

Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development

Volume 4
Number 4 *Service Learning as Student Affairs
Practice*

Article 8

2004

Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning

Tony Marchese
Messiah College

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Marchese, Tony (2004) "Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning," *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*. Vol. 4 : No. 4 , Article 8.
Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth/vol4/iss4/8

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Association of Christians in Student Development at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.

Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning.

Wolterstorff, N.P. (2002). Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Reviewed by Tony Marchese

Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning is a superb collection of the speeches of master teacher and scholar Nicholas Wolterstorff. With a professional career spanning over four decades, Wolterstorff has consistently generated national acclaim as a capable critic of the American educational enterprise. Readers are invited to explore the evolution of Wolterstorff's taxonomy of American Christian education. This unique collection of speeches is carefully assembled chronologically within its four sections providing a rare opportunity to witness the developing perspectives of a scholar without the timely exercise of independently searching for these pivotal works. In virtually every speech, Wolterstorff displays a lucid argumentative method that is delicately seasoned with anecdotal precision and exudes a keen contextual awareness that is reflected in his appropriate choice of idiom. He seems to steer away from language that could be deemed inappropriate or loquacious.

Wolterstorff demonstrates the same zeal for the exigency of American Christian Education as Arthur Holmes yet expands his views to encompass secondary and higher education in his exposition as well as narrowly defining his perspective by always speaking from a Reformed position. His theological exclusivity could serve as a sectarian bulwark for some readers who may be unfamiliar with or in disagreement with Reformed theology. The reader should be encouraged, though to explore his rich commentary deeply immersed in decades of teaching experience and an unapologetic commitment to the preeminence of Christ both in word and deed to institutional vitality and longevity.

Only a quick glance through *Educating for Life* is necessary for the reader to ascertain that this text boasts only of an implicit affinity to Student Affairs. Furthermore, it would be safe to conclude that nearly two-thirds of his speeches contained in the text reference "Christian Day Schools" rather than the Academy. For the professional ardently searching for a quick fix to strengthen his/her department, it might be helpful to look elsewhere. This text does not offer a collection of practical tools to increase student involvement in co-curricular initiatives or introduce readers to contemporary triangular research designs for program assessment. An evaluation of those concepts implicitly relevant to Student Affairs is in order.

Wolterstorff speaks of the need for schools to embrace the value of learning outside of the classroom. In a 1966 speech entitled "Curriculum" he writes, "School education

Tony Marchese is a Residence Education Coordinator at Messiah College and is pursuing a Ph.D in Organizational Leadership at Regent University.

must be of worth and significance to students in their lives outside the school as well as inside. The needs it answers to must not be needs confined simply to the students' hours in school. There must be a carryover, from life in the classroom to life outside the classroom. The school must inculcate those excellencies that are of worth for life outside the school as well as inside...The school acts irresponsibly when the excellencies it strives to inculcate are limited in relevance to the classroom" (Wolterstorff, 2002). In this excerpt, Wolterstorff issues a call to educators to include out-of-class experiences within their pedagogical matrix. While he does not refer to Student Affairs specifically, we must remember that he is addressing an academic audience of the 1960's during which time the popularity of pizza parties and ice cream socials was prominent in a newly evolving profession. There are two considerations that can be made here. First, faculty should strive for relevancy by continuously pointing students in the direction of the out-of-class application of their discipline. This can be accomplished without subscribing to a harmful form of pragmatism. Secondly, he inadvertently welcomes co-curricular educators to the academic community by creating a space wherein they can aid in the integrative process of extending and applying education beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Historically, evangelical Christian Colleges do not have a strong record of facilitating conflict and exposing students to the beneficial nature of controversy. Wolterstorff challenges educators to refuse to acquiesce to the stifling demands of those who would choose to restrict student exposure to certain cultural masterpieces because of their alleged secularity. In his reference to the disagreement over the merits of a piece of controversial literature, he writes, "Do we, as God's children, look it square in the face? Or do we avert our gaze? How do we keep ourselves pure? By living only in pure surroundings? Or by, God's help, warding off the impurities in our impure world...For where are those pure surroundings? Is it not the case that the things in this world that look pure to me look so because I am looking for only certain kinds of impurity? Of course immaturity is a factor here. But only if one looks toward God can one avert one's gaze from evil. One has no choice, if one is to live in this world, but to look evil in the face since it is all about" (Wolterstorff, 2002). Wolterstorff concludes this section by urging readers to work through controversial issues rather than pretending that they do not exist. Wolterstorff, here, was alluding to conflict over whether or not it was appropriate for a Christian school to include humanistic works in the curriculum. He suggests that although some aspects might be objectionable to some, if aesthetic value exists, it should not be quickly ignored. This line of reasoning has many implications for Student Affairs programming. Many Christian schools will not allow cable television in their residence halls due to the decadence that worldly programming promotes. Additionally, attendance at the local theater can be deemed an activity of ill repute. To refuse to enter the debate and utilize its educational opportunities is to be professionally irresponsible. He does not espouse an either/or-secular/sacred dichotomization within the college. He suggests that it is harmful to do so.

Wolterstorff addresses the popular perception that for some reason, many teachers perpetuate the impression that they are not human. This can complicate the learning process. Rather, he would suggest that the best teaching is authentic teaching. He instructs professionals this way. "Do not in the presence of students act as if you were a teaching machine. Instead, reveal that you too are on the journey of Christian

existence- sometimes successful, sometimes not, sometimes confident, sometimes doubting, sometimes joyful, sometimes discouraged. Do not try to transubstantiate yourself into something other than what you are nor conceal the fact that you have not been transubstantiated. Authentic Christian teaching is autobiographical teaching” (Wolterstorff, 2002).

For the purposes of this review, it would be helpful to replace the word teaching with leading. Student Affairs personnel more than any other type of educator, have the power to capitalize on the immense potential of authentic leading, primarily due to the out-of class nature of the role. It would be apropos for the co-curricular educator to ask herself, “Do my students see the real me?” Or in response to my insecurities do I construct a shell of a person that puts students at a safe distance?” Wolterstorff invites teachers to welcome students into their own worlds and educate out of authenticity. Co-curricular educators should do the same.

If one is seeking to understand education from a Reformed perspective, *Educating for Life* might serve the reader well. If, however, one is searching for a relevant Student Affairs resource, this text is probably not very applicable. It is well organized and provocative and could prove useful as long as the reader is able to effectively synthesize and apply ideas that are only implicitly related to Student Affairs.