

The Courage to Guide

A Christian Philosophy of Education

Bram de Muynck and
Bram Kunz



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Justification of some sources taken from own work:

- Chapter 2 contains key notions from De Muynck, A. (2016). *Tijd voor verlangen. Persoonsvorming als toetssteen voor bevindelijke pedagogiek* [Time for desire. Person formation as a touchstone for experiential pedagogy] Theological University Apeldoorn.

- Chapter 6 contains key ideas from De Muynck, A. (2012). *Wees een gids! Naar een nieuw elan voor christelijk leraarschap* [*Be a guide! Towards a new impetus for Christian teaching*]. Driestar Christian University.
- Chapter 8 is taken from Murre, P. M. (2021). *Less is more*. Driestar Christian University.
- Chapter 9 is a revision of the article: ‘Building a Hospitable Christian School Community: An Exploration of Theological Concepts That Inspire Dealing with Special Needs’. *Religions*, 2025, 16(3): 377. <https://doi/10.3390/rel16030377>
- Chapter 10 is a revision of the article: ‘Rediscovering the mission. The challenge for Christian education to revitalise vocation and ethos’. *Religions*. 2023; 14(10): 1330. Special Issue on Christian education. <https://doi/10.3390/rel14101330>

All scripture quotations in this book were taken from the New International Version.

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Introduction

Jim, an English teacher at a secondary school, hesitates while reviewing Peter's essay. How can this average student have possibly handed in such an excellent text? Jim suspects Peter owes this not to his own intelligence but to Artificial Intelligence.

This is how teachers often feel nowadays when checking papers. What is the authenticity of the knowledge reproduced by Peter? This is just one of the questions posed by the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). What is knowledge, and is knowledge only of value if someone has made it their own? Where do the senses come in? Was it not claimed in the past that students like Peter need their bodies (eyes, ears and movements) to learn, or is it enough to master a computer screen? And what role is left for the teacher when so many sources of knowledge are freely accessible, and machines can be excellent trainers? These are questions for a philosophy of education. Such a philosophy is 'centrally concerned with questions of meaning and value, with conceptual matters and with coherence of ideas' (Bailey, 2010, p. 10). A philosophy of education provides no easy answers. This book aims to assist reflection on basic questions from a Christian perspective.

The title *The Courage to Guide* is programmatic, it shows what we believe teaching should be like today. We envision the teacher as a vital person in knowledge acquisition, summarised by the word *guide*. This word can be taken as a noun, placing the teacher in the centre. In this book we explain that the teacher has a mission, calling him to work in a long Christian tradition. But the word *guide* is also a verb. The Christian interpretation of being a teacher is reflected in one's actions. This book emphasises that teaching has to become an embodied practice. Referring to the image on the cover: it is like navigating with a compass to find the right way. Being a guide in times of AI can be quite a challenge. This brings us to another aspect of the programmatic nature of the title. We believe that in this day and age, it takes a lot of courage to take on the guiding role, which is why we have written this book to encourage those involved in the complex task of teaching. The title is also a nod to Parker Palmer's wonderful book, *The Courage to Teach*, which has the subtitle *Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. *The Courage to Guide* offers our own access to the inner landscape from the Dutch context. Yet, we feel a strong affinity with the ideas in Palmer's book, especially where he places teachers and students in the midst of that one great thing, referred to in our book as the reality of God.

1 Why This Book?

Firstly, as mentioned, this philosophy of education aims to serve Christian reflection on new developments in the 21st century. The influence of educational possibilities, ultimately displayed in AI, leads to greater attention to personal learning paths. The invention of a diversity of tools has enriched education, but it has also caused it to become instrumentalised, which, in turn, has caused pedagogical issues to fade into the background. Above all, this publication wishes to bring pedagogy back into the spotlight (compare Biesta, 2011; Deng, 2024). We will not be focusing on the political, legal or social function of the Christian school in society, which can differ greatly across the globe (De Muynck, Reijnoudt-Klein & Spruijt-De Kloe, 2017; Wodon, 2019). Although important for justifying the existence of Christian schools and Christian-inspired teaching, political discussions will receive little attention.

Secondly, this book is intended as study material for students and alumni of master's programmes, although it is certainly conceivable that parts of it are used in bachelor's programmes. It should be noted, however, that this publication is not meant as a practical guide to teaching – even though the teaching practice is constantly present in the background. Besides being used as study material in training programmes, we would like to see *The Courage to Guide* function as a background study for trainers of educational professionals who wish to deepen their understanding of the character of Christian teaching.

2 Our Position

What is our position in relation to the many others who have reflected on education and, more specifically, on education in faith schools? Our life course is coloured by the Protestant Christian tradition in which we were raised. During our careers as pedagogical and theological academics, respectively, we have served in teacher training and theological education programs at universities with a reformed commitment. We prefer, however, to see our vision as one of the voices in the rich Catholic-Christian tradition. We aim to nourish our biblical thinking in the spirit of what Paul says to educators: 'Bring them up in the training and instruction of the LORD' (Eph. 6:4). When expressing this intention, we must acknowledge that we stand in a long tradition of Christian reflection on upbringing and education. This tradition starts with the Bible as the primary source, having a long history via early Christian thinkers such as Augustine (354–430), medieval scholars like Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and

representatives of the Reformation period, such as John Calvin (1509–1564) and Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670).

Influences specific to our Dutch and Reformed setting can be added to this list. In this context, representatives of Pietism, such as Johannes de Swaef (1594–1653), Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617–1666) and Jacobus Fruytier (1659–1731) have been of significant importance. Of a more recent date we regard highly, in particular, Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), Philip Abraham Kohnstamm (1975–1951), Martinus J. Langeveld (1905–1989), Wim ter Horst (1929–2018) and Siebren Miedema (b. 1949). As for contemporary thinkers, we are also especially indebted to international colleagues: Nicholas Wolterstorff (b. 1932), David Smith (b. 1966), Trevor Cooling (b. 1952) and Hans van Crombrugge (b. 1961). While we gratefully acknowledge all the mentioned thinkers as guides, not all of them are explicitly mentioned and we do not discuss their work in separate sections. The names mentioned are by no means a complete list of those whose reflection on school pedagogy we consider important.

3 Reading Guide

By way of a reader's guide, we draw the reader's attention to a few features of the text that are mainly related to the fact that the book was written as an academic book used for educational purposes. The fact that we view the Bible as our primary source and have an ongoing conversation with various scholars becomes manifest in each chapter by citing a Bible passage for the chapter concerned and one quote from our conversation partners. We aim to link our reasoning with practice, which is apparent from an example, a quote or a practical case mentioned in the introduction to each chapter. We subsequently refer to this in the text that follows.

4 Impression of Content

In Chapter 1 we present the main message of the book. Psalm 78 has been chosen as the starting point for pedagogical reflection. We emphasise that students in Christian education must learn to orient themselves to God and his Word and, from there, to place their trust in God. This chapter explains the pedagogical triangle (teacher, student, content/reality) as a structuring framework for our reasoning. This framework secures the coherence of ideas, as required for a philosophy of education. Our theological engagement with Psalm 78 raises the question of how pedagogy and theology are related. We

address this in Chapter 2, where we explain that taking our starting point in the Bible is not the same as transferring Bible texts directly to education, nor is Christian pedagogy applied theology: it can only be understood from a layered thinking about the two fields of theology and pedagogy. In Chapter 3 we sketch the professional context for which benefit a philosophy of education is formulated. We explain that Christian teaching should be understood as a social practice as well as a normative practice. There are several norms, each of which has something to say about school practice. The next three chapters discuss a vision of the three corners of the pedagogical triangle. Chapter 4 is about theological anthropology. Who is the student as a learner, accompanied by guides to show him the way? We propose that the learner must become a *wise interpreter*, a concept borrowed from Cooling (2021). Chapter 5 gives an overview of our epistemological perspective on knowledge and learning. This is not only important because the school is all about knowledge, learning, and subject matter, but also for the way teachers look at their own practice in a contemporary and constructively critical way. We will argue that a critical-realistic position offers prospects for this. Chapter 6 depicts the teacher. Here, the focus is on the person of the guide. What do they ideally have at their disposal: what characterises their minds, hearts and hands? The core idea is that teachers point out something, at the same time pointing away from it, encouraging students to start to look differently than before, not necessarily following the teachers' opinions. In Chapter 7 we highlight some pedagogical moments which we argue to be crucial for a Christian school pedagogy. The pedagogue establishes a relationship with students, the basis for dealing with situations arising throughout the day. We also consider what we mean by authority and the boundaries of manipulation and indoctrination. Chapter 8 discusses the central aspects of didactics. Using the 'Design Diamond', a Christian perspective on teaching is outlined. The teacher needs to combine a good vision of teaching with a toolbox for the educational practice. Both receive attention in this chapter. Chapter 9 discusses how a school can deal with diversity. The keyword for this is hospitality. With this concept, we argue that the gifts of every student should be seen and respected and that this has consequences for the school culture, including colleagues' dealings with each other. Although some faith schools in our context mainly have children from Christian families, this is completely different in other contexts. Some faith schools include students from non-Christian backgrounds, often a majority. Regardless of the composition of the population, in this book we argue that a school that wants to work from a Christian inspiration is welcoming to everyone. Finally, Chapter 10 addresses how a school presenting itself as Christian should understand its vocation in these times. This chapter invites student teachers and practising

teachers to reflect on their unique context on the one hand and, on the other hand, to see this within a broader global perspective. While all feel a calling to do good, how this is expressed differs. By placing several common approaches alongside each other, we allow readers to mirror their situation against other options. This chapter is deliberately placed at the end of the book rather than at the beginning because we wish to emphasise Christian teaching as a pedagogical practice. The exposure to this practice fills the first and largest part of the book, while we only draw attention to the school as an institution at the end.

5 Terminology

In this book, we take *teaching* to refer to the wide range of activities by teachers. We approach teaching generically, addressing issues within all contexts of education. Therefore, what is discussed in this book concerns primary, secondary, and tertiary education, as well as vocational training so we mostly speak of *students*, meaning learners in a general sense, and sometimes *pupils* in sections referring specifically to school children. We are aware of the significant differences that stamp each practice. In primary education, teachers are usually responsible for a wide range of subjects, while in secondary and tertiary education, teachers are specialists in subject content. The word *education* stands for the more or less institutionalised form of teaching as it takes shape in schools. We also use the word *pedagogy*. By this we do not just mean a certain way of acting by a teacher or even more specifically *didactics*, such as is often used synonymously in the Anglo-Saxon context. We also use *pedagogy* as a designation of the academic discipline referring to assisting the maturing process (as happens in families) and the teacher's educational actions. Thus, *pedagogy* is a 'practical discipline centred on understanding and developing educational practice' (Deng, 2024). Conceived in this way, *pedagogy* is closely related to the meaning of philosophy of education. Because we focus on educational practice within the school (and not, for example, in the family or youth work), we speak of a *school pedagogy* in this publication.

Teaching for Trust

I will open my mouth with a parable;
I will utter hidden things, things from of old –
things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.
We will not hide them from their descendants;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.
They would not be like their ancestors –
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
whose hearts were not loyal to God,
whose spirits were not faithful to him.

PS. 78:2–8

1 The Beginning

When reflecting on Christian education, teachers are generally at the centre of attention. They are figures pupils and students identify with, while learning from their knowledge, insights and life experiences. However, Psalm 78, also shows another image of the teacher. Certainly, the psalm contains beautiful thoughts on education and the educator's role: each generation is called to tell their children God's deeds and commandments so that they put their trust in God (Ps. 78:4–7). Yet, here, this task stands against the background of the educator's fallibility: they must teach their children *so that they would not be like*

their ancestors. In Psalm 78, those forefathers are characterised as stubborn, rebellious and unfaithful (Ps. 78:8). This is reflected in the disconcerting image of failing adults (Ps. 78:9–58). For educators, the psalm gives a lamentable account. It must have been a disconcerting message at the time: You are called to teach children because otherwise, they will become like you.

As the introduction to a Christian philosophy of education, Psalm 78 would not seem the most adequate choice, perhaps even discouraging. After all, the teacher's professional image includes being an identifying figure. They must be a reliable guide for students. Is it not inappropriate to call them rebellious, disobedient and unfaithful? The image of educators presented by Psalm 78 is not only discouraging but disturbing. Do we not expect more from educators such as parents and teachers? Although the psalm has gained a significant place in Christian reflection on education, its disturbing nature is often glossed over. The positive message of hope is better suited to the prevailing image of Christian education than that of failing educators.

1.1 *Hope*

If one generalises the fathers' failures in Psalm 78, one could state that pedagogical practice is threatened by the educator's unfaithfulness and disobedience. That would be a gloomy beginning indeed! It is, on the contrary, quite liberating. Teachers must provide good examples, but not by referring to themselves. Whoever expects the same behaviour from students as shown by the pedagogue, will see students copying their sins and failings, too. Christian teachers are examples because they put their trust in God, for He alone can break the vicious circle of sin and brokenness (Ps. 78:59–72; see also Kuiper, 2025). In the New Testament, this is revealed with even more clarity: only Christ delivers us from our sins. Therefore, a Christian school pedagogy is not just about the unfaithfulness of educators but above all about God's faithfulness and grace. Whoever wants to reflect on pedagogy in a Christian manner, cannot do so without Christ.

1.2 *Alliance*

Let us take a closer look at the entire psalm. In Psalm 78, teaching is placed in the context of the covenant. The LORD makes Himself known as the God of Israel. In turn, the people are called to put their trust in God and serve Him with love. This covenantal practice is manifested in intergenerational learning (Ps. 78:3–6). Despite all their failures, educators are called to teach children in God's witness and law (Ps. 78:5). In this context, the word *law* refers to how one's destination can be attained; the word *witness* refers to the admonitions given to prevent going astray.

The second noticeable thing in the context of the covenant is that educators share an authoritative story. Christian teachers, as part of the broader network

surrounding primary educators such as parents, are called to acquaint their students with God and His world. In doing so, they do not have to conceal their sins and shortcomings. On the contrary, the psalm offers space to acknowledge sin and brokenness and is an exercise in humility for teachers: you are called to teach students so that they do not become like you. This is also comforting: there is no need to turn students into copies of yourself. In the words of the New Testament, teachers should reflect the image of Christ. Psalm 78 also provides content for teaching: teachers do not come with their own story, but initiate their students into God's world (Wannenwetsch, 2021). The biblical story is a gateway to a hopeful future.

1.3 *Mission-oriented Pedagogy*

An initial reading of Psalm 78 demonstrates the unfruitfulness of an anthropological approach to school pedagogy. An engagement with the essence of humanity, with man's abilities and shortcomings, focusing on how the teacher can best connect to these, only throws the teacher back on himself. The main objective of this book is that Christian thinking about teaching starts with the mission God assigns to educators: to teach students so that they may place their trust in God. In New Testament language, Christian education is aimed at ensuring that students grow towards Christ, the Head, in all things (Eph. 4:15). In our argument we are moving away from an *essence-oriented pedagogy* (Golverdingen, 1996, pp. 78–81; Moroney, Phelps & Waalkes, 2007), which starts with the qualities of the teacher or the student, towards a *mission-oriented pedagogy*. Education does not derive its meaning from the fact that teachers themselves set a good example, but from God's call to teach students so that they will put their trust in God.

To prevent teachers feeling the emphasis on mission as a burden, we strive to avoid teachers being thrown back on themselves, by not placing a demand on their capacities nor expecting them to be able to fulfil God's commandments. We underline that the assignment in Psalm 78 is written in the context of the covenant, as is evidenced by God's name 'LORD'. Furthermore, that educators must pass on God's deeds means the command is embedded in God's merciful intervention with His people Israel. Similarly, the ethical imperative in Paul's letters is preceded by the indicative of salvation in Christ. To avoid imbalances, we must take the adjective *Christian* seriously. Whoever wants to start with the mission must begin with God, with His promise, with Christ the Saviour.

2 Mission and Source

In the previous section, Psalm 78 guided us in an initial exploration. In doing so, this psalm was addressed within a specific framework: not as a sermon or a

Bible study, but as the starting point for a Christian philosophy of education. We even derive from the psalm the guiding motif of a mission-oriented pedagogy, even though the word *pedagogy* is not mentioned in Psalm 78 nor ‘mission-oriented’. The usage of these terms presupposes a shift from the biblical text to Christian pedagogical reasoning. The same applies to other terms and concepts we will deal with in this book. How can we use a normative text like Psalm 78 in the context of Christian school pedagogy? We will clarify this more broadly in the next chapter, explaining that we need to distinguish ‘layers of reflection’. In this section, let us make just a few remarks to give an impression of our vision on the relationship between theology, normative sources and education.

Christian thinking finds its inspiration in the source texts: primarily the Bible, the norm for believing, thinking and acting. In addition, these source texts include confessions or credos, defined as directive documents for reading the Holy Scripture. However, it is often impossible to move directly from normative texts to daily practice. The Bible is not a textbook for pedagogy, and confessional texts do not offer an instruction manual for the classroom. Applying normative texts to actions requires a hermeneutic of reflection, the domain of the philosophy of education. Careful reading of the Bible is still considered decisive for conceptualising education such as, in our case, the fact that God calls educators to teach despite their sins and shortcomings. The same applies to the pursued ideal of religiously inspired education, namely that students will put their trust in God. At the same time, however, a biblical-theological approach alone is not sufficient. Shaping a vision also requires profound pedagogical-philosophical reflection, for example regarding issues such as the character of learning or pedagogical-didactical choices made by teachers.

Beside the movement from the sources to practice, there is a reverse movement. When considering and shaping educational practice, we realise that teachers work in a particular societal context. The current social context has inclusiveness, sexual diversity, AI, tolerance and citizenship education high on the political agenda. These issues demand articulation from the Christian vision of teaching. The same applies to the context of family and church, for example concerning an increasing diversity in the parental population or situations of brokenness. When responding to these questions, we delve into the sources of the Christian tradition. When we include Psalm 78 in our thinking about education, we must consider that this psalm originates from a different context than ours, namely an Israelite culture of 2500 years ago. This implies that one cannot apply sources as a perfect parallel to our present situation. In this publication, we strive to use the sources with a sound hermeneutic approach. This means that we take into account the context in which they

originated and that, in their application, we consider the characteristics of the current situation.

3 Triadic Pedagogy

In this section, we acknowledge the distinctive character of a school pedagogy, by introducing a pedagogical model that helps to structure our Christian school pedagogy. We define pedagogy as a reflection on education. In antiquity, a *paidagogos* was a slave who took (*agein*) the child (*pais*) to school. This house slave often had a broader educational task, although the father held the main responsibility (Brezinka, 1978, p. 1; Böhm, 2004, p. 13). In the Bible, God's law is called a *paidagogos* (Gal. 3:24): a disciplinarian or teacher. Based on the classical use of *paidagogos*, a connection can easily be made with the common meaning of pedagogy: pedagogy is about guiding children to adulthood. School pedagogy is thereby a specification of general pedagogy. It is about the pedagogical practice of education, adjoining practices being family pedagogy and the ecclesiastical pedagogical practice.

As an academic discipline, pedagogy is to be understood as an action-directed science, because it concerns the actions of the educator (Brezinka, 1978, p. 10 ff.; Langeveld, 1974, pp. 17–19, 68–71; Miedema, 1997; Ter Horst, 2008; Waterink, 1926, p. 35). In these last decades, general pedagogy has become controlled by educational science and special needs pedagogy (Berding & Pols, 2018, pp. 5–6). As a result, pedagogy seems to be a more or less a technical matter, in which normativity is merely present in the background. Because of its operational character, however, pedagogy has always been regarded as a normative science, in which reflection on the nature and purpose of education plays a major role. Our reasoning on education follows this line.

What school pedagogy is about, can be clarified using the pedagogical triangle as projected in Figure 1. The model assumes that education requires a teacher, a student and learning content as corner stones (Beugelsdijk & Souverein, 1997, p. 62; Friesen & Osguthorpe, 2018; Imelman, 2002, pp. 38–59, 95; Meijer, 1997, pp. 236–238). Schematically, this is illustrated in Figure 1.

The arrows show that the three constitutive elements of education are inter-related. The arrow between teacher and subject matter refers to how teachers respectfully relate to the subject matter. The arrow between the teacher and the student illustrates the pedagogical relationship at stake here. Teachers engage students with subject matter by introducing meanings to them in a manner that is profitable to the student. Finally, the arrow between the student and the subject matter concerns the process of the students giving meaning. Between

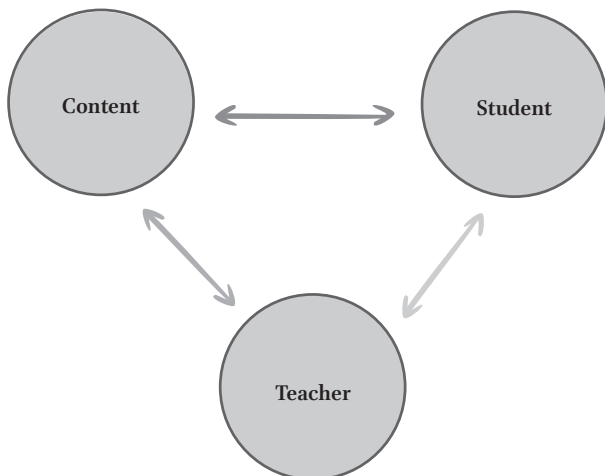


FIGURE 1 Pedagogical triangle

these three components is the didactic playing field where teachers make their choices (De Muynck, 2018, p. 88; Friesen & Osguthorpe, 2018).

The triangle illustrates an educational situation. The top arrow between subject matter and student, reveals the purpose of education: students must become active givers of meaning. Indeed, they are also engaged in subject matter outside school but in the context of education, teachers are the key mediators. They form the link between the subject matter and the students by introducing them to the world of meaning. On the other hand, the top arrow puts the role of the teacher into perspective: teaching may be an activity by the teacher, but it is focused on active meaning-making by the student himself.

In a triadic understanding of teaching the three elements are correlative. A pedagogical statement about one of the facets always affects the other two. Because school pedagogy, as an action-oriented science, aims to understand and improve the teacher's practises, the triad shows where the focus of attention in education should be. Researchers engaged in educational innovation at Harvard University refer to the pedagogical triangle as the 'instructional core, which represents the critical work of teaching and learning that goes on in classrooms' (Fullan, 2009, p. 181). Innovations planned by schools can only be implemented successfully if they support the work in the whole of the triangle.

Our philosophy of education is based on this triadic concept. Education is about the teacher, the student and the subject matter in their interrelatedness. As far as the subject matter is concerned, our interpretation differs slightly but significantly from the Dutch key author on the triadic concept, Jan

Dirk Imelman (b. 1939). He understands introduction to meanings mainly as learning to deal critically with knowledge (Imelman, 2002, pp. 48–52). In our opinion, however, it is not just a cognitive process; teachers bring students into contact with God's reality. For this reason, we choose the broader word *reality*, rather than *subject matter*.

4 Relationships

We argue that Christian teachers initiate students to meanings so that they can become active meaning-givers. Using the pedagogical triangle, we outline the principles of a Christian school pedagogy from Psalm 78. It is not only about the angles but also about their interconnectedness as shown in Figure 2.

4.1 *Teachers as Guides*

The aim of education is that students learn to engage with reality. In the pedagogical triangle, this is indicated by the top arrow, which connects the angles of *reality* and *the student*. Through personal learning, a student achieves a lived experience and knowledge of reality. In Psalm 78 the ultimate goal of this process is called trust in God (Ps. 78:7). From the perspective of a school pedagogy, this may seem a narrow view of reality, for a student not only receives religious education at school but also lessons in elementary skills such as arithmetic and reading. In addition, teachers offer subject matters to them. However, as trust in God means seeing this world in the light of God's deeds and commandments, this must not be seen as a narrowing down, but a biblical embedding

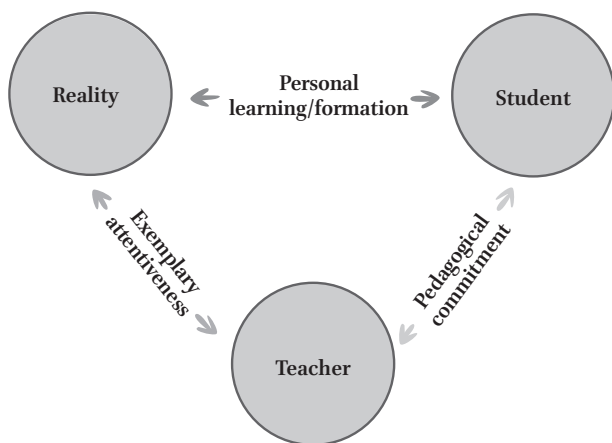


FIGURE 2 The pedagogical triangle with the interdependent relationships

of learning: this world is God's world, and people are called to live with God in this world.

Teachers play an important part in students' learning about reality. According to Psalm 78, they are called by God to teach students God's law and testimony so that they may put their trust in God. In the pedagogical triangle, the crucial role of the teacher is to mediate between students and reality. For this reason, the teacher is called a guide in this book: the teacher initiates students into Christian meaning (see Chapter 5). For teachers this entails that, in the educational process, they are connected both to the reality and to the students who they must introduce into that reality.

The relationship between the teacher and reality shows that, like students, teachers are active meaning-givers. Teachers have, in turn, acquired meaning through their own upbringing and, as they continue to learn as professionals, demonstrating exemplary attentiveness in their teaching. In Psalm 78, it is apparent that teaching God's law and testimony is a process of intergenerational learning: the one generation is teaching the next. So we see that teachers belong to communities of meaning-givers. This is a general statement since every culture has shared meanings (Peacock, 2001, p. 120; see further Chapter 5) and a biblical-Christian culture is no exception. In the Christian tradition, shared meanings have taken the form of an authoritative narrative about God, man and the world. In this book, we argue that an institutionalised worldview does not automatically coincide with a personal worldview (see Chapter 5). Despite this, we claim that Christians have shared meanings constitutive to their worldview.

Besides their own relationship to reality, teachers have a pedagogical relationship with students (see Chapters 6 and 7). Because education strives to introduce meanings, the pedagogical relationship is always normative and guiding. According to the Dutch theologian and pedagogue Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), the normative nature of Christian education is shown by the fact that a person at birth is 'not what he can be and much less than what he should be' (Bavinck, 1928, p. 8, our translation). This duality is characteristic of a Christian philosophy of education. On the one hand, the ideal is to bring students to personal responsibility. In doing so, claims are made about what man can become. Teachers are committed to sharing the Christian faith with the new generation. This is about how human beings should become. The pedagogical commitment to students drives teachers to hold course between both ideals (see Chapter 2).

4.2 *Vulnerable and Hopeful*

The pedagogical triangle may suggest that education is a linear process in which teachers are good meaning-givers who, through a good pedagogical relationship, make good meaning-givers of their students. Yet we have seen earlier

that the sinfulness and fallibility of educators can, in real life, threaten that education. Educators should not be paralleled with identification figures or ideal examples because there is no guarantee of a consistent and lasting inner commitment to God and His world. Teachers can undermine the authoritative story they are telling through opposing behaviour. As guides, the teachers also need guidance. Psalm 78 teaches us that the Christian teacher takes sin and brokenness into account, without using it as an excuse for acting inadequately.

The relationship between the teacher and reality is vulnerable but the pedagogical relationship to the student, too. We have to deal with sin and brokenness in these relationships, which can interfere with the initiation into Christian meanings (Schaafsma, 2025). It is important to realise that, in addition to Christian meaning-giving, there are other competing images. Moreover, in today's Western context, the question may arise as to whether the teacher's pedagogical relationship with students still matters, given the increasingly prominent role of modern technology in education (Haidt, 2024).

To conclude, the vulnerable nature of education is reflected in the fact that teachers cannot determine the outcome of their actions. They can stimulate the process of giving meaning to the students by introducing them to Christian meanings. However, it is impossible to force students into becoming active Christian meaning-givers, just as the pedagogues in Psalm 78 could not force their students to place their trust in God. This clarifies that – contrary to what the pedagogical triangle may suggest at first sight – the relationships between the three are not a perfect, unbroken line. The mission-guided character of our pedagogy can therefore be seen as liberating. Teachers do not need to check whether they can keep these relationships pure; they are only called to obey God's command. This does not lead to a pessimistic view of education. On the contrary: in the psalm, the recognition of the fallibility of educators is a motivation to teach children, so that they do not become like their fathers. This places Christian education in a hopeful perspective. Redemption from sin and brokenness is promised: God does not fix people through their sinful forefathers, but He provides sinners with a hopeful future through Christ. Teachers bring their students into contact with a reality that includes both beauty and brokenness. Through Christ, the creation is biblically linked to the re-creation. This offers a perspective for Christian education: it is focused on participation in this world and God's future on the new earth.

5 Context

Christian teachers initiate students into Christian meaning in a social context in which large shifts are taking place. There are currently two dominant

discourses of meaning in which a Christian philosophy of education needs to position itself: constructivism with its emphasis on the student's self-efficacy, and neo-liberalism with its approach to effectiveness in education. It is precisely in the discussion with these leading schools of thought that the metaphor of the guide has a powerful potential to clarify the role of the Christian teacher in the 21st century. Because these discourses play an important role in the background of this book, we will briefly describe both.

Constructivism, understood here as an educational movement, emphasises the importance of self-direction and self-exploration in learning. Without denying the relevance of this approach, as we show in Chapter 5, it tends to narrow down educational practice towards conditioning the student's individual learning journey. This is evident, for example, in the use of concepts such as *learning environment* and *personalised learning*. In our view, however, student learning presupposes a direction in which students are guided. Guiding is an active process, in which teachers take the students and their questions seriously. They do not just wait passively until students ask a question, nor do they leave it to an unpredictable process between the learners and AI on their devices. They bring in new things too, regardless of whether the students ask for it. Teaching and learning are a twofold entity. Therefore, the teacher's activity is not limited to facilitating the student's learning process, nor is the learning process limited to reproducing the teacher's knowledge. The guide-metaphor reveals something of the beautiful, complex process of teaching and learning, in which both teacher and student actively participate.

The other discourse is neoliberalism, which tends to focus on results. To comply with this, education tends to concentrate on training skills (socialisation) that can be measured with input and output variables. Compared with this 'efficiency-thinking', the guide-metaphor exposes the inadequacy of such a way of thinking: in education, meaningful content is always at stake and the education of students cannot be captured in fixed variables. The teacher's task is not just to deliver new consumers and producers to the economic market and to promote meritocracy (Sandel, 2021). Their call is to form students to take their place in society independently. This demands a focus on formation and transformation instead of socialisation (Loder, 2018, pp. 33–76). In turn, formation presupposes content (see Chapter 5). The metaphor of the guide and our explanation of the pedagogical triangle both illustrate that the appropriation of meanings is the goal so that students may become active meaning-givers. Often, neoliberalism is justified by the argument that education demands quality and that this requires assessment. In this book, we argue that while quality measurements have value, they are not a goal in themselves. Those who emphasise the formative significance of education know that not everything of value can be measured (Bulterman-Bos & De Muynck, 2014).

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have set out the starting points of our philosophy of education. Starting theologically with Psalm 78, we drew a line to the charge of teachers as guides, turning away from themselves towards the student, who has to take an independent position in the world. Furthermore, we explained what it means to connect pedagogical thinking with the sources through which teachers allow themselves to be guided. Finally, we introduced a triadic approach, which structures this book. The meaning we attribute to the Bible and the theological conceptualisation of the Bible raises the question of how theological and pedagogical thinking relate to each other in Christian school pedagogy. We will discuss this in detail in the next chapter.

School Pedagogy and Theology

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the LORD.

EPH. 6:4

...

If they are to connect their faith with their professional role, Christian teachers will need theological support to see how their work in the classroom relates to the work of the kingdom.

COOLING, 2010a, p. 10

1 Introduction

Using the adjective ‘Christian’ in connection with ‘school pedagogy’ presupposes a relationship between Christian faith and pedagogical practice. All teachers at Christian schools must establish this relationship in one way or another and ask themselves: How do our Christian beliefs affect our educational ideals and convictions? The same applies to school principals and curriculum developers. The relationship between Christian beliefs and pedagogy must be considered when determining strategies or developing curricula for Christian education. There are different ways to view that relationship. One option would be to conceive of education as a standalone issue, in which faith is a mere additive. Others may disagree and be of the opinion that Christian beliefs can be fully integrated into education. In this chapter, we show how we position ourselves between these two extremes.

Let us start with a practical example: A principal at a Christian school is, together with his teaching staff, committed to tackling the problem of bullying. Now imagine this principal finding an article in his email box containing the following text: *A study on bullying behaviour has shown that many students benefit from anti-bullying programmes. However, for 20% of the initial victims, even the best possible group approach does not work. For them, the situation only seems to get worse. They feel even more like outsiders than before. For them, bullying is a persistent problem* (Kaufman, 2020). How should the principal process

this information considering his Christian worldview? In other words: how are pedagogical and Christian beliefs connected? While this may not be the first question the principal will ask, it is a good example of the conversation we wish to stimulate through our philosophy of education.

Let us first consider the terminology we will be using. *Christian beliefs* is a general designation for thoughts informed by the Christian faith. In this chapter, we choose to use the word *theology*. By this, we do not refer to theology in the broadest sense of the word, including, for example, Islamic or Hindu theology (cf. Schweitzer, 2006, p. 98), but solely to Christian theology. If theology and pedagogy are related, how are they intertwined? Does theology have authority over pedagogy? This conclusion could easily be drawn from the introductory chapter, where we chose our starting point in Psalm 78. This Psalm urged us to frame our pedagogical ideals as mission-oriented pedagogy: the ground for Christian pedagogical action is God's call to educators. Does this mean that the primacy in this philosophy of education lies with theology, or should we look at it differently and does pedagogy take up a more or less independent position?

We will attempt to formulate a proper answer by following several steps. First, we need to clarify what is exactly meant by theology. We will see that we must avoid labelling all statements about the Christian faith *theology* (Section 2). The same applies to pedagogy. We can only clearly understand pedagogy after defining several layers in which we need to think about education (Section 3). In the next section, we take a look at the teacher in relationship to these two disciplines (Section 4). Subsequently, we will discuss the relationship between conceptual and empirical approaches. We need both, but how do they relate (Section 5)? Throughout our argument, it will become clear that theology and pedagogy are connected in various ways. In total, we differentiate four ways theology and pedagogy are reciprocally connected (Section 6). We will conclude with a few reflections on how the two disciplines are related (Section 7).

2 Theology

We start by observing the school principal who wishes to tackle the bullying problem at his school. He decides to write in the school newsletter about the Biblical example of Joseph, a maverick in Jacob's family, who was dumped into a well by his brothers (Gen. 37). Exclusion, he writes, is a danger in the family and school setting. He concludes that schools must be places where no child is excluded. In his newsletter column, the principal refers to ideas common among Christians, such as treating each other with respect because every

human being is a creation of God. This raises an interesting question: is what the principal wrote theology?

Comprised of the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (knowledge, word or doctrine), theology literally means 'speaking about God'. Usually, theology is understood to be 'thinking about God'. Theology encompasses a broad field of thought, including both the academic theology of church ministers and that of laymen, such as the principal in the example exhibited. Christian education even includes the phenomenon of children's theology, in which students learn to connect the Bible and their own lives using biblical-theological concepts (Schweitzer, Zimmerman & Roebben, 2013).

This broad spectrum shows that we should conceive of theology as a broad term that incorporates a variety of contexts and domains. As an academic discipline, theology is a scientific enterprise that researches the Bible, its history, its message (biblical studies), Christian tradition and the development of its dogma (historical and systematic theology), and the Christian praxis (practical theology). In all these subdisciplines, theology has the task of clarifying language about God, having its mandate in the sense that 'the religious is not explained in terms of anything else' (Immink, 2003, pp. 177–179). Theology can also be understood as being related to the church: it is about representations of faith, such as confessions, to which Christians (or a group of Christians) ascribe authority.

Apart from these ways of practising theology, every believer is addressed by God individually and consequently has to think about God's existence and revelation. In this sense, all Christians engage in theology. In the example we gave at the beginning of our chapter, the school principal is portrayed as a Christian believer. He observes and interprets what happens at his school from this perspective. Bible passages and Christian concepts are involved in everything he does. According to Van der Walt (2020, p. 4), we may speak of personal or informal theology in these situations. This kind of theology is pre-scientific and pre-theoretical by nature; it is part of someone's social life and worldview (see Chapter 5). Doing theology is first and foremost an existential matter, not a rational one. 'You do not become a theologian', as Huijgen states, 'by sitting down at a desk and by speculating and developing all kinds of profound thoughts about God, but by standing in the fullness of life with the Word of God' (Huijgen, 2019, p. 69, our translation). Theologising at this layer is equivalent to expressing lived faith (Immink, 2003, p. 13), or as 'a second order activity, coming after or in support of the faith that a believer already holds in response to the God who reveals' (Whittle, 2021, p. 104).

To better understand these different expressions of theology, the approach of Cameron et al. (2010, pp. 57–59) can be helpful. They argue that theology

can be understood as a dialogue between four voices. First, there is *operant theology*: theology embedded in the actual practices of a group, that which is lived by people and can thus be observed ('what people of faith actually do', Cameron & Duce, 2014, p. xxx). Second, there is *espoused theology*; theology that people cherish, the things they consider important and aspire to ('what people say about what they do', Cameron & Duce, 2014, p. xxx). Third is *normative theology*, which receives authority from a specific group. This might include the doctrine of the church to which one belongs. The last type is *formal theology*: academic theologians' efforts to understand and clarify tradition. These four voices are constantly in open and critical dialogue with each other. For example, *operant theology* may differ from *espoused theology*: this happens when what one practises does not correspond with what one believes. *Formal theology* can also provide interpretations of tradition that challenge contemporary theological frameworks. Conversely, *normative theology* can also question *academic theology* (see in detail Cameron et al., 2010; for a summary see Cameron & Duce, 2014, p. xxx).

Theology is, so we see, multidimensional and functions on different layers. Consequently, an imaginary line can be drawn from the participant's perspective to the perspective of the observer, or from the lived faith (first-order practice) to theoretical reflection on faith (second-order activity). For the remainder of this chapter, it is important to consider that, ideally speaking, there is a continual back-and-forth movement on the imaginary line. The lived faith influences what is said and studied in the church and the academy; conversely, the lived faith is also influenced by the church and the academy. The Dutch Reformed theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) considered this to be an essential principle: theology should be the practice of piety. It then needs to be practically assessed by seeing how and if it has contributed to the edification of the church and the salvation of the people (Van Asselt, 2001). We will later see the importance of language and imagination within this back-and-forth movement. For now, we conclude that theology is a broad phenomenon which operates in several 'layers', it is not limited to professionals but is practised by all believers, and one person can operate at different levels simultaneously, as in the example of the principal. Later in this chapter, we will argue that a proper Christian philosophy of education needs all four layers of theology.

3 Pedagogy

What applies to theology is equally applicable to pedagogy. Here, too, we can distinguish different layers. These layers start with lived practice and build

up to a philosophy of education. We underline that a Christian philosophy of education must be action oriented. This means that the philosophy of education is about knowledge that can direct and clarify educators' actions, as we have argued in Chapter 1. Pedagogy is not primarily about children, but, as Waterink put it, about 'the act of guidance that must be given to a developing human being' (Waterink, 1926, p. 35, our translation). Therefore, pedagogical reflection is not primarily about child development in itself but about how educators can contribute to such development. A philosophy of education should explicate, support and improve teachers' actions.

So how are academic reasoning and practice connected? Before making distinctions, as we did in the section on theology, it is important to realise that Christian education has been able to exist without scientific reflection. When Christian communities founded schools, the primary focus was to pass on the faith to the next generation. Historical examples show that this took place successfully. A case study of Dutch Reformed schools shows that teachers fervently propagated the covenant idea in the classroom as cherished in their own circle (Spoelstra, 2017). Christian schools were satisfied with this approach and therefore not interested in applying higher-order pedagogical knowledge to their practice. In other words, Christian education was often focused on transferring faith-related content rather than the application of a Christian philosophy of education. Whatever tradition a Christian school belongs to, be it Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran or Orthodox, its identity is principally derived from religious education. In terms of the theory of ideals (De Ruyter, 2006), the ideals of educational content (what is ideally taught) are informed by formal and normative theology, but ideals about work and purpose (how and to what end one should teach: lived pedagogy) are not informed by academic pedagogy. In short, Christian educational practice did not emerge from a well-defined pedagogical theory. Philosophy of education as a scholarly activity came later.

Let us now come back to the layers that can be distinguished in pedagogy, as described by the Dutch pedagogue Ter Horst (1980, 2008). The basic layer comprises *the daily work of teaching*. Teachers follow traditions, common sense, intuition, personal desires and preferences. At this level, work is done according to plans and agreements. However, there are many unpredictable factors, consisting either of wonderful events or traces of brokenness and sin. Experiences are stored as 'stories and examples of success and failure' (Ter Horst, 1980, p. 21, our translation), experienced in collaboration with others in the (teaching) community.

The second layer is defined as *subjective educational theory* and *collective educational theory*. Within this layer, teachers express their ideals (see Chapter 6 for details). Each teacher has their own subjective theory but is also part of,

and participates in, the ideals of the community, expressed in the collective theory. The teachers' accumulated experiences, common sense and stories are now filtered and arranged into more structured guidelines. They have been stripped of contingencies and are logically processed into concepts. Many pedagogical texts, scientific and non-scientific, have profoundly impacted this process. At this point, Christian ethos has a critical function because it can be helpful to clarify well-proven guidelines from practice and transform them into new guidelines for similar situations.

The third layer manifests itself on the institutional level, the *strategic* layer. In this layer, schools, or networks of schools, consciously pick and choose their policies. More often than not, schools depend on policies determined by governmental institutions. But, whatever the governmental influence, schools must always consider their guidelines and boundaries (see Chapter 10).

The top layer is called the *philosophy of education*. Theoretical insight is gained through second-order abstraction, using philosophical vocabulary, concepts, and models based on empirical sources. It 'bypasses the concrete and searches for underlying patterns and laws' (Glas, 2010, p. 2). However, scholarly reflection is always informed bottom-up, not only by elevating practical wisdom to a higher level of abstraction but also by the power of pre-theoretical intuitions (Glas, 2010) and *control beliefs* (Wolterstorff, 2004). These pre-theoretical intuitions and beliefs are given substance in the philosophy of education, with attitudes in the first order of practice: awe, reverence, surrender, gratitude, amazement, awareness of nothingness and shortage, etc. (Glas, 2012).

Every philosophy of education can be distinctively identified by what Ter Horst calls 'a theory concept'. This is a core insight that holds everything together. Such a theory concept is culture-bound, has its own language, and is authoritative over all other parts of a philosophy of education (Ter Horst, 1980, pp. 12–35). In the Dutch context, Martinus Langeveld's concept of 'self-responsible self-determination', is well known (Hoencamp et al., 2024). Many different theory-concepts exist within the Christian tradition, some of which consist of a single Bible verse. Bavinck, for example, defines education based on 2 Timothy 3:17: 'so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (Bavinck, 1928, p. 89). The theory concept can also be narrowed down to a metaphor, as in our attempt to present the teacher as a guide of hope. It need not necessarily follow that different theory concepts lead to relativism:

If core statements about parenting and human life are possible – apart from the time – and place-related shells – then every era would need its own vocabulary, because these would have to correspond to their

contemporary actions and experiences. But even within the same culture, no one can put reality into words in such a way that it provides solutions for all the sufferings of upbringing. (Ter Horst, 1980, p. 30, our translation)

We would therefore argue that every Christian philosophy of education is contextual. Each Christian school community desiring academic reflection on their educational practice can formulate their own theory concept. As a starting point, they should seek Biblically inspired wisdom and mirror themselves to what others have done in similar or different contexts while taking their own geographic, cultural, and historical context seriously.

4 The Pedagogue between Theology and Pedagogy

Figure 3 visualises the relationship between theology and pedagogy. The theological layers are on the left, and the pedagogical layers are on the right. Within these layers, there is the possibility of top-down movement. The lower levels reflect what is lived, assumed and practised and the further up one goes, the more systematic and reflective things become. The Christian pedagogue, positioned in the middle, is related to both domains and all their layers.

Not every professional will be equally active in all layers. Their role and its corresponding responsibility are decisive. A distinction can be made between the pedagogue as a classroom teacher, as a manager, as an administrator and as a scholar. However, we should use the term pedagogue consistently to ensure that all educational roles require holistic pedagogical reflection and application. The teacher in the classroom needs practical wisdom, and the principal needs to articulate a pedagogical vision at a strategic level. The same applies to leaders at other levels in a school, such as coordinators and location managers. They must all be able to transfer scholarly ideals and visions (the layer of philosophy of education) into concrete decision-making (the layer of institutional conventions and limitations and the layer of the subjective and collective educational theory). Christian educators need to navigate through the layers of the theological domain, too, because Christian education is nourished by the Christian faith. In practice, this means that teachers need to theologically reflect on anthropology of the student (discussed in Chapter 4) and on how and why learners must be initiated into God's world (discussed in Chapter 5). Christian schools are always part of the Christian tradition, often founded by church denominations with distinctive normative theological positions (the second layer from above).

The Christian pedagogue finds himself both in a back-and-forth movement between the two domains and in a movement from top to bottom. Theology can clarify (or sometimes problematise) pedagogical action, and vice versa, pedagogical questions can problematise theological principles and assumptions. In this back-and-forth process, the pedagogue matures into a truly Christian professional. Depending on the role they find themselves in, pedagogues will determine their position and receive a more thorough *self-understanding*; a concept used by the Flemish educationalist Geert Kelchtermans (2009) and which will return in Chapter 6. Later in this chapter, we will demonstrate that the left-to-right movement between theology and pedagogy has several functions. We emphasise that the outline in Figure 3 should not be viewed hierarchically. It is not the layers that make the difference but the quality of reflection and application.

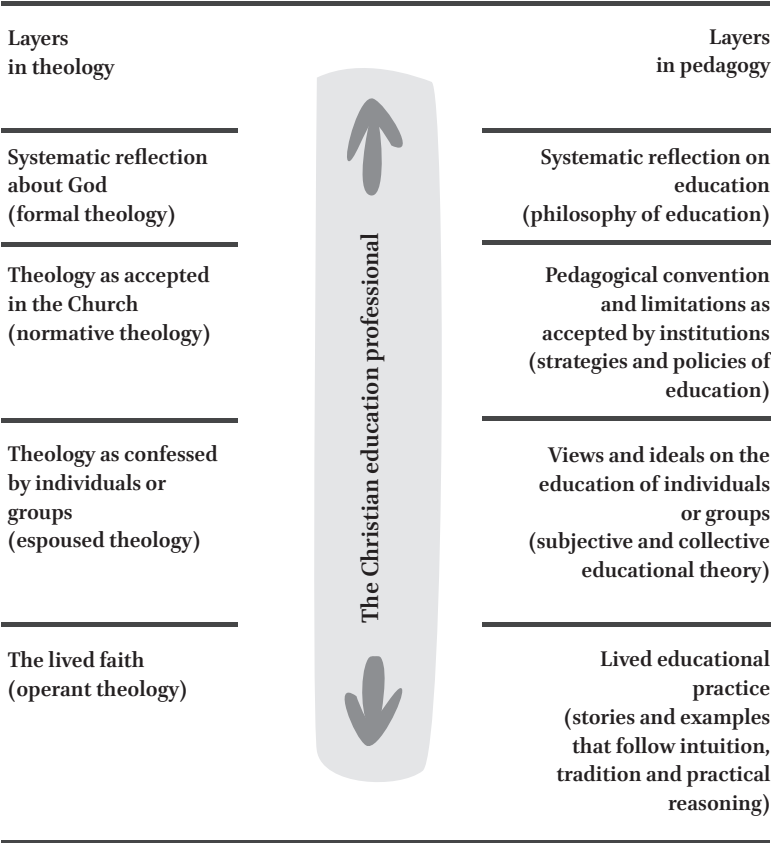


FIGURE 3 Layers in theology and pedagogy

5 Empirical and Conceptual-Normative

In this section, we address a specific problem that emerges when navigating between the different levels of reflection. Namely, what type of knowledge are we considering: empirical or conceptual? And if one is preferred over the other, how do they relate?

5.1 *Empirical*

Let us return to the principal searching for a new anti-bullying policy. He has been reading a research report based on a large study of interventions against bullying and is shocked that some children are worse off after the implementation of a strict anti-bullying policy. Now, let us view the principal's situation from the perspective of Figure 3. We see the principal utilising both domains as he strives to make effective new policies with ideas from the theological domain (Biblical input) and the pedagogical domain (empirical research input).

Concerning the latter: *empirical* originates from the natural sciences and refers to that which can be concluded by a systematic observation of reality. More precisely, through controlled experience, one tries to extract statements about a specific phenomenon as objectively as possible. Usually, this type of research is used to measure the effects of interventions, such as prescribing medication (in health care research) or testing new screens in a smart board (technical research). Two groups are used to analyse the effectiveness of interventions: a treatment group and a control group. The former receives the intended intervention; the latter does not. With this method, researchers assess which protocols do and do not yield the desired result. By similarly examining various interventions, researchers can prove which is the most effective.

This empirical way of thinking is common in contemporary pedagogy. As a result, many believe that objective knowledge should direct the practice. However, it is important to note that science is not to be solely understood as empirical, but as a systematic and traceable way of reasoning and working. In other words, be it natural sciences or humanities, it is primarily about working systematically and analytically and whether someone is prepared to consider alternative interpretations (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pp. 15–16). Empirical knowledge is also often associated with value-free thinking. Philosophers are, however, strongly convinced that value-free thinking does not exist. In addition, other complex problems can occur in social sciences. For instance, how should a researcher correct for variables of behavioural differences in control and intervention groups? Or how do researchers deal with findings that are proven in past research and apply them to a new contemporary context? Is

this even possible (Biesta, 2010a)? The words ‘are proven’ contain another difficulty. They suggest that humans can objectively determine how to act based on data: so, if we introduce the most effective anti-bullying method in a school, it should automatically lead to a significant reduction in bullying. This may seem obvious reasoning, but there is a catch.

5.2 *Conceptual-Normative*

The normative is always at stake when looking for the most effective action, so pedagogical reflection must direct action and address the question of where the normativity comes from. Do empirical data themselves show what is true and good, or are other sources needed, for instance, concepts or statements from philosophy of education and theology? Taking the example of bullying, would evidence of the effectiveness of programmes suffice for the school principal, or will he also need to use biblical data or other reflective material? Since empirical research began to gain influence at the beginning of the twentieth century, this issue has often been discussed (Hyslop-Margison & Ayaz Naseem, 2007).

The basic approach is twofold. On the one hand, it has been argued that the discipline is so closely involved with reality that it is necessary to clarify what practice looks like. This clarification helps to direct actions. For that reason, empirical research has a legitimate position in pedagogy. On the other hand, it has always been recognised that empirical material can never be the only directive for action. There is always a process of reasoning needed, which brought Kohnstamm to the statement: ‘Pedagogy will be philosophical, or it will not be’ (Kohnstamm, 1981, p. 92, our translation). Choices in all facets of scholarship are made by theoretical and ethical deliberations, in which not only empirically proven facts but also concepts come into play. Through the concepts, phenomena are named, analysed and interpreted. The bullying example shows that both pedagogical and theological questions are at stake. Regarding the pedagogical one, it may require explaining whether pedagogues have to consider the difference between teasing and bullying. Are there gradations? What makes it a serious problem? Why should we make a point of it at school? In what way does power play a role? Is the attention to this also related to what we educate people for? On the other hand, theological questions are also at stake: how does the brokenness affect this (Van Laar-Jochimsen, 2025)? Does it help when we refer to the phenomenon of bullying as injustice? And what does that mean? How can justice be done, and what does this mean in a context where teachers have responsibility for a group of students? All these questions are not empirical, but conceptual-normative by nature. We can only answer them by reflecting on the phenomenon (*conceptual*) and the choices to be made for action (*normative*).

Regarding the relationship between an empirical approach and a conceptual-normative approach, we believe that Christian pedagogues should be competent in navigating between the different types of sources from the outset. Although they need empirical data, these data should be interpreted in pedagogical and theological conceptual frameworks.

5.3 *Imagination*

The previous example suggests pedagogical action is mainly a matter of reasoning, using different data types. This is true when it comes to empirical data. But is it also the case regarding the influence of concepts? At first glance, it would seem so. When we apply concepts from theology, psychology or pedagogy to practice, we use a theory. For example, should a human being be considered a unique developing individual, this may lead to a different application in practice than when a human is thought of as a determined assembly of neurons. Strictly speaking, theoretical assumptions can be translated into practice by logical reasoning.

Concepts also influence in another way, namely imagination. By imagination, we mean that the educator gets a certain idea of how to act, which may not be exactly contained in a logical framework (a $\rightarrow$ b) while it is guiding. Smith and Smith (2011) point out that imagination is an important mediator from ideas to pedagogical practices and vice versa: 'Over time, imagination becomes embodied in repertoire, and repertoire at the same time shapes imagination' (p. 14). Imagination is mainly created by using a certain type of analogy or metaphor. These have a different operating power than moral precepts, techniques or beliefs. According to Smith and Felch (2016), this might mean that '(...) perhaps refreshing our imaginations in conversation with Scripture and with Christian educators past and present might be exactly what we need in order to better come to grasp with the real world' (p. 2). They then mention several examples, comparing education to a pilgrimage, gardening and building construction. The way teachers imagine pedagogical practice influences their actions: 'Our imagery offers direction for our actions and inquiries, not only when we are reading fiction or studying art, but also when we are focusing on real-world tasks. Imagination is one of our basic ways of getting at the world' (Smith & Felch, 2016, p. 2). Take the example of stonecutters: when one asks what they are doing, one cutter might say 'I am cutting the stone into a perfect square shape', while the other might say 'I am building a cathedral'.

So, we see that action strategies are nourished not only by data but also by language and images. These can originate from different disciplines. Given the purpose of this book, we are particularly interested in the reciprocal interaction of language and images derived from theology and pedagogy. When concepts

are thoroughly argued and explained, they each give their own direction to what happens on the different layers. However, they also influence each other. This brings us back to the main question in this chapter, namely the relationship between theology and pedagogy.

6 Relationship between Theology and Pedagogy

In the previous section, we have seen that empirical and conceptual research have their own right of existence, each playing its own role in the interaction between the levels, from bottom to top and vice versa, How should we now consider the relationship between the left and right columns in Figure 3? Miedema (2016) has proposed that they should be seen as complementary. The relationship between the disciplines is represented as an ellipse, with the two focuses formed respectively by pedagogy and theology. According to Miedema, pedagogy and theology both have their own sub-context but can complement each other. In this way, they remain in a tension-filled and potentially complementary relationship. The attractiveness of this approach is that it does justice to the language and insights used in each discipline while referring to the same phenomena. With this in mind, we propose four functions in the relationship between the disciplines: the hermeneutical function, the inspirational function, the directive function and the critical function (De Muynck, 2020b, p. 242). In explaining these functions, we will mainly discuss the impact of theology on pedagogy. We wish to prove that the left-to-right interaction cannot be separated from the top-to-bottom interaction.

6.1 Hermeneutical Function

The primary function has to do with looking at educational phenomena theologically. In doing so, we first note that much of the language in the education

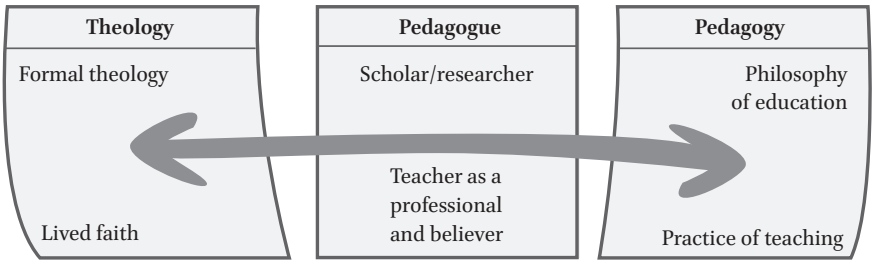


FIGURE 4 The hermeneutical, inspirational, directive and critical functions in the interaction between pedagogy and theology

practice is borrowed from other disciplines, not only from neighbouring disciplines such as psychology and philosophy but also from management science or economics, as we see in the term ‘classroom management’, derived from a management discourse. It explains classroom actions in a managerial, controlling framework. The phrase ‘potential for development’ has an economic background: potential is about exploiting resources and using employees’ talents. A specific interpretation comes with using a particular term. In the phrasing, the pedagogical phenomenon can adopt the colour of the discipline from which the jargon is derived.

In this way, using theological language can make one view education a certain way. The case of bullying is a good illustration, and a common reasoning would be as follows. Bullying harms another pupil (or several pupils), which is bad for the self-image and thus for the development of the victim. The teacher observes that the group is excluding the pupil. Bullying is an indication of underlying aggression, which means the group is not functioning well. The bullying protocol might prescribe that this should be solved by discussions in small groups. This pedagogic action may result in pupils apologizing to the bullied pupil and expressing their intention to accept them: ‘You can always join us in the playground in future’. The pupils can then realise that the problem has been solved.

How does the hermeneutical function of theology function in this reasoning? Consider the command to ask for forgiveness and grant forgiveness (Col. 3:13). From a faith perspective, apologising can result in a moment of forgiveness. The offended person could then express that they no longer blame the other. If a Christian teacher has forgiveness as an ideal for repairing disturbed relationships, it has a different connotation than ‘an apology has been made’ and ‘the apology has been accepted’. This example illustrates that the language reflects the ideals. De Ruyter (2006) has pointed out that religious ideals function in different ways: ideals that are constituted by religion (*constituted ideals*) and ideals that are described in a religious manner (*determined ideals*). Constituted ideals are unique to a religion and the origin of the ideals can be traced back to it – consider the word ‘reconciliation’. Determined ideals are shared with others but are given their own religious justification. This applies to the word forgiveness, which is also used in non-religious discourses but has a specific connotation in Christian schools.

6.2 *Inspirational Function*

The inspirational function is similar to the hermeneutical function but is less an explanation of a phenomenon in a Christian way and more an introduction of Christian meanings into practice. Teachers who feel inspired to do this will behave differently. Let us provide an example. Christian thought is inspired by one important principle: love. Love leads to a certain desire (Paul, 2016).

A mission-oriented pedagogy takes the call seriously to owe nothing but love (Rom. 13:8). In the New Testament, this viewpoint is enriched with many features. Consider the admonition not to provoke bitterness in children (Eph. 6:4). In the classroom climate, one can also think of hospitality (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2, see Chapter 9). Students should feel welcome in their classroom.

The inspirational function can operate through the various theological sub-disciplines. The biblical sciences can provide information about pedagogical relationships, as Heino (2015) has demonstrated, regarding the Bible book of Proverbs. These relationships are always moral as they point to life or death. There are also entrances through systematic theology: in this example, if we consider the image of man and child and the theory of knowledge (see Chapters 4 and 5). Finally, church history shows the origins of pedagogical practices, for example in monastery schools.

6.3 *Directive Function*

Pedagogical reflection aims to serve the teaching practice. Empirical research clarifies patterns in educational practice at the lower layers but subsequently can direct action, using theological vocabulary. The directional function of theology requires careful observation within the pedagogical situation as it determines the Christian notions at stake. A theological framework can profoundly influence the strategy.

An example could be the question of to what extent students with special educational needs should be accepted at schools, which will be discussed in Chapter 9. How strongly is the theological perspective taken into account that we must treat everyone equally and not primarily differentiate between observed talents? Or to come back again to bullying: how do we develop an awareness in schools of the seriousness of this problem when we consider God's demands for justice? And how is it to be thematised in a school? Does it simply happen (in the conditional sphere: it is nice when people are not being bullied because this disturbs the proper education process), or is it a breaking point (we cannot call ourselves a Christian school if pupils are being bullied) (De Muynck, 2025)?

Professionals may consider such a theological thematisation an exaggeration. Practical problems have strong knock-on effects in pedagogical practice when it comes to (theologically motivated) theory formation: 'If I only knew how to deal with this hyperactive child', says a teacher in primary education. 'Please, tell me how to improve the atmosphere in the group' says a teacher in secondary education. 'How do I deal with parents' critical questions?' asks a mentor of an exam class. These all are legitimate questions. They are so urgent that the theological input could easily be neglected in strategy choices. One might wonder whether it makes sense to bring the adjective 'Christian'

into play in such questions. We, indeed, believe this is not always the case, which explains our formulation above: ‘*can* profoundly influence the strategy’. Practices do not become more Christian because they are labelled ‘Christian’. Decisive is whether there is a readiness and willingness to look beyond current issues of action (see also what was said in Section 2 in Chapter 1 about a source-based approach). Theological sensitivity is needed to make Christian pedagogical judgements. All actions involve concepts and images that interpret and place short-term actions in a broader perspective. To take the example of a mentor, empirical research has shown that increasing parental involvement enhances the student’s learning. However, collaboration with parents is not just a pragmatic issue. Christian parenting and education practices are obliged to ask questions like: who has primary responsibility for the upbringing and what does that mean for the division of tasks between parents and school? We will come back to this in more detail in Chapter 3 when we describe the action-oriented character of a Christian philosophy of education.

6.4 *Critical Function*

The last role we attribute to theology is a critical one. Sometimes the biblical message is at odds with what is being practised. As we pointed out in Chapter 1 with Psalm 78: reality proves that the adult generation does not naturally live a good life according to the love commandment. God’s Word is prophetic. In the Old Testament, prophets often shockingly reveal what lies beneath the polished surface of a life practice. A lifestyle consisting only of outwardly correct habits is heavily criticised (see, for example, Isa. 58; Jer. 23). We also see this critical prophetic function very concretely when it comes to judgemental statements about educational practice (2 Kings 16:3; Ezek. 16:21) or more implicitly in narrative passages (such as Father Jacob with Joseph and his brothers, Gen. 37). In the New Testament, Jesus reprimands His disciples for hindering children in coming to Him (Matt. 19:13–15).

The critical function has two sides. Christian pedagogy is both self-critical and culture-critical, as explained in Chapter 1. It operates in a tension between the achievements of culture and the criticism from a Christian worldview. By ‘critical’ we refer to the Greek word *krinein*: to discern what is essential. The positions that can be taken here can be illustrated by contrasting the Dutch theologians Oepke Noordmans (1871–1956) and Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). Kuyper reasons along the lines of cultural development and Noordmans advocates the Biblical idea of Christians as strangers. In his theology, Kuyper values culture positively. Based on the cultural mandate from Genesis 1 and 2 and Christ’s authority over all of life, he poses that Christians are obliged to engage in culture. Noordmans, on the other hand, sees in Kuyper’s neo-Reformed

reasoning the danger that Christianisation be considered a historically observable process, instead of a matter of faith. The relationship between faith and life is always tense and therefore more dialectical than harmonic. The Word of God is a critical voice in the given cultural setting (see especially Noordmans, 1988, pp. 141–153). When applied to education, the neo-Reformed position could mean that Christian education, with the help of reason and research, becomes ever more purely Christian. Christian schools could bring the Kingdom of God nearer. Noordmans' criticism, for which we have sympathy, implies that one should not present pedagogical practice as a utopia, as if faith were manifested in a purely integrated manner, and as such can transform society. Following Noordmans, it is more obvious to work on the quality of Christian education through spiritual impulses than through organisational measures and check-lists. We will get back to this in Chapter 10 (see at length Smith, 2018).

6.5 *Reciprocal*

Christian pedagogy can profit from the four functions. The hermeneutical function involves the theological naming and clarification of pedagogical phenomena. The inspirational function allows educators to be informed by the main line of Christian thought handed down in the tradition of the Church. In the directive function theology can be of decisive importance in the choice of a pedagogical strategy. And finally, there is the critical function that contributes to transforming pedagogical practice.

Reversely, pedagogy can influence theology with its conceptual frameworks. For instance, with the help of pedagogical language, biblical passages can be better understood (biblical sciences), the meaning of guilt and forgiveness can be better expressed (systematic theology), how schooling in monasteries and universities promoted the Protestant Reformation can be better understood (church history), empirical and conceptual research can give a better understanding of how practical theology can provide insight into the pedagogical and didactic needs of catechists and pastors (practical theology). That all functions can also work in reverse poses the question of what authority should be given to theological concepts. In other words: what kind of authority does theology have in the hybrid interplay of disciplines? In the next section, we will show that in a mission-oriented pedagogy, as we call it, several biblical-theological contents are decisive.

7 Pedagogically Relevant Theological Themes

7.1 *Mission*

The legitimacy of the contribution of theological thinking to pedagogy is that Christian education is positioned in the Christian tradition. Concerning the

Christian mission, a few Biblical key moments stand out. When Abraham was called, the commandment had the character of a desire for blessing: ‘and you will be a blessing (...) and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ (Gen. 12:2–3). When God explains His commandment to Israel, it is in the context of God’s redeeming action in Egypt. From there follows the command to hear:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4–9)

Hearing must penetrate the heart and lead to love. The command to love must be instilled into the next generation (Deut. 6:1–9). The educating generation is intentionally charged with filling the entire environment with love, which becomes visible and tangible even in the body and in the home space. In Psalm 78, as we saw in Chapter 1, the commandment can be sung, allowing for an even stronger embodiment. The entire wisdom literature is about learning how to practice the commandments. Keeping the commandments does not come naturally, as the prophets are continuously reminding Israel. Education is needed. In the New Testament, the commandment continues but now with the charge to follow Christ as the fulfiller of the commandment. The whole Scripture is fulfilled in Him and therefore the entire education is focused on that.

In Ephesians 6:4, Paul expresses the Christological commitment profoundly: ‘Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the LORD’. In view of the broad outline of the passage in which this text occurs (Eph. 5:22–6:9), dealing with children is embedded in the ethos that applies to all categories in the Christian congregation: women, men, children, employers and employees. Everything must be done ‘in the LORD’, which means ‘in Christ’. The identity of Christ is all-important: in Him, the commandment of love is fulfilled, and therefore men and women must be willing to position themselves beneath each other, children must be willing to obey, and parents must take care not to damage their children emotionally. The command to educate is directive in the New Testament, as in the Old Testament. It is evident in the equipping task of pastors as expressed by Paul in his letters to Timothy. By teaching, Timothy must make sure that the message of Christ is continually explained: persistently, with repetition and perseverance (e.g. 1 Tim. 4:11, 6:2; 2 Tim. 4:2).

The question of prioritisation touches on the position Christians and Christian-inspired education have in society. Hilgenherger narrows this down to this question: 'What does one find most important in life?' Whereas in the past all education was religious education, since the Enlightenment more and more attempts have been made to free public education (such as schools) from religious elements (Hilgenherger, 2006, p. 75). The question of the place of theology in pedagogy is then regarded as obsolete and the influence of faith on pedagogical action would then be reserved for the last pillar-based Christian schools. We believe that this reasoning does not do justice to the power theological thinking can have. Faith language is not only accessible to the principal who speaks from a religious perspective about bullying. When one thinks religiously, the four functions mentioned are also active in a secularised context, for example when one works as a Christian in a public school. The question 'What is the most important thing in life' can, in that context, be a guide for these teachers. Not only in terms of the ideal goals (desiring children to serve God) or content ideals (wanting to show something of God in the content), but especially in terms of the work ideals: teachers can establish a Christian practice in their pedagogical action in which ends and means are not separated (see Edlin, 2014, pp. 293–309; Smith, 2020; Cairney, 2018, pp. 12–15).

7.2 *Sin*

A major problem in raising children is that we cannot assume they will do or desire the right thing automatically. Children and their educators are sinners who cannot do good because of their apostasy from God (Gen. 3; Ps. 14; Rom. 3). Therefore, parents, educators and children often fail. As we argued in Chapter 1: educators are called to prevent the next generation from being as sinful as them. One of the core elements of the Christian faith is this existential problem of sin and apostasy. Human beings cannot do good by themselves and are in a restored relationship with God only because of the reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

What does this theological notion mean for Christian pedagogy? The fact of human sinfulness may lead to one connecting the educational issue to humans' possibilities or impossibilities to educate properly or to be educated to do good. This can either paralyse or lead to an ambiguous anthropological optimism. The former happens when humans' sinfulness is made the all-decisive point when dealing with children. The second occurs in the search for sparks of general grace found in man to which education can connect. When dividing the domains between God and man, what goes well in upbringing is ascribed to God and what goes wrong to the failure of the educator. This fruitlessness is one of the reasons we do not take our starting point from anthropology but

from God's mission. When we agree with Jan Habl in line with Comenius that children are neither angels nor demons (Habl, 2025), this does not deny or relativise the sinfulness of educators. On the contrary, the fact that educators have a mission, biblically speaking, presupposes humans' sinfulness. It also shows that the educator and the person being educated are not thrown back on themselves, but on God who, in His grace, reaches out to sinful people.

7.3 *Promise*

As explained above, a line runs through salvation history via church history to the present. 21st-century believers had best start their reasoning from the New Testament church, without neglecting the Old Testament. When, in Ephesians 6:4, Paul calls to raise each other in the instruction and admonition of the LORD, it is about the church that does not live under the law, but under grace. That grace is not there due to qualities in man, but because of God's mercy. The educator's task is to raise an awareness that a promise rests upon those, as anticipated (future) believers: that they are by grace set free from sin and called to be servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:18). Therefore, a positive expectation of education does not exist because of abilities in children or their educators, but because of the promise of God. Children are called to become who they are or will be in Christ. The Creator knows what is to be expected of His creation, but the God of Israel does not allow His mercy to be limited by this (Ps. 103:17). The future life of children is not thought of in terms of the merits of educators or achievements of children, but from God's grace, and so educating them to act responsibly, which we will describe in the next chapter as the core of pedagogy, is not about isolated efforts. Pupils are considered people who will live by the grace of God.

7.4 *Covenant*

To start one's thinking from assignment and promise is based on God's covenant. Just as the LORD established His covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the Christian congregation is primarily a covenant community. The covenant places today's Christians in line with all believers in salvation history; they are incorporated into the covenant with Israel, as Paul indicates in the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 3:6). Believers from the Gentiles are no longer 'foreigners and strangers', but 'fellow citizens with God's people and also members of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19). In the New Testament, the covenant is characterised by Christ establishing fellowship and people being called to faith and repentance; children are raised in the 'training and instruction of the LORD' (Eph. 6:4). Like in the Old Testament, God usually works by covenant: along the lines of generations, whereby educators are called to

make their children acquainted with the salvific deeds of God. The concept of covenant does not exclude children from other faith backgrounds. Just as foreigners in the Old Testament were approached as if they belonged to Israel, the Christian school should show a similar hospitality. We will come back to this in Chapter 9.

The pedagogical presupposition of the covenant is that education can only be positively directed when there is trust in God's promise. If not, there is no solid ground for action. Believers must trust in God (see Ps. 78:7; 1 Tim. 1:1); this also applies to educators and children. The next generation must be allowed to grow into this. The positive message about God's mercy must be passed on in word and practice to the educators of the next generation so that they, in turn, can tell their children. The acknowledgement of the covenant as the basis of education thus also implies trusting that God goes beyond the generation that is being educated now. In biblical terminology, God keeps His covenant forever, up to thousands of generations (Ps. 105:8).

For education, this starting point has several consequences. First of all, teachers should be realistic, that is, not optimistic about their good actions and those of their students. They therefore derive their motivation from the assignment and promise of God and not from visible results. The teacher's actions are supported by God's promise and the prescriptions from the Christian tradition based on it. Subsequently, the teacher may embrace the message that the child is accepted regardless of performance. Speaking from grace, the good works are already laid out (Eph. 2:12). It then follows that being accepted for who they are does not depend on accurately following the rules. And finally, there is always the possibility of a new beginning. Children, because of their imperfection and sinfulness, will make many mistakes. The pedagogue is aware of this and has confidence that, through falling, the child may rise again (Kohnstamm, 1959, p. 137 ff.; Raes, 2009, pp. 88–85).

Making the covenant decisive in a Christian philosophy of education may be questioned. Is there not a threat of indoctrination? Indeed, there is a claim in the proclamation of the covenant, but the mediated message must be freely accepted. There is a proclamation that is saving, and healing, which has no traits of violence and therefore cannot be interpreted in terms of indoctrination. This proclamation is not about man's search for God but about God's search for man (Raes, 2009, p. 42). The hidden work of the Holy Spirit is at stake here. For a Christian school pedagogy, this entails, above all, the nurturing of receptivity, hope and trust and remaining open to the expectation that something will happen with and to the child's soul. The necessary implication is attention to the student's personal hermeneutical space, in which the

appropriation of convictions, insights and attitudes can evolve. On this theme, see the discussion on authority and tradition in Chapter 7.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored how Christian thinking and speaking can influence the reflection on education. As we have argued, pedagogy and theology should be considered multi-layered. The more one speaks scholarly in both disciplines, the more systematic it will become and the more abstract the insights become. Reflection on education must be action-oriented: normative insights will always influence the interpretation of empirical data. To clarify how theology affects pedagogy we have distinguished four functions of theology: a hermeneutical, an inspirational, a directive and a critical one. Theology explains educational phenomena in its own way, inspires educational reasoning with its own language and images, and can also give direction to strategies. It has a critical function because it can question educational practices from a Christian perspective. To get back to the policy of schools on bullying, with which we started this chapter, we can say it can be coloured by applying these four functions. Not only do they influence the intuitions and expectations of the classroom teacher but also the strategy advocated by a school principal and the policy outlined by a board. Based on what we have covered, we can define Christian school pedagogy as the activity that clarifies how and promotes that, educational and upbringing practices are Christianly inspired, informed, and practised. In this publication, we concern ourselves with educational practices within the school. How we understand them as pedagogical practices is explained in the next chapter.

Christian Teaching as Pedagogical Practice

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

ROM. 14:17–19

...

Very much of what goes on in schooling consists, or should consist, of inducting students into social practices (...). And if that is true, then very much of what goes on in schooling consists of making available to students delights and satisfactions that otherwise would not be available.

WOLTERSTORFF, 2002, p. 264

1 Introduction

I believe that you can teach a lesson as a Christian but that you can't teach a Christian lesson. Yesterday, I was ready to start a grammar lesson when my phone rang. Usually, I keep it on mute, but I kept it on this time because my mother was in poor health. This immediately evoked a chorus of protest: 'Miss, you can't pick up your phone'. They were critical because students are not allowed to have phones with them in school. 'Calm down guys', I answered before leaving the classroom, 'I'll explain later, please carry on with your work quietly'. It turned out indeed to be a phone call about my mother. When I came back, the class was working quietly as asked. When I came in, however, they immediately started protesting again: 'How can you do that, Miss, while we are not allowed?' I explained that my mother was in bad health and that I, as her only daughter, had to be available. The atmosphere changed immediately. They were quite compassionate and wanted to know everything about it. This made me think: did I give a Christian grammar lesson? Only to think: of course I didn't – I wasn't even teaching then, but these things happen at school.

So it doesn't make much sense to speak of a Christian lesson! (Secondary school language teacher)

In the previous chapter, we positioned Christian teaching within the broad outline of the Christian tradition. It is in this context that 21st-century teachers understand their calling and develop educational practices. By 'practices' we do not only mean practical action, as opposed to theory. Practices also and more importantly mean a pattern of doing things, which has been internalised by the teacher, with the help of others. The main purpose of this chapter is to clarify this practices approach. The above is a good example of such a practice. We start by asking and answering three questions. The first concerns the practices approach. Why is it important for Christian education to speak about school pedagogy (Section 2)? The second question is about the practice itself: what do we mean by a practice, and how does this support our reasoning about education (Section 3)? Finally, we ask what the characteristics are of *good* pedagogical practice and argue that the concept of practice is normatively loaded and says something about the quality of education (Section 4).

2 The Pedagogical Dimension in Christian Teaching

Who is pedagogy for? It is often thought that children are the subject of pedagogy. But is that true? When discussing pedagogy, we should, in the first place, look at the teacher, as we already pointed out in Section 3. Now it is time to characterise the pedagogical task of the teacher. As will become clear, in a triadic approach, teachers are the subject of school pedagogy, not the learners. They are the guides who must take up their pedagogical responsibility. We clarify this by successively discussing some main concepts related to the nature, purpose and content of pedagogical action. The nature of the teacher's action is intentional: they act deliberately, directed towards the goal. The goal of action is evoking the learner's responsibility. This growing responsibility in a child is called *maturing*. This definition implies a distinction between *education* and *formation*. Teachers provide education and formation refers to the processing by the students. The content of the action comprises active leadership, expanding learners' understanding of the world and teaching.

2.1 *Intentional Action*

The example mentioned at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates several moments of deliberate action by the teacher. She prepared a grammar lesson,

intending to teach her students something. ‘Teaching as an act’ is described by the Canadian educationalist Harro Walter van Brummelen (1942–2014) as ‘the deliberate attempt to bring about learning’ (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 34). The teacher in the example had a well-considered goal with her lesson. However, when the phone call disturbed her intentions to carry out the lesson, she again took deliberate action. She explained to the students what was happening and created space for herself. She also consciously asked the students to work by themselves. Pedagogical action is aimed at goals the teacher consciously wishes to achieve. This is the first characterisation of what we mean by pedagogy. The goals can be more or less open but the direction being pursued is decisive. Some things are pursued deliberately, but some are not intentional. The intentions also have a further-reaching purpose best summarised by the word *responsibility*.

2.2 *Learner Responsibility*

Students must learn to love God above all and their neighbour as themselves (Deut. 6:4–5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37–39; Mark 12:30–31). Pedagogical action imagines learners who desire to independently perform their task and vocation for God, the other and this world; in other words, to take responsibility. Responsibility is related to the stewardship to which God calls every creature (Gen. 2:15). Educators have a leading, initiating and supporting role towards achieving this responsibility. While their role is important, at the same time, it is limited because it is the individual learner who is the one to take responsibility and to undergo the formation process that leads to taking responsibility (Visser & De Muynck, 2020, p. 24). This implies an increasing independence which presupposes personal space for development. We refer to a *hermeneutical space*, the human ability to receive and give meaning (Pollefeyt, 2020; see extensively Chapters 4 and 5). In this space learners gradually transcend their own existence and reflect on it, can be open to what they are not or are not yet, and what they do not yet understand but can learn to understand (De Muynck & Vos, 2021). This capacity for self-transcendence expresses something of God’s glory, which the Bible also assumes in children. The words used by the prophet Micah for the blessing of a child (Mic. 2:9) can also be translated as *ornament*. In Chapter 4 we will deal with this in detail, explaining that children should primarily be seen as creatures in God’s image.

By defining it this way, a misunderstanding can easily arise. This has to do with the cultural dominance of the autonomy ideal. It led a Dutch pedagogue to warn against self-regulation in complete freedom (Golverdingen, 2003, p. 12). In our view, the duty of self-formation should not be confused with non-normalised freedom. Responsibility can only exist when one hears someone’s

claim and responds to it. From a biblical perspective this claim is above all the voice of God in His commandments, as summarised above. The distinction between own responsibility and the necessity to obey is a false contradiction: the first cannot exist without the second. In other words: persons being formed need to develop a listening attitude, in which they open themselves with awe to the voice of God. They cannot learn this without educators. Educators appeal to them, based on their own accepted meanings, but invite them to respond and act independently, always aiming at personal appropriation by the student. Ultimately, the students themselves stand *coram Deo*.

2.3 *Coming of Age*

The ability to take increasing responsibility for oneself and towards God, the other and creation is called *maturing*. The educators' actions are aimed at this. Because of God's promise, educators have high expectations, which motivate them to guide the child in the right direction. In the words of Psalm 78: 'so that they would put their trust in God'. The use of 'aim at' and 'in the right direction' is important, because we cannot assume that the student will self-evidently take on this responsibility. This is not only because human beings in their choices have sinful tendencies, i.e. *moral* conditions but also for other reasons, which lie in the *natural* conditions. Children and young people with special needs (physical, mental, or psychological) are sometimes unable to take responsibility. Yet we pursue a similar direction with them. The pedagogue maintains, sometimes against the visible or expectations, that God has put glory in every child, independent of physical or psychological conditions (see Chapters 4 and 9). The dignity of the human being is not impaired if the person shows few signs of self-transcendence (Bowie, 2016).

It is appropriate to recognise two points of emphasis concerning school pedagogy. On the one hand, growing up is about increasing insight: learning to understand the world. This is the aspect of reason. In the coming-of-age process, one increasingly learns to formulate the acquired convictions, using the hermeneutical space. On the other hand, there is action. The more mature a person becomes, the better they can make responsible decisions independently. These actions express whether one loves God above all else and one's neighbour as oneself. The person is involved with their whole being: ideals, desires, and considerations, which all determine the direction in which one acts. The Bible refers to this being as *the heart*. Some philosophers of education call it *conscience*, not as the inner warning voice when something is in danger of going wrong, but as the core of personhood: a person is someone who is addressed in their conscience and speaks out. This speaking out is not so much about trivial choices like choosing between two flavours of soft

drinks, but about moral decisions that affect the person deeply (Kohnstamm, 1959, p. 68; Langeveld, 1974, p. 65; Hoencamp et al., 2024).

In classical anthropology, both aspects (understanding and acting) are expressed with the term *reasonable-moral being*. Morality is at the heart of responsible action for love must become apparent through action. One learns to see oneself as less than the other, to control oneself for the sake of the other, and to look in awe at all that the Creator has created, whether material, plant, animal or human. This moral attitude can only develop when one acquires insight into the world. The aims are closely related (Bavinck, 1928, p. 46; Langeveld, 1974, pp. 68–71). After all, to make decisions and be morally wise, one must know why one acts as one does. In a school pedagogy, both aspects are involved. Pedagogy has the duality of being instructed (so that insight can increase) and being taught to guide and control oneself (so that one can act according to the commandment of love). In this duality, moral action bears the most weight. This led the Dutch pedagogue Jan Waterink (1890–1966), in his argumentation on the question of whether one can speak of Christian arithmetic, to state that Christianity lies not in a competence: ‘But herein it finds its uniqueness, that the child must learn to *act according to the will of God*’ (Waterink, 1937, p. 9, our translation).

The close interconnection between knowledge and action can be seen in biblical wisdom (see Chapter 5). It is apparent when Bezaleel and Aholiab are commissioned to construct the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3). They are filled with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, insight, knowledge and all kinds of craftsmanship (Ex. 31:6). Thanks to the wisdom they receive, they can make what God had proposed to Moses. A less favourable example can be found in the Book of Hosea. The prophet charges Israel with immorality: there is no loyalty and no love, there is cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery (Hos. 4:1–2) going on. The cause is a lack of knowledge. The prophet sees the people perishing because they have no moral compass (Hos. 4:6). Shockingly, the leaders are held responsible for this, primarily the priests, who are supposed to teach (Deut. 31:9–13, 33:10; 2 Chron. 17:8–9; Jer. 18:8). Due to the lack of initiation into the law of God, morality withered (Hos. 4:4, 6). These matters are cutting-edge in Hosea’s prophecy because the lack of knowledge harms the covenant relationship. This relationship is expressed with imagery of great intimacy: that of marriage (Hos. 2:16–18) and that of a parent and child (Hos. 11:3). Understanding of the commandment must lead to knowledge of God. This is not about slavishly following rules: even if the law is recited ten thousand times, people can remain far from God (Hos. 8:12 [English Standard Version]). What matters is that, through the commandment, a person acknowledges the Creator and accepts His love (Hos. 8:14). When educators fail, it leads not only to lack of

knowledge but also to godlessness and immorality, people can remain far from God (Hos. 8:12).

2.4 *Formation*

There is an important question to be asked about what has been said so far: if upbringing is aimed at children taking more and more responsibility, does this imply that educators can take a back seat? We answer in the negative because we must distinguish between upbringing and education on the one hand and formation on the other. Upbringing and education imply the deliberate exertion of influence on the developing person (Langeveld, 1974, p. 31). Where it is true that in everyday language one often says that the teacher forms, which refers to kneading such as when a potter forms a pot, this is an incorrect use of the term formation (for a detailed analysis see De Muynck & Vos, 2021). To keep the distinction between upbringing, education and formation clear, we define formation as something that takes place within the person, or to put it in the words of Kohnstamm: all formation is self-guided development (Kohnstamm, 1959, p. 137; cf. Bavinck, 1928, p. 171). It is the process in which through all kinds of influences – not only those of the educators – the person grows in understanding and takes more personal responsibility. In Chapter 5 we will explain how we understand this responsibility with the Biblical concept of wisdom: the Christian educator's ideal is that the student develops into a *wise interpreter* (a concept borrowed from Cooling, 2021), with both a receptive and an active attitude. For the sake of brevity let us say that the developing person learns to walk their life's journey in search of God's commandments, finding meaning in and giving meaning to this world. This is what educators strive for while acknowledging that they are not the only ones to influence formation but are part of a dynamic of various actors and factors. Langeveld expresses this as follows:

The person being raised wants to be someone himself. He is subjected to many involuntary influences and many intentional ones but also distances himself, chooses, feels attracted to, resists, etc., and in the gradually constituting personality of the person being raised we see the most personally processed disappear in the most untraceable way. It becomes one's own. (Langeveld, 1974, pp. 32–33, our translation)

In the example of the teacher at the beginning of this chapter, we see both education and formation. The teacher uses an everyday moment (a pedagogical act) to help students discover how to take responsibility (the formational process). When she returns after her phone call, the students demonstrate

their space to ask questions. They wonder why the teacher takes a phone call when they are not allowed to. By responding to that question, the teacher helps the students understand that the rules do not prescribe precisely how to take responsibility. The phone call was imperative to her mother. The students understood and learned from this example how each situation requires a unique manner of action.

From a Christian perspective, formation can only be thought of paradoxically. The only Bible text in which the word formation occurs, is Galatians 4:19. Here Paul expresses the desire that Christ should take shape (literally: be formed) in the believer so that the believer is formed in the image of Christ. The love in human beings only comes about through the reconciling work of Christ. Here, one is entirely receptive; love originates from God and not from humans themselves. On the other hand, this love only becomes visible in action. 'Only in doing,' Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) comments about the end of Matthew 7, 'does submission to the will of God happen' (Bonhoeffer, 2009, p. 340). Where the formation we described above appears to be active, theologically speaking it only exists in its receptive form (for this paradox, cf. Bonhoeffer, 2009, pp. 349–351, and the testing activity required of the human mind in Rom. 12:2, p. 336 ff.). The required activity of the developing person (required because of the responsibility to which God calls him) can only be understood in a Christian way if it goes hand in hand with a receiving attitude (Canons of Dort, III/IV, 11–12). Here the one is not a condition for the other, such as when receiving God's love leads to an attitude of love. The different categories (the religious attitude, the psychological processes and what is pedagogically provoked) each have their own character and dynamics but cannot be separated. In a Christian pedagogy, therefore, practices need to be cultivated in which the active and the receiving attitudes are united. Here, we observe a connection between the educational and the spiritual. The student receives a lesson in a receptive attitude as one receives grace. The student experiences patience from the teacher, the student is explained something, the student gets an answer to a question, the student is given a correction, and yet the student actively incorporates this into the own experiential world, getting an idea of what patience is, understanding the problem, integrating the answer into the own thinking, and accepting or protesting against the correction.

2.5 *Active Leadership*

Teachers have an important guiding influence within the formation process, which is prone to two tensions. Firstly, there is tension between personal responsibility and serving the interests of others. Teachers are not just professionals representing their educational ideals, acting based on their own

convictions. They also, somehow, represent the parents (who send the child to school), the colleagues (the teacher is part of a community of professionals) and the society in which the child grows up (the law in many countries prescribes education as compulsory, and sets the core objectives for that education). At the same time, decisions are required in which, by their very nature, personal ideas dominate the deliberations. For this reason, as we shall see in Chapter 6, it is of great importance that teachers understand their vocation.

Secondly, there is a tension between active leadership and the expectation of responsibility from the student. Teachers also guide students when they do not want instructions. They aim for goals and expect the students to be receptive and also lead the students into areas they are not interested in. Students may initially fail to comprehend the necessity of what is offered. This demands that teachers look ahead so that when they do not immediately see a sense of responsibility developing in the students, they still expect this responsibility to come. Within this long-term process, teachers should have a supporting, helping, and assisting attitude (De Ruyter, 2017, p. 133; Kohnstamm, 1959, p. 136; Langeveld, 1974, p. 30; Waterink, 1958, p. 17).

To illustrate how the pedagogical attitude is woven into the systematic character of education, we return to the example at the beginning of this chapter. The teacher had prepared a grammar lesson through which pupils were expected to master the grammatical structure of the language. Unexpectedly, the situation required the teacher to assess, in a split second, what was pedagogically good for the pupils. She decided to ask the students to work independently and then explained why she thought it was justified to answer the phone call. In both decisions she was directive. This exemplifies that pedagogical action urges the teacher to act in this specific situation (with *these* students, in *this* room, at *this* moment), estimating what will be best for the students.

2.6 *Understanding the World*

All human beings receive a responsibility in its broadest sense: they are responsible before God for themselves, for their fellow human beings (Lev. 19:18, 34), and for the environment. Education is therefore always aimed at broad formation: the adult must be able to function in all contexts of life (Bavinck, 1928, p. 170; Biesta, 2022; De Muynck & Vos, 2021; Waterink, 1958, p. 121). School pedagogy does not exclude any domains a priori. We will argue in Chapter 5 that knowledge is a total concept, in which the cognitive, the relational and the affective are interwoven. In a school pedagogy, therefore, attention should be paid to the development of the whole person.

Within this holistic task, a school pedagogy has to emphasise certain aspects. This has to do with the relatively autonomous position of the school.

According to Kohnstamm, the task of the modern school is to introduce the child to the world of work, 'to make them feel the joy of work and thus to prepare them to use their natural gifts in the service of society and the development of their own personality' (Kohnstamm, 1959, p. 343, our translation). Kohnstamm argues this because of the differentiation in modern society, in which children's upbringing in their primary environment is insufficient. The notion of work is interesting because it does not limit formation to an increasing responsibility to better understanding, a growing grasping of reality or the ability to make independent judgements (all aspects of the reasonable) but also incorporates the ability to act independently (the moral). This goal determines the scope of the school's activity: children only learn to act responsibly if they have acquired a broad and deep knowledge of the world. The school, therefore, more than any other educational institution, has the task of extending the learners' world.

In our approach, the school is not only an extension of the family and society but also of the church, which follows from the broad outline we gave in the first chapters. *School pedagogy* has its own emphasis, next to *family pedagogy* which concerns the initial initiation into the values fostered in the family and *church pedagogy* which has the task of initiating children and young people into the faith. School pedagogy has the task of guiding young people to find existing meanings and inviting them to give meaning to the contemporary world. Our vision is connected to the pedagogical triangle, explained in Chapter 1: the teacher guides students in their epistemological relationship to reality. This brings us to the character of teaching.

2.7 Teaching

As we saw in Chapter 1, the purpose of education is not to direct the student towards the teacher, but learners must, in the maturing process, learn to orient themselves increasingly towards the external source, namely the commandment of God. Teachers help students to see reality from God's perspective. Their task is to clarify how meaning is given to the world from a faith perspective. This is where the prophetic element of being a teacher is revealed. We say this with some restraint because a prophet in the Old Testament was often an unwanted person who did not confirm the existing order but, rather, questioned it. A teacher may not be an unwanted person, but the analogy is that, as a guide, one points to a source outside oneself.

In Chapter 2, this idea was applied abstractly to the critical function of theology in relation to pedagogy. This prophetic task applies to teachers in three ways. Firstly, in the act of exhortation, in which teachers invite the students to correct their judgements. Second, teachers are also culture critics as they

test phenomena in their settings and the world around them against biblical frameworks (see Chapter 8). In doing so, they are not concerned merely with apparent cultural expressions but also the underlying presuppositions, and guide pupils accordingly in the development of their decision-making faculties. Third, the teacher interrupts what is taken for granted. The philosopher of education Gert Biesta calls interruption the core of teaching (Biesta, 2017, pp. 17–19). In doing so, he echoes his earlier criticism of the tendency of educationalists to reduce teaching to learning processes (*learnification*, Biesta, 2022, pp. 58–74). If teaching were only about learning, the pedagogical relationship would no longer be in the picture. The specificity of being a teacher is precisely that it interrupts the learner's self-centredness (the *egological worldview*, Biesta, 2017, p. 43). A teacher raises issues learners are not asking for, for example by giving difficult assignments, asking difficult questions or telling stories. Personhood formation (or, in line with what is argued in this chapter: the formation of a person) is not constructed from within but evoked from without. One of the main tasks of students is simply to allow themselves to be addressed. Receptivity is more important than construction (Biesta, 2017, pp. 31–34; De Muynck, 2020a). That the student is 'addressed' is in line with what we see in this chapter as the central task of pedagogy: that students learn to understand their unique responsibility towards God, themselves, and their neighbour and creation.

It is important to remember that the aim of an interruption is not a student's complete submission to what the teacher proclaims. Rather, an interruption aims to stir something up in the learner's thought process. In the first case, the teacher would want to control the outcome of the interruption; in the second the teacher acts in the confidence that something good will happen. This distinction is important because education often tries to conform to rigid models, preventing learners from feeling engaged. The interrupter needs confidence, especially when initial signs seem unpromising. Teachers should approach their students as subjects, even when (Biesta raises this possibility) nothing indicates they are any such thing. Teachers nevertheless address their students as if they were subjects, hoping and trusting that something substantial will happen (Biesta, 2017, pp. 90–94).

3 Christian Teaching as Social Practice

The teacher in the given example distinguishes between what she does as a person and the lesson she teaches. Based on her experience, she believes that while it is possible to teach a lesson as a Christian, teaching is a craft and there

is no standard to measure whether a lesson is Christian. In this section, we will examine whether it is possible to pinpoint a standard that identifies a lesson as distinctly Christian. We will discover that there is good reason to agree with this teacher although her view has some difficulties. The question is whether the distinction between teachers as Christians and their craft is desirable. The concept of practice helps to clarify in which way we should and should not make this distinction. In the following section, we start by explaining why we understand Christian teaching as a *social* practice. Then, in conclusion, we will show that it is also a *normative* practice.

3.1 *Teachers*

In the teacher's comment that her lesson was not a Christian lesson, we hear the assumption that we can see exactly how an individual teacher acts in a Christian way. Imagine that someone has figured out that Christian teaching involves the characteristics a, b, and c. Then one could observe a lesson and determine whether it meets these characteristics. Such an approach fits how vocational training currently works towards qualification: the teacher must have sufficient knowledge and a set of basic skills to be competent to start teaching. Does this, however, also apply to Christian teaching? We argue that it does not, for if this was to be our reasoning, what implications would this have?

The main problem is that Christian teaching is then regarded as an individual matter, implying that Christianity should be observable in the teacher's behaviour. One would be able to distinguish two categories of behaviour: behaviour that is Christian and behaviour that is non-Christian. However, we believe it is impossible to conclude from behavioural characteristics whether Christian teaching is being practised. The approach we propose, which uses the concept of *social practice*, is contrary to this assumption. We understand Christian teaching not as an individual but as a social practice. Hence, the practice of teaching by Christians, which we will further clarify, can only be understood in terms of a shared practice. In addition, in our approach, it is important that the teacher is one within himself and consequently experienced by students as a whole person. In addition, even though a teacher may behave in an unchristian way, this tells us little about the Christian character of teaching, for it is not the sum of what can be observed or cannot be observed. In our view, head, heart and hands are connected. Christian teaching, therefore, should not be thought of first and foremost in terms of a duty ethic (in which one follows a set of rules), but in terms of a virtue ethic (the disposition that determines one's behaviour). We will elaborate on this in Chapter 6.

3.2 *Tradition and Community*

What is meant by a social practice? According to the British philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1929–2025), a practice is ‘any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized’ (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 187). This is a complex definition. To clarify, we will highlight a few elements related to Christian teaching. First of all, in the act of teaching, something important is pursued *by a specific group of people*, namely professionals in schools. They form a community of Christian teachers who pursue an ideal. Together they think about what benefits students for their future. The fact that this is accomplished in synergy also functions as a cultural-critical movement against individualistic educational tendencies. We will return to this in Chapter 9. To be precise: Christian education is not a matter of an organised association of teachers but about an imagined group, across the world, that shapes teaching from a Christian perspective. Christian teachers always function within a tradition and a community (cf. Kuiper, 2020, p. 193).

MacIntyre calls the ideal that is being pursued an *internal good*. The English word *good* can be read here as *value*. The adjective *internal* shows that it is not primarily about effect or result; there is a value to be found in the practice itself. The concept of an *internal good* refers mainly to intrinsic value, that which makes the practice worthwhile, that which cannot be relativised. For our school pedagogy, we consider the teacher’s contribution to the personhood formation an *internal good*. All school activities should be related to this (De Muynck, 2006; De Muynck, 2018, pp. 71–72; Kuiper, 2019, p. 194). This mediatory role in the student’s formation makes the teaching profession meaningful. We cannot speak of school pedagogy if this is not the goal of actions.

However, being a teacher also involves various activities and responsibilities that are further away from this core. To distinguish these from *internal goods*, we call them *external goods*. The adjective *external* conveys the idea of usefulness, results, and outcomes, all of which are part of being a teacher, but carry a different weight, i.e., salary, reputation or livelihood security. This also includes obtaining a diploma and experiencing social appreciation from the students.

Finally, MacIntyre also speaks of *standards of excellence*. Some activities and responsibilities are more important than others. The decisive factor is whether the action contributes to the formation of students. Excellence should therefore not be thought of in terms of the teacher’s skills, for example, effectively pursuing plenary explanations or composing good maths lessons but

excellence is mainly thought of in terms of the virtuous attitude of teachers. In Chapter 6 we mention various examples such as reliability, accessibility and the willingness to help.

3.3 *Formation*

How is a virtuous practice cultivated in a Christian manner? As stated in Chapter 2, a practice is nourished by imagination: teachers hold particular ideas of what constitutes good teaching and try to make these ideas happen. The teacher repeatedly mentioned in this chapter believes that a lesson itself cannot be Christian. Nevertheless, unnoticed, she showed the students a proper moral attitude, which can be called 'Christian'. She demonstrated concern for her mother. She expected understanding from the pupils and received it. This expectation was nourished by her image of her learners. She 'imagines' pupils who can handle a situation like this and learn from it. Such imagination is embedded in the Christian view of life and so the importance of care, trust, empathy and consideration for one another is paramount. The English-American educationalist David Smith puts it this way: 'Practices are born out of imagination. They are forms of life that keep us hopeful and focused on the call of the good to which we have committed ourselves' (Smith, 2018, p. 135). This somewhat cryptic description shows that the teacher's action can be linked to the implicit Christian view of life. Teachers act in a Christian manner through their 'imagination' about who students are and what they need, to then focus on their future with hope. In this way, Christian teaching is nourished by a Christian imagination.

As a consequence, practices are *embodied*. This means that what is done, happens in a particular space and place and is carried out by a concrete person who behaves a certain way. A practice can turn out to be Christian if it is carried out by *this* teacher, in *this* specific lesson and *this* classroom. To understand social practices, it is crucial to emphasise that these practices consist of certain patterns internalised by the teacher. These internalised habits reflect what is important in the teacher's tradition: the style of instructing, the way of correcting, where one stands when students enter the classroom, etc. But also: whether or not one knows the pupils' names, how much time is spent preparing the Bible story, which pupils are given a voice, and how much silence you allow between a question you ask and the answer you expect (cf. Stratman, 2013). All these behavioural patterns originate within the tradition the teachers stand in, namely, those things they have come to consider important and which have become habits.

Next to the imagination, there is also habituation, a process influencing the everyday stance of a teacher. This is clearly explained in the American

philosopher James K. Smith's thinking on Christian practices. In his theory on liturgical practices, he emphasises the influence of the environment in which people are formed (James K. A. Smith, 2009, 2013, 2017; Smith & Smith, 2011). It follows Augustine's idea that a person is not primarily a thinking, but a desiring being. Rather than being driven by ideas, human desires and behaviours are formed by rituals, practices and liturgies. *Rituals* are routines whose repetition and practice form the wiring of existence. It becomes second nature: this is how we feel, this is how we look, this is how we act (James K. A. Smith, 2009, p. 86). *Practices* are a set of rituals aimed at a particular goal. *Liturgies* are a subcategory of this because they have an ultimate purpose (James K. A. Smith, 2009, p. 25). Ongoing participation in rituals, practices and liturgies determines what people ultimately love (James K. A. Smith, 2009, p. 87).

3.4 *Christian Practice*

In practices, some patterns can be recognised as Christian, but others less so. David Smith clarifies this as follows:

Teaching practices (and other practices) are somewhat like this in their relationship to the beliefs that motivate them. Practices engage us with the world and with others, and they often require improvisation, adjustment, revision, and fresh attempts. Practices draw upon our habits, our competencies, our desires, our contexts, our resources, and not just our explicit beliefs. Yet it does not follow that the relationship between our practices and our beliefs has to be arbitrary. It is reasonable to look for the best sense of it. (Smith, 2018, p. 63)

While it is obvious that there is such a thing as a Christian practice, determining exactly what characterises a Christian practice is difficult. A practice can be Christianly motivated and be shaped through Christian imagination, stamped by Christian concepts, yet this does not mean that teachers are passively subject to the customs of their school or to what they have practised for years. In our mission-oriented pedagogy, we want to emphasise that educators are not automatically right and must actively reflect on their actions. It is a truism that teachers can form new routines and rituals, which, in turn, can influence their entire practice. A teacher can repent of what they perceive as unfruitful. This is not just a question of behaviour. The head and heart are involved in what the hands do. Embodied practices are, in other words, organic by nature. Life must be viewed as holistic, hence, the practice of one virtue leads to the appearance of another (MacIntyre, 1984, pp. 204–225).

Because education is a social practice, collective conversion can also take place. Therefore, in Chapter 10, we advocate the potential need for the revitalisation of Christian education. Practices can be deliberately corrected by examining how these lived practices correspond to biblical values (Smith, 2018, pp. 68–80). A school team may, for instance, discover that the assessment practices are over the top, unjust or counterproductive to the formation of students. The team may then decide to make radical changes. This is where the critical function of theology appears, as explained in Chapter 2. The critical function also appears, for example, when a team studies methods for a subject such as maths. Some methods are more useful for imagining a practice as Christian than others.

This reasoning shows that practice is not a static concept. Lived practices in schools are subject to change. Practices can, over time, become secularised, but they can also be Christianised. Indeed, practices can be routinely borrowed, adapted and incorporated into new contexts (Smith, 2018, p. 130). Christian practices can even take shape in non-Christian schools. When actions are incorporated into stories and relationships, they acquire meaning and are directly linked to beliefs. The embeddedness within a Christian framework of meaning makes a practice Christian. Conversely, theological thought needs practice to come to expression (Smith, 2018, p. 130).

3.5 *Students*

The final implication of the theory of practice is that students grow into certain habits. Something is cultivated through the manner of teaching. Again, referring to the example: the students have got used to not using smartphones and the teacher has tried (perhaps with all colleagues) to promote concentration by setting this rule. It is an attempt to cultivate attention and unlearn distractibility. The reverse can also occur. Instead of something being cultivated, something positive is unlearned. The Dutch philosopher Cornelis Verhoeven (1928–2001) shows in his book ‘wonderment’ how easily this is unlearned. ‘At school’, he says, ‘the wonder that might lead to closer acquaintance is all too often nipped in the bud, and we are left with a collection of phrases and quotations. (...) We have “covered it” at school, but we haven’t internalised it, it hasn’t captivated us and we’ll therefore never appropriate it again’ (Verhoeven, 1999, p. 16, our translation).

With MacIntyre we state that an *internal good* is stifled by the routines we practice in education: teachers make students do homework, rehearse the work using tests and then move on to the next set of skills. We do not want to give the impression that this is unimportant; after all, learning skills have their place in education. But it is important to realise that something undesirable

is happening here. In Verhoeven's words: a secondary goal is being elevated to the level of the primary goal: 'Unless an intellectual crisis intervenes, we are doomed to a life of mediocrity after such an education. This raises the question of whether something that is so regularly the outcome of institutional action should not eventually be seen as the actual goal' (Verhoeven, 1999, p. 16, our translation). We do not like to see a school that produces lifelong mediocrity. Such a school disturbs the Christian idea that awe, wonder, righteous indignation and respect belong to the *internal good* of educational practice (Ps. 111:10). Yet we can imagine a school where wonder is cultivated, which brings us to the idea of education as a *normative* practice.

4 Christian Teaching as a Normative Practice

In the previous sections, we have argued what we mean by *the pedagogical* in school practice and why teaching should be understood as a social practice. We now take a final step by explaining how Christian teaching is normative. In doing so, we employ the so-called normative practices approach which originates in the reformed philosophy of the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) (De Vries & Jochemsen, 2019; Jochemsen, Kuiper & De Muynck, 2006; applied to education by De Muynck, 2006, and Kuiper, 2019 respectively).

For various reasons, it is important to discuss this normativity separately. Firstly, because of the action-oriented character of pedagogy itself, as we emphasised earlier in this chapter. Within the complexity of educational practice, choices are constantly made. Education is not an open process that can wander off in any direction, but it is intentional, that is, it is guided by conscious considerations and goals (see Section 2). This remains true, even if the result cannot be exactly predicted and things may take a different direction than intended. The question is: what are teachers directed by? In answering this complex question, it is important to distinguish between what is important and what is less important. A point of orientation is needed to know what should and should not be thus classified. This is particularly important for the development of a school vision. The normative practices approach clarifies how the point of orientation relates to all the things one does.

4.1 *Constitutive*

In the normative practices approach, the *constitutive* side of reality is distinguished from the *regulative* side. The reasoning for the constitutive side

is as follows: every professional practice has a meaning that is specific to this particular profession. This is reflected in the profession's applicable rules. Certain types of rules determine or constitute the nature of the profession, in our case: of teaching.

To flesh this out, three types of constituting rules are distinguished, each representing a certain type of normativity. The first is the *qualifying* norm, which determines the core function of the profession, and indicates what is at stake in a practice and what must be achieved by one's actions. For education, we have established that this is personal formation (see Section 2). Whatever happens in school practice, is aimed at forming students. The qualifying standard not only shows what is at stake but also brings unity to everyday action (Hoogland, 2019, p. 49). We then approach what has been described above as *internal goods*. Teachers sense qualifying moments when their heart is moved, and they think: 'This is why I do what I do'. The qualifying corresponds with what the professional likes to do best so that they experience 'pedagogical transcendence' (De Muynck, 2008, p. 402). In this way, qualifying touches on what teachers themselves desire (Kuiper, 2019).

Some rules serve this core. In the constitutive side of the normative practice approach, we call these the *conditioning* norms. These include biological norms (we take the development and maturation of children into account), legal norms (children have a right to education) and economic norms (salaries must be paid). Many standards are important and can be said to serve the main purpose of educating children, but they should not become the main purpose of education. For example, the economic importance of education must not overrule the content of education (De Muynck & Visser, 2013; Nussbaum, 2010).

The third type of standards belonging to the constitutive side are called the *foundational* norms. They refer to the elementary rules that have become commonplace in education over time. All kinds of things are involved here, such as the division of learning areas, the use of books, a blackboard that developed into a smart board, teachers' job descriptions, the organisation of parent's meetings, rules for using AI etc. The strong orientation and the inescapable presence of founding norms means that the teacher from the example at the beginning of this chapter does not experience the practice of teaching as Christian. All the ordinary things given a place in her actions can just as well be encountered with non-Christian colleagues. We have already seen in the section on social practices that the presence of these 'ordinary' things is only part of the story. The embedding is what counts. In the next section we want to show how being embedded in a Christian framework is part of what we call *the regulative*.

The examples mentioned show that basic standards can change over time. Practices are influenced by culture and subject to change. To see how this works, let us take the example of how the school playground is designed. A few decades ago, in the Netherlands, reshaping the playground into a school garden was widely promoted. The idea was that children should play in a green natural environment and learn by being jointly responsible for its maintenance. Yet we hardly see school gardens anymore today. This shows two things. Firstly, it reflects a change of vision: a more functional approach has come to the fore. Secondly, how the environment is structured directs what teachers can do. It limits the possibilities: you cannot grow plants with the pupils on concrete. It also opens up possibilities: it is easier to supervise and keep in touch with all the children in an open space. So, the physical conditions determine what one can or cannot do.

Changing paradigms of opening and limiting school playgrounds do not only touch on the foundational norms but also the conditioning norms (Hoogland, 2019, p. 49). The enabling and limiting effects can be seen in changes in technology. Due to the presence of the smart board, for instance, a teacher in a kindergarten class is forced to programme a day more tightly. Having tight and regulated whole-day schedules restricts the occurrence of unexpected events. To mention another example, if there is software for training spelling rules, the instruction of the spelling exercises is outsourced to the computer programs. Explaining remains in the teacher's repertoire of actions, but the nature of it shifts.

4.2 *Regulative*

The regulative side of the normative practices approach is directed by the idea that the way people act is rooted in the heart (Hoogland, 2019, pp. 48–49). The heart is the source of personal motivation, style, preferences, desires and ideals. Hoogland (2019, p. 48) clarifies this by giving an example of two chess players who both follow the same rules. They both share the goal of the game (the qualifying norm), they are subject to the same types of conditions (the conditioning norms), and they use the same pieces, the same chessboard, and the same habits that have been followed in the game for generations (the foundational norms). Yet, they differ in motivation, style, and preferences. In the same way, teachers are different in how they carry out their profession. The regulative side 'includes all those factors that, given people's involvement in practices, determine their attitude towards them: their motivation their inspiration' (Hoogland, 2019, p. 50).

The assumption that all action is rooted in the heart is important because it means that people should be *personally* committed to shared standards of

professional practice yet take ownership and not blindly follow the rules. They are actively accountable for the way they apply the rules and must be able to explain why they act a certain way. This is also where religious convictions come into play as part of the reasoning for which teachers wish to take responsibility. We will return to this in Chapter 6.

The teacher’s virtue takes the stage here: they want to meet the *standards of excellence* that apply to their professional practice (Hoogland, 2019, p. 51; see above what is explained about MacIntyre’s philosophy). In our reasoning, however, it is important to note that the teacher is not only accountable as an individual. The regulative side of practice is sustained by the school team. Within teams, all members possess an ‘ethos’: the ‘social attitudes and processes within a group which can strengthen and improve the accountability of its members’ (Hoogland, 2019, p. 51). Together they are accountable for following this ethos. In Chapter 9, we will see what this means for the leadership in a school community.

4.3 Christianity in Practice

In summary, a picture emerges with three types of standards determining the nature of teaching (see Figure 5). All three belong to the constitutive side, which clarifies the professionalism of teaching. Its uniqueness is expressed in its distinction from other professional practices such as care, administration and technology. Through it runs the regulatory side, which relates to the ideals and motives of this specific teacher or a specific group of teachers. Theological understanding colours and directs the regulative aspect of Christian teaching. Teachers do not only account for this as individuals but as a collective. For this reason, we call Christian teaching a collective practice. Teachers form a vision together. Let us think of the example of the school playground. Teachers may agree together that play is of great importance for a child’s well-being: there is a time to work and a time to relax and caring for creation is important. In these convictions, their Christian image ‘regulatively’ comes into play. This can give

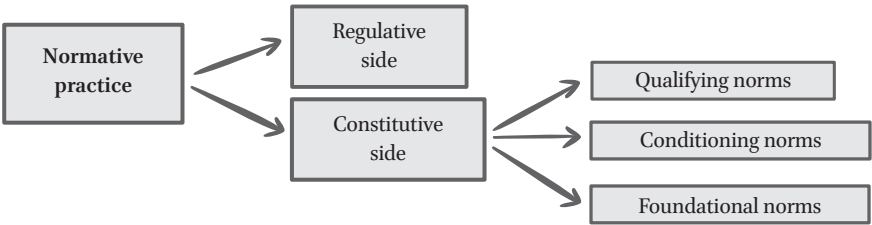


FIGURE 5 The constitutive and the regulative in normative practice (Jochemsen et al., 2006, p. 12)

them a good reason to make the school playground a natural part of school life and reshape it into a garden.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have clarified that Christian teaching is a *pedagogical* practice because it enables students to form themselves. We understand teaching as a profession in which intentional action is taken with a view to the maturity of students. This maturity must be reflected in the way young people take responsibility. Teaching aims to enlarge the world for the students and helps them see this world from a Christian perspective. Next, using MacIntyre's virtue ethics, we have argued that Christian teaching is a *social* practice. This practice is historically determined and is not a matter of individuals but of a collective. To relate Christian teaching, which always functions within a collective, to a meaningful general practice of teaching, the *normative* practices approach is helpful. The specificity of Christian teaching as a social practice is bound up with several norms, infused with a regulative stream of Christian inspiration and interpretation.

Christian teaching, however, is not a neatly rounded whole with a closed set of guidelines but is historically and contextually determined. A uniform Christian pedagogical practice does not exist. This is evident, for example, in the difference between the professed and lived identity of many schools that call themselves Christian (De Wolff et al., 2002; Smith, 2018). Christian teaching is also expressed in a wide variety of professional practices (Bakker 2004; De Muijnck, Reijnoudt-Klein & Spruijt-De Kloe, 2017). The Christian concept of teaching is embodied, and thus visible, but stops short of controllability.

This is an important observation throughout this book. In understanding that young people should not become like their fathers (see Chapter 1), the current generation of educators cannot pretend their style and habits to be the ultimate standard. A tension in the normative practices approach is therefore unavoidable. Christian teachers commit themselves to regulative commandments outside themselves, something they consider so important that it presupposes all their actions. The meaning is found in the promises of God; trusting that God as the Creator of a new generation will make a new beginning with them. This trust also means that current generations will put their trust in God and orientate themselves towards His revelation. In addition, the regulative means that one's own practice must be constantly reflected upon. There is no guarantee that following foundational, conditioning and qualifying norms will result in an immaculate school practice, let alone one in which the ideal (a new generation that places its trust in God) sure to be realised. As

Kuiper (2020) pointed out, there is an articulation deficit in modern school practice if qualifying aspects are not discussed. Articulating the deeper meaning of education also brings to light the frayed edges. These sometimes have to do with contingencies such as unexpected illness, death, conflicts, disasters in the environment, and the threat of moral failure, for example in the case of temper, injustice, unequal treatment, inattention, etc. Moreover, destructive patterns can creep into a Christian ethos. Despite all this, we may live in expectation because of God's promises. He invites us to shape this ethos by His commandments. Let us discuss our view of the pupil or student within this ethos in the next chapter.

Students and the Image of God

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

GEN. 1:27

...

To educate and teach is to help the other become human. And so, behind every education, however concrete and pragmatic it may be, lies an idea of the human being. After all, how can you help children and students become more human without having your own idea about being human? You have to know where you are going with children and students!

RAES, 2011b, p. 70, our translation

1 Introduction

Now that we have outlined our pedagogical and theological premises, the following three chapters will focus on the main elements of a Christian school pedagogy. In this we follow the three corners of the pedagogical triangle, starting in this chapter with our view of the student. For the pedagogical setting, we need insights from formal theology on the perception of the human being. In other words: we provide, with a philosophical term, a reasoned ‘anthropology’. How we view students as human beings is not only a matter of philosophy. We are aware of non-differentiated anthropological conceptions in the everyday teaching practice, at the lowest layer of theological reflection (see Chapter 2, Figure 3). Teachers do not usually act based on an explicit doctrine about the human being but on unexpressed ideals and expectations about humanity, internalised in the course of their lives (De Muynck, 2021). Consider the example of a 6th-year teacher who decides to deviate from the maths method for a lesson about chance and probability. He relates the following:

I didn't just want the children to learn about chance and probability as prescribed in our educational method. I want them to see how you can deal rationally with the future. In their future professions, they will have to reason about what is

coming, won't they? I also want them to consider what our view of the future has to do with God's view of the world. I started the lesson with two statements, which the children discussed in groups: (1) coincidence exists and (2) God determines everything. The answers were not discussed afterwards, but I did classroom experiments with coins and dice. What I found striking is that very different answers emerged, which I had not predicted. A small conversation went like this:

Student: 'If you keep on trying something often enough, it will always work once.'

Teacher: 'Even if I want to throw a six, one hundred times in a row?'

Student: 'No, some things are just not possible. Nobody is that lucky.'

Teacher: 'Aha, that's interesting. What else do you think?'

Student: 'It just doesn't happen. And I don't think it matters much to God anyway. He'll think it's more important not to secretly put your dice down with the 6 on top.'

Remarkably, the teacher links a maths lesson with religion. To use the words of the previous chapter: in his imagination, thinking about God is not separated from mathematics. However, what interests us most in the context of this chapter is what image of man is involved in the teacher's actions. Does the example reveal something about humans, their destination and how they can be led there (Bavinck, 1928, p. 21)? Or, to put it in the words of the quotation above this chapter: is the teacher engaged in helping students to grow as human beings (Raes, 2011b, p. 70)?

We shall not answer that question immediately but return to it further on in this chapter. First, let us stop to make a general remark here. As stated earlier, the starting point of this school pedagogy is not anthropology, but God's mission. However, this does not mean that anthropology is of minor importance. Even though images of human beings are often implicitly present in education, these images strongly determine the teachers' actions. They are part of their own professional theory. We will return to this in Chapter 6. This means essentially that teachers integrate images of man into their own framework of knowledge, insights and teaching style (Kelchtermans, 2009, pp. 260–265). Teachers can proclaim, for example, 'children are naturally curious', and apply this in their teaching. This indicates the importance of an anthropological chapter in a school pedagogy: teachers' images of students direct their pedagogical actions (Beugelsdijk & Souverein, 1997, pp. 24–25).

To answer the question of what kind of beings learners are, and what task teachers have, concerning their education and training, we take our starting point in the image of God. Following the Reformed theological tradition,

which considers this to be the most central idea in anthropology, we will argue that it also determines the teleological character of learners (Section 2). We will not be designing a comprehensive biblical anthropology, in which case we would have to pay attention to many more aspects, such as man's materiality, freedom, immortality and biblical data about the soul. Because we only aim to provide an anthropology for teachers, we elaborate on the main ideas concerning the student as the image of God: students are humans in relationships, the goal of education is taking responsibility, and students must learn to use their hermeneutical space to become active givers of meaning (Section 3).

2 Humans as the Image of God

2.1 *Created in God's Image*

The central idea of being created in God's image is explained by many theologians (see for example Bavinck, 1928, pp. 83–84; Bavinck, 2004, Vol. 2, pp. 511–588; Middleton, 2005; Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, 2017, pp. 260–266). According to Genesis 1, God has created humans in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:27), unlike the animals, which were made according to their kinds (Gen. 1:25). Although humans are explicitly called the image of God only a few times in the Bible, this concept belongs to the core of the biblical discourse on humankind; it is presupposed, for example, in Psalm 8, Ephesians 4 and Hebrews 2.

There is broad theological consensus that the image of God expresses the connectedness to God and at the same time subordination to God. The human being is the crown of God's creation, yet not divine. The Bible does not state that the human *is* the image of God (this is only said of Christ; see 2 Cor. 4:4), but that they are created *in* God's image and likeness. They are an image of God in the sense of representation, not of archetype. In addition, according to the second creation narrative, humans are made from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). They are created in God's image but also out of dust, meaning that there is at the same an intrinsic connection and a qualitative difference between God and human beings.

While there is hardly any difference of opinion about the basic outlines of the image of God, it is another matter when it comes to its concrete elaboration. The history of the reception of Genesis 1:26–28 is characterised by various interpretations. According to the classical interpretation, the image of God is shown in humans' *capabilities*. As living beings (*animal rationale*), they have a capacity for reasoning and for acting morally. Sometimes reference is

also made to humans' physical characteristics, like the ability to walk upright (Augustine, Calvin) and the ability to communicate with others. All these things, some say, distinguish humans from animals. This approach (usually called the *structural interpretation*) makes it possible to concretise the image of God: in their capacities, human beings reflect something of God. In the example given at the beginning of this chapter, the teacher expects students to be able to reason logically. This ability can be related to the creation in God's image. The objection could be raised, however, that the Bible nowhere relates the image of God to a structure in humans (e.g. the soul) or with abilities such as walking upright, rationality or moral consciousness. Another objection is that not all people have these abilities, or at least not to the same degree, which could raise the question of whether they are a lesser reflection of God's image than others. Finally, situating the image of God in human faculties is also problematic because dispositions that used to be considered exclusively human, such as the ability to calculate or grieve, also occur in animals (see Middleton, 2017, p. 75; Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, 2017, p. 262).

By way of illustration, we will explore how various influential scholars have given a structural interpretation of the image of God. To start with, the idea is already found in the work of Augustine, for example in *De Genesi adversus manichaeos*:

When man is said to have been made to the image of God, these words refer to the interior man, where reason and intellect reside. (...) Even our body has been made so that it reveals that we are better than the beasts and, for that reason, like God. For the bodies of all the animals which live either in the waters or on the earth, or which fly in the air, are turned toward the earth and are not erect as is the body of man. This signifies that our mind ought to be raised up toward those things above it, that is, to eternal spiritual things. (Augustine, 1991, p. 76)

Although Augustine commonly interprets the image of God in a structural way, we can also connect his anthropology with a relational interpretation: the opening of the *Confessions* ('Our hearts find no peace until they rest in you') shows Augustine's conviction that the human being was created relationally. As long as the relation is not restored, people are not only estranged from God, but also from themselves (Augustine, 1982, Book 1.1).

John Calvin (1509–1564) situates the image of God in the soul, although he also connects it with the human body. This occurs for example in a sermon on Gen. 1:26–28 from 1559 (Calvin, 2009, p. 94), and in the *Institutes* (1559). The image of God relates to the soul, but God's glory also shines in the body: that

humans walk upright distinguishes them from blunt animals and connects them more closely to God (Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3). According to Van Eck, referring to Calvin's commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* (1532), Calvin derives his insights not only from the Bible but also refers to the Stoic ideal of man: thinking and feeling in a balanced way, with a body that obeys the insights of reason (Van Eck, 1992, p. 114). Most importantly, Calvin relates the image of God to true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. His starting point is not general humanity, but Christ, who is, according to Calvin, the most perfect image of God. When people become like Him, God renews them as bearing God's image in true piety, righteousness, purity and knowledge (Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4). In this interpretation, the human condition before the Fall is reconstructed from redemption (Col. 3:10 and Eph. 4:24). In addition, rationality and creativity are linked to the image of God as creaturely abilities; these remained after the Fall. Reformed orthodoxy followed Calvin in this view (Belgic Confession, Art. 14 and Canons of Dort III/IV).

As indicated above, one can argue against a structural interpretation that the image of God is primarily connected with capacities. On this point, Wolterstorff draws a parallel with secular views on human rights, often based on rational agency or the capacity to act out of duty. Wolterstorff formulates the following objection:

The capacity of rational agency is a remarkable capacity; it gives those who possess it great worth. The problem, however, for those who want to ground human rights in the worth we have by virtue of possessing this capacity is that some human beings do not have the capacity: newborn infants do not yet have the capacity, those sunk deep into dementia or in a permanent coma no longer have it, those severely impaired mentally from birth never have it. (Wolterstorff, 2013, p. 134)

Against a foundation of human rights in capabilities, he argues that people have rights because of their humanity. When discussing the Christian position founding human dignity and human rights in the image of God, he returns to the abilities approach:

The main point made above about the secular capacity accounts applies here as well: whatever be the capacities required to possess the image of God, some human beings do not have those capacities. If the image of God is understood in the traditional way, as presupposing or consisting of the possession of certain capacities, then some human beings lack the image of God. (Wolterstorff, 2013, p. 136)

For this reason, Wolterstorff does not connect being created in God's image with abilities, but with man's being as a relational being.

Besides a structural interpretation of the image of God, we can distinguish a *functional understanding*. Here the emphasis is on what the human being does or is called to do as God's representative: fulfilling and subduing the earth and ruling over the animals. Being human is then linked to the formation and transformation of culture. Middleton, phrases as follows: '(...) the human calling as *imago Dei* is itself developmental and transformative and may be helpfully understood as equivalent to the labour or work of forming culture and developing civilization' (Middleton, 2005, p. 89). This becomes manifest, for example, in the building of cities (Gen. 4:17; 11:1–9) and the making of musical instruments (Gen. 4:20–22). This explanation stands stronger than the structural interpretation, because the image of God relates to the command to multiply and to master creation (Gen. 1:28). Thus, the human being reflects God's wisdom and creativity. This approach is recognisable in the objectives of teaching, for the teacher wants to teach the students something beneficial for their lives and their future professions. A functional view of the image of God suits our mission-oriented pedagogical approach. An objection to this explanation is that it narrows being created in God's image to a task. A human being, however, is more than the task they fulfil. So, for biblical-theological reasons, despite the validity of the functional interpretation, we need to interpret the image of God more broadly.

From the twentieth century on, there has been broad consensus on a *relational interpretation* of the image of God. Not abilities distinguish human beings from animals, but the fact that they are relational beings: created in relationship with God (Gen. 1:26–27), other people (Gen. 1:27) and the world (Gen. 1:28). This relates to the creation account of Genesis 2, which is about the relationship with God (v. 8), with other people (vv. 7, 12, 16), and with creation (vv. 18–19) (Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, 2017, p. 265). According to this interpretation, neither human capacities nor the task given to humans is decisive but their resemblance to God as a relational person. A person is the object of God's love and can respond to love; as a person, they can enter into relationships with others and take responsibility for their task and calling. This corresponds to their unique position: while the animals were created in their own kind, God created humans in His image and likeness.

There are various biblical-theological arguments for a relational understanding of the image of God. The biblical talk of *image* and *likeness* points to a relationship: as the image of God, human beings do not exist in isolation, but as creatures in relation to God. As creatures, they are addressed by God and held responsible. Furthermore, the relational aspect is apparent from the

fact that humans were created male and female (Gen. 1:27). Man and woman together reflect God's image. Finally, the relational character of God's image is shown by the fact that humans stand in relation to their environment.

A relational interpretation enables us to integrate important aspects of the other interpretations. For example, the human's calling according to the functional interpretation could easily be connected to a relational interpretation. Being called presupposes that people are related to God and their environment. Based on Genesis 1 and 2, one can add that humans are related to other people. In the same way God addresses people, they can answer God and enter into reciprocal relationships (Van den Brink, 2017, pp. 200–201). They are not only in a responding position towards God but also towards other human beings. In the school pedagogy context, we can apply this to the student's relationship with the teacher. Students can listen to and receive something from the teacher and are also able to respond. However, they are independently growing in a knowing relationship to reality (the top line of the pedagogical triangle). They develop their own perceptions and reasoning. In the dialogical relationship, they practise taking responsibility. A relational interpretation can also do justice to an important aspect of the structural interpretation: as unique creatures, humans stand in relation to God because, as opposed to animals, they have souls. As reasonable-moral beings (as formulated in Chapter 3), they are able to gain insight and act (morally).

2.2 *Fall*

Now we come to the question of the consequences of the Fall for man as God's image. Can we, from the here and now, refer to an anthropological given from the good creation? If not, the creation of humans in God's image loses its relevance for school pedagogy, because it is not applicable to the student's actual situation. We give separate attention to this because this issue seems to have been underestimated (Kuiper & De Muynck, 2025). In addition, if the answer is affirmative, what sin means for man as created in the image of God will have to be explained.

Christian tradition has answered the question of whether man remained in God's image after the Fall in different ways (for an overview, see Van de Beek, 2014, pp. 189–194). According to Reformed theology, the image has not been lost, but severely damaged. Calvin, for example, says that the image of God has not been destroyed and annihilated in man, but corrupted in such a manner that only a 'frightful deformity' remains. As said in the previous section, Calvin relates the current image of God not to creation, but to its restoration through Christ: the gifts and abilities by which man excels and why he is a mirror of

God's glory can nowhere be learned better than from the restoration of man's corrupted nature (Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4).

The Reformed confessions also emphasise human depravity with remnants of the image of God remaining. However, the Belgic Confession says that these are only to deprive humans of any excuses for his unbelief (Art. 14). The Canons of Dort offer a more positive interpretation: after the Fall, man has still some light of nature left, by which he retains some knowledge of God and natural things as well, such as the distinction between moral and immoral (Chapter III/IV, 4). Neo-Calvinist theology, distinguished between the image of God in a narrow and wider sense, and by doing so, sought to honour both human depravity and the residual gifts to safeguard humanity (see for example Bavinck, 2004, Vol. 2, pp. 548–549). An important objection to the distinction between the image of God in a narrow and wider sense is that it would lead to a division of human capacities: what can humans still do after the Fall and what can they no longer do? Because humans have lost true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, the focus is shifted to rationality and creativity. This, however, leads to a dualistic view of humans as sinners, but in practice, the confession of being sinners not resonating with the view on the rationality and creativity of human beings.

A relational interpretation solves this problem because it is no longer required to determine which abilities remain since the Fall. As relationship bonds are essential to humans, they cannot lose the image of God. Every person continues to resemble the Creator. That the human has remained a relational and a reasonable-moral being after the Fall is evident by the fact that God calls Adam to account: 'Where are you?' (Gen. 3:9). When Adam hides himself, avoiding communication with God, the LORD calls him out. At the same time, the command to cultivate and preserve the earth remains, so that we can also acknowledge an important point of the distinction 'in a narrow and wider sense', namely the preservation of humanity.

The image of God has not remained undamaged after the Fall. The relationship with God is broken. In their relationality humans seek to replace the broken relationship with God in self-idolatry or idolatry of creatures: people have replaced the glory of the imperishable God with an image resembling a perishable human being (Rom. 1:23–25). While inter-human relationships are not broken, nor those with the surrounding world, they are under pressure. Adam blames his wife (Gen. 3:12); in the post-fall situation, the man rules over his wife (Gen. 3:16). In Genesis 4, the broken relationship becomes manifest when Cain kills his brother Abel out of jealousy (Gen. 4:8). However, the calling of humans also remains; from now on, sadly, reproduction is accompanied by sorrow, where the woman gives birth with pain (Gen. 3:16). And still,

responsibility is the core of education. In Biblical language: humans are called to cultivate and keep the earth, but because they are cursed due to sin, humans will eat their bread by the sweat of their brow (Gen. 3:17–19).

The fact that relationships are broken and disturbed has consequences for being human. Again, the significance of Augustinian anthropology becomes apparent: 'Our hearts find no peace until they rest in you' (Augustine, 1982, Book 1.1). Human beings are looking for something they do not have (anymore). A relational interpretation does not relativise sin and brokenness. Because of the broken relationship with God, humans are estranged from their Creator and therefore from themselves; this affects interpersonal relationships and the relationship to the world. To respond to their calling, they need redemption, regeneration and conversion. This brings us to another aspect of the biblical discourse about the image of God: The New Testament's primary concern with Christ.

2.3 *Redemption*

As we have seen, after the Fall, people have remained relational beings. However, the relationship with God is broken, and the relationships with neighbour and environment are disrupted. At this point it is significant that, in the New Testament, not humankind in general but Christ is called God's Image (2 Cor. 4:4): He is the radiance of God's glory (Heb. 1:3), the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15). Where we dealt with humans as creatures in God's image and likeness in the foregoing; we now come to a second biblical line. The fact that, in the New Testament, Christ is primarily the image of God confirms that humans did not come through the fall unscathed. Christ, as God's image, does not reflect the ideal human being. He is called the image of God in the New Testament in the context of reconciliation and redemption (2 Cor. 4:6; Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:20–22). The fact that human's relationship with God has been disrupted has consequences for other relationships: those with other human beings and with this world. Even though humans after the Fall are still relational beings, responsible, unique, rational and creative, they need redemption. Therefore, in Christian pedagogy, we cannot speak about man as the image of God apart from Christ. Creation and redemption must be kept united: humans are created in God's image, but they need Christ, the Image of God, as Saviour.

Finally, the emphasis on Christ as the image of God and the renewal of the image into true knowledge, righteousness and holiness raises the question of whether the New Testament makes all references to Genesis 1 superfluous: does the redeemed creation replace the old? This issue is also important because, in our triadic school pedagogy, we speak about the created world we live in. That the redeemed creation does not replace the old becomes clear from Paul's

letter to the Colossians, where Christ is both creator and image of God (Col. 1:15–17). In anthropology, creation and redemption should not be played off against each other. Creation needs redemption, but this does not entail the destruction of creation. Redemption through Christ means the restoration of the image of God in humankind. Christ renews people to knowledge, according to the image of their creator (Col. 3:10). Since knowledge in the Bible can never be understood in a purely cognitive way because it always has the connotation of community and relationship, recreation through Christ becomes visible above all in the restoration of the relationship with God, but also the relationship with one's neighbour and with the environment. The same can be said of Ephesians 4:24 the new man is created in the image of God in true righteousness and holiness.

3 Students as the Image of God

In this section, we would like to address the consequences of the image of God for a Christian pedagogical view of students. Firstly, we explore the pedagogical implications of a relational view of students as being created in God's image. Then we explore the concept of responsibility: as God's image, students must learn to take responsibility. Afterwards, using the concept of hermeneutical space, we explain that students as God's image are created with an openness to reality, whereby they can transcend their own existence as reasonable beings and receive and give meaning. These expositions allow us to confirm what we discovered about the structural and functional understanding of the image of God. Finally, we formulate questions that need to be answered from within the pedagogical triangle when we articulate the relationship between the student and the subject matter on the one hand and the relationship between teacher and student on the other.

3.1 *Relational Person*

By conceiving students as created in God's image, we have chosen a starting point that differs from the anthropocentric paradigm dominant in Western culture. Not the student, but God is at the centre. That students are created in the image of God not only indicates an intrinsic connection but also subordination to God. In the previous section, we emphasised the relational aspect of the image of God. That students are relational human beings colours pedagogical themes such as uniqueness, authority, responsibility and development (worked out more extensively in Chapter 7). In terms of a school pedagogy, however, the notion of the image of God is relevant in another way, too:

because students are primarily relational beings, we do not start with the question of what they are capable of, but rather who they are. The priority of being has practical consequences: teachers do not in the first place look at what students can do, but at who they are (Kohnstamm, 1959, pp. 137–144). This is specifically relevant for inclusive and special needs education (Chapter 9). Students are creatures of God, called to become who they are in Christ (Chapter 1). What does it mean if we start with the question of who students are?

3.2 *Religious*

‘To be’ refers firstly to the ‘religious’ in human beings: the relationship with God is essential to their existence. We affirm Augustine’s assumption that students find their ultimate goal in serving and loving God. Christian teaching therefore cherishes the ideal of the God-fearing person (De Muynck & Visser-Vogel, 2020). By God-fearing, we do not mean being socialised by Christian habits, but rather living faithfully with God, which requires high moral responsibility. This ideal is difficult for several reasons, not only because it cannot be produced (see Chapter 1), but also because its content has some unattractive aspects. Believing in a crucified person is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23), it requires submission (Mark 8:35), and faith involves suffering (1 Pet. 4:12). The latter can be the case, among others, in a cultural context in which faith has been so marginalised that living as a Christian believer sets one aside as ‘strange’.

3.3 *Unique*

Secondly, a learner as a relational being is a unique person. Again, this is primarily determined by the relationship with God: as persons, humans reflect something of God (Wolterstorff, 2013, pp. 136–137). Having the ability to enter into relationships does not mean students merge into these relationships; they remain unique and independent individuals. Nevertheless, the image of God implies that human beings cannot stand on their own. They are, after all, God’s *image*: they remain demarcated individuals. Mainstream Christian theology has always rejected the mystical option of merging into the divine. Human beings are dependent on and subordinate to God, yet self-contained beings.

Teachers need to respect the uniqueness of all students’ personhood (on the image of God and respect see also James 3:9). Students are not objects, but unique persons, created in freedom from others. According to Bonhoeffer, from whom we derive this thought, we must go against our tendency to set ourselves as the standard and leave room for others. Whoever allows the image of God to take shape in the other, concedes others their freedom and bears the burden of the other’s freedom, including the structure of the personality,

character, individual traits, and special abilities, but also weaknesses and peculiarities that test our patience (Bonhoeffer, 1996, p. 117). To put it into pedagogical terms: subjectification presupposes that students are given space to take responsibility for their actions and the consequences thereof (see De Muynck, 2016; Biesta, 2018).

3.4 *Undetermined*

Thirdly, the fact that students are created in God's image means that they cannot be reduced to their biological characteristics (genes, gender), psychological structure (character), sociological status (origin, position) or economic value (consumer and producer). All these aspects are co-determinants of the human being, but they remain part of the larger framework that the student is created in God's image. This mystery that '(...) there is a reality hidden in human beings' (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 115) must be respected by the teacher. Students are created with gender diversity, but this does not totally determine their identity. The biblical message about gender is part of how one ought to live with others. Together, male and female, reflect God's image, also in mutual dependence ('male and female He created them', Gen. 1:27) and equality (Gal. 3:28, where is said from the relationship with Christ: 'There is neither ... nor male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'). Moreover, how students experience gender in no way determines how they should be addressed. While teachers should take the psychological structure of students into account, they may not narrow them down to this. The same applies to their sociological status (see again Gal. 3:28: in Christ, it does not matter whether one is Jew or Greek, slave or free).

In the current context of meritocracy, efficiency and management strategies, it is relevant to emphasise that the economic status of students does not decide our vision of students. They derive their dignity not from their achievements but from the fact that they are image-bearers of God. 'There is no ideal of perfection that is placed as on a pedestal, as if a successful, intelligent, and attractive person would optimally reflect the image of God' (Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, 2017, p. 264). They are more than the sum of their abilities or deficiencies. In the educational culture in which test results function as a frame for teachers, the concept of the image of God is culturally critical because it forces us to focus primarily on the student as a responsible person and not on achievements. Here we refer to what was said in Chapter 3 about the qualifying norm in school pedagogy. From a human dignity perspective, we are therefore critical of overvaluation of academic results and of excellence programs, as these tend to strengthen the one-sided attention to the student's cognitive achievements.

3.5 *Brokenness*

An important question remains regarding the relationality of being human. Sin has not destroyed relationality: students remain attached to relationships, even if they are sinners. Also, all students have their gifts and talents, which can be accepted ‘with “cheerfulness and gratitude” as a starting point for their education’ (Bavinck, 1928, p. 78, our translation). The good and the beautiful found in creatures should receive appreciation (Bavinck, 1928, p. 106). At the same time, brokenness affects everything; a condition the teacher needs to reckon with while teaching. Because of sin, the dynamic of address and response is under tension. There are obstacles, both in the student and the teacher: self-centredness, miscommunication, misinterpretations, entering into contact and breaking it off can all be found in classrooms (Van Laar-Jochensen, 2025). In addition, there can be trouble at home and the brokenness can sometimes be manifest in the relationship between teachers and parents.

Therefore, both the relationship founded in creation and its restoration through Christ are pedagogically relevant. To be a human being in a relationship, called to develop gifts and qualities to the honour of God and the salvation of one’s neighbour, students should not be addressed solely in terms of their creative origin. For this would imply that people with but a few pieces of the image of God just have to make the best of it. A Christian pedagogy that takes its anthropological focal point in the image of God therefore needs to relate creation, sin and redemption to each other. Although students remain relational beings, they will not reach their destination without redemption through Christ. In the words of Augustine: the heart of a student finds no peace until it finds rest in God (see Augustine, 1982, Book 1.1). People depend on Christ who, as the Image of God, does not reflect the ideal human being we must conform to, but is the Redeemer through Whom sinners come to their destiny. If sinners are renewed in the Image of Christ, this means a hopeful perspective, both within the educational context, for the task and vocation in this life and for the life to come.

3.6 *Responsible Person*

Human beings are designed to bear responsibility. This is intrinsically connected to the image of God, as is shown by the task God gave to humans to master, cultivate and preserve the earth (Gen. 1:28; see also Ps. 8). This touches on another aspect of the image of God for school pedagogy: education aims at responsibility. Connecting the image of God with responsibility has deep roots in the Christian pedagogical tradition. Comenius says: ‘He spoke wisely who said that schools were the workshops of humanity, since it is undoubtedly

through their agency that man really becomes man, that is to say (...): (i) a rational creature; (ii) a creature which is lord over all creatures and also over himself; (iii) a creature which is the delight of his Creator' (Comenius, 1910, p. 71). In Chapter 3 we mentioned responsibility as the key point of maturity. We will elaborate on this now.

The increasing independence of the student, Biesta aptly says, is not a problem to be solved; rather, it is the goal of the teacher's (school) pedagogical action (see Chapter 3 and Biesta, 2018, p. 13). We agree with what has often been emphasised in the pedagogical tradition that man is *animal educandum*, a being who must be raised to become someone 'who *stands* for what he is and does, and also *wants to stand* for it' (Langeveld, 1974, p. 45, our translation, italics in the original text). Maturity refers to stability in the person. It also refers to a 'unity of moral standards with which this person identifies, or strives to identify' (Langeveld, 1974, p. 45, our translation). From the concept of the image of God: the student stands as a person in relationships, and they must learn to be responsible in their relationships, as a moral entity. Connecting this to the functional understanding of the image of God: as image-bearers, students acquire a moral stance during their education, and therein they learn to understand their task and calling.

3.7 *Hearing and Responding*

Responsibility assumes that students are responsive beings, being addressed and expressing themselves (cf. Kohnstamm's description in Langeveld, 1974, p. 65). From a pedagogical point of view, the ethical-responsive form of being a person is at the heart of attention (Danner, 2010, pp. 150–156; Geertsema, 2005). In education, children learn to take responsibility. The responsive nature of the relationship implies that students should develop a listening attitude. This could be brought in connection with *Shema Israel*, Israel is called upon to hear: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts' (Deut. 6:4–6). Remarkably, these words are linked to the parent's educational task, in which hearing and responding are important ('Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up', Deut. 6:7). From this, we derive the insight that education should be rich in practices that elicit listening and attentiveness. From the central idea of hearing and responding, we can also derive the importance of understanding symbols, meaning letters and numbers which, in the cultural development of mankind, have become tools for hearing and understanding. Literacy and numeracy are skills that should be given priority

in education. They teach humans not only to hear and understand but also to respond. In other words, they learn to relate to reality in a dialogical way using symbol systems (Boyer, 1995, p. 65).

3.8 *Guides*

The pedagogical relationship between teacher and student does not aim at students' permanent dependence on their teacher but at their maturity. Only by standing in the world as an adult, can the student take responsibility (Biesta, 2018, pp. 16 ff.). Because students do not take responsibility naturally, the teacher's task is to guide them and help them carry it. They also encourage students to *take* responsibility for relationships. In the process of guiding, teachers provide space and set limits and, in doing so, they prepare students for a situation that does not yet exist, namely that of adult responsibility. At school, students practise responsibility in caring for each other and taking care of their tasks. Apart from that, the teacher also invites the students to imagine what the future will look like. In the example at the beginning of this chapter, the teacher looks ahead to the students' future position in society. He believes his lesson on probability can help students develop an idea of certainty and uncertainty. Here, the functional understanding of the image of God comes in: people are created with a task and a vocation, to master, cultivate and preserve the earth. Even if daily work after the Fall is done in a sweat, because the earth brings forth thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:17–19), humans remain responsible.

3.9 *Freedom*

Responsibility presupposes freedom because it requires intrinsic motivation rather than compulsion. Freedom and the related concept of autonomy can be understood as freedom *from* someone or something. In situations of oppression, through exploitation and also through systematic humiliation, such as bullying, freedom holds an important emancipatory value. In pedagogical terms, this is evident in, among other things, safeguarding the uniqueness of the person. However, being free *from* something or someone is not unlimited. Based on our view of students as image-bearers of God, we demarcate this freedom from negative or unrestricted freedom that fosters a solitary approach to the human being. Theologically speaking, God's commandments bring freedom: students are called to love God above all else in freedom and their neighbour as themselves.

The connection between responsibility and freedom is most evident if we understand freedom as being free *for* someone or something. It requires that people are created for the community. It is precisely through the relationship with God and others that individuals can define themselves. The notion of the

image of God transcends the tension between independence and dependence (Hermans, 1993, p. 124). Students are dependent creatures: they depend on God and their educators. However, in that dependent relationship, they are not puppets but independent individuals with their own growing responsibilities. From this perspective, it becomes clear that self-responsible self-determination (Langeveld, 1974, p. 45) does not mean that the development of the student is a solitary project revolving around self-flourishing but rather about learning to function as a person bearing independent responsibility. We are therefore critical of a vocabulary of self-development and self-regulation (Paul & Slob, 2015). We agree that students are focused on development and that ownership and taking initiative are pedagogically important goals, but we place them in a Christian framework from the notion of the image of God by preferring to speak about self-control and responsibility (see above and in Chapter 6).

3.10 *Culture Mandate*

From the perspective of the image of God, responsibility means taking one's task and vocation on earth seriously. Students are called to love God above all, the neighbour as themselves and to care for the world they live in. The notion of the image of God puts the learning process in a broad, meaningful framework. Learning serves to sense and understand God's calling better (cf. Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 99). Here, once again, lies the connection with the functional approach of the image of God, which in the Reformed tradition is linked to the cultural task given to humans (Middleton, 2005, p. 89; David I. Smith, 2009, pp. 53–57; Smith & Felch, 2016, p. 97).

3.11 *Development*

In Section 2 of Chapter 3 of this book, we concluded that a learner needs their own developmental space to become an adult. This notion is closely connected to the relational understanding of the image of God. For pedagogy, it is important to state that a relationship is not static, but always in development. As a relational being, we acquire knowledge and experiences with others, with the world we live in and, if we live *coram Deo*, with God. Bavinck already linked the image of God with development in knowledge and art (Bavinck, 2004, Vol. 2, p. 557). Development is bound to the image of God; it not only points to humans' origin and the relationships in which they stand but also to the teleologic character of their existence. Because the image of God in man was originally unfinished, it requires development. Therefore, Bavinck considers the image of God as a gift and a task: it is a gift of grace and simultaneously the seed of a wonderful development (Bavinck, 2004, Vol. 2, p. 557).

3.12 *Redemption and Sanctification*

Although we are inclined to express ourselves less idealistically than Bavinck did on this point, the fact remains that development is part of man's vocation as God's image. Teachers contribute to students' development by exposing them to existing meanings. This is generally true. However, according to Psalm 78, this involves God's deeds and words, so that students put their trust in God and do not become like their fathers. Students are also assigned to form themselves, to be able to perform their task and vocation before God as active signifiers of meaning. Christian teachers know that, since the Fall, separation from God happens within a development process. Therefore, pedagogical action is not based on the qualities of the human being. The Christian faith paradoxically claims that people can come into harmony with God through God's grace. Redemption and sanctification are also necessary for development. Teaching is aimed at the student being devoted to Christ, now and in their future daily work: 'so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:17).

3.13 *Hermeneutical Space*

Following the Flemish theologian Didier Pollefeyt, we connect the concept of the image of God pedagogically with *hermeneutical space*. The learners, as the image of God, have a radical openness to the reality in which they live, and they can transcend their own existence. They are created in receptivity to receive meanings and give meaning to phenomena. According to Pollefeyt's definition, hermeneutical space is '(...) a place of openness, freedom, sensitivity, self-transcendence, and of receptivity for otherness and for a rich plurality of implicit and explicit meanings and interpretations' (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 116). Unlike animals, human beings, in God's image, are not only able to relate to the world (animals are after all also capable of this), but also to enter receptive and creative relations with the outside world. The ability to *find meanings* and *give meanings* is important for teaching: rationality and creativity are characteristic of the student's humanity. Traces of this ability can be found throughout the Bible. Humans can reflect on themselves, talk to themselves, and multiply their thoughts (Ps. 77:6-9; Ps. 94:19). The inner self can be a source of deceit (Jer. 17:9) but by addressing themselves believers can also arouse themselves to praise God (Ps. 103:1). In today's educational culture, conferring meaning is more valued than receiving meaning. Receptivity is under great pressure because all the emphasis is on active learning and taking self-direction. In contrast to this, we stress the importance of receptivity as a critical regulatory moment in anthropology. Because educational practices do not automatically incorporate this, there is much reason to cultivate receptivity (De Muynck, 2020a). In times

of AI, receptivity cannot exist without critical evaluation, which underpins the importance of a critical-realistic epistemology, explained in the next chapter.

3.14 *Fragile*

The hermeneutical space is fragile (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 116). After all, meanings are received through the teacher, who, when they acknowledge their limitations and fallibility, will experience tension. On the one hand, they open reality for students by telling an authoritative story about God and His world. They try to enlarge the world for students by means of their own interpretative framework and the teacher's Christian conviction can come into play without restraint. On the other hand, they do not take possession of the student's hermeneutical space. Teachers aim to help students to find Christian meaning. However, the aim is equally that they learn to practice Christian meaning-giving. As we will point out in Chapter 5, acquiring knowledge is never neutral and the Christian perspective of the teacher never gets appropriated by the student automatically, especially when the teacher respects the hermeneutical space of students. A respectful distance to the student's own space is not only necessary because education would otherwise become indoctrination but especially because knowledge acquisition requires the students' active involvement. As further described in the next chapter, the teacher aims to make them wise interpreters.

3.15 *Creativity*

While the main focus in the hermeneutical space may, in the above, appear to be knowledge and cognitive skills, it does not exclude human creativity. Created in the image of God, students are not only rational but also creative beings. Artistic education brings students into contact with reality in a different way. Here, too, the student should be encouraged to become a wise interpreter: by discovering God's world through the discovery of meaning, the attribution of meaning and creativity. For education, this implies that students should not only get answers but above all learn to address issues, acting for themselves. This means that students should be stimulated to think the Biblical message through for themselves (cf. Wolterstorff, 2002, pp. 30–31).

4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have elaborated our view of the learner from the biblical concept of man as an image-bearer of God. We have observed that three interpretations are possible, each with its value: a structural, a functional, and a relational understanding. There are good reasons to give the latter the most

central position. Therefore, we have argued that students' attitudes towards God, themselves, their fellow human beings and creation should be seen as relational. They are both persons addressed (receptive) and as speakers (active). This also bears directions for school pedagogical reasoning. We have also shown that, for various reasons, we must be careful with a structural interpretation because we risk misunderstanding that different categories of people are all created in God's image. The strength of the functional approach lies in expressing the task God gives to every human to cultivate and preserve the earth.

Although we have emphasised earlier that we do not start this pedagogy from theological anthropology, we have shown in this chapter that biblical information about humanity is regulative. By regarding humans as image bearers of God, it becomes clear how important it is to approach students as autonomous persons with a hermeneutical space. Their responsibility is not only moral but also concerns finding and giving meaning as the love for God and neighbour concerns all aspects of life. Education aims at making students wise interpreters. The issue we are faced with now is how they can become so. What do we mean by acquiring knowledge? Can we, from our concept of school pedagogy, clarify how this process takes place? We will elaborate on this in the next chapter.

Acquisition of Knowledge

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.

PROV. 1:7

...

Christian education cannot teach only for development; it must also teach for healing and reconciliation – and must do so in a way that is healing and reconciling.

WOLTERSTORFF, 2002, p. 258

1 Introduction

We saw in the previous chapter that students, as God's image bearers, can relate to others. Looking at the pedagogical triangle, we can say: they get to know the world through relationality, which enables the top line of the triangle, the connection between reality and the learner (and vice versa), to operate (Figures 2 and 3). As the triangle illustrates, teachers play a key role in this process. We will get back to the teacher in Chapter 6 but, in this chapter, we would first like to raise the question of how students, as active knowledge acquirers, relate to reality.

One may ask why knowledge acquisition should be problematised. After all, learning skills and acquiring knowledge are of all times. Without contradicting the latter, we argue that it is worth delving into this. What to think of an educational policy adviser who states that knowledge used to be in your brain and in books but is now in the computer and the cloud? This statement raises various questions. For example: does knowledge indeed consist of a bookshelf with information or web pages on the Internet, accessible through a Google search or AI? What is the difference with the past? And does the statement not also imply a hidden idea about knowledge, namely that it is neutral?

The students' acquisition of knowledge leads us into the domain of epistemology, which can be defined as 'the branch of philosophy that enquires into the nature and the possibility of knowledge. It deals also with the scope and limits of human knowledge, and with how it is acquired and possessed' (Mautner, 2000, p. 174). Reflection on knowledge is important, because images

and concepts about knowledge acquisition guide the educational practice, just as images about human beings, discussed in Chapter 4, guide the teacher's actions. It depends on one's ideas about knowledge and knowledge acquisition whether one sees the teacher as a guide, as we authors do, or as a facilitator of the student's learning process.

In this chapter, we first consider what is at stake with epistemology (Section 2). Next, we explore the concepts of knowledge and knowledge acquisition (Section 3), to continue by exploring theological data regarding acquiring knowledge: what is knowledge according to the Bible, and what do we learn from this about how students acquire knowledge (Section 4)? Thereafter, we move on to contemporary thinking about education, by outlining realism, positivism and constructivism as important epistemological positions (Section 5). Subsequently, we elaborate on critical realism as an alternative to shape a Christian view of knowledge acquisition that does justice both to the objective character of reality and to the fact that knowledge acquisition always involves interpretation (Section 6). We connect this to the practice of education by arguing that critical realism aims at making students wise interpreters (Section 7) and we clarify the implications for the curriculum (Section 8). Finally, we return to the biblical insight that knowledge is aimed at serving God and neighbour; to use Wolterstorff's phrase: knowledge is aimed at *shalom* (Section 9).

2 What Is at Stake?

If our ambition is to make Biblical wisdom fruitful for developing the next generation's worldview, we must imagine how children and youngsters gain wisdom. In other words: how do we perceive them as knowing subjects and how do we understand the teacher's role therein? A postmodern educational discourse understands knowledge mostly as a construct of the human mind. Acquisition of knowledge is not about finding meaning but about meaning-giving: the knowing subject – the learner – structures the world, instead of learning to know (understand) the order that reality has in itself. Many factors play a role in this process, including the contextual nature of knowledge acquisition. In terms of epistemology, this is known as the position of constructivism. That only humans, as knowing subjects, construct reality is, however, incompatible with a view of reality in which God precedes our knowledge and in which reality also exists objectively, i.e. independently of human knowledge. This position has dominated Western philosophy for centuries but is no longer mainstream and therefore requires further underpinning in the current debate on epistemology.

This standpoint leads to an urgent question: does the acknowledgment of a reality that exists independently of the knowing subject necessarily imply that students acquire objective knowledge of that reality? If so, the consequence would be that knowledge acquisition is neutral: all learners look at the same reality, have the same representations and can reproduce the same knowledge content. The view that knowledge acquisition (and often linked to this, education) is neutral is generally considered outdated because knowledge is always imbued with assumptions, hidden or unconscious (Miedema & Vroom, 2002, p. 7; Polanyi, 1962). In other words, knowledge acquisition is conditioned by the situation. We can only look at reality through our own 'glasses', shaped by beliefs and culture. Finally, we must consider that people are limited in what they can learn and that they can also fail. Therefore, the issue we are facing in this chapter is how to do justice to both a realistic approach to reality and the situated and conditioned nature of knowledge acquisition by students in their learning process.

A third issue is what our understanding of knowledge acquisition entails for the nature and structure of the subject matter in the curriculum. As argued in the previous chapter, human beings are both addressed and responsive. The ethical-responsive nature of students is at the heart of the matter: teaching and learning are aimed at students getting to know God and His world and guiding them to live and act as responsible persons. In terms of acquiring knowledge: students are addressed by God through their educators. Formulated in terms of this mission-guided pedagogy: they are acquainted with God's Word, to learn to respond responsibly. This is expressed in all school subjects: the curriculum is directed towards allowing students to know God's reality. In this process of finding and giving meaning, language plays a key role: teachers communicate through language and teach students to give meaning to the surrounding world. In the previous chapter, we linked this to the hermeneutical space that students have as active meaning-givers.

Finally, knowledge acquisition is always morally determined: approaching and understanding reality is never without obligation. In a modern knowledge economy, knowledge is connected to power; it can lead to economic profit but also to oppression. This understanding of reality not only has to do with the effects of learning, but also with the view on learning itself. Contemporary educational vocabulary used to describe learning is fundamentally individualistic and individualising. Besides this, it is more process-oriented than substantive language. Biesta observes that this language exerts a powerful influence on what learners can be and how they can be; an influence that in his opinion 'tends to domesticate rather than to emancipate' (Biesta, 2014, p. 68). For Christian thinking about knowledge acquisition, it is decisive that the

biblical word for knowing is connected to serving God: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7) and wisdom (Prov. 9:10). As we will argue in this chapter, knowledge acquisition is therefore aimed at wholeness, at *shalom* (see Wolterstorff, 2002, pp. 253–284; Wolterstorff, 2004, pp. 10–26).

3 Knowledge Acquisition

Knowledge can be defined as the acquaintance with a person, thing or phenomenon. It is acquired through observing and reasoning and the interaction between these makes it possible to receive and give meaning. People who have knowledge are able to understand and act adequately. There are different types of knowledge. It can be explicit or implicit and we can distinguish between declarative knowledge, which includes both factual and theoretical knowledge; conceptual knowledge, which explains a phenomenon; procedural knowledge, which provides insight into how to act and metacognitive knowledge as clarification of the learning process. In addition, we can discern scientific knowledge, practical knowledge and experiential knowledge. More specifically within the ethical-philosophical domain, we discern moral and contemplative knowledge.

Based on a biblical account (which will be discussed in more detail in the next section) knowing cannot be separated from acting. Therefore, we can also describe knowledge as a compilation of information about persons, things or phenomena and skills acquired through experience or education. Information can be mediated through education, books or databases to name persons, things and phenomena and to gain a personal understanding of them. Skills are developed by acting with perception and understanding, enabling people to become competent in some way. In developing knowledge, one relies on tacit knowledge, unique individual knowledge, of which one may not be consciously aware (Polanyi, 1961). Knowledge includes more than information that can be looked up. New knowledge, acquired in an education setting requires conscious appropriation, to know reality better and act more responsibly.

The different types of knowledge listed above, such as conceptual, procedural and experiential knowledge, cannot be separated, because they all contain truth claims about reality. The distinction, however, helps to grasp the differences: conceptual knowledge is not experiential knowledge, and procedural knowledge is not self-knowledge, although conceptual knowledge is based on experience and experiential knowledge is relevant for operationalising procedural knowledge.

Looking at knowledge acquisition from the learner's perspective, we use the term 'learning', which we define as the process of both receiving and giving meaning. Just as there are many types of knowledge, as indications of different knowledge domains, there are also many forms of learning: children learn by imitation, by experience and by how other people react to them. These are forms of spontaneous learning. When they grow up children learn through school education. This is intentional learning: the activity arranged by the teacher intends to facilitate learning. Teachers act intentionally, as we stated in Chapter 3, and so contribute to the process of acquiring knowledge. From a teacher's perspective, education could also be seen as the action of disclosing meaning. It aims to enlarge the student's world and stimulate the meaning-making process. 'Disclosing meaning' and 'meaning-making' reveals a strong connection between the process and the content. As Biesta emphasises: 'learning' in itself is an empty concept; it always concerns the fact that students are learning *something*. Learning, therefore, 'not really means anything until it is specified what the *content* of the learning is and, more important, until it is specified what the *purpose* of the learning is' (Biesta, 2014, p. 63).

All this raises the question of what we mean by learning to know reality. We take our starting point in the biblical account of knowledge (Section 4), to subsequently examine three epistemological discourses relevant to education (Section 5).

4 Knowledge and Wisdom in the Bible

In the Bible, knowledge is linked to loving and serving God. This becomes evident from two important aphorisms in Old Testament wisdom literature: 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge' (Prov. 1:7) and 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. 9:10). Knowledge and wisdom are both rooted in serving God. This immediately brings us to the core of the biblical discourse on knowledge: it is more than cognitive understanding. The Hebrew equivalent of knowledge, *yada'*, has the connotation of intercourse. Knowledge is knowledge in close interaction with others and obtained in a relationship with God. The fear of the LORD (Hebr. *yir'at YHWH*, see Heino, 2015, pp. 406–412; Vreekamp, 1984) is the principle, the foundation (Hebr. *resit*) of knowledge and wisdom. The attainment of knowledge is therefore not an end in itself but is an aspect of serving God. The connotations also include love (Meek, 2011; Meijer-Kater, 2022): Knowing is not aimed at mastery and control but at the loving recognition of God. Whoever gets to know reality, will see it in the light of God.

The connection between knowledge, loving and serving can also be seen in the term ‘the fear of the LORD’. While this fear is often misunderstood as anxiety, the Hebrew word emphasises both awe and respect and is related to the humble serving of the LORD. In the fear of the LORD lies the right and humble relationship to the LORD and thus the right attitude to life. Humility ‘means that the foundation of true wisdom is nothing less than bowing in our hearts in a humble fear of the LORD’ (Edlin, 2014, pp. 52–53).

Augustine relates the biblical account of knowledge to an attitude of love: loving God and the neighbour. From that perspective knowledge is not a matter of *curiositas*, but of *studiositas*. The former is understood as a self-willed form of acquiring knowledge, in which the connection with God has been broken. (Griffiths, 2009, pp. 108–109). Christian teaching tries to cultivate a way of working in which *studiositas* is in the foreground. Looking once more at the pedagogical triangle, the teacher is the one who demonstrates love for the object being studied and the one who tries to provoke the same loving and committed attitude towards reality in the students. The connection of knowing and serving God is also made apparent where knowing is called ‘knowledge and good judgement’ (Ps. 119:66). It returns in the New Testament when Paul prays for the believers that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that they may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ (Phil. 1:9–10). Serving God is here interpreted from Christ: through faith in Christ, people receive knowledge to discern what is essential.

4.1 *God as the Source of Knowledge and Wisdom*

In the Biblical view of knowledge, God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom. In Proverbs, wisdom is even a personification of God (Prov. 8:22). He gives wisdom, knowledge and understanding to humankind (Prov. 2:6). People can acquire knowledge because God makes Himself known to them: in Your light we see light (Ps. 36:10). We find the same line in the New Testament, as true wisdom comes from above, in other words: from God (James 3:17). The connection between God, knowledge and wisdom becomes even more explicit in the statement that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3).

Because God is the source of knowledge, acquiring knowledge has primarily a receptive character. Educators receive the assignment from His hand and act in His spirit to help students acquire knowledge. Priests teach God’s commandments (Lev. 10:11). Students are expected to be obedient (Prov. 15:20), although obedience is not the same as passivity: learners have to be receptive to knowledge, in order to acquire and preserve it (cf. Prov. 3:1; Prov. 4:4).

Therefore, the acquisition of knowledge is more than reproduction; it presumes an active attitude. This attitude is characteristic of wise persons: the heart of the wise person acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise person seeks knowledge (Prov. 18:15).

4.2 *Layering of the Biblical Understanding of Knowledge*

While we do not find theoretical distinctions such as empirical-rational, conceptual-procedural, scientific-practical and active-receptive in the Bible, knowledge is a layered notion. We find practical knowledge, for example, about the use of weapons (Ps. 18:35) and educational songs (2 Sam. 1:18), men gain tactical insight in warfare (Isa. 10:13) and the art of steering (Ps. 107:27), and Daniel's friends have knowledge and understanding of science and all kinds of scriptures (Dan. 1:4). In relation to God, knowledge has God's deeds as its object (see, for example, Deut. 4:35). Children learn the commandments of the LORD (Deut. 4:10, in combination with the fear of the LORD).

4.3 *Sensory Perception*

According to the Bible, knowledge is primarily acquired by sensory perception, where knowing runs parallel with hearing (Heb. *sh'ma'*; Ex. 3:7; Ps. 78:3) and seeing (Heb. *ra'h*; Gen. 18:21; Eccl. 6:5). Humans are created with senses so that they can connect with the other and with otherness. The senses function in coherence with cognitive processes: because humans are reason-gifted beings, they order their sensory perception. We must not omit to articulate here that, in Biblical vocabulary, the acquisition of knowledge is linked to the service of God. This is where all the layers of knowledge have their religious focus point, which is not easy to observe within a 21st-century cultural setting. It is a matter of faith to state that the senses are how we come to know God and His world; hence hearing, seeing and noticing are often in the context of an ethical imperative. Hearing and seeing have their purpose in serving God, loving one's neighbour and living in God's world. A Christian pedagogical view of knowledge has an ethical edge: all meaning is ultimately intended to enable the learner to act responsibly.

Many scholars in the past have reflected on the connection of the senses to the intellect. Thomas Aquinas calls human cognition without perception a '*tabula rasa, in qua nihil scriptum est*' (see Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, 79 Art. 2) and Bavinck, in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, adopts this thought: 'From the outset the intellect is pure potential, a blank page (*tabula rasa*) without any content, and is only activated, aroused to actuality, by the sensible world. The primary impetus therefore comes from the sensible world; it impinges upon the human mind, arouses it, urges it to action' (Bavinck, 2004, Vol. 1, p. 225). In

his *Paedagogische beginnselen* [*Pedagogical Principles*] he expresses himself in the same way: 'It is perfectly true that all knowledge of the mind begins with sensory perception, and also true to a certain extent that there is nothing in the mind that was not first there' (Bavinck, 1928, p. 136, our translation). Comenius had already stated this before: '(...) The commencement of knowledge must always come from the senses (for the understanding possesses nothing that it has not first derived from the senses). Surely, then, the beginning of wisdom should consist, not in the mere learning the names of things, but in the actual perception of the things themselves!' (Comenius, 1910, p. 185).

In acquiring knowledge, human beings are limited, for no one can comprehend God's work from beginning to end (Eccl. 3:11; Job 9:10). The LORD asks Job the rhetorical question: 'Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this' (Job 38:18). Human knowledge is always partial (1 Cor. 13:9) and people can also err and act out of ignorance. The limited nature of human knowledge is a consequence not only of being a creature but also of being a sinner. In Genesis 3, knowledge revolves around creaturely limitation: God knows more and in a different way than man. We humans never know reality as God knows it. In Genesis 3, however, knowledge is predominantly about human disobedience to God's commandment: Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the desire to be like God by knowing good and evil. This is an important warning for the acquisition of knowledge: since the Fall, the acquisition of knowledge risks the deification of the creature. This sometimes does humans and the world they live in more harm than good: knowledge is also a potentially a destructive power.

4.4 *Knowledge of Non-Believers*

So far, we have emphasised that true knowledge comes from God: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. Yet this statement requires some nuance because the Bible itself shows that knowledge can also be acquired without a true relationship with God. For example, Moses was brought up in the court of the king of Egypt in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. According to the book of Acts, this made him 'powerful in speech and action' (Acts 7:22). At the Areopagus, Paul quotes the Greek poet Aratus not as a contrasting figure, but to support his message (Acts 17:28). This seems to contrast with the negative qualifications about people who do not know God. He who does not know God is called a fool (Ps. 14:1). A fool does not gain knowledge (Prov. 14:7); he dies for lack of sense (Prov. 10:21); a fool lacks sense (Eccl. 10:3). In the letters of Paul, God's knowledge and wisdom are contrasted with the foolishness of Hellenistic philosophy. God has made foolish the wisdom of this world (1 Cor. 1:20). Against seeking wisdom, as the Greeks did, Paul places

the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:22–24). With these negative qualifications, however, it is important to consider that these are not epistemological, but theological claims. Acquisition of knowledge that makes people independent of God hinders serving God, hinders finding one's destiny in Him and hinders finding love, which is decisive for the meaningfulness of knowledge (1 Cor. 13:2).

5 Epistemological Positions

We now turn to modern epistemology by presenting three important epistemological positions: realism, positivism and constructivism. We are aware that we are presenting them in a pronounced form. Many philosophers have taken positions with nuances that cannot be considered here.

5.1 *Realism*

A realistic epistemology is based on the idea that order, harmony and knowability are given and can be discovered and understood by humans, albeit to a certain extent. An objective reality exists, and people can find order and laws in that reality through sensory perception and rational processing. In the Christian-theistic understanding, God is the One who made this reality and gives people knowledge of it. The Judeo-Christian realistic epistemology contributed to the development of scientific research: material reality is not a fake world, as in Eastern religions; it is not sacred, as in animistic religions; it is not inferior to the ideal world, as in Platonism; it is not necessary, as in Aristotelianism, but contingent. This idea stimulated scientists to study the Book of Nature, initially mostly inspired by the Christian faith. Because people were supposed to be the image of God and consequently could reason like God (at that time the image of God was mainly understood in rational terms), structures could be found in reality (see also Van den Brink, 2004, pp. 313–317). This position was dominant in Europe until the Middle Ages, but with the Renaissance a different epistemology emerged in which humans as the givers of meaning took centre stage.

A realistic theory of knowledge implies that reality is open to being discovered. Education is therefore aimed at finding meaning and discovering order and harmony in reality. Above all, learners must experience that reality is always more than we can grasp. Teachers play an important role: they introduce pupils to reality by presenting and clarifying facts and passing on theories and concepts of knowledge. Above all, they must make their learners

understand that there is always more to reality, including through faith, than science can explain about that reality.

5.2 *Positivism*

Positivism shares with realism the premise that there is an objectively existing reality. This position is about the natural order of phenomena and data that can be known through sensory perception. The tenability of claims about those phenomena can be verified by scientific methods. Positivism limits the experience of reality to what is quantifiable and objectifiable. Sensory perception provides raw data, after which science provides reasoned insight into the structure of reality through systematic methods. According to positivist epistemology, ontology (the theory of being) has priority over epistemology (the theory of knowing) while humans are the ones to use scientific evidence to reveal the natural order.

This strong emphasis on the empirical restricts the knowledge domain: according to positivism, only what can be observed or is experimentally proven leads to reliable knowledge. Ideally, human interpretation plays no role here: knowledge is based on intersubjectively verifiable observations which can be analysed using scientific methods. The existence of God also falls outside sensory perception and therefore does not belong to the domain of (scientifically) reliable knowledge. Positivism so draws a sharp line between belief and knowledge: what people believe is scientifically irrelevant, because it cannot be proven.

Positivism has been criticised because one cannot build knowledge solely on undoubtedly true statements. According to the Austrian-born British philosopher Karl Popper (1902–1994), not the verification criterion is needed to distinguish true knowledge from pseudo-science, but the criterion of falsification. However, positivism still plays an important role in the discussion about the role of philosophical views in the view of reality; the same applies to popular opinions about the status of what is scientifically proven.

Positivism becomes manifest in education in the transmission learning model: the teacher transmits objective knowledge (Cooling, 2010b; Miedema, 2002). In discussions on the freedom of education in the Western world, it is a recurring point that faith belongs in church and at home but at school it is about facts. Underlying this is a different understanding of teaching and learning. In a positivist frame, teachers may understand themselves as guides, but in a way that they lead the minds of the students from the subjective darkness to the objective light. Teachers are then not guides in God's world but people who explain how the world works and how phenomena can be understood. The fact that the acquisition of knowledge also entails interpretation

is left out of consideration: what is true, is true for everyone. Recognition of tacit knowledge, the context of the knowing subject, change of opinion and recognition of the diversity of interpretation are problematic for positivism. The same applies to the hermeneutical space for students (see Chapter 4): not one's interpretation but the transfer of objective, non-questionable data is the goal of knowledge acquisition. Not the construction, but the reproduction of knowledge is the goal of education. New knowledge based on experiments and logical deductions can be added to more adequately understand reality.

Although positivism leaves no room for religious convictions, there is nevertheless a Christian variant, which is problematic. Biblical truth is then presented as completely comprehensible and non-ambiguous. Once it has been discovered, it can be applied without any difficulty. The Bible is then presented as a clear, unambiguous text that corresponds one-on-one with what people see around them, needing no explanation. When applied to learning, this can lead to a top-down transmission approach, where learners must adopt meanings without their thinking being involved (Cooling, 2014a, p. 54). We opt for a more nuanced approach, in which the understanding of the Bible requires a hermeneutic twist. Students can be trained in careful reading of the Bible without compromising its authority.

5.3 *Constructivism*

Compared to realism and positivism, constructivism is at the other end of the epistemological spectrum. Although it has variants with different nuances, such as social constructivism and radical constructivism, this position assumes that reality does not have a structure in itself but that, instead, the knowing subject structures it. As a result, there is no objective truth, only interpretations and partial truths. Meaning is not given *to* people but *by* people. Knowledge acquisition is giving language to one's own experiences with the world and the connection of new knowledge to existing knowledge. In this process, the subject is autonomous, which makes a multitude of interpretations possible. Knowledge acquisition as an act of interpretation applies not only to knowledge acquired through sensory perception but also to hearing explanations or instructions and knowledge acquired through reading texts. This position easily leads to relativism as everyone has their own truth.

For education, it is important to distinguish between a radical constructivist learning theory, in which learning objectives are gradually shaped by the learning needs of students, and a social constructivist learning theory, which states that students always learn in a context. The first form is mainly based on the individual student: the student constructs their own network of meanings. In the second, the group process is central: students construct

shared meanings together. In both cases, students are challenged to construct their own view of reality instead of appropriating the knowledge presented by the teacher. Here, the hermeneutical space of the students is extended to the maximum. In a constructivist learning theory, teachers are not transmitters of knowledge, but primarily facilitators of learning. An important insight of constructivism is that knowledge is best acquired when it builds on previous knowledge. What is observed or explained must connect somehow with what is present in the meaning system. Meanings are conferred with meanings already acquired.

Educators can also adopt a moderate form of social constructivism. We agree with Berding and Pols (2018) who honour both the student's own creativity in the educational process and the role of the teacher who teaches by instruction and clear examples. The teacher is a mediator between what presents itself as valuable in culture and is represented in the school subjects on the one hand, and the growing child who enters the institution of the school with its own experiences and baggage from the world in which it lives (Berding & Pols, 2018, pp. 210–211). The school is a learning environment based on knowledge construction rather than knowledge transfer. The side effect of constructivism is that the learner is placed in the centre of the teaching-learning process, as expressed in concepts such as learner-centred learning, discovery learning, and experiential learning (Oosthuizen et al., 2003, p. 464).

6 Critical Realism

The ideal objective of Christian education is that students come to know God and His world. This presupposes an epistemology in which God is at the beginning of reality and all meaning. To know God and His world, to fulfil one's vocation by living to the honour of God and the salvation of one's neighbour is the ultimate goal of all knowledge acquisition. This ideal fits best with a realistic approach to epistemology as outlined above. Students are not viewed as autonomous meaning-givers, because the fear of the LORD is the principle of knowledge and wisdom. This raises an important issue in a post-modern context because such an understanding of reality conflicts with two dominant educational discourses. Firstly, with positivist epistemology because, while it assumes the existence of an objective, knowable reality, it claims that knowledge acquisition is neutral. Regardless of one's convictions, objective knowledge results from sensory perception and its reasonable processing. Secondly, there is an issue with constructivism, where knowledge acquisition does not refer to an objective reality and knowledge is a construct of the human mind.

Yet it is too simple to rely solely on a realistic epistemology. It is true that all people look at the same reality and have similar hardware: the capacity to organise the knowledge acquired through sensing things and events (for the metaphor, see Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 233). However, educational practice shows that teaching and learning involve more than teachers transferring knowledge to students. Education is about finding meaning (the truth of realism) but also about meaning-giving (the truth of constructivism). What also needs to be considered is that philosophical assumptions play a role in the understanding of reality (the opposite of positivism). If we acknowledge this and consider the diversity of philosophies, we cannot deny that there is a considerable constructivist aspect in knowledge acquisition. In terms of Wolterstorff's metaphor: every human has not only hardware, but also software: we are programmed in a certain manner. Our perception and reasoning are influenced by culture, upbringing and education. In addition, each person perceives, orders and conceptualises observations uniquely. This differs from person to person and even occasionally in the same individual.

In our reasoning, the student's 'hardware' is assumed. As stated in Chapter 4, students are reasonable creatures, capable of acquiring knowledge, each with their own gifts and at their own level. Regarding the 'software': through upbringing and education, students learn to look at the world in a certain way. The socio-cultural context, the worldview students acquire, personal opinions, formed concepts and value judgements cover a range of presuppositions through which they reason in a certain way and evaluate their observations. 'Perception and thinking are not neutral but possess a certain kind of *normativity*: the concepts used, either unconsciously acquired or consciously learned, determine *how* we look and *what* we see' (Imelman, 2002, p. 62, our translation). People also include concealed presuppositions in how they look and think, amongst others, dictated by the culture in which they live. If we were to interview the educational policy adviser quoted in the introduction to this chapter, who stated that knowledge used to be in your brain and books and is now in the computer and the cloud, we could find out what is guiding this educational vision and how it has been shaped by the influence of culture and other presuppositions.

Let us take a closer look at the contextual nature of knowledge acquisition. We do this by using three concepts, which all emphasise that people do not acquire knowledge in a vacuum, namely, social imaginary, worldview and control beliefs. Although these concepts originate from different philosophical frameworks, for our purposes they are complementary: they make clear that knowledge acquisition is always value laden.

6.1 *Social Imaginary*

We derive the concept of 'social imaginary' from the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. According to Taylor, social imaginary consists of assumptions about reality shared by a large group of people. Although these presuppositions are rooted in theoretical reflection, they were initially reserved for the elite in society. Their views are popularised by people who have little or no knowledge of the background of these images. For example, one does not need to have studied constitutional law to recognise the importance of the constitutional state. A characteristic of social image formation is that people hardly, or not at all, question its presuppositions (Taylor, 2007, pp. 171–176).

Social imaginary is not transferred by theory but through images, stories and legends. According to Taylor, images and legends make people who they are. In this way, unexpressed, unreasoned views influence people's perception of reality in a particular time and culture. No one can simply withdraw from this; it is not even the intention that people withdraw. A shared narrative shows who people want to be as the collective of a society. Christians are part of society and also narratively embedded in secular reality. This is never only negative: Christians share many images and desires with non-Christians. An attack on democracy, for instance, affects both Christians and non-Christians, because the democratic constitutional state is part of a shared narrative. There is, however, another side to social imaginary: Christians today have to deal with a naturalistic conception of reality: a social imaginary in which God is left out. Because no one can avoid the prevailing social image, we must take the socio-cultural context into account when acquiring knowledge: students are provided with a frame of reference by the cultural climate. A Christian philosophy of education has to take into account the context of the ideal of control, and of an imminent naturalistic view of reality, in which belief in God has its legitimate place only in the private domain. Although people cannot withdraw from social imaginary, this does not mean that it completely determines the agenda for knowledge acquisition. In their own observations of upcoming ideas, people can become aware of the limitations and deficiencies of a social imaginary.

6.2 *Worldview*

In addition to social imaginaries, there is another approach to the value-laden nature of knowledge acquisition: the worldview with which people are brought up. Unlike social imaginary, this involves a reasoned view of the world. While social imaginary can have an unconscious effect, worldview is more conscious by nature. According to a worldview approach, every person is raised with truth

claims about reality, religious assumptions, moral values and prescriptions for action. There is not only a Christian view of reality, but also, for example, a humanist or a naturalist one. It is an inseparable part of being human to be brought up with a worldview (Cooling, 2010b, p. 33), even if this is not immediately explicit and learners only become aware of it as they grow up.

When it comes to worldviews, we distinguish between institutionalised and personal worldviews (Van der Kooij et al., 2015). The former is a more or less coherent view of reality shared by a certain group of people. It is reflected in cognitive views of the world, moral values and prescriptive rules for action. A personal worldview arises from an individual appropriation of a community's worldview. Because of personal appropriation and because people adjust their vision of reality throughout their lives, a personal worldview never entirely coincides with an institutionalised worldview (see also Cooling, 2014b, p. 158). Teachers inevitably socialise students into a certain way of looking at reality. Teachers initiate into meaning; Christian teachers initiate into Christian meaning. This indicates the importance of teachers being able to make their worldview explicit. At least as far as the worldview they imagine as ideal for their students is concerned, but also regarding their personal worldview.

6.3 *Control Beliefs*

The third concept we use to clarify the value-laden nature of knowledge acquisition is 'control beliefs'. This is derived from Wolterstorff, and brings us to the reformed epistemology, a movement in Anglo-Saxon philosophy that opposes foundationalism, according to which truth claims are only valid when empirically proven (see Wolterstorff, 1976, p. 24). The positivist assumption that beliefs should be excluded from the acquisition of knowledge, as explained above, is a form of foundation thinking. Control beliefs are a frame of reference for reconciling data, theory and personal beliefs. This may involve methodological convictions regarding theory formation, but also ontological beliefs, for example, about the existence of God. In his own words:

As to control beliefs, I had in mind the fact that always, when engaging in learning, we operate with certain convictions as to the sorts of theories that we will find acceptable. Understood thus, control beliefs are of many different sorts. Sometimes they take the form of methodological convictions. (...) Sometimes they take the form of ontological convictions. The picture I offered of theorists was that, insofar as they are engaged in what I called theory weighing, they try to find a theory which both fits the data and satisfies the control beliefs. (Wolterstorff, 2004, pp. 193–194)

The assumption that everyone operates with control beliefs again shows that knowledge acquisition does not occur from a neutral starting point. According to Wolterstorff, it leads people to reject theories that contradict their convictions (Wolterstorff, 2002, p. 114), although control beliefs are also sometimes adjusted because they prove untenable in the light of data and theory (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 198).

6.4 *Value-Laden*

The contextual and value-laden nature of knowledge acquisition means that students do not have a neutral starting point. This is not the only implication. Another one is that knowledge acquisition is always perspective-based: social imaginary, worldview and control beliefs imparted to students also determine teaching and acquisition of knowledge. Teaching contributes to the formation of a worldview and students' control beliefs.

Therefore, the issue at stake with constructivism is not the idea that students construct knowledge and that acquired knowledge influences what students will still learn. neither is it a problem that experiences with those who think differently influence one's own worldview. The issue is the underlying idea that reality does not have order or meaning in itself, but that it only comes into being through human cognition. As we have seen, this applies not only to the rational processing of sensory perception but also to the processing of what students appropriate by studying books. To use Wolterstorff's terminology, our Christian control beliefs make it impossible to adopt a radical constructivist theory of reality. However situated and fragmented knowledge may be, knowledge acquisition is about the connection between the knowing subject and a reality that exists independently of the subject's act of knowing. Although we do not conceive objective knowledge in a positivistic way, we see realistic epistemology as an important implication of the biblical-theological data on knowledge. This would appear to cause a dilemma. The recognition that knowledge acquisition is characterised by interpretations and that the context influences the way people acquire knowledge, seems to exclude the view that knowledge acquisition refers to an objective reality that precedes human knowledge. Is there a way out?

6.5 *Critical Realism*

We can answer this question by introducing another epistemological position, namely critical realism (A. Wright, 2013). We have argued that we want to acknowledge the contextual and fragmentary nature of knowledge acquisition. At the same time, however, we want to maintain that the acquisition

of knowledge is more than interpretation. Knowledge refers to an objective reality, that also exists independently of the knowing subject. A critical realism epistemology shares with realism the conviction that this reality exists and can be known by people (*ontological* realism; hence: critical *realism*). As people get to know reality, they discover its intrinsic structure (De Vries & Jochemsen, 2019). According to critical realism, the human act of knowing does not construct reality, it rather makes an image of that reality. More than realism, however, and especially positivism, critical realism guards the distinction between the physical structure of reality and our knowledge of that reality, even if there is consonance between the two. Critical realism shares with constructivism the view that knowledge acquisition requires the engagement of the knowing subject: it is always the concrete person who acquires knowledge through sensory perception and its rational processing. Thus, knowledge acquisition is always an interpretation of reality. Human knowledge is embedded in specific cultures and ways of thinking so that people perceive through certain filters. Social imaginary and worldviews colour the view of reality (hence: *critical realism*).

Because reality is beyond human comprehension, knowledge claims have to recognise epistemic relativism. This epistemic relativism must be distinguished from ontological relativism: in the latter case, knowledge does not refer to an objective reality (as constructivism claims), whereas epistemic relativism entails the recognition that the acquisition of knowledge is always an interpretation of that objective reality. Apart from the acquisition of meaning, knowledge acquisition is, therefore, also meaning-making: people interpret the world they live in, as Cooling states, ‘(...) human knowing is essentially an interpretive exercise’ (Cooling, 2014b, p. 158).

Critical realism is an important building block of our vision of school pedagogy and is directly connected to the beginning of this book, namely that the upcoming generation does not put their trust in what is transferred by the previous generation but in God. We can concretise the meaning of critical realism in three ways. Firstly, it has consequences for the content of the teaching material. Students should judge critically whatever is put in the spotlight. The complexity and ambiguity of reality demand critical judgements about its interpretations (*recognition of the fallibility of the interpreter*). The competence to judge is necessary to determine which knowledge claims are consonant with reality and which are not (*judgemental rationality*). We will refer to students in this position as wise interpreters. This competence has come even more to the fore since the enormous influence of AI. Secondly, critical realism has something to say about the students’ own thinking. This does not automatically develop in the direction of what is desirable and the external orientation on

God's commandment is therefore necessary. So critical judgment also applies to one's own thinking process. Finally, critical realism puts the current generation of educators in a self-critical position, because they do not automatically foster the right *control beliefs*. The awareness of this is crucial because they have an important mission and are therefore called to a self-critical attitude just as, or even more than, the students.

7 Wise Interpreters

In the previous section, we presented critical realism as an alternative to a realist, a positivist and a constructivist epistemology. In this way, we can do justice to the biblical account of knowledge: knowledge is primarily a gift of God, it is oriented towards the reality of God that precedes the knowing subject, and it is characterised by the interaction with God and His world. At the same time, we can consider the situated nature of knowledge acquisition, as well as the fact that knowledge acquisition is always limited and fallible.

With this, we return to the main question of this chapter. How do students acquire knowledge? In short, our answer is that students must become wise interpreters. In the remainder of this section, we elaborate on what we mean by this. First, we explain how the interpreter relates to external authority and subsequently that an active attitude on the part of the student is required. Knowledge acquisition demands both receptivity and activity. Finally, we show that our understanding of knowledge is conceived integrally within the ideal of the fear of the LORD.

7.1 *External Authority*

We start with N. T. Wright's familiar fifth-act example (see Wright, 1992, pp. 139–144). Suppose, Wright poses, a drama play by Shakespeare is discovered but the last act is missing. Players may then be asked to complete the drama by reconstructing the missing act. A first requirement for the players' contribution is that the constructed final act must line with Shakespeare's thinking and that there is congruence with the preceding acts. Not every interpretation is good, at least if it is to do justice to Shakespeare's intention. In other words: recognition of Shakespeare's external authority is a prerequisite for an interpretation that does justice to the author's intentions. Yet the context and creativity of the actors also play a role. The versions of the different authors will have important similarities because all writers commit themselves to Shakespeare and the first acts of the play. However, they will not be identical, as each of them writes from their own context and perspective. Each version also involves interpretation.

Calling students *wise interpreters* implies the assumption of an objective reality. Knowledge acquisition is an interpretation, but it is more than an act of the knowing subject. Just as people who add a last act to an unfinished drama by Shakespeare need to know the earlier acts (and the author's style of thinking and writing), students need to get to know God's world: finding meaning precedes meaning-giving. After all, learning is always learning something; and that 'something' has a history of meaning. This demonstrates the importance of the statement that learning is more than a process. In terms of critical realism, this involves the recognition of reality, independent of the knowing subject, which is knowable to humans (*ontological realism*). Students must become *wise interpreters*, for not all interpretations of reality can claim truth in the Christian sense. They must learn to discern what matters. Our biblical-theological exposition has demonstrated that knowledge and wisdom relate to God, the Giver of knowledge and wisdom. True knowledge does not mean that humans themselves become the centre of it, but that they come to know God and His world.

7.2 *Correspondence*

Wright's fifth-act example also clarifies that knowledge acquisition involves the learners' activity. They must become *wise interpreters*, in other words, they must actively interpret the world they live in. Being part of created reality, they are able to reflect on God's actions, their own actions and their task and vocation in this world. The conception of knowledge acquisition given above is called the correspondence criterion. We derive it mostly from Bavinck, who connects it with Ps. 36:9 ('in your light we see light'). Philosophically, he bases it on the Logos-concept:

But that conviction can, therefore, rest only in the belief that it is the same Logos who created both the reality outside of us and the laws of thought within us and who produced an organic connection and correspondence between the two. Only in this way is science possible, i.e., knowledge not only of the changing appearances but of the universal, the logical connections inherent in things. (Bavinck, 2004, Vol. 1, p. 231)

People can perceive through the light of God that shines into the mind. Bavinck speaks in this connection of the

'natural light of reason', by which they merely meant the permanent property or power of the human mind enabling human beings, at the very first moment of perceiving things, to form the basic concepts and

principles that would guide them further in all perception and reflection. In the first place the light of reason is therefore identical with the active intellect, the faculty of abstraction, which shines its light on objects and brings to light the intelligible components of these objects. ... But in both ways we owe that light to God or, more specifically, to the Logos (Ps. 36:9, John 1:9). It is He who causes this light to arise in us and constantly maintains it. (Bavinck, 2004, Vol. 1, p. 232)

In acquiring knowledge, students hear and respond; there is a dialogical structure of word and response, of being addressed and taking responsibility. God's revelation in creation and Scripture precedes all knowledge acquisition (Belgic Confession, Art. 2; see Kunz, 2013). Bavinck uses the simple metaphor of a meal. Those who sit down at the table must also take the trouble to eat: 'Thus the child in education can never be completely passive, or be treated as such' (Bavinck, 1928, p. 171, our translation). Because students are reason-gifted creatures, created in God's image, and can use their own hermeneutical space, they can acquire knowledge. Interpretations of reality, however, are not beyond criticism. Here a critical realist epistemology provides perspective because it recognises the commitment of the knowing subject: the acquisition of knowledge is, by its very nature, interpretation (*epistemic relativism*). Besides the fact that knowledge acquisition is always an act of interpretation, we have to consider that the interpreter can fail (*recognition of the fallibility of the interpreter*). Imparted knowledge can prove false because reality turns out to be different than previously assumed. The aim of education is for students to make responsible and well-underpinned judgements about reality and knowledge claims concerning that reality (*judgemental rationality*). In doing so, they add new knowledge to existing knowledge and new information and data can place existing knowledge in a different configuration.

7.3 *The Fear of the LORD*

Technically we can formulate knowledge acquisition as follows: the learner sustains the existing relationships with reality and extends those relationships. Doing justice to what we learn from Scripture, we would like to formulate differently: receiving wisdom means extending the knowing relationships with fellow human beings and the created reality in the light of fearing the LORD. We prefer to interpret the adjective *wise* in its Biblical meaning. As we have seen, this is formulated most succinctly in Old Testament wisdom literature (Prov. 1:7; Prov. 9:10). In the New Testament, this is shown, among other things, by the fact that Christ is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24) and that in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col. 2:3). From

the relationship of faith with Christ, people learn to discern what matters. Knowledge is not equal to power and control, but must be seen as a means to serve God and the other and to live as creatures in God's world. In the ideal of knowledge, knowing is close to loving: the knowing one can love, the loving one can know (cf. Eph. 3:19).

8 Curriculum

How does this ideal of wise interpreters affect the curriculum and the arrangement of interventions that compose education? We would now like to give some key points to guide students on their journey to become wise interpreters. This chapter does not offer concrete elaborations, but it presents a number of key notions that help our view on knowledge to become visible in the school curriculum. The didactic consequences will be discussed in Chapter 8.

8.1 *Religious Education in All Subjects*

According to Psalm 78, the ideal of educators is to teach children to trust in God. Because of the prominent role of this ideal, religious education is at the heart of a Christian school's curriculum. This also does justice to the idea propagated in this chapter that God's revelation is at the centre of knowledge acquisition. Formation of a personal worldview, however, is not limited to daily devotional practices. Language and mathematics, history, geography and biology, creative expression subjects and physical education: all these subjects are about the student's exposure to the reality of God. The holistic, integrated vision of education implies that a Christian view of reality affects all subjects (Smith, 2018, p. 35 ff.).

8.2 *Provoking Relational Knowledge*

We connect our starting point in Psalm 78 with the relational character of the image of God (Chapter 4). As image bearers of God, students are predisposed to relationships. In the curriculum, the school contributes to establishing and maintaining these relationships. As the top line of the pedagogical triangle shows, education aims for the personal acquaintance of the student with reality. In finding and giving meaning, education must appeal to both the receptive and the active. Teachers try to provide knowledge and, as Wolterstorff says, we socialise students into a certain way of looking at reality. Education is therefore not a free-floating presentation of reality. We are surrounded by the world; we are influenced by it: 'We are embedded in this world. We are creatures of dust and creatures of habits and impulse and disposition and conditioning'

(Wolterstorff, 2002, p. 94). And at the same time, we also influence the environment: 'Yet we are not only acted upon but we act upon. We and the world interact. (...) So education not only points children toward a being in the world, but it also points them toward one certain way from among alternative ways' (Wolterstorff, 2002, p. 94). It is therefore important that the curriculum makes pupils aware of how they connect with the surrounding reality.

8.3 *Coherence*

The acquisition of knowledge flourishes when teaching and learning are coherent. This applies in two ways. Firstly, we assume coherence in reality itself. This demands that areas of reality are integrated throughout the curriculum. The knowing subject must not be programmed in a fragmented idea of knowledge in a positivistic manner, but in finding coherence of spiritual, social, historical and natural reality. That coherence is also done justice when students are allowed to connect with what they have already learned, one of the insights of constructivism. It promotes the development of a personal worldview if the student can link larger frames of meaning to detailed knowledge. Sometimes it is necessary to zoom in on detailed subject knowledge (see Chapter 6), sometimes it is required to zoom out to larger frames of meaning. Secondly, attention should be paid to different levels of knowledge throughout the curriculum. Education aims at imparting so-called propositional knowledge, but it also facilitates the hermeneutical space: the search for meaning is aimed at active meaning-giving. Finally, education provides students with procedural knowledge and metacognitive insight into their own learning process. The goals set for education reflect these various aspects. The art of designing education is bringing all aspects together.

8.4 *Responsible Choices*

A curriculum is based on choices. It is impossible to teach everything; anyone who works with students to find meaning restricts themselves to a fraction of what is knowable and discoverable of God's reality. The best way is to learn more from less, as Chapter 8 will show. Choices must be made. This occurs in the asymmetrical relationship between teacher and students: the student depends on the teacher's readiness to help, guide and inform (De Muijnck, 2006, pp. 66–67). The role of a teacher in the process of knowledge acquisition is not value-free: as a guide, they initiate students into meaning, providing building blocks for the further development of their *personal worldview*. In this way, the curriculum is also about responsibility: teachers are responsible for what they do and do not teach, just as students bear responsibility for their knowledge and ignorance. In this regard, Wolterstorff's description of the

curriculum is helpful: 'The outcome of decisions as to what shall be taught to our fellow human beings and what shall not be taught to them, what shall be stressed and what shall not be stressed' (Wolterstorff, 2002, p. 19).

In current educational practice, teachers often have limited influence on how worldview affects the curriculum structure. They come to work at a school where either the school follows a state curriculum (in many countries) or where the manuals have already been determined by the management (in countries where schools decide on curriculum content). Also in these cases, teachers still have an important role in the application of the curriculum in concrete teaching practice: they assess what should be taught and what should not be taught, in what way students are initiated into meaning and how students learn to relate to conflicting views (see more on this in Chapters 6 and 8).

8.5 *The Colour of Didactic Practice*

If knowledge acquisition is not understood in a positivist way, this has consequences for the didactic practice. Teaching aims to awaken the students' interest (*studiositas*, see Section 4) so that their reasoning is activated (Bavinck, 1928, p. 172; De Muynck, 2006, pp. 68–69). In the words of Bavinck:

The school is a place where the student acquires images through observation and where the teacher contributes to clarifying, expanding and enriching the child's world of images in such a way that the child will later know his way in the world, be able to help himself and act in that world as a person of God, perfectly equipped for all good works. (Bavinck, 1928, p. 144, our translation)

As far as the curriculum is concerned, this requires the creation of learning conditions and a rich learning environment by the teacher, so that students are initiated into meaning-making and learn to give meaning themselves. To do justice to the students' hermeneutical space their creativity must be addressed. Not only should they be given the answers, but the curriculum should also be geared towards eliciting critical judgement (see also Wolterstorff, 2002, pp. 30–31).

The argument of this chapter is brought together in Figure 6. The first column contains knowledge aspects highlighted in Sections 2–5. In the second column, the knowledge aspects are assigned to student skills and in the third column to teacher competencies, which can be recognised in Chapter 6 of this book. The last column gives some points of interest for curriculum developers, which can be recognised on the level of didactics in Chapter 8.

Insights about knowledge and reality	Implications for the learner as a wise interpreter (see also Chapters 4 and 5)	Implications for the teacher as a guide (see also Chapter 6)	Implications for the curriculum (see also Chapter 8)
God is at the beginning of reality and knowledge; He is the acting subject in the background.	Receptive attitude. Respectful attitude.	Showing a receptive and reverent attitude. Calling to be a guide.	Religious formation will occur in all subjects.
Knowledge connects and nurtures relationships. Knowledge is situated. Knowledge builds on existing knowledge.	Inquisitive attitude. Using existing knowledge.	Making connections with other knowledge domains than the subject at stake.	Coherence in the curriculum: logical structure. Attention to all types of learning and knowing.
The objective reality can subjectively be understood. Knowledge arises through sense perceptions and becomes active through reasoning. Knowing and wisdom are connected.	Wisdom. Listening comprehension. Viewing skills. Thinking skills.	A rich repertoire of didactic strategies. Phenomena can disclose their own meaning for itself.	Responsible choices: – variation in modes that are addressed. – sufficient components of action.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: the ideal of knowledge can be characterised by humility, service and love.	Wondering.	Demonstrating <i>studiositas</i> .	The flavour of didactic practice: elicit <i>studiositas</i> , knowing with love.
Dialogical structure of knowing.	Listening and answering: a receptive and active attitude.	Powerful narrative competence, linked to powerful dialogical competence.	Methods are sober and leave room for exploiting hermeneutical space.
Preference of the critical-realistic position.	Critical judgement.	Encouraging critical judgement.	Parts with choices for individuals or groups of students.

FIGURE 6 Implications of the knowledge ideal for the student, the teacher and the curriculum

9 Serving Knowledge

We are aware that the reasoning so far depicts a high ideal. In this section we discuss briefly two issues that show the significance of this ideal within the framework of this book. First, we connect the ideal with the qualifying aspect of school pedagogy, explained in Chapter 3. Everything we do is aimed at stimulating responsibility among students. Then we expand this by indicating that knowledge acquisition is not a project of self-realisation but rather has a broader purpose: education is aimed at *shalom*.

9.1 *Meaning-Giving in View of Responsibility*

In Chapter 3, the *internal good* was equated with the qualifying norm, which we described as acting in responsibility. Having considered at length possible ways of looking at knowledge, we conclude that this responsible action in a Christian sense is only possible if the learner has learned to give meaning to everything in a critically reflective way. Knowledge acquisition aims at acting responsibly, that is, acting in line with God's commandment. So, ideally, knowledge acquisition has an ethical rationale. In terms of the Christian tradition, we can say that knowing is connected with conscience: that for which others can call me to account because I know something or at least should have known something. Thus, conscience is more than a psychological category. It is also more than an internal voice that warns people about committing sin. The Latin term for conscience is *conscientia*: knowing something together with someone: with your educator, but above all with God. This knowing together is not so much the passive application of rules, but an active attitude in which one makes one's own judgement about what is happening in reality. It is also an active attitude in which the student looks for the best way to act in a specific situation. To be able to have this wider function, the conscience must be positively charged with knowledge; both knowledge that children acquire in their upbringing at home and at school, and knowledge from the Word of God.

Closely related to this is the question of how knowledge is applied. Although we have emphasised that there is no neutral knowledge, the same kind of knowledge can be applied differently. A doctor in a hospital and a doctor in a concentration camp may have the same training, but the way they use their knowledge in practice is completely different. Even if this is an example *in extremis*, as wise interpreters, students must learn to distinguish what matters.

9.2 *Shalom*

This brings us to the broader aim of knowledge acquisition. To acquire knowledge involves not only the cognitive development of students. Christian school pedagogy aims to form students into responsible persons who love God above all else and their neighbour as themselves. There is, however, a broader scope of knowledge acquisition. Education is aimed at *shalom*, a notion we derive from Wolterstorff: 'Christian education cannot teach only for development; it must also teach for healing and reconciliation – and must do so in a way that is healing and reconciling' (Wolterstorff, 2002, p. 258). With *shalom* Wolterstorff refers to the original Hebrew meaning which expresses the harmonious relations between God, man and his neighbour, society, and creation. He is convinced that God's original plan for the world also includes a calling for how people take responsibility: 'Shalom is both God's cause in the world and our

human calling' (Wolterstorff, 2011, p. 113; for an extensive study on shalom in teacher education, see Van Olst, 2024). The whole law of God (Torah) aims at *shalom*, in the desire that peace and justice will kiss each other (Ps. 85:10). *Shalom* does not only refer to inner peace or the absence of war.

When we connect the responsibility of students, which we conceive in a Christian way, to this, the aim of school pedagogy becomes much broader than acting wisely in the individual classroom. Rather, wise interpreters not only assess their own situation, listen to their vocation here and now but also try to judge how to act for the good of the global community (Kunz, 2025). In the knowledge that human beings cannot accomplish the Kingdom of God and that the new heaven and earth will come into being through judgment, sensitivity to fair relationships will be pursued, not as an extra, but in the realisation that virtuous citizenship and sustainability are themes directly related to the stewardship to which human beings are called. Thus, a Christian view of knowledge acquisition is culture critical. Knowledge is not primarily aimed at perpetuating economic growth, but at the welfare and salvation of others, and at caring for God's creation.

10 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown what it means from a Christian perspective to acquire knowledge. Students must find meaning in responsibility and arrive at meaning-making. They should become wise interpreters, in the realisation that they, as fallible human beings, do not have a monopoly on wisdom but are, nevertheless, capable of acquiring knowledge. As we have already seen, the teacher plays a key role in this process. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on the teachers: how do they contribute to students taking up their hermeneutical space and becoming wise interpreters?

The Teacher as a Guide

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

1 TIM. 4:12

...

When Christ is not present in the heart of the school – the teaching heart of the school – then He will always remain a stranger or a passer-by at school.

MARGUÉRITE LÉNA (1998, p. 225; as quoted in Raes, 2011b, p. 14, our translation)

1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have taken quite some time to consider the nature of knowledge and how students acquire knowledge and concluded that the ideal of a Christian school pedagogy is for students to become wise interpreters. In that chapter, the top line of the pedagogical triangle was at stake: the connection between the student as a learner and the real world. In this chapter, our focus is on the teacher as a guide. The key question is: what do we expect from Christian teachers regarding their part in the student's journey to becoming a wise interpreter?

Let us take an example from the sector in which the metaphor of the guide originates. Imagine someone who works as a guide for a travel agency. She receives a request to organise a theme-based city trip to Berlin for a group of about twenty people. The theme is 'Threat and Freedom', and the trip is supposed to explain the city's twentieth-century history to the group. The guide has visited Berlin a few times, but the last time was about ten years ago, so she starts reading about it and notices how much has changed. What she discovers affects her design of the trip.

As stated earlier, we aim for a mission-oriented pedagogy in this book. The case of the travel guide illustrates what *mission-oriented* means. The guide prepares the trip on behalf of an organisation. She heard the organisation's appeal

and agreed to do the job. It has to be a theme-based journey. So, we see that meaning-making cannot run in all directions because it is preconceived from a theme. Applied to Christian teaching: this can be similarly called theme-based insofar as it aims at promoting the Christian message. Teachers are guides who introduce this message: taking their students along on a journey of discovery through the world the students are increasingly coming to know. Standing in a tradition, Christian teachers convey Christian meaning. They do more than that: Christian teachers are called to represent Christ, see the epigraph heading this chapter. Just as a city tour of Berlin is more than just sightseeing, Christian teaching is ultimately about the encounter with Christ. From Him, our world acquires its meaning.

1.1 *The Identity of the Guide*

What does this mean for Christian teachers? What is their contribution to the process of giving meaning? How can Christ be represented? How can anyone be called a Christian teacher? What would give them the courage to take that role? This all has to do with a view on identity. Let us start by simply defining a Christian teacher as ‘someone who understands themselves as such’. Not their work at a Christian school makes them a Christian teacher but that they perceive themselves as a believer practising the teaching profession. The teacher belongs to the worldwide Christian faith community in their mission to initiate students into Christian meaning-giving. Given this, an important question is: what are the points of intersection of profession and faith? In other words: how do Christian teachers connect their faith and their professional actions? What was said in Chapter 2 in general about the relationship between school pedagogy and theology, will now be examined in more detail in connection with the teacher. Referring once more to Figure 3, we wish to reflect on the relationship between the right and left columns.

1.2 *Professional Self-Understanding*

The role of Christianity in teaching is part of what we theoretically call *professional self-understanding*, defined by Kelchtermans as ‘teachers’ sense of themselves as teachers, how they conceive of and represent themselves in their professional practice’ (Kelchtermans, 2018). How teachers perceive themselves is important, Kelchtermans argues, because teaching is a relational, social and public act that is observed and evaluated by others. Teachers send a certain message by the way they act (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 259; cf. Hanesova, 2016). Interviews with teachers demonstrate that they are often unsure how to articulate the relationship between their faith and professional identity. The claim ‘how I teach is the message’ is not self-evident. Moreover, differences between

teachers within schools are substantial in primary education (De Muynck, 2008) and secondary education (De Kock, 2009). Therefore, it is not easy for teachers to sense a coherence between their self-understanding and the *corporate identity* of the school (the concept of *corporate identity* is explained in Chapter 10).

Self-perceptions vary from 'I happen to be a Christian, but my actions are otherwise no different than those of a non-Christian teacher' to the idea that the teacher's faith pervades their whole profession. Between these extremes, all kinds of variants exist, from completely separated to well-considered integration (Estep, Anthony & Alisson, 2008, p. 37). Sometimes the issue is raised whether to speak of *the Christian as teacher* or *a Christian teacher*. The former formula has the advantage of creating equivalence with every profession: every Christian has a divine profession, as does a teacher. The disadvantage is that this can be read in a dualistic way. Someone is Christian as a person, but their profession can be exercised by anybody. Only the personal touch makes you (more or less by chance) perform the profession differently. The disadvantage of the second formulation may be that the interwovenness is *a priori* inescapable. In addition, it may suggest the high pretence of being different. Nevertheless, we opt for the second, because we consider this type of teaching to be an articulated social practice, shared and cultivated by a group of people. We consider that each teacher puts it into practice in their own way and without pretence that it is a uniquely different practice (see Chapter 3).

What people think of this depends on the subject they teach, the field in which they teach, and the type of education they have received. Instead of speaking of degrees of integration, the German religious pedagogue Manfred L. Pirner (2018), refers to points of contact. Based on qualitative research, he observes points of contact when it comes to religious *motivation* for teaching, religious *coping* (dealing with yourself and the environment), *worldview* (as it affects your professional knowledge) and religious *convictions* (which are expressed in values and goals you set). Arranged slightly differently, this coheres with how we structure the relationship between profession and faith in this chapter. Motivation is related to the heart, worldview and religious convictions to the head and coping to the hands.

First, the teacher's actions have to do with basic attitudes to life and the world, that is, with the *heart* (Section 2). By the heart, we mean what people are deeply committed to. It is shaped by one's biography, including someone's personal and professional socialisation. A faithful teacher is a disciple of Christ, not as an automatism, but as a contested position. Nevertheless, the desire to be His disciple gives direction to the sources that inspire them. The Bible and

other sources of Christian thought nurture their spirituality and colour how they speak. The Christian teacher is, in some way, as Van Crombrugge called it: a contemplative practitioner (Van Crombrugge, 2013), someone who is guided by sources outside himself. In dealing with these sources, they find the courage and strength to do their daily work and are challenged to dwell on what truly matters. These things relate to the bottom layers of Figure 5.

The second point of contact is the *mind* (Section 3). Each teacher has a particular worldview, supported by basic convictions about who human beings are, what students should be raised to and what type of actions are most desirable. Teachers must be capable of articulating how profession and faith relate to each other. While they may not always be outspoken about their convictions and these need not always be articulated, they should be able to talk about their theological and pedagogical convictions when asked.

The third concerns the *action* (Section 4). It is usually not so easy to exactly determine the Christian element in actions. Teachers sometimes struggle to define their actions as Christian. At the beginning of Chapter 3, a teacher said: 'I think you can teach as a Christian, but you cannot give a Christian lesson'. Another teacher might say: 'We just must meet our targets' and yet another: 'I am not going to artificially insert a Christian flavour into my maths lesson'. Nevertheless, we assume that meanings are conveyed by these teachers' actions. We will now discuss the points of contact in the heart, head and hands in more detail, and then see how the three relate to each other (Section 5).

2 A Guide Is Involved – The Heart

We introduced the heart above as a deep level of commitment. In the Bible the heart is the source of life (Prov. 4:23). In the heart, feelings and desires reside and enthusiasm is nourished. The heart can only find rest with God (see Chapter 4); or, as Ter Horst states, the heart is 'the innermost' or 'the place of great desire' (Ter Horst, 2008, p. 159, our translation). Desires can be intensely directed toward peace and justice and powerfully help the guide to act. Desires, however, do not automatically have a positive orientation (James K. A. Smith, 2009, pp. 177–182; Paul, 2016, p. 94). The heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9). Man is sometimes unable to fathom his own heart, while God probes its depth (Ps. 44:21; John 2:24–25). God judges the heart (Jer. 17:10). The heart is the source of renewal (Rom. 10:10; Ps. 51:10; Ezek. 36:26; 2 Cor. 8:16). The heart can also be seen as the organ through which one answers and understands one's calling (Geertsema, 2005). In the remainder of this section, we highlight a few related themes: faith, basic attitude and vocation.

2.1 *Faith*

We emphasised earlier that educators must take a healthy self-critical position, to ensure that children do not go astray as their ancestors did (Ps. 78, see Chapter 1). Personal faith is not a guarantee for good Christian teaching. The leading principle is confidence in the intrinsic goodness of God's mission, the source of joy and goodness (Ps. 19:8–10), and therefore the best point of orientation for the upcoming generation. This conviction should be accompanied by a profound awareness of dependency on God's abundant grace. In the protestant tradition, with Luther, grace is understood as a *joyful exchange* (cf. Luther, 2008): all your unrighteousness has been reconciled, because Christ has taken your guilt and sin upon Himself. This faith marks the teacher's desire. Their identity is not determined by their personality but by faith in Christ. Phrased in the Pauline paradox: one does not live one's own life, because one is in unity with Christ's (John 14:19–20; Gal. 2:20). The teacher's faith, although not a criterion for good Christian teaching, has implications for how they perform their job. Living out of grace means, in short, that one *may* do it, rather than that one *must* do it. Living by faith entails trust. One does not have to perform but receives all good gifts for free (Eph. 6:6–8). From this earnestness, joy and peace radiate through everyday actions. Living by faith also means receiving strength from the outside and not seeking it in oneself. The identity is not based on core qualities, the natural gifts one received from God, or one's authenticity, but – as we cannot emphasise enough – in Christ.

How can we defend such an argument in our times, called the age of authenticity (Taylor, 2007)? Indeed, our argument does not deny the good of authenticity. Students generally consider authenticity an important characteristic of a good teacher (De Bruyckere, 2017). It means that actions are congruent with feeling and thinking. De Bruyckere found in qualitative research that teachers are perceived as authentic when they know what they are talking about, are enthusiastic, allow each student to feel they matter and are interested, without being too friendly. An authentic, inspiring teacher is often a good teacher (Van der Zee, 2012). Yet 'authenticity' is a problematic concept because, although it can be used descriptively, it can only be used in a certain sense as an imperative, namely as a call to be sincere (Ps. 119:1). A righteous person is someone who does not allow themselves to be controlled by temptations (see for example Ps. 1, 15 and 26). Commanding yourself to be authentic is a paradox because authenticity is a gift. When one lives by grace, one need not worry about authenticity. Moments of authenticity are experienced, though, which we can also call 'flow', experiencing unity between what drives you, what you enjoy and the destination of your actions. This

is more likely to occur when one is in frequent contact with students and feels supported by colleagues (De Muynck, 2008, pp. 429–430). Yet the positive feeling of being authentic can rapidly disappear when circumstances perplex or bewilder the teacher. Consequently, having positive feelings can never be a final goal. They are gifts one may receive when responding properly to the demands of the situation (see below). Even then, a positive feeling cannot be seen as evidence of a good response. This may not be a pleasant message – for does not everyone have the need to feel satisfied in their profession? – but the strength of the Christian faith is its external orientation: it is precisely the moment that a believer does not rely on themselves (and their good feelings) that they receive hope from outside.

2.2 *Basic Pedagogical Attitude*

So far, we have linked self-understanding to personal faith. To apply this more to professional life, we use the concept of *basic pedagogical attitude*: the primary posture in the pedagogical situation (Danner, 2010, p. 219). This involves a disposition inclined to feel, reason and act in a certain way (Perloff, 2016). While there is a relationship between faith and basic attitude, a study of teachers' ideals deduced that faith experience and the teacher's basic attitude are different categories (Boele & De Muynck, 2018). This is not surprising, as faith is focused on man's relationship with God, while the basic attitude relates to communication with other human beings (Immink, 2003, p. 122). The basic attitude is connected to the vertical relationship but not absorbed by it. In other words: the vertical relationship immediately influences the horizontal relationships. Faith involves a virtuous attitude. To recall the relationships from Chapter 4: commitment to the Divine is closely related to commitment to fellow humans and creation, which are, for the teacher, the students, parents and colleagues, and the disclosed reality.

Regarding students, parents and colleagues, this ideal basic attitude is manifested in presence (a concept that will be explained in Chapter 7), but also in virtues of patience, attention, tact, trust, sense of justice and courage. A basic attitude can be expressed in specific issues, such as the extent to which one is willing to help students with special needs (Anderson, 2011). Regarding the subject matter, the basic attitude manifests itself in wonder and inquisitiveness. We will return to both in the next section. We speak of a basic Christian attitude in the singular because all Christian virtues can be traced back to the fear of the LORD, which is called the principle of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Ps. 111:10, see Chapter 5). Virtue comes from reverence for God and respect for one's neighbour (Vreekamp, 1984, pp. 96–100).

2.3 *Vocation*

Understanding a calling is preceded by reverent listening. In this book, we speak about a teaching mission that comes to you from the outside, a voice inviting and prompting the teacher to do something. A call can generally be described as the realisation that you are the person who must do this task at this moment (De Muynck et al., 2017; Roebben, 2011, p. 13). It is also called ‘the ethical moment’ (Gunning, 1940) or ‘internal ethos’ (Banning, 2015, p. 279). It evokes a commitment to the task: teachers are ready to contribute to the education of young people. A teacher feels compelled to add value to the lives of students (Van Crombrugge, 2013). The calling should not be understood here as a direct voice from God, although some teachers feel guided by the Holy Spirit in some specific way, pointing to a moment when they suddenly knew for certain that they should become a teacher. For others, however, it was a gradual process, due to earlier school experiences or an awareness that developed gradually (De Muynck, 2008, pp. 190, 235). Research also shows that the teacher’s training contributes significantly to a teacher’s sense of vocation (De Muynck et al., 2012; Rots et al., 2010).

The basic premise of this book is that the teaching profession is mission-oriented: a consequence of an outside calling, which raises another question. How does accepting a charge relate to intrinsic motivation, which is usually seen as the most desirable type of motivation, while external motivation is seen as not beneficial (Vansteenkiste et al., 2010)? Here we encounter an inescapable tension, in which we must separate two things. On the one hand, intrinsic motivation is promoted when a person’s core qualities are addressed (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2007). Naming these qualities helps to deploy them. They can be seen as natural gifts from God, for example, to prevent procrastination in studies (Visser, 2020). Gifts may not be neglected (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14 and 2 Tim. 1:6–7), but ‘joyfully and gratefully’ deployed (Bavinck, 1928, p. 78). Knowledge of one’s gifts can increase one’s joy in work and influence others. Thus, external motivation can be closely linked to internal motivation.

On the other hand, the gifts are not the point of orientation. Core qualities bring flow and satisfaction but even when not experiencing the flow, teachers are called to do their work in challenging circumstances. Living out a Christian calling is also being able to suffer adversity with the help of God (note that the text about adversity in 2 Tim. 1: 8 immediately follows the text on gifts). Or, as we emphasised earlier, a mission-oriented pedagogy does not rest on authenticity, inspiration or core qualities of teachers but starts with their mission. Intrinsic motivation must be nourished by what comes to you externally.

Another question regards the difference with other professions. If each profession is divine, why should the work of teachers be different from other jobs,

for example, that of a carpenter? We assume that the interwovenness between each specific profession is related to the aim of the actions. That of a carpenter can be called an instrumental aim. They will serve people and glorify God by crafting houses or furniture. The actions of Christian teachers have a relational aim: they influence the lives of learners. This aim is part of a greater mission that started in Biblical times, and through a long line of history, up to today. Earlier in this book we related this to Ephesians 6:4, among others. When teachers understand themselves to be Christians and are connected to Christ's church, they translate the mission in two ways. First, they have a socialisation task, because they contribute to the Christian students gaining solid ground to be prepared for a place in society. Secondly, teaching has a missionary function, for teachers desire to share the Gospel with each child, regardless of its context. Because we perceive a connection to the church in some ways, it could even be appropriate to give teachers some sort of ordination, as is possible for some ministries in the Roman Catholic Church. Teachers could then be positioned in the 'synergistic offices', 'office-bearers who are co-workers with ordained office-bearers' (Van de Beek, 2012, pp. 245–246, our translation).

2.4 *Context*

The words 'at this moment' in the above description of vocation point to its contextual nature. The mission must be realised in a specific situation. This moment and this place is where the teacher must fulfil their vocation. In all cases, the mission is focused on the students, as stated above: the teacher adds value to the lives of children and young people. How this added value is given depends on the type of school they work at. A teacher of faith can have a lonely position in a non-religious state school and reflect on faith and profession on their own (Mihovilović & Boulton, 2020), while one can cultivate faith in reflection with others in a Christian independent or private school.

Wherever the teaching position is, the teacher also has a vocation to exert their influence in the school as a whole (which we understand as a system, with geographical and historical characteristics, as we will argue in Chapters 9 and 10). Both for students and for the school, the future is at stake. The teacher influences how students develop as individual persons and how the school develops as an organisation. Therefore, teachers are *agents of change* who understand the needs of students, colleagues and the organisation. They must learn to distinguish what is important at that moment. Perhaps they wish to save the students with special needs from marginalisation or serve elderly people in the neighbourhood. How teachers are situated in time and space partly determines what they are called to do. A teacher working for a development organisation may feel called to set up education for children in a refugee

camp. At the same time, someone at a Christian village school may feel the vocation to serve pupils who belong exclusively to one or a few related church denominations.

3 A Guide Knows the World – The Mind

3.1 *Personal Professional Theory*

After discussing the heart as part of the Christian teachers' professional self-understanding, we now turn to the teachers' minds. Part of faith is assigning authority to theological and pedagogical sources (see Chapters 1, 2 and 7 for more detail). Teachers appropriate its contents and integrate it with their pedagogical views. This is not isolated, but – in coherence with our 'practices' approach, explained in Chapter 3 – linked to the faith tradition (Van Crombrugge, 2008). It applies to the 'ability to erase yourself in favour of something else that is bigger, stronger, more powerful and more beautiful' (Raes, 2011b, p. 87, our translation). The connection between professionalism and faith is established in a *Personal Professional Theory* (see Schaap et al., 2009). It acts as a filter through which a teacher perceives situations and acts accordingly. We have already discussed the function of filters in the chapter on knowledge, referring to social imagination, worldview and control beliefs (Chapter 5). Empirical research evidences their functions. Filters not only determine how someone acts but also what inspires a person and the topics one wishes to professionalise in (De Muynck, 2008, pp. 416–417). Thus, a Personal Professional Theory not only guides a teacher's classroom actions but also their willingness to learn and the topics they want to further develop themselves in. Schaap et al. (2009, p. 21, following Pajares, 1992) argue there is an inextricable intertwining of knowledge and beliefs. What you want to know depends on your beliefs. The Personal Professional Theory is often expressed in one's actions in an unconscious way. Yet, in conversations with individual teachers such as those used in the referenced research, their professional theory can almost always be unravelled.

It is helpful to distinguish between the content of a Personal Professional Theory that is relatively stable on the one hand and the ideas that arise in interaction with practice on the other hand. The former are mainly stored in long-term memory and the latter are evoked in action and therefore called 'interactive cognitions' (Schaap et al., 2009, p. 24). This means that a Personal Professional Theory exists, in part, independently of specific situations. One's own theory develops, as Kelchtermans states, as 'a personal frame of interpretation through meaningful interaction with the context' (Kelchtermans, 2018, p. 236). For the relationship between faith and profession, this framework functions

independently of the context in which one feels a calling. It is strongly rooted in one's personal socialisation. It consists, among other things, of a self-developed set of values, norms and convictions, including religious convictions. How they are all mixed in the unique personal professional framework, depends on the school context. This will be different for the teacher in the refugee camp than at the Christian village school. The framework is also formed differently when working in primary or secondary education. The personal interpretative framework is therefore not formed apart from the context.

3.2 *Collective Professional Theory and Worldview*

In addition to a Personal Professional Theory of work, there is a Collective Professional Theory. Schaap et al. define this as 'a certain degree of consensus among the members of a professional community' (Schaap et al., 2009, p. 488). Knowledge, values, norms and beliefs are shared in a professional community. We mentioned in Chapter 3 that the professional community of Christian teachers has a shared social practice. The knowledge, values, norms and beliefs therein are rooted in a long tradition (see Chapters 1, 2 and 3). Teachers grow in this tradition by attending faith schools themselves (not necessarily, but it often occurs), studying at teacher training colleges, doing internships and participating in a school community. Christian teachers, in their knowledge, values, norms and beliefs, have much in common with the broader collective professional self-understanding in their own cultural context. Within this, they form one of the *schools of thought* (Schaap et al., 2009, pp. 488–489). In a Christian school of thought, teachers know they are called to teach in the spirit of Christ. From this guiding principle, teachers give meaning to the subject matter, the interaction with their students and the didactics. They explain all aspects of their work according to this coherent understanding. Therefore, we can also speak of a community of interpretation. A *community of interpretation* need not be restricted to one school but can also be broadened to networks of teachers in a certain region. Finally, a Christian pedagogical school of thought, has a range of variants, as we will see in Chapter 10.

3.3 *Content of the Personal Professional Theory*

What would, ideally, be the main components of an individual and a collective professional theory? The anchor points are highlighted in several places in this book. Bearing in mind the elements of the pedagogical triangle, the professional theory contains beliefs about the learner (Chapter 4), about the nature of reality and knowledge acquisition (Chapter 5), about the self-understanding of the teacher (this chapter), and about the pedagogical-didactical playing-field (Chapters 7 and 8). All beliefs are influenced, to a greater or lesser extent, by conceptual-normative elements, which we summarise here as a synthesis.

The learner can best be seen as created in God's image, a creature with a high calling and an intrinsic value. The student is dependent on a guide who wishes to let the light of God's command shine on creation and history. Regarding the acquisition of knowledge and reality, we have emphasised the knowability of reality. At the same time, there is the intense impact of brokenness, both in reality and in knowing and reasoning. Therefore, teachers and their students are called to relate to knowledge critically. As far as the self-understanding of the teacher is concerned, we emphasise in this chapter the importance of living by grace, the basic attitude and the awareness of being called in one's specific context. Finally, as far as the pedagogical-didactical domain is concerned, in the following chapters, we will emphasise the importance of presence, pedagogical wisdom and hospitality, as well as thorough knowledge of subject content and the corresponding didactic instruments.

4 A Guide Shows the Way – The Action

Having explained the role of heart and mind in the professional self-understanding of the Christian teacher, we now turn to action. Action needs to be distinguished from behaviour. *Behaviour* can be moving your head, raising your hand, or handing over a book. By behaviour we mean the individual actions of a person that are not part of a larger meaningful framework, unless interpreted as such. In *action*, it is precisely this meaningful framework that is important. For the Christian teacher, acting is always morally qualified, because one has the student's interest at heart. 'Conduct in teaching', says the American educationalist David Hansen, 'constitutes a pattern of action that supports meaningful teaching and learning' (Hansen, 2001, p. 39; cf. Smith, 2018, pp. 27–40). We return to the pedagogical triangle introduced in Chapter 1 to elaborate on this. Education occurs in a field of action between the three basic elements: teacher, student and reality. In that field (indicated here as a triangular surface within the vertices), every teacher acts along two lines: the reality-teacher line and the teacher-student line. In doing so, one aims to ensure that something important happens on the top line (reality-student), namely that the student learns to experience and know reality thoroughly within a Christian frame of reference. On this line, the teacher is the guide, focused on the development of the student's own relationship to reality. To this end, the teacher designs lessons, for which we provide some principles in Chapter 8. In this section, we focus on the two other lines. The left axis concerns the teacher's own relationship to the subject matter. The right axis is about the teacher's relationship with the students. Teachers, says Ter Horst,

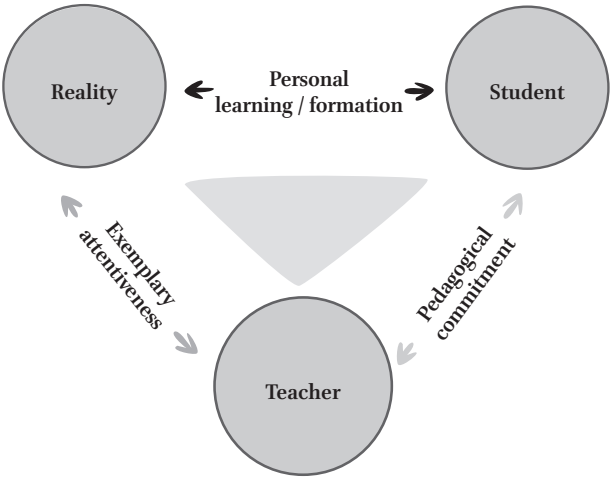


FIGURE 7 The educational playing field

love both: they love the subject matter, and they love the students (Ter Horst, 2002). This indivisible love is fundamental to the teacher's actions.

4.1 *Provoke Imagination*

To clarify the teachers' relationship to the subject matter (reality), we draw attention to the provoking of imagination, which a teacher will do daily, through instruction and explanation of the subject matter. The images are part of their perceptions. Let us illustrate how provoking imagination is a process of trial and error. Suppose you take a cycle trip, and you are following a marked route. At a certain point, you miss a marker. You ride back a little way and then you are surprised to see that a few markers are not placed at eye level, but low on the ground. As a follower of the system, you need to know the reasoning of the person who designed it. We imagine something similar in the learning process you go through as a teacher. Gradually, while teaching, you gain a better understanding of how the world can be understood as God's reality, making new discoveries all the time.

Next, there is an interesting parallel with one's own actions. Like the markers above, the teacher, somehow, places signs, taking the students into the pattern of thinking they have internalised about reality. In doing so they are aware that their reasoning is only a limited reflection of reality. In a lesson, one wants to reveal something of God's majesty in creation and history. At the same time, one becomes aware of how limited one is. It is only very partially possible for teachers to picture God's purpose in creation and history. Just as on a bicycle

ride, one sometimes has to go back and look for a missed marker or start over. The teacher practices appropriate restraint and reverent wonder at what God is doing in creation and history. This restraint reflects the reverence of someone who does not want to be the centre of attention. Not that this means that teachers have nothing to say. With all the didactical means at their disposal (Chapter 8), they tell an authoritative story about the reality they have come to know (see Chapter 8, especially principle 2 from the didactic diamond). And they see it as their task to acquaint students with a world they already know, but which others are not yet so familiar with. In doing so, they do not draw attention to themselves, but to the reality, in which the learners have to find their way.

Here we also expand a theme from Chapter 5. Teachers do not refer to the subject matter but to reality. They do everything possible to ensure the learner develops a critically reflective worldview. They provide an excellent lesson because in doing so they will strengthen the student's good sense of meaning. A teacher's story, a PowerPoint diagram, and a textbook: all help to introduce reality, although they are not identical to reality. So, teachers always point away from themselves, even when they do their work from a great commitment to the world. To recapitulate the analogy of a city guide: the teacher's main aim is not to make students familiar only with the map, with the stories or with the markers, but to make them acquainted with the city itself. The pointing and guiding assist the students in seeing things their way (cf. Biesta, 2021, pp. 51–58).

4.2 *The Challenge of Being a Guide in Times of AI*

Provoking the appropriate images in relation to proper knowledge acquisition is becoming increasingly complicated in times of AI. To explore this, we return to the example of the guide in Berlin. The guide who takes a group of students to Berlin can consider it a challenge to practice critical realism in concrete terms. All sorts of inputs are conceivable. The city of Berlin itself lends itself to the thematisation of the problem of fake news. Before 1989, residents of the GDR were used to news facts being manipulated. As this can now be seen on a global scale, manipulation of information appears to be closely linked to power. A positive approach could be to use AI to have students pre-imagine a trip for a day. During their visit, they can then experience what is right or wrong in Berlin, what is magnified in the artificial day trip and what is not emphasised. Assignments can also be given to check what knowledge is correct. Then students could interview residents about their perception of history, which also allows one to discover the different worldviews of former East and West Berlin residents.

4.3 *Incorporating Stories and Imagery*

In his narrative work, C. S. Lewis demonstrates how to evoke images of the mysterious and astonishing nature of reality. Through stories and imagery, he helped his readers to understand reality as violated, with suffering and pain, but he also depicted redemption and its effects. Lewis achieved all this by telling stories. Language teachers working with literature can follow him in doing so, although, for many other colleagues in primary and secondary education, special education and vocational training, this is a less obvious tool. We are convinced, however, that teachers at any type of school or training programme are called upon to highlight something of the mysterious and astonishing world. It should not be done artificially and should be geared to the learning goals. A Christian teacher must therefore train himself in imaginative competence, i.e. the ability to evoke appropriate images for the subject matter. This requires teachers to be broadly oriented towards culture and alert to which sources can be used (see more broadly in Chapter 8, principle 6). The Berlin guide could have many options to evoke the imagination using stories. Think, for example, of stories about the Huguenots who found refuge in Berlin in the eighteenth century. Or about Bonhoeffer, imprisoned in Berlin in 1943. Or more recently in history, stories about refugees trying to flee from East to West, across the Iron Curtain (1961–1989).

One way of using sources could be to use Bible texts frequently. Here the danger of artificiality lurks as does the danger of working in an associative and fragmentary way: 'The process involved is more one of vague word association than the transforming power of the Bible' (Smith & Shortt, 2002, p. 16). Instead, the art is to weave the big story of God's actions into the small stories of the lesson. In the so-called matter subjects (e.g. history and biology) this would be easier than in skill subjects (e.g., mathematics and languages) but it is not excluded anywhere. For this, we refer to Bloom's taxonomy. It will usually be easier to make this connection in the case of higher-order learning objectives (see more about this in Chapter 8).

As we have seen, teachers stand in a meaning-giving tradition. This influences their teaching, although it is not a template. To use the example of the city guide: teachers always tell their own stories about the city. They make their choices, based on what they know. The city guide in the example above prepares herself with several sources on the city's history. Because of the focus of her mission, she chooses what to study further. Then she decides how and where to share this knowledge with the visitors. By telling the story, the images of the city get meaning for the visitors. The Iron Curtain in Berlin suddenly appears in the context of a division that ran through the city for decades; the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche turns out to be more than a ruin. In this

way, too, teachers give meaning to their subjects through the context they provide (Van der Zee, 2012, pp. 80–82). They must therefore know the stories about the subject matter they teach thoroughly. Only when they have in-depth knowledge can they properly understand their task and choose where to place the emphasis and how best to make their subject meaningful for their students (Bavinck, 1928, p. 170). That is why students find a teacher with great knowledge more inspiring than one with little (Van der Zee, 2012, p. 81).

4.4 *Virtuous Teachers*

The teacher's action is always action in a relationship. The student becomes an adult by being guided by an adult. In the pedagogical triangle, this is visualised by the line, which is about the relationship of the teacher to the students. Its quality is mainly determined by the teacher's basic attitude, a concept we explained earlier in this chapter. There are many virtues the teacher could cultivate. According to the Apostle Paul, teachers must be kind, patient and gentle. They must be tactful and, at the right moment, channel conflicts or proceed to admonish (2 Tim. 2:24–25). This list, originally used for pastors teaching in a church context, can easily be augmented with virtues like wisdom, commitment, respect, justice, alertness and thoughtfulness. All people are called to virtue, but this applies even more to teachers because they deal with young people in a dependency relationship. A feature of the above-mentioned concepts is that they are difficult to define and therefore overlap with other concepts. In addition, they are characteristics of action in the sense that they always manifest themselves in concrete situations. While a questionnaire to determine if someone is wise, involved and patient is conceivable, the pedagogical virtue can only be determined from the concrete situation. A teacher is wise because they encourage *this* student in *this* situation while correcting the same student in another situation. Virtues are not obtainable in isolation; they are always connected to the teacher's person and their acting at a given moment in a given context (Kunz, 2025). We will explain this further in the next chapter, with the concepts of pedagogical relationship, pedagogical situation and presence. In this chapter, we only discuss the virtue relating to how teachers themselves cope: with self-control. We will also relate this to the concept of self-management.

4.5 *Self-Control*

In classical antiquity, the virtue of self-control was considered to be the virtue of protecting human beings against their natural instincts. For Plato, this virtue was so important that it was equated with wisdom and justice. Self-controlled persons would know how to act properly at the right moment. They do not

drift along on the sentiments of their surroundings but are not dependent on their impulses either. We consider this virtue to be important for teachers because they must make countless decisions in the complexity of everyday life. Self-control protects against the uncertain moods of a group and against one's impulses evoked by the student's behaviour. Self-control is a moral responsibility because a teacher must act in a manner that benefits the students. This moral appropriateness is not self-evident because – as we saw in Chapter 1 – the teacher is not necessarily a representative of a virtuous generation. There are plenty of opportunities to unintentionally set a wrong example. Vigilance and alertness are needed (1 Thess. 5:6, 8; Titus 1:8, 2:2; 1 Pet. 1:13; 5:8). Thoughtful teachers are prepared for what is to come, knowing the students and knowing their own attitudes.

Hansen, referring to Dewey, speaks of *readiness* (Hansen, 2001, p. 61). Readiness denotes an alert attitude that leads to 'reading' (interpreting) a situation correctly. It requires reflection on oneself and on the environment. Student behaviour arises in the context of a class, in life histories and as a reaction to the behaviour of the teacher. It is therefore the teachers' task to monitor themselves, be alert to the effect of their actions and adapt to what the new situation demands. Adapting is not easy because our ways of seeing and acting have become a fixed pattern of *knowing in action*: the 'strategies, understandings of phenomena, and ways of framing a task or problem appropriate to the situations' (Schön, 1987, p. 28). As we cannot trust that this pattern is automatically in the students' interests, a teacher must learn from the situation how things can be done differently. The most instructive situation is one in which something unexpected happens. For example: why does a student suddenly respond cooperatively when the teacher addresses the whole group, and not when addressed individually? It is precisely in such an unexpected dynamic that a change of perspective is possible. A teacher, as a professional, must be trained in *reflection-on-action* to do things differently *in action*. Schön formulates this as follows: 'We may reflect *on action*, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome' (Schön, 1987, p. 26). It is impressive and promising that self-control in Galatians 6:22 concludes the list of fruits of the Spirit. Believers can practice self-control, but at the same time experience it as a gift.

4.6 *Self-Management*

In connection with the pedagogical context, we link the virtue of self-control with the duty of self-management. The concepts are closely connected but need to be distinguished. Self-control is focused on the individual, while self-management is the response to a pedagogical situation in which the

teacher, for the benefit of the students, consciously directs the actions in a different direction than when based on intuition or impulse. Self-management is closely related to concepts of *reflection-in-action* (see above) and pedagogical tact. The latter concept will be discussed in Chapter 7. *Self-control* is an indication that a self-critical attitude increases with the growth of competencies: 'The more independent the teacher is (...) the more critical he will be about his own work, the more he will be aware of his own shortcomings' (Kohnstamm, 1959, p. 375, our translation). Self-management can relate to the other two points of the pedagogical triangle. Regarding reality, Bavinck believes that teachers can show self-management when limiting themselves in presenting the subject matter (Bavinck, 1928, p. 170; cf. principle 1 in Section 4 in Chapter 8). When teachers have extensive knowledge of the subject matter, they know what is important and less important. They then limit themselves to the correct outlines, using salient details as illustrations and balancing the material so that it is neither too much nor too little, but what is appropriate for the students at that time.

In the relationship with the student, self-management by the teacher is about managing one's own emotions. These can range from happiness and joy to irritation and aggression. Research shows that the student's behaviour towards their teacher and fellow students is a common source of irritation (De Muynck, 2008, pp. 381–386). A student may offend the teacher or bully another student. In the example from the research mentioned in Chapter 2, the principal heard from the parents that a pupil had been bullied. This made him very angry, and he wondered whether he should admonish or start a conversation. He channelled his anger by starting a conversation with classes, even though he knew it would take him a long time (example described in De Muynck, 2008, pp. 381–382). This example shows that self-management is not just a matter of restraining yourself, but above all choosing an approach that is most likely to make children responsible for their behaviour in the given situation.

In connection with the relationship with students, we call attention to *patience* and the teacher's ability to adjust their actions to the time required for growth and development. Patience is an aspect of self-management, as the teacher restrains from wanting to work towards a certain result at that moment. Being patient means giving students time to come to understanding. Patience also means accepting that the student is allowed to make mistakes. After all, becoming an adult involves trial and error (Raes, 2009, pp. 90–95). The pedagogue sees the child fall but also gives the child room to rise again before continuing. The teacher rejoices in development, even when it is not the result of own intervention. The image of the gardener has often been used in the history of education. The gardener waters and cares for the plant but is careful not to touch the plant itself (Smith & Felch, 2016, pp. 83–138; Van Crombrugge, 2025). Patience is the art

of waiting. Growth towards maturity takes time and the teacher must allow the student to fail and recover. There is tension between reckoning with a natural maturation process and using a precise didactic toolbox that splits and scatters children's learning processes into pieces. Many sub-processes proceed spontaneously, without the need for external guidance. In 1958, the German pedagogue Otto F. Bollnow (1903–1991) already saw the lack of patience as a problem of our culture. In existentialism, there is 'no longing to wait quietly', because there is no confidence in the future, (Bollnow, 1958, p. 58, our translation). In his analysis, patience cannot exist without hope. Patience is not a natural characteristic 'given to man simply as a fact, for patience rests on confidence in a future which cannot be calculated by any rational means' (Bollnow, 1958, p. 59; our translation).

4.7 *Practices*

So far, we have considered the left and right lines of the pedagogical triangle, the teacher-student relationship and the teacher-reality relationship. They express the two loving relationships as we learned from Ter Horst's statement: the teacher loves both subject and student. Now we need to consider a third aspect, closely related to the didactics will be discussed in Chapter 8. In the pedagogical playing-field (the triangle in Figure 7) something occurs that cannot be positioned on the left or right line. It is about what is cultivated in the interaction of teacher, students and subject matter. By cultivating a practice, we mean the order in space, time and action that causes learners to see things in a certain way (Cooling & Green, 2015; Smith, 2011, 2013, 2018, see also Chapter 3). Through that 'certain way' meanings are mediated. Supposing a teacher always allows students to work independently after the instruction moment, conveying that individual work is important. If their colleague in the classroom next door has their students work in groups every day, another value is embodied: students experience that it matters to help each other. Please note that we do not provide this example to say that group work is more important than individual work. After all, a teacher can have a good experience of getting students to work alone and a fruitless one of getting them to work in groups. What matters is that teachers, through their actions, establish a type of perception and meaning in their students. A certain sort of desire can be provoked by patterns: the daily way of doing things (for an explanation of the meaning of patterns and habits in a practice, we refer to Chapter 3; illustrative examples can be found in Smith, 2018).

We find it important to mention that it is not always immediately visible what type of desire is evoked by the teacher's actions. Only when you observe a teaching practice from a distance, as we saw in Chapter 3, can be queried

if Christian meaning-making is mediated in the particular rhythm of time and space. According to Cooling and Green (2015) this is the reason why it is important for teachers to be able to carefully review their own practice. To connect with the image of the bike junction signs: teachers can check what the signs say but also look at how they are placed. They can also decide to position the signs differently, that is, to change course and pursue a different type of practice.

5 **The Relationship between Heart, Mind and Action**

Returning to the question of how heart, mind and action relate, what can we conclude from the above about the secret of the Christian teacher’s actions? First, we note that action is embedded in the whole of the person. There is a strong interconnection between heart, mind and actions. What happens in the heart and the mind is expressed in action. Here the person of teachers is at stake, because they embody meanings. In their actions, teachers show how and why they feel addressed and called (heart), what their view of the world is (mind) and what they are capable of (actions). This can be represented schematically as shown in Figure 8.

Christian teaching is not articulated by what the teacher thinks or experiences religiously or what they do, but by the coherence of heart, mind and actions. The Christian character is expressed in action (on the uniqueness of Christian action, see Chapter 3). The connection can therefore also be represented as shown in Figure 9.

Next, action cannot be separated from biography. teachers have already formed a Personal Professional Theory before starting their training, and this theory develops during and after the training. Moreover, as we emphasised earlier, there is, within their framework of understanding, no sharp distinction between religious and professional convictions. In each teacher, these are uniquely woven into a whole. For Christian-socialised teachers, it is difficult to say without qualification, ‘We must just meet our targets’ (as if religious convictions are then placed in brackets), or ‘I am not going to artificially insert

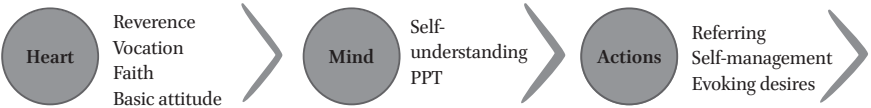


FIGURE 8 The relationship between heart, mind and actions (first visualisation)

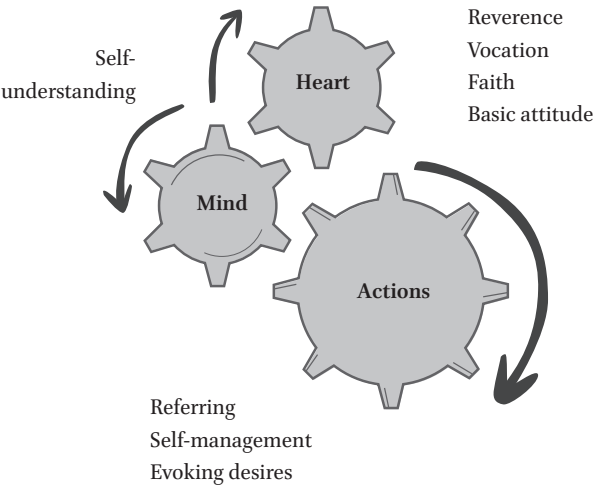


FIGURE 9 The relationship between heart, mind and actions (second visualisation)

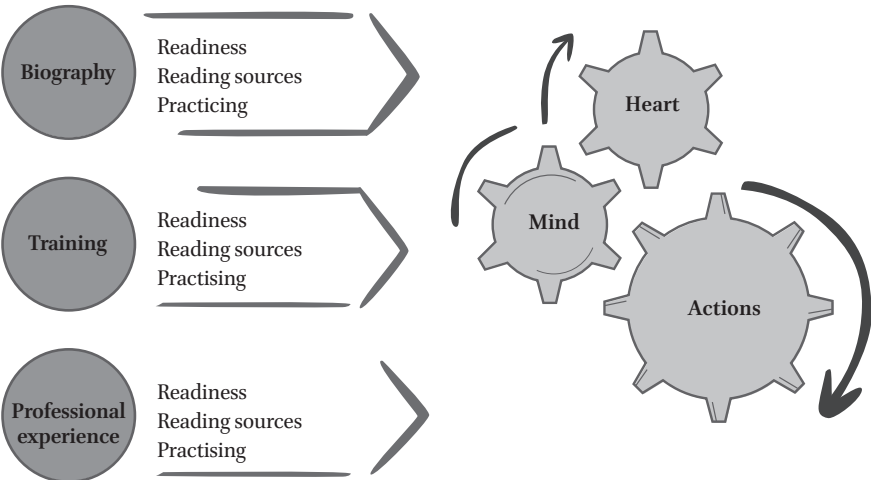


FIGURE 10 The formation of heart, mind and hands

a Christian flavour into my Maths lesson' (as if Christianity is by definition separate from maths; quotations from the end of Section 1). In one way or another, beliefs always play a role. The statements mentioned also conceal beliefs that are related to religion. Both statements may stem from a conviction that faith should be separated from everyday action. Faith is then something for the inner self, the domain of special grace, while pedagogical action is for the outward, the domain of the common grace. We disagree with such a frame.

Having seen the interconnectedness of heart, mind and actions, what can we say about how teachers develop during their career? In Chapter 1 we stated that we cannot assume that the teacher automatically acts fairly and properly. A readiness to pay attention to what one is doing and to adjust one's actions is required (cf. Eph. 5:15). Based on the insights we have gained so far, we can conclude how this adjustment takes place. It starts with the willingness to stop and reflect on one's actions. The readiness for *reflection-on-action* makes teachers aware of the impact of their actions on the students. This can be practised in everyday interaction with students. By adjusting their actions, teachers can look differently but can also change their attitudes. Reason too, is influential: by gaining new insights (e.g., by reading certain sources), the teacher can start to behave differently. Changing insights can also change the attitude. Last but not least, being addressed by the Word of God changes the attitude and thinking of the teacher (Rom. 12:2).

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have answered the question of what can be said from a Christian perspective about the teacher's role in the pedagogical triangle. We have argued that Christian teaching can only function in an interplay of heart, mind and actions. How faith and profession are connected in these three points of contact, cannot be understood by using protocols. Christian inspiration influences the basic attitude through faith and knowing oneself to be called. This basic attitude is part of one's own professional theory. The teachers' Christian understanding is reflected in how they evoke images in the teaching practice. However, it also becomes visible in what is communicated in the teachers' behaviour. We have focused on the virtuous attitude of the teacher, the virtue of self-control and the ability to manage oneself. This ability is evident in the unique pedagogical situation. In the next chapter, we will explore the pedagogy of this unique action in more detail.

Committed and Situated Pedagogy

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.

COL. 3:16

• • •

A feeling of critical solidarity with tradition in teaching triggers a deeper concern for those living today, and in whose lives one plays a part because in that concern hangs the balance for how one affects human flourishing.

HANSEN, 2001, p. 125

1 Introduction

‘Teachers are not surprised if you ask a question that others find weird. Anyway, they shouldn’t be surprised because you can trust a teacher. If there is something wrong at home, you can tell your teacher about it. He can help you with that’ (Connor, an 11-year-old pupil in an interview, De Braal-Prins, 2020).

‘I just love children and also like to observe them when they are playing or arguing with each other. I am just interested in them. Sometimes I can also be quite puzzled: “Why is this child behaving like this now?” I like working with children, but it is also quite demanding. There are a lot of bothersome incentives and blocked energy in children, and they sometimes have difficulty getting away from home. So, then I think: you shouldn’t do this, but at the same time, as an insider, I can also quite understand it. If you were leaving home like that or left to your own devices. (...) I know a lot about the children because I sometimes take them aside or get information from their parents. I sometimes sit with a student in the corridor or have a small talk during the break. That often helps a lot. Yesterday, there was Nick who refused to read a text aloud. That kind of obstinacy doesn’t fit him at all. I didn’t insist, but when I saw him in the corridor a little later, I realised he was very angry with a classmate and in a bad mood. I called them together and talked until it was okay’ (Interview with Grethe, 6th-year primary school teacher).

In Chapter 3, we explained that we understand Christian teaching as a pedagogical practice. It is *pedagogical* because its ultimate aim is to encourage students to act responsibly. All activities at school can contribute to this. They either have a pedagogical or a didactical emphasis. Now, we discuss the pedagogical, and in Chapter 8 the didactical aspect.

Let us start with the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student and, more broadly, between the teacher and class. The relationship enables the student to be open to what the teacher provides. ‘You can trust a teacher’, says Connor in the first quote at the beginning of this chapter. Mutual trust also opens up the possibility of using classroom situations pedagogically (Section 2). For this, the teacher must know how to properly assess the pedagogical situation. Actions are used pedagogically when a teacher is sensitive to the student’s needs (Section 3). The required pedagogical attitude is indicated by the word *presence* (Section 4). The three discussed concepts of relationship, situation and presence come together in *pedagogical tact*. This stands for a teacher’s art of recognising a situation in which something meaningful can happen (Section 5). We will explain this as an act of trust. Teachers can be present and act tactfully because they have authority. As we will demonstrate, authority has to do with the teacher’s responsibility and without trust authority cannot function (Section 6). In this book, authority stands in an articulated religious tradition. Therefore, we will look separately at its function and how it relates to the pursued ideal that the student develops a commitment to that tradition. Christian teachers, after all, aim to emphasise a perspective that they envision becoming part of the student’s baggage. This raises the question regarding the limits of influence. By its very nature, education influences, but how do we avoid the danger of indoctrination and ensure that pedagogical action is always hopeful? (Section 7).

2 Pedagogical Relationship

Bavinck starts his book on *Pedagogical Principles* with the statement: ‘Of all the creatures on earth, man is born most helpless and needy’ (Bavinck, 1928, p. 7, our translation). Children depend on the care and attention of their parents, who responsibly provide this. The relationship usually has biological roots and even if these are absent, for example in case of adoption, the parents meet the child’s need for help. Attachment is the sustaining base for parenting.

The relationship the teacher establishes with the students at school is more functional than that in the family; the teacher’s commitment to students differs from parental love. ‘The teacher is replaceable, the parents are

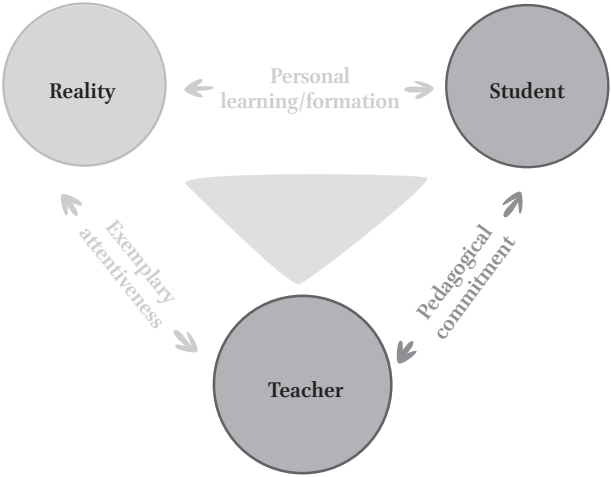


FIGURE 11 The pedagogical relationship in the pedagogical triangle

not’ (Levering, 2016, p. 44, our translation). At school, the emphasis is on getting to know the world. It is the school’s task to introduce the children to the bigger world so that they can find their own way. In line with our critical realistic preference, explained in Chapter 5, teaching is ‘assistance in the interpretation of reality’ (Stellwag, 1970, p. 74, our translation). However, education and teaching are embedded in contact, interaction, confidentiality, loyalty and love. The teacher in the second example above explains her relationship with her students: she is involved with the children, is affected by children’s experiences and tries to understand the pupil’s world as well as possible. This characterises the pedagogical relationship. This relationship refers to the line on the right of the pedagogical triangle. As we will argue in this chapter, the pedagogical aspect in the relationship is fundamental for the quality of education.

2.1 *‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’*

Let us consider what we mean by the word *relationship*. This term was used before in our anthropological chapter, where we called the student, as the image of God, a relational being (see Section 4 in Chapter 4). The human being is designed to have relationships: with God, others and the creational environment. To elaborate on the relational nature of being human, the ideas of Martin Buber (1878–1965) in his well-known book *I and Thou* (2023) are helpful. Buber distinguishes two kinds of relationships: an *I-Thou relationship* and an *I-It relationship*. To explain his thoughts, we will use the words ‘subject’ and

‘object’ in a philosophical sense. Keep in mind that ‘subject’ does not refer to ‘subject matter’ but to the ‘knowing subject’ (cf. Section 2 in Chapter 5).

I-Thou refers to the human being in relationship to the other: knowing in a subject-subject relationship. It is a mutual involvement of love and responsibility between two subjects. In that relationship, people can control, influence and structure reality. The *I-Thou* is transcendental or extra-temporal, meaning it occurs *in* the moment, in the here and now. This also means that an encounter, an event from person to person, is unique and not repeatable. Classrooms are full of such (potential) *I-Thou* encounters. The *I-it relationship*, on the other hand, extends across time and is different by nature from a one-time and unique encounter. The difference is well summarised by Buber’s use of two German words: *I-it* is not ‘*Gegenwart*’ (the present, as opposed to past and future), but ‘*Gegenstand*’ (that which stands against) (Buber, 2023, p. 55). A tree remains a tree, even if I no longer look at it. The *I-Thou* relationship is reciprocal (although not necessarily equal): an encounter between two subjects implies a mutual commitment. Because there is commitment, people influence each other. After an encounter, the person is not the same as before, whereas the tree remains the same tree after the encounter.

The direction of the relationship between a teacher and a student is from teacher to student but also vice versa. Awareness of this is important because it implies that not only is the student open to the teacher, but the teacher to the student as well. Buber considers the *I-Thou* relationship necessary for life. One cannot expect teachers to flourish if they do not experience a reciprocal encounter with their students. However, this does not mean that the *I-It* relationship is unimportant. A large part of what students do at school is learning to control, influence and structure the surrounding world. In Chapter 5 we called this the process of finding and giving meaning. Teachers help them to relate to the world in the *I-it* manner. However, as Buber says, the *I-It* should not dominate the *I-Thou* relationship. In our modern highly sophisticated world, there is a constant tendency to do just so. The teacher should help students recognise this overestimation of the *I-It* relationship and deal with it in a balanced way. As we argued in Chapter 5, we find this balance especially when our relationship with reality is not instrumental but imbued with respect and love.

Theologically, an equal relationship can be viewed in terms of a covenant. The covenant between God and man in Genesis is also a covenant with creation. With His Word, God calls creation to what it is. Following Bavinck, Faber formulates this as follows: ‘The world and all that is in it, therefore, is not merely a thing that has been made but a creation that corresponds with and is answerable to its Creator’ (Faber, 2020, p. 257). Teacher and student are both part of this, he argues, and thus stand in an equal relationship to each

other: 'If all creation answers the call of being, the teacher and the student are equals, coming side by side to respond to that call' (Faber, 2020, p. 263). Classroom events appear in a new perspective when viewed from one's place in creation. It puts teachers and learners in a humble position in connection with other things in creation and acknowledges that we cannot instrumentally exploit everything around us without serious consequences. Although humans are called to stewardship, they have a modest place. Observing the covenant idea, teachers who are used to thinking from a top-down position of control might change their attitude to a more relational one. The roles of teacher and student remain the same, but assessment adopts a different character: 'The act of assessing is an act of speaking the truth in love' (p. 266).

2.2 *Overshadowing*

From a pedagogical point of view, it is important to add some nuance here. The *I-It* relationship is not only about things, and the *I-Thou* relationship is not exclusively about people. A person can be approached as a thing, even manipulated, whereas a thing can also have real appeal. With the former we need not think only about abuse of the pedagogical relationship. In problematic educational situations or with students with special needs, teachers have to engage a certain degree of objectification: they must assess what is going on and how to act in this situation. Grethe, in the quote above, can puzzle to understand a child's behaviour. When thinking about children, the learner is inevitably regarded as an 'it', but this objectification is embedded in the relationship between teacher and student, in which the student's well-being as an independent subject is assumed. This embeddedness colours the teacher's reflections on her pupils. In Grethe's puzzling, she loves Nick. Indeed, she thinks about him so deeply because she is in an *I-Thou* relationship with Nick.

Where objectification leads to losing sight of the human dimension the relationship can become overshadowed. At this point, it is important to stress the reciprocal character of the relationship. To cite Buber: 'My You acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us' (Buber, 2023, p. 58). Here we also pay attention to the fact that the *I-Thou* relationship can be subject to failure. Teachers who interpret everyday work as entirely *I-Thou*, can become drained and there is a threat of merging with the classroom dynamics. To remain vital professionals, teachers have to be able to maintain some distance. They must develop the skill to look at the relationship between *I-Thou* and *I-It* from an outside perspective.

The teacher's professional conduct necessarily oscillates between the two positions of *I-Thou* and *I-It*. The *I-Thou* is in danger of being overshadowed by the *I-it*, mainly due to the many administrative duties. The software of student

monitoring systems is so powerful that it can process enormous amounts of data about a child and directly visualise all kinds of results. The direct encounter with the real child threatens to be overshadowed by the presence of a virtual digital student. The problem with this is that it suggests that what is stored is important and that these stored data will automatically determine the future. We will return to this in Chapter 9, where we will explain how the overshadowing of the *I-It* hampers hospitality.

That the *I-It* relationship is not only about the relationship of people to objects, but also the other way around is very important for teaching. Students must be able to relate to the objects around them: whether nature or culture. In Chapter 5, we argued that students using their hermeneutical space should be open to an encounter with the surrounding reality, without intervention of others. This is a cornerstone for our view of reality. Reality is not only created by human meaning-giving but also by the discovery of meaning. This will be discussed from a didactic perspective, in the next chapter (see Section 4 in Chapter 8, principle 3).

2.3 *Mediating Relationship*

The teacher's relationship with students is, by its very nature, temporary. It is also functional because the aim is for the student to become an adult. When discussing the concept of relationship in a school pedagogical context, it is important to emphasise that the relationship aims at more than the creation of a good, confidential atmosphere. As an educator in a school context, the teacher mediates meaning. Also, when teachers respect the students' hermeneutical space and encourage students to use that space, they mediate meaning about the world. Meanings are filled with particular imaginaries, religious worldviews and control beliefs (Section 4 of Chapter 6), all part of the so-called *hidden curriculum* but this need not be problematised. In fact, according to Van Crombrugge, pedagogues are inescapable witnesses: 'They not only act from this world but also present it and bear witness to it in their being and doing. They are witnesses even before they attempt to convince (should they wish to). They are already living examples before they give reasons' (Van Crombrugge, 2017, p. 298, our translation). Pedagogues imagine their own conceptions of the good and meaningful life in the way they relate to the child, each other and the surrounding world (Van Crombrugge, 2017, pp. 300–301). This imagination involves a cluster of meanings: teachers wish to act as they would like their students to act. In the relationship they demonstrate values, such as respect, wonder, attentiveness, caution and a constructive-critical attitude, including what they are communicating as representative of the present generation

(cf. the motto in Chapter 1). To act this way, teachers do not follow a programme; they are always ready. To anticipate on the terminology that will be used in Section 4: the teacher is *present*. Of course, it is important that the transfer of meaning merges with the teaching of lesson content. In every subject, be it arithmetic/mathematics, history or English, the teacher bears witness to a tradition. We will get back to this in the remainder of this chapter.

Finally, a relationship does not stand alone: meanings are transferred between the lines, the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968, pp. 33–37), and through subject content, the intended curriculum, but this all happens through the relationship. In the school context, the transfer of meaning among the students is inconceivable without the teacher. Therefore, we cannot speak about relationships as just a condition, a prerequisite for good teaching, but it is an intrinsic part of the teaching practice.

3 Pedagogical Situation

Meanings are mediated not only by instruction but also by the pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the students. As mentioned earlier, the teacher does not follow a programme but acts pedagogically so that something significant happens. We can define the term *pedagogical situation* with Stellwag as a situation ‘in which pedagogical potential is acted upon’ (Stellwag, 1970, p. 56, our translation). This cryptic formulation aptly indicates what a pedagogical situation is about: a continuous sequence of situations in which pedagogical issues may arise. In that sequence, the teacher takes up specific situations and acts on them, making the pedagogical potential fruitful at certain moments. The teacher can also choose to skip the opportunity, by not acting, not making use of it. Teachers prove themselves pedagogues by using potential wisely.

It makes sense to distinguish between pedagogical interaction and pedagogical action. *Pedagogical interaction* covers the teacher’s own pattern of behaviour, consisting of, for example, gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice. The teacher’s behaviour determines this contact. Together with other factors in the environment (such as the material design of the classroom), this behaviour is experienced by the student as a climate. A complexity of actions and environmental characteristics ensure that a student feels love, trust and safety. The particular *pedagogical action* emerges from this bedding. A certain moment in the interaction urges the teacher to decide to take action in the student’s interest (Stellwag, 1970, p. 25). That decision could be anything,

from asking a question to making a gesture to calm down the class. To use the example of Grethe at the beginning of this chapter: she noticed something in the lesson, which she responded to during the break. She used her observation (namely the student who refused to answer) to start a conversation with him and his classmate during the break. Here we see that the lesson itself contains the pedagogical potential, on which she ‘acts’ later. Langeveld speaks in this context of a pedagogically pre-formed field, in which the ordinary interaction with each other can suddenly become a pedagogically meaningful situation: ‘The interaction can turn into education at any moment’ (Langeveld, 1974, p. 36, our translation).

It is crucial that pedagogical action handles this pedagogically pre-formed field well. Well-chosen actions touch on the core of Christian education: leading the student to take and bear responsibility (see Chapter 3). The opportunity to act towards students occurs during everyday teaching. A seemingly trivial issue can urge the teacher to do something. For example, Grethe tactfully (see below on this concept) decides not to press the student who refuses to read but, at the same time, she feels compelled to start a conversation with him and his classmate during the break (cf. Stellwag, 1970, pp. 24–25). It is important to emphasise that the school context itself can already be called pedagogical. Therefore, we distinguish between context, interaction and action. The *pedagogical context* (in this case: the school) is a context where practices are cultivated pedagogically and has a broad purpose. Didactics, which we will discuss in the next chapter, is also part of the pedagogical context. The *pedagogical interaction* stands for the everyday activities of the teacher with the students, and the *pedagogical action* concerns the moment that calls out to the teacher to act in the student’s interest. The action is not arbitrary, but intentional, because the teacher aims to serve the learners by leading them to bear responsibility. As Grethe shows in her actions towards her pupil, it is important to make peace when you are angry with someone.

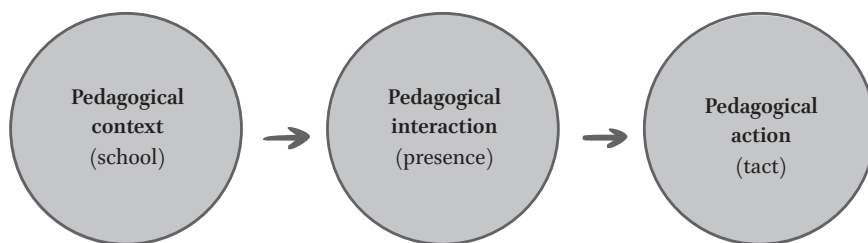


FIGURE 12 Context, interaction and action

4 Presence

4.1 *Being With*

In the everyday classroom practice, situations arise in which the teacher acts in an explicit pedagogical way. The example of Grethe and Nick shows that the quality of the relationship matters. Grethe does not mind letting go of her wish for Nick to read aloud, trusting that it will not harm him if he does not do so this one time. From Nick's side: he engages in conversation with his classmate and trusts the teacher in her invitation to do so. This trust can grow based on what we call the *presence* of the teacher. With the word 'presence' we mean being *actively* present. The teacher is not just a spectator but is actively present, with body and mind. More importantly, the word stands for 'being there for the other', or more precisely: 'being there with someone' (see De Muynck, 2004). Theologically, the concept of presence is linked to the revelation of the God of Israel to His people. In His Self-revelation to Moses, He calls Himself the God 'Who is', the 'I am Who I am' (Ex. 3:14), which means, according to the Hebrew text, the 'the one Who will be who He will be'. This is about the mysterious presence of God: He is close, without people being able to control Him. God's presence becomes most manifest in the incarnation of his Son. Christ is the Immanuel, 'God with us' (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). This proves that God's presence is related to reliability: God, in His grace, acts as He has promised.

God's presence can only be applied to human-to-human relationships with restraint. We have strongly questioned the equation of the two relationships from the very beginning of our book. However, there is an analogy to be found via the elaboration of the commandment of love in the Christian congregation. The Dutch New Testament scholar J. P. Versteeg (1938–1987) states in his study on the term 'one another' that, 'because we have been given to one another, we are called to be there for each other. In the reality of being there with one another, one may receive the stimulus to fulfil the calling of being there for one another' (Versteeg, 1980, p. 94, our translation).

In their professional identity, Christian teachers live out being there for the other. They are reliable in their actions so that the students can trust them. They are present, because they are physically in the classroom, following the students in their actions. By doing so, they can handle the situation tactfully. They follow what they observe in the here and now, always with a view to what is beneficial to the student. The interest of the student is foremost.

4.2 *Loving Presence*

The teacher's presence is filled with love, in the Christian understanding of self-giving love, with the willingness to sacrifice oneself as the ultimate

consequence (Phil. 2:1–8). Positioning oneself beneath the other is part of following Christ (John 13:15). Applying love to teaching could appear to be a tense subject. On the one hand, the teacher is called to transmit something the child does not ask for. The teacher conveys meanings with authority, which seems to primarily imply a hierarchical, directive position. This ‘conveying something authoritatively’ may be at odds with self-giving love. This tension is unavoidable because the student needs authority: the teacher exercises authority to serve the student, in other words, acting in the manner the pupil can be expected to agree on and entering the student’s world with love (cf. Raes, 2009, p. 42 ff.). A loving attitude is modest, with awareness of the fallibility of the adult generation when it comes to setting a good example (Psalm 78:4–6, see Chapter 1). This theoretical paradox is resolved in practice when authority is not oppressive, but humble. The loving involvement with the students strengthens the eloquence of the teacher’s action.

Hansen aptly speaks of ‘tenacious *humility*’. In a tenacious humility, one regards the student with respect. ‘For a teacher, humility entails a refusal to treat students as less worthy of being heard than the teacher him- or herself’ (Hansen, 2001, p. 167). Humility is related to dedication and respect. It is not automatic but demands perseverance. The ideal of humility requires a constant readiness for self-reflection. The reflective capacity, discussed in the previous chapter, which the human being possesses as a gift, is not just meant to confirm oneself but to question and change how one usually shows oneself in action. A humble attitude is an ‘active rather than passive quality. It has to be worked at, developed and accepted’ (Hansen, 2001, p. 167). Such an attitude ensures teachers are not blinded by their surrounding ideologies but remain down to earth.

5 Pedagogical Tact

An attitude of presence should result in tactful pedagogical action. By *pedagogical tact*, we mean being able to act carefully and wisely in a given situation. The concept of tact has been extensively studied and explained by the Dutch-born Canadian pedagogue Max van Manen (b. 1942). We derive the characteristics of pedagogical tact from a review article, written by Van Manen himself (1995). The first characteristic of tact is the sensitivity to read inner thoughts, insights, feelings and desires from indirect hints (like gestures, manners of acting, facial expression, body language). In other words, a tactful teacher can read a student’s inner life like a book. The second characteristic is the ability to derive psychological or social meaning from the observations.

The teacher can interpret the deeper meaning of timidity, frustration, difficulty, interest, tenderness, humour and discipline in concrete situations with certain children or groups. Thirdly, tactful teachers have a keen sense of measure, limits and balance. They know almost immediately when and to what extent they should intervene in a particular situation, and how much distance they should maintain. Teachers should challenge the pupils, always expecting more than they see, while, paradoxically, at the same time estimating 'how much you can expect if you expect too much' (Van Manen, 1995, p. 73, our translation). Finally, tactful teachers have a strong moral intuition. They sense how to act correctly, or in the right direction, given what they understand about the student and given the circumstances. In the latter case, everyday experience in dealing with students is decisive as this intuition can only develop in interaction with students (Van Manen, 1995, p. 73).

5.1 *Sensitivity and Responsiveness*

Acting tactfully pedagogically is about understanding the situation and deducing the best way to act. These two elements are also called sensitivity and responsivity (Mark & Mulderij, 2008). Sensitivity is about observing and interpreting what happens in a certain situation. Responsiveness involves taking action based on this interpretation. We would like to comment shortly on both concepts.

Sensitivity is a challenge because we do not know exactly what is going on with a student. At best, a pedagogue can estimate why a student behaves a certain way. One sees what happens, but the background or purpose of the student's behaviour is unclear. Therefore, Langeveld calls the interpretation of behaviour the *optional experience* (Langeveld, 1974, p. 105): the student *may have* experienced the situation this way. He understands the pedagogical situation as a 'set of experiential possibilities' (ibid., p. 105). Based on what they observe, teachers guess how the students perceive the situation and afterwards use their interpretation to choose one of the options. A wide diversity of experiences in dealing with students is essential to make good judgements. But even with a lot of experience, the teacher remains open and tries to look in wonder at what is about to happen. Teachers must be able to observe and understand that behaviour can have multiple causes. In the encounters with the students, they constantly learn from the students. To quote Buber again: 'Our students teach us, our work forms us' (Buber, 2023, p. 58). Or as Grethe demonstrates in the example at the beginning of this chapter: the world of the students must also become the world of the teacher.

Responsiveness is giving an appropriate response to what the interpreted situation demands. The teacher observes something and judges that they should

act in a particular way. They say something, do something, or deliberately refrain from doing something. By looking closely, a pedagogical task, as it were, is conjured up. Assessment of the situation provides important starting points for action. This includes intentions, which, as we will see later, are partly determined by the tradition one stands in. After all, education implies having intentions, aimed at the student's good future actions. A value-loaded image of the future is at stake: will this student go their way with respect, love, and amazement and properly respond to the commandment in the future?

According to Van Manen, teachers can assess the extent of their actions tactfully, but only students can say in retrospect whether the action was tactful. In the example of Grethe, only Nick can indicate whether Grethe's initiative to talk to him and his classmate during the break was the right thing to do. Did it make him feel at ease, or did it provoke fear? For this reason, it is important that, during (and after) teacher training, many exercises are done in careful observation, empathising with the student's world and observing and discussing pedagogical encounters. The anecdote, says Van Manen, is the best learning material (Van Manen, 1995, p. 64).

5.2 *Tensions*

The dynamic between teachers and students is full of potential tensions. Tact is about dealing with these tensions and wisely resolving them together. The following quote perfectly illustrates what pedagogical tact is about:

In a teacher who acts with tact, you see that situations which usually almost predictably lead to tension and dissatisfaction between teacher and student remain balanced or are immediately re-balanced by the teacher in certainty and confidence. The student also experiences this movement towards a restored balance. For them, too, the air is cleared, a problem solved, and peace and trust restored. (Stevens & Bors, 2018, p. 37, our translation)

A Christian theological interpretation of the ability to achieve a restored balance lies in forgiveness and tolerance. Someone with a loving disposition will have the willingness and ability to put aside what has been and to start over again and again, even if one has suffered (De Muynck, 2025). This is also reflected in the way events are reported. Problem situations do not need to be recorded in a student monitoring system. This would only tempt the teacher to let the moment of recovery (an encounter) be reduced to an *I-Thou relationship*. Tact can therefore be understood as an expression of teachers' forgiving

dispositions. By acting tactfully, they show that things can go wrong, but that there is hope: trust in a new beginning.

5.3 *Tact and the Guidance of the Holy Spirit*

A peculiarity of the pedagogical situation is that teachers do not have time to reflect on the moment itself. Observations and their assessment often happen in a *split second* (Van Manen, 1995, p. 74). Everything comes down to the *reflection-in-action* (Schön, 1987; see Chapter 6). Therefore, a trained intuition is needed in which values, like the forgiveness mentioned earlier, are carefully involved (Kunz, 2025). The apostle Paul's words are appropriate for teachers who wish to act in the spirit of Christ: 'Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom' (Col. 3:16). Christ works with His Spirit through the teacher's mind, emotions and actions. It has long been common practice in Catholic schools to begin each lesson with the prayer '*Spiritus sancti gratia illuminet sensus et corda nostra*' ('The grace of the Holy Spirit enlightens our senses and our hearts', see Waaijman, 2004). This is a very apt prayer, for it places tact under the tension of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit's action is both a gift and a charge, critically challenging the teacher who is perhaps being led by their own spirit or the spirit of the times.

6 Tradition and Authority

In her study of the pedagogical situation, Stellwag criticises Langeveld's understanding of 'situation' (Stellwag, 1970, p. 43). She claims there is a strong tendency in Langeveld's work to imply that the situation already contains the norm for action. If the pedagogue properly oversees the situation (we could say: with all the characteristics of *tact* mentioned above), they will know how to act. Stellwag, however, believes that this makes the pedagogical situation top-heavy and creates a *naturalistic fallacy*. There is then, she says, an excessively direct transition from the factual to the normative. According to Stellwag, the situation can be descriptive, but not prescriptive. But how, then, can the normative aspect come into pedagogical action? And what is this normativity about?

Van Manen, in his treatise on pedagogical tact, clarifies that the normative cannot simply be derived from the situation (confirming Stellwag), nor can it be derived by systematically following a rule (Van Manen, 1995, p. 61). In the teacher's actions, the whole person is involved, with all the beliefs, values, norms and tendencies of that person. In Kelchtermans' (2009) terminology,

as discussed in Chapter 6, the teacher's subjective educational theory and self-understanding are at work. *In actu*, teachers cannot consult theory but must rely on their pedagogical, theological and psychological baggage. In the immediate tactful action of the teacher, normativity plays a part, such as their view of the human being (Chapter 4), their view of knowledge acquisition (Chapter 5) and their self-understanding as a teacher (Chapter 6). This normativity is also evident in response to the why and the what of education: the mission, with all the related theological considerations (Chapters 1 and 2).

6.1 *Tradition*

At this point, an important topic is at stake, namely *tradition*, by which we do not mean that teachers act traditionally, focusing on the past rather than the present. Rather, it is the opposite. In emphasising the importance of tradition, we think about the teacher and their concrete actions in the present. We base the notion of tradition on our view of education as a normative practice. In Chapter 3, we described Christian teaching with MacIntyre's concept of practice as a praxis of a community of practitioners, acting in the same tradition. A practice and a tradition 'go hand-in-hand' (Hansen, 2001, p. 117). Teachers' actions are not merely based on their feelings, intuition and common sense, but especially on what they have observed and appreciated in others' practices. In the example at the beginning of this chapter, Grethe represents a tradition in her intervention with Nick.

A community dedicated to a tradition also interprets that tradition in, what we call in Chapter 6, its school of thought. The community of practitioners participate in the tradition as artists relate to their predecessors. They learn from them, are inspired by their work, and integrate what they observe into their own work. 'Tradition comprises a set of commitments, activities, questions, concerns, and aspirations that continuously evolve as individuals in one generation respond to the efforts and projects of those who preceded them in a particular practice' (Hansen, 2001, p. 121). In the *split second* of a given situation, teachers carry their inherent commitment to tradition with them. They may have seen something in a mentor during an internship long ago, or in a colleague recently, that inspires them:

Someone who inspires us within a tradition is not just a representative of a tradition. What inspires us in such people is that they show that the tradition they stand in is inspiring, and it is in those people that the tradition they stand in becomes inspiring. (Van Crombrugge, 2007, p. 106, our translation)

Tradition, therefore, can only be effective if understood as a living tradition. Something must be demonstrated and there must be something to imitate: 'Tradition is not so much transferring but calling for imitation by example' (Van Crombrugge, 2007, p. 106, our translation). In the well-defined tradition in which Christian teachers place themselves, they take with them meanings that have been sustained for several thousand years. If one has confessed oneself to the Christian faith, one is consciously a bearer of those meanings, standing in a long line of witnesses (Heb. 11:2; 2 Tim. 2:2). Teachers commit themselves to that tradition, take it into account in their actions, but ultimately also have the ambition to pass on its value.

6.2 *Invoking Love*

The Christian faith assigns authority to the sources established by the church since the first centuries as testimony about God (Belgic Confession, Art. 5), providing a priority in meaning by which Christian teachers are addressed. They, in turn, wish to pass on these meanings to the other generation and somehow mediate the confirmed authority. A Christian view on authority, however, is always moved by love. It may seem paradoxical to say that the teacher with the authority proclaims love. Indeed, this very paradox reveals what it is all about. Love cannot be enforced; it can only be invoked. That is why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4 that he does not want to use 'weapons of the world'. This refers to the exercise of power, which in today's language can be understood as indoctrination, in the sense that people are forced to think in a certain way. Bible interpreter Matthew Henry relates Paul's word to the human conscience, over which no coercion may be exercised:

External force, then, is not the way of the Gospel, but strong persuasion, by the power of truth and the meekness of wisdom. This is a good objection to persecution for conscience's sake; conscience alone is accountable to God, and men must be persuaded, and not driven by force of arms, to God and their duty. (Henry, n.d., Comments on 2 Corinthians: 2 Corinthians 10 Commentary)

6.3 *Authority and Interpretation*

At this point, several themes in this book come together. According to Psalm 78, educators have the task of familiarising their students with God's commandments, so that they would put their trust in God (Ps. 78: 7). In connection with the issue of forcing and invoking, it is important to distinguish between *ectypal*

knowledge and *archetypal* knowledge (Kapic, 2012, p. 31). The first applies to the interpretation of the Bible, as given by educators, and more broadly in the Christian tradition. The latter applies to the Word of God itself. There are good grounds for the interpretation (the *ectypal*) and we therefore acknowledge the Christian tradition as authoritative. However, it does not coincide with the Word of God, which is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12; on the fallibility of human interpretation, see Chapter 5). When human interpretation is made absolute, indoctrination ensues. The teacher's ideal is that students have their minds taken captive 'to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Cor. 10:5). However, this is a spiritual authority: the Bible is the voice of the (the *archetypal*) Living One who seeks the salvation of man. The voice of the educator is the (*ectypal*) means used by the Holy Spirit, but this voice does not coincide with the voice of God Himself. Familiarising pupils with God's mission is, according to Psalm 78:8, fallible.

7 Pedagogical Authority

In the previous section, we made the connection between the pedagogical action, the tradition accompanying the teacher's action, and authority. Thereby the word 'authority' has been highlighted for the process of transferring meanings. However, authority must also be discussed in relation to the pedagogical relationship. One of the characteristic features is its inequality. This seems to contrast with our emphasis, relying on Buber, on the reciprocal character of the *I-Thou relationship*. Buber himself, however, also indicates that, in teaching, there is not a complete reciprocity (Buber, 1985, p. 139). The inequality is rooted in the teacher's mission, to, both at planned and unplanned moments, follow the initial intentions about what needs to be transferred.

7.1 *Vicarious Responsibility*

First and foremost, pedagogical authority has to do with responsibility. Because a child comes into the world from a position of need (cf. the quotation from Bavinck at the beginning of this chapter), educators are vicariously responsible for their pupils. 'The educator identifies himself with the *interest*, well-being and welfare of the person being educated' (Langeveld, 1974, p. 51, our translation; cf. Bonhoeffer, 2009, p. 85). Bearing authority also has to do with liability. Parents are responsible for the pupil's behaviour, even when they show undesirable behaviour. Liability goes hand in hand with the desire for the child to take full future responsibility. The liability of the educator does not make the child passive. On the contrary, the educator constantly appeals to

the child's responsibility. Educational authority at school has the same character as parental authority. Teachers must identify themselves with the student's interests in such a way that students can take responsibility by themselves. Therefore, they make all kinds of choices for students, such as what they provide in the classroom and how it is presented to them. 'Education of a human being by a human being means', says Buber, 'selection of the active world by and in a person' (Buber, 1964, p. 38, our translation).

7.2 *Authority and Trust*

Acceptance of authority is rooted in the *I-Thou relationship* and consequently a matter of trust. Teachers must be trustworthy in exercising authority because the students depend on them. Wittgenstein stated this aptly, 'The child learns because it believes the adult' (quoted in Berding & Pols, 2018, p. 97). Education could not function without this premise. Philosopher Hester IJsseling gives a fine example of this in an interview:

At the end of the 1980s, I took classes from Cornelis Verhoeven at Amsterdam University. He was my professor, and I was his student. He was always studying something, often translating it – something that interested him – and meanwhile lecturing about it. This was about Heraclitus, for example, or Plato's cave equation, but also about the rather obscure seventeenth-century Cartesian Arnout Geulincx. *I wanted to listen to him because I felt something was happening there.* You felt his love for those texts, his fire – and you were allowed to be there. While we were working on these texts together, he based on his expertise and we students based on our interests, something happened to us, to me. It shaped me. It is only now that you ask me about it directly that I realise how much his teaching meant to me. (*Filosofie Magazine* no. 7/2019, our translation, italics not in the original)

The words in italics 'I wanted to listen to him, because I felt something was happening there', express the student's trust. Trust is important because children rely on education. Students assign authority to teachers and their message because they trust them. What they trust, they are more likely to accept and want to be loyal to than what they do not trust. Trust also creates a safe framework for the student to ask critical questions. Within that framework, the teacher can even invite critical responses. Trust demands a high moral obligation. Teachers may fail and betray confidence, and the relationship of trust also imposes an obligation to relate critically to the tradition one represents.

As Hansen states, teachers must take the mistakes of the previous generation extremely seriously and must therefore place themselves in a critical relationship to what has gone wrong with others. Sometimes, this is painful, and it may be tempting not to face reality. 'Those who failed, or who, far worse, harmed human beings, while wearing the mantle of teacher are part of my past. My task is to accept that truth and to act on it by learning to distinguish the moral and the intellectual wheat from the chaff' (Hansen, 2001, p. 124). Students should not become like their teachers but put their trust in God. The teachers, in turn, must take heed of the failures of the previous generation, so that they can be guides in a new way, pointing back to the source of life.

7.3 *Receptivity*

If, in a Christian framework, teacher and student are both subject to God's commandment, they both have to practise a listening attitude. Attentive listening is a central characteristic of a Christian educational culture. This attitude cannot be assumed to be a natural habit but has to be practised. It also has to do with something above or opposite you: you are being addressed. In his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer says that awareness of high and low is a condition for being able to act morally well (Bonhoeffer, 2009, pp. 386–387). It is not so much about high and low in the sense of hierarchy but in the sense of wanting to respond to what meets you. Attentive alertness is the basis for accepting what comes your way, an attitude closely connected to an attitude of respect and astonishment for what is presented to you, also closely connected to receptivity (De Muynck, 2020a). This is the framework for obedience: responding to the call that comes your way.

Responding is not a case of all-or-nothing, something a student is or is not competent in. Neither is it something that happens by chance, depending on the student's motivation. Rather, it is something that has to be learned by participating in practices. Those practices must be cultivated within the school. The teacher must demonstrate the practice and the students imitate it. They must practise it together, which requires explanation and dialogue. An open mind by the student, illustrated in IJsseling's example, is both vulnerable and promising. Teaching will include moments of silence, providing space for listening, noticing and being attentive. It is predominantly a matter of evocation, without excluding admonition and correction.

The willingness to comply with the teacher's message is not causally related to obeying God's commandments. We must bear in mind the difference between the ectypal and the archetypal. The willingness to listen because the teacher asks is not equivalent to listening to God's voice, which is not to say that there is no relation at all. By cultivating an attitude of listening, educators

create something new on behalf of the divine (cf. Bonhoeffer, 2009, p. 85). Giving and receiving must be experienced from both sides. When students are being educated, they receive something that adds value to their lives. The teacher should offer the lesson as an attractive gift.

8 Influence and Indoctrination

Those who educate, represent a tradition and – as repeatedly explained – unavoidably articulate notions that were not asked for. This raises the question of whether Christian education implies undesirable influence or indoctrination, which would contradict the goal of teaching to think critically and further that pupils make their own responsible decisions. If this is a threat, how can we practice pedagogy from a religious worldview? A simple yet principal remark should be made here. Educating and raising children always means influencing, if only because of the unequal relationship between the educator and the person being educated. Those who want to avoid influencing students, cannot educate. The same applies to indoctrination, which means literally ‘imprinting doctrines’ (Westerman, 2001, pp. 149–164). After all, many things are expected of students at school that they do not choose for themselves. In many of the skills to be learned, the choice is not left to the students; they are expected to master these skills through practice. A lot of energy and time is involved in this at school.

At this level, influencing and indoctrinating is usually not a pedagogical problem. In the discourse on upbringing and education, however, indoctrination has acquired a pejorative meaning. According to Thiessen, this meaning is a recent one: ‘Indoctrination (...) gradually became to be associated with keeping children locked within the present and the particular, within a particular tradition, and subject to authority’ (Thiessen, 1993, p. 37; cf. Westerman 2001, p. 176). The accusation of indoctrination particularly affects education initiated by a worldview community, for example, adhering to the Bible’s authority. In this publication this is manifest by starting from the command given by God to educators (Ps. 78; Eph. 6:4), which is decisive for the way we speak about the teacher’s pedagogical actions. The question then is whether Christian education and teaching would necessarily lead to a one-size-fits-all. In other words, does it lead to indoctrination, in the sense of influencing everyone in the same way, with a fixed result?

To discuss this issue, we again refer to the pedagogical triangle. In our conception, the upper left line in the triangle is not conceived as content knowledge, but as the reality of God. Perceptions of reality are implied, but those

perceptions are not only cognitively framed; they also hold religious images, values and beliefs. We cannot empirically prove that the visible reality is God's world. In defining so, we refrain from a positivist framing. Imelman, who is a representative of the latter, explicitly states that fixed religious beliefs cannot be taken as knowledge: 'Everything that is taken as fixed, true, sacred, decreed by God, prescribed, everything that is offered as "this is how it is and no other", all this distinguishes itself from knowledge' (Imelman, 2002, p. 48, our translation). When religious beliefs are presented as knowledge, it approaches indoctrination (Imelman, 2002, pp. 48–50). This again raises the question of whether, and if so, how it is possible to practice pedagogy with a religious mission in mind.

To make it even more complicated: the question of influence and indoctrination comes not only from the secular-naturalistic side. It is also raised by our own argument: education is primarily self-formation, and teachers must help students to get to know and interpret reality. The hermeneutical space of the student is essential in this respect. Students must, as we formulated at the end of Chapter 5, become wise interpreters, in freedom and responsibility. Does this not clash with a view on upbringing and education aimed at initiation into and appropriation of values and norms determined by the Bible? According to Imelman, a pedagogue should put ideology between brackets in the practice of education (Imelman, 2002, pp. 46–47). We present Imelman here as a representative of a scientific view of upbringing and education, in which the educator must stick to empirically verifiable facts, guiding the student in critically verifying what is true, thereby guaranteeing the student's autonomy. Reason must be allowed to do its purifying work. This makes Imelman a representative of a much broader naturalistic climate in which the place of worldview in educational situations must be as marginal as possible; at least in the school context (for a critical consideration of Imelman's position, see Westerman, 2001, pp. 139–149).

8.1 *Living Realities*

We cannot exhaustively discuss the issue of indoctrination within the framework of this chapter. For an extensive address, we refer to Thiessen (1993). Here we link it to our reasoning about tradition and authority and our view of formation as self-formation, as evidenced by the plea for hermeneutical space. In doing so, we remain within the Christian paradigm, which, from a secular perspective, might feed the suspicion of indoctrination. At this point, however, it is again important to emphasise that teaching is never value-neutral; whoever educates is, as mentioned, always influencing. This is true for educating from a Christian philosophy, but just as much if we educate from a scientific

reality view (Thiessen, 1993, pp. 59–86). Pedagogically, a child's space should not be taken away by an upbringing in which they are not stimulated to independence and responsibility. It is important to see that not only Christian educators must be aware of the danger of indoctrination. Those with a scientific worldview are just as exposed to this danger. For our reasoning, Van Crombrugge's argument on the relationship between worldview and education can be helpful. We would like to mention three considerations, taken from his work.

The first point is that ideologies 'are not just ideas that may or may not be explicitly passed on in education. In the first place, they are "living" realities' (Van Crombrugge, 2017, p. 298, our translation). How educators imagine reality, therefore, is not just a matter of words, but is something that happens. To put it in the same words as we did in the previous paragraph: they bear witness to this without preconceived intentions. Thus, everyone stands in a tradition and every educator introduces children to meaning: 'If parents do not introduce children to a certain meaning, others will do so, and the child will take values for granted anyway' (Van Crombrugge, 2017, p. 299, our translation). It is therefore not appropriate to reduce the relationship between worldview and education to opposing subjective assumptions on the one hand and reasonably justifiable knowledge on the other. It is much more about what is experienced as meaningful that counts and resonates in education.

8.2 *Pointing the Way*

The second point is that teachers representing this tradition show, through their teaching, that faith in God is full of meanings. These meanings are, in Van Crombrugge's words, 'the starting point and point of orientation, even when they are fundamentally questioned' (Van Crombrugge, 2017, p. 303, our translation). Teaching is an act of wisdom. In the Christian sense, teachers point their students to God and His world. This does not mean, however, that students are supposed to passively accept all interpretations. As we have frequently emphasised, responsibility is an important educational goal: education aims at responsible thinking and acting people. Students must participate and act in this world themselves. Tradition will be appropriated or not. The question of taking a position may translate into loyal acceptance or surrender (Van Crombrugge, 2007, p. 300) but may also lead to rejection.

The above has shown that the danger of indoctrination is not exclusive to education from a religious worldview. At the same time, we have stated that indoctrination, in the sense of influencing the educator with a fixed intended result, must be avoided. Students must become wise interpreters, and that does not happen if they only repeat the teacher's words. However, this does not say everything about authority in the work of the teacher. Chapter 5 clarified that

the teacher tells an authoritative story about reality. Teaching is not without obligation. The alternative to indoctrination is not non-commitment but giving direction. In this book, we therefore understand the teacher's task to be guiding students for this life and the next. Or, in the metaphor used by Van Crombrugge, teaching is captivating students:

Captivating is to hold someone and to take him, whether he wants to or not. To captivate a student is to take him away from his own little world, to offer him new horizons. And not without obligation, but compulsively. (Van Crombrugge, 2007, p. 103, our translation)

By the nature of pedagogy, this is not about physical coercion or brainwashing, but 'a teacher captivates by letting the student enjoy (...) what captivates him (...). You can only enthrall a student by something you yourself are enthusiastic about. That is what used to be called authority' (Van Crombrugge, 2007, p. 103, our translation).

8.3 *Commitment*

The third point has to do with a somewhat paradoxical issue in engaging pupils. Teachers are committed to getting the student to engage in the provided content, but at the same time they are prepared to let it go, as aptly formulated by Van Crombrugge:

What the effect will be, whether the student will be enthused or turned off, is beyond the teacher's control. He should not worry about that. Educating is done with determination as to its meaningfulness but with resignation as to its outcome. In the end, the student will find his own form and make his own selection of what he has experienced, but that is their task, not that of the teacher. The teacher takes the student on a journey, the return from that journey is for the student. Formation is not possible without this form of 'diversions', of alienation. (Van Crombrugge, 2007, p. 104, our translation)

Education leaves what happens in the hermeneutical space open. Teachers create commitment in students but do not force them into a straitjacket. In the phrasing of Thiessen:

Christian parents and teachers should actively promote both Christian commitment and growth toward normal autonomy. Although their children and students are brought up within a context of Christian commitment, they will be taught and nurtured toward an eventual

‘independent’ choice for or against Christian commitment. (Thiessen, 1993, p. 257)

Thiessen’s use of the *normal autonomy* concept corresponds to our plea for hermeneutical space. In this process, worldview and initiation in the Christian tradition are linked to the freedom and responsibility of the educator. Teachers ultimately make their own choices or suspend their judgment; students always remain responsible for what they do with the acquired knowledge. This process of creating commitment involves more than socialisation. Critical questions – also questions related to the Christian tradition – are not a difficulty, but desirable. The same applies when students present critical cases with dissenting opinions. Students should not learn to think in right-wrong categories but become wise interpreters. The true wise person is the one who loves God. And love cannot be enforced.

8.4 *Limitations*

From the above, the limits of teachers’ influence on students are more or less obvious. Teachers select what they teach and how they teach it. The teaching is linked to the teachers’ own interpretations of what is happening. In the reciprocal relationship, so we discussed in this chapter, the teacher’s influence is strong. The teacher, however, must consider the student’s own hermeneutical space. Teachers have an intense desire for commitment, but paradoxically they must also enable or even provoke potential disloyalty. The teachers’ influence will not harm students if they consider that the learners may be critical of the teachers’ claims and space is left for developing alternatives. Christian teachers are humble in the sense that they do not force but invoke.

9 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have brought together a series of pedagogical themes. We began by defining the pedagogical relationship with the help of Buber’s types of relationships. We then explored the pedagogical situation in which the teacher is called to act. We showed that this action has to be tactful and that teachers are unavoidably representatives of their tradition. Christian teachers assign authority to normative sources: the Bible. They also attempt to bring students to allow themselves to be guided by these sources. Teachers are guides who point out and point ahead, travelling with their students on a journey that is exciting for all participants. Teachers and parents will look at the world differently as a result of their different pedagogical relationships, as we saw with Buber. Some will want to adapt the world to their map, as it were, while

others are prepared to change their maps because of what they experience (Van Crombrugge, 2017, p. 301). Students are called upon to determine their position based on their own insight and will. Inevitably, students must increasingly make their own choices. Teachers provide signposts and points of recognition. The pedagogical framework of the teaching profession has been outlined with this line of reasoning. In this framework, the didactical actions of the teacher can flourish. The next chapter will explain how to imagine didactics within a Christian school pedagogy.

Teaching

All your works praise you, LORD;
your faithful people extol you.
They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,
so that all people may know of your mighty acts
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.

PS. 145:10–12

• • •

To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practised.

PARKER PALMER, *The Courage to Teach*, p. 92

1 Introduction

Case study: teacher educator (part 1)

Would you be interested in giving some lessons to prepare students for the CPE? This was the question put to me by the head of the B.Ed. English programme at a vocational college for trainee teachers. The CPE (Certificate of Proficiency in English) is a globally recognised English exam at the highest language level, C2. It assesses all key skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. After some consideration, I agreed. But that, of course, was only the start. How was I to proceed?

This case takes us directly to the heart of this chapter: learning, teaching, design, content and purpose. It addresses the roles of both teacher and student. It is, in short, about pedagogy. While the emphasis often lies on student–teacher interactions (the right-hand side of the pedagogical triangle; see Chapters 6 and 7), pedagogy encompasses the full richness of the relationship connecting teacher, student and reality – the complete pedagogical triangle. It involves educational actions intended to support the learning of *things of value*. This refers not only to subject content but also to the process of discovering and making meaning – a process in which teachers actively engage and invite students to participate.

Within this process, judgements can be made about what is more or less desirable, effective or efficient. What we consider valuable is shaped in part by

our beliefs, values and worldview. The *desirable* can be distinguished from the *undesirable*; standards exist to this end. Terms such as *effective* and *efficient*, however, are ideologically loaded. As previously discussed in relation to education more broadly (Chapter 5), neutrality is a myth. Pedagogy, therefore, is far more than just a toolkit. From a Christian perspective, teaching is an ethical matter and must be understood in the light of God's Word. Given also the regulatory issues at stake (Chapter 3), there is clear justification to reflect explicitly on pedagogy and teaching in this volume.

Closely related to pedagogy is *didactics*, derived from the Greek *didáskein* ('to teach'). While we use *pedagogy* as a broader, umbrella term, the key questions remain the same: What is teaching? Why should something be taught, and by whom? What can we say about purpose, goals, content or methods? The pedagogical literature rightly addresses these questions with a view to strengthening the connection between teaching and learning. This chapter explores such practical issues with a focus on guiding students from a Christian perspective.

Section 2 briefly discusses the definitions of pedagogy and didactics, as well as the distinction between general and subject-specific aspects. Sections 3 and 4 introduce the *Design Diamond* and its seven design principles. Section 5 focuses on the *Didactic Analysis Model*. Finally, Section 6 summarises the chapter, elaborates on key ideas and highlights a number of implications. The case study is revisited throughout the chapter.

2 Definitions

2.1 *Didactics and Pedagogy*

In this chapter, *didactics* is used synonymously with *pedagogy* in the sense that pedagogy is often understood in English. As mentioned above, we treat pedagogy as an overarching concept, using didactics to refer more specifically to the pedagogical actions concerned with learning and knowledge acquisition.

A widely cited definition describes didactics as the science of learning and teaching in general (Dolch, 1967). However, this definition carries a natural-scientific and behaviourist connotation, arguably overstating the idea that pedagogical actions typically arise from immediate or even inevitable cause-and-effect relationships. It neglects the fact that teaching and learning occur within social contexts involving numerous factors and participants. A wide range of variables influence teaching and its outcomes, of which learning is just one. For instance, Bertolini et al. (2012) identify 15 categories, each containing multiple factors. Hattie (2009), focusing exclusively on aspects that can be influenced by either schools or teachers, lists 138 distinct factors. Moreover,

many of these factors are interdependent. The resulting system is characterised less by straightforward causal relationships than it is by loosely connected elements (Weick, 1976).

Clearly, teaching and learning are complex, dynamic processes (Koopmans & Stamovlasis, 2016), in which small changes over time can have major but fundamentally unpredictable effects. Any suggestion of simple (mono)causality is difficult to justify. Thus, there are inherent limitations to the measurability of effectiveness and efficiency. Teachers, students and school leaders always retain a certain freedom of action, and the ensuing unpredictability makes education intrinsically non-deterministic. From a Biblical perspective, this freedom is linked to the human capacity for responsibility and love (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Teaching can also be understood in terms of art and craft (e.g., Lindsay, 2018; Murre, 2021; Sennett, 2008; Tom, 1984; Van Brummelen, 2009). These concepts are not entirely distinct, as illustrated by the word pairs *artist–artisan* in English and *artiste–artisan* in French. Craft is also associated with the traditional master–apprentice model of learning, familiar from the Middle Ages. Apprentices learn from and alongside their masters by observing, imitating, listening to explanations and following their reasoning. This form of learning ties in with many qualities explored in earlier chapters, which seem intuitively beneficial: proximity, connectedness, sensitivity, humility and realism.

2.2 *Teaching Specific Subjects*

So far, we have implicitly assumed that pedagogy can be meaningfully discussed in general terms. That is, certain principles apply across nearly all teaching situations and must be present for education to be as effective and efficient as possible. However, curriculum content and subject matter vary considerably across school subjects (understood as distinct areas of reality systematically explored in education). As a result, elements of general didactics are influenced by specific subject content. The intersection between them forms the field of subject-teaching methodology. This can be illustrated using a Venn diagram, where the overlap between general didactics and subject knowledge represents the domain of subject-specific didactics (Figure 13).

Internationally, subject-specific didactics is commonly referred to as pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), a term introduced by Shulman (1986, 1987). Many others have since adopted this concept, applying it to individual subjects or groups of subjects (cf. Andrews, 2003; Chan & Hume, 2019; Grossman, 1990; Jing-Jing, 2014; Magnusson et al., 1999; Wu, Yu & Zhang, 2018). PCK encompasses a teacher's subject knowledge, the historical development of the subject as both an academic discipline and a school subject, and its relationship to

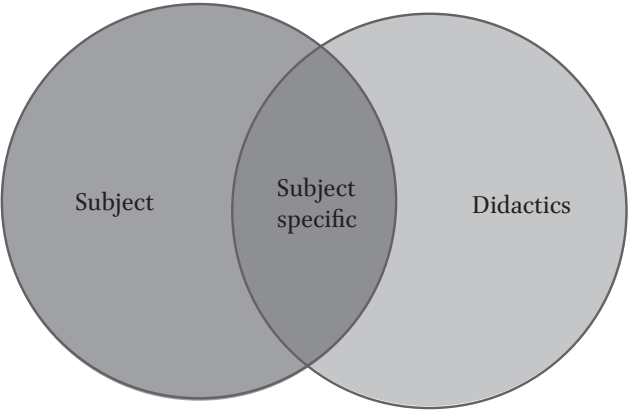


FIGURE 13 Relationship between general didactics and subject-specific teaching

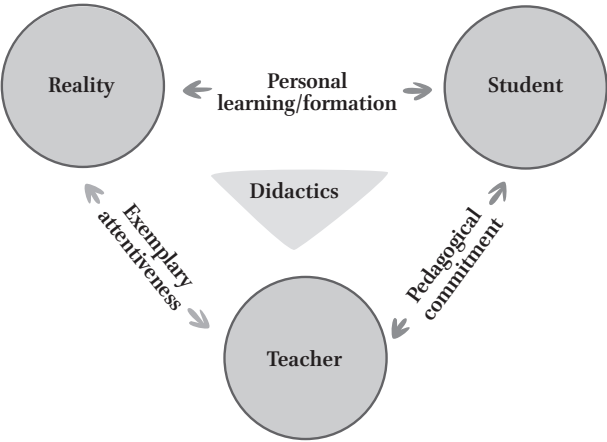


FIGURE 14 Didactics: the educational playing field

other subjects. It also involves the curriculum – what subject matter should be covered, in what order and how it should be presented – along with what students bring to the subject and any subject-specific learning challenges, including prior (mis)conceptions (e.g., Ardui, 2011; De Vries, 2019; Geerligs & Van der Veen, 2011). We do not discuss PCK further in this chapter.

Before continuing, let us summarise the reflections prompted by the first part of the case study. Didactics involves fostering the learning of valuable things through education, studying the coherence between aspects of the teaching process, and making informed judgements about what is more or less desirable, effective and efficient. These form the elements of the pedagogical

triangle, with its vertices (reality, teacher, students), sides (the binary relations) and inner space. Furthermore, we must distinguish between general didactics and subject-specific didactics (PCK), though these cannot be entirely separated. From this perspective, the key question for the case study (teaching a preparatory lesson for a CPE exam) is how to design the teaching to effectively promote student learning (for the relationship between teaching and learning, see Chapter 5). A further question concerns the value of teaching or learning skills devoid of specific content. To address these questions, both subject knowledge and PCK related to foreign-language teaching are required, and any choices made should be in some way justifiable.

3 Lesson Design

Case study: teacher educator (part 2)

The first lecture was scheduled shortly after I received the request, and some lessons had already been delivered. Now the next lecture was approaching. Students were also independently practising parts of past CPE exams using a textbook. What should my next step be?

Recalling a text I had read some time ago, I decided to devote the lesson to the story of an American and a German pilot during the Second World War. The American bomber, badly damaged, was attempting to return home. The Messerschmitt pilot chose not to shoot it down but instead escorted it to the North Sea. Years later, the two pilots met and became friends. What considerations influence this choice of lesson content, and to what extent does it reflect a Christian perspective?

As part 2 of the case study shows, designing a new lesson necessitates a whole series of decisions, whether implicit or explicit, that arise from convictions, ideals and other influences. Some of these aspects have already been discussed, particularly in the chapters on the Christian teacher, the student and the pursuit of knowledge about the reality of God. In this chapter, we revisit them through the lens of classroom pedagogy – specifically, the process of lesson design as illustrated in the case study.

3.1 *Three Levels*

Based on a brief but seminal article by Anthony (1963), we can distinguish several levels in this design process. The most concrete level is that of *techniques*, which include instructional strategies and procedures that can be observed and experienced; I also include content at this level. It is underpinned by myriad choices and considerations as teachers decide which teaching methods

or materials to use (or not), determine the order of activities, and define the respective roles of teacher and students. All of this also bears on the second, deeper level: that of *design*. Once again, design is a matter of choice, and alternatives abound. This choice is shaped by a set of views and assumptions about learning, the nature of the discipline and more, which together form the third level: the *approach*. This level resembles a theory and is, in nature, conceptual, axiomatic and paradigmatic. It is at this most fundamental level that a Christian perspective must operate. From there, it can permeate the other two levels – and thus the actual lesson, with its chosen content and instructional strategies.

It is important to note that although the techniques (level 1) and design (level 2) are always connected to the underlying approach (level 3), they cannot be derived from the approach deductively, in a strictly logical manner. In this chapter, we work from the assumption that distinguishing between these levels helps us to consider how a Christian perspective can shape and permeate the teaching of school subjects across the curriculum. Richards and Rodgers (2014) develop a similar idea in relation to second-language teaching, and Smith and Shortt do likewise for Christian education (2002, p. 49 ff). While teachers may not always be consciously aware of these three levels, it is important to recognise that they in fact form the foundation of every lesson.

4 The Design Diamond

The previous chapters focused mainly on aspects of Anthony's (1963) third level: the paradigmatic approach. To translate this into real-life lessons, it must be made more concrete through design (level 2) and brought to life in the lesson as experienced by students (level 1). What pedagogical (didactic) design principles support the processes of discovering and making meaning (see also Chapter 5)? How can teachers enhance and encourage student learning? In this section, we introduce the Design Diamond (Murre, 2021, 2025). The Design Diamond comprises seven design principles that form a holistic whole, much like the facets of a diamond – each distinct yet inseparable.

The Design Diamond stems from a view of reality and a pedagogy that embodies distinctly Biblical notions, such as loving God's creation, loving one's neighbour, discerning truth and promoting conversion, as discussed in previous chapters. To some extent, this also holds for the seven principles themselves, which we outline briefly here and describe in more detail below. Each one accords with Biblical ideas and, when applied together in a holistic practice, they reflect a distinctly Christian perspective (cf. Cooling, 2010).

That said, they are not uniquely Christian, but were distilled from a vast body of educational and empirical literature (e.g. Bain, 2004; Bertolini, Stremmel & Thorngren, 2012; Biesta, 2010a, 2010b; Brophy, 2009; Cooling, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009; Day, 2004; De Bruyckere, Kirschner & Hulshof, 2015; De Muynck, 2012, 2016; De Rooy, 2018; Fried, 2001; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Jaarsma, 1953; Janssen, Hulshof & Van Veen, 2016; Kalkman, Veldman, De Kool & Reijnoudt, 2005; Kroon & Levering, 2008; Loughran, 2010; Marzano, 2003; Pike, 2013; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010; Van Brummelen, 2009; Van Dyk, 2000).

The first two design principles help to determine the *what* of a lesson:

- *Less is more*: Covering too many topics often results in shallow understanding and fails to do justice to God's creation and the contributions of culture. At its core, this principle connects with the Creation–Fall–Redemption–Renewal framework.
- *Identify pivotal points*: Teachers and students alike benefit from engaging deeply with pivotal points. The principle of *less is more* creates time and space to grapple meaningfully with core issues and key, sometimes transformative, insights.

The next three design principles guide the *how* of a lesson, ensuring that the presentation of content reflects the complex reality of nature and culture:

- *Use authentic phenomena*: This involves staying as close to reality as possible, without introducing unnecessary layers or abstractions.
- *Cultivate attention*: Real phenomena and meaningful issues often spark interest, but attention still needs to be deliberately nurtured. Jesus modelled this approach in His teaching.
- *Engage the whole person*: Not just the head, but also the heart (the Biblical core of one's being) and the hands.

The final two design principles specifically help us to focus on values in lessons – the *what for*. Values, while invisible themselves, are inseparable from what happens at the more concrete levels of a lesson. In this sense, they are integral to the functioning of principles 1 to 5.

- *Promote the good*, such as wonder, beauty, hope and salvation.
- *Resist the evil* in ourselves and others, including idleness, chaos, arrogance, vice and sin.

4.1 *Principle 1: Less Is More*

This principle can be expressed in various ways, each emphasising a particular aspect: *small is beautiful, slow and steady, do away with haste and hurry, time to*

ruminate, slow questions, slow education. When too much has to be covered in too little time, nothing can be explored in depth, leading to superficiality and its associated drawbacks.

In many countries, curricula have long been criticised for being overloaded. Nearly a century ago, Kohnstamm (1928, p. 345) observed that a ‘*multitude of knowledge* always seems *cet. par.* [*ceteris paribus*, all other things being equal] to stand in the way of *thoroughness*’ (our translation; italics in original). There are external requirements, such as core objectives, that need to be met. The tendency to interpret these in excessive detail, break them down into specific indicators and refine them again and again seems difficult to resist. Meanwhile, textbook publishers, wary of omitting anything deemed important, produce vast volumes. In this context, *less is more* is not likely to happen by itself.

Teachers, too, are sometimes responsible for breaking subject matter and skills into small pieces to make them learnable and programmable. This can lead to fragmentation, isolation of parts and teaching of purely instrumental skills. The result is often a loss of relevance and coherence, making it difficult for students (and perhaps even teachers) to perceive the whole. Meaningful learning requires a holistic view – a sense of the bigger picture. Visualising every pixel of the *Mona Lisa* will not reveal a work of art. *Less is more* invites students to dig deeper, to engage more profoundly with the material and, in doing so, to develop their outlook on life and their worldview. There is a real risk in trying to cover too much in too little time, only to achieve very little of lasting value. The real challenge lies in taking the necessary time to do the opposite: less, but in greater depth. As Wagenschein (1976, p. 11) wrote, ‘Haste spoils everything’.

4.2 *Principle 2: Use Pivotal Points*

Less is more is only possible because certain elements or issues have greater potential than others to offer insight into reality. These pivotal points are often ‘small but critical examples’ that ‘help students understand how a practitioner in this field generates data, checks and corrects data, thinks about data, uses and applies data, and shares data with others’ (Palmer, 1998, p. 124).

This is true for every subject and can apply in almost any educational sector. Every subject, after all, has a limited number of fundamental concepts and its own logic through which it reveals something of reality. These ‘powerful concepts’ (Brophy, 2010, p. 28) serve as pivotal points that facilitate depth and detail. Once the core of the subject has been addressed, other elements may no longer need to be covered or can be approached less intensively and at a quicker pace.

To identify characteristic pivotal points per subject or subject cluster, consider questions such as: What are the essential issues, theoretical concepts and prevailing practices that consistently play a role in this subject? What do these reveal about our understanding of reality, and how can they be made accessible to students through carefully chosen examples (see the next design principle)? Pivotal points can be identified at various levels, including within a single lesson, a series of lessons or a curriculum year, across a full curriculum or in a discipline as a whole.

Many disciplines have experienced remarkable moments of development and discovery, when new perspectives were gained or stumbled upon, occasionally resulting in paradigm shifts. These moments have shaped the course of each discipline throughout history. Pivotal points offer insight into how a discipline views reality and which problems and dilemmas are still at stake. They reveal something of the mystery of God's reality as it is uncovered through cultural development. Engaging with pivotal issues can help to unlock deeper meaning.

Different subjects or subject clusters naturally have different pivotal points, some of which are more suitable for primary education and others for secondary. Here, we offer a few illustrative examples. In the case of language and languages, one might consider (children's) literature and the themes it highlights to reflect the times (De Jong-Slagman, 2017; Kamp et al., 2019; Vos et al., 2020; cf. Bloemert, 2019). A foreign-language teacher with insight into the relevant country, customs, culture, history and people can awaken empathy and spark interest in our neighbours and the message they have for us (Ferreira, 2019; Smith & Carvill, 2000;). In biology, themes such as adaptation (Roques, 1989, p. 164; cf. Smith & Shortt, 2002, p. 81), symbiosis and parasitism are pivotal, as is the astonishing complexity of organs and life processes. There is a significant risk of reducing this complexity to the point where the extraordinary becomes commonplace, bland and unremarkable. In physics, deceptively simple concepts such as force and speed can be pivotal, as well as more abstract and complex ones like energy and density. History, meanwhile, deals with historical processes and the diversity of perspectives. It raises important questions about truth, relativity, causality, the 'accidental' detail and the broader context, including themes such as responsibility, gratitude, care and – again – empathy. History also offers glimpses of the unfolding of God's Word over time, up to the present day. Educators can identify and list the pivotal points relevant to each subject in their own teaching context. Taken together, these pivotal points offer insight into the reality of God.

Applying the first two principles places significant demands on the teacher, not least of which is thorough subject knowledge (Chapter 6). The next three

principles build on these. They concern the *how* of teaching, providing the means to bring principles 1 and 2 to life in the classroom in a meaningful and effective way.

4.3 *Principle 3: Use Authentic Phenomena*

Because pivotal points always revolve around important controversies, dilemmas and issues, they naturally offer opportunities to spark students' curiosity, connect to their everyday lives and make lessons meaningful. This can be supported through the third principle: focus on authentic phenomena. This should be done in a manner that is as direct and unmediated as possible, allowing for more immediate contact with God's creation. The phenomenon itself is always more evocative than its two-dimensional representation (although such reductions can sometimes be helpful). A study trip abroad is preferable to reading about another culture. A real plant is better than a picture of one. A well-equipped chemistry lab offers more than does simply reading about chemical reactions. An original painting in a castle or museum has greater impact than a reproduction. A visit to or from a veteran leaves a deeper impression than reading their story.

Of course, it is not always possible to use authentic phenomena for practical or ethical reasons. In such cases, it is important to seek the best possible substitute, even if it remains, in some sense, a step removed from reality.

Compared to mediated representations, authentic content makes it easier to break free from that which is trite or self-evident. As long as something is taken for granted, it will not induce awe or wonder, let alone praise of God. Authentic content usually appeals to more senses (cf. Chapter 5), as well as to curiosity, empathy and care (including for materials). Additionally, it evokes a desire to connect not only with the content itself but also with the teacher and fellow students. The debate between teacher-led and student-led education becomes secondary, even irrelevant, when reality itself takes centre stage. According to Palmer (1998, p. 122): 'Passion for the subject propels that subject, not the teacher, into the centre of the learning circle – and when a great thing is in their midst, students have direct access to the energy of learning and life. A subject-centred classroom is not one in which students are ignored. Such a classroom honours one of the most vital needs of our students: to be introduced to a world larger than their own experiences and egos, a world that expands their personal boundaries and enlarges their sense of community'.

Authentic phenomena typically involve more than one discipline. Because such phenomena are multidimensional and ecologically embedded, they are less prone to being reduced to a single aspect or subject. Instead, they naturally

invite connections with other subjects, and it is up to teachers, drawing on their pedagogical wisdom and craft, to decide how far to highlight these connections. The various subjects and phenomena (through which all disciplines or modal aspects of reality ultimately reveal themselves; Clouser, 2005; Kalsbeek, 1975) all have a right to exist. The intention is 'that the teacher, with each part of the subject matter, has the whole in mind and teaches each part in the light of the whole' (Bavinck, 1928, p. 170, our translation). This also means that no sharper contrast should be drawn between subject-based and project-based education than is strictly necessary. As students grow in age and insight, the depth of the subject matter must increase, but this should include – rather than exclude – authentic contexts, phenomena, issues and content. Teachers would do well to use the potential of authentic phenomena to make that depth and breadth explicit.

The use of authentic material is illustrated in the real-life case study presented in this chapter. It is concise (*less is more*, design principle 1), yet it engages with significant themes, such as WWII, friendship and mercy (*pivotal points*, principle 2), and addresses semantic fields relevant to the learning objectives (also principle 2). The individuals involved, the photographs and the video of their meeting are all real (*authentic phenomena*, principle 3).

4.4 *Principle 4: Cultivate Attention*

Doing more with less and doing justice to authentic content requires being fully present and attentive. This is, in itself, an expression of love and respect for others – seeing them not as objects but as co-subjects, valuable because they are given to us by God in His providence. It requires allowing the subject matter to breathe and becoming receptive to the aspect of reality it represents. This involves entering into a 'real dialogue' (Pike, 2013, p. 120) between teacher and students, with open questions to which even the teacher may not know the answer in advance. It means paying attention not only to the student, but also to the *thing*, the subject itself, for the teacher's task is to nurture the student's understanding of reality (the top line of the pedagogical triangle).

All this takes time, which is why it is no longer a question of covering extensive material, irrespective of how well the students remember or understand it, let alone genuinely appreciate or 'know' it in the deeper sense described in Chapter 5. *Slow education* (De Bruijn & Van Dam, 2014) goes hand in hand with *slow questions* (cf. principle 1 and Biesta, 2018, p. 25) and an unvarnished reality. Looking at lab research and fieldwork, for instance, anything that does not neatly fit the theory is often ignored or excluded. Yet this precludes the possibility of arousing astonishment and awe – senses that cannot be programmed but can certainly be stifled. In this way, principle 4 circles back to principles 1, 2 and 3.

4.5 *Principle 5: Engage the Whole Person*

When the previous principles are honoured, education inevitably involves the whole person. In practice, it often focuses primarily on cognition and on that which can be quantitatively measured. The educationalist Pestalozzi (1746–1827) upheld the threefold principle of head, heart and actions. Perhaps this order should be reversed – to heart, actions and head, as suggested for the teacher in Chapter 6 – to counterbalance the dominance of the cognitive, but in any case, education must address the whole human being, as emphasised in Chapter 5. This means bringing together cognitive, affective and psychomotor goals (see also Chapter 5), as well as both technical and moral facets. The well-being of the soul is not in conflict with the wellbeing of mind and body, or vice versa. Education should therefore engage all five (or even six) senses.

Teaching skills play a vital role here, as principles 3, 4 and 5 are intended to bring to fruition what was outlined in principles 1 and 2. Many school subjects include skills-based goals, often broken down into isolated sub-skills that must be practised and repeated, sometimes over an extended period. This is not always enjoyable, although enjoyment is not the ultimate criterion. Such practice can be valuable, both in terms of content and in fostering virtues such as perseverance and concentration. The question is how to do justice to principles 1 to 4 when teaching and practising these skills.

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The answer probably lies in embedding skills within a meaningful whole, rather than teaching them in isolation. This was already recognised by Comenius (1592–1670) (Van Crombrugge, 2025), whose approach encourages us not to strip skills-focused lessons of real content, but to choose that content carefully, so that head, actions and heart work together. Applying principle 5 further calls for creativity, which may well grow through regular use.

How principles 4 and 5 – *cultivate attention* and *engage the whole person* – will take shape in the continuation of the case study remains to be seen; this will be addressed in the next part. However, the groundwork for drawing students into the unfolding story and providing time to dwell on it has already been laid through principles 1, 2 and 3.

4.6 *Principle 6: Promote the Good*

Principle 6 affirms that the Biblical testimony of awe and wonder, beauty, hope and salvation must be shared wherever possible, precisely because our world is marred by ugliness, brokenness, sin and disaster. Nature itself involves death and destruction. There is genocide and slavery. Stories of salvation and help, of people acting positively, loving their neighbour and giving of themselves, offer signs of hope. The same is true when justice prevails in the face of injustice, or when something brings beauty or healing, and counters the disruptive effects of triviality, evil and sin. Positive values can thus play a role even in subjects such as biology, physics, chemistry and geography (Janse, 2018).

Ultimately, however, the good and the positive exist not because people succeed through their actions or techniques, but because God does not abandon this world (Belgic Confession, Art. 13), and history will end in restoration and judgement. Reality as we experience it – with all its chaos, upheaval and brokenness, as revealed in authentic phenomena – groans for redemption (Rom. 8). The cultivation of hope is impossible without Christ, who is the hope of all who believe in Him (1 Tim. 1:1). Drawing attention to that which is lovely and beautiful (Phil. 4:8), to the aesthetic, whether literally or figuratively, offers students an alternative to disharmony and can thus underpin the choice of subject matter. Introducing them to something substantive that arises from a phenomenon or subject may prompt them to praise God and rejoice in His work.

Principle 6 is also reflected in the case study. Even in the midst of war, the German enemy showed compassion, and a friendship developed long after the conflict ended. There is life and hope in this world. But how does this relate to the Christian hope of eventual renewal? This is not yet clear from the case study – though all the injustices of history will be set right on the final day of judgement, which remains a profound and hopeful Christian perspective.

4.7 *Principle 7: Resist Evil*

Principle 7 is the counterpart to principle 6. It involves recognising and resisting the evil in ourselves and others, such as idleness, chaos, arrogance and other vices – in other words, sin. In Biblical terms, it is about weeding out ‘thorns and thistles’ (Gen. 3) and pruning for greater fruitfulness (John 15). Every era and culture has its own un-Biblical or even anti-Christian traits. It is essential to take these into account when designing a lesson, including its aims, content and methods (see also Chapter 10 on adopting a culture-critical attitude). The decisive factor should not be the perceived likelihood of success, but rather what the godly vocation of teaching demands here and now.

A lesson can embody both principles 6 and 7 by reflecting on ‘the life to come’ (Calvin) and ‘how one should use the present life and its resources’ (*Institutes* III.9–10), or by contemplating things above (Col. 3) to counter what Calvin describes as a ‘bestly love of the world’ (*Institutes* III.9.1).

Principle 7 also entails developing a sensitivity to that which does not please God. Evil must not remain abstract or distant. Rather, it concerns us directly, and includes judging hastily, lacking mercy, being unfriendly or inhospitable, boasting, gossiping, drunkenness and displaying the fruits of the flesh (Gal. 5). Jesus speaks of the evils that flow from the heart: ‘for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander’ (Matt. 15:19). In the school context, the risks include dualism – a separation between morning devotions and the rest of the school day – and instrumentalism or functionalism, such as in modern foreign languages, where the focus may fall solely on self-interested communication at the expense of learning from other cultures or engaging with another part of God’s reality. There is also a tendency towards practical deism, especially in the sciences and geography, where the laws of nature are seldom recognised as evidence of God’s unfailing faithfulness. Consider, too, the often-implicit pretensions of the natural sciences and technological progress stemming from a materialistic and evolutionist worldview, and the hopelessness of a universe born of chance, where human beings are reduced to little more than their brains. Explicitly drawing students’ attention to such tendencies can contribute to the Christian character of the lessons.

Thiessen (1993, 2001) writes of ‘teaching for commitment’ (in his eponymous book) and critical openness (cf. Murre, 2018). When children are young, parents naturally teach them commitment to their own worldview. As they grow older, critical openness becomes increasingly important – open-mindedness towards other perspectives, yet with a reflective stance that includes evaluating the worldview and faith to which they are or are becoming committed. Knowledge of one’s own tradition, and exploring, appropriating and critically engaging with it all contribute to the emergence of a stable, rooted identity (Marcia, 1966; Thiessen, 1993). In a Christian vision of education, this involves receiving a renewed identity in Christ, one whose core is not bound to any particular time, place or culture.

As indicated above, the seven principles form a coherent whole within the Design Diamond. When designing a lesson, resisting evil can therefore be carried out with the help of the other principles (see also the next section). Specifically, principle 7 can be put into practice by posing dilemmas, asking unmasking or ‘subversive’ questions (Roques & Jones, 2011), using authentic stories and highlighting the flip side of positive examples.

5 Didactic Analysis Model

Case study: teacher educator (part 3)

The seven principles of the Design Diamond help to clarify the contours of the lesson. The authentic story of the two pilots enables much to be achieved with little. It promotes positive values, carries a message of hope and speaks to both the heart and the mind. From the perspective of the CPE exam, scheduled in six months, it holds ample potential. Yet all this, in itself, does not yield a concrete, classroom-ready lesson or outline with a clear structure and suitable tools. How do I take this a step further?

In the previous section, we considered Anthony's (1963) three levels in education. While the first level – teaching techniques, methods and materials – is the most visible, the most important choices are made at level 2 (design) and level 3 (approach). The third level is axiomatic and paradigmatic, shaped by deep convictions about education, the world, the subject and its content. The seven principles of the Design Diamond concern levels 2 and 3. To arrive at a concrete lesson (level 1), a teacher must answer the following key questions:

1. What are the learning objectives?
2. What is the starting situation?
3. What subject matter, teaching methods, learning environment and learning resources will I use during the educational process?
4. How do I monitor and evaluate the results, and how does that feed into teaching and learning?

The Didactic Analysis (DA) Model (Van Gelder et al., 1973) highlights the interrelationships between these questions and their corresponding answers. Developed by the Groningen professor Léon van Gelder (1913–1981), the model has several important characteristics. It uses relatively open concepts, is simple and compact, groups related factors together and illustrates their mutual dependencies. It offers teachers something both concrete and insightful to work with. And it has stood the test of time, its lasting relevance resting on the assumption that the fundamental dynamics of the pedagogical triangle remain largely unchanged.

The model also offers practical usability. It relates directly to real-life school practice – Anthony's (1963) level 1. Teachers can grasp it with little effort, see clearly what it means for their teaching and lesson design, and use it to support informed decision making. Finally, it does not aim to represent the whole of reality, which would render any model not only excessively ambitious but also inherently confusing. This practical value is enhanced by the concise visual presentation of the model.

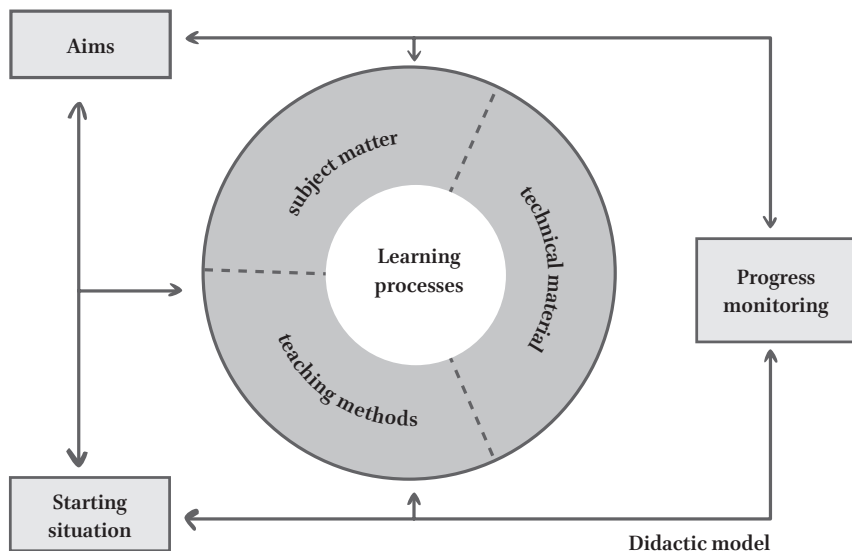


FIGURE 15 Didactic analysis model (Source: Adapted from Van Gelder, 1973)

This section outlines the components of the DA model (the blocks in Figure 15) and their interrelationships (the arrows in the figure). It is worth noting that this interpretation does not necessarily reflect how Van Gelder himself applied the model. Moreover, it has been described as overly instrumental and based on ‘means-ends thinking’, whereas in reality education involves unpredictability and calls for the opening up of pedagogical space (Meijer, 2013, p. 143). This unpredictability is undeniable, as noted earlier, but as long as the model is not applied in a mechanical way, it remains valuable for education, including Christian education (cf. Stam, 1985). Its power and utility have been widely recognised, as evidenced by its inclusion in authoritative handbooks (e.g. Geerts & Van Kralingen, 2016). In our discussion below, we highlight those aspects that reflect a Christian understanding of teaching and learning.

5.1 *Starting Situation*

The first element is the starting situation, which should be understood in a broad sense. It includes practical factors such as the timing of the lesson (Friday afternoon or Monday morning), weather conditions (a brewing storm, temperature, humidity), classroom layout and students’ perceptions of the previous lesson (whether it was quiet, dull or inspiring). It also concerns the learner as a unique individual (see Chapter 4), with their own general and subject-specific knowledge, preconceptions and interests. From an epistemological perspective, new knowledge should connect to existing knowledge networks.

In addition, the learner is embedded in a personal context – with their own biography and lived experience – and belongs to various groups, such as a class, an age group, a family or a church congregation. These groups share certain characteristics, such as intellectual ability or patterns of interest.

When preparing and teaching lessons, educators should take this starting situation into account, and not only because it influences the effectiveness of the lesson (e.g., in terms of learning outcomes). It enables them to factor in differences between students (e.g., Tomlinson, 2014) and introduce some form of differentiation, which is often a major practical challenge. Moreover, it is a way of recognising and acknowledging the students as their neighbours, who are made in God's image and deserving of love. One way of expressing this love is to do justice to the other by meeting their needs, even when students are unable or unwilling to determine what is of value for themselves (cf. Biesta, 2020); thus, it ultimately relates to how teachers understand their vocation (see Chapter 6). Finally, the teacher's assessment of the starting situation also informs and shapes other elements of the DA model.

5.2 *Goals*

The second element concerns the lesson objectives, which can be understood in multiple ways. At the most general level, lesson aims reflect an ideal (Murre, 2021, p. 38) – one that is closely tied to the question of why we are on Earth at all. According to the Westminster Larger Catechism, 'Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever'. The ideal of education in the Christian sense has been expressed in various ways across different historical and cultural contexts (e.g., Golverdingen, 1996; Van Dyk, 2000; Weeks, 1988). It includes love of God and our neighbour, as well as a willingness to serve (see Chapter 3, and Chapter 9 on hospitality). It is important to return to this ideal regularly and to consider how closely a particular lesson aligns with it, or is, perhaps unexpectedly, at odds with it.

However, ideals cannot serve as goals for concrete lessons. They are too abstract and, almost by definition, unattainable. Ideals therefore belong to the second and third levels of Anthony's (1963) framework. Goals, by contrast, can be more concrete. In other words, the distance from starting situation to goals is smaller than the distance to ideals. Before we address the relationship between goals and the starting situation, let us first consider different types of goals and how they can be formulated.

Goals indicate a level of mastery of certain content. The more precisely both the content and the level of mastery can be identified and formulated, the more concrete the goals become. For cognitive proficiency levels, Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956) has been widely used since the 1950s and was revised in 2002 (Krathwohl, 2002). A taxonomy for affective goals has been

developed (Krathwohl et al., 1964), as have taxonomies for the psychomotor domain. Each of these frameworks comprises several levels of mastery.

Bloom's taxonomy strikes a useful balance between lofty ideals and concrete lessons. It also allows for movement between the various elements of the DA model, reflecting their interdependence and the iterative nature of lesson design. One important condition, however, is that the three types of goals – cognitive, affective and psychomotor – are not treated as entirely separate or reduced to the cognitive alone. Paying conscious attention to the affective side of learning and teaching is necessary in light of criticism, including from Christian quarters (Van Dyk, 2000, p. 60 ff.; cf. Murre, 2021), that education often focuses too narrowly on the cognitive domain. Bloom's taxonomy can serve as a corrective, reminding us to include affective and psychomotor goals when designing and delivering lessons. All three types of goals are linked to a Christian understanding of education, as outlined earlier in this book, and help to make principle 4 of the Design Diamond – engage the whole person: heart, hands and head – more concrete.

When describing lesson goals, the 'SMART' approach (Specific, Measurable goals that are Acceptable and Realistic to achieve within a given Time) is sometimes adopted too readily. Where applicable – particularly for lower-order objectives – this approach may well be beneficial. However, several caveats are worth noting (see also Murre, 2021, p. 37 ff):

- Ideals, including the Christian ideal of formation and education, cannot be neatly broken down into concrete SMART components.
- The SMART approach does not preclude the fragmentation of reality (and the curriculum) into tiny parts. Such atomisation can lead to a loss of meaning and significance.
- SMART goals tend to be confined to the cognitive domain, as the affective domain is much harder to express in such terms. This may point to the vital role of the latter domain, including in personal formation and socialisation (Biesta, 2014), rather than to any shortcoming in the taxonomy or the domain itself.
- Even within the cognitive domain, it is harder to frame higher-order objectives in SMART terms, though they are no less important than lower-order ones.
- If everything must be 'smartable', valuable and joyful aspects of education risk being excluded. Children's play, laughter at humour, tears in response to sadness, pedagogical tact (*phronesis*, Chapters 6 and 7) and other facets cannot be captured in SMART objectives.
- SMART goals can give the impression that the teacher is fully in control of the learning process – an assumption that lacks both modesty and realism.

It seems best to use SMART objectives only sparingly. Teachers who never make use of them may benefit from reflecting on what their lessons aim to achieve. Conversely, teacher educators or students who attempt to frame every lesson entirely in these terms would do well to bear the above caveats in mind and to consider incorporating other types of goals as well.

Setting goals for a lesson for a particular class requires a fair degree of flexibility, finesse, differentiation and discernment. Many interrelated aspects must be carefully attuned. Goals can be derived from (or consistent with) a Christian educational ideal, encompass different goal domains (Biesta, 2010, 2012) and involve three types (Krathwohl, 2002), each with various attainment levels. They may be realised within a single lesson, a broader learning strand or a long-term, overarching curriculum, which typically includes both internal and external requirements.

Finally, goals should align as closely as possible with the starting situation. By definition, there is a gap between the starting point and the intended outcomes, and the purpose of education is to narrow that gap. Students must be met where they are. Goals that are not attuned to the starting situation may be set too high, making them unattainable, or too low, in which case students may learn less than they are capable of. Empirical research shows that effective teachers set goals that are both challenging and realistic – neither too easy nor too difficult (e.g., Bain, 2004; Hattie, 2009; McKinsey, 2007). They have high expectations of their students, while also keeping sight of broader ideals that transcend concrete objectives. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) can be seen in action here (Bolhuis, 2012, p. 269), between the zones of boredom (not challenging enough) and anxiety (not feasible). This is where optimal learning, sometimes described as *flow*, can occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). These zones differ across students and subjects. In short, this process is complex, and a seamless match between the learning goals and each student's starting situation is rarely achievable. This calls for a measure of humility.

The recurring case study in this chapter involves adult part-time learners. Because they have relatively few lessons and are expected to engage in independent study, high motivation is essential. They expect the lessons to support their preparation for the CPE exam, for which they need to make particular progress in speaking and writing, which are assessed in specific formats in the exam. The lesson objectives should therefore focus on these areas. Speaking will take place mainly in class, while writing (and receiving feedback) can be done independently. As these are trainee teachers, the teaching should also serve, in some way, as a model for their own future practice.

5.3 *Subject Matter*

At the core of the model in Figure 15 is a circle termed *learning processes*. This circle contains three segments: subject matter, teaching methods and teaching material. The latter two will be discussed below; here, the focus is on subject matter. As this has already been partly addressed under principles 1 and 2 of the Design Diamond and in Chapter 5, we now zoom in on its relationship with learning objectives. In the DA model, the arrows between subject matter and learning objectives are bidirectional.

These two aspects are always connected, but depending on the context, the emphasis may fall on one or the other. In some situations, learning objectives take the lead, and subject matter (i.e., content) is then selected to support those objectives. With skill-oriented objectives, it is important not to separate them from meaningful content. Language teaching, for example, occasionally devolves into purely instrumental skills training. Because any topic might be used to practise speaking, writing, critical thinking or creativity, the result can be content that is abstracted from reality and lacks intrinsic meaning, resulting in little more than bare-bones skills exercises. Similarly, consider the drilling of thousands of arithmetic calculations of increasing difficulty to attain some higher education qualification. This kind of approach should be avoided wherever possible, as it leads to a sense of meaninglessness (Murre, 2014). Take, as an alternative, learning to recognise different features of poetry. If this is the goal (the learning objective), it need not be at odds with enjoying a particular poem and grappling with its meaning (the subject matter). In such cases, many poems could serve as suitable subject matter, and the final selection can be guided by other criteria discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

Of course, learning objectives do not always come first; in other situations, subject matter takes precedence. As disciplines themselves reflect aspects of God's reality (see also principles 1 and 2 and Chapter 5), their content matters in itself, regardless of any instrumental value for other objectives or ideals. The subject matter is not simply a cultural artefact, a more or less accidental body of knowledge, or merely 'everything that the future teacher is presented with in one way or another in that teacher training programme' (Geerdink & Pauw, 2017, p. 11). It has intrinsic worth that justifies passing it on to future generations. In this sense, content knowledge becomes a goal in its own right. Growing into a tradition (Biesta's socialisation function) and learning to stand on the shoulders of giants (cf. Murre et al., 2012, p. 11) requires engaging with and appropriating this content, while exercising an attitude of critical openness (see design principle 7). Being initiated into an area and becoming familiar

with it may lead to praise of the Lord (Psalm 8; Isaiah 40:26). The pedagogical setting should support this process.

5.4 *Teaching Methods*

The fourth component concerns the teaching methods. These should be aimed at achieving the learning objectives and enabling students to engage meaningfully with the material. They must also respect the students' capabilities and uniqueness as human beings created in God's image. In a real-life lesson, meaning is communicated not only through content but also through the methods employed. Teaching methods, both in themselves and in the way they are connected – levels 1 and 2 of Anthony's (1963) framework – convey a message, even without words. The same applies to the design of the overall learning environment and the teaching materials.

There is an ongoing interplay between teaching methods and the three components already discussed (starting situation, learning goals and subject matter). Learning presupposes learner activity, which can be encouraged through a wide variety of teaching methods, from active listening to writing a poem, performing a gymnastic routine for classmates or visiting an octogenarian. Teachers should be well-versed in a broad repertoire of methods, enabling them to select the most appropriate one for the situation at hand. One of the appealing aspects of such methods is that good teachers often differ greatly in how they employ them (Bain, 2004, p. 18 ff.; Fried, 2001, p. 23).

When selecting teaching methods, general criteria also come into play, ultimately centred on the responsible use of time and resources. Such criteria include questions like what empirical evidence exists for the effectiveness of the instructional strategy (e.g. Hattie, 2009; Kirschner et al., 2019; Marzano, 2003), how the chosen method might prevent boredom or monotony, whether it calms or energises, and how it affects students' sense of physical and social safety. The choice of a particular teaching method can form an expression of trust in students and convey high expectations of them. As learning objectives and subject matter often lend themselves to certain methods, they should be paid explicit and careful attention.

The Bible should not be regarded as a sourcebook for teaching methods. While certain methods can be found within its pages, this does not imply that these – and certainly not only these – are prescribed. Should we use parables simply because our Saviour did? Should we form groups of 12? Drawing a direct link between teaching methods and the Bible is problematic for various reasons and can often serve as a post-hoc justification, when in fact the choices are based on other considerations (for a fuller discussion, see Smith & Shortt, 2002).

There are, however, instructional strategies that may raise theological concerns. Take, for example, role playing in language learning, where a student is asked to say in French that they have a dog and enjoy fishing. ‘So I’m allowed to lie in French?’ one student asked (Smith & Shortt, 2002, p. 42). Though starkly put, the question touches on a valid concern, and genuine dialogue is generally preferable for several reasons. Or consider competitive teaching methods: more extreme forms of these tend to appeal to egocentrism and pride rather than mutual dependence and charity. This has been a problem since the Fall (Genesis 3), and there is no reason to reinforce it in our teaching. Such methods also run counter to the principles of the Design Diamond. If a competitive method is used, it is wise to adapt it in a way that allows students to practise Christian virtues rather than vices.

5.5 *Teaching Materials*

The central circle in Figure 15 also includes teaching materials. Like teaching methods, these are a means to an end. Any materials may be used that meet ethical standards and represent the best available option in the given context. As with teaching methods, there are general criteria aimed at ensuring responsible choices. For instance, materials should be effective and efficient, with no undesirable or distorting effects. Disposable resources should not be used lightly, and costs should be reasonable in relation to other expenses. These criteria apply to everything from crayons to virtual reality headsets. New tools are not inherently good (or bad) simply because they are new, nor are old tools good (or bad) merely because they have become the classroom standard. While much more could be said about teaching materials, we focus below on digital technology and coursebooks, given their importance and widespread use.

5.6 *Digital Technology*

Digital technologies are capable of far more than many of the tools traditionally used in education. While specific examples may quickly become outdated, current possibilities include time-saving analytics, repeated, randomised and adaptive exercises, access to virtual or augmented reality, and the use of generative artificial intelligence. In principle, these developments are to be welcomed and seen as gifts of which we can make use. However, when one element begins to dominate or take precedence, it risks undermining the organic integrity of the whole. Teaching materials should ultimately invite learners to take, or share in, responsibility (see Chapter 3). This applies not only to digital tools, but particularly – in our current age of rapid technological advancement (e.g. Schuurman, 1977) – to AI, where the potential to undermine

integrity is relatively high. Digital literacy must be embedded in a values-based approach (cf. De Bruijn & Van Dam, 2014). Moreover, research has shown that educational approaches driven primarily by the latest technology have a 'hundred-year history of failure' (Mayer, 2014, p. 15). Tools should serve, not lead.

New technology changes the way we look at life, how we imagine things (our *social imaginaries*, Chapter 5) and which metaphors we use. From 1830 onwards, the blackboard – essentially a mere technical aid – became widespread and reshaped the (subconscious) archetype of school and classroom. In a similar way, today's technological tools can make teachers view children and education differently and, perhaps more concerningly, narrow-mindedly. To the extent that this results in relevant aspects being overlooked or excluded, it can be detrimental. In every teaching and learning situation, a thoughtful and discerning judgement must be made between what is possible and what is desirable. The principles of the Design Diamond and the components of the DA model should inform, and ultimately guide, the selection and use of teaching materials.

5.7 Coursebooks

Coursebooks play an essential role in education. They encompass specially designed textbooks and materials that offer a structured approach to achieving the learning objectives. Coursebooks should be current in both subject matter and pedagogical approach, suited to the student population for which they are intended, have a clear and accessible layout, and include rich, meaningful information. The text should be coherent and cohesive, as bite-sized chunks can lead to fragmentation and a loss of clarity and continuity. A coursebook should be treated as a resource rather than a definitive manual, allowing for flexible use to accommodate both the complexity of educational processes and the individuality of students.

Flexible use of textbooks is also desirable not only for commercial reasons, but because teachers differ. A detailed coursebook can be particularly useful for those early in their careers. However, this can lead to over-reliance, where the quality of a lesson is limited to what the textbook offers. A McKinsey study of 20 high-performing school systems describes this as 'prescrib[ing] adequacy', an approach that can support teachers whose competence is still developing (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 20). Yet prescription, whether explicit or implicit, can hinder progress beyond a certain threshold precisely because of its formulaic nature. Rising above a basic level requires 'unleash[ing] greatness' (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 20). That is, a fully competent teacher needs the freedom to respond to their students' context and adapt lessons accordingly. Coursebooks should allow for this – and, ideally, encourage and facilitate it.

More important still is the fact that coursebooks always carry a particular narrative. Inevitably, they reflect underlying axioms and theories – Anthony’s (1963) paradigmatic third level. This narrative has a powerful, often implicit, influence, as its underlying assumptions are absorbed almost unconsciously and thus evade critical scrutiny (cf. Roques, 1989, p. 163). This is already a concern for busy teachers, let alone for students. Ideally, the narrative conveyed at various levels should be rooted in the grand Biblical story: God’s revelation, His saving work in Christ, and the call to repentance. The principles of the Design Diamond and the elements of the DA model, as discussed here, aim to give expression to this.

The question arises as to whether a coursebook should contain only material consistent with a Christian worldview, and whether such coursebooks should be developed for every subject or theme. Several considerations come into play here. On an overarching level, we would argue in favour, since God’s sovereignty extends to all of creation. In practice, teachers tend to follow their coursebooks closely, occasionally supplementing them with additional material or skipping small sections. Thus, a textbook that promotes a worldview contrary to a Christian outlook will exert a persistent, undermining influence. This poses a serious and genuine risk. Drawing out and discussing this underlying message will, however, help students to develop into open, discerning individuals, capable of recognising un-Biblical perspectives (see also principle 7). Doing so requires a wide range of teacher competences, along with creativity, energy and time. It also presupposes the support of the wider school environment (see also Chapters 6 and 9).

A related consideration is the pedagogical imperative of teaching students to deal with differing insights, opinions and perspectives. Even Christian coursebooks will always reflect a certain range of views. This ties in with design principles 6 and 7 and implies that textbooks written from a Christian perspective should not be limited to ‘safe’ material or teaching methods that merely affirm traditional positions. Coursebooks are written for specific groups of students, and as these students grow older and more mature, the balance between *teaching for commitment* and encouraging *critical openness* shifts. Students should learn how to relate to positions that are at odds with their own ideas, whatever their own faith or worldview is.

In our case study, subject matter and teaching materials largely overlap. The information needed for the lecture is provided in the form of an article and two videos about the WWII pilots. The instructional strategy involves independent reading, watching the videos and looking up unfamiliar words. The expectation is that the content will capture the students’ interest, and they will come to the lesson with heightened curiosity.

5.8 *Evaluation*

At the beginning of this section, we posed four questions requiring concrete answers to help us move from Anthony's (1963) levels 2 and 3 to level 1 – that of a practical lesson or lesson series. We have now reached the fourth and final question: how to monitor and evaluate results, and how this feeds into our teaching and the students' learning. This forms an integral part of the educational process.

In this chapter, we use *evaluation* as a collective term that includes both monitoring and assessment. Any evaluation should meet the usual technical requirements, for which standard manuals may be consulted. Here, we focus only on why these requirements matter and what purposes testing may serve.

The term evaluation suggests a continuum. At one end lies any form of provisional – and possibly low-quality – information about a student's progress and the extent to which they have achieved the learning objectives. As this becomes more systematic and begins to inform changes in lesson structure and feedback to students, it develops into full-fledged *assessment for learning* (also known as formative assessment or formative evaluation). Formative assessments are only meaningful if they lead to targeted feedback for students that is also followed up (*feedforward*, Didau & Rose, 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kirschner et al., 2019) or to adjustments in the teaching (Hattie, 2009). This kind of evaluation is therefore aimed primarily at increasing student learning gains by intrinsically improving the learning process.

At the other end of the continuum is *summative assessment*. Summative tests are used to determine whether a student has achieved the intended goals and performed to a satisfactory standard. This type of assessment serves a qualifying function: it offers society a guarantee that students who meet the required standards have attained a certain level of competence.

Whenever assessments carry significant consequences – *high-stakes* tests – they bring various risks. One example is the increasing tendency to focus on the test, rather than on teaching and learning (cf. Westhoff, 2012). The curriculum may become rigidly determined by assessments and test dates, as can happen with nationwide tests in primary education or school-based exams in the final years of secondary education. 'Teaching to the test' and negative washback arise when the test, rather than the goals, ideals or subject matter, begins to dictate the learning process. Another risk is an overemphasis on knowledge or skills that appear to be easily measurable, often limiting assessment to the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy. All of this should be avoided, as it distorts and undermines genuinely meaningful teaching and learning.

Evaluation and testing have direct links with Biblical virtues, including modesty (not making exaggerated claims), truth (ensuring good construct validity and marks that reflect true attainment levels), and loving one's neighbour (by embodying these virtues in practice). A test claims to make a just and truthful statement on a student's progress, and a degree of humility is required as to the certainty of that claim. For these reasons, tests should meet established quality standards (cf. Van Dyk et al., 2020). An added bonus is that a well-designed evaluation can lead to joy and gratitude at the achievement of goals. Even when goals are not 'smart' or easily expressed in quantitative terms, it is still possible to keep track of what is happening in the learning process.

6 Conclusion

Case study: teacher educator (part 4)

Before the lecture, students read a text and watch two videos, giving them the opportunity to practise their reading and listening skills. In the lesson, they complete four speaking tasks in pairs, following the strict format used in the compulsory CPE exam, which will be administered by an accredited independent organisation. The tasks follow a clear sequence:

1. *What did you like about it? (2 minutes of uninterrupted speaking, 1 question)*
2. *Do you have any doubts or reservations? (2 minutes of uninterrupted speaking, 1 question)*
3. *Why do you think it took so long for Charlie to start looking for the German pilot? (5 minutes to share ideas and reach agreement)*
4. *Is showing friendship or mercy to an enemy a betrayal of comradeship and loyalty to your own side? (10 minutes to share ideas and reach agreement)*

After each of the four tasks, we discuss them together as a class, focusing on both language and content. The lecture concludes with a writing assignment as homework.

The lesson is now fully developed in terms of aims, subject matter and teaching methods. Intrinsically valuable content is seamlessly integrated with the development of language skills.

This chapter has explored the concept of didactics, the seven principles of the Design Diamond and the four concrete questions raised by the DA model. We now conclude with a brief summary and a few reflections that are partly inferential and partly overarching. What have we found?

First, the case study shows that the design of a real-life lesson – or any other educational unit – cannot simply be derived from a model and a set of design principles. It involves a creative process which, as demonstrated above, is complex and demands a high degree of craftsmanship. However, reflecting on the final design and delivery of the lesson with the benefit of hindsight does reveal how and to what extent it aligns with the DA model and the seven principles of the Design Diamond.

This holds true across different levels of scale: from individual lessons (as in the case study) to a series of lessons, to year-long modules and even to a complete curriculum. What becomes clear is how just a few design principles and a simple model can give shape and substance to an education that seeks to be faithful to the testimony of God's Word. These principles and the model offer valuable tools for designing and delivering lessons in both Christian and non-Christian educational settings.

The Christian perspective lies just beneath the surface of the lesson described in the final part of the case study. Depending on the context, it may be possible to pay more or less attention to certain elements, and to engage more or less explicitly with particular arguments. At the same time, this perspective operates more at the level of the whole than in isolated parts. The overall approach – Anthony's (1963) deepest level – is especially significant: the subtle but consistent rhythms and practices, and the choices made within them. These are also expressed in very concrete aspects of the lesson, as well as in who the teacher is as a person and how they interact with the students. Thus, what makes a lesson 'Christian' should not be sought primarily in the choice of specific content (though that may be relevant), in particular teaching methods (though they may play a role) or in certain forms of assessment (though they, too, play a part). Each one of these elements matters, but it is in how they come together that the broader narrative of the lesson takes shape, and the Christian perspective becomes evident.

Both the Design Diamond and the DA model are intrinsically coherent frameworks. Their strength is lost if individual parts are taken in isolation. Education is an integrated, holistic unity that exerts a formative influence as a whole – even when the teacher is not consciously or deliberately focused on formation. Not everything needs to be stated or made explicit at all times, but it is important to draw attention to these aspects on occasion. Students do not naturally perceive the deeper layers or the connections to a Christian perspective. If these are never made explicit, they may fail to recognise that such a perspective is present at all. At the same time, constantly drawing attention to it is impractical, and risks feeling unnatural, forced or contrived.

All kinds of virtues come into play in different lessons and throughout a student's school life, including modesty, humility, diligence, awe, empathy, hospitality, curiosity, wonder and compassion. This may lead to a form of self-knowledge that recognises one's own lack of Christian virtues and failure to keep God's commandments. The Holy Spirit can deepen this into a sense of sin and use it as a path towards knowing and believing in Christ. Schools may also opt for an approach that places more emphasis on values or virtues (cf. Lickona & Davidson, 2005; Pike, 2009, 2013). In these cases, too, it remains essential to pay thoughtful attention to the principles set out in the Design Diamond and the DA model.

The story that Christian education must tell across the curriculum is, at its heart, always aimed at honouring and praising God, and at the salvation and welfare of our neighbours; 'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6). The seven principles of the Design Diamond, along with the four interrelated questions posed by the DA model, help to shape educational units from a Christian perspective at multiple levels: from individual lessons to entire curricula, and from presuppositions and theory to subject matter, lesson design and teaching methods.

Acknowledgement

This chapter was written by Piet Murre.

The Hospitable School

The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffers together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating and of various kinds of tongues.

1 COR. 12:21–27

...

These ideals can best be realised in hospitable classrooms where diversity, rather than being seen as a threat to community, is welcomed, and where relationships between disabled and nondisabled students are consciously nurtured. A sense of *belonging* to the classroom community is made possible when the unique contribution of each person to the community’s well-being is valued.

ANDERSON, 2011, p. 17; italics in original text

1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with how a teacher provides high-quality lessons from a Christian perspective. The didactics have been considered mainly on a group level: how can you best guide a group of students through the subject content? However, the question arises whether what a teacher offers in a classroom context is suitable for all students. There are great differences between

them, not only in primary education where often all levels are in the same class, but also in secondary education where students are divided into streams. How do you deal with this pedagogically and didactically? This issue does not only play a role in the classroom but also the school in other ways. Even teachers in one team differ from each other. Martine, a 6th-year teacher, mentions both kinds of differences in an interview.

I experience my class as very diverse, and I consider this a privilege. That not all children are either busy or quiet makes a school day a dynamic event. I also like that not all children are practical or brilliant thinkers. This year, Tom, in particular, is making diversity a challenge for me. He can suddenly behave aggressively for no apparent reason. When he starts shouting, there is no choice but to take him into the hallway. But what about the other pupils? In such a case, I feel like I'm falling short. You don't always have such demanding children in the classroom, but teaching a child like this who has been labelled with an attention deficit problem is quite intense'. 'Our team is quite nice; without the support of my colleagues, I would not have managed easily with Tom. We are a great team. It is an advantage that there are always senior colleagues who can help younger ones. Almost every class has two teachers (unfortunately, almost all women), so everyone has a buddy to evaluate and discuss classroom situations. Because we work in sub-teams we don't all know each other equally well. Sometimes I notice that one colleague is treated differently from another. A male colleague was recently moved over from another school to ours. He already had the image of having trouble with structure and with dealing with parents. You notice that people react differently to him than to other colleagues. I sometimes have an uneasy feeling about it, but because he is in a different sub-team than I am, I can't really deal with it. (Interview with Martine, 7th-year teacher).

The first part of the interview is about differences in the classroom. The system of year classes used worldwide means that we approach a class as a group of more or less average students, even though every teacher knows that such a class does not exist. The question arises: how does caring for the class relate to caring for the individual students, who are all so different? Martine gives an example of how this relationship can sometimes become quite tense. How does the progress of the group event and the class management relate to differentiation and the care for the individual student in that situation? And what choices should be made for structures in the school, such as time schedules and the use of rooms? In the second part of the interview, it becomes clear how teachers differ. When a team of teachers appreciate diversity, what will be the consequences for the approach of each other as colleagues? How does a school principal deal with differences?

In this chapter, we choose the issue of how to deal with diversity as an entry point to define a vision for the school as a holistic entity. We will explain how

theological notions related to dealing with differences can inspire a school's climate, which can simply be defined as 'the quality and character of school life'.¹ For reasons that will become clear later, we summarise this vision as 'The Hospitable School'. The pedagogical task is that a hospitable school is not marked by opportunities and competition, but by a culture in which everyone is accepted and feels safe.

We begin this chapter by picturing how schools across the globe deal with differences (Section 2). After that, we explain the ecclesiological basis for the preference of the community ideal over the individual (Section 3). This section provides reasons for using *hospitality* as a proper concept. The concept is related to several biblical principles that nourish hospitable practices (Section 4). Next, we apply the community principle to teams of teachers (Section 5). After these applications, we argue that the scope of community thinking goes beyond initially welcoming children and addressing their needs, as is commonly pursued (Haug, 2016). Embracing the concept of hospitality impacts a school's overall climate. Section 6 proposes some general moves for schools in the current educational climate. In conclusion, we formulate a theologically inspired definition of hospitable education (Section 7). Throughout the chapter we relate the call for a community ideal in education to empirical research and educational philosophies, demonstrating the feasibility of this ideal.

2 Difference, Inclusive Education and Hospitality

Whether what a teacher offers in a classroom context is suitable for all students is a point of broad discussion (Dewey, 1966; Jackson, 1962; Jonassen & Grabowski, 1993; Roffey, 2013; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2013). The problem of dealing with differences in gifts and needs is currently approached by the ideal of inclusive education, which aims to serve a diversity of students in the same setting (Haug, 2016; Kefallinou et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2017). While we, as authors of this book agree with this ideal, a problematic tendency in school practice can be observed. Inclusive education is pursued through highly individualised practices; every student is treated as if they require a personalised pedagogical approach (Abawi, 2015; Bondie et al., 2019; Zhang, 2024). This is problematic because a high level of differentiation leads to teachers focusing on individual learning outcomes instead of the classroom and school system (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021; Solheim et al., 2018). Pedagogical aims, such as consideration of each other, learning to work together, and learning to tolerate each other's difficulties, usually highly prioritised in the teachers' ideals, are unintentionally pushed to the sideline. Moreover, the tendency

toward personalised approaches is highly demanding for teachers and teacher training institutions. If teachers must serve the broadest range of needs imaginable, they must be trained in a broad range of skills at an exceptional level (Mitchell, 2007).

In this chapter, we argue for an inclusive education practice that does not put the individual at the centre but rather the community. Referring to biblical sources and the early ages of Christianity, and inspired by the concept of *hospitality*, which has deep roots in the Christian tradition, we argue that a Christian community is a hospitable community (Pohl, 1999; Smith, 2018; Zizioulas, 1997). In recent decades, this concept, originally used primarily in the hotel industry, has been adapted to education by several scholars. Anderson (2011) advocated that the teacher should nurture a classroom setting that conveys welcome, acceptance, and belonging. Stratman first applied the concept to furthering empathy in literature education and subsequently to the requirement that teachers know the names of their pupils (Stratman, 2013, 2015). Marmon (2008) used it didactically, believing that a teacher, in their capacity as a ‘host’, should invite students not only to behave as recipients of knowledge but also contribute to knowledge construction. David I. Smith (2009) and Ter Avest (2024) used the concept to argue that students from other cultures should not only be integrated into the existing population but also, more importantly, learn something from it. All the aforementioned authors referred to the Bible, but none explored the connection with other key biblical concepts, as we will do in this chapter.

As explained in the introduction of this book, we write from the perspective of education in the Netherlands, in which inclusive education is presented as the standard and the trend toward personalised learning is prominent (Turner-Cmuchal & Lecheva, 2022). Many theological insights on dealing with diversity have been developed in our European context, especially in religious pedagogical literature. Herein the focus is mainly on religious diversity (Knauth et al., 2020; Roebben & Kammeyer, 2014; Ter Avest, 2024) while in this chapter we concentrate on differences in (special) educational needs. The trends described, including individualisation and personalisation, occur worldwide (Mincu, 2012; OECD, 2022).

3 The Christological and Ecclesiological Bases of the Community Ideal

3.1 *Christ, the Community, and the Virtue of Hospitality*

The idea of a school as a community is derived from the New Testament depiction of the Church. There is a great diversity of images in the Bible, and it is

striking that they are all organic. The Church is the *body* of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27); Christ compares the relationship between Himself and His disciples to a *vine* and branches (John 15); and the Church is like a *house* built of different stones (Eph. 2:19–22). The early church compared a local congregation to a household – in Greek, *oikos* (Eph. 2:19). These metaphors reveal aspects of community and connectedness, and it is part of the identity of the Christian congregation that believers are connected and can flourish thanks to each other. All members belong to the body, and with each other, they grow in love for the congregation's head, Christ (Eph. 4:1–16; Ridderbos, 1997, pp. 438–445; Wolter & Brawley, 2015, pp. 253–264).

3.2 *The Community Ideal and the School*

Can we apply this Church ideal to educational practices? This is a relevant question, all the more so when we consider that many Christian schools admit students with non-Christian backgrounds. The first reason to answer this question positively is that the Christian school as an institution can, in some respects, be regarded as an extension of the Church and so intends to communicate the gospel (Grethlein, 2016). The focus on the vulnerable and marginalised in Christian communities can be translated into special needs in education. The second reason is that, as commanded in the Old and New Testaments (see above), a *community* has not only an internal movement but also an external movement, which are the movements of *belonging* and *being sent*, respectively. Practising in a community involves both *communion* and *mission*, with the two being directly connected (Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, 2017, pp. 581–582). Schools also function in line with these two movements. Regarding the inward movement, they practice a liturgy and the lifestyle that goes with it. Concerning the external movement, schools that relate to the identity in Christ do not limit access to those raised in Christian families. Such schools also make space for a diversity of children independent of their backgrounds and (special) needs. All are invited to be part of the community.

The idea of hospitality suggests a radical ethos, which shows its fragility in everyday reality. There are limits to staff competencies, financial resources and housing, as well as limitations through legal regulations (Pohl, 1999, pp. 127–149). The French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) made a helpful distinction: on the one hand, there is the *law* of hospitality, expressing a singular, radical demand, and, on the other hand, there are the *laws* of hospitality (plural), reflecting the need for practical arrangements. Regarding the first, genuine hospitality must be absolute, asymmetrical, and unmasterable, going beyond even the capacity to welcome or the ability to receive' (Wortham, 2010, p. 121). However, regarding the latter, the laws of hospitality 'reflect the way that we actually do hospitality. They are conditional and limited and

provide both guests and hosts with roles and obligations. Hosts welcome their guests to cross the threshold and provide guidance for how the guest should behave' (Chalwell, 2018, p. 209). This distinction clarifies that a hospitable school does not function as a dream but in real life, with all its practical limitations. Hospitality cannot be practised only by serving on demand – an idea that might easily emerge from inclusive education ideals.

The *Rule of Benedict* states that life in a monastery exists independently of the presence or absence of pilgrims (Smith & Felch, 2016, pp. 69–70). Hospitality is thus provided as in a hotel, with the sole intention of meeting the needs of all visitors. Guests, although temporarily present, like pilgrims staying in a monastery, are seen as participants who contribute to the existing community. The community is not entirely focused on pleasing customers but also has its own rules. At the same time, the guest's well-being is not sacrificed by those rules. The abbot and the guest master, who are allowed 'to "break" rules of the community such as injunctions to fast or to keep silent, mediate between monastery and pilgrim' (Smith & Felch, 2016, p. 70). The school is a temporary place where students, with others, prepare for the next stage. To ensure the good progress of the community and meet the needs of its guests, staff must have a picture of what the visitor's destination is and what can realistically be offered to the visitor. At the same time, it is clear – because the visitor is staying temporarily – that all kinds of things have already passed and that the journey will continue even after the visitor's stay. Envisioning teachers as guest masters means they must mediate between a stable community and the pilgrim's path. They must protect the community while also helping the pilgrim by 'selecting those activities that will refresh and nourish the pilgrim. That means, among other tasks, selecting not just what is fun to teach or what comes easiest to hand or what is currently recognised as "excellent" but rather what students need to know or receive from a community to continue their own pilgrimage' (Smith & Felch, 2016, p. 70).

4 Biblical Keywords Inspiring Hospitable Practices

In this section, we relate the metaphor of the guesthouse and the host to basic New Testament principles ruling community life, which can be regarded as directives for the realistic *laws of hospitality*. These principles are helpful in further fleshing out the community ideal in an educational context. The justification for this exploration is that biblical meanings (belonging to, in terms of Chapter 2, the layer of *normative theology*) have value for practical situations in the present (belonging to the layer of *lived faith* and *lived educational practice*).

Christian schools are involved in the story of God with humanity (Loder, 2018). Human beings are called to make their own choices and can follow what is revealed in the scriptures (N. T. Wright, 2013, pp. 122–123). This conviction also allows for an iterative search for principles, the movement from right to left in Figures 3 and 4. From the Bible, which is part of normative theology, lines in the story of God draw direction for practice. Conversely, in the 21st-century educational setting, it is possible to search for what inspires the main problem in this chapter – namely, dealing with differences in educational needs.

In seeking principles for dealing with differences, therefore, teachers must first and foremost be thought of as a team of leaders of groups in which they must fulfil their professional tasks. At the same time, they take their religious beliefs seriously in their teaching jobs. As representatives of the body of Christ, they are not just expected to think as Christians but also to practice virtuousness (see Chapter 6). These factors direct the search in scripture and lead to a set of virtue principles: *safety, care and mercy, equality, dignity, and justice*. Two other principles have a different character. First, the word *gift* is central to Paul's understanding of the congregation, which refers to the principle that, without exception, each community member is assumed to contribute to the whole. As will be demonstrated, the word helps to name the differences between pupils. Second, *bearing each other's burdens*, which has to be read as a command because it is counterintuitive, claims that resilience is not something individual but a responsibility of all members.

4.1 *Safety*

The first principle, closely related to hospitality, is safety. In the Old Testament context, the commandment to be hospitable is related to frequent threats of violence. Hospitality means providing protection and security. 'To exercise hospitality is to enact an alternative to indifference, exploitation, or violence. A hospitable stance rejects an understanding of others as threats to be feared, as too much trouble, or as resources to be used' (Smith & Felch, 2016, p. 67). That it is far from self-obvious that strong believers are examples of providing safety is reflected in the parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). The representatives of the religious community – the priest and the Levite – deliberately look away from the person in trouble, while the Samaritan brings the victim to safety. In Hebrew, safety is denoted by *shalom*, which is a broad concept for well-being, wholeness, and health. When Jesus is moved by the multitude (Matt. 9:36), He encounters people who feel agitated – the opposite of safety, peace, and well-being. Full of compassion, He invites them to find safety with Him (Matt. 11:28–29). This welcoming attitude contrasts with the insecure social environments in which people feel excluded because they are compared

with others. Those who are insignificant in the eyes of the majority (1 Cor. 1:27) should be seen and respected. The significance of the safety principle is in coherence with the call for schools as safe places, a requirement for inclusive education (Roffey, 2013; Sautner, 2008; Winter & Bamberger, 2021).

4.2 *Care and Mercy*

Second, special educational needs can be related to the biblical mandate to care for those in need. God has given special laws to protect all those who are disabled (blind, deaf, and paralysed) or at risk of social exclusion (widows, orphans, and strangers). They should not be hindered (Lev. 19:14) and need active attention. One may not turn away a call; one may not close one's heart to it (Deut. 15:7), but one must act (Deut. 15:11). In the New Testament Church, this demand is worked out in diaconal service. Care and mercy do not emerge automatically but need intentional action, as reflected in the parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10: 31–32). The action aims to overcome the limitations of the person in need, such as slowness, clumsiness, and the help needed for what one cannot do oneself. The limitations of others cause stress for the helper and other group members, especially if they slow things down. This is why inclusive environments are usually assumed to increase stress for teachers. However, research has shown that this is not true for those intrinsically convinced that troubled students should be part of a community (Weiss et al., 2019).

4.3 *Equality*

Third, when speaking of care and mercy, one can think of two kinds of people: the healthy who help the sick and the strong who save the weak. In the school context, this can lead to the split image of, firstly, a group of average students, the strong – and secondly, students with something special going on – the weak. However, the division that arises conflicts with the charge of thinking in terms of equality. From person to person, we have to deal with the irreplaceable value the Creator gives to every human being. The development of ideas on inclusive education coheres with this principle. The initial emphasis on access to education (education for all) developed into attention to justice within education (UNESCO, 2017). Paying attention to the rights of every individual, including gender, (dis)ability, culture, religion etc. has come to the fore, which leads to a pedagogy of recognition in which the image of the strong and the weak is criticised (Bainbridge, 2015; Prengel, 2018).

4.4 *Justice*

Fourth, in care and mercy, it might seem that we should give all our attention to the care of special educational needs. This would mean that the 'weaker' student is more entitled to the teacher's attention than the 'average'

or ‘stronger’ student. Parents may interpret a hospitable school as such but because all children are welcome, the weaker students pull down the level, creating a situation of injustice. The weaker students receive much attention, while the others are neglected. Biblically, there is reason to address the issue of justice. The needy are not to be favoured (Deut. 16:19; Lev. 19:15; Prov. 24:23; Zech. 7:9–10), and there are no separate rights for at-risk groups. This means that at-risk children should not be treated as parties to be pitied. As they are made in the image of God, those with limitations or special talents are called to use their gifts in the service of God and their neighbours. In other words, the teacher takes everyone’s needs equally into account. At the same time, it may be fair to give some children more or different types of attention.

4.5 *Gifts*

Fifth, ‘the eye cannot say to the hand: I do not need you’, or ‘the head cannot say to the feet: I do not need you’, said Paul (1 Cor. 12:14–24). According to the community ideal of the Christian Church, everyone has their own place, without thinking in terms of more or less, strong or weak, high or low. In the same way, a Christian school is not about ranking but about recognising and accepting each other’s unique gifts. The leading concept is not disabilities or special educational needs but the potential to develop and the corresponding need for assistance. Or, as Bavinck so eloquently put it, pedagogy must ‘joyfully and gratefully’ proceed from what God gives each child (Bavinck, 1928, p. 78).

According to the image of the body, all parts are needed – the hand and the foot are no less than the eye. Decisive in this image is that everyone’s gifts contribute to what others are lacking. Consequently, we define a gift as a received quality that the student uses to benefit the other and the greater whole. Not only are personal qualities such as intelligence and creativity implied but so are the ways of behaving toward others. As Paul teaches, the gifts (*charismata*) are in the service of building up the body of Christ. All parts of the body should thus move into the body of Christ. A Christian school pedagogy should not promote the ego-driven development of talents but development in the service of others and a greater whole. In the literature on inclusive education, the development of all talents is often stressed, while, in system theory approaches, the importance of communicating the participation of all individuals in the classroom system is stressed, as expressed in the concept *gift* (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021).

4.6 *Carrying the Load*

Finally, I draw attention to the willingness to bear the other person’s burden. Serving others means carrying their burden with their own received qualities

(Gal 6:2). Carrying a burden can be defined as consciously giving attention to all kinds of hardship, troubles, and needs (Schlatter, 1963, p. 143) as well as moral deficits (Bonhoeffer, 2003, p. 104). It is not a one-sided process in which the stronger assist the weaker but a reciprocal process in which every participant in the community potentially needs support (Schlatter, 1963, p. 143). Accomplishing this is called fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Consequently, serving the other as Christ is not taking the upper position, as if someone with more qualities stands above the weaker. On the contrary, it is taking the lower position (Phil. 2:5,6), meaning refraining from any judgment, such as looking at the other as an object but considering everything they carry with them in their created being (Bonhoeffer, 1996, p. 52). This also has to do with the freedom allowed to the other person. As long as one puts a label on someone else, the other person is not free; rather, they are free when they feel accepted as they are, with all their possible weaknesses and gifts. The fellow human being has to learn to accept what is given to others. This can cause tensions because the other also challenges in their otherness, frictions and opposites, and clashes can arise in the encounter (Bonhoeffer, 1996, p. 116). Acceptance of the other is a general demand. The other is seen in the gifts they have, not in what they do not have (2 Cor. 8:12).

5 The Community of Teachers

So far, we have elaborated on the concept of hospitality for students. However, this approach requires an embodied practice for the whole school community, including the team of teachers. The fact that we put it this way follows the concept of practice, as we explained in Chapter 3, in which we defined a practice as a *set of activities* pursued by a group of people. This *whole* contributes to the realisation of the core value. By activities, we are not thinking only of an isolated set of classroom teaching practices; it is also about how teachers live together in the wider community.

Hospitality is therefore not only an answer to the diversity between students but also between teachers. To recall the interview with Martine from the beginning of this chapter: the school must prove itself to be a hospitable school not only in its good dealings with Tom but also with the colleague who enters the school with a specific reputation. Various researchers point out the great importance of congruence. What is expected of students in their association with each other, must also be seen with teachers (Booth & Ainscow, 2009). Hospitality must also be expressed at the level of the teachers (cf. Ekins, 2017).

We elaborate on this by paying attention to learning as a community, the employment of personal gifts and leadership.

5.1 *Community Vocabulary*

In the past, teaching was often practised as an individual responsibility within the classroom walls. In secondary education, this is still often the case (Admiraal & Lokhorst, 2012). In a hospitable school, teachers need to think more broadly. Teachers are not only responsible for their own classes but also for the school as a whole. And vice versa, colleagues bear responsibility for the others and their classes. The school climate should be such that teachers are open to others learning from them and are willing to help others. Moreover, there should be a willingness to reflect on the school as a whole together (see Chapter 10). This requires a way of looking beyond one's own professional space. Instead of thinking along an 'autonomy' concept, it is good to think with a 'holistic' vocabulary, meaning that in classroom practice, the teacher is always aware of the organic exchange with everything that happens in and outside the school.

The word 'holistic' refers to a living entity in which parts are interrelated in a more or less natural way (Van Olst, 2025). This word applies to the school because every school is a whole with both spatial and historical characteristics. Spatial, because it is situated in a particular place or neighbourhood; historical, because it was founded based on a particular ideal and has continuity through the adjustment of those ideals. Thinking holistically means that teachers depend on and interact with each other. They cannot do without each other, and they are there for each other. If teachers bear each other's burdens, this increases the school's bearing capacity.

Having a *sense of community* refers to the conviction that the job cannot be accomplished individually. According to Admiraal and Lockhorst (2012), this concept has the following dimensions: a group identity, a mutual commitment that binds participants together as a social entity, the sharing of common goals of the community, a shared repertoire of interaction and communication among members, emotional safety, acceptance of individual differences within the community, and having meaningful relationships among community members. When teachers develop a *sense of community*, they begin to feel responsible for each other and all students within the school (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ekins, 2017). Schools often describe this as a community where there is openness within the team as well as learning from and with each other. A sense of community is important for teachers' well-being, because the school as a guesthouse is not, as with the student, a temporary residence. Teachers

are part of the staff, welcoming newcomers and seeing others go. Hospitality, therefore, is not something that only happens when newcomers arrive but is constantly cultivated together.

5.2 *Community of Practice*

The commonality is reflected in the way teachers learn about teaching. Following the pedagogical triangle, teachers learn about reality (the subject matter), the students and themselves. Ideally, this takes place in a *community of practice*, which Wenger et al. (2002) describe as a group of people who share a similar concern or passion for something they do and want to professionalise through regular exchange. A *community of practice* has three characteristics. Firstly, a shared domain of interest, through which people value each other's competencies and want to learn from each other 'even though few people outside the group may value or even recognise their expertise' (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). So, it is not an official association or a club striving for certification but a group with a common drive to learn professionally. Secondly, it is a community of people involved in similar activities and discussions, who want to help each other and share information. The relationships allow learning from each other. 'They care about their standing with each other' (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). The third characteristic is practitioners' sharing of a common repertoire of stories, practices and tools. This sharing is done by hanging out together, not just by occasional official meetings. An inspiring meeting with a few colleagues at a conference does not constitute a *community of practice*. Getting to know each other's burdens and joys takes a long time. A community of practice does not have rigid boundaries. People can drop out and new people can join, which happens naturally in a school when people retire, and young new teachers enter. So, the community of practice always has room for newcomers. In this context, it is interesting to note that the concept of *community of practice* was born when the anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger discovered that internships should not be understood as something between an intern and a mentor, but as a much more complex event. The intern is initiated into a set of customs and practices of the community.

We understand the Christian school as an institution run by a committed group of people willing to form a *community of practice*. In this community, the same values are valid, such as in hospitality for students. People notice each other's gifts; they want to share their own gifts, and they can also receive each other's gifts. Together they want to be 'hosts' for the individual teacher, even if inexperienced, with a bad reputation or considered less sympathetic by parents. Hospitality comes from a willingness to accept one another as we are (Phil. 2:1–11). There is no requirement that someone must first change before being accepted. People speak appreciatively of each other, and troublesome

observations of the other are not enlarged. It can even be said that one does not talk about someone when that person is not present, as Bonhoeffer demanded of his students in the pastoral training programme (Bonhoeffer, 1996, p. 109). One takes each other's vulnerability into account and stands up for a colleague when injustice threatens.

Whether there is hospitality becomes visible in team meetings. Is everyone ready to listen before speaking, to keep listening when opinions conflict, to give everyone a voice, doing justice to everyone? This becomes demanding in larger groups. Research shows that when the number of group members increases, the talkative remain just as talkative or become even more talkative while the silent group members allow themselves to be pushed into the background (Remmerswaal, 2013, p. 263). Can a school team also let the talkative remain silent and give a voice to the quiet ones in a larger group? In a group it will become clear whether people are capable of self-management, as we emphasised in Chapter 6: can everyone restrain themselves, not let their emotions prevail and respond to others in a sober and considered way?

5.3 *Employing Personal Gifts*

The focus of this chapter on the differences between people was followed by an emphasis on the importance of each person's individual gifts. A hospitable community will function well when each person's gifts are flourishing. The gifts as we find them in Paul's letters are very different, ranging from the more spiritual and supernatural to the mundane and practical (cf. Rom. 12:7–8). The type of gift is less important than the principle behind it, namely, to persistently place it at the service of others (Rom. 12:10). In the context of teaching, gifts can be understood in the same broad sense: all gifts have the potential to serve the community. Gifts of teachers do not only concern core qualities that are deeply rooted in biography and personality, but also competencies that have been acquired over time. The different gifts correspond to places in the pedagogical triangle. One person may have a strong knowledge of the subject, another may be brilliant in his pedagogical posture, and a third may have a rich creativity in devising didactic forms of work.

The complexity of education demands continuous professionalisation and specialisation. The recognition of individual gifts, all serving the strength of the hospitable community, is therefore of urgent importance, while, in practice, interaction in education often tends towards the opposite. The traditions in our school system easily promote a so-called political culture, which means that everyone is supposed to be equal, negotiations take place, and management is done mainly through leaders and middle managers (Van Emst, 2012, pp. 12–13). Such a culture hinders a professional culture, recognising inequality and specialisation, although we, instead of a professional culture, prefer to speak

of a gift-oriented culture, in which everyone's input is accepted and respected in advance. Just as there are high expectations of students, there are also high expectations of all colleagues. All are expected to make an appropriate commitment with the gifts that they possess (see again Rom. 12:10–11). This includes realistic self-knowledge: teachers must not overestimate themselves, nor should they underestimate themselves (see Chapter 6). In the hospitable school, it is never about the limitations but about what one has received (2 Cor. 8:12).

5.4 *Increasing Specialisation*

The trend towards increasing specialisation is particularly evident in dealing with special needs. In our approach, we assume pedagogical qualities in all teachers. They are potentially sensitive to employing the situation of the moment pedagogically (see Chapter 7), in such a way that a broad spectrum of different students can function in the classroom. The basic pedagogical competence to tactfully deal with differences in the classroom not only involves knowledge about the type of needs and the desired responses, but also about how the teacher's role influences the student.

The self-reflective ability emphasised in Chapters 6 and 7 is, therefore, a condition for practising hospitality. The same applies to self-confidence: considering yourself a capable teacher, including the capacity to deal with special needs, strongly influences daily practice (Stoutjesdijk, 2013). In addition to basic pedagogical competence, there is a need for high-quality specialist knowledge in the school. In the hospitable school, these specialised skills serve the primary work in the classroom. If there are relatively many special needs, more hands in the classroom are to be preferred over segregating types of students. Professionalisation increases if one can jointly acquire experience in teaching students with special needs. In addition, the team should rely on the potential contribution of all internally and externally involved with the student. Available knowledge within the school should be disseminated among staff members, so that expertise is shared and utilised. Next to specialists like psychologists or counsellors, parents and students must be regarded as experts. Talks with students are an important way of getting to know students and their needs. Next to this, proper communication with parents and caregivers is extremely important.

5.5 *Leadership in the School*

Working on a sense of community requires servant leadership. The school principal has management tasks: monitoring hours, finances, distribution of tasks, and accounting for resources. They will do this carefully and follow the conditioning norms, as we called them in Chapter 3. However, these management tasks are not the most important. A hospitable school first of all needs a pedagogical leader

who demonstrates to their team what they consider ideal for their teachers to do in the classroom. Every aspect of teaching in a hospitable way applies to the leadership. The leader's task is to make the team a *community of practice*, in which everyone's gifts and tasks are recognised and can be done justice. This prevents people from judging each other, for example, 'x is a good teacher and y is less competent'. The leader communicates in 'we' terms instead of individual judgements. Together, the team is responsible for quality education. They understand the art of sharing leadership and making people co-responsible (Ekins, 2017). Such a leadership style has indirectly affected students' development. A school principal who actively promotes learning among teachers and participates has much more impact on student learning than a school principal who unilaterally focuses on strategic points, achieving targets and systematic evaluation (Robinson et al., 2009). What leaders communicate, embodies their vision. When a teacher presents an idea to the leader, the first question should not be about the financial possibilities ('How are we going to pay for this?'), but about the fruitfulness of the idea ('In what way does it help our mission; does it benefit the students?').

An ultimate moment for uncovering the leader's preferences is the conversation about work: work meetings about planning and progress or appraisal interviews. What applies to students also applies to teachers: they flourish when they experience space to flourish. The question is whether leaders are capable of addressing what matters most. They preferably start the conversation by asking: 'How are the children doing, are they enjoying themselves?', thinking about the pedagogical embedding of education. Or they might ask: 'Do you manage to get the students to feel responsible for each other?', thinking about the purpose of education: the meaning-making towards responsibility (see Chapter 3). Once these issues have been reviewed, the conditioning issues, such as hours and finances, can be addressed. These should, however, not be 'back pocket' questions demonstrating that the leader craves control and these questions are only placed last on the agenda for tactical reasons.

Hospitable leadership is especially effective when work meetings and appraisal interviews occur in groups rather than individually. Organising this in groups illustrates the desire to think in terms of shared responsibility instead of individual accountability. When outcomes are measured in statistics, the team's performance should be reflected in graphs. This also radiates confidence that people will strive for good together.

6 Schools and Classrooms as Hospitable Communities

In this section, we derive directives from the above for dealing with differences from the hospitality ideal and its related biblical principles.

6.1 *From the Individual to the Community*

Putting the community at the centre invites a different way of looking at things, especially concerning the chosen goals. International ranking systems look at the sum of individual learners' outcomes (Sjøberg, 2018). This reinforces the tendency in didactics to think only about personalised learning. When building a community comes first, group goals receive more attention. In addition, envisioning the classroom community as a safe place implies a shift from primarily cognitive learning goals to working at social-emotional goals, not instrumentalised but by creating a safe and secure group climate. Stressing the importance of the community is supported by research, which demonstrates that students achieve more in schools with healthy learning environments (MacNeil et al., 2009; Roffey, 2013).

6.2 *From Instrumentalism to Realism*

Special needs should not be approached as a problem but as a reality and a pedagogical opportunity. By including students with special needs, the teacher shows recognition and acceptance of the brokenness of existence. Concentrating on gifts and services implies that relatively little importance should be given to competition. Tests are seen as a necessary thermometer to support the teacher's actions, useful as a means of feedback or feedforward. It is possible to work with results at class and school levels but only on condition that it is done outside the competitive sphere. A sober assessment climate is preferred, a limited presence of graphs, and a minimal administrative burden. Energy should not be spent worrying about equality problems. Research has shown that strong students do not flourish less if much attention is paid to other students in the group. When education is well organised, everyone benefits (Prengel, 2018; Sardes, 2020).

6.3 *From Access to School Climate*

Hospitality is not, first and foremost, a question of whether there should be separate schools. It is a question of whether justice is done to the gifts and needs of all pupils. This can happen within regular and within special schools. The preferred regular setting, as promoted in this chapter, does not alter the fact that special education is sometimes more appropriate than regular education (Zweers, 2018).

6.4 *From Organisation to Pedagogy*

Many organisational issues are at the forefront when arranging inclusive, hospitable practices. How do we organise education so that special needs are adequately addressed? When we think about inclusion from a pedagogical point

of view, the first question we ask is how the teacher can act pedagogically in such a way that all students learn to serve with their gifts and see the needs of others. Therefore, the answer to the organisational question should not start with efficiency considerations by asking how a teacher can divide their limited time across all students with specific questions. The main pedagogical consideration should be whether differences in the classroom provide an opportunity to practice handling – together – what at first glance seems to be deviant and troublesome. An obstacle encountered by a teacher is also experienced as a problem by the students. The teacher should not regard this as a barrier but use it as an opportunity for learning within the classroom system (Prenzel, 2018; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). The pivotal question then is the following: Does our school system create a setting where students can practice looking differently and carrying other people's burdens? These burdens are acquired to practice patience, endure the inhibiting factors caused by limitations, and be creative in finding solutions.

6.5 *From Risk to Trust*

Instead of seeing differences as threats, the biblical image of the community leads us to see them as challenges. The hospitality ideals, as Anderson (2011) aptly formulated,

can best be realised in hospitable classrooms where diversity, rather than being seen as a threat to the community, is welcomed, and where relationships between disabled and nondisabled students are consciously nurtured. A sense of *belonging* to the classroom community is made possible when the unique contribution of each person to the community's well-being is valued. (p. 17; italics in the original text)

Empirical research has shown that there is no cause to fear a drop in level; specific attention to needs does not harm the learning outcomes of 'average' students (Ruijs, 2017).

6.6 *From Students to Staff*

Whatever practices are chosen, hospitality will be cultivated only when the school climate as a whole includes visions and practices of togetherness (Roffey, 2013). This applies not only to practices in which students learn to deal with other's specific needs but also to leadership and staff. If a school team is seen as a community of relatively permanent hosts making room for the flourishing of temporary guests (the pupils), its members need to build a climate in which this can happen. Schools that are successful in dealing with many types

of needs have a shared vision (Booth & Ainscow, 2009). These schools do not start to reason from isolated classroom teaching practices but build practices of cooperation. Teachers must serve each other with the received qualities. In this way, hospitality is an answer to the diversity not only between students but also between teachers. What is expected of students, namely, serving each other should be exemplified by teachers (Booth & Ainscow, 2009). When teachers develop a sense of community, they begin to feel responsible for each other and all students within the school (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ekins, 2017). Togetherness also strengthens collective self-efficacy through a shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to deal with differences (Krammer et al., 2017).

7 Conclusion

As a training ground for what the Church of Christ stands for, the Christian school can mirror itself on the ideals of hospitality and building a community. This is a challenge, given that current school practices are organised entirely in terms of more or less strong or weak or high or low. The answer to the question formulated in the introduction of how theological notions relate to differences and needs and inspire the school climate was provided by articulating community life within the teams of teachers. In addition, we presented different shifts from current practices towards the community ideal. We concluded that education with the intention of being Christian-inspired needs to move from the individual to the community, from instrumentalism to realism, from access to the school climate, from organisation to pedagogy, and from risk to trust, as well as from moving the focus from pupils to staff. The elements from community and hospitality ideals and biblical principles pave the way for a working definition of hospitable education. We propose defining this as follows: Hospitable education aims to create a welcoming and safe space for all students while considering gifts as well as all kinds of hardship, troubles and needs in which a team of teachers, leaders, and other professionals, considering everyone's strengths and vulnerabilities, serves all students with their particular gifts and needs in collective responsibility, such that all school staff can flourish and learn to serve others and the common good with their gifts.

Note

1 www.schoolclimate.org

The Vital Mission of the School

They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it.

PS. 22: 31

• • •

The Christian school is not a return to a former state, but something new.

D. CHANTEPIE DE LA SAUSSAYE, 1856, p. 227

1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we introduced the word hospitality to outline the ideal of the Christian school. As we have stated, this ideal should permeate pedagogical action and the interaction between teachers should exemplify the ideal. We focussed on the school culture, which is about the do's and don'ts of interaction within the community. In this last chapter, we broaden our scope by examining the school's mission in the social-cultural context. In doing so, we take up the main line of the argument, as given in Chapter 1, where we expressed our conviction that Christian-inspired education has the mission to communicate God's good message both inside and outside the school. Because cultural contexts are different and social environments rapidly changing, we can only make general statements about the Christian school's mission in society. We try to be as concrete as possible while recognising that each school must apply this in its context. The good message embodied by the school has the potential to endure all contexts and is, to quote the Dutch theologian Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818–1874) at the heading of this chapter, always able to produce something new. Faithful educators, in whatever historical or geographical position, aim for the next generation to put their trust in God.

In this chapter, we explore how the school's vocation can be determined in its context, and how it can be revitalised over time. To set the stage, we begin with an example from *Augustine College*, a school for secondary education. Teachers want to bring their students more consciously into contact with the neighbourhood and broader society. As one of the teachers states:

We are a classic and rather conservative Christian school. Traditionally, every teacher has their own classroom, and we don't have a modern school concept like the neighbouring school community here in town. The neighbours have set up their school with learning squares; teachers are mainly coaches instead of teachers. Fortunately, we are not worse in terms of the students' outcomes. However, we felt we had a problem with the students' somewhat closed worldview. Sometimes it seems as if they judge everything outside their vision as hostile. Because the students come from average affluent white middle-class families, they also have little contact with people who are economically less well-off. In our opinion, this does not fit with the Biblical idea that you should aim for the good of all your surroundings. Then one colleague proposed doing something about it. We contacted a welfare foundation that promotes Christian charity in our area. Together we made a programme that stimulates students to actively participate in their neighbourhood. They do all kinds of things: walking with people from a nursing home, taking care of the garden, shopping for elderly people, helping to refurbish an attic, helping at the food bank, etc. You could call it 'learning to serve'. We have framed it within responsible citizenship. In the lessons before and after the activities, we discuss the question: why should you do these things? After all, we were amazed by the impact. The students and teachers alike suddenly understood that, as a school, you are not isolated. Students had stories that showed that they started to see things differently. It also gave us, as a team, a much greater sense of being able to make education relevant.

One of the remarkable aspects of this example is that teachers, based on their observations, start looking at their charge and mission differently and subsequently make their own choices in the process of renewal. They are not concerned with modernising the teaching methods but are reflecting on social awareness. At the same time, the case of Augustine College shows that a new direction has consequences for the curriculum and classroom practices. In this chapter, we assume that every school can reflect critically on its position in a similar way and has the potential to refresh its mission.

1.1 *Revitalisation*

Regarding the latter, let us provide some background. For their survival, educational institutions depend on a certain degree of continuity. This provides a connection between the past and the future, as well as allowing stakeholders to commit to the institution (Rust, 2019). However, this continuity is relative because it can change under the influence of the users of education (parents and students), societal demands (government measures), and changes in views among the staff (teachers and managers) (Bertram-Troost

et al., 2018; Bunnell et al., 2020; Karakas & Kılıç, 2021; Van der Walt, 2007; Wardekker & Miedema, 2001). This potential change also applies to Christian educational institutions. Once Christian educational institutions have a recognised place in society, they run the risk of secularisation (Edlin, 2014; Flatt, 2020). The famous universities of Harvard and Yale are often cited as examples. Over time, the religious motives within the institutions were replaced by commitments to public service, training for democracy, and the promotion of character (Marsden, 1994). In this chapter, we argue that change in an educational institution's identity is not a fateful development evading any influence. Instead, we contend that because of inevitable changes within and outside these institutions, consciously led revitalisation should be promoted. According to Pazmiño (2008, p. 14), the 'preparadigmatic stage of Christian education requires that each new generation of Christian educators reconsider the foundational questions. Without raising these questions, Christian educators are likely to perpetuate antiquated conceptions and practices that are not faithful to the gospel'. Thus, in Pazmiño's view, the relevance of revitalising a school's identity lies in the desired consistency between the ideal of the gospel and its practice. The value of job satisfaction goes beyond the importance of the organisation.

1.2 *Back to the Ideals*

Christians who want to justify how Christian education is realised can do this most easily when a new school is founded. However, in other situations, the progression in time requires a renewed reflection on the education design. Regarding this progression in time, we consider two concerns about the ideals and practice of Christian education. First, the relation between the school's mission and what should be done in concrete action is not a matter of logically translating a vision into 'SMART' goals. There is always a creative process in which an educator looks for opportunities. This chapter is meant to clarify this process. If one claims to set SMART goals, social engineering is tempting, while reality can only be influenced to a limited extent. As long as we talk about ideals, that is, the larger and more distant representations, most people in education know that they will not fully achieve such ideals, even if they derive well-thought-out goals from them. With an ideal, people strive for excellence but will not achieve it fully (De Ruyter, 2007). So, on the one hand, stakeholders in education need the ideal to know their goal; on the other hand, it is important to realise that it is not easily attainable. Second, when translating the mission into concrete terms, there is a risk of the misleading idea that what cannot be made concrete and is not measurable is not meaningful in the eyes

of stakeholders. This idea suggests that only behaviour that can be checked is meaningful. From the perspective of Christian spirituality, it is precisely the other way around – what is not noticed or grows unnoticed takes root invisibly. The things that cannot be measured are important.

1.3 *Overview*

We begin this chapter by explaining the theory about the unique character of a school, often referred to as the school's identity (Section 2). We distinguish three types of identity: intended, lived, and perceived. They may be in tension with one another, for example, because the pursued ideal conflicts with the school's ethos. Tensions perceived by a stakeholder may be a starting point for rethinking the mission. Other triggers are the changing context of the school, such as less money being available, demanding governmental legislation changes and changes in the student population. In the following sections, we envision the revitalisation process in three stages. In the first stage, we explain our vision that a school's mission can be seen as a unique calling (Section 3). We present four exemplary approaches observed in school missions. The second stage shows that the desired dynamics of revitalisation can be summarised as a process of sense-making, sense-giving, action formation, and institutionalisation (Section 4). In the third stage, we propose a seven-step model through which one can determine the school's vocation in any context (Section 5).

2 **Theory of Identity and Mission**

First a few remarks about the terminology used in this chapter. We relate the words vocation and mission to the concept of identity. When we refer to the school's mission, the meanings of 'special charge' and 'being sent' are included, meaning that we define a mission as a vocation. Just as in the calling of an individual teacher, as defined in Chapter 6, a school's mission involves the awareness that it must pursue a particular ideal at this very moment. When a school reflects on its mission from a Christian perspective, it is therefore a question of establishing Christian-inspired ideas in this school and this place. It is not uncommon to use the word 'foundation', which includes claims about leading convictions, specifically the desired point of departure ('where from') (Wardekker & Miedema, 2001), or in more popular language, 'Why is this school on earth?'. For founders of Christian schools, 'where from' (the foundation) is sometimes clearer than 'where to go', often called 'the vision'. A vision then stands for long-term ideals. In the short term, concrete goals can be

derived from this vision, resulting in a school's lived and perceived identities, also referred to as the school ethos in this chapter.

2.1 *The Concept of Identity*

From the educational history perspective, identity can be directly linked to a sociological group who founded a school. The group's ideal envisioned the school's character. De Wolff (2000, p. 52) describes a school's identity as 'that which makes the school this school, in other words, what the school's characteristic features are and what has a certain degree of continuity'. This differs from the word 'mission' (which we also use in this chapter) in that it is not only about the direction of an aim but also how the school becomes 'empirically' visible in the here and now. Mission pertains to the future; identity concerns the present.

When orienting a school's identity toward school practice, three dimensions can be distinguished: worldview identity, pedagogical identity, and educational-organisational identity (Miedema, 1994; De Wolff, 2000, p. 67). An identity concentrating on the worldview dimension can be seen as a narrow identity. If identity also involves the other two dimensions, it is called a broad or a multidimensional identity (De Wolff, 2000, pp. 68–69). The difference lies in how much the ideological dimension dominates the others. We consider an articulated influence of the ideological dimension on both the pedagogical and the educational-organisational ones to be legitimate. In other words, inspiration from the gospel can be legitimised similarly to those derived from other worldviews, such as the ones adopted in public schools, free schools or Islamic schools (Bertram-Troost et al., 2018; Walt, 2007; Williams et al., 2023). This is where the respective layers of 'normative theology' and 'strategies and policies of education' (Figure 3) interact.

In philosophical terms, identity can be understood in various ways. It can relate to persons, objects, and institutions (Rust, 2019). In his influential book on the identity of persons, Paul Ricoeur (1992) distinguishes between three types of identity. He relates these to how people talk about themselves. First, the so-called *idem identity* refers to people's need for stability and the sense in which people experience themselves as the same; something stable and unchanging. Second, the *ipse identity* is about what can change under the influence of circumstances. Third, between the two poles of sameness and changeability, people develop characteristics distinguishing them from others. Ricoeur calls this process of identity formation *narrative identity*. These distinctions can also be applied to the institutional identity of a school. One can assume a school's sustainable identity elements to be visible, as we stated at the beginning of this chapter. They indicate continuity and are related to

ideals that are further afield. However, some elements are subject to changes over time. It is important for revitalising a mission to notice these elements because a mission is about what must be accomplished over time. Lastly, the identity formation of the school is a narrative – as it is in the identity formation of the individual.

2.2 *Intended, Lived, and Perceived Identities*

In the remainder of this chapter, we use distinctions of the concept of identity that can be related to Ricoeur’s tripartite division but have their own character, too. We distinguish intended identity from lived and perceived identity; see Figure 16. The intended identity can be related to Ricoeur’s *idem* identity. The other two are both an expression of the *ipse* identity and the narrative identity.

First, we call the school founders’ ideal the *intended identity*, sometimes also referred to as the school’s mission statement. It describes the school’s intended sustainable elements and can refer to an articulated worldview. A mission statement expresses the ‘why’ of the school. What does this school wish to accomplish and what story is experienced as the supporting ground? The institutional identity of denominational Christian schools can be recognised in the interpretation of their claim on religious truth, for example, when referring to the Reformed confession. The intended identity can also be observed in the conception of the nature of education, for instance, how much freedom can be offered to students. And lastly, in view of cultural differences as part of the content of education, it could be, for example, how strongly a vision of evolution and gender is emphasised as opposed to mainstream views

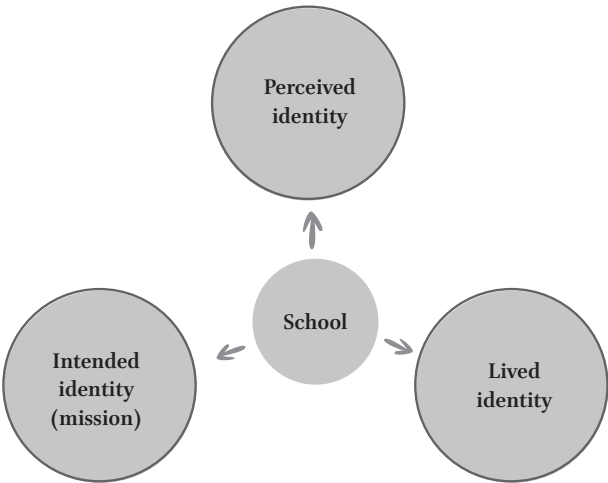


FIGURE 16 Intended, lived, and perceived identities

(Wardekker & Miedema, 2001). Second, from the perspective of the school's current stakeholders, apart from the intended identity, they may speak of the *lived identity*, which is expressed and experienced by students, teachers, and leaders in their practices. Third, the outsiders' perspective means that the people who view the school from the outside have a perception of its identity, which we call the *perceived identity*. The perspectives of the school's founders, its current stakeholders, and outsiders are also referred to as self-referential identity, shared identity, and relational identity (Faber, 2012, pp. 39–43).

2.3 *Development of Schools*

One of the changing elements is that successive generations involved in the school will each tell a different story about the institution over time, as already mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. After their establishment, schools undergo a development process that cannot be predicted in advance. Edlin (2010) distinguishes three phases or stages in the development of Christian schools. In the aspirational stage, the school is in its initial phase. Some schools put a lot of work into the biblical foundation of their intentions. In the dynamic stage, the school becomes known, and the organisation is consolidated. In the gentrified stage, the school reaches a state where the original intentions are less recognisable. A new generation considers the school's existence important but no longer keeps the founders' inspiration in mind. The school's operations are more or less managed smoothly, and there is no need to be constantly preoccupied with ideals. For the schools that initially turned against the mainstream culture with their faith-based programs, Edlin (2010, p. 100) recognises the danger of dilution, referring to 'schools which may retain a Christian linkage in their name but which operationally demonstrate few of the biblically authentic goals that motivated their founders'. In this chapter, however, we claim that the sequence of the three stages is not an ever-valid and inescapable fate. Schools have the opportunity to rediscover their aspirations at any stage. To avoid the loss of the schools' Christian identity, it is wise – to quote Pazmiño once again – 'to reconsider the foundational questions' from time to time (Pazmiño, 2008, p. 14). One of the entry points for doing so is to zoom in on the potential discrepancy between the intended and the lived identities. Bringing to light these differences opens perspectives for the renewal of existing practices (Edlin, 2010; Smith, 2018). What is lived out reveals what is thought and felt below the surface. 'It is the operational which is a much more accurate reflection of the true life and vision of the place' (Edlin, 2014, p. 93). Unfolding the contradictions can be challenging because even a school is usually reluctant to admit incongruence. However, the process is also beneficial because the inconsistency is a reason for reconsidering the school's

mission. The same applies when one compares the perceived identity with the described and lived identity. Every comparison can lead to a rethinking of the mission.

3 Stage 1: Mission Understood as a Unique Calling

3.1 *Four Approaches*

Where we approached the school's mission formally in the previous section, in this section, we consider the same theme substantively. Whether the case is starting a new school or reconsidering the mission, substantive choices are decisive. Depending on the context, the mission will have different facets. To make the school's mission explicit, we first discuss four exemplary approaches – socialising, person-centred, transformational, and charity-based – through which the school's calling can be shaped in different ways in the concrete context. The emphasis of each approach is on the Christian community, the individual believer, the influence on society, and the aim to solve the problems in society, respectively. In all four approaches, the truth claims identified by Wardekker and Miedema (2001) can be recognised: claims on religious truth, the nature of education, and cultural differences. The approaches are not mutually exclusive but overlap. Although several approaches can be used in a school, one of the images is often dominant. Regarding the following subsections, it is important to note that a Christian school is not necessarily private and unsubsidised. This is self-evident in some countries, where the law prescribes a conditional full or partial funding of religious schools.

3.2 *Socialising Approach*

The first approach can be observed in a school founded by a specific Christian denomination. Often, this is a church congregation or group. The governing idea is that the church, family, and school are in a triangular relationship, where the same goal is pursued. The children belonging to the congregation are considered part of the covenant established by God. According to their (baptismal) promise, parents have the task of initiating their children into the Christian doctrine. The school is supportive of this pedagogical task. The initiation into the Christian faith occurs here as in the family. Many schools have been founded on the idea that children in family, church, and school should grow up in the same atmosphere (Markus et al., 2018). A Christian parent or educator values unity in what is taught to children at home and at school. It is therefore not surprising that after a church split occurs, it sometimes results in the establishment of a new school. The newly formed denomination feels

the calling to found a school because it is believed that children cannot be entrusted to teachers who are not pure in their teaching (for example, see Spoelstra, 2017, p. 118). A possible consequence of this approach is that only the children who belong to the school's denomination are admitted as pupils, but this is not always the case. Many Christian schools worldwide are maintained by members of different churches with a related spirituality. This is not due to an equal community in the sense of a formal church but of a community of mentality: a sociological group of Christians who share similar truth claims and lifestyles. In the socialising approach, the priority lies in the interests of one's community, not of society. The responsible body will defend the school's right to consolidate its own position and to prepare pupils for a place in society.

The formation of a school based on the socialising approach sometimes evokes aversion. In an interview, an opponent of Christian education says: 'Schools are not an instrument for transmitting a certain group identity. Education is not meant to be an extension of parents and to propagate their values. At school, children should learn things that conflict with what they belong to. So that they can form their own opinions' (Van der Zee, 2019). This quotation strongly conveys the idea from the Enlightenment that the school is an institution that distances the youth from the parental environment.

3.3 *Person-Centred Approach*

The second approach focuses on the student's individual relationship with God. The school's primary calling is the spiritual formation of children; to help them develop their personal faith in Christ. The need for regeneration and conversion is stressed and it is the task of a school to facilitate this. Articulations can vary widely, depending on the church denomination or the group of denominations on which the schools are founded. Sometimes, a broader objective is indicated, such as the glorification of God (per the abridged Westminster Catechism Q/A 1, which states that each person is meant 'to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever'). There are also examples where imitation and discipleship are at the forefront. The website of the American organisation that developed the all-Christian curriculum, Accelerated Christian Education, states that staff at the schools 'help students grow closer to the Lord Jesus Christ and demonstrate their achievements in a wide range of categories from chess to Bible, basketball to art'.

3.4 *Transformational Approach*

The third approach takes neither the covenant nor the growth of individual faith as its starting point but the function of a school in relation to culture. According to Edlin (2014, p. 245), Christians are in danger of retreating to an

island; they try to safeguard the church through schools. In his view, this is against God's intention for this world; God has given people the mandate to build up and preserve the earth. Moreover, Christ is the ruler of the whole world. Salvation not only concerns humankind and the church but every square inch of the world. Schools should educate Christian students to be the salt of the earth and shining lights.

Christian cultural engagement (...) is a proactive and winsome calling for all Christians that delight in the majesty of God over his creation and the creative and stewardly lordship that he has given to humankind over the world. And it places the cross of Christ at the centre of all of life. Christian schools ought to prepare students for this type of cultural engagement. (Edlin, 2014, p. 52)

The transformative ideal, in which the transformation of the world is central, implies, even more than the previous approaches, an antithetical attitude toward the prevailing (secular) culture (Edlin, 2014, p. 239; cf. Loder, 2018, p. 33 ff). Edlin emphasises that a Christ-centred approach does not mean a concentration on the relationship with Christ but on the world of Christ: 'Christian education does not spend all its time looking at the Son; instead, it looks at the world and our places and tasks in it in the light that the Son provides' (pp. 41, 53). Elsewhere, Edlin (2010, p. 98) states that 'the nation-building goal of these Christian schools is to equip children to discern what is best (Phil. 1:9–11), including a peaceful and robust cultural critique and transformation in the name of Christ'.

3.5 *Charity-Oriented Approach*

Many public schools around the world, founded by Christians, started from the ideal of solving social problems, for example, by providing education where there were no schools. This happened, for instance, in developing countries, often with the support of aid organisations. From the school founders' perspective, the social interest in establishing a school was the priority. Sometimes, they had not yet thought about the Christian content of education. In contexts where education is common, Christians also establish schools for charitable reasons, for example, when education pays little attention to children with learning difficulties or to students' moral development. We call this the charity-oriented approach, referring to the charitable drive of Christians because they perceive the school's mission as serving vulnerable groups in society.

3.6 *Evaluating the Four Approaches*

As stated, the approaches are not mutually exclusive but overlap. Many Christian schools have something from all four approaches. The socialising approach honours the place of the covenant and the baptismal promise. The person-centred approach has an eye for the awkwardness and the subtlety of faith and salvation appropriation. The positive aspects of the transformational approach are its intention to eliminate dualism and its mandate to make the Christian faith relevant to everyday life. The charity-oriented approach shows the Christians' sensitivity to the needs of the world, which is very important concerning civic duty.

However, all approaches have their limitations, too. The socialising approach can be very inward-looking, limited to a small community, with no regard for society. The person-centred approach may focus too much on the inner self, without paying attention to concrete action. The transformational approach may suggest social engineering and optimism. For this reason, it runs the risk of insufficiently acknowledging sin and brokenness, maybe suggesting that serving God is simply a given instead of a learning journey that finds security in divine providence. Finally, the charity-oriented approach might run the risk of eliminating religious education or not paying attention to the Christian meaning in school subjects. If the merits and limitations of all the approaches are taken seriously, they can be helpful in the reflection on the school's mission.

4 **Stage 2: Keeping the Fire Burning**

This section discusses the dynamics at stake when revitalising the school's mission. Stakeholders will have a connection to the existing or intended identity in the making (Boele-de Bruin & De Muynck, 2018; Markus et al., 2018), but this is not obvious for all teachers (Bertram-Troost et al., 2018; Bunnell et al., 2020) and in all stages of school development (Edlin, 2014). Revitalisation will occur effectively only when the participants' interactions are taken seriously.

4.1 *Four Mechanisms*

We use a line of thought from Faber (2012) to clarify the abovementioned point. In her study of school identity, she distinguishes four mechanisms: sense-giving, action formation, sense-making, and institutionalisation. *Sense-giving* is about the identity claims when a school is founded. They give 'advance meaning to what is, or should be, important at this school in terms of religious orientation' (Faber, 2012, p. 201). Sense-giving does not concern what is laid down on

paper or on the internet, which is the scope of the fourth mechanism. What counts here is what is initially perceived as meaningful. Sense-giving involves the ‘triggers’ that direct a group of people to establish a school. From a religious perspective, this process entails receiving meaning from God’s transcendent call. The search for the mission can be a collective spiritual process, in which what is needed for the near future is weighed. This may include reflecting on the past, deciding to stop any current action and stating the intentions about what points to use to make a new start. *Action formation* shows that identity claims direct behaviour. Meanings guide behaviour; beliefs influence professional practice (Penthin et al., 2023). *Sense-making* is about how professionals experience the school culture. Based on their experiences in teaching, teachers can start to understand things differently. They learn profoundly from their daily contact with students and thus become more aware of what matters to the children. This daily contact is inspiring. They also develop meaningful stories that they like to share with others. Sharing stories can lead to rewriting the collective story of the school, which is the core of revitalisation. Finally, in the mechanism of *institutionalisation*, the initial meanings are anchored institutionally – in the school statutes, in the school plan, and on its website. Here, the intended identity, as felt in the stage of sense-giving, is formalised in a mission statement, a common ground with which the stakeholders can identify. The Christian school has a reference point to envision the direction of its future development.

4.2 *Keeping Meanings Active*

The four mechanisms can all function to consciously revitalise Christian-inspired education, as shown in Figure 17. A stakeholder can update the mission (sense-giving); another can initiate projects in which teachers explicitly connect their actions to the mission (action formation). A reorientation using religious sources can also be chosen as an entry point (sense-making). Finally, one can examine how meanings can be institutionalised in new routines and practices (institutionalisation). Revitalisation assumes that a stakeholder wants to cope with an existing situation. The situation of the current leaders is different from the circumstances encountered by the school’s founders. When a new school is instituted, the founders play dominant roles in sense-giving and institutionalisation. When a school is established, the staff members dominate the action formation and the sense-making. Consequently, if one wants to revise the mission, the incumbent leaders and teachers should play a key role. A responsible leader should listen to them. After all, they are the ones who observe in daily practice what is at stake and what matters. In addition, they

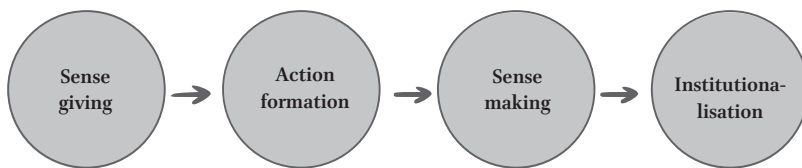


FIGURE 17 Collective sense-making

sense deeply if the personal and the professional identities are at odds with the intended and described identity because this has to do with the personal biography (Bakker & Rigg, 2004; Claeys & Vanspeybroeck, 2010, pp. 17–19). The existential tensions should be dealt with carefully.

4.3 *A Two-Sided Process*

Sense-giving and sense-making are triggered from the bottom up. However, the process must also be triggered by sources that do not speak directly from practice but feed the leaders and the teaching staff with ideological meanings. These may be Bible texts or source texts from historical pedagogues or confessional documents. Because the routine of everyday life does not automatically make space for theological notions, these must be consciously sought. The quest for receiving meaning from sources can be initiated by all stakeholders – teaching staff and leaders in any position. Reflection on theological notions can occur at informal moments, such as when teachers collectively prepare lessons, discuss a course-of-action plan, or reflect on critical class situations. However, it can also occur at planned moments, for instance, during reflective sessions and study meetings. By listening to sources in the Christian tradition, teachers can clarify what they want to see in practice. At the same time, they test the validity of ideas in the existing practice. These deliberations will reveal what thoughts and images dominate. The encounter between sources and practice clarifies how the institutional ideal relates to existing practice. Work forms are preferably chosen in such a way that not only cognitive knowledge of the Christian sources is acquired but that the heart is touched with a view to the practice of education. We believe it is possible to rekindle the original sense-giving of the school's founders in a new generation of teachers by listening again to what the founders intended. One can be inspired by the school's name, biblical sources, or exemplary figures in the school's tradition. In doing so, it is important to ensure that both personal reflection and joint reflection (sharing experiences) take place. Personal and joint reflections should also lead to action formation so that the described identity can become a lived identity.

5 Stage 3: How to Contextually Revitalise the School Identity

Having described some exemplary approaches to school mission (stage 1) and clarified the dynamics of revitalisation (stage 2), we now propose the steps that can be followed on the road to a revitalised mission. These steps, pictured in Figure 18, are successively about the urgency, the starting point, the population, the law, the tradition of the school, the cultural issues observed, and the interests of the family, church, and society. The steps are based on the earlier research described by De Muynck, Reijnoudt-Klein and Spruijt-De Kloe (2017). It is conceivable that a school board, a school team, and possibly other people involved follow the steps, but these do not necessarily happen in the presented sequence. The seven steps are about the content in the process of sense-giving, action formation, sense-making, and institutionalisation. In meetings, one can choose different work formats, varying from reflecting individually to weighing thoughts together. In the process of jointly discerning what is important in the given circumstances, the stakeholders should decide what needs to be changed and what the future actions in the school should look like. Does their calling take into account the interests of the future generation?

5.1 *What is the Urgency?*

We can determine what is urgent using the four approaches described in Stage 1. As we have seen, none of them are exclusive; however, they are valid as the first step in determining one's preferred position. One can focus on the Christian community, concentrate on faith appropriation or character development, have a school that aims to further the Christian influence on culture or place a charitable motive at the fore. When the situation changes, the question of urgency must be raised again. The school may change its preferences due to the changes in its population. The types of students change, and the types of parents change, which in turn alters the whole pedagogical setting. Another influence constitutes society's changing expectations (politically driven or resulting from cultural trends). For example, the government might ask schools to pay more attention to their public presentation. This requirement can be based on the idea that if the government finances a diversity of schools, the latter must also clarify how their profiles are translated into classroom activities. This requires the manoeuvrability of both the management and the staff.

5.2 *Which Entry?*

The next question is about the chosen point of entry. First, one can select the entrance of the students. The question is then what kind of students one strives for at the end of their schooling? If this entrance is chosen, the school's policy is

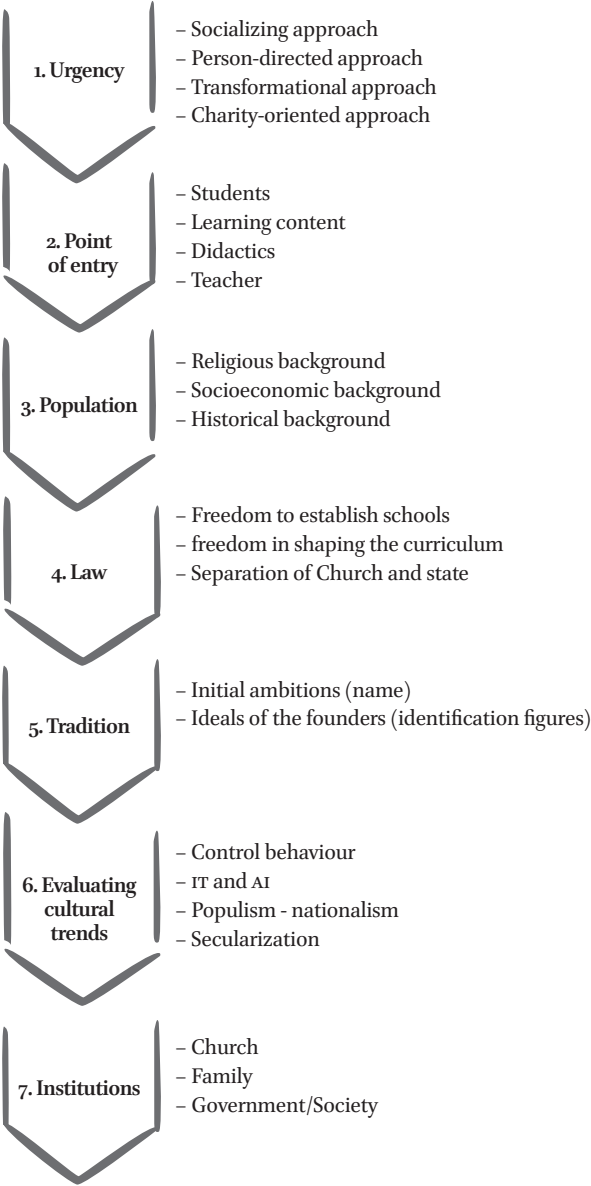


FIGURE 18 Steps to follow in defining the mission

determined by the exit profiles of the students. A school will preferably choose this entrance in a person-oriented approach if prioritised in the urgency step. A school can work with a specific set of virtues, for example, responsibility, respect, and reliability. The second point of entry can be the curriculum: what does the

school want to convey, and how much worldview should the content include? There are schools in disadvantaged situations that focus strongly on basic skills. Other schools, in more favourable circumstances, stress the use of Christian-designed methods. The third input can be a specific didactic approach. In this case, the school chooses a concept, sometimes an existing one, that is integrated into the Christian school. For example, there are Christian schools that consider development-oriented education, based on Vygotsky's philosophy, compatible with their Christian principles. The fourth point of entry is the teacher. School boards can defend their position by claiming that the teachers' high level of knowledge determines the quality of education and the Christian character of the school. In this case, they will invest heavily in professionalisation.

5.3 *What Is the Population?*

One of the decisive factors in the context in which the school operates is demographic development. What students does the school serve or want to serve? After all, goals differ by age and target group in primary education, and in higher education, they vary by subject area – types of professions and types of academic disciplines. The population may be prosperous but may also be marked by poverty. In a wealthy environment, it may be possible to start one's own school, whereas in other environments, one is dependent on government funds or charities. Cultural characteristics are closely related to the population. The language levels with which children enter school are usually strongly correlated with the educational levels of their parents. The question is which need is observed in the population. For example, a school in a prosperous metropolitan area may observe that many children feel lonely and may consequently decide to focus on strong contact with their parents. A school in a large Asian city's slum area can also focus on parent contacts but mainly to provide extra training for parents.

5.4 *What Are the Possibilities and Limitations of the Law?*

The legislation of a country limits or opens possibilities. In many countries there is a state curriculum, making it impossible to teach religion in state-funded schools. However, this does not prevent some Christian communities from establishing a school, organising prayer meetings at teachers' homes, and teaching religious education to families. As mentioned above, some countries have ample freedom in setting up schools, organising education, and shaping the curriculum. Legislation may impose qualification requirements on staff or requirements relating to the minimum number of students. However, schools must sometimes also consider the demands regarding content, such as attention to the prescribed democratic core values in citizenship education.

5.5 *How Does One Use the Potential of One's Tradition?*

When shaping Christian education, one cannot disregard the historically developed context. The community in which the target group is situated has its own tradition, with its own leaders and role models who have made the community flourish. Traditions have their own potential, sometimes limiting choices, at other times opening possibilities. The school must take these into account because the target groups (parents and students) must feel safe at school. At the same time, a tradition offers sources to re-evaluate current school practices. When the school was founded, careful thought was given to its name. As a result, schools often have meaningful names. A connection between the name and the educational content, or the school culture, is a good entry point if possible. In this way, Augustine College could be inspired by the writings of Augustine, and the Timothy School could measure itself against what Paul says to Timothy in his pastoral letters when re-evaluating its tradition. A Rehoboth school can thematise receiving God-given space for the school culture (Gen. 26:22).

5.6 *To Which Cultural Issues will the School Respond?*

This brings us to cultural criticism. Besides internal cultural criticism (critical reflection on one's own Christian community), a culture-critical view is a basic competence of the Christian community. Whereas at the beginning of the twentieth century, Christian education had to relate to the emerging reform pedagogy (see Bavinck, 1928, p. 123), and since the turn of the century, to the dominance of constructivism, there are other dominant movements in which one now has to choose a position. First, one can think of the major influence of performative thinking leading to strong efficiency and performance drive (Biesta, 2010b). Second, the rapid advance of information technology and AI greatly increases the number of didactic tools available and necessitates a reassessment of the role of the teacher (see Chapter 8). Third, there are many international developments: populism and nationalism are on the rise, and there is a great need to make students politically aware and resilient. Finally, one can think of the strong secularisation of the whole of society, which makes the way of perceiving things in the dominant culture naturalistic, positivistic, and anti-metaphysical.

5.7 *What Is the Right Balance between the Stake-Holding Institutions?*

The ideal of the Christian school can be envisaged as an institution between the church, family, and government. The government's interests must in some way be balanced with those of Christian families and church communities (Exalto, 2012, pp. 173–187). The Christian school has to deal with the three

stakeholders in every context. Education aims to form students into good citizens (the interest of the state), prepares them for responsibility in the private sphere (the interest of the family), and invites them to become faithful believers (the interest of the church). The school's role is not to be a neutral institution that objectively allows the student to take up an autonomous position but to take into account values originating from family socialisation and educational ideals in the religious sphere.

6 Conclusion

We have argued in this last chapter that Christian schools can identify, articulate and revitalise their mission. In this, they respond to their collectively felt challenge to guide. We have conceptually clarified the mission by relating it to different expressions of a school identity. In three stages, we offered arguments that can be useful in the process of revitalisation. First, we identified four approaches revealing claims about theological issues, pedagogical convictions, and the cultural position of the school. Second, we explained how the process of revitalising the mission could work. Third, we presented a seven-step model that can be followed to make new decisions about the mission. Summarising what we have developed in our chapter, the revitalised mission can be described as the ideal of a school through which – given the context and the interests of children and young people at stake – it adopts a realistic but hopeful position amid the family, church, and society. Finding a revitalised mission is difficult because various interests need to be pursued simultaneously. One has to determine one's position in the existing culture, strive for balance in one's own community, and at the same time, anticipate the interests of young people and what they will need in the future. The dynamics of revitalisation cannot always be harmonious but can include abrasive moments due to differences in opinions and power. The awareness that educators should not reproduce the failures of the current generation into the next (Psalm 78 as broadly discussed in the first chapter), can easily cause tension. We have stressed that leadership is required to make a difference. After all, teachers have diverse professional preferences. Even if the connection with the mission is broadly the same, the teacher's actions are not automatically connected to it and are often inconsistent. Interests can also diverge. Nonetheless, these differences are precisely the entry points for a hopeful revitalisation.

Epilogue

Our hope is that the philosophy of education presented here will help teachers to form a courageous vision on teaching, enabling new generations of pupils and students to put their trust in God (Ps. 78:7). That is why we have inserted the word *courage* in the title. That we call it a *Christian* philosophy of education is based on the conviction that the Christian faith has something meaningful to add to courageous professionals. Consequently, our book contains many concepts that are directly derived from Holy Scripture, such as 'hope', 'image of God', and 'hospitality'. This does not mean that our philosophy of education simply relies on Bible passages. Writing this book has been a hermeneutical enterprise, a continuous search for the essence of biblical notions for Christian teaching and learning today, in our personal and global context. We have placed the relationship between faith and teaching in a theoretical framework. While we have strived to present a coherent whole – one of the features of a philosophy of education –, our primary goal was not to formulate a neatly rounded theory. By clarifying theoretical concepts and explaining its meaning and background, we wish to serve the educational practice. In doing so, we have emphasised that it is the responsibility of all those involved in Christian education to critically reflect on current practice through the lens of the broad pedagogical tradition, and more specifically: the Christian pedagogical tradition. Here, the personal faith and beliefs of educators are at stake: how do they incorporate their self-understanding, their job perception and, most of all, their calling to be a teacher into their reflections on their practice?

In this epilogue, we wish to address briefly two specific challenges facing teachers today. The first is about the person of the teachers themselves. It takes courage to be a teacher, because teachers teach in who they are (Parker Palmer). That is why they need to know the inner landscape of their own soul, their beliefs and ideals. We have therefore emphasised the formation of teachers as persons and of their Personal Professional Theory. This may feel like a heavy burden to place on teachers, as if they themselves are capable of precisely defining what teaching should look like in practice, and how they should embody an ideal of teaching in order to be an identification figure for their students. The opposite is true. The message from Psalm 78 that students do not have to be like us is liberating. Teachers are guides; they point to God, who is full of grace and salvation, and to the world, which is in His hands. The Christological commitment in Ephesians 6:4 ('Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord') gives even deeper meaning to the fact that teachers need not expect this of themselves. Understood in this way, courageously

taking up the challenge is a joyful enterprise: not to paint an ideal picture of themselves, but as people who are eager to serve God and their students, acknowledging that they do their work through trial and error.

There is, however, also the teachers' external landscape, namely the context they work in. This presents another challenge. Based on their ideals and beliefs, they relate to different stakeholders in education. In many situations today the pedagogical professionalism of teachers is being questioned. How to be a guide with respect to the high demands of society regarding e.g. sexual and citizenship formation? And how to handle the great differences between students: emotional, social, cognitive, and so on? On top of this – as we mentioned in the introduction – there is also the overwhelming presence of AI, which can make teachers feel redundant. We wrote this philosophy of education because we are convinced that teaching matters, even in our contemporary world. In a highly sophisticated society with increasing demands, students need reliable guides. In the opening verses of Romans 12, the apostle Paul exhorts Christians to offer their bodies as a sacrifice acceptable to God (verse 1). Applied to teaching, this means the Christian life can be put into practice in the classroom. 'Renewal of the mind' (verse 2) is not primarily evident from a beautifully formulated vision, but from actions, from what happens in contact with the students. It demonstrates that careful reasoning is involved. Discernment is the key. Christian teachers have a call to see the unique and rich meaning of Christ amid the schemes, the challenges and the temptations of our world. He is not only the Guide, but the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). That, most of all, may give teachers the courage to guide.

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The Courage to Guide

A Christian Philosophy of Education

Bram de Muynck and Bram Kunz

The central idea of this Christian educational philosophy is that teachers are guides. The authors use this metaphor to express that teachers play a crucial role in an era dominated by artificial intelligence and meritocracy. The book addresses the main topics of an educational discourse, such as the role of the teacher, the view on learning individuals, and the nature of knowledge. Besides this, attention is paid to the relationship between pedagogy and theology, the contributions that teachers make to a vital school culture, and how a school can revitalise its Christian identity.

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