

Human Development

Education's Purpose

by
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The purpose of Christian education is human development. Ellen White states it this way. The aim of true education . . . *is the harmonious development of the physical, mental and spiritual powers.*¹

The Primacy of Purpose: An educational *purpose* is primary and holding firmly to it is essential. A purpose gives clarity and meaning to *product* and intention and direction to *method*. Parents and educators should maintain a firm commitment to purpose? However, maintaining this commitment can face serious challenges. Unclear and conflicting purposes frequently compromise educational programs. And a plethora of alluring educational reform agendas often distract from purpose.

Competing Purposes: Historically, a society's schools have been motivated by three fundamentally different visions of purpose.² The first vision promotes *socialization* as the goal of education. Here, education's purpose is to prepare and shape students to fill productive roles in society and to preserve a culture's norms and values. In service of this purpose, the educational process tends to emphasize similarities, conformity and shared values. The expected outcome would generally lead toward a convergence of its members and the development of a more homogeneous society. The goal for the second purpose of education is to pass on to the youth the accumulation of a culture's *forms of knowledge*, understanding and wisdom. This process tends to emphasize differences, nonconformity and individual specialization. The expected outcome would generally lead toward a divergence of its members and the development of a more heterogeneous society. The third purpose for education is to help each individual student realize his or her unique *human potential*. This process also tends to emphasize individual differences and individual specialization. The expected outcome would generally lead toward a divergence of its members and the development of a more heterogeneous society.

Because these three purposes inherently compete with each other, the educational results have been seriously diluted. These include a compromised curriculum, a confused and ambiguous approach to method, and a frustrated realization that the educational product has not adequately achieved any of these purposes.³

Competing Reforms: In addition to the problem of conflicting purposes, parents and educators are frequently confused and detracted by an abundance of enticing educational reform agendas. Many of these reforms focus on a variety of educational products and methods. Their appeal is a promise of success in correcting the perceived failures of education.

One example of a reform movement that keeps reappearing and is currently receiving considerable attention advocates a return to the basics. Proponents insist that education cannot succeed without emphasizing the basic essentials of reading, writing and arithmetic. However, parents and educators must ask if a return to the three R's can really solve education's problems and fulfill education's promise. While many would acknowledge the educational value of attending to the basics, the primary

purpose of Christian education requires much more. That is why every reform movement must be examined through the lens of Christian education's purpose. It is this inspired perspective that will enable Christian parents and educators to remain focused upon the true aims of Christian education. To do otherwise would compromise education's primary purpose of human development.

Purpose and Choice: Why should parents and educators spend precious time and resources considering and choosing an educational theory or purpose? Would it not be more productive to just get on with the practical tasks of teaching and learning? It is true that abstract ideas about a theory or purpose are usually dead unless supported by concrete practice. However, it is also true that any educational practice that does not benefit from the guidance of a meaningful theory or purpose is like wandering aimlessly in an educational wilderness. Therefore, purpose and method must be intentionally linked if the product is to fulfill a chosen purpose.

Robert Frost reinforces this critical function of making a choice. In his poem, *The Road Not Taken*, he affirms that one's ultimate destiny is determined by making a choice.⁴ That inevitable "Y" in the road requires a choice. And this decision will ultimately mark the course of a path to follow. Thus it is that "way leads to way." A choice leads to subsequent choices, the paths of which reveal a direction and ultimate destiny. Whether based upon capricious, calculated, or inspired reasons, the impact of a choice on direction remains.

Today, parents and educators face a plethora of educational purposes and reforms. On what basis should they make choices? The results of these choices will make a difference. And the choice of a worthy purpose will make all the difference.

Choosing a Purpose: This choice of purpose is critical because of its potential impact on every aspect of the educational process. The consequences are both temporal and eternal.⁵ When facing a fundamental decision of this magnitude, inspiration will point the way. Inspiration may not provide all of the details for the journey, but inspiration will indicate the very important direction that one should follow. Therefore, Christians will look to an inspired source when choosing a purpose for education. Ellen White has provided this source and has indicated that the aim of true education . . . is *the harmonious development of the physical, mental and spiritual powers*.⁶ This inspired purpose points to a path to follow. And choosing to follow that path will make all the difference.

If human development is the purpose of education, and if this purpose is to be achieved, then several important questions need to be addressed as Christian parents and educators follow this path. What is a physical, mental or spiritual power? What does it mean to harmoniously develop these powers? How should parents and educators foster the harmonious development of the physical, mental and spiritual powers?

The Nature of Physical, Mental and Spiritual Powers: What is a physical, mental or spiritual power? A physical, mental or spiritual *power* may be viewed as an intrinsic human quality or ability that has the potential to be developed and utilized. While there are multiple and diverse powers that possess potential for development, each one can be classified as a unique aspect of a physical, mental or spiritual power. The harmonious development of these diverse powers will enable and enhance a person's potential to perceive and do (*physical*), understand and know (*mental*), and value and choose (*spiritual*) in unique and multiple ways. The focus of these powers may be applied to oneself and

one's personal experiences, others and their experiences, the world with its multiple contours, the larger universe, and the God of creation. When applied, these powers will serve as valuable tools or abilities to mediate all reality and experiences. They provide multiple windows through which to view the world of reality and experiences. They can facilitate the development of a coherent, enriched, meaningful, and harmonious life and worldview. (See Figure 1.)

Physical powers tend to be *body* centered. They enable a person to strive for what is real, concrete, and often observable and measurable. Physical powers will help one to perceive, act, do, and produce real concrete products. These products are often associated with the physical body and the senses. The empirical powers of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling and doing are vital to living the full life as ordained by the Creator. Thus sensory perceptions, skills, performances and concrete products are hallmarks of physical powers. An important work for Christian parents and educators is to nurture the development of a rich diversity of physical powers so that they can become effective empirical tools or mediators of all reality and experiences.

Mental powers tend to be *mind* centered. They enable a person to strive for what is true, ideal, abstract, and often less observable and measurable. Mental powers will help one to know and understand abstract patterns of truth, ideas, facts and information. These patterns are creations of the mind. The rational powers of thinking, reasoning, analyzing, knowing, and understanding in logical, constructive, patterned and creative ways are vital to living the full life as ordained by the Creator. Thus thinking, reasoning, analyzing, knowing, and understanding are hallmarks of mental powers. An important work for Christian parents and educators is to nurture the development of a rich diversity of mental powers so that they can become effective rational tools or mediators of all reality and experiences.

Spiritual powers tend to be *soul* centered. They enable a person to strive for what is of value, worthy and purposeful. Spiritual powers will help one to evaluate, select, accept and internalize worthy values and purposes. These values and purposes are grounded in spiritual, moral, ethical and aesthetic values that are evaluated, selected, accepted and internalized as worthy for the body, mind and soul. These normative powers are vital to living the full life as ordained by the Creator. Thus evaluating, selecting, accepting and internalizing worthy values and purposes are hallmarks of spiritual powers. An important work for Christian parents and educators is to nurture the development of a rich diversity of spiritual powers so that they can become effective evaluative tools or mediators of all reality and experiences.

The Harmonious Development of Powers: What does it mean to harmoniously develop the physical, mental and spiritual powers? In addressing this question, it is critical to understand the concepts of harmony and development. First, the concept of *harmony* suggests that a specific and intimate relationship exists between separate elements or dimensions. For example, harmony in music occurs when several notes sound simultaneously. However, each note must be specified and in tune if there is to be harmony. If a wrong note or an out of tune note is inserted, the result is discord or dissonance.

This music analogy may be helpful in understanding the concept of harmonious development. Here, harmony suggests that an intimate relationship exists between the powers and between the diverse dimensions of each power. Harmony occurs when each power is developed in an appropriate manner so that all other powers work and support each other. The sum of their harmonious relationships is

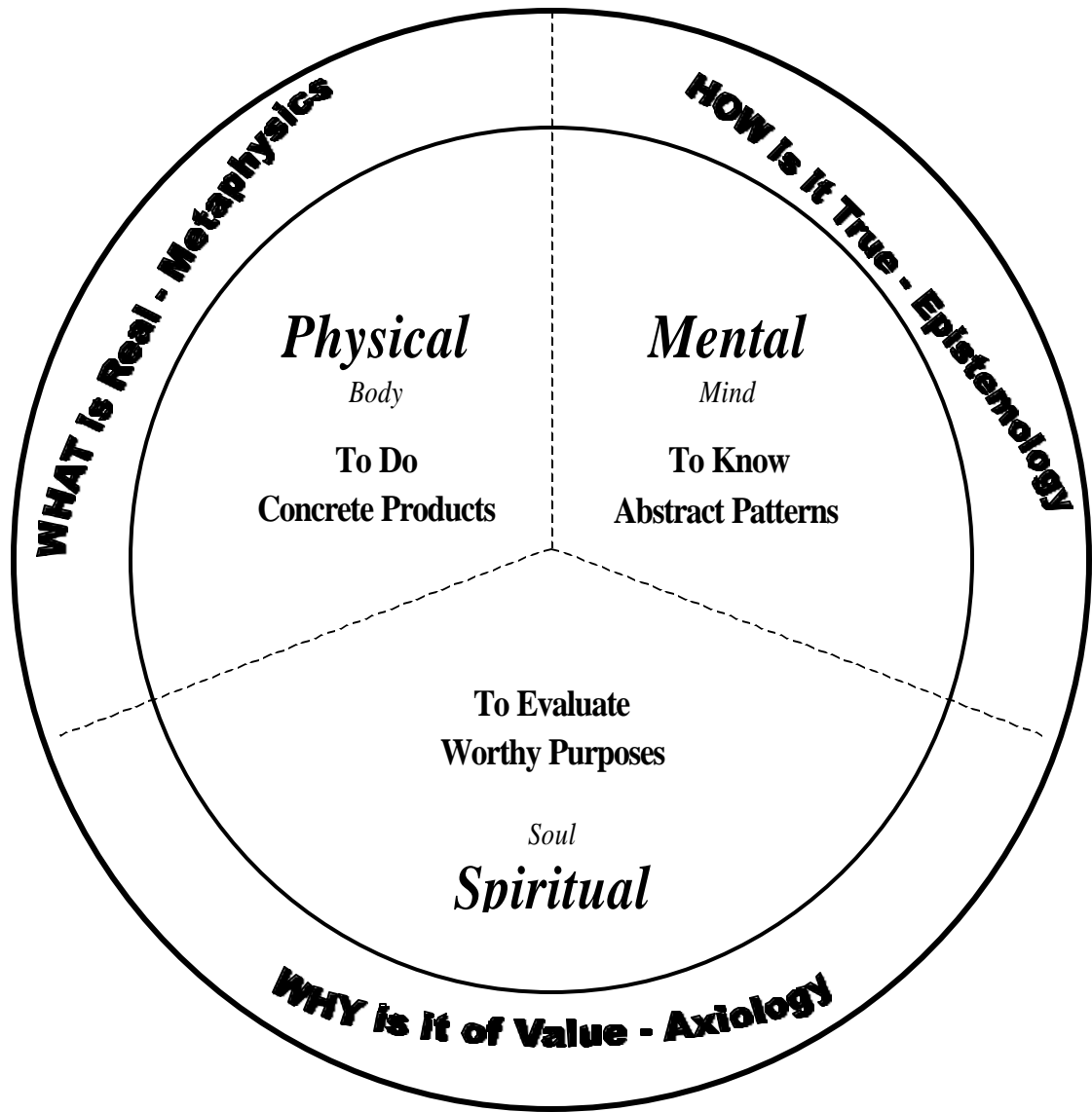


Figure 1. The Physical, Mental and Spiritual Powers
 This Model Places these powers within a philosophical context.

more than the product of each individual power. In other words, physical powers cannot be effective without the harmonious interactive support of developing mental and spiritual powers. Likewise, mental powers cannot be effective without the harmonious interactive support of developing physical and spiritual powers. And it follows that spiritual powers cannot be effective without the harmonious interactive support of developing physical and mental powers. Therefore, the meaningful whole will not occur unless all three types of developing powers are in tune and in harmony with each other. When this happens, there is a synergistic interaction between the powers. The result is an enriched and complete whole that is significantly more than the sum of the three individual dimensions or separate powers.

Second, it is important to understand the concept of *development*. Powers are not constructed. Powers are developed. Human beings may assemble parts and pieces in the process of constructing a physical entity. This is a technological process. The process of development, however, is very different and may be observed in living organisms as found in nature. For example, if a seed is planted in appropriate soil conditions and if it receives adequate sunlight, water and nutrients, it will develop into a mature plant. The seed contains intrinsic potential qualities necessary for development. However, development also requires appropriate conditions and nurture.

This analogy is helpful in understanding human development. Every human being possesses intrinsic potential for the development of physical, mental and spiritual powers. However, to realize this development potential, the developmental processes must be supported by appropriate conditions and nurtured in a harmonious manner.

The educational process, therefore, is about the harmonious development of a diversity of human powers. It is not about a technological process designed to erect a structure of knowledge, skills and values. Consequently, if human development is the real purpose of Christian education, then every aspect of educational practice must come under review. This leads to a question about method.

Method, Purpose and Product: How should parents and educators foster the harmonious development of physical, mental and spiritual powers? On first reading, it appears that this question is about *method (how)*. However, a more holistic view suggests that *purpose (why)* and *product (what)* are also essential elements to consider.

First, a ***purpose*** addresses the question of *why* Christian parents and educators should pursue this complex educational process. As they ponder this process, they should acknowledge the primacy and power of a worthy purpose. An educational purpose is primary because it is formative in shaping method and product. It has power because it is grounded in worthy and important values. The values that support this worthy purpose stem from the Judeo-Christian tradition as given in the biblical transcendent narrative. They acknowledge a Creator and the true nature of all created reality. They recognize the unique nature and condition of mankind, the origin of evil, the plan of redemption and restoration through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the hope of the second coming, and life in the recreated new earth. A purpose grounded in these values provides powerful and compelling reasons for employing effective methods to achieve significant products.

While the purpose of education is to nurture the development of the physical, mental and spiritual powers, it also acknowledges the multiplicity and diversity of powers within each of these three categories. Thus every power has the potential to serve as a mediating ability or tool that offers a unique window upon the Creator and His creation. These unique perspectives may provide particular and specific types of “knowing” that are not available through other sources or other powers. This means that there are levels or types of “knowing” (doing, knowing, valuing) that are only possible when specific powers are developed and utilized. The formative implications of this for curriculum content, teaching methods and student learning are profound. For example, this biblical view affirms the physical, mental and spiritual nature of every teacher and student. It confirms a human condition that is in need of redemption, character development and restoration. This view also recognizes the special nature of the curriculum, because it is based upon a biblical view of created reality and its Creator. Every topic for study, therefore, becomes a subject of significance, or a “great subject” because its object of study has intrinsic value and worth endowed by the Creator.

Second, a **product** addresses the question of *what* Christian parents and educators should strive for as the goal of the educational process. This product has merit only when it fulfills a worthy purpose. In this case, the product is an individual who possessed an expanded repertoire of harmoniously developed powers. These powers enable the person to experience an enriched interaction with all created reality including self, others, the world, the universe, and creation’s God. These mediating abilities and tools or powers greatly increase and enrich ones capacity to live and do many things (*physical*), to know and understand many things (*mental*), and to evaluate, choose, and commit to aesthetic, moral, ethical and spiritual values that are of most worth (*spiritual*). This increased capacity goes beyond the mere acquisition of content knowledge or the ability to perform various skills. It includes a rich repertoire of well developed diverse powers that enable one to engage the mind to think beyond the mere reflection of others,⁷ to do and act upon principle rather than mere impulse or repetition,⁸ and to evaluate and exercise the will in making choices⁹ beyond a mere code. These individuals will have developed a character¹⁰ that enables them to find joy in service in this world and anticipate the joy of wider service in the world to come.¹¹

Third, a **method** addresses the question of *how* Christian parents and teachers can nurture the product of harmonious human development. The following methodological patterns provide three significant approaches designed to promote human development. They are not exhaustive or complete. They are an important beginning, however, and a great deal of work remains to be done.

Methodological Patterns: A **first** methodological pattern suggests that parents and educators should deliberately expose children and youth to experience a greatly expanded and diverse repertoire of physical, mental and spiritual powers for potential development. These multiple, diverse and developing powers will serve as “tools” or “abilities” to mediate reality in unique ways. Each will serve as a window on reality offering its unique perspective. This perspective will provide a distinctive kind of “knowing” that is only available through a particular power or group of powers. For example, a person who has developed the powers of musical performance will possess an “understanding” and unique type of “knowing” about reality that a non-performing person will know nothing about.¹² Thus, the development of a greater diversity of powers will provide a richer understanding of reality. Many of these powers need to be introduced at an early age for effective development to occur. Some may require significant patterns of training and practice to facilitate

effective development and enriched meaning and knowing. The renowned Suzuki violin method is a good example of how patterns of training and practice facilitate this type of development.

It will not be possible for one person to fully develop all potential powers that are available. Each individual must make choices based on interest, talent, need, time and place. Those powers selected for development will provide specific and unique abilities or tools to mediate selected aspects of created reality. Therefore, the breadth and depth of the selection will determine, to a significant degree, the potential richness of the experience.

It is important to observe that powers are developed rather than discovered or created. While discovery and creativity are recognized to be important experiences in the educational process, yet they do not happen in isolation. They occur only within the context of a rich and diverse repertoire of developing powers. Therefore, it is vital that this diverse repertoire of developing powers be available to provide a rich context for nurturing the discovery and creative processes.

A *second* methodological pattern is based upon methods employed by Jesus, the Master Teacher. In this process the teacher guides the student through patterns of engagement and interaction with some aspect of created reality. The purpose of this engagement will be to enhance the student's abilities to *know, do* and *value* in multiple and enriching ways, in relation to the portion of reality under study. These patterns of engagement include three primary steps of *state, apply* and *accept* plus three supporting steps of *illustrate, evaluate* and *review*.¹³ Applying these methodological patterns will reflect Christ's teaching method and if followed, they will assist in connecting the physical, mental, and spiritual powers in the dynamic process of harmonious human development.

The first primary step is to introduce or *state* the truth to be addressed. This statement of truth may be presented in the form of an abstract pattern. The pattern describes or represents the specifics and limits of the reality under study and thus brings an initial focus to the process. The format of this statement will be oriented to one or more of the senses for decoding. Some examples of a statement format include language in a verbal or written form, a graphic, a mathematical or scientific formula, a musical symbol or sound, a shape, a line or color, a kinesthetic movement or touch, a flavor or odor, or any other means by which the reality may be represented. Success in achieving this step will rely primarily upon engaging the unique qualities of mental powers.

Accompanying this first primary step will be a supporting step designed to *illustrate* the abstract statement of truth. The purpose of illustration is to clarify and enlarge the context for comprehension and meaning. The power of illustration is its ability to show how truth connects with reality, the abstract with the concrete, the mental with the physical, and the imminent with the transcendent. An effective illustration connects truth to meaning within the context of the larger biblical transcendent narrative. Some examples of an illustration may take the form of a metaphor, image, model, example, representation, parable or story. Success in the use of an illustration will rely primarily upon engaging the unique qualities of mental and physical powers.

The second primary step in this process is to invite the learners to *apply* the stated and illustrated truth to make it real. Application will take an abstract idea of the mind and transform it into a concrete physical reality. Thus an application connects the abstract to the concrete, theory to practice, and

pattern to product. Knowing will become being and doing, and theory will become practice. Success in achieving an application will rely primarily upon engaging the unique qualities of physical powers.

Accompanying an application will be a supporting step designed to *evaluate* the product of application. The purpose of evaluation will be to assess the applied product's value and worth. If it is determined to be of no value, then it may be rejected or abandon. If it is determined to be of value, then it may be retained as worthy of acceptance. Success in the use of evaluation will rely primarily upon engaging the unique qualities of physical and spiritual powers.

The third primary step is to invite the learner to *accept* the product of the stated, illustrated, applied and evaluated truth. This step is crucial because acceptance confirms and validates the value of the original abstract statement of truth and its concrete application. In addition, acceptance promotes personal ownership because of its worth. And when accepted and owned, it becomes meaningful and important to the developing person. Success in acceptance will rely primarily upon engaging the unique qualities of spiritual powers.

A *review* of this total process will be a final supporting step. The reason for the review will be to assess and affirm the accepted product's continuing value, worth and purpose. An ongoing review will support the continuing and dynamic processes of enriched levels of development. Success in the review process will rely primarily upon engaging the unique qualities of spiritual and mental powers.

In summary, the key elements of this methodological model reflect the patterns of Christ's teaching method. They include a statement of truth that is presented and illustrated, applied and evaluated, and finally offered for personal acceptance and review. This process engages parents, teachers and students in significant and disciplined *patterns* or *methods* of inquire designed to achieve *products* that fulfill meaningful and worthy *purposes*. Learners will develop enriched levels of understanding and knowing (truth), being and doing (reality), evaluating, accepting and internalizing that which is of most worth (values), and all in a harmonious manner. Expressed in another way, these levels can be understood as three types of *knowing*: abstract *declarative* knowing, concrete *procedural* knowing, and worthy *valuative, normative* or *spiritual* knowing. Therefore, this method has the potential to connect the physical, mental, and spiritual powers in a dynamic process of harmonious human development. (See Figure 2.)

A *third* methodological pattern concerns the nature of *curriculum content*. Curriculum must be viewed as intrinsically ternary in nature because its function is to open windows on created reality that is also three-dimensional. This holistic view of the curriculum echoes a holistic view of reality. It proposes that every subject area has intrinsic physical, mental and spiritual dimensions because the reality under study is three-dimensional. This means that it is possible to perceive what is *real* (physical concrete product), understand and know what is *true* (mental abstract pattern), and evaluate, accept and internalize what is of *value* (spiritual worthy purpose), concerning every entity of created reality. Learning and development occur best when students, parents or teachers are engaged in a significant interaction with the three intrinsic dimensions of some aspect of reality. And because all reality is ternary in nature, every entity has an inherent value or spiritual dimension. That is why every subject should be viewed as a "great subject" because its point of focus merits a profound sense of wonder, awe and reverence.

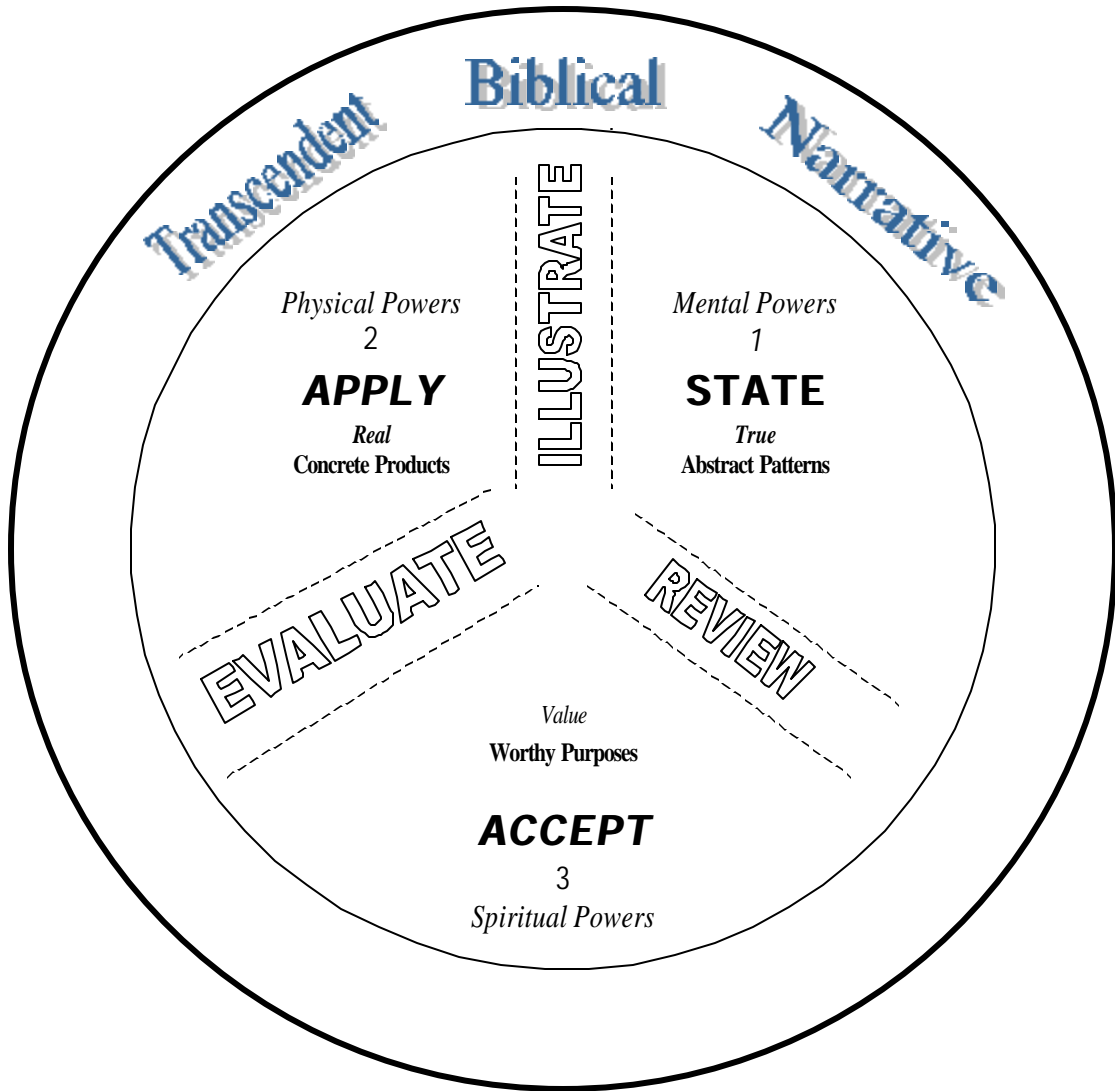


Figure 2. A Methodological Pattern for Education

This model places the methods of Jesus, the Master Teacher, within the context of the physical, mental and spiritual powers and the transcendent narrative.

“There is a profound sense of mystery and wonder inherent in every great subject. This gives grandeur to the mind, fertility and worth to the soul, and an essence of dignity to life and living. The ineffable mystery of the design and very existence of the created universe proclaims in silent thunder a moral and spiritual imperative: ‘What is required of me?’

“Because of this, we are compelled to sing a song which we cannot utter, say a word we do not know how to spell or pronounce, and see the world we do not know how to name. It is then that we discover a Psalm, a song that we can sing, a word that we can spell and pronounce, and a world that we can name. A Song! A Psalm!”

PRAISE the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light! Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, And you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created. He has also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which shall not pass away. (Psalms 148: 1-6 NKJV)

“By acknowledging and recognizing that a knowledge of God provides the foundation and source of all true knowledge and development,¹⁴ the Adventist Christian educator acknowledges the true foundation for every aspect of the educational process. This perspective places the spiritual dimension of all reality at the heart of every great subject, every effective method and every learning experience.”¹⁵

Conclusion: The purpose of Christian education is the harmonious development of the physical, mental and spiritual powers. Parents and educators will enhance this holistic developmental potential by deliberately exposing children and youth to experience a greatly expanded and diverse repertoire of physical, mental and spiritual powers. These developing powers will facilitate and mediate significant interactions with the Creator and His creation. Employing the methods of Jesus, the Master Teacher provides an important methodological pattern. And holding a view of created reality that celebrates an intrinsic spiritual dimension endows this process with a sense of reverence, wonder and awe. Achieving this educational purpose will enable students to achieve many concrete physical products, know many abstract mental patterns, and develop a faith commitment to many worthy spiritual values and purposes. Adventist Christian education links character development with redemption and restoration within the context of the transcendent biblical narrative. Therefore, this purpose gives supreme value and power to Christian education and endows it with direction, integrity and meaning.¹⁶

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