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Challenges and opportunities of staff formation in Lutheran schools—a case study

Tim Jarick

Introduction

To form or not to intentionally form, that is the question for leaders in Lutheran schools as they wrestle with and consider the identity, wellbeing and flourishing of Lutheran education in Australia. How do schools intentionally and deeply guide staff formation experiences to be informed by Lutheran theology and spirituality yet shaped authentically? The spiritual, theological, and vocational formation of staff is critical in enhancing a Lutheran school's identity. If Lutheran schools are to be true to their purpose and mission, then the people who staff them, teachers, support staff and leaders are to be not only informed but also reformed or even transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ¹ as they encounter the Lutheran theological and educational tradition authentically and deeply.

At issue is that many new staff, and increasingly leaders, have no Lutheran or Christian connection. Therefore, formation programs, processes and experiences need to be more intentional, deliberate, and missional than has occurred in the past. At another level, the formation opportunities schools provide must go deeper than surface-level knowledge, orientation and, tick-the-box accreditation. Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) formation programs are only the start of an ongoing formation journey for staff within schools. How do schools and their leaders prioritise time, facilitators, and resources, to provide ongoing deep formation experiences that are real, authentic, life-changing encounters with Jesus Christ? The problem each principal, pastor and school leader confronts is how to make the most of formation opportunities to provide intentional growth of individuals and change in the formational culture of a school to in turn nurture the formation of students.

The following research was conducted as part of a Minor Thesis in the Graduate Certificate of Research Methodology course at Catholic Theological College, Melbourne. This research I conducted into the formation of staff focused on the official formation programs developed by LEA in recent years, LEA and LCA statements, biblical, contemporary and Lutheran understandings of formation, and a case study of the formation culture in one particular school. This article describes case study material from interviewing two teaching staff and two leaders. The case study highlights the story of leaders who changed the staff formation culture of their school over time. My research was limited to investigating the

1 See Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) statement on why the church operates schools, LEA website, accessed 30 October 2020, <http://www.lutheran.edu.au/download/the-lutheran-church-of-australia-and-its-schools/>. This is also articulated as 'Our Foundation' in LEA's *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2016), <http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/index.php/our-foundation/>.

phenomena of staff experience of formation in one particular school but will hopefully shed some insight into how Lutheran schools undertake formation generally.²

LEA formation programs

Since the 1990s, LEA has produced several in-service formation programs and processes for staff new to Lutheran schools (Figure 1).

Program	Years Developed	Description	Time	Authors
<i>Theological Orientation Program (TOPS)</i>	1992 first edition 2000 revised edition	Nine sessions of orientation to Lutheran theology and the ethos of Lutheran schools	Nine sessions of two hours each	Eric Simpfendorfer, Andrew Jaensch and Anne Dohnt
<i>Pathways Spiritual</i>	2005 first edition 2012 revised edition	Twelve then nine sessions to explore Christian spirituality within a Lutheran school context	Twelve sessions then nine of one hour each	Anne Dohnt and Malcolm Bartsch
<i>Pathways Theological</i>	2010	Seven encounters of key theological foci for Lutheran schools	12 hours for the seven encounters; 103 minutes each	Louise Mason and Malcolm Bartsch
<i>Pathways Vocational</i>	2008	Three sessions to explore the mission and ministry of Lutheran education and the contribution of staff	1 day delivered by regions. (Originally 6 days for all <i>Pathways</i> over 3 years)	Reference group and Anne Dohnt
<i>Connect</i>	2019	An induction then four sessions on Lutheran theological perspectives that shape practice and critical reflection on a person's role in a school	Two hours Half Day Half Day Half Day Full Day (3 Days in total)	Anne Dohnt, Steph Maher, Gary Jewson, Stuart Traeger

Figure 1: LEA in-service formation programs

As the name suggests, the first program, *Theological Orientation Program (TOPS)*,³ was a broad theological orientation to Lutheran schools and ethos. The second program, *Pathways*,⁴ was intended to be a three-year cycle focusing on Christian spirituality, Lutheran theological distinctives within the school context and Luther's approach to vocation and

2 This research does not investigate the specific formation programs of LEA for principals, leaders, and Christian Studies (CS) teachers.

3 Lutheran Education Australia, *Theological orientation program for staff in Lutheran schools (TOPS)* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2001).

4 Lutheran Education Australia, *Pathways: Spiritual Focus*, rev. ed. Malcolm Bartsch and Anne Dohnt (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2012); Idem, *Pathways: Theological Focus*, rev. ed. Malcolm Bartsch and Louise Mason (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2010); Idem, *Pathways: Vocational Focus* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2008).

teaching as a ministry. The third and current program, *Connect*,⁵ is significantly different in content, covering less Lutheran theological distinctives and more pedagogically delivered. A significant change in this *Connect* material is the requirement for participants to critically reflect on the content as it applies to their role and submit an e-portfolio to LEA for accreditation.

Formation language and biblical definitions

The language of formation is still evolving in Lutheran schools across Australia. The Lutheran tradition of education has always emphasised the theological and spiritual formation of teachers and school staff. What has changed is the use of intentional formation language due to the contemporary challenge of staffing Lutheran schools in a secular culture.

What exactly is meant by the term ‘formation’? The word formation is derived from the Latin *formare*, which means ‘to shape, fashion, create, make or mould.’⁶ In the context of a Christian learning organisation, a person undergoing formation is a person who is being formed and shaped into something new or different by God. For Christians, this happens through engaging in the community as God’s Spirit works through the Word, sacraments, prayer, worship, ritual, meaning-making and other distinctive Christian practices.

Biblical passages that use this language of formation include passages from the psalms and the prophets in the Old Testament⁷ and the New Testament epistles. The Hebrew word *yatsar*, ‘to form, fashion, or frame in the mind’, can refer to human activity, such as a potter who forms a vessel out of clay or a carver using wood, such as in graven images. Alternatively, it can refer to divine activity such as God forming Adam out of the ground, Israel as a people, creation, or individuals from conception and the womb.⁸ One example is Psalm 119:73–74: ‘Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands. May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word.’⁹

In the New Testament, the Greek word *morphō* is translated as ‘to form, fashion.’ Artists ‘morph’ their materials, and in the passive voice, ‘to take on form’ is used in the context of the womb. This passive use is found in Galatians 4:19, where the growth of Christ in believers is compared to development in the womb. This growth is an ongoing process, both open and secret, both a gift and a task, with maturity as the end goal.¹⁰ For the apostle

5 Lutheran Education Australia, *Connect* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2019), <http://www.lutheran.edu.au/connect/>.

6 ‘Formation,’ *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed 10 April 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=formation>.

7 For examples of the divine use of this word see Isaiah 27:11; 43:1,7,21; 44:2,21,24; 45:9,11; 49:5; 64:7; Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 104:26, 95:5; 74:17; 33:15.

8 William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Edward Robinson, ed. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 427–428.

9 In this article the NIV translation is used.

10 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 609.

Paul, spiritual formation is having ‘Christ formed in you’ (Gal 4:19), ‘coming to fullness of life in him’ (Col 2:10), ‘growing to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (Eph 4:13) and ‘gaining the mind of Christ’ (Phil 2:5). These examples illustrate that biblically and theologically, we do not form ourselves, but God forms us.

Contemporary and Lutheran understandings

Formation language, in particular, the term ‘spiritual formation’ has become more widespread in recent decades through writers on Christian spirituality such as Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Eugene Peterson and Dallas Willard.¹¹ These authors explain spiritual formation in terms of the Christian maturing in their discipleship, learning spiritual practices and growing in faith in Christ. A contemporary understanding influenced by these writers is this definition from the Northumbria Christian community: ‘Spiritual formation describes “forming” or “shaping” the Christian disciple’s life and character in Christlikeness. It is an intentional inner journey towards deepening faith and spiritual growth using spiritual disciplines as active participants with God, “until Christ is formed in us”.’¹²

A more expansive view of formation used in some Lutheran schools and secular educational discourse comes from the Quaker educationalist Parker Palmer. While exploring teacher formation, Palmer elaborated:

Formation is a concept from the spiritual traditions, and it involves a concern for personal wholeness. Where training asks if the person has the right knowledge and technique, formation asks after the state of the person’s soul. Where training offers the person new data and methods, formation offers the person help in discerning his or her identity and integrity.¹³

For Palmer, formation includes the spiritual and vocational renewal of teachers. This definition echoes the understanding behind the former LEA formation program *Pathways*, as described above. The current LEA emphasis on formation and leadership in the *Growing deep* framework includes vocational practices such as strengthening Lutheran identity and capabilities like growing oneself, engaging the community, and descriptors such as building self-awareness, deepening faith, listening and understanding, and nurturing faith.¹⁴

For some staff and leaders in Lutheran schools, there is a level of uneasiness about

11 Richard Foster, *A Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper, 1978); Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011); Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005); Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012).

12 ‘Spiritual Formation,’ Northumbria Community website, accessed 10 November 2019, https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/article_types/spiritual-formation/.

13 Parker J. Palmer, ‘Reflections on a program for “the formation of teachers”: an occasional paper of the Fetzer Institute’, *Centre for Courage and Renewal*, accessed 10 December 2020, <http://www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/reflections-on-a-program/>.

14 Lutheran Education Australia, *Growing deep: Leadership and formation framework* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2016), <http://growingdeep.lutheran.edu.au/>.

using the term ‘formation’. Neville Grieger has recently articulated this.¹⁵ This uneasiness around formation language comes from the perception that formation is a ‘sausage-making’ process where everyone comes out the other end completed and uniformly made. I remember hearing this critique of seminarians in the 1990s when I was a student of ALC’s antecedent, Luther Seminary. I would argue though that this view of formation is a distorted perception based on the process of being conformed to something.

Formation in a Lutheran school is ongoing, unique to a person’s role, and ultimately the Holy Spirit’s work. God shapes that person spiritually, theologically and vocationally in that particular Christian community depending on the effectiveness and faithfulness of that formation culture. The aim of formation in any Christian community is not ‘conformation’ but ‘transformation’. In a Lutheran school, the aim is also a ‘reformation’ of the person. Commenting on Romans 12:2, Marva Dawn explains it through the voice of a child:

Once a little boy was trying to open a flower bud. Under his persistent efforts the blossom fell apart in his hands. In exasperation he looked up at his mother and asked, ‘Why does the bud fall apart when I try to open it, but when God opens it the flower is beautiful?’ Shocked at his profundity, his mother was speechless. Soon, however, the child exclaimed eagerly, ‘Oh, I know! When God opens the flower, he opens it up from the inside.’¹⁶

The sausage-making process of being conformed is all about forcing a person’s spiritual development from the outside, whereas transformation opens up a person from the inside. The difference is dramatic. Dawn writes, ‘when God opens persons from the inside, they can truly be themselves, the uniquely gifted individuals they were created to be.’¹⁷ For this type of transformative God-inspired formation to happen, trusted relationships are needed. An openness to explore, question and dialogue with others is paramount, as well as a welcoming, encouraging, and safe place. This aligns with a Lutheran understanding of the gospel and of faith, which is invitational, relational, incarnate, and focused on Christ’s action in us.

Case study

School background

To explore the experience of staff in their formation, I undertook a descriptive case study of one particular school, interviewing two teaching staff and two school leaders.¹⁸ The school

15 See Neville Grieger’s introduction in *Fuelling the Fire* (Adelaide: Lutheran Education Australia, 2020), 1.

16 Marva Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 29.

17 Dawn, *Truly the Community*, 29.

18 The case study was conducted through ninety-minute face-to-face interviews. The interview questions were open-ended and worded to highlight the experiences staff had in their spiritual, theological and vocational development within their school. The interviews were also semi-structured to allow for follow-up questions to go further into the individual and school culture’s formation experience. In each of the interviews, the transcripts of the two teachers and the combined leaders were coded for concepts, correlations, differences, and themes that emerged. NVivo, which is a qualitative data software, was used to code the data according to formation language, formation descriptions, ideal formation, the reality of formation and key formation stories. Further, codes were created around formation challenges and signifiers of a possible formation culture.

selected was a K-12 Lutheran college which had a stable leadership of principal and pastor and demonstrated a capacity to build a positive formational culture. The school is located on two separate campuses with a population of over a thousand students and over a hundred staff. It was initially a two-entity school, with the primary school started first by the local Lutheran congregation, then the secondary school sometime later. Over time the two schools amalgamated into one college. As will become apparent, the school's historical development is significant when analysing the dynamics of the culture of formation.

Participants' background

Concerning the backgrounds of the participants, interviewee one was a female, late-career humanities teacher from the secondary campus. Although primary trained, she was a secondary teacher, having taught at the school for twelve years. She had previously taught in an Anglican school and before that in various government schools in another state. The individual was also a formation leader for the school. Interviewee one had also joined the Lutheran congregation worshipping at the school.

Interviewee two was an early to mid-career teacher from the primary campus. She had taught at the school for five to six years, and before that, taught in another local independent public school. Interviewee two is a former student of the secondary campus in their senior years and currently a primary school parent. Interviewee two was not worshipping or connected to any local Christian church.

The principal had been in their role for just over ten years. The principal's religious background involved involvement in evangelistic church groups, bible studies, and student groups at university. The college pastor was an ordained pastor of the LCA, having been at the school for over seventeen years. His role had changed from initially being a pastor to the junior campus with a distinct missional orientation to now being the sole pastor for the whole college community.

Case study analysis

Analysis of the data was undertaken in three parts,

- 1) focusing on the definition, language and purpose questions from the interviews
- 2) outlining the broad themes and challenges that emerged
- 3) articulating the changed culture of formation in the school as described by the school leaders.

To help organise the culture data, Ron Ritchhart's cultural forces¹⁹ were used, particularly the time, opportunity, routines, modelling, and expectations elements. These categories from Ritchhart were helpful signifiers of the priorities, resources, and validity a school structure gives to the formation of its staff.

19 Ron Ritchhart is a senior researcher at Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero. His research centres around making student's thinking visible, teaching for understanding and the establishment of school and classroom culture. For the latter see his work *Creating Cultures of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 6–10.

Definitions

Responses to the question *'How might you describe formation?'* ranged from the theological and educational to the missional and personal for each of the teachers.

Interviewee one confirmed that formation is about the alignment of the individual with the ethos and purpose of the Lutheran school, as well as an appreciation of Lutheran theology and how it applies in a school setting. This strongly supports Malcolm Bartsch's approach that Lutheran theology is to be in dialogue with the educational practice of teachers in a Lutheran school.²⁰ It also highlights the argument that a Lutheran school's identity is not necessarily found in a critical mass of Lutheran staff but in the professional and theological conversations amongst staff. Conversations that link classroom practice with the theology of the church are critical for deep formation.

Interviewee two responded to this definition question in a more personal and missional way, stating her opinion of formation as a personal journey of growth, connection and understanding in their relationship with God.

The principal's answer was more from the lens of leadership and collaboration. For her, formation is helping staff or students on their journey of spiritual growth and understanding. Like the teachers, the principal highlighted the differing journeys for staff but articulated the importance of deepening the understanding and practice in that formation process.

The pastor described formation as an alignment with Lutheran theology. Important for him was the missional goal of not only providing information but also opening the door for a deeper relationship with Christ.

Language

At first, both teachers reacted negatively to using the term 'formation' in their school setting. Interviewee one indicated she did use the term when communicating and planning with the school pastor and leaders but not on the classroom level with colleagues. She expressed the discomfort some teachers feel with the term 'formation', which is perceived as being formed or moulded in a particular way. Interviewee one suggested that if it grew to be common language in a school, she would be happy to use it.

Likewise, interviewee two indicated that 'formation' was not a term she used or heard used at her school. When questioned further, she expressed that she had a positive response to the term and linked it closely to 'learning and growth' and 'understanding more about God and your relationship with him'. Interviewee two frequently used formation language to describe her experience of spiritual growth; both personally, professionally and vocationally. At one point during the interview, she inadvertently used the word, 'transformation' instead of formation to describe her teaching experience in a Lutheran school. This suggested that she understood the language of formation at a deeper level and was cognisant that formation involves transformative change by God. This comment also demonstrates how some staff might not be aware of or able to express their formation

²⁰ See Malcolm Bartsch, 'The dialogue of education and the Lutheran confessional theology: not either/or but both/and,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 33, no. 3 (December 1999): 147–156.

experiences, especially if they are not given the time, space and language for reflection. These comments on the use of formation language at this school site were also evident in the principal and pastor's responses.

Purposes

Responding to the question '*What do you understand is the purpose of formation in a Lutheran school?*'; interviewee one gave a detailed response, while interviewee two struggled to answer. Interviewee one outlined her journey of growth in understanding Lutheranism as well as responding to the purpose question. To the latter, she responded with statements like 'establishing a common understanding of Lutheran theology'. She also pondered the changing makeup of staff in her school and that when she first started teaching in Lutheran schools:

We had teachers who came with no faith... It was important that they have some awareness of the heart and mind of Lutheran education. These days...we have a higher number of people who would identify as being of Christian faith. So now it is more of a question of aligning those people with the finer elements and also some of the bigger ideas.

This refining of the purpose of formation in the school's changed staff situation was intriguing and explained further by her personal reflection of her journey in Lutheran theology and spirituality: 'One of the things that struck me of the Lutheran system when I came is that I kept on hearing this word 'grace' all the time... I think one of the bigger words in formation is grace... That's one of the keys of formation.' There is a Lutheran view on grace that is different from other Christian traditions that this staff member took on board. A clarity of the gospel and the action of God in a person's life that is distinguished from any human merit or works.

Interviewee two initially had trouble answering this purpose question, but after time to reflect, she responded in terms of 'going through' that journey of 'growth and understanding'. As well as adding 'they probably would like us to be attached to the church of the school although I am not.... You are asking very challenging questions.' This indicated to me some tension within her thinking that she knew the missional purpose of Lutheran education, but this understanding also included an expectation of worship at the school's congregation.

The principal responded to the purpose of formation in a gospel, mission orientated way, with the language of formation. She stated that formation is 'about shaping someone's faith through the experience they have...a Lutheran school is somewhere where people should experience the gospel, witness the gospel being lived... So for me forming is in the direction of the gospel, the relationship with Christ, growth with Christ.' The principal had a clear vision of what formation is theologically and why and how Lutheran schools do it. She also had a clear focus on the gospel in her leadership of the school and a deep awareness of and capacity to model it to staff, students and parents. She also expressed the purpose of her leadership of the school in terms of influencing others with the gospel, such as regularly leading staff formation groups.

Case study themes and challenges

During the research process four broad themes and their challenges were identified from the case study data.

1. Time for professional and personal growth

Both teachers who were at different points in their careers and faith had grown significantly and deeply in their teaching practice, spirituality and connection to Christian community through their time in a Lutheran school. This growth had a specific effect on their relationships at school, home and congregation. The secondary teacher's positive involvement in the LEA accreditation and formation programs, particularly the relational and reflective aspects of *Pathways* and *Equip*²¹, contributed to this personal and professional growth. She acknowledged the importance of aspects like extended time for reflective learning and personal enquiry to go deeper into the biblical narratives for the sake of better teaching. For the primary teacher, it was when she was involved in teaching Christian Studies (CS) and the bible and leading devotions with staff peers that deeper connections were made.

Pathways has been a very key integral part of my formation... The other one that comes to mind is *Equip*...as well as submitting the final portfolio at the end... *Pathways* being spread over the year gave me time to reflect and to reflect on my teaching with my students...

I guess there are the formal programs, but then there are other things... I make time to make my own personal connections and to spend time with God myself praying...even just through listening to morning devotions led by other staff members there is formation happening inside me all the time when I am listening to them and reflecting on them. I am making more time to make those connections... I guess that is part of my formation...reading the bible and with the kids in my class through our morning devotions.

For the secondary teacher, when she was involved in teaching *Equip* to other teachers, she indicated a desire for deeper understanding and learning:

Having the information I needed to facilitate *Equip* led me on a journey of professional and personal enquiry. That leads me on to personal readings... I didn't need that for the professional part, but certainly it formed me and my theology, so the two went hand in hand... I think teaching CS is a strong contributor to my own spiritual formation because it requires me to reflect and know where I am coming from if I am teaching it.

An authentic deep formation experience for these teachers involved working and struggling with the biblical text by teaching it or leading devotional practices with staff and students. There was a strong correlation between teaching CS and deep formation experiences.

21 *Equip* is the LEA formation program for teachers of CS (cf. Lutheran Education Australia, *Equip* [Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Education Australia, 2008]). Typically all primary teachers undergo *Equip* and specific teachers who teach CS in secondary schools.

One of the challenges of developing deep growth at both the personal and professional level for staff is regularly carving out time to learn the bible and faith together. There is never enough time to do everything that is needed in a school, and formation can seem to come at the end of the priority list. However, having whole formation experiences where processes are built upon, and staff are not missing bits due to school commitments, is invaluable. Viewing time for staff formation differently from the rest of school time is crucial. The way we approach time for formation and use time for the formation journey is a major factor in aiding or inhibiting the development of a school's formation culture.

2. Christian culture and worship life

Another theme that emerged was a deep appreciation of the school's Christian culture, particularly the worship life and devotional practices. For both staff, teaching in a Lutheran school involved an expanding journey of Christian faith and a growing understanding of the essential practices of a Lutheran school. For both teachers, this growth of understanding and appreciation involved being in a position where they taught the Christian faith and lead devotions for students and staff. It involved them reconceptualising the Christian life and Lutheran understandings of things such as grace and the gospel. Importantly, it also involved an engagement and appreciation of the worship life of the school and why it is regularly practised.

A key story of deep formation from interviewee two described her changed mindset over the expected routine of weekly staff devotions:

Initially, when I arrived, I was quite frustrated by morning devotion because I wanted to be in my room...setting up and organised for the day... It quickly became part of the expected morning routine... We are in the staff room together, we are having a devotion, someone is reading a bible verse having a discussion and reflection. That is a time of growth and learning...that really became an important part of my day... That's an important part of college formation.

To go deeper into this switched thinking, I asked another follow-up question: '*What changed for you to be open to that morning devotion time?*'. She responded:

I wasn't shut off to the idea of it being a devotion. It was just that I wanted to get into my room and get ready for the day. I think it was just a shift in routine...in the way the day should begin, and I also think actually being a busy mum started to play a role in it. I could sit down from 8.15 to 8.30 have that moment of stillness...and learn to listen to what we were discussing before the busyness restarted again.

The change in mindset for this teacher to see times of worship and devotion as a different, yet important use of time, was pivotal for her formation. This is a significant barrier and opportunity for new staff in Lutheran schools who have not been immersed in a Christian community before. Profound formation experiences that involve a complete change of thinking and understanding of purpose seem to need what the biblical writers would call *kairos* rather than *chronos* time.²² An authentic connection of staff to the

²² Positive psychologists would call this *kairos* time 'flow' in terms of its human dimension.

school's worship life is paramount to the potential of deep formation. Engagement with the devotional practices of a school is arguably a touchstone for spiritual and theological growth. The amount of engagement across a staff group in the worship and devotional life of a school is a great aid or inhibitor of authentic formation.

An example of growth in understanding of Christian faith, the gospel, Lutheran theology and spirituality are also included in the following responses from both interviewees:

When I was a teenager, I was heavily involved in youth groups, and I considered myself a strong Christian person... I think I was a bit of a pharisee (laughs)... When I look back at that teenager, someone needed to tell me what the real message of Christian faith is. And I think that is what working in the Lutheran system has given me.

In the very first *Pathways* activity pastor said, tell us a little bit about your relationship with God or your story. I remember saying to him...that I was a good person and I had good morals, I meant that I was religious... Part of my formation now is that I understand that being a good person and having good morals is not part of being a Christian.

Change in understanding the Christian life from being religious, a good person with good morals to a grace centred, Christ initiated view of faith is evidence of a deep, authentic experience of Lutheran formation and spirituality. Once again, this change in understanding occurred only after a long period of reflection for the teachers.

3. Listening and learning from others

Openness to listening and learning from the formation stories of others emerged strongly from the interviewees. The responses of interviewee two showed that Lutheran formation can only be done in community when people are open to listen and learn from others. Or, to put it another way, the faith is often caught more than taught. Further, the storytelling of these formation experiences is seminal for the faith development of other staff. Interviewee two said:

There's one lady on staff that I love listening to her story of formation. I feel like she has had this complete change of mindset and growth from what she learnt as a Catholic girl to now. I do think that shapes my formation when I have those in-depth conversations about their journey... I think through those conversations and opportunities to connect with each other they are part of my formation too.

There was also a ready acknowledgement that everyone in a school community is on a different stage of their spiritual and faith journey. Not everyone in the staffroom or in devotions is open to talking and reflecting on their spiritual development. Listening and learning from others cannot be forced when it comes to encouraging the faith and is antithetical to the invitational Lutheran understanding of formation.

The starting point for any formation experience needs to be a safe place where teachers can inquire and ask questions. Where this atmosphere or culture does not exist in a school, deep, authentic formation will be severely limited. Openness where people can

freely explore the Christian faith without fear of fitting in or being dropped into the deep end is vital—being empathetic to where people are in their spiritual and theological development, not confrontational. Making people feel comfortable in a Lutheran school of exploring spirituality requires high trust levels. Skilled formation facilitators, who can develop a trusted place where people listen and learn from others, is critical. This is part of the DNA of a faithful and effective culture of formation.

4. Missional effect of formation

For interviewee one, who had been a lifelong Christian, the missional effect²³ of teaching in a Lutheran school was initially learning elements of Lutheran theology. This, in turn, led to teaching it to students in CS and then building on it in teaching fellow staff. Part of this formation journey was a reconceptualising of the Christian life through a Lutheran understanding of grace and the gospel; finally leading to joining the Lutheran church worshipping at their school site, even though she was reluctant at first and came from another denomination.

For interviewee two, who could be described as a 'lapsed Catholic', the missional effect was phrased in terms of personal spiritual growth, such as, 'journey', growth in 'understanding more about God', 'your relationship with Him' and 'my connection with God'. This faith development included her children and her family relationships at home:

I make time to make my own personal connections and to spend time with God myself praying... I do spend a lot more time with God in the mornings or when I am lying in bed at night and tucking my children into bed. In my journey, I am making more time to make those connections.

Her development as a CS teacher, teaching bible stories in the classroom and leading devotions for students and staff, was intertwined with her personal spiritual growth:

I will often read the bible at home with the girls. It is usually lead by the girls who say 'Mummy, can we read it together?' But I guess that is part of my formation with the girls at home reading the bible and with the kids in my class through our morning devotions.

This was compounded by her role as a parent of two children who were students at her school. Their questioning of her as a parent, led to a growing faith of both children and parent, to the point of her children desiring to be baptised, with the added challenge of her husband being at a different stage:

A challenge for me personally is...that my husband does not have a relationship with God. So there might be moments at home when I am talking to God, or I might be praying with the girls. That's a challenge because he is not going down that path, whereas our children are constantly going down that path, and have asked to be baptised.

A final self-revelation by interviewee two was her perception that her formation

23 'Missional effect' is used to describe that over time teaching in a Lutheran school can lead to significant change in the person as they experience the gospel. This can become evident through transformation in their personal or professional lives, a changed understanding of the Christian faith, or a commitment to a particular faith community.

experiences happened more as an adult, teaching in the school rather than when she was a student of the school:

I went to high school here... The only thing I can really remember of CS was singing at chapels...the acolytes walking forward...lighting the candles...praying...but... I'm not sure a lot of that was key in my formation. I think my formation personally has happened...from the moment I arrived here...as an adult.

This awareness of formation as an adult rather than as a student raises significant, pertinent questions for how student formation is attempted in Lutheran schools.

Formation culture in the case study school

This school's journey of improving its formation culture reflects its background and context, two schools on differing sites amalgamating to become one college. This history brings its dynamics and challenges in working with staff and encouraging a whole school culture. The principal relayed the following turning point that kickstarted a changed approach to the formation of staff:

I was horrified... The staff member had been on staff for ten, fifteen years in the high school, and she was unaware that the bible has an Old and New Testament... I was floored. How is it possible someone immersed in this environment doesn't even have a clue? I didn't expect them to know every book in each of the Testaments, but at least before Christ and after Christ, Genesis the first book, Revelation the last and the four Gospels. It just kind of reflected to me that the way *Pathways* was happening was not really working.

With reflection and dialogue, this incident led to a change of formation culture for the whole college.

In initiating this change the principal was very mindful of overt formation language. With the different makeup of secondary staff's religious identity, she indicated that 'the staff on the senior campus were not predominately practising. I knew I would scare them to death if I used the term "bible study"...so we came up with the term "growth groups".' At first, the principal and pastor faced intense challenges in establishing a new formation culture of weekly 'growth groups' for staff. The pastor indicated the conflict involved in this culture change, 'Hostility... It was horrible. It was such a contrast between the two spirits of the school... At the start, I had some people quite angry at me. They came to me and said this isn't [name of school].' After initiating this change of formation culture, the composition of staff changed too.

Several topics, ways of delivery, and facilitators were tried across both campuses in developing the 'growth groups'. Over time, it was refined to include a cyclical system of LEA formation programs, including *Pathways* and now *Connect, Growing deep (GD)* and other Lutheran educational emphases. The pastor explained:

First year everyone does *Connect*. Second year everyone does *GD*. Third year everyone does *Restorative and Service Learning*. And fourth year we are looking at a theological (program) so people can get into the CS and what we teach in CS. It is

systematic, and everyone gets covered... There is good theology being given to staff. Reflecting on this formation journey of developing and refining these 'growth groups' over ten years, the principal evaluated it this way:

We feel like it has been working and it has made a difference. Over the years, we can't ask people to lead when we don't have practising Christians or those who are confident... We have staff who are non-practising, or they were baptised and never returned to church during their time with us...those who have joined us recently...have found that the environment...the growth groups can talk about all things spiritual, life, and connections, practical stuff that they feel they gain greater insight...I think staff have grown in their understanding and capability to engage in those conversations but, more importantly also in their personal commitment.

According to the interviewees, what aided this formation change was the regular ongoing time in the school day for staff to grow personally and professionally in a safe environment. After the change, formation expectations were accepted, and the formation processes and structures were improved over time. Formation language developed as leaders and staff encouraged spiritual and theological growth through trusted relationships and interactions. Using Ritchhart's cultural forces framework,²⁴ the development of the school's formation culture can be described:

Cultural force	Evidence in case study school
Time	School leadership allocating paid time for 'growth groups' as well as extended time for reflection through ongoing formation processes
Opportunities	Providing purposeful formation activities on Lutheran educational emphases to engage staff's personal and professional capabilities
Routines and Structures	The introduction and improvement of a cyclical formation process for all staff to grow spiritually, theologically and vocationally
Language	Using formation language and terms for school leaders yet translating them when needed to provide staff with a vocabulary for describing their growth, spirituality, the biblical narrative and theology
Modelling	School leadership and some staff modelling a growing faith as people search spiritually and question theologically so that formation stories are discussed, shared and made visible. An authentic witness to the gospel and God's grace
Interactions and Relationships	School leadership showing respect for where staff are at in their own spiritual journeys and some staff encouraging the professional formation conversations
Expectations	School leadership setting an agenda of understanding that ongoing formation is required to teach in a Lutheran school and staff building on this
Environment	Making formation visible and arranging space to facilitate deep/thoughtful formation experiences

24 Ritchhart, *Creating Cultures of Thinking*, 6–10.

Conclusion

This research has found that staff formation in Lutheran schools is much more than theological orientation and accreditation. It is more than trying to impose a particular shape on an individual. It is a God-initiated gospel transformation of the whole person from the inside out. The language of, and focus on, formation, is still evolving across Australian Lutheran schools. One could argue that the Lutheran tradition of education has always emphasised the theological and spiritual formation of teachers and school staff. What has changed though, in recent times, is the use of intentional formation language and processes due to the contemporary challenge of staffing faith-based schools.

The case study school I researched showed that Lutheran formation in an educational setting is an ongoing engagement, both professionally and personally, with a school's communal life. As school staff engage and are challenged to grow in their experiences of essential practices like worship, devotions, and scripture, their understanding, knowledge and practice of formation and Lutheran theology can change and grow. The challenge of staff, in a busy school environment, deeply engaging with God's Word is what can cause a change of mindset, practice and spirituality. Further, deliberate time for theological and spiritual reflection, listening and learning from others, and the space to safely ask questions can greatly enhance a formation of the heart. The stories of teaching staff from this case study highlights the missional focus and opportunities for growing staff formation in schools.

A formational culture can take root in a school when time and opportunity is given not only for the delivery of formation programs but also the personal and professional, spiritual and theological conversations, the sharing of staff formation stories, and deep reflection on the essential practices of a Lutheran school. Deeply transformative, God-initiated formation happens when there is an authentic engagement with the gospel and the leadership and culture of the school aid this and prioritise it.

Intentional formation happens when staff grow in appreciation of the purposes and benefits of time for worship, devotion, and prayer in the school setting. Collaboration of school leaders, regular formation opportunities for staff, time to grow in God's word and be challenged by it, are some of the factors and opportunities that encourage a formation of the heart for staff in Lutheran schools.