

## Fishing for the Main Game

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I recall vividly the day I caught a beautiful 1.8kg rainbow trout. I have the above photograph to prove it. It was just after dawn on a mild fall morning on Lake Tarawera near Rotorua in New Zealand. But the fish almost got away!

You see, I was down on the little jetty that protrudes over the lake just by the holiday house my wife and I were renting. I had gone down to the lake with my fishing rod, a book, and an old plastic chair to sit on. I put the book down on the jetty, set up my rod in the early morning light, cast out onto the lake (I had to cast two or three times because I'm not very good at it) and then sat down. I still hadn't had time to pick up my devotional book when the rod started to quiver. A fish was on the end! Unfortunately, I jumped up so quickly that a leg of the chair bumped into the book and knocked Tom Wright (the book) into the water!

What was I to do? I had a fish on the line. It was the sole testimony to my fishing prowess thus far in our stay here. My manhood was at stake. Yet Tom Wright was in the water! If I was to retrieve the book, I would have to take my attention off the rod and scoop up the book now with the fishing net before it drifted out of reach or got so sodden that it sank. But I needed the fishing net to scoop up the fish if and when I brought it in to shore. What should I do? What was the main game? As you can tell, I focussed on the fish (sorry Tom Wright!).

In an address to a group of Christian school educators, my friend Rod Thompson asked the same question that faced me on the jetty: What is the main game? Rod was making the point that in his research on Christian schools, the predominant reflection of graduating students about the impact of their years at a Christian school was that “The teachers really cared for me as a person”. Whilst this is a laudable and expected outcome, does it reflect our main game? After all, I can think of many non-Christian schools where graduates would testify to the same positive interrelationships.

Our graduates are the living report cards of Christian schools. Despite the goals that we might express in vision statements or educational creeds, the real main game of our schools is that which is reflected by and lived out in the lives of our students. And if cosy affirming relationships (not wrong in themselves of course) turn out to be the actual as opposed to the expressed main game of Christian schooling, then, to mix my metaphors, we have missed the boat.

In Luke 10:27, Jesus repeats God’s command from Deuteronomy 6 to tell us what is the main game: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.” This love is not a wishy-washy, bubble-and-froth feeling. It is a deliberate choice which acts on and reflects the love that God in Christ has for us. It is all-consuming. As Paul reminds us in Philippians 1: 9-11, this love abounds in knowledge and depth of insight; living and thinking in this love enable us to discern what is best; living out this love is the fruit of righteousness in our lives to the glory and praise of God.

Christian schools, at least in part, are about training the mind to think and live (the biblical concept of knowing) with Christ at the centre. From the basis of a biblically informed worldview, our students should be being challenged by how we as Christian educators live, and by the teaching and learning that we do with them, to understand, articulate and live the lordship of Christ over all aspects of learning.

So, if this is loving God with everything really is what we want to be the main game for the Christian school, how is it that our living report cards do not see it this way? The answer I fear, is that we as Christian educators, Christian school board members, and Christian parents, have been deluded into taking our eyes off the real main game and substituted something else in its place. Instead, apart from reflecting upon warm relationships, our students by their perspectives, aspirations, values and lifestyles, demonstrate that most of what we do encourages a timid, socially acceptable submission to the slavery of the idolatrous economic rationalism of our age. We are hard working, dedicated and well intentioned – but deluded. We are fighting little skirmishes while the main game goes on at the other end of the field.

Rod Thompson told the educators he was addressing that when as principals we do not give the highest priority in time and resources to helping our teachers through biblically authentic professional development to increase their understanding of what it means to teach Christianly, we are missing the main game. We might add some other examples:

- When as teachers we teach as if the goal of our schools is to help students achieve high marks in examinations, we are missing the main game.
- When as board members the financing of a new building programme or consideration of a new public relations initiative takes up more time in a board meeting than does articulating and nurturing our distinctive vision, we are missing the main game.

- When as parents our involvement in school association meetings is greatest when we are discussing uniforms or school fees or the image of the school in the community, we are missing the main game.

Nick Wolterstorff (2002, p. 170) was not overstating the radical and culturally offensive nature of the Christian school when he said that our schools should be training grounds for dissent and reform in the name of Christ. Challenging students with the celebration of the Lordship of Christ over all of creation really does mean that we adults in Christian schools think and live differently about vocation, about history, about literature, about discipline, about science, about school policies, organization and leadership - and then that we nurture these radical, God-honouring and culture-renouncing perspectives in our students.

I pray longingly for the day when the overwhelming testimony of graduates from Christian schools is that we have helped them to look at the world and careers through God's eyes, and that we have equipped them to be God's radical (really radical) agents of change and shalom rather than uncertain private followers of Jesus who have no real answer for the faith that lies within them. This is the main game! What are we doing about it?

Wolterstorff, N. (2002). *Educating for life: Reflections on Christian teaching and learning*. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, IL