A HEURISTIC PROCESS FOR BIBLICAL INTEGRATION

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Keywords: integration, Bible, faith-learning, Christian education.

There may be nothing more important to the mission of a Christian school than the integration of Scripture into all aspects of school life. Christian school educators have the responsibility to not only integrate throughout their teaching but to also equip students with the very same skills (Bailey, 2012; Holmes, 1994). As important as faith-learning integration is to the very reason for Christian education, it is typically an underdeveloped process for both the classroom teacher and the student.

The vast majority of the literature on faith-learning integration focuses on definitional and conceptual understandings to the general neglect of teaching the actual skills of integration. This under-appreciation of integration skill development is evidenced by the extant lack of skills among teachers (Korniejczuk & Kijai, 1994). And that is exacerbated by the high frequency of secular text usage in Christian schools (Cox, Hameloth, & Talbot, 2006), and the belief by most students that integration is not part of their
personal educational responsibilities (Lawrence, Burton, & Nwosu, 2005).

Addressing very directly the development of faith-learning skills, this article presents a four-step sequentially guided process for integrating Scripture and academic content. It is titled the Semantic Connections Integration Heuristic. Semantic is defined as ‘of or related to meaning in language’ (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Specifically, by semantic we mean linguistic features or properties, specifically words, phrases, values, facts, principles, issues, assumptions, and implications. A heuristic serves to guide or discover typically through a flexible or experimental process. Here it describes an integration procedure incorporating flexibility of choice within and across each of its four guiding steps. Simply stated, this process uses these eight semantic features/properties of academic content to make connections to Scripture which in turn can be selectively integrated back into the academic content.

The word ‘heuristic’ in the title communicates that the process is not intended to be lock-step but widely adaptable to many different variables in the learning event. For instance, it presumes no denominational perspective, integration expertise, or world view orientation. It is academically rigorous in the way it taps into a wide range of learning types similar to Bloom’s popular taxonomy. It builds integration and critical thinking skills in both the teacher-user and student-recipient. It promotes user individuality within an easy to follow heuristic approach. And, it is applicable to practically all instructional content.

For all its strengths, the veracity of the proposed integration process and its products rest upon the underlying even foundational activity of biblical interpretation, or what is generally known as hermeneutics. This is to say that any perfectly executed integration process will likely be flawed if the biblical interpretation is flawed. For instance, the product of an integrated lesson on personal finances would differ greatly depending on whether Jesus’ words to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23, 24 are interpreted as endorsing tithing exclusively for those operating under Old Testament laws as opposed to also including those under New Testament grace. Similarly, Paul’s teaching on a woman’s head covering in church (1 Corinthians 11) or not talking in church (1 Corinthians 14:34) would be integrated differently and perhaps questionably depending on whether perceived as cultural versus God-directed expectations.

Thankfully, there are a number of credible hermeneutical guidelines regarding proper biblical interpretation. They include interpreting within context, discerning cultural practices versus godly expectations, and interpreting as the original speaker and hearer likely would. While hermeneutical skills such as these are not specifically taught in this article, sample resources for that purpose are supplied in the conclusion section.

There is yet another cautionary caveat that should be discussed prior to getting into the integration process itself. This one is even more foundational than the hermeneutics issue since interpretation seemingly ‘always proceeds on the basis of various preunderstandings and governing commitments’ (Naugle, 2002, p. 311). These presuppositions, often called world views, are generally conceived of as interpretative frameworks by which humans understand life’s issues. Unavoidably inherent in human nature, they influence hermeneutical
processes and biblical understandings. Sample world view orientations include formal, sometimes denominationally specific perspectives such as Calvinism and Evangelicalism; more general perspectives such as postmodernity, antinomianism, and relativism; as well as views on significant topics such as dispensationalism, predestination versus human free will, supernaturalism, 6-day creationism, and the unpunishable status of Christians. Clearly, just as integration calls for some level of hermeneutical understandings and skills, it likewise calls for self-awareness of personal world view beliefs.

Bottom line, the subtleties of these hermeneutical and world view caveats operate during integration activities whether acknowledged or not. Given the complexities of simultaneously addressing the three-fold interaction of hermeneutical, world view, and integration issues, this article focuses primarily on integration.

The Semantic Connections Integration Heuristic involves four sequential but non-rigid steps (see Figure 1): 1) Identify a semantic feature of the instructional material to connect to the Bible, 2) Use Bible reference resources to identify potentially relevant biblical content, 3) Select the specific biblical content to integrate, and 4) Integrate the Bible and instructional text in a way most meaningful to the intended learning process and outcome (see Figure 2). The example products/outcomes exhibited in this article are not restrictive but represent a much larger number of possibilities of this proposed integration process.

To demonstrate, consider the following paragraph modified and paraphrased from a Christian textbook:

*The 1950’s experienced a national concern over juvenile delinquency. Lack of discipline in the home was one of the chief reasons cited for the problem. Many parents no longer followed the biblical counsel to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They instead turned to child care books that emphasized helping children become sin-denying, guilt free adults. Only the Bible, a much better answer to the problem of human guilt, outsold those popular books* (United States History for Christian Schools, 2001, p.556).

**SEMANTIC CONNECTION: WORD**

*Step One*

Step one involves identifying a semantic feature. Starting with the semantic feature ‘word’, we select ‘sin’ from the above paragraph because it has rich biblical integration potential.

*Step Two*

Step two involves connecting the semantic feature to Bible text. One of the many possible ways to do this is by searching a concordance keyed to the Bible version used. For example, Strong’s Concordance (King James based) defines the word ‘sin’ in Psalm 4:4 to mean ‘to miss’ (Strong’s Hebrew # 2398). In 1 John 1:8 sin means ‘offense’ (Strong’s Greek # 266). Further definitions can certainly be pursued as needed.

*Step Three*

Step three involves selecting Bible text(s) relevant to the academic lesson. Since it directly connects to the academic content (and is a good example for the teaching purposes of this manuscript), we selected 1 John 1:8a that says: ‘If we say that we have no sin (#266) we deceive ourselves.’

*Step Four*

Step four simply requires the integration of the biblical material into the academic text. We thus enhanced the following sample paragraph:
sentence —'They instead turned to childcare books that emphasized helping children become sin-denying, guilt-free adults' — with the subsequent sentence 'Since the Bible claims that everyone is a sinner, sin-denying child rearing practices are unbiblical'.

**SEMANTIC CONNECTION: VALUE**

An example of the next semantic feature, i.e., value, in the sample paragraph is the claim that the Bible is 'a much better answer...'. This is clearly a value statement that we can use to guide integration of the sample paragraph. A primary resource selected for connecting to the Bible for this property is the website www.biblestudytools.com. The popular contemporary paraphrase of the Bible — The Message — at this electronic site was selected because of its high likelihood of addressing the contemporary wording 'human wisdom' located in the academic text. Finding success (accessed June 1, 2012), 1 Corinthians 1:25 states 'Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's weakness.'

Beyond that approach, Christian teachers have likely required students to memorize 2 Timothy 3:16 regarding the practical usefulness of the Bible, or perhaps personally had to face the reality that God's ways are different and even higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). Or, integration of this value of the efficacy of God's wonderful words could, by way of memory, be done by explaining how experiencing God's affirming words (Acts 22:10, 17-21) freed the apostle Paul from the guilt (Acts 23:1) of being a participant to the murder of Stephen and others (Acts 8:1, 26:10). Integration could then be a simple matter of referring to these verses to reinforce the academic text about the Bible having better kinds of child-rearing/guilt-freeing approaches than secular approaches. A statement like: 'Jesus' word literally heals people of guilt rather than vainly trying to deny it'.
integrates well as an ending to the juvenile delinquency paragraph.

INTEGRATION PROGRESS CHECK
Depicting our integration progress to this point, the original 'juvenile delinquency' paragraph is repeated immediately below with the addition in italics of the integration examples of word, phrase, and value material from above. Additionally, Figure 3 contains a graphic representation of the evidence of the process discussed thus far. Obviously, the paragraph is biblically enriched!

The 1950s experienced a national concern over juvenile delinquency. Lack of discipline in the home was one of the chief reasons cited for the problem. Juvenile delinquency, an outcome of the sin nature, started very early in mankind's history and calls for biblically-oriented interventions. Many parents no longer followed the biblical counsel to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They instead turned to childcare books that emphasized helping children become sin-denying, guilt-free adults. Since the Bible claims that everyone is born a sinner, sin-denying child rearing practices are unbiblical. Only the Bible, a much better answer to the problem of human guilt, outdoes those popular books. Jesus' word literally heals people of guilt rather than vainly trying to deny it!

SEMANTIC CONNECTION: FACT
To illustrate the suitability of the semantic connection approach to a diversity of academic

Figure 2: General Integration Process
content, we switch to a different content to illustrate integration of the semantic feature, facts. Consider this short passage from a science text (Earth and Space Science, 2009, p. 191): ‘Tyrannosaurus Rex is a dinosaur that lived more than 66 million years ago. It stood 12m tall and used its powerful jaws and sharp teeth to capture and eat its prey. No human has seen a living dinosaur.’ All three sentences are stated as facts (that they are seen by many as assumptions does not nullify our example), yet we seemingly have a dilemma regarding how to connect any of these facts to the Bible since the concepts of dinosaurs and millions of earth years, and the claim about humans not ever seeing dinosaurs are seemingly not directly addressed in the Bible. But resources like commentaries and biblical encyclopedias contain authoritative information directly relevant to this integration exercise. Information from electronic sources like the Christian Answers web site www.christiananswers.net/dinosaurs/i-where2.html (accessed June 1, 2012) can be used to amplify the academic text with statements like,

Dinosaur-like creatures are mentioned in the Bible. The Bible uses ancient names like ‘behemoth’ and ‘tannin’. Behemoth means kingly, gigantic beasts. Tannin is a term which includes dragon-like animals and the great sea creatures such as whales, giant squid, and marine reptiles like the plesiosaurs that may have become extinct (Taylor, n.d.).

Or we can go to the resource www.Creation moment.com (accessed June 1, 2012) for information suggesting that dinosaurs lived coincident in time with mankind.

While the majority of instances in this article focus on providing biblical insight to pre-existing academic content, this section on the semantic feature, facts, provides a good opportunity to suggest a somewhat converse approach. Namely, the proposed 4-step integration process equally equips for using environmentally based facts and evidence from the academic realm to support a theologically based position. For instance, environmentally based understandings could help bring clarity to theological issues such as evolution versus creation, the potential meaning of biblical text such as the words ‘due penalty’ in the biblical phrase ‘received within themselves the due penalty for perversion’ (Rom 1:28 NIV), and the result of a biblical life-style such as the role of faith in physical healing.

SEMANTIC CONNECTION:
PRINCIPLE
Integrating the next four semantic features — principles, issues, assumptions, and implications — will likely require deeper critical thinking since they are less likely to be overtly stated in course materials. Critical thinking has in fact been proposed by Bailey (2012) as sharing similar qualities with integration. In affirming of that perspective, the integration activities from this point forward treat them as highly compatible, even interactive processes. Additionally, working with semantic properties that are not overtly stated makes integration educationally challenging, in a good way. For instance, students could be asked to not just absorb information or state facts but to work with the information and facts to state how they can also be operational principles.

To illustrate working with principles, we draw from another text, this time a history book (Western Civilization). ‘At the heart of the Roman structure was the family, headed by the dominant male. The father was the chief figure in providing for the education of his children’
(Spielvogel, 2011, p.127). If principles are defined as ‘relationships of regularity among concepts’ students could be asked to state what they think the concepts are and why and then to state the derived principle. The above text contains at least two concepts: 1) The dominant male operated as the family leader, and 2) the father was the chief educational figure over his children. Using the concordance resource typically found at the back of most Bibles to locate information on ‘fathers’, numerous instances in the Old and New Testaments are located regarding the father’s responsibility to raise his children God’s way (e.g. Deuteronomy 6:2-7; Ephesians 6:4). Going further to engage critical thinking, a type of integration could be something along the line of suggesting that paternal leadership over the family and its education is a biblical principle. For instance, since principles are sometimes also or alternately conceived as regularity over different instances, students could then wrestle with what makes the Ephesians 6:4 not just an instance-specific statement but a statement about regularity across instances. Students could be asked to use relevant resources to search the Bible for declarations and also for examples that it is a biblical principle.

SEMANTIC CONNECTION: ISSUE
From a different science textbook (Science 5 Student Text, 2009), we read:

People have different views about how to use our resources. Some people believe that man should use and benefit freely from all of the earth’s resources. This attitude can lead to a waste of natural resources. Other people believe that preserving an ecosystem is more important than any benefit man might receive from it (p. 208).

Clearly, the issue of contemporary concern relates to how to value, use, and protect our natural resources. Relevant resources specifically related to environmental issues can be located by searching electronic sites such as Google on topics such as ‘dominion mandate environment’. Specifically, the article The Environment vs. Christian Worldview at www.angelfire.com/la/TEACH2/WviewEnviron.html (accessed June 1, 2012) discusses the dominion mandate charge of Genesis 2:26-30 and 9:1-3 for man to shepherd and cultivate God’s creation. Depending on the extensiveness of resources like Bible commentaries and concordances, the reader may also find references to the practice of letting the land go unplanted every seventh year for regeneration purposes (Leviticus 25). Using Bible cross-referencing, other findings could include information such that God was the first one to kill an animal for purposes unrelated to nutritional needs (Genesis 3:21) and that God also released New Testament believers to eat any and all kinds of previously forbidden animal meat (Acts 11:13).

As should be obvious by now, there is great liberty in terms of how the instructor (and student) might integrate biblical material into the academic text. Teacher conversations with students could help with issues identification by asking them to submit supposed issue statements to an ‘issues verification test’ which requires that the statements make sense when recast as a question concerning a substantial matter that has multiple even contrasting but viable answers. This skill of issue identification could then be practiced using different denominational views on biblical issues (e.g., tongues as initial evidence of Holy Spirit infilling, creationism versus evolution versus theistic evolution).
SEMANTIC CONNECTION:
ASSUMPTION

Some assumptions are specific right down to literal wording such as something like: ‘The underlying assumption is that all things resulted from evolutionary processes.’ But to focus on the more prevalent task of integrating covert assumptions, consider this statement from the novel Pride and Prejudice: ‘...a simple man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife’ (Austen, 2008, p. 1). While stated as a tongue-in-check fact, the statement actually constitutes an assumption held by genteel people of that era. Again we employ strategies such as use of synonyms and related terms, and searches via concordances and other resources to identify related Bible content. In this case we could examine terms like wife, young man, marry, and single to find that while God encourages a single man to seek out a godly wife (Proverbs 18:22), it is not at all the case that all men should be married as revealed by the context of the phrase ‘better not to marry’ (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1). Integrating, the assumption —‘in want of a wife’ — could thus be challenged as not representing a universal truth! But even before that, skill in identifying assumptions could be developed by challenging students to take an informed defendable stand on why the quote may or may not be a reasonable assumption biblically.

Figure 3: Graphic Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Content</th>
<th>Resource Link</th>
<th>Select Bible Content</th>
<th>INTEGRATE into Lesson Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WORD: ‘Sin’</td>
<td>1. Using Concordance KJV: ‘sin’ Gen. 4:7 #2403, an offence; Ps. 44:4 #2398 to miss, 1 John 1:8 #266 offence</td>
<td>If we claim to be without sin(266) we deceive ourselves — 1 John 1:8</td>
<td>‘Since the Bible claims that everyone is born a sinner thus — sin denying child rearing practices are Biblically antithetical’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHRASE: ‘Juvenile delinquency’ (two contemporary words neither likely to be in the Bible — thus need to enter the Bible via the concept rather than the words themselves)</td>
<td>1. From Memory: Prodigal Son #5207 son Luk 15:13 — NTV Study Bible footnotes 2. From Memory: Cain Gen. 4:5; slew, Gen. 4:8 #2026 kill</td>
<td>Cain and the Prodigal son and his brother were delinquent sons (juveniles) according to God’s standards Luk 15:13, Gen. 4:8</td>
<td>‘Juvenile delinquency, an outcome of the sin nature, started very early in mankind’s history and calls for biblically-oriented interventions’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUE: ‘a much better’ — valuing biblical answers to child rearing issues rather than those not biblical</td>
<td>1. Memory: profitable to Tim 3:16 #5624 helpful/profitable 2. Memory: His ways better; Is55:8,9 #1870 course of life</td>
<td>His ways are different and better than our ways</td>
<td>Jesus’ work literally heals people of guilt rather than vainly trying to deny it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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SEMANTIC CONNECTION:
IMPLICATION
The eighth and final semantic feature is that of implication. An implication is a statement of outcome or consequence from believing a certain way. For instance, an implication from the assumption above about single rich men in want of a wife would be that certain women would be poised to present themselves to him as the one he needs. This is generally the meaning of the follow-on sentence in this particular Pride and Prejudice paragraph:

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters (Austen, 2008, p.1).

A purpose of biblical integration on this topic could be to see what the Bible says about women who might posture themselves to attract young men who are single and rich. A biblical search strategy for getting a lead on the idea of single women looking for and perhaps even laying claim to a potential husband could follow several pathways. One approach would be use of a concordance to examine places in the Bible that describe the father’s role of protecting his daughters (Titus 2:3-5), or examining how young women should be perceived by young men (1 Timothy 5:2). The integration outcome might be a statement that suggests women should avoid presenting themselves presumptuously, thereby countering the initial implication. Regarding development of critical thinking, students could be challenged to suggest implications for biblically authorized headship in the home when the male is not respected in that way early in the relationship such as implied in the quote above.

CONCLUSION
The eight semantic features of the Semantic Connections Integration Heuristic can be used singularly or in combination to help biblically integrate. Using these eight semantic features as a starting point, we propose using various resources and search strategies to locate relevant biblical texts from which to select for integration purposes. From that point, it’s a simple matter of constructing a biblically informed statement/perspective on whatever matter is being investigated. Other integration methodologies that may bring further clarity include those by Chadwick (1990), Eckel (2003), MacCullough (n.d.), and Overman & Johnson (2003).

Returning to the influential matter of hermeneutics discussed earlier, development of such skills should ideally co-occur with development of integration skills. As a step in that direction, commendable resources in this area include those by Fee & Stuart (1993), Traina (1980), and Virkler (1981). These skills can be supplemented by use of valuable resources such as concordances; Bible cross-referencing systems; Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and commentaries; Noah Webster’s Bible-rich 1828 Dictionary; Ruth Haycock’s Encyclopedia of Bible Truth for School Subjects; and publications from Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Life Principles. Certainly, the greater one's biblical interpretation and application skills, the greater will be the outcome.

Aside from those integration issues already discussed, an important but often overlooked issue is that of purpose. In that regard, it is sometimes deceptively easy to think that teacher mastery of integration and accompanying skills is a stand-alone end purpose in Christian education. Optimally, in the spirit of excellent education, goals of integration should include
equipping students with the skills of and perspectives on integration rather than merely being the recipients of teacher integration labors.

Another major issue regarding purpose relates to characterizing what actually constitutes biblical integration. For instance, an analogy (e.g., using the three forms of water as an analogy for the Trinity) or a correlation between biblical and academic topics (using the dimensions of Noah’s Ark for practicing mathematics) may be discounted as integration on the grounds that biblical and academic content were not brought into a unified whole (e.g., Eckel, 2003; MacCullough, n.d.). However, that type of reasoning may not take into account the purpose of the lesson. Additionally, one lesson or learning unit may not be able to demonstrate the wholeness desired but certainly may provide the necessary beginnings of an integrated understanding. Moreover, the initial learning level of students may be such that some elementary, less than holistic understanding is all that can reasonably be presented in one or more given units.

Beyond the stringency of developing a unified whole, a case could seemingly be made that biblical integration, rigorously called integration, must address God's expressed ultimate purpose such as that of reconciling His family (cf. Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16) and instituting a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13). Or perhaps to be rightly called integration, God's major commands of, for instance, the Two Greatest Commandments (Matthew 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) must be addressed in one way or another. The view promoted in this article is that the immediate purpose for which the Bible and other academic content are connected should self-define integration for that lesson.

Perhaps in the long run, the most important purpose of integration has to do with metaphysics rather than just knowledge or even skills acquisition (important as these are). For instance, integration is often perceived as essentially about discovering what the Bible has to say about any given topic. To a lesser degree, integration is viewed as discovering how academics can help understand the Bible and theology more generally. But ultimately, though not necessarily immediately, it would seem that integration is about seeing the Bible and other academic content as part of a unified whole regarding God’s creation. Integration properly conceived points to the fact that academics and the Bible are both revelations from God—general and special, respectively— which together are mutually complementary, not disjunctive.

In closing, while the activity of integration is at times perceived by educators as difficult and/or time consuming, the Semantic Connections Integration Heuristic flows easily and can be very edifying personally. Once the skill is acquired by the teacher, it can readily be used for planning a single lesson as well as an entire course. Even though the process is primarily intended to enrich academic text via Scripture, it can equally facilitate use of academic content to enrich Bible understandings. The Semantic Connections Integration Heuristic can be implemented with minimal training and can increase teacher effectiveness in one of the most important skill areas unique to the mission of the Christian school. And it can be a foundational skill for students to use the rest of their lives for becoming reason-able disciples of Christ and His Word.

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ENDNOTES
1 The delayed publication of this issue of the journal has enabled a revised 2012 version of this article to be published.

REFERENCES


