 1500s are a time of great upheaval across Europe, and it is safe to say that with the Reformation artists begin to leave the church.

In response to Luther and the reformers, the Catholic Church continued in its artistic tradition, but the style changed. Relics and indulgences were used with great care. The Council of Trent gave specific instructions: relics, saints, Mary, were to be used, but not to be seen as divine or holy; veneration and worship was proper (Dillinberger 1993, 76). All art was to be judged by the bishop for appropriateness

The problems with art and good works were imported into the Americas by the early Lutherans. The Danish Evangelical Church raised the problem in 1878 in their search for independence. “Two issues, which had been imported from Denmark, kept rising to the surface. One was the interpretation of the Bible and Christian authority, the other was, “the question as to whether

or not Christian people could have general cultural interests and should participate in cultural life...” (Gilbert 1988, 76).

In the nineteenth century artists continued to be Christians, even though art was far removed from the life of the Gospel. Van Gogh is offered up in art history as a great painter who cut off his ear and then shot himself. Frequently overlooked is his deep spiritual passion. He read the Bible daily and for a time was a preacher to Belgian coal miners. He rejected modern culture to pursue his gifts, and in his lifetime the mainstream art world never accepted him. But in his letters to Theo he wrote, “I cannot help thinking that the best way of knowing God is to love many things...with a sublime, genuine, profound sympathy, with devotion, with intelligence, and you must try all the time to understand Him more” (De Borchgrave 2000, 179).

Henry Moore, who became one of the most influential sculptors of our age, was commissioned to sculpt a Madonna and Child in 1937 for St Matthew’s Church in Northhampton. He made large quantities of sketches and clay models, and worked with the patron to select the final design. He stated that “it should have austerity and a nobility and some touch of grandeur which is missing in everyday life” (De Borchgrave 2000, 195). The knees have been polished by people rubbing and touching them, and the piece established his career.

Jacob Epstein created his Christ figure in 1917-19. His figure confronts us

with its wounds. He wrote in 1940, “My statue of Christ still stands for what I intended it to be. It stands and accuses the world of its grossness, inhumanity, cruelty, and beastliness. For the World War and the new wars in Abyssinia, China, Spain, and now our new Great War” (Finaldi 2000, 194). We do not see the same tender Christ we encounter after the Reformation.

A final modern example to look at in considering contemporary art is Salvador Dali. His painting titled “Christ of Saint John of the Cross” from 1951 has always been controversial, and yet hundreds flock to see it. It is perhaps the most reproduced religious image in the twentieth century. Christ hovers above the world and yet we are above him. The image almost floats out of the canvass and into our space. Dali took his influence from a drawing called “St. John of the Cross” from 1572. Dali later said, “...In a dream, I saw the Christ in the same position... and I heard voices which told me, ‘Dali, you must paint this Christ’” (Finaldi 2000, 194). Among modern artists and the art world there is frequently talk about “spirituality.” But this is often self-invented and poorly defined. To keep the arts alive within a meaningful context, we must all agree on a few points. Art has value to us as Christians, not just in public worship, but also in our daily lives. The need to represent the life of a Christian as rich and diverse in its calling, the need for images that keep our focus on spiritual matters, and the need to enliven the imagination, as well as the heart, are a few aspects of the potential of the visual

arts. Art is about thinking, feeling and doing. In education as in life, our attention must focus on developing the whole person. ❧

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The Meaning of Repentance: Understanding Luther's First Thesis

Nathan Zastrow

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when he said, "Repent" (poenitentiam agite), willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

- Martin Luther, Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences (1517), thesis 1

Please, I'd do anything to make it right! I borrowed your new digital camera without asking, and broke it. I told others the things you had told me in confidence. I copied your homework. I cheated you out of what you had rightfully earned. I cheated on you.

Have you ever found yourself in one of the above situations? Or maybe a similar one? We've probably all been in one or more of them at some time in our lives. As painful as it is to be on the receiving end of a sin, it's even more painful to be the originator. Oftentimes, we would do just about anything to earn our way back to our previous reputation, our previous relationship with that person. The idea that we must, or that we even can earn our way back into our victim's good graces is strongly ingrained in us – but how often does it help? Even if that other person does

give us a venue to "make up" for our mistakes, don't we still have to live with ourselves? Isn't there still that accuser

As painful as it is to be on the receiving end of a sin, it's even more painful to be the originator.

inside of us, convicting us of our sin?

In some sense, that accuser is there by the grace of God. That accuser is our conscience; that feeling of compulsion that bears witness to God's Law written on our hearts. The Law leads us to despair and show us our sins, so that the Holy Spirit can work through the Gospel and speak gladness to our hearts. Martin Luther's first thesis in his famous ninety-five says, "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." Whether he knew it at that point or not, Dr. Luther had just drawn a distinction between

penance and repentance, between Law and Gospel.

Dr. Luther was specifically fighting the Roman Catholic Church's idea of penance. The pope and his followers promoted good works as a way to earn salvation. Therefore they instructed people to earn God's forgiveness for their sins by prescribing certain penitential acts that would reconcile them to him: contrition, penance, and satisfac-

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tion. Everything was done as an outward act so that it was measurable by the church. "Fast this way," "Give this much," or "Say this prayer." Sound familiar? It should... It's the same attitude that lives in all of us because of sin. It's an attitude that ignores Christ and his work on our behalf. It's an attitude that says, "I can do it myself." Penance is a lie that deceives people into trying to save themselves through the Law—an impossible task. Repentance, on the other hand, uses the Law to show us our need for the Gospel.

"The entire life of believers should be one of repentance." Does that mean we should live our whole life in despair because of our sin? No! Despair is a product of the Law without the Gospel, but repentance leads us to rely on Christ. Literally, repentance is a turning

back from ourselves to God. By learning to rely on him for our salvation, we will have contentment in knowing that our sins are certainly and entirely forgiven. Salvation is already earned. It is a completed act!

Of course, that doesn't mean that we'll never struggle with sin again. If that were the case there would be no need for repentance beyond our initial understanding of the Gospel. But as long as we live in this sinful world, we will always be affected by the sin within us. Dr. Luther writes, "This repentance endures among Christians until death because it struggles with the sin that remains in the flesh throughout life" (Smalcald Articles III.iii.40). 🌹

This essay was written in conjunction with a religion course at MLC.

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A Teacher's Outstretched Hand and Mind

Rebecca Kruschel

DAILY I GO, unaware of how I will grow. Daily I teach, learning more myself than guiding others to learn. Daily I wonder what else I can do, only too late realizing that it is not about me. It is about the students. The students are my day, my teachers, my perseverance to do more. I am a teacher, yes. More importantly, I am my students' teacher.

My students are gifts. They laugh and bring joy. They cry and accept comfort. They question and provide answers. They answer and provide questions. They are students, and they are teachers. They are gifted learners, giving more than they realize, taking less than they ought.

As their teacher, it is my privilege to show interest in their needs. It is my responsibility to understand all that I can about them. It is my opportunity to accept all that I do not understand about them. It is my mission to love all that makes each of them unique. It is my honor to ask what can be done to help them grow into persons they want to be.

Portrait of a gifted learner

Perhaps the most challenging part of all

is helping them see who it is they want to be. These students have amazing power. They have intelligence far surpassing not only that of their age peers, but that of their teacher. They have insight that can see right through me. They have abilities that set them apart from students in any ordinary situation. They have sensitivities that understand these characteristics and impact they have on the "normal" world around them. "Gifted persons are profoundly sensitive to small differences—and those differences make all the difference." (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002, p. 63). Embracing the beautiful differences with which they have been gifted, and growing in them instead of away from them, is the challenge they face each day. As their teacher, it is my duty to protect, encourage, guide, and support their differences so that they may have the chance and right to make a difference in the world they love.

The abilities and insights that give these children power is exactly the reasons they are in danger of being at-risk. They are able in ways that do not match the normal population. As such, they are often sufferers of misdirected service. Strategies for learning and behavior management that may aid another nongifted child may actually harm a

gifted child. The “learning how to learn” that a gifted child may need is often overlooked in a traditional academic setting. They are allowed to slip by because focus is given to their performance, not to their learning process. They have special needs—socially, academically, and emotionally—that their peers may not have. “Pervasive misunderstandings of the nature of giftedness have created conditions in homes, schools, and communities that exacerbate the natural vulnerability of gifted children to underachievement” (Whitmore, 1988, p. 10). The fact that these needs go unmet in a traditional setting due to lack of knowledge, funds, or care places these dear children in the “at-risk” category, in danger of missing the path to their full potential.

Positive learning environments for at-risk gifted learners

What is being done to help them? Thankfully and undeservedly, I count myself among the blessed who are allowed to be with these special students in a special setting. The Wisconsin Center for Gifted Learners provides a safe and stimulating environment for gifted learners to grow. Surrounded by other gifted learners, students at The Center are encouraged to accept themselves and their peers in a way that promotes each individual in a healthy manner. Individual time and attention is given to each student by the staff members, allowing educational growth to be a personal endeavor for each student - not just a time consuming array of vari-

ous tasks to produce. Students learn how to learn. Coming from various backgrounds and histories, students are welcomed to The Center as important individuals who need and deserve more than what has been given to them in other places of schooling. The members of The Center work to provide the emotional, social, and academic support necessary for each student to thrive.

So everyone is happy, right? As soon as a gifted learner walks into the doors of The Center as a student, there are no longer any signs showing that they are at-risk, right? The Center sees only high motivation for any learning activity, only the kindest words of encouragement, only the clearest signs of individual growth every day, right?

I am going to take a risk here and tell a little truth: I teach at The Center, not in heaven. We work with gifted learners, yes. Those students I described at the beginning, they are wonderful and dear to my heart. But they are not perfect. Acknowledging that myself, and helping them to see this fact is an important step in removing the “at-risk-ness” that they may have. Learning involves false starts. Some of the most beautiful learning comes through a glorious false start. Helping students to accept the imperfections that they have and still strive to learn is what happens at The Center.

I want to take another risk here and tell another little truth: my experience of what teaching at The Center would involve was made deep in naivety concerning the gifted learner. I had the expectation of classes full of lovers of learning who could manage themselves

with nary a whisper from me as we moved along the plotted lines of a lesson plan designed for their benefit. Yes, I had the false equation in my mind's lofty ideal: gifted learners = perfect students. Thankfully, my students have taught me a thing or two since they graciously allowed my misinformed self into their daily lives. Now I am getting through my thick, slow skill a different, more appropriate, lovelier equation: gifted learners = real people.

For some of these dear real people, academic life is still a real struggle—even at a place made for them. The gifted learner often comes with social and emotional needs that may not immediately be associated with their academic level. Add to this the possibility that their desynchronous development may have been poorly supported by uninformed adults in their past, and one begins to see the difficulty that the child may face even when placed in an environment friendly to the gifted learner. Those gifted learners who suffer the consequences of these past (or still current) disservices done to them are the ones that may still be considered at-risk.

Ways to build an ever stronger support for at-risk gifted learners

What can I do to further help these gifted learners? First of all, I can open my eyes and see these students for who they are: learners in need of positive attention. The student who makes it through another class without accepting any options offered might not benefit from another negative comment directed his

way. He had (likely) heard all about what “should” be done when one “applies” oneself to “completing tasks” in a “timely” manner. These types of comments may no longer cause any sort of reaction from the student at all. Worse, they may add to the already overwhelming amount of negative feedback that the student has received.

Instead of a comment focusing on the negative, the student needs to hear about the great starts he has made, all the growth he has shown, and all the moments he did attend to his learning. It is possible that at those times when positive attention could have been given to his learning activities, the thoughts floating through the teacher's head went something like this: It is about time he gets down to business; Maybe he heard my 17th reminder after all; Why is he so quiet now? Is he getting into trouble? I know—I have, to my shame, often considered these very thoughts before. Positively reinforcing the strengths of an at-risk gifted learner may be the first simple step in addressing his needs. Remembering as Whitmore (1980) describes, to

Recognize that students are not perfect—that each child has specific strengths and weaknesses as well as social, emotional and intellectual needs. With remedial strategies, students are given chances to excel in their areas of strength and interest while opportunities are provided in specific areas of learning deficiencies. This remediation is done in a safe environment in which mistakes are considered a part of learning

for everyone, including the teacher.
(Delisle & Berger, 1990, 30)

Practical ways of carrying out this idea are enjoyable to consider and even more enjoyable to carry out. Learning is relational, and building a relationship with a gifted learner is an incredibly exciting opportunity for any teacher. Changing the mindset of curbing unproductive behavior to supporting productive behavior brings a new brightness to classroom. Gone are the “sit downs” and “be quiet” uttered countless times in varying degrees of patient tones. In their place we can find “let’s give this a try” and “what would happen if...”—phrases to promote a harmonious learning environment without sounding as if harmony must be silent and still. Modeling courtesy and civility in listening and speaking skills to students accustomed to brusque commands and restrictions allows for both social and intellectual growth within classroom discussions. Providing honest, appropriate praise and encouragement to students in the midst of learning brings an emotional boost that may brighten a child’s entire day. Gifted learners have an incredible capacity for memory. To provide positive reinforcements is to provide positive memories associated with the learning environment.

We are left, then, with the question of what will happen with these real people, these at-risk gifted learners, when they are given the opportunity to thrive. Set aside thoughts of rescued future Einsteins. Think about this: a gifted learner is given the opportunity to

acknowledge his self worth; to embrace his right to false starts; to understand the caring support available from peers and adults; and to appreciate his place in the world. It is not the perfect ending, the happily every after. It is the beautiful beginning, —the first steps of a lifelong learner. ❁

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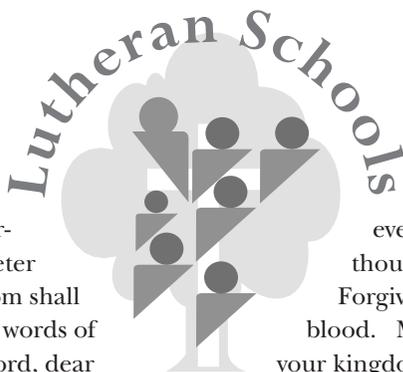
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Prayer for Our Schools

Mark Zarling



LORD JESUS, you are the perfect teacher. With Peter we say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Your word, dear Jesus, is truth and life. Place your Gospel deeply into our hearts so that we might firmly “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in your name.”

We thank you, dear Savior, for the Christian schools in our midst—our grade schools, high schools, colleges, and seminary. Bless them as places where your word of truth and life is shared in every class on every day. Move us to place our schools before your throne of grace daily so that your word remains true in our midst, and our schools remain the workplaces of the Holy Spirit. We confess today that we often have let our spiritual vision be clouded — that we have forgotten how your Great Commission is connected with each Christian school. Our schools are more than just classrooms and sports, budgets or buildings. Lord, forgive us for not seeing your Holy Spirit at

work in these places of the Word, where each and every class “brings captive our thoughts to the word of Christ.” Forgive us through your precious blood. Move each of us to pray that your kingdom be advanced in and through our schools. Move us to pray for our teachers that they may be powerful instruments of your grace as they touch hearts with the Gospel. Please, Lord Jesus, grant our teachers joy and strength and contentment in their ministries.

I especially ask your blessing upon the schools of our synod that train future workers in your kingdom. Pour out the Spirit so that we all may view these schools as remarkable gifts of your grace. Move us to cherish these schools as blessings, not financial burdens. I especially ask your hand of blessing upon Martin Luther College. Continue to keep it in your love and care so that the Gospel is clearly taught and that you, Lord Jesus, are clearly seen in every classroom, dorm room, and at every event. Grant your rich grace upon the professors and staff. Empower them for faithful service and mold them into models of ministry for the next genera-

tion. Grant them contentment in their labors, knowing that their labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Move the hearts of the people in our synod to fervently pray for the mission of MLC, a mission to train witnesses eager to live Jesus and to proclaim him to a changing and shrinking world. Move the hearts of your people to generously support this school with gifts and offerings. Move the hearts of your baptized children to consider the amazing adventure of being a public servant of the Gospel. Preserve among us the treasure of your precious word, and preserve the schools where that word is passed on to another generation of heralds. May we never forget the apostle's admonition: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who

will also be qualified to teach others." Dear Jesus, take not your Spirit from us. Remain with us and walk with us, that we may walk confidently and victoriously into the future.

In the Name of Jesus, our living and ascended Lord, Amen. ✠

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