

JESUS' NONFORMAL APPROACH IN TEACHING (Adapted from Ted W. Ward, TEDS)

Educational theory has identified three basic types of learning situations.

FORMAL

- learning in classroom context
- structured—fixed class hours, fixed curriculum, tests, assignments, teacher-centered
- intentional
- leads to certification

NONFORMAL

- learning in/out of classroom
- less structure—curriculum is contextually sensitive to learner's needs, learning is often field-based (observing phenomenon, reflect upon meaning, seek relationships to present life), learner-centered
- intentional
- no recognized degree/certificate

INFORMAL

- socialization process whereby people become part of culture (enculturation, modeling, mentoring)
- no structure, does not lead to certification
- may be intentional, most cases it's non-intentional ("incidental")

Note the kinds of teaching situations Jesus employed.

A. Jesus & the Scribe (Mk. 12: 28-34)

v. 28

Jesus debated with Sadducees about resurrection (vs. 18-27)

Enquire, dispute, question, reason with, "seek to examine together"—common in Jesus' teaching method.

After seeing how well Jesus answered Sadducees, he asked Jesus a question (can you tell that this scribe is critical student, thoughtfully assessing teacher?)

Jesus was always open to Qs from learners.

As teachers, we tend to provide a lot of information/facts.
But are these addressing the learners' pressing questions?
Are we helping the learners with real needs?

Lecture provides high degree of control of subject area (time limited).
Also, teachers fear not being prepared, so may not want to entertain Qs.
Yet, a good teacher is open to inquiry of learners (vulnerable).

Best teaching is when teacher brings the whole of knowledge to bear in an integrating way on a question, enlightening a learner's deep concerns.

Nonformal

- Teaching closely linked to needs of learners. Something troubling the scribe. In contrast to Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees in earlier passage, this scribe had a genuine question. "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (v. 28)
- Concern in nonformal education is often "Is it worthwhile?" not "Is it coming out in the exam?"

Formal

- Structure & control—credits, grades, papers (pages?), tests, grades
- Strict curriculum to be covered
- Concern in formal education is, "You may not come across the issues now, but you will after you graduate." Students take notes, file them up for future, and may never read notes again!

v. 32

After Jesus quoted from the *Shema*, the scribe commented, "Well said Teacher."

Student sits in judgment of teacher, not just teacher judging student.

Why? We are a learning community.

Need to nurture this thoughtful element in our learners. Are students thinking about what you are saying?

Scribe continued, "You are right in saying..." (v. 32)

The scribe's "right" is not just academic, but functional (relates to life).

Shema is not just head knowledge; it's wholehearted love for God.

Formal

- Concern with academic knowledge, rational and defensible truth
- A cognitive concern

Nonformal

- Concern with both academic and functional knowledge, truth and relevance.
- Greek notion of "truth" is non-material, philosophical, abstract idea.
- Hebraic wisdom is truth expressed in practical terms, life-related. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1: 7; 9:10)

v. 33

Dialogue going somewhere. Ideas lead to more ideas.

Scribe talked about loving God and neighbor as "more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Teacher's comment leads to more ideas.

Need to teach toward “creative thinking” (development of new ideas), not just “critical thinking (examination of current ideas).

v. 34

Jesus gives his judgment, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

This is a scribe, a doctor of the law, but Jesus said, “You are not there yet.”

Jesus almost teased the scribe to ask, “What do you mean?”

Good teaching always causes a “disequilibrium.” Good teachers will throw a spanner in your thinking, and force you to re-think the problem.

How do you think the scribe felt when he heard Jesus’ response?

He must be wondering, "Am I not in the kingdom?"

What would the other hearers be thinking?

"If the scribe is not in the kingdom, what about us?"

Formal

- Operates propositionally, didactically.
- Students hold teachers liable for giving them answers to pass exams.

Nonformal

- Operates in nonclosure way. "Not quite right."
- Students are encouraged to find the answers for the problems themselves. Teacher is to help learners discover truth, not just giving truth; learning is an act of “co-construction.” To teach is to arouse and direct the self-activities of the learner. (Seven Laws of the Learner).

B. Jesus at the Temple Courts (vs. 35-37)

v. 35

Jesus asks a critical question,

"Why do scribes say the Christ is David's son?" (v. 35)

David calls him (the Christ), 'Lord.' (v. 36)

How could he be David's son? (Question repeated, v. 37)

Jesus points them back to the information and asks them to take a second look.

Do what the experts say square with the data?

v. 37

The large crowd listened to Jesus with delight.

What are the people enjoying? The “dilemma” that Jesus has just highlighted!

People enjoy learning when you get them to think about their problems more deeply.

When we challenge glib answers and shallow conclusions. Most people can tell when an issue is complex!

Formal

- Invite people to memorize more than think.
- Acquiring information is more important than developing ideas.

Nonformal

- Thinking and learning facts are equally important!

C. Jesus at the Temple Treasury (vs. 41-44)

v. 41

Jesus sat down and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury (lots of fanfare and conversation over the generosity of the giver, the amounts).

"Sit down, I want you to watch something."

Formal

- Emphasis on hearing

Nonformal

- Emphasis not just on sight, but sound and whole of lived experience.
- Debrief—talk about meaning of experience (observe, reflect, conclude)
- Allows us to put ideas into words and make them accessible to the mind (abstract conceptualization)

Life experiences help us encounter events fully with all senses.

We provide learners the opportunity to reflect upon their experience, to draw certain conclusions, meaning, ideas.

Encourage "reflective praxis" (action-reflection feedback loop)

Conclusion

Formal learning is so much part of our educational experiences. It has formed us in certain ways, affecting how we teach.

We need to expand our ideas of education (learn about nonformal approaches) and revise some of our educational methods.

Reflection

1. What are the advantages of formal learning?
2. What principles in nonformal approaches to education particularly apply to our teaching & learning contexts?

Select Bibliography

For nonformal learning, see resources on Moodle.

For teaching method of Jesus.

Keith Ferdinando, "Jesus, the Theological Educator," *Themelios* 38, issue 3 (Nov. 2013)

H. Blocher, 'Jésus Educateur', *Ichthus* 128 (1985)

Tony Compolo and Mary Albert Darling, *Connecting Like Jesus: Practices for Healing, Teaching and Preaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010)

Nicholas Burbules, "Jesus as a Teacher," is reflection of his teaching style for moral education. See website: <http://faculty.ed.uiuc.edu/burbules/papers/jesus.htm> (think he's on faculty at U of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign).

La Verne Tolbert, *Teaching Like Jesus: A Practical Guide to CE in Your Church* (Zondervan, 2000).

Herman H. Horne, [*Jesus the Teacher: Examining His Expertise in Education*](#). Revised and updated by Angus M. Gunn (Kregel Publishing, 1998).

Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

PHEME PERKINS, *Jesus as Teacher* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), reprinted 1991, 1995, 1998.

Joseph A. Grassi, *Teaching the Way: Jesus, the Early Church, and Today* (University Press of America, 1982).