Editor's Perspective

Teaching and Learning: Connections and Distinctions

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I recently viewed a teacher training video in which the speaker asserted that the purpose of teaching is to cause people to learn. He argued this based on the fact that the Hebrew word for teaching and learning are the same. The Hebrew word *lamad* is variously translated as to learn, to study, to teach, and to train.

With due respect to the video speaker, I believe he is only somewhat right and, in important ways, very wrong. To argue a simple identity between teaching and learning is, simply, incorrect and misleading. The distinction between teaching and learning is as important as the connection between the two — and both speak to a variety of concerns shared by all Christian business faculty.

Teaching-Learning Connections

The goal of teaching should be to encourage and enable or equip another to learn. The content of our teaching only becomes real and relevant when we position that content in the context of the learner's experiences and expectations. Teaching with learning impact is far more than talking about a subject or telling someone what they need to do. Effective teaching seeks to engage the learner in a conversation or dialogue (maybe even debate!) about important ideas and issues. Learning impact is every bit as important as teaching initiatives.

Teaching and learning are also connected because *we teach from the overflow of our own learning*. The energy we invest in our own intellectual and emotional growth is what drives the excitement we have for teaching others. Our personal commitment to lifelong learning provides the contagious enthusiasm that supports our efforts to encourage students to engage in semester-long learning. We teach most authentically that which we have been learning

most actively. A lovely passage from the Old Testament book of Ezra expresses this clearly: "For Ezra had set his heart to study [seek] the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Teaching and learning are also connected because *each learner must ultimately teach him/herself if he/she is to learn*. Teachers can articulate ideas and amplify issues — only the learner can assimilate and attach those ideas and issues to what they already know. Real learning demands active acquisition of wisdom, not just relaxed receptions of another's words. Ultimately, everything we have learned we have taught, to some degree, ourselves.

Teaching-Learning Distinctions

Clearly no one can cause another person to learn anything. In truth all learning is voluntary; teachers can only invite others to learn and then support the efforts of people as they engage in the learning process. There are several important ways that we must know that teaching and learning are distinctive processes.

Inspired teaching can occur amidst indifferent learning. Good teachers seek to connect with students, but they cannot make students see those connections or care about those connections. This is all the more true when those connections relate to future conditions students will certainly face but have little or no appreciation for in the present. Good teachers can and should clearly identify what students *need* to learn, but only students can determine what they *want* to learn.

The distinction between teaching and learning is also revealed by the fact that *effective learning can occur amidst ineffective (and even inept) teaching*. Intense learning motivation can overcome ineffective teaching methodology. While we hope students learn because of our teaching, all of us who instruct for a living know there are days when students are learning in spite of our teaching. A motivated learner can accomplish far more than might be expected even when taught by a mediocre teacher.

Why Teaching-Learning Connections and Distinctions Matter

Understanding the connections and distinctions between teaching and learning helps us properly frame the issues we face in collegiate business education. We avoid simplistic assertions that "teaching *causes* someone to learn" and arrive at a more realistic and nuanced set of conclusions.

1) If we understand that our goal as educators is to teach students to learn, then we will place as great an emphasis on understanding our students as we do on understanding our subject matter. Learning is a complex amalgam of attitude, aptitude, and action. While we can generalize about its components, its totality is reflected and refined uniquely in each learner. So, while we teach a class collectively through lectures and discussions, our ultimate goal must be to reach each student individually. Practically, this means that providing choices in the kinds and timing of assignments where possible will allow the course to better fit any one student's learning style and goals. Another practical implication is that one-on-one encounters with students in our office may motivate greater learning than our best in-class lectures — and must be seen as welcome opportunities to inform and inspire rather than unwelcome interruptions in our own personal schedules.

2) If we understand that effective teachers must also be engaged learners, then our own professional development becomes essential rather than optional. Our reading, researching, and reporting (through publishing and presentations) become less acts of personal career advancement and more acts of service to students. Furthermore, the need for our institutions to provide both the time and resources to support professional development of teachers becomes a logical mandate rather than a local option. Research and teaching are not activities in conflict — they are activities in concert. The collegiate teaching profession does not require certification nor continuing education credits or units. So, a personal research and publishing/presentation agenda and degree advancement act as de facto certifications.

3) If we understand that all learning is in reality a process of self-teaching, then we must focus as great an attention on teaching students *how* to think as we do on teaching them *what* to think. Earlier we quoted from the book of Ezra. The book of Nehemiah is the companion piece to Ezra. In chapter 8 of Nehemiah, Ezra is

called on to dedicate the newly reconstructed wall around Jerusalem. While Ezra opened the "Book of the Law" and read it to the people, a selected group of teachers "explained the law to the people … translating [explaining] to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:7-8). The Hebrew word for "sense" is *sekel*, a word translated as "understanding," "prudent insight," and "successful comprehension." As teachers, we are challenged to translate the content of our course into the context of hands-on experiences for our students. It is ultimately more important to learn to fish than to catch a fish. Providing students with food for thought today is good — helping them learn to grow, harvest, and process that food for themselves is a more challenging but greater goal.

4) If we understand the distinction between teaching and learning, we will better appreciate the importance and limitations of our roles as professors. While we cannot cause students to learn, we can provide a climate which encourages and rewards them to do so. While we cannot force students to read, we can provide a climate which challenges them to apply and communicate what they have read. In my own teaching I use the "80-20" rule. I believe that at least 80 percent of what a student learns is due to his or her own effort. This leaves the teacher with a significant but minority influence. Good teaching matters importantly but derivatively. This truth could be discouraging as we acknowledge that our best efforts are only a smaller part of the learning story. However, let me suggest a different, more encouraging view:

a) As teachers, our primary responsibility is to teach our students, not learn for them. This truth should provide us with the freedom to do all we can do without shouldering the responsibility for what we cannot do. Some students will not learn because of their own lack of preparation or lack of interest or lack of effort.

b) As teachers, our aim is to use learning as leverage for our teaching: our 20 percent is multiplied by the student's 80 percent. At its best, teaching is the privilege of seeing our lesson plans, lectures, and assignments turned into real learning by the students themselves. We are privileged to be witnesses to the wonder of learning as ignorance yields to insight and indolence gives way to initiative.

A Challenge

Neither teaching nor learning comes easily or naturally. The Hebrew word *lamad* is derived from a word (*malmad*) meaning "a goad or yoke for an oxen." It is a very strong word, invoking images of discipline, correction, and active self-control. There are some teaching philosophies which begin with what I believe to be an erroneous assumption — that students are inherently interested in learning and naturally yield to effective teaching.

The fact is that learning (and its related un-learning as we gain new insight) is hard, uncomfortable, and frequently frustrating work requiring prodigious amounts of energy and time. Encouraging and exhorting anyone to walk that path is a challenge. As teachers we learn that students are not our enemies; neither, however, can we expect them to be our natural allies.

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We cannot do everything as teachers, but we can do some things. While we cannot force our students to learn, we can support and reward the efforts of those who do. Learning involves students investing their heads, hearts, and hands in a course of study. Teaching involves the challenge of trying to reach into the minds, emotions, and wills of our students. Teaching and learning are importantly distinct, but essentially connected, processes.

The Fall 2003 *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*

This issue of the ***JBIB*** targets both teaching and learning through creative, and perhaps even controversial, articles.

In "Looking Through New Lenses: Complexity Theory and the Christian Life," Janice A. Black from New Mexico State University and Yvonne S. Smith from Biola University combine their insights and considerable writing skills to illustrate how complex adaptive systems theory can demonstrate the process of a Christian's growth to maturity. The authors offer ten significant principles and include applications of each.

Our good friend Richard Chewning offers an intriguing paper titled simply, "God Is Infinitely WISE: We Have Access

to His Wisdom." As one whose life is dedicated to helping students grow in wisdom, Chewning provides great insight into the very core of godly wisdom. As usual, Chewning's work has drawn the interest of our board of review. We have included response articles by board members W. Calvin Fields from Wingate University and Brian Porter from Hope College.

From Richard J. Martinez at Baylor University we have a wonderfully in-depth treatment of strategic management, called "Teaching Strategic Management from A Christian Perspective." As a strategy teacher for more than 27 years, I was delighted at this article's careful review of the "state of the field" and its challenge to provide students with a biblical context for their study.

In our ongoing "Best Practices" series we have several contributions. In "Firstfruits," an article by Jonathan D. Stewart of Abilene Christian University, the author describes a pedagogical approach (used in a financial management class) to 1) communicate that "learning about business is a method of worshipping God by growing the talents He has blessed us with;" 2) "stimulate student thought" concerning the "biblical principle of firstfruits (that is, offering the first and best of all that we have and are to the Lord);" and 3) "illustrate these beliefs by offering the first part of the semester to the Lord and seeking His blessing" on all work and interaction in the class.

In "Work Before and After the Fall: A Project for the Managerial/Cost Accounting Course," Brad Lemler of Grace College provides a framework from Genesis (and other books of the Bible) for helping students gain a better understanding of managerial/cost accounting from a biblical perspective. It is a great illustration of the challenge of achieving biblical integration in business courses in substantive, and perhaps surprising, ways.

In "Building A Marketing Case Around A Campus Ministry," A. Bruce Clark of Bloomsburg University demonstrates how Christian business educators, in both Christian and secular colleges, can both enrich students' understanding of course materials and make them aware of some fundamentals of the Christian faith by assigning a campus ministry case based on an organization like Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, or the Navigators. For business professors who utilize written or "live" cases in their classes, Clark offers some creative approaches to having students wrestle with both business and biblical issues.

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