



Leadership Letter

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John Dewey, the American philosopher who died in 1952, objected to the idea that education was simply the transmission of past knowledge (usually facts and figures) to the present generation. He also objected to how knowledge was transmitted only through lectures and reading. It's amazing how little we have changed in our educational approach in the last 50 plus years.

Thinking of teaching approaches, I can remember sitting in so many meetings over the years, at school, university and church where time seemed to stand still. I had tuned out, because everything seemed so boring, predictable, unchallenging, irrelevant and therefore didn't warrant my attention. In so many meetings the only thing really moving or changing was the clock on the wall. My mind wandered to think about how many ums and ahhs the speaker was slipping into, or what I needed to do in the break. I believe the teaching style needed some inspiration!

John 21 gives us a wonderful example of the way Jesus taught, developed, coached and challenged Peter and the disciples and witnessed transformation in their lives. Let's focus into the scene and identify some of the basic principles that were key for Jesus as he trained the disciples.

Jesus prepared an environment. While the disciples were struggling to catch fish on the lake, Jesus had already been fishing, made a fire and had breakfast cooking. So as the disciples approach the shore, Jesus calls out to them with a hospitable welcome to breakfast. He even creates a miracle catch of fish so the disciples have something to add to the breakfast feast. It must have reminded Peter of when he was first called by Jesus when he had been asked to cast the net on the other side. Jesus had used the miraculous catch of fish back then as the basis to challenge Peter to be a fisher of men.

When the environment is positive, it opens our hearts to receive input. When we feel at ease, comfortable and welcomed as a friend, it's so much easier to open our heart, be teachable and responsive. My wife and I recently invited a couple over to our house for a meal. We laid the table nicely with our special dishes, had the fire blazing, cooked a delicious meal and generally pulled out all the stops for a beautiful evening together. During the evening we connected as couples and had a very enjoyable time. A few days later I met with the husband for a coffee and he poured out his heart to me. What made that possible? Well we had put some effort into creating a warm welcome and had prepared the environment. We need to be creative first of all with the environment in which we teach before we even start talking! What are some of the things you can do to prepare your teaching environment? *"Create a climate to connect with the creator"*

Jesus valued relationships. Jesus knew the disciples had been disillusioned and discouraged after the crucifixion. Even though he had appeared to them, he wasn't with them all the time and here they were back fishing. So he went down to the beach and

called out to them to join him. Just like when he first met them, he had invited them back to his house for coffee. Establishing the relationship was central for Jesus. Throughout the gospels we see him inviting people to meals, or accepting invitations to meals even to the point where he is criticized for it. For Jesus, learning was all about relationship.

When you think back to your school days, who was your favourite teacher? You probably learned the most and were motivated by the teacher who cared for you and with whom you had more relationship. On the negative side, I even gave up a subject because I didn't like the teacher. As teachers we value people by being approachable, listening for their needs, being open in our sharing and believing in them as people. Rather than stay aloof we need to look for ways of building relationships with those we teach. *"Education is relationship" – a YWAM early childhood education principle.*

Jesus created a sensorial experience. Jesus didn't just tell a story or preach some principles to the disciples. He produced a miracle, made a fire, cooked breakfast and got them involved in the whole process. Children love to be hands on and use their five senses in any learning experience. The truth is that we are all just big kids. We may not all love the hands on approach but we can learn a lot more that way. Think back to the last teaching that you really learned an important lesson and worked it through. The chances are that it wasn't a straight lecture. It was probably an experience you were going through, a clear picture you could look at, a symbol you related to or something you can even visualize now as you think about it. Jesus was always using visual aids like the fig tree without fruit, the money in the fish, the farmer sowing seeds, turning over the tables in the temple and a hundred more examples. John expresses the use of his senses as he writes in his letter: *1 John 1:1 "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched..."*

I learn as I am involved in activities, do role plays, verbalise, discuss and do something practical in application. My kids still talk about the preacher on Sunday morning who created a John 21 scene in the centre of the meeting hall. He started telling the story of the disciples fishing and started cooking on his camp stove at the same time. He warmed the pan, put in the oil and freshly prepared fish and continued with the story with the background noise of sizzling fish. Everyone's attention was on those fish. Of course at the end everyone got a taste too. We may not all be able to take a campfire into our classroom but how can we create a sensorial experience where people will use more than just their ears. *"Maximum involvement gives maximum results" – Edgar Dale*

Jesus had an outcome in mind. Jesus wanted to see Peter encouraged, motivated, get back on track and be ready to take on the leadership. Peter was struggling to forgive himself after his denial of Jesus and he needed a breakthrough. So Jesus, having developed an environment, built a relationship and created a sensorial experience together, now needed to move to a concrete application.

There are two kinds of application. The first kind is a *"practical application."* Having heard the basic principles around a topic, we need the time to exercise our new knowledge or discover further as we discuss, go through activities or do an assignment of some kind. Through this practical application we find out what we really know about the topic and recognize our need to go back for some more help and understanding.

The second kind is a “*Spiritual application.*” It’s one thing to gain head knowledge, but it’s quite another for that knowledge to move 25 centimeters to our hearts. Peter had already done the assignment of 2 by 2 outreach, working with the 72, and then the preaching, healing and casting out demons modules. He understood what it was to be a disciple. Now was the time for a spiritual application and Jesus asked a question: “Do you love me?” Peter answers at first with his mind, so Jesus asks again. By the 3rd time of asking, the message has reached his heart and Peter’s spirit is reunited with Jesus. Then Jesus prays for Peter and prophesies over him, solidifying this new commitment.

Weeks later we see the transformed Peter full of the Spirit leading a move of God in the city of Jerusalem. He was a good learner, but it took a teacher who understood how Peter was best going to learn to see that transformation come about.

Let’s give room to the Holy Spirit in our training, to guide our students into all truth, in the way he desires. That means praying through what would be a spiritual application for the topic in hand and then making time to work through it.

Jesus has the attitude of a learner. Scripture says that Jesus understood obedience by the things that he suffered, and that “*He only did the things he saw the Father doing.*” As we take on roles in leadership and begin to fulfill tasks that produce fruit, we soon come to the realization that we will never arrive. We recognize that “The more we know, the more there is to know” and that we can learn from every situation and from every person. Jesus didn’t put on his “teacher hat” or his “master status” or his “Godhead (leadership role) position”. He simply related naturally and supernaturally and asked questions, listened and allowed his disciples to come to conclusion. As teachers and followers we need to be ready to share our weaknesses, failures and struggles and share them even as we are going through them and not only after we have made them successes. We can often think failure is a disaster, but the truth is that God sees it as a learning curve. We can be real, life long learners and make every learning session not just for the participant but for ourselves as well. In this way we will give off a positive fragrance to those we train, showing that we are teachable, that we don’t have it all together and that every situation can teach us something new. *Howard Hendricks says, “we are all learners in life and if we stop learning we become very dry and uninspired instructors.”*

Conclusion:

May we all come to realise that the words we share are a small fraction of the message we bring. And the words we do share are enhanced by how we say them, the environment in which they are shared, the ability we have to establish relationship with those we teach, the use of all our senses and clear applications. As a teacher we are the living curriculum. People will look at us, and the way we live and relate, as a model, whether we like it or not. As we seek to encourage people to learn and grow, we have to move from focusing only on left brain orientation (the normal style of teaching in schools: speech, written language, number skills, reasoning and scientific skills) and include right brain styles of art and music awareness, creativity, symbols, pictures, hands on and the use of imagination. So as we take on teaching opportunities, let’s take the time to wait on God for what will help learners to learn and not to focus on what can I say or do that will be the most impressive!