

Teaching for *shalom*

Christian education

It was Friday 6th January 2006, and it was rather more of a rush than usual heading north for the annual Christian Education Theory Conference. I have been going to it since 1999, but usually I have not found myself teaching on the Friday on which it starts! Consequently I disappeared pretty quickly after a lesson on diameters and circumferences of circles and, after a tube, was soon on a train to Derby Station. I arrived in time for the evening meal and was pleased to meet up again over the weekend with many familiar faces, both from the UK and further afield, as well as meeting some new people (including Dr Peter Price from Brisbane, who kindly took the photographs that you see in this article).

As usual, the weekend was well structured and had a good balance of main plenary sessions and optional seminars on a variety of topics. The



Clarence, John and David



David in action

theme of the weekend was 'Teaching for Shalom' and the two main speakers were Clarence Joldersma and David Smith, who both teach at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. (Some of you will remember David Smith from his work several years ago with John Shortt, when they were both based at The Stapleford Centre.) Given that there were seven optional seminars to fit into three slots, people, as usual, could not hear all the seminars, but everyone receives a copy of all the papers given at the conference. To give three examples, one understood special education as spiritual warfare, another contrasted education for democratic citizenship with the Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff's idea of education for justice, and another presented the results of a survey of pre-service (and mainly Christian) teachers' personal use of ICT. This latter seminar led to much discussion, including a concern that file-sharing and plagiarism are often not seen as unethical; do we need a clearer idea of what collaborative learning is?

Plenaries and seminars

Whilst not attempting to summarise the content of all the plenaries and seminars, Clarence Joldersma said that the flourishing that is shalom requires our response to God's call through creation. He made the significant point that shalom is not just about individual relationships, but involves social roles and institutions. It also includes right relationships to the natural world, but again this is not merely an individual's appreciation of the world, shalom implies the existence of ecological roles, including global, regional and local ones. Moreover, shalom is not just a mental construct, but it is experienced, for example, in the form of the abolition of slavery, or in the aid given after the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004. He said that teaching for shalom should be focused outwards towards the other, and not upon results, personal development, or even the development of an alternative Christian culture. His challenge was for us to be 'teaching a generation to struggle towards bringing human flourishing in our communities, our societies, around the globe. Teaching for the purpose of raising a new generation of "kingdom workers" who see themselves as responsible for being a healing hand in society, concretely, on behalf of Christ, for the marginalised in society and the fragility of the non-human world'.



Clarence explains



John dramatically retelling passages of Scripture



In-depth conversations over coffee

Andrew Palfreyman teaches mathematics at Twyford CE High School, Acton, which is in West London. He has also recently finished a thesis on the religious context for an understanding of mathematics.

In another of the plenary sessions, David Smith unpacked the idea that every tool that we use within our teaching has a tendency to understand the world in one way rather than in another. By considering the use of ICT within language learning, he helped us to think of the positive and negative implications of various approaches. For example, computer-assisted language learning is good with respect to differentiation, and is advantageous for quieter pupils who would not speak up so readily, but in using this method, an emotional response towards the pupil is lost, and the computer is not good at asking follow-up questions! Alternatively, if one were to use computer-mediated communication, this could help pupils to re-read their contributions before making them, and it could remove elements of status within a classroom. However, the loss of personal immediacy could also depersonalise the others involved in a computer-mediated conversation, leading to an increase in insensitive comments, which would not so easily happen face-to-face in a classroom.

A word of thanks

On the Sunday morning, Ben Jones, Director of The Stapleford Centre, thanked John Shortt for having organised so many Christian education theory conferences over the years – 16 of them in all! Fortunately, however, we will not be losing John's fellowship as he is still intending to come to the conferences; he'll just enjoy quieter Christmases from now on in not having to think ahead as to what needs to happen in early January! I would personally like to thank John for his friendship and support, as it was he who invited me along to my first conference back in 1999!

■ Andrew Palfreyman