A Wesleyan Ecology of Christian Formation

Dan Sheffield
Educating toward outcomes
Moses

4 Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.

Deut. 6:4-9
Jesus

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matt 28:19-20
20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. 

Eph 4:20-24
Christian tradition

- Augustine’s *Confessions*
- Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*
- Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*
- Wesley’s *via Salutis; “The Scripture Way of Salvation”*
- Robert Mulholland’s *Invitation to a Journey*
Oikonomia – an ecology
Overview of Wesleyan framework

“Some time since, you desired an account of the whole economy of the people commonly called Methodists... I sent you this account, that you may know not only their practice on every head, but likewise the reasons whereon it is grounded, the occasion of every step they have taken, and the advantages reaped thereby.”

John Wesley, from A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists (1749)
Methodist “methodology”

- Theoretical rationale: “reasons”
- Methods of formation: “practices”
- Process of development: “steps taken”
- Evaluative measurables: “advantages reaped”
Methodist Conference
(1744)

What to teach?
How to teach?
Who shall teach?
Overview of Wesleyan framework

“the aim of a Wesleyan ecology of faith formation is to make disciples – to shape Christian identity and Christian vocation...

And following on that, to develop the church’s role in nurturing and supporting human response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit...”

Overview of Wesleyan framework

“the context for a Wesleyan ecology of faith formation is the community of the church that is called to pattern its life after the community of the Trinity...”

Matthaei, 171
Overview of Wesleyan framework

**GOAL/AIM**
- Evaluative measurables

**PROCESS**
- Process of development
- Methods of formation
- Theoretical rationale

**CONTEXT**
- “steps taken”
- “practices”
- “reasons”

“advantages reaped”

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*GOAL/AIM*
“it is necessary to have the intended learner’s transformation as a focus of design and not merely as a statement of output. Such a learning orientation needs to be made explicit in the curriculum design process at the earliest stage...”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anderson and Krathwohl's update of (Bloom’s Taxonomy), 2001, 1956</th>
<th>Fink’s Taxonomy 2003 (domains)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating (Evaluation)</td>
<td>Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning or producing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating (Synthesis)</td>
<td>Making judgements based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyzing (Analysis)</td>
<td>Breaking materials into parts and then determining how the parts interrelate to each other or to an overall structure or purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applying (Application)</td>
<td>Carrying out a procedure through executing or implementing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding (Comprehension)</td>
<td>Constructing meaning from different types of functions, be they written or graphic messages, or activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering (Knowledge)</td>
<td>When memory is used to produce definitions, facts, or lists, or to recite or retrieve information</td>
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Bloom and Fink
“to foster learners who are able to act on their own purposes, values and beliefs rather than uncritically acting on those of others.”

“the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective, so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action”

# Mezirow’s transformative learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mezirow’s TLT movements</th>
<th>Specific phases</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Disorienting dilemma</td>
<td>New experience, new content&lt;br&gt;Unsettled sensation</td>
<td>Context</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-examination (shame, fear, guilt, anger)</td>
<td>Critical self-reflection</td>
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<td>Critical assessment of assumptions</td>
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<td>Reformulation</td>
<td>Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared</td>
<td>Critical discourse</td>
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<td>Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning a course of action</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting upon new meaning system</td>
<td>Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provisional trying of new roles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building self-confidence and competence in new roles, relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reintegrating into one’s life</td>
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</table>
The learner has to make “a decision to negate an old perspective in favor of a new one or to make a synthesis of old and new.”

Methodist Conference (1744)

What to teach?
How to teach?
Who should teach?
Wesley: What to teach?

a **cognitive** process of didactic learning

**Means of Grace**
**Acts of Piety/Acts of Mercy**

a **formative** process of spiritual nurturing
Wesley: What to teach?

**PROCESS**

1. **Acquiring** Christian beliefs and practices
   - “instructional mode”
2. **Clarifying** Christian beliefs and practices
   - “dialogical mode”
3. **Extending** Christian beliefs and practices
   - “embodied mode”

**CONTEXT**
Wesley: How to teach?

- Critical learning
- Means of Grace
- Acts of Piety/Acts of Mercy
- Practical divinity
“That part of our economy [method/system], the private weekly meeting for prayer, examination and particular exhortation, has been the greatest means of deepening and confirming every blessing that was received by the word preached, and of diffusing it to others, who could not attend the public ministry; whereas without this religious connection and intercourse [conversation], the most ardent attempts by mere preaching have proved of no lasting value.”

John Wesley, Works, VIII: 252
A Wesleyan Ecology of Christian Formation

Corporate Worship
(Word/sacraments)

Life Groups
(dialogue/integration)

Acts of mercy/service
(Application/behavioural adjustment)

Society/Missional Community
(teaching/organizational/practical)
An alternative formation as kingdom people

“conformed to the pattern of this world”
Assumptions
Knowledge perceptions
Habits/Practices

“be transformed by...”
Assumptions
Knowledge perceptions
Habits/Practices
A Wesleyan Ecology of Christian Formation

Corporate Worship (Word/sacraments)

Life Groups (dialogue/integration)

Society/Missional Community (teaching/organizational/practical)

Acts of mercy/service (Application/behavioural adjustment)

A Methodist Christian
An outcome of the Wesleyan methodology
An alternative formation as kingdom people

Christian Formation
“make disciples”

Discipleship
Ongoing formation in the Wesleyan ecology

“conformed to the pattern of this world”
Assumptions
Knowledge perceptions
Habits/Practices

“be transformed by…”
Assumptions
Knowledge perceptions
Habits/Practices
A Wesleyan Ecology of Christian Formation

Do we know how to shape Christian identity and vocation (belief and practice) in the context of small group community? (make disciples)
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Do we know how to shape small disciple-making groups into larger faith communities of mutual support and resourcing? (form congregations/societies)
A Wesleyan Ecology of Christian Formation

Do we know how to shape our corporate worship so that Christian identity and vocation are formed and energized?
A Wesleyan Ecology of Christian Formation

Do we know how to integrate acts of mercy, or service as formative practice, not just as “random acts of kindness” or “social justice?”

Context

Process

Outcomes

Life Groups

Corporate Worship

Society/
Missional Community

Acts of mercy/
service
A Wesleyan Ecology of Christian Formation

Do we have the **resources/methods to support** this kind of comprehensive eco-system?
Lastly, so that his followers may the more _effectually provoke one another_ to love, holy tempers (*fruit of the Spirit*), and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one — the church, dispersed all over the earth; a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.”

Sermon 92 “On Zeal”
Our primary formation has been toward the culture of consumerism and self-interest. The call to conversion is a call to a rival, alternative worldview. This new worldview likewise requires formation – a rival formation. There is every reason to believe that the process will require an intensive and sustained process of detoxification… Bryan Stone

We initiate churches, and shape the life of those Christian congregations, as a context within which to form Jesus-followers toward the obedient life – loving God and loving our neighbour – and this life together glorifies God, bearing faithful witness. Dan Sheffield