

Synchronic and Diachronic Exploration in Faith-based History Teaching

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Abstract

Historicity is a fundamental element in the effort to mediate tensions between Christian Liberal Arts critical thinking, interdisciplinary, and holistic citizenship with pragmatic, economic utility. In Art, Design, and Architecture, design thinking has shifted away from designing material object towards socio-materiality as an end goal. The design process is increasingly appointed towards building, recreating, redefining social frameworks, rituals, habit, and placement; how to use, mediate, or synthesizes various perspectives to create pre-determined conditioning. This disciplinary development made historical consciousness a dominant aspect in comprehending the direction and possibilities of competing narratives and cultural hermeneutics. To mediate learning that allows socio-materiality and faith-based emphasis, history of Art, Design, and Architecture must be taught not as a chronological exploration of artefacts produced, but as a critical reflection of human being, worldviews, civilization, artefacts produced by individual and social groups, in particular time and place. The Initial Historical Reflection is designed to constrain the quantity of data and information; providing an in-depth analytical reading of a given text, visual, supporting narratives. Initial Historical Reflection utilizes Cultural Studies and Design categorizations to allow students to build collective reflection synchronically across all variables of one place and timeframe. The result of this initial reflection is collected as a repository to execute Diachronic Historical Reflection. This Diachronic Reflection is designed to allow students to build a hypothetical correlation between different timeframe and place on a selected phenomenon. Combined Synchronic-Diachronic historical reflection produces historically grounded ideation, post-course discourses for further stages of disciplinary praxis.

Keywords: historicity, socio-materiality, synchronic, diachronic

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Introduction

The Synchronic- Diachronic Exploration in Faith-based History teaching started as a disciplinary response to institutional Christian Liberal Arts general education. The challenge given by the institution was threefold, firstly to fully engage its underlying faith-based presuppositions in all teaching and learning process; secondly, to create coherent relationship between Christian Liberal Arts general education and specific disciplinary education; thirdly, to fulfill vocational expectation posit by the professional and governmental regulatory board.

A common ground needs to be identified between faith-based, Liberal Arts, and disciplinary pedagogical expectations. This so-called common ground may consist of a framework, a starting point, or a common element that are present and intertwined in what seemed to be less compatible pedagogical expectations. To search and identify possible alternatives for this common element, a collaborative task force between Liberal Arts and Art and Design disciplinary educators tested several joint teaching modules. Analysis was carried out to determine specific compatibility issues between existing faith-based, liberal arts, and disciplinary expectations. This collaboration resulted in the decision to investigate the possibility of making the worldview approach as common ground of developing faith-based, liberal arts, and disciplinary pedagogy.

From Worldview to History

Historically since the late nineteen century, Christian philosophers and education scholars have utilized the worldview conception as an instrument of pursuing holistic intellectual and spiritual formation. The utilization of Worldview conception also occurred in various disciplinary sciences. From Polanyi and Kuhn in natural sciences, Freud and Jung in psychology, to sociologists like Karl Manheim and Peter Berger. The utilization of worldview conception allows converging shifts in the way the faith-based, liberal arts, and disciplinary elements form a compatible pedagogy. The shift to worldview terminology and thought allows faith-based foundational framework not to be taught dogmatically as a completely separated normative principles. It allows its dogmatic propositions to be understood and studied in its underlying presuppositions. It became for formative learning purposes, a study of behind-the-scene distillate pre-theoretical formation. This shift opens a dialogue and comparative analysis to similar pre-theoretical conviction held in every disciplinary science. The shift provided a deeper understanding in each discipline of its own internal presuppositions and pre-theoretical formation, beyond instrumental utilization. To the Liberal Arts general education, the shift increases the possibility of interdisciplinary learning.

In his worldview investigation, Buijs (2012) reveal an important element indirectly instrumental in evaluating our present pedagogical approach in faith-based teaching. The implication that a person's worldview conception is never a unity, nor private, but constantly in tensions of disunity in its communal and societal context, seriously challenges rationalistic, ahistorical, proposition-based pedagogical approach.

Why historiography as means to engage worldview? Sire's (2015) and Buijs' (2012) development of worldview understanding provide fundamental critique towards our present pedagogy. Sire's (2009) revised the focus of a worldview. Worldview is

understood as a fundamental orientation of the heart, which can be held consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently would be put into contrast with stable, completed framework, constructed with normative propositions upon which clear differentiation of any given context can be defined. Buijs' (2012) explanation of worldview as communal phenomenon raised questions of how current deductive learning, through propositions taken out of its historical and societal context, can sufficiently support critical reflection of worldview contestation embodied daily at the present. Due to various constraints, the utilization of worldview conception as common ground in our pedagogy remain incoherently rationalistic, mostly detached from situatedness of disciplinary practices. It failed to act as a bridge between systemic or normative concern with the embodied situatedness. This condition seemed to reflect the late development of worldview conception in Christian philosophy.

Buijs (2012) proposed a solution to the incoherent disunity of rationalistic Christian Worldview, a new role for worldview. After explaining the current context of what Charles Taylor (2007) called The Age of Authenticity, Buijs underlined how the character of the age that fight against any idea of external ideological, imposing framework brought a deathblow to a rationalistic, comprehensive all-encompassing idea of worldview. Buijs (2012) offer a possible role for worldview in the current context. This role no longer placing worldview as intellect-driven (propositional, abstractions, deductive learning) comprehensive framework but as reflections, deep explorations towards any deep commitments any patterns of life may be rooted. Buijs (2012) stated that these deep explorations can be in two forms as follows:

“The first form may be that of narratives: novels, myths, parables, biographies, theatre plays, movies and so forth. In many (if not all) of these kind of narratives, ways of life are explored and analyzed, some of whom may seem attractive at first, but then turn out to be quite harmful to oneself or others, whilst other ways of life may be just the other way around. In the background of the stories one can also sometimes discern deeper issues that come close to what is called ‘a worldview’. However, in an ‘age of authenticity,’ the primary focus is probably going to be on the question whether a certain story helps me to understand life in general and my life and the A second form that ‘worldview’ may take in an ‘age of authenticity’ is that of personal examples and personal inspiration. The key question may not simply be what your ‘encompassing framework’ is, but: ‘by whom are you inspired?’, ‘who is your great example?’, ‘who is your hero?’. This line goes a long way back in Christian history, of course: whom are you going to follow? Do you choose the *Imitatio Christi*? Or are there other leading stars in your life? Next to storytelling, this second form requires personal, face-to-face encounters.”

This developing understanding of worldview in Christian philosophy crucially influence pedagogical assumptions set for this research. Its comprehensive and holistic nature, not merely as rational propositions, affirms the value of worldview as a pedagogical instrument where deep assumptions upon which we perceive reality is known and disclosed. Its historical precedent of being expressed through storytelling also play an important role in how further methodical development is conducted.

Bloch (1953) quoted in Bradley and Muller (2016) observed the importance of history to Christianity as a consequence of situating its whole narrative of Creation, Fall,

Redemption, and Judgment in the canvas of world history. Thus, whether it is a history of Christian thought, doctrine, dogma, or worldview, it must be identified in a still broader field of inquiry. It can only be adequately understood in relation to its broader situatedness in the historical context of time, place, and society. Bradley and Muller (2016) observed that in the pluralistic concerns of the present, traditional divisions of historical investigation such as history of theology, the church, the dogma, becomes inadequate without placing it in wider situatedness such as Western intellectual history and Western civilization.

Thus, the development of Christian worldview conception, also its relationship to historiography becomes an important foundation for any interdisciplinary development. Concurring with Pannenberg (1976) quoted in Bradley and Muller (2016) I propose that not only Church history, but also the history of theology, and dogmatic propositions constructed in response to a historical context as subject-matter must inescapably engages pressures of the whole history. Thus propositions, words or meanings as distinct from events have of themselves no discerning value. Events and interpretations, facts and meanings must, therefore, be viewed in embodied situatedness, synchronically at their original historical context.

Christianity's challenging relationship with history is reciprocated in the development of how historicity is regarded and situated in disciplinary and special sciences education.

Strauss (2009) investigate the way in which academic disciplines are influenced by philosophy, while at the same time acknowledging the dependence of philosophy on developments within the special sciences. While plenty of discourses can be drawn based on Strauss's investigation, this research is interested in the way and how a philosophical historiography approach provided constant historical interplay between underlying philosophical presuppositions and distinctiveness of disciplinary development. As such, problems resulted from systematic distinctions and the connection between disciplines are brought in a different light, resulting in fruitful discernment. Strauss's historical investigation is both synchronic and diachronic, offering investigation of underlying unity that runs underneath various special sciences development of certain time and place. It also investigates continuity and discontinuity of presuppositions, considering the historicity of all human knowledge.

Synchronic and Diachronic Historiography

Looking further back from Strauss's synchronic and diachronic historical investigation of interaction between disciplines and special sciences, the experiment will now draw lessons from Christian philosophical historiography to develop disciplinary historicity that emphasis discernment and deep reflection to worldview.

Historiography in Christian philosophy tradition, as exemplified in Vollenhoven's philosophical historiography method addresses several inadequacies of rationalistic worldview pedagogy. To understand why we need to look back at some underlying considerations that Vollenhoven's tried to address through his historiography method. Wolters, as mentioned in Seerveld (2014), situated the development of Vollenhoven's philosophical historiography as a response to Neo-Positivistic historicism. As such the historiography method address the tension between normative stability and the

relativizing in interpreting every phenomenon. The method is, by how it was constructed, fashioned with specific categories that allow specific Christian presuppositions to be brought into in-depth reflection within another competing framework. As it was a reflection upon presuppositions brought within a critically shared historicity, it avoids the early-on detachment and rejection to absolutizing normativity. As it makes openness for deeper contextual relevance in interpreting meaning in any subject matter, it preserves the normative stability and macro-interpretation of history through methodical categorization.

The next phase of developing faith-based, liberal arts, and disciplinary integration is conducted separately in each domain. Having established a general argument to designate worldview through historiography as common ground, a more thorough examination is conducted to identify the existing historiography and the role that historicity took in each domain.

History Teaching at School of Design

At the School of Design, further examination identifies the nature of historicity in relation to pedagogical practices in Arts, Design, and Architecture. Firstly, it agrees that Arts, Design and Architecture practices generally posit historicity as an important element in generating concepts, interpreting practices, and constructing values. Secondly, it identifies the presence of both synchronic and diachronic historical investigation in various stages of our teaching and learning process.

Diachronic historical investigation is mostly characterized as foundational knowledge, in which each time period or traditionally accepted categorization is introduced. The historical analysis would narrow its focus on what considered as representing the best material culture and artefact produced by specific time, place, or stylistic movement. Synchronic historical investigation mostly appears as part of preliminary ideation, in the stage where the design process search for contextual understanding. At its existing practices, the diachronic historical investigation of artefacts and material culture provide a basic understanding of similarities and differences, but less concerned and frequently detached from its specific situatedness. The absence of synchronic historical investigation in preliminary search for contextual understanding resulting in various forms of social, cultural, and ethical misappropriation. In the age of information where identity becomes a primary design element, the challenge to understand and consider multiple contexts appropriately is crucial.

In Art, Design, and Architecture, design thinking has shifted away from designing material object towards socio-materiality as an end goal. The design process is increasingly appointed towards building, recreating, redefining social frameworks, rituals, habit, and placement; how to use, mediate, or synthesizes various perspectives to create pre-determined conditioning. As this happened, the emphasis in design to study contingent interaction between human actors and material objects shifted from merely taking the human consideration as an initial means of generating materiality. Materiality and objects must now be understood by its social impact, as a representation of values, norms, and intentions.

This disciplinary development above made historical consciousness a dominant aspect in comprehending the direction and possibilities of designing. Material culture now

must be understood to represent competing narratives, whether presently or in its historical past.

To mediate learning that allows socio-materiality in Arts, Design, and Architecture requires similar changes to how historicity is situated for faith-based emphasis. History of Art, Design, and Architecture must be taught not as chronological exploration of artefacts produced, but as a critical reflection of human being, worldviews, civilization, artefacts produced by individual and social groups, time and place.

To allow theoretical arguments above be tested pedagogically, the explorative practices must be strategically placed in the School of Design curriculum structure. In relation to Liberal Arts and faith-based institutional subjects, the test-bed subject is located synchronically in the first year to allow interdisciplinary dialogue. In the context of an interdisciplinary approach to specific disciplines, the test-bed subject is faculty developed and presently taught at Visual Communication, Product, and Interior Design.

The exploration tested ideas as follows:

1. The utilization of worldview and historicity as common ground for disciplinary, Liberal Arts, and faith-based subjects.
2. The utilization of Diachronic historiography to develop a normative proposition.
3. The utilization of Synchronic historiography to develop deeper temporal and contextual understanding.
4. The combined utilization of Synchronic and Diachronic historical investigation as means of historically grounded interpretation and ideation.

The Synchronic Diachronic Exploration is presently conducted for three years since 2017 in the duration of 16-week semesters. Each semester with 3 to 4 classrooms running simultaneously in Visual Communication, Interior, and Product Design.

Result and Exposition

The Initial Historical Reflection is designed to constrain the quantity of data and information; providing an in-depth analytical reading of a given text, visual, supporting narratives. These constraints are designed to allow utilization of Synchronic Historiography to the fullest. The 16-week semesters are designed to allow students to work collaboratively in a minimum of two selected Synchronic investigations. The synchronic investigation is subjected to collective questioning, in which each contextual understanding must be subjected to sound historical reasoning.

A series of Synchronic historical investigation conducted by students are subjected to Diachronic Historical Investigation conducted by Lecturers. The Diachronic Historical Investigation draw out comparative analysis between two synchronic investigation. It generates a question of continuity and discontinuity between two or more synchronic investigation, which resulted in a normative proposition to be concluded collectively.

To create further possibility of cross-examination across disciplines and subjects, Initial Historical Reflection utilizes existing Cultural Studies and Design categorizations that allow students to build collective reflection synchronically across all variables of one place and timeframe.

The combined Synchronic investigation by students and Diachronic investigation by Lecturers is collected to be utilized in the next stage of the process. The result of this combined initial reflection is collected as a shared repository to execute Diachronic Historical Reflection. This Diachronic Reflection is designed to allow students to build a hypothetical correlation between different timeframes and places on a selected phenomenon. Combined Synchronic-Diachronic historical reflection produces historically grounded ideation, post-course discourses for further stages of disciplinary praxis.

Conclusion

The Synchronic Diachronic Teaching was designed from the first with the intention to allow continuing student's engagement and participation to independently construct and accumulate relevant themes for contextual discourses. The exploration has demonstrated ongoing discussion and interest to both Synchronic and Diachronic historical investigation between normative principles taught in different disciplines and contemporary interpretation of certain phenomenon. While specific turn of investigation that incorporates faith-based or Liberal Arts questions regularly appear in School of Design classes, no current evaluation has been conducted in related faith-based and Liberal Arts subjects. Further stage of collaborative development between Liberal Arts and School of Design is needed.

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