

Teaching through Narrative

Fraser Douglas Hannam, Charlton Christian College, Director of Teaching and Learning, Australia

ABSTRACT

Story telling in its most basic form is a means by which a culture passes onto the next generation what they have found to be useful, to be of value, or to be good. Curriculum can be understood as a certain way of telling a story about the world. By contextualising units of work within a narrative, lessons become more meaningful, dynamic and engaging for the learner. This paper will explore the importance of narrative as a delivery system for curriculum and will unpack the Story Form Model through the identification of binary opposites and the organising of content into narrative form.

OUTLINE:

- Introduction
- The problem with education –Have we lost the plot?
- Why Narrative- the story so far
- Curriculum –poetic license or scripted control
- Implications for Implementation
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- Limitations of Narrative
- Recommendation for further research
- Conclusion

LIST OF TERMS:

- **Content** –suggested activities from a course syllabus to deliver its mandatory outcomes
- **Course** –an individual Key Learning Area e.g. Mathematics
- **Curriculum** –state or nationally prescribed outcomes / content for all Key Learning Areas or subjects
- **Narrative** –movement of characters through time following the structure of orientation-complication-resolution
- **Outcome** –individual descriptor of student achievement. An indicator that content has been achieved (as identified in syllabus)
- **Syllabus** –curriculum for an individual Key Learning Area e.g. Mathematics
- **Teaching Program** –a detailed running sheet created by teachers outlining how they intend to comply with the requirements of the syllabus document in meeting mandatory outcomes and content
- **Unit of Work** – sequence of lessons covering a single topic. May continue for several days or weeks e.g. Decimals

INTRODUCTION

There is an indescribable attraction to narrative. Something that will make the most unruly junior school class lunge for the mat and sit quietly at the promise of a story. Teenagers may not have a preference for subjects but they will always have a favourite movie or book. How might this natural attraction be exploited for teacher and learning? More importantly, how might God's story, be brought into our classrooms? When we anchor ourselves in the Biblical narrative and discern meaning, purpose and vision as individuals and as living communities how might the gospel transform our methodology, practices, policies and curriculum? This paper will explore the efficacy of narrative for engaging young minds and argue for its worth in the promotion of learning and as a delivery mechanism and augmentation of curricula. We will then look at a model for patterning a unit of work after a story-form model.

THE PROBLEM WITH EDUCATION – HAVE WE LOST THE PLOT??

Curriculum by nature of its prescriptiveness, time constraints and sheer volume, has the effect of reducing education to a delivery system and teachers into glorified messengers of information. The temptation to teach outcomes rather than contextualising knowledge into meaningful interdisciplinary units of work is a reality in this overcrowded time-driven syllabus. Divorced from its context, the data with which we populate our teaching programs render our lessons informative at best. A data-laden curriculum is simply not good enough! Teachers have become the servants of the mighty outcome, transmissionists who blandly dictate the curriculum by transferring facts and then measuring the 'bounce back' from the wall of testing. Test preparation has become the true curriculum rather than learning, and compliance has overridden the importance of engagement. And when all the testing is done and the students pass into the world we can only wonder at the myriad of non-measurable outcomes such as compassion, confidence, creativity, empathy, hope, resilience and self-management that may or may not have been gleaned accidentally by osmosis somewhere between lectures and assessments.

To achieve this, we organise students into birth cohorts, sit them uncomfortably in rows for hours on end, give them clerical tasks to do and then are surprised when they become distracted by things vastly more interesting than our daily force feeding of facts in which they may or may not have any interest in at all. For the sake of efficiency we compartmentalise the knowledge and skills into disciplines with specialist teachers and subject time allocations so that one cannot steal seconds from the other.

We are more than ready to label a child as ADHD but seemingly unwilling to diagnose the debilitating condition of 'childhood' upon them. Children often behave in childish ways. Our task as adults is to direct the positive aspects of this developmental stage and teach the way the child learns rather than forcing the child to fit the mould as we have been seemingly forced to conform to political legislature. We don't like it, why should they? "If a child is not learning the way you are teaching, then you must teach in the way the child learns," (Bruetsch, A., 1999, p.4). Disengagement remains the most challenging bane of our school systems and the natural consequence of a data-laden curricula.

Our scholastic lexicon is not always helpful in properly apprehending our role as teachers. 'Education' and 'Teaching' are process words that are narrowly input focussed not unlike 'dieting' or 'driving' which, more likely than not, will elicit probing interrogatives such as 'did you lose weight?' or 'did you reach your destination?' A great orator may occupy a classroom filled with young people and be engaged in the process of 'Teaching' but it would be wrong to assume that the children are 'learning' without further evidence.

Education in the broadest sense of the word is the cycle of input-process-output whereby it is not teaching per se but learning that is the measure of educational efficacy. The push for this can be seen in the Australian syllabus documents from the shift in the use of the temporal term 'objectives' to 'outcomes' i.e. 'students should', to, 'students will'. Thus placing the onus on the teacher to not just throw the ball but to ensure the students catch it. A successful lesson taught to one class may need to be drastically altered or even abandoned for a different group despite the fact that the teaching remains the same on measures of validity and reliability. This directs us to the reality that understanding the curriculum is secondary to an appreciation of pedagogy and the learner. Knowing a little more than the students know about Ancient History is not enough -it is one of many prerequisites. Knowledge of human beings (what motivates them, what inspires and excites their creative intellect) is a far more urgent precondition for classroom success. It is a human system not a data system.

A successful exponent of 'Learning' will know exactly what their class is capable of, what their interests are, what resources are available in their local community. They will know when their students are engaged and precisely when they begin to lose them and whether their disengagement is due uninspiring teaching, room temperature, seating arrangement or an overnight excursion the previous day. And should they perceive that a lesson is losing momentum they will know exactly what to do to bring it

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back on track. Should the electricity fail i.e. lights, computers, data projectors, they will know how to exploit the circumstance as an opportunity rather than a problem to be solved. Should it begin snowing outside they will be more than willing to drop their planned teaching program in order to turn the situation into an adventure.

Children are learning animals. Armed with the word “Dat?” and a well-directed finger my one year old moves about any environment on a systematic fact finding mission. This lasts from the time he gets up to the time he lays down with a slight slowing down at meal times. Surely it would take far more ingenuity to quash this innate drive to learn than to direct and augment it? Students are innate apprentices; they don’t need to be taught how to learn, but rather they need to have learning balanced and systematised. Sadly, often when learning takes place it is despite our practices rather than because of them. Our current education system ‘schools’ our innate capacities out of us. We don’t need to assist students in learning as much as we need to just stop being boring -perhaps the saddest label a teacher can append to themselves. We can’t necessarily make a child learn but we can certainly snuff out any intrinsic motivation they may have had towards getting to know the world better.

“You need to engage them, you need to peak their imagination, to fuel their creativity to drive their passion. For this you need to get them to want to learn this, you need to find points of entry –that’s the gift of a great teacher (Robinson, K., 2013).

WHY NARRATIVE? THE STORY SO FAR

Story telling has undergone changes of form across time but its purpose and message is still the same: this is what we have found to be useful, to be of value, to be true. Narrative is an historical relic, a Lamarckian artefact imbuing the ghosts of the past with flesh, voice and the momentum to drive that which is ancient into the present. Stories permeate all aspects of our lives. “They make us laugh, cry, reflect, imagine, lose ourselves . . . In the broadest sense, a narrative is an account provided by a narrator of characters and events moving in some pattern over time and space.” (Smith, D. & Shortt, J., 2002, p.69).

Regardless of whether it takes the form of story, script or the medium of monologue, books, magazines, theatre, television, movies or internet; everyone connects with narrative. We find them in DVD bins and theatres around the world. We prioritise time to hear them, to connect with them, to share them, regardless of distance or time constraints. We look to stories to encourage us, to make us laugh, to infuse life with meaning and provide us with heroes to look up to and model our own lives after. Since time began we have whispered tales in caves, shared them across campfires and shouted them from the clifftops of the world! ‘Once upon a time’ has become a linguistic marker that transcends time, calling us to impossible adventures.

The simple structure and movement of story as it advances through the predefined cycle of Orientation, Complication and Resolution resonates deep within us as it mimics the natural rhythmic ebb and flow of our own lives. Our interest is engaged during the orientation, our imagination sparked through the complication and our applause deafening at its resolution. We lose less facts when information is infused through narrative. Story imbues them with mnemonic traction coding and structuring our experiences. The natural winding trail of the story reveals remembered facts in chronological order at each turn. One cannot arrive at the complication if the binary opposites are not recalled, nor rise triumphantly at the story’s climactic finale if cause and effect are lost to the mind.

Our lives are both formed and informed by the stories in which they are located. We choose, are chosen and are composers of story. It is no coincidence that upon attending an initial visit to an Alcoholics Anonymous visit you are required to state your name and concede your condition. “I am Igor and I am an alcoholic”. Interestingly enough it would seem that the first step in taking hold of your life, of changing it and becoming the protagonist (or hero) is to accept ownership for your own story regardless of its current state.

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We also identify with the temporal nature of narrative as our lives follow the same patterns: where we came from, where we are now and where we are headed (as well as encouraging us to embrace the transitions in-between). Narrative is therefore more than just a search for meaning or destiny; it orientates and drives us towards a destination.

“ . . . a story is more than a collection of timeless pieces of information because it moves from past to future, from memory to vision. It can therefore offer us not just individual items to consider, but a sense of direction, and orientation with time and history, an image of where we have come from and where we might be headed” (Smith, D. & Shortt, J., p. 98).

Furthermore without this ‘direction’ found in a guiding core narrative Smith and Shortt discern a potentially tragic situation.

“Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words . . . lacking a sense of how life should go; it is perhaps more common for individuals to end up ‘mis-scripted’, presented mainly with unhealthy narrative models for life” (Smith, D. & Shortt, J., p.71).

If we don’t give children a story they will find one. If we don’t provide them with healthy characters and heroes they will seek them out down at the skate park. “In the post-modern world of subjective experience the young are “crying-out” for a personal story which will give meaning to their lives and a sense of transcendence which gives meaning to life beyond themselves” (Blanch, H., 2003). Could not our teaching and learning be rendered with a healthy amount of meaning, purpose and direction? The narrative we are seeking is one that will supply them not just with objective facts, but a set of core values onto which they might graft and scaffold their lives.

CURRICULUM – POETIC LICENCE OR SCRIPTED CONTROL?

In envisaging narrative as a delivery system for curriculum I do not mean the ‘telling of stories’ per se (although it does include this) but rather the patterning of our planning after a narrative structure. This paper makes the presumptuous leap that stories in their various forms are not just recreational activities nor are they to be considered something we ‘grow out of’ as infant learners, but that there is a potent and distinctive connection between narrative structure and the way we assimilate knowledge and develop skills.

As education has evolved and increasingly surrendered itself to a top-down system of control, a tipping point was reached in favour of compliance, assessing, reporting and overcrowded syllabus documents with unrealistic timelines, at the expense of an engaging tale to stimulate creativity, deep learning and retention. We have forsaken the contours of story for rote learning. Now, many of us have lost the art of oral tradition. We struggle to sequence activities much less regale the hearts of those entrusted to our campfires. We need to relearn the art of storytelling and abandon our mechanistic teaching systems. To show our children how to find direction and destination in their own stories and, more importantly, to become heroes of their own modern day epic.

The ironic truth is that teaching via a top-down system emasculates the very essence of what education ought to be. Story inoculates against a surprisingly large number of common problems and criticisms of our modern classrooms: lack of engagement, structure, differentiation etc. A curriculum based on such a foundation is incompatible with a bland mechanistic delivery system. It naturally differentiates and expands itself along the continuum of Blooms Taxonomy and across Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences as each student locates themselves within its pages and create individual responses in their own imagination. It brings light to bear on the hidden and null curriculum rendering our prejudices and limitations self-evident. Other potential benefits include:

- i) Story is internally driven. Extrinsic motivation may be more important initially but intrinsic is more sustainable, multifaceted and functionally useful.
- ii) Traditional mathematic-logical testing is arguably narrow and elitist in nature. The depth and breadth of a story-formed teaching program addresses many traditional non-measurables making it accessible to younger students and the less intellectually able.
- iii) Narrative draws our attention to the weakness of the unbalanced concrete to abstract, known to unknown, simple to complex and the objectives-content-testing-evaluation teaching

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cycle which leads to a mechanistic way of thinking. “. . . we need, for the educational benefit of children, to reconstruct our curricula and teaching methods in light of a richer image of the child as an imaginative as well as a logico-mathematical thinker” (Egan, K., 1988, p.17).

- iv) Learning results in a permanent change in behaviour –not merely the acquisition of knowledge. It must touch the heart and not just the intellect. If it engages the mind but not the emotions there is the potential to imbue with head knowledge at the expense of simple appreciation at best and indifference to human suffering at worst. “Taking a narrative approach to teaching encourages students to relate taught content to their own experience and to understand the experiences of others. . . .” (Parish, A., 2012, p.4). It provides children with cause to emotionally invest in their lessons.
- v) Children are able to engage with story at a very young age. They have an early understanding of fundamental causation and resolution allowing us to introduce concrete rather than abstract concepts from the start of schooling. They can deal with story, they are good at story and yet we continue to bombard them predominantly with mathematical and logical concepts which they struggle with rather than using their natural creative strengths as a means of assimilating knowledge.
- vi) Recall of knowledge is improved when it is applied as evidenced by the increasing number of first hand practicum mandated by the Australian syllabus in the latter years of schooling. At its heart narrative is an evidence-based approach to education. Story naturally contextualises information through the contours of real world situations. The onus is then ours to discern what we want our students to remember long after the tests are over and what stories we will use to get them there.
- vii) Narrative requires a holistic education that is multifaceted and interdisciplinary rather than a fragmented collection of isolated subjects. In this way it is more authentic of the world of work our students will one day populate.
- viii) Teachers concerned with the diffusion of objective facts sooner or later find themselves confronted with, “Why do I have to do this? Why is this important? How could this stuff possibly be useful in my future?” Narrative will contextualise and infuse courses with meaning for students and teachers may never again have to apologise or justify the ongoing existence of their subject areas.

In summary, Egan proposes that we see curriculum as a “story told by teachers, a story composed of all the little stories associated with the various areas of learning . . . an alternative to seeing curriculum in the traditional ‘assembly line’ way in terms of aims, objectives, content, method and evaluation” (Egan, K., 1988, p.29). Hence, “As teachers are our professional story-tellers, so the curriculum is the story they are to tell” (Egan, K., 1988, p. 14). It would seem wise to incorporate the ‘story units’ of our courses within the larger narrative of syllabus and curriculum. Similarly Rice encourages teachers to “.....design interesting and engaging lessons as if they were mini-plays or narratives in themselves.....a writer must keep the reader interested in exactly the same way you keep a student engaged in class-by making them think, by building knowledge slowly or by surprising them” (Rice, B., 2012, p.5).

There is a shift taking place in education - a teaching asymmetry whereby knowledge is both free and freely accessible. All is known and no information is hidden from our students. Ownership of information and arguably learning is now with the students. We are no longer the gatekeepers of learning and the option of being a transmissionist practitioner no longer exists. We are guides, facilitators or better still, story tellers!

Government legislated Curricula represent a finite set of knowledge that, once defined, grows more and more obsolete. Essentially in our syllabus documents we find a beginning, it can never be more than that. But through the narrative structure and the power of the internet students finally have the means to see the stories introduced by curricula through to their end. To write their own questions, to unravel the convoluted ‘complications’ and arrive at their own conclusions. Curricula can no longer encompass

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the entirety of learning. We will show our children how to search, discriminate and to ask good questions that reveal the truth about humanity. To discern what is good, noble and true and to build a better world rather than perpetuate the status quo. Students can be both the passenger and the driver of their own learning if we give them the freedom and flexibility to be involved in curriculum planning. We as teachers need to teach less in order that our students might finally learn more.

Print defines curriculum as, “All the planned learning opportunities offered to learners by the educational institution and the experiences learners encounter when the curriculum is implemented” (Print, M., 1993, p.9). This suggests that curriculum is more than the transmission of objective facts. It is arguable that the totality of these ‘experiences’ constitute a curriculum more reminiscent of a ‘world view’ ideology held within the learning community. Such a community uses ‘curriculum’ to transfer their values and beliefs to the next generation, to pass on their intellectual and spiritual heritage. As such, “The school is a specialized community in which the larger community preserves and passes on its cultural memory. Education is a matter of passing on and of nurturing students in a shared memory, incorporating them into a shared story” (Bolt, J., 1993, p.3).

Smith is able to make the connection, “Curriculum can be understood as a certain way of telling a story about the world. We need to think of story not as illustrations but as curriculum and therefore how do we relate the biblical story to curriculum” (Smith, D., 2005). Similarly Egan identifies story as an invaluable model for planning teaching that encourages us to see lessons or units as good stories to be told rather than sets of objectives to be attained (Egan, K., 1988, p.2).

“Recognizing that stories are the pre-eminent means by which we make sense out of our experience, and realizing that thanks to divine revelation Christians have access to the story by which all stories are judged, a Christian school curriculum that tells the Great True Story and all true derivative and supporting stories is the only way for Christian education to help students make sense of their experience” (Bolt, J., 1993, p.5).

What precisely then is the ‘Great True Story’ or ‘God’s Story’? It is the narrative of God and his dealings with humanity from creation, through fall, redemption and looking forward to renewal -the God of the universe and the unfolding revelation of His plan to restore creation to Himself through the atoning sacrifice of his Son Jesus.

At its inception one of the guiding principles of Christian Schools Australia (originally set up as Christian Community Schools) was that the message told in the Christian home and in the church would be the same as that told in the school. If our prime directive is to ensure these three narratives are congruent then we cannot fabricate our curriculum with anything less than God’s Story. If the biblical narrative is to become our World View in and outside of school then this is a fundamental, non-negotiable requirement for the Christian Community. Blanch suggests, “We have a Christian school when the gospel is inseparable from the curriculum” (Blanch, H., 2003).

As identified above, narrative encourages us to embrace the past to learn from it and to identify who we are and how we came to be here. Not that we are to live in the past but we are to use it to provide a purpose for now and a vision for the future. No secular curriculum can approach anything with the depth or breadth of this treatment.

“A good Christian school curriculum draws significantly from the wisdom of the ages, good teachers drink deeply from the wells of tradition, and students are incorporated into a story of the past, present, and future of God and his people. Incorporated into this story, students are given a memory, a vision, and, in this way, a mission” (Bolt, J., 1993, p.4).

Most importantly, we are in the business of teaching about truth and the truth is that God permeates all there is. Our history is God’s history –‘His Story’. In Science we discover the laws that God has set in motion etc.

JN 1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (New International Version).

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The world and everything in it including education is dependent on God and cannot be separated from Him. Courses constructed from secular and Christian principles, like two boats leaving a port together on slightly different bearings, will initially appear to be heading in the same direction, but by the time they have travelled a few hours it will be obvious they are on different courses. Christian Education offers more than a destiny it offers a destination –a better one!

“The battle in Christian education in the next decades will, I suspect, be less about abstract philosophies and psychologies of education than about who tells what stories to our children” (Bolt, J., 1993, p.6). As long as there are competing narratives that negate God’s story the secular world can continue to vainly hope that our conscious minds are answerable to no one and that the voice that speaks into our selfish, materialistic, sinful and debased lives will remain silent.

“If one story can judge another through its contrasting shape, then the distinctive contours of biblical narratives may call into question some of the stories about life which implicitly underpin the school curriculum”(Smith, D. & Shortt, J., p.87). The bible provides us with stories that cause us to reflect, encourage, challenge and re-evaluate our lifestyles. A natural result will be the transformation of our communities into ones which witness to the world of the truth and strength of the gospel message.

Narrative also provides us with a clear mechanism for the selection and organisation of content. “Everything in the story is focussed on the central task . . . Stories then have a clear means of determining what should be included and excluded” (Egan, K., 1988, p24). It thereby assists in the curriculum generation process and ensures it is not content driven. Narrative facilitates the move from principles to practice showing us what to teach and how to teach it.

In summation Boyd concludes, “It would seem that our motivating story (the secular individualistic narrative) is no longer adequate, and as educators, teachers and parents we must engage with urgency in listening to our hearts and confronting the choices available to us” (Boyd, A., 2001, p.55). As such he acknowledges a primary concept that is often overlooked: it is not a void we are seeking to fill but an inadequate humanistic ideology that we are resolving to overthrow and replace.

When we enrol students we invite them to become part of the story of our colleges. A deliberate attempt should be made to tell and retell these stories. More significantly as we indoctrinate students within our halls the meta-narrative we instil in them will act as a filter (reference) determining which sub-narratives they will choose to take on and which to discard. It may not be a silver bullet panacea to our modern educational woes but it will organically gather many of the desired characteristics we look for in our graduates and preclude undesirable and unhelpful traits in beginning teachers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

A learning community built to any extent on the use of narrative as a delivery system for curriculum implicitly understands that within its walls stories will be made, shared and rewritten by individuals and groups. They must be given a space and a voice to facilitate this. These might be summarised as:

- Caves –places where students can work on stories in private without distraction.
- Campfires –opportunities for students to share their stories and hear feedback from peers.
- Clifftops –the ability to publish finished stories be it via hardcopy, email, blog etc.

ONCE UPON A TIME: Towards a Model

(Disclaimer: This is the outline of a unit only...the concepts to be discussed etc. It is not intended to be a complete unit of work).

This unit was developed for the current New South Wales Board of Studies Course “Information and Software Technology” (Stage 5 –Years 9 and 10). It will amalgamate the core units “Robotics & Automated Systems”, “Artificial Intelligence and Simulation” under various aspects of the

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theme topic “Issues”. The unit will explore the scenario where technology reaches its zenith in the near future to the point where rights, control, love and definitions of life itself come into question. As artificial life gives the appearance of surpassing humanity, questions of our origins and identity come to the fore in an effort to determine whether humanity has a future.

“The science-god sends people to the moon, inoculates people against disease, transports images through vast spaces so that they can be seen in our living rooms. It is a mighty god and, like more ancient ones, gives people a measure of control over their lives, which is one of the reasons why gods are invented in the first place. . . Nonetheless, like all gods, it is imperfect. Its story of our origins and our end is, to say the least, unsatisfactory (no promise) –by accident. . . . And to many people, the accidental life is not worth living . . .”
(Postman, N., 1996, p.9-10).

We will use Egan’s Structure (Egan, K., 1988, p.41) to develop the unit (see below). In doing so I will also be mindful of Blanch’s essential criteria for a biblical curriculum.

- 1) **What stories ‘are told’ through my subject area? What kind of ‘ethos’ and vision for life am I seeking to encourage through my learning area?**
- 2) **How do these stories depict/distort the reality of God’s design in this area of God’s creation?**
- 3) **How does the story of my subject area enable students:**
 - a) **To love God**
 - b) **To love themselves**
 - c) **To care for God’s creation in a deeper way?**

I have identified the following competing narratives at the outset:

- The glory of technology
- Scientific utopianism
- The great technological panacea

The Story Form Model

1) Identifying importance:

- a) **What is most important about the topic?**
- b) **Why should it matter to Children?**
- c) **What is affectively engaging about it?**

- We often raise technology beyond the ‘tool’ it was intended to a more important status than humanity –an end in itself
- Technology is equated with power, wealth, market and information control
- It enslaves us not frees us.
- Technology is naturally future-oriented but where is the end of our knowledge headed?
- Students are comfortable with their ipods and mobile phones –they cling to them for security –this unit will need to make them uncomfortable

2) Finding binary opposites:

What powerful binary opposites best catch the importance of the topic?

- Good V Bad
- Fear V Hope
- Survival V Destruction
- Promise V Unknown
- Our intelligence V God’s intelligence
- Creation V Evolution

3) Organizing content into story forms:

- i) **What content most dramatically embodies the binary opposites, in order to provide access to the topic?**
- ii) **What content best articulates the topic into a developing story form?**

LESSON 1

SCENARIO:

With the escalation of crime the World Council introduces compulsory DNA testing. As a natural result into such research the Human Genome is mapped. From birth your height, intelligence, psychological make-up and predisposition to certain diseases is known.

CLASS DISCUSSION:

Who has ownership or control of this information, the individual? Government? Or should it be made available to the highest bidder?

- Individual –will have implications for the detection of crime
- Government –will have implication for health care
- Highest bidder –will have implications for employment.

LESSON 2

SCENARIO:

Within weeks 12 million people identified with future life threatening disorders (as a result of their unique genome map) either signed up for expensive health plans, insured

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their lives for exorbitant amounts and / or quit their jobs choosing instead to blow what savings they had on luxury items. The World Council responds by making Genome maps freely available through the internet. Another class is born -a class division that would make the boundaries of race, sex, religion and socio economic seem superficial.

EMPLOYMENT:

What are the issues facing a highly qualified and experienced businessperson identified with a 70% chance of developing Alzheimer Disorder by the age of 50? List 3 points for and against a company taking on such an employee

HEALTH CARE:

Compulsory genome compatibility analysis are instigated by governments before marriage in order to identify certain parental combinations exhibiting a strong genetic likelihood of producing children with severe physical / developmental abnormalities or learning difficulties. Decisions facing the 'Next Generation Summit' include:

- i) Refusal of health care / social security benefits & unemployment benefits to the offspring of identified couples whom knowingly get pregnant
- ii) Refusal to grant marriage licences to identified couples unless chemical castration is agreed to by both couples.

The rationale behind this is that if you knowingly bring a child into the world that has minimal likelihood of being a productive member of society, then the parents alone should provide lifelong support.

CLASS DEBATE:

"The compulsory mapping of the human genome and the subsequent distribution of this information will create more problems than solutions."

LESSON 3

As earlier identified we have created a new class, one that in addition to losing access to basic benefits are uninsurable, unemployable and unmarriageable. A second class distinction developed within the next 50 years –those who were genetically modified at birth and those through decision or by virtue of being born before its inception, remained biologically 'unimproved' (as nature intended).

The highest employment positions are now reserved for those genetically modified to reach their full potential.

VIDEO GATTACA:

Gattaca portrays a futuristic world where the highest positions are reserved for those genetically modified to reach their full potential. It follows the life of a young man who yearns to be an astronaut but lacks the height, strength, stamina and IQ to make the cut. He purchases the identity of a young genetically altered man who was crippled in a car accident. The protagonist uses DNA samples (blood, skin and hair) from the crippled man to pass the rigorous daily testing of the space organisation. Raw determination to achieve elite levels in the organisation are his only asset. The catch cry of the DVD is: *"There is no gene for the human spirit"*

CLASS DISCUSSION:

How was the protagonist able to achieve the heights he reached with everything going against him? What are the implications for school and our lives?

(EXTENSION) FURTHER DISCUSSION

Consider Evolution: we can appreciate how the turtles of the Galapagos Islands have developed, through mutation, long necks by passing their genes onto their offspring. But Consider:

- 1) Every drop of our blood remembers your hair colour
- 2) Every fingernail remembers your height
- 3) Every hair on your head recalls the exact alignment of your vocal chords that produce the unique intonations and inflexions of your voice.

It makes sense that a hair follicle contains enough information to create more of itself. But why should every cell we possess contain enough biological data to create us all over again?

HOMEWORK QUESTION: The bible suggests we came from dust and will return to dust. On the Day of Resurrection how might God achieve the ‘re-creation’ of those around the world throughout history whose mortal bodies have been destroyed in a variety of ways?

LESSON 4

SCENARIO:

With the creation of a class of people who are unmarriable and / or unable to have children, research and development into robotics and artificial intelligence escalates to exorbitant levels. The result is the creation of ‘Artificial Human’ spouses and later children. The following timeline ensues:

- Artificial allowed to purchase property.
- Vote given to Artificial
- Citizenship available to Artificial
- Term ‘Artificial’ banned in favour of ‘Synthetics’
- First ‘Will and Testament’ contested and won by an synthetic spouse
- First synthetic to adopt a human child
- Confidence in Synthetic skill and decision making reaches its pinnacle
 - A Synthetic becomes leader of the Opposition Party
 - Synthetics analyse humanities wastage:
 - Land used for food (crops / cattle)
 - Garbage landfill
 - Medical costs
 - Churches identified as exclusionary and discriminatory against Synthetics - attempts made to close churches and remove concepts such as ‘soul’, ‘spirit’ and ‘life’ from the dictionary
 - Synthetics declare the human god is dead –exert their own divinity.

CLASS DISCUSSION

- “What is the place of humanity in this world?”

DVD –Bicentennial Man

We create an android to be perfect, to assimilate information and to grow and evolve towards perfection. But in this DVD we see the Robin Williams (an android) finding instead perfection in humanity as he endeavours to become less robot-like and more and more organic even to the point of being able to die!

CLASS DISCUSSION:

“What is the pinnacle of creation, robotics or humanity?”

INVESTIGATION:

- 1) Research the development of robotics
- 2) Scientists have had a great deal of success in developing industrial robots in the manufacturing industry. Other robots, created to explore the geography of other planets first hand, have had their mobility designed around insectivore models due to considerable difficulty in replicating humanoid bipedal motion. Why might this be the case?

4) Conclusion:

- a) **What is the best way of resolving the dramatic conflict inherent in the binary opposites?**
- b) **What degree of mediation of those opposites is it appropriate to seek?**

We will find our conclusion in the countering of these concepts through the biblical narrative. The following serves as both the unit / lesson structure, and as an explanation of its implementation and discussion of how it works biblically.

“At stake in the different possible tellings of such a story is the question of whether technology is our hope for earthly progress or whether it too is subject to the drama of creation, fall and redemption” (Smith, D. & Shortt, J., p.76).

The following 3-fold discussion will be used concurrently with the content of point 3 above:

CREATION: Students will

- 1) know that God created the heavens and the Earth (Genesis 1:1, Job 38).
- 2) know that God did this simply through the power of His Word (Genesis 1).
- 3) know that Jesus Christ is that Word (John 1:1, Colossians 1:16-17).
- 4) know Jesus Christ sustains the universe by the power of His Word (Hebrews 1:1-3).
- 5) affirm that in the beginning before sin entered the world God created the universe in a perfect state GE 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good..
- 6) understand that humanity (not technology) is the pinnacle of God’s creation –made in the image of God.

GE 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . . “ (New International Version).

N.B. only after the sixth day and the creation of man are things said to be ‘very good’

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PS 139:14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, ¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (New International Version).

To consider that technology might aspire for a higher perfection is incompatible with this view. Movies such as *Bicentennial Man* and *Artificial Intelligence* depict technology aspiring to perfection in the form of humanity.

- 7) We are totally dependent on God and made to be in relationship with him and each other. Our relationships are to be characterised by love and consideration for those less fortunate, on the fringes of society, not to favour the strong over the weak.
- 8) God has commanded man to have dominion over the earth to care and tend for it and it in turn to be a blessing for all mankind.

GE 1:26 . . . let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (New International Version).

PS 8:6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet (New International Version).

Science & technology is a system of processes and tools given by God so that we may more effectively be stewards of his creation, fulfil this command, and enjoy the creation He has given to man.

- 9) Students will know that the role of Creation is ongoing:

“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” Colossians 1:17 (New International Version).

“The son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by His powerful word . . . “ Hebrews 1:3 (New International Version).

FALL:

- 1) Through sin all of creation was alienated from God
- 2) We have become enemies of God in rebellion against him in an effort to self-rule through our own intelligence and the development of technology
- 3) Love, rationality, creativity etc. continue but are polluted
- 4) People still yearn for meaning, significance and impact. Pascal called it ‘the God-shaped vacuum’ in every human life –we find only false meaning in our love for technology and materialism
- 5) Bondage and corruption characterise the earthly realm of God’s dominion. Technology forces us to become more and more reliant on its communication systems
- 6) Creation is distorted because it has departed from its original creational design
- 7) The fall has meant that greed and exploitation threaten man doing his job properly. Control of technology is identified as the means of achieving these ends. Repentance towards God also involves repentance from harm done to God’s world.
- 8) “The Bible gives us ample warning of our sinful tendency to distort the truth, and surely invites us to have these warnings clearly in mind if we try to allow the biblical story to frame and inform our educational projects . . . Smith, D. & Shortt, J., (p. 94). We need to be aware of our tendencies to be blinded when it comes to other gods in our life -serving them and not fulfilling our true calling.

REDEMPTION:

ISA 42:3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; 4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth (New International Version).

God is concerned for those people on the fringe –not ‘survival of the fittest’ which is implied in the above unit of work and the development of technology.

- 1) Redemption means restoration or the return to the goodness of creation. We cannot improve things gradually –repair the broken creation through our own intellect and the pursuit of science.
- 2) If Christ is the reconciler of all things, and if we have been entrusted with the ‘ministry of reconciliation’ on His behalf, then we have the redemptive task wherever our vocation places us. Technology is to serve the Great Commission and Great Commandment.

“Our story is fundamentally one which invites us to testify to God’s great reclamation project (Fernhout, H., 1997, p.96).

CONCLUSION (per model)

Often when it comes to technology we ‘do’ simply because we ‘can’ rather than taking a step back and asking we ‘can’ now we need to consider whether we ‘should’. Being mindful of God’s purpose for humanity and our role in sharing dominion over His creation, will inform how we might use technology to usher in His kingdom rather than merely sating the desires of man.

LIMITATIONS OF NARRATIVE

The inherent advantages of narrative do not come without complications. Narrative may provide us with an efficient tool for the inclusion or exclusion of content as Egan suggests, but it can be problematic forcing all the outcomes for a particular curriculum unit into story form without it seeming somewhat contrived. What if mandatory syllabus content is identified as that to be excluded? What if it is incompatible with our core narrative, should we just tack these outcomes onto the conclusion of a unit like orphaned facts after the story book has closed?

The use of the ‘narrative pattern’ necessitates that “. . . our model needs to provide some way of ending a lesson or unit that has something more in common with the way stories end than with ending because we have “covered” all the content identified as relevant” (Egan, K., 1988, p. 31). Some narratives are necessarily open ended and the subject matter at hand does not always ‘round-off’ as neatly as we might hope for.

Because story is powerful it can also be misused. Narrative empowers us to use untruths but because it’s ‘in a story’ it still ‘works’ on some level and will be accepted as our emotions are raised and the learning blinkers are lowered into place. How many of us cheered at the end of Titanic when Kate Winslett was reunited with Leonardo Decaprio? The story was actually about a rebellious daughter who, despite being betrothed, had an affair out of wedlock for a couple of days with a stranger. Then after dying she was reunited NOT with her husband to whom she had had several children, but with the

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stranger she had enjoyed a 'dirty weekend' with! Why were we so easily fooled? Why did we cheer? Because the script, the cinematography, the lighting, the music and Leonardo's billowing blonde fringe told us to! Crocodile Dundee's narrative was not far from this storyline. As a potent instrument for the manipulation of 'truth' narrative can become self-serving. We tell the stories that present the truths that we want to convey and unless they are identified and corrected they will continue unchecked rendering our teaching contaminated with erroneous facts and misdirected instructions for the next generation.

Although God's Story is central to our beliefs and practices we must not allow it to stop us from exploring other Christian methodologies that might be used in conjunction with narrative (such as canonical and metaphorical approaches etc.), nor should it blind us to its limitations when implemented without Godly wisdom or attention to the finer aspects of good pedagogy.

Smith and Shortt draw our attention to several pitfalls in using narrative that we need to be aware of:

“...the ability of the biblical narrative itself to become self-serving, to confirm our own injustices, selfishness and narrow mindedness (Smith, D. & Shortt, J., p. 91). This is true only when we consider individual narratives separate from the entire meta-narrative of Scripture.

And yet within the framework of the biblical narrative there is a mechanism of correction, self-reflection and of maintaining transparency in our teaching methodologies, practices and beliefs. “. . . It (the bible) invites us to consider how sin may affect our thinking as well as our doing. What's more, it contains within itself examples of stories, even biblical stories about God being distorted to serve our own interests” (Smith, D. & Shortt, J., p. 93).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The limitations of this paper preclude the addressing the following equally compelling areas:

- The potential for narrative to impact positively on the Null and Hidden curriculum. How might the intellectual inertia of our subversive agendas and alliances be negated or brought into the light by story?
- The potential for the shared story of a learning community to motivate and direct its decision making. How might it help or hinder our sense of ownership and investment in our organisations. How might it inform our marketing from the perspective of inviting potential enrolments to embrace our story and to write the next chapter with us rather than treat enrolment as a cold strategic numbers game?

Conclusion

Walter Brueggemann points out from Deuteronomy 6, “whenever the young asks ‘what does it all mean?’”, the response of the older generation is to tell the story of what God has done, is doing and will do and how Israel is called to participate in, not spectate at this drama” (Brueggemann, W., 1982, p.56) It is clear that God's Story holds the answers to the fundamental questions of a child: Who am I? Where am I? What do I do? This is the story that our communities need to pass onto the next generation. A story that will necessarily form and inform the curriculum of our schools. A narrative with the potential to transform the policies, practices and pedagogies within our educational communities.

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