EDUCATION FOR WISDOM

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A Philosophy of Education for the Melos Group of Schools

Executive Summary

At the request of the Executive Principal, Phillip Nash, I have written a philosophy of education for the Melos Group of Schools (GoS). This philosophy is intended to provide and promote a common understanding amongst the Group as to the nature, goals, and methods of Christian education. This understanding is necessary because the Melos foundation does not seek to tightly control the culture and operations of its member schools. Rather, it seeks to support and nurture each school to achieve its unique mission, vision, and organisational goals according to the strategies and settings appropriate to each school. The danger in this approach is that the Melos group will *only* be united by its common governance structure, rather than *also* by its shared understanding of Christian education. For this reason, the group requires a clearly articulated educational philosophy that: (a) is read by (at least) the senior leaders of each school, (b) forms the basis of ongoing conversations and professional development and so, (c) guides educational decision making in each member school. In this way the group will be united educationally, while retaining diversity in expressing its shared educational philosophy.

Overview

Education for Wisdom seeks to integrate relevant philosophical, theological, and educational understandings of Christian education and to situate these within, and in response to, the overarching missional context of the Group. The philosophy centres on the idea of *wisdom* as both the key organising construct and the key output from Christian education. Wisdom is critical to the welfare and wellbeing of students both now and in their future lives. Moreover, the getting of wisdom is mandated biblically and theologically. As such, wisdom should be bought to bear across the whole curriculum – with both natural and supernatural (revealed) theology making mutually supportive contributions to the content of the curriculum. Under this approach, students are presented not only with an integrated curriculum, but with an integrated view of the world.

Wisdom as the Focus of the Philosophy

Wisdom is an appropriate focus for the philosophy theologically, educationally, and politically. Theologically, wisdom is a key Biblical theme, including in the New Testament where Christ is designated as the Wisdom of God. Educationally, wisdom prepares students for life by enabling students to make choices that lead to a full rather than an empty life. For this reason (if no other), teachers, parents and (maybe with some reluctance on occasions) students can agree politically that the getting of wisdom is a good thing. Moreover, one need not be Christian to recognise that Christian wisdom makes a positive contribution to living a safe, productive, and emotionally/relationally stable life.

Knowledge, Understanding and Wisdom

Wisdom requires but is not limited to knowledge and understanding. *Education for Wisdom* shows the relationship between knowledge, understanding and wisdom based on five axioms of Christian education:

1. Knowledge is revealed truth.
2. Understanding is insight into knowledge.
3. Wisdom is the correct application of knowledge and understanding.
4. The purpose of all education is "the getting of wisdom".
5. The distinctive of Christian education is that, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, Christians have special access to *all* the treasures of wisdom, understanding and knowledge. Hence, Christian education is in a privileged position with respect to the getting of wisdom.

These axioms lead on to a theory of learning which asserts that the accumulation of knowledge and the development of understanding are, by themselves, not enough to constitute learning. Learning (framed as the development of wisdom) properly occurs when the individual or group applies its knowledge and understanding in the pursuit of some intended good effect. i.e., in the pursuit of truth, beauty and/or goodness. In each of these activities learning is scaffolded by language. In this sense, learning occurs *through* language. However, learning does not occur as the result of exposure to language alone. Rather, students learn as they engage in observation (thus developing knowledge), investigation (thus developing understanding) and application (thus developing wisdom); supported by teachers who use language to explicate observations, explain the results of investigations and evaluate the applications of investigations. These processes are represented in the Model of Learning and Teaching (MLT) presented in the paper (and reproduced below).

Model of Learning and Teaching

	Knowledge	**Understanding**	**Wisdom**
Students	Observation	Investigation	Application
Teachers	Explication	Explanation	Evaluation

The MLT implies that knowledge, understanding and (ultimately) wisdom are acquired and developed when students are actively engaged learning, and when teachers linguistically (and thus conceptually) deepen and extend active learning.

Conclusion

The formation of the Melos GoS is, to some extent, motivated by pragmatic reasons i.e., it is expedient for schools to work together for legal reasons, for the development of shared knowledge, and to enhance collective bargaining power when dealing with government. However, the Melos GoS does not wish to be defined by these pragmatic imperatives alone. Rather, the group would also like to be defined by a shared philosophy of education that guides the educational activities of the group as a whole. It is hoped that *Education for Wisdom* provides a philosophy that is 'tight' enough such that schools in the group are united and characterised by a common understanding and approach to Christian education, but 'loose' enough such that each school is able to pursue its own unique vision and mission in its own context.