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# Being Available, Flexible, Transparent, and Relational

PENG WEN

It is humbling to write a reflection of pedagogy, since I am indebted to many predecessors and my contribution to teaching is still a product-in-process.

Many times in the Bible teaching and ministry are mentioned together. Indeed teaching is ministry. As an economist, I realize the difficulty of introducing faith in a quantitative discipline such as economics and finance. However, teaching is more than classroom and lecture; it is also interpersonal relationships with students. Knowledge is the integration of faith, life, and teaching and Jesus is the quintessential teacher. He provides the teaching template and is the paragon of pedagogy whose actions model the discipline. It may be difficult to incorporate biblical truth with an equation or a formula, but it is not a difficult to discuss the biblical philosophy of economics and to demonstrate Christian faith in class and with students.

Oftentimes student of Scriptures focus on the content of the Gospels but overlook their methodology. We must constantly remember that what Christ said and did are equally inspired by God. Thus followers of Jesus Christ should work very hard to be a Christ-like teacher in the classroom, as well as in life. The best reward of teaching is not necessarily high scores in the Student Perception Inventory (an evaluation form filled out by students at the end of every semester). Rather, it is a confirmation of who a teacher is and how he or she inspires students. We are the chosen few who have opportunities to teach and minister to His children.

If the Student Perception Inventory is an indicator of a professor's value as a teacher, students have categorized me as available, flexible, transparent, and enthusiastic. Here is why these attributes are valuable:

*Availability:* When students come to teachers they want to have their questions answered. So walk an extra mile with them. Be available to all students, not just those taking in class this semester. For example, I am regularly interviewed by students in American Ethnicity, Oral Communications, World Religions, Pluralism in Central California, Leadership, Mediaeval Civilization, and Introduction to Psychology courses because of

my cultural background. I have lent them personal belongings, such as my wedding album, Chinese Bible, and my wife's traditional Chinese clothes) to enhance their presentations.

*Flexibility:* Rigid academic caricatures may be popular among Ivy Leaguers, but a Christian professor should be flexible to meet the needs of students and the institution. When a student has three exams on the same day, give your exam on another day, even if you must come to school on a day when you have no other assignments. When students have to take final exams early in order to get a cheaper airfare to spend Christmas with their families, give them the exam at 3:00 p.m. on the Friday before finals week, even when you have to rewrite another final exam for the rest of the class. When students suggest that multiple-choice questions are too nuts-and-bolts in detail, tailor the following exam to add essay questions, definitions, and problems. When the whole class stares after the textbook presentation on the concept of operating cash flows, come back in the next session with your version. Students will show their appreciations.

*Transparency:* Students should know their professors. Tell your story, successes and failures. Do not hesitate to use experiences to enhance discussion, and show students who you are: a human being in formed by the hand of God.

*Enthusiasm:* Love to teach. Among a student's first impressions should be that you love being in class and are an energetic and enthusiastic professor. Teaching renews the teacher. A former student once asked how I keep up "high octane teaching." Its because teaching is a process of renewing and not repeating. Every time teachers face a class, they do something that did not exist before. Even though students always belong to the same age group, every class is an entity different from others in the past.

Student Perception Inventory surveys keep teachers up to date on how students view them and offer constructive ideas to enhance future classes. Also important is staying current in your field. The well-informed economics professor read many journals: *Wall Street Journal* and *Nikkei shin bum*, *Barron's*, *Business Week*,

*The Economist, Smart Money, Far-East Economic Reports, Federal Reserve Reports & Research Papers, The American Economic Review, and the Journal of Political Economy.*

With classroom technology we can use these journals' interactive editions to bring live events into the classroom. For example, my FIN 450 Financial Management and Fin 470 Investment courses are scheduled between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., during the hours the stock market reaches its transactional peak, so students see how the market operates in real time. Allotting \$500,000 in virtual money to each student allows them to trade actively in the market and compete with other participating university students. This kind of real-time, real-market experience simply is impossible to replace with lectures and exercises.

Teaching has changed from traditional white board writing, lecture, and slide presentation to 100 percent digitalization. In addition to the finance and investment courses already mentioned, Fresno Pacific's new International Finance and Economics class is also fully computerized. Examples come from websites based in many different nations, stirring students to more vigorous discussion and participation. Classroom technology and Internet availability are investments that enhance teaching and help students learn.

Whatever the changes in education and in academic fields, teaching remains more than a job. It is a calling and a ministry. Educators are part of students' young adulthood, supporting them and challenging them to grow in spiritual service to glorify God.