

**Institute for Christian Teaching  
Education Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists**

## **THE BIBLE AND PEDAGOGY**

**Andrea Luxton**

**558-04 Institute for Christian Teaching  
12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA**

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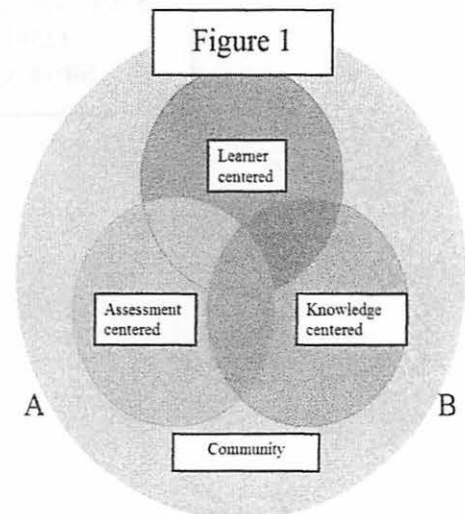
## THE BIBLE AND PEDAGOGY

### Introduction

... apte the Mind or Fancie is to roave  
 Uncheckt, and of her roaving is no end;  
 Till warn'r or by experience taught, she learn  
 That not to know at large of things remote  
 From use, obscure and subtle, but to know  
 That which before us lies in daily life,  
 Is the prime Wisdom, what is more, is fume,  
 Or emptiness, or fond impertinence,  
 And renders us in the things that most concerne  
 Unpractis'e unprepar'd, and still to seek.<sup>1</sup>

So speaks Adam in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in a statement that on first appearance may sound anti-intellectual. Yet the context of the passage and of *Paradise Lost* suggests this statement does not argue against intellectual pursuits, but is more a statement of pedagogy, identifying the importance of knowledge impacting life and particularly humanity's relationship with God. In the context of this epic Adam has been learning from Raphael, God's emissary. In fact John Milton, scholar, poet and theologian, finds numerous opportunities in this epic to reflect on education, and particularly the education of Adam and Eve by God—both before and after the Fall. This is, in His view, one of the major concerns of God. How can He teach Adam and Eve so that they remain "free" and yet know enough to resist temptation. And after they do Fall, how does He teach them so that after they have left Eden they can still have hope and direction for the future? John Milton was correct in seeing pedagogy as a major concern of God and the Bible, not pedagogy for its own sake, but with clearly delineated outcomes: that those who experience God and read His Word will know and fully commit to Him.

Pedagogy is also, of course, of ongoing concern to society and to the educational community. The last decade has seen educational theorists focusing on several key areas of pedagogy. Many of these spring from research about the way the brain works, the individual learns and society develops. The National Research Council of the United States has perhaps most succinctly and thoroughly encapsulated these



<sup>1</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VIII, 188-197, in John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Hughes (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1981).

directions in the 2000 text, *How People Learn*.<sup>2</sup> In summary, the writers conclude that modern studies lead to a conclusion on a framework that can optimize learning. This framework is built on four ideals of a teaching environment that in turn impact on pedagogy. These four ideals look for an education process that is learner centered; that ensures cohesion between knowledge of facts, understanding and life application; that is strong on particularly formative assessment, and that is community-centered (both in the learning act and in application). None of these stand alone and the last is seen as providing the optimum context in which the other ideals are most successful. So we have the chart found in Figure 1.<sup>3</sup>

This paper seeks to identify and explore some of the pedagogical principles practiced in the Bible. To limit the extent of the discussion, the four “ideals” of pedagogy identified by the National Research Council will be used as a framework for the study. Two levels of teaching will be explored: the principles and practice we see within the inspired text as God interacts with humanity; and the principles and practice found in the way that the Bible as an inspired text itself becomes a teacher to its readers.<sup>4</sup> Finally in each of the four areas this paper will consider what the conclusions say about the way schools, churches and homes should approach the teaching process to assist in a greater understanding of God and the Word of God.

## **Learner-centered Education**

### ***The Pedagogical Principles: Learner-Centered Education***

... They bend over their books and begin.  
 Hamid’s lips move as he follows  
 the tortuous labyrinth of English syntax.  
 Yoshie sits erect, perfect in her pale make-up,  
 legs crossed, quick pulse minutely  
 jerking her right foot. Tony,  
 from an island in the South Pacific, sprawls  
 limp and relaxed in his desk.

The melody floats around and through us  
 in the room, broken here and there, fragmented,  
 re-started. It feels Mideastern, but  
 it could be jazz, or the blues—it could be  
 anything from anywhere.

<sup>2</sup> National Research Council, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School* (National Academic Press, Washington D.C., 2000).

<sup>3</sup> *How People Learn*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of the Bible as teacher is most clearly delineated in the Bible in 2 Tim 3: 15-16 where Paul tells Timothy that the Scriptures he has learnt from a child are able to make him “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Paul continues: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” This text and all future texts will be taken from the *New International Version* of the Bible. References will be cited in text.

I sit down on my desk to wait,  
and it hits me from nowhere—a sudden,  
sweet, almost painful love for my students.<sup>5</sup>

Learner-centered education has often had bad press due to a misperception of its underlying principles. It does not intend to remove authority from the teacher, or allow students total control of their own learning. It does recognize that the best learning takes place within the context of a student's prior experience, that students are unique and learn in different ways, that there are different types of "intelligences" that need to be recognized and appreciated in the education processes, and that each student is worthy of dignity, respect, even love. *How People Learn* summarizes the basic pedagogical principle:

Overall, learner-centered environments include teachers who are aware that learners construct their own meanings, beginning with the beliefs, understandings, and cultural practices that they bring to the classroom. If teaching is conceived as constructing a bridge between the subject matter and the student, learner-centered teachers keep a constant eye on both ends of the bridge.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, unless a teacher recognizes the cultural and personal constructs that make each student what he/she is, then there will be a gap in the learning process—a gulf, rather than the necessary bridge. However, the education process does invite the students to cross the bridge into new territories and areas of understanding. "Diagnostic teaching" is one of the approaches that work with this understanding of pedagogy, a teaching approach that starts with students' perceptions/comprehension of a concrete situation, then moving from there to open up misperceptions and encourage personal growth.

A consideration of prior environments largely means focus on external student difference; focus on internal difference means recognizing that learning styles of students vary dramatically and that students are individuals with very different needs. So for example, some students will respond more to logic, others to design, and others to language and linguistic symbol. Some will be more visual, some auditory, some kinesthetic. A learner-focused classroom will seek to deliver curriculum in a multi-sensory manner. This ties very closely to a recognition of the different intelligences. The seminal work on multiple intelligences was by Howard Gardner, in 1983, who identified seven intelligences that he considered impacted the way that students learn.<sup>7</sup> Other categorizations have followed, as for example the eight intelligences identified in *Schools That Learn*: word smart, logic smart, picture smart, body smart, music smart, nature

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<sup>5</sup> Al Zolynas, "Love in the Classroom," in *Teaching with Fire*, eds. Sam M. Intrator and Megan Scribner (Jossey Bass: San Francisco), p. 53. *Teaching with Fire* is a selection of poems chosen by teachers, with commentaries from those same teachers about how the poem has had a particular influence on their approach to teaching.

<sup>6</sup> *How People Learn*, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 141. A useful discussion of Gardner's views is found in Charles Fowler, *Strong Arts, Strong Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 40.

smart, people smart and self smart.<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this paper, however, the important fact is not which are the right categories, but that there are different categories and that traditional focus on certain intelligences as “superior” can undermine the dignity of students who may have intelligence in less traditional ways. Learner-centered education seeks to recognize and encourage all intelligences, while continuing to develop skills in all areas.

All of these approaches to learning-centered education demand an attitude of teachers towards their students: dignity, respect, love. In *Schools That Learn*, one of the writers, Timothy Lucas, reflects:

I consider myself fortunate to have been exposed to the idea of the dignity of the child so early in my career. It has motivated me to keep learning from new research on different types of learners and their varied ways of thinking and interacting. Only students with a strong sense of their own dignity can grow up to be adults who can take risks, handle minor failures, and act to protect other people’s dignity.<sup>9</sup>

Such an attitude demands intentional personal interaction between teacher and student, an ideal environment to encourage a high level of inter-personal communication and to develop a positive caring relationship. That in itself encourages learning and personal growth.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Actions of God: Learner-Centered Education***

One does not have to move far into the Bible to see God’s intentional “learner-centered” education. From his personal interaction with Adam and Even, to his long-suffering process of educating the Israelites, to his patient awakening of growing spiritual depth in his leaders and prophets, God shows a keen awareness of personal situation, past circumstance and human uniqueness in his determined focus on educating for salvation.

Some of the most memorable personal encounters, however, come with Jesus’ interaction with different individuals. The desired outcome in each case is the same—belief in Christ and in the Father—but the methodology and nature of interaction vary considerably. Consider, for example John 3-5, where Jesus encounters a series of very different individuals. With Nicodemus, Jesus speaks “intellectual” to “intellectual”, asking him to move away from the logical to the impossible, undefined matters of the Spirit. Speaking of the mystery of new birth, Jesus argues, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear the sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

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<sup>8</sup> This summary comes from Peter Senge et al, *Schools That Learn* (New York: Doubleday), p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> Senge et al, p, 122.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin, *Building Character in Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999) focus on the necessity of positive personal relationships for moral instruction and learning—a part of the discussion on integrated learning later in this paper.

The Samaritan woman, however, has different needs. An intelligent woman, she has not found true satisfaction in the life of men and daily survival she has been living. And so Jesus takes her somewhere new and more satisfying: to the living water that doesn't have to be drawn up from the well, and to the Messiah who knows how she has lived and that she wants to live another way. His ability to intersect with her life is what convicts the woman that Jesus is the Messiah. Then one chapter later Jesus sees a man whose life is embodied in his thirty-eight years of sickness. Before he could hear of a salvation that was more than physical health, he needed to be healed. And so Jesus asks him first for that level of belief—a belief that will let him get up off the ground, pick up his bed and walk. Then later Jesus sees him again. This time he asks more of him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (John 5:14).

Jesus conversation with the men on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35) is another example of learner-centered education. Jesus could have revealed himself to the men immediately, but he didn't. He wanted them to come to understanding from their own experience. So Jesus led them through the prophets and prophecies—information they knew, but that needed to be focused in a new way. Only after that process did Jesus reveal himself to them, and all the earlier discussion was then fully understood. It is interesting that when Cleopas and his friend report the discussion, they do not speak just of the revelation of Christ at the end, but “the two told of what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread” (Luke 24:35).

In the process of educating his people, God is a good example of a teacher who keeps “a constant eye on both ends of the bridge” between the student (and his/her background and previous learning experiences) and the subject-matter (in God's case, an understanding of Himself and salvation).

God's pedagogy also exemplifies a multi-sensory approach to teaching. In the New Testament Jesus' parables and sermons constantly link the concrete and abstract. He speaks to what the disciples and crowds can see and feel. It is in the tempest as the boat is rocking and the disciples can feel the wind and rain, and hear the storm that He teaches them of God's power; it is with the fields in full view that He describes salvation in terms of seed falling in different types of ground, and it is at a feast, where the guests are enjoying the taste of good food, that Jesus uses the banquet as an image of God's gifts and goodness.

God's education of the Israelites also is multi-sensory. He shows his care for them by visually leading them by a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night, and he feeds them miraculously by manna. However, his instructions to Moses for the Israelites perhaps most effectively encapsulate God's plan of education. He provides the core regulations (ten commandments) in a visual form; he gives instructions for the building of a sanctuary that is very visual and symbolic, and then he describes key ceremonies, which will involve the Israelites in worship that will include music, the enjoyment of food, and have strong visual impact with the sacrifices and the sanctuary symbolism. God realized that declaration was not enough—he needed to teach his people in many different forms and ways.

Another evidence of learner-centered pedagogy identified above was the teacher's recognition of the uniqueness and value of each individual, evidenced in their treating all students with dignity, even love. This is, of course, a constant pattern in God's dealing with his followers. From the woman caught in adultery to the hated Zaccheus, Jesus treated all he met with dignity. Even those who chose not to accept the sacrifice involved in following him, He loved. Speaking of the rich young ruler, who was about to walk away from Jesus, the gospel records His reaction to the young man, "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (Mark 10:21). It is God's compassion and love for individuals (in this case the Ninevites) that makes Jonah so upset with him. "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love" (Jonah 4:2), he complains about God's salvation of the repentant Ninevites. Yes even while he complains, God is teaching him, despite his self-centeredness, with that same compassion and love. Ironically, even when Jonah was in the most undignified of places (the belly of the great fish), God was still treating him graciously and with the dignity that says Jonah is worth His work and love.

### ***The Word of God: Learner-Centered Education***

Much of the pattern that can be seen in the actions of God can also be seen in the way the Word of God teaches.

The gospel of Matthew is a good example of a text that is constantly relating the testimony of Christ to the past knowledge and experience of the gospel readers. "So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets" (Matt 2: 13), and "for this is what the prophet has written" (Matt 2:5) becomes almost a chorus throughout the gospel, linking past knowledge to present experience. The writers of the Psalms also often seek to link past and present experiences in order to encourage a deepening faith from the reader. The psalmist may at the primary level of experience be talking about Israelite experience, but, for example, transitions from emotional despair to hope and faith provide a pattern of experience for the reader. So Psalm 77 starts with the deep discouragement of the individual who "stretched out untiring hands/and my soul refused to be comforted" (Psalm 77:2). Then the Psalmist turns to memory of the Lord's leading in the past, with His guidance of the Israelites through the Red Sea. "Your path led through the sea,/your way through the mighty waters,/ though your footprints were not seen" (Ps 77:19), the Psalmist concludes. There is no clear statement that this memory has resolved the despair identified at the beginning of the Psalm, but there is a point of calm. In effect the psalmist says, "Yes, You have led and You will lead in the future also."

The Scriptures also speaks to different individuals whose experiences may require a different "voice". Again, returning to the gospels, each gospel speaks with a different point-of-view (or voice) to a different immediate target audience. For example, Matthew is more focused on the need for the Jews to link the reality of Jesus with the prophetic words of the Old Testament; Luke wants to ensure the Gentiles that they too are welcomed by Jesus to salvation. Yet beyond the immediate framework of the writers, the voices of each gospel also speak through time with different emphases. Eugene Peterson

summarizes the perspectives in this way. Matthew lets us know that “Jesus is the coming together in final form of themes and energies and movements that has been set in motion before the foundation of the world;” Mark doesn’t want to “waste a minute of these precious lives of ours” to let us know that “God is passionate to save us;” Luke “champions the outsider” and lets them know that the doors are “wide open” for them and they are “found and welcomed by God in Jesus,” and John talks of the power of God’s word: “forgiveness and judgment, healing and illumination, mercy and grace, joy and love, freedom and resurrection. Everything broken and fallen, sinful and diseased, called into salvation by God’s spoken word.”<sup>11</sup> Each is a different voice, all are inspired, recognizing human variety and uniqueness and the need for the Bible to speak in different ways to meet the myriad of human experiences and needs.

Not only does the inspired Word of God speak with different voices to different human needs, it also presents its message in varied genre in response to the different ways we learn. It can only be God’s design that such a high percentage of the Bible is written in recognizable literary forms (narrative, poetry, wisdom literature, etc.) and uses literary approaches (allegory, symbol, simile, fable, etc.) as a way of communicating to its readers. To some readers the declarative theology of Paul may speak most effectively; however, to others theology is best learnt in story, in symbol and in images that provide a view of God that is relational and lies beyond human definition.<sup>12</sup> So God speaks to those of us with emotional/relational intelligence through the very personal interactions between God and his people. Theology is learnt through the way God gently takes Abraham outside to see the stars, or lets Elijah sleep, eat and walk for two days before he tries to speak to him. God speaks to those with picture/word intelligence by the evocative language of the poetry and images of the Bible. So God will help the weary “soar on wings like eagles” (Is 40:51) and will rescue the repentant from the “mire” and the “floodwaters” (Is 69: 14, 15).

Literary forms also give God a human context for some of the more thoughtful passages of Scripture. Ecclesiastes and Job, for example, say much of God when they are considered in the context of wisdom literature (a genre pattern they both follow). In Job God speaks and in doing so moves wisdom literature to a higher level of understanding. Human debate does not bring a solution, and neither does God’s speeches, but they do transform Job. They leave him “changed” as Roland Murphy explains it.<sup>13</sup> Then at the end of Ecclesiastes the speaker finally realizes that the human cycle of understanding does not provide a context that gives meaning to a life with God—and identifies that this meaning lies in a commitment to God, irrespective of human understanding (see Eccl

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<sup>11</sup> Eugene Peterson, ed., *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado: NavPress), pp. 1743, 1808, 1846, 1904.

<sup>12</sup> Key critical texts that consider the theology of biblical narrative are Terence Tilley, *Story Theology* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1985); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). More wide-ranging texts on the impact of literary techniques on biblical understanding include Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), and Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 43.



12:1-7). Some may learn from these books by considering important declarative statements; others will learn from the beautiful imagery and the memorable poetry. Others will learn best from understanding how the texts break from normal literary structure, saying something unique and powerful about the God who inspired the texts. All approaches, applied within the vital context of recognizing the inspiration of the Word, encourage the deepening of faith and a greater understanding of God.

***Application: Learner-Centered Education***

Clearly, both in His dealings with humanity and in His divine Word, God uses the approaches educational theorists have in their studies identified as learner-centered education. How can the church, the home and the school use the same principle to teach more effectively of God and salvation?

Traditionally the church has been strong on recognizing the dignity of all individuals, and this paper will not explore that concept any further. The church has also recognized the power of personal contact between teacher and student, whether in the home, the classroom, of the church. However, perhaps this study does have more to tell us about the way we speak and teach of God.

In theory, the program of the traditional Seventh-day Adventist church is set up well to provide learner-centered education. The combination of Sabbath-School, with its focus on interaction and participation, with the divine service, which seeks to provide a total worship experience, gives opportunity for individuals to learn in different modes and to attach learning to past experiences and their present experiences. In practice, the weakening in many countries of the Sabbath School, and the focus on preaching as the most (only) important part of the worship service, with the rest as preliminaries, can seriously limit the learning potential of the traditional Sabbath morning services. Of course, the church should provide other means of involving their members in learning more of their God, but a more intentional recognition of the importance of the different ways individuals learn, and of the need to provide opportunities for members to link new knowledge with their present situation and past knowledge and to participate fully in learning can only strengthen the program of the church.

When it comes to the home, parents are always encouraged to treat each of their children as unique, with different skills and talents. All should know they are loved, no matter their intellectual capacity, or particular talents. That is understood. However, the matter of training in the matters of faith is perhaps more difficult for parents. Do they know how to encourage faith development in a child who may be very different from them? The traditional worship at home is a good start, especially one that is participative and invites children to discuss their ideas and perceptions. However, it may also be equally important for parents to encourage children to explore faith in their areas of strength—through music, through poetry, through nature, through art, through history. More will be discussed on this in the next section of this paper.

Then there is the challenge of school, at all levels. How can learner-centered principles be encouraged in faith development, both inside and outside the classroom? It may well be that teachers of younger children, who are used to multi-sensory approaches to teaching and teaching to the unique needs of individuals, may most easily provide a learner-centered approach to the teaching of God. The more discipline-focused the education of the teacher, the less he or she may naturally recognize the need for considering the learner in the teaching process. This argues for ensuring that all religion teachers, or teachers involved in religion teaching, do take enough classes in education to realize how learning takes place. It also argues for all teachers in all disciplines taking an intentional role in faith development of students, as each will naturally bring different approaches to learning to the classroom. It also argues for careful consideration of the religious activities that take place outside the classroom so that students will experience the fullness of God in their experience. This cannot happen without a thoughtful, holistic approach to spiritual life on a campus.

## **Integrated Education**

### ***The Pedagogical Principles: Integrated Education***

Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground.

You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.

More than half a tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.

Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.

Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.

Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.

Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real homes.<sup>14</sup>

Another focus among educational theorists in recent years has been the emphasis on the vital link in learning between information, conceptual understanding and action that is based on understanding. *How People Learn* explores this need for inter-connections in learning in terms of the “knowledge-centered classroom”. The writers suggest the connections should be seen in the curriculum, the teaching itself and the assessment processes. The pedagogical principle is identified well in the following statement:

. . . it is the network, the connections among objectives, that is important. This is the kind of knowledge that characterizes expertise. Stress on isolated parts can train students in a series of routines without educating them to understand an overall picture that will ensure the development of integrated knowledge structures and information about conditions of applicability.<sup>15</sup>

Peter Senge discusses interconnectivity also, by focusing on the systems view of reality, which assumes a reality that is “composed fundamentally of relationships.” In his view

<sup>14</sup> Marge Piercy, “The seven of pentacles,” in *Teaching with Fire*, p. 101.

<sup>15</sup> *How People Learn*, p. 139.

the “fragmented theory of knowledge” which controls the traditional Industrial-age school, operates against the natural interrelationships that exist. He quotes Tim Lucas, “The fragmentation of knowledge is the saddest irony of our business.”<sup>16</sup>

This need to educate students to see relationships does not just mean relationships between different areas of knowledge, but the relationships that come from an education of all areas of the body and mind. Senge refers to the “spectrum of intelligencies” involved in learning, and concludes that “the more modalities of learning we engage, the broader and deeper is our growth.”<sup>17</sup>

Another element of this integrated approach to education is explored by Ryan and Bohlin, who focus on the integration of teaching to the soul in education. This is the key in their mind to character education, which in turn should be the whole focus of education. So knowledge and its connectivity to constructs and life application, and the harmonious education of all areas of the body and mind, are only fully meeting the goals of education if this is all aimed at “soul turning.” They quote Plato:

“Then education is the craft concerned with ...this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn’t the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn’t turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately.”<sup>18</sup>

So for Ryan and Bohlin, connectivity, whether defined as between different intelligences within each individual, or as the link between different branches of knowledge, concepts, and action with understanding is only successful education if it intentionally centers on the molding of the character and soul. The other writers fall short of demanding this additional component.

### ***The Actions of God: Integrated Education***

With Jesus, His actions and teachings never stood as isolated incidents. There was always a larger picture—He wanted conceptual understanding, and in turn wanted that to be the basis of His followers’ convictions and their commitments to action. So parables lead to deeper truths about the nature of God and the kingdom and His miracles encouraged a deeper level of belief, giving a foretaste of the kingdom He was promising.

Jesus’ movement from single action to concept is seen well in John 6. At the beginning of the chapter the multitudes are fed with the loaves and fishes, and many of the followers consider this evidence that Jesus is the promised Prophet and wish to crown him king—by force if necessary (John 6:14-15). So Jesus withdraws, but when He

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<sup>16</sup> Senge et al, p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> Senge et al, p. 38. Senge continues to describe the story of a retired chair of the Physics department at MIT who said he became a physicist at the age of four, lying under his grandmother’s piano as she played Bach and feeling the sensation of the music “washing over him.”

<sup>18</sup> Ryan and Bohlin, p. 140.

reappears it is to redirect the thinking of the same followers. “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life,” He tells them (John 6:27). He continues, making very clear to all those listening that his role was not to bring them immediate satisfaction, but a satisfaction that only comes from God, and that lies in commitment, not a desire for victory. This is one way in which Jesus uses miracles to help His followers move from a shallow “save us from the Romans” mentality to a deeper understanding of God and His plans.

Philip Yancey suggests another useful way of looking at the integrating nature of Jesus’ miracles. He writes:

As he strode through life Jesus used supernatural power to set right what was wrong. Every physical healing pointed back to a time in Eden when physical bodies did not go blind, get crippled, or bleed non-stop for twelve years—and also pointed forward to a time of re-creation to come. The miracles . . . give me a glimpse of what the world was meant to be and instill hope that one day God will right its wrongs.<sup>19</sup>

In this sense miracles are not single events to solve an immediate problem, but signs of what God is and what his kingdom will be like. This integration works in a similar way in parables. Take for example Luke 18:1-8, where Jesus tells the simple story of a persistent widow, seeking justice. The story is concrete, almost humorous in its presentation of the “nagging” woman and the harassed (if unjust) judge. Yet in that simple story, Jesus draws links with the second coming (Luke 17); the need for persistent prayer (Luke 18:1); the reliability of God (Luke 18:6-7), and the need for active faith (Luke 18:9).

Jesus’ pedagogy (for he teaches in all he says and does) assumes a world where there is no separation between every day living (secular) and the spiritual, between present action and the wider context of God’s kingdom. And all the teaching is to one end: that the learners may know God and fully commit to Him. This is integrated education at its best.

Neither is this approach limited to the gospels. In Acts and the epistles, the personal experiences of the apostles lead to statements of theological understanding, which in turn lead to very practical exhortations on life and witness; often these are inextricably bound together. For example, after commenting on his own experience of faith, Paul writes to the church of Ephesus,

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:1-6)

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<sup>19</sup> Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (London: Marshall Pickering), 1995.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's actions and teachings are always within a bigger context also—to teach of his will, to bring salvation to the Israelites, to bring understanding to the point where the law is written in their hearts—a phrase that suggests both conceptual understanding and a decision to act on understanding. In the book of Deuteronomy, speaking of His law to the Israelites through Moses, God constantly links the law or commandments with understanding and with commitment of the heart. For example, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give to you today are to be upon your hearts” (Deut 6: 5-6). This also leads to action, “Impress them [the commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up . . . (See also Deut 4:6, 29, 39; Deut 30:6, 10, 14). In brief, love of God impacts all we are and do. It leads to adherence to commandments and witness to others (of both love and commandments, for the two cannot be separated).<sup>20</sup>

### ***The Word of God: Integrated Education***

The teaching that comes from the biblical text also relies on integration as a pedagogical technique.

Not many of the biblical writers provide an explicit context for their text. However, those who do are very direct about their intention to provide information (history) that readers may understand and believe. For example, at the beginning of the gospel of Luke, the writer says, “. . . since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good . . . to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3-4). John also gives a personal testimony, though at the end of his gospel, of the truth of his writing, for he is one of those in the story and so he knows what he writes is true (John 21:24). But what is this truth? It is not merely a series of events, but a series of stories and teachings that together point to a God whose death and resurrection embodied God's character and purposes. John lets us have the full picture from the beginning, with his summary statement of who God is in John 1. Luke lets the picture develop throughout the gospel, but in both cases the inspired text brings to the readers a fully integrated picture of the gospel and its implications.

The Old Testament writers are less transparent about their purposes, but nevertheless the pattern is the same. The scripture constantly unifies—both within the same book and between books. So Genesis invites us to experience God's leading in the lives of a variety of individuals. However, the unifying question in all the stories is, in effect, what does all this say of God and humanity's relationship to Him? History, story, poetry, prophecy—all unify to help us, the readers, know the God who invites us to hear His

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<sup>20</sup> *The Interpreter's Bible* II, pp. 372-74, provides a good analysis of the use of terms in this passage, identifying the balance between the most intimate of emotions and a deep commitment to obedience, both of which are implied in this passage and throughout the book of Deuteronomy (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953).

voice through the disparate voices of the Bible writers, understand Him and His purposes, and commit to belief and action.

Sometimes the reader is given a little help to make the interconnections. At the end of Ecclesiastes, a book that could lead the reader in many directions, the link is given: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl 12:13). Job provides us with several chapters describing who God is to bring together the strands of that text. The Psalms sometimes provide a full picture in one poetic picture; and sometimes, there are fragments of experiences, and only a study of a number of Psalms will give the whole picture. The basic pattern though is clear: the Word of God teaches in different ways, and in different methods, but when the Bible is looked at as a whole there is a pattern of integration—both between different approaches to the subject and between information, conceptual understanding and an invitation for the reader’s active response.

One of the most powerful texts that looks at the unity of the Bible is by Christian and literary critic, Northrop Frye. *The Great Code* and particularly the chapter “Typology II: Phases of Revelation” considers the astonishing level of integration and unification within and between biblical texts. So from Genesis to Revelation there are many individual voices speaking, but in a very important way there is also one voice.<sup>21</sup> Frye does not use the term “inspiration”, yet his text clearly leans in the direction of giving evidence of biblical inspiration. Yet this integration of biblical truths and the consistency of the picture of God and the salvation He offers that lies behind individual books, stories, or messages do more than prove inspiration. Such unity provides good pedagogical methodology, so that the readers of the Bible will not just hear (read) but that they will understand and that understanding will lead to action.

### ***Application: Integrated Education***

How then can the pedagogical principle of integrated education help us in the home, church and school as we seek to teach more of God’s character and his Word to children, church-members and students?

First, it is easy for Christians to draw an unrealistic line between the secular and sacred. While parallels and applications can be taken too far, the general principle that God is involved and interested in all aspects of life is an important one. Much of our experiences every day provide evidence of God’s grace—to perceive those gifts of grace is often the result of viewing the world in a holistic fashion.<sup>22</sup> Taken into the classroom setting, the tendency to segment disciplines or areas of learning, particularly throughout secondary and tertiary education, encourages a “cubby-hole” view of the world. This is not only an artificial view of reality—it can lead to a separation of spiritual experience

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<sup>21</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovick, 1982). The chapter *Typology II*, is pp. 105-38.

<sup>22</sup> Kathleen Norris in *Amazing Grace* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), does an excellent job of unpacking biblical concepts such as grace and showing the reality of the “language” of Christianity in the world we live in daily.

from other learning experiences. The integration of faith and learning acts to combine human experiences. It is pedagogically sound; it is also the pattern of the pedagogy evidenced in the Bible. However, in the church and home there are also many opportunities to encourage children and church-members to see the broad way in which God impacts on human life—from the gifts of food, to music, to the changing seasons, to the laugh of a child, to personal relationships.

Second, while the Adventist church has a good practice of developing doctrines by exploring the full biblical picture, that ideal is not always practiced in the home, the church or even the school. The principle of integrated education argues strongly against a proof-text method of theology, preaching or teaching. Taking one text to prove a point, without consideration of context, or other passages of scripture, is poor education. Even from an early age children can be asked to connect Bible story to Bible story, or story to concepts about God.

Finally an integrated approach to education always leads to the question, “So how will this impact your life?” Integration does not stop with linking of knowledge to concepts. It invites personal commitment and anticipates that commitment will be evidenced in action. It is easy to get the balance wrong here—to jump from biblical “command” to expectation of action. And of course, there is a time for just obedience. This, however, is not what it means to write commandments in the heart. The biblical ideal wants action to spring from personal understanding and relationship with God. So while encouragement of positive action and obedience is important, this always needs be balanced with providing an environment where an integrated approach to developing a relationship with God is encouraged.

## **Formative Education**

### ***Formative Education: The Pedagogical Principles***

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
 Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
     It's had tacks in it,  
     And splinters,  
     And boards torn up,  
 And places with no carpet on the floor—  
     Bare.  
     But all the time  
     I've been a-climbin' on,  
     And reachin' landin's,  
     And turnin' corners,  
 And sometimes going in the dark  
 Where there ain't been no light.  
     So boy, don't you turn back.  
     Don't you set down on the steps  
 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—  
 For I'se still goin', honey,  
 I'se still climbin',  
 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.<sup>23</sup>

It is tempting in all communities and for all governments to develop a summative assessment process that encourage educators to limit the potential available in assessment for improving the total education process. While assessment must inevitably gauge levels of achievement in order to validate learning, a third strong pedagogical principle highlighted by educationalists in recent years is that assessment should be a flexible and on-going partner in the total learning process, and that formative assessment is perhaps even more important to the education process than summative assessment.

The differential between summative and formative assessment provides a particularly important tool in giving assessment a more constructive role in education. Formative assessment is well defined in *How People Learn* as “involving the use of assessments . . . as sources of feedback to improve teaching and learning.”<sup>24</sup> It is a more formal and maybe gentler way of incurring the on-going learning that life so often provides a good learner (see Langston Hughes' poem above). It does ascertain whether learning has taken place, but more importantly it becomes part of a learning and assessment cycle which allows student (and teacher) the opportunity to review their learning (and teaching) process and readjust their focus so more effective learning can then take place. Done well, formative assessment also develops self-assessment skills in students, allowing them to take more control over their learning. It also helps students revise their thinking while working on a project, encouraging the development of a more thoughtful final product.

“In short, we need assessments that are designed for learning, not assessments that are used for blaming, ranking, and certifying.”<sup>25</sup> This comment by Bella Kallick may deny the reality that there is need for some of the harder side of summative assessment, but it nevertheless summarizes the views of a growing number of educationalists that traditional education often over-emphasizes one type of assessment process. In her mind assessment should be more about “improving people's capabilities.” She continues to define a series of useful characteristics for quality formative assessment: timeliness, honesty, giving time for reflection, constructive guidance (i.e. working on students' strengths), focus and involvement of parents (i.e. using a wider circle to both assess and develop new directions).<sup>26</sup>

Most of these qualities speak for themselves and they will be considered further as this paper considers the biblical approach to “formative assessment”. The key pedagogical principle involved in all these characteristics, however, is the same: assessment should care about the learner and seek to improve both the level of learning, and the learner's

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<sup>23</sup> Langston Hughes, “Mother to Son,” *Teaching with Fire*, p. 179.

<sup>24</sup> *How People Learn*, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> Bella Kallick “Assessment as Learning,” in Senge et al, pp. 186-195.

<sup>26</sup> Senge et al, pp. 187-195.



ability to self-assess. All of these characteristics also suggest that assessment at its best is not just an event in time, but is an active ongoing participant in the pedagogical process.

### ***Formative Education: The Actions of God***

Although there are clearly times in the Bible where God's judgment is summative (the Flood, the Tower of Babel, the final judgment), God's preferred method of "assessment" is clearly formative. He takes considerable time and effort to work with humanity, providing time for growth and opportunities for self-reflection, and giving focused and honest feedback.

For example, the prophet Elijah after experiencing many spiritual victories, is faced with an apparently insurmountable hurdle—Queen Jezebel wanting to take his life. In I Kings 19 he flees into the desert and wants to die. During many difficult times, Elijah has shown faith and he has seen God's "assessment" as God has performed miracle after miracle in response to his prayers. Now God has a different assessment. First, however, He knows Elijah needs some time to reflect, some time to build up his strength, so He makes sure he is fed and has chance to sleep. Only after forty days does God come to him and speak to him. Elijah has his conclusion to share with God, "I am the only one [prophet] left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (I Kings 19:14). God's response is to tell him to leave the mountain and go and anoint a number of named individuals; then He concludes, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (I Kings 19: 18). In other words, "no, Elijah, you are not right on this one. Go and meet the people I speak of and you will learn that many follow me and I am still in control."

Abraham is another believer who God leads formatively--step by step towards faith. God debates with him, He tells him not to laugh about His promises, He points out where his faith is limited and finally He tests Him on Mount Moriah, when He asks Abraham to sacrifice his son. And having had considerable formative assessment on the way, Abraham shows himself ready for the summative test. Jonah, Jacob, Isaac, David, Eli, Solomon—just a few of the characters that God tests, assesses, allows to grow. This is the individual teaching process. With the Israelites, the strokes are larger, and the results of their mistakes more dramatic—but the purpose is the same. God turns the Israelites back at the edge of the Promised Land (Numbers 13,14) because they have shown they are not yet understanding what it means to have God leading them; he allows them to lose battles, go into captivity—all can be seen as "formative assessment". What is most important is preparing them for the "summative assessment" that comes at the end of their struggles.

Jesus' teaching of His disciples and His followers has a similar approach. He knows that His time with them is short and the challenges they will face at the time of His death and after His ascension will demand a high level of faith. So he gives them opportunities to test their faith and grow by their successes and mistakes. What will they do faced with a demon-possessed child when He is not around? What will they suggest He does to feed a crowd of more than 5000, with five loaves and two fishes? How will they respond to His

delay at going to the home of Lazarus, his friend, who is dying? What will they do when the pressure comes, and the Jews are ready to kill Jesus? Who do they say He is? And what will they do when He allows Himself to be killed? And can they believe He is resurrected?

Those are some of the questions and tests given to the disciples. And how does Jesus respond to their uncertainties, mistakes and sometimes, successes? With their tears, He weeps; with their uncertainties, He offers hope; with their denials and mistakes, He offers forgiveness and sets a new direction, and with their successes He rejoices. For His time with them is formative; the summative conclusions on their lives and faith will come later.

One of the most poignant examples of formative assessment is Jesus' discussion with Peter after Peter's denial of Him. Peter knows He has failed that test of loyalty. So Jesus takes Him aside to speak to Him, not to tell him of his failure, but to show him that Jesus knows he has learnt from this mistake. Yet the discussion is not about just forgiveness, but about future responsibility: "Feed my lambs"; "feed my sheep," Jesus tells him. There will be enormous challenges ahead for Peter, but because of this and other formative times with Christ, he will be ready for it. The challenges will even take him to a cruel death himself, Jesus warns him, but his faith will hold that time. But for now, he concludes, "Follow me!" There is more to learn.

### ***Formative Education: the Word of God***

It is not surprising that with such a strong focus on formative pedagogy by God, the Scriptures also have that same focus. Writing in Romans 15:4, Paul comments on the formative nature of the Scriptures, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." For a Christian the Word of God acts as a "teacher", not as teaching support. In itself, as God's word, it is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (I Tim 3:16). It would be hard to find a better definition of formative assessment. The Scriptures, in all its variety, helps the reader assess himself or herself honestly. It provides a measuring stick that helps the reader grow and develop in faith, as the Scriptures encourage and correct.

Psalm 119 provides us with an interesting conversation between the Psalmist and God regarding the relationship between on one hand, God's law and His words (which are often considered as parallel and synonymous terms throughout this Psalm), and on the other, the relationship of the Psalmist with God. The Psalmist indicates that there is a responsibility to keep God's law—that is our human responsibility. However, the Psalm also focuses on the process of learning. For example: "Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands" (Ps 119:66); "Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands" (Ps. 119:73). The Word (or law) of God in Psalm 119 has a teaching life of its own—leading to conviction of sin, revealing the character of God, assisting in growing personal commitment.

“If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives,” says John in I John 1:10. The Scripture also gives its readers an honest reflection of their lives and assesses their present status. But that assessment always encourages the reader to move on to something better, higher: “My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word” (Psalm 119:81). It is not surprising, therefore, that the ups and downs of Israel’s relationship with God coincided with their willingness to listen and respond to the Scriptures (Law) (e.g. 2 Chr 17:9; Ezra 7:10; Neh 8:18; Ez 44:24; Mal 4:4). The Law was from its outset intended to be an active agent in change and just like Christ, the Word of God in human flesh, the Law is an embodiment of the character of God. By the time Christ came, however, the life of the Law and Prophets had been lost—no wonder that one of the attractions of Christ was that he taught with authority, even from the age of twelve in the Temple (Luke 2:46-47) and sought to bring his followers back to an understanding of the power and relevance of the Scriptures (e.g. Matt. 5: 17-20).

The Scriptures are the ever-present Word of God, teaching, offering formative assessment, and encouraging further growth in faith and sanctification.

### ***Formative Education: Application***

When it comes to the application of assessment-centered education to the way we teach of God and the Bible in our homes, churches and schools, probably the most important principle to be remembered is the power of the Scriptures to convict, to teach and to guide. We can do nothing better than to teach our children, our church members and our students how to read the Scriptures in a “formative” way. While there is clearly a role for using Scriptures to decide how we should live, and decide matters of doctrine, the ability of Scriptures to convict us of our need of Christ and lead us to deeper spiritual understanding—that is the formative part of Scripture. This means teaching the methodology for reading the Bible, as well as what the Bible says. It also means ensuring that our children, church-members and students learn how to converse with the Bible and the God of the Bible, in just as real a way as Elijah and Abraham. That in itself requires a willingness to be vulnerable and open while reading the Scriptures, another attitude that may require some teaching.

God’s focus on formative education also leads to inevitable conclusions about His character and the way He interacts with humanity. Certainly God is involved in summative assessment (final judgment), but He does not get there quickly. While not denying the realities of judgment and the results of not following God’s will, teachers will do well in ensuring that the God they present is also the one who walks beside us with longsuffering and personal care. Ellen White draws a comparison between the way discipline is often meted out in schools and the way God practices his discipline. She comments that if all could see it as she had been shown, “There would be far more forgiveness and sympathy and love practiced, and far less discouraging, tearing down

influences exercised.”<sup>27</sup> A formative approach to pedagogy expects an attitude of encouragement, understanding, and compassion in the actions and attitudes of teachers, church leaders and parents. Such an environment provides opportunity for considerable learning, molding and honest reflection to take place. It does not imply weakness.

## **Community-focused Education**

### ***Community-focused Education: The Pedagogical Principles***

A man crosses the street in rain,  
stepping gently, looking two times north and south,  
because his son is asleep on his shoulder.

No car must splash him.  
No car drive too near to his shadow.

This man carries the world’s most sensitive cargo  
but he’s not marked.  
Nowhere does his jacket say FRAGILE,  
HANDLE WITH CARE.

His ear fills up with breathing,  
He hears the hum of a boy’s dream  
deep inside him.  
We’re not going to be able  
to live in this world  
if we’re not willing to do what he’s doing  
with one another.

The road will only be wide.  
The rain will never stop falling.<sup>28</sup>

Of all the contemporary emphases of educational theorists today, community is arguably considered the most important. The term “community” can relate to the community of learners in a classroom, the community of an institution involved in teaching and learning, the wider community that should ideally be involved in any learning process, and the community that should be impacted by what takes place in learning. In short, the education process thrives in community and its ultimate response is to give to community. The pedagogical principles could be phrased as, “Teaching is most effective when it is a community process” and, “Teaching should have as its key end—the improvement of community.”

<sup>27</sup> Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Tennessee: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), p. 282. Pages 277-84 discuss the whole issue in more detail.

<sup>28</sup> Naomi Shihab Nye, “Shoulders,” *Teaching with Fire*, p. 161.

As the writers of *How People Learn* indicate, seeing the classroom or school as community does not mean any one style of classroom learning. How the Japanese classroom interprets this is very different from the classroom in the United States<sup>29</sup>—but nevertheless it is a community enterprise and learning, particularly at the level of concepts and connectivity, takes place more effectively in such a classroom culture. Peter Senge et al use the term “alignment” to identify the strength of a classroom community:

In a classroom, alignment develops when students all feel involved in their common learning endeavor, not just individual learning. In a school of community, alignment starts with the ability to see and respect each other, and to establish some common mental models about reality.<sup>30</sup>

Community in this sense is not something that happens by chance—it must be consciously nurtured as part of the learning and teaching endeavor. Thomas Sergiovanni helpfully considers how such community is built and what it will look like: in institutional structures, in the curriculum, in the classroom. However, nothing can happen, he suggests, unless there is a purposeful focus on building an environment of shared ideology and shared values.<sup>31</sup> This can include an attitude towards learning and an attitude towards other learners. It can include also an attitude towards the wider community beyond the immediate classroom.

In practical terms what does this mean about what actually happens in the classroom? It means more focus on collaboration than competition.<sup>32</sup> It means that even when dealing with disciplines such as information technology, community building is highlighted.<sup>33</sup> It means that the learning process constantly brings students back to the question of finding shared realities. So for example, it does not matter if we learn in different ways; what is important is that we seek for a shared conclusion, and that the different ways we learn broaden our understanding of what leads to the shared conclusions.

Community-focused learning, however, cannot stop within the classroom. By its very definition, it will look for interrelations outside that micro-community. Parents or extended family become part of the learning community. The local community of the town can become part of this learning process. Within a Christian ideology, the church also becomes part of the learning process. Ryan and Bohlin speak strongly about the importance of parents working in co-operation with schools.<sup>34</sup> Sergiovanni’s *Building Community in Schools* assumes the parental and society role in education throughout his text. Texts such as *Quality with Soul*<sup>35</sup> and *The Fabric of Faithfulness*<sup>36</sup> identify the

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<sup>29</sup> *How People Learn*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>30</sup> Senge et al, p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> One of the most helpful chapters in Sergiovanni’s book *Building Community in Schools* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 1994) is his chapter on “Building a Purposeful Community”, pp. 71-95.

<sup>32</sup> Senge et al, pp. 146-47.

<sup>33</sup> The need to ensure communities are built in internet learning is the focus of the text by Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt, *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Ryan and Bohlin, pp. 124-25.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

church as a key player in the education process. *How People Learn* summarizes the importance of these interrelated groups to the education process by identifying that only 14% of a typical student's year is spent in school, while 53% is spent in the home and community (and the rest is in sleep).<sup>37</sup> If there is no alignment in values between these groups, then education is far less effective.

And of course, it goes both ways. What happens in education should also impact the family, the church, society—that is also part of community-centered education. The fervor of Paulo Freire, probably most succinctly expressed in *Pedagogy of the Heart*,<sup>38</sup> identifies an important connection between education and change in society. While his views have been seen as radical, even revolutionary, his principles are sound. If education does not reach into life, and make demands of its society then it has not served its purpose. In the terms of this paper, we can argue, without such connections and impact, it has not become community-focused education.

In terms of the other three pedagogical principles discussed in this paper, community-focused education is a process that provides a culture where the other three principles are able to thrive. It demands mutual respect and a willingness to learn from others who may approach learning differently and is therefore learner centered. It provides an environment where the interconnections between knowledge, conceptual understanding and practical application will naturally surface and be applied, so it nurtures interconnected learning. It provides an environment where there is constant feedback within the learning community on ideas and on the learning process; it therefore encourages on-going assessment.

### ***Community-focused Education: The Actions of God***

God wanted community from the beginning of the world. The Garden of Eden was intended as a mini-community. The Israelite nation was to be the community of God. The disciples were a community of followers. The early church developed as a community of believers. The church today remains a community of worshippers. God's wish is expressed clearly in Leviticus 26: 11-12: "I will put my dwelling place among you and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." Here for God was the ideal community, with Him at the center.

Throughout his actions with the Israelites God constantly sought for that ideal: asking them to build a sanctuary; giving them laws and community regulations that would ensure their happiness; involving them in acts of unified worship; appointing leaders who could train them. God saw their strength residing in their community. Too regularly, however, they responded by acting against community—fighting among themselves, distancing themselves from God, not believing in the strength they had when they were united together and with God. Yet as God would seek to bring them back to Him, he retained the same community ideal:

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<sup>36</sup> Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> *How We Learn*, p. 148-19.

<sup>38</sup> Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Heart* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

You will have plenty to eat until you are full,  
 and you will praise the name of the Lord your God,  
 who has worked wonders for you;  
 never again will my people be shamed.  
 Then you will know that I am in Israel,  
 that I am the Lord your God,  
 and that there is no other. (Joel 2: 26-27)

The value the community offers to itself, however, is not the end of the reason for community, in God's ideal. Ezekiel 47:1-12 presents a vision of a temple and out of the temple flows a stream of water, first of all that is ankle deep, but it soon becomes knee-deep, then waist deep. Soon it is a river too deep to cross but a river that is watering many fruit-bearing trees that will never wither; then it empties into the sea, and wherever the water flows into the sea swarms of creatures will live. Here is a strong image of the impact of the "temple"—a place of meeting between the community and God—and the world beyond. Community impacting community.

The New Testament presents similar ideals. Jesus developed a community among His disciples. He sent them out two by two, He prayed with them, involved them in His miracles and shared the last supper with them. He gave them strength, and He hoped that they too would offer Him strength. As his death drew near He took them with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane. He needed their prayers and strength—they fell asleep. Jesus' prayer in John 17 provides good insight into his ideals for community. He prays most for unity for his disciples and later followers, but this is a unity of the community of believers. "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them as you have loved me" (John 17: 22-23). Community that is unified gives strength to all those in the community, but also serves as a witness to the community beyond.

That was the pattern of the early church. Acts and the Epistles speak of a church which sees community as key to their own process of growth and their witness. Paul's epistles in particular focus on unity of the church, support of individuals to each other, and how the church becomes a witness. (See Eph 2:21, 22; 4:4-6.) His teaching is to the community; he asks them to work together in their "learning" processes, to recognize and respect different gifts, for the diversity of the church brings its strength. United purposes, but different strengths. I Corinthians, for example, focuses at the beginning on Paul's concerns about the divisions in the church and then in I Corinthians 12 and 13, emphasizes the need for diverse gifts within unity. And what ties it all together: the gift of love to each other.

### ***Community-focused Education: The Word of God***

The Word of God also focuses on the learning and teaching potential of a diverse but unified community. As this paper has discussed above, the Scriptures speak in diverse

ways, but with a unified message and end. It also encourages a diverse community of readers to be unified in purpose as they learn from the Scriptures.

One approach to literary criticism that focuses significantly on community is reader-response theory. Reader-response criticism argues for communities of readers that are defined as a group by the way they interpret the text they read. This approach to the interaction between text and reader is particularly interesting as it sees a reader bringing his own experience to the text, then interacting on a very personal level with the text, with interpretation being shaped in the process of interaction. Then readers who interpret in similar ways form into “communities of readers”—each community with valid conclusions. This does not deny the importance of text, for the text must always inform the direction readers take in their interpretation; however, there is considerable focus on the reader.<sup>39</sup> This approach to community understanding of text has some value when it comes to reading the Scripture, for it emphasizes the need for a reader to be involved in “conversation” with the text, potentially leading to not just understanding of the text but change and commitment in the reader. However, there are also distinct differences when it comes to the biblical text.

One important distinction between a regular literary text and the Scriptures is that with the Scriptures, there is already an existing community--of writers, unified in purpose, as inspired by God. Readers still come with their different backgrounds and needs to interact with the text, and the community of the home, church and school still has a role in interacting together in looking at what the scriptures say. However, the Scriptures do not invite the readers to form their own communities; but rather join the community it speaks of, and of which all its writers are a part. This is the community of believers, listening and responding to the actions and words of God, which are described and experienced within the text. Northrop Frye explains it this way:

We suggested earlier that the Bible deliberately blocks off the sense of the referential from itself: it is not a book pointing to a historical presence outside it, but a book that identifies itself with that presence. At the end the reader, also, is invited to identify himself with the book.<sup>40</sup>

The Scriptures strong sense of “community” cannot be ignored. One Scripture passage will reference another, state the importance of other parts of the Scriptures, or refer to experiences related in other parts of the Bible. For example, the description of the restoration of Jerusalem in Nehemiah constantly references the importance of the reading of the Law (Neh 8,9) and in Psalms such as Psalm 66, the psalmist presupposes knowledge of the history of Israel.

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<sup>39</sup> Stanley Fish is the chief proponent of reader-response theory and his 1967 text *Surprised by Sin* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998) that takes a reader response approach to *Paradise Lost* is generally considered an application of the theory at its best. In this book Fish follows the readers growing understanding of both the nature of sin and their involvement in sin as they read the epic.

<sup>40</sup> Northrop Frye, 99. 137-38.



This sense of a community of writers is even more distinct in the New Testament. Matthew 5: 17, 18 show how this works. Jesus both upholds the Law and the Prophets, and emphasizes His fulfillment of the earlier writings:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law of the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear until everything is accomplished.

So the gospels constantly provide a commentary on the Old Testament, enriching and expanding the message of the community of biblical writers. And by responding to the word of God, believers also join the community of faith. Romans 10 discusses the complex relationships between law, Christ and the faith of the believer. Paul concludes, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

The concept of “implied author” may be useful here. An implied author can be defined as the “author” that can be reconstructed beyond the immediate voice of the writer of a text. In the context of the Bible, it can be argued that while there are many writers of the Bible, the implied author (the author every text points to) is always the same: God. That is what provides unity to the community of writers and that is why readers are invited to become part of the same community—because the total Bible seeks together to invite commitment, faith, to that same author.

### ***Community-focused Education: Application***

The home, the church and the school are already potential learning communities. However, a group of individuals together in one place does not mean there is a community. In order to teach God and His Word effectively, modeling good community in learning is very important. In the family that can mean the willingness to give all a part in the process of family worship. In the church it can mean giving important focus to ensuring that there is an underlying purpose (unity) in the church that allows focus on the important issues of spiritual growth. In the school it can mean teaching students the important balance between biblical authority and personal or community uniqueness.

In an age when for many cultures individualism is the norm, the family, school and church also have an important role in emphasizing the importance of community in learning of God and growing in faith. The biblical model is clear—that good community provides a much stronger base for learning and for growth in faith. Keeping community and reaching out to a wider community is also a biblical model for discipleship. That battle to give strength to community activities, such as Sabbath School and worship services is vital. In the home the community focus might be in family worship, involvement in service activities. In the school, it can be in the forms of learning taking place in the classroom, in ensuring the values learnt in the classroom are linked to action in the community beyond the school.

Community focus also asks for an alignment of values between home, church and school. The pedagogical principle is that education is most effectively accomplished when the different aspects of a community are reinforcing the same ideals and values. This is a position that the Seventh-day Adventist church has consistently stated is important. So, for example, the church's official philosophy of education statement considers the role of all three groups, making a clear stand on the importance of all three speaking uniformly.<sup>41</sup> This still remains an area, however, for needed continued emphasis.

As identified above, community-focused pedagogy also assumes that collaboration is extremely important in the education process and should provide an important balance to the competition often intrinsic to education. The church has traditionally emphasized this same point, particularly in relationship to sports. However, perhaps the tendency has been to present an anti-competition slant to the issue, more than to focus positively on the collaborative learning options and processes. This issue is relevant in the home, church and school. Certainly when it comes to spiritual issues, collaborative learning is much more appropriate. All of us remain learners when it comes to spiritual maturity and understanding of the Scriptures. Nurturing an atmosphere where mutual spiritual growth and understanding is more important than spiritual one-upmanship is a vital spiritual issue. Jesus resisted the attempt of any individual or group to suggest that they should have eminence in his kingdom. He constantly upheld those that others considered "unworthy," from Mary Magdeline, as she poured perfume on his feet, to the little children who he used as an example to his disciples of how their faith should be.

Finally, action is vital to community-focused education. The pedagogical principle is that learning has not fully taken place until it is evidenced in action in the wider community. Jesus could not help but reach out to those in need. Jesus' final instruction to his disciples was to be his witnesses. The early church reached out evangelistically and in service to the communities of which they were a part. The present home, church and school has a responsibility to recognize that community-centered education always has two sides to it—strengthening the learning process through community learning and completing learning by putting what has been learnt into a real context.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that educational theorists are recommending the same approaches to pedagogy that the Word of God exemplifies, at least in the four areas this paper has considered. Is that all there is to be said?

Certainly other pedagogical methods could be identified. For example, this paper has not considered the authority with which God acts and the Bible speaks. Neither has it gone into detail on training methods within the four major principles of pedagogy that have

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<sup>41</sup> The Philosophy statement was approved by consensus at the First International Conference of the Philosophy of Seventh-day Adventist Education (2001) and has been incorporated into the Working Policy of the General Conference.

been considered. Nor have we considered the issue of the difference between knowledge and wisdom and which it is that God favors, and how that impacts the biblical ideals of pedagogy—another interesting topic.

Within the context of what has been considered, however, one important reality still needs to be emphasized. Educationalists continually seek to find balance between different pedagogical approaches. Some have more favor at different times and in different cultural situations. However, the Bible, as a revelation of the acts of God and as the Word of God, shows an enviable balance and clear focus throughout. Focus on the individual, but recognizing that the individual is on one side of the bridge and on the other side is always “truth.” Focus on integration, but knowing all the time what the integrating factor is: the character of God. Focus on formative assessment and growth, but always knowing what the growth is towards, and the high stakes of the summative assessment that will come. Focus on community as the environment where all the other learning processes can best take place, but constantly emphasizing that at the center of the community, there needs to be just one—God.

Increasingly there is focus in educational circles on outcomes, and much debate (often division) about what the outcomes should be. With God, the desired outcomes are completely clear: to know and fully commit to Him. From a Christian perspective, achieving those outcomes should be the focus of all pedagogy. This is where the actions and Word of God give us an excellent pattern to follow, for this is exactly the impact of the teaching of God for those that will read with understanding and be open to the leading of the Spirit. It is also where our pedagogy, patterned on that of God, should and can lead.