

CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

Teacher Tips by Wendy Guthrie

THE FIRST ARTICLE of this four-part series introduced the idea of *community* as the context in which learning takes place. This installment will focus on using certain teaching strategies to promote learner engagement, which helps to build community within the classroom.

A Comprehensive Process

Learning should be viewed as a comprehensive process that involves not just the head but heart and hands as well. Lesson preparation and delivery should take this into account. Students need information to ponder and reflect upon (head), but they also need input that interacts with their emotions (heart). It is head and heart together that will challenge learners to some sort of action (hands).

A Personal Process

Because learning involves more than just the intellect, teachers must find ways to make it relevant to the learner—to help the learner attach the information from class to his or her previous knowledge and experiences. One way to do this is to use current events or past personal experiences as an introduction to the lesson.

For example, in a lesson on the birth of Jesus, you the teacher might begin by having a couple tell their story of being surprised and alarmed to have a child born in an unanticipated environment (in the car on the way to the hospital, etc.). If a couple with a personal story such as this is not available to relate it, a learner (or you) can share a similar story about someone you know personally.

Using this method activates learning on an emotional level as well as on an intellectual level. The lesson becomes personalized to the learner rather than being just a collection of facts or verses the teacher thinks are important. Lessons that become emotionally and personally relevant

prompt the learner to make application to his or her life, thus better assuring changed thinking and behaviors.

An Engaging Process

Using strategies that promote problem-solving, cooperative learning, and personal reflection will also help to build fellowship among a class of learners. Rather than relying on lecture or questions and answers as the main vehicle for dispensing biblical information, a teacher could use the following scenario for a lesson on James 5:13-18: Begin by showing the class pictures of people in need of prayer or needing to pray for the various reasons listed in the text. Say that there are people like this in every church (the problem).

Next, propose a prayer ministry where church members make personal visits to those in need of prayer or who need help praying. Have students brainstorm the pros and cons of this idea and record their responses on the board. Then divide students into groups and assign portions of the text to each, asking groups to defend or refute the proposal as they combine the pros and cons with what they see in the text (cooperative learning). Finally, give each learner an index card on which he or she will identify the biblical strengths and weaknesses of your original proposal (personal reflection).

A Growing Process

When learners struggle together to solve problems, they become connected to one another and begin to trust each other with their own flaws and shortcomings. Trust builds community, and community helps each learner to grow in his or her walk with God. Teachers who use strategies that engage learners in not only the knowledge of Scripture but also in its emotion and action will accomplish the goal of the gospel.