

Is It Really Worth It?

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IS IT REALLY WORTH IT?

CONSIDERING EVERYTHING, IS CHRISTIAN EDUCATION WORTH IT?

One morning in 2014, I went to a teacher in-service that changed the way I view Christian education. Educator Doug Monsma led the in-service around the new Teaching for Transformation framework. Professional development around the idea sounded interesting, but my expectations were low, as it can be difficult for teachers to think beyond classroom preparations and the upcoming open house in August.

However, during the in-service Monsma recalled a conversation he had as a teacher, in which one of his student's parents explained the sacrifices they endured to send their child to a Christian school. The parent told Monsma how they got up every morning at 4 a.m. to do a paper route and later go to their other job to send their child to that school. At the end of the talk, the parent looked Monsma in the eye, shook his finger, and said, "It better be worth it."

"It better be worth it." That statement follows me to this day and has transformed the way I see Christian education and the *privilege* that I get to make it all "worth it" for my students, families, and the world.

But what does "worth it" mean? Does it mean that Christian schools raise a generation of students that hold the same political beliefs or ideologies? Does it mean that Christian schools protect students from difficult or controversial topics? Does it mean that Christian schools grow academic scholars who enter high profile, high influence, and high-paying jobs? Does it mean that Christian schools compete at a high level

in high school sports and win multiple championships?

If that is the goal of Christian education, I don't think any of these reasons are "worth it."



WHAT DOES "WORTH IT" MEAN?

According to a recent "New York Times" article, Christian schools around the country have seen an enrollment increase of 12%. Parents are *choosing to invest* in Christian education because of various reasons, including small class sizes, in-person classes, ideologies, and curriculum transparency. Christian schools have been presented this wonderful opportunity to show the value around the investment of Christian education, and while some enrollment decisions may change, I hope students stay and these families say that it is "worth it" because of the testimonies that are formed.

God is calling a generation to be world changers—to be *peculiar* people—who will see the *good creation* and the way that sin has distorted God's original design but will not stop there.

That day at the in-service, Monsma challenged the teachers to be peculiar and to form peculiar people and students in their classrooms.

Christian education is a formational experience. It is stated in most Christian

schools' mission statements to offer a Christ-centered education, a high standard for academic rigor, and a response to do kingdom work.

Christian schoolteachers and parents, let's fulfill those missions!

We get the opportunity to tell the story of God and invite students to see their role in the grand narrative. We have the privilege to immerse students into this good story and to shape their thoughts and actions. God is calling a generation to be world changers—to be *peculiar* people—who will see the *good creation* and the way that sin has distorted God's original design but will not stop there. God desires that his people work to *restore* and form culture.

Christian schools, we need to do this. We need to immerse our students into a biblical worldview that cannot be separated. Theologian Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence

over which Christ, who is sovereign overall, does not cry, 'Mine!'" This means God is sovereign over all subjects, and the teaching pedagogy should inspire wonder and curiosity for God's world.

It is good work to purposefully plan a curriculum through the lens of the grand

narrative, and to spend time creating opportunities in the curriculum to fulfill a true need in the world, which is real work for real people.

In his book *Beyond Biblical Integration*, Erdvig relates Christian

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education claiming to build disciples to a story of a trade school claiming to produce master electricians. The trade school didn't offer any fieldwork, only paper tests around the ideas of electrician work. Would you hire them? Most likely not. Doing the work is a valuable piece of learning how to be an electrician. It is the same for future disciples of Christ. If Christian schools are claiming that they are equipping students for Kingdom work, making disciples of the world, or that they are shaping worldviews, students need the opportunity to practice and contribute to developing Christian culture by doing real work for real people. God is sovereign over all things, every square inch, and we get the opportunity to raise up a generation that will work for restoration.

All this means is that Christian schools are holding high standards for academic rigor and developing students to use their gifts to glorify God. Christian schools must be mindful of the competing worldviews while standing firm when preparing students to do kingdom work wherever God calls them.

There are many reasons that a person may choose Christian education, but I hope that the measurement for whether it was "worth it" is seeing peculiar people that are being transformed in these peculiar schools to glorify God *wherever* they are called.

Christian educators, let's heed the challenge of making Christian education worth it. Let's invest in prioritizing peculiar, Kingdom workers that desire to serve others and work toward restoration.

SHEILA (ENGELTJES, '10) MULDER,
INSTRUCTOR OF EDUCATION



Dr. Kathleen VanTol has over 35 years of experience in education and currently serves on the task force for Iowa's Special Education Guidance System.

DORDT ADDS MASTER IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Dordt University Graduate Studies Department is now accepting applications for the new Master of Special Education (M.SPED) program.

"Dordt's Master of Special Education will prepare you to teach students with special needs across a range of settings and ages," says Dr. Kathleen VanTol, professor of education. "Students with disabilities need teachers who both care about them and have the tools and techniques to help them be successful. In this cross-categorical program, teachers will learn those research-based practices which will enable them to support students who have a variety of learning and behavioral challenges."

The 30-credit program is entirely online and can be completed in as little as two years. Students also have the opportunity to take courses in Applied Behavior Analysis to qualify for the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) exam.

"This new program allows teachers to build on their existing strengths and prepare for their future professional needs such as instructional strategy,

behavior analysis, assessment, and interventions," says Dr. Steve Holtrop, professor of education and director of graduate studies.

The M.SPED program will partner with Dordt's Thrive Center, a teaching center providing areas of behavior therapy and skills acquisition for children. The center

employs therapies based on the principles of applied behavior analysis, collaborating with schools, families, and agencies to achieve the best outcome for each client.

"Dordt's strengths in special education combined with opportunities in the Thrive Center, help teachers boost the caring, competence, and confidence needed to help all students thrive," says Holtrop. "This is a

great opportunity for educators to hear God saying, 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,' as is said in Matthew 25:40.

BETHANY VAN VOORST



LEARN MORE

To learn more about the Master of Special Education, visit dordt.edu/msped.

