

Good Stewardship: A Biblical and Data-Driven Approach to Educational Philosophy

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Abstract

As educators, it is imperative that we teach a diverse body of students how to be excellent stewards of the world around them by teaching them how to learn, to be excellent stewards of relationships by developing socio-emotional skills and becoming productive members of society that are a benefit to themselves and others, as they apply the knowledge they have learned in school. Students will be taught to be excellent stewards of the world around them by being taught not only imperative concepts, but also how to learn. This will enable them to continue learning after they graduate high school rather than becoming stagnant. Students will be taught communication and socio-emotional skills through classroom management principles; these strategies will enable students to express empathy and understanding for one another, as well as how to communicate in an effective and loving way, rather than merely following rules.

There are many different approaches to learning and methods by which to educate, and there are many students with individual needs and backgrounds. Educators are needed to address each one and to teach to the utmost of their ability. As a future educator, I see the need to teach students how to be good stewards of the world around them, of their relationships and society, and thus to be productive member of society. This will allow them to be a benefit to themselves, and others around them.

Philosophy of Schools and Learning

The need for learning is present from creation, even as God asks Adam to assign names to each animal; Adam is having to evaluate each creature and categorize them (Gen. 2:18-20). Ultimately, an individual's primary purpose is to bring glory and recognition to God, and an individual can do such by learning about the character of God through creation (Graham, 2009). Yet for those who do not believe in God nor desire to glorify him, there is still purpose in learning; education allows humankind to imitate in a much smaller scale the creative-redemptive nature of God within the advancements in our culture (Graham, 2009). As Christians we can use education in this way to point back to the Creator and his redemptive and creative nature (Graham, 2009). God also call us to be good stewards of our resources, such as time and money, and thus education gives us tools to do just that (Eph. 5:15). When individuals understand how the world around them works, they are better able to function in it effectively and productively. Thus, another purpose of education is to intake information about the world around us, and apply it to our schema, how we understand the world. Thus, in learning, it is the educator's job to equip the students with the skills they need in order to take in information from the world around them (Ornstein, et al., 2017). Some of these skills include mathematics, reading, writing, logic, and the like (Ornstein, et al., 2017). These skills allow students to take information from the world

around them and from there, make decisions based on the information they receive. Students must be able to communicate, live an orderly, productive life, and these are some of the foundational skills to doing so. Thus, the highest quality of education possible is necessary, so that the students are not merely learning a person's concept of reality, but true reality (Ornstein, et al., 2017). As students come to understand reality and use the tools they've learned to become productive stewards of resources in society, they can then make advancements within society, thus imitating the redemptive nature of God. As they are benefitting and working towards the good of those around them, they are also fulfilling the purpose of education: to display God's creative-redemptive work, and if they are true believers, they are also fulfilling their ultimate purpose: to glorify God and enjoy him eternally (Graham, 2009).

Instructional Practice

As educators seek to encourage their students to be excellent stewards in society, they need to have a way to teach these tools. Epistemology, or how individuals learn, is carried out through sensation and abstraction (Ornstein, et al., 2017). This means that individuals experience something through their senses, and from there they take that sensory knowledge and categorize it into different categories (Ornstein, et al., 2017). This is why there is a need for ordered, categorized learning, and why material is organized into subjects such as history and mathematics and science. Because information is taken through the senses, there is a need for hands-on and interactive learning of various subjects. Hands-on learning also helps cement the knowledge in that an individual's knowledge is based on something that exists in reality, and thus this type of learning helps students gain an accurate concept (Orstein, et al., 2017). This must be done according to developmental readiness, however. As children continue to develop, more complex types of hands-on learning can be used to encourage logic and more complex

problem-solving, as students are more able to understand complexities and multifaceted problems (Ornstein, et al., 2017). For younger learners, a more natural environment in which they can informally learn can be beneficial. Within this informal environment, the educator may contrive situations in which learners spontaneously and informally learn different concepts. Thus, the students are able to gain hands-on concrete knowledge of a concept, while also exploring the concept informally, in everyday life. Using a 6-8 step method of teaching a lesson has been effective according to research; this method of explicit teaching allows time for the educator to introduce the new material in small steps, and from there, allows the student to practice the material while given feedback (Ornstein, et al., 2017). This method of teaching is seen to be effective in learning a concept, but doesn't explicitly encouraging higher-order learning, or complete mastery of a concept (Ornstein, et al., 2017). Educators would do well to include other methods to encourage mastery and higher-order thinking by providing assignments where students must learn and teach one another concepts in a group, thinking maps, and having students predict new material based on what they have previously learned (Ornstein, et al., 2017).

Teacher-Learner Relationships

The role of the teacher is to ideally be an expert in their subject, so that they can effectively teach and encourage higher-order thinking in students (Ornstein, et al., 2017). Thus, the students will be able to wholly understand the concept, instead of merely rote recall. Teachers need to set forth clear expectations of what is expected of students, clearly show students how they can obtain help if they need it, give reminders between activities and positive reinforcement so that students are following rules, facilitate smooth transitions, remain flexible as situations arise, and guide the students through a variety of assignments and instruction so as

to keep them engaged and learning (Ornstein, et al., 2017). The educator must fill many different roles while keeping students safe and engaged and forming caring relationships with each one. For Christian educators, they may look to Jesus as an example of what their role is. For example, Jesus showed by example the lessons he was teaching (Graham, 2009). He didn't merely preach, but he lived out his instruction. Jesus was also compassionate, loving, and very person-oriented (Graham, 2009). He cared deeply about individuals, even as he was teaching. Jesus also was able to use his teaching in the context of a situation, and responded appropriately (Graham, 2009). If there was a rebuke needed, he would gently give it; but if the situation called for grace and compassion, Jesus responded in kind (Graham, 2009). As educators are able to read a situation, they must also be able to understand a situation so as to present it to students in a way that understanding the students' deepest longings for fulfillment, and step into that dissonance in a way that is relevant and is able to show students that the education they are receiving will enable as they search for fulfillment and satisfaction (Graham, 2009). Ultimately, Christian educators recognize that fulfillment only come from a relationship with Jesus, but learning allows them to understand more of who God is through created order and allows them to be good stewards of the world (Graham, 2009). From a Christian perspective, it is the role of the learner to increasingly become good stewards of the creation around them, form relationships with others in society, and enact love and mercy towards those around them (Graham, 2009). Additionally, students are ultimately dependent upon their Creator for any sort of satisfaction or fulfillment (Graham, 2009). The role of students is to intake the information they are given process it and apply it to their life, so as to be good citizens and good stewards of what is around them. For those that are Christians, learning enables them to be more dependent upon their Creator as they learn more about him through Creation. For those who are not, learning can serve as a reminder

that fulfillment cannot come from this world, try as we might. As the educator is teaching in the classroom, it is imperative that they remember the ultimate role and goal of the learner, so that they may treat them with grace, respect, providing the highest quality of education they are able while balanced with the understanding that learners are broken and affected by the fall.

Diversity

Within school systems, there is much diversity among learners and many issues that need to be taken into account by the educator. Diversity of cultural backgrounds is imperative for a teacher to consider and acknowledge. Within the content that the educator is presenting, they should present it in a way that acknowledges the legitimacy of different cultural approaches to the material (Ornstein, et al., 2017). This may be different ways of approaching holidays, the family structure, and many different other aspects. Additionally, there needs to be a multicultural focus so that diverse students can connect the learning to their own life, as well as teaching the students about diverse culture and to live and communicate with those who are different than them. Additionally, there are neurodivergent diversity factors that need to be taken into account by the educator. The educator must be aware if there are a neurodivergent students in the classroom, take great care to understand what their specific needs are, and advocate and provide for those needs (Ornstein, et al., 2017). This also may mean being aware and providing additional instruction according to the students Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Ornstein, et al., 2017). Economic diversity is also a factor of which educators need to be aware (Ornstein, et al., 2017). These various diversity factors may impact instruction in that educators may need to account for the differences in students' backgrounds and abilities and change their general instruction practice so that students are able to learn (Ornstein, et al., 2017). As the educator implements these various strategies to increase learning among a diverse group of students, the

educator must also be implementing and teaching good learning habits, socio-emotional awareness, good communication skills, and the like, so that students are able to continue learning well and will be ready for college or respective career. In one study, there was an emphasis among African American young men to increase self-efficacy, empowerment, and self-agency in their own personal stories (Challenger, et al., 2020). This intervention helped young men to make positive choices and to take control of their future, rather than letting it be set by the negative narrative heard in the media and throughout school systems (Challeneger, et al., 2020). Educators can do similarly by empowering students to make positive choices and to control their own personal narrative.

Classroom Management Philosophy

There is much data on classroom management, primarily in two types: preventative and reactive (Korpershoek, et al., 2016). Preventative measure includes developing the student-teacher relationship, preparing the physical environment, and the like (Korpershoek, et al., 2016). Reactive measures deal with correction and punishment (Korpershoek, et al., 2016). Within these categories, there are teachers' behavior strategies, which entail introducing rules, disciplinary actions, etc.; teacher-student strategies, which focus on improving and creating a supportive, caring relationship between the teacher and student; student-focused strategies, which focus on improving self-control among students; and socio-emotional development strategies, which focus on students developing empathy for one another (Korpershoek, et al., 2016). Out of all these strategies, developing socio-emotional skills among students was shown to be the most effective in reducing problem behaviors (Korpershoek, et al., 2016). This is also true for a Biblically based perspective: as students are sinful, yet they still are bearers of the image of God; thus, there is knowledge they will make mistakes (Graham, 2009). As they make those mistakes, the focus

should be on people, not on the rules (Graham, 2009). Thus, developing socio-emotional skills within students allows them to see how the consequences of their actions aren't merely a breaking of the rules, but hurting other people. Additionally, there should be a focus on building relationships between students (Graham, 2009). For example, allowing students to make decisions regarding how the classroom runs and sharing with one another. This type of community building would allow students to practice their communication skills, as well as learn about students who may be different than them in some way (Graham, 2009).

Conclusion

There are many different ways an educator could approach teaching students, and thus, my educational philosophy is a blend of learning theories, a Biblically based understanding of human nature, and data-driven interventions. This is seen throughout the emphasis on teaching students how to be good stewards of their environment by learning from it, which will enable them to be productive member of society after graduation. Data-driven and Biblically based classroom management strategies teach students how to relate to one another in an empathetic way, thus decreasing problem behaviors. Additionally, creating a community-minded classroom will encourage students' effective and gracious communication skills, which will allow them to maintain positive relationships within society.

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