

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: INTEGRATING FAITH AND LEARNING IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Alvyn Hendriks

Abstract.

Despite the vast research on the integration of faith and learning (IFL), little is known on how instructional strategies can enhance what true education necessitates—an IFL that prepares learners beyond the present life. This study explores the impact of instructional strategies towards IFL. It reveals that to be more effective and powerful in such integration, instructional strategies play an important role—within and without the classroom setting.

Keywords: *Integration of faith and learning, instructional strategies*

Introduction

The mission of faith-based institutions is not only to serve the community through varied programs and initiatives (Daniels & Gustafson, n.d.) but also to share the gospel to their own learners. Since the IFL is considered a critical issue on Christian campuses (Burton & Nwosu, 2002), faith-based institutions are distinctively positioned to accomplish such a significant mission. The IFL is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Christian education because Christian institutions assist learners see the world through the lenses of a Christian worldview (Dockery, 2007).

Taylor (2012) emphasizes that, Based on Scripture, the concept of the integration of faith and learning in Seventh-day Adventist education seems defensible, indeed, an imperative. The Bible teaches the importance of receiving the mind of Christ, the comprehensiveness of Christian life and learning, as well as the interrelationship of faith and learning in life. Furthermore, Scripture describes the parameters of an integrated educational program, defines the role of divine and human instrumentalities in the educational process, and provides spiritual perspectives for both content and method. Through the integration of faith and learning, Adventist education becomes distinctive—in the world, but not of the world (John 17:15, 16). It enables students to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Such education represents a

challenge—a high calling for teachers and administrators. It is, however, attainable (p. 13).

Faith-based institutions, campuses which are uniquely accountable in the IFL, takes into account instructional strategies (IS) within and without the classrooms. Scenarios for moral and ethical applications have been carefully thought on how to live out faith [in learning] in appropriate ways (Ahn, Hinson, & Teets, 2016). This papers discusses the IFL and how faith and learning are integrated. Also, the roles of IS in relations to the IFL are explored.

Faith

Faith is defined in many ways. However, the Bible defines faith as “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Below is summary of Erskine (cited in Ditzel, n.d., p. 10) of what faith is.

1. Faith is **THE GIFT OF GOD**. It is not the product of a free will but rather the operation of the Spirit of God by the Word of God

2. Faith has **CHRIST JESUS** as its principal object, for it is faith in Christ Jesus—our Lord, Saviour, Mediator, and Hope. Christ is the Bread; faith is the mouth which eats. Christ is the brazen serpent; faith is the eye that looks.

3. Faith is **RECEIVING CHRIST**, not just hearing about Him or acknowledging Him, but a committal to Him. Is Christ meat? Then eat! Is Christ living water? Then drink! Is Christ the refuge? Then flee to Him! Is Christ Lord? Then worship Him!

4. Faith is to **REST UPON CHRIST**. "Rest in the Lord" (Psa. 37:7). Faith is not an isolated act based upon an intellectual knowledge of some facts, but is a trusting in and resting upon Christ to perform all that we need.

5. Faith is to **REST UPON CHRIST ALONE!** The word "ALONE" is important. Most men, by nature, try to add something to the sacrifice and intercession of Christ. God has established a bridge of communication between heaven and earth by the obedience and blood of Christ

6. Faith rests upon Christ **AS HE IS PRESENTED IN THE GOSPEL**. We ask no other sign than the Word of God. Faith is to believe the record that God hath given concerning His Son. "He that hath the Son of God hath life."

7. Faith rests upon Christ **FOR SALVATION, SANCTIFICATION, RIGHTEOUSNESS, and FULL REDEMPTION!** The goal of faith is the salvation

of our souls; and this our Lord undertook in the eternal covenant and which He completed on Calvary when He cried, "IT IS FINISHED!" (p. 10)

Learning

Learning, which yields a transformation in knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and/or lifestyle, can draw on a change of heart, mind, and being (Taylor, 2012). It is considered as fundamental resources for future development (Qvortrup, Wiberg, Christensen, & Hansbol, 2016). Teachers are instrumentalies of integrating faith in learning. Teachers are agents of the Great Teacher. 1 Peter 4:11 “whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Teachers are given the authority to [Teach] a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). Given this, teachers have a significant role towards IFL. It is because when “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isaiah 54:13, KJV). The IFL is not a proces that is unusual but an activity that is performed by everyone who comprehend the importance of a worldview that guides lives (Harris, 2003). Indeed, IFL is necessitated.

Interconnection of Faith and Learning

The Bible narrates how faith and learning are connected. Romans 10:17 “Faith comes by hearing, and by hearing the word of God.” It stresses the power of God and that we must take it by heart through listening. Another text is James 2: 20, 26 which states “Faith without works is dead.” In other words, what we believe must be reflected in our deeds—applications of what we our belief is. **2 Timothy 4:7** “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” We need faith in order to pass through life’s difficulties. From different challenges in life, we learn lessons that last for a lifetime. It is because we have the faith that we “can do all things through Him who strengthens [me] (Philippians 4:13).

The kind of faith that the Bible illuminates is faith in Jesus/God . We all have troubles in this world. Yet, we are promised that we will attain triumph through our faith in Him. Anyone who is facing hard and uncertain times need to be encouraged to press on knowing that he is an overcomer like Jesus. Every time one demonstrates faith in God, it involves a certain promise (Park, 2017). As John 16:33 strongly emphasizes, “*I have* said these things to you, that in me you may *have* peace. In the

world you will *have* tribulation. But take heart; *I have overcome the world.*”

Deuteronomy 31:6 “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” Thus, no one needs to fear what is ahead but rather to dare because in every step of the way, the Lord God goes with him. Faith is needed for “without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6)

Teacher’s Role in the Integration of Faith and Learning

Teachers play a significant role in the IFL. Through IFL, an intentional action of an individual, teachers can take their faith into their classrooms in ways that influence the behaviors and attitudes of the students (Thomas, 2012). Thus, Thomas (2012) added,

The behavior of the teacher influences the worldview of the students in such a way that the student experiences a paradigm shift in their thinking. With such a definition, educators are prepared to develop strategies for implementing the integration of faith and learning in the classroom and see results amongst the students (p. 18).

Given the significance of a teacher’s role in the IFL, it is imperative that such representatives of the Great Teacher are to find ways to reach their learners closer to the feet of Jesus through IS. That varied IS toward IFL must be a concern in one’s teaching profession. As Taylor (2011) stresses that “Teachers must consciously include in their course requirement activities that will equip students to communicate God’s truth (p. 14). IS for IFL (Taylor, 2011) are outlined below.

Instructional Strategies

There are four classifications of strategies—contextual, illustrative, conceptual, and experiential. Contextual strategies include tactical methods, ornamental, and environmental strategies. Illustrative strategies include analogous, narrative, and exemplary strategies. Conceptual strategies include textual, thematic, and exemplary strategies. Experiential strategies include personal, interrelational, and declarative strategies. Each group of strategies will be discussed below.

Contextual Strategies

Tactical Methods. These methods are descriptive in their characteristic. It may include the word Adventist in the name of the school, for instance. An example is, Universitas Advent Indonesia. Course descriptions may include faith-based subjects, like The Teachings of Jesus.

Ornamental Strategies. These strategies include Bible verses or quotations with moral principles which are posted at different sections across the campus. An example to this is a Bible verse written in front of the library which states “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

Environmental Strategies deal with the “hidden curriculum”—school’s organization, classroom structure, interactions between student and teachers, and student and student, and co-curricular activities. In other words, it is an implicit curriculum that represents not only attitudes but knowledge and behaviors—which can be relayed indirectly by words and actions (Jerald, 2006). In other words, faith can be demonstrated in their relationships (Sites, Garzon, Milacci, & Boothe, 2009).

Illustrative Strategies

Analogy, is the connection of the curriculum with spiritual factors in one’s personal life. In discussing reliability for example, one can discuss on how reliable God is and that He will always help us in any circumstances we are in. These kinds of strategies direct learners to new dimensions of spiritual truth.

Narrative strategies, are illustrative approaches wherein teachers may provide Christian examples of certain topics under considerations. Stories of Bible characters can be discussed. Take for example Peter and Paul (Galatians 2) in terms of dispute resolutions.

Exemplary strategies are deemed to be the most powerful illustrative method. In these strategies, teachers reflect through their own lives on what they desire their learners to be in terms of ethics, for example.

Conceptual Strategies

Textual strategies are strategies which incorporate Bible text to teaching/learning processes. This can be done by citing a Bible verse and connecting it to the upcoming topic of the day.

Thematic strategies, which can be identified by examining course goals and objectives, are effective strategies to integrate faith and learning. This can be achieved through systematic theology inquiring how they can employ themes as points of integration.

Valuative strategies concentrate on relevant issues and ethical implications of each subject. An example to this is plagiarism—which has relevance in arts. In these strategies, teachers should share their faith-based beliefs to the students while being open not only to questions and comments, but also objections.

Experiential Strategies

Personal strategies desire to assist learners experience faith and come close to God. In this sense, teachers need to take a personal interest in each learner and find ways to talk over spiritual issues. Teachers may discuss learners' issues in life and teacher can pray for and with the learners.

Interrelational methods assist students to be able to interact with others in ways that improve faith and learning—cooperative learning and service.

Declarative strategies deal on Christian witnesses. Its goal is to assist students to be able to themselves as energetic witnesses for God.

IFL in Tertiary Education Through Instructional Strategies

IS which can be employed across different grade levels and subject areas (Alberta Learning, 2002) are significant (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2012;

Goodwin & Webb, 2014) for improvement (Mandernach, Zafonte, & Taylor, 2016) may be it for struggling students (Bertrando & Carr, 2012) or not.

Thus, there is a call for teachers to be exposed to constant workshop for effective use of IS (Ofodu, 2012; Sangoleye, 2016) because of the role IS play toward teaching and learning processes.

Also, IS helps learners in motivation, focus of attention, organization of information for comprehension and recollection, monitoring and assessing learning (Sangoleye, 2016). IS assist for developing critical thinking (Zhao & Sing, 2016), creativity, innovation, and stimulate ideas in learning (Seechalia, 2017) and making meaning (Fletcher, Djajalaksana, & Eison, 2012). IS help in assisting students demonstrate higher levels of motivation towards their course enabling them to be more actively engaged in learning (Stefaniak & Tracey, 2012). Above all the aforementioned reasons, IS based on Christian perspective are effective tools for the IFL.

Below are examples of how biblical norms can be applied to particular disciplines, specifically in tertiary educations as outlined by Greidanus (1982; cited in Harris, 2003, pp. 183-184).

In the discipline of ethics, for example, we can draw on the biblically revealed norms for right conduct. Of central importance here is the love commandment, but the significance of other biblical passages should not be overlooked. Biblical laws relating to the protection of life and the concern for the poor for instance give learners insights into the divine norms for justice and stewardship.

In political science we can be guided by such biblical themes as the sovereignty of God, the God-given authority of government, the task of government to promote (the Biblical norms of) justice, liberty, and peace, and the required obedience of citizens.

In sociology we can take into account the Biblical norms for marriage, family, and other societal structures.

In psychology we would view man not as an animal that can be conditioned, nor as a machine that can be programmed, but as a creature of exceptional worth because man alone is made in the image of God. We would be guided by Biblical insights into the essence of man (his relationship with God) and the fundamental unity of man (a living soul, heart).

In the discipline of history, we would be guided by the Biblical theme that God acts in history.

In economics, we can consider the biblical ideas of justice and stewardship, of ownership, of work and play.

There is a need of the IFL. Harris (200) strong emphasizes that,

Integration is not simply as engagement of disciplinary knowledge with Christian truth in order to develop and elaborate a holistic view of truth and reality, but as the practice of developing specifically Christian disciplinary knowledge..... Instead of viewing integration as largely a reactive process of bringing the faith to the discipline, integration should become proactive, working to shape the discipline itself or at least to pursue disciplinary learning (the creation of new knowledge and interpretations) from a Christian perspective (Harris, 2003, p. 183).

Conclusions

Faith-based institutions are commissioned to share the gospel. One of the ways to sharing the gospel is by integrating faith into learning. The IFL is one of the most distinctive features of Christian institutions—a way of helping learners have a *picture* of the world through Christian worldview lenses.

IFL is a commitment that must be done in all disciplines (Dockery, 2007) and grade levels through IS. The IFL can be done through the different instructional strategies (see Taylor, 2012) by faith-based institutions. Teachers have significant roles in this outreach.

Pedagogical Implications

Successful integration is a powerful course of action to strengthen one's faith towards greater love of learning (Harris, 2003). The IFL is deemed to be a urgent and vital mission. Those without and within the classroom setting need to do their parts.

Teachers need a thorough and careful thought through comprehension of the Bible coupled with a good comprehension of how academic claims are made through Christian worldviews. With Jesus as the Master Teacher is an inspiration that the IFL be a success for with Him prepares learners beyond the present life.

References

- Ahn, J., Hinson, D. W., & Teets, S. T. (2016). Teachers' views on integrating faith into their professional lives: A cross-cultural glimpse. *AILACTE*, 8, 41-57. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1130333).
- Alberta Learning (2002). Health and life skills: Guide to implementation. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media35298/pdf_on_21/10/2015.
- Browne-Ferrigno, T. & Muth, R. (2012). Use of learner-centered instructional strategies in higher education: Doctoral student assessments. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(2), 1-21. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1135557)
- Bertrando, S., & Carr, J. (2012). Top 10 instructional strategies for struggling students. *Leadership*, 24-38. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ983557)
- Burton, L. D., Nwosu, C. C. (2002). *Student perceptions of the integration of faith, learning, and practice in a selected education course*. 22pp; Paper presented at the Biennial Symposium of the Coalition of Christian Teacher Educators (5th, Grand Rapids, MI, May 24-25, 2002).
- Ditzel, P. (n.d). *What is faith?* Retrieved from <https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/whatisfaith.pdf>
- Dockery, D. S. (2007). A bibliography for the integration of faith and learning. Retrieved from https://www.uu.edu/dockery/FaithLearnBooklet_Fa07.pdf
- Fletcher, E. C., Djajalaksana, Y., & Eison, J. (2012). Instructional strategy use of faculty in career and technical education. *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, 27(2), 69-83. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ995896)
- Goodwin, D. & Webb, M. A. (2014). Toward a common understanding of research-based instructional strategies. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 26, 1-7. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1055304)
- Harris, R. A. (2003). Defining the integration of faith and learning. *Virtual Salt*, 1-4. Retrieved from <https://www.virtualsalt.com/int/intdef.pdf>
- Jerald, C. D. (2006). School culture: The hidden curriculum. *The Center for Comprehensive School and Improvement*, 1-8. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ495013).
- Mandernach, B. J., Zafonte, M., & Taylor, C. (2016). Instructional strategies to improve college students' APA style writing. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 27(3), 407-412. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1093747)
- Marczyk, G., DeMatteo, D., & Festinger, D. (2005). *Essentials of research design and methodology*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

- Ofodu, G. O. (2012). Instructional strategies and resource utility in language teaching among basic educators in 21st century Nigeria. *English Language Teaching*, 5(5), 79-84. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1079443)
- Park, D. C. (2017). *What is Real Faith?* USA: The Restored Church of God.
- Qvortrup, A., Wiberg, M., Christensen, G., & Hansbol, M. (2016). *On the definition of learning*. Denmark: University Press.
- Sangoleye, S.A. (2016). A critique of selected instructional strategies in Shigher Institutions in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(7), 78-84. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1095271)
- Seechalia, T. (2017). Instructional strategies to support creativity and innovation in education. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(4), 201-208. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1148839)
- Sites, E. C., Garzon, F. L., Milacci, F., & Boothe, B. (2009). A phenomenology of the integration of faith and learning. Faculty Publications and Presentations, 28-38. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/ccfs_fac_pubs/44
- Stefaniak, J. E. & Tracey, M. W. (2012). An exploration of student experiences with learner-centered instructional strategies. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 6(2), 95-112. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ1105645)
- Taylor, J. W. (2001). Instructional strategies for integrating faith and learning. *Journal of Adventist Education*, 63(5), 5-14. Retrieved from <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200163050507.pdf>
- Taylor, J. W. (2012). A biblical foundation for integrating faith and learning. *The Journal of Adventist Education*, 8-14. Retrieved from <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae201274050807.pdf>
- Thomas, D. (2012). Defining the integration of faith and Learning. *Catalyst*, 7(1), 14-20.
- Zhao, C., Pandian, A., & Singh, M. K. M. (2016). Instructional strategies for developing critical thinking in EFL classrooms. *English Language Teaching*, 9(10), 14-21. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ111989)