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Is Christian Education "Worth It"?

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Abstract

"God desires that His people work to *restore* and form culture."

Posting about the value of Christian education from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/is-christian-education-worth-it/>

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Is Christian Education 'Worth It'?

Sheila Mulder

August 1, 2022

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

However, during the in-service Doug 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 Doug how they got up every morning at 4 am 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 Doug 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 and controversial topics? Does it mean that Christian schools raise a generation of academic scholars that rank higher than other schools in the area and proceed to 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%.¹ Parents are *choosing to invest* in Christian education because of various reasons, including small class sizes, in-person classes, ideologies, and curriculum transparency.² 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.

That day at the in-service, Doug Monsma challenged the teachers to be peculiar, and to form peculiar people and students in their classrooms. To quote James K.A. Smith, “The primary goal of Christian education is the formation of a peculiar people—a people who desire the kingdom of God and thus undertake their life’s expression of that desire.”³

Christian education is a formational experience. It is stated in most Christian schools’ missions to offer a Christ-centered education, a high standard for academic rigor, and a response to do kingdom work.

Christian school teachers 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 separated⁴. 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 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.⁵ 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 and let’s invest in prioritizing peculiar, kingdom workers that desire to serve others and work towards restoration.

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4. Erdvig, R. C. S. (2020). *Beyond biblical integration: Immersing you and your students in a biblical worldview*. Summit Ministries
5. Nicholas Wolterstorff