

Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

**CONVEYING CHRISTIAN VALUES
IN AN AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM:
A PRACTICAL APPROACH**

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Prepared for the
34th International Faith and Learning Seminar
held at
Valley View University
Accra, Ghana
June 18 – 30, 2006

INTRODUCTION

With reference to opportunities for the integration of faith and learning by instructors, areas of study such as Automotive Technology have erroneously been considered “stony ground”¹ – a position held even by teachers of automotive technology in Christian institutions. This misconception may be largely responsible for the general lack of ethics among practitioners in the automotive industry. In the East African region where this author resides, the attitude of the general public is evinced in the continued and frequent use of the Swahili saying ‘*fundi mzuri ni kinyozi*’. It implies that the *kinyozi* (barber) is the most trustworthy of all *mafundi* (artisans, craftsmen, and such other skilled artists whose work is largely practical). The argument that this is only so because the barber never sends his clients away while he does the job is incomplete. The general lack of trust for the average *fundi*, for sure, is not without basis.

Many valid conclusions regarding this state of affairs where automotive technicians, along with technicians in other fields, can hardly be trusted can be raised. Two of these are relevant to this paper, and thus form this author’s premises.

1. Christian technicians in industry have become assimilated to the extent that no difference between the practices of Christian and non-Christian technicians exists at all.
2. Christian trainers involved in the training of automotive technicians have failed to convey the greatly-needed Christian ethics and values to the learners under their charge.

¹ Barry Hill and Barry Plane, “Teaching Values in Industrial Technology and Computer Studies”, *The Journal of Adventist Education*, (December 1993/January 1994), p. 33

Since this paper has been put together with the Christian teacher in mind, regardless of whether he/she teaches in a Christian or non-Christian institution, it mainly addresses the issue of conveying ethics and values, as referred to in the second premise above. However, many of the issues raised apply to technicians in industry whose worldview is bible based. In this sense, even the first premise is addressed as well.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is two-fold.

1. To re-emphasize the need for the integration of faith and learning in the area of automotive technology by narrating a few situations that technicians have faced in the course of their careers. To simply state the need for integration of faith and learning without living testimony often fails to convey the gravity of the matter.
2. To propose a 'practical approach' to the conveyance of vital Christian ethics and values in the course of teaching students in automotive technology programs. 'Practical approach' as used here is in reference to conveyance in alternative settings, in addition, to the usual teacher-in-front-of-the-class or preacher-on-the-pulpit formats.

THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION

The narration of the examples that follow is for the purpose of driving home the point that the average automotive technician faces values-requiring, decision-making situations every single day. The cases narrated below are accounts of experiences that this author faced at different times and places in his working life in the field of automotive

technology. Other than the names of places and the characters in each case, everything is as it happened.

Case I

Mukuhi was a regular customer at BD Garage - the automotive repair shop where this author worked as the Garage Manager. My duties included teaching principles of automotive mechanics to crafts-level students, and managing the operations of the seven-bay service facility.

One day Mukuhi requested that his vehicle be fitted with new tires and the cracked windshield be replaced, but that the invoice be written “general service” – he would get a refund if the documentation read as he requested. Note that general service normally includes such procedures as oil and filter change, fuel filter and air cleaner elements change, lubrication, basic electrical checks, and such other low-cost procedures.

I was unable to meet Mukuhi’s request as that would amount to lying, and insisted that the invoice had to read only what would have been done. Mukuhi walked away saying that what he wanted would be done elsewhere. He did not patronize BD Garage again.

To understand the pressure I felt to comply, it is significant to note that Mukuhi was a minister of the gospel. It is also significant to note that this happened a few days after I got this job (the very first in my field of study after three years of job-hunting since graduation from a Christian institution of higher learning), a time when the temptation to compromise for the sake of the job was very high.

The significance of this event, however, is best captured by the change among trainees and workers at BD Garage, emboldened by my action; almost everyone volunteered

information revealing all the unethical practices they had been compelled to take part in previously, and declared BD Garage a corruption-free zone from then on.

Case II

Nyamu was the Assistant Garage Manager at BD Garage. His duties included supervising the repairs carried out on customers' vehicles, and running laboratory exercises for the apprentices who were attached to BD Garage as part of their training. Several complaints regarding Nyamu's conduct had previously been forwarded to the Garage Manager by trainees and colleagues though no step had been taken for lack of evidence. One day, however, Nyamu was caught siphoning fuel from a customer's vehicle that was under repair at BD Garage. He resigned shortly after when he realized that no deal could be struck to escape discipline.

The most shocking truth is that Nyamu was a Church Elder in a local congregation. His continued employment at BD Garage had all along been erroneously viewed as inability, on the part of the Christian Manager, to act since he was a 'fellow believer'.

Case III

Upon taking up employment at Vivu Garage as the Garage Manager, Thuku received numerous spare-part dealers (many of them non-Christians) who were keen on 'establishing links' with Vivu Garage. Their way of establishing links was by offering cash incentives as a way of securing purchase orders from the new manager. Each time such an offer was rejected by the manager, the reaction by the dealers was consistently

similar – “everybody at your institution does it, you know”. Some even went as far as mentioning names of beneficiaries of this kind of arrangement.

The most striking statement, however, was from one of Thuku’s students in the automotive program at Vivu Garage. He said, “You are introducing a new way of doing things around here”.

Again, the significance of this is best appreciated in light of the fact that Vivu Garage was established to create the opportunity for real-work experience for students in a church-sponsored institution of higher learning.

That even some in leadership positions in Christian institutions have accepted the unethical culture as the normal way of conducting business leaves students exposed to everything but a good example. Is it any wonder, then, that little Christian influence is being felt in the automotive industry?

The following questions have been addressed in this study, and shed light on the areas of concern regarding the issue of integration of faith and learning in an automotive technology program.

1. Are we teaching students in automotive technology programs at our institutions what we ought to?
2. Who/what is getting in the way of the conveying of ethics and values to students in automotive technology programs?
3. What effective/alternative methods can be employed by the sincere and dedicated teacher to convey ethics in automotive technology programs?

WHAT OUGHT WE TO TEACH?

While it is true that the evaluation of the effectiveness of an institution in achieving its mission needs to be “performed from different perspectives”², care must be taken in the weighting of the different perspectives such as the profile of the graduate regarding knowledge, competencies, attitudes and the development of the various faculties.³ This is so that emphasis does not shift to aspects that do not further the mission of the institution. Any evaluation instrument that carries with it the probability of entrenching in people’s minds the notion that education is only a means towards greater wealth and high positions must be avoided by the Christian institution.

Looking at education merely as the means towards poverty eradication and job placement for the graduate forces institution leaders to shift attention from the Source of all knowledge (God) to the users of products of the institution. The employer, rather than the desire to seek the restoration of the image of God in man, begins to play a bigger role in determining the content of the programs that will be offered at institutions of higher learning. Unfortunately, even Christian institutions are beginning to succumb to this notion in the quest for survival and competitiveness in the ‘real world’. It is no longer unusual to hear calls from some among our faculty members to cut down on the general education requirements and increase on the course content in order to make our programs more competitive.

² Raquel de Korniejczuk, “Faith and Learning at Institutional Level: An Integrative Model – The Experience of the University of Montemorelos”. 34th International Seminar on Integration of Faith & Learning Paper, Valley View University, Accra, Ghana, 2006, p. 11

³ Ibid.

“To make the possession of worldly honor or riches our ruling motive is unworthy of one who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ”.⁴ This is the one thought that makes bible-based Christian education unique. “To bring man back into harmony with God, so to elevate and ennoble his moral nature that he may again reflect the image of the Creator, is the great purpose of all the education and discipline in life”.⁵

If Christian institutions exist to train a workforce whose service is exemplary, to the question “what ought we to teach?”, therefore, the response must be “moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness”⁶ - regardless of the discipline. The response must also include the fear God and the keeping of His commandments”.⁷ Christian institutions must refuse to be contented with products of the system that are only competent in their chosen fields of study. The objective in all our institutions should be to make Christ’s ambassadors of all who pass through these institutions, “seeking to restore the image of Christ in those placed under [our] care”.⁸

As long as it is clear that “the mark of any Christian institution of learning is not whether teachers are Christian, whether the bible is read or taught, or chapel is held, but whether each subject in the curriculum is presented from the Creator’s perspective”⁹, education in Christian institutions will continue to produce people whose service will make a significant difference in the world. In a nutshell, our understanding and acceptance of who we are, why we are here, and what our destiny is must forever remain the guide

⁴ Ellen G. White, “Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students”. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1913, pp. 47, 48

⁵ Ibid., p. 49

⁶ Thomas Lickona, “Educating for Character”. New York: Bantam Books, 1991, p. 38

⁷ Ecclesiastes 1:1

⁸ White, p. 61

⁹ H. W. Byrene, “A Christian Approach to Education”. Michigan: Mott Media, 1977, p. 9

posts for planners of Christian education. Where we came from determines who we ought to be, hence our view of education.

HOW ARE WE TO TEACH?

A discourse on the *how* of teaching ethics to automotive technology students, given the preceding discourse on *what* to teach, must of necessity follow one on *who* may teach, for what we hope to achieve determines who we will assign the job to, and this in turn determines the success or failure of the approaches proposed in this paper.

Who may teach?

The selection of teachers is of great importance if they are expected to teach more than mere automotive technology principles. Too often teaching positions in Christian institutions are filled with men and women who are themselves in need of true education. Unless this trend is corrected, the great commission to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey”¹⁰ will continue to be a three-steps-forward-and-two-backwards experience. What this means is that every effort should be made to ensure that educationists and planners themselves do not go off course in their suggested solutions to the challenges faced by departments that offer automotive technology programs. Ignorance and biases sometimes get in the way of honest deliberations, resulting in irrelevant and sometimes disastrous suggestions/solutions. This concern is of vital importance in, but not limited to, the selection of teachers in the program.

It is the duty of every teacher who subscribes to the bible-based worldview to ensure that they are “in words and character what they wish their students to become – men and

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19,20

women that fear God and work righteousness”.¹¹ To expect those who are yet to find their bearing to be of help to those who know where they stand and need direction is, to say the least, unreasonable. No teacher can “convey to students a relationship between God and their discipline if they themselves do not grasp the relationship”.¹² “If they are acquainted with the way themselves, they [teachers] can train the youth to walk in it”.¹³ Moreover, any attempt by a teacher to fool students into thinking one is in touch with God when they really are not undermines everything the institution stands for and takes much valuable time and effort to correct. This author subscribes to the idea that it is better to have spiritually strong teachers even though not holding superior papers in their areas of study than to have spiritually uncommitted, though qualified, teachers teaching in Christian institutions.¹⁴ Does the man who attempts to keep the commandments of God merely from a sense of obligation – because he is required to do so – experience the joy of obedience? No; he does not obey.¹⁵ Is such a person fit to teach obedience? I think not.

Practical approaches

If it is true that teachers take the place of parents whenever learners are in educational institutions, is it not also true that any instructions given to parents regarding the raising of children apply to teachers as well. It is without hesitation, therefore, that the approaches suggested below are based on the instructions to teach “our children” those things that we cherish in our hearts about the God we love with all our hearts, souls, and strength¹⁶. “Impress them on your children”¹⁷, the Bible commands. “Talk about them

¹¹ White, p. 47

¹² Harry Lee Poe, “Christianity in the Academy”. Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004, p. 49

¹³ White, p. 48

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 77

¹⁵ Thomas A. Davis, “How to be a Victorious Christian”. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975, p. 45

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 6:5

when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates”.¹⁸ In other words, since every Christian teacher’s mind is (or ought to be) constantly engaged in thinking about “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, and [whatever] is excellent or praiseworthy”¹⁹, the teaching of Christian ethics and values need not be confined to the structured, planned lecture in the classroom. The spontaneity and frequency that is evident in Jesus’ teaching ministry on earth is the recommendation in Deuteronomy 6:7-9 as quoted above. “He simply lived what He taught. What He taught flowed out of who He was”,²⁰ and that was all the time.

Bible-based Christian education acknowledges that “there is more to life than work”²¹ and therefore seeks to impact the lives of people beyond the vocation by paying attention to the co-curricular activities that students engage in. This method gives the dedicated teacher more opportunities to teach a value now and then. The way to do this is through two steps. The first is to invite the Holy Spirit to help us to live our lives according to the truths we hold dear. The second is to ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see opportunities where they may be least expected.

To rely solely on the traditional teacher-in-front-of-the-class opportunity to teach values in the automotive technology program denies the students much opportunity for

¹⁷ Ibid. 6:7

¹⁸ Ibid. 6:7-9

¹⁹ Philippians 4:8

²⁰ William R. Yount, “Called to Teach: An Introduction to the Ministry of Teaching”. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998, p. 82

²¹ Holmes, p. 37

instruction as, only about 30% of the time allocated to teaching of most units in the program is actually spent in front of the learners in a regular class setting. This is due to the practical nature of the program. While it is true that drastic organizational changes that are often beyond the control of the individual teacher must be effected in an effort to tap into the other 70% time slot, it is also true that much can be done by the teacher who has genuine concern for the students he/she instructs. This calls for teachers in the automotive technology program who appreciate the fact that the opportunities to integrate faith with learning lie more outside of the normal class setting than inside. The ability to seize those out-of-class opportunities calls for creativity, willingness to go the extra mile, and true discipleship on the part of the teacher. Above all, however, a heart that is so in tune with God that the promptings of the Holy Spirit are easily discerned and readily obeyed is a prerequisite.

1. Taking charge of lab sessions

There is a worrying trend where teachers leave the running of laboratory sessions to assistants, citing heavy teaching loads. This argument holds water when, especially, there is a comparison between the teacher-student contact hours in a course in automotive technology and the equivalent in, say, humanities. Unfortunately, avoiding the lab altogether, though logically justifiable, does not solve the problem of inadequate positive, teacher influence on the students. This only results in a situation where opportunities for conveying values are limited to part of the 30% slot, and that is clearly inadequate.

“Within a classroom one learns what an administrator should do, yet within the classroom one rarely learns how to do it”.²² So it is with the automotive technology program. Laboratory exercises are guided practice sessions that are hands-on, interactive, and task oriented. These must be structured and curriculum-based as they are part of the course requirements. However, the wise teacher is able to seize such occasions to demonstrate such virtues as patience (such as by dealing patiently with the slow learner), unselfishness (such as by giving up his ‘right’ to use a tool first), and orderliness and planning (such as by maintaining a neat and clean work area).

2. Having genuine interest in students’ clubs

Student clubs and associations are alternative settings where skills in leadership, organization, planning, project evaluation, discipline and teamwork can be developed. Especially valuable are those associations that revolve around the program being pursued by the students. As the patron of one such club at UEAB, I have found the regular consultations with club leaders to be some of the most ideal opportunities that are hard to otherwise come by. The fact that it is the students who come to the teacher for ideas sets the stage for the reception of truth. Such settings where the relationship is unlike the usual teacher-student one are perfect opportunities to convey values.

3. Being an exemplar

²² Frances K. Stage and Michael Dannells (Ed.), “Linking Theory to Practice”. Philadelphia: Accelerated Development, 2000, 2nd Ed., p. 13

Wise teachers “strive to be examples of godly thinking, godly priorities, and godly behavior, thereby setting the stage for student growth toward excellence”.²³ This is in line with Jesus’ teaching to let “your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”.²⁴ And since automotive technology is an area where demonstrated competence and interest earn the students’ respect and admiration most, the wise, competent teacher will take advantage of this position of influence to seek audience with the students regarding other aspects of their lives.

He is a rare student who puts more passion into their area of study than the teacher demonstrates. He is a rarer student who will not be inspired by the teacher who puts in time at the workshop level – regardless of the task at hand. This author suggests that, even if for the sake of example alone, it pays to spend time in the workshop demonstrating skills, values and practices that the teacher considers vital. After all, even Paul, Silas and Timothy “worked night and day, laboring and toiling...in order to make [themselves] a model”²⁵ for Thessalonians to follow. “In everything, set them an example by doing what is good”.²⁶

Precision, planning, determination, and humility are some of the lessons that a teacher can demonstrate in this way.

4. Learning to Empathize.

As a student pursuing a bachelor’s degree at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (UEAB), I was one of the most financially needy students. My academic

²³ Yount, p. 37

²⁴ Matthew 5:16

²⁵ 2 Thessalonians 3:8,9

²⁶ Titus 2:7

advisor who must have known about my financial situation called me to his office on several occasions 'just to have a chat' with me. Each time he would encourage me to hang in there until the end. He would then pray with me and send me out feeling that he felt the weight of inadequate resources with me. Even though he never once offered any financial support, I learnt to see him as one who was genuinely interested in my affairs. As a result, he became my role model even though I never told him so. In an attempt to be like this teacher, I took up camping as a hobby, spent my free time fixing cars in the garage, and even joined ministerial association – just to be like him. These interests have persisted until now – all because he empathized.

The thought that I, as a teacher now, could be someone's role model is humbling. For this reason I have to be very careful about who I am and what I do - what I eat, how I play, how I talk, etc - at all times. I find that this becomes easier to do whenever I devote myself anew to live by the truths I hold dear.

5. Relating as friends as well

It is the uniqueness of the setting in Christian institutions that makes friendships with students possible. It is amazing how far an evening of popcorn, some juice and an indoor game or a movie go into establishing the atmosphere of friendship. My family's practice of inviting students to our house each Friday evening for a meal has persisted for more than the seven years I have been at UEAB. These evenings have become opportunities for discussions on topical issues or a quick review of the week's bible study guide, and a season of prayer. The ease with which those who visit with us regularly share their frustrations, concerns and fears

(as well as joys and hopes) with us is proof that our relationship has transcended the acquaintance level. Only God has record of the many battles that have been won by these friends that God has brought to our doorstep. We only know of a few that they have been gracious enough to share with us.

6. Showing trust

Trusting students with projects that they know are important compels them to strive to meet the teacher's high expectations. Risky as this may seem, it is the only way the teacher will demonstrate that he/she appreciates the growth to professional maturity that is taking place in the student. After all, has not God taken a greater risk entrusting the task of representing Him to our fellow human beings on us? By sending us to "go and make disciples of all nations ... and teaching them to obey everything [He] has commanded us",²⁷ God has given us an example that should act as a lesson in the way we treat those we hope to influence for eternity.

7. Praising honestly

"The most effective reinforcer in education is the praise of a teacher",²⁸ especially that which is given in moderation and focusing on student performance and not teacher perceptions.²⁹ The ability to strike the balance between honest praise and flattery without ignoring the improvement that could easily pass unnoticed is expected of every sincere and observant teacher. No improvement is too insignificant that it should go unnoticed. Yet, praise must never be allowed to have the appearance of flattery.

²⁷ Matthew 28:19,20

²⁸ Yount, p. 78

²⁹ Ibid.

Because of the nature of the automotive program, progress is often not noticed by the unobservant teacher, and opportunities for praise are lost. This is because there are numerous errors students will make that tend to stand out more than the progress they make. The teacher who spends time with the students as they work, however, is able to detect the minutest improvements made by students.

8. Creating opportunities

The admonition to be an example in the workshop can easily degenerate into an opportunity to demonstrate one's superior skill at the expense of student learning. The teacher must never lose sight of the fact that the aim of being involved in the workshop is to give the students the opportunity to grow in skill and attitude. It is prudent, therefore, to refrain from completing any complex task and instead give the students the opportunity to attempt the task under guidance. Delaying the completion of certain tasks so as to give students the opportunity to handle a tougher assignment under the instructor's guidance convinces them of your interest in their learning. Working with them confirms that the aim was not to avoid the more involving assignments, but to create yet another learning opportunity for them.

9. Challenging the mind

"The educator's task is to inspire and equip individuals to think and act for themselves",³⁰ rather than attempt to provide solutions that the students could look up whenever they are in a situation. "Thought-provoking questions drive learners more deeply into the subject".³¹ This method is made more meaningful

³⁰ Holmes, p.16

³¹ Ibid., p. 88

by the teacher who makes the process of problem-solving methodical, eliminating guesswork when seeking for solutions to problems. Showing how the step-by-step method of problem-solving can be applied in non-curricular, real-life situations empowers the student to excel in problem analysis and decision-making.

10. Having fun together

For some reason or other, many automotive technology students at UEAB exhibit the ‘tough guy’ attitude. Recently, they organized an obstacle race that involved many physically demanding maneuvers (jumping, crawling, hopping, etc) and challenged faculty in the technology department to form or joins a team and take part. My colleagues and I did and the students were immensely tickled to see their instructors all sweaty and dirty at the end of the course. The moment of joy and satisfaction, for the faculty, where fatigue and dirt faded into nothingness, came when one student was overheard saying that he had had the most fun on that day since he joined UEAB.

Having fun with students (especially in co-curricular activities they themselves have organized) prepares them for those co-curricular activities organized by the faculty.

11. Standing up for them

Many situations arise where somebody needs to stand up in defense of the student, though never in pursuit of cheap popularity. A needy apprentice on work program once damaged one of two rather expensive pieces of equipment in the garage where I was assistant manger. An infuriated garage manager concluded the damage was due to carelessness and decided to charge the apprentice the cost of

the equipment. After listening to the apprentice's explanation, I was not convinced carelessness was the cause of the damage. I offered to pay for the damage on behalf of the apprentice. Before the charge could be effected, however, the manager damaged the other piece of equipment under similar circumstances. The charge was never effected. The student went on to become the manager of an engine diagnostic center. Recently, he sent to me a message thanking me for believing in him and standing up for him all along.

12. Talking about God

When the Spirit leads the teacher to freely confess Christ before the students (individually or together in a group), there should be no hesitation at all. There are times when it is touching to listen to the good old redemption story, plain and simple. There is a time and place for this and the Spirit will guide the heart that is accustomed to listening to the soft voice.

CONCLUSION

As far as the integration of faith and learning is concerned, no ground is stony ground, for all truth is God's truth. It is often the teachers' lack of interest, commitment, or a saving relationship with God that blur the vision, leading to such conclusions. Sometimes it is all the three.

The teacher of automotive technology who appreciates the importance of their calling will strive to utilize all the opportunities that he/she can find to convey vital, life-saving truths and values. This he/she will do by integrating faith and learning in the content of the course (in itself the subject of another paper), and more by living his/her life by the example provided by Jesus Christ. The latter approach, really, is the gist of this paper considering the numerous out-of-class student-teacher contact hours available for the conveyance of vital principles.

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