CHAPTER ONE
And a Little Lamb Shall Lead Them

Martin Luther wrote the Small Catechism of the Lutheran church as a teaching tool for parents and their children. Luther organized and provided theological explanation for the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the articles of the Apostle's creed. At the end of each petition, commandment, or article is the question *"What does this mean"?* This question is so basic to daily living that people seldom consider the complex amalgam of experience, language, information and concepts required to answer. As a matter of daily living, meaning filters into consciousness through the limited and limiting capacities of our senses as vaguely intuited impressions or as overt and intrusive demands. Meaning forms amid contextual influences, community consensus, and inherited propositions. Our place on the planet, the demands of time, the energy available for engagement, the bumps and bruises of life and the pervasive sense of acceptance or rejection, failure or accomplishment alters or deflects meaning. In a theological sense, logos reveals meaning, the Holy Spirit inspires meaning and community witness shapes and confirms meaning.

Paradoxically, as people's awareness of the vast array of nuances possible for each meaning increases, our ability to respond efficiently to life's perpetual fluctuations decreases. Expediency requires us to settle on simplified meanings that are intelligible and manageable. Through simplified meanings categories are framed, actions are interpreted, boundaries are defined, priorities are set and power is exerted. By providing control – or at least the illusion of control – in the midst of chaos, simplified meanings attempt to provide order, resist ambiguity, mitigate fear and conserve energy.

Although the process of forming simplified meaning is vital to the effective functioning of both individuals and the knowing community, it is necessary to remember that such meanings are limited by our experiences, our ability to gather and retain information, our sense of the connectedness of creation and our willingness to engage. Without that recollection individuals and communities degenerate into absolutism or totalitarianism: conditions which result "when a limited thing does not recognize its own limits" (Christenson, 2004, p. 125). Beneath each formed meaning, systematic explanation, defined content or dogmatic belief lingers a pattern of creation which is more complex and connected than our simplified meanings can comprehend.

The process by which people form or discard meaning determines whether our simplified meaning will be vibrant, compelling and transformational or inert, external and dogmatic. Awareness of how we form meaning helps us determine if a meaning is useful, an intent clear or a purpose one to be engaged. Such awareness is the purpose of the discipline of epistemology which seeks to define the scope and nature of knowing. A similar task of linking, clarifying and broadening the meanings formed within communities of faith, is the purpose of theology. Relating such meanings to the processes of education and the activities of daily living are goals for both epistemology and theology. Merging theological and epistemological criteria is both possible and desirable because they share similarity of function (Solberg, 1997, p. 97). When engaged in an open, dynamic and responsive way both disciplines strive to ensure that our simplified meanings do not become simplistic meanings. As a process of ordered learning, Lutheran confirmation is shaped by both epistemology and theology.

Despite having strong epistemic and theological roots, confirmation's curricula and instructors often pose the bold question "What does this mean?" without asking the same question about the intent, methods and expected results of the meaning- making process. Without clarity about intent this dynamic query becomes either fixed and dogmatic or vague and irrelevant. Meaning is reduced to recitation of content and the vibrant words of scripture and the catechism become simple proofs to complex problems. As none of these outcomes are beneficial to the development of meaningful lifelong learning; this thesis identifies and connects key theological and epistemological assumptions congenial to confirmation and argues that: *Familiarity with content is insufficient for learners to achieve confirmation's intent: a coemergent approach is required.*

Formed in the crucible of the Reformation, Lutheran theology is generally open to ambiguity, revision and the possibility of error; yet, Lutheran tenets can also be influenced by dogmatic impulses. In the same way, epistemology claims both a revisionist and self-critical purpose but can be myopic in regard to its conventions. In both theology and epistemology there exists a dichotomy between tradition and context which is shaped and defined by the respective approaches to meaning. A conceptual orientation, which values tradition, places a high emphasis on stable, coherent and enduring propositions. An orientation, which is contextual, tends to see meaning as dynamic, malleable and provisional. What if these two approaches are not opposing conceptual encampments, but are bound to together for the synergetic purpose of forming trusted meaning? What would change if the catechism was not simply the content of confirmation, but a resource for forming theological meaning? What if the task given

educators was not to develop interesting and engaging ways to deliver a fixed content, but to teach people how to think and act theologically each day? The importance of these questions can be seen in the following quotation:

Theology itself is searching to discover why meaning itself is carried in a constant process of reinterpretation. Education cannot simply focus upon the process of meaning-making without asking the fundamental questions about what is meaningful. To do so is to court the trivial (Seymour & Miller, 1990, p. 243). The limited apprehension of contemporary learners may stem from a sense that inflexible content appears trivial in face of the global challenges. As engaging such challenges are part of daily living, it is necessary for the both the intent and the doctrines of confirmation to be pertinent and responsive.

Developing a sense of pertinence requires reinvigoration of the theological intent of confirmation. The purpose of theology in confirmation cannot be limited to learning dogma. Instead of acting to define order and protect inherited propositions, educators and theologians need to equip, encourage, and respect the formation of meaning within the context of daily living. "Theology and education must be drawn into a mutually supportive dialogue" (Seymour & Miller, 1990, p. 243), in order to reform previous operational assumptions. Theologians must cease to be guardians of doctrine and adopt a role more akin to that of a 'mid-wife' (Belenky, McVicker Clinchy, Goldberger & Mattuck Tarule, 1986, p. 217). Confirmation teachers and students must be about the business of birthing new ideas. In a biological sense birth relies on the resources and vigor of the pre-existing organism as well as environmental conditions which are

conducive to life. The birth of meaning has similar needs. Meaning coemerges as an amalgam of inherited content, grounded life experience and community interaction.

Part One: Terms, Limits and Structure

1.1.1   Reasons for Writing

As a Lutheran pastor I have enjoyed the privilege and responsibility of instructing confirmation for 23 years. In the early days I approached teaching with an anxious dedication to content. During that period I was often frustrated that despite my best efforts, confirmation students seldom retained the content of a lesson beyond the demands of the moment. Over time, I began to introduce games, life simulations, drama and other devices to promote student engagement. My mantra at the time was: 'to blur the boundaries between learning and play – study and life.' To my surprise, although the students enjoyed the play, they resisted attempts to move from play to deeper meaning. Also pastoral colleagues and parents began to assert that anything beyond the delivery of content was not really confirmation. This set in motion a cascade of personal questions concerning fidelity to tradition, integrity of call, appropriateness of methods and the viability of intent. Although the work thus far has been personally cathartic, it has also produced a deluge of new queries.

1.1.2   Audience

Teaching is not an isolated endeavor, effective teaching relies on consensus, shared creativity and clearly voiced correctives. As such, my primary audience is those of us charged with the task of developing and teaching programs of structured learning.

Confirmation is a topic of particular interest for Lutheran pastors and teachers; however, in this thesis, confirmation is both the topic of interest and a medium for exploring broader questions which affect all educational processes. For example, the questions theologians ask are remarkably similar to questions that educators in the sciences grapple with. Both groups struggled over the relationship between established beliefs and the formation of meaning. Educators who are embroiled in the recent quantitative-reductive demands of public education (teaching to the test), will find that the five hundred year history of Confirmation, amid the interests, issues and orthodoxies of the church, provides perspective.

1.1.3   God as Meaning-Maker

Theological themes are referred to throughout the thesis. In some circles mentioning God in an academic paper is considered as out of place as discussing religion in a pub. As anyone who has read Martin Luther's *Table Talks* can attest to, Lutheran theology knows no such constraints: theology is a vibrant and essential part of how meaning forms. The topic of faith comes up frequently, but not for the purpose of devotional writing or to proselytize.

Those reading this thesis from a Christian faith perspective will note that explicit discussions of God's role in the formation of meaning are limited. Belief that God is an active meaning-maker is essential to the framework and purpose of confirmation. Confirmation is founded on scripture. Many of the key Bible passages which the catechism and curricula cite proclaim God's direct activity.   For example, in the prophetic writings of the book of Jeremiah, are found the words:

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel says the Lord:

I will put my law within them, I will write it on their hearts. I shall be their God

and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to one

another, 'Know the Lord' for they all shall know me from the least to the

greatest…" (Jeremiah 31:33-34a, New Revised Standard Version)

The Gospels also speak of God's direct involvement. In the gospel of John Jesus states:

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach you everything, and remind you all I have

said to you" (John 14:26, NRSV). The catechism affirms God's activist role by stating in

the explanation to the third article of the creed:

"I believe that through my own understanding and strength I cannot believe in

Jesus Christ or come to him. But instead the Holy Spirit has called me through

the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts and kept me in the true faith…" (Luther

1529, in Wengert, 1994, p. 29) In passages such as these the Holy Spirit's role as

meaning-maker is named and claimed.

For many Christians spiritual knowing is a distinct and essential category of

knowing which supersedes all other ways of knowing. That affirmation has led to a deep

reverence for, and sensitivity to, God's role as meaning-maker in the confirmation

process. However, the affirmation has also promoted superficial notions about the work

of the Holy Spirit which can hinder discussion about how meaning forms. Three stand

out as problematic: 1) Spiritual gifts are limited to those specific gifts listed in by Christ

or Paul in the New Testament. Systematic and critical thought fail to make the list and

can be deemed of little consequence. 2) God will form meaning despite us. As God's

omnipotent nature resists constraints, it is unwise to preclude the possibility; however,

instead of reverence the assertion often produces laxity. Indeed, for some Christians, human efforts at wisdom are resisted because they are believed to hamper spiritual knowing. 3) The Holy Spirit becomes an adornment. Spiritual gifts are prominently displayed; yet basic patterns of knowing remain fixed and largely unexamined. For example, fundamentalism argues fervently against a social scientific interpretation of the world, yet often utilizes Modernist assumptions and scientific methods to prove its case.

In Lutheran theology the Holy Spirit has a radically centrist role. All we have all we are and all we can be is a result of God's grace. All creation resonates within that grace. God's gracious activity becomes both the basis and framework of human cognition. Within that gift God provides the freedom and the intellect to respond with wonder and gratitude or with grudging denial. This frees people to utilize their full intellectual capacities to probe, explore, hypothesize, doubt, criticize and trust without fear of somehow passing outside of the Holy Spirit's active engagement.

1.1.4   Terminology

The term *confirmation* is used throughout this thesis. Traditionally confirmation refers to either a rite conducted by the church for young people and new members, or a process of ordered learning. For many Lutherans, the term confirmation is synonymous with a pedantic form of church education that emphasizes rote learning. In the late 1970's the common term for the rite became "Affirmation of Baptism" and a variety of terms based on curricula came to refer to ordered learning. Curricula like "The Jesus Life" (1973), "Free to be" (1975), "Affirm" (1984), "Creative Confirmation" (1994), and "Faith Inkubators" (2007) conveyed a new pedagogic approach in their titles.

The term *catechism* refers specifically to Martin Luther's Small Catechism first published in poster form in 1518, and its derivatives. Other denominations use the terms confirmation and catechism. For most of the thesis the qualifier "Lutheran" is omitted to avoid ponderous sentences. Qualifiers such as the "Weissenburg" or Luther's "Large" catechism are added as needed. The exception to this rule is found in pre-reformation references to confirmation. Early confirmation references refer to a rite, sacrament or process of ordered learning of the Roman Catholic Church.

The term *coemergence* is adopted to describe the dynamic and shifting relationship between content, context and learner formed meaning. Although the term is used for a variety of purposes by various academic disciplines and the business world, its use in this thesis was prompted by a connection to experiential learning. An article by Tara Fenwick (2000) uses the term to describe a particular category of experiential learning. This thesis expands Fenwick's original concept and will provide a definition of the term suited to the needs of confirmation.

1.1.5   Organization

This thesis is a theoretical study. The approach is to progressively intensify and clarify the question "What does this mean?" as it relates to the meaning formed by learners. Questions of intent require an expansive rather than detailed view in order to perceive the landmarks of the vista. The balance of this chapter explores current curricula design and practices and relates them to the formation of meaning. The central argument is that simply adjusting programs and methods in response to questions of meaning is an inadequate response to confirmation's communal and dispositional

objectives. Chapter two, "Confirmation as a Theological Enterprise," reviews the history of confirmation as both a rite and a form of education and argues that education was given the task of making fixed dogmatic affirmations interesting, rather than the opportunity of equipping learners to form meaning. Chapter three, "More about Birthing than Building," focuses on the epistemological assumptions which shape ordered learning. The philosophic lineage of personal constructivist thought is explored and the approaches of Piaget, Dewey, Polanyi and Whitehead are tied to their epistemic roots. Through these efforts the *necessity* of the learner formed-meaning is identified. Chapter four, "Emerging into Meaning," investigates social constructivism as a corrective to the pervasive in modernist myth of the autonomous knower.

Rather than define (and confine) confirmation's intent with rigid theological or epistemological propositions, a series of open questions to guide intent are suggested. In order to provide a framework to tie inherited content, life experience and community interaction together, coemergence (enactivism) is presented as a viable and answerable theological - epistemological framework for community-formed meanings.

The interplay between theology and epistemology is a recurrent theme throughout this thesis. Chapter five, "Cloud by Day, Fire by Night," suggests three epistemological-theological pillars to guide and shape confirmation's intent. They represent a preliminary attempt to suggest a unique and authentically Lutheran response to the task of forming meaning through a process of ordered learning.

Questions of intent require rigorous effort to identify, connect, clarify and relate to the task of teaching. Ideally intent should be clear before the scope, sequence and methods of a lesson or curricula are determined. The demands of the real world seldom

afford that opportunity. As this thesis focuses on intent and stops short of recommending specific program or curricular suggestions, the work can best be understood as a prelude for a curriculum.

Part Two: The Present Context

1.2.1   Confirmation Story One (circa. 1992)

The lesson started off badly. Students arrived reluctantly as confirmation night conflicted with the Stanley Cup playoffs. I managed to persuade my students to open their Bibles and workbooks. We read the life application story together, in the way described in the teacher's handbook, and students did a matching exercise to show they listened. One student preferred doodling on his page and I asked him to stop. After a sullen look, he made a half-hearted attempt to draw some lines on his page. With that little duty completed we began the "What does this mean" section of the lesson. This was the part when I, as pastor, was to make significant connections between the lesson from scripture and the lives of the students. As I spoke my doodler began to sigh heavily and look out the window. I attempted to bring him into the conversation by addressing a "What do you think?" question to him directly. He shrugged, didn't answer and began to systematically tear pages from his bible and stuff them in his mouth. I asked him to stop and eventually sent him to my office to wait for his parents. It was only after he left for home that I discovered he used his time and creative abilities to change the passwords on my computer.

1.2.2   Confirmation Story Two (circa. 2001):

My son was four and just attended his first funeral. It was the funeral of his cousin who died after years of struggling with cerebral palsy. Cousin Ian never walked and speech was no longer possible, but he was an important family member. As our family debriefed together, my wife posed the question "What do you think Ian is doing right now in heaven?" She added "I bet he's talking God's ear off!" I, being the theologian of the family, said "Nonsense, Ian has always talked to God. I bet he is running." My son looked at us both and said "You're wrong, he's doing this." He immediately began to dance around the living room and sing loudly "Glory to God, Glory to God, Glory to God in the high -I- est." As we watched his joyful antics, I realized he was the better theologian. That song, which he had learned at church, was from the book of Revelations. Its joyful melody framed the words from scripture that described the saints in the presence of God. Somehow, despite his young age and limited experience, my son connected an essential story from scripture with a significant life event in a meaningful way.

1.2.3   Cause for Concern

Meaning can emerge in our lives with powerful clarity that inspires and equips us for the challenges of life, or meaning can be remote, inert, compartmentalized and irrelevant. As a process of ordered learning confirmation is intended as a time of learning and reflection which permits teachers and learners to apprehend and express the wonder of creation and encourages a mature faith capable of engaging the challenges of daily living. Yet, too often, confirmation becomes a thankless chore: Pastors grumble amongst

themselves about the challenges of teaching; students complain about attending classes;

volunteers are difficult to recruit; learners with high capacities in other intellectual

pursuits disengage; and out of class work either never returns or returns with little

evidence of thought or effort. The rite of confirmation is often a day of festivity, yet the

day frequently marks the departure of students from active participation in the life of the

congregation. Bibby (2001), notes that statistical results of a national survey of Canadians

indicate a steady decline in participation in organized aspects of faith (p. 282). At the 12th

biannual convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, (June, 2009) national

bishop Susan Johnson reported that church membership has declined by 24 percent since

1986. Litanies of concerns similar to these play out in congregations across the nation.

A statement entitled "Our Calling in Education" (Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America, Assembly Statement, 2007) provides an institutional version of this litany:

> Each generation faces its own challenges in maintaining, nurturing and passing
>
> on faith. In our time these challenges are profound and pervasive.   Attempts to
>
> communicate the faith face the demands and the fragmentation of modern life,
>
> numerous religions and ideologies competing for our loyalty and ever present
>
> messages which tell us that success and happiness come from consuming goods
>
> and perusing individual desires and pleasures. The disconnect between home and
>
> congregation, the hesitance of Christians to witness the gospel, and their lack of
>
> commitment to be lifelong learners impair continued faith formation. (p.18)

In the face of social pressures and institutional malaise, the response of the church has

typically been to renovate educational methods.

1.2.4   Definition Dilemma

The current and most widely accepted definition for confirmation was adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in 1993. It says, *"Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that helps the baptized through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission"* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada Division of Parish Life, 1993, p. 2). This intentionally open definition supports a large variety of activities and programs within the church. Confirmation is an expected part of both congregational life and the pastor's call; yet, there is nothing prescriptive about the way it is to be done. Standardized criteria do not exist between synods or among congregations. Lutheran publishing houses regularly produce curricula, but congregations interpret and present the materials in ways dependent on the resources of the congregation, the skills and preferences of the pastor, and the milieu of the community.

Typically, confirmation is a program of ordered learning for adolescents which lasts on average two years. Published curricula available to congregations generally assume this pattern. However, in some settings confirmation may consist simply of a couple of meetings with a pastor to discuss faith: In other settings, confirmation can be an intensive educational program which spans the years from childhood to early adulthood and includes structured lessons, retreats, camp, service learning and social opportunities.

The variation which exists among congregations and pastors makes it difficult to paint a comprehensive and comparative picture of confirmation practices. However, church publishing houses, which typically gather ideas from local congregations and design their curricula in response, are indicators of aggregate trends. One sizable

drawback is that published materials reflect the needs and priorities of the United States market. Canadian Lutheran publications are rare and tend to address local or niche markets. "Our Christian Faith" (Likeness, 1981), an adult study produced for congregational use, and "Living Witness: the adult catechumenate" (Lathrop, 1992), a worship resource intended for adults preparing for baptism, are two examples of Canadian resources. United States curricula reflect Lutheran doctrine in general but lack Canadian context.

1.2.5   From Reader to Internet; 50 years of Tinkering

Curricula materials over the past fifty years fall into three basic categories. Materials first published in the 1940's, but actively in use until the late sixties such as "The Junior Catechism" (Dell, 1960) combined Bible stories, the historic catechetical question answer format, and a list of Bible or catechism passages for memorization. In the mid to late 1960's, confirmation books shifted from Biblical stories to life application stories. Books such as "I believe in God the Father" (Horn, 1965) include art work and altered the use of scriptural passages. Instead of the content of the story, scriptural references became the 'logical' or 'acceptable' response to questions. Recitation of the catechism became the focus of memory work. In the 1970's the quality of both the artwork and life application stories improved, but the same general format was retained. The best example of this era is "Free to Be" (Nestingen & Forde, 1975). This particular study book used clear and engaging language in an attempt to draw learners into active theological discussion. In the late 1970's, and more predominantly in the 1980's and 1990's, curricula adopted the workbook model. The curricula were divided into units of

six to eight lessons. Each lesson typically included a brief life application story, questions about the catechism, practice in looking up scriptural references and a variety of different word activities such as acrostics, puzzles, matching exercises and fill in the blanks. Memory work by this period was generally recommended as an optional activity.

During the 1980's and 1990's curricula began to provide instructions for teachers. In the earlier materials (prior to 1979) such instructions were rare. "Affirm Series" (1984) included comments about student's physical, cognitive and emotional changes. Helpful advice such as: "you may help students find answers but don't impose your answers on them." (Helland, 1984, p. 3) was included among the teacher resources. "New Journeys" (Tetlie & Rosenkvist, 1990, p. 4) gave practical advice for including disabled children and creating a positive learning environment. One of the most innovative resources of the era was "Creative Confirmation" which noted in a chapter entitled *"Education for Life"* that: "Confirmation must make a qualitative leap from being an educational program to becoming a relational ministry" (DuBose, 1994, p.26). In keeping with changing emphasis in education, information on brain structure, multiple intelligences or contextual learning now add to the discussion of developmental stages.

In recent years, internet-based resources have begun to replace print materials. Internet resources are marketed by publishing houses as the next great teaching tool. The avant-garde appeal of technology resonates well with students. Electronic resources enable stories to be told through video and text is enlivened with music or animation. Teacher resources often include references to segments from popular movies which, when integrated into the lesson, prompt discussion. Most internet-based curricula tout the option of students accessing material and lessons from home. Lessons, reference

material and internet discussion groups are available to students when they register for the course.

On the surface internet based resources are appealing to church decision makers: electronic media promote a sense that the church is 'keeping up with the times.' Beneath the hype, however, little has changed. Students have access to materials at home, yet seldom avail themselves of them. Video clips attract student attention but also distract from the key concepts being engaged; it is often difficult to transition from the videos to discussion. Most problematic is the shift in student attitudes toward content. An electronic 'fill in the blank' exercise teaches no more than the same task found in a workbook. Indeed, the ease with which an answer can be inserted means that less time is spent considering the response then when it was hand written. Catechetical materials included in an electronic database, convey a notion of temporary information that is accessed to answer a specific question, rather than an enduring resource for Christian living.

It should be noted at this point that teacher instruction included in confirmation curricula are rudimentary. Instructions are written for either volunteers with little or no teacher training or pastors who receive limited teacher training in seminary. Seldom are alternate teaching strategies presented. Assessment is either ignored or limited to a review of the lesson content. Teacher guides frequently provide 'correct' or 'best' answers that correspond to the student workbook. While provided for teacher convenience, this emphasis on correct answers conveys an emphasis on content rather than meaning.

As a group confirmation curricula include lively art, basic teacher instructions and active learning strategies. They have been and continue to be influenced by general trends

in education. Innovations in the publishing industry have creatively attempted to connect with and inspire learners. However, despite these efforts the old adage applies: the more things change the more they are the same.

1.2.6   Pondering Programs

Along with print and internet resources, six distinct of approaches to confirmation are identifiable (Monroe, 1998, pp. 2-5). These are: 1) Large group – small group; 2) Individual self-paced; 3) Traditional; 4) Home and Family; 5) Extended (longer and later); and, 6) Retreat and Camp based. To quickly place these categories in context is it helpful to use personal experience. I have taught confirmation in five different churches which ranged in size from 60- 900 members. During that time I have used most of these approaches. In my present church we use a large group-small group model. Students from across the city congregate for music, drama and game-based learning. Power-point has replaced worksheets as the presenting medium and internet resources are available. As the name suggests teaching is done in a big group but breakout opportunities to for games and discussion are regular. In my previous congregation we used a modified *longer and later* program. Learners participated in two units a year for nine years. The program employed various approaches such drama based learning, life simulations, retreats and discussion groups. During my tenure I was able to complete one cycle of students before the congregation abandoned the program. In Vancouver, I had opportunity to design and participate in a week-long confirmation camp. More recently, the camp experience has been limited to weekend retreats. Weekend retreats follow the camp model by providing

an intensive and dynamic learning environment. The camp setting facilitates learning through games, opportunities for extended conversation, and by changing the setting.

1.2.7 Identifying the problem

There are two objectives in presenting this overview. The first is to familiarize the reader with the general scope and form that confirmation takes in a Western Canadian setting. The second objective is to assert that despite concerted efforts to creatively modify methods of presenting confirmation's content, little has changed. The stated goal of confirmation is to assist learners to "identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission;" however, the ubiquitous emphasis on content which underlies both curricula and present practices does little to improve that goal.

The path between current assumptions and practices of confirmation and a coemergent approach requires a reassessment the intent of the confirmation process. Over the past fifty years progressive education has influenced confirmation. Lutheran curricula designers have adopted and adapted contemporary learning theories in response to the changing needs of society and the faith community. Even if this had not been the case the learners whom confirmation instructors encounter would bring new understandings and expectations formed by experiences within public education. Unfortunately, although contemporary ideas about cognitive development and experiential learning are present in the curricula, contemporary ideas are often grafted to traditional practices and objectives without acknowledging or accounting for the shift in epistemological assumptions. This

grafting causes ambiguity to grow between established tenets of faith and the meanings learners are assumed to form.

Revealing and responding to the roots of this ambiguity will require a shift in emphasis from the familiarity of common practice, to the language of theology and epistemology. Such topics are not merely for philosophers or theologians: they are essential understandings necessary to engage and support our most elementary learners. Remember my four year old theologian. His insights are not only a gift to a proud father; they reveal a missing aspect of how meaning is understood. From the limited experience of a four year old he was able to identify key resources needed for making sense of a significant life challenge. The insights of my four year old represent a way God strengthens, informs, enriches and propels the community of believers. No wonder Jesus said: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14, NRSV) Confirmation is the Lutheran process of ordered learning intended to provide young people and new Christians resources to engage life. Perhaps the little ones should lead us.

CHAPTER TWO
Confirmation as a Theological Enterprise

2.1 Part One: A Limited Theological Purpose

The term *enterprise* is defined as both "a risky, complicated or difficult

undertaking" and as "a systematic, purposeful activity" (Mish, 2009, p. 416). For most of

its history confirmation has fit both of these definitions. Understanding the confused

lineage of confirmation from a theological perspective will require a brief overview of

confirmation's history as a rite and as an educational practice. Throughout confirmation's

history formal theological meanings and informal learner assumptions have shifted in

response to prevailing social philosophies. Between 1960 and 1970 a shift from a

theological discourse to an educational discourse occurred. Unfortunately, educators

assumed the limited and limiting task of delivering content to guide their methods.

Disseminating information was clearly not the intention of Martin Luther's catechism.

Luther intended learners to be active interpreters of theology. A limited theological

purpose for confirmation is also incongruous with the emphasis on learner-formed-

meaning found in contemporary theologies. Conceptual hegemony inhibits learner

engagement and hinders vibrant and essential meanings from emerging. The challenge of

this chapter is to reveal the roots of these limitations and to suggest that theologians and

educators shift their focus from methods which deliver content to processes which form

meaning.

2.1.1 A practice seeking a theory

An assertion that confirmation is a theological process begs the question "what else could it be?" After all confirmation is a program of a Christian community. It seeks to affirm faith and inculcate the core beliefs of the church; it has as its content the essential prayers, commands and creeds of the Lutheran Confessions, and it is most often taught by Pastors. Yet, the nature of confirmation as a theological enterprise has been a matter of considerable debate. Theologians, educators, historians, and church commissions have not settled on a consistent definition, practice or statement of intent.

Confirmation is described as an order of worship, an educational process, a ministry and a rite of passage. Luther Lindberg, a prolific and influential Lutheran educator, notes that:

> Confirmation has been a tangled web, a maze of confusion, a complicated and controverted practice since the beginning. Confirmation is still searching for theology and rationale. Even though its practice has been taken seriously – perhaps too seriously – for centuries, its theology and meaning have seldom been clear. (Lindberg, 1999, pp. 43-44)

Gerald Austin sums up the problem more succinctly when he says: "Confirmation is a practice seeking a theory." (1985, p. 23) The task ahead is to unravel some of this confusion.

2.1.2 A brief history

For Lutherans confirmation is so entwined with tradition, theology and institutional identity that it is often seen as the quintessence of right beliefs, good order and proper worship (Lindberg, 1999, p. 44). Based on the presentation of the topic in most Lutheran curricula, students erroneously assume that confirmation began with Luther's publication of the Small Catechism. However, some form of confirmation is present in Christian practice since the early church.

A precise date of origin is not known. Confirmation is not a practice mandated or described in scripture. Only one tenuous reference to confirmation is found in the New Testament-Greek term '*Bebaios*' which means "to validate something which has already happened" (Lindberg, 1999, p. 47). The writings of the Apostolic Fathers also make no direct reference to confirmation. According to Aidan Kavanagh's (1988) authoritative book *Confirmation: Origins and Reform,* an act resembling confirmation originated in the prayers of dismissal which marked the conclusion of catechesis and baptism (p. 3). Kavanagh (1988) suggests that, confirmation began as liturgical act conducted by a bishop to mark the completion of the process of Christian initiation (p. 31). In that world where life was fragile, the time between birth and baptism decreased and catechesis no longer preceded baptism. Gradually confirmation became a separate rite - a matter of institutional validation that required little or no response from the individual. The Bishop simply 'confirmed' the validity of the baptism. In 441 AD, the Council of Orange gave this understanding of confirmation official recognition (Klos, 1968, p. 43).

The Weissenburg catechism, which appeared at the end of the eighth century, contained the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, liturgical materials and a section

describing capital sins (Lueker, Poellet & Jackson, 2000, para. 5). The 11th century saw the development and adoption of the catechism's familiar question and answer format. This pattern was adopted by John Hus and his followers (para. 6). By the 13th century, a notion of an "intellectual acceptance of doctrine" (Klos, 1968, p. 43) began to change the theological understanding of confirmation. Thomas Aquinas, who championed this view, also promoted the belief that confirmation is a sacrament which gives Christians the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Catechesis once again was a prerequisite to the rite. Aquinas' duel emphasis on intellectual acceptance and conferring of Spiritual gifts added a sense of both 'rite of passage' and 'sacramental blessing' to the meaning of confirmation.

The spiritual and philosophical intents of Bishops and councils did not translate into a practical process for the laity. Confirmation in the late middle-ages was so casual that the "faithful would line up on the roadside to be confirmed as bishops passed" (Lindberg, 1999, p. 50). To illustrate medieval laxity David Holeton (1983), who contributed to the influential study *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, quipped that "A 'good' bishop would actually get off his horse and lay his both hands on each confirmand"(p. 86). This bit of historic trivia summed up the era so effectively that Lindberg's history includes the sardonic comment, "confirmation is the result of Episcopal arrogance and bad medieval roads" (1999, p. 50).

Inconsistencies between intent and practices of the late medieval church fueled the discontent of the Reformation. For Martin Luther the inconsistencies were made acute by the lack of good teaching. Luther was first and foremost an educator. He wanted an "informed church membership" who could "live faith intelligently" and apply their understanding to "the decisions of daily life" (Klos, 1968, p. 52). Luther developed the

Large Catechism as a study guide for pastors and the Small Catechism for home use.

Luther's motivation for writing was pastoral. The preface to Lenker's translation of the

Large Catechism notes that the two catechisms were "written out of compassion for

people who were distressed and without a shepherd" (Lenker, 1935). A clear distinction

must be drawn between Luther's educational imperatives and his attitudes toward the rite

of confirmation. Luther strongly opposed the sacramental character of the rite and never

composed an order of worship for confirmation. The rite was merely a solemn churchly

ceremony - an optional gesture which could accompany and explain the efficacy and

work of the Word of God (Commission on Education, Lutheran World Federation, 1963,

p. 24)

Luther's catechisms, though clearly intended as helpful instructional resources,

became part of the formal confessional writings which defined the theological and

practical basis for the Lutheran church. Reformer Martin Bucer introduced an

Evangelical rite of confirmation which attempted to synthesize Lutheran theology and

medieval practice. (Commission on Education, L.W. F., 1963, p. 26) Philip Melanchthon

eventually concluded that confirmation should include an examination in the catechism, a

public confession of faith and a consecration (Commission on Education, L.W.F., 1963,

p. 29). These alterations to Luther's intent provided an institutional aspect to

confirmation by focusing attention on the examination and the rite.

An emphasis on orthodoxy in the 16th century meant that acceptance of

confessional content became a requisite for church membership. With a response from

the learner of increased institutional importance, instruction shifted from the home to the

church - from parents to the pastor. Pietism of the 17th century attempted to rejuvenate

parish life. A desire "to bring head and heart together" (Lindberg, 1999, p. 55) led to an emphasis on a personal decision and reintroduced among Lutherans the belief that confirmation completed baptism. Pietism's emphasis on a *solemn vow* relied on a subjective act of conversion and renewal. Pietism left an indelible mark on confirmation by making the rite a *goal*, an outward sign of personal preparation and worthiness (Commission on Education, L.W.F, 1963, p. 30). The Enlightenment of the 18th century altered attitudes toward the importance of the individual and produced a slow development of techniques for questioning (Nipkow, 1996, pp. 15-16). Rationalism of the era supplanted the subjectivity of Pietism and transformed confirmation into a simple declaration of maturity, accompanied by a vow to lead a responsible and ethical life (Commission on Education, L.W.F, 1963, p. 31).

This limited synopsis of confirmation's origins shows how the church has searched for meaning in confirmation. As a 'rite' confirmation changed from simple prayers offered at the end of baptism to an elaborate independent ceremony which celebrated maturity and conveyed particular blessings. As an educational process confirmation's connection to catechesis vacillated between essential and nonexistent. The theological, episcopal and philosophical assumptions of each successive century caused the meaning of confirmation to adapt and modify as both a rite and an educational practice. Both the institutional church and the participants in the program have been influenced by these shifts in meaning.

2.1.3   The 'Rite' Solution

With the arrival of the twentieth century, the intent and methods of confirmation continued to shift in response to prevailing philosophical modes. The balance of this chapter will discuss the nature of this shift; however, for now, it is important make two observations: 1) until the 1960's, discussions concerning historical and philosophical influences affecting confirmation centered on the nature of the rite, and 2) assumptions about the nature of the rite and requirements associated with it, produced powerful informal meanings which linger to the present.

Church leaders recognize that for confirmation to be meaningful, learner response is necessary. Theologians are aware that, "When we postulate catechesis as the learning of a set of beliefs, no real engagement is required between an individual and the faith community" (Bernsten, 1996, p. 230). As the instructional locus shifted from home to church, confirmation became a program attended rather than a natural extension of shared identity. Students are often unaware of the assumptions, practices and wisdom which traditionally frame confirmation. George Linbeck (1984) likens the situation to learning a language - "that is interiorizing outlooks that others have created and mastering skills that others have honed" (p. 22). Learners could master the catechism's content in predictable and measurable ways and yet be oblivious to confirmation's broader sense of meaning.

Concern for the learner's place within community led theologians to focus on the rite of confirmation. The rite assumed, enabled, provided and sometimes required a response, even if that response was merely ceremonial. By defining and articulating appropriate characteristics for such responses, theologians attempted to forge a

conclusive meaning for confirmation consistent with theological understandings of the community.

2.1.3.1   Six conceptual themes.

It is helpful to recognize the six conceptual themes which have influenced present aims and practices. Versions of these themes appear in the Lutheran World Federation Study on confirmation (1963) and the seminal works of Klos (1969) and Lindberg (1999). For the purposes of discussion they are summarized as follows: 1) *Hierarchical,* which prepared young people to make a vow of faith; 2) *Sacramental*, which focused on God's activity within the rite; 3) *Convincing Evidence,* which encouraged a decision prior to first communion; 4) *Rationalistic,* which required intellectual assent before graduation; 5) *Catechetical,* which required a recitation of the catechism; and 6) *Pietistic,* which encouraged personal renewal. In their respective eras, each descriptor represents a particular theological quality or intent adopted as a summary meaning for confirmation. Vestiges of each of these descriptors are evident in the contemporary rite of confirmation.

2.1.3.2   *Informal Meanings.*

Along with these formal descriptors informal meanings developed from repetitive practice. The tenacious influence of informal meanings frequently distorted or displaced the crafted theological meaning. This caused participants to form ideas about intent which conflicted with the assumed theological intent. For example:

1) Until recently, a remnant of the Catechetical tradition could be found in the practice of memorization and recitation of the explanations of the Small Catechism prior

to confirmation. Rather than a foundation resource for Christian living, the catechism was merely a document to learn and recite. Thus the rite became contingent on the mastery of rote learning.

2) The sense of graduation, which often ensures that confirmation day marks the end of association with the church rather than the beginning, is a byproduct of the Rationalistic approach. Instead of embracing the logical arguments and intellectual assent of Rationalism, contemporary practice emphasized a secular-social "rite of passage."

3) In Canada, prior to adoption of the *Statement of Sacramental Practices* (1991), Confirmation Day commonly included the celebration of first communion. This practice stemmed from the intent of the Sacramental approach to deepen the understanding of the gift of communion and the goal of the Hierarchical approach to prompt a vow. Informally this meaning changed so that confirmation was assumed to be a prerequisite for communion or communion was a reward for completing the classes. Both these notions produced a theologically unwarranted idea that we must understand the Lord's Supper before we are worthy to receive communion.

4) The Pietistic tradition valued a faith deepened by personal acts of devotion such as reading scripture, prayer and attendance at worship. However, the pietistic emphasis on personal assent also fit well with individualistic and pluralistic impulses of society at large. As Linbeck (1984) explains: "The structures of modernity press individuals to meet God first in the depths of their souls and then perhaps if they find something personally congenial, to become part of a tradition or to join a church" (p. 22). Thus instead of personal engagement the confirmation became about personal choice.

The examples above illustrate how common practice fosters tacit assumptions around the intent of the rite. These tacit assumptions are often more powerful and pervasive than the theological or philosophical meanings which preceded them. Clearly informal meaning is a powerful influence in confirmation. By ignoring the influence of context and adding the intensity of a ceremonial event, there is great potential for change in meaning. Focus on the rite shifted attention away from natural learning outcomes such as, how confirmation enabled the individual to face life with faith or how the practice strengthened and informed the Christian community. It is fascinating that the often cited deficiencies of confirmation are more closely associated with the informal meanings than the formal meanings intended to guide the practice. All this leads to the concludion that preoccupation with the rite produced a great deal of activity but very little momentum toward the goal of deepening learner connections with the community. Indeed, the rite frequently implied that a conclusive meaning for confirmation could be achieved simply by performing an accepted action of affirmation.

2.1.4   Shifting Terms of Reference

In the late 1960's confirmation's terms of reference shifted abruptly to educational interests. *The Joint Commission on the Theology and the Practice of Confirmation* published in 1967, included a section entitled "Practical Aspects of Confirmation" (Part iv, p.199). It discussed such topics as the characteristics of adolescents and the educational implications for the church (Conrad, 1999, pp. 204-206). The 1967 Joint Commission resulted from a massive study which assessed confirmation practices of the three main Lutheran denominations in North America. A report presented

in 1970 to the Lutheran churches of North America first crafted the now common definition for confirmation. The report stated: "Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized child through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission" (Joint Commission, 1969, p. 18). The language of the report shifted attention from the 'rite' to 'ministry and mission' from 'theological' to 'pastoral and educational' concerns. *Confirmation and Education,* the title of the academic companion journal to the 1969 report, attests to the decisive nature of this shift. Articles within the companion journal are almost exclusively dedicated to educational theory (Gillbert, 1969). Confirmation was to be seen as a process of education not a possession of theology.

The shift from theological to educational language occurred with little fanfare in the heady days of moon landings, the civil rights movement, war protests and political ferment. However, for the purposes of this thesis this transition brings into focus a crucial alteration in how theological meaning was conceptualized. Theology was no longer seen as the medium by which catechetical concepts were disseminated; instead, education and its incumbent emphasis on curriculum, teaching methods, learners, and evaluation became the central activity of confirmation. Theologians were relegated to the task of ensuring that the content of confirmation correlated with the confessional understandings of the church.

2.1.5   *Reasons for the Shift.*

As this change in confirmation's terms of reference contributes to the current confusion regarding the role of theology in confirmation, it is helpful to consider factors which enabled the shift to occur. Prior to doing this, however, it is important to note that what appears dramatic in hindsight was likely not perceived so at the time. Neither church documents nor curricular outlines explicitly announced a change. In retrospect the transitions in these documents are noticeable as subtle adjustments in language and emphasis. Amid the business of parish life such diffuse changes often pass unnoticed. The same holds true for the examples to be considered. The significance of these commonplace examples is that they facilitated the shift in theological intent and allowed it to feel natural.

2.1.5.1   *Disciplines.*

Post-Enlightenment influences reshaped theology, as they did to most modern academic pursuits. Modern belief in carefully systematized methods of inquiry fostered the rise of academic disciplines. Strict adherence to a set of assumptions and methodologies which underlie and regulate a field of study often made such disciplines effectively autonomous. At seminaries, the location for the training of professional clergy, a number of quasi-independent sciences formed as distinct disciplines such as systematic theology, counseling and homiletics. Gradually "theology became a cluster term for a faculty, a set of disciplines" (Farley, 1988, p. 64) Time further narrowed the locus of theology to "the specific school and scholarly enterprise which deals with doctrines" (Farley, 1996, pg. 33) These divisions and their associated methodologies

conveyed a fragmented notion that, "education is what teachers do, building is what carpenters do and religion is what clergy do" (Oliver & Gershman, 1989, p. 29).

With this narrow view already well established it was expected that the discipline of theology maintain a role distinctive from the discipline of education. It is also reasonable to assume that the hierarchical nature of the academic accreditation produced the belief that theological engagement was not a matter for beginners, but was the product of rigorous specialized training.

2.1.5.2   *Limited content variation.*

Apart from translation and adaptation of the text into contemporary vernacular, the catechism is essentially the same as the days of Luther. Luther himself urged constancy in the language of the catechism. He composed the catechism in an era when the majority of the population did not read and therefore felt consistency was important in order to assist "those who learn" to "repeat" the phrases and "retain them in the memory" (Luther, Preface 1529, in Tappert, 1959, p. 337). The Lutheran World Federation underscored this fixed quality of content by concluding that, "the catechetical content or more precisely Luther's Small Catechism has maintained its place as the basic substance of confirmation instruction" (Lutheran World Federation Department of Studies, 1986, p.27).

The established text of the catechism also fit well with systematic notions of core belief and essential teachings. Systematic theology, like most modern era natural sciences, actively searched for basic rules, truths and guiding principles. The catechism provides common terms of reference to measure other theological concepts. In this sense

the catechism functions theologically in the same way as the fundamentals of arithmetic and grammar function for mathematics and literature. The concept of the catechism as a primer fits well into the general rubrics of education. Thus, theology was able to respond to education's need for a core curriculum. Unfortunately, presenting the catechism as the quintessential Lutheran formulation creates the notion that it represents an unequivocal truth or a single way of knowing. Once the catechism becomes a fixed foundational doctrinal statement there is little need for additional theological elucidation.

2.1.5.3   *Homiletic Paradigm.*

In most congregations, apart from a small educationally oriented group of people, Lutheran adults seldom participate in ordered learning after confirmation. Therefore the sermon is the prime venue that the majority of members have for continuing theological learning. Typical homiletic instruction teaches pastors that the basic structure of a sermon is to begin with a passage of scripture, to connect it to whatever may be relevant to the hearer and then to conclude with some moral or theological precepts: theologian-educator Edward Farley (1996) calls this the "Homiletic Paradigm" (p. 40). Sermons which are open-ended or invite dialogue are exceptions, not the norm. The onus for "struggling with the text, doctrines and problems of interpretation and application" (Farley, 1996 p. 40) is upon the preacher. Thus, any benefit accrued from the theological process resides with the one who delivers the sermon. Farley (1996) asserts that:

> In its claim to be sufficient, the homiletic paradigm subverts the very structure of
>
> the reflective wisdom of the believer. It does this by reducing the relation of
>
> the believer to the tradition or heritage of faith to a relation to texts and by its

assumption that exposition of the authoritative text settles the question of truth.

Further, its method of 'application' of text to life vastly simplifies and even

replaces the complex tasks of interpretation and reflecting on situations. (P.40)

The lack of emphasis on the grounded experience, wisdom and creative contributions of

learners fosters a sense of disengagement and\or selective consumerism. It also likely

ensures that the skills, intellect and life experience of adult learners will be used mostly in

places other than the church. If the anticipated outcome of the confirmation process is an

adult life, where little or no theological interpretation is expected, required or perhaps

even allowed for, one could conclude that theology is tangential to that process.

2.1.6   Redefining Theology's Role

Even though theology was no longer the central emphasis of confirmation,

theological input remained necessary to shape the process. The *Confirmation Ministry*

Task Force Report (1993) makes this clear when it notes that one of the theological tasks

of confirmation is to make connections between the words of the Small Catechism and

the theological concepts such as "grace, affirmation of Baptism, mission, discipleship and

vocation" (Conrad, 1999, p. 274). This redefined role no longer requires the interpretive

energies of theology at large. Instead scholars with a particular interest in confirmation

ministry can accomplish the task. An example of this focus is found in an article by

Margaret Krych (1999), entitled *The Theology of Confirmation.* In it she limits theology

to the classic Lutheran themes such as justification by grace through faith, means of

grace, scripture and the sacraments (pp. 85-109). The theological topics presented fit the

interests of *Confessional Theology*. This specialized branch of theology developed in the

eighteen century and "used the confessional documents of the Reformation as bulwark against pietism and rationalism" (Bratten & Jenson, 1995, p. 247). The goal was not to reproduce Reformation theology but to combine faith's experience, Biblical study and the confessions of the church. Such an emphasis is suitable for presenting venerable doctrines of the church, but it risks becoming irrelevant by attempting to address contemporary situations with sixteenth century propositions.

Confessional theology functions in the orthodox domain of Systematic Theology. This branch of theology undertakes to interpret theological and Biblical concepts in a coherent and orderly way. However, such a perspective process can adopt an "academic dullness and a museum-like quality" (Oeming, 2006, pg. 120). More importantly, as hermeneutic theorists are prone to argue, "the inner need for systematic coherence also carries the danger of violently bending the texts to suit a certain dogmatic space when dogmatics selectively sees only what converges with dogmatic prejudices" (Oeming, 2006, pg. 120). In other words, this framework systematically shapes and limits meaning to established tenets. When applied to beginning learners the problem is amplified. Systematic theologians claim as their task the identification and prioritization of fundamental teachings. As a result, students receive a simplified list of key texts and concepts presumed to carry sufficient meaning for life.

From the perspective of an educational intent, theologians as the 'guardians of doctrine' are necessary but not particularly helpful. The diminished role of theological interpretation has led to a situation where fixed theological content is presented through variable educational means.

The risk of briefly identifying a historic shift in thinking and extrapolating conclusions from it is that what results is more a caricature than a true representation. Most certainly the shift of terms of reference began well before it could be identified. Also the shift I have described was by no means universal. Even in the midst of the separation of theology and education, scholars looked past these particular problems of modernity and proclaimed the need for a shift in intent. The same study guide which explained the need for an educational basis for confirmation included the quote:

> It is assumed that not all things are settled; that there is a present and continuing need to keep on thinking, keep on sharing, to keep on seeking. It is assumed that in our spiritual life we exist in a world of finding, not having found; a world of faith continually being formulated, not a faith delivered to the saints; a world of probabilities and beliefs, not absolutes and proofs.
>
> (Lindberg & Holmin, 1969, p. 46)

The unfortunate result for Confirmation is that dynamic and hopeful intentions such as these were not adopted as the dominant purpose. The shift to a narrow theological and educational purpose are still identifiable in the training of pastors, the construction of curricula, the administration of programs and the assumptions of the learners.

2.2 *Part Two: Theology as Engaged Interpretation*

Common to each of the elements of the preceding section is an assumption that meaning is external to the learner. Formal rites designed to reflect prevailing ideologies require little more than attendance. Teaching, which delivers an approved content, requires little more than absorbing and regurgitating information. This part explores the

precedence, both historical and contemporary for active theological engagement by learners.

2.2.1 A Historical Precedent

Confirmation is one of the few processes of ordered learning which pre-dates the Modern era's social-scientific concept of education. It is helpful to note that at inception neither the basic theological intent nor the expected outcomes of confirmation were the same as those experienced by Modern learners. Consequently, indications that all believers engage in theology, found in Luther's writings, are overlooked in favor of the more limited purpose of explaining and connecting.

2.2.1.1 *Theology as Habitus.*

From the late middle ages through the Reformation and extending to the seventeenth century, the dominant meaning of theology was both more spacious and elemental than Modernist understandings. In that older view, "theology is a 'habitus', or disposition of the mind, that has the character of wisdom or understanding" (Farley, 1988 p. 81, footnote 15). It was from this perspective that Luther penned the Small Catechism. His words in the "Introduction to the Small Catechism" make it clear that study is more than rote learning. "Teach them to understand the meaning of these words" he says "so that they may become acquainted with the object and purport of the lesson" (Luther, 1529. in Tappert, 1959 p. 338). Interpreting the objectives and faith claims of the catechism requires a deeper understanding and engagement of the text than simple recitation. Edward Farley attempts to recover the "older meaning" of theology by stating:

Theology was not just the scholar's profession, the teacher's trade, but the

wisdom proper to the life of the believer. This presupposed that faith (as a mode

of existence before God) was not simply an emotion or feeling but included a kind

of knowledge. Faith was a kind of practical knowledge having the character of

wisdom because it had to do with the believer's way of existing before God.

(Farley, 1996, p. 33)

This notion of faith-formed wisdom appears as a goal in the introduction to Luther's

Large Catechism as well. Luther writes:

Therefore, I once more entreat all Christians, especially pastors and preachers, do

not become doctors too soon and to fancy they know all. It is with our vain

fancies as with false measurements, there is shrinkage. But let them carefully

study their Catechism daily and consistently practice its lessons, guarding with the

greatest care and diligence against the poisonous contagion of such security or

presumption. Let them continue to read and to teach, to learn and to meditate and

to ponder. (Luther, 1529, in Lenker, 1935, p. 39)

There is no sense of a closed or fixed approach to knowledge in Luther's intent. On the

contrary he actively encourages a life-long process of discovery, interpretation and

application of catechetical teachings.

2.2.1.2   *Pedagogy of Prayer.*

Perhaps the most important historic precedent for engaged theological

interpretation comes in a letter published by Luther in 1535. Entitled *"A simple way to*

pray, for a good friend," the document is as much a pedagogical model as it is a

suggested approach to prayer (Wiencke & Lehmann, 1968, pp. 193- 211). Luther

explains how to use the catechism as a foundation for prayerfully engaging life. In

describing how to use each of the Ten Commandments to enrich meaning, discover truth,

and establish direction, Luther states:

> Out of each I make a garland of four twisted strands. That is I take each
>
> commandment first as a teaching, which is what it actually is, and I reflect upon
>
> what our Lord God so earnestly requires of me here. Secondly I make it a reason
>
> for thanksgiving. Thirdly, a confession and fourthly a prayer petition.
>
> (Luther, 1535, in Wiencke & Lehmann, 1968, p. 195)

It is interesting to note that letter is dedicated to Peter Berkendorf – Luther's barber –

instead of eminent theologians. For Luther theological meaning is formed amid the

grounded activities of daily life: wisdom in the catechism is found not just in the

recitation of a teaching but through recognition of its benefits, thoughtful assessment of

its impediments, and purposeful response. Luther's approach would encourage all

Christians to actively engage in a daily process of remembering, discerning, revising and

taking action.

2.2.1.3 *Priesthood of all Believers.*

Beyond the specifics of the catechism, it is clear throughout Luther's writings that

making sense of faith is a matter for everyone. In his work *An Appeal to the Ruling Class*

(1520) Luther muses, "Would not it be reasonable for every Christian upon reaching his

[or her] ninth or tenth year to know the holy gospel in its entirety, since his [her] name

and standing as a Christian are based upon it" (Dillenberger, 1961, p. 475)? That same

work called for establishment of schools for girls in every town, argued for the revision

of university curricula and prayed that God would be raised up "real doctors of

theology…no matter whether they were young or old, laymen or priest, monk or secular,

celibate or married…" (Dillenberger, 1961, p. 474). In Luther's treatise "Freedom of a

Christian" (1520) two essential propositions were set forth: 1) "a Christian is a perfectly

free lord of all, subject to none." 2) "a Christian is a dutiful servant of all, subject to all"

(Dillenberger, 1961, p. 53) . In support of these seemingly contradictory statements

Luther draws on the experiences of daily living. Throughout the treatise Luther makes it

clear that each person is to engage in discernment and service. He concludes: "From

what has been said, everyone can pass safe judgment on all works and all laws and make

a trustworthy distinction between them and know who are the blind and ignorant pastors

and who are the good and true" (Dillenberger, 1961, p. 79). All this is consistent with a

core tenet of the Reformation - the *Priesthood of all believers*.

2.2.1.4   *Theology of the Cross.*

        At the heart of the Lutheran confessions stands the *theology of the cross*.

(Theology of the cross is found in theses 16 to 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation.) In this

set of theses Luther expands the equality of all who would do theology by eliminating

any pretense of credentials.   For example in thesis 16 Luther claims we add sin to sin by

attempting to find grace "by doing what is in us". In thesis 18 Luther says "we must

utterly despair of our ability". In thesis 19 he challenges any theologian who "looks upon

the invisible things of God like they were clearly visible. In theses 21 Luther says "A

theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is (Pelikan & Lehmann, 1955, pp. 40-

41). Luther promotes a theology that is humble, authentic and existential. In two related quotes Luther states, "Experience alone makes a theologian…. It is by living – no rather by dying and being damned that a theologian is made, not by understanding, reading or speculating" (Solberg, 1997, p.57).

As no person could by virtue, special wisdom or particular merit warrant the grace of God, at the cross, all people are equally destitute and equally loved. Solberg (1997) argues there is a direct connection between Luther's theology of the cross and feminist epistemology. She notes: "The compulsion of humans to rely on and reside in their own power, Luther would say, is not abstract: it always takes concrete forms. This is what makes it so pernicious" (p.75). The desire for absolute, control, choice and discernment; indeed, all self-defined human efforts are revealed as finite and provisional by the cross.

By stripping away vestiges of power, privilege, erudition and justification, all that remains is faith. Solberg (1997) calls the cross an "epistemic fulcrum, the point on which true reality and the gift to see it and name it hinge" (p.90). In the catechism Luther's explanation of the third article of the creed begins with the words, "I believe that by my own understanding and strength I cannot believe in my Lord Jesus Christ or come to him…" (Wengert, 1994, p. 29). In Lutheran theology, knowing begins with recognition of fallibility not the requirement of precision.

The catechism at its inception sought to actively engage Christian learners. Daily life shaped catechetical ideas and expanded their relevance. Luther saw theology as the art and wisdom of Christian living, a 'habitus' rather than a specialized skill: as the avocation of every Christian and not just the job of pastors.

2.2.2   Post-Modern Theologies

From the perspective of history, it is possible to observe how the Modern period altered the theological character and intent of Confirmation. However, to assume that either theology or education adopted modernist concepts and then remained inert in their respective fields is a mistake. Paradoxically, just as the educational paradigm became preeminent in confirmation, new ideas revitalized theology and substantially altered the principles and processes by which theological precepts form and are conveyed. Emerging theological movements are often critical of the dogmatic prescriptions of classical theology. At the same time, a dialectical relationship between the theories of education and the affirmations of theology call for "integration of faith, reflection and action – praxis" (Shipani, 1995, p. 286). Critical awareness of the different experiences of women and men, the coercive nature of power, insights formed from oppression, the transformative quality of story and the recognition of transient meaning formed in process all combined to shift the posture of theology. Contemporary theologies share a common rejection of a "static notion of being" and "provide alternate visions of God and the world equally committed to dynamic categories of interpretation rather than static essences, substances, and natures" (Bratten & Jenson, 1995, p.332).

Without question, this shift in theological emphasis has altered the context of confirmation. Feminist, Liberation, and Narrative theology each have made an indelible mark on confirmation. As each of these theological viewpoints have contributed to the confirmation experience in palpable ways, it is helpful to expand on them briefly.

2.2.2.1   *Feminist Voice.*

In 1969 mainline Lutheran churches did not ordain women and feminist concepts had not emerged as distinct theologies. Now, feminist theologians provide new insights about how theology is done and who does it. Today, among the majority of Lutherans in Canada, women not only minister as parish pastors and chaplains but serve as synod bishops, the national bishop and, until recently, as a seminary president. Also, as a result of efforts made by feminist theologians most contemporary confirmation curricula avoid exclusively masculine language, examples and images.

At a basic level feminist theologians are altering the terrain of confirmation. The feminist perspective of meaning derived from lived-experience, demands that the particular perceptions of individuals inform, shape and hold accountable our collective insights. For example theologian Margaret Hammer discovered that the word 'travail' - an archaic word for childbirth - is used in the King James Bible to describe Christ's action on the cross (Hammer, 1994, p. 65). She learned that the word 'travail' was adopted in the English translation to convey the concept of 'pain which gives life' (Hammer, 1994, p. 66).   This concept resonates throughout the salvation narrative in both the Hebrew and New Testaments. Hammer's linguistic and theological discoveries enabled her to connect her own experience of giving birth, to the essential story of salvation (Hammer, 1994, p. 67). Her experience does not imply that giving birth is a preferable or universal human experience; it simply reveals a previously overlooked understanding of the divine. Opening to the life-experiences of others permits meaningful connections between confirmation and life.

2.2.2.2   *Liberating Voice.*

The liberating ideas of Paulo Freire, which influenced education, have theological roots in Latin American churches. The integration of theological, political, educational and practical concerns results in an active critical-consciousness "emerging from historical contexts of injustice, oppression, and massive human suffering" (Schipani, 1995, p. 288). Liberation theology began to make its presence known in confirmation in the topics and types of stories which appeared in the curricula. Often, these stories relate to the oppression and the struggle for civil rights experienced by black Americans. The stories of indigenous Canadians, Chinese immigrant workers, the Japanese internment and the challenges facing refugees, which attest to Canadian oppression, are typically missing. Stories drawn from a broader world context are only now beginning to filter into the materials. Despite these shortcomings, the presence of an alternate viewpoint, which stems from Liberation theology softens the rhetoric of dogma and opens the possibility for an expanded worldview.

Liberation theology calls on leaders and teachers to relinquish power so that the voices of others might emerge. Liberating education moves outside of ordinary practice, beyond the fear of an uncertain future and embraces the prophetic-active task of forming new understandings (Freire, 1996, pp. 172-175). This messy world of making mistakes and deepening wisdom, indignation and insightful passions, stalwart resistance and persistent protest is hard to reconcile with the safe and manageable program traits of confirmation. Liberation theology reveals that when fear and the bureaucratic urges of a program displace the fervent drive to risk, discover, reform meaning and take action, it is likely that a loss of relevance will soon follow.

2.2.2.3   *Narrative Voice.*

As a vehicle of faith and culture 'story' provides meaning at the intersection between inherited wisdom and present experience. Narrative theology functions at this juncture and attempts to generate the richest possible expression of faith (Stone, 1995, p. 262). Faith stories (which are essentially unique at each telling) can be gathered under the broad headings of: *Canonical* - biblical literature accepted as authentic accounts of God's activity; *Community* – stories that relate the collective experience of contemporaries; and *Life-stories* – which are drawn from the experiences of individuals (Stone, 1995, pp. 263-264).   Confirmation utilizes story both as a method of educational engagement and a path for deepening theological connections between the community and the inherited texts. In most recent curricula learners are 1) encouraged to relate their life-stories; 2) compelling human stories and vibrant biblical accounts are included, and 3) teachers are charged with the task of making meaningful connections.

However narrative theology is more about creative engagement than about telling interesting tales. It seeks to push beyond the simple goals of related experience or community connection, in order to identify the power stories have to shape and create meaning (Stone, 1995, p. 259). Narrative theology takes seriously the transformative nature of story by noting that with each telling meaning deflects slightly by the experiences and circumstances of the teller and the context of the hearer. In telling stories we add some layers of meaning and lose others. The constantly changing situations and relational dynamics of communities make some aspects of story compelling even as they deem other aspects inconsequential. The process happens corporately through the trends of society and personally through the experiences of an individual. Confirmation's

orientation and structure assumes fixed core content: narrative theology assumes that these core stories are always in a state of creative flux.

As these examples illustrate, contemporary theologies increase the reservoir and function of stories and heighten sensitivity toward, power, inclusiveness and context. The larger objective of contemporary theological projects is to introduce a deeper orientation toward meaning as it pertains to the core content of confirmation. Theology formed in this way, results in opportunities for enriched meaning, critical appraisal and creative interpretation. It is obvious from both historical precedent and contemporary priorities that the possibility of learners as engaged theologians exists.

2.3 Part Three: Authority and Conceptual Hegemony

2.3.1 Questioning the Unquestionable

Since the 1967 report on confirmation, theology has become less about propositions and more about process (Joint Commission, 1967). Unlike their predecessors, contemporary theologians draw widely from human experience and context. By holding this contextual experience in dialectical tension with the inherited tenets of faith, they offer compelling ways for learners to form meaning. Ample reasons exist to re-conceptualize the theological intent of confirmation; however one significant hurtle remains. Theology like all modern pursuits is bound by conceptual hegemony.

In theology, as in life, the past is never fully abandoned; former ideals accumulate in and influence, distort or dominate, present practice. Despite recent shifts in thinking a state of exigency is present whenever the intuitive, experiential wisdom of an individual appears to be at odds with the interpretive tradition of a community or the veracity of an

inherited text. This problem is at the heart of the ecclesiastical, hermeneutical and philosophical turbulence which besets theology. Farley (1988) notes that, "difficulties can arise if earlier ways of understanding theology and theological study continue in the present as a conceptual hegemony…" (p. 111).

Farley (1988) contends that two presuppositions shaped earlier theological imperatives: 1) "the pre-critical conviction that textual and institutional authorities have some sort of *a priori* truth" and 2) because "the institutions of religion (congregations, denominations, schools) provide the basis and possibility for theology; theology should have no existence outside of them" (pp. 120 & 121). From these perspectives the essence of theology is to identify, emphasize and conserve the "shared propositions, common modes of interpretation and understanding and the common meanings which unite the members of a group" (Cahill, 1982, p. 157).

As the ideas formed by individuals can be unsettling to community, tradition and authority it is not uncommon for ancient charge of *heresy* to be jokingly or dismissively applied. This archaic charge is accurate in as far as the traditional definition of heresy is understood. Peter Berger notes that "the heretic is one who does not accept the authority of a tradition in its fullness, but picks and chooses" (Berger, 1979, p.30). He goes on to observe that with the coming of modernity the situation changed radically. In somewhat less than inclusive language he says:

> 'In the premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation.' Indeed, one could put this change even

more sharply: 'for premodern man, heresy is a possibility- usually rather a remote one; for modern man heresy typically becomes a necessity.' Or again 'modernity creates a situation where picking and choosing becomes an imperative.' (Berger, 1979, p.30)

When emphasis is placed on the formation and maintenance of consensus, theology tends to be authoritative. Such authority represents "a cluster of underpinnings that Christian theology has always taken for granted: Scripture, dogma, revelation, authority, church, tradition, and the like (Farley, 1988, p. 225). Hence, to criticize theology is to criticize the essential foundations of Christian faith. Declarative statements convey a static, protective notion of community; yet, "a faith-community is essentially dynamic in structure; it is not a place but a project" (Lonergan, 1972, p. 79).

In acknowledging the formative nature of community, contemporary theologies shift attention from how a message is formed and transmitted to how a message is received. Oeming (2006) captures the essence of this shift in his statement: "interpretation no longer draws meaning out of a text; interpretation places meaning into a text" (p. 75). The inclination of contemporary theologies to give precedence to the individual's context, experience and intuition, reverses the classical approach.

Within Lutheran ecclesiastical structures, the *Confessions* function as a significant source of interpretive authority. Indeed by definition, one cannot be a Lutheran unless one subcribes to the Confessions. The catechism, embedded as it is in the confessional statements, ensures that confirmation closely aligns with the orthodox structures of the church. When an authoritative theological mode becomes the mandate for an educational means it is difficult to access other possible intentions for the confirmation process.

2.3.2   Caught in the Fray

Understandings which develop from conceptual hegemony tend to perceive innovation as a threat to good order. The impact of hegemony intensifies when people begin to take sides or act defensively out of fear. Issues which impinge on the formation of meaning exist in both the activities of ordered learning and the lives of individuals. Establishing sharp distinctions between the individual's sense of meaning and an assumed norm can, in the words of Moltmann (1974):

> reinforce the idea that fidelity to the tradition and commitment to the contemporary context are forces essentially in opposition to one another, and therefore that the church can only solve the crisis of relevance by *precipitating* the crisis of identity and can only solve the crisis of identity by precipitating the crisis of relevance. (p. xiii)

People obtain relevance through efforts to make sense of the relationship between propositions and life experience. Neither theologians nor educators can develop, depost or enforce relevance through eloquent words, persistent repetition, or coercive means. A crisis of identity both describes a person's feelings of belonging and the perception of an institution's pertinence. To precipitate such a crisis, is to limit ability to access the depth of thought and meaning the church possesses. In short, the act of protection curtails the goal of integration. When there is an implicit assumption that 'fidelity to tradition' opposes context, all participants in confirmation become tentative. Pastors and lay instructors fret over their ability to correctly and effectively deliver the content. Learners hesitate to offer opinions - especially if those opinions seem to differ from established or perceived norms.

A disconnection between context and tradition reduces the content of confirmation to simple data. More importantly, the wisdom that linked well-crafted statements of faith to the sweat, tears, hunger, thirst, pain and hopeful passion of life, becomes little more than a distant relic. Instead, learners perceive confirmation's content as merely defining a specialized religious world. The rich resources of life-experience, the learning gained from making sense of problems, and the wisdom formed from creative solutions are lost. Rather than adopting a protective stance, pastors and teachers must trust that the faith which motivates and inspires their teaching is dynamic and trustworthy enough to bear the necessary questions, challenges, misconceptions and doubts integral to the formation of faith by learners.

The introduction of this thesis stated: "Theologians must cease to be 'guardians of doctrine' and adopt a role more akin to that of a 'mid-wife' (Belenky, McVicker Clinchy, Goldberger & Mattuck Tarule, 1986, p. 217). Confirmation teachers and students must be about the business of birthing new ideas. " Like all mid-wives, we undertake this task with an understanding of what conditions offer the chance for a healthy delivery, what factors can put the birthing process at risk and knowledge that not every birth can produce life. Mid-wives operate at a moment of travail – shaped and informed by the history which has preceded it and with an eye on what is to come. It is that moment which best describes a theological intent for confirmation.

2.3.4   Faithful Criticism

Lutheran philosopher Tom Christenson (2004) proposes the idea of "faithful reformation" or "faithful criticism" as a basic Lutheran trait (p. 112 & p. 122).   He says

"This pattern of thinking – that we criticize from the point of view that also stands in need of criticism – comes as close as anything to being a Lutheran epistemological principle" (p.112) To undertake Lutheran theology one must be prepared to venture into ambiguity, paradox, dialectic and mystery. Consider the following Lutheran tenets: Christians dwell at the foot of the cross both utterly destitute and completely loved; Christians are both saints and sinners; God's heaven is breaking in among us – heaven is already but not yet; Christians are free lords subject to none and dutiful servants subject to all; Christ is in, with, through and under the elements of communion. These essential Lutheran affirmations each require a way of knowing more rich and rigorous than simple logic.

For Lutherans, theologies and epistemologies which strive to name, limit and control ways of knowing are met with suspicion. Simplistic, one-dimensional precepts seldom consider the rich inter-connected diversity of the cosmos. Faithful criticism, if it is to be authentic, is also self-critical. Christenson (2004) states that being willing to question is "an act of faith" (p.112). Each affirmation made must be accompanied by the humble awareness that "our categories (and our mental equipment) are not adequate" (Christenson, 2004, p. 114) for the ideas we affirm.

The students we encounter arrive not only with the linear, black and white thinking of early adolescence; they also have been schooled in systems shaped by modernist absolutes. In addition, their notions of Christian faith have often been influenced by the loud legalisms of other denominations. To simply recite doctrine in the face of such challenges perpetuates the problem. Equipping students to for the task of

faithful criticism requires instructors who have a sharp sense of how meaning forms, a

deep appreciation for the role of the learner and a willingness to venture into ambiguity.

CHAPTER THREE

3. More about birthing than building:

Part One: Epistemological Assumptions

3.1.1 Building Bridges

The metaphor of *a mid-wife enabling new meanings to be born in the midst of travail* does not fit easily with conventional understandings of education. This messy biological metaphor is quite different from the tidy distinctions usually drawn between knowing agent and known world, self from other, fact from fiction, right from wrong, teacher from student (Davis and Sumara, 1997, p. 108). Within carefully delineated boundaries curricula describe what needs to be known, the method of presentation and the means for assessment. Operational assumptions such as these predicate on deeper assumptions about the nature of the world and the ways knowledge apprehended.

Rather than a part of us that is given birth, people speak of knowledge as if it was essentially distinct from the knower - an object "to be grasped, held, stored, manipulated and wielded" (Davis and Sumara, 1997, p. 109). Instead of mid-wives, teachers become *mediators of the gap* who connect deficient learners to necessary knowledge. Teaching in this paradigm is like bridge building. Diligent and helpful work takes place on either side of the chasm. On one side footings are built on the carefully determined propositions, truths, and facts of an assumed real world. On the other side deep pilings are driven to

find the biological, psychological and sociological bedrock of learners. The rift is spanned by the appropriate methods to make a meaningful learning connection.

But what if the ground on either side of the chasm is not as stable as imagined? What if the propositional pilings constantly need repositioning so that the distance of the gap can no longer be calculated? What if those who venture into the dimness between knower and known, discovered that there was no gap at all only a shadow created by the footings which had been constructed? Would the need for bridge builders persist? If there is no need for bridge builders, and our propositions and perceptions are no longer certain, will learning become mired in "anarchy of belief" (Adam, 2006, p. 58)? Such is the quandary of the contemporary learning situation.

Confusion about epistemological assumptions and conceptual discomfort concerning the intent of teaching define the postmodern milieu. Assumptions about the nature of truth and general desires for precision, practicality and expediency rest uneasily beside emerging intuitions about formed and viable meaning. Not only is it necessary to recognize this confused state and its implications for instruction, but it is important to situate confirmation amid epistemological theories which are best suited to the educational and theological goals of the process. If, as is proposed in the previous chapter, an educational goal for confirmation is to engage and equip learners as co-participants in the theological task of forming meaning, then the epistemological concepts which support and facilitate that intent must be identified.

The concept of constructivism will be utilized to bring focus to the epistemological vista. Adopting the term *constructivism* requires immediate clarification. In a general sense, constructivist concepts maintain that "learners actively create,

interpret and reorganize knowledge in individual ways" (Windschitl, 1999, para. 9).

When presented as a colloquial definition, such as above, constructivism functions as "a powerful folktale about the origins of human knowledge" which is "something akin to a secular religion" (Phillips, 1995, p.5). Beneath popular maxims, constructivism takes on a variety of forms. It may describe a philosophical ontology, an epistemological orientation, a referent, a learning theory, a discourse, a model or a framework of interpretation (Harlow, Cummings & Aberasturi, 2006, p. 41; Geelan, 1997, pp. 17-19). Constructivist ideas also emerge from a variety of different starting points. David Geelan (1997) suggests six distinct but related interests of constructivism as: personal, radical, critical, contextual, social objectivist and social relativist (pp. 17-22). Wesley Null (2004) argues that the attitudes and interests of its advocates shape constructivism. He proposes a modest list that includes: a) *Epistemological*, those who focus on the nature of knowledge; b) *Instructional*, those who investigate student-teacher interactions; and c) *Prescriptive* those who develop useful constructivist tips and techniques (pp. 181-182). In short, constructivism is not a single unified theory but is best understood as a variety of perspectives loosely gathered into several domains (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 163).

In this chapter, the personal-epistemological domain of constructivism will dominate. The writings of four well known epistemological theorists will be explored to expand the view that "teaching should promote experiences that require students to become active scholarly participators in the learning process" (Gordon, 2009, para. 2). Prior to doing this however, it is important to clarify the role of epistemology and the lineage of constructivist philosophy.

3.1.2   The Confused Vista of Contemporary Epistemology

Noting that the word philosophy literally means the love of wisdom, Johnson (1995) states that wisdom "is not a fixed entity that once it has been found is to be applied routinely to all of life's questions, but a disposition or habit of seeking and creating connections among disparate aspects of life" (p.100). Unfortunately, the discipline of philosophy often reduces this creative, fluid disposition to one of "endless textual explication and historic comparison, tireless policing of the borders and purity of philosophy and ceaseless cleverness without consequence.... that has little to do with philosophy understood as the love of wisdom and the art of existence" (Stuhr, 2003, p.89).

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy which studies how "knowing is related to belief, to practice, (and) to the institutions which embody or pursue knowing" (Christenson, 2004, p. 85). Epistemologies attempt to identify vague intuitions and prescriptive principles of both individuals and communities, in order to clarify and organize them into meaningful patterns of knowing. Solberg (1997) provides an accessible metaphor and description of the role of epistemologies. She says:

> Epistemologies act as 'lenses' or frameworks, implicitly or explicitly shaping our sense of what can and cannot be known, what is and what is not worth knowing, who can and who cannot know, whether some knowledge is useful or is not useful, for what purposes knowledge should be used for and so forth. (p. 8)

Whether they exist as undefined feelings or overt expectations, epistemological assumptions guide our actions as teachers and our engagement as learners - our notions of failure or accomplishment; our sense of satisfaction or frustration; our drive to improve or

our ability to disregard all stem from these core beliefs. Palmer (1983) observes that "the shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living; the relation of knower to the known become the relation of the living self to the larger world." (p. 21) With our attitudes, aptitudes and actions so closely tied to the assumptions we make and the beliefs we affirm, it behooves those of us who engage in any process of ordered learning to have clarity about the epistemologies which shape our aims.

Developing such clarity is no easy task. The amount of significance we assign to what we know or wish to know is in a constant state of flux. Our health, mental acuity and physical location, form and shape these perceptions. Simultaneously, experiences derived from the interplay within with our families, schools, churches, mass media, sports teams and other social networks all contribute to our diverse ways of knowing. Adding to the complexity is that "we acquire our epistemologies, without examining them simply by absorbing the general culture of which they are a hidden but extremely important part" (Christenson, 2004, p. 86). Much of what people know and utilize daily either is not recognized as a belief, or is not easy to express.

Despite this ambiguity and opacity, most people cling tenaciously to patterns of knowing. Our experiences, the preferences we form and our "more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means" (Stuhr, 2003, p. 89) play an important role in our lives. We often react with consternation or disengagement when there is a lack of correspondence between what we know and what we do (Solberg, 1997, p. 2). In this way "our epistemology is quietly transformed into our ethic" (Palmer, 1983, p. 21). This happens whether these personal philosophies are profound and helpful or unjust, destructive, myopic and petty (Stuhr, 2003, p. 89). The same need for clarity and

correspondence inhabits the programs we develop and the educational processes we engage in.

Clarity is not easily achieved; educational philosophers are experiencing a crisis of metaphysical identity and warrant (Johnson, 1995, p. 37). Discerning a single epistemological path is not possible; instead, it is as if one stands at a crossroad peering tentatively in a variety of directions. One path leads back to the eighteenth century debates between Realism and Idealism in the hopes that the struggles of Kant and Hegel to "have no object but to restore faith" (Hildebrand, 2003, p. 9) would finally win out over the mechanistic, materialistic Cartesian-Newtonian world view. Another brightly lit path passes through the empiricist paths of pragmatism. Billboards along the wayside advertise methods and processes to engage the modern world. While each sign appears different they share the axiom *that the right method rigorously applied will produce truth*. Close at hand is the widening path of feminist epistemologies which beckon us to question how and by whom knowledge formed and who benefits from its construction. Meandering throughout the landscape, one can see the indeterminate trails of hermeneutical interpretation which encourage travelers to journey without the promise of a destination. Beside the crossroads are benches built on deconstructionist ideas which incline a traveler to ponder both the mode of travel and the purposes of the journey.

3.1.3   Why can't it just be simple?

A reason for this confused vista is that typically our epistemologies try, by precise observation and weight of logic, to construct theories which are universal, stable, and coherent (Solberg, 1997, p. 8). Contemporary philosophers argue that this objective is

neither worthwhile nor ultimately achievable. Hildebrand notes that neo-pragmatists like Rorty contend that attempts "to systematically describe the world in general terms are either banal statements of the obvious or thinly disguised religious dogma of self-appointed priests" (Hildebrand, 2003, p. 116). In a similar fashion Putnam rejects notions of a "fixed totality of mind-independent objects" or "one true and complete description" (as cited in Hildebrand, 2003, p. 132). Shifting their efforts away from the ambiguity of fixed methodologies, these philosophers "re-weave beliefs" through hermeneutical propositions based on what Rorty calls the "linguistic turn" (as cited in Hildebrand, 2003, p. 122). Feminist philosophers also note the limitations of our generalized theories. Their emerging epistemologies point to the ubiquitous presence of power and privilege in the formation of our ideas. From that observation, notions of accountability and lived experience are embedded in their constructs (Solberg, 1997, p. 37).

This philosophical state of flux is nothing new. The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (ca. 535-475 BCE) quipped "you can't step in the same river twice" (in Pegues, 2007, p. 317). Protagoras (ca. 481-411 BCE) said "[humans] are the measure of all things" (in Neff, 1966, p. 66). These simple adages apply to our most sophisticated constructs. Bauersfeld (1988) observed that "with change in perspective, the descriptive system changes, and the object is no longer the 'same' object" (p. 41). This means that every time we attempt to present an extramundane truth, advance a proposition, describe an object or convey a concept, enough factors change to make the object of our attention essentially different. Rather than concede to this assertion, philosophy has long sought to identify a stable essence or immutable truth which can be conveyed in precise and consistent terms.

Historically efforts fell into two camps: *Idealism,* which was "concerned with the metaphysical rather than the existential, with the general rather than the particular, with the whole rather than the part and the eternal rather than the transitory" (Neff, 1966, p. 10); and *realism*, which "supports the sustained existence of things and denies the necessity of the knower" (Neff, 1966, p. 40). From these starting points, each perspective seeks to develop a stable concept of what knowing is. An idealist epistemology emphasizes consistency and coherence. We know something is *true* when it fits the harmonious nature of creation and is *false* when it is inconsistent or incongruous with an ideal (Neff, 1966, p. 35). For the Realist, the foundation of knowledge is fact, knowledge corresponds to the independent existence of matter and we measure knowledge by how effectively we describe and deal with the environment. If concepts do not correspond to something *real* they are dismissed as figments of our imagination (Pegues, 2007, p. 318). Epistemological attributes from both these starting points resonate in contemporary understandings of knowing. The essential question is: "Does our knowledge conform to objects or do objects conform to our knowledge" (Staver, 1986, p. 6)?

At the onset of the modern era, the separation of object and ideal intensified with the rise of materialism and scientific realism. The ideas of Rene Descartes represent "an attempt to recognize reality as consisting of both mind and matter" (Neff, 1966, p. 18). Proceeding from a solipsist belief, Descartes concluded that the only thing he could trust was his doubts. Sensory experience, the rational grounds for logic and the conclusions we draw all are fallible. Cartesian dualism reoriented the philosophic debate from one centered on the primacy of object or idea, to a new discourse about the ways the subjective mind can access the objective world.

Descartes' assertions and the gulf he created between the knower and the known world, invited a defense from both the deductive reasoning of rationalism and the inductive processes of empiricism. These spirited defenses established the conceptual boundaries that define the modern era. Empiricists asserted that we perceive all reality through our senses and establish truth through the verification of experience. (Staver, 1986, p. 8). John Locke argued that the only source for our knowledge is experience or logical observation. He went as far as to say that the newborn's mind is a "tabula rasa –a blank tablet" (Neff, 1966, p. 59). The best clues as to the nature of reality come through careful observation and diligent methods. For Locke, the only source of knowledge is the data we gather, organize and quantify. Knowledge in this framework is the "objective-representation of an observer-independent world" (Glastersfeld, 1988, p. 5). The common sense accessibility and the startling discoveries that empiricist processes reveal support its epistemic propositions.

Education theory formed in the crucible of the rationalist-empiricist debate operates with the rationale that "mature living requires knowledge of reality [and] this is best accomplished by inundating the student with vast amounts of information" (Pegues, 2007, p. 320). Collectively we define these premises as *Intrinsicism* (conceptual realism) and Intrinsicism constitutes the epistemological foundation of classical education. Classical (or transmissive) education can be summed up in colloquial terms as: the belief that "knowledge is fixed absolute and certain; teachers and textbooks have the right answer; the student has a duty to get it right and teachers should make it easier to find out what is expected" (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 166).

When knowledge is static, external and deliverable learning becomes a matter of picking and choosing and the necessity for comprehensive thinking diminishes. Palmer (1993) contends that:

> The conventional pedagogy persists because it conveys a view of reality which simplifies our lives. By this view we and our world become objects to be lined up, counted, organized and owned, rather than a community of selves and spirits related to each other in a complex web of accountability called 'truth' (p. 39)

Such simplicity comes at a cost. When we value education for its simple expediency: learners risk becoming passive receptors of knowledge; our knowing risks becoming limited, inert and compartmentalized; we fail to recognize that bias and prejudices can distort our methods; or we fail to notice that our community of selves is fickle and fragmented.

3.1.4 Constructivist Compromise

Settling on a materialist-objectivist epistemology did not remove the necessity of interacting with internal, subjective dimensions of learners and so the subject-object gap persisted (Staver, 1986, p. 12). Two philosophers who attempted to bridge the gap are commonly regarded as the progenitors of contemporary constructivism.

3.1.4.1 *Vico.*

The first, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), contended that "epistemic agents can know nothing but the cognitive structures they themselves have put together" (von Glastersfeld, 1985, p. 5). Vico observed that the hypothetico-deductive method of

Cartesians implies that phenomena which cannot be expressed logically or

mathematically are illusions (Costelloe, 2008, section 3, para. 3). For Vico knowledge is

what the knower considers viable on the basis of language and tradition. Vico supported

his claim that "to know" means to "know how to make" (Glastersfeld, 1988, p. 5) by

asserting that we only know something when we can tell what parts it consists of. Rather

than Descartes idea that clear and distinct ideas are the source of truth; Vico argued that

humans are about the task of dissecting the constituent parts of the world and

reconstituting them to form viable meaning. Vico's ideas, though provocative, lay

dormant for almost 200 years.

3.1.4.2   *Kant.*

        The second and more influential philosopher was Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Kant attempted a compromise between rationalism and empiricism by accepting the

ontological reality of the external world and proposing a third layer of reality which he

called the *phenomenal* realm. (Staver, 1986, p. 13). The phenomenal realm was

constructed by a priori categories of the mind (Pegues, 2007, p. 317). Kant contended

that, although the mind is part of, senses and receives stimulation from the external

world, the mind merely senses the appearance of the external. Ultimately the 'thing-in-

itself' or noumenon realm (as he terms it) is available only through interpretation (Staver,

1986 & Pegues, 2007). For Kant, the mind was the active agent which shaped and

organized experiences into ordered whole thought "through internal rules integral to the

mind's operation" (Staver, 1986, p. 12)

With Kant the epistemological interest shifted from finding ways to eliminate the mind's interference with objects to discovering new ways to comprehend the mind's universal formative processes. Staver (1986) provides a simple metaphor to identify this shift. If the interest is a pile of screened rocks; the empiricist would note that all rocks are of a consistent size; the rationalist would reason that some inherent logic determined the homogeneous size of the rocks, but for Kant, the interest would be the function of the screen (p.14). This part sensory, part intellectual function of the mind is referred to as schema (Staver, 1986, p. 13). The nature and operation of schema is the basis of constructivist thought.

3.2 Part Two: Digging near the Roots

Contemporary advocates of constructivism are prone to promote constructivist values as a panacea for all the pedantic practices of classical education. For example Maclellan & Soden (2004) suggest that constructivism implies:

> a) learners are intellectually generative (with the capacity to pose questions, solve problems and construct theories and knowledge) rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled; b) instruction should be based primarily on the development of learner's thinking; and, c) the locus of intellectual authority resides not in the teacher nor in the resources but in the discourse facilitated by both teachers and learners. (pp. 254-255)

Such calls for active meaning-making are inspiring and motivational, but they do not necessarily reflect practice. Null (2004) concludes that from the perspective of history

constructivism has "immense rhetorical appeal" but it "quickly disintegrates" as it enters the classroom (p.187). Engaged discourse, problem solving and generative intellectualism do not always present as the natural inclination of learners.

In the paragraph following Maclellan & Soden's (2004) optimistic list (cited above) is the claim that the "insidious influence of behaviorism" and "the pervasiveness of public accountability" (p. 255) compromise constructivist practices. Elkind (2004) blames teacher, curricular and social readiness for slow implementation of constructivist ideals. Yilmaz (2008) proposes that the problem is that constructivism is a learning theory not a teaching theory (p. 168). Von Glastersfeld (1985) argues that educators confuse acquisition of skills with the construction of viable conceptual networks (p. 15). Adding to general confusion, is the tendency to "graft" constructivist ideas onto existing practices (Maclellan & Soden, 2004, p. 255) as *yet another* new teaching initiative or method. I believe a different horticultural metaphor is needed. Constructivism is not simply about grafting; it is about uprooting the vine.

The fact that constructivist ideas do not readily translate into model classroom practices or exemplary curricula, does not mean that they lack influence. That influence manifests as a willingness to see learners as active epistemic agents who form viable conceptual networks. Four authors stand out as influential in North American educational philosophy: Jean Piaget, John Dewey, Michael Polanyi and Alfred North Whitehead. These authors produced thorough and vibrant epistemologies which took into account both the experiences of the learners and the formation of meaning.

To identify constructivist ideas of Piaget and Dewey, is nothing new. Phillips (1995) claims "Piaget is generally regarded as a foundational figure by many

Constructivists" (p.6). Likewise, Dewey's Pragmatism shares basic attitudes toward the formation knowledge with constructivism (Glastersfeld, 1985, p. 3). My intent is not to repeat these observations, but to note the epistemological assumptions of Piaget and Dewey which shaped their intent. Polanyi and Whitehead are less frequently labeled constructivist but they are no less interested in how learners form meaning. Polanyi's ideas of *tacit knowing* and *emergence* speak of formed intuition. Whitehead's notion of *actual occasions* collapses the distinctions between knower and known altogether. As a group these four theorists expand the domain of the personal-epistemological constructivism.

3.2.1 Jean Piaget

Of the four theorists Piaget's epistemological roots are closely linked to concepts already discussed and so my consideration of his ideas shall be cursory. Piaget assumes, like Kant, that "the conscious self and its differentiation from the external world rest on the constructive activity of the knower" (Staver, 1986, p. 15). Like Vico, knowledge for Piaget is not (and cannot be) a representation of the real world (Glastersfeld, 1985, p. 6). Nor are cognitive structures innate; instead, structures are created by organizing successive actions preformed on objects (Phillips, 1985, p. 6). Cognitive schemas do not produce a "representation of external reality but a map of actions and conceptual operations" (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 166). Focusing on these mental processes, Piaget introduces three coordinating concepts: *content* which is raw behavioral data; *function,* which is the activity of assimilation, accommodation and adaptation; and *structure*, which stands between function and content. (Staver, 1986, p. 15).

Time sets Piaget's concepts apart from earlier constructivist notions. Piaget argues that over time, the mental schemas which organize content and function, become sophisticated. This happens gradually by way of assimilation and accommodation; the two basic concepts in Piaget's cognitive theory of equilibration (Glastersfeld, 1985, p. 7). Our schemas grow in complexity when we have to contend with conceptual conflicts or contradictions. Piaget speculated that we learn best from the unexpected. As von Glastersfeld (1985) says, "learning takes place when a scheme, instead of producing an expected result, leads to a perturbation, and perturbation, in turn leads to accommodation that establishes a new equilibrium" (p. 9) This temporal-developmental quality of Piaget's epistemology became the basis of the celebrated stage theory.

Difficulties arise when Piaget's stage theory is separated from its constructivist roots. Attention swings from interest in how learners are forming meaning to questions about which *real world* concept they are able to comprehend. Instead of participating with learners in forming a *viable* meaning, interest reverts to establishing a *correct* one. Notions of correct or complete meanings attach a preferential hierarchy to the successive formation of schemas. Thus, Piaget's formal operational period is often seen as preferable because the underlying assumption is that the more complex the schema the closer to reality they are. When the traditional notion of *knowledge as correspondence* displaces Piaget's constructivist concepts, adaptation and accommodation no longer refer to active learner reorganization; they are simply an organism's response to change in the environment. (Glastersfeld, 1985, p. 6)

3.2.2   John Dewey

For many modern educators, John Dewey's name is synonymous with the development of education as a profession guided by scientific inquiry and dedicated to fostering effective method. Certainly these themes are a central aspect of much of Dewey's educational theory and philosophical pragmatism. Recently however, several Dewey scholars argue that we misunderstand, reduce and misappropriate Dewey's philosophical work. (Johnson, 1995: Kestenbaum, 2002: Hildebrand, 2003: Stuhr, 2003) A "propensity to take the line of least resistance" (Kestenbaum, 2002, p. 13) and a "general metaphysical conservatism found among educational theorists" (Johnson, 1995, p. 139) produces static notions of what Dewey was attempting to achieve. Dewey produced a dynamic philosophy based on experience, molded by habit, enriched by inquiry and open to revision. What often passes for Dewey's work is a narrow methodological process that "equates truth with verification" (Hildebrand, 2003, p. 32). Or, as Victor Kestenbaum (2002) describes it: "The qualitative, rich, stubborn, elusive, massive, halting, flowing, expectant, nostalgic meanings of ordinary experience are not so easily reconciled with the qualitatively reduced and instrumentally ordered meanings of scientific knowing" (p. 13). A careful reading of Dewey's epistemological ideas reveals that his thinking did not reduce knowing to the limited categories of scientific meaning.

Dewey's pragmatism attempted to sidestep the dichotomy of knower and known by offering a radically empirical philosophy that began with experience as lived. For Dewey, humans live in the midst of experience and knowing forms in its crucible. Habits are the means by which we gain our original access or opening to the world. The

"creative, constitutive power of habitual meanings" enables people to "pre-reflectively establish an accord between self and world" (Kestenbaum, 2002, p. 143). Habits of the mind filter and establish our sense of things by bringing into focus some possibilities and excluding others. The useful reductions and comfortable patterns that habits evoke, conserve a stable relation with our experience, but they also "create and construe" (Kestenbaum, 2002, p. 81) that experience. Through the quality of *vigilance*, we come to see some habitual meanings as random and arbitrary while others become interesting, compelling and useful (Kestenbaum, 2002, p. 91). In short, habitual behavior establishes the continuity needed for daily living. Experience, informed through and bounded by habit, is "natural, taken for granted" (Kestenbaum, 2002, p. 81) and resistant to change. In the process of living we encounter problematic situations which necessitate the modification, adaptation, re-orientation or abandonment of habit. Encountering problems is essential for people to learn and grow. Learning is instigated by, attempts to engage problems which are "continuous with, yet different from" (Johnson, 1995, p. 99,) previous knowledge, habit or experience. Such engagement of problems entails observation, analysis, evaluation of likely consequences, and selection of the most desirable alternatives. This process taken together forms the methodological basis for what Dewey calls *inquiry*.

Inquiry lies at the heart of Dewey's pragmatism. We are who we are and know what we know as a result of the effort and process of inquiry. Inquiry redirects us from the metaphysical categories of object and truth toward an empirical and methodological process of truth-making. The process of inquiry remains open ended. Every formed truth or settled belief, which is derived from the process of inquiry, must hold open its "own

provisionally and permanent possibility of revision" (Hildebrand, 2003, p. 75). The logical extension of this concept is that no belief is so settled that it can no longer be subjected to inquiry.

This is not mere philosophical brinkmanship. If inquiry is by nature open-ended and if this is the case in all forms of inquiry, including the most carefully constructed forms of empiricism, then Dewey's philosophical pragmatism challenges the basic precepts of modernism. Neither Descartes' view of "the universe as a disembodied mind viewing a finished machine" (Oliver & Gershman, 1989, p. 30) nor empiricism's tendency to "imbue brute facts with a fixed and inherent significance" (Hildebrand, 2003, p. 40) can reconcile with the provisional, formed meaning found in Dewey's process of inquiry.

Dewey's Constructivist ideas differ from Piaget in the locus of interest. For Dewey the objective world is in flux but it remains substantive. Habit and inquiry describe active, repeatable ways of forming connections between the knower and the known. Piaget's objective world is more a growing impression formed within the knower. Both Piaget and Dewey convey an impression that cognitive processes are universal, predictable and progressive. This is not the case for either Polanyi or Whitehead.

3.3.3 *Michael Polanyi*

For Michael Polanyi the Enlightenment which bred Scientism and Rationalism, with all their important and helpful achievements also produced a distorted combination of absolute perfectionism, skepticism and self determination (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4).

71

Polanyi asserted that such absolutes produced the tyrannies and cruelties of modern fanaticisms. Based on his experiences in Nazi Germany and Soviet-dominated Hungary, Polanyi argued that scientists must not remain blind and detached to the social and political evils their scientific work serves (Christenson, 2004, p. 91). Driven by these convictions, he undertook to identify basic fallacies in positivist philosophy and offer an alternate theory.

Observing that "the declared aim of modern science is to establish a strictly detached, objective knowledge," (Polanyi, 1966, p.20) Polanyi asserted that this aim produces a narrow, unimaginative, manipulative form of knowing motivated more by a need to control than a desire to discover. He also observed that the strict confines of verification and falsification did little to account for the creativity and intuition which were essential to the process of discovery (Christenson, 2004, p. 92).

Polanyi (1966) began to "reconsider human knowledge" by stating simply that "we can know more than we can tell" (p. 4). Referencing a person's ability to ride a bicycle without the knowledge of laws of physics or to recognize a face without being able to fully describe all its features, Polanyi notes that much knowledge is beyond our immediate focus (p. 8). This 'tacit knowing', as he calls it, underpins the explicit knowledge that we can articulate.

"In the act of tacit knowing" says Polanyi (1966), "we attend from something to attend to something else." The "proximal" knowledge we attend from becomes known to us in the appearance (or characteristics) of the "distal" thing we attend to (p. 16). As the interplay continues the distal becomes proximal and we incorporate, interiorize or, as

Polanyi says, "come to dwell in it" (p.18). He goes on to conclude that "it is not by looking at things but by dwelling in them that we understand their joint meaning" (p. 18).

The interplay between student and instructor, pupil and content, idea and meaning is more than the adequate presenting of a concept or the unmediated grasping of a truth. Polanyi (1966) says:

> We have seen that tacit knowledge dwells in our awareness of particulars while bearing on an entity which the particulars jointly constitute. In order to share this indwelling, the pupil must presume that a teaching which appears meaningless to start with has in fact a meaning which can be discovered by hitting on the same indwelling as the teacher is practicing. (p.61)

Dwelling in and abiding with, a person, idea or thing is far removed from the impersonal, dispassionate, objective requirements of Cartesian knowledge. We engage the things we know with an intense personal commitment. As we incorporate new things into our lives, our vision of reality evolves and changes by the experiences through which the knowing occurs (Solberg, 1997, p. 37).

The combination of highly relational and largely unarticulated ways of knowing leads Polanyi to assert that Tacit knowing is the primary way we pass knowledge between generations. Polanyi (1966) claims, "the growing mind recreates the whole conceptual framework and all the rules of reasoning bequeathed to it by its culture" (p. 45). From this interaction, new knowledge "emerges." This emergence is described as hierarchical, yet, it is very clear from the concerns Polanyi expresses about what science produces, that he does not necessarily see this hierarchy as progressive.

In discussing the nature of the hierarchy, Polanyi (1966) observes that, "the logical structure of a hierarchy implies that a higher level can come into existence through a process not manifest in the lower level, a process which thus qualifies as an emergence" (p. 45). This is more than semantics. If the task of education is to facilitate the next level of emergence, then we cannot assume that we know or can define the boundaries of that level in advance. If, as noted above, the student and teacher must dwell together in the formation of meaning and strive to make tacit knowledge explicit, then the boundaries marking emergence must be permeable.

Polanyi expands the notion of formed meaning to include interactions with others. This is a concept essential to social constructivism which I shall expand upon in the next chapter. Polanyi's tacit knowing is fluid and less defined than the epistemological constructs of Dewey and Piaget. In that sense, he offers another shade of meaning to the personal constructivist domain.

3.2.4 *Alfred North Whitehead*

For students experiencing deadening, pedantic attempts to disseminate information or teachers who question the emphasis place on the acquisition of structured knowledge and specific expertise, the educational and philosophical ideas of Alfred North Whitehead are hortatory. His writings, composed during bleak inter-war years of the 1920's and 30's, resonate with a passion for life in all its dynamic, relational, spacious forms.

When speaking generally about the practices of modern, formal education, Whitehead is reminiscent of Dewey. He asserts that learners have three natural rhythmic

cravings which combine to form a cycle of growth. Romance, the first craving, "is a process of becoming used to curious thoughts, of shaping questions, of seeking answers, of devising new experiences, of noticing what happens as the result of new ventures" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 32). When a learner's curiosity is satiated, a craving for precision emerges - it is a time to order salient details, to acquire aptitudes and learn principles. As competency and content become part of the learner's repertoire, confidence to move into the stage of generalization grows. In much the same way as in the stage of romance, the learner looks at the world broadly and questions where and how newly apprehended skills and understandings may be applied. In this sense, Whitehead concludes that, "education should begin with research and end with research" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 37).

What disturbs the natural growth and completion of this cycle, contends Whitehead, is the preoccupation of modern education with the stage of precision. He argues that, "so long as we conceive intellectual education as consisting in the acquirement of mechanical mental aptitudes, and of formulated statements of useful truths, there can be no progress" (Whitehead, 1929, p.29). The "aimless accumulation of precise knowledge, inert and unutilized" (Whitehead, 1929, p.37) displaces the passion, drive, and romance of learning. His critique extends to religious education which he feels also moves too quickly to a stage of precision. Instead of being "disrupting and the energizing forces of civilization," (Whitehead, 1938, p.19),   religious and moral education often opt for an emphasis on dogma. This causes "vigor to abate and slow decay to ensue" (Whitehead, 1938, p. 19).

As Whitehead ruminates on the incomplete, arrested and fragmented nature of this cycle, his epistemological theories move him on a path distinct from Piaget's orderly

schema, the empirical-methodological concepts of Dewey or the innate, tacit aptitudes of learners found in Polanyi. Whitehead asserts that: "the first principle of epistemology should be that the changeable, shifting aspects of our relations to nature are the primary topics for conscious observation" (Whitehead, 1938, p. 29). In contrast, Modern intellectual, logical and scientific energies often focus on the development, debate and dissemination of limited and limiting facts, truths and concepts.

"Mere facts," as he terms them, are abstractions which "masquerade as final reality" (Whitehead, 1938, p. 9 & p. 18) by confining thought to strictly formal relationships that either omit or fail to express, presuppositions and essential connections of facts considered. The quest of philosophy and theology to establish and maintain a concept of knowledge that portrays a world of changeless and ultimate reality has run headlong into the messy, confusing, temporary, conditional relationships of our world in flux (Whitehead, 1938, pp. 81-82). This has led to an "arrogant assumption" that "vagueness, ambiguity or contradiction reveals flaws in the construction of our theories," (Oliver & Gershman, 1989, p. 145) rather than the motivation to explore and discover life's relational mysteries.

In the face of this intransigent modernist myth, Whitehead develops a comprehensive cosmology founded on a process of ever-changing, infinite, dynamic relationships. Existence is not abstract from process; instead, the universe consists of pulsations of activity and relationships called "actual-occasions" (Oliver & Gershman, 1989, p. 113). Each actual occasion is a point of convergence where "the full content of the antecedent universe as it exists in relevance to that pulsation" (Whitehead, 1938, p.89) meets the potential and process of becoming something new (Oliver & Gershman,

1989, p. 115). Using the verb 'to be' to place this idea in terms more commonly used, Whitehead (1938) notes that each pulsation "consists in what has been, what might have been, and what may be" (p. 89). Knowing, in these terms, is immersed in constant "composition, gradation and elimination," (Whitehead, 1938, p. 89) rather than preoccupied with abstract attempts to observe, limit, categorize and manipulate a given phenomenon.

Whitehead's teleological emphasis intentionally pushes beyond static notions of Cartesian dualism to establish a vibrant epistemological framework. Recognizing, exploring and processing the universe's dynamic connections enables cognition to grow simultaneously into both "grounded knowing" (Oliver & Gershman, 1989, p. 63) which exhibits deep ecological, social and ontological connections and into the romance, engagement, creativity and vast potentialities of the "art of life" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 39).

As a Constructivist epistemology Whitehead's notions depart from the other theorists in both their immediate and ephemeral qualities. More significantly Whitehead argues that the intersection of the knower and known produces actual change in both. Piaget, Dewey and Polanyi construct theories of knowledge which cast the epistemic agent as autonomous and direct their attention to the nature of the gap between the knower and the world (Davis & Sumara, 1997, p. 109). Whitehead frames his epistemology from the perspective of the individual (and thus remains in the personal domain) but contends that knower and known are bound together in continual process.

3.2.5 Congenial Concepts

The task of this chapter was to identify concepts congenial to the belief that learners actively create, interpret and reorganize knowledge in individual ways. The epistemological assumptions of these four well known theorists illustrate that active creation, organization and interpretation of knowledge is not only viable, it is essential. If Dewey's concept of "inquiry" is dynamic enough to claim that this process must be open to its "own provisionally and permanent possibility of revision" (Hildebrand, 2003, p. 75), it seems unlikely that Dewey assumed that his formulations complete the task. It is also unlikely that Polanyi considered his recognition of emergence as the final emanation of tacit knowing. One could not conclude from Piaget's use of the term *concrete operations*, that with maturity all one's schemas are set in stone. Nor would Whitehead assume that his writings would finally penetrate the masquerade of "mere facts."

Taken together these various assertions create a picture of knowing which is in a perpetual process of formation. Dewey's problem solving empiricism anticipates no fixed destination; simply habitual, energetic engagement of meaning. Learning for Piaget is an adaptive activity which continually forms new conceptual structures as we interact with and interpret new ideas and events (Yalmaz, 2008, p. 165). Polanyi's tacit knowing asserts that meaning is permeable and is dwelt in until new understanding emerges. Whitehead argues that meaning cannot be extricated from process. He paints a vivid notion of an actual occasion consisting of all the potentialities of past and future which supplants the myth of a static world.

Establishing the learner as an active epistemic agent is an important first step in reformulating confirmation's intent. Without active, personal engagement of the learner

the catechism remains inert, external and irrelevant. When a learner integrates knowing formed through engagement, the catechism becomes a "catalyst" (Oliver & Gershman, 1989, p.166) for creative Christian living.

I consider this a first step because the personal-epistemological domain of Constructivism does not provide a complete picture. Geelan (1997) observes that the Constructivist emphasis on the individual to the exclusion of social factors has led to inconsistent and limited results (p. 18). It is obvious from the writings of Piaget, Dewey, Polanyi and Whitehead that the social factors were not excluded. What is evident from their writings is that autonomy of the learner must be established first. Davis & Sumara (1997) observe that the autonomous nature of the knower is necessary but presumes a "solitary truth-determining authority" (p. 109). This introduces a new set of challenges for confirmation. If our relationship to context is not considered; personal meaning becomes personalized meaning. The result of personalized meaning is a fragmented assemblage of data and individuals.

3.2.6   Bent Inward.

Although epistemic theorists do account for patterns of knowing which are self-centered, unresponsive and destructive, theologians tend to assert that these concepts are not taken seriously enough. Epistemology is often silent on the concept of sin. Perhaps this is because society is well familiar with the lists of sins and the constant calls for purity which often accompany Christian attempts to proselytize.   Lutheran theologians are careful to differentiate between 'sin' which is considered a state of being 'bent inward on oneself' from 'sins' which are individual transgressions.   To be bent inward is to

assume that the fundamental orientation of creation is to affirm personal priorities, prejudices and predilections. An autonomous knower has little accountability to either inherited propositions or community needs. Palmer (1993) forges a strong epistemic and theological link when he states: "In the language of the religious tradition, Adam and Eve committed the first sin. In the language of intellectual tradition, they made the first epistemological error" (p.25). The original arrogance of wanting the knowledge of good and evil is replicated in the assumption that individuals are capable of both purity of motives and discerning the full ramifications of their ideas and actions. Sin is not simply limited to bad behavior. From a Lutheran perspective even best efforts can be tainted by selfishness, power and pride. Christenson (2004) cites the story of the caring Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) and says: "The point of the story is not just the goodness of the Samaritan. We also need to note that the *goodness* of the priest and the Levite prevent them from acting" (p.126).

If the concept of 'bent inward' is connected to the idea of an 'epistemological error' it becomes necessary to temper the concept of the autonomous knower. If forming meaning in confirmation is the central task, the meanings learners form cannot be closed and absolute. There must always remain space for individual, community and systemic fallibility. The finite and fallible nature of knowing must be held in creative tension with the need for innovative thought. From the dynamics of that tension is forged a sense of authenticity within both learners and the ordered learning process. This authenticity develops when both learners and the systems which assist them learn recognize that they can be distorted or bent inward. This authenticity bodes well for learners as they extend the meanings they form in confirmation to the activities of daily living.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Emerging into Meaning

4.1 Part One: The Social Dimension

The myth of the autonomous knower formed in response to persistent objectivist epistemology. Educator and sometimes theologian, Parker Palmer (1993), claims that "the major movement against objectivism today – against the tyranny which makes us and our world 'things' – is a form of knowing which reduces personal truth to private terms" (p. 54). Palmer argues that once we assume reality is not external to us, we settle on an intrinsic reality comprised of little more than our needs and perceptions. Palmer contends that this private, subjective truth is "simply one more way to objectify and hold the other at arm's length" (p. 55).

From the perspective of objectivist thought, the concept of an autonomous knower challenges the veracity of personal epistemological constructivist formulations. If all concepts form in the mind of the knower, what point is there in teaching a catechism formed in the mind of another person five hundred years ago? If the best answer our epistemology can provide is that the catechism represents a viable idea within the world as we know it, what will lure, confront or transform us? What will differentiate the catechism's historic affirmations of faith from the entertainments found on Saturday morning television?

Palmer (1993) claims that the "relation of the knower and the known does not conform to the stiff protocol of observer and observed" (p.57). Instead, he describes the relation as "more like the resonance of two persons" (Palmer, 1993, p. 57). Among the possible definitions for the term resonance are concepts such as "the intensification and enriching of a musical tone; the enhancement of atomic, nuclear, or particle reaction… by excitation of internal movement in the system; the vibration of large amplitude produced by a relatively small periodic stimulus" (Mish, 2009, p. 1061). These acoustical, electronic and physicochemical concepts carry well a basic idea of knowledge formed in community. We resonate with others to produce different and perhaps enlarged knowing.

Building on this basic idea, this final chapter will investigate social constructivism. The nagging problem of relativism is re-conceptualized as relationalism. Discussions of feminist epistemology and the work of Parker Palmer (1993) of Daloz Parks (2000) lead to posing new questions of intent. An augmented definition of coemergent (Fenwick, 2000) or enactivist (Davis & Sumara, 1997) theory provides a suitable framework to bring together the epistemological and theological intents identified thus far. The basic ideas of these writers will be expanded to connect coemergent theory with the practical concerns of confirmation.

4.1.1 From Self Interest to Interested Self.

Palmer's observations about the affects of objectivist thought draw upon a deeper tradition of openness. Meaning formed in community begins with the epistemic trait of openness. Individuals become open to views other than their own, they gain an awareness of the opinions and the people at the margins of power structures, they forge a

community discourse which shapes knowing and they develop a connectedness which resists limiting the world to its simplest parts (Christenson, 2004, pp. 117 - 118). Within this assumption of openness it is helpful to briefly trace the tradition of inter-actionist sociology in order to connect sociological theories to constructivist epistemology.

4.1.1.1   *George Herbert Mead.*

Pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead (1934), proposed that the self, mind and society are all socially generated. Mead asserted that our self forms through interaction with other selves by means of what he terms "a conversation of gestures" (Cronk, 2005, Part 3a). Often this happens unconsciously. We are unaware of our gestures or the response to our gestures by others. With awareness the exchange becomes "a conversation of symbolic gestures" (Cronk, 2005, Part 3a). Meaning forms by interpreting a complex combination of appearance, posture and language gestures (Lawler, 2005, p. 45). In Mead's philosophy, people actively form meaning in a social dialectic between "I" and "we" (Cronk, 2005, Part 3c). The epistemology of social knowledge formed from these concepts asserts that: humans do not have an inherent relationship with the world; they must establish one (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 60).

4.1.1.2   *Popper's "three worlds."*

Attempting to create a structured representation of social knowing, philosopher Karl Popper conceives of three worlds of cognition. The first world is similar to Kant's noumena, in that it filters to us through our senses. The second world is "comprised of internal mental states, feelings, volitions, whims, and ideas" (Harlow, Cummings &

Aberasturi, 2006, p. 43). World two resembles Polanyi's tacit knowing. Popper's third

world describes, predicts, organizes, constructs and retains the products and solutions of

the human mind (Harlow, Cummings & Aberasturi, 2006, p. 43). These include creative

endeavors such as languages, stories, theories, scientific conjectures, tools and art. It is

this world which is the focus of social knowledge. Popper advances the idea that "all

observation-statements are theory-laden, and are as much a function of purely subjective

factors (interests, expectations, wishes, etc.) as they are a function of what is objectively

real" (Thornton, 2009, 4. para. 1). Observations-statements are a function of cognition in

Popper's world three. They from a combination of what our senses vaguely perceive and

our intellect constructs.

4.1.1.3   *Paradox of formed society.*

Humans both create and are part of the world they know. People create a paradox

as they form society. The world we shape also shapes us. Lawler (2005) sums up this

concept:

> They construct a language and then find that their verbal communication is
>
> dominated by that language and its rules of syntax. They construct values and
>
> then feel guilty when they contravene them. They fashion institutions which then
>
> confront them as powerful forces in the external world apart from their
>
> activities. Institutions such as family, education, politics, economics, religion;
>
> meaning structures such as mythology, religion, science; roles and identities
>
> such as parent, child, theologian, scientist; all these are apprehended as real and

true phenomena in the social world apart from human activity, though they and

the social world are nothing but the products of creative human activity. (p. 51)

Lawler's point that we affect and are affected by structures of our own making is

important. The complex microcosms of human relationships gather and compound until a

"province" of meaning forms. Lawler (2005) calls the coherence within a province of

meaning a "plausibility structure" (p. 55). We deem something "true" as long as it

remains plausible within a meaning structure that we participate in.

4.1.1.4   *Relativism or relationalism.*

As plausibility structures are construed broadly among all of humanity or

narrowly among the few or the one, it becomes necessary to negotiate what is true.

Philosopher Karl Mannheim (1883-1947) suggested that two possible ways exist to

ascertain truth in a socially constructed world (Lawler, 2005, p. 53). The first asserts that

all truth is relative. Relativism combines the modern notion that all thinking is bound to

the thinker's social-historical location with the older notion of static prototypical

knowledge (Lawler, 2005, p. 53). The second possibility is *relationalism*, which assumes

that human assertions always formulate provisionally by way of dynamic inter-

relationship within the provinces of thought. (Lawler, 2005, p. 55). Theologian Lonergan

(1972) renames relationalism – *pespectivism* and says our finite, individual and selective

natures shape human knowing (p. 217). Perspectivism stresses that the complexity of

thought combines with the specificity of difference to produce partial truth shaped by a

unique view of the panorama of creation. (Lawler, 2005, p. 53)

4.1.1.5   *Parker Palmer.*

Palmer (1993) enriches these concepts by offering an idea, shaped by Christian understandings, stating that, "truth is neither 'out there' nor 'in here,' but both" (p. 55). Palmer continues, "truth is between us, in relationship, to be found in the dialogue between the knower and the known who are understood as independent but accountable selves" (p.55). In what he terms the "emerging community of our lives" (p.57), Palmer says we continue to become amid the claims made on us and the claims we make on others. In a manner similar to Whitehead, Palmer believes that our connection is not just with other people, but with all the essences and possibilities of creation.

Palmer (1994) uses the language of incarnation to convey his sense of an opening to the relationships we are immersed in (pp. 60-65). Incarnation does not limit the divine to the narrowness of human form; it opens the possibility to engage the vastness of creation. Instead of striving to comprehend a far off God, a historic event, a conceptual formulation or the properties of an object, we come to know and be known in community (communion) with such others. Our communal opening to others means the primordial, the present, the conceptual and the substantive all are bound together in a shared and unfolding story.

4.1.1.6   *Daloz Parks.*

Quaker author Sharon Daloz-Parks (2000) says, "We reserve the word *faith* for meaning-making in its most comprehensive dimensions… all humans compose and dwell in some conviction of what is *ultimately* true, real, dependable within the largest framework imaginable" (p. 20). Faith defined this way has an organizing, sorting,

prioritizing and orienting quality and thus functions as an epistemology. Like Palmer, Daloz Parks understands that faith forms within community. She uses a developmental framework to explain that forms of knowing correspond to forms of community. We are shaped and nourished by communities as we develop. She defines these communities as: *conventional*, built on authority; *mentoring*, which let us probe commitment; *self selected*, through which we share and test beliefs; and *communities open to others*, in which we live in our convictions (p.91). Ultimately we learn to accept complexity, difference and discover that "the most adequate intimations of truth emerge in dialogue with the other" (p.101).

We do not arrive at or adopted such convictions easily. Instead, our "form of knowing and being takes on a tested quality, a sense of fittingness, a recognition that one is willing to make one's peace and affirm one's place in the scheme of things" (Daloz-Parks, 2000, p. 69). There is no static or fixed sense of how this process unfolds. A worthy faith, says Daloz Parks:

> …must bear the test of lived experience in the real world – our discoveries and disappointments, expectations and betrayals, assumptions and surprises. It is an ongoing dialogue between self and world, between community and lived reality, that meaning – a faith – takes form. (p. 23)

Such ideas of formed, tested and trusted faith fit well with concept of a "habitus" described previously.

An ironic caveat to the expansive notions of both Palmer and Daloz Parks emerges around the questions: Can we be comfortable with the enormity of the universe, the diversity of culture or vast the variety of opinions, perspectives and beliefs? Do we

have the will, energy or ability to maintain open, intimate and dynamic relationships with the other? Fear of being "obliterated by the vastness" (Daloz-Parks, 2000, p. 36) causes us to fortify conceptual boundaries, retreat to the safety of our homes and as Palmer (1993) says "hold the other at arms length" (p.55). Overwhelmed as managers of our constructed meanings, we either fragment our beliefs into an assortment of "isolated wholes" or we fixate on one "narrow particularism" (p. 22). Daloz Parks uses the term *polytheistic* to describe how we fragment meaning into spheres of interest oriented to differing values. By this, she means people exercise their beliefs differently at home, work, school, church or sport. Daloz Parks uses the term *henotheistic*, coined by Niebuhr (1949), to describe belief in a single cause, such as devotion to a child, a business or aesthetics. Such interests may be worth our attention but are not sufficient to sustain our big questions or support us when the things we trust cease to be. (pp. 24-39)

Both Palmer and Daloz Parks utilize language and ideas which are educational but reference themes and concepts which are clearly theological. This makes them helpful contributors in framing intent for confirmation. The separation between theology and education described in chapter two can be bridged by such language. Neither author restricts their discussion of meaning to learners engaged in higher learning. Both advocate for an open consistent and relational approach to learning with every type of learner.

4.1.17   *Feminist epistemologies.*

Not only are our epistemologies self-limited, they are distorted by faulty frameworks. Whether formed in naivety or with shrewd, malicious power, an

epistemology is deemed incompetent when it excludes the knowing of others (Solberg, 1997, p. 50). Incompetence becomes reprehensible when the knowing of others is, ignored, distorted, manipulated or dismissed. An epistemology that fosters injustice; stigmatizes, subjugates or limits inclusion of others is destructive. Feminist epistemologists argue that accountability is not simply a "burden over and against intellectual and ethical standards set for knowers, knowledge and knowing" (Solberg, 1997, p. 52); accountability is a "shared process of discovery, interpretation and adjustment between persons" (Walker, 1982, p. 166). Instead of working toward a one size fits all criteria, our epistemologies – including the ideas of this paper – must be considered provisional, malleable and structured in such a way that invites conversation, reciprocity and criticism.

4.1.1.8   *Paulo Freire.*

Paulo Freire whose watershed book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) alerted both education and theology to the oppressive and destructive natures of our assumptions, warns that conversations and good intentions are not sufficient to reconcile the irreconcilable (Freire, 1996, p. 171). We cannot simply adopt methods and techniques to observe and describe social reality; to do so Freire says, is to engage in palliative care and ignore the cause of the disease (pp. 172-173). We cannot limit our social epistemological framework to intellectual concepts; we must adopt problem solving praxis (Freire, 1970, p.74). This means working alongside and learning to share the frustrations of the other. Friere (1996) calls entering into action with the other "a new apprenticeship". He says:

In their new apprenticeship they finally realize that it is not sufficient to give lip

service to the idea that men and women are human beings if nothing is done

objectively to help them experience what it means to be persons. They learn that it

is not through good works that the oppressed become incarnate as persons.

(p. 175)

This is a social epistemology with hands, back, sweat, thirst, hunger and lack of sleep. It

is a way of knowing which finds existence in the tension between "past and future, death

and life, staying and going, creating and not creating, between saying the word and

mutilating silence, between hope and despair, between being and non-being"(Friere,

1996, p. 175). In the context of this paper Friere's words are a salient reminder that our

frameworks, theories and concepts can just as easily alienate us form others and insulate

us from potent and life-giving ways of knowing. Confirmation seeks to be relational –

that is to make a connection between the learner and the community of faith – Friere

points to the need form those connections through praxis, partnership and sensitivity to

others.

4.1.1.9   *Open and closed theories.*

In the introduction to this discussion of socially constructed knowing was the

comment that social knowing occurs in the context of openness. Popper has produced a

systematic representation of what openness means. Popper uses the notion of *falsifiability*

to determine if theories are open or closed. (Harlow, Cummings & Aberasturi, 2006, p.

43) Closed theories function like dogma and are unavailable for critical evaluation. Open

theories are limited, provisional and always under scrutiny. Popper reasons that our finite

perspectives never have enough information to fully describe the reality of an object: The best we can do is to determine what about the theory can be disproved. Popper's ideas shift the orientation of theory formation. The traditional point of constructing a theory, knowing a topic or answering a question is to get it right. An objectivist assumes getting it right means the most accurate description possible. A personal constructivist assumes getting it right means a viable meaning within available terms of reference. From Popper's perspective, the point of a theory is to remain open by stimulating critical discourse and permitting concepts to evolve (Harlow, Cummings & Aberasturi, 2006, p. 44).

Popper's idea is different from provisionally constructed concepts. When the term provisional is attached to a theory there resides the notion that this is a step, an increment, a prelude or an attempt to reveal an as yet unknown. In this sense provisional theories work toward closure: the point at which no further explication is required. Popper, in a manner reminiscent of Dewey's inquiry, assumes that the objective is not closure but a state of continual opening.

In an ordered learning process like confirmation, there is tacit pressure to offer closed theories. A closed theory or dogmatic statement provides the convenience of short term responses. Closed theories enable us to acknowledge and respond without the work of engaging and transforming. Closed theories form a protective shell around us enabling our perceptions, prejudices and behaviors to be unchallenged and become unresponsive. Thus, closed theories are time and content limited rather than progressive and adaptable.

4.1.2 Essential Questions

I entitled the previous section "from self-interest to interested selves" to convey the essence of the social-epistemological orientation. Both classical-objectivist and personal-constructive epistemologies share common questions: What do I need to know? How can I make sense of this? What should I do in response to what I know? How can I share my knowledge with others? In a socially-constructive epistemological framework we pose different questions. Our interested selves begin to ask: What is she saying? What does this mean in our world? What have we decided? What have we discovered? What can we do? What more can we learn?

Ending this epistemological overview with questions is appropriate. In a sense I have come full circle and returned to the catechetical question "what does this mean"? What changed in the process is the expectation of an answer. What has emerged as helpful is not set of conclusions, but a group of questions common to education, philosophy, theology and life in community. All are questions of openness:

Can we be open to:

the intuition, opinions and creativity of others;

our shared context and inherited content;

our diverse and dynamic community;

our faulty and fallible assumptions;

waiting, listening and relinquishing control;

provisional meaning and new meaning;

and, not knowing?

Intent, based on questions of openness, is available to the experiences, pain, intuitions, willingness, creativity, joy and discoveries of an inclusive learning community. Mastery of content is not the only possible learning outcome. Effective learning includes the capacities to form, connect, question, revise, listen and do. The next task of this chapter is to identify a learning model amenable to these goals and suitable for confirmation.

4.2 Part Two: Co-emergent Learning.

The familiar experience of a conversation is a metaphor for how we form and communicate meaning according to hermeneutical philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1990). Conversations meander to and fro in response to the actions of the persons involved and arrive at places that could not be anticipated (Davis, Sumara, 1997, p.110). Yet, at the same time conversations depend on inherited conventions, are influenced by context and progress by reciprocal engagement. The formed meaning of a conversation is both unique to the particular time and place it happens and is generally understandable to the tradition it emerges from. A conversation is recognizable and yet "such an exchange is never completely under the control of either conversational partner, but is rather determined by the matter at issue" (Malpas, 2008, para. 3.3,). In this sense it is more appropriate to think of the participants as being led by the conversation (Davis, Sumara, 1997, p.110).

The concept of the conversation forms the basis of what has been termed *enactivis*t (Davis, Sumara, 1997) or *coemergent* learning. (Fenwick, 2000). The term coemergent represents three key qualities of learning: 1) the learner is part of the context 2) that learning is mutual and reciprocal and 3) that learning forms meaning which cannot

93

be anticipated or controlled ahead of the process. The concept of emergence flows from Polanyi's logic, which illustrates that a "higher level can come into existence through a process not manifest in the lower level" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 45). If this concept is combined with Daloz Parks' definition of faith as trusted meaning (that is, tested, trusted, true, real, and dependable within the largest framework imaginable), then coemergence in the faith-forming process of confirmation can be defined as: *Trusted meaning forms as an amalgam of inherited content, grounded life experience and community interaction.* To clarify this definition the key words need expansion.

4.2.1   Amalgam.

An amalgam can mean a mixture of different elements (Mish, Ed.,2009, p.38). Amalgam conveys the idea that the cognizing agent is inextricably intertwined with everything else (Davis, Sumara, 1997, p. 111). The connections in coemergence are at a deeper level than the exchanges of a conversation. The theory has ecological roots and thus considers the intersections of all the elements involved as germane. Within an amalgam each constituent part contributes to the formulation of the whole. Indeed the removal of an element means that the mixture is essentially different.

4.2.2   Inherited content.

In the case of confirmation, *Inherited content* will typically refer to the Biblical, confessional and theological topics presented within the various curricula, but it also refers to a much broader set of occurrences: community expectations of the process; parental memories of past classes; previous experiences with structured learning combine

with a plethora of other factors to create a sense of content which extends well beyond

the topics presented in the curriculum. The unifying factor of inherited content is that it is

an assemblage ideas and information which are a resource or influence for learners.

Inherited content removes the necessity of learners recreating the world from the ground

up as each new circumstance arises. The wisdom formed from the experiences of others

is integral to the formation of knowing.   The morals bequeathed by the faith community,

priorities promoted by culture, the attitudes formed from a host of experiences combine

as partially assembled schema within each person.

4.2.3   Grounded life experience.

Our particular place on the planet shapes grounded life experience. It functions

like Polanyi's tacit knowing or Popper's second world in that grounded life experience is

ubiquitous but not systematic. Fenwick (2004) notes that: "learning is an active world-

creating process inscribed on the body and at the same time, subject to the particular

material and discursive conditions that constrain the body within culture and history"

(p.6). Life experience determines which aspects of the content are accessible to the

learner. Fluctuations within life experience will determine if a learner's connection to

content will persist. Life experience is the place where Dewey's habitual meaning forms.

Here the understanding, flexibility and responsiveness of the instructor may initiate the

process of inquiry by prompting curiosity, problem solving and the vigorous act of living.

4.2.4   Community interaction.

 Meaning which forms within a group as result of shared experiences is termed community interaction. This consensus is seldom absolute, yet it is influential. Communal aspects of learning enable new senses of meaning to emerge based on the unique characteristics of the group. As Whitehead (1938) observed, an almost infinite number of "antecedent events" and "unrealized potentialities" bound and influence each occasion (p. 151). This creative advance, as Whitehead terms it, produces ways of knowing which vary from the ways of knowing formed on other similar occasions. Whether emergent knowledge enhances or diminishes content, some form of altered knowing is passed on to successive learners.

4.2.5   Learners as meaning-makers.

The coemergent pattern recognizes that 1) each person forms meaning; 2) that meaning is altered by a communal process and 3) modified meaning is passed on. The participants in the process are not categorized as either a disseminator of content or a receptor of information. The formed knowledge of the learner is as indispensable to the process as the inherited content. The essential knower of coemergence displaces the devalued learner of objectivist epistemologies.

Heightened awareness of the role of the learner does not imply a learner-centered process destined to adopt parochial, narcissistic or anthropocentric tendencies. Rather, participants are accountable to both inherited content and community interaction in its broadest sense. In such a process it is not sufficient for learners to assume the presentation of content completes learning. Effective engagement means that the

conversation does not end; instead meaning is continually being formed, entertained, modified and tested in other contexts and communities. The grounded life-experiences of individuals confirm and add depth to the growing community witness. When learners share life-experiences, the community witness resonates more profoundly.

Coemergence is a shift in intent, not an abandonment of content. Active engagement enriches content by enabling overlooked dimensions of body, emotions, environment and essential relationships to emerge. Centered on the development of meaning, coemergence allows the rich traditions of scripture and the deep collective experiences of the church augment our feelings and life-experiences. Relevance develops from this dynamic process. For confirmation to be relevant, it cannot limit itself to a simple process of acquiring a correct set of beliefs. It must be an intentional process which enables us to explore, integrate, apply *and enhance* the meanings we discover.

4.2.6   Tempering Coemergence

The nature of human relationships means that the concepts of coemergence must be tempered. Fenwick (2000) states that, "it is unclear how individual integrity is maintained in a co-mingling of consciousnesses" (p.9). The dynamics of groups, particularly groups with competitive tendencies, can make it difficult for individuals to maintain autonomy. Without care, an artificial consensus can emerge: a consensus often defined by the most persistent, articulate or loudest members of the group. Fenwick also notes (p.9) that some aspects of cognition are unavailable to groups. Symbolic gestures of verbal and body language tend to dominate in groups. Other forms of knowing are difficult to access. Davis and Sumara (1997) observed a "frustrating" tendency to fall

back into teaching behaviors which were incompatible with coemergent learning (p. 113). Students expectations pressured them to revert a pattern of asking questions designed to elicit predetermined answers. (p. 114)

Added to these concerns is the concept of 'drift.' Circumstances including the mood of the moment, the weather, or the behavior of an individual all can divert the trajectory of even the most carefully formulated transmissive class. In coemergent settings this problem persists and amplifies over time. Adjusting for and adapting to personalities within the group diverts energy and causes the group's attention to drift away from the topics of interest. In time the initiating ideas are forgotten, lost or abandoned. Connected to the idea of drift is the risk of an increasingly parochial outlook which occurs when students are captivated by the trivial or consolidate their prejudices.

Coemergence is not a panacea for all that ails confirmation: it simply represents a viable way to expand intent to include context and learner contributions. If a goal for confirmation, is to train learners as theologians and if theology is to be a 'habitus' (a way of living before God), then context and learner engagement are essential. Personal constructivist, social constructivist and coemergent concepts are bound together to form an epistemological frameworks for confirmation. This framework encourages a malleable, responsive and engaging approach to confirmation instruction.

4.2.7 Answerable Knowing

The concept of coemergence is built on Gadamer's idea of a conversation. The reciprocal nature of a conversation models the formation of meaning between people well. Yet, conversations are brief and do not necessarily require mutual regard or abiding

concern between participants. In the sustained and ordered process of confirmation the metaphor of a friendship is a better choice. When friendship forms between people the nature of knowing is changed because of the relationship. Acquaintances build knowing on the observable attributes of the other – she's wealthy, he runs marathons, she is tall, he's a teacher… and so forth.   Friends affirm the qualities which form between them – she listens, he understands my humor, she enjoys our walks… and the like. Patterns of behavior which strengthen or threaten loyalty between friends are attended to in a ways which did not (and could not) exist outside of the friendship. Confident in the bond of friendship individuals are more likely to drop pretenses and attempt an honest appraisal of their foibles and failings.

This same interactive sense forms as a reader enters deeply into a text. The words of the text impel the reader not just to comprehend the content, style and sentence structure, but to compare the ideas and elements of the text to lived experience. The same can be said about those who resonate with music and allow its movements to set them in motion or those who are inspired by visual arts and come to abide in or meditate on the perspective of the artist. In each case knowing is changed by the relationships we establish and a deeper sense of meaning emerges.

Christenson (2004) proposes the term *answerable knowing* to describe ways of knowing which are formed by our interconnectedness (p. 80). Answerable knowing can simultaneously comprehend both limitations and potential. Within relationship people exist both as they are and as they can be. Such know is answerable in the sense that each knower transforms in response to the other.

This way of knowing blends the theological ideas of incarnation (God with us) with the structured precepts of social constructivism. Social constructivist epistemology asserts that the categories of meaning form socially: theology affirms that God builds relationships with people. Answerable knowing gives credence is to the communal activities of confirmation such as: play, service learning, team problem solving, worship, devotional reading, taking time for conversation, and sharing meals. Such activities do not function with the predetermined goals implied by a method or agenda, these activities simply present and represent an opening between teachers and learners.

CHAPTER FIVE
5. Cloud by day fire by night.

5.1 Unique Social Role

Coemergence enables the formation of meaning to remain at the center of learning. In that respect it is a helpful framework for organizing and understanding confirmation. If the goal of forming meaning becomes explicit, then confirmation becomes a process of ordered learning that is somewhat unique in society. Public education is embroiled in a broad and acrimonious debate between pressures to teach and assess according to narrow scientifically based research and the desires for a qualitative interpretive approach (Shaker & Ruitenberg, 2007, p. 209). Opportunities for sport and the arts are increasingly specialized. Proficiency at specific skills has replaced the historic purpose of developing character or learning social skills. Service groups such as 4H or Scouting are on the wane. Confirmation has the potential to present an intentional alternative to this narrowly structured social milieu – not as prescriptive or parochial dogma, but as an open interpretive process which supports and encourages critical thinking.

To accomplish this task one additional alteration to our epistemological landscape is required. The efforts of this thesis, to identify the importance of learner contributions are potentially just another attempt to promote learner-centered education. According to objectivist epistemologies, which place greater value on what a student knows, this is a

logical assumption. The theological and epistemological roots of confirmation are not based on a learner-centered assumption. Indeed Lutheran theology suggests that an authentic posture for learners is honest, thankful humility.

5.2   Three Pillars

I suggest three theological/epistemological pillars to guide both our intent in confirmation and our understanding of learners. The term "pillar" is drawn from the Biblical story of God forming and guiding the people of Israel in the wilderness (Gen. 13:21-22, NRSV). In the Biblical sense a pillar is a beacon that lures rather than the architectural sense of a structure which defines.

5.2.1   *Essential Knowing.*

At the center of the constructivist project is a belief that the knower is essential in the formation of meaning. Whether formed socially through the interaction of community or individually through the schemas of cognition, or as a combination of both, meaning requires the knower. This places identity at the center of knowing. Article seven of the United Nations charter of human right recognizes that each person must have a name. That identity is necessary for health care, education, political involvement, employment and most other things needed to function in society. Confirmation - rooted in baptism - also begins from a point of identity, we are known, we are named. We have an intrinsic value.

This creates a unique epistemological starting point. In an objectivist epistemology, our identity makes no difference to reality. The tree which falls in the

forest makes a sound whether we hear it or not. In constructivist thought, identity is beset with a struggle between differentiation and assimilation. From a personal constructivist perspective, the schema I form and the connections I make, establish my place (and perhaps my value) within the world I know. From a social constructivist perspective my identity is forged (or may become lost) in community.

Lutheran's affirm that in baptism we are named as God's children, made heirs to God's promises and given the Holy Spirit. God's name and God's promises are sufficient for life. Yet, Lutheran theology also affirms that we are finite and cannot fully comprehend creation. Our life in faith lives with this paradox. An epistemology formed from a known and valued identity is also founded on the dichotomy of two affirmations: 1) In baptism I know all I need to know and 2) I have a world yet to learn. With identity secure it is possible to venture into the unknown and to risk the unimaginable. With identity secure learning is no longer predicated on acceptance through increased capacities it is reframed as a grateful response to a given.

5.2.2   *Fallible Knowing*

The second "epistemic fulcrum" (Solberg, 1997, p. 90) is found with Luther's theology of the cross. Luther's starting point to life is the counter-intuitive recognition that nothing is required and all is not lost. This is an epistemology which neutralizes our claims to power and entitlement and changes us from determined initiators to modest responders. Such modesty is neither self-effacing nor self-deprecating but, is an honest authentic recognition that our credentials do not produce absolute or correct meaning.

As finite beings, limited by our senses and experiences, we lack a vantage point distinct or remote enough to capture the vast vista of meaning. Embedded within socially constructed systems of language, practices and behaviors we are unable to easily extricate our opinions from the social milieu. Self interest, which sets our needs over the needs of neighbors, distorts our formed opinions. In traditional Lutheran terminology we are bent inward on ourselves. At this point of utter destitution, the cross becomes symbolic of our opening to the possibilities of God and the other.

The possibility of an opening which is not dependent on correct knowledge or behavior makes possible our attentiveness to the stories of others, our place in relationship to the physical elements of creation, and our sense of meaning which forms around inherited tenets. Inherited propositions, others and our world, are no longer items which bind and define our being; they become the means by which we open to a freer and more vibrant existence.

5.2.3   *Gracious Knowing*

Grace in Lutheran theology is the essential orientation of God to creation. Lutherans understand grace to be robust.   Notions of God, as a kindly benefactor who turns a blind eye to our misdemeanors cheapen the theology of grace. Instead grace is a risky behavior that situates the one who cares between the ones who are hurt and the ones who would throw stones (John 8:3-11, NRSV). Failing to recognize the robust nature of grace is a recurrent problem in confirmation. Pastors and instructors frequently remind students that we are dependent on the grace of God and that nothing can separate us from it (Romans 8:39). That gracious affirmation often produces more license than liberty.

Students assume that – in grace nothing really matters – because God will love people no matter what.

The Lutheran theology of grace forms as an extension of the theology of the cross and the concept of relational knowing. Grace assumes that God has an authentic understanding of our flaws and failings; thus gracious knowing must always be held in tension with fallible knowing. Grace is not static. To be realized fully, grace is lived in and responded to. Gracious knowing is a call to build relationships based on a clear and compassionate understanding of the other and a clear and compassionate understanding of self. Donovan Graham (2003) in his book "Teaching Redemptively: Bringing grace and truth into your classroom" does a good job of identifying how gracious knowing transforms a learning environment. He says:

> The learning process is viewed differently as well with the experience of grace occurring as much during the process of exploration as in the results of it. Even being allowed to explore instead of simply absorbing what is told is a testimony to grace. For without grace what teacher would have the nerve to let students explore and ask questions and create ideas? Success and failure in learning produce more than reward and punishment for the degree of accomplishment. Grace allows us to appreciate and embrace the unsolved mysteries of our inquiry as well as the identified problems we are able to 'solve.' Instead of being consumed with finding answers so that we can exercise control over things (or worse yet, just to prove we have the answers), we might learn to appreciate the sovereignty of God precisely because we cannot know enough to find the answers and thus gain control. (p.43)

As an epistemological concept, gracious knowing has similar goals as feminist epistemologies. Gracious knowing requires us to take long and increasingly honest looks at ourselves and others with reciprocal compassion. As we recognize our limits, truth between us forms and we become open to the possibilities of creation.

5.3   Concluding to Begin.

The demands of life and the expectation of demonstrable results often cause pastors, teachers and curriculum designers to skip over questions of intent. This thesis has approached the question "what does this mean?" by delving deeply into the theological and epistemological intent of confirmation. Invigoration of this essential question requires an understanding that learners are actively engaged in forming meaning through a process best described as coemergence. Although the specific references to coemergence are limited to establishing a rudimentary definition, the case for coemergence is found in the concept of theology as "habitus" and in a comprehensive understanding of constructivism. More work is needed to explore the practical implications of a coemergent learning framework. Also, the epistemological-theological pillars suggested in the final chapter require deeper consideration. The understanding that theology and epistemology intersect is becoming increasingly prevalent. As this concept matures the tenets of theology and education will need to continue to inform and shape each other.

As this thesis is a prelude to a curriculum, the logical next step is the development of Canadian confirmation curriculum. Such a curriculum would have a strong experiential component. Learning would happen through lively games, discussion,

service projects, debate and activities involving the whole faith community. The students would enliven inherited texts by creating and performing drama. They would visit people in other economic and social circumstances, speak with seniors, learn about other faiths and would share what they discovered with the whole church. This open learning environment would not culminate in a rite which resembled graduation but in a rite of commissioning to service and life-long learning.

One nagging question remains. "If the confirmation process was coemergent what would change for the young boy who changed my computer password?" The best answer is simply "My attitude as a teacher." That story resides in my memory not because his actions were outrageous, but because his response challenged both my lesson plan and my assumptions. It was my misplaced sense of duty which propelled the events and framed the story. Instead of just a disruptive influence, that student was likely the most authentic responder to the pattern of knowing I was attempting to enforce. This does not mean he was an appropriate responder or that he had a clearer perception of the goal of confirmation, it simply attests to how single-minded delivery of content can form unintended meanings.

If that story was imagined in a coemergent framework, the obvious conflict between the playoff game (grounded life experience), student interest in the game (community interaction) and the content of the lesson (inherited content) would have been recognized. If the conflict was recognized as intrinsic to learning, the potential for forming meaning would be vast and lasting. The game itself could provide metaphors (or teachable moments) that could bring life to the affirmations of confirmation. Gathering community resources to create a suitable location to view the game; organizing parents to

supply snacks; developing conversation starters for between periods; and inviting mature hockey players to talk would enable fun, food, sports, and faith to intersect. The excitement and passions of hockey fan students could be balanced against the opinions of students who did not care for hockey – enabling new understanding to form.

If even a fraction of such intentions had been possible, that young man, who is now likely raising children of his own, would retain some sense that faith, learning and life's passions are bound together by caring relationships. Such understandings are needed to respond in an authentic an caring way to a world which reduces people and things to commodities; that sees value in people only in their appearance, skills or net worth; that promotes narrow legalisms and fierce intolerance; a world which resists ambiguity and the connectedness of creation.

The manageable, predictable processes of objectivist epistemologies and the careful orderly patterns of modern theology create a world which is too confined to live in. Opening to a coemergent world provides the freedom and space to discover new meaning. Openness asks much of us as both learners and teachers: engagement, uncertainty, creativity, hard work, and frequent mistakes leave us weary, humble and a little confused. Yet, this 'habitus', or way of being before God, is necessary if new meaning is to emerge among us.

5.4   Confirmation Story Three (circa. 2004)

Twenty confirmation students climbed out of a van on a grid road twenty kilometers from Outlook Saskatchewan. They were given instructions to follow a dirt

road a couple of kilometers to a building situated in a valley. After an hour walk, the students came to a derelict building with a United Nations symbol nailed to the wall.

The students met two official looking people who spoke only German. They were given forms, written in German, to fill out. After struggling to both understand and fill out the forms, the students were instructed to head east along a seldom used rail line. About a kilometer from the derelict building the students were met by soldiers carrying firearms. The soldiers took the students' flashlights, cameras, and electronic devises. The soldiers then told the students to continue along the tracks.

As dusk approach they found a cluster of old canvas camping tents at the edge of a field. They were met by a volunteer teacher who told them this was their home for the night. At nightfall a large pot of hot rice and lentils arrived for the student campers. Most of the students elected not to eat.

The next morning another pot of hot rice and lentils was delivered. The students reluctantly ate the food; then packed up the tents. A truck arrived and they were driven to a nearby farmhouse. There they met the director of refugee settlement for Canadian Lutheran World Relief. He asked them about their experience and patiently listened as they complained about the conditions.

When the students had finished complaining, the director spoke of what it meant to be displaced by war and violence. The silence and attentiveness of the students was palpable. The students asked questions and made comments which were insightful and passionate. The simulation ended with a prayer for those torn from their homes by war, poverty and ethnic violence. It was for those students and teachers a turning point.

REFERENCES

Austin, G. (1985). Anointing with the Spirit. New York: Pueblo Publishing Company.

Adam, A. K. M. (2006) Faithful interpretation: Reading the Bible in a postmodern world. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Bauersfeld, H (1988). Interaction, construction and knowledge: Alternative perspectives for Mathematics education, in Grouws, Cooney & Jones (Eds.) *Perspectives on research on effective mathematics teaching.* Reston, VA.: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.

Belenky, M. F., McVicker Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N. R. & Mattuck Tarule, J. (1986) Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind. New York: Basic Harper Collins.

Berger, P. (1979). *The heretical imperative*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Berger P. & Luckmann T. (1966). *The social Construction of Reality: A treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.* New York: Doubleday.

Bernsten, J. (1996). Christian affections and the catechumenate. In J. Astley, L. Francis & C. Crowder, (Eds.), *Theological perspectives on Christian formation: a reader on theology and Christian education*. (pp. 229-243) Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

Bibby, R.W. (2001). *Canada's teens: Today, yesterday and tomorrow.* Toronto: Stoddart Publishing C. Ltd.

Braaten, C. E & Jenson, R. W. (Eds.). (1995). *A map of twentieth century theology: readings from Karl Barth to radical Pluralism*. Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Cahill, J. (1982). *Mended Speech: the crisis of religious studies and theology.* Crossroads: New York.

Commission on Education, Lutheran World Federation. (1963) Confirmation a study document. W.C. Tillmanns (Trans.), Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Christenson, T. (2004). *The gift and task of Lutheran higher education*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Conrad, R. (Ed.). (1999). *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran foundations and practices*. Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Costelloe, T. (2008). Giambattista Vico, E. N. Zalta (Ed.).*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved July 20, 2009, from
URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/vico/>.

Cronk, G. (2005). George Herbert Mead. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Retrieved May 5, 2009 from http://www.iep.utm.edu/m/mead.htm

Daloz-Parks, S. (2000). Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young people in their search for meaning, purpose and faith. San Francisco: Josse-Bass.

Davis B., & Sumara D. J. (1997). Cognition, complexity and teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review, 67, 1*, 105-125. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ543537)

Dillenberger, J. (Ed.). (1961). *Martin Luther: Selections of his writings with an introduction.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books Doubleday and Company.

Dell, J. A. (1960). *Junior catechism*. Columbus OH: The Wartburg Press.

Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches in the United States of America. (1989). *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (NRSV). Grand Rapids, MN. Zondervan Bible Publishers.

DuBose, E., (1994). *Creative confirmation planning guide.* M. Gardner & J. Lindsmith, (Eds.), Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Elkind, D. (2004). The problems with constructivism. *The Educational Forum. 68:4.* (306-312). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ773733)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Assembly Statement, (2007). *"Our Calling in Education"* Retrieved June 30, 2009, from http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Education.aspx

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada Division for Parish Life. (1993). *Report of the Confirmation Task Force.* Retrieved June 30, 2009.
http://notes.elcic.ca/WebSite/docs.nsf/title/E43BB192B862A6D286256F4D007B7F20?OpenDocument

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (1991) *Statement on Sacramental Practices*. 1991 Biannual Convention. Internet Retrieved, July, 20, 2009.
http://www.elcic.ca/What-WeBelieve/Sacraments/Sacramental-Policy.cfm

Farley, E. (1988). *The Fragility of Knowledge*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Farley, E. (1996). Can church education be theological education? In J. Astley, L. Francis & C. Crowder, (Eds.), (pp. 31-44). *Theological perspectives on Christian formation: a reader on theology and Christian education.* Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

Fenwick, T. (2000). Expanding conceptions of experiential learning: a review of five contemporary perspectives on cognition. Adult Education Quarterly. Vol.50, n.4 pp. 243-272. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ609260)

Fenwick, T. (2004). The practice-based learning of educators: a co-emergent perspective. *Scholar-Practitioner Quarterly*, June. Retrieved July 21, 2009 fromhttp://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+practice-based+learning+of+educators:+a+co-emergent+perspective-a0142965863

Freire, P. (1996). Education liberation and the church. ? In J. Astley, L. Francis & C. Crowder, (Eds.), *Theological perspectives on Christian formation: a reader on theology and Christian education.* (pp. 169-186). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* M. Bergman Ramos, (Trans.), New York: Herder and Herder.

Geelan, D. R. (1997). Epistemological anarchy and the many faces of constructivism. *Science and Education, 6,* (15-28). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EV540090)

Gillbert W. K. (Ed.). (1969). *Confirmation and education*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Glasersfeld von, E. (1988). *Cognition, construction of knowledge and teaching*. Report. National Science Foundation, Washington (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED294754)

Gordon, M. (2009). Toward a pragmatic discourse of constructivism: Reflections on lessons from practice. *Educational Studies*. 45:1, (39-58). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ826556)

Graham, Donovan, L. (2003). *Teaching redemptively: Bringing grace and truth into your classroom*. Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Publications.

Hammer, M., L. (1994). *Giving birth: Reclaiming biblical metaphor for pastoral practice.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Hanson T. S. & Einess H. (Eds.). (1990). *New journeys saints and sojourners: A bible survey.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

Harlow, S., Cummings, R. & Aberasturi, S. (2006). Karl Popper and Jean Piaget: A rationale for constructivism. *The Educational Forum. 71,* (pp. 41-48). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ796332)

Helland, G. M. (1984). *Affirm: Worship teacher's guide*. R. Finch, & L.L. Rosenkvist, (Eds.), Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Hildebrand, D. L. (2003*). Beyond realism and anti-realism: John Dewey and the neopragmatists*. Nashville,TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Holeton, D. R. (1983). Confirmation in the 1980's**.** In M. Thurian, (Ed.), *Ecumenical Perspectives on baptism, Eucharist and ministry.* (pp. 80- 91).Faith and order paper 116. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

Horn, W. M. (1965). *I believe in God the Father*. F.W. Kloss, (Ed.), Philadelphia: Lutheran Church Press.

Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation. (1967). *Confirmation Ministry Study Document.* Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church in America. Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Publishing House. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation. (1969). *A Report on the Study of Confirmation and First Communion by Lutheran Congregations.* Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church in America.

Johnson, T. W. (1995). *Discipleship or pilgrimage: The educator's quest for philosophy.* P. L Smith, (Ed.), Suny Series, The Philosophy of Education. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kavanagh, A. (1988). *Confirmation: origins and reform.* New York: Pueblo Publishing Company.

Kestenbaum, Victor: (2002). *The grace and severity of the ideal: Dewey and the transcendent.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Klos, F. (1968). *Confirmation and first communion.* (joint pub.) Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church in America. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Krych, M. (1999). The theology of Confirmation. R. Conrad, (Ed.). *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran foundations and practices.* (pp. 85-109). Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Lathrop, G. W. (1992). *Living witness: The adult catechumenate*. Winnipeg, Man.: Division for Parish Life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Lawler, M. (2005). *What is and what ought to be: Dialectic of experience, theology and church.* New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Likness, L.W. (1981). *Our Christian Faith*. Saskatoon, SK: Division of Congregational Life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada.

Linbeck, G. (1984). *The nature of doctrine: religion and theology in a post-liberal age.* Philadelphia, Fortress Press.

Lindberg, L. (1999). Lutheran confirmation ministry in historical perspective. In R. Conrad. (Ed.), *Confirmation: engaging Lutheran foundations and practices.* (pp. 42-84) Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Lindberg, L. & Homin R. (1969). The present scene. In W. K. Gillbert (Ed.), *Confirmation and education*. (pp. 17-31). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Lenker, J. N. (Trans.). (1935). *Luther's large catechism*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House. (Original published 1529)

Lonergan, B. J. (1972). *Method in theology*. London: Herder and Herder.

Lueker, E.L., Poellet, L. & Jackson, P. (2000). *Christian Cyclopedia*. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House. Internet resource. Retrieved May 11, 2009, from http://www.lcms.org/ca/www/cyclopedia/02/display.asp?t1=c&word=CATECHETICS

Lutheran World Federation Department of Studies. (1986). *Confirmation in Lutheran Churches Today.* Riitta Virkkunen. (Trans.), Geneva: Lutheran World Federation.

Maclellan, E. & Soden, R. (2004). The importance of epistemic cognition in student-centered learning. *Instructional Science.* 32. (253-268). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No.EJ732340)

Malpas, J.(2008). Hans-Georg Gadamer. E. N. Zalta, (Ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved, May 8, 2009, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/gadamer/>.

Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society.* C.W. Morris. (Ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago.

Melheim, R. & Gauch, N. (2006). *Living Lutheran.* Stillwater MN: Faith Inkubators.

Miller R. C. (1963). *Education for Christian living*. Toronto, Ont.: Prentice-Hall.

Mish, F.C. (Ed.) (2009). Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary – 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam Webster Incorporated.

Moltmann, J. (1974). *Man: Christian anthropology in the conflicts of the present*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Monroe, D. (1998). *Confirmation more than just business as usual.* Chicago: Division for Congregational Ministries. Internet Resource: Retrieved, May 16, 2009, from http://archive.elca.org/christianeducation/print/confirm.html

Neff, F. C. (1966). *Philosophy and American education*. New York: Center for Applied Research in Education.

Nestingen, J. A. & Forde, G.O. (1975). *Free to be: A handbook to Luther's small catechism.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Nipkow, K. (1996). Theological and educational concepts: Problems of integration and differentiation. J. Astley, L. Francis & C. Crowder, (Eds.), *Theological perspectives on Christian formation: a reader on theology and Christian education.* (pp. 14-30). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

Niebuhr, H. R. (1943). *Radical monotheism*. London: Faber and Faber.

Null, W. (2004). Is constructivism traditional? Historical and practical perspectives on a popular advocacy. *The Educational Forum,63:2,* (180-188). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EV724882)

Oliver, D. W.& Gershman, K. W. (1989). *Education, modernity and fractured meaning: Toward a process theory of teaching and learning.* New York: Suny Press.

Oeming, M. (2006). *Contemporary Biblical hermeneutics.* J. Vette (trans.), Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Palmer, Parker (1993). *To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey*. San Francisco: Harper

Pegues, H. (2007). Of paradigm wars: Constructivism, Objectivism and Postmodern stratagem. *The Educational Forum 71:4.* (416-330). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ796339)

Pelikan, J. & Lehmann, H.T. (Eds.). (1955). *Luther's works.* St Louis, MO: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Phillips, D.C., (1995). The good, the bad and the ugly: The many faces of constructivism. *Educational Researcher,24: 7,* (5-12). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ514302)

Polanyi, M. (1966). *The Tacit Dimension*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Putnam, H. (1981). *Reason, truth and history.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Rogness, A. N. (1973). *The Jesus life: A guide for young Christians.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Rorty, R. (1985). Comments on sleeper and Edel. *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society*, 21 no. 1 (Winter):39

Schipani, D. S. (1995). Liberation theology and religious education. R. M. Crump (Ed.), *Theologies of religious education*. (pp. 286-314). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Seymour J. L. & Miller D. E. (Eds.). (1990). *Theological approaches to Christian education.* Nashville TN: Abingdon Press.

Shaker, P. & Ruitenberg, C. (2007). "Scientifically based research: the art of politics and the distortion of science. *Journal of Research and Methods in Education,* 30:2, 207-219 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No.EJ768523)

Solberg M.M. (1997). *Compelling Knowledge: A feminist proposal for an epistemology of the cross.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Staver, J. R. (1986). The constructivist epistemology of Jean Piaget: Its roots and relevance to science teaching. *Report to United States – Japan Seminar on Science Education Honolulu HI.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED278563)

Stone, J. H.(1995). Narrative theology and religious education. R. M. Crump. (Ed.). *Theologies of Religious Education.* (258-269) Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Stuhr, J. J. (2003). *Pragmatism, postmodernism, and the future of philosophy.* New York: Routledge.

Tappert, T.G. (Trans. & Ed.). (1967) Table Talks: Luther's Works American Edition. H.T. Lehmann (General Ed.) Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Tetlie, S.M. & Rosenkvist, L.L. (Eds.). (1990). *A Companion on your way: The small catechism – new journeys series*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

The Book of Concord. (1959) Tappert, T. (Trans.) Philadelphia: Fortress Press. (Original Work Published 1580)

Thompson, D. M. (1985). Lutheran Church History, Affirm Series. S.N. Tetlie, S.R. Tonsager, & J. S. Rolfs. (Eds.), Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Thornton, S. (2009). Karl Popper. *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy.* Internet Resource: Retrieved May 7, 2009, from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/popper/#GroHumKno

Walker, M. U. (1982). Moral understandings: Alternate epistemology for feminist ethics. E. Browning Cole & S. Coultrap-McQuin. (Eds.), *Explorations in feminist ethics: theory and practice.* Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.

Wengert, T (1994). *A contemporary translation of Luther's small catechism.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Whitehead, A. N. (1929). *The aims of education and other essays.* New York: The Free Press.

Whitehead, A. N. (1938). *Modes of thought.* New York: The Free Press.

Wiencke, G. K. & Lehmann H. T. (Eds.). (1968). *Luther's works: American ed.*, Vol. 43. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Windschitl, M. (1999). The challenges of sustaining a constructivist classroom culture. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80: 10, (751-756). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ587664)

Yilmaz, K. (2008). Constructivism: Its theoretical underpinnings, variations, and implications for classroom Instruction. *Educational Horizons. 86:3,* (161-172). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ798521)