



Commentaries on Facets of the Schooling Paradigm: *Transforming the Schooling Paradigm*¹

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The School's Classroom is the place to learn. *Is this what we want?*

No. this facet of the schooling paradigm is part of the problem! The classroom is generally an unnatural part of life and is rarely the only place or the best possible place to learn.

Principle: Whenever possible, think first of practical locations and situations rather than classrooms—places where the learning will be used in real life.

What are best available choices for learning environments? **Recommendation:** *Choose learning environments that look and “feel” as much as possible like the places and situations in which the learning will be used.*

What learning environments are most convenient to the fields and situations where learners will work? **Recommendation:** *Choose environments and locations that are close-by so that learners can put the learning to work promptly.*

How can the teaching and learning be made less dependent on classrooms? **Recommendations:** *Make the assignments practical and job-related. Use the group meeting-times for discussion and sharing of prepared plans, not for reading and writing.*

School as Schedule. *Is this what we want?*

No. This facet leads away from creative reasoning. While the discipline of following a schedule develops in a person certain good habits, it rarely encourages spontaneous and timely problem-solving.

Principle: Schedules should *serve* the learner groups, not control them.

What guidelines can be suggested for establishing appropriate schedules? **Recommendations:** *Seek advice from the learners about making the teaching-learning schedule better fit their life-schedules. Try to make the schedule serve the learners rather than expecting the learners to adjust to the schedule.*

What are the indications that the schedules used in your program are serving the learners?

Recommendation: *Pay attention to the judgments of the learners, including their complaints!*

What biblical teachings can help learners see and accept their personal responsibility for disciplining themselves to the requirements of appropriate schedules? **Recommendation:** *In the Pauline epistles, for example, note the emphasis on personal accountability in matters of the disciplines of spirituality.*

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School as Conformity. *Is this what we want?*

No. For a Christian, conformity to Christ comes first; social conformity, even within the church, is a diversion. The purposes of learning include the capability of initiative and creative adaptability; these are not encouraged by conformity.

Principle: *Avoid the tendency to remake learners in the image of some “ideal product” from your own mind.*

In what ways could the variability among the learners be more respected? **Recommendation:** *Encourage the learners to recognize and respect the different gifts that God has given each one.*

What biblical light can be shed on the difference between conformity to Christ and the generalized habit of “giving in” to pressures? **Recommendation:** *Identify in the life of Christ the situations in which he chose not to be like others, even when his disciples encouraged conformity.*

How can the learning situations encourage diversity? **Recommendation:** *Encourage the learners to establish skills, topics, and competencies that can become uniquely “one’s own,” rather than moving through the training becoming standardized pieces in a machine.*

School as Relationships. *Is this what we want?*

Yes. Relationship-building is a fundamental part of life in a healthy church. Leaders need to learn how to encourage it.

Principle: Center the teaching-learning experiences on relationship-building. Relate the social relationships to the spiritual relationships.

How well do the learning experiences build interpersonal relationships? **Recommendation:** *Provide situations in which the learners can become better acquainted with each other.*

In what ways have learners learned to enjoy working with others and sharing their accomplishments with colleagues? **Recommendation:** *Since working together is one of the best ways to develop healthy relationships, encourage collaboration and sharing rather than privatizing his or her own learning tasks.*

To what extent do learners recognize the procedures and situations that Jesus used to encourage sharing and cooperation among his disciples? **Recommendation:** *Help your learners search through the Gospels for situations and methods employed by Jesus to stimulate cooperation.*

School as Authority: *Is this what we want?*

No. Authority should be based in the truth of God revealed in Scripture. Leaders share a special responsibility to assure that human authority is understood as being subject to Christ.

Principle: When respected, honored, or glorified to excess, the school can put itself on a level of authority competing with the church. Respecting biblical principles and teaching, we should see the church as the ultimate authoritative institution; educational institutions and programs need to be dedicated to serving God by serving the Christ-centered purposes of the church.

How can learners develop a sound relationship to God through their educational and training experiences? **Recommendation:** *What is needed first and foremost is a clear and discerning view of the church. Help your learners develop the habit of talking about their service in the church and about the church itself in light of what God is trying to bring about in their lives and through the work of the Holy Spirit equipping their giftedness.*

How can a proper balance be assured between the authority of the church and the authority of the school (or training program)? **Recommendation:** *Help learners examine the biblical teachings concerning the accountability of God's people to God's community, the church.*

How do your learners relate their learning to their worth as God's servants? **Recommendation:** *Encourage your learners to respect themselves. First and foremost, because God has shown his respect for their worth because of what is true in their hearts. Next, they should give humble thanks for their calling and the competencies that God is equipping in them through their training.*

School as Ladder. *Is this what we want?*

Yes and No. Education and training should be used to improve one's skills and usefulness to the godly purposes of life, but they should not be employed as a means for one's own self-centered advancement.

Principle: The worth of educational opportunities and training experiences is valued in terms of what they equip a person to *know*, to *do*, and to *be*. Pride and the glorifying of oneself should be seen as inappropriate.

How can you increase the logical flow of the learning tasks without encouraging mechanical patterns? **Recommendation:** *Develop in the learners habits of doing their own organizing, sequencing, and planning. Help learners think carefully about the way that knowing, doing, and being are nurtured, and particularly to reflect upon the interaction among these three aspects of learning outcomes. Which is more important—Knowing, Doing, or Being? Where does schooling tend to put its emphasis? Which of these three is more tightly linked to **character**? What insight about that can we get from the epistle of James?*

How could what is learned become more understandable to the learners? **Recommendation:** *In each presentation and discussion provide encouragement, time, and opportunity for learners to ask questions. Depend on the learners to provide answers and illustrations from their own experiences.*

How could the worth of each learning experience be made more concrete? **Recommendation:** *Do as Jesus did: Use illustrations and examples from practical experience. Parables, metaphors, and stories about applications of the ideas help learners to "make sense" of generalizations and abstractions.*

School as Imprint. *Is this what we want?*

No and Yes. Avoiding personal pride is important for the Christian leader. Pride in one's schooling readily becomes a self-centered hazard, but to identify oneself with a schooling experience that increases one's usefulness in the kingdom can be an honorable matter of thankfulness for a blessing that God has made available.

Principle: As in many life decisions, the Christian makes a godly choice in matters of education and training only to discover that once more the evidence of sin is still present. Godliness involves continual discipline of subordinating oneself to the glory of God. Thus it is especially important not to pridefully carry the imprint of an educational experience or institution.

What is the difference between pride and boasting? It may be a very fine line, but one way to think about it is to compare the pride that comes from what we have earned, accomplished, or won, to thankfulness to God that in His grace He has allowed us to fulfill His purpose for the event or circumstance. **Recommendation:** *When trying to understand pride, start with thankfulness, but recognize that*

God provides the resources for which you are thankful, enables the competency with which you address the learning tasks, and sustain your health, vitality, and motivation through His grace. Leaders need especially to develop the habit of thanking God, even when things seem to be disappointing. The recognition that “all things work together for good” is basic to Christian spirituality.

Is there such a thing as righteous boasting? Pride of achievement and accomplishment, pride in possessions, pride induced by honor and personal praise passed along by others—these are the dangerous seeds of “thinking more highly of oneself than one ought;” sound judgment depends on resisting this temptation (See Romans 12:3) **Recommendation:** *Since pride is an insidious danger for Christians in leadership roles, it is best to avoid any practice or tendency toward self-congratulation that extends and builds the common habits of pride.*

How can we make sure that God receives the glory for the things that make us thankful and “successful?” **Recommendation:** *Thankfulness is a learned habit that shows through on many occasions. A deep spiritual consciousness of dependency on God’s goodness can make a leader “successful” in humility because the glory goes to Christ—the best success there is.*

School as Social Filter. *Is this what we want?*

No but Yes. Schooling is often a tool for sorting and classifying people according to their merits; as such it too readily glorifies human attributes and accomplishments.

Principle: Even as the accreditation self-assessment process encourages an institution to seek honor by comparing itself with others, the entire teaching-learning process opens us to the seeking of pride.

What are the predictable effects of the school’s filter? What is accepted? What is filtered out? In the matter of access alone schooling wields powerful effects on individuals and groups.

Recommendation: *Carefully make a list of the characteristics of people that fit the school’s criteria of “appropriate” and “inappropriate” learners. Consider the probable consequences of this basis of inclusion/exclusion. Discuss with a partner: In what ways to you feel shaped, selected, included, excluded, encouraged, discouraged by your encounters with the schooling experiences that have filtered you?*

In what ways does the school deliver or administer its filtering effect? **Recommendation:** *Trace the sources of the criteria for exclusion/inclusion. Who benefits? Who suffers? Does the church make a valuable contribution to society through its helping Christians deepen their commitment to serve society? How do you feel about the emphasis on excellence that schooling demonstrates? What contrasts have you noted in training activities and field experiences? Is the academic emphasis preferable? Why?*

What is the basis of accountability for the school’s effects? (From whom or what does it derive its authority?) **Recommendation:** *Reflect on the evidence that Christian values, or lack thereof, show through in many ways across the training or educational process. What attention is given to fairness and bias? Why are the “good” effects valued? What effects on society are anticipated in the educational planning? What scope of Christian influence is assumed? Suggest ways to make these influences more potent.*

School as Truth Source. *Is this what we want?*

No. Idolatry is just around the corner when the school or any other human institution is glorified for what should be accredited to God. His Word is our ultimate source of authority, even when we use our schooling and training to make use of his revelations through natural revelation.

Principle: Any propagating of information and ideas should pass the test of truth. For Christians, there is no truth held in higher regard than the revelation of God's Word evident in the Bible.

Information and ideas are rarely "taught" as information to be transferred from a source to a mind. Learning is more precisely described as a search for meanings. **Recommendation:** *Dialogue and discussion are recommended forms of learning experiences intended to encourage reasoning and the application of principles. Such methods are often misunderstood. Some even deride verbal interactions as "sharing ignorance." Happily, ignorance is one commodity that doesn't "share" very easily. Instead what usually happens is better described as sharing insights. Ideally, some sort of practical experience or reading from well-chosen sources would come first so that the discussion can build upon information and ideas that will stand up well as a reliable grounding for interactions about application, meanings, and the organizing of insight-producing questions.*

Information and ideas learned as memorization tasks (called "rote learning") are rarely useful for reasoning or generating appropriate applications. **Recommendation:** *Use rote learning only for very simple fact-type data. Whenever the purposes will include applications of information into principles or varieties of practical applications, allow time and provide learning experiences for the "digestion" of data through lively interaction. Otherwise the level of understanding will remain low and provide an inadequate basis for further learning.*

Learners can be actively involved in applying and even evaluating the truth-content of information if it is taught with an emphasis on critical thinking and comparison of ideas from contrasting truth sources. **Recommendation:** *Since the basic purposes of education of training for leaders in the church includes using the Bible as a basis for moral judgments, effective learning for leaders must give attention to reasoning. The curriculum for such training should include appropriate content (information) and the means for passing along the needed skills to work with older and younger groups of growing Christians toward this sort of development.*

School as Living Library. Is this what we want?

Yes. The principal usefulness of an orderly access to documents and media is to provide source materials that can help us develop responsible and effective understanding. Thus these source materials represent the lives through which God provides the means of illuminating our understanding of his revelation.

Principle: As the "people of the book" our viewpoint and choices are based in documentary sources. We respect books as the means of access to the realm of ideas and reflections on tradition and history. Though by no means does this suggest that all sources are trustworthy, it does require us to be informed and to base our judgments responsibly on the information that relates biblical truth to culture and scientific evidence.

How can the habits of godly choices be nurtured? **Recommendation:** *Understanding of God's authority in the world can be developed through the making of choices and the wise decisions of selection of what to read and how to read it. For the Christian, one of the most important outcomes of education and training is the discriminating use of literature.*

What criteria can be used to make choices that honor God? **Recommendation:** *Consistency is one of the most important guidelines: Does the advice or reflection draw the reader closer to God as we come to know Him through the Scripture?*

Is there any value in materials that are apparently not written by Christians? **Recommendation:** *This question bothers many Christians until we learn that even in the Bible God uses the voices and the words of non-believers to inform and enlighten God's own people by providing us a more thorough view of good and evil. Consider the discussions with Satan that the prophets and the Gospels report to us; or note how much Job was able to learn through conversations with friends whose theology was obviously faulty!*

School as Regulator. *Is this what we want?*

Yes and No. The habits and mechanical routines encouraged by schooling can pull learners away from awareness of their responsibility toward a “colonial” culture of dependency. Such a culture can inhibit learners in matters of history and reasoning. Thus they learn to repress the freedom of thought upon which the biblical meaning of truth depends.

Principle: For Christians, no institution with its own traditions and values should become a substitute for biblical principles and teachings. Thus, the habits, decrees, and lifestyle of schooling should not be substituted for the Christian basis of regulating lifestyle and decisions. Every effort should be made to avoid repressing the freedom of thought upon which the biblical meaning of history and reasoning depends. “If you abide in my Word, then you are truly disciples of mine; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

What is the value of schooling? **Recommendation:** *Allow the lifestyle of schooling to become a “practice field” in which you put the disciplines of godliness to work. Recognize and accept the good that comes from discipline and the order that comes from regulation. But retain your personal identity and the accountability that comes with making your own decisions.*

Maturation is one of the parts of “growing up.” We never outgrow the lessons that schooling can teach about subordinating our own tastes, whims, and moment-by-moment preferences for the benefit of others. **Recommendation:** *Translate what you can learn from the school's emphasis on regulation into life tasks of personal decision-making and self-control. The schooling environment is a great situation in which to learn selflessness, concern for others, sharing, and “bearing one another's burdens.”*

Not even a “Christian school” can be so excellent that it will provide a truly Christlike environment for teaching and learning. Those who claim perfection—even near-perfection—for their favorite school do so at their peril. The schooling environment tends to encourage competitive behavior and selfish striving for excellence as incentives and as a primary mode of assessing quality. These non-Christlike elements are only the tip of the iceberg. No school comes even close to being a thoroughly Christian environment. **Recommendation:** *In matters of regulating and comparing academic standards, and substituting artificial encounters for real experiences with life, we must recognize the presence of sin and the damage it does to the learning environment. We must make the best possible uses of the flawed situations that surround us. This principle holds up as a value for lifelong learning!*

School as More (adding to the interactive exercise):

As a small-group exercise, select a **Principle** from one of your suggestions (as Item 12) and create some appropriate questions that will illustrate the facet of the schooling paradigm your group has added.