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Dedication to Dean and Rosemarie Buntrock

by Shirley K Morgenthaler

I strongly believe that the inherent value of a parochial education is that it provides both the academic rigor and the moral compass necessary to meet the many challenges of modern life. Not only are academic excellence coupled with strong Christian values the best of both worlds, but they are also critical components for successfully living in today's world.

Dean Buntrock

Editor's note: With this issue we are using the Lutheran Education Journal in a unique way.

We are showcasing the collaborative work of Concordia University Chicago's Center for Literacy and the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation within the schools of urban Chicago. This work has been generously funded by Dean and Rosemarie Buntrock. The articles included in this issue describe pieces of the project as that project has developed and grown.

The innovative collaboration between CUC and CLEF may be groundbreaking in terms of urban parochial schools, and especially within the Lutheran schools across the country. To do work such as this requires a vision that is clearly articulated, funding from a generous donor, a group of persons with the educational expertise necessary to address the vision, a group of schools willing to work together to implement the vision, much persistence, and the blessing of our God.

Since the founding of the LCMS in 1847, Christian education has been an integral part of the DNA of the church. At the same time, things have changed. The backgrounds of the children in the classroom are different. The communities in which most of our congregations are sited are different. The congregations themselves are different. What is not different is the message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let the children come to me. . . . Feed my lambs.

This message is our inspiration and our mantra for the work that we do. Lutheran schools are a commitment of the congregations who fund and support them. Lutheran teaching is a vocation and a calling from that same Lord who has redeemed us and given us the command to teach children.

When the message and the vision and the funding and the persistence of vocation come together as they have for CUC and CLEF, beautiful things happen. This issue of the Lutheran Education Journal is dedicated to the women and men who have come together to make this vision a beautiful reality.

From Striving to Thriving

Be the best you can be. Just do it! Good, better best. Never let it rest. Till to good is better, and the better, best. We have all heard these and other slogans about excellence. How do we attain excellence? How do we know when we have arrived at excellence? Those of us who teach know that excellence is a moving target and that we never stop working toward it.

This issue looks at excellence. It also has a subscript of survival. Most of us know that the heyday of parochial education is history. We are now in a struggle to keep alive this great concept and to help it thrive. This issue reports on a unique collaboration between Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF) and the Center for Literacy (CFL) of Concordia University Chicago.

For more than 25 years, CLEF has implemented its mission to support urban Lutheran Schools in Chicago. Over the years, it has also come to support struggling schools in the collar communities of metropolitan Chicago. In her column that follows this one, Dara Soljaga gives you a glimpse of each of the articles to follow in this issue of *LEJ*. The partnership between CLEF and CFL is due in no small part to the leadership and creative determination of Janet Klotz, current Executive Director of the CLEF board and Dara, the Director of CFL.

In *Issue 2 of LEJ Volume 155*, we examined the changing landscape, issues and priorities of a Lutheran university, this university. In this issue, *Issue 3, Volume 155*, we take a close look at a segment of the population for which we, CUC, have been preparing and praying since 1864. The Lutheran schools of metropolitan Chicago are a microcosm of the Lutheran schools nationally and internationally. Some of these schools are thriving. Some are struggling. Most are somewhere in between.

It is important that we know about that status of the Lutheran schools around us. We are one of those schools. Their status and stature affects us. Their movement from striving to thriving is important to our day-to-day mission.

As we continue to take our insights from Martin Luther, we remind ourselves that we maintain our support of Lutheran schools for the good of the church. In their work with the

Lutheran schools of CLEF, our faculty working with CFL have begun to understand the crises facing many of our schools. Simeon Stumme's review of a book on the effects of Catholic education in the inner city provides insights into our work with Lutheran schools.

Parochial education must begin to partner across denominational lines if we are to thrive. The message in Simeon's review touches on the sociocultural impact of a parochial school in an urban community. Some of what we learn about that impact comes from the losses that are identified after the closing of a struggling parochial school. That is real food for thought.

My *Words for Thought* for this issue give you a glimpse into how one handful of Lutheran laymen have partnered to make a difference in the Lutheran Schools of Chicago. That partnership has helped Lutheran schools to thrive, to continue to strive, and sometimes to simply stay alive. What a difference one business lunch has made!

We, the faculty of Concordia University Chicago, are all in the business of making a difference. That is a part of our role as teachers. Professors of knowledge. Researchers of what is. Dreamers of what might be. Communicators of those dreams to our students and to colleagues locally across our faculty and nationally across our various disciplines. Blessings to each of you as you continue to make a difference. **LEJ**

From Where I Sit, Too: Celebrating Collaboration

by Dara Soljaga

With heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Shirley Morgenthaler for the invitation to serve as guest editor, I am honored that this issue of the Lutheran Education Journal celebrates the ongoing collaboration between Concordia University Chicago's Center for Literacy and the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF).

Founded in January 2014, Concordia University Chicago's Center for Literacy serves and leads by creating access to meaningful and innovative literacy-related experiences in diverse educational and social settings. Similarly, CLEF equips children in Chicagoland with the opportunity to experience Christ's love and grace through a high-quality, Christian values-based education, in order to reach their potential and fulfill their vocation.

"Teaching is of more importance than urging," wrote Martin Luther. We hearkened to this message as co-principal investigators, Simeon Stumme and I, sought to support thriving urban Lutheran schools. The Center's and CLEF's efforts resulted in a multi-faceted approach that included a strong teacher-training component, an articulated plan of study and the recognition of effective instruction. In the pursuit of academic excellence and to grow school enrollments, our worthwhile partnership with CLEF emerged; one that supported innovative practices and systemic evolution in Lutheran schools.

Our fruitful partnership began in 2014 when CLEF's Executive Director, Janet Klotz, accepted an invitation to join the Center's Founders Board. Janet's leadership resulted in a multi-year, grant-funded, language and literacy initiative within two CLEF schools, as well as a curriculum series, and other consultative work between our two organizations. However, the *Pathways to Excellence for Teachers* program marks our first comprehensive effort engaging both entities with all 15 Preschool- through-Grade 8 CLEF schools. Janet Klotz will share a detailed overview of the partnership initiative, and then the baseline data regarding teachers' writing pedagogy that was used in project planning as examined by Simeon Stumme, Amanda Mulcahy and me.

Also in this issue, various components of the Pathways to Excellence program are presented. The Innovative Teacher Institute (ITI), which provided all teachers in CLEF schools with

ongoing, targeted professional-development sessions, included opportunities for professional collaboration, instructional and practice-based shifts and curricular work enhancement. The ITI component also offered weekly, in-classroom, on-site instructional coaching where coaches model lessons, support planning and engage teachers in the participating schools. Kari Pawl connects the theory and practice of instructional coaching. A glimpse into the importance of background knowledge and experience in a CLEF teacher's development is shared by Della Weaver.

Insight regarding the second portion of the program, the Collaboratively Articulated Plan of Study (CAPS), which gathered teachers and university experts to develop goals, activities and assessments for writing, reading and an innovative framework for learning is offered by Tim Bouman. A book review from Simeon Stumme underscores the important role faith-based schools serve in urban settings. Finally, Samantha Lazich and Don Hendricks preview the next phase of the project by exploring the development and implementation of the CLEF Medallion program.

After two years of implementation, the partnership between CLEF and the Center for Literacy continues to flourish as we explore pathways to continue supporting excellence in teaching and learning. I earnestly invite you to enjoy reading this very special issue of the *Lutheran Education Journal*. **LEJ**

Pathways to Excellence

Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation and Concordia University Chicago: A Unique Partnership Initiative

By Janet Klotz

A History of Leadership, Service, and Innovation

In the fall of 1993, the idea to organize a “coalition of Lutheran and other Christian corporate leaders in order to support, promote and secure the future of Lutheran elementary and secondary schools in the Chicagoland area” became a reality known as the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF). With a shared sense of vision and mission and a fervent belief in the power and faithfulness of their Lord and Savior, the original board of directors vowed to underwrite 100 percent of all organizational operating expenses so that 100 percent of all contributions would go directly to the schools to help thousands of students each year. Today, the current board of directors faithfully carries on the tradition of underwriting 100 percent of all CLEF’s operational costs.

Since the founding by dedicated Christian men and women 26 years ago, CLEF has provided over \$30 million in educational funding, scholarship support, classroom resources and innovative programs to Lutheran schools in the greater Chicago area. The 23 CLEF schools have over 5,574 years of combined teaching experience and roughly 5,295,300 hours of combined instructional time. Through it all, CLEF remains dedicated to transforming children’s lives through education. Its mission is to empower urban Lutheran schools to deliver an innovative, high quality, Christian, values-based education in a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment.

Origin of the Pathways Initiative and Partnerships

About three years ago, CLEF partnered with Concordia University Chicago (CUC) through CUC’s Center for Literacy, and in collaboration with the consulting firm of Davidoff Mission-Driven Business Strategy, to create the Pathways to Excellence initiative. The three-year initiative, generously funded by Dean and Rosemarie Buntrock, is designed to provide principals, administrators, and teachers with the updated skills and technology necessary to promote

excellence in student learning. Pathways is an educational adaptation of the Romans 12:2 directive to *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* The Pathways program also addresses the need for school leadership to implement new ways to insure that their schools remain viable and sustainable, by providing the financial and education tools to thrive in today’s challenging educational environment. Pathways recognizes the unique circumstances and needs of each school and adapts its curriculum and content to meet those specific needs.

Through the development and implementation of multiple and creative proprietary teaching and training modules, this unique and comprehensive multi-tiered program has offered new insights into educational leadership, classroom curriculum and instruction, as well as valuable assessment tools. All with a singular focus of empowering and encouraging educators to guide their students to achieve academic excellence through personal growth, expert teaching, coaching, and enhanced learning techniques. The role of Concordia-Chicago in providing over 150 years of educational expertise along with modern-day learning and training techniques is fundamental and essential to Pathways’ success.

For the CLEF partnership, CUC faculty members and staff from multiple departments, including especially the Center for Literacy, are providing relevant, practical and real-world protocols for all phases of the initiative. For example, Concordia’s instructional design and technology team managed both content architecture and a digital media portal that enhanced the functionality and availability of critical training tools for all participants. Leadership faculty delivered administrative content courses to principals. The Center for Literacy faculty created an instructional coaching and plan-of-study program. Science faculty assisted with the development of a new STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) path of study, and aided in the planning of CLEF’s annual fall Lutheran School Networking Conference.

Pathways Program Architecture and Rationale

The educational landscape in Chicago, like that of many urban cities, is complex and competitive. All schools, whether public, private, or parochial, face daunting challenges related to their budget, administration, instruction, safety, and quality of education. While parents have a variety of educational choices they are still limited by socio-economic barriers, location, transportation, gangs, and many other real-world variables. The Pathways Program, along with its many practical benefits, supports faith-based schools that serve as the bedrock for many socially, linguistically, and economically diverse communities. These schools provide a high-quality education dedicated to helping students realize the greatness for which they were made (Schoenig, 2017). For generations, these schools have played an invaluable role in the American educational landscape.

“They are part of our Nation’s proud story of religious freedom and tolerance, community development, immigration and assimilation, academic achievement, upward mobility, and more” (DOE, 2008, p. 1).

In many neighborhoods with a Lutheran school nearby, the choice often hinges on whether the school is safe, what financial assistance is available, and what kind of values are taught to the students. The importance of the Lutheran school option in these neighborhoods is vital, as it provides parents with the peace of mind that their children will be learning in a safe and supportive, values-based Christian environment. Though the number of faith-based schools are diminishing over time, the US Department of Education found that

First, faith-based schools improve student learning. Second, faith-based schools have a greater positive impact on minority students. And third, faith-based schools’ positive influence grows as students’ socio-economic status falls; that is, the more disadvantaged the student, the greater the benefits of a faith-based education. (2008, p. 7)

The Christian values and morals embodied in a Lutheran education—caring, compassion, forgiveness, grace, inclusiveness and service—make our schools a welcoming alternative to public education.

In order to remain competitive, the quality of our Lutheran schools must continuously improve. Teale et al. (2007) note that the persistent achievement gap in the educational learning environment of many urban schools, can often best be addressed through in faith-based schools (Teale et al., 2007). At the core of the Pathways to Excellence initiative is the solid educational foundation and symbiotic relationships, mission, expertise, and commitment of our principals, teachers, CLEF, and CUC.

Pathways to Excellence in a Nutshell

Pathways to Excellence was designed to renew and refresh the inherent servant’s heart within each principal, teacher and staff member that serves in our Lutheran educational system. Using their gifts to benefit their students and families is their mission and their calling. They honor their Lord with their teaching and caring, with their love and leadership, and ultimately by serving with all their heart as the Spirit directs. Pathways to Excellence is designed to be practical, actionable and customized to identify challenges, create individualized solutions, reinforce school culture and encourage behavioral changes that result in the implementation of strategic school and classroom improvement plans. Pathways is a rigorous program which requires time, attention, and deliberate effort from participants in order to apply their learning from Day One to begin effecting improvements in their school. This rigor and discipline in application and behavioral change is critical to the success of our Lutheran schools today and into the future.

In the first year of Pathways, the focus was on the principal as the instructional, business, and inspirational leader of the school. Each principal was given instruction, leadership coaching, training, and support in preparing a strategic plan for their school and in appreciating how it informs the work of his or her teachers and students. This phase was driven by the combined efforts and expertise of CLEF, CUC and Davidoff Mission-Driven Business Strategy over a period of 10 months. In addition to coursework, assignments, and one-on-one expert coaching, each principal developed a customized, strategic improvement plan for his/her school.

In the second year of Pathways, CUC's Center for Literacy rolled out a two-pronged professional-development program designed to strengthen teachers' foundational skills in literacy instruction. Similar to year one, this phase made extensive use of one-on-one coaching, with in-classroom coaching for all teachers to assist in meeting the unique instructional needs of every student. This ongoing professional development with instructional coaching, ongoing professional development and curricular articulation establishes and promotes Lutheran schools as 21st-century centers of innovative literacy and faith-based practices. Also in year two, the principals continued work with their leadership coaches to develop their schools' strategic improvement plans. They received training in the area of social-emotional intelligence while also receiving valuable preparation in marketing, enrollment, recruitment, and retention.

In year three, the principal and teacher programs continued, and a unique Medallion program for CLEF schools was introduced. A Medallion school is recognized and rewarded for achieving the following rubrics:

- School leadership—governance and evaluation
- School leadership—financial sustainability and enrollment
- Student learning and academic excellence
- School health and wellness

In order to appreciate school boards, year three also introduced school-board-member workshops including topics such as: board function and roles, best practices, alignment of governance policy with school goals and objectives, fundraising, and the importance of financial sustainability.

The Journey Continues with HEART—an Everyday Miracle

The Pathways to Excellence program, while launched as a three-year initiative with the educational goal of academic excellence in a Christian school, is meant to be a journey not a destination. To paraphrase a famous running-shoe slogan, this is a journey that begins in life and ends in eternity with real souls held firmly by God's grace and forgiveness. Think of it. The journey of Pathways is a heavenly journey! The students in CLEF schools are on this journey with us because of this unique partnership.

It has been evident from the very first step on Pathways to Excellence, evident from the beginning of our partnership with CUC, and evident while with working with all the servant leaders and teachers at every CLEF school, that each and every person involved embraces and demonstrates a servant's **HEART**. In his book, *The Heart of Leadership*, author Mark Miller (2013) writes that effective and inspirational leadership is all about HEART, and the resulting leadership character. Here is how he describes the traits that constitute the HEART of leadership-character:

- **Hunger for Wisdom**—personal development is a high priority
- **Expect the Best**—when difficulties arise I remain optimistic
- **Accept Responsibility**—I accept responsibility for my efforts and outcomes
- **Respond with Courage**—I am willing to make hard decisions
- **Think Others First**—I consider the needs and desires of others before my own (Miller, 2013)

On Pathways to Excellence, academic excellence is woven into the Christian fabric of education, all the while students are nurtured, taught and surrounded by a teacher's love and a servant's heart. The important work of our faith-based schools in supporting student learning in urban settings continues. This everyday miracle is truly a blessing and a joy to experience for all involved. It's what CLEF means with their credo: Learning—Good News—For Life. Or perhaps, Pathways—Good News—For Life. **LEJ**

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Janet Klotz joined the CLEF Board of Directors in 2011 and was named executive director in 2013. A product of Lutheran schools, including Concordia University Chicago, Janet Klotz has more than 25 years' experience in leadership and volunteer positions for many community and nonprofit organizations. As an entrepreneur and successful fundraiser, her creative and people skills serve her well in her multifaceted role as CLEF's executive director.

A CLEF Board Member's Perspective on Pathways to Excellence

By Michael Welch

It has been my privilege to have served on the Board of Directors of the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF) for the past 18 years. When CLEF was first founded in 1993 by individuals concerned about the declining state of Lutheran education in Chicago, the organization solicited whatever money it could, and then simply distributed it to the Chicago Lutheran schools, primarily for scholarships and capital improvements. The thinking at that time was that the needs of the schools were tied to financial concerns, without focusing on the underlying reasons why these schools were experiencing declining enrollment.

As CLEF matured, so did its approach to partnering with the schools. While CLEF has continued to provide our Lutheran schools with scholarship and other monetary support, we recognized that the schools would only be able to thrive if the principals and teachers at the schools were properly trained and equipped to meet the needs of 21st-century education. Thus, the current mission of CLEF is “To *empower* urban Lutheran schools to deliver innovative, quality education in a Christian environment.”

The primary driver of this new approach came from the fact that there had been a significant shift in the make-up of the students attending Lutheran schools. Whereas at one time Lutheran congregations produced enough students to fill the schools, that number declined beginning in the 1980s, a trend that has continued to the present. Thus, in order to attract students from outside the congregation, particularly in light of the alternative of free public education, the schools needed to provide a high-quality education that appropriately prepared students for high schools and the challenges of life that they soon would be facing. At the same time, it was imperative that Lutheran schools continued to provide the religious training and Christ-centered culture that had always been their hallmark. While we were confident of our Lutheran schools' ability to deliver on the latter, we determined that CLEF needed to focus on providing our principals and teachers with the tools to deliver a high-quality education that exceeded the education provided by the local public schools and other educational options available to parents.

A secondary driver was the inability of many Lutheran schools to pay their principals and teachers a decent salary. While the dedication of these individuals to their students and families is inspiring, a byproduct of this was that many teachers were so focused on their day-to-day duties that they could not take part in meaningful professional development. The result was a wonderfully caring environment but a pedagogy that was stuck to a large extent in the concepts that the teachers had learned while in college. While CLEF is currently focused on professional development of teachers and administrators, it intends to address the compensation needs of our school staffs as part of its long-term strategic planning.

Thus, for a while, CLEF intermittently sponsored professional-development programs, made efforts to improve the curricula and educational materials offered at the schools, and provided new technology for teachers and students. The hope was that by providing these tools, the staffs at Lutheran schools would apply them in ways that would lead to the academic improvements necessary to sustain the schools into the future. Having not seen the results that we had hoped for in the schools, however, CLEF, in 2016, embarked on a major strategic planning process and determined that we needed to make a major investment in assisting the schools to improve the quality of the education they offered. Therefore, we adopted two key strategic initiatives into our new strategic plan.

The first strategic initiative was “To Foster Leadership and Professional Development in Lutheran Schools” and the second strategic initiative was “Improve the Quality of Lutheran Education in Chicago.” Specific action steps to implement these initiatives were identified, and led to the formation of the team of CLEF personnel, Concordia University Chicago professors and the CUC Literacy Center, and the knowledgeable and experienced consultants at Davidoff Mission-Driven Business Strategy. This dynamic team has spent countless hours in developing and implementing the Pathways to Excellence program. This is by far the largest financial commitment that CLEF has made in its history toward its mission and its core belief that students and families in Chicago Lutheran schools should not have to choose between the loving and safe Christian environment schools have historically provided and a high-quality education.

The CLEF Board firmly believes that the success of any school is directly correlated to the leadership of that school, and that leadership’s ability to strategically plan for the future sustainability of their school. Therefore, much of the Pathways to Excellence program was devoted to providing school principals and administrators with leadership training that allows them to look beyond the day-to-day operation of the school to strategically plan for the future, and then engage all of the school’s stakeholders in understanding, embracing, and executing against that strategic plan.

In addition, the CAPS and ITI components of the Pathways program have provided teachers with the kind of systematic knowledge and hands-on coaching that one-off seminars and training programs can never achieve. Giving our teachers the opportunity to sharpen their skills as the result of their interaction with professors from Concordia who expose them to the latest thinking in education allows them to combine their current experience with innovative new ways of effectively teaching their students. The ongoing coaching provided through these programs assures that these new techniques will, in fact, be incorporated into the teachers' classroom styles.

One of the largest challenges that CLEF has faced over the years is that each one of the Lutheran schools is autonomous, and has complete control over the operation of its school. Thus, CLEF has no direct authority to require schools to take any particular action, unlike Catholic schools which are directly controlled by the Archdiocese of Chicago. The Pathways program was always voluntary, and it was up to the individual schools to determine whether to engage in the program. Thus, we recognized that in order to ask the principals and teachers at the schools to take time out of their busy schedules to engage in the Pathways to Excellence program, CLEF needed to have a compelling value proposition that would demonstrate measurable improvements in the schools' quality of education. CLEF is gratified by the overwhelmingly positive response of principals and teachers to the Pathways programs. We believe that the Pathways to Excellence programs to date have delivered and exceeded our articulated value proposition, and that the Medallion program will provide the basis on which our schools can thrive in the future in a very competitive environment.

As an adjunct to these comprehensive professional-development programs, our donors have enabled CLEF to provide many other services to Chicago Lutheran schools, such as nursing and health-care services, technology support, marketing assistance, Title-funds assistance, special-education services, and assistance with state recognition and accreditation processes. All of these services contribute to schools that can offer an overall educational experience for their students and families that will continue to attract the children of congregation members as well as children from the surrounding community.

Of course, CLEF's ability to continue to partner with Chicago Lutheran Schools in meaningful ways depends upon our ability to raise funds to carry on the great work of the Pathways to Excellence program. However, the reality is that donors today do not simply contribute to a charitable organization and say "do whatever you think is best with the money." Donors want tangible evidence of the impact that their dollars are having on the academic progress of the students in our Lutheran schools. Our team is in the process of gathering real data that will demonstrate to our donors the wonderful academic improvements that our

students and schools are making as the result of the Pathways program. This demonstrable progress will allow CLEF to establish that the Medallion program, with its rubrics as to what defines an excellent Lutheran school, will drive their sustainability into the future.

As a Board member, I want to acknowledge the tremendous work done by our Executive Director, Janet Klotz, and the generous and unwavering support of Dean and Rosemarie Buntrock, in bringing the Pathways to Excellence program to fruition. Our team of academic experts and mission-driven consultants has worked together amazingly well. We are all confident that we have set the stage for Lutheran schools in Chicago to provide a high-quality education in a Christ-centered environment to all of their students, and to sustain that effort going forward into the future through the Medallion program.

Proverbs 22:6 says “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” I had the joy of recently attending graduation ceremonies at my home church, St. James Lutheran Church, and at Grace Christian Academy, both in Chicago. I was struck by the manner in which these graduates eloquently spoke of their Lutheran educational experience, how it had prepared them for high school and, more importantly, how it had helped them understand who they are and what kind of life they want to lead. Listening to these students and being the parent of two Lutheran-school graduates, I was reminded how important it is for us to preserve this heritage and to make sure that future students have the opportunity to hear Christ’s message of salvation while receiving a top-notch education in all disciplines.

It has been my pleasure as a CLEF Board member and educator to have had the opportunity to work with our partners in the formulation and execution of the Pathways to Excellence and Medallion programs. We believe that this approach, which combines the practical and effective application of leadership, strategic planning, and academic principles to improving the quality of Chicago Lutheran schools, can be a model for future use in other parochial schools. The entire Board of Directors of CLEF is proud to be a part of this groundbreaking program to assure the sustainability of our Chicago Lutheran schools into the future. **LEJ**

Michael T. Welch is an Executive Instructor at the Quinlan School of Business at Loyola University Chicago. Since 2003, he has taught courses in strategic management, leadership, microenterprise consulting and the legal environment of business. He spent 23 years at The Quaker Oats Company, last serving as the Vice President – Legal Services until 2002. Prior to Quaker, he was an associate at Winston & Strawn. He obtained his B.S. in Marketing and his J.D. from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. He is a member of the Board of Directors of Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF).

Pedagogy, Knowledge and Learning

An Examination of Parochial School Teachers' Writing Instruction

By Dara Soljaga, Simeon Stumme & Amanda Mulcahy

As part of the Pathways to Excellence for Teachers project with the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation and their schools, our team of faculty, instructional coaches and consultants facilitated focus-group meetings and reviewed existing school data in order to determine project priorities. Initial data indicated an opportunity to support writing instruction in the partner schools. In order to further refine our work, the team determined that a survey administered to teachers would provide additional clarity regarding specific areas. Teachers were invited to participate in a study to determine the instructional writing practices, programs, and strategies currently being used in Chicago's Lutheran schools. This article will establish our theoretical underpinnings, share our study's methods, present our preliminary results, and offer a concluding discussion.

Our understanding of teaching and learning, and of pedagogy in general, is framed within a sociocultural context which values teachers' experience, situated communities of practice, and knowledge as a negotiated process (Vygotsky, 1931/1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Cole & Engestrom, 1994; Lee, 2007). Central to our work is the guided, yet collaborative, development of an intellectual, theoretical and practical understanding of learning that encourages particular practices designed to re-contextualize language and literacy instruction inclusive of writing (Soljaga & Stumme, 2015). As such, the dissemination of certain fundamental knowledge and skills are needed for effective instruction in general, and for writing specifically, as well as the ability to sustain and support this growth.

Theoretical Framework

Here, we present our sociocultural framework for teaching and learning as one that delimits our work and guides all decisions regarding the value and appropriateness of classroom practices (Vygotsky, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Cole & Engestrom, 1994; Lee, 2007). This theoretical stance is useful only when connected to classroom practices. It must be viewed as a complete and complex basis for offering learning opportunities to all students. The framework

encourages and requires teachers to critically reflect on their practice, and privileges pedagogy over curricular products. It is grounded in an asset-based perspective, instead of deficit-based, and positions teachers as necessary content and pedagogical experts who appreciate students as valuable cultural and social-capital owners.

The following sociocultural principles guide our work:

Learning is social. This principle speaks to the idea that learning and teaching are active processes that occur in the social world and depend on interaction among learners. Teaching requires activities that offer meaningful and purposeful interactions.

Communities of practice are necessary. Learning is the process of becoming a full member of a community of practice. Learning the norms, culture and “ways of being” of community happens through practice. Practice implies approximation to the behaviors and knowledge of the community. Learning becomes the process of identity formation – learning means becoming an active member of a community. The unity and interdependence of learning as an act of enculturation is valued.

Engagement with more expert others is required. Teaching and learning depend on the interaction of novice learners with more expert learners. Traditionally, this has been understood as the students interacting with the “more expert” teacher. While this type of interaction is necessary and valuable, our sociocultural framework broadens the possibilities of who is considered an expert to include the students. Classroom practice requires activities that position different students in the role of the expert at opportune times.

Knowledge is negotiated. All learners bring their own unique and valuable perspective to different topics. Within our framework, teaching demands recognition that each of these perspectives has value in the construction of new knowledge. Teaching and learning are defined as the creating of new ways of understanding the world, achieved through the active interaction, compromise, and assimilation of new and old information.

Regarding teaching and learning, the classroom environment and atmosphere created by the teacher and students transacting with each another and with their environment, grows to include the whole institutional, social, and cultural context (Cobb & Kallus, 2011). As such, when teachers employ a variety of tools and strategies that ensure students can develop agency by guiding learning, supporting metacognition, and nurturing collaboration, learning happens. In this case, students’ writing will reflect a corresponding ability to communicate coherent, well-developed arguments as authentic vocabulary instruction and clear purposes for reading and talking assist students in structuring and presenting their thinking as writing. These goals are further augmented with the legitimization of

different notions of text as teachers–students, and students–students engage in discourse about academic content and co-create knowledge.

Within our framework, discernible knowledge and skills include teachers having the ability to be responsive to student understanding and misunderstanding. “...We have learned that our brains are hardwired to learn oral language from infancy, but that written language must be taught.” (Krashen, 1981, as cited in Cobb & Kallus, 2011, p. 202). Teachers’ deep content knowledge will lead to greater confidence in their students to deepen analytical, communication, and writing skills. Through our work, students and teachers will be able to confidently and critically facilitate discourse, both oral and written, grounded in a variety of content areas.

In order to support and sustain the benefits of the project with Chicago’s Lutheran schools, the need to determine existing instructional writing practices, programs, and strategies was identified. In valuing teaching as a profession and privilege, the time, space and structures for reflection and growth suited the administration of a survey. This quantitative study of parochial school teachers’ pedagogy informed by writing instruction practices was guided by the following research questions:

1. How often do teachers at Lutheran schools have their students engage in writing activities? Which activities are most common? Which are least common?
2. How do Lutheran school teachers who teach different subjects approach the frequency of writing instruction?
3. How do Lutheran school teachers who teach different grade levels approach writing instruction differently?

The survey was constructed, by a doctoral student under Dr. Stumme’s supervision, with carefully selected items from an instrument created by Mike Ronen, from Southwest Plains Regional Service Center. His written permission was obtained on September 17, 2017. The questions were organized into subcategories including Paragraphs and Essays; Creating Effective Writing Prompts; Read, Score and Justify; Revision Strategies; Teacher Involvement; Reader as Writer; and Goal and Monitoring of Progress. It is comprised of 28 items, such as “Students in my classroom actively employ a writing process to develop their writing.” Teachers were instructed to reflect on writing instruction in their classroom and rate the frequency of application. A rating scale of 0 for Never, 1 for Once or Twice a Year, 2 for Once or Twice a Semester, 3 for Once or Twice a Month, 4 for Once or Twice a Week and 5 for Daily or Almost Daily was used to gauge frequency. Two open-ended questions, inquiring about resource use and perceived obstacles completed the survey.

Method

Our research study utilized a quantitative, survey-research design to investigate Lutheran teachers' pedagogy through writing instruction. According to Creswell, "Survey researchers often correlate variables, but their focus is directed more toward learning about a population..." (Creswell, 2015, p. 379). As such, the survey was used to identify areas of writing instruction occurring in the classroom so as to better understand pedagogy. In considering the reported information, our team would then be better positioned to support teaching and learning.

In our quantitative study, as in most surveys, the dependent variable is viewed as the teachers or respondents themselves, represented by the demographic information collected on the instrument. The independent variables are the descriptive survey question items. The survey requests grade-level, subject, and number of years taught and contains no other demographic information, making it virtually blind. An accompanying letter informed teachers of their voluntary, confidential participation.

Prior to the start of the study, we secured proper authorization through the CUC Institutional Review Board. Following IRB approval, our population of interest was identified as all teachers in attendance at the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Fund's annual August Networking Conference. Attendance records indicate that 135 teachers were present. Each teacher was individually handed a copy of the survey as they were exiting the keynote speech and as they were transitioning to breakout sessions. Teachers were given oral instructions to complete the survey at their leisure or during the lunch period and to return the completed anonymous survey packet by the end of the day to a box placed on the registration table. The data in this study are not sensitive and accidental disclosure would not result in harm to the participants. There is no risk to the participants, and their participation was optional. For the administration of the surveys, there was no time limit; it was expected that the surveys took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Our sampling method is considered nonprobability and stratified because only teachers in attendance at CLEF's Networking Conference were considered for participation. Nonprobability, convenience sampling may be used based on reality constraints with securing institutional permission and access to other teachers. According to Mertens, "Reality constraints, such as access and cost, must be considered in all sampling decisions" (Mertens, 2015, p. 325).

A total of 76 participants responded (N=76). Of those respondents, 12 reported teaching in grade pre-Kindergarten, 17 in grades Kindergarten-2nd, 17 in grades 3-5 and 21 in grades 5-8, with nine leaving the grade-level(s) taught section blank. 13 left the subject(s) taught item blank and 14 did not respond to the number of years of teaching experience item.

Results

Three major findings on the writing pedagogical practices of Lutheran school teachers were identified from the survey data. First, teachers, as a group, organize writing activities for students in Lutheran schools on a once or twice monthly basis. Second, there is significant difference between ELA (English/Language Arts) and non-ELA teacher pedagogical practices around writing. Finally, the data indicate that teachers that serve different grade levels engage in several significantly different pedagogical approaches to writing instruction.

Specifically, for Question #1: How often do teachers at Lutheran schools have their students engage in writing activities? Which activities are most common? Which are least common?

As a group, teachers at Lutheran schools organize writing activities for their students between twice a month and once a week. With mean scores ranging from 4.13 (in response to giving students opportunities to practice writing for a variety of purposes) to 1.78 (in response to creating opportunities for students to peer review their writing work), Lutheran teachers reported varying degrees of frequency based on different writing activities.

Table #1

Means and standard deviations

SURVEY ITEM	M (n)	SD
Paragraphs and Essays		
Students in my classroom actively employ a writing process to develop their writing.	3.70 (71)	1.224
Students practice writing for a variety of purposes in my classroom.	4.13 (75)	1.166
I model for my students how to revise various pieces of writing.	3.53 (72)	1.233
As a teacher I focus my instruction on correct grammar, punctuation, spelling.	3.66 (70)	1.623

Table #1 (*cont.*)

Means and standard deviations

SURVEY ITEM	M (n)	SD
Creating Effective Writing Prompts		
When I give writing assignments to students, I suggest prompts but encourage students to identify the audience and purpose for their writing.	3.38 (71)	1.377
In my classroom, students are asked to write for a wide variety of different audiences (e.g. other students, newspaper readers, people from other cultures).	2.82 (67)	1.291
I give my students opportunities to select what forms of writing they wish to work on (e.g. essays, posters, presentations, brochures).	2.57 (68)	1.317
I give students writing assignments that require them to write for a variety of purposes (e.g. explanation, persuasion, storytelling).	3.16 (71)	1.356
Students in my classroom must practice writing in many different forms (e.g. essays, posters, presentations, brochures).	2.99 (64)	1.545
Read, Score, and Justify		
I demonstrate scoring with students, using example papers to highlight and explain the scoring criteria.	2.23 (71)	1.664
Students in my classroom evaluate a variety of writing forms (e.g. posters, leaflets, letters, essays).	2.10 (70)	1.652
Students in my classroom get actively involved in self-assessment, scoring their own papers to understand their own strengths and weaknesses as writers.	2.34 (70)	1.541
Students in my classroom score the papers of fellow students as part of learning how to think about and discuss writing.	1.78 (69)	1.561

Table #1 (*cont.*)

Means and standard deviations

SURVEY ITEM	M (n)	SD
Revision Strategies		
In my classroom, students spend time revising their writing, as a separate conscious step in the writing process after reflecting on their initial draft writing.	2.77 (69)	1.526
As part of my writing instruction, I teach specific strategies for how to revise initial drafts into more polished final versions.	2.63 (68)	1.455
Revision strategies for writing are posted in my classroom.	2.00 (67)	1.688
Teacher Involvement		
I talk with students about my own writing experiences, using trait concepts and language.	2.94 (71)	1.611
In my classroom, I use examples of my own writing when teaching students about writing.	3.22 (73)	1.702
To demonstrate how to think about writing, I reflect aloud on strengths and weaknesses of my own writing.	2.97 (71)	1.715
I model for students how to receive and reflect on feedback about my own writing.	2.75 (69)	1.777
Read as a Writer		
In my classroom, we read and discuss the quality of many kinds of printed materials, (e.g. posters, leaflets, letters, articles, essays, books).	3.30 (73)	1.478
In my classroom, we read and discuss the quality of many kinds of writing (e.g. explanation, persuasion, storytelling).	3.30 (70)	1.438

Table #1 (*cont.*)

Means and standard deviations

SURVEY ITEM	M (n)	SD
Goal and Monitoring of Progress		
Students in my classroom participate in real publishing opportunities (e.g. writing competitions, commercial publications, school-wide newsletters).	1.89 (71)	1.626
Assessments are used to evaluate student writing (e.g. rubrics, checklist).	3.27 (71)	1.576

Further, teachers reported regularly using some type of “writing process” in their writing instruction (M 3.70), from modeling how to engage in writing revisions (M 3.53), to providing prompts to motivate students to write (M 3.38), to using rubrics to and checklist to evaluating writing (M 3.27) and to focus their instruction on correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling (M 3.66). All of these activities are done on an at-least weekly basis. Finally, teachers reported that they frequently have students systematically organize and store their writing (M 3.00).

Lutheran teachers report not engaging as frequently in some writing activities. For example, teachers reported to not having their students engage in publication of work that is part of a writing competition, commercial publication, or school-wide newsletter (M 1.89); they reported to not posting revision strategies in the classroom (M 2.00); and, they did not often have students evaluate a wide variety of written forms, like posters, letters, leaflets and essays (M 2.00).

Regarding Question #2: How do Lutheran school teachers who teach different subjects approach the frequency of writing instruction?

Our data reveal that Lutheran teachers who teach different subjects engage in writing practices with different frequency. One significant distinction regarding the frequency of engagement in different writing activities by teachers evident in the data relates to all teachers who teach English Language Arts (ELA) and non-English Language Arts Teachers. As explained above, not all Lutheran teachers in the sample were ELA teachers. Several teachers surveyed reported to teach math, science, social studies or physical education and not ELA. Further, some teachers reported teaching self-contained classes where they taught all subjects, including ELA. Here, we grouped all teachers who reported to teach any ELA and compared them to teachers that did not report to teach any ELA. On several responses, this distinction proved to be significant in how often different writing practices were organized.

Table #2

Comparing ELA+ALL teachers to Non-ELA teachers

GRADE LEVEL					
Variable		ELA+ALL (n=49)	Non-ELA (n=14)	t-value (df)	prob
Students practice writing for a variety of purposes in my classroom.	<i>M</i>	4.51	3.50	3.691	.000
	<i>SD</i>	(0.767)	(1.286)	(61)	
In my classroom, I use examples of my own writing when teaching students about writing.	<i>M</i>	3.60	2.31	2.691	.015
	<i>SD</i>	(1.512)	(1.548)	(59)	
In my classroom, we read and discuss the quality of many kinds of writing (e.g. explanation, persuasion, story-telling).	<i>M</i>	3.62	2.77	2.221	.037
	<i>SD</i>	(1.392)	(1.166)	(58)	

For example, in ELA classrooms, teachers report to use examples of their own writing in order to model different forms of writing for students; teachers who describe themselves as non-ELA teachers do not engage in the practice as often $t(59) = 2.691, p < .05$. Similarly, ELA teachers have students engage in significantly greater variety of writing purposes $t(61) = 3.691, p < .001$. Non-ELA teachers have students read and discuss different writing genres less often $t(58) = 2.221, p < .05$.

The distinction between ELA and non-ELA teachers is statistically significant in several areas of Lutheran teacher writing instruction.

Table #3

Comparing ELA+ALL teachers to Non-ELA teachers

GRADE LEVEL					
Variable		ELA+ (n=12)	Non-ELA (n=14)	t-value (df)	prob
Students practice writing for a variety of purposes in my classroom.	<i>M</i>	4.58	3.50	2.625	.015
	<i>SD</i>	(0.669)	(1.286)	(24)	
In my classroom I have a systematic way for students to store and organize their writing.	<i>M</i>	3.82	2.50	2.147	.015
	<i>SD</i>	(1.250)	(1.679)	(21)	

When comparing all teachers who teach ELA to non-ELA, there was a significant difference in offering writing practice for a variety of purposes, as well as regarding the systemization and organization of student writing.

For Question #3: How do Lutheran school teachers who teach different grade levels approach writing instruction differently?

Our data found a second important distinction within the group of Lutheran teachers surveyed regarding the grade-level each taught. While many reported teaching several grade levels, a distinction here was made between Pre-Kindergarten through 2nd grade (early childhood) and 3rd through 8th grade teachers (elementary). The grade-level distinction proved to be statistically significant in several areas of writing instruction, while in other areas no significant difference existed.

Table #4

Comparing PK-2 teachers to grade 3-8 teachers

GRADE LEVEL					
Variable		PK-2 (n=29)	3-8 (n=38)	t-value (df)	prob
I give students writing assignments that require them to write for a variety of purposes (e.g. explanation, persuasion, story-telling).	<i>M</i>	2.61	3.43	-2.186	.036
	<i>SD</i>	(1.588)	(1.094)	(58)	
Students in my classroom must practice writing in many different forms (e.g. essays, posters, presentations, brochures).	<i>M</i>	2.32	3.43	-2.913	.005
	<i>SD</i>	(1.842)	(1.168)	(60)	
I demonstrate scoring with students, using example papers to highlight and explain the scoring criteria.	<i>M</i>	1.52	2.68	-2.705	.010
	<i>SD</i>	(1.755)	(1.334)	(58)	
Students in my classroom evaluate a variety of writing forms (e.g. posters, leaflets, letters, essays).	<i>M</i>	1.29	2.57	-3.130	.003
	<i>SD</i>	(1.601)	(1.482)	(59)	
Students in my classroom get actively involved in self-assessment, scoring their own papers to understand their own strengths and weaknesses as writers.	<i>M</i>	1.46	2.84	-3.619	.001
	<i>SD</i>	(1.474)	(1.424)	(59)	

Table #4 (cont.)

Comparing PK-2 teachers to grade 3-8 teachers

GRADE LEVEL					
Students in my classroom score the papers of fellow students as part of learning how to think about and discuss writing.	<i>M</i>	0.87	2.22	-3.711	.000
	<i>SD</i>	(1.254)	(1.530)	(58)	
In my classroom, students spend time revising their writing, as a separate conscious step in the writing process after reflecting on their initial draft writing.	<i>M</i>	1.70	3.43	-4.933	.000
	<i>SD</i>	(1.579)	(1.144)	(58)	
As part of my writing instruction, I teach specific strategies for how to revise initial drafts into more polished final versions.	<i>M</i>	1.70	3.05	-3.703	.001
	<i>SD</i>	(1.460)	(1.246)	(58)	
Revision strategies for writing are posted in my classroom.	<i>M</i>	1.22	2.53	-3.311	.002
	<i>SD</i>	(1.313)	(1.715)	(57)	

In all questions that showed some level of statistical significance, elementary school teachers reported to engage in the activity more frequently. The early childhood education teachers reported to engage in the activities less often. For example, several questions regarding peer and self-editing and revising strategies showed statistically significant differences. When teachers were asked “*In my classroom, students spend time revising their writing, as a separate conscious step in the writing process after reflecting on their initial draft writing*” teachers in the upper grades answered that they engaged in the practice much more often $t(58)=-4.933, p < 0.001$.

Discussion

Three major findings on the writing pedagogical practices of Lutheran school teachers were identified from the survey data. First, as a group, teachers organize writing activities for students in Lutheran schools on a once- or twice-monthly basis. Second, overall teacher response rate indicates low levels of certain pedagogical practices; there is significant difference between ELA- and non-ELA-teacher pedagogical practices. Finally, the data indicate that teachers who serve different grade levels engage in significantly different pedagogical approaches to writing instruction.

Regarding the robustness of practices, the data show that Lutheran teachers have their students engage in writing on a weekly basis. They report to engage in several writing activities on a regular basis. Graham et al. (2012) assert that writing instruction needs to occur on a regular and consistent basis for it to be effective. Not only should daily opportunities, of at least 30 minutes, occur; but students should write for a variety of purposes.

As previously described, our model of writing and literacy instruction relies on four sociocultural principles. These findings connect to two of those principles, that of engagement with a more expert other and of negotiating knowledge. A robust writing program requires that students are given opportunities to engage with “more expert others.” In many cases, as is here, the classroom teacher acts as the expert other. Lutheran teachers reported to model good writing by sharing examples of their own writing. This modeling provides students with examples of what their own writing could look like. Still, the “expert” can and should arise from sources other than merely the teacher. Unfortunately, teachers did not consistently report using peer examples or other texts from a variety of genres and authors as a source of examples, or of expert others, during instruction.

A robust program also requires that students have an opportunity to make sense, to negotiate meaning of what good writing looks like across a variety of genres. Lutheran teachers report less frequent activity. For example, an increase in the use of peer editing and group analysis of different types of text have the benefit of situating the students to engage in the analysis of writing with the purpose of improving their own. These two types of activities require that students interact with text, to negotiate and compromise with each other regarding what is valuable, and in this way assimilate new information.

Second, the data revealed a marked difference in the frequency of writing instructional practices of English Language Arts teachers and non-English Language Arts teachers. It is common to think of writing as an activity that should only, or most often, occur in the language arts classroom. In more recent instructional plans and standards, writing is understood as a tool of communication that needs to be present across the curriculum (Krashen, 1981,

as cited in Cobb & Kallus, 2011, p. 202). Further, it has become critical that each discipline ensure students' understanding of specific norms, styles and conventions of particular fields. Supporting students in developing proficiency for writing is a critical component of full participation in a field-specific community of practice and is the responsibility of teachers in the field.

Lutheran ELA teachers show a significant difference in many writing practices as compared to non-ELA teachers. Still, teachers in non-ELA classes, would benefit students by investing more instructional time toward providing students with specific activities allowing them to engage in writing in a discipline-specific way. Writing is not proprietary to ELA, but rather, a tool that all school disciplines can use to communicate with the outside world. Students must be given access to these experiences so they can become full participants of the community.

Finally, the data demonstrate the need for a greater emphasis in the early grades on writing as form of communication and not just the process of learning to write. Early childhood teachers and elementary teachers organize different writing activities for their students. The most significant distinction was in how often teachers organized activities that required peer interaction. We would like to contextualize our comments on these findings around the idea that learning occurs in the social world and is dependent on interactions with others.

Peer interaction is a powerful requisite for learning. Providing students with space and time, regardless of age and ability, to interact with each other around their writing is a powerful learning experience. Early childhood teachers reported much less frequent use of activities requiring peer review and interaction than elementary teachers. Creating spaces where young students have an opportunity to critically discuss text, within our model of literacy instruction, is a necessary requirement.

As part of the Pathways to Excellence for Teachers project with the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation and their schools, our initial data indicating an opportunity to support writing instruction in the partner schools was confirmed with survey findings. With a more sociocultural focus on pedagogy, knowledge and learning, teachers can develop student agency. By dedicating ample time, across disciplines, and by employing a variety of tools and strategies, student writing will demonstrate the ability to communicate coherent, well-developed arguments that structure thinking. **LEJ**

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Collaboratively Articulating a Plan of Study for CLEF Schools

By Timothy Bouman

For the past two years, Lutheran school teachers in Chicago have participated in an interesting and unique collaboration involving their individual schools, Concordia University Chicago's Center for Literacy (Center) and the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF). While their overall partnership and collaboration are detailed elsewhere in this journal, this article will focus on one project in particular: the Collaboratively Articulated Plan of Study (CAPS) Project.

This project capitalizes on the strengths of many individual teachers in Chicago's Lutheran Schools (CLEF Schools) by gathering them to create instructional, curricular and assessment materials to be used by all of the CLEF Schools. It is a collaborative, teacher-driven endeavor that focuses on teachers' assets, experience, and skills by creating and sharing common resources with all stakeholders. It has been an illuminating study of the impact and challenges of collaboration, as well as the negotiation of power and ownership in which individual schools and their teachers have agreed to implement a collaborative program. This article will explore the process, as well as the role that each stakeholder plays, and will then make some observations about the successes and remaining challenges with the project to date.

In terms of governance, Lutheran schools in Chicago have a high degree of autonomy. While they do receive some support and oversight from entities such as the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association (ELEA), the LCMS Northern Illinois District's Education Office, and other accrediting agencies, each school is largely independent. Typically, each school is supported and governed by a church and its congregation, which considers the school a part of its ministry. As one might expect, there is a great diversity of practice in the administration of Lutheran schools in Chicago, with curriculum, instructional methodology, administrative structure, and school culture varying from school to school. While this freedom can be liberating and can lead to innovation as well as to the adoption of practices that best fit each individual school, it can also be isolating. While it may be desirable, on the one hand, not to have a central office dictating curriculum, it can also, at times, be challenging to keep up with current research, best practice, and new trends in our collective understanding

of teaching and learning. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that many schools do not have full-time principals due to budget limitations, so it is often up to individual teachers to create or search out curricular maps, lesson plans and instructional activities.

Given that Chicago's CLEF schools and the educators serving in them need to do so much on their own, as well as the fact that in all types of schools across the nation it is common for teachers to feel isolated in their own classrooms, the CAPS Project was conceived. With input from all stakeholders, a plan was formulated by Concordia's Center for Literacy and CLEF to gather teachers from the cooperating schools and guide them through a process of collaboratively creating a teaching and learning plan that all teachers and schools could use. Much thought went into the name of this project in an effort to strike a balance of allowing schools to maintain their independence and unique characters while at the same time agreeing to adopt common curriculum and instructional elements. Were we to create a curriculum? This was rejected, as it connoted a rigid, top-down mandate: i.e., "you need to teach this." Hence, "Collaboratively Articulated Plan of Study" was selected, the idea being that teachers would work together in order to outline a "plan" that could be incorporated by schools and integrated with their existing curricula. Yet, the goal was also to make it rich enough that it was more than something like a list of goals or suggestions; CAPS would ideally have enough substance to truly guide teachers and provide them valuable resources for the classroom.

Once this was established, stakeholders were again engaged to determine where to begin. It was decided that writing would be a first area of focus and the initial content for the CAPS project. Writing worked well as a starting point because many other areas of elementary education have a set curriculum and resources that schools have adopted (i.e. a math textbook series, a reading program, etc.). While all schools teach writing, few had a well-developed writing curriculum or program. Additionally, the principal investigators' surveys and focus-group interviews revealed that there was a desire for more support of writing instruction. Therefore, it was established that the first year of the CAPS Program would focus on writing.

While the process was a teacher-driven, collaborative one, all projects need leadership and guidance. CAPS was no different. A lot of the logistical and all of the financial support came from CLEF. CLEF administrators emailed participants about upcoming meetings and schedule changes. CLEF also provided stipends for all participating teachers, as added incentive for engagement. Finally, CLEF had representatives at all CAPS work sessions who provided support and reported progress back to CLEF. CLEF also collaborated with the Center for Literacy in the ongoing planning of the program. The academic leadership for the project

came primarily from the Center for Literacy at Concordia University Chicago. The principal investigators and leaders were CUC professors. They were also instructional coaches who worked alongside teachers in the schools as part of another CLEF/CUC partnership initiative. In addition, they also served as project administrators. This CAPS Administrative Team provided the structure and leadership that enabled the teachers to create CAPS Writing.

With the structure in place, principals each chose one teacher to represent their school and to spend a full year working on the project. Some of the larger schools sent two teachers. This was done in order to have broad representation from all schools in the network, as well as to increase buy-in and to speed implementation by having a “champion” at each school who had been part of the process that created the writing program. Care was also taken to ensure that the teachers chosen represented every grade level since the project encompassed every student at every school, from 3-year-old preschoolers to eighth graders.

The CAPS Writing team of teachers, CLEF representatives and Center faculty met for each session on Concordia’s campus, approximately once every three weeks for a full year. In all, they met twelve times during the 2017-2018 school year, for two hours or more, for a total of 32 hours. It was at these meetings that the collaborative plan of study was written. The CAPS Administrative team met before each meeting to prepare an agenda and establish specific goals for the session. They also debriefed after each meeting to ensure that the project stayed on track. The teachers brought ideas, energy, enthusiasm, and wisdom to the process, ensuring that the materials being created would be appropriate for use in actual Lutheran-school classrooms.

By the end of the 2017-2018 school year the project was mostly complete, with the remaining work, connected to the common assessments, completed during the 2018-2019 school year. The CAPS Writing product includes a mission statement for writing, five overarching goals, essential questions for each goal, articulations for each goal at each grade-level, a performance task for each goal at each grade level, instructional activities for each goal at each grade level, and assessments with rubrics for each grade level. Together, this represents a comprehensive writing program that each Lutheran school can use to plan and implement their writing curriculum. It is flexible enough to be adapted at each school to fit with existing and school-specific academic programs, yet detailed enough to provide a clear map at every grade level, with a suite of assessments to measure progress toward the goals (See Fig 1 for the CAPS Writing overview).

In addition to producing a roadmap for Lutheran schools to follow for writing instruction, the process itself was excellent professional development for all teachers involved. The twenty teachers who met every few weeks to work on the project continually reflected on their own practice. Teachers were taken out

of their comfort zones. As the team worked to define goals or plan challenging yet grade-level-appropriate performance tasks, there was not always consensus. Difficult questions were raised. Are some schools more academically “advanced” than others? Can expectations be equal across a large and diverse network of schools, many of which are very different from one another in terms of size, student body, or teacher expertise? Real questions about teachers’ belief systems were tested. For example, is it a realistic goal for Kindergarten students to write a paragraph? Is a five-paragraph essay the best way to assess writing ability at the sixth-grade level? Should typing skills be taught? Should cursive writing be included? Strongly-held opinions clashed in this arena of ideas, but a common document did emerge through a careful process of conversation, collaboration and compromise.

The process the team followed in writing the CAPS Writing plan was based on the Understanding by Design (UbD) work of Wiggins and McTighe (2011). It began by looking at what teachers wanted their students to be able to do by the time they graduated from their schools in terms of writing skills, and worked backwards from there. After much discussion and countless revisions (which continued even after the team had moved on to other tasks), they established the CAPS Writing Mission: “Develop and empower a culture of confident, lifelong writers who use the tools of writing to articulate their thinking and experience.” From here, the group consulted existing state, national, and international writing plans of study, the Common Core Standards and school-specific goals. They then moved on to the creation of CAPS-specific goals. The teachers chose five overarching ideas:

1. Learning to Write
2. Writing to Learn
3. Critical Analysis
4. Research and Digital Tools
5. Inspiration

The CAPS Writing team agreed that all the elements that they hoped their students would learn as writers could be found within these five goals.

As the work went on, the question arose of why we were establishing goals and carefully planning what each goal would look like at each grade level. This has been done before so why are we re-inventing the wheel? Could we not just adopt Common Core? These were valid questions. The consensus emerged that it was a much richer experience to have this group of talented, creative teachers take a fresh look at writing instruction, and form their own experiential points of view using the backwards-design framework. At the end of the process, the team compiled an alignment chart showing that CAPS Writing did, in fact, align with

Common Core and it also went beyond in some ways that were very important. CAPS Writing wove Christian faith and values into the plan through tailored activities, assessments and inspiration. Research-based academic best practice was the foundation and there were spaces to highlight our Christian identity. For example, when middle schoolers worked on Critical Analysis writing skills, one instructional activity was finding Christian allegory in a text such as C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. In a writing common assessment students were prompted to write a narrative essay re-telling a favorite Bible story. While the skills look familiar to anyone with experience in writing instruction, the Lutheran identity is woven into the fabric of CAPS Writing.

Another way in which CAPS Writing breaks new ground is in the explicit inclusion of "Inspiration" as a goal. Teachers felt strongly that their students should be well-read and should leave school with the practice of taking inspiration from writers and texts of all types, and that the inspiring works of others should guide their students' writing. Teachers told stories of their own inspiration drawn from other writers, and decided that they need to teach students to read and write for reasons that go beyond learning the format of a five-paragraph essay or the proper placement of a comma in a compound-complex sentence. The team wanted students to savor the beauty of language and to strive to produce writing that will, in turn, inspire others.

CAPS Writing produced a clear guide for schools to use as a roadmap for writing, including all elements of curriculum, instruction and assessment. The teachers who participated saw the benefits and began to use the materials in their own classrooms. However, the question now became how to be sure that the plan was implemented in all the schools. So many well-written resources and well-intentioned initiatives gather dust in bookrooms or on office shelves in schools everywhere. . The team knew that to keep this from happening to CAPS Writing, teachers would need support and guidance. Fortunately, there was a structure in place to provide not only an overview but ongoing professional development throughout the year. Another element of the CLEF/CUC partnership is the Innovative Teacher Institute (ITI), in which every teacher from every Chicagoland Lutheran school attends five two-hour professional development workshops each school year. These workshops, held on the CUC campus from 5-7 pm, were the venue for introducing CAPS Writing to all the teachers. For over a year, teachers had multiple sessions introducing them to the framework, training them how to implement it, giving them model lessons at their grade level, and allowing them to learn through hands-on exercises followed by guided group discussions. Rather than just being told about the initiative, teachers were being shown how to use it and own it. Finally, because it is a collaborative project, teachers' feedback and comments at these sessions were used to update and further edit the

CAPS Writing materials, giving every teacher ownership while simultaneously improving the product, based on the feedback of invested, working teachers.

During the 2017-2018 school year, CAPS Writing was created, and in January 2018, teachers were given professional development in using the work-in-progress at the ITI sessions. With their feedback, the plan was finalized in time for formal implementation in the 2018-2019 school year. Throughout this year, more workshops were conducted to make sure that every teacher felt comfortable implementing CAPS Writing. This support was further reinforced by the Instructional Coaches at each school providing in-classroom support and guidance. By winter, the CAPS Writing Common Assessments were ready, and all the network schools participated in the experience of administering them. Through this process—as well as through the ITI workshops where sample student papers were graded collaboratively and the rubrics were refined—teachers could really see the connection between the writing goals and activities and what the students were able to produce. Moving forward, all students will be assessed three times each year with the same Common Assessments being used across the CLEF network. The results will enable teachers to better inform instruction and to look more deeply into the resources. On a final and very exciting note, all CAPS materials were recently uploaded onto a platform called Chalk, which all schools can access. Plans are now in place for the grass-roots sharing of additional resources through Chalk to become a routine part of collaboration at CLEF schools.

While the production and implementation of CAPS Writing was a success in that many teachers improved their writing instruction and students, consequently, are still improving their writing, this is not the end of the CAPS story. Following a similar process in the summer and fall of 2018 a group of teachers gathered to prepare CAPS Reading, a process structured similarly to CAPS Writing. There is a danger in education of having too many new initiatives at once, so while the plan is ready to go, it will not be implemented until next year, when teachers are all comfortable with CAPS Writing and have the bandwidth to take on a new project. Fortunately, part of the CAPS Reading design was to integrate with CAPS Writing so that it could smoothly complement work already being done. Finally, there is a group that worked during the 2018-2019 school year to write a third CAPS Plan: CAPS Innovative Framework for Learning (IFfL), which builds on elements from Project-Based Learning, Problem-Based Learning, Individualized Learning and 21st Century Skills Learning, and articulates a unique approach to learning in the CLEF network schools.

In summary, CAPS projects engaged teachers by putting them at the center of the creative process, using their expertise and their knowledge of their students and their schools to produce valuable instructional materials that will be relevant

and applicable to their classrooms. It sets high expectations for student learning and further articulates the values and aspirations of CLEF schools. It is the hope that both the materials that were produced, as well as the process by which they were created could one day become resources that are shared widely beyond our CLEF schools. *LEJ*

Appendix

Figure 1:



PATHWAYS TO EXCELLENCE FOR TEACHERS

Collaboratively Articulated Plan of Study (CAPS Writing)

CAPS Writing Mission: Develop and empower a culture of confident, lifelong writers who use the tools of writing to articulate their thinking and experience.

Established Goal #1 Learning to Write: Understand and learn to use the writing process with the goal of publishing and/or presenting for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Essential Questions:

- How do I define the writing process?
- Why and when do I use the writing process?
- How do I know my writing is ready for my audience?
- Why am I writing? For whom?

Established Goal #2 Writing to Learn: Use writing to clarify thinking, present knowledge and demonstrate learning through varied time frames and across a range of tasks, purposes and audiences.

Essential Questions:

- How does writing help me understand and reflect on the world around me?
- How can writing help me learn academic content across the curriculum?
- What does it mean to have stamina?

Established Goal #3 Critical Analysis: Develop an ability to respond, support, and critique across content areas and genres.

Essential Questions:

- What is the difference between a thoughtful and thoughtless critique?
- How do I know I have enough information to respond to a prompt thoroughly?

Established Goal #4 Research and Digital Tools: Incorporate digital tools to research, collaborate, produce and publish multiple forms of text.

Essential Questions:

- How can digital tools support my writing?
- How can digital tools support collaboration?
- How can digital tools change how we think and write?

Established Goal #5 Inspiration: Incorporate inspiration and learn from peers' work, available print, digital texts and cross-curricular reading opportunities to support writing efforts.

Essential Questions:

- What do other writers do?
- What does it mean to be inspired by others' writing?
- How can others' writing make me a better writer?

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Going for the Gold: CLEF Medallion Program Development

By Samantha Lazich and Don Hendricks

Chicago Land Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF) and Concordia University Chicago (CUC) have a long history of collaboration based on their common faith and similar missions. The entity that has grown into the CLEF of today is deeply rooted in service to the Lutheran schools in the city of Chicago and continues to thrive through growing initiatives. In keeping with its mission, CLEF remains dedicated to efforts to empower urban Lutheran schools to deliver innovative, high-quality, Christian values-based education in safe, supportive environments. As a partner in this endeavor, CUC continues its historic commitment to Lutheran schools generally, and to increasing the viability and visibility of the schools supported by CLEF. This partnership has grown out of a common mission and a shared vision for urban Lutheran schools. Aiming to drive their mission even further, the Board of Directors of CLEF made the decision to engage in an intensive strategic-planning process. As a result of this process, five initiatives were born, subsequently launching new efforts to empower the Lutheran schools in Chicago. Two initiatives (1) Improve the quality of Lutheran Education in Chicago and (2) Foster leadership and professional development in the Chicago Lutheran schools resulted in the development of the Pathways to Excellence program. Funded by a generous donor, CLEF created the Pathways to Excellence program as the venue to address both initiatives. This program seeking to improve the quality of Lutheran education is the largest investment in the history of the foundation. As a result, the CLEF-CUC partnership has designed and delivered professional programming for Lutheran principals and teachers in Chicago.

The Pathways to Excellence program has focused efforts on the professional leadership skills of school leaders for principals, and on teaching and learning for teachers. The Board of Directors of CLEF respects the strong correlation between the success of a school and the strength of the leadership and instruction at the school level (Marzano et al, 2005). As part of Pathways to Excellence, programming was designed specifically to support the development of urban Lutheran school leaders and teachers.

Strengthening personal and professional leadership skills and creating strategic plans were at the cornerstone of this work. Great emphasis was placed on the creation of the strategic plan (Bryson, 1988). Communication to stakeholders, action steps for implementation, and continued revisions of respective plans furthered the work in the program. In these efforts, the logical next step in supporting schools to grow and improve, was the creation of the CLEF Medallion program.

The Medallion Program

CLEF and CUC joined forces along with select school principals and consultants from the private and public sector to launch The Medallion Program. A clear vision of quality and innovative Lutheran education was born through this endeavor. Historically, Lutheran schools excel in and are strong models of Christian education. As such, it was important to CLEF to build on this strength and provide a roadmap to support schools in achieving academic excellence as well. Revising outdated perspectives as to the capacity in which these schools could achieve academic excellence was a driving principle of the Medallion program. Essentially, schools should not have to lose one in order to gain the other. Yet, there must be a clear understanding that an achievement of this nature is a rather complex task. Keeping Christian values and teaching while providing academic excellence is at the heart of the Medallion program.

The Medallion Program articulates levels of excellence for the Lutheran schools in the city of Chicago. Levels of excellence are organized by criteria on a continuum in which schools can advance. The continuum provides a roadmap for schools as they strive toward recognition as distinguished hubs of Christian education, academic excellence, and innovation. In addition to providing this clearly-articulated vision, the program has the capacity to assist schools and CLEF in identifying gaps on the roadmap leading to excellence. This leads schools and CLEF in prioritizing and closing those gaps.

Through the Medallion Program, schools can easily identify strengths, as well as areas in need of greater and focused attention. It also provides CLEF a better understanding of how to support the schools they serve. In addition, the continuum provides an opportunity to review school progress over time. Insights such as common strengths or weaknesses across all Lutheran schools in Chicago will provide CLEF key information to support the development of programming for school leaders, teachers and board members as well as the funding for school needs. Building on and continuing the efforts to grow and improve the Lutheran schools, the Medallion Program allows both the schools and CLEF to make targeted choices in utilizing the support and resources of the foundation.

Program Development

As inspired by CLEF's vision, the goal of the Medallion Program is to have a formalized, clearly-articulated definition of academic excellence in a Christian environment. The program will also serve as a tool to measure sustainability and success of CLEF schools. Based on the work and outcomes of the Pathways to Excellence Program for principals and teachers, the Medallion Program integrates principles of excellence with subject-matter experts and complementary systems of school assessments.

The development of the Medallion program is a collaborative and reflective process. Over the course of two years, the Medallion team, representative of CLEF, CUC, private and public sector consultants, subject-matter experts and Lutheran school principals, came together to begin the process. It was important to the team to explore similar existing programs. Many of the schools work in compliance with guidelines set by the Illinois State Board of Education and other accrediting bodies.

Information related to school effectiveness was gathered. The current needs of individual schools was compiled. The team administered a survey to current school leaders. Finally, the team reached out to various subject-matter experts and studied successful models of private-school education outside of the Chicago area. This collection of information was used to launch the design of the Medallion Program.

The Medallion Program is designed to provide schools with critical data and a roadmap to track a school's progress in the following four categories utilized to define a high-quality, energized and innovative Christian School: (1) School Leadership and Sustainability (2) Student Learning and Academic Excellence (3) School Environment and Wellbeing and (4) School Culture. Each of the four categories has specific criteria that the school can use to assess its overall performance and level of excellence in the category. Levels of performance are then rated as: (1) Unsatisfactory (2) Satisfactory (3) Thriving and (4) Distinguished.

The criteria in each category are arranged in a rubric, which is designed to allow each school to identify its position on the continuum of excellence. The Medallion Program is designed to support principals and school leaders to address school challenges and advance along the continuum of excellence toward the "Distinguished" level. Additionally, CLEF is provided with feedback on individual schools and communities to address professional development and other resource needs. The entire process was constructed within the partnership between CLEF and the CUC Center for Literacy and with a focus on strategies to best utilize resources.

Categories of Excellence

The category of School Leadership and Sustainability focuses on criteria related to school leadership and school-board matters. Specific criteria related to this category include School Board Culture and Climate, Board Policy and Evaluation, Board Engagement and Retention, Board Structure and Succession, School Leader and Board Communication, Board Fiduciary Responsibility, Faculty and Non-Teaching-Staff Evaluations and Principal Evaluation.

Factors related to school boards are also explored in this category. A highlight of this section is the comprehensive look at school-board structure, and the governance and involvement of a board. As such, a distinguished board might exhibit high levels of engagement, meet or exceed viable goals, and establish and fulfill committee-membership responsibilities. Successes in this category are likely to remove common issues facing school boards, so that low member turnover or long-term fulfillment of board positions are likely results. Factors related to school leadership are also addressed in this first category of excellence. Highlighted is the role of personnel evaluation for school leaders, teachers and support staff. Moving through the continuum in this area brings the typical evaluation process used in schools to a more collaborative learning process with goal setting and ample opportunities for feedback related to the growth of school professionals.

The second category of The Medallion Program is related to Student Learning and Academic Excellence. This category is marked by criteria related to teaching and learning. Included are Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Innovation, and Student Engagement. Due to the density of these criteria, each one is broken down further, to not only fully capture these crucial components related to student learning and academic excellence, but to also provide a roadmap to bring schools to a 21st-century vision of teaching and learning. Curriculum is further distinguished between written and applied curriculum. Written curriculum ensures schools have clearly defined learning goals per grade level and subject, and are standards based in vertical and horizontal alignment among classrooms and grade levels. Applied curriculum examines whether students' individual curricular needs are met at appropriate levels, and collectively supported through the instructional leaders within the school. The Innovation component of the Student Learning and Academic Excellence category echoes CLEF's desire and commitment to support schools in achieving a 21st-century approach to teaching and learning. These criteria move past traditional advancement programs in that they capture classroom practices aligned with authentic or real-world learning experiences.

School Environment and Wellbeing is the third category of The Medallion Program. This category addresses Building and Grounds, Inside

School Appearance, Safety and Security Measures, Health/Life Safety, Physical Health/Nutrition Education, Counseling/Nursing Services, and Staff Wellness. Components related to safety and aesthetics of the school are mapped out to lead schools to the implementation of security measures, protocols and improvement plans to continue to keep the Lutheran schools in Chicago operating safely. In addition to the physical structure of the school, this program views the wellness of those inside the building as a critical component of the school environment. Through the Medallion Program, making a commitment to wellness would lead schools to implement programming, training opportunities for staff, and to provide resources to support the wellness of the school community.

The final category of the Medallion Program is School Culture. Included in this category are Principles, Values and Faith Formation, School-Community Engagement and a Culture of Continuous Improvement. Strong Christian principles and values are at the heart of the School Culture category. While each school may have a different set of principles or values, the Medallion program provides structure to ensure school communities are representative of the Christian faith, modeled internally within the school community, as well as in how members of the school community relate to individuals and organizations beyond the four walls of the school.

Levels of Excellence

All categories and subsequent criteria are evaluated as *Unsatisfactory*, *Satisfactory*, *Thriving*, or *Distinguished*. The intent of the Medallion Program is for each Lutheran School to evaluate itself and address criteria in relationship to the “*Distinguished*” category. This is done through the utilization of a self-assessment process followed by an improvement plan aiming to assist schools in understanding the goal of how to achieve excellence in all areas of school operations. The self-assessment process gives schools the chance to look at leadership skills and academic culture and assess themselves in order to develop a plan of improvement to move from “*Satisfactory*” to “*Thriving*” to “*Distinguished*.” Furthermore, the mechanism to move schools toward achieving Medallion status is CLEF’s Pathways to Excellence program, which provides the schools the necessary expertise and resources to allow schools to attain the Medallion status.

It is important to CLEF to support school leaders, teachers and students in achieving excellence. Through Pathways-to-Excellence professional-development sessions, school leaders became familiar with the Medallion rubric. Subject-matter experts in each of the four categories provided and presented information related to each respective content area. Principals then had the opportunity to ask questions and provide the Medallion team with feedback. This furthered CLEF’s commitment to keeping a collaborative and reflective process in place.

Once principals had a greater sense of the criteria for each category, they were asked to complete a self-study survey. Individual principals evaluated the current status of their schools using a self-assessment tool for each of the four categories. Additionally, to ensure the accurate assessment of the Medallion criteria, each school requested that a school survey be completed by parents, staff, and community members regarding perceptions of success in the school. The survey addressed stakeholders' points of view on what is important, what the school is doing well, and what the school needs to address. Results were compiled for individual schools and on a network-wide basis for CLEF. The results of the survey were presented to the individual Lutheran School Boards to be analyzed and discussed to inform a plan of action to address the issues that need improvement. The role of CLEF in supporting this process will be to provide any needed resources to the schools to address the issues identified for improvement.

Moving Forward in Excellence

Collaboration between CLEF staff, CUC representatives, and individual CLEF schools will continue as the Medallion program team rolls out the application and evaluation process. Efforts to ensure that school boards and leaders are well informed will continue. CLEF views the voice of all stakeholders as an integral part of the development process. The roll-out of the Medallion program is evidence of the strong community supporting efforts to revitalize Lutheran schools as distinguished hubs of academic excellence and innovation. With pride, the CLEF Medallion program will recognize outstanding work in educating the children in Chicago

The Medallion Program exemplifies CLEF's commitment to empowering urban Lutheran schools to deliver innovative, high-quality, Christian values-based education in safe, supportive environments. With this roadmap to excellence clearly defined and organized, the Lutheran schools in the city of Chicago, along with their partner CLEF, now have the mechanisms in place to continue the path to excellence. As a longtime partner, CUC will continue to share the university's expertise and capacity to support CLEF, and the schools they serve to reach new levels of excellence and innovation while remaining outstanding providers of Lutheran education and values. **LEJ**

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Portrait of Professional Growth: Reflections from a Fifth-Sixth Grade Science Teacher

By Della Weaver

It is through the role of literacy coaching that I have come to know the participant interviewed for this article. This teacher's warmth and friendliness is evident as soon as you enter her classroom. Occasionally, a soft, but firm reprimand wafts through the room when a student is persistently off-task, disruptive, or shows a confrontational attitude. After working with this teacher as a literacy coach for the past four years, I felt it incumbent upon me to understand and interpret her story in a way that would enable the reader to make a connection with her personality, character, intrigue with science, and with teaching science, especially to middle-grade students.

The participant has made several transitions in her tenure as an elementary schoolteacher. Each transition has provided her with valuable insight about teaching, pedagogy and learning as she resolves to touch the lives of her students. However, her tenure does not include a certification in science. Initially, she taught special education in a special day school setting for five years. After that, she taught special education in a public school setting for fifteen years. Then she served students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in a Lutheran school setting. When a position became available in the PreK-Kindergarten program at this Lutheran school, she was offered and accepted the position. Now, for the past three years, she is staffed at the school as the fifth and sixth grade teacher for English language arts, health, Christian education, and the departmental science teacher for 3rd-8th grades.

Before seeking to interview this practicing teacher, I shared the goal of the work and received verbal permission for her participation. The interviews were carried out over a three-day period. The first session lasted approximately thirty minutes. The second session lasted over thirty minutes and the final session lasted almost an hour. I shared the videotapes with the teacher. In order to ensure privacy, original copies shall be destroyed.

These open-ended questions framed this inquiry:

1. What is your perception of the role that background and education play in classroom practice?

2. How do you perceive experiences with teaching science to middle school students?

Portraiture Methodology

Portraiture supports data collections best captured with interviews as described by researchers such as Merriam (1998), and Creswell (2007). Cope, Jones, and Hendricks (2014) state that portraiture enables the lived experiences of real people in real settings to be illuminated through the ‘painting’ of their stories. Brooks (2017) believes portraiture research takes into consideration the social and cultural context and perspectives of the people with whom the researcher is collaborating. Then, “research portraits” are shaped through dialogue between the researcher and the participant in order to capture an “authentic” voice through the researcher’s “articulation.” According to Brooks (2017), portraiture methodology calls for close attention to context because it is an important tool in the interpretation of meaning. Research portraits are shaped through dialogue between the researcher and the participant, a focus on history and context, and on participant observation. Further, Brooks (2017) states that portraiture methodology makes a connection between the participant’s “life history, biography, and fieldwork.” (p. 2235). As suggested by Brooks, I used theory to help me think “with” the data. In striving to achieve the purpose of this article, I will use the methodological framework from the perspectives of the above researchers.

Participant

One practicing middle school teacher participated in this exploration. The teacher’s tenure is 25 years. Presently, the teacher is staffed as a homeroom teacher for middle-school language arts, health and Christian education, and the departmental science teacher for grades 3 through 8.

Data Analysis Procedure

Dilley (2004) surmises that interviewing in qualitative methods involves constant attention to the “heard data” in order to understand the meaning that the participants make through their interaction with the context of the phenomena. The process of data analysis in qualitative research is not an isolated process, but is interrelated and can be completed simultaneously with data collection and writing of results (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). The first step in the procedure for data reduction is data management (Creswell & Merriam, 1998). During this step, data are organized for analysis and reflected upon in order to glean an understanding of the categories. Category construction is crucial to qualitative data analysis (Mayan, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2010). At this stage of analysis, Creswell (2007) states the data are coded in order to begin describing, classifying, and interpreting the findings.

Here, the data can undergo what Creswell (2007) refers to as “winnowing” because not all information collected has the same importance to the study. The goal of winnowing is to develop a “short list of tentative codes that match text segments, regardless of the length of the database” (p. 152). Merriam’s (1998) earlier research supports Creswell’s position that “the fewer the categories, the greater the level of abstraction, and the greater ease with which you can communicate your findings to others. A large number of categories is likely to reflect an analysis too lodged in concrete description” (p. 185). After coding the information, the researcher reduces and combines the categories into themes that are used to write the results. To accomplish the task of data analysis relevant to developing themes, I followed the procedures outlined by the researchers above.

Validity in Qualitative Methods

To determine whether the results of this work relate to other contexts and are consistent in other contexts, I sought to enhance its validity. Within interpretative research, validation is “a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 205). According to Creswell (2007), as well as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), ethical validation means that all research agendas must question their underlying moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and the equitable treatment of diverse voices that experience a phenomenon while also providing practical answers to questions. Since the validity of this work focused on data obtained from interviews, my validation concerns revolved around credible reporting of the participant’s narrative.

Reliability in Qualitative Methods

Reliability pertains to how consistent and trustworthy research findings are construed to be. Reliability is problematic when applied to qualitative research methods because human behavior is dynamic, ever-changing, and cannot be isolated (Merriam, 1998). However, despite the controversy over the issue of reliability relevant to qualitative study, researchers in this field have offered several techniques to ensure the dependability of results in their studies. Among these techniques are *investigator’s position, triangulation, and audit trail*.

Findings and Discussion

Speaking of Background and Educational Experiences

The participant began with sharing the joy of living directly across the street from a large park. Two of her most memorable experiences during childhood were going to the park and roller skating. Going to the park was memorable because “*There was horseback riding in the summer. I was excited and scared of horseback riding. I was also fascinated by the stories the keeper and trainer in charge of the particular horse I rode would tell. He would talk about the horse’s care, habits and personality. He was responsible and caring.*” She spent most of her summer

days “*roaming through the park with friends looking at nature,*” and attributes this experience with helping to develop her love of science today.

This participant attributed her Catholic elementary and high school education with providing “*the foundational skills I needed to succeed in life.*” Experience in elementary school was described as strict because, “*The nuns had tight discipline. They wore habits at this time. The demeanor of some of them was very stern and they were firm. They were committed and dedicated to our education. We were taught the principles of Christian Education. The curriculum required us to attend Mass on Sundays. It was mandatory.*”

Recalling her experience at an all girls’ high school, the participant stated, “*Yes, high school had turbulence, but it was not tragic. The faculty were mainly lay teachers in high school, rather than nuns. Each of the teachers made a personal investment in my future. They were always willing to give you a chance. They were always willing to work with you if you didn’t understand something. They didn’t leave you just hanging. I guess seeing all the types of examples of how people help and how people work together helped me.*” Her view of her high school teachers’ commitment and dedication was summed up as “*Like it takes a village to raise the whole child. They never made fun of you. They never belittled or ridiculed you. But, they were stern. They were firm. They instilled a mindset of ‘Don’t give up’ and taught the students important life skills that are still appropriate and valuable in my outlook on life today.*” She credited her high school teachers with instilling in her the mantra “*I tried*” instead of the more negative and common “*I can’t.*” The participant credited her high school teachers for shaping her attitude of respect, caring, humbleness and integrity as she explained “*Yes, we all had problems, but we were taught how to show kindness, and humbleness. Our teachers took time to help and encourage every student and they had wisdom. Often I was asked, ‘How can I help you?’ I felt that the teachers always wanted to include me in decision-making when I was trying to solve a problem. The end result, I came out to be a beautiful person because of that.*”

It was during high school that this participant made the choice to become an elementary school teacher. She said that her decision was largely because of how her high school teachers worked with the students. This participant continued, “*There were high expectations for scholastic excellence, and respect among the teachers toward each other and the students. When I was in Catholic school, all the teachers worked together to ensure that the kids learned.*”

Undergraduate education was a time of reflection. “*Well, I started my college career at Harold Washington because I was kind of scared of being on my own.* While in the junior college setting, she took a Social Science class with a teacher she described as one who “*spoke in parables, was very intelligent, and told a joke before his lesson to loosen us up. He knew a lot about politics and inspired young people to*

get involved and listen to what was going on in their city. He talked about the issues of the day.” That Social Studies teacher further influenced the decision to become an elementary school teacher.

The participant enrolled in a four-year institution and reflected on a teaching career, the rigor of a dual major, and support. *“Attending a four-year institution really opened my eyes to a career in education, but the workload was heavy. I often talked to the professors about my coursework and sought their help.”* Although undergraduate support was available, the participant felt *“My challenges were still hard because of my dual major of regular and special education. There was so much to learn and to complete. The practicum was difficult because most of the time I felt on my own to complete so much work.”*

Although the level of support in undergraduate school was substantially lower than it was in high school, it did contribute to increased learning because the participant explained *“It helped me to become an observer who looked at how the professors taught and interacted with us as students in order to glean some idea about delivering instruction.”*

This is Personal: Teaching Middle School Science

Despite the participant’s love for science, the first experience with actually teaching science came after a twenty-year tenure in public education through a position in a summer school S.T.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) program for primary students.

In order to deliver science instruction, the participant explained *“You need professional development. You need the endorsements to stay up with what’s going on in science. Science is evolving every day. So, in order for me to stay on top of it, I need to be doing research in order to help myself. There are three disciplines in science. They’re life, earth and physical. I need to know how to deliver the lesson. Whatever I’m doing, I need the background information.”*

Experiences with teaching are explained as *“I have been in departmental, this is the third year. In terms of working with departmental, I’m still learning. I need to know how to make sure that they understand the concepts of science. I have my ups. I have my downs. As a teacher, everything is not going to be perfect. You have those teachable moments when everybody is learning. Everybody is cooperating.”* In expressing the desire to expand the students’ understanding the participant said, *“As a science teacher, I have to make myself aware of what’s happening globally, not just in the community. I need to invest. Talk about scientists. Find people in the sciences to come in to talk to the students. It takes time. It takes research. It takes scheduling. Just being a science (sic) teacher is challenging. Coming to work knowing you have a purpose.”*

Perception of assessments was described as *“And, that’s a challenge because sometimes kids will tell you that they know it and they don’t when you give them*

the test. Sometimes kids cheat. Sometimes they say ‘Well, I didn’t study. I just kind of guessed’. But, you want them to know.”

Emergent Themes

Two themes emerged from the participant’s descriptions and explanations of her background and educational experiences, and perceptions with teaching science to middle school students. Based on the interview data, I identified the following two themes:

1. Effect of Teacher’s Social-Emotional Learning on Practice
2. Teacher’s Awareness of Efficacy

The participant’s voice provided the kind of “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) of lived experiences with background and educational experiences and teaching middle grade science that Geertz (1973) states are needed to capture and interpret the significance of cultural milieu.

The theme emerging from the participant’s responses about background and educational experiences focused on the social-emotional skills associated with character development; i.e. caring, kindness, respect, responsibility, and integrity. Salovey and Sluyter (1997), state that understanding emotional development is useful to educators. These researchers describe emotional development as a necessary intelligence that guides our ability to monitor and discriminate among our own as well as others’ feelings and emotions. Then this information is used to make reasonable choices in thought processes and actions. This participant believed that her elementary and high school teachers mentored her social-emotional development.

The theme that emerged from this teacher’s perception of teaching science to middle school students was efficacy. Glackin and Hohenstein (2018) state that researchers traditionally use quantitative methodology to investigate teacher efficacy, but this theory could be studied more effectively through triangulation. However, these two researchers’ meta-analysis argues that qualitative data sources might be able to capture a more comprehensive picture of teacher efficacy. Self-efficacy is framed in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), and defined as the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life (Bandura, 2001).

According to Bandura (2001), intentionality and forethought are components of direct personal agency, which help us to operate within a broad network of socio-structural influences. That is, people are producers and products of the social systems (Bandura, 2001) they experience. Classrooms are examples of sociocultural constructs. Therefore, teachers are producers as well as products of social systems.

Conclusion

Although this one practicing teacher did not frame the descriptions and explanations of lived experiences with background and education as social-emotional development, or perceptions of experiences with teaching middle grade science as efficacy, the stories evolved as such. The participant's stories demonstrated that a teacher can actively engage in the conversation on teaching and learning from the perspective of the influence that her background and educational experiences have on practice. The participant's stories also demonstrated awareness of and reflections on self-efficacy. **LEJ**

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Instructional Coaching: Reflective Relationships between Theory and Practice

By Kari Pawl

“**E**xperience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play.” These words by philosopher Immanuel Kant explain the connection between theory and practice. In other words, though practitioners may implement strategies and are limited in their ability to provide a researched-based rationale or theory to justify their instructional decisions, researchers without practical-application experience are ineffectual. Basically, without the strong practice-to-theory connection, teachers play with what they know without knowing why they are actually teaching the concepts. By the same token, researchers without a theory-to-practice connection have no strong basis for their theory. In order to enhance the learning of both practitioners and their students, a coach or mentor can provide educators with the information they need to understand what they are planning and teaching why they are planning and teaching.

The role of an instructional coach has been defined in different ways. Although there is not a universal definition, common attributes of coaching described by Wolpert-Gawron (2016) include the following: mentoring, facilitating professional development, researching and curating, publicizing, supporting, being a change agent and solution finder. This article is a reflective piece that will explain how a Center for Literacy instructional coach guided and supported Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF) teachers and administrators to understand and build a repertoire of strategies and to effectively increase their knowledge about literacy instructional practices.

Parallels of Coaching and Professional Development

Sharon Walpole and Michael McKenna (2015) wrote a chapter in the book, *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction* titled “Best Practices for Improving Literacy Instruction in Schools”. They argue, “The key to effective PD (professional development) is the specificity of its target. Unless PD is designed for immediate application in instruction, with particular students and instructional materials in mind, it will not work” (p. 415). The goal is to provide professional development that brings about changes in instructional practices. Teacher input and participation are essential as this cultivates a purpose for learning the information

so that it can be implemented with students.

Therefore, it is the instructional coach's responsibility to motivate teachers to become active participants in the learning process rather than passive receivers of information. A primary goal in coaching is to provide high-quality professional development that leads to increased teacher knowledge, which then results in improved instruction. Teachers internalize the information, plan how they will use the strategy, scaffold instruction and engage the students in learning the concepts. The following are the experiences of the author's literacy-coaching site visits to explain how mentoring and support were provided to meet the teachers' learning needs, which would enhance their teaching and the quality of their interactions with students.

Coaching Visits

My role as an instructional coach was multifaceted and carefully planned. Getting to know the teachers was a top priority and this was accomplished in different ways at each of the schools I served. Introductions were conducted via a tour of the school and classrooms, which allowed for brief exchanges or invitations to join staff meetings, which led to instantly feeling part of the team. Another effective approach was scheduling time to meet with each teacher for approximately 20-30 minutes to talk about successes and challenges, and to set goals for the year. Each one of these situations provided opportunities for coaches to put faces with names and actions to plans. Dedicating time for these important initial meetings paved the road for a productive working partnership. Establishing a community of learners was essential in developing a productive learning environment, which included dedicating time for building trusting relationships.

With the guidance of school administrators, ample time was devoted for classroom observations. This allowed me to know the teachers, students, and curriculum better. Observations were generally followed with debriefing conversations that were strategically scheduled on the same day to allow time for authentic feedback, decision-making, and goal-setting. My time was also spent in the classroom interacting with students, administering assessments, modeling lessons, and co-teaching new units of study. For example, I modeled differentiated guided reading lessons in kindergarten, facilitated interactive word-study lessons in fourth grade and demonstrated how to use critical thinking skills when reading informational texts with six, seventh, and eighth graders.

As an instructional coach, I also dedicated time to research resources and create units of study that aligned with the curricular goals of the schools. And, at the end of each day, I would reflect on the learning that transpired and record insights on student learning, teacher questions, and my favorite, plan for next

steps. Just as teachers differentiate instruction for their students, literacy coaches do the same for teachers. A “one size fits all” approach for coaching does not exist, especially in regard to facilitating professional development. During each school visit, I found myself providing on-the-spot professional development for teachers at different grade levels. The topics and approaches to instruction were carefully designed to meet each teacher’s needs.

Personal Experiences

My extensive experience as a reading specialist has prepared me for my work as a literacy coach. A study conducted by Bean, Swan and Knaub (2003) looked at characteristics of exemplary reading specialists and the leadership roles they assumed. Their study revealed the following characteristics of an ideal reading specialist:

- Teaching abilities
- Knowledge of reading instruction
- Sensitivity to children with reading difficulties
- Knowledge of assessments
- Ability and willingness to fill an advocacy role
- Ability to work with adults
- Knowledge of reading research
- Lifelong learners
- Ability to provide professional development
- Ability to articulate reading philosophy
- Energy (p. 10).

The Concordia University Chicago Center for Literacy provided me with various opportunities to share my expertise with others. In fact, anyone who knows me would agree that reading is my passion, and the spark that ignites my endless desire to teach and learn. Gaining new knowledge and sharing this information with others is fulfilling, and assuming a coaching role with partnering schools is a natural way to do this.

My varied experiences as an educator have also allowed me to flexibly adopt the various roles that have come my way, including classroom teacher, reading specialist, literacy consultant, college professor and most recently, an added position as an instructional coach. It is this variety of experiences that has allowed me to get to know the teachers and determine the best ways to meet their needs.

Conclusion

Embarking on my coaching journey required crossing the infamous bridge. That is, the bridge between theory and practice. As a coinsurer of knowledge, researching theories and best practices come as second nature to me. Discovering

the viable connections between what in research works and how these practices are applied in the classroom coupled with their impact on student achievement remains at the forefront of my mind. I always have the question on my mind, is this going to work? This question appears in my teaching of graduate students, working on doctoral committees, and serving as a coach in the CLEF schools.

The following list and acronym tells of the many lessons learned through the experiences as an instructional coach for the teachers as they worked to turn theory into practice and to build practice that could become strong theory.

- Collaborate with communities of learners
- Observe to enrich understanding of the culture, climate, and curriculum
- Advocate for best practices, resources, and using assessment to inform instruction
- Continue to provide support through trials and tribulations
- Harvest giving authentic feedback
- Innovative thinking
- Note-taking, using what happens today to plan for tomorrow
- Going the extra mile, whatever it takes.

In other words, it was the time for targeted observations, and meaningful collaboration, and developing trusting relationships that made this successful. Unconditional support through trials and tribulations helped the teachers understand how theory informs instruction. With CLEF funds, resources were purchased to enhance instruction and increase teacher capacity to differentiate instruction. Creating a shared vision and goals (short-term and long-term) for each teacher in their particular grade level impacted their planning and work with their students.

Lessons learned are plentiful and heartfelt. One of the most important lessons was being surrounded by passionate and dedicated professionals. The team was comprised amazing leaders in the Center for Literacy, the CLEF organization and coaching team, and of course the talented administrators and teachers at each of the Lutheran schools. But most importantly, I reflect on my faith and prayerful guidance in fulfilling the mission of serving the teachers and administrators. How they understood the information shared and grew as effective educators, as they enhanced their literacy instruction, demonstrates the important connection between theory and practice. It also demonstrates our shared vocation of answering God's calling to teach children, and for me, to teach their teachers. **LEJ**

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Lost Classroom, Lost Community: Catholic Schools' Importance in Urban America

by Brinig, M. & Garnett, N. S. (2014) Chicago, IL:
University of Chicago Press.

I first came across this book, *Lost Classroom, Lost Community: Catholic Schools' Importance in Urban America*, by Margaret Brinig and Nicole Stelle Garnett, as my colleague, Dara Soljaga, and I started a grant-funded project with Lutheran schools in the city of Chicago. The project centered on providing professional development for Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade teachers on language and literacy development. The book helped me understand the urgency of the work we were engaged in at the time.

The thesis of the book is clear and straightforward. Parochial schools in large urban centers have a deep and lasting impact on the community where they are present. This impact is greater than the sum of its parts: parochial schools tend to have higher graduation rates, better school attendance, better educational outcomes, and more content parents and students when compared to their local public schools. These impacts on individual students translate into communities that are more cohesive, have lower levels of violence and property crime, and are more stable (less transient). Brinig and Garnett argue that parochial schools in urban and working-class neighborhoods increase the community's social capital. This, they assert, is unique to communities with parochial schools present. "...Our findings suggest that urban Catholic elementary schools are one kind of neighborhood institution that acts organically to generate neighborhood social capital" (2014, p. 89).

The authors provide evidence of the thesis through statistical analysis of data from several cities in the United States. Chicago is central to their research and the authors closely analyze the impact Catholic school closings have had on several communities. The use of data is accessible and does not require the reader to be a statistician to understand it. At the most basic level, the authors compare communities in which Catholic schools once existed and were closed

with communities where parochial schools are still functioning. The findings support their thesis. Parochial schools have a positive impact on communities and function to increase social cohesion. Further, they argue, the data show that newly-opened charter schools do not replace the ability of parochial schools to create community social capital.

(For another review of the source that delves into the findings, this review of the book is helpful. <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/review-lost-classroom-lost-community>).

Here, I would like to revisit this important book in the context of our current work, which focuses solely on Lutheran schools in the City of Chicago. After the success of our first project with parochial schools, my colleague, Dara Soljaga, and I were asked to develop professional development and curricular alignment programming. This issue of the *LEJ* delves deeper into several of the areas we developed.

Like Catholic schools, Lutheran schools are striving to stay open and serve the communities in which they are located. Like Catholic schools, Lutheran schools were originally created to serve the religious and sociocultural needs of immigrant communities. As communities have changed, so has the school population. Like Catholic schools, Lutheran schools are connected to a parish; administratively, the two institutions, church and school, are connected. Lutheran and Catholic schools share financial struggles; they share a dependence on tuition and the contributions of outside donors. Unlike Catholic schools, where immigrants from Mexico, Central America, Eastern Europe and the Philippines are traditionally Catholic, most new immigrants do not have a historical connection to Lutheranism. Still, many recent immigrants enroll in Lutheran schools; likewise, many African Americans who do not identify as Lutherans attend these schools. This continued commitment to serving all students, regardless of religious affiliation is a testament to the vocation of the Lutheran school teachers and staff.

Finally, one critical factor Lutheran and Catholic schools share is a commitment to religious education. The authors articulate the importance of Christian education. They do not emphasize theological or dogmatic claims as the cause for parochial school success; rather, they frame their argument around the schools' desire to build "intentional communities, featuring high levels of trust among students, parents, teachers, and administrators" (Brinig & Garnett, 2014, p. 115). They further argue that parochial "school teachers and administrators saw their role as not just educational but formative" (Brinig & Garnett, p. 115).

The common history and their shared current challenges allow for much of the authors' analysis in *Lost Classroom, Lost Community* to be extended to the impact of Lutheran schools in the Chicagoland area. And, while Catholic

schools outnumber Lutheran schools, each school represents a community that can benefit from the fundamental support of parochial education. And each community suffers when one of these schools is closed. Lutheran schools occupy an important sociological space within working-class communities of the city. And their continued closing will have a negative effect on the social capital of the neighborhoods in which they strive to thrive.

In chapter 7, Brinig and Garnett present seven different explanations for how and why parochial schools are important institutions in the creation of social capital. All focus on the role of the schools in establishing meaningful community, increasing social engagement, creating social capital, and therefore, “suppress disorder and crime in neighborhoods where they are located” (2014, p. 121). The explanations rely on sociological theories to make their case. For example, the authors show in great detail how neighborhood networks in parochial schools explain greater amounts of social capital. They argue that changing policy on school choice in public institutions has left religious schools as the “neighborhood choice” for many parents. They write, parochial schools “generate social capital not (or perhaps not only) because they are educational institutions that connect parents but also because they are community institutions that connect neighbors. That is, they may generate community-specific social capital not because they are schools but because they are neighborhood institutions” (Brinig & Garnett, p. 131). Revisiting this book refocused my efforts on helping to create schools of excellence that focus on academic engagement and faith formation for all students. Parochial Lutheran schools in the city of Chicago are institutions of social cohesion. As the authors argue, they cannot be replaced by non-religious charter schools. Yes, these are beneficial to the students that attend these Lutheran schools (high graduation rates, greater academic proficiency, etc.); but more broadly, the schools are important institutions for the health and wellbeing of the city. The parochial Lutheran schools in Chicago benefit the wider community. **LEJ**

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Centering Teacher Vocation: Physical, Emotional and Intellectual Engagement

We often associate the term vocation with manual labor, or an activity that we enjoy but is different from our paid work. In the Lutheran tradition, the idea of vocation is more encompassing; it is our calling—it is what we do in the world to glorify God and be (flawed) examples of God’s grace. Vocation is deeply human – it is what gives us meaning and purpose. Vocation engages us physically, emotionally and intellectually. It is our calling, a calling from God himself.

Many people find vocation in teaching. Teaching is often framed as work done by caring, patient, selfless people; teachers don’t do it for the pay; teaching is physically exhausting. It is a labor of Love. All these things are true. But this is an incomplete picture of teaching and what teachers do. Teaching is also complex, ethically demanding and intellectually stimulating work. When the intellectually challenging aspect is omitted, teaching can be easily dismissed to be simply a job.

Recently, colleagues at Concordia University Chicago and I (Simeon) had the opportunity to work closely with Lutheran school teachers in Chicago. Our work focused on creating a scope-and-sequence of literacy goals for pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. It was the first-ever such effort to bring several independently-run schools under a common curricular umbrella. The goal of the effort was to create opportunities for teachers and schools to cooperate, share resources, and have a common basis from which to discuss academic excellence in their schools. The effort was not one of standardization, but rather of making explicit the common mission for academic excellence in faith-centered education.

Our approach to the work took the teachers’ vocation seriously. The process we engaged in privileged the experiences and voices of teachers. Our starting assumption was that teachers are experts in their field, and, when given the time and resources necessary, they can create meaningful and robust collaboratively-articulated plans of study for Lutheran schools.

The group of teachers gathered for this project were the intellectual foundation of the final product. Teachers were intellectually (and emotionally and physically) committed in our work together. The fullness of their dedication is evident in the final articulation of learning goals, activities and assessments they created.

The Lutheran definition of vocation is expansive and inclusive. It recognizes the connection between what we do and our humanness: we are physical, emotional and intellectual beings. Our recent work with Lutheran school teachers reminded me of the benefits of embracing the full potential of teachers' vocation.

Teaching is God at work in and through us. His calling creates our vocation. Our vocation creates a Lutheran classroom that is welcoming, safe, intellectually stimulating, and rigorous. That vocation, knit together with the vocations of colleagues in one place, creates a Lutheran school. A Lutheran school that makes a difference in the community where it serves. A Lutheran school that speaks the love of Jesus Christ through all of its being. Ministry in the classroom. Ministry in the school. Ministry in the congregation. Ministry in the community. **LEJ**

A Lasting Influence, a Lasting Impact

As I thought about what to write for you, the reader, to contemplate, I thought of the words engraved on our Martin Luther statue in the center of campus.

For the sake of the church, we must have and maintain Christian schools. How true! The stories in this issue and in this column underscore that emphatically.

The organization we now know as CLEF grew from the visions of five men and their spouses who were friends. Each of these men and women had attended Lutheran schools. Grade school. High school for some. University education beyond that. Each of these couples appreciated the educations they had received in the Chicagoland Lutheran schools they attended as children.

Now, some decades later, these same couples began to be concerned for the viability of the schools they had attended. They saw the deterioration of the inner-city schools they had called home. They became concerned about the viability of the Lutheran high schools in the metropolitan area. They decided it was time to do something.

These men and woman had both business and personal relationships. They were successful businesspersons who decided that it was time to give back. Clarence Schawk, Jay Christopher, Bill Mattes, Dick Vie and Ann Rundio were all very successful businesspersons with the means to make a financial difference in Lutheran schools. But how? According to Jay, it was Don Roush, a member of the Concordia Chicago development team at the time, who pulled the group together into a team. Over time, that team became the beginning of the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation, the beginning of CLEF.

It was at least two decades ago that my late husband and I attended an alumni gathering at St. Andrews Lutheran Church at 27th and Hoyne. Bob had attended school there from first through eighth grades. He had fond memories of those years and of the schooling he received there. After Sunday worship, about thirty of us gathered in the school basement for lunch and a meeting. My most compelling memory of that meeting was an impromptu presentation by Bill Mattes. Bill spoke passionately

about the need for all Lutheran-school alumni to give back by supporting Lutheran schools financially as well as with prayer.

He spoke about the changing demographics of Chicagoland urban Lutheran schools. And about the urgent needs for physical repair in many of the school buildings. And about the need for funding the professional development of the teachers in those schools His enthusiasm and passion were palpable. I can still see him speaking to us that day. His words and his passion made an impact on me.

The interesting detail about that lasting impact is that I already had that same passion. I was a professor at Concordia University River Forest. I had come to CTC many years earlier in order to become a Lutheran teacher. I, too, was a product of Lutheran education. Elementary. High school. College. I knew the value of those experiences. But here was this businessman, this very successful businessman, speaking passionately enough to match my professional passion about the schools for which I helped to prepare teachers. Here was this businessman describing an emerging way to support urban Lutheran schools in Chicago. Here was this businessman sharing a concept of support for schools that his fellow St. Andrews alumni could grasp.

The names of those working with him were only names on that Sunday afternoon. Over the years, those names have come to represent individuals whom I, too, call friends. Clarence Schawk is referred to as the person with the original vision. He and his wife Marilyn, spoke with their friends, Eunice and Bill Mattes. The four of them shared a similar vision for the support of urban Lutheran schools. Soon Jay and Doris Christopher were pulled into the vision, followed by Dick Vie and his wife, Joan plus Ann Rundio and her husband Lou. Those ten individuals gathered their considerable funds to make a difference for the Lutheran schools of Chicago. There were others who pitched in at the time of founding, However, the ten listed here are those who still sit on the board more than two decades after they helped to found CLEF.

In the early days, the urgent need was physical repair. New windows to replace old and drafty ones. A new hot water heater to provide the hot water that had disappeared with the breakdown of the old one. New floors. New doors. Whatever an individual school needed in order to provide a safe and aesthetically-pleasing environment for schooling.

Over the more than 25 years since the inception of CLEF, the vision has broadened and deepened. As Mike Welch wrote in his article, this board has come to the realization that the high quality of teachers and principals is the formula for a high-quality school. Parents will pay for high quality. Parents will pay for results they can see. Young parents watch the paths of the older children in the neighborhood and want the same high-quality path for their own children. Simeon Stumme's book review adds the dimension of the sociological

and cultural impact of high-quality parochial education. Lutheran education.

We have the facts. We know what it takes. We also know how a community is impoverished when a parochial school closes. When a Lutheran school closes. We have the knowledge. Now do we also have the will? Five individuals – Clarence, Bill, Jay, Dick, Ann – had the will 25 years ago. They have been joined by people like Mike and Janet, Eunice and Marilyn. By others whose names I do not know.

Most people who know CLEF know only one or two persons on that board or on the list of founders. Most people, like me, are impressed without knowing all the details. People are impressed by the vision. By the results. By the ability to obtain funding from others outside their CLEF family. By the fact that the board itself pays for all of its expenses. People and paper. Computers and communication systems. Office space and bank accounts. All of the money they raise for CLEF goes to the schools. The Lutheran schools of Chicago.

What else in our spheres of influence needs similar vision? Similar passion? Similar commitment? Similar investment? Can you and a colleague make a difference? Absolutely! Do you need to be rich? Absolutely not! Do you need a vision? Absolutely! Do you need to have all the details in order? Absolutely not! What you need is the conviction and the vision. The passion and the determination. The understanding that God blesses the work of his people. Especially when it is work that He needs done.

So figure out what work God wants of you and get busy! For some of you, like me, your passion will intersect with your professional life. That's where you will make a difference. For others of you, your passion will grow out of a hobby, an interest, an experience. God will take whatever we will give Him. What's your gift going to be? **LEJ**

Editor's Note: *It's Transition Time in the Publisher's Office, aka the President's Office. We have said goodbye to Dr. Dan Gard, our President for the past five years, through June 23, 2019. And we thank God for his inspired leadership of this university and of this journal. Now we turn our faces to the future and await the arrival of our new President, Dr. Russell Dawn, who officially begins his duties in August. In the hyphen between the service of these two servants of God, we welcome Dr. Erik Ankerberg as our Acting President. In his Acting-President role, Erik has agreed to serve this Journal as its Acting Publisher. In that role he also pens this Last Word column.*

Blessed Are The Meek

*Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.*

– Matthew 5:5 NKJV

When we read the biblical text we call the “Beatitudes,” we can be overwhelmed by the piety that Jesus promotes. Perhaps our discomfort arises from a rhetoric we can recognize in these aphorisms: Most of them follow some implied form of cause and effect. We might not love the implications of that pattern or the expectations it spells out, but we can buy into some of the transactions that Jesus describes. We can find comfort in the idea that God sees our mourning and desires to comfort us. We respect the sense of justice implied when God bestows mercy to those who themselves show mercy to others.

But verse five throws a wrench into that logic: In the economy of our Lord's design, He calls the meek blessed and promises that they will inherit the earth.

In one sense, the Church's hermeneutic tradition invites us to read these verses as a description of Jesus Christ. He is the one who veils the divine under the cloak of human meekness, and in his suffering, death, and resurrection, He demonstrates dominion over the things of this world, including life and death.

As those who live in Jesus Christ, we are called to participate in this meekness, and that call may not sound particularly attractive, even to those of us who serve in the vocation of teaching. It's just not our first play when we imagine the successful life. As we think about our own lives and careers, we might be tempted to think of our participating in a line of

impressive and strong people: driven, virtuous, faithful--all accomplished in every way. But, this text compels us to think about the true teachers differently. If we are honest about our efforts, we come to realize that we are neither making our world “great” or “equitable” again.

Instead we are poor people again; we are peacemakers again; we are persecuted people again. For saints like us, the new life that follows faith in Christ is a life of recognizing how much we lack without Him, a life in which He mourns with us, a life in which He suffers with us, a life in which we hunger and thirst for a righteousness only He can provide. And, as we carry out our work, we are meekly waiting for the all the good gifts Jesus promises and delivers through His Church.

The teachers and professors carrying out their vocations in Chicagoland Lutheran Schools over the past three years have worked mightily to increase the equitability and greatness of these schools. They have worked meekly, making peace wherever possible. They have experienced the good gifts Jesus promises. Yet there is more for which they yearn. Peace is not always possible. Not all conditions are equitable. It’s not possible to think of all of these schools as great. Yet. Even as leaders, maybe especially as leaders they yearn to be comforted and strengthened in their work.

When the world is born again, we know we will be comforted and God will dry our tears. In the resurrection, the frustrations and failures of our lives and careers will fade to nothing, and we will possess the new heavens and the new earth that God prepared for us. At the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, we will be dinner guests, and our meekness will find its satisfaction, as we rest in the fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ. In that moment, we will finally live the life our Lord always intended for us. Through the optics that only the meekness of faith provides, we will see Him face to face and be His children forever. Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly, and bring your meek saints, your blessed servants, into your eternal kingdom. **LEJ**

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