

# FAITH AND LEARNING



A HANDBOOK FOR CHRISTIAN  
HIGHER EDUCATION

DAVID S. DOCKERY

EDITOR

  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

2012

5

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

*Klaus Issler*

The teaching-learning process encompasses an intentional, dynamic encounter between teachers and students—often within a group setting—involving complex, multi-dimensional interactions, with the intent to facilitate greater progress to wholeness and maturity. God’s nature and attributes are unchanging and God is infinitely omniscient, needing no instruction (Isa 40:13–14; Rom 11:33–34). Humanity, on the other hand, was created in the image of God (Gen 1:26) as finite persons who must learn to come to maturity. Humans begin life as immature creatures designed to change through the means of (a) supernatural transformation, (b) human development, and (c) human learning—and for this final means we as teachers have the most influence.

Although learning can take place without purposeful instruction—and at times without any awareness (e.g., acquiring our first language as a child)—the focus here will be on learning associated with teaching. Complete learning is not possible without God’s mysterious work, yet God has ordained that human teachers have a legitimate (and lesser) role to play. The chapter offers an orientation, informed by a Christian perspective, regarding the main components of the teaching-learning process, then clarifying a framework for the development of a philosophy of education, and finally offering a few suggestions for improved practice.

## The Teaching-Learning Process

### A Distinctive Christian Perspective

What is distinctive about the teaching-learning process that is uniquely Christian? At one level of analysis, the process of teaching and learning is a common human experience regardless of Christian beliefs and commitments since all are created in God's image. On this level to do it well, teachers must attend to the study and practice of normal development and teaching-learning processes shared by all humans. Even studying the Bible by itself cannot guarantee any *unique* effects—nonbelievers can make sense of much of the Bible.

The distinctively Christian factor relates to the transformational encounter with God in regeneration and God's subsequent dynamic participation in the lives of each Christian. Along these lines, then, Christian teaching is an intentional interaction superintended by God the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:12; 1 Pet 1:2) who indwells (John 14:16) and empowers (Eph 3:16) both Christian teachers and Christian learners, with the broader goal of transformation into Christlikeness (Rom 8:29; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 4:13–16). When teachers and learners are genuinely walking with the Spirit of God, His divine, transforming power makes it possible to exceed what is normally expected of our human capacities (Gal 3:3; Eph 3:16). This divine enablement permits a greater flourishing among those with the spiritual gift of teaching (Rom 12:6–7; 1 Cor 12:28–29; 1 Pet 4:11).

Regarding the study of the Bible, Christian learners must listen to the Spirit who enlivens the Scripture to become living and active in their hearts and minds (1 Cor 2:10–16; Heb 4:12). Thus, along with the normal process of learning, and to the extent learners are *filled*—not just indwelt—by the Spirit and sustaining a dynamic spiritual relationship, a distinctively Christian teaching and learning experience can unfold. Thankfully, the teaching-learning process is carried out under the authority of God,<sup>1</sup> and with God's commitment to supervise the process (Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 10:13), He ultimately will see the process through to completion (Eph 4:11–16).

Christians are called to be lifelong learners, as evidenced in our Lord Jesus Christ's invitation: "Come to me, all of you who

are laboring and bearing burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is kind and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28–30).<sup>2</sup> The heart of the Great Commission is to "make disciples" (Matt 28:19). The word *disciple* means to be a "learner" or "student." New Testament professor Michael Wilkins explains, "In the Christian sense, a disciple of Jesus is one who has come to him for eternal life, has claimed him as Savior and God, and has embarked upon the life of following him."<sup>3</sup>

Following Jesus is a lifelong process, for there is much to learn. If being renewed in our minds (Rom 12:2) is an essential aspect of growing toward maturity, how do we go about that? The apostle Paul explains that we may fill our minds with truth in all of its varied manifestations: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things" (Phil 4:8 HCSB). In one address to Athenian philosophers Paul—educated as a Pharisee under the rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and trained also as a tent-maker (Acts 18:3)—was sufficiently acquainted with philosophical writings to quote one of their own to make a point (Acts 17:28). Furthermore, King Solomon studied diverse subjects to the degree that many from the surrounding nations came to learn from his distinctive wisdom (1 Kgs 4:29,32–33).

Scripture teaches that we can learn much by observing nature: "Go to the ant, you slacker! Observe its ways and become wise. Without leader, administrator, or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest" (Prov 6:6–8 HCSB). From nature we can also discern something of the character of God himself: "For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made" (Rom 1:20 HCSB). Dallas Willard explains, "The biblical and the classical sources . . . take the physical universe to be the conclusive evidence for the existence of God."<sup>4</sup> Because there is much to learn in life, one of our educational aims as teachers will be to help our students sustain the motivation and skills to continue as lifelong learners—and disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' calling on this earth also included a teaching mission, the most common title ascribed to Him was "teacher" ("rabbi," "master" KJV, John 13:14). As mentioned above, in His Great Commission, Jesus commanded the church to "make disciples of all nations . . . *teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you*" (Matt 28:19–20 HCSB, emphasis added; cf. Col 3:16). Consequently, in some sense all Christians are called to be teachers. Yet some teachers have greater accountability in light of roles related to two primary instructional contexts: (a) parents in the home (Deut 6:4–9; Prov 6:22; Eph 6:4) and (b) teachers in the local church (2 Tim 2:2; office of teacher, Acts 13:11; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:7,17). Furthermore, some of us employ our spiritual gift of teaching (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28–29) in a full-time capacity as faculty in Christian higher education. Although our intent is to do good, we must be aware of potential harm in which we can hinder student learning (e.g., Luke 11:52).

### The Paradox of the Teaching and Learning Process

Clarifying the interaction between teaching and learning is complicated. Should it be comparable to coaching athletes or machining a tool on a lathe? Is the relationship directly causal—so that a specific method always yields a specific result? Such a causal model fits more appropriately to research within the natural sciences involving investigations of physical entities—bombarding atoms and chemical reactions, for example. Human beings are much more than such material objects. The term "correlational" may fit, but this label offers little insight. At the heart of the teaching-learning process is a relationship among willing persons with a common purpose, that is, a relationship of consensus—if you will, a relationship among causal agents—implying some expression of free will.

As with any relationship involving persons, no specific action by one person ("teaching") can automatically guarantee a predetermined response by another person ("learning"). If such guarantees were possible, inquiry into education would adopt an educational engineering approach, with little place for genuine student participation. Rather, let us value both teachers and students and propose that teaching is typically what teachers do, and learning is typically what students do. Each student is ultimately responsible for his or her own learning, according to D. Bob Gowin, "Learners

are viewed as the efficient cause of learning; therefore, they can be held responsible for learning."<sup>5</sup> This explains why learning can occur without teaching (students learn on their own), and teaching can take place without learning (students fail to understand; cf. Mark 8:14–21).

How can we make some sense of this paradox—that students are primarily in the driver's seat of their learning, yet teachers are responsible to bring about student learning and are often effective? John Dewey (1933) suggested an analogy from retail sales to help explain this paradox of the teaching-learning process: "There is the same exact equation between teaching and learning that there is between selling and buying."<sup>6</sup> Teachers engage in plans and activities to offer students opportunities for learning. Students expend their effort to learn, under the care of teachers, with the prospect of becoming, in some way, better persons. Ultimately, human flourishing—in which learning is a factor—thrives best where truth is valued and welcomed (John 8:31–32) and where genuine love displaces fear (1 John 4:18).

Yet, despite no direct causal relationship, teachers are not without any idea of how best to facilitate learning. Due to knowledge gleaned from research and reflective experience about patterns of teacher-student interactions and their results, teachers can plan for instruction that will likely or probably facilitate student learning, given students who are willing and able. Teachers are accountable for faithfully carrying through with good intentions in their teaching, and for some measure of positive results in students. If a good number of students are not "buying," we may wonder if what we are selling is legitimate.

In his work *The Teacher*, philosopher, theologian, and pastor Augustine (354–430) touched on two points mentioned above, offering a distinctively Christian view on learning. The teacher cannot cause understanding in students; this is something students must do themselves. Furthermore, God Himself is involved in this learning process.

Do teachers hold that it is their thoughts that are perceived and grasped rather than the very disciplines they take themselves to pass on by speaking? . . . When the teachers have explained by means of words all the disciplines they profess to teach, even the disciplines of virtue and of wisdom, then those who are called "students" consider within themselves whether truths have been stated. They do so by looking

upon the inner Truth, according to their abilities. That is therefore the point at which they learn. . . . [T]hey inwardly discover that truths have been stated. . . . Men are mistaken in calling persons “teachers” who are not, which they do because generally there is no delay between the time of speaking and the time of knowing; and since they are quick to learn internally after the prompting of the lecturer, they suppose that they have learned externally from the one who prompted them.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to these comments, Augustine said,

When we deal with things that we perceive by the mind, namely by the intellect and reason, we’re speaking of things that we look upon immediately in the inner light of Truth, in virtue of which the so-called inner man is illuminated and rejoices. Under these conditions our listener, if he likewise sees these things with his inward and undivided eye, knows what I’m saying from his own contemplating, not from my words. Therefore, when I’m stating truths, I don’t even teach the person who is looking upon these truths. He’s taught not by my words but by the things themselves made manifest within when God discloses them.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding each of the things we understand, however, we don’t consult a speaker who makes sounds outside us, but the Truth that presides within over the mind itself, though perhaps [the teacher’s] words prompt us to consult Him. What is more, He Who is consulted, He Who is said to  *dwell in the inner man*  [Eph 3:16–17], does teach: Christ—that is,  *the unchangeable power and everlasting wisdom of God*  [1 Cor 1:24], which every rational soul does consult, but is disclosed to anyone, to the extent that he can apprehend it, according to his good or evil will.<sup>9</sup>

According to Augustine, although the human teacher has a role to play, the Inner Divine Teacher is more important. In  *On Christian Teaching* , Augustine exhorts lecturers to pray to God for themselves and for their listeners, employing a pun with the Latin word  *orator*  which could mean either orator (one who speaks) or pray-er (one who prays).

[T]he aim, as I say, that [our orator] pursues to the best of his ability when he speaks of these things [that are just and holy and good] to be listened to with understanding, with pleasure, and with obedience. He should be in no doubt that any ability he has and however much he has derives more from his devotion to prayer than his dedication to oratory; and so, by praying for himself and for those he is about to address, he must become a man of prayer before becoming a man of words. As the hour of his address approaches, before he opens his thrusting lips he should lift his thirsting soul to God so that he may utter what he has drunk in and pour out what has filled him.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, for the fullest teaching and learning to occur, both teachers and students must cultivate a sensitive and responsive mind and heart to attend to this essential divine interaction within.

### Seven Components of the Teaching-Learning Encounter

Having clarified the interaction between teaching and learning, let us consider the main components of a teaching-learning encounter. Every teaching-learning situation in some way involves the following seven aspects: Teacher, Student, Subject Matter, Setting, Aim (Intention), Method, and Outcome/Result.<sup>11</sup> These seven components can be clustered further into three groups:

<i>Persons:</i>	<i>Boundaries:</i>	<i>Process:</i>
1. Teacher 2. Student	3. Subject Matter 4. Setting	5. Aim 6. Method 7. Outcome

For example, when teaching goes awry we can begin to check off potential problem areas for improvement by working through the list. To illustrate these seven components, consider a simple teaching episode in the life of Jesus (as  *Teacher* ) and His disciples (as  *Students* ) (Mark 8:14–21). Table 1 provides a summary of the analysis. The  *Setting*  of the lesson is on a boat, and the text also notes that the disciples had forgotten to take some bread along. They had just left a brief dispute with the religious leaders (vv. 11–13), which will become the  *Subject Matter*  of His lesson. Jesus warns them ( *Method* : mini lecture), “Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod” (v. 15 HCSB). We can infer Jesus’  *Aim* , that He wanted them to be wary of the false teaching of the Pharisees and Herodians. Yet the disciples were tripped up by the metaphor (“yeast”) and thought Jesus was rebuking them for their forgetfulness about literal “yeast”—no bread in the boat (student  *Outcome* ).

**Table 5.1**  
**Seven-Component Analysis of a Gospel**  
**Teaching Episode—Mark 8:14–21**

Components	Analysis
1. <i>Teacher:</i>	Jesus
2. <i>Students:</i>	12 Disciples
3. <i>Subject Matter:</i>	1. The doctrine of the Pharisees 2. Faith in God's provision of food
4. <i>Setting:</i>	In a boat on the Sea of Galilee Episode follows a situation in which the Pharisees were arguing with Jesus (8:11–13) and, earlier, the feeding of the 4,000 (8:1–10). Disciples did not bring any food on the boat.
5. <i>Aim:</i>	1-Initial Aim: 1. To demonstrate an awareness/understanding of the danger of Pharisee teaching (cf. Matt 16:12) 2-Spontaneous Aim 2a. To demonstrate an awareness of God's recent miraculous provision of food by identifying facts from recent miracles in which food was provided; and 2b. To demonstrate an attitude of faith in God's provision of food/material needs by not expressing concern about the lack of bread in the boat
6. <i>(Teacher) Method:</i>	7. <i>(Student) Outcome:</i>
M1. Jesus' warning with metaphor (15)	O1. Misunderstood discussion about bread (16)
M2a. Recitation question & answer (17–20)	O2a-1. Correct responses given regarding miraculous feeding of 5,000/4,000; (19–20) O2a-2 (No indication given regarding expressing an attitude of faith)
M2b. Concluding challenge/question (21)	O2b. (No response)
[M3. Follow-up comment cf. Matt 16:11–12]	

© Klaus Issler 2/05

In light of their response (*Teacher* evaluation of student *Outcome*), Jesus then moves to a second lesson about the faithfulness of God's provision through Him (*Subject Matter-2*) and for the need of the apostles to have faith in Him (*Aim-2*). He employs a recitation question-answer format (*Method-2*) regarding the recent miracles of feeding the 5,000 (Mark 6:30–44) and the 4,000 (Mark 8:1–10). They answer His two questions correctly (*Outcome-2*), yet it would still take time for their confidence in Jesus to grow (which is perhaps Jesus' long-term *Aim*).<sup>12</sup> The Markan episode concludes with Jesus expressing His disappointment about their lack of faith in His power—they really do not know who He is and have been taken in by the skepticism of the Pharisees—"Do you still not understand?" (*Teacher* evaluation of student *Outcome*).<sup>13</sup> This historical account of Jesus' teaching illustrates a fundamental teaching-learning encounter, but it does not provide all the details of the process.

For our own teaching, we have better access to much of what transpires, and this framework can become a great aid for improving the teaching-learning process. For example, consider these categories, based on this framework, to use when you are asked to observe a colleague, or for evaluating your own teaching:

1. Competence in [3] Subject Matter (including integration of faith and learning)
2. Organization of the Session related to [5] Aims, goals, teaching plan and [7] Outcomes: what Aims you deem were accomplished and how well
3. Teaching [6] Method(s) and any educational interaction with students (including any comment on Facilities/[4] Setting and resources used in teaching)
4. [2] Student-[1] Teacher relationships, Class Atmosphere (including person, character of the [1] Teacher)
5. Recommendations for Improvement (if not included in the above)

### Frankena's Framework for Analyzing a Philosophy of Education

Beyond a focus on teaching-learning encounters, another helpful model provides more attention to foundational matters regarding the development of a philosophy of education. William



as well. Here teachers identify the kind of person they wish the student to become as a result of instruction in the particular field of study. For example, regardless of discipline, we want our students to develop their in-depth, conceptual thinking skills further and to grow in their desire to be lifelong readers of the discipline. That means we would focus on both the “want to’s” along with the “how to’s,” helping students acquire the desire to think at deeper levels and to become avid readers. Content in Box C could include a list of broader educational goals of the whole college/university, or focus on a particular school or department, a particular degree program, a series of related courses involving prerequisites, or a single course.

For example, if we think of learning to excel at the piano, we might list basic competencies (e.g., practicing scales and chords), intermediate competencies (reading or improvising a worship song or Broadway tune), and advanced competencies (mastering classic sonatas and concertos, or performing in a modern Jazz trio). In learning a foreign language, there would be basic competencies in each of the key areas of reading, listening, writing, and speaking, such as recognizing a hundred vocabulary words and being able to use the major rules of grammar. Intermediate competencies include correct pronunciation, understanding a conversation, writing a paper, and making a presentation that could be understood by native speakers. Box C lists the educational outcomes toward which we teach, identifying areas of competencies, and the range within each competency from very basic to advanced, across the spectrum of categories such as cognitive, affective, skills sets, attitudes, and dispositions, in observable and measurable ways.

Next, Boxes D and E both relate to *Question #3: How should we cultivate these particular competencies in students?* Box D (*Menu of Particular Teaching Methods*) will provide a list of recognized, effective teaching options from which to choose in order to cultivate one or more of the competencies listed in Box C. These strategies of teaching can be based on common sense, one’s own teaching experience or the experience of others, as well as empirical research on teaching and learning.<sup>15</sup> For Box D we ask: For each item listed in Box C, what is an effective means for students to learn? One cannot learn to play the piano well or learn to speak a foreign language fluently only by listening to good music or by watching a foreign movie. As Aristotle suggested, habituation

is one helpful method of learning for all disciplines—practice, practice, practice.<sup>16</sup> Students can improve piano performance and language fluency through persistent supervised practice with constructive feedback.

Finally in Box E (*Educational Plan and Activities*) we develop the specific, logistical plan for teaching all of the items in Box C, based on the options of teaching methods from Box D, given our situation (e.g., ability of the student, available resources, competencies of the teacher), and then we carry them out and teach our students. Which factors are included in the plan depends on the scope. Are we planning one course, or a particular sequence of courses within a major, or all the courses within a degree program? From an institutional perspective, additional factors include, for example, matters related to time and location of the course, budget of teaching resources and teaching assistants, and maintenance of the facilities (e.g., classrooms, faculty/staff offices, restrooms). Regarding practice for piano and language learning, as part of their planning teachers may need to coordinate regular availability of practice rooms and language laboratory for all students with a master weekly schedule—if these resources are available.

So in Box C we list the competencies to be cultivated in students, from Box D we select for teaching from this list of recognized teaching methods that are matched with and can cultivate each particular competency, and then in Box E we identify the educational plan, and then carry it out.

### The Theoretical Boxes—A and B

Boxes A and B both relate to *Question #2: Why should we cultivate these particular competencies in students?* At the head of the Frankena model is Box A (*Regularly Engaging in Excellent Activities*), toward which all planning and effort is directed. As teachers, we recognize that our Box C goals—what can be measured or observed within a formal educational setting—are necessarily limited. But whatever the limitations, our ultimate hope is that a synergy of these varied discrete competencies will become united in the students’ characters, so they are able to transition toward a flourishing lifestyle related to the discipline, regularly engaging in relevant excellent activities of the discipline with fluency. When our graduates develop into the kind of persons matching the craft of the discipline, they are able regularly to engage in

discipline-related activities, and do them well. For example our piano student becoming a concert pianist or our language student becoming one who can easily translate a speech into another language illustrate the attainment of these goals.

Aristotle claimed *eudaimonia* (translated as “happiness”) was the highest human good; living the good life, “living well” or “doing well.”<sup>17</sup> Although contemporary usage of the word *happiness* has reduced the term to signify simply a feeling of satisfaction or pleasure, Aristotle and others argued that *eudaimonia* was something sought for its own sake alone. David Naugle explains,

Classically among the great Western philosophers and theologians, happiness denoted the state of the genuine fulfillment of human nature that resulted from being properly related as a person to the truth of reality. Educating the soul to conform it to reality, rather than conforming reality to the dictates of the individual soul, was the secret to the happy life. But those days of defining happiness and the good life, and what it means to be truly human, are long gone.<sup>18</sup>

For Christians, God is the ultimate source of happiness, as John Calvin clarifies: “If God contains the fullness of all good things in himself like an inexhaustible fountain, nothing beyond him is to be sought by those who strive after the highest good and all the elements of happiness.”<sup>19</sup> Naugle proposes that the Old Testament word *shalom* may be the biblical concept most closely aligned with this classical meaning signifying well-being, wholeness, fulfillment, prosperity, and absence of strife (translated in the LXX as *sōzō*, “save”; *eirēnē*, “peace”; and *teleios*, “complete”).<sup>20</sup> *Shalom* “was influential in broadening the Greek idea of *eirēnē* [peace] to include the Semitic ideas of growth and prosperity.”<sup>21</sup> The key phrase for Box A is “doing X well and fluently” usually as second nature. It is a phrase that normally cannot yet apply to our students still in training, or sadly to some graduates who never acquire the appropriate desires and dispositions of the discipline. Furthermore, we have aspirations that in some way our teaching will also nurture them in living well the good life. For Box A we ask, what kind of routine lifestyle or pattern of living do we wish our students to engage in regarding our field of study? And, what is our conception of maximal human flourishing for our students? We do our best to help students acquire Box C competencies and dispositions, while we also model as best we can our particular version of a Box A lifestyle in the discipline and the good life.

In Box B (*Beliefs and Givens about Reality*) we articulate our worldview—our main beliefs regarding ultimate reality (metaphysics) and what we know to be true about God, the world, and human persons and their capacities, particularly as it relates to our discipline and the learning of that discipline within the regional community. We identify what is the nature of truth (epistemology), and what is moral and ethical, and what we understand about beauty (aesthetics). Also in Box B we include empirical statements about the *givens of life*, such as the various systems in place (e.g., type of government, economic system, and educational system) and specific cultural mores, religious values, and opportunities within our living situation that impact learning and living in our part of the world. These may also influence which particular dispositions can or should be cultivated and listed in Box C. In Box B, we include the theological, philosophical, and empirical statements that justify or give a rationale for the particular competencies listed in Box C and those of the good life related to our discipline in Box A.

For example, a Christian worldview acknowledges two realms of reality, coexisting simultaneously: (a) the visible, physical, “natural” realm, and (b) the invisible, immaterial, supernatural realm, in which God exists as do angels and demons. Furthermore, there are two grand kingdoms vying for everyone’s allegiance: the kingdom of God (Matt 12:28) and the kingdom of Satan (Matt 12:26). God “has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves” (Col 1:13 HCSB). As a result of these truths we recognize that all people are engaged in a spiritual conflict about which kingdom to serve (Eph 6:10–13).

Regarding our illustration, we would draw on conceptions of human capabilities, for example, that in general all humans have the capacity for appreciating aesthetics and playing a musical instrument well, or for learning a foreign language fluently, although some may have disabilities preventing the full development of these potentialities. We would also identify the ethical principles that actually govern how we teach and interact with our students.

More will be developed on the important topic of worldview below. Using this Frankena five-box framework can help teachers and educational leaders keep in mind the foundational claims and ideas that undergird the particular education plan that is designed,

and that distinctly Christian values are kept in focus. The model is a helpful means to provide answers to these basic educational questions: What particular competencies should we cultivate in students? (Box C) Why? (Boxes A and B) How? (Boxes D and E).<sup>22</sup>

### Worldview Matters

Regarding worldview, today we engage in an uphill struggle as we attempt to nurture our students' confidence in God within a distinctively Christian perspective. Currently, competing worldviews vie for our loyalties and our students' allegiance. J. P. Moreland proposes that "a three-way worldview struggle rages in our culture: between ethical monotheism (especially Christianity), [philosophical] postmodernism, and scientific naturalism."<sup>23</sup> Our basic Christian conception of what counts as knowledge and truth is being assaulted by both of these non-Christian worldviews. That is, religious claims have no standing in the public square—they are regarded as mere opinion, matters of "faith" not knowledge, where faith is believing something that has no scientific or reasonable basis—or they are merely one particular community's story of faith that has no greater value than that of any other community.

### At the Heart of the Matter

A worldview, then, is a semiotic system of narrative signs that creates the definitive symbolic universe which is responsible in the main for the shape of a variety of life-determining, human practices. It creates the channels in which the waters of reason flow. It establishes the horizons of an interpreter's point of view by which texts of all types are understood. It is that mental medium by which the world is known. The human heart is its home, and it provides a home for the human heart. At the end of the day it is hard to conceive of a more important human or cultural reality, theoretically or practically, than the semiotic system of narrative signs that makes up a worldview.<sup>24</sup>

For each of us our worldview is central to the core of our being and living.

Jesus Himself taught this same point, speaking in terms of the "heart." In Luke 6:45 He said, "A good man produces good out of the good storeroom of his heart. An evil man produces evil out of the evil storeroom, for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart." This teaching about the centrality of inner heart formation

is really not new information. It is an amplification of what was taught much earlier in the Old Testament Scriptures. According to Bruce Waltke, "'Heart' (*leb/lebab*) is the most important anthropological term in the Old Testament . . . but the English language has no equivalent. It occurs 46 times in Proverbs and 858 times in the Old Testament."<sup>25</sup> In his comment on Prov 4:23: "Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life," Waltke notes, "This direction or bent of the heart [wise, pure, or perverse] determines its decisions and thus the persons' actions. . . . Since the heart is the center of all of a person's emotional-intellectual-religious-moral activity, it must be safeguarded above all things (4:23)."<sup>26</sup>

Why should we be concerned about competing worldviews out there? Because within, our worldview—whatever beliefs we have about reality—almost always guides how we live. We can discern our actual values and worldview by our actions and lifestyles. It is possible then to profess to believe something, but that particular professed belief may not actually be embedded within one's worldview and evident in one's lifestyle. In fact the opposite belief might actually be held in one's worldview. So, it is probably the case that we profess to believe more Christian truths than we actually live and practice. As Dallas Willard suggests, "our souls, accordingly, are soaked in secularity."<sup>27</sup> Various tenets of these competing worldviews probably have a greater hold on our personal worldviews than we prefer to admit or than we realize.<sup>28</sup>

### Excellence in Teaching and Teacher Character

In this final section of the chapter, we return to a focus on the teacher and suggest some ideas for practice. How can we best improve our teaching? An initial response might focus on our instructional methods and how we could use modified or additional teaching strategies, and while that can be a helpful exercise Scripture directs our attention elsewhere: "Students are not above their teacher, but all who are fully trained will be like their teacher" (Luke 6:40 TNIV). Jesus presents here (vv. 39–49) "the kind of inward character which produces the type of behaviour outlined in the earlier sections."<sup>29</sup> He alerts his disciples not to follow in the wayward trail of the Pharisees in v. 39 (cf. Matt 15:14; 23:16), particularly not to judge others (cf. vv. 37 and 41). So, in v. 40, He refers to their own situation: they will become like Him when they are fully trained. Since He does not practice such

criticism (v. 37), they ought not to do it either. Then, as mentioned earlier, in v. 45 our Lord points to the inward source of outward conduct, either from the good or evil stored up in one's heart.

Thus the character of the teacher will largely influence what kind of student outcomes are accomplished, and this reinforces the importance of teachers modeling Box A ideals, as mentioned above. This seems to be a missing element in discussions of the pursuit of educational excellence, improving the practice of teaching through a focus on teachers cultivating certain "habits" or "dispositions." The connection between character and excellence was made long ago by Aristotle: "human excellence will be the disposition that makes a good man and causes him to perform his function well."<sup>30</sup>

Two contrasts may help us unpack his point and get a better handle on the concept of excellence. First, within our understanding of "excellence" we usually include a qualitative distinction of exemplifying high standards worthy of our praise, "to perform his function well" in the words of Aristotle. For example, we do not praise a veteran teacher who still uses the very same notes and lesson plans as the first year of teaching. The pursuit of excellence for a teacher will at least involve incremental innovations and added insights and creativity over the years. Second, the excellent teacher is one who typically goes beyond the call of the routine, especially accomplishing that which takes extra effort, to do what is best for students. We usually do not praise a teacher for simply preparing to teach a lesson, unless special circumstances apply (e.g., developing it when he or she is very sick or in other circumstances that create extra hurdles to overcome). At least two factors, then, characterize the excellent teacher: (a) reaching for higher standards, and (b) regularly going beyond the routine. These are matters of the heart, not just the head; of character, not just technique.<sup>31</sup> Teaching involves more than performing educational skills; it involves a life influencing a life.

One further matter requires clarification. Some may wish to equate "effective teacher" with "excellent teacher." The concept of "effective teacher" draws our focus to means-end concerns, the consequences of teaching as evidenced in student outcomes. These indicators are largely identified with short-term outcomes: within the scope of a unit, a semester or a year of study. But by such a limited criterion, Jesus must be regarded as an ineffective teacher

on occasion during His earthly ministry.<sup>32</sup> The Gospel writers seem to go out of their way to underscore how dull the disciples were, as was evident in the Mark 8:14–21 passage studied earlier in the chapter (also see Mark 8:31–33; Luke 22:24–27; John 14:8–9). But, when we think about the excellent teacher, we must use a broader set of criteria and look at both short- and long-term effects.

Furthermore, the term *effective* seems to be associated primarily with what can be validated exclusively through empirical research. But there are other sources of knowledge from which we can glean truths about excellent teachers and teaching (e.g., the Bible, or our conceptual analysis of the topic as exemplified in this chapter). Effectiveness is an important aspect of excellence, but there is more to excellence than empirical research can tell us.<sup>33</sup> As an example of such habits of excellence that can undergird our teaching ministry, two nontypical dispositions are presented below to stimulate our thinking. Readers may wish to ponder these matters further and expand the list as a follow-up exercise.<sup>34</sup>

### The Teacher as a Fellow Learner

Even though we may be experts and mentors, our theology reminds us that we are fellow learners in the grace of life. The humble posture of fellow learner invites our students to come to us freely and without fear. Are students willing to risk sharing their ignorance by asking questions or by expressing new thoughts? How much effort do we expend to identify with our students, to look at the issue from their point of view? On occasion can we share a bit of our own learning trajectory, the new areas of study we have been pursuing with a brief report in progress? What questions are we pursuing for which we do not yet have complete answers?

How do we come to empathize with our students' life situations? Since Jesus, very God, took on human form to identify with us, we have an example to follow. First, we realize that no task is too menial; nothing is beneath our dignity. Remember how Jesus washed the disciples' dirty feet? Secondly, there may be times when we can be with our students in a nonteacher capacity, where we relate as members of the family of God. Since we may need to break through cultural perceptions of the teacher-student roles, we may need to take the initiative here. In addition to grander ways of doing this, let us keep in mind simple means such as cleaning

up after class or receiving a student's criticism without defensiveness. Until this comes naturally, we may need to look for menial tasks to do—not for show of course—but as a school for learning humility and being with our students as fellow followers of Jesus.

### The Teacher as a Partner

As teachers, we must ask some fundamental questions: What right do we have to teach, to attempt to bring about changes in another? In bringing about these changes, who determines the ultimate ends toward which we strive in our teaching? Within a Christian perspective, only God has such ultimate authority to determine such ends. As Jesus was appointed for His ministry on this earth, so we have been appointed for ours (Matt 28:18–20; John 17:8). Our ultimate authority does not come from a local church, a denomination, an educational institution, or the state; it comes from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Yet we do stand under various degrees of delegated authority, and we are called into a spirit of cooperation and coordination with these partners. There is no room for lone rangers or prima donnas. We must hold hands and work together to accomplish the task. We stand on the shoulders of our forebears who have taught us. And we stand side by side with fellow teachers who share this grand project.

An honest recognition of our ultimate commission and our necessary partnership can nurture a posture of humility before our students. Since we are not God's sole gift to humanity, we can urge our students to take classes from other teachers to round out their education fully. We may wish to invite fellow teachers to share their expertise in our classroom so students are not hindered by our own foibles and whims. We pursue the best for our students by not claiming exclusive rights to them. And they will rise up to new heights through the labors of many human teachers, not just one. Furthermore, as Augustine exhorted us, we are partners with God in the teaching of our students. We pray for ourselves and for them for responsive hearts and minds to the Inner Teacher so the truth can set us free.

A century ago, American public educators were required to have "exhibited testimonials of Good Moral Character" as an essential qualification.<sup>35</sup> We with kingdom priorities must be concerned about more than mastery and techniques. We should keep

our standards high, for "everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40 HCSB), for this privilege also bears a grave responsibility, for teachers "will receive a stricter judgment" (Jas 3:1 HCSB).

### Summary

Although Christian teachers have an important role in student learning, students are primarily in the driver's seat. Furthermore, God mysteriously enables an enriched learning process when both teacher and student are receptive and attentive to such divine inner teaching. One model for analyzing a teaching-learning encounter suggests seven distinctive components: teacher, student, subject matter, setting, aim, method, and outcome. On a grander scale, Frankena proposed a five-factor model for analyzing a philosophy of education (these labels are mine): A: regularly engaging in excellent activities; B: beliefs and givens about reality; C: competencies to be learned; D: menu of particular teaching methods; and E: educational plan and activities. One implication of this model is that it is important for teachers to attend to the particular worldview that grounds our teaching (Box B). Finally, it was suggested that an excellent teacher is one who increasingly embodies certain dispositions, exemplifying high standards and regularly going beyond the routine. Which particular dispositions are we increasingly developing as we attempt to model the Box A ideals of our discipline?

### Questions for Further Reflection

1. The author suggests three persons involved in the teaching-learning process: teacher, student, and God. Do you agree or disagree? Explain. Clarify in your own words and with as much detail as you can your understanding of the role of each person in the teaching-learning process. In specific ways does your explanation include a distinctly Christian element?
2. Do you think that the proposed Seven Components of Teaching are comprehensive? What additional factor would you include? Use either the seven-factor model, or your adapted model, and analyze a gospel teaching episode of Jesus, similar to what was done in the chapter.

Some passages for analysis:

- a. Mark 9:14–29 (with parallels in Matt 17:14–20 and Luke 9:37–43)
  - b. Mark 10:17–31 (with parallels in Matt 19:16–30 and Luke 18:18–30)
  - c. Mark 10:35–45 (with parallels in Matt 20:20–28)
  - d. Mark 11:12–14, 20–25 (with parallels in Matt 21:18–22)
  - e. Luke 7:36–50
  - f. John 21:1–25
3. Draw a diagram of the five boxes of Frankena's Framework. Explain the contents of each of and how they relate to each other. Then think of a recent course you have taught or taken as a student, and use the five boxes to analyze that course. Provide as much detail as you can and fill in the data for each box. Now consider one or two ways for improving the course.
  4. What counts as "knowledge" today? Why is Christian teaching often regarded as outside of the domain of knowledge? Did Jesus regard His teachings as outside of the domain of knowledge? How can one verify knowledge? Is knowledge solely verifiable through empirical investigation, or solely through consensus of the community?
  5. Is there a genuine difference between excellent and effective teaching? Explain.
  6. What kinds of dispositions or character traits do you think would be important for Christian faculty to develop? Why are these important? What kinds of dispositions or character traits do you think would be important for Christian students to develop? Why are these important?

### Resources for Further Study

- Craig, William Lane, and Paul M. Gould, eds. *The Two Tasks of the Christian Scholar: Redeeming the Soul, Redeeming the Mind*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2007.
- Frankena, William. *Three Historical Philosophies of Education*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1965.
- Lockerbie, D. Bruce, ed. *A Passion for Learning: The History of Christian Thought on Education*. Chicago: Moody, 1994.

- Peterson, Michael L. *With All Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy of Education*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2001.
- Rorty, Amelie Oksenberg, ed. *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Spears, Paul, and Steven Loomis. *Education for Human Flourishing: A Christian Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009.
- Willard, Dallas. *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge*. New York: HarperOne, 2009.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Robert W. Pazmino, *By What Authority Do We Teach? Sources for Empowering Christian Educators* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).
- <sup>2</sup> Alternate translation by Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 322.
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 40–41.
- <sup>4</sup> Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 99, italics in original.
- <sup>5</sup> D. Bob Gowin, *Educating* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1981), 152.
- <sup>6</sup> John Dewey, *How We Think* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1933), 36.
- <sup>7</sup> Augustine, *The Teacher (De magistro)*, in *Against the Academicians and the Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995), [14.45], 145.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, [12.40], 141.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, [11.38], 139.
- <sup>10</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), [15.32], 121.
- <sup>11</sup> I was introduced to this seven-part framework during my master's degree at the University of California, Riverside, by Prof. J. T. Dillon in the early 1980s. It appears in his *Questioning and Teaching: A Manual of Practice* (New York: Teacher's College, 1988), an outstanding book on the use of questions in teaching. A six-part framework is used by Harold Burgess in *Models of Religious Education* (1975 [repr., Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing, 1996, 2001], 9): Aim, [Subject-matter] Content, Teacher, Learner, Environment, and Evaluation. "Method" is included within "Content." I prefer to keep these two distinct.
- <sup>12</sup> For further reading on nurturing confidence in God, see J. P. Moreland and Klaus Issler, *In Search of a Confident Faith: Overcoming Barriers to Trusting in God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).
- <sup>13</sup> The parallel passage in Matt 16:5–12 provides more details about this event.
- <sup>14</sup> For further reading, see William Frankena, "A Model for Analyzing a Philosophy of Education," *High School Journal* 2/1 (1966): 8–13; and *Three Historical Philosophies of Education* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1965) in which, after explaining the model in chapter 1, in succeeding chapters Frankena uses the model to analyze the educational philosophies of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and John Dewey.
- <sup>15</sup> For suggestions on effective teaching strategies see table 22–6 in T. J. Shuell, "Teaching and Learning in a Classroom Context" (chap. 22), in *Handbook of*

*Educational Psychology*, ed. David Berliner and Robert C. Calfee (New York: Simon & Schuster/Macmillan, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> For further reading in practice and habitation, see J. P. Moreland and Klaus Issler, *The Lost Virtue of Happiness: Discovering the Disciplines of the Good Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (New York: Penguin, 1986), [1095a 15–22] 66 (original trans. published 1953).

<sup>18</sup> David K. Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives: Learning the Deep Meaning of Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 10.

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1005 [3.25.10].

<sup>20</sup> Naugle, *Reordered Love*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> G. L. Carney, “Shalom,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:931. See my article on “Happiness” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Notice that each question includes a normative task, what “should” be the case. Frankena clarified that the contents of Boxes A, C and E are specifically normative in nature, in that the contents of these boxes are based on decisions (what *ought* to be the case). Boxes B and D are specifically descriptive in nature, articulating relevant reality (what *is* the case).

<sup>23</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle: Recover the Christian Mind, Renovate the Soul, Restore the Spirit's Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 22.

<sup>24</sup> David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 329–30.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 90.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–92.

<sup>27</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1998), 71.

<sup>28</sup> For further reading regarding the difference between professed beliefs and actual beliefs, see my *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1978), 267.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Ethics*, 100 [1106a20].

<sup>31</sup> Even though we may perform certain techniques effortlessly (i.e., “routinely” for us) at a high standard, we are still worthy of praise since these actions flow from the habits we formed in the crucible of painstaking effort. For a more nuanced and detailed discussion of praiseworthy actions, see Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), chap. 2: “Moral Responsibility and Weakness of Will.”

<sup>32</sup> “Jesus was an accomplished yet ineffective teacher. He taught well, even masterfully in respects, yet the learning that came about did not correspond to the quality of the teacher.” J. T. Dillon, *Jesus as a Teacher: A Multidisciplinary Case*

*Study* (Bethesda, MD: International Scholars, 1995), 161. Dillon draws this conclusion based on the response (or lack of response) from all Jesus’ listeners, including the religious leaders, and without consideration of the long-term learning outcomes in the lives of His followers in the book of Acts.

<sup>33</sup> Research related to short-term learning outcomes can help us improve our teaching for certain kinds of effects, such as cognitive outcomes. Yet consideration of a longer scope is necessary for assessing teaching for dispositional and attitude formation.

<sup>34</sup> For additional suggested habits see my “Habits of the Excellent Teacher,” in *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century* [Festschrift for Ted Ward], ed. D. Elmer and L. McKinney (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996), 215–22; “A Conception of Excellence in Teaching,” *Education*, 103 (1983): 338–43; and *How We Learn: A Christian Teacher's Guide to Educational Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> From “Teacher’s Certificate” of 1882, cited in Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), 306.