Out of its best motives, the Christian day school movement was born from the deep conviction by parents that God’s truth be recognized in every subject and every aspect of learning. Knowing that a teacher’s worldview has a powerful and undeniable impact on students’ worldviews, public schooling was not acceptable to these parents because of concerns over what core values/worldview would be promoted. In a public school setting, where all worldviews sit on an equal platform, the highest aspirations for student outcomes often gravitate toward individual economic success and becoming a good citizen.

By contrast, while Christian education also works toward these goals, it does so within the context of nurturing students to love God and serve their neighbors in Christ’s name. Christian schools seek to unfold the wonder of God’s creation, teach students wisdom according to biblical principles, and help students begin to practice for their life work of service/worship.

The Central Problem

In their book, *Education for Human Flourishing: A Christian Perspective*, Spears and Loomis express concerns about the current educational emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge/technical prowess versus the pursuit of truth/virtue in the classroom setting.
Are we educating for excellence and flourishing, or primarily to have students possess certain skills and pass high-stakes tests? As Christian educators, we might well agree that our work should transcend state/national standards. We are educating with an eye toward the student’s work/vocation and an understanding that our work is our acceptable sacrifice to God, not simply directed toward success and employment. Historically then, how have we ended up with our current state of education today? The authors believe that the concerns can be summed up in two words—a lack of wisdom and theology:

“Wisdom pursues how knowledge, within a discipline, is coherent, and recognizes how the seemingly discrete pieces of knowledge within a discipline fit together as a unified whole…the study of theology is a unique pursuit of wisdom because it is a study of God – the one who created and makes coherent all the universe.” Quoting Aquinas: “…we should pursue theology because we love God and want to better understand what he has revealed about himself.” Spears and Loomis point out that the loss of theology as pre-eminent in the Enlightenment Era led to the loss of the connectedness in the disciplines. This factor in turn led to empirical science being seen as superior to Christian revelation. (Earlier in the book the authors point out that both rationality and revelation are needed in Christian education.) They are concerned that in American education we are increasingly being drawn into a homogenous, technical, information-narrowing educational process as contrasted with Jesus’ emphasis on the personal and connected model of teaching people.
Given the current information economy, they believe that “schools no longer have the capacity to act as a trustworthy guide in the development of moral dispositions and actions.” If we seek to maximize human flourishing in a holistic manner, there must be space in the educational process for “creativity, complexity, diversity, richness, and multicultural understandings” that lead to human growth and flourishing.

Deeper (or Deepest) Learning as an Answer

I call this approach *educating children for flourishing* with a mind to *wonder, wisdom, and work*—discovering God’s wonderful creation and our appropriate response of awe, worship, and stewardship, seeking to live wisely and with discernment as demonstrated through the counter-cultural life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and our response of all work, and service to neighbor, being offered back to God as a sacrifice of most excellent praise and worship.

Is what we are seeking today personalized learning? No; it is not ultimately about the person and individual learning, it is about God on the throne. Deeper (or Deepest) Learning in this sense is a much better description of what we desire for students. We seek to find the congruence between seeing Christ as the Tree of Life in whom all knowledge and wisdom comes together or coheres, and the very best ways of honoring students as image-bearers in our teaching and learning. Many of the traditional practices adopted by Christian schools fall short in engagement and promoting the God-given joyfulness of learning, in helping to show the connectedness in creation, in allowing for meaningful service, and in helping students flourish according to their God-given gifts and wiring. We seek a better way and we
believe that Deeper Learning practices take us closer to our aspirations for further congruence between philosophy/theology and practice.

**How to Learn More**

For the remainder of this post, I will lay out a number of different resources available to learn more about Deeper Learning.

**Events**

- At the upcoming Global Christian School Leadership Summit, I will be leading a panel on Deeper Learning in the Christian School—I invite you to attend. If you are unfamiliar with the term Christian Deeper Learning, I would like to take this opportunity to help you understand more about what is meant by the term, where it comes from, who is doing Deeper Learning, and invite you to consider further implications.

- Our first Christian Deeper Learning conference was held last year; “It was the best of times! When you bring together 150+ creative, energetic, and passionate Christian educators from across North America and they discover their shared interests, powerful learning and excitement results!”

- Our next Christian Deeper Learning conference will be March 6-8 at Legacy Christian School in Frisco, Texas. Check [our website](#) for pre-conference and conference information.

**Suggested Readings**

- *Why PBL? (Project-Based Learning)* – “I have argued that not only is this type of learning “stickier” but also better reflects our belief as Christian educators that learning should reflect the coherence Christ brings to this world, and it allows students as image-bearers to
identify and practice gifts and habits of service. I believe it moves us toward the goal of helping students to flourish in their lives.”

- **Exciting Developments** – “…we are living in just such a time where connections and congruence between our deepest spiritual convictions and our professional practice are increasingly possible!”

- **A Book Review** of *Redefining Smart: Awakening Students’ Power to Reimagine Their World* (Corwin, 2016) – a very helpful book connecting engagement, brain research, and reasons for the major educational shifts we are experiencing in education.

- **Deeper Learning Developing Across Canadian Christian Schools** – “One of the most compelling and celebrative aspects of the day was to look together at the student projects, work products, and artifacts that were taken along for sharing by the participants.”

- **True Service Learning** – a book review of *Bring It To Life: Christian Education and the Transformative Power of Service Learning* by Swaner and Erdvig. “Ultimately, service-learning can help students to grow in their identity in Christ, and in their ability to be His agents of restoration in a broken world. They can learn about how they are uniquely created for good works (Ephesians 2:10) and can gain practical experience in walking in those works, with Christian school teachers as helpful mentors and guides.”

- **What Do We Mean by Christian Deeper Learning? A Draft Document for Your Consideration** – via two separate blog posts; the first part of the document can be found here and the second part here. The full document can also be accessed here.
Blog Posts by Steven Levy, CACE Fellow
I also recommend posts written by CACE Fellow Steven Levy to gain a closer feel for how Deeper Learning plays out in the classroom setting:
• Honoring the Treasures They Bring
• Looking Under the Label: A Journey in Deeper Thinking
• Real Work for a Real Audience
• Why Teach Math?
• Opportunity Costs of the Common Core, or Any System of High Stakes Test Accountability
• Where Do the Subjects Come From?
• Are Your Students Crew or Passengers?
• Deeper Understanding Through Art: The “Word” in “Flesh”
• Celebrate Learning!

Reference:

[Editor’s Note: This post is co-published by the ACSI blog and the CACE blog, in an effort to bring innovative and relevant thinking in Christian education to our respective readerships.]

About the Author

Dan Beerens is an educational consultant, author, international speaker, and educational leader. Before starting DB Consulting in May 2010, he served as vice
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