



Opportunity education?

Mark Greene, executive director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, believes education is a vital context for mission and ministry...

Education, education, education,” Tony Blair famously said, firmly asserting his party’s priority for government. It struck a nerve and still does.

Education, after all, is as important to a country’s long-term health and prosperity as “location, location, location” is to house prices. Similarly, most parents recognise just how vital education can be, not only to their children’s present happiness, but to their long-term flourishing.

Furthermore, if you look around an average church community, a high percentage of people are likely to be involved with education in a significant way.

Quite apart from teachers, lecturers, administrators and governors, there are pupils and students; and there are also parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts deeply concerned about the quality of education of those they love. And of course there are youth workers, schools workers, chaplains and church leaders, all of whom are seeking to bring Christ’s love and wisdom into local schools, colleges and universities.

What other context naturally involves so many of us? Indeed, if you are a church leader looking for a mission context where Christians are already emotionally engaged, if you are looking for a mission field where your people are already present or already have natural regular contact, then the chances are that no institution has the potential to involve more of your people than the local school, college or university. And no context has the potential for your whole church community to make more positive connections with people who don’t yet know Jesus.

The vision thing

Of course, supporting Christians in education is not primarily about hassling people to be evangelists, nor about providing pre-packaged, pre-processed, pre-chewed answers to the many challenges they face. Nor is it about exhorting people to be part of prayer groups or action groups. (Though evangelism, thinking biblically, prayer and fellowship are to be encouraged.)

Rather, supporting Christians in education is about giving children, teachers and parents a vision for being mission-inspired disciples in their engagement with education and resourcing and supporting them to live out that vision.

After all, for teachers and pupils, their school or college is one of the primary contexts for their discipleship. It’s the place where the average Christian pupil probably relates daily to more than 60 people, the place where the average teacher may relate daily to as many as 200 and weekly to far more.

For everyone involved, issues, challenges and opportunities abound. For teachers and lecturers, there’s the pressure of more and more targets and constant shifts in teaching methods and curriculum. There’s the discouragement of having less freedom to experiment. And, sadly, there’s also the fear of verbal abuse and

physical violence. But there’s also the joy of seeing discoveries made, seeing lives changed, and being a model of care and thoughtfulness to hundreds of children, parents and colleagues.

For pupils, there’s the pressure of more and more assessments: salvation by works, significance through SAT scores and A stars. But there’s also the joy of learning, of growing in character,

knowledge and skill, and in the ability to live as God’s person in a multi-cultural environment. And there’s the opportunity to learn to think biblically about education in general, and indeed about specific subjects and career choices.

For parents, there’s the increasing sense of anxiety about the whole system and the challenge of choosing schools wisely, as well as the challenge and opportunity of helping children to live the way of Jesus faithfully in the world.



No context outside church naturally involves so many of our people

Practical ideas

It’s with these issues in mind that Trevor Cooling has written *Supporting Christians in Education*. Trevor, a national expert with a wealth of experience in education (see story on p20), sets out helpful theological foundations for thinking about school,

college and university in the context of whole-life discipleship. In addition, he provides a host of practical ideas and links to enable church communities to support teachers, parents and pupils in their discipleship in the education system.

It’s a companion volume to *Supporting Christians at Work*, which I wrote in 2000 to help pastors and churches support workers in general. In this new resource, Trevor has quite rightly avoided repeating the principles and ideas from that book and has focused on helping us understand education in a biblical way, offering a variety of practical ideas to equip and support those engaged in education. Indeed, it’s because these are such vital issues that we at LICC have partnered with Trevor to produce this resource.

Supporting Christians in Education is complemented by the *Transforming Lives Toolkit*, a multi-media resource including film clips, Bible studies and a host of other ideas to help groups explore the vocation of teaching, consider how faith transforms work and think through how to live as a Christian in a multi-cultural educational context.

I hope you’ll find that these resources not only provide you with a framework and practical ideas for engagement in education, but that they stimulate many of your own initiatives so that church communities will indeed make an ever more significant contribution to the transformation of education in the UK.

► *Supporting Christians in Education (£5) and the Transforming Lives Toolkit (£5) are available from LICC. Readers who quote “idea” can buy both for £7 plus P&P: tel 020 7399 9560 or www.licc.org.uk*