SCEA Staff Conference Seminar / Workshop

# Intro Slides

**What’s love got to do with learning?**

**Brief:**What’s love got to do with it? (No, not Tina Turner). What’s love got to do with the learning journey and with teaching my Kindy class, Primary PE, Year 9 English, Year 12 Physics? Maybe, everything. Come join the conversation and be prepared to grapple with, discuss, discover **how we work out in our practice the gospel’s greatest challenge.**

# Slide 3

“LOVE IN THE CLASSROOM”

a poem by Al Zolynas

Afternoon. Across the garden, in Green Hall,

someone begins playing the old piano —

a spontaneous piece, amateurish and alive,

full of a simple, joyful melody.

The music floats among us in the classroom.

I stand in front of my students

telling them about sentence fragments.

I ask them to find the ten fragments

in the twenty-one-sentence paragraph on page forty-five.

They’ve come from all parts

of the world — Iran, Micronesia, Africa,

Japan, China, even Los Angeles — and they’re still

eager to please me. It’s less than half

way through the quarter.

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.

I sit down on my desk to wait,

and it hits me from nowhere — a sudden,

sweet, almost painful love for my students.

“Nevermind,” I want to cry out.

“It doesn’t matter about fragments.

Finding them or not. Everything’s

a fragment and everything’s not a fragment.

Listen to the music, how fragmented,

how whole, how we can’t separate the music

from the sun falling on its knees on all the greenness,

from this moment, how this moment

contains all the fragments of yesterday

and everything we’ll ever know of tomorrow!”

Instead, I keep a coward’s silence.

The music stops abruptly;

they finish their work,

and we go through the right answers,

which is to say

we separate the fragments from the whole.

# Slide 4

**The Tension**

Reflecting on the poem

1. **The predominant endgame and narrative in education is performance. Nearly everything schools aim for, design, and measure is about a certain take on success.**
2. **The gospel of the New Testament has nothing to do with performance.**

“Every Christian generation tried to dim the blinding brightness of its meaning because the gospel seems too good to be true.” Brennan Manning

Ch 5 James Bryan Smith A Good and Beautiful God

**A God who welcomes sinners.** (Matthew 9:9-13).

Jesus’ narrative of unconditional acceptance goes against the grain of the performance-based-acceptance narrative that is so deeply embedded in our lives. How could God possibly love sinners? He might be able to forgive them and even love them if they promise to improve. But this is not what Jesus taught. In actions and words, he proclaimed that God loves sinners—as they are, and not as they should be.

**God loves sinners.**

He said God loved the world—an all-inclusive world of sinners. The apostle Paul echoes this when he writes, “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God loves in spite of the broken and sinful condition of the beloved, and this is the only real proof of genuine love.

**The Prodigal Father**

The most well-known of all Jesus’ parables is a story about a father and his two sons, which resonates with our deep yearning to be loved by God without condition.

The word prodigal means “recklessly extravagant.”

Jesus wants us to understand that even the worst of our sins will not prevent God from loving us or stop God from longing for our return. The parable is not so much about a sinner getting saved as it is about a God who loves even those who sin against him.

The second half of the parable (Luke 15:25-32) reveals Jesus’ primary storytelling aim. This parable was not directed to the downtrodden and marginalized as much as it was to the upright and the pious who could not accept the radical message of God’s unconditional love.

Jesus is striking at the heart of the problem we have with grace: we don’t like it. It seems unfair, but in reality, it is perfectly fair. God is gracious to all. It smacks against our performance-based-acceptance narrative. It is not my sin that moves me away from God, it is my refusal of grace, both for myself and for others.

Dalla Willard helpfully defines the love of God, agape, as “to will the good of another”. It is not an emotion but action. It is not that God’s love is dispassionate, it’s just that God’s love is a lot more like a parent’s love toward a child than the “love” between infatuated teens. In other words, the love of God is not an emotion that waxes and wanes.

That is why we can be Christian schools on mission.

1. **How then do we in our schools undertake our mission of gospel-inspired teaching and learning? What the ends to which we are dedicated and how do we live with the tension?**

I don’t have all the answers but I do think we have to constantly grapple with what it means to missional with the gospel shaping everything we are and do.

**TASK: Have someone read these excerpts**

# Slide 5

**My Proposition:** The heart of the gospel is love, the gospel is the heart of our schools.

If “to will the good of another” is the definition of God’s love then this defines our mission.

# Slide 6

**Therefore, four suppositions**

Love is the basis of true human flourishing  
Love undergirds the entire process of learning

While knowledge informs, love has the capacity to transform

The gospel needs to shape everything we do, including how we regard and work with performance

Three questions every student will ask of their teacher, every team member will ask their leader

Do you care?

Can I trust you?

What can you do for me?

**PAIR TASK (3 min):** Do you agree with the proposition and suppositions? Why or why not?

# Slide 7

**Pope Benedict XVI:** “Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moralism. Christianity is instead an encounter, a love story; it is an event.”

# Slide 8

SCEA’s first value: love

We are captivated by the love and compassion for all people that Jesus Christ modelled, which inspires us to serve students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their family’s religious or nonreligious beliefs, cultural heritage and financial means.

# Slide 9

CSA Proclaim Statement

For Christian schools, the role of the gospel in our work is simple:

We want students to encounter Jesus; be transformed into His image and likeness; and for this transformation to make an impact as they witness, model and engage in God’s restorative work across every sphere of creation.

Our belief is that through the ministry of proclaiming and modelling Christ in all we do, students will capture a vision of who they can be - and what the world could become - if we allow the love and justice of God to impact all we do.

# Slide 10

What if, as James Smith proposes,

… education was primarily concerned with shaping our hopes and passions—our visions of the “good life”?

… the primary work of education was the transforming of our imagination rather than the saturation of our intellect?

… we began by appreciating how education not only gets into our head but also grabs us by the gut—what the New Testament refers to as kardia, “the heart”?

**SMALL GROUP TASK (7 min):** Based on the last few slides take a look at some of the key statements on each of our SCEA schools & colleges and see how they align with or allude to this idea of love linked to the gospel, learning, encounter and true flourishing.

# Slide 11

**Saint Augustine of Hippo:** A revolutionary way of understanding the role of the leader as teacher comes from what might be considered an unexpected source—an African bishop from the fifth century. Of course, this is no ordinary bishop, but Augustine, the greatest mind of the early centuries of the church, perhaps the most influential thinker in the church’s history. Augustine was born to teach, and, as a teacher of teachers, he devoted himself to thinking deeply about how teachers should approach their responsibility. He was grounded in his knowledge of the love of Christ, and he realized that there is really only one worthy motivation to teach, and that is love.

Augustine grappled with and wrote extensively about the right ordering of loves.

Love undergirds the entire process of learning, taught Augustine.

**We teach because we first love Christ, who first loved us**

**The teacher loves those being taught**

**The teacher must love what is taught**

Augustine defined the ultimate goal of teaching in a powerful way that should reshape every teacher’s vision of what we do. The old theologian specified that the goal of teaching is to see every student instructed, delighted, and moved."

# Slide 12

1. **We teach because we first love Christ, who first loved us**

The most important thing that Augustine reminded Christian leaders was that we teach because we first love Christ, who first loved us. Augustine once wrote, “By loving us, God makes us lovable.” Our worthiness will never be merited, achieved or earned. It is given to us as a gift, and a gift can only be received. While he was most concerned for those who would lead churches, Augustine’s point extends to every arena, especially for us as Christian educators. Wherever we lead learning, we must do so out of the love of Christ.

**Dr Graeme Cross** – excerpt from CEO news in March of this year

1 John 4:19 which simply says: "We love because He [God] first loved us". This verse comes towards the end of the passage in 1 John 4 that describes God's love for us, how He dwells within us and how we are then able to respond in love to him and experience a 'completeness' in life because of His love for us.

When seeking to explain the interaction between God's love and ours, Dr Thelma Perso reminded us (Head Office Staff) that in the same way as we experience love for a newborn child - as we smile with joy in the hope that a response might occur - this is what God does with humanity and with each one of us. In fact, she further explained, when Jesus entered the world, it was God's way of smiling at us in the hope that we too might respond in love to Him and then spread that love to those around us.

Let's not let that thought go by too quickly!

In the same way that I feel all of that joy and love as I look into the eyes of our children and grandchild, that is how God looks at me….and you.

As I have contemplated this thought it occurred to me that as each of us experiences the love of God in this way, we too can look with love and joy into the eyes of the students and families we serve. By doing so, it will always be our hope and prayer that they too might encounter Jesus and know more of the love God has for them.

Two of our core values at SCEA are love and joy. Let's take every opportunity as we go about our work to make the love of Jesus known as we look into the eyes of others and be intentional about sharing the joy that comes from our relationship with Him.

# Slide 13

Teaching is an exercise in vulnerability.

**Parker Palmer**

We teach who we are.

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together.

The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul.

**THINK-PAIR TASK (4 min):** Personal reflection on what the love of God means to you and its affect on your life, calling and teaching/leading.

1. **We love those being taught**

The teacher is not only imparting knowledge but also giving a gift, and the motivation for that gift is not any gain for the teacher but that the student will benefit from the knowledge. We know from well substantiated and wide research the crucial importance of relationships to learning. One can teach basic skills without love, but to truly make a difference in a student’s life, there needs to be love.

Perhaps in talking about relationships with students the word compassion is better used. Compassion allows us to see our students in a different light. To see them as individuals with their own way of being, thinking, expressing themselves; their struggles and needs and even suffering. We don’t know the battles others are facing - Heb 10 Consider how we can, daily, spur on, encourage, support, challenge, comfort.

Compassion allows us to see ourselves in the student, even the student who we find is hard to relate to. Nel Noddings [Stanford emeritus professor] has written about the importance of care, and if our students feel that we care for them, this can be a strong motivation for learning.

**AND WE LOVE THEM TOO MUCH to let them not achieve all they can.**

**PAIR & SHARE TASK – different person than last time (8 min):**

What approaches/actions have you taken to build positive, caring relationships with students?

Share a couple with the whole group.

1. **We must love that which is being taught, engendering a love of learning**

Love sees teaching as an art where we explore different ways of connecting to subject matter and to students. You probably know this from your own experiences as both student and teacher. The best teachers are those who simply can’t wait to teach something they truly love. The best teachers are infectious with their enthusiasm and love of what they are trying to teach. We should not be surprised that just as their enthusiasm for their subject is contagious, so is their call to teach. Most of us who lead and teach do so because our own lives were impacted by those who led and taught us.

*“I have always been an enthusiastic student, but I will admit that some courses and subjects have tested my enthusiasm. One of those was chemistry. At every level, I tried my best to get excited about chemicals, reminding myself of how important knowledge of chemistry is to our understanding of the world. It didn’t work. Nevertheless, my high school chemistry teacher loved his work, and he definitely loved chemistry. I think he went to bed every night dreaming of the next morning’s first chemistry lesson. To tell you the truth, I credit his love for chemistry as the only reason I learned anything about chemistry at all. He was so excited about it that I wanted to share at least something of his knowledge.”*

Many premodern traditions also wove truth, beauty, and goodness into their teaching. They weren’t just concerned with showing Christianity as true. They also wanted to show how it was good and beautiful.

# Slide 14

**Mrs. Morgan**

**SMALL GROUP TASK:** Who for you has in some way personified love and learning:

* love of God
* love of who they taught
* love of what they taught
* engendering a love of learning
* providing encounters with Jesus

# Slide 15

**Grappling with love and learning**

An education …is a constellation of practices, rituals, and routines that inculcates a particular vision of the good life by inscribing or infusing that vision into the heart (the gut) by means of material, embodied practices.

**TASK: Individuals read articles and then find others with the same sheet – to discuss**

* **What Story Is at the Heart of Our Schools?**
* **What Does It Mean to Teach Like a Disciple?**
* **Reforming the Formers: On Teaching for Formation**
* **Grading: What’s Love Got to do With It?**
* **The Love Principle. “For Jesus; Through Mission; With Students.”**

# Slide 16

**I Corinthians 13 for Teachers**

**13**If I speak in the tongues[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians+13&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-28667a)] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. **2**If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3**If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians+13&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-28669b)] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

**4**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5**It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6**Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7**It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

**8**Love never fails.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. **9**For we know in part and we prophesy in part, **10**but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. **11**When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. **12**For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

**13**And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Slide 17

**Adapted from a KCS staff Devotion in Term 1**

If I am an entertaining and articulate teacher, but don’t have love, I am nothing.

If I have all wisdom in dealing with student and parent issues that arise, but don’t have love, I am nothing.

If I give my free time grading, creating exciting lesson plans, and designing exemplar bulletin boards; but don’t have love, I am nothing.

So, no matter what I may say, and what I do, I am quite bankrupt without love.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Love is patient / longsuffering** |  |
| **Love is kind** |  |
| **Love does not envy or boast** |  |
| **Love is not arrogant or rude / dishonour others** |  |
| **Love does not insist on its own way / self-seeking** |  |
| **Love is not irritable or resentful (keeping a record of wrongs)** |  |
| **Love does not delight at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth** |  |
| **Love bears all things** |  |
| **Love believes all things** |  |
| **Love hopes all things** |  |
| **Love endures all things** |  |
| **Love never fails/ends** |  |

# Slide 18

**End Task:**

Turn to another who you have worked with on tasks today and let them know something that your really appreciated / enjoyed / loved about them.

# Appendices

## Slide 3 Task

**SMALL GROUP TASK**

Based on the last few slides (see below) take a look at some of the key statements on each of our SCEA schools & colleges and see how they align with or allude to this idea of love linked to the gospel, learning, encounter and true flourishing.

**A Proposition**

* The heart of the gospel is love, the gospel is the heart of our schools

**Three Suppositions**

* Love is the basis of true human flourishing
* Love undergirds the entire process of learning
* While knowledge informs, love has the capacity to transform

**Pope Benedict XVI**

“Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moralism. Christianity is instead an encounter, a love story; it is an event.”

**SCEA’s first value: love**

We are captivated by the love and compassion for all people that Jesus Christ modelled, which inspires us to serve students from all backgrounds, irrespective of their family’s religious or nonreligious beliefs, cultural heritage and financial means.

**CSA Proclaim Statement**

For Christian schools, the role of the gospel in our work is simple:

We want students to encounter Jesus; be transformed into His image and likeness; and for this transformation to make an impact as they witness, model and engage in God’s restorative work across every sphere of creation.

Our belief is that through the ministry of proclaiming and modelling Christ in all we do, students will capture a vision of who they can be - and what the world could become - if we allow the love and justice of God to impact all we do.

**James K. A. Smith**

What if …

* education was primarily concerned with shaping our hopes and passions—our visions of the “good life”?
* the primary work of education was the transforming of our imagination rather than the saturation of our intellect?
* we began by appreciating how education not only gets into our head but also grabs us by the gut—what the New Testament refers to as kardia, “the heart”?

## Slide 5 Task

# BEECHBORO

**Mission:**

To provide a holistic, Christ-centered education that develops students’ God-given talents; in a welcoming environment where every child is loved, accepted and encouraged to explore, inquire and become a life-long learner.

**Vision:**

To partner with families and communities and provide a Christ-centered, holistic education promoting kindness, community, courage and excellence. We are focused on cultivating a culture of innovative and inspired practices, to enable our students to be positive, active influences and contributors in this world.

**Values:**

Kindness

Community

Courage

Excellence

**Graduates:**

Our students will be informed of the gospel and encouraged to *act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.  (Micah 6:8)*.

Our hope is that our graduates will be kind individuals, who confidently go out into the world with a discerning heart and the strength of character to make a difference.

# ELLENBROOK

**Vision:**

Our College seeks to provide students with the opportunity to develop their talents, pursue excellence and foster a passion for lifelong learning so that they can serve and be leaders in society.

**Mission:**

We are a Christian community dedicated to sharing God’s love for the world through an exceptional educational experience. We value the uniqueness of every child and understand the crucial place educators have in assisting them to reach their full potential.

Our graceful Christian environment is the foundation of a strong sense of community and holistic educational philosophy, supporting students in becoming the Salt and the Light of the world. Our personalised learning experience inspires students to be globally aware and compassionate, guided by the principles of Humility, Integrity and Purpose.

**Graduates:**

* Exhibit a highly developed moral compass, displaying integrity, humility and purpose and lead by example.
* Possess an awareness of the global community, inspired by a genuine Christian foundation which fuels a desire to contribute positively to society.
* View challenges as opportunities to achieve personal excellence and possess skills and passion to pursue lifelong learning.

# KALAMUNDA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

**Calling:**

To cultivate character and competencies foundational to flourishing lives and community through holistic Christian Education.

**Values:**

Our Calling is underpinned and realised by our four core values; it is always about aiming **HIGH**.

**H**ONOUR:Treating others with respect, valuing the individual and promoting a sense of belonging for all.

**I**NTEGRITY: Seeking truth, honesty, and wisdom in all things.

**G**ENEROSITY: Big-hearted and open-handed, giving of time, effort, hospitality, and friendship.

**H**UMILITY: A gracious and other-person-centred approach to relationships.

**Mission:**

**Students:** Our chief calling is to cultivate character and competencies in all KCS students foundational to them flourishing in their learning and wellbeing, valued members of the school community.

**Staff:** We seek to cultivate in all our staff a passion for Christian Education and the expertise and professionalism associated with their roles. We constantly work at being a high functioning team of professionals who collaborate, and problem solve together.

**Parents and Partners:** We undertake this Christian education enterprise as a community to benefit the wider community. Hence, our commitment to cultivate positive partnership between home and school, and our many and varied relationships with churches, educational institutions, organisations, and businesses.

**Culture:** We are acutely aware of the importance of cultivating a vibrant and attractive culture comprising vibrant faith, care, respect, belonging and optimism. This task belongs to all who are part of the Kalamunda Christian School community.

**Learning and Teaching:** We are committed to providing the best of classical and contemporary teaching practice that delivers varied, challenging, and stimulating learning experiences and opportunities that enable all learners to explore and build on their individual abilities, interests, and experiences.

**KCS Student Profile**

What does it mean for a KCS student to flourish in learning and life?

For us it is a combination of six fundamentals that develop over time and are expressed in unique ways by each student. Together they reflect the school’s commitment to cultivating both character and competencies in each child, realising some of what it means to be truly human, in relationship with God, with others and all of creation.

Christ Follower - Self Manager - Empowered Learner - Problem Solver - Team Player - Servant Leader

# MUNDARING CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

**Mission/Vision:**

With a focus on excellence in teaching and learning, our desire is to create a culture of highly engaged, purposeful learning where education is enjoyable and where students develop a thirst and the skills for life-long learning.

**Providing opportunity:** We are intentionally giving students access to the whole curriculum, they will not be pigeon-holed or told they can only perform at a certain level. With encouragement and support, we have seen our students flourish.

**Voice:** We have a saying at MCC: “We do not work on students – we work with them.” Our students know they have a voice and that their opinions are valued, and that they can contribute to positive change on several levels. You empower young people by listening to them and giving them a chance.

**Character:** Contemporary society has divided ‘hard skills’ (knowledge and expertise) and ‘soft skills’ (empathy, resilience, communication, creativity). We believe it should be the other way around. These elements of character are essential for a life well lived. At our College, we believe character should be developed through real action and not just words. It’s not just what you know, it’s who you are.

**Community:** Our College is part of concentric circles of community: we who know each other and work together for a common goal, then our neighbourhood and on into our world. We are a school that doesn’t just try to explain our communities, we strive to improve them. We want you to be a part of this good story and we are grateful for your contribution.

As we consider our staff, our families, our students and our mission – we have faith in the future.

# NORTHSHORE CHRISTIAN GRAMMAR

**Vision:**

Our vision is to raise young people who are both capable and action-oriented, internationally minded and Christ-centred.

**Values:**

Knowledge

Wisdom

Resilience

Compassion

Our four school values represent four different characteristics which are each pivotal in the development of young people. They are also sequential in the development of character as small children grow into young adults.

Starting with knowledge about themselves and their world at the youngest years of education, students grow into wisdom as they begin to integrate knowledge with their experiences of the world and in particular their relationships. They move from what they know, to how and why they know.

Such wisdom will assist them to become resilient; with the ability to make mistakes and learn from them, the ability to persevere in difficult circumstances and to hold on to what is important and valuable about themselves in an ever-changing and challenging world.

As resilient young people they then reach out to others in compassion as they take up roles as leaders, facilitators, mentors and guides to others in their families, their work-life, their communities and their world.

# SOUTHERN HILLS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

**Vision:**

To provide holistic authentic Christian Education to our students

**Mission:**

To present to the community a quality learning environment in which children are cared for emotionally and socially by embedding and by modelling Christian values

**Values:**

We aim to embed Christian Values into everything we do. It is our aim to turn values into virtues, encouraging all members of the school community to be Christlike in the way they interact with others. We use SPIRIT to demonstrate what we want a member of our community to be.

**S**elf-Motivated – Committed to Learning

**P**erseverance – Embrace Challenges

**I**dentity - In Christ

**R**elational – Servant Hearted

**I**ntegrity – Do What is Right

**T**hinkers – Empowered to Inquire

# SWAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

**Vision:**

To provide excellent innovative educational leadership and continue to be a school of first choice for students, parents, and educators.

**Mission:**

Empowering and equipping children and young people to flourish in life by welcoming them into our College that is shaped by Christian faith and values and creating an environment where all within the community can truly belong, learn and thrive.

**Values:**

Swan Christian College seeks to teach and uphold Christian values with a particular focus on:

Spirituality: To seek to know and be known by God

Integrity: To be experienced as honest and fair

Respect: To be acclaimed for kind treatment of all

Excellence: To aim to be the best we can be

## Slide 16 Task

**LOVE IN THE CLASSROOM / LOVE IN THE OFFICE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Love is patient / longsuffering** |  |
| **Love is kind** |  |
| **Love does not envy or boast** |  |
| **Love is not arrogant or rude / dishonour others** |  |
| **Love does not insist on its own way / self-seeking** |  |
| **Love is not irritable or resentful (keeping a record of wrongs)** |  |
| **Love does not delight at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth** |  |
| **Love bears all things** |  |
| **Love believes all things** |  |
| **Love hopes all things** |  |
| **Love endures all things** |  |
| **Love never fails/ends** |  |

**Additional Articles (related to Slide 15)**

**What Story Is at the Heart of Our Schools?**

ACSI, JUNE 18, 2019

*What if (Christian) education was primarily concerned with shaping our hopes and passions—our visions of the “good life”?*

*What if the primary work of (Christian) education was the transforming of our imagination rather than the saturation of our intellect?*

*What if we began by appreciating how education not only gets into our head but also (and more fundamentally) grabs us by the gut—what the New Testament refers to as*kardia*, “the heart”?*

The day that I encountered Jamie Smith’s “what if” statements was the day I began to re-awaken myself to the better story. It was the day that I began to stop treating these image-bearers of God, my students, as if they were simply “thinking humans.” I began a journey to discover how to nurture desiring and passionate students within a curriculum that is “dripping with God.” As my posture and practices around curriculum began to change, *I* began to change. You see, practices are not just something we do—practices do something to us.

**Telling a Better Story**

Maybe you are like me. You are living in the tension of competing stories around the curriculum–the stuff of our courses and classes. You have classrooms of image-bearers—desiring, passionate, creative image-bearers of God, and at the same time, you have heaps and heaps of stuff to cover. You have told—and sold—yourself stories about curriculum and learning. You have become really good at wrong things. Maybe, like me, in the busyness of school and the need to cover the content, you have forgotten the story for which we, you, our students were created. You have forgotten the deep hopes we have for our students and our Christian schools.

This secondary science teacher has learned that all the data, the analysis, facts and diagrams, theories and laws, all the “stuff” of science class is meaningless without the context of the *epic* into which we are born. Our curriculum finds meaning and purpose within God’s unfolding story: a story of intimacy and things good and beautiful; of rebellion and brokenness; and of an invitation from the cross to participate, to co-create with our creator, in the restoration of a broken world and in the making of all things new.

When we talk about “deeper learning,” we mean going deeper into this story. Those nitrate and phosphate measurements in the stream study? They are part of this story of making all things new again. The study of conflict and war through history? Also part of this story. The writing of poetry and music, the study of the stars, and that classic PE game of dodgeball? It’s all part of the same story. Without this story, it is simply “stuff.” Deeper learning takes us and our students deeper into this story. Our students—these curious, passionate, desiring students—were created to participate in God’s unfolding story of redemption. *Your*classroom is part of this story.

**Teaching for Transformation**

So, what are we to do with these students? [**Teaching for Transformation**](https://cace.org/download/17493) (TfT) is a framework for designing learning stories that invite, nurture, and empower students to play their part in God’s story—not just upon graduation, but right now! TfT equips teachers to design learning for students to “see the Story, live the Story” through three core practices:

1. **Storyline**: Connecting the curriculum and students to the Biblical Story.
2. **Through-Lines**: Connecting the curriculum and students to practice a way of being—to form habits such as community building, justice seeking, servant working.
3. **Formational Learning Experiences**: Connecting students and their schoolwork to “real work that meets real needs for real people” learning experiences.

When these three core practices interact with each other, they result in learning experiences of deep Kingdom-building hope for students and teachers*.*

If time refer to website: <https://cace.org/download/17493>

**What Does It Mean to Teach Like a Disciple?**

*Jillian Lederhouse | December 20, 2017*

Doug Lemov’s practical book *Teach Like a Champion* significantly influenced the K–12 profession by assuring all novices that while excellent teaching is hard work, it is achievable—in part through implementing several strategic but often simple techniques. The phrase “teach like a champion” has been used both to encourage and challenge many beginning and even veteran educators to improve their practice. It reminds them of their ultimate goal in the classroom: to equip their students for college, careers, and civic engagement.

However, as an education professor who values and recommends Lemov’s ideas, I wondered if Christian educators should aspire to be something more than a champion in the classroom. Although Lemov’s goal and strategies are extremely valid and useful, I began to ask, “What is the highest teaching aspiration for a follower of Christ?” I believe it is to teach like Jesus taught, to teach like His disciple. Thus I began my exploration of Jesus’ interactions in the Gospels with many different types of “students,” and then shared these findings in class devotional times with my college students.

When graduates returned to campus and told me how these brief comments had helped them in their first years of teaching, I decided to write a book for other K–12 Christian educators on what it means to teach like a disciple, featuring 10 encounters Christ had with an extremely diverse group that included wealthy and poor, male and female, unschooled and well-educated, impulsive and shy, influential and powerless, those familiar to Him and those who were strangers, as well as those of His own faith and culture and those outside of it. The individuals He taught were remarkably similar to the broad spectrum of students we find in our public and private school classrooms today.

To keep “teach like a disciple” from merely serving as a slogan for Christian educators, we need to unpack the phrase. Although there is not space here to include every lesson, there are three aspects of this concept that I would like to offer you, whether you are a classroom teacher or an administrator with instructional leadership responsibilities. My goal in sharing these insights is to take a global truth offered in Jesus’ curriculum or pedagogy and see its application to our profession without trivializing His original message. My intent is not to substitute a practical meaning for an eternal one, but to show how Jesus communicated significant truths through a carefully chosen instructional approach—one that was specifically tailored for each of His students.

**To teach like a disciple means we are, first and foremost, relational teachers.**

It doesn’t matter what subject we teach; if we are not relational, we will not be effective educators. The first lesson we learn from Jesus is that He was relational. This is not only a spiritual but a recognized professional aspiration. Charlotte Danielson, creator of “A Framework for Teaching” (the foundation for public school teacher evaluation in most states) writes, “Teaching depends, fundamentally, on the quality of relationships among individuals” (Danielson 2007).

Jesus himself demonstrated the importance of establishing and strengthening appropriate relationships when He met Mary Magdalene outside the tomb after His resurrection. Despite having just accomplished the greatest feat in history—saving all humanity from the power of sin by His death and resurrection—He stopped to take time for her. All of heaven waited to celebrate Jesus’ glorious return, because He heard a heartbroken woman crying in a garden and needed to heal her sorrow. Knowing that Jesus had delivered Mary from demon possession, we can understand why she was so despondent and why He mattered so much to her. But it is somewhat shocking to realize that she mattered *that much* to Jesus. Although she certainly would have learned of His resurrection later from the apostles, He delayed His schedule to personally meet her need in that moment. He assured her that everything was all right. In fact, for the first time since the Garden of Eden, everything was truly right again.

Just as Mary learned that she mattered to Jesus, our students need to know they matter to us—not just as students but as persons too. I often think of how busy we teachers are both inside and outside of the classroom. It is so easy to let our instructional responsibilities take priority over every other aspect of our profession. However, from this account, we learn that there is no lesson plan, no appointment, no phone call, no issue more important than meeting with a student who is troubled. This was true when I was a kindergarten teacher, but it is equally true as a college professor. No matter what their age, all students deserve a safe space for releasing a burden and a caring adult who can provide empathy, advice, or advocacy for them as the situation requires.

Being a relational teacher does not imply that we must all be extroverts. Susan Cain’s research reports that one-third to one-half of all adults, including teachers, are introverted (Cain 2013). Being introverted is a natural phenomenon, not a disadvantage for either students or teachers to overcome. Introverted teachers contribute significantly to students and other school faculty members through their thoughtful perspective and analysis. Regardless of whether we consider ourselves to be extroverted or introverted teachers, being relational requires us to be perceptive of and accessible to our students.

Although we need to be available to help our students in a major crisis, many times it is our smallest action that students remember best. It may be calling them at home when they have missed class or done well on an assignment. Perhaps it is affirming them for being thoughtful toward another student when they didn’t think we had noticed or just stopping in the hall to have a conversation with them about their weekend. We can communicate our desire to know our students better in a variety of ways, but they all require taking time to show that we are genuinely interested in them, just as Christ took time with Mary Magdalene. To teach like His disciple, we must work to connect with every student.

**To teach like a disciple means we value the individual student.**

Because Jesus offered His students such abundant healing, wisdom, and love, it is easy to see the stark contrast between the all-knowing, benevolent Master Teacher and His needy students. It is tempting to see His students only for the qualities they lacked rather than what they possessed. But Jesus saw His students’ strengths and built on them to help each one learn His objective. He recognized Mary Magdalene’s loyalty and sense of agency, and therefore gave her the first gospel message to deliver to the apostles. He recognized the Samaritan woman’s intelligence and spiritual knowledge to help her understand that He truly was the Messiah. He saw determination and sincere faith in a woman who brushed against Him in a crowd, making her healing public so that she could be restored to her community. He saw boldness in Peter’s impulsivity. He recognized Saul’s keen mind and rich background to take the gospel to the Gentiles, even though all others feared him for persecuting the fledgling church. Jesus saw resilient trust in Mary and Martha despite their great disappointment when He did not come immediately to heal their brother, Lazarus. He accepted love and gratitude from a woman entrenched in prostitution, and by doing this showed her true compassion. As evidenced in these and other encounters, Jesus consistently looked beyond His students’ disadvantages and instead used their capacities to engage them in understanding truth.

As educators we might be tempted to look at these interactions and focus only on poverty, religious and cultural differences, social class discrimination, the effects of trauma, attention-seeking behavior, emotional crisis, or prejudice. But Jesus did not succumb to this pattern of deficit thinking; He saw capacity in His learners regardless of their background. Jesus is regarded as a remarkable teacher not because He recognized and addressed these complex issues but because He valued the individuals who faced them. He is an exemplary model for us in this regard.

Elementary and secondary teaching goals often work against valuing the individual. The need to group learners for instruction often makes us appreciate conformity over individual differences. Learners who already excel at a subject or who fail to grasp its fundamental concepts are challenging to thoughtful teachers because they require us to differentiate our instruction. Non-native English speakers and students requiring special education services similarly stretch us to adapt our teaching skills for their specific linguistic and physical needs. Addressing these complex challenges takes time and expertise, two resources that are often scarce for busy classroom teachers. However, if we are not mindful of our model, we may not see the “tree” for the forest. To teach like a disciple, we must look for each student’s strengths.

**To teach like a disciple means we hold all of our students to high expectations.**

If a group of teachers were to design a profile of the ideal student, I imagine it would look a lot like the rich young ruler in Mark 10. We would all probably want this obedient, accomplished, and motivated student to be in our own class. He had financial resources, solid background knowledge, and a strong track record of following directions. The Gospel of Mark even includes the fact that “Jesus looked on him and loved him” (10:22). What more could we want in a learner?

However, the encounter ends far differently than we might have predicted. I believe the young man anticipated another answer to his question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” than the one he received from the Master Teacher. I think he expected Jesus to tell him that if he just kept on doing what he was doing, he would easily gain access to heaven. The young man merely wanted the assurance that his many efforts were good enough to please God. But Jesus didn’t say this. There are no self-made men or women in heaven, because access to heaven is not based on what we have done. It is based solely on what Christ has done for us.

The end of this encounter with Jesus shows our highly successful “dream student” failing to grasp the most important lesson. Jesus saw that the young man’s identity was trapped in the most obvious sign of his success—his great wealth. Therefore Jesus asked him to give it all to the poor. Since the young man could not do this, he turned and sadly walked away. As an educator, I find Jesus’ demand of the rich young ruler shocking. If I had been in Jesus’ place, I probably would have run after the young man calling out, “Wait! What about giving away just half of it? What about starting with just a third?” I hate to see a student not succeed, so I would have been tempted to lower my expectation for him. But Jesus didn’t compromise. The paradox of salvation is that it is freely given, but it demands everything. Jesus didn’t change His requirements; He actually let the student He loved fail.

Jesus is a great example here of a teacher who employs “tough love,” a skill every educator must master. Discerning when to hold a student responsible and when to offer grace is one of the greatest challenges for novices. For beginners, it is easy to mistake excusing a student for showing compassion to a student. We don’t want anyone to fail, in part because it indicates we too have failed. This misguided compassion results in students quickly learning how to wriggle out of assignments or how to avoid consequences that are rightfully theirs to pay. Over time, students fail to achieve what they must learn and are ultimately cheated out of a rich and rigorous educational experience. So even though life at home may be especially difficult for one student, we cannot excuse him from turning in his homework. We may need to modify an assignment for a student with a learning disability, but we still need to insist she finish it. To help my pre-service teachers prepare for situations like these, I have them practice saying, “Because I care about you, I am holding you accountable.” To teach like Jesus’ disciple, we can’t compromise our expectations.

**Conclusion**

Teaching is one of the most demanding professions we can choose. As a teacher educator, I need to assure my state board of education that every graduate I recommend for a license is “safe to practice,” much like a pilot must be deemed “safe to practice” before being allowed to fly passengers to their destination. The analogy communicates the importance of mastering professional preparation before beginning one’s teaching career—although the teacher is not only to fly the plane, but also provide the beverage service and monitor the bathrooms during the flight. Stepping into a classroom requires us to fill an overwhelming number of roles.

However, teaching is also a highly rewarding ministry. We are called by God to instruct and encourage students in the ways He has called them to live. We are also called to support their parents in this process and contribute to our school community life. You can’t find more significant work than this profession. You never know when you might have a Mary Magdalene, a Peter, a Martha, a rich young ruler, or even a Saul sitting in front of you. You also cannot find a better guide than the Master Teacher himself. I pray that all of the teachers at your school will teach like His disciple.

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**Reforming the Formers: On Teaching for Formation**

**From You are What You Love by James K. A. Smith– Ch 6 pp158-166**

I became a better teacher as soon as I was willing to be a heretic.

Now, before you get worried, let me explain. Something is a heresy only in relation to some orthodoxy. And as a teacher, particularly in higher education, I had been inculcated into an orthodoxy about teaching: under no circumstances should I impose on the autonomy and independence of my students (whose primary goal in life was to become prodigious consumers).

This may seem strange to you, and I mean absolutely no disrespect to my students, but I didn’t really know how to teach until it gradually dawned on me that students are children. I had basically imagined, early on in my teaching career, that the eighteen-year-olds in my Intro to Philosophy class were graduate-students-in-waiting and that my job was simply to “facilitate” their own theorizing. But as my own children grew and started to look more and more like the students in my classes, it finally hit me: the paradigm for teaching that I absorbed in graduate school was disastrous when it came to actually teaching young people. The notion of teaching that I had imbibed was actually allergic to formation, to the notion that I might have a sense of what students ought to be. So the “heresy” I began to entertain was a historic notion of the faculty in loco parentis (“in place of parents”). I was a heretic precisely because I started to entertain the thought that good teaching might actually be paternalistic. In the environs of educational progressivism, this would be seen as just plain *loco.*

So I came to see that an education that was going to be more intentionally formative would have to push back on some common assumptions of “public” education. More importantly, I came to see that this way of educating for formation points to the higher calling of the teacher—nothing less than forming students as people of virtue. Since education is a formative project, aimed at the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, then the teacher is a steward of transcendence who needs not only to know the Good but also to teach from that conviction. The teacher of virtue will not apologize for seeking to apprentice students to the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. But she will also run up against the scariest aspect of this: that virtue is often absorbed from exemplars.

If we are going to be formative teachers, we need to reflect critically on our own formation as teachers. Our own educations—particularly for those who have gone through the intense secular “novitiate” that is graduate school—were also formations. But we often don’t realize the extent to which we absorbed a very different story about the telos of learning that continues to operate in our unconscious. So we need to ask ourselves: What are our society’s default assumptions about the ends and goals of education? What visions and values about education have we absorbed in the course of our own university educations?

If we analyzed this, I think we’d find that implicit in the dominant models of education is a modern, secularist narrative that prizes autonomy as the ultimate good. Thus, the goal of education is reduced to “critical thinking,” which only turns out to be an empty, vacuous way of saying that education will simply enable young people to choose whatever “good” they see fit. In this picture, “freedom” requires the loss of a telos, since any stipulation of “the Good” impinges on the autonomy of the individual. In other words, such a model of education actually precludes virtue.

We need to appreciate how far this departs from a classical education in virtue and from a “thick” notion of Christian formation. As James Davison Hunter puts it in his brilliant analysis The Death of Character, “There have never been ‘generic’ values.”13 Virtues are thick realities tethered to particular communities governed by a particular Story. An education in virtue, then, will have to resist the regnant orthodoxy we often absorb in our own formal educations. But we also need to recognize that such notions of autonomy and independence are absorbed through informal educations, through the continuing education, so to speak, that is effected by our immersion in the secular liturgies of Americanism.

So if education is going to be formative—and more specifically, form students in the Christian faith—we first need to re-form the formers. If we, as educators, are going to be part of a classical project of education that seeks to form the whole person, to apprentice students to a love for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful as revealed to us in Christ, then we need to be reformed and transformed. Educational reform, you might say, begins with us.

If I am going to be a teacher of virtue, I need to be a virtuous teacher. If I hope to invite students into a formative educational project, then I, too, need to relinquish any myth of independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency and recognize that my own formation is never final. Virtue is not a one-time accomplishment; it requires a maintenance program. So how can educators of virtue be reformed and transformed? What practices can sustain such a lofty pedagogical project?

Recognizing that Jesus gave the gift of his Spirit, who is our continuing teacher, we should also recognize that the Spirit gives us the gift of practices that are “habitations of the Spirit,” conduits of grace and illumination. Let me describe just a few.

First, we can begin by seeing worship as a kind of “faculty development.” Just by committing ourselves to communities of formative Christian worship, we are refueling our own imaginations with the biblical story, immersing our own hearts in the reconciling practices of the body of Christ. This is one of the most important commitments we can make if we hope to be formative teachers: to submit ourselves to the disciplines of Christian worship.

Second, we can cultivate practices of faculty “life together,” as Bonhoeffer put it. Like the stonemasons we encountered in Wenger’s story in chapter 5, we Christian teachers sometimes have to be reminded, amid the workaday pressures of class prep and grading, that we are building cathedrals. One of the most important practices we can undertake as Christian educators is to cultivate time and space to re-narrate to one another just what we’re doing together. Reminding one another of that is a huge part of sustaining the ethos of our institutions—a reminder that we aren’t just grading math tests; we’re building prime citizens of the coming kingdom of God. Every school community needs to foster an ethos of mutual re-narration. Let me then suggest a few communal practices for reforming the formers:

1. **Eat together.** Don’t underestimate the ethos that is fostered by sharing a table.
2. **Pray together.** More specifically, pray together in ways that are formative. Pray the Psalms; pray the Divine Office; inhabit the rhythms of the liturgical year and the narrative sweep of Scripture in prayer. You might also find this is an opportunity to confess to one another.
3. **Sing together.** The bodily blending of voices has important, unarticulated implications for cultivating harmony in your community. Theologian and musician Steven Guthrie points out that we learn something about submission when we sing. “What kind of mutual submission happens in song?” he asks. “For one thing, singing words together involves synchronicity—staying in time with one another. The singers submit themselves to a common tempo, a common musical structure and rhythm.”14 Singing together is a way for a staff to practice harmony, mutual submission, and the synchronicity needed for the shared mission of Christian education.
4. **Think and read together.** Discuss the substance of your common work and vocation as educators instead of just gathering to deal with “business.” Visit one another’s classes and provide honest, constructive feedback. My friend Matt Beimers, a Christian school principal in Surrey, British Columbia, would add to the list: play together, grieve together, listen to one another’s stories. This vision of education is communal.

Finally, undertake practices for students as a teacher. Don’t underestimate how cultivating loving concern for your students can itself be a (re)formative experience. I experienced something like this several years ago when I taught an advanced seminar on phenomenology and cognitive science at 8:30 in the morning. This was incredibly challenging material to consider at such an early hour, so I made a promise to my students: I went to the local Goodwill store, bought a cheap coffee maker, and promised them that I would always have coffee ready and waiting for them by 8:25 a.m. each day. That way they could roll out of bed, pull on some sweatpants and a cap, and not have to worry about finding their caffeine fix before class: it would be ready and waiting for them here. Since the course was specifically focused on aspects of embodiment, this was a way of honoring their own embodiment.

But I hadn’t anticipated an unintended consequence of this seemingly banal routine. Over the course of the semester, I found that the simple practice of having to prepare the coffee ahead of time also meant that I started anticipating the students’ arrival in more intentional ways. Instead of cramming to prepare my notes I could focus on creating a space for the students to be welcomed into, fresh with the scent of brewing coffee, a kind of incense for early-morning learning. In the process, I found my own attention shifted from self-regard to concern for the students. And in the moments it took to make the coffee, I would silently pray for the students, anticipating their arrival and the challenges of that day’s material, recalling some personal struggles students had shared. The simple act of making coffee became its own little ritual of contemplation and prayer, a habit of pedagogical hospitality.15 What started as a promise to do something simple, tangible, and embodied became an incubator of virtue.

Teachers of virtue are not born; they are formed. They are not “produced” by a diploma or merely credentialed by a certificate; they are shaped by immersion in practices that bend their loves and longing toward Christ and his coming kingdom. In short, becoming a teacher of virtue takes practice.

**Grading: What’s Love Got to do With It?**

By Rebecca Pennington

January 24, 2022

In her recent CSR blog post (November 18, 2021), Marybeth Baggett invited professors to reconsider their grading practices through the lens of spiritual disciplines, guided by Richard Foster’s influential book, Celebration of Discipline. Baggett’s essay argued that grading student work, while a necessary part of teachers’ “mundane” work, can be rejuvenated when understood as an opportunity for spiritual growth, both for the professor and for students, each image-bearers of God. Intentional focus on each individual’s work eschews the mechanistic and transactional nature of current assessment practices. She wrote,

*With each paper I turn to, I have the choice either to affirm the humanity and vocation of the student at the receiving end of my feedback or to fall back into my old mechanistic practice. I can either commune with this student’s mind and surrender our interaction to the lordship of Christ or stand in detached judgment. Undertaking the grading process in prayer, in personal relationship with and in service to my students has opened up new vistas for me to inculcate patience, develop humility, and practice love.*1

Judging from the comments and popularity of the post, her words struck a chord during this season of the semester. I found her post refreshing, a beautiful reminder to place our relationship with students, even in the drudgery of grading, before the face of Christ.

While Baggett pondered how our disposition during grading can be a spiritual discipline, a different question haunts me. How might grading and assessment be Christ-animated at the heart of its academic purpose? Baggett and others (Ballock, 2018)2 offer pertinent reminders that our attitude should remain loving, charitable, and respectful, but how do we approach the root act of grading, assessing the quality of a product? In other words, what’s love got to do with grading?

Scripture points out that love is not just an emotion but involves action (I John 3:18) and self-sacrifice (I John 3:16). Love considers what is best for and honours another (Romans 12:10). To the extent that grading contributes to student growth and flourishing as whole persons, it is an act of love.

I have argued elsewhere that assessment, including classroom grading, is a normal part of our work as teachers, best undertaken within a caring learning environment. I stated,

1. educational assessment constitutes a God-designed natural act of human knowing and valuing, though finite and distorted by sin;
2. (b) human fallibility necessitates assessment processes characterized by transparency, enabling learners to use their gifts for God’s glory; and
3. (c) assessment is most effective when enacted in a loving community of learners who recognize that performance doesn’t determine worth in God’s eyes.3

Even when conducted with loving consideration of the unique creature behind each piece of work, the valuing task remains, and grades or scores of some kind are required. So how might conscientious teachers determine them? While volumes have been written about assessment overall, I suggest three principles for loving our student neighbors while engaged in grading work.

**Clear Purpose**

First, clearly determine the purpose of grading. Why grade? Assessment experts posit two main purposes for grading:

1) to provide information about how well students are progressing toward learning goals (formative) and

2) to assign a final grade that is an evaluation of how well overall objectives were met (summative).

Key questions to consider are: Is the grade to reflect only performance against academic skills and contents standards? Will effort or other behavioral performances be included? What are the symbol systems you will use and why have they been selected?

Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) suggest that assessment marks (whatever form they take) should only reflect the quality of performance utilizing course “learning targets,” a set of criteria revealed to students before instruction. In criterion-referenced assessment, learning performance is compared to pre-determined criteria for success.4

Ideally, instructor feedback throughout the course guides students toward accomplishing the learning goals. For classroom grading purposes, criterion-referenced assessments offer opportunities for learning to all whose work demonstrates evidence of learning.

Regardless of what factors are included, communicating grading policies and philosophy enables students to devote their energies to the learning tasks and builds confidence. While there are several purposes for assessment, classroom grading offers students information about their progress toward essential course outcomes. It also provides professors a way to adjust their teaching in light of students’ needs. Sharing the purpose of grading is one way to love and care for students.

**Clear Learning Goals**

A second principle, closely related to a clear purpose, involves describing the expected type of learning. Often referred to as “student learning outcomes,” these statements are written from the perspective of what the student will know and be able to do or become. For those skeptical of educational assessment jargon, this is an essential piece of the process and one that all professors engage in, whether written down or not. This step forces the teacher to ask, “What are the essential aspects of this course, and what might evidence of learning look like?” This may have been done at the beginning of the course; however, it is worth reviewing with students as final assessments approach. Did they understand what I hoped they would learn? What did they value? Did they connect the goals with the tests, projects, papers, and other tasks facing them?

As I have reflected on reasons why professors dread grading, I suspect that too little focused attention on this second principle may be one of the culprits. When purpose and learning goals are well-aligned with assignments and scoring tools, everyone involved has a roadmap to guide the journey through the learning process and the course. It forces all involved to interpret the work in light of essential learning desired. When transparent criteria for success accompany clear goals, learners and professors alike can steward their time and energies to important learning activities. If one waits until the end of the instructional period to determine grading criteria or offer feedback, the work “piles up like the snow on the front of a snowplow,” as one colleague expressed it.5 Rather than a celebration of learning, a culmination of visible evidence gained along the way, grading becomes a punishment accompanied by noticeable grumbling about how students don’t read the comments anyway.

**Varied Methods**

A third principle for Christ-animated grading is to design multiple assessment tasks of varying types. Smaller low-stakes assessments assigned frequently throughout the semester provide students and teachers with information about progress toward the more significant learning goals. In addition, offering options that involve mediums other than writing or traditional tests can tap into students’ particular gifts and talents. Angelo and Cross’s (1993) classic work, Classroom Assessment Techniques,6 offers numerous tools to assist professors in gathering data as students’ progress.

Involving students in the assessment process also enables them to track their learning and serves as a motivational tool. Peer editing, multiple drafts of work, opportunities to redo assignments, and the use of exemplars with a rubric are all effective methods for active learning before the end of the term. Such practices reduce the grading load on professors, enhance student involvement, and create joyful opportunities for celebration. If Christian higher educators aim for transformation rather than transaction, student-involved assessment can shine a spotlight on how one’s gifts have been used for God’s glory, rather than what one has earned as a form of payment.

**Conclusion: What’s love got to do with it, again?**

For Christians, study of God’s creation and the interactions of its inhabits (general revelation), along with insight from Scripture (special revelation), suggest guidelines for what counts as “good” or “high-quality.” Humans made in God’s image and placed in the environment of created reality can appropriately attempt criteria for success.

Christian educators can confidently and lovingly design learning and assessment practices focused on enabling students to discover and enact their gifts as they investigate the natural and social world God has created.

None of the principles suggested here are unique to Christians, nor do they directly demonstrate “love” understood as an emotion or disposition. They do offer a way for those whose mission is to imitate Christ as loving teachers to turn the attention away from their own knowledge and needs toward their students’ learning needs. Intentional assessment practice is one way to love our students as neighbours.

**Footnotes**

1. Marybeth Baggett, “Grading as Spiritual Discipline,” Christian Scholars Review, November 18, 2021, https://christianscholars.com/grading-as-spiritual-discipline/.
2. Ballock, “Toward a More Loving Assessment Practice,” International Community of Christian Teacher Educators Journal 13, no. 1 (2018), 2. https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/icctej/vol13/iss1/2/
3. Rebecca Pennington, “Assessment as Science and Story: A Roadmap for Christian Higher Education,”
4. Jan Chappuis and Rick Stiggins, Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing It Right-Using It Well (Hoboken, NJ: Pearson, Inc., 2020)
5. William C. Davis (philosophy colleague) in personal interview, December 2, 2021.
6. T. Angelo, and K. Cross, Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).

# The Love Principle. “For Jesus; Through Mission; With Students.”

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Christian teachers provide an optimal environment for their students. It is loving and just:

• Just – not arbitrary or capricious – fair: allows the students to meet each interaction with an adult with certainty because the response to behaviour or performance (good or bad) can be predicted irrespective of time or place; it is “Always.”

• Loving – student-centred, not judgmental: goes to where the student is; assures the student that, whatever the circumstances, the adult has the student’s best interests at heart and will do whatever is needed for the student to be successful; it is Love incarnate.

It is good to remember the admonition of James that is, maybe, not spoken enough: “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check” (James 3: 1-2).

James provides a significant insight that we can all associate with – the task of teaching is carried out with words and actions, and the way in which we use words and interact with children has enormous significance. The teacher is the single most influential person in a child’s learning journey.

Today we think of words not just as the overt use of criticism or praise with the power to motivate or demotivate, but as elements of incredible subtlety. Consider the use of vocabulary that includes or excludes; the way words are supported – or contradicted – by body language; the exercise of authority versus power; communication methods, including technology; the giving and taking of responsibility; rewards and sanctions. Placing the child at the centre of the conversation, i.e., focusing on the way in which children can benefit from our words and actions, leads to asking how completely a child can trust us. Here, we are not talking about truth and deceit (which are obviously important) but rather about the just and loving nature of our school exemplified in our words and actions.

The Love Principle, at its heart, is about establishing a trust relationship. The writer of Titus says: “In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us … but to show that they [the teachers] can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:6-7). It is important that we always recognize that the teacher in a Christian school not only wants the child to do well in an academic sense, thus securing a hopeful secular future, but also to be open to the Word of God and thus to have that secular future imbued with and infused with God’s love, giving it meaning and eternal significance. We will not think of this as a biblical worldview (although that can be a useful phrase) but rather as the personal presence of God in the child’s learning experience. The Love Principle brings the presence of God into the presence of the child. The teacher’s trustworthiness is a model of God’s trustworthiness.

God’s trustworthiness can be thought of in this context as providing two feedback loops: offering a true assessment of who we are – dead in our sins – and providing the way through – making us alive.

As Paul says in Colossians 2:13: “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.” We trust God because we know in ourselves that His assessment of us is accurate (we are dead in our sins) AND that He did whatever needed to be done (died and rose again) and told us how we needed to respond (your faith in the working of God – v. 12). It is this essential trustworthiness of God that the teacher echoes as a faint shadow in every interaction with a child. The teacher speaks truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) so that the child can mature. The teacher provides a true assessment and a solution at the same time. Too many schools are far too individualistic in creating this environment of trust, one that consistently reinforces for children that ALL teachers are just / fair and loving / committed to each child’s success. The way individual teachers put these ideas into practice can vary so significantly that the environment is not empowering from the child’s point of view. Instead, it may seem contradictory, even capricious.

The Love Principle, therefore, also supports the Christian Professional Learning Community. Through this approach, being just and being loving becomes systemic through the best practices of communities of teachers. In such a community:

* The child’s healthy development is the key measure of success, and the community’s commitment to that is primary.
* Each teacher’s commitment to his or her own development is palpable.
* The willingness to engage in professional conversations as a norm of professional practice, unbounded by time or place, is endemic to the faculty culture.
* There is a common and unquestioned commitment to the mission of the school. There is generative conversation about the translation of that mission to every area of school life and to every developmental stage of the children.
* Study of the research and improvements in the practice of learning and teaching are valued. Best practice should imply a journey, not an ending.
* The teachers collaborate to ensure that their own improving practice is aligned (not identical) and that it is clear what is meant by pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and standards.
* Teachers examine practice in their own classrooms and those of their colleagues, critique on the basis of each-child learning, and implement on the basis of continual improvement.

The Love Principle is both individual and corporate. It certainly is individual. Each teacher must be just (accurate and fair) while supporting the child through thick and thin. As Jesus identified the failings of those around him, so he also drew people to himself so that they could be healed. While we are not so grandiose, nonetheless, we are an important echo of his ministry in the lives of our students. Through us, they will have a glimpse of the eternal. This Principle is also corporate. We cannot do this on our own. Together with our colleagues (and assuredly with study and prayer), we must become a Christian Professional Learning Community where being just and loving is encoded in everyday practice, an environment in which learning becomes not just possible but profound for each child.

And that is the final point of this Principle. It is not enough for us to do this for some, most, or even almost all of our children. As families are called to our mission and the child enters our hallways, so our measure of success individually and corporately is 100%. Outside of circumstances where the child or family must be counselled out, our measure of success is absolute – all “100” children must be met, nurtured, and brought to a place of success. “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?” (Matthew 18:12). The Love Principle looks easier than it is. To be just and loving every minute of every day of every week of every month of every year can only be accomplished through personal and corporate commitment to the task. “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11).