

Original Paper

From Athens to Berlin

A pedagogical field trip for Christian educators

Dr Fraser Douglas Hannam

Lecturer, Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, Australia.

Lecturer, Morling College, North Ryde, Australia.

Senior Educational Officer Christian Education Ministries, Erina, Australia.

Email: fraserhannam@yahoo.com

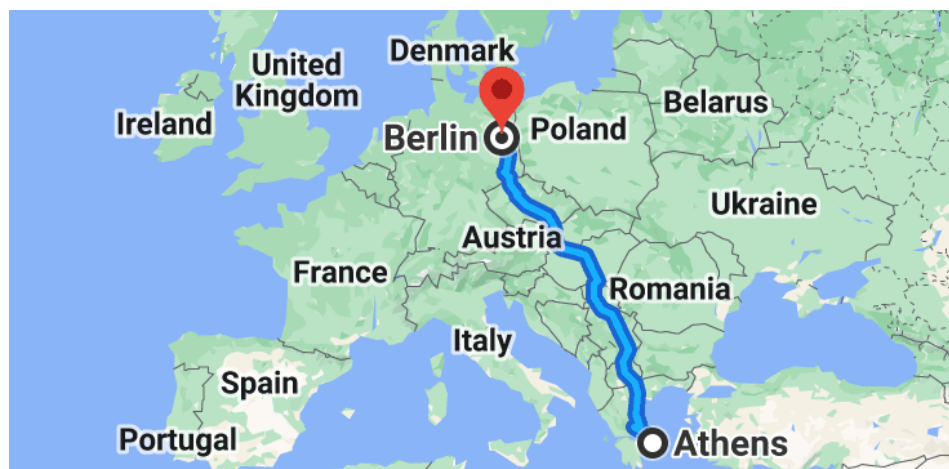
Abstract

Kelsey (1993), in his work ‘Between Athens and Berlin’, draws our attention back to the classic educational deliberation of ‘student’ or ‘teacher’ centred educational approaches. His pedagogic debate is perhaps more reminiscent of a continuum between ancient Greek *Paideia* –holistic education aimed at the creation of good citizenry and that of Germanic *Wissenschaft* –technical expertise, whereby modern educational practices might be conceivably mapped somewhere between one extreme and the other. The burden of this paper is to explore the space along this continuum to locate an optimal position whereby instructional best practice might flourish through the balance of what may be described as a combination of excellence in a discipline (systematic education) or a cultivation of the soul.

Keywords: Christian Education, Religious Education, Holistic education, Paideia, Wissenschaft

Introduction

Although the correct title of Kelsey’s book is ‘between’ Athens and Berlin not ‘from’, I wanted to envision the concept as a pedagogical field trip along a continuum to determine an instructional destination of best practice within the extremities. Physically the geographical measure between Athens and Berlin constitutes a 24-hour journey of 2,337.6 km via the A1 Motorway. It is in Athens that our fieldtrip begins.



In ancient Athens, *Paideia* simply named an unself-conscious educational process through which young free males were “formed” by those virtues they would need to function as responsible adult citizens. The process involved the whole person. Their bodies were subjected to physical discipline, and their souls were informed by ancient Greece’s traditions and customs, chiefly by studying Homer, so that the young would emerge deeply shaped by the dispositions that make for good citizens. The goal of education as *Paideia* was something

both very public and very political: the cultivating of politically skilled citizens for an idealized “democratic” self-governing polis or city. (Kelsey, 1993, p.8)

Paideia and Wissenschaft

Kelsey (1993), in his work *Between Athens And Berlin*, draws our attention back to the classic educational debate of ‘student’ centred education, juxtaposed with ‘teacher’ centred education, using the pedagogic counterparts of Greek (*paideia*) and Germanic (*wissenschaft*) from the 1820s onwards, in the context of theological education:

I propose a typology. I suggest that for historical reasons Christian theological education in North America is inescapably committed to two contrasting and finally irreconcilable types or modes of what education at its best ought to be. They are normative models, models of “excellent” education. For one type I shall suggest that “Athens” be the symbol, for the other “Berlin”. (1993, p.5)

His pedagogic debate is perhaps more reminiscent of a continuum between ancient Greek *paideia* (holistic education aimed at the creation of good citizenry), and that of Germanic technical expertise, whereby educational practices might be mapped somewhere between one extreme or the other. It is in this space that Kelsey identifies a fundamental instructional problem often passed over (by theological educators at least), that providing the models are mutually exclusive, then the first burden on educators (which presupposes the generation of curriculum material) is that they work out which model they are looking to put in place – excellence in a discipline (systematic education) or a cultivation of the soul? The implication being that we might be honing the wrong tool for the wrong job. Thereby rendering instruction ineffective in as far as achieving the desired outcomes which are dependent on whether our educational aspiration might be in the first instance, inquiry into the formation of ‘good citizenry’ through holistic education (Kelsey, 1993, p. 8), or “inquiry into mastery of the truth about whatever isolated subject is studied” (Kelsey, 1993, p. 13).

Despite Kelsey’s initial assertion regarding the irreconcilable nature of the two pedagogies, he later amends this contention, “the way we acquire *wissenschaftlich* disciplines is through some kind of *paideia*” (p. 216). Individual preferences aside, logic would dictate that a holistic *paideia*, which anticipates and appreciates the values and utility of a complete person, constitutes the necessary ‘soil’ from which *wissenschaft* might spring forth. Plantinga (2002) affirms this balance, “Nobody pursues purely ‘objective’ learning. Everybody pursues ‘committed’ and ‘socially located’ learning (p. 67). Technical excellence must necessarily be results driven and therein only those outcomes that are readily measurable and backed up by contemporary research can be utilised. As such, ‘knowledge’ becomes a fragile and temporal construct without the ‘hook’ of *paideia*, that recognises and connects it to the social animal of the student’s personage. This reminds us of an often-cited observation of C.S. Lewis that perhaps captures the heart of the problem when he refers to students passing through the university system as ‘men without chests’ (1947). Lewis posited that education had slipped into ‘head knowledge’, producing men with disproportionately large heads and emaciated bodies.

Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to observe that, anthropologically, based on our definition of what a human being is, *paideia* is a normalised shaping of a child. More so, *paideia* would seem to be a ‘bringing out’ rather than a ‘putting in’ of information, which seems highly suggestive of the technical excellence required of *wissenschaft*. Crudely put, a forming of the person rather than a filling of the head. Hanscamp et al. refers to this practice as ‘formational learning’.

Racing from one topic to another to comply with an overcrowded curriculum is the very opposite of formational learning. While there are benefits in the standardisation of a mandated curriculum, many teachers feel that their role has changed to that of a technocrat needing to find the most efficient way of pushing students through a prescribed course. (Hanscamp et al., 2019a, p.19)

Paideia and Christianity

The next matter to attend to is formalising the link between Greek *paideia* and educational processes in the 1st-century Mediterranean surrounding the formation of the Christian movement out of the Jewish tradition.

Christian theological education in North America is ineluctably located between “Athens” and “Berlin”. Every theological course of study rests on some more or more or less implicit negotiated truce between these two models of excellent schooling. (Kelsey, 1993, p.6)

Although the primary concern of this paper is not with theological education per se, its burden, in an eccentrically roundabout sort of way, *is* concerned with how education might be conceived through a theological lens (i.e., rather than ‘theological education’ the paper seeks to ‘theologically educate’). Therefore, Kelsey’s Athens–Berlin binary opposite model of excellent education does have an application, although clearly what I am proposing gravitates naturally to the *paideia* end of the continuum while remaining compliant with the requirements of the educational governing bodies. On this, I am confident Kelsey would concur:

In Greek *paideia* meant a process of “culturing” the soul, schooling as “character formation.” It is the oldest picture of education to be found in Christianity and has been powerfully retrieved in the current debate about theological education. (1993, p.6)

According to Hanscamp et al., the purpose of Christian education is to seek a particular type of student formation. Students are invited to be people who not only understand the world God has made through the lens of His big story – but are inspired to be engaged in His world as they live out what it is to be truly human as an image-bearer of the creator (Hanscamp et al., 2019, p. 23). Jaeger (1985), one of the seminal authors in the area of *paideia*, went so far as to assert, “The true *paideia* is the Christian religion itself” (p. 61). The implication is that the 1st-century Greek converts did not come to view Christianity as a *paideic type*, but rather the final and fullest unfolding of its natural evolution. Kelsey buttresses this notion of Christianity as the new and ultimate *paideia*.

“Christianity’s not so alien; it’s a *paideia* like yours, aimed at the same goal, but superior in the way it does so... .” Clement of Alexandria and his brilliant student Origen were self-consciously affirming, not that Christianity was like *paideia*, but that Christianity *is* [emphasis added] *paideia*, given by God in Jesus Christ, turning on a radical conversion possible only by the Holy Spirit’s help, and taught only indirectly by study of divinely inspired Scriptures in the social context of the church understood to be in some ways a school. Thus, very early in the history of Christianity, *paideia* was simply built into the very way in which Christianity was understood by Christians themselves. (1993, p.11)

I note that while this reference is clearly outside the New Testament era, it is useful to show the history of interpretation within the tradition. Predominantly through the lens of the Gospel communities, the educational processes employed by Jesus are more reminiscent of the development of the whole person, a *paideia* of the soul – essentially, a pedagogy designed to shape a well-functioning human (through discipleship) being rather than a mastery of a particular technical discipline. The language and the influence of the Greek culture, particularly its educational models of the 1st century, would mean his audience would ‘get him’, and would understand and engage with the instruction of Jesus through a *paideic* lens. That was their context as listeners and that is how they would have read Jesus, and by employing that same lens it may be possible to achieve an ‘ancient equivalence’ that resonates with what we are trying to do in the modern educational context. Not surprisingly then this strong connection between Greek *paideia* and Christianity might flow from its leader and namesake.

Paideia, Jesus and the Bible

As the Greek *paideia* consists of the entire corpus of Greek Literature, so the Christian *paideia* is the Bible. Literature is *paideia*, in so far as it contains the highest norms of human life, which in it have taken on their lasting and most impressive form. It is the ideal picture of man, the great paradigm ... the formation of the Christian man, his morphosis, is the effect of his unceasing study of the Bible. (Jaeger, 1985, p.91)

Jaeger further strengthens this notion of Greek *paideia* as being synonymous with the biblical text and therefore, by association, is inextricably linked not just to the ‘Christian man’, but to Jesus the Christ, and the founder, head and ‘perfector’ (Hebrews 12:1-3) of the Christian movement:

The form is Christ. The *paideia* of the Christian is *imitatio* Christi: Christ must take shape in him. This appears most clearly in the manner in which Gregory quotes the Bible as the supreme authority. (Instead of saying “the apostle says” he writes “The apostle educates us.....”) implying that what the Bible teaches must be accepted as the *paideia* of the Christian. (p.93)

The quote carries resonances with the ‘incarnational approach’ deployed within Christian education (Holmes, 2006) to achieve a ‘Christ-centred’ pedagogy, but now with a clear *paideic* purpose and context within the historical vision of the Gospels as a whole. A similar pattern emerged in the Latin West where Augustine of Hippo evolved a Christian curriculum based on scripture rather than epic (de Hipona, 1957).

Paideic Implications for the Classroom

“How the Spirit speaks to the human race in the Scriptures is that of the wise educator who never forgets the narrow limits of his pupils’ capacity” (Jaeger, 1985, p. 94). An understanding of the implications for how *paideic* instruction might manifest in the classroom will afford invaluable forensic markers for instances of pedagogic episodes within the Gospels.

Each type of excellent education has definite implications regarding a number of features of theological education, such as the relation between teachers and students, the characteristics looked for in an excellent teacher, what the education aims to do for the student, what the movement of the course of study should be, and the sort of community the school should be. (Kelsey, 1993, p.6)

Although characterised by their distinctive Christian flavour, all Christian schools are heavily regulated by their respective governing bodies. Using Kelsey’s continuum, we can broadly enquire of such organisations, “Is the focus on technical excellence or *paideia* – the cultivation of the whole individual? (i.e., what are they teaching and why are they teaching it?) What are our governing bodies’ aspirations, teaching a precise set of disciplines, for example scientific rigor and method?” Certainly, that would be required of every educational institution to some extent. However, Jesus never taught in that way. Jesus was someone who was involved in teaching *paideia* (the development of the whole person) and therefore every subject that is taught in a curriculum is somehow contributing to the development of a person. Within the Australian context, a cursory examination of the principles contained within the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) Statement of Values (Figure 1) reveals a key directive is the holistic growth of the student, including ‘spiritual development’ and other qualities reminiscent of ‘good citizenry’ (circled in Figure 1). Moreover, these qualities are to form and inform the development of individual syllabi within the curriculum.

Statement of Values

Preamble

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is responsible for the provision of quality curriculum and other materials for Kindergarten to Year 12, the development of quality assessment and examination materials and awarding secondary school credentials, the Record of School Achievement and Higher School Certificate. NESA is also responsible for the registration and accreditation of non-government schools and home schooling, as well as maintaining and monitoring teaching standards, including teacher accreditation.

NESA acknowledges the central role of education for intellectual, physical, social, moral and spiritual development. It provides syllabuses and other materials that support students, schools, teachers, parents and other stakeholders in the interactive process of teaching and learning.

The following values are used by NESA to inform the development of syllabuses and other materials:

- [Excellence](#)
- [Respect and responsibility](#)
- [Equity and justice](#)
- [Inclusivity](#)
- [Environmental sustainability](#).

Figure 1. NESA Statement of Values

(NSW Education Standards Authority, 2024b, Statement of Values section, paras. 2–6)

Although beyond the scope of this paper, it would seem from the outset that a paideic pedagogy has clear implications for all levels of schooling, not just as a matter of good practice but robust holistic outcomes in terms of good citizenry. The pedagogy we are seeking will supply students not just with objective facts, but a set of core values onto which they might graft and scaffold their lives. An educational pedagogy that is more reminiscent of holistic education, transformational in nature and directed towards the promotion of a good citizenry of the future. Smith (2009) concurs, suggesting for the Christian educator:

Education is not primarily ... concerned with providing information; rather, education most fundamentally is a matter of formation, a task of shaping and creating a certain kind of people. These people are distinct because of what they love and desire – the Kingdom of God. (p.26)

So where is the optimum balance for our Pedagogical Fieldtrip between Athens and Berlin? Where does our quest between good citizenry and technical excellence find us? Hungary!



Hungry for best practice in teaching, hungry for optimising learning and hungry for serving our educational communities. We pray that our students will graduate well- rounded, courageous, lovers of learning and life. But also equipped with the technical expertise to thrive and flourish in their chosen professions so that they might give back and invest in those communities they have chosen to serve.

References

- de Hipona, A. (1957). De doctrina christiana. *Obras de San Agustín, 15*, 49-349.
- Hanscamp, M., Clarke, D., Mustin, A., & Parker, C. (2019). *Transformation by design: Crafting formational learning*. Christian Education National.
- Holmes, G. (2006). *EDUC577: The Relationship of the Bible to Education: Weeks 3-7 lecture* [Lecture notes].
- Jaeger, W. (1985). *Early Christianity and Greek paideia*. Harvard University Press.
- Kelsey, D. (1993). *Between Athens and Berlin*. W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Lewis, C. S. (1947). Men without chests. *The Abolition of Man*, 1-26.
- NSW Education Standards Authority. (2024). *Statement of values*. <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/Understanding-the-curriculum/curriculum-development/syllabus-development/statement-of-values>
- Plantinga, C. (2002). *Engaging God's world: A Christian vision of faith, learning, and living*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Smith, J. K. (2009). *Desiring the kingdom (cultural liturgies): Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*. Baker Academic.