

Running Head: Every Situation a Vocational Calling

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Vocation transcends ordinary, mundane, and everyday tasks as Christians interact with the tangible, material, real world. Veith recalls C.S. Lewis' warning that the devil will distract Christians by emphasizing the mundane appearance of ordinary tasks. Christ is hidden in His presence in His Word and Sacraments and "in the hearts of all believers who, though drab and lowly, make up the royal priesthood whom Christ has called and in whom He dwells" (Veith, 2002, p. 122). "And yet this mundane institution is also the Body of Christ" (p. 132).

Veith (2002) and Benne (2003) outline our places of responsibility as fulfilling our vocations in the callings as worker, family member, active citizen, community member, and as a member in the church. As we are called to serve in our various vocations, we serve the Body of Christ. Veith cites St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12-20, 26, 27-30 to further illustrate how our individual gifts and abilities come together for the benefit of loving our neighbors (Veith, 2002). Christians are not called to retreat from the ordinary world into a life of spirituality. Christians are called to be in the world, but not of the world, participating in culture as a whole (Veith, 2002). Serving in these places of responsibility, serves our community and world.

My Calling – Professional Vocation

A sign of our calling are our own interests, in which our hearts are stirred up and we are driven to take part in work as seen in Exodus 36:2 (Veith, 2002). My innate interests to create, build, and lead, have driven me to teach. As an art teacher, I am called to instruct, continue learning, create, engage interests, challenge the thought process, and

facilitate exploration and experimentation. The social issues I will address in relation to my professional vocation as an educator are 1) how teachers can motivate students by engaging students' personal skills and interests and 2) how to develop and sustain teacher leaders in our schools who can motivate students.

Social Issue – Strength-based Education

“Knowledge of strengths and talents often supply the energy and motivation to do the hard work necessary to achieve excellence” (Anderson, 2001). Therefore, educators must help students to identify their strengths and talents so that students may discover their intrinsic motivation. “Students are more likely to be motivated to achieve when their strengths are affirmed,” claims E. Anderson and W. McGuire (1997) in a book on student retention and success (“A Valuable tool for local churches,” 2002). When educators affirm student interests by incorporating interests into lessons or when educators affirm student talents by recognizing natural abilities, it motivates students to continue in the pursuit of their interests.

Greenville College's StrengthsFinder provides a strengths-based focus, which broadens the horizon of what one is capable of doing. This means that these strengths-based skills may not yet be developed. “God often chooses to use and empowers people to serve in areas outside of their giftedness, and even in areas of personal weakness” (“A Valuable tool for local churches,” 2002). The StrengthsFinder could assist in identifying skills that students have a natural aptitude for, but have not yet had the opportunity or encouragement to enact.

Daniel Pink (2009) explains that the idea of management as giving away to an emphasis on self-direction. Pink writes about Chief Investment Officer Jeff Gunther of

Meddus, who implemented a results-only work environment (ROWE). Employees work when, how, and where they want. Gunther says that, “management isn’t about walking around and seeing if people are in their offices. It’s about creating conditions for people to do their best work” (as cited in Pink, 2009, p. 86). The results are what matter. Gunther found that productivity rose, stress declined, and his team accomplished more under ROWE.

Gunther sees his relationship to his employees as a partnership. They must all work together to achieve the goal and the best possible outcomes. Gunther provides a work environment with minimized command and control, while still being available for guidance and support when needed (Pink, 2009). This concept can be applied in our classrooms, families, churches, and place of work.

When we lift up each other’s gifts and abilities then we become motivated to work in those areas. Motivated service is comparable to self-directed learning. You become your own manager as you meet and often exceed expectations. You take ownership of projects in which you have become the leader and expert.

I work to build relationships with students in order to observe “behaviors, thoughts, attitudes, motivations and beliefs that enable the student to be most effective” (Anderson, 2001). If I am aware of what peaks my students’ personal interests or strengths, I can help students relate the content and objectives to their personal learning interests. The ability to draw connections between topics and personal interests to create relevancy, is an important learning tool. It allows for every learning opportunity to become relevant to personal interests and goals. “Students' greatest potential for excellence is found in their strengths and talents” (2001).

Social Issue – Developing & Sustaining Teacher Leaders

In order to prepare teachers who are able to draw upon student talents and interests, and themselves be self-aware of their own strengths, then there must exist support for teacher development. In accordance with 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Veith's reference to 1 Corinthians in terms of vocation, (Veith, 2002), the Wallace Foundations article, *Becoming A Leader* (2008), reports that leadership is not about one person; it is about composing and conducting a leadership team. The body is made from many parts. Although one body, the parts serve different purposes. Within a school, principals should identify individual teacher's areas of strength and share or delegate leadership responsibility (The Wallace Foundation, 2008).

Developing leadership skills and roles for teachers is important because in successful schools, teachers are sharing the leadership responsibilities with the principal. Developing, supporting, and implementing teachers as leaders is difficult because it requires a commitment to protected time for in-service training, implementation, and reflection. Developing effective leaders also requires funded learning experiences and the commitment of mentors or peer coaches. Time commitments and funding are sparse, but are key components in successful collaborations, supported professional development, and protecting the time for teachers to utilize evaluation results in planning curriculum and instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

The amount work allotted to teachers in terms of classroom management, curriculum and assessment development, keeping up with and implementing current practices, lesson planning, and grading is quite heavy enough. Leadership is another area of expertise to add to the full plate. It is difficult to develop effective leadership skills

when time, funding, and mentors are sparse. Supportive administration along with state and district policies and can it possible for teachers to develop as successful leaders in schools and classrooms.

Teachers are to “hold themselves accountable and take responsibility for student learning and well-being. Along with accountability and responsibility comes the need for authority to make instruction and educational management choices and decisions” (Transforming Teaching, 2010, p. 3). However, without professional development, new standards and improved achievement for all students will not occur. Professional development is best implemented when teachers are allowed the “continuous process of individual and collective examination and improvement of practice” (Cortese, Johnson, & Weingarten, 2008, p. 3). Teachers need protected time for formal learning to develop an understanding of theory and application, content knowledge, curriculum, and assessment (2008).

Teachers must create and maintain a safe and orderly learning environment, have a deep and broad knowledge of subject matter and also master how to teach the content and assess for learning. Professional development opportunities must be provided with sufficient time, support, and resources enabling teachers to master new content, along with teaching and assessment methods, and methods for implementing this into practice (2008).

Reflection & Application

A deepened understanding of vocation has shaped my thinking and behavior by how I prioritize of my time. My values have been challenged in that I no longer find my value in my achievements and others’ opinions of me, but instead my value is based in

my identity as a child of God; one who responds to God's love by fulfilling my various vocational callings to serve others. My identity in Christ was affirmed, but now I have been challenged to adjust my response to my various vocation callings as my eyes have been opened wider. I now see vocational callings in every situation, rather than just in my work as a 'called church worker'. My vocational callings involve every aspect of my life and how I respond to the people and opportunities around me. This has been a big shift.

At first, the responsibility of responding to vocational opportunities in every aspect of life was overwhelming. I worried that I would not be prepared for the task or that I would fail in leading others to Christ. I became consumed with fear of failure and the worry for another person's spiritual health based upon my ability to lead them to Christ. It only took a day of contemplation before I realized how foolish these thoughts were. I can respond to vocational callings, but beyond that... God can only act.

"Realizing that one does not have to worry about what will happen, that the future is in God's hands, is liberating" (Veith, 2002, p. 152). Veith quotes Luther to provide an insightful illustration of vocation. "Work and let Him give the fruits! Battle, and let Him give victory! Preach, and let Him make hearts devout! Whatever we do, He will effect everything through us; and to him alone shall be the glory" (p. 152). Moulds cites Augustine's *City of God*, in which Augustine proclaims a purpose in our dual citizenship as Christians: that we can be used for God's transforming work here on earth. We are God's instruments. We are called to action, however, the outcome our actions are in God's hands. We simply must fulfill our vocations. We do not have to worry the outcomes, the value of our work, our status, or our accomplishments. This is indeed liberating!

Having been brought up in a society that often places self-worth on accomplishments and other people's opinions, the doctrine of vocation helps me to direct my thoughts on self-worth towards God's opinion alone. God calls me to my vocations, He works through my vocations, and He gives me the ability to fulfill my vocations. All the glory is to God; not me, my talents or accomplishments. All are available because God has granted them. Since the results of fulfilling my vocations are in God's hands, I can fully trust in Him and His will, in all situations, and give Him the glory. I do not have to worry about the value of my vocational callings if I am exercising my abilities and leading the life that the Lord has assigned to me (Veith, 2002).

In a capitalistic and individualistic society where value and identity are often based in achievements and titles, I find it essential to address the Body of Christ and our callings to vocations in the courses I teach. As students learn to interact with one another in families, the workplace, society, and the church, it is poignant to instill an awareness and thankful heart for the blessings of unique abilities and characteristics. I use the 1 Corinthians' text in the classroom to explain how each individual is a child of God, with unique skills, characteristics, and personalities. It is important that our students value people of various cultures, economic backgrounds, belief systems, etc., in order to see how our various blessings are all needed and valuable. One is not superior to another in identity, value, or vocation.

My students and I learn about one another and how we respond in various vocations in our lives. We learn about how we are to respond as called into particular vocations and if there are incongruities in how we respond and how we are called to respond. As students see glimpses into my life and my various vocational responsibilities,

they begin to share more about their vocational responsibilities and ask questions about how to meet the needs of so many areas in their lives. This generally leads to conversations about using our abilities, resources, and time wisely so that we can make ourselves available to be a means by which God can work.

I plan to address social issues in my places of responsibility by building future goals from a solid base of defined values, which give meaning to my actions and helps me to differentiate where my vocational callings are priorities. This course and our readings have helped me to seriously reconsider where I devote my time and my heart has changed. Instead of seeking accomplishments and praise, I now realize the worldly value in this compared to a heavenly value in fulfilling our vocational callings to God's glory. Veith quotes Luther to provide an illustration of God using us as His utensils on this side of Heaven: "whatever we do, He will affect everything through us; and to him alone shall be the glory" (Veith, 2002, p. 152). The personal mission statement has helped me not only to define where it is most important to serve, but also why because it is based in my values and beliefs.

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