Methodist schools: innovating to survive and accomplish the mission

Escolas metodistas: inovar para sobreviver e cumprir a missão

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ABSTRACT
Based on John Wesley’s activity, the article seeks to answer the raison d’être of Methodists schools, colleges and universities and define what they are today and how they should be distinguished from other institutions of the educational system. Then it defines the basic assumptions of Methodist education and indicates the commitment of the new leaders it should form in the contemporary world, with different characteristics and attitudes. Keywords: methodist education, leadership, Wesley, educational proposal, internationalization.

RESUMO
O artigo busca, a partir da atividade de John Wesley, responder à razão de existir das escolas, faculdades e universidades metodistas e definir o que elas são nos dias atuais e como devem se distinguir das demais instituições do sistema educacional. Define, então, os pressupostos básicos da Educação Metodista e indica o compromisso de novas lideranças que ela deve formar no mundo contemporâneo, com características e atitudes diferenciadas. Palavras-chave: educação metodista, liderança, Wesley, proposta educacional, internacionalização.

RESUMEN
Sobre la base de la actividad de John Wesley, esto artículo trata de responder a la razón de ser de las escuelas, colegios y universidades

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Methodism was blessed by being born in a university. Our founder, John Wesley, always referred to himself as a Fellow of Lincoln College at Oxford University, not a pastor.

John Wesley himself was one of the most learned men of his time. His mastery of literature, classical and scientific, was extensive. He took on social ills – poverty, child exploitation, slavery. He was an activist, challenging the status quo. And he was a voracious reader and writer. He urged his preachers to read classics and he wrote books on electricity and medical practice. It was in that unique combination of confidence in reason (knowledge) and religion (vital piety) that drove Methodists for rage of learning.

Thus, the Methodist Church’s commitment to learning and education was begun with John Wesley. His concern and commitment to education at all levels led to establish Kingswood school in 1748. At Kingswood, coal miners’ children received thorough intellectual education as well as religious training, and personal and social ethical behavior. Curiosity about the world and a passion for knowing the world have been with us from the beginning as Wesley’s followers. That curiosity and rage to knowledge were products of the Enlightenment of the 18th century. This intersection of piety and care for the world introduces us to one of the great achievements of John Wesley, his ability to link learning and evangelism. In his belief, knowledge and piety are partners in empowering persons in their faith and work. Thus, educating the whole person in a balanced way is exemplified in Wesley’s approach to learning the essentials for a life of faith and meaningful citizenship in society.

The Christmas Conference of 1784, at which the Methodist Church in the United States of America was established, authorized as one of its first acts, the establishment of Cokesbury College in Abingdon, Maryland (COKESBURY). Soon thereafter Bishop Francis Asbury wrote to all Methodists, reminding them of their obligation to erect a school in the vicinity of every church: “[…] to give the key of knowledge in a general way to our children, and those of the poor in the vicinity of your small towns and villages” (MICHAEL et al., 1976, p.13).

Since that time literally hundreds of schools and colleges have been founded by or for Methodists in the United States, Asia, and Latin America.
Those Methodist pioneer educators had absolute confidence in their missional centrality of education in the life of the Methodist Church, and in their firm commitment to the idea of the connections between learning and faith.

Although the Methodist tradition today faces new frontiers and challenges in a contemporary global community, an understanding of the history of that tradition informs current policy and practice. The new issues are difficult and require new kinds of solutions, but the educational mission and tradition of Methodists are not outdated.

Then, what is Methodist-related schools, colleges, and universities and why do they exist? The late Merrimon Cuninggim stated in his book *Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church*, that there are, basically, three requisites: 1) it must have a sense, and appreciation of its past; 2) it must have an understanding of and must practice essential values; and 3) it must hold on to, or build, a genuine, defensible relationship with its church (CUNINGGIM, 1994). Cuninggim further suggested

[… the changed realities of the church and college today force us to the conclusion that earlier formation needs to be revised. Whereas at one time the church was the senior partner in the association, the new reality is that the college must now understand itself as the senior partner in the ancient church-college relationship (CUNINGGIM, 1994).

Today, we who representing Methodist-related schools, colleges, and universities sit in the driver’s seat and define the mission, vision, priority, direction, and more importantly producing high quality graduates equipped with broad based knowledge and vocational and professional skills. Our task is quality human capital and leadership development. Are we as Methodist-related educational institutions generating the kind of graduates and leaders that society expects? Are those graduates distinctly different from those which come out of non-Christian educational institutions?

These questions must be answered even before we talk about human capital and leadership development. What is the definition of Methodist Education and human capital and leadership development?

- Methodist Education is the avenue to transform people and the world;
- Methodist Education gives people hope, and frees people from poverty;
- Methodist Education gives people the key of knowledge and faith;
- Methodist Education gives definitive values – Reconciliation, Justice for Equality, and Service for Others;
- Methodist Education is accessible to all people;
• Methodist Education helps people make full use of their capabilities and experiences for service; therefore, liberal and classical learning is critical along with professional and vocational training and neither is subservient to the other;
• Methodist Education aims at high standards for student achievement based on deep concern for what is best for the person;
• Methodist Education can realize impossible dreams because of our connectional system of support which is a privilege that provides an opportunity for everyone to share their God-given financial resources;
• Methodist Education creates an opportunity to develop true partnerships to accomplish the common mission and objectives along with a real sense of pride, accomplishment, and satisfaction;
• Methodist Education creates a purposeful, disciplined, just, and caring community, and networks with Methodist educational institutions around the world for mutual support and benefits.

John Wesley understood that the real purpose of education is not to fill a person with information but to enable him/her to think. He recognized that schools needed to be places that cared for the whole individual. For him, “knowledge” was not only acquiring intellectual development, but also gaining the self-understanding crucial to salvation. And “vital piety” was not only the worship of God based on understanding His love, but also as social outreach. Therefore, Methodist education must foster the formation of character and values, not “train people.” Character and value development is more than a subject on the curriculum. It is an integral part of the character of the Methodist-related educational institutions. The Methodist-related schools, colleges, and universities must not think only of teaching a subject or preparing for a job, but of the development of a person and his/her relationships; of learning about ourselves and how to live with others. Methodist-related educational institutions must understand their role in this perspective.

Dr. James Laney spoke at the 250th Anniversary Celebration of Kingswood School:

[…] to get courage, to reclaim the authority […] we need to understand our tradition in the way that is not imperialistic or aggressive. This means that we need to appropriate this heritage in such a way that it can confidently and generously offer a vision of the world beyond the classroom, beyond much-needed techniques

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1 James Laney, former president of Emory University, was the keynote speaker at the 250th Anniversary Celebration of Kingswood School in Grantham, England in July 21, 1998.
and disciplines. We want a new generation of students to see that inhabiting the atmosphere and climate – the ethos – of that vision can introduce them to a culture of concern and appreciation of a world that needs their skills and their commitment, as well as their dedication. What are the concerns implied by a “culture of concern?” The three concerns are justice (fundamental human right), reconciliation (people to live with their differences with integrity, and do so in peace and mutual affirmation), and service (people to serve the common good, to be educated for more than personal benefit). When the question is asked “Leadership Development for WHAT”, the response, therefore, is “for RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE, and SERVICE.”

John Wesley defined “the character of a Methodist” as:

- love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength;
- in everything gives thanks;
- heart lifted to God at all times;
- loves every man as his own soul;
- pure in heart;
- God reigns alone;
- keep all to the glory of God;
- adorns the doctrine of God in all things (WESLEY).

He further stated that a Methodist should:

- do all the good you can;
- by all the means you can;
- in all the ways you can;
- in all the places you can;
- at all the times you can;
- to all the people you can;
- as long as ever you can (WESLEY).

This is the uncompromising foundation of the Methodist interpretation of quality persons and leaders. When every graduate from Methodist-related schools, colleges, and universities understands, accepts, and practices the belief of John Wesley, Methodist-related schools, colleges, and universities can generate persons and leaders who make a real difference in transforming this troubled world.

Then, qualities of graduates of Methodist-affiliated schools, colleges, and universities in context of the three distinct values – Reconciliation, Justice, and Service – are:
• intellectually competent;
• religiously faithful;
• understand, accept, and exercise the “culture of concern” – justice, reconciliation, and service;
• visional and critical thinker;
• understand, accept, and exercise the global ethics;
• equipped with the following skills:
  1. ability to change the situation with fairness, respect, and honesty;
  2. ability to be visionary with courage to move forward;
  3. ability to resolve problems with ethical and moral responsibility;
  4. ability to organize and lead a team creating self-esteem and motivation;
  5. ability to manage, to plan, to strategize, time, emotion, and resources;
  6. ability to communicate effectively and to be an effective listener;
  7. ability to nurture and develop persons for the future;
  8. ability to build relationships with trust and respect;
  9. ability to create an imaginary idea, develop it into a plan, and strategize to implement it;
  10. ability to be an effective and dynamic servant leader.

Quoting from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Report of 2000 “leadership occurs when people become concerned about something and work to engage others in bringing about positive change” (KELLOGG, 2000).

Today, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry plays a supportive role rather than a commanding role for our schools, colleges, universities, and theological seminaries by offering technical assistance that includes developing effective governance and efficient administration, and cultivating and deploying local resources. This technical assistance and support shifts from the traditional financially “dependent model” to an “independent self supporting model.” Institutions must exercise evolutional changes in order to survive and prosper. Christian colleges and universities must think, and exercise creativity and innovation to create a new image or “brand”. Re-affirming the founding mission and creating innovative ways to carry out the mission may be the way to move. Sitting on the past glorious and prospering image and brand without making adoptive changes cannot save institutions. Many institutions may not have developed ideas for what should be done to meet these unexpected challenges.

There are no shortcuts or easy answers. From student’s perspectives, perhaps the most important advantage for Methodist-related schools, colleges, and universities lies in the students’ belief that Methodist-
-related institutions are more concerned with the development of the whole person. Students should choose Methodist-related institution because they are interested in social, personal, professional, spiritual, and intellectual growth and development.

Reference List


