

LUTHER TAUGHT THE CHILDREN—AND SO DO WE



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## Luther taught the children—and so do we

Lutherans have an extraordinary birthright in the area of education. Because we know the bondage of the will, and because we understand children to be body and soul, mind and spirit, intellect, emotion, and will, not just blank slates, we think of education as far more than an intellectual exercise.

This birthright, as our Lutheran legacy, persuades us that education, to be worthy of the name, can be nothing less than training the whole man of God. It persuades us that such training must be concentrated on imparting wisdom, nourishing soundness of body and mind, and cultivating largeness of spirit. It persuades us that these goals are unattainable without the continuing presence of God's Word.<sup>1</sup>

Historians have documented how Martin Luther championed the cause of the education of children as much as anyone in modern history.

He was not a tactician or a detail man, leaving others to work on the nuts and bolts. But because of his outsized presence, when he spoke, people listened. He provided an immense service by arguing simply for the need for more than a cursory education, thinking through the purpose and goal as this all related not only to the Reformation cause but also to life in general. Along the way he tried to persuade and cajole those who took short views and short-changed education. His was not a selfish concern, simply wanting better prepared students for the university (though he probably would not have complained). Rather, Luther's interest had theological as well as practical roots. His Reformation grew out of what was going on in education in his day, and his Reformation's expansion and continued success would depend on a strong educational foundation. As time passed, the Reformation realized the debt it owed to good education, and continued to incorporate larger educational trends and tools.<sup>2</sup>

Luther's interest in the education of children had theological roots. From his study of the Scriptures, he had come to believe, teach, and confess salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ with remarkable clarity. It became clear to him that all nations were to see Christ in the Bible, and "all nations" included children.

Children, because we trust they are people and included in the command to teach all nations, need to receive Christ via Word and Sacrament, just like all other people do. They're not 'covenanted in' or waiting until they can make their decision for Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Hartwig, "The Education of the Christian in Lutheran Legacy," WLS Essay File, Onalaska, Wisconsin (October 24, 1977), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Rosin, "Luther on Education," *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 2 (Summer 2007): 199.

Children need Christ via the fleshy mouth of the fleshy prophet and they need to hear Him through their fleshy ears.<sup>3</sup>

Children must learn to hear and read the Scriptures accurately, and that means accurate historical and grammatical training. Historians posit that when Luther realized the importance of personal responsibility for interaction with Scripture, encapsulated in the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, he called for a broader base of popular education than the pre-Reformation Catholic system.<sup>4</sup>

Yes, there was a pre-Reformation Catholic system of education for children. It had replaced a system that would have been recognized by the writers of the New Testament. Formal education for children in the ancient world was generally only for the sons of wealthy families. They were free people, not slaves, and they learned the “liberal” (free) arts rather than the “servile” (slave) arts. Famous teachers in a particular liberal arts tradition would attract student disciples, who would also be tutored by individuals hired by the family. Western historians generally trace the roots of formal education in the liberal arts back to ancient Greece with teachers like Plato.

That Platonic academy was closed, after it had existed in Athens for nine hundred years, by the Christian emperor Justinian in 529 A.D. The odd caesaropapism, the tempting mixture of Church and State, had begun to rear its ugly head. For the next thousand years, most education of any sort in Europe took place in the cloistered environments provided by the Roman Church. As a result, when Lutherans began their attempt to reform and replace Roman institutions with beautiful and evangelical catholic institutions, it was natural for Martin Luther to picture classrooms in which clergy were the teachers.

The problem Luther identified early in his career as an educator was that the Roman clergy serving as teachers were trained to think of everything in terms of the philosophy of Aristotle, which obscured the truth.<sup>5</sup> At first, in the centuries after Christ, Greek students studied works by such recognized authors as Plato, Hero of Alexandria, Nicomachus, Menelaus, Galen,

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<sup>3</sup> Phil Hirsch, private e-mail to the author, July 21, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Mark R. Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Luther, Martin. *Address to the Christian Nobility*, Luther's Works 44, 201.

and Ptolemy. They also studied Aristotle's natural philosophy. Roman schools made everything depend on Aristotle, keeping only a small amount of Greek science alive as an application of Greek ideas to a Christian contemplation of the Creator and his creation. This bit of inherited science was applied to education in the West, at least at a popular level, in the traditional *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.<sup>6</sup> By the time of Luther, the average Roman school taught only the *trivium* (beginning Latin grammar, logic and rhetoric), the *quadrivium*, and some outward forms of religious instruction. This instruction was in church Latin as opposed to classical Latin or a vernacular language.<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing the positive evangelical catholic nature of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, with all of the content and application subject to the Word of God, some modern American Lutherans are attempting to reorganize parish education of children into those categories once again, with the hope that the resulting system will get rid of much of the damage that Dewey and his followers have perpetrated on the American educational scene.<sup>8</sup>

It is good to keep in mind this educational context in Europe in the 1500's when we read Luther's formal statements on behalf of the education of children, which boil down to just a few writings. These include the *Address to the Christian Nobility*, published in 1520; the *Letter to the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Should Establish and Maintain Christian Schools*, published in 1524; the *Instruction for the Visitation of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony*, published in collaboration with Melanchthon in 1528; and the *Sermon on Keeping Children in School*, published in 1530.<sup>9</sup>

In the Saxon Visitation of 1528-1529, we see Luther in action as an educator.

The earliest reports reached Luther in the fall [of 1528]. On November 8 he wrote Spalatin, "Our visitation is proceeding apace. What miseries we see here!" Three days

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Nispel. "Wittenberg Reforms in the University and the Early Reaction to Copernicus" (1997), 2, accessed from <http://mnispel.net/library/papers-articles/Wittenberg%20Reforms%20in%20the%20University.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> William J. Wright, "Impact of the Reformation on Hessian education," *Church History* 44 2 (June 1975): 183, citing Eva Hesselbach, "Die 'deutsche ' Schule im Mittelalter," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Erziehung und des Unterrichts*, 10 (1920), 6-7; and Ernst Christian Helmreich, *Religious Education in German Schools: An Historical Approach* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

<sup>8</sup> See the website of the Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education ([www.ccle.org](http://www.ccle.org)) for more information on this effort.

<sup>9</sup> The classic text for these, *Luther on Education* by F.V.N. Painter, is available to be printed on demand by Concordia Publishing House.

later he reported more fully: “In our visitation of the area around Wittenberg, we have discovered so far that all the pastors are living in harmony with their peasants, but the people are lazy when it comes to Word and sacrament. Pray for us.” When his health and the situation in Wittenberg finally permitted, Luther himself served as a visitor. In January 1529 he wrote Elector John, “We maintain, believe, and know that your Electoral Grace can have ordered no better work than the visitation; there is therefore nothing that we will withhold from it.” A few days later, the new direction of Luther’s career was clear. To a pastor at Braunschweig he wrote, “I am busy with preparing a catechism for the raw pagans.”<sup>10</sup>

When we survey the condition of our congregations and realize that people are lazy when it comes to Word and sacrament, my advice as an essayist is that we return to teaching the content of the Small Catechism. For children it is a valuable textbook. For teenagers and adults who have no children it is a valuable devotional book. For parents and grandparents, it is, of course, as it says, “as the head of the family should teach in the simplest way to those in his household.”

Luther’s Small Catechism is genius for instruction of both children and adults. It has stood the test of time. Can anyone summarize Law better than Luther in the Ten Commandments? Can anyone tie them together better than he does with his “we should fear and love God”? Who explains the nature of our big and promising God better than Luther in the First Article explanation? Who does Christ—not as example, but *Christus pro nobis*—better than the Second Article? And who ties it all to Christ’s resurrection better? Who shoots down the vast majority of American Protestant teaching better and more succinctly than “cannot by my thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him”? Who does the Christian life better than Luther in the Lord’s Prayer? And who does the Sacraments as gospel better and more succinctly? Table of Duties (vocation)? We have a reason for asking in the rite of confirmation about Lutheran teaching “as summarized in Luther’s Small Catechism.”

The loss of a certain percentage of students to active participation in the life of the congregation after confirmation<sup>11</sup> should not lead us to give up on the Small Catechism as instructional material. In fact, I propose that it should lead us to double-down on training

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<sup>10</sup> James M. Kittelson, “Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career” (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003), 216, citing *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Briefwechsel*, 4:603,605; 5:1,5 (Weimar, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> Documented well by Richard H. Krahn II, “Confirmation—Form in Search of Function,” WLS Essay File, Neenah, Wisconsin (September 25, 2012).

children to use it after confirmation. If you are unfamiliar with the mechanics of using the Small Catechism yourself in a devotional way, so that you can teach it, you can find a vivid description of how to do that in Martin Luther's *A Simple Way to Pray: For Master Peter, the Barber*.<sup>12</sup>

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### *Questions for reflection*

1. What is your experience with using the Small Catechism in a devotional way?
  2. What do you think it would take to have the Small Catechism commonly used in our homes as intended?
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The Small Catechism supplies much of the content for the pastor as a teacher of children. The Large Catechism is helpful for preparing to teach the truths of the Small Catechism. But what form should that teaching take?

Some of us have the blessing of teaching children in Lutheran elementary schools and Lutheran high schools. You may not be aware that historians generally credit the first Lutherans for those forms. Perhaps the most significant contribution of Luther in this area was the strong encouragement that primary education be compulsory and universally available.<sup>13</sup> He hoped that every person would gain the ability to read the Scriptures and learn about forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. It is no overstatement to suggest that today's worldwide expectation that all children receive formal education began in Wittenberg. Of course, it took Philip Melanchthon to put Luther's educational ideas into widespread practice. Melanchthon would come to be called the *Praeceptor Germaniae*, the teacher of Germany, known for the detailed advice he offered to many schools.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> My copy of this valuable publication is part of John W. Doberstein, "Minister's Prayer Book" (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, n.d.), 437-460. Concordia Publishing House currently sells a translation by Matthew Harrison.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher D. Jackson, "Educational Reforms of Wittenberg and their faithfulness to Martin Luther's thought." *Christian Education Journal* 3rd ser 10 no 1 (Spring 2013): 76-77, quoting L.W. Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation*, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1988), 385.

<sup>14</sup> Rosin, op. cit., 206, quoting Sachiko Kusakawa and Christine E Salazar, eds., *Melanchthon: Orations on Philosophy and Education, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

The first Lutherans began with the forms of schooling that they inherited from the Roman Church, but soon they collaborated with the Lutheran princes in Germany to improve those forms. Luther's *Address to the German Nobility* (1520), *Letter to the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Should Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524), and the *Sermon on Keeping Children in School* (1530) document the progress that the Lutherans made in implementing the ideas of Luther and Melanchthon. It is from the *Letter to the Councilmen*, for example, when people were questioning whether everything should still be taught in church Latin or whether schools could use just German, that we have the oft-quoted gem:

In proportion then as we value the gospel, let us zealously hold to the languages. For it was not without purpose that God caused his Scriptures to be set down in these two languages alone—the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek. Now if God did not despise them but chose them above all others for his word, then we too ought to honor them above all others.... We will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained.

But there was much to be taught before and during the teaching of the biblical languages. At first, Melanchthon recommended that all pupils be divided into three groups, regardless of age, according to their mastery of basic subject material. Roughly speaking, pupils in the first grouping learned the alphabet and beginning reading and writing. The second grouping was to concentrate on learning Latin grammar well, particularly conjugation and declension. Students entered the third grouping when they had mastered the Latin grammar and were ready to proceed to what were often known as the difficult readings: Cicero, Aesop, Virgil, and the Colloquies of Erasmus. Those who could handle the difficult readings were ready for university study, which was to include Greek and Hebrew.<sup>15</sup> Religious instruction occurred as each day began and ended in the ancient prayer offices of Matins and Vespers, with the children chanting Psalms and singing hymns. Classes began and closed in prayer. Students received formal catechetical instruction for a full day and a half each week.<sup>16</sup>

It soon became clear, however, that having most children from a community in school, both boys and girls, required dividing up classrooms as much by age as by mastery of material.

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1999); and Sachiko Kusukawa, *Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Wright, op. cit., 194.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, op. cit., 76,77.

Lutherans began to research what worked best, and continued to modify forms of school accordingly. People who were doing that educational research went beyond the clergy. The Reformers called upon state officials to pay attention to the qualifications for schoolmasters in connection with research and the curriculum. "The communities shall select only capable people for this business [teaching], those who are capable of encouraging the students to good conduct and diligence."<sup>17</sup>

If you have the privilege of teaching in a Lutheran elementary school or a Lutheran high school alongside Lutheran men and women who are trained to be teachers and are capable people for this business, listen to their insights on the forms that education of children should take. Our first college degrees were in the arts, and theirs were in the sciences. Education is a science, a “soft science” in comparison to engineering, for example, but a science nevertheless. The educational world around us is driven by data.<sup>18</sup> Teachers, especially those who have continued into a Masters program, speak in interesting and helpful scientific data terms.

For example, teachers learn to improve student learning by using data from teacher performance evaluations and professional development. The heart of the model is the link between teacher behavior, student effort, and student learning. Performance evaluation and professional development (which are called “human resource leadership functions”) act directly to influence teachers’ behavior in the classroom.<sup>19</sup> The data about these functions are so compelling for improving student learning that it is hard for teachers to understand when anyone objects to programs of performance evaluation and professional development. Even if you are teaching only catechism classes, research suggests that your students will learn more content more quickly with your participation in programs of performance evaluation and professional development.

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### *Questions for reflection*

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<sup>17</sup> Wright, op. cit., 188, quoting Friedrich Hahn, *Die evangelische Unterweisung in der Schulen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1957), 26, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Erin Richards, “Driving education with data,” *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (July 13, 2015), 1,12A.

<sup>19</sup> John Seyfarth, *Human Resource Leadership for Effective Schools* (Boston: Pearson, 2008), 3.

1. What program of performance evaluation might work best in your circumstances?
  2. What program of professional development might work best in your circumstances?
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Do you want to read the research studies for yourself? ERIC, the Education Resources Information Center, is your best friend when it comes to educational literature. ERIC is a digital library of education-related resources, kind of a WLS library essay file on steroids. The online version is continually updated ([www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov)).<sup>20</sup> Qualitative articles like ethnographies and case studies on ERIC are easier for beginners to read, but more detailed quantitative articles with sophisticated, well-documented statistical analysis are the bread and butter of the field.<sup>21</sup>

If you have a particular educational question, you would do well to research it in ERIC. But if you just want to keep up with what's going on in education, you can subscribe to the Issues in Lutheran Education blog (<http://blogs.mlc-wels.edu/wels-educator/>), a service from the Graduate Studies and Continuing Education department of Martin Luther College. Every couple of weeks, people of our fellowship write summaries of current educational studies that are likely to be of interest to many pastors and teachers of our fellowship.

People from outside of our fellowship write very accessible summaries of educational research as well. The most popular and useful in print are *Visible Learning for Teachers*,<sup>22</sup> *The First Days of School*,<sup>23</sup> and *Teach Like A Champion*.<sup>24</sup> In addition, there are regularly very helpful publications from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). The ASCD invites you to browse excerpts from ASCD books at <http://www.ascd.org/books>.

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<sup>20</sup> James H. McMillan, *Educational Research: Fundamentals for the Consumer* (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 62,63.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Shank, Launcelot Brown, and Janice Pringle, *Understanding Education Research: A Guide to Critical Reading* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), 26-31.

<sup>22</sup> John Hattie, *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Harry and Rosemary Wong, *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher, 4th Edition* (Singapore: Harry K. Wong Publications, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Doug Lemov, *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College (K-12)* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

One ASCD book that would be worth your time to browse is Eric Jensen's *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005). It is a wealth of information. Do you want to know what the research says about 8<sup>th</sup> graders? The appropriate amount of direct instruction of new content without a break is 12-15 minutes (page 37). After that it is best to provide time and exercises for reflection. Repetition really is the mother of learning at that age, and to be most effective it should be varied, including activities of pre-exposure (covert), previewing (overt), priming, reviewing, and revising (pages 38-42). Practical suggestions are given for each of those categories. Because of brain changes during growth spurts, students at ages 11 and 12 are less able to distinguish accurately among the emotions conveyed by facial expressions than they were at age 10 (pages 31-32). In other words, they are often not picking up the facial expressions you are attempting to use in classroom management. Ideally, students should spend 5 to 20 percent of class time in social groupings, and grouping should be used purposefully and strategically (page 97). Do you want to reduce improper motivations for students of that age? Eliminate threat, manage student emotions and teach them to do it too, give feedback, and set daily goals that incorporate some student choice (page 110).

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### ***Questions for reflection***

1. Which of these documented observations about eighth grade students resonates with you?
  2. Which of the observations sounds a little sketchy?
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Incorporating student choice in lesson plans is a huge issue right now in educational research. The philosophy, called constructivism,

is an approach to learning in which students construct new understandings through active engagement with their past and present experiences. Constructivists contend that traditional instructional models emphasize knowledge transmission without producing deeper levels of understanding and internalization. Objectivists and other critics of constructivism say that this approach to learning is imprecise, overly permissive, and lacking in rigor. This argument is well-illustrated in a *Phi Delta Kappan* exchange between Lawrence A. Baines and Gregory Stanley on one hand and Lynn Chrenka on the other (Baines and Stanley, "We Want to See the Teacher: Constructivism and The Rage Against Expertise," in the December 2000 issue and Chrenka, "Misconstructing

Constructivism,” in the May 2001 issue). Baines and Stanley condemn the constructivists’ adamant stand *against direct instruction by lecturing and the sin of memorization* [emphasis mine].<sup>25</sup>

Constructivism may offer some insights into methods for adult education, but our own understanding of the sinful human nature makes it impossible for us to adopt it wholeheartedly. We teach propositional truth from the Scriptures, and the sinful nature is hostile to propositional truth. My observation is the younger the students, the more formal structure they need when it comes to choices. At best, in elementary and secondary schools we can incorporate age-appropriate guided choice into our lesson plans.

One way to accomplish age-appropriate guided choice is by what educators are calling Project-Based Learning (PBL). Think about how much more you learned and remembered about a subject when it was, say, your own project, your church history paper or senior thesis. My own confirmation class included a project in which we used old Sunday School materials to put together a scrapbook about the life of Jesus. With a great deal of educational research available for most ages about PBL, you can find out how to help students design projects that will increase their motivation and interest and prepare them for high-stakes tests and lifelong learning.<sup>26</sup>

A more controversial way to incorporate constructivist ideas in the education of children is called competency-based learning. Some public school districts are shifting from a traditional course model to competency-based learning systems. Such systems often include elements such as course advancement upon mastery rather than upon earning a specific grade and continual assessment of student progress.<sup>27</sup> The public school that I attended for my elementary years used this model of education, and my observation after transferring to Lutheran schooling was that competency-based models assumed that every student was motivated every day to learn.

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<sup>25</sup> Glenn L. Koonce, “Is Constructivism the Best Philosophy of Education?” in *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Educational Issues* (New York City: McGraw-Hill, 2014), 48.

<sup>26</sup> John Larmer, John Mergendoller, and Suzie Boss. *Setting the Standard for Project Based Learning: A Proven Approach to Rigorous Classroom Instruction* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Chris Sturgis. *Implementing Competency Education in K–12 Systems: Insights from Local Leaders* (June 2015). Accessed from [http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/iNCL\\_CWIssueBrief\\_Implementing\\_v5\\_web.pdf](http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/iNCL_CWIssueBrief_Implementing_v5_web.pdf)

The use of technology in education is an issue consuming the time and resources of most teachers these days. ERIC offers over 5,000 peer-reviewed research studies on the subject of educational technology. Here is a typical abstract:

Technology integration is an important aspect of student competence in the 21st century. The use of technology in teaching and learning is a valuable practice for supporting student learning and engagement. Modelling the pedagogical practices that integrate authentic, performance-based opportunities for technology integration was the focus of a project designed to support future teachers with acquiring these same pedagogical practices. The project was an opportunity to demonstrate value for a competency-based approach to teacher education that integrates technology literacy as a required component of teaching and learning in the 21st century. It explored the extent to which preservice teachers integrated technology tools in the lesson plans they created. The use of various self-selected technology tools using this approach served as an illustration of the important aspects of sound instructional pedagogy including authentic learning, technology integration and performance-based learning.<sup>28</sup>

When it comes to technology, my advice for pastors in our role as teachers is to use whatever screens are available to you and to your students. Do not be afraid to use smart phone applications or Chromebooks. In particular, use short video clips available to you to illustrate biblical truths. Search for them on Google videos. Use the short movie clips that the synod is making available from the movies, *The Road to Emmaus*; *Come, Follow Me*; and *My Son, My Savior*.<sup>29</sup> If you are in contact with Lutheran teachers who are arranging inservice sessions on the use of technology, attend those sessions. If there are no Lutheran teachers in your area, ask whether you can join public school teachers when they have those inservice sessions. Consider courses on the use of technology offered by Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran College.

Another issue right now in educational research is the role of parents. To be sure, it is not a new issue. Some historians opine that the issue of education became central to Lutheran reform once "Luther had come to accept that parents could not invariably be trusted with the

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<sup>28</sup> Susan Cydis, "Authentic Instruction and Technology Literacy," *Journal of Learning Design*, 8 1 (2015): 68-78.

<sup>29</sup> The best places to access these are the movie websites: [www.RoadtoEmmausMovie.com](http://www.RoadtoEmmausMovie.com) (the whole film is available here); [www.ComeFollowMeMovie.com](http://www.ComeFollowMeMovie.com); [www.MySonMySaviorMovie.com](http://www.MySonMySaviorMovie.com) (this site is still under construction, but should be up soon).

education of their offspring."<sup>30</sup> Many current educational studies deal with the special dynamics of teaching students in urban schools with little or no parental presence in their homes.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, some of our parents find homeschooling to be the best option as long as their mastery of the subject matter allows them to teach in good conscience. The advantage they often have is their natural parental concern for their children in addition to the spiritual concern that the Holy Spirit works in them. The disadvantage they often have is lack of understanding of the extraordinary Lutheran birthright in education.

The most dramatic recent change for pastors as teachers is probably the level of communication expected by most parents.

No longer can an educator get by just slipping a monthly newsletter into the backpack. In an age of instantaneous access and 24/7 demand, educators must be able to manage the flow of information not only from teacher to students sitting in a classroom, but also to parents at the workplace and home. . . Steve Constantino, a former principal, tracked the documented trends over four years at one high school as a result of increased communication with parents. Some results:

Parent satisfaction rose from 34 percent to 59 percent.

Teacher satisfaction rose from 39 percent to 76 percent.

The average SAT score rose 61 points, with an 18 percent reduction in disparity between minority and non-minority students.

The dropout rate fell from 11 percent to 3 percent.<sup>31</sup>

My wife, a kindergarten teacher at St. John's Lutheran Elementary School (WELS), Burlington, Wisconsin, remarks that some days she feels like she spends almost as much time outside of the classroom advising parents on Christian parenting issues by text, phone call, and e-mail, as she does inside the classroom teaching her students.

The higher engagement of modern parents with the education of their children gives us more opportunities for teachable moments. Over the years we pastors have probably observed that it is not necessarily the students who get the best grades in catechism who remain in contact with the Means of Grace throughout their lives. Instead, the students whose parents model their participation in the life of the Church are often the ones who themselves find a place in worship,

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<sup>30</sup> Charles A. McDaniel and Vance E. Woods, "John Henry Newman and Martin Luther: Balancing Heart and Mind in Higher Education," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 23 1-2 (2011): 22, quoting Charlotte Methuen, *Kepler's Tübingen: Stimulus to a Theological Mathematics* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 30.

<sup>31</sup> Edward H. Moore, Donald R. Gallagher, and Don Bagin, *The School and Community Relations* (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 297,298.

service, and fellowship. We pastors are in a wonderful position to instruct young parents interested in the academic progress and spiritual growth of their children.

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### *Questions for Reflection*

1. What is working for you in communication with parents?
  2. How could you improve your communication with parents?
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Pastors of congregations with Lutheran elementary schools normally have a broader ministry perspective, and that perspective can improve the function of the school as an organization. Just remember that the principal of your school has probably studied the organization in even more detail, and can bring quite a bit of educational research to bear in his analysis of what might improve the place.

Educational research on schools as organizations looks at them in terms of frames. There is a Structural Frame which reflects confidence in rationality and documents how a suitable array of formal roles and responsibilities will minimize distracting personal static and maximize people's performance on the job.<sup>32</sup> The Human Resources frame deals with issues by changing people through training, rotation, promotion, or dismissal. It centers on what schools and people do to and for one another.<sup>33</sup> The Political Frame looks at schools as arenas, places where contending claims are constantly being worked out. In this view, students, teachers, and administrators agree on ways to distribute power and resources, producing temporary settlements that are reflected in organizational design.<sup>34</sup> In the Symbolic Frame, schools are places where people make sense of the chaotic world in which they live. Meaning, belief, and faith are its central concerns.<sup>35</sup> The idea of the research is that appropriate reframing by leaders can improve

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<sup>32</sup> Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 45.

<sup>33</sup> Bolman, op. cit., 113.

<sup>34</sup> Bolman, op. cit., 228.

<sup>35</sup> Bolman, op. cit., 244.

the performance of the organization.<sup>36</sup> If you are a pastor with a role in an existing school, it is likely that you understand the Symbolic Frame best, although you are aware the other frames exist and need to be addressed.

The educational organizations that I understand best, WELS preparatory schools, have an interesting dynamic in the Human Resources frame. They have approximately the same number of pastor-trained men and teacher-trained men and women teaching side-by-side. Observing those dynamics over the years has led to some conventional wisdoms. “It is good when the teachers are a little more pastoral,” say the school administrators. “And it is good when the pastors are little more, well, teacherly.”

“A little more teacherly” means a willingness to engage in the science of education. Luther recognized the benefit, suggesting that men training for the pastoral ministry would first be teachers for ten years. “Schoolmasters (teachers) have learned to speak in school with their pupils; they know how the passages of Holy Scripture are properly to be handled and explained. I wish that no one would be elected preacher unless he had first been a schoolmaster.”<sup>37</sup>

But the observation “it is good when teachers are ‘a little more pastoral’” tells you, brothers, that you bring something important to your role as a teacher. You understand that Lutheran teachers are ministers of the gospel. You know that the Lutheran school is Church, where the gospel is taught in truth and purity. You have come to a personal conviction about teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to every student. You have come to the understanding that the law applied in the structure of the classroom is primarily to bring a student to repentance. The Holy Spirit has given you *Privatseelsorge*, a pastoral care for individual souls, and your view of the student as a soul to be cared for by the application of law and gospel is of greater value than anything else. For what good is it for a student to gain an A+ for the semester, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can any student give in exchange for his soul? This is the Lutheran birthright in education, always to be treasured, never to be sold.

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<sup>36</sup> Bolman, op. cit., 335.

<sup>37</sup> Ewald M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), vol 3, 1337, from the notes of John Mathesius (September 2-17, 1540).