



TEACHER AND STUDENT CENTERED CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A Christian Philosophy of Education



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Teacher and Student centred Christian Education:

This is a brief providing a somewhat definition of the Philosophy of Christian Education. It starts off very generally and then progresses to more specific points. The main article that is referred to here was written by John De Beer and Cornelius Jaarsma, both were professors at Calvin College. I find it very interested and not necessarily out-dated. Others have been researched in regards to this article. I hope I have quoted them equally.

They say that the function of Christian Education is to help people know about God, his purpose for people and our own capacities and limitations. The Christian Educator uses the Bible as the central focus and framework of his or her teaching because of the ‘absolute’ truth it contains. Remember, unlike secular teachings, there are absolutes in the Bible. God, himself is an absolute. So, the Christian educator’s job is to develop the power, skills, attitudes and capacities of growing personalities. This just doesn’t happen! It takes a lot of study and research and more research and study and experiential teaching to discern ways to go about this. In addition the Christian Educator hopes to correct certain personalities we develop from living in a sinful world. This is difficult and it takes work to go beyond how the world has affected the teacher. We are made in the image of God; thus our intellect is a reflection of one of God’s attributes which much be developed. The subject which we are to teach represents the achievements which God has permitted people to accomplish. This is not necessarily academic but experiential in nature. These essentials should be well taught in order for individuals to possess a basic understanding of this information. The Christian educational process is linked to God’s redemptive process for mankind. What does this mean for the teacher; there is a process that include humbling yourself before God, trying to go beyond self and you one way attitude. This involves the learner understanding the inclusive process included in God’s divine plan and purpose. Our relationship to God includes our desire for His will and to follow His revelation and promote the advancement of His kingdom. This learning process brings us closer to His creation before the advent of sin. This process emphasises the development of separate elements which enables the growth and maturity of the individual.

John and Cornelius say that the general objectives of Christian Education are God-centred living, self-understanding and development, civic and social behaviour, and to provide vocational occupational effectiveness. On a broader scale, this involves understanding God’s eternal purposes, the nature of sin and its effects, and a desire for God-

oriented living and understanding our relationship to creation. If your theology takes away from the authority and authenticity of the Bible or God and the Scriptures in any way, you simply can't achieve God ordained teaching that the Holy Spirit can work in. But as you experience this development and sometimes it is a process of learning; it includes skills such as speech, reading, writing, etc. and knowing our own capacity and limitations. Yes, a lot of this can be learned if you are willing to let God rebuild you from the inside out. We also need to know the proper care of human resources such as health, exercise and recreation. This development also helps us to pursue the arts, music, leisure time and other attitudes and habits appropriate to the person of God which include moral and ethical behaviour, relating to God's standards. The educator should also be concerned that the attitudes and behaviour patterns should be consistent with Christian ethics. You must have a Christian ethical persona because there are forces and influences within and without that interfere with the development of wholesome Christian attitudes. The Christian should understand that they are responsible for Christian relations with others. The Christian should be aware of the fields of opportunities that are available to them and to know their own aptitudes involving such.

Christian education is a process where a student is involved in learning Christian ideals and theology and these should be differentiated from secular influences as much as possible. Christ is reshaping humanity to be like Him through the process of redemption for those who know and accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Educators can be parents, friends, teachers, wives and husbands. Education takes place everywhere; in talking with people, in a school, institution, college or university. But in dealing with people you can't be bashing their heads although you will most likely experience this from them. Those who are teaching must be a Christian committed to a life of faithful service to God in Christ. The training must operate in an environment of love, faith, and obedience where love is the motive, faith is the chart and obedience is the goal. A Christian environment can provide a learning process which is distinctive because it accepts divine ordinances for personal development. But this environment must be holistic and sometimes it is difficult to get everyone on board with this. A Christian environment represents a culture of its own where any curriculum should represent a life-giving principle in self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ with prayer. The student is the learner but in a sense, the teacher also must be open to learning. Children are viewed in terms of their physiological-life, their social-emotional-life and in their knowledge of life, but this can be applied to just about anyone. Only in their relationship to God, students can be regenerated. The stages of learning first include

childhood, puberty, adolescence, and finally adulthood. The youngest that I have ever talk has been fifteen year olds; I have more training teaching adults than children.

My wife, an elementary school teacher says that pre-school years of a child shows a readiness to learn which the school should be prepared to meet in organized play, in construction, in reading, etc. The school gradually differentiates areas of learning according to the maturity of the child. As directed, the child begins to express himself with security and confidence in different areas. It takes about six to seven years for the child to develop and mature in his basic life knowledge. After this, the student is reasonably well prepared for the puberty stage of life where major changes start to take place in the physiological and social dimensions of the person's personality. John and Cornelius say that there is a desire for freedom and responsibility that begins to show that requires a certain amount of direction from the educator. This demand for freedom will increase as the student progresses in age which will require a less degree of guidance. Yet, even the more mature adolescent appreciates a firm hand by the teacher because they do understand their own aggressiveness. These aggressive feelings threaten his security. Areas of study should be organized to bring adolescents face to face with truths that guide them in their whole-person-in-life.

So we see that the Christian school hopefully seeks to mature the student in a cultural medium appropriate for this purpose. This requires certain phrases which is set within what we call curriculum. Curriculum is a guide to what should take place in a school learning environment. Because life is only understood in relation to those things around the student the basic principles of learning and those of life must be in line with each other. These principles also include ways to handle abstract areas of life, acceptance of truth and its impact in his life. According to the article, the major stages in curriculum organization are kindergarten through grade three, the intermediate grades four through six, junior high school grades and senior high school grades.

My wife, Janice Smith, says that the primary grades curriculum should community life, Bible stories of individuals, living related reading, skills in writing and maths and proper loving discipline. Know that discipline becomes more and more difficult because many parents now sent their unruly children to Christian schools because they are no longer allowed secular schools. Discipline is a difficult issue; you can no longer spank a child to teach that unruliness result in a wayward and a life that will punish them far worse as they grow up than a spanking. The intermediate grades include classroom citizenship, peer groups, guided Bible reading on salvation as self-revelation. This of course takes place these days

only in a designated Christian school. Well, other learning should include language and social studies. For the junior years, major life commitments should be included in curriculum development along with Biblical truths, language, social sciences and history, maths and arts. For the seniors, Bible books should be understood along with church history along with the idea of the call of God on individual lives.

As stated, this is nothing but a brief indication of what Christian education is about. Some would say that it is somewhat unrealistic or even unachievable in today climate where Christian activities is becoming more and more limited. But understand that these points are as important to understand and are as relevant today as any other time in history.

Some of the problems associated with these points has to do with understanding what the Christian teacher believes in today? Do they truly understand and know the Bible and its doctrines or they have a superficial understanding of it? In my own church, most have a very basic and superficial understanding of God. You may not agree but all of these points still apply today especially in most Christian Schools regardless of the country. The commitment to the spiritual and historical side of the Bible is encouraging and much needed.. This article is simple and straight forward and uncomplicated.

Julie Conlan says that the following theories of action learning, experiential learning, project based learning and self-directed learning should be inclusive to the teaching program and the teacher.

Resnick states in an article published by the National Academy Press, Washington DC in 1987 that schools have tried to teach students to think critically, to reason, to solve problems, to interpret, to refine ideas and to apply these in creative ways. These higher order thinking skills are non-algorithmic and complex, yielding multiple solutions which involve nuance judgment and the application of multiple learning criteria. It also involves self-regulation of the thinking process and finding structure in apparent disorder. Higher order thinking is also effortful with goals representing what used to be called high literacy involving extensive writing and textual criticism.

Two such higher order skills are reading and the ability to communicate effectively. Communicating effectively is greatly lacking in our society today. Remember that on the one hand we are talking about Christians teaching children in a Christian school with students who may or may not be Christian. Nevertheless, whether Christian or not, they will interact in a secular society. There also needs to be a combination of what is written, prior knowledge, making inferences, noting connections, checking and organizing in order to construct a

representation of what the author intended to communicate. Yet, normally, written texts are incomplete expressions of the author's mental representation, thus we can no longer trust our assumptions in the cross cultural world which we live in.

More specifically, in order to construct effective meanings and comprehension from texts, readers must have linguistic knowledge, topical knowledge, rules of inference and conventional rhetorical structures. Narratives must have a natural flow otherwise the reader will find it difficult to understand what they read. Certain frameworks should also be in place to support and sustain communications between the reader and the writer which are represented by structures such as compare/contrast, cause/effect and problem/solutions. The reader depends on these linguistic, topical and inferential knowledge as a meaning imposing process to attain comprehension. This also includes self-questioning and summarising whereas writing consists of shaping ideas and thoughts for the purpose of appealing to an intended audience. As mentioned, this requires you to call upon a wide range of knowledge for the purpose of the construction of argumentation. These metacognitive skills are characteristic of effective learners, good readers and writers. What is being said here is beyond the character of the individual teacher which has hopefully been sorted out and defined. So, different strategies are to be used at different times but weak readers often apply strategies in-discriminatively which disrupts comprehension. Tutors must share responsibilities for text interpretation with the ability to model certain interpretive processes.

Resmick says that in regards to understanding intelligence, there is no fully satisfactory definitive definition of the term. Programmes that help define intelligence include vocabulary building activities, exercises involving synonyms and antonyms, analogies, spatial reasoning items and certain kinds of logic tasks. Some theorists suggest working in pairs alternating between problem solver and listener critic to help enhance intelligence. Others have suggested problems that encourage general reasoning and argumentation skills. Many books often present techniques for displaying the relationship between segments of an argument which includes certain vocabulary and such structures. One author commented that reasoning must come from a concrete or absolute source because it can't be done within the abstract. Higher order learning looks at reading as an enabling discipline, along with writing and effective oral communications. Writing helps to think through arguments and to master forms of reasoning. Writing should be treated as an intentional process involving already mentioned mental resources in linguistic knowledge, topic knowledge and knowledge of processes of attentive and judgement. The process of learning is also aided when there are

many opportunities to observe others engaging in thinking activities such as thinking aloud or brain storming and also simply writing the points out. Other cognitive styles included reflectivity while others include external and intrinsic motivation.

So, we have seen that higher order thinking is extremely important for successful learning and good thinking which depends on specific knowledge. This good thinking must be based on a Christian and Biblical point of view. Elements of thinking are clearly teachable and successful educational achievement requires both motivation and appropriate cognitive activity.

In Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy, this consists of a mental construct of thinking and learning process. This process identifies three domains: cognitive, affective and kinaesthetic. This taxonomy contains six levels: the bottom three are considered lower levels which promote lower thinking skills of knowledge, comprehension and application whereas analysis, synthesis and evaluation promote higher order thinking skills.

For adults, the theory of transformation learning asserts that learner's critical reflection and critical thinking are closely related. Others have added to bloom's taxonomy by changing the titles to verbal information, concrete concepts, rule using, problem solving and cognitive strategy. Christian adults have been greatly affected by this type of thinking and has challenged their Christian stand. From this point, we deal more with secular and non-Christian institutes than Christian institutes.

Andragogy is a pedagogical practice that focuses on adult learners. It says that adults are responsible for their own learning (Malcolm Knowles 1975). Instructional design factors are concerned with self-direction, previous experience, motivation, readiness, need to know, timing, practicality and socialization. So this critical thinking is a well-known critical western learning theory, it is a higher-order thinking skill that consists of evaluating arguments. This type of teaching has been detrimental to Christian thinking and the Bible. It is purposeful, self-regulatory and strongly judgmental resulting in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference against God as well as explanation of the evidential conceptual, methodological or contextual consideration upon which the judgement is based.

Some assumptions of adult learning are summarized under what is called andragogy which is the art and science of helping adults learn. Five assumptions are made about adult learning. First, they can direct their own learning and their needs are often associated with social rules. Adult students come with a life of experience which they can apply to their learning. There are internal factors that motivate adult learners and often they are problem

focused. Self-directed learning has been referred to as, ‘a theory of adult education’ or ‘adult learning.’ Besides their experiences, adults come with cognitive abilities and age factors.

Facilitators of adult learning should be aware, understand and be able to use the basics of design and delivery when dealing with adults. This includes such items as needs assessment, developing objectives, creating an agenda, selecting appropriate activities, the ability to process transfer of materials plus design, conduct and evaluate activities. Facilitators should also realize the diversity of adult learners and their different learning styles. The use of reflective practice skills can be used to make sense of their situation, tailoring learning solutions to their own and other local learning needs, developing and nurturing collaboration. They should also understand how to coordinate university-based, certificate and in-service programmes designed as learning laboratories and have the ability to develop activities that involve active learning. Facilitators should be able to use more than one delivery system such as online and eLearning. They should be able to create better ways to include opportunities for reflection, clarification and guidance.

One such theory is known as *action learning*; an approach to working with people and helping them to develop in regards to solving real problems. There are groups and group leaders with each group contributing to solving a problem. In this approach, objectives are set, groups are created, challenges are presented, problems are defined, actions are identified, actions are tested, results are discussed, action plans are set and conclusions are drawn up. Overall learning takes place through on-going action and reflection among the groups.

Another theory involves what is known as a *case study*. This is a real live example of an action situation that took place. Among other things, it utilizes group dynamics to see what actions were taken to solve a problem.

Another well-known theory in adult learning is *experiential learning*. This is a learner-centred theory that operates on the premise that individuals learn best by experience. This is the way that most adults learn best. It is learning by doing. It is a cyclic process involving setting goals, thinking, planning, experiencing and making decisions followed by observation and reflective, following by revision. The process allows for understanding and transfer of skills and knowledge. It is doing something and discovering what it is like, how it feels and what it meant. It addresses the cognitive, emotional and the physical aspect of the learner.

The next theory is more informal learning. *Self-Directed Learners* analyse their own needs, goals, identifying resources, strategies and evaluating the outcomes, strategies and

evaluating the outcomes. This is the most difficult for adults unless you are greatly motivated with a good deal of discipline. My experience is that, this isn't for everybody, yet it is indeed a very good way to approach learning; being independent of a teacher. Motivation is the key to a successful self-directed learning experience. This motivation comes from gaining new skills, knowledge and attitudes.

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