Assessing Christian Learning: Towards a Practices-Based Approach to Faith, Vocation, and Assessment

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Abstract

This essay proposes that efforts at assessing the contribution of faith-based schools to faith formation be grounded in an account of student vocation framed by Christian practices. We identify gaps in research on assessment of school effectiveness and suggest that a focus on the present vocation of students may fruitfully connect faith and school-based learning practices. On this basis, we describe a framework for viewing assessment through a practices lens by identifying Christian practices that orient learning practices. We also briefly introduce the Practicing Faith Survey, a new tool based on this approach.

Introduction

Assessment helps connect teaching and learning to desired outcomes and is also a mechanism of institutional cultural change as pathways to those outcomes are validated or placed in question. By measuring things, we direct attention to them, and by interpreting results we project possible changes to practice. Teachers and learners in faith-based schools work in rapidly changing cultural contexts in which people inside and outside their communities question what such schools can accomplish (Cheng and Sikkink, 2020; Green and Cooling, 2009). In faith-based schools, the educational mission is commonly understood in ways framed by faith commitments, with spiritual development or faith formation viewed as a desired outcome (Boerema, 2006; Cheng et al., 2016). Yet current whole-school assessment approaches include little that might enable schools to relate their pedagogical practices to questions of faith formation (Van der Walt and Zecha, 2004). We

suggest in this paper that an account of Christian practices rooted in a conception of student vocation offers a conceptual framework that might connect faith formation concerns to school practices in an assessable way, helping to bridge between a concern for faith formation and questions about school effectiveness.

The paper begins by identifying a gap in published research on the assessment of school effectiveness in Christian schools. We show that there is a need for more focused attention to how school effectiveness might relate to faith formation. We then advance a framework that we argue has potential to serve as a bridging construct between school effectiveness and faith formation. We unpack this framework in three stages. First, we note the importance of implicit conceptions of faith, and suggest that if faith is construed in ways that tend to separate it from embodied learning practices, it will be difficult to relate it to school effectiveness. Second, we suggest that focusing on the present vocation of students and its outworking in intentional learning-related practices offers a way to think about the school's and the student's responsibilities in a way that better connects learner agency, school agency, and faith. Third, we turn to the practices themselves and describe a framework for mapping Christian practices that are closely related to learning practices and can be seen as an outworking of present student vocation. In closing, we briefly describe how this framework has been used to develop a new school-level assessment initiative, called the *Practicing Faith Survey* (PFS). This initiative aims to enable closer integration between the identities, learning approaches, and faith formation goals of Christian schools and their approaches to assessing school effectiveness.

Assessing faith-based schools: Existing research

We turn first to the relationship between assessment of school effectiveness and faith formation in existing literature. Research literature related to the assessment of faith formation in North American Christian K-12 (primary and secondary) schools is sparse. We extended the parameters of our peer-reviewed literature search to include empirical and theoretical discussions, all kinds of K-12 faith-based schools, anything related to school climate and school culture, and contexts beyond North America. This yielded only 18 articles that were closely related to our focus and a further nine that were minimally related. Many of these articles note that attention to the distinctive frame and mission of faith-based schools is lacking in the literature on assessing school effectiveness and climate. Van der Walt and Zecha (2004: 169, 174), for instance, did not find any studies "that were concerned with the effectiveness of Christian schools," nor could they find any models for "assessing the effectiveness of Christian schools." Pollock (2013) carried out research into perceptions of school success in a publicly funded, separate Catholic school in the Canadian province of Ontario. Separate Catholic schools in Ontario are constitutionally mandated and fully funded, with their own school boards and elected trustees who are accountable to the provincial authority. Pollock notes that evaluating school effectiveness has become synonymous with performance on provincial and national standardized state testing in core academic areas. She observes that even in contexts where Christian schools are funded as part of the public system, little work has been done to consider their particular religious identity and its implications for the nature of academics and faith formation. She levels this critique at both research and educational policy.

Following such critiques, we suggest that the absence of attempts to take account of the distinctively Christian mission of schools in processes of assessment means that generic practices of evaluating school effectiveness and climate have become normalized whether or not they support Christian school learning goals. In some cases, these mechanisms may simply neglect faith formation as a goal, creating an omission in assessment data. However, the possibility must also be

considered that the assumptions informing standardized testing and resulting forms of practice and institutional adjustment could actively undermine faith formation, either by shifting energies away from the neglected area or by fostering learning practices not plausibly conducive to faith formation.

The study of teacher-student relationships in a group of American Catholic middle and high schools by Maney et al. (2017) sheds some light on this process. Their qualitative investigation focused on the quality of teacher-student relationships as a factor forming culture. They administered questionnaires developed by the *Successful Practices Network* (SPN, 2019). These questionnaires are designed to measure the consistency between teacher and student responses to questions about the school's rigor, relevance, relationships, and school leadership. After asking teachers and students additional questions on Catholic instructional practices and conducting focus groups with parents, the authors concluded that Catholic mission and identity were missing from practices of whole-school evaluation. They state further that "faculty-student relationships are rarely measured regarding their effectiveness in bolstering academic achievement or Catholic mission effectiveness" (Maney et al. 2017: 36). Their research uncovered gaps between teacher and student perceptions of relationships in school. Teachers, for example, tended to rate items indicating the presence of a stronger relationship more highly than students. However, differences in ratings related to faith formation were even more pronounced. Results showed a significant difference between students and teachers, "with students more often endorsing items about their own perceptions of the importance of faith formation than teachers" (47). This suggests that faith formation, as a dimension of the quality of relationship, was of higher importance to students than it was for teachers. In focus groups, the researchers also found that parents placed a higher priority on faith formation than on academics. This echoes other research findings that show faith formation to be a significant priority for parents who choose faith-based schools and that it is consistently underrated as an educational priority by those who carry out research in this field (Cheng et al., 2016; Erikson 2017; Green, 2018). The reasons for the discrepancies between the priority that parents and students give to faith-formation relative to teachers are unclear. Some research suggests that professional and sector norms within which teachers have been socialized, including assessment regimes, play a major role. If teachers mainly experience accountability in terms of processes of school assessment practices that neglect faith formation, they may be less likely to prioritize it as a component of teaching and learning (DeAngelis and Burke, 2017).

We found similar conversations taking place within other Christian denominations represented in the literature. Mizelle (2009), for example, explores school climate within the context of Lutheran schooling in America and offers the *Lutheran School Climate Inventory* as a tool for Lutheran principals. This survey is administered to students and collects diagnostic information regarding the academic, physical, social, and affective environments of the school. Again, faith formation is lacking as a distinct concern. In this regard, the survey is typical of most of the climate-diagnostic survey tools we found referenced in the literature as tools available to Christian schools embarking on a process of assessment of school effectiveness.

Bradfield (2014: 130) developed the *Growing Disciples Inventory* (GDI) for use in Seventh Day Adventist schools because she found "no assessment of holistic goals for Christian spiritual development in the context of Protestant private schools in America." The GDI aims to provide individual formative assessment to students in relation to the goals of Seventh Day Adventist schools. These goals can be summarized under the headings "connecting," "understanding," "ministering," and "equipping," with the aim of helping students grow in their relationship with

God, self, and others (133). The GDI is based on a holistic view of spiritual development. Its items are designed to promote student self-reflection, and it generates summative group reports for schools to review. However, the survey items do not appear to connect directly to practices of teaching and learning in the classroom, nor is it intended to function as a tool for assessment of school effectiveness. We have not found published discussion of how the GDI influences teaching and learning in Seventh Day Adventist schools, though we do hope that such research is forthcoming.

Some sector-wide surveys measure the influence of Christian schooling on religious belief, behaviors, and spiritual formation. Two of the most well-known independently validated and publicly reported measures are the attitudinal scales developed by Francis (1979) and the Cardus Education Survey (Sikkink, 2012; Neven Van Pelt et al., 2012). Francis has measured the contribution of schools to students' religious, personal, and social values in England and Wales over the last 30 years and his research constitutes an impressive body of peer-reviewed material (Village and Francis, 2016; Robbins and Francis, 2010). The Francis attitudinal scale has also been employed by Baker (2013) to explore the religious beliefs and values of graduates from independent UK Christian schools, though this work did not examine teaching and learning practices. The Cardus Education Survey (CES) is a cross-sectional study of the impact of school sector on graduate outcomes. Nationally representative samples of graduates from public, independent non-religious, and independent religious schools in the U.S. and Canada are surveyed. However, like the Francis surveys, the CES does not collect data related to the teaching and learning approaches undertaken in classrooms, nor does it provide feedback on faith formation in relation to the student's own learning practices. It is quite possible that various institutions draw on the Francis and CES studies when they have conversations about whole-school evaluation in relation to mission, but we are not aware of any published literature that reviews use of these surveys directly in relation to the school-level assessment of faith formation in schools.

In sum, the sparse literature on assessment of faith-based schools points to a lack of sustained focus on faith formation as an integrated part of school-based learning processes, despite its importance as a learning goal for parents and students associated with such schools. Approaches to assessing school effectiveness and the assessment of faith formation remain weakly connected to each other and to classroom pedagogy and do not typically address faith-informed teaching and learning practices. If faith-based schools claim faith formation as an integral part of their educational mission, then assessing their educational success should include ways of connecting educational practices, assessment practices, and faith formation (Smith and Smith, 2011; Smith, 2018). In the remainder of this article, we propose a framework for thinking about these connections that might offer schools a way of integrating them and introduce an initiative designed to do so.

Faith

If we wish to address the relationship of faith formation to school-level learning and assessment practices, it is important to attend to the conceptions of faith that might inform such an enterprise. The question of how faith relates to life in the world lies behind the language of faith formation (Ghiloni, 2011). In a suggestive formulation, Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper once aired the worry that in the modern world "particular grace floats in the air" (Bartholomew, 2017: 39). The phrase encapsulates a concern that under the conditions of modernity, beliefs and rituals pertaining to God, salvation, and personal spiritual transformation easily become separated from the social forces and structures determining personal practice and public life (cf. Taylor, 2007). Engagement with Christian faith comes to be understood and experienced as engagement with specifically and

narrowly religious elements of life, and these are isolated from other life settings and practices. A focus on "faith" might then mean a focus on matters such as belief in the resurrection or frequency of prayer, with less focus on what these might have to do with, say, patterns of consumption, learning technology choices, or classroom management strategies. In Kuyper's eloquent image, if the cluster of focal concerns associated with faith "floats in the air," it becomes a kind of hot-air balloon: decorative, evocative of peace and transcendence, perhaps even majestic, but not useful for daily transportation needs. If faith is implicitly conceived as referring to a distinct religious slice of experience exemplified by devotional activity or confessional assent, the challenge of relating it coherently to teaching, learning, and assessment practices increases (Smith, 2021).

Literature on faith formation, spiritual formation, or Christian formation commonly contrasts these with mere information, implying an engagement of the whole self (Glennon et al., 2011; Miller and Beazley, 2018). Yet in practical terms, faith formation can end up mainly associated with religion classes, chapel programs, prayer meetings, individual spirituality, or specific focal interventions, such as addition of spiritual practices, service projects, or personal mentoring to curricula (Bramer, 2010; Horan, 2017). All of these may indeed be contributors to faith formation and sites where faith intersects with the overall life of a school, yet they remain tangential to the main business of schooling. If a focus on faith formation and its assessment is too closely aligned with such specifically religious/spiritual experiences, attention is drawn away from how faith might be expressed, enacted, or formed within everyday learning practices across the curriculum and the school day (Smith, 2018). Faith then remains largely disconnected from everyday questions of pedagogical design and assessment within the wider curriculum (Ramsey, 2012).

Other kinds of assumptions about faith may further shape what we think needs to be assessed. For instance, an emphasis on faith as affirmation of propositional statements of belief or as personal spiritual experience may each suggest a particular kind of data to be gathered and a particular set of intersections with educational questions (Lewin, 2019). Yet each risks underestimation of how faith is worked out in wider life practices and disconnection from broader pedagogical design decisions (Mittwede, 2013). Even if we know how many students believe in the resurrection, visit worship services, or experience God in prayer, it may remain unclear how the school should respond pedagogically or how the school contributed.

Astley (2018: 22) suggests that "formation" denotes "all the processes of teaching and/or learning that help to shape a learner in a tradition and its beliefs, experiences and practices, in a way that leads to the learner's acceptance of that tradition in her thinking, valuing, feeling and perceiving, and her dispositions to act and experience, together with her appraisal of the tradition's merits and faults." If "all the processes of teaching and/or learning" that have formational force and all ways in which students come to live a tradition are relevant, then faith formation and teaching may intersect at points other than overtly religious practices, assent to beliefs, or explicitly theological learning (Glennon et al., 2011: 366). The task of teachers becomes to "create classroom conditions that help to shape the hearts and lives of the students in ways that do not hinder the receiving of grace but instead make it easier to believe" (Holm, 2008: 161).

For these reasons, we suggest that pursuing the question of how faith formation relates to school-level assessment requires an account of faith that focuses on the ways in which it is embodied in practices (Dykstra, 2005; Smith and Smith, 2011). The following examples of four students' reflections on their own growth in faith illustrate formation-relevant practices that may be missed by an emphasis on religious instruction, propositional assent, or spiritual experience. The first two are drawn from a second research project on educational technology in faith-based schools (Smith

et al., 2020: 204, 246), while the others are from interaction with individual students during the PFS project.

> A student is asked whether his school's emphasis on discipleship practices has affected his life outside school. He points to creation care as a Christian practice as explored in his science classes and describes how he and his friends decided to spend part of their weekend picking up trash on local beaches instead of heading for the mall.

> A student describes how, when working online, she imagines God watching what she is doing. This serves as a conscious strategy for resisting the temptation to visit inappropriate websites or otherwise use her online time unwisely. She connects this to her teachers' explicit focus on using technology with Christian discernment.

> A student relates that after a year in college he is uncomfortable with being surrounded by people serving him (preparing meals, maintaining buildings and grounds, teaching, cleaning rooms, etc.). This feels like an egocentric way to live and unhealthy for his growth in his Christian faith. He resolves to adopt an intentional practice of getting to know, praying for, and looking for ways to bless those who work in food services, physical plant, and campus safety.

> A student points out the connection between her Christian commitment and her ability to listen well to others, including her teachers, framing this in terms of respect for others. She has decided to work on this by intentionally sitting closer to the front of class in the hope that this will help her to be more attentive.

Each of these vignettes portrays lived Christian faith, yet they are not primarily expressed in the form of theological affirmations, spiritual experiences, or narrowly religious activities. They are therefore likely to remain invisible if assessment of faith formation focuses on affirmation of beliefs, reports of spiritual experience, or frequency of religious activity. Each also explicitly includes responsiveness to a pedagogical setting. These students appear to be responding not only to motifs in their Christian faith, but also to specific elements of their schools' teaching and learning environments outside the limits of chapel services, religion classes, service projects, and the like (Smith et al., 2020). Moreover, their practices are the kinds of things that Christian schools might plausibly want Christian students to be doing, and it seems within the power of Christian teachers to help students grasp them as possibilities and begin to enact them (cf. Yonker et al., 2019). There is a connection to actual or potential pedagogical choices as well as to students' beliefs. This combination of enacted faith, interaction with pedagogy, and grounding in everyday student experience of school provides a locus for assessing schools' interaction with faith formation.

We develop this point into a more systematic outline of relevant faith-informed practices below. Before doing so, it is important to consider the matter not only from the side of the school's influence, but in terms of the student's agency. If we consider only the practices that the school wishes to foster, there is a risk of slipping into a deterministic picture of faith formation focused on how the school or teacher acts upon the student. The vignettes just described all indicate students' own investment in their faith formation, in interaction with the school. We will argue in the next section that thinking of this process in terms of vocation may be useful to both students and educators and help define the kind of support that the school should be providing.

Vocation

After the Reformation, the idea of vocation shifted from connection with people in specifically

religious occupations to a more expansive and inclusive usage, drawing in every part of a Christian's life and all kinds of life roles. Puritan theologian William Perkins (1631/2005: 266) wrote that "Every person, of every degree, state, sex, or condition without exception, must have some personal and particular calling to walk in." This expanded sense of calling extends beyond work (Badcock, 1998), so that "...every significant social relation constitutes a calling, including paid work, but also being a friend, aunt, uncle, child, parent, student, and more" (Cahalan and Schuurman, 2016: xii).

In conjunction with this expansion, Christian vocation has been understood as comprising two nested callings: a general and a particular calling, also sometimes referred to as a spiritual and an external calling (Bunge, 2011; Hardy, 1990; Vos, 2017). Vocation is, in the first instance, a call to love of God and neighbor as part of the body of Christ, regardless of one's specific roles in life, while a particular calling takes the form of living out the general Christian vocation in a particular setting, role, and community (Schuurman, 2004).

A raft of recent literature relates talk of vocation to the goals of Christian education and the needs of Christian students. Yet when it turns to students, current literature on vocation regularly slips into the future tense, focusing on how students are being *prepared for* vocations still to come. Plantinga (2002: 115), for instance, rejects the idea of "college as no more than a job training program", yet goes on to assert that "the full value of your education is that it will help you find and prepare for your vocation" before acknowledging that being a student is also a vocation. Literature emerging from the *Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation* funded by the Lilly Foundation in the early 2000s often exhibits a similar focus on preparation for future activity (Gallagher, 2007; Roels, 2014, 2017; Clydesdale, 2015; Miller, 2017). This emphasis neglects the present particular calling of students as students.

Some of the literature does advance the idea that Christian students might work out their particular calling as students within the general calling to discipleship (Boulton, 2010; Calhoun, 1954; Cahalan and Schuurman, 2016; Turpin, 2017; Opitz and Melleby, 2007; Plantinga, 2002). A number of authors affirm children's present vocations as children (Bunge, 2011; Miller-McLemore, 2017). Even in these contexts, however, there has been little exploration of how the idea of student vocation relates specifically to teaching and learning practices. The idea of being a student as both a present-focused, particular vocation and an arena in which the general Christian vocation is worked out seems under-explored in connection with school-based learning, let alone school assessment practices.

We suggest that focusing on the idea of the student's particular calling as a present reality, nested within and expressive of the general Christian calling, and asking what kinds of learning practices might be most clearly connected to working out this calling, offers a useful avenue for connecting faith formation, assessment of school effectiveness, and pedagogical practice. It creates space for thinking about the student's agency in faith formation and a language that may help to both focus and moderate the school's understanding of its agency. If schools are understood as providing a set of educational practices that nurture students' growth in their vocation as students, assessment of students' investment in those practices may offer a way of asking concrete questions about students' growth in faith as well as the adequacy of the school's provision for that growth. The vocational frame may also allow feedback to students that suggests a purpose and trajectory for growth in faith that is related to engagement in school.

Christian practices

As we turn to the question of what kinds of practices might count as embodiments of faith and sites where schools and students interact, we intersect with a significant body of work on the nature of social practices, Christian practices, and their intersection with educational practices (e.g. Cooling and Green, 2015; Dykstra, 2005; Glanzer and Alleman, 2019; Griffiths, 1999; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Macintyre, 1984; Peachey, 2020; Smith and Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2020; Wenger, 1999; Volf, 2002). As framed in this literature, practices are not the less intellectual half of a theory-practice or a belief-practice divide. The common construct of "putting beliefs into practice" is therefore not a good representation of what is envisioned. Practices are indeed embodied, involving concrete moves in space and time, but they are also shaped by narratives and commitments and marked by intentionality as well as by socially established frameworks of meaning.

As an illustration, consider two hypothetical enthusiasts for the Christian Eucharist. One loves debating theological views of transubstantiation, substantial presence, or spiritual nourishment, but does not attend communion services. The other's favorite snack is a little bread and wine, and they partake daily in their kitchen, but they have little interest in the story of Christ crucified or the congregation that confesses it. Neither is engaged in the practice of the Eucharist, which involves bodily, communal, and confessional participation. Christian practices are complexes of belief, belonging, and action rather than secondary "applications" of an already complete faith. Engaging in them is not only a way of expressing faith, but a way of strengthening, extending, and discovering the contours of faith (Dykstra, 2005). Practices do not just apply belief; they imply, embody, and help shape belief.

In this sense, a behavior such as choosing to sit at the front of class or picking up litter on the beach may or may not be a Christian practice, depending on how it is experienced and narrated. One student may pick up litter to pave the way to a self-promoting photo for social media, while another may be responding to hearing about creation care as a Christian obligation. Conversely, many intentional practices in learning environments may become Christian practices as they are lived and narrated in ways rooted in Christian faith. The important question thus becomes not simply whether students are engaging in a specific set of behaviors, but whether they are investing in them as Christian practices, in a way that shows some tether to faith-informed intentions. Investigating how students are engaging in learning-related practices that may count as Christian practices may provide insights for schools seeking to examine the connection between school-based learning and faith formation.

Development of the *Practicing Faith Survey* (described further below) focused on this approach. This required specification of areas of Christian practice connected to learning settings. What kinds of practices might enact the vocation of a Christian student? Through a process of literature review, focus-group interaction with students, educators, and student-life professionals, and the construction and validation of an assessment tool (Cheng et al., 2019), we sketched and refined five basic areas of practice that together provide contours of the vocation to live as a Christian who is a student. We propose the following as a workable map of Christian learning practices (Dykstra, 2005):

> **Intellectual practices** focus on intentional discipling of the mind. This may include direct reflection on the relationship between faith and ideas and seeking out resources (literature, discussion partners, mentors) that help with understanding the intellectual implications of and challenges to faith. It also includes intentional truth-seeking practices, such as fact-checking, questioning, and working to refine understanding. This area covers learning practices that contribute to the formation of an informed Christian worldview or belief framework (cf. e.g. Holmes, 1983).

Relational practices focus on attentiveness to the well-being of others in the immediate community. This may include working to encourage, support, or include other students and being aware of their needs. It may include learning to navigate cultural differences that may impede interaction or collaboration or working to help another student learn. This area covers practices oriented toward caring for and building connection with others and contributing to the formation of a hospitable community (cf. e.g. Bonhoeffer, 1996).

Introspective practices focus on self-examination and discerning one's own motives. This may include reflecting on motives for pursuing projects or seeking academic success or clarifying one's sense of one's own gifts and contribution. It may include fostering gratitude or wonder or seeking to discern God's voice. This area covers practices that recognize the mixed motives that drive learning and move toward discernment, growth, and repentance (cf. e.g. Griffiths, 2006).

Beneficent practices focus on the well-being of the wider community, society, and world. This may include acts of or projects focused on justice-seeking, service-learning, creation care, community engagement, civic action, professional service, etc. This area covers practices that apply learning to needs in the world and seek to make a constructive contribution to its flourishing (cf. e.g. Wolterstorff, 2004).

Formational Practices focus on the intentional cultivation of faith through activities such as Scripture reading, worship, etc. It may also include intentional investments in specific forms of growth that are rooted in the desire to grow as a Christian, such as working to become a better listener in order to treat one's neighbor better. This area covers explicitly devotional practices such as engagement in chapel services, devotions, or personal prayer, but also intersects with the other areas of practice when the focal intent is personal spiritual growth (cf. e.g. Smith, 2009).

Each of these areas names a facet of Christian engagement that is focused on learning environments. These areas are not to be understood as necessarily denoting separate activities. A concrete act such as reading a text or taking part in a service activity may involve multiple forms of practice at once (truth-seeking, sharing insights with a neighbor, preparing for service, etc.). Rather, the areas represent directions of investment that may come to the fore in particular learning intentions and practices.

This map of Christian learning practices outlines the particular calling of being a Christian student. Christian schools should be working to develop and sustain pedagogical practices likely to nurture and sustain investment in these areas of practice. Christian schools can gain from assessment of the degree to which students are invested in these areas of practice as learners. Through such assessment over time they may draw inferences about the efficacy of their educational provision in relation to a broad picture of faith formation.

The *Practicing Faith Survey*

This paper has described a conceptual lens for examining the intersection between faith formation and school-based learning practices with a focus on student agency in relation to student vocation. We argue that such a framework creates space to develop school-level assessment strategies that focus on whether the school is fostering student engagement in Christian learning practices. This both connects faith formation goals to school-level assessment and relates the school's investment in faith formation to a broader cross-section of learner experience than theological or devotional

activities alone. The approach retains points of connection with the existing work surveyed earlier, but also suggests space for fresh exploration. In closing, we report briefly on work to operationalize this approach in an actual assessment tool. The PFS tool (www.practicing.faith) cannot be presented in detail here, but is presented as the practical context in which the present argument developed and an example of its instantiation.

The PFS is an online assessment tool designed to help Christian secondary schools measure the extent to which students connect their faith to school-based learning practices. Development of the survey was co-funded by the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning at Calvin University and Cardus. The initiative builds upon past Cardus work on assessing Christian school outcomes (Neven Van Pelt et al., 2012; Pennings et al., 2014; Green et al., 2016; Green et al., 2018a; Green et al., 2018b; Cardus, 2019) and the Kuyers Institute's work on Christian pedagogical practices (Smith and Smith, 2011; Smith, 2018). At the time of writing, the PFS instrument has been successfully designed and validated (Cheng et al., 2019), a supporting website has been built, and the instrument is being piloted in North American schools. While the current iteration of the tool focuses primarily on secondary-school students in Christian schools, we believe the approach to be relevant to other education settings.

The PFS approach seeks to treat the above five areas in concert as a broad map of investments in Christian learning practices, enabling the identification of areas of relatively strong or weak investment. Using the PFS tool, these areas of practice are explored via questionnaire items. Students receive formative feedback on their practice investments. This feedback is individual and confidential; only the student has access to their personal results. Teachers and school administrators receive an aggregate profile that maps patterns of investment in the cohort or school as a whole. Resources are provided to assist teachers and administrators in exploring how to teach in ways which support Christian practices oriented towards student vocation. In this, the PFS tool is able to draw upon a body of previous work on faith and pedagogy (Cooling and Green, 2015; Cooling et al., 2016; Smith, 2018). We anticipate that this direct connection to teaching and learning in the survey and its processes might help schools to respond not simply to data on how religious their students are, but to data on the nature of students' investment in practices that are at once faith-formative and learning-related; this offers a context for re-evaluating pedagogical practice.

The range of practices embraced in the model pushes against a narrowing of faith to personal belief, spiritual experience, or explicitly devotional activity. The primary focus on practice rather than belief opens the possibility that students who do not profess faith, yet learn in Christian institutional environments, could usefully review their own learning practices against the background of a faith-informed model of learning. Such students may be able to find pathways to growth as learners and increased understanding of how faith can frame learning even if they are not able to assent to Christian beliefs. Whether or not the PFS will have effects on teaching and learning in Christian schools remains to be seen. We hope that future research will address this question.

Conclusion

In this paper we have identified a gap in existing literature on assessment of school effectiveness and described a framework for approaching the intersection of schooling, faith formation, and assessment. Very few research resources or empirically validated approaches are available to Christian schools wishing to assess the contribution of school-based teaching and learning to the faith formation of students. We have suggested that this gap is exacerbated by lack of attention to

the specific mission of faith-based schools, narrow understandings of faith, and a tendency to displace student vocation into the future. Conversely, we have argued that it might be bridged by an approach that focuses on Christian learning practices as an outworking of the present vocation of students as students. By mapping five areas of Christian learning practices, we have sought to frame faith formation in a way that offers potential to connecting school mission, student agency, faith formation, and school-level assessment, as exemplified by the PFS tool. We suggest that it is part of the vocation of Christian students to seek out, respond to, and intentionally work with pedagogical affordances in these five areas, and that the mission of faith-based schools implies an obligation to create and assess the uptake of such affordances. We can therefore think about the challenge of assessing the effectiveness of Christian education in terms of attempting to discover how students are intentionally invested in these areas of practice. What is learned from such assessment can be offered back to students as a tool to inform their own further investment, and to teachers as a way to review the contribution of their pedagogical practices. The approach doubtless requires further elaboration and evaluation and will not answer every question about faith formation and schooling. Nevertheless, the current lack of resources in this area justifies attention to the question of what it is that Christian schools need to assess in light of their particular mission and how they might conceptualize the task.

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