



Teaching for Transformation: *Implications for Assessment*¹

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Abstract. In this article, Ted Ward distinguishes among the terms used in the process of judgment. He sets responsible evaluation in ministerial education in the context of learning and schooling and suggests key areas for this evaluation.

Definitions are basic to mutual understanding. Several of the terms used following are often used interchangeably. The technical language of educational assessment is especially prone to vary from one moment to the next. **Assessment** is the philosophical and comprehensive term for the whole judgment. **Testing** is used to measure the degree of accomplishment, the extent of a deficit, or the effect of a treatment. **Measurement** is the metric outcome of testing. It provides the basis for *reporting*. **Evaluation** usually indicates a thorough and often complex examination of the merit, worth, and significance of the teaching-learning transaction. The various facets of an educational process are examined for their interrelatedness; emphasis is on the questions of *why?* and *of what value?* that investigate (assess) the origins and ultimate consequences anticipated in the learning situation. **Assessment** takes things a step further, examining the context and the larger scope of the educational process and its outcomes. **Assessment** is concerned with systematic and specific evidences of input, process, and output. It puts these matters in relation to one another in comprehensive regard to merit, worth, and significance of the teaching-learning transaction.

Several theological terms should also be clarified. **Transformation** is a more explicit term than *conversion*. **Transformation** denotes the life-change that is biblically indicated as the norm for the Christian. Because it suggests a more consequential change than that indicated by rudimentary verbal declarations, it is used as the comprehensive representation of the spiritual characteristics of the redeemed life in Jesus Christ.

This article likely will make more sense to those familiar with the language of teaching and learning, especially those who grasp the difference between developmental models and behavioristic models. There is a great difference between the images of teaching and learning that are grounded in developmental theory and those that are more mechanistic, arising from a *deus ex machina* philosophy. Great damage is done if teaching, for example, is assumed to be largely a matter of *telling*, measurable in terms of transferring pieces of language and vocabulary from the teacher to the learner. Such a view presumes that learning is essentially a matter of remembering information. Thus the teaching process is nothing much more than transmitting retainable information in such ways as to enable deposits in the learner's memory bank. For good reason, Paulo Freire called this the "banking" model of teaching and learning. One gets pieces of "knowledge" from sources presumed to be reliable, admits them into consciousness, and deposits them in an information bank where they will repose until called upon in a subsequent "thinking" moment.

For many educators, the impoverishment of such over-simplification represents a serious problem in a world demanding nothing short of the very best that learners can bring to the table. The major problem with this *brain is a computer* notion of learning is that it under-values **reasoning**. Far

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more than recalling information out of memory to answer a question, thinking is the marvelous and active mental process that is sometimes described as “making sense” out of experience. Thinking is actually a creative use of the human mind in which the great variety and many forms of experiences are brought to mind, reflected upon, sorted through, and rearranged in order to bring into conscious thought the points at which they intersect, “add up,” and point the way to an application in a current or new situation to explain or somehow resolve a nagging anxiety or to fulfill an itching curiosity. This complex process in learners is representative of what teachers who really think want their students to experience. Educational experiences have philosophical meaning, both in terms of content (**why** is this being taught?) and in terms of context (**how** are the learner’s previous experiences and the additional knowledge related?).

For the “banking” model of teaching and learning, the importance is derived from the content. Thus the *why?* is far less important than the *what?* The primary evidence of this conclusion is the stuff of testing. When the information itself is deemed to be inherently important, testing commonly puts the emphasis on *what is? who did? when was? What?* questions, especially those calling for the more elegant uses of the mind such the capability of dealing with *why? toward what outcomes?* and the vital questions of *relationship* and *hypothesis* are rarely examined. Scientific thinking, creative thought, and philosophical reasoning are highly dependent on mental processes of this latter sort.

The misuse of this concept will lead toward a dead end; merely adding courses dealing with formal logic, demanding more memorization of data tables, and adding factual tidbits to the data to be tested are of limited value in the development of the capacity to reflect, to reason, and thus to discover.

Learning: competitive or cooperative venture?

Curriculum analysis, if undertaken with serious intent and constructive purpose, will always examine the learning environment itself. One of the more important components is the quality of the social relationships. Although it is easy for teachers, especially in moments of exasperation and fatigue, to fall into the patterns of fostering conflict and cultivating hostility; few teaching and learning situations are improved by open conflict. In simple terms, the social relationship among humans is most productive and conducive to mutual satisfactions when people work together in a cooperative fashion.

Education has experienced a long tradition of competitive social style. It has arisen from the human reactions to authoritarian contexts compounded by the human tendency toward self-centeredness, interpersonal tension, territorial defensiveness, and capacity for irrational anger. Virtually all of society is affected by the *school* from which society’s institutional enterprises—from the post office, the bank, the doctor’s office, the hospital, and even public transportation—draw their styles, habits, and roles. These enterprises are formalized around the values first encountered by children in the schooling arena; they are hierarchical, authoritarian, regimented, and most often insensitive. Perhaps it is unwise to blame all of these negative qualities on the school, but since the school environment is one of the most widely encountered, the causation seems probable.

The hierarchical characteristic is perhaps the most ubiquitous. The learning environment consists of two classes: teachers and learners. The distinction is assumed to reflect that some know, the teachers, and some don’t know, the students. Control is authoritarian, assumed to be vested in those who know. Thus challenging the teacher is ruled out, even if the challenge is in the form of a problematic question raised in a sincere curiosity and willingness to learn.

In the schooling context evaluation is commonly delimited to recollection of intentional teachings. But since the likelihood of remembering these bits of knowledge will depend on the quality of the relationship between the teacher and the learner, examining only the cognitive outcomes will say very little about the most important variable, the social climate.

This truth should be understood also to extend to the nature of the cooperative/competitive environment which is engendered by the teacher-learner relationship. In *cooperative* environments, learning is greater. In *competitive* environments learning is encouraged most in those who emerge as leaders. The level of motivation may also be enhanced in those few who are inspired by “following the leader.” All in all, constructive outcomes are more likely to arise from cooperative learning activities. Such outcomes are at the base of satisfaction and preferences for various sorts of learning environments.

Learning: solitary or communal experience?

Attributes of personality are involved in the choices one makes to prefer and to seek certain sorts of experiences. While a developmentalist will presume that a substantial portion of these preferences is learned (rather than based on genetic “traits”), the basic source arises from one’s interactions with experiences. This principle can be seen in the formation of vocabulary, linguistic accent, and others of life’s earliest acquisitions. Perhaps the most useful illustration is the formation of tastes for flavors, colors, and sounds. A parent who wishes to see the child develop a broad appreciation for various foods will take care to introduce “strange-tasting” food items slowly but persistently. Most preferences in diet, music, environment, art, friends, partners, for example, are acquired tastes. These learnings begin in the **communal environment of the family**; if not, the outcome is a youngster and then an adult whose diet consists of sweet drinks, McDonald’s hamburgers, macaroni and cheese, with lots of ketchup on everything, plus a pattern of associations in life that are degrading.

Because many systematic learnings are highly dependent on activities that are fulfilled in a solitary mode—reading and musical performance skills, for example—learners can come to believe that all learning is lonely. This image of the solitary learner is prevalent in popular culture. The “bookworm” as a mousy figure with tousled hair, hunched behind massive stacks of books is the idealized image of the scholar. Students bring this expectation with them to high school and college. In valiant attempts to avoid having this become their fate, some students avoid any and all of the demands of the academic environment. Others, conceding that this is what it is all about, cast themselves in this mold and compartmentalize the collegiate experience into a dualism. They strive to fulfill social relationships in ways that are incompatible with scholarly pursuits.

In the hopeful effort to make schooling more interesting, competition has provided the thematic undercurrent. Competition is accepted as a virtue and is employed in weird and wonderful ways. Competition is not only promoted as the most humane and necessary sort of motivation for learning but as the very essence of the schooling enterprise. Awards and symbols of achievement are everywhere. Schools are intensively conscious of rank. Children are sorted and assigned access to various experiences in terms of these rankings. In some schools, ranking (rewarding) is somewhat disguised, but it is always a major factor. Children quickly learn that their social standing and personal privileges depend on their grade (assigned level) and grades (qualitative production).

Competition is assumed to be both the social stimulus and the qualitative justification for all sorts of decisions within the schooling enterprise. Competition is not just a game that children play; it is evident among teachers and staff members. It shows up in the almost irrational relationship between years of experience and position on the salary scale for school personnel. Teachers are classified in terms of the amount of academic credits earned in preparation and skill development. This fact would be more justifiable if there were clear evidences that the competency and skills of the teacher were correlated with the quantitative factors. It is enough that the symbols of merit are quantitative and that the school collects voluminous data, honoring people differently according to these often irrelevant indicators.

One of most important current transformations of the traditional paradigm of teaching and learning is the emerging awareness that learning is and ought to be a *social enterprise*. Thus the

assumption that learning is a lonely pursuit and a private experience is being replaced by a new consciousness that people learn best in situations where the interaction with others is not only coincidental but fundamental and foundational. Accepting the collegial social context of learning leads to a respect for shared experience and insights and the production of more elegant and thorough conclusions. While it is deeply imbedded in human nature to be competitive, and in many situations it is harmless and entertaining, the concrete problem is that excessive emphasis on competition works against the sort of *experience, insights, and conclusion formulation* that best define effective learning.

Schooling as education: use and misuse

Saying anything critical of schools and schooling usually leads to an emotional argument. Not surprising. People defend their view of institutional relationships with vigor. Whether the institution is the church, the medical services sector, or the financial system, whatever is most clearly habituated and assumed to function satisfactorily is virtually sacred and unassailable. Don't touch. The rage increases in direct proportion to the rigidity of the underlying assumption—whether reasonable or unreasonable, logical or illogical, wise or silly.

Some people are able to consider alternative assumptions; others are so sensitive that their fur bristles when a new thought begins to emerge. Consider this: while *education* is part of the human social situation and will emerge in practical forms in the hands of most any thinking parents, the form in which that education will be more or less effective and competently provided depends on the choices, resources, and procedures of each parent.

Schooling is one form of education—usually the first form encountered other than the family. For many, school is an alternative and a supplement to the education one encounters through experiences with parents. This is not to suggest that schooling is unnecessary if parenting is done well, but it illustrates that parenting and schooling are two processes that are aimed toward similar ends and yet are quite different forms and have different outcomes. In human societies more emphasis is given to one alternative or the other. Schooling is the more institutional mode. Parenting is a less rigidly defined form. It may be more demanding or less, and may be more or less child-centered.

It is beyond the scope of this writing to assert that schooling is either procedurally ineffective or functionally flawed. But being able to reflect critically on the ways schooling functions in the service of the church is an essential requisite for those who lead and teach toward transformation. The assumption that learning is facilitated most effectively by the schooling mode of teaching and learning is a deeply flawed presupposition.

The era of disconnection

Theological schools and Bible colleges are creatures of paradox. While most such institutions were established and are perpetually maintained in order to provide the church with leaders who can bring the knowledge of God's Word to bear upon the worldly realities in which the people of God live and minister, they maintain sharply delimited involvement with the church. In fact, as the church in modern society has become increasingly institutionalized and ceremonial, the leadership produced by the institutions has become less relevant to the people in the pews. There are a few outstanding exceptions to this disconnected affiliation, but in many cases even the churches' representatives on the boards are chosen for their business acumen rather than for the spiritual maturity so much needed in the directing and development of the educating institution. It often seems that the seminary is either irrelevant or an object of neglect and disdain. Reciprocally, the churches are telling themselves, and the world around, that the seminaries are not delivering the sort of competent young leaders they need. The most promising of the voices of change are calling for a return to the early centuries of the church when leadership development was initiated by apostolic communication within and for the churches themselves.

Hierarchy, power, and control

The major complaint against the schooling approach to teaching and learning can be summarized in these three words: it fosters **hierarchy**, uses the resultant status and structure as **power** for the purpose of **controlling** people and situations. Jesus was not the captain of the team, nor did he appoint sergeants in the “army of the righteous.” His posture was at the same time both gregarious and exemplary. He taught his disciples as a band of brothers and a circle of friends. His disdain for pomposity and the lofty airs of superiority assumed by religious leaders was evident and predictable. Although Jesus recognized and acknowledged differences among his disciples, he did not let these differences lead to a “pecking order.” He did not demonstrate nor encourage a hierarchy of authority among his followers. Jesus constantly emphasized *spiritual* authority and *spiritual* power. He helped people redirect their attention from the materialistic and pragmatic to encourage an awareness of the presence of God in the day-to-day life of humanity. His work and words increased people’s consciousness of the power of God in their lives. With all of this, he warned against human intrusions on the prerogatives of God. And yet, substantially different from the human tendency to acquire qualities and skills in order to enhance one’s power and leverage, Jesus taught that integrity is to be demonstrated by selflessness. Above all his human traits, the elegance of Jesus’ self-sacrifice accompanied by his absolutely clear voice declaring the authority of God became the lingering evidence of his sonship.

In his final charge to the disciples Jesus reminded them that they should fulfill his purposes *in his ways*. He came to seek and he expected that they would do the same. His ministry was marked by outreach and openness. Thus the Great Commission was not a command to *go*; Jesus assumed that the disciples would be on the move, and historically that has commonly been the case. The commission was that they be fulfilling the task of **making disciples** as they go.

Responsible evaluation in ministry education

In the Pauline epistles, especially, it is clear that emergence of the leadership of the early church was a function of transformation by faith due to the direct power and action of God’s Holy Spirit within an active missional life. Few if any clues suggest that “going off to school” was part of the pattern. If the institutions of formal theological education are to be returned to the service of the church, the evaluation of theological learning is one promising place to begin. But this does not call simply for more of the present mode. What now exists focuses almost exclusively on assessing memorized bits of scripture and doctrinal dogmas, often organized around “systematic” topics, in which habituated patterns and classifications have displaced timely and responsive interpretive thought.

The values we teach

Leadership development within the church should bring followers of Christ to a more thorough utilization of the giftedness that the Holy Spirit brings freely to each of Christ’s followers. Unless a leader develops the habit of stepping out of the path of Jesus, the leader’s emphasis in teaching will be on mutual respect, kindness, and the acts of love that distinguished Jesus. This respect overrides the tendency to treat people differentially based upon talents and abilities that we observe in them. These differences will be more evident in some than others, and thus it will seem appropriate to select people with more academic merit for leadership development experiences. But the church neither requires nor bestows its privileges on a selective basis; it is open to all believers; indeed it does not require merit or accomplishment, nor is it being faithful to its nature when it employs preferential treatment or special concessions. Thus when it uses its relationships with its educational institutions in such a way as to fulfill prejudices or social-class preferences, it is moving in a non-Christian direction. Christians are to avoid making judgments on any other than biblical standards and evidences of

sincere and worthy participation within the learning community. Violation of its mandates gives evidence of irresponsibility or incompetency.

These are serious matters. Education for ministry development must be consistent with the holy mission of the church, fulfilling the transformation of the Holy Spirit by encouraging through example, story, practical illustrations, and other responsible learning activities a deep commitment to living in ways that represent profound godliness in company with the simple and sincere humility exemplified by Jesus.

In the interest of facilitating the development of leadership in and for the church, evaluation should be grounded in a commitment to work with the Holy Spirit of God toward the transformation that signifies the living presence of Christ in the Christian's life.

Responsible evaluation in ministry education will examine **the competencies of thought and reasoning**—thinking that encourages discovery and exploration.

Responsible evaluation in ministry education will focus on the **development of and capacity to deal with concepts and reflections on truth**—not merely on information transfer. Ministerial leadership must hold firmly to truth. But unfortunately, the emphasis on reading and sermonizing has turned this important matter into a preoccupation with verbalization (words, words, words). In most approaches to evaluation, testing is extensively concerned with recall of bits of information, usually disembodied and fragmentary information with unclear meanings.

Responsible evaluation in ministry education will **examine the development of public and private communication skills**. From storytelling to selecting and quoting appropriate passages of scripture, Jesus' followers should be able to draw effectively from a substantial and skillfully-delivered repertoire.

Responsible evaluation in ministry education will include **assessment of the uses of and attitudes toward hierarchy, power, and control**. Through documentary and journaling experiences, evidence will be developed concerning the ways that positive uses are made of social forces and, at the same time, unhealthy encounters are avoided or remedied.

Responsible evaluation in ministry education will develop a sequence of journaled writings that will **establish the level and pattern of skill development in appropriate use of biblical content**.

Responsible evaluation in ministry education will include **assessment of one's current situation, spiritual gifts, and personal commitment to the making of disciples**.