



Why Biblical Hospitality?

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One of the strengths of this model is that it has been rigorously reviewed at critical stages by expert trainers, practitioners, and compared with existing biblical integration models.¹ These reviews have not been cursory but detailed and thorough. Receiving this level of feedback has allowed us to sharpen how we communicate these ideas internally and with our members. The concept of biblical hospitality has received the majority of the questions. Two questions have risen to the surface: 1) What do you mean by biblical hospitality? 2) Why put the modifier *biblical* in front of hospitality?

The concept of hospitality as a pedagogical practice might be assumed in some circles, but the word itself has little to no mention in modern educational theory. In developing our foundational documents, we have followed the principle of *ad fontes*—a rigorous evaluation of primary sources, especially God’s Word—to ensure that what we share with our members is grounded in truth while allowing room for contextualization. In our search for phraseology that captures, in totality, the sense of belonging we hope students will experience in a school, the practices of Jesus—seeing people (John 4:5-42), inviting them into His world (Matt. 4:19), entering into the world of others (Matt. 9:10–13), and seeking to meet their immediate needs while pointing them to the source of everlasting healing (Matt. 9:6)—influenced our use of the term hospitality.²

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount posed these questions: “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” He ends this string of rhetorical questions with “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The challenge here is to be complete in the fulfillment of your calling. Don’t do things halfway.

Biblical Hospitality challenges our modern conception of hospitality influenced by a \$5.5 trillion global industry and degreed programs in almost every university. Modern definitions focus on the Latin root of the word, which typically means being kind, charitable, or simply one who is a

¹ Hetzel, J., & Coddington, L. (Eds.). (2023). *Biblical integration models for education*. Kendall Hunt Publishing.

² In one of the earliest iterations of our principles, we used the word “shalom,” which we defined in our Biblical Unity, Diversity, and Social Engagement document as the pursuit of love and justice. Shalom involves seeking the general welfare of every individual (justice) as an image-bearer while prioritizing their highest good (love). For more information, see acsi.org/unity. However, we concluded that “shalom” was a word that required significant exploration, presenting challenges to understanding and application. While we didn’t want to diminish the overall purpose of the document, our aim is always to use the words of Scripture to convey our meaning. Hospitality is a universally understood concept, and the general idea aligns with what we aim to achieve in the school environment. Therefore, the risk in choosing words was to err on the side of using “hospitality,” a word not commonly used in education, and explaining it within this context rather than “shalom,” which we believed might overshadow the main thrust of the document.

guest. However, when Paul uses it in Romans 12:13, it means “love of the stranger.” Philoxenia is used in Romans 12:13 and Hebrew 13:2. Philo meaning “love” and xenia meaning “strange.” The literal translation is to love the stranger as if they are a part of your family—a blood relative. The commands by both Paul and the writer of Hebrews are rather strong and to the point, suggesting this is a core practice of our expression of faith in Christ; “Practice Hospitality” in Romans and “do not neglect to show hospitality” in Hebrews. The same overtones can be heard in James’ admonishment of his largely Hebrew listeners, where he says that pure and undefiled religion is one that cares for the widow and the orphan—namely those who don’t possess the familial structure that helps us sustain the challenges of life (James 1:27); those that are typically on the fringes of societal structures. The expectation is that this familial love should be found in abundance amongst the people of God. James gives further guidance on how we ought to execute our hospitality—without partiality, (James 2:9, Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34, Leviticus 19:34).

Biblical Hospitality pushes us beyond the boundaries of our sociological comfort zones, urging us to dedicate resources to accommodating those on the fringes of our sphere of influence. True biblical hospitality doesn’t call us to compromise our core beliefs or to deny our identity; it calls us to remain anchored while not allowing our cultural mores to become a stumbling block to faith and unity in Christ. (See Romans 14-15.) This was the very concern that led to the Jerusalem Council, which declared that Gentiles didn’t have to be circumcised or observe the laws of Moses (see Acts 15).

In addition to the biblical mandate to be hospitable, brain-based and sociological research suggests that hospitality as a pedagogical imperative has a direct impact on working memory—a student’s ability to retain new learning—as well as their long-term commitment to faith in Christ.

This is particularly important for educators since their mission is to demonstrate the glory of Christ and his majesty through each subject or discipline with the aim of students developing and deepening their faith in Jesus Christ. Spiritual formation is the ultimate goal, but the Christian educator in a Christian school is specifically called (as a matter of proportion, but not in isolation) to develop the cognitive abilities of their students. The home and the church remain the primary agents in stewarding the minds and hearts of students. The Christian school, however, assists accordingly.

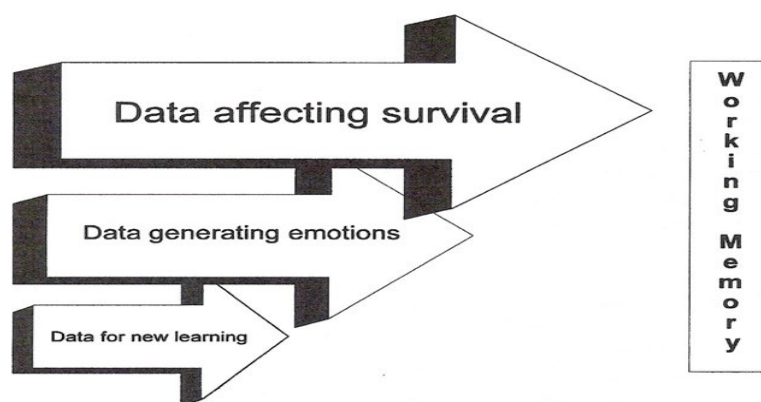


Figure 2.2 Data that affect survival and data that generate emotions are processed ahead of data for new cognitive learning.

But research has shown that our brains can limit or broaden what comes in. If there is negative data entering that impact survival or it has a negative impact on emotions, then the sensory register is likely to limit its entry (Figure 2.1)³ This means that even if the data is critical to the new learning, they may miss that data because it is filtered out through the sensory register (Figure 2.2). As an example, a student who has been shamed by a teacher typically will not hear the next few pieces of "information" that the teacher gives whilst processing the emotional negative data received from the teacher. Thus, the student misses learning and often spiritually formative opportunities. We use the term biblical hospitality to encompass the data received from the environment of the school or class because this has a potential direct outcome on the learning that takes place.

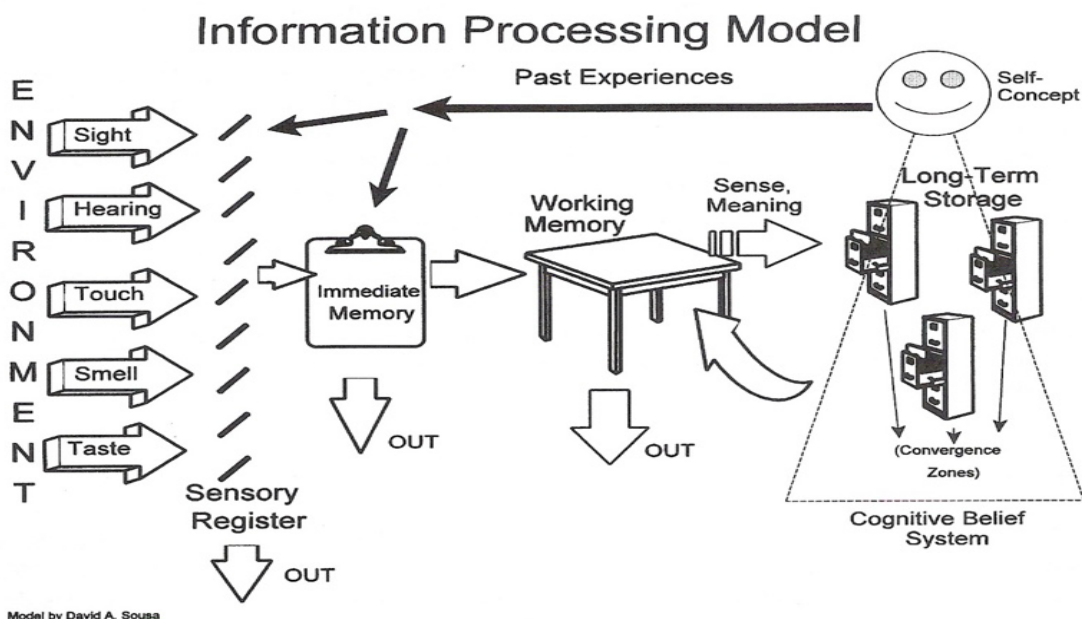


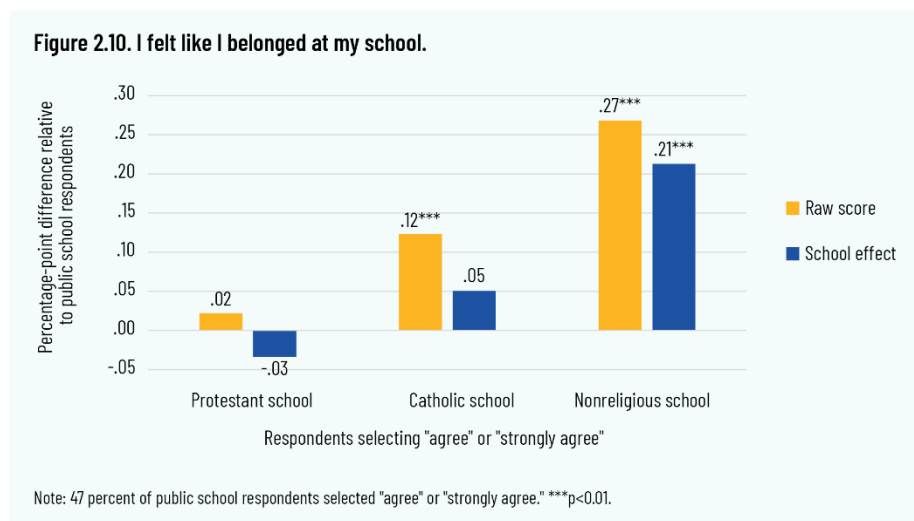
Figure 2.1 The Information Processing Model shows how the brain deals with information from the environment. (Adaptation and enhancement of original model by Robert Stahl.)

In the Flourishing School Culture Model, the triplet constructs of [Insular Culture](#), Caring Environment, and [Community Engagement](#) from the Relationships Domain suggest that a key component of a flourishing school is the degree to which schools engage their surrounding community and to an extent reflect its diversity. And while engagement is good and having the diversity of the community reflected in the school population is very positive, how graduates feel about their school experience—whether they felt safe, seen, and had a sense of belonging—is one of the strongest indicators of their continued walk with the Lord.

The Flourishing Faith Index expounds upon the importance of relationships in the Heart and Nurture domains, suggesting that wooing students to Christ includes the presence of a supportive culture, faithful friends, peer encouragement, and hopefulness. The importance of connecting and belonging is deeply intertwined with a student's disposition towards the propositional aspects of faith. In other words, there is a greater chance students will believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he rose from the dead if there is someone in their life who walks with them and models Christ in their interactions.

³ *How the Brain Learns* (2002) Corwin Press pg. 43

A [recent Cardus report](#) shows that while Protestant Christian schools in the global West have made great gains academically compared to public schools, we have seen declines in students' sense of belonging in our institutions. One probable reason for this decline in sense of belonging is the tendency to lead with secular (or non-biblical) approaches to overcoming the persistent lag in academic rigor. An either-or proposition is not suggested here; rather, it is a matter of whether our pedagogical practices are aligned with Scripture, aligned with our mission as Christian schools, and are the most compatible with how students, made in the image of God, learn.



What is suggested here is that biblical hospitality unlocks the greatest potential in the image bearer as they sense the love of Christ in administrators, teachers, peers, and parents; remain open to new and challenging learning; and begin to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to take this new learning and advance God's kingdom. True biblical hospitality unlocks divine purpose and potential in all of us, especially the students we serve and lead.

Reflect and Discuss

Reflection questions for administrators:

- Evaluate your mission, vision, and core values. If a parent were reading it with little knowledge of your institution, would it come through that it is a place of belonging?
- Examine your admissions and onboarding policies. Is there alignment with your mission, vision, and core values? What practices are in place to prepare families (parents and students) to feel a sense of belonging as they join your school community?

Reflection questions for classroom teachers and coaches:

- What practices do you have in place to help students feel a sense of belonging in your classroom or on the practice field?
- Consider a student who might not like the subject you are teaching or do not feel confident or even antagonistic. How might you set them up to gain confidence and feel empowered to embrace the challenge of the subject? What are the implications for young athletes learning a new sport?

Reflection question for support staff:

- What practices do you have in place to help students, parents, or teachers feel a sense of belonging in your area of influence?

Reflection question for spiritual formation ambassadors (chaplains, discipleship directors, spiritual life coordinator, Bible teachers, etc.):

- Recognizing that students are at different faith levels and knowing that some are even antagonistic to faith in Christ, how do you create the conditions for receptivity to faith in Christ without compromising or diluting the core teachings of the Gospel?

Bonus Question:

- What practices do you have in place to address when this sense of belonging is threatened?

Reflection questions for structuring Professional Learning:

- Reflect on your school's professional development or learning objectives for your staff.
 - Are the objectives tied to the mission and vision of the school?
 - Are there clear expectations of what it means to be a Christian educator?
- Do the learning opportunities take into consideration how best adults learn?
- Does the environment in which professional learning occurs support and encourage effective learning?
 - Is the andragogy compatible with the learning objectives?

What resources does ACSI have to promote biblical hospitality?

- Landing page: [ACSI.org/unity](https://www.acsi.org/unity)
- Print: ACSI statements of Biblical Unity, Diversity, and Social Engagement
- Webinar: Three-part Biblical Unity Series on [ACSI.org/unity](https://www.acsi.org/unity)
- Consulting and Networking: GRAACE Initiatives go to [ACSI.org/graaace](https://www.acsi.org/graaace)
- On Demand: Cultivating Biblical Unity PD by Design Series
- On Demand: Belonging Together PD by Design
- Professional Learning: Biblical Unity Summit