Biblical Worldview and the Teacher-Student Relationship

ACSI Professional Development Forum, 2016
Ryan Dixon

Evangelical Christian School: Memphis, Tennessee

11th grade American Literature, Modern Philosophy, Creative Writing

Faculty sponsor: The Servant Leadership Institute

Cross country coach

Abby, Ezra (5) and Nora (3)
2001-2008 UTC FACIEMVS
2008-2013 YISS
2013-Present ECS
Yongsan International School of Seoul
Key Questions and Objectives

How do “creational norms” inform the way we build positive teacher-student relationships in order to develop restorative strategies for instruction and classroom management?

How does the Bible inform us about the goal or purpose of Christian education?

Participants will:
Recognize the importance of positive teacher-student relationships to the learning process.

Evaluate the impact of the fall on the assumptions we make about our students.

Compare the goals of Christian and secular education.

Recognize the importance of tension and trust in the educational experience.

Design a set of classroom expectations that reflect Christ’s work of reconciliation.
With 2 or 3 other people:

Discuss your favorite high school teacher. What were the qualities in his/her teaching style, character, or personality that made him/her effective?

Can you recall a particular lesson that this teacher taught which made an impact on you?
Relational teaching is the key

“Relationship is the very medium through which successful teaching and learning is performed.” (Reichert and Hawley, *Reaching Boys, Teaching Boys*)

Converging research trends across the world spotlight relational approaches. “Positive student-teacher relationships” were found to explain the success of students in The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). And in an analysis of nearly 100 studies, a Dutch research team found that both positive and negative teacher-student relationships affected scholastic achievement. Even hard-to-engage students respond to relational strategies. Research finds that positive learning relationships may be especially beneficial in reaching those [. . .] at the bottom of the achievement gap. And for the 30 to 50 percent of students who come to school with troubled attachment histories and who because of resistant behaviors are harder for teachers to deal with, the negative effects of these primary relationships can be corrected - “disconfirmed” - by subsequent positive ones with teachers, with corresponding improvements in school engagement and achievement. (Micheal Reichert, from “Relational Strategies to Engage Boys”)
Jesus’ Example

From Donovon Graham’s *Teaching Redemptively*

“Jesus taught with authority.”

“Jesus lived what He taught.”

“Jesus’ interaction style met the demands of the situation.”

Jesus led through humility.

“Jesus was personal.”
What is a Biblical Worldview?

“The comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things.” -Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*

Professing beliefs vs. Controlling beliefs

“Christian teachers” vs. “teachers who are Christians”

“Our worldview must be shaped and tested by Scripture.” -Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*
What is a Biblical Worldview

**Metanarrative**—the overarching story of Creation, Fall, and Redemption

**Creation**—How things *ought* be?

Laws of nature and *norms*. -Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*

**Fall**—What went wrong?

Structure and direction (Wolters)

**Redemption**—How can it be made right? Redemption: “means literally ‘to buy back,’ returning something to the original owner, or restoring it to its original state.” (Graham, *Teaching Redemptively*)
He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (emphasis added).
Relational Barriers from the Fall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alienation from God</th>
<th>Alienation from others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Colossians 1:21)</td>
<td>(Genesis 4:3-8; Job 19:13-19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation from ourselves</td>
<td>Alienation from creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Genesis 3:7)</td>
<td>(Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of the fall, we have distorted images of ourselves and each other.
With 2 or 3 other people:

What are some assumptions, positive and negative, we make about the learners in our classroom?

What is the impact of these assumptions on our ability to teach and their ability to learn?
Two Students

Jane is tardy to your class at least twice per week. She is currently failing your class, not because she cannot do the work, but because she fails to turn in any assignments. Early in the year you held a conference with her parents to express your concerns. However, you began to give up hope as the pattern continued. During class, Jane seems listless and bored.

John is a meticulous student—intelligent and motivated to succeed. He often stops in between classes or during lunch to ask questions or clarify the details of an assignment. In class, John’s hand is always the first to go up to answer questions or to make a comment. He is always on time with his work, and the quality of his assignments is exemplary.

What are the dangers of our assumptions?
Apart from the Gospel we:

Reinforce a “merit based” system of justification or worth. In this way we preach a false gospel,

Present a distorted vision of the purpose of education,

Perpetuate an image of the teacher as the “answer giver” and the student as a “passive recipient” of information.
The Gospel Centered Teacher:

Recognizes his/her dependence on God (“I can’t; He can!”),

Models humility and repentance,

Recognizes the implications of the fall, but seeks reconciliation in all things,

Teaches in a way that honors the image of God in his/her students.
Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”
With 2 or 3 other people:

Considering Christ’s work of reconciliation, come up with a sentence that best represents the goal of Christian education.

How does this goal differ from that of a secular educational system?
“Aiming beyond a target, towards eternity”

“The task of true education is to develop knowledge of God and His created reality and to use that knowledge in exercising a creative-redemptive dominion over the world in which we live. Such an outcome can be attained only by loving God and communing with Him, resulting in the wholehearted worship of God.” -Donovon Graham, *Teaching Redemptively*

“The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him. . . .” -John Milton
Reconciliation and the Christian classroom

What does it mean that we are *redeemed image bearers*?

- Creative
- Free
- Rational/Intellectual
- Dependent
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Relational

“If we subject [our students] to an educational process that *treats* them as objects rather than as God’s image bearers, what will we have? In all likelihood, we will have students who know how to *talk* about being image bearers and who *live* like objects and treat others the same--not a very acceptable result.” -Donovan Graham, from *Teaching Redemptively*
Tension and Trust

Maslow’s four levels of learning:

Unconscious Incompetence⇒ Conscious Incompetence⇒ Conscious Competence⇒ Unconscious Competence

“The art of teaching--and the difficulty of learning--is getting people to place themselves at the beginning of that cycle, to plunge to the bottom, so they can start the learning process.” (Howard Hendrix, *Teaching to Change Lives*, 41)
As teachers, we are facilitators and guides as our students actively live in the tension that comes along with learning.

If our students are going to follow us, they have to trust us.
The nature of true education:

Socrates: “Education is not what the professions of certain men assert it to be. They presumably assert that they put into the soul knowledge that isn’t in it, as though they were putting sight into blind eyes” (Republic, book 7).
Ultimate Reality

Truth
("The Good")

Shadows

The Cave

The upward journey of education
Tension and Trust

How does Plato’s analogy exemplify the tension and trust required in true education?

What are some strategies that you use to create a constructive tension in your students’ experience? How do you maintain the balance between too much and not enough tension?

What are some strategies you use to establish relationships of trust in your classroom?
The Redemptive Classroom

“We are to teach in accord with God’s creational ordinances and in a way that demonstrates His grace in redemption. We are called to apply biblical truth to the whole educational process, not just parts of it” (Graham, Teaching Redemptively).
Reconciliation and Discipline

In the way we discipline and apply our classroom expectations, how can we shift our focus from simply reacting to a problem to encouraging repentance and reconciliation?
Shane Safir, *The Listening Leader: Creating the Conditions for School Transformation*

“In reality, many schools don't operate as communities; they are transactional institutions where students come to get things—knowledge and skills, social interaction with peers, a diploma. To practice restorative justice, you have to first build a real community that is worth restoring.

Restorative justice (RJ) is a powerful approach to discipline that focuses on repairing harm through inclusive processes that engage all stakeholders. Implemented well, RJ shifts the focus of discipline from punishment to learning and from the individual to the community...
Based on our discussion today, what is the difference between a “teacher who is a Christian” and a “Christian teacher?” How does this distinction affect the relationships we establish with our students?