Chapter 8
Developing a Nurturance Teaching Model

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Education may be thought of as deriving from and necessitated by the fall of Adam and Eve. Yet it can also reasonably be argued that education is a core creation concept. After all, it was before the fall that Adam learned from God that he needed a mate and their assumed time together in the cool of the evening likely had educational purposes. From this view of human nature as possessing both imago Dei (image of God) and sinful qualities, a biblically derived model regarding teacher-learner events can be identified. The model’s essential component of godly love serves as both the foundational developer and healer in the teacher-learner dynamic.

Education, as a biblical concept, carries significant implications both temporally and eternally. The wisdom literature admonishes believers to seek after wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (Proverbs 1); Daniel, Joseph, and others were given special recognition because of their educational attainments; and Solomon was called the wisest (II Chronicles 1:12) because he had more knowledge about life than any other person. Further, what is learned and accepted as true about the hereafter can determine one’s eternal destiny. After the issue of salvation, mind renewal (cf. Romans 12:2) is likely the most significant influencer of Christian discipleship. In fact, one of the first matters of business after God delivered His people from the Egyptians was to educate for obedience both the adults and their children (Deuteronomy 4-6). It is no mere coincidence that God’s declaration of His Lordship to His chosen called-out nation is juxtaposed in the Deuteronomy text with the commandments to teach and to obey His ordinances.

Given the awesome potential of education, Christians can be thankful that God’s Word is intended to equip His people for His calling. It is in His very nature and character to equip for the calling (I Thessalonians 5:24). Surely God would not be so harsh to expect performance without proper preparation just as the master warned the fearful servant in advance of what he was expected to do with the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).
Even so, the Scriptures lack clear evidence regarding what educators would call instructional prescriptions. Analogous to a medical prescription, an educational prescription would advise in cause–effect or if-then language what to do instructionally contingent upon certain educationally relevant parameters like age of the learner, learning style, aptitude, curriculum content, compatibility of learner and teacher, environmental conditions, and so on. Were God not faithful and true to His word, this paradoxical mismatch between educational importance and the apparent lack in the Bible of educational prescriptions would truly be cause for despair.

Prescriptive Guidance

Closer examination of God’s Word regarding education rewards the faith to keep seeking for His answer (cf. Proverbs 25:2). Consider the educationally relevant recommendations of Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21. While neither set of verses are prescriptions they do lead us to prescriptive ideas. That is, using Ephesians 6:4 as the target verse, we see that the first half - - “Do not exasperate your child” (NIV) - - is worded in the negative and emphasizes outcome. Conversely, the second half of the verse - - “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (KJV) - - is worded in the positive and emphasizes input. Most importantly, the connecting conjunction - - “but” - - couples the two halves of the verse in a cause-effect relationship as proper hermeneutics suggest (Traina, 1980). Consequently, the implied message of the passage is that when children are raised consistent with God’s ways they will not become exasperated or frustrated. Said differently, frustration and even wrath and bitterness (cf. Strong, 1980) are natural outcomes of not being raised consistent with God’s ways. And this truth about Ephesians 6:4 is so because of yet another creation concept.

Human Nature

At creation, God created humans in His form and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). Obviously not possessive of the “omni” qualities of God (e.g., omnipotent, omniscient), humans nonetheless do possess elements of God’s nature. Some of these God-image qualities that humans possess include socialization, dignity, trust, security, righteousness, authority, self-discipline, worship, dominion, perfection, creativity, competence, destiny, purpose and love. They exist perfectly in Triune God but latently and imperfectly in humans as both research and human experience regularly attests. In fact, they exist as motivations or needs in want of development. For illustration purposes, these imago Dei
qualities likely motivate in the same way as the desire to walk does in small children. The desire is latent but as the child matures and as the behavior is modeled by others, the child naturally moves toward actualization of the desire to walk even in the face of hurt and the discomfort of bumps and falls.

So in context of Ephesians 6:4, the instructional recommendation is that as children are raised for the purpose of developing and enhancing inherent imago Dei qualities they will not be frustrated. In other words, humans are created for optimal growth in these qualities. When this is not done, frustration on the part of the learner is the natural outcome. This is likewise the message of Proverbs 22:6. That is, the “way the child should go” of the verse is in the development of imago Dei qualities. While the Proverbs wisdom literature is not a binding promise from God, it accurately reflects the way the world generally operates and thus there is validity in the 22:6 recommendation. In fact, Proverbs 22:6 type thinking suggests that in addition to the general “way he should go” that applies to all people in development of imago Dei qualities, there is the other dimension of a personal “way he should go.” God has a personalized plan for each of His children (Ephesians 2:10) and it is in this path that the child also needs to be educated. It is not too difficult to imagine the frustration that would result in training a child with a musical calling and talent to be instead a mechanic or some other type of tradesman.

Similarly, God’s word suggests that humans are created to live consistent with His ways and His morality. Thus the child is most blessed when raised to live according to God’s commands. Even so, the practical reality is that learners often resist being raised to reflect God’s nature, to optimize God’s call on their lives, and to live consistent with His ways.

Resident within each person are two types of resistance to being raised “in the way he should go.” Both of these dual inhibitors have their basis in the sin nature. One inhibitor is the desire and drive to be independent of others, including God. This makes the learner resistant to submitting to both the authority of the teacher and the curriculum content that doesn’t find favor with the learner. The other inhibitor comes from external sources. Namely, the impact of living in an imperfect, sin-stained world will at times result in disappointment and even hurt. The natural response to these negative experiences leaves the learner again resistant to authority, defensive, and self-protective.

In the case of both inhibitors the learner has at least some degree of resistance to surrendering to the learning process particularly where it is a stretching experience or at least perceived that way by the learner. In this way the frustration spoke to in Ephesians 6:4 has already developed in the child
making the success of Proverbs 22:6 less than optimal. And thus the process of learning to surrender to God's ways is at times uncomfortable if not forthrightly painful.

Necessity of Love

Not just a theological concept, the good news of the Gospel has relevance for practical problems in education. The love that operates perfectly within the Trinity, the love that God has for His creation (John 3:16), and the love that carried Jesus all the way through the experience of the cross has promise for both the positive dimension of imago Dei enhancement and the negative dimension of sin nature inhibitors. As one of the most, if not the most basic human need, love is the foundational medium or ground for human development. In fact, research consistently demonstrates that infants deprived of love, affection, and psycho-emotional nurturance literally perish even though properly nourished physically (Montagu, 1962). Similarly, as the most powerful force in the universe and with its capacity to cover a multitude of sins (I Peter 4:8), love is the healing balm for the damage done to the human psyche from merely living in this sinful world (cf. Menninger, 1989).

This dual enhancement of positive and diminishment of negative human qualities explains the power resident in selfless behaviors as found, for instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, Romans 12, and I Corinthians 13:1-7. Further if it is true as the Bible states that all adult humans have an inherent understanding of who God is, then non-acceptance of Christ is really active rejection of Him (Romans 1:19-20). Each rejector, therefore, is likely to be fighting a battle against God at some sub-conscious level. Application of godly love works to break the dynamic of self-justifying anger by taking away the reason for its existence (cf. Romans 2:4). The person-to-person application of God's love is ultimately irresistible to all but the most hardened of hearts. It can even be hypothesized that this most basic need of love, when deprived, particularly in the early years of life, actually generates psychological anger at not getting what is so inherently needed and desired. Again, application of love to this offense heals and takes away the germane reason for the anger.

The next logical step of model development is a post hoc analysis to determine whether the theoretical tenets are actually related to successful practice.

Exploratory Study

A field-based exploratory study was conducted by the authors to document teacher behaviors, expectations, and personal characteristics in the classroom
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and to relate those findings to the proposed nurturance teaching model. We interviewed a small sample of public and private school teachers (grades K-12) in Virginia who in the past year received the “Teacher of the Year” award from their respective school divisions. The awards were all based upon results from objective rating systems of peer, student, and parent evaluations.

Ten teachers (five elementary, four middle, and one secondary) were randomly selected from lists provided by the fourteen public school divisions as well as by private schools in Hampton Roads, Virginia. A standardized interview schedule was developed by the researchers and piloted on these ten teachers, grades K-12, during the months of March-May 1998. Teachers were contacted by telephone to set interview appointments in their school settings.

The eight interview questions pre-developed by the researchers addressed the following themes: personal meaningfulness; successful strategies to help children; personal characteristics of teachers; strategies used for building relationships with children, especially “hurt” children; measurement of personal success; role models for teachers; and negative teacher behaviors that impact children. As should be obvious, these question themes searched for meaning and purpose behind the dynamics of teaching as the model suggests rather than for successful techniques per se.

Some of the findings were that teachers derived personal meaningfulness from the fact that they felt “called or particularly drawn” to teaching as a profession and that they knew they had a definite impact on a child’s life. A strong sense of professional identity and pride was also expressed by these study participants. The most frequent strategies identified to assist children in their classrooms included providing appropriate, continual feedback to children in ways children could understand; cooperative learning and other group strategies; guided-practice and supportive supervision tactics; use of multi-model teaching activities; and teacher self-responsibility for making their own teaching stimulating and engaging for the children in their classrooms.

These teachers considered themselves to be caring, sensitive, and loving individuals who recognized their own personal needs and found ways to meet them in classroom activities. A majority of the respondents described themselves as “out-spoken advocates” for children and expressed high motivation to see children successfully complete learning activities.

Major strategies for building relationships with children included unconditionally accepting and expressing respect and affection for them. Teachers would find ways to connect with parents and took considerable time to foster open communication with children’s caregivers.
Gaining a child's trust and utilization of non-verbal as well as verbal indicators to assess a child's physical behavior and mannerisms were stated as the two most important strategies for dealing with "hurt" children.

Eight of the ten teacher respondents indicated a former teacher served as a positive influence on their own career choice while the remaining two indicated a significant person other than a former teacher influenced their career choice as a professional educator. The respondents were outspoken in their assessments of negative teacher behaviors that significantly impact children. Such behaviors as teachers not extending themselves or not valuing all children, seldom varying lesson structure and relying on "seat" or "busy" work, insistence on grading children by "what they produce," and a lack of self-responsibility for children's learning were expressed by respondents as erosive of positive learning climates for children.

In sum, these outstanding or excellent teachers defined themselves as persons who exhibited love, dignity, respect, and trust towards their students. They placed high value on relationship-building with peers, students, and parents, and they fostered a classroom climate of mutual respect and acceptance of differences. They indicated a close association between their personal and professional selves. Also emphasized was the acknowledged importance of self-control and direction meaning that love includes judicious disciplining of the students. Personal growth was especially important to the respondents — they felt challenged to explore their own needs and to link those needs to activities in the classroom that were related to student learning. They stated that they were able to connect their own learning and attribution styles (as they best understood them) to student performance thus, by our interpretation, reinforcing the nurturance model construct of godly love (which serves as both the foundational developer and healer in the teacher-learner dynamic). While only correlationally and not causally related to success, the above qualities are predicted from the model and as demonstrated, they appeared in regularity among teachers rated as excellent by multiple constituencies. As the model also predicts these qualities were considered by the respondents as more valuable than typically highly valued and pragmatically oriented teaching techniques.

The next step was to expand the scope of the study using 50 recipients of "Teacher of the Year" award. In the interim, some initial practical implications of love-based teaching are developed as follows.
Gifts as Love in Action

A guide for love in action is found in Romans 12:6-9. First, Paul admonishes his readers to "let" people function according to their gifts. This is the first step in promoting the use of the imago Dei qualities of each individual. Second, the gifts or traits are to be practiced and exercised to some level of maturity. Third, the use of each individual's gifts and talents must have a purpose. A key purpose, according to Paul, is for the benefit of others. In this way, God's will is fulfilled in the person who receives and responds to His love as practiced by others. In like manner, God's will is fulfilled in the person who practices or demonstrates His love to others. Thus, for the gift-holder and the beneficiary of the gifts in action, imago Dei qualities are drawn out by these recommendations.

In the educational setting, as with other settings, the gifts must first be identified if they are to be practiced and/or developed. Fortunately, identification of giftings has received good coverage in educational writings (e.g., Fortune and Fortune, 1989; Selig and Arroyo, 1989). Experts note that the various gifts have behavioral indicators of high regularity. For instance, someone with a gift of leadership typically demonstrates behaviors such as enthusiasm for activities and projects, organizational skills, and being first to make suggestions as to how to accomplish a task. Further, these gift/behavioral indictor sets appear fairly early in a child's life and generally remain stable throughout the growing years.

An example list of gifts follows along with their academically related behavioral indicators (cf. Selig & Arroyo, 1989).

Prophecy
- Due to an "all or none" philosophy, this person either excels in a subject or s/he doesn't exert the effort to succeed in it.
- Reading habits are varied, but tend toward mysteries, adventures, and stories with morals specifically for him/herself.
- Short-term memory is strong, but s/he may not attend to things long enough to effectively store them into long-term memory

Mercy
- Enjoys listening to or reading satires involving fantasy, fairy tales, etc. Will avoid tragedies.
- Will associate with—and volunteer to help—peers considered to be "needy," provided that the recipient is receptive to help.
- May avoid volunteering information/answers in a large-group situation.
Exhortation
- Enjoys academic activities that include working in groups, dramas, and public speaking.
- Will not be drawn to computer or math-related activities, since systematic tasks are considered boring.
- New concepts must be understood and mastered before they're applied (sometimes by models or examples).

Teaching
- Thirst for knowledge and love reading (or being read to as a pre-schooler).
- Tend to be overprepared for assignments and tasks. May suffer a great deal of anxiety if self-perception is that of unpreparedness.
- Have difficulty feigning interest in a non-interesting topic.

Leadership
- Will become formal and informal leaders in a classroom situation.
- Display a mental alertness and an ability to attend to key details.
- Public speaking and working in groups or projects are enjoyable activities.

Service
- Drawn to menial and routine classroom tasks (cleaning the chalkboard, sweeping the floor, arranging the books on the shelves, etc.)
- Interest and frequency of reading or listening varies greatly depending upon the utilitarian nature of the material (i.e., "Will this help me build the model? ... solve the computer problem? ... pass the math test?").
- May become frustrated and want to quit if long-term class projects are not monitored by the teacher or parent.

The next step — encouraging use of the (spiritual) “gifts” — started with asking some simple questions about each child. For example, what image of God category (e.g., relationship, authority, creativity) does he or she most display or are capable of displaying with some encouragement? What instructional strategies could be used to draw out the gifts and traits (e.g., cooperative grouping for those with relationship gifts)? What are some approaches to be used to deal with inhibitors, both internal and external? What are some things the teacher must keep in mind about self (e.g., How does the teacher's gifts and style match or conflict with the student's gifts?). Lastly, what discipline approaches could be used to both draw out the gifts or traits and limit the influence of inhibitors?

The answers to the questions, which can be found in resources like that by Selig and Arroyo (1995), serve to link instructional strategies to both the student’s talents as well as to the inhibitors of these talents. When these gifts are
identified, refined, and practiced, the possessor of the gift(s) is enabled to function consistent with God's ways and in keeping with one's God-given strengths. In this way, both the gift-possessor and the recipient of exercised gifts are lovingly edified.

When love becomes the watchword to guide instruction, the student is not the only beneficiary; the teacher benefits also. Just as Jesus demonstrated, love in action is most obvious and most powerful when it meets resistance. Very often teacher's actions that are designed both to stimulate growth of student abilities and to thwart wayward tendencies will meet some form of resistance. From this perspective, only love will keep the teacher on target. Without godly love, the teacher will experience the natural human reactions of impatience and frustration over the resisting student. Thus, the prescription for love-in-action by the teacher will invariably move the teacher him or herself to a deeper desire to walk in love. Actions short of love toward resisting students ultimately strengthen the inappropriate behavior of the student. As our theory explains, love in action will eventually soften the reason for resistance on the part of the receiver of love.

Our hypothesis regarding a nurturance teaching model is that all teaching techniques and methods, to be optimally effective, must be grounded in godly love. In pursuit of the question regarding how to manifest and operationalize this love (to avoid its misperception as mushy sentimentality or non-evaluative compassion), the remainder of the paper presents a true example of love in action.

An Actual Account

A third grade teacher, Mrs. Allen, begins use of the nurturance approach by collecting information over the following categories for her student Missy:
- Student's gift or talent
- Image of God category
- Matching instructional strategy
- Instructional strategy for building qualities
- Teacher's qualities
- Discipline approaches

To start, Mrs. Allen notes from Missy's behavior that she has the prophecy or truth-telling gift. Missy is forceful and bold in her communication pattern and enjoys having the final word. Missy also states her points and arguments forcefully and with confidence but is slow to listen to others opinions or to consider multiple sides to an argument.
Staying consistent with the language of this chapter, the prophet gift translates to the Image of God trait of authority as, in this case, detailed by Selig & Arroyo, (1989). Missy’s purpose in class could thus easily be the standard bearer or teller of truth. While Missy’s behavior could be challenging at times, Mrs. Allen saw how Missy’s gift could be used for the growth and benefit of others in the classroom setting. Equally important, proper development and exercise of this gift allows Missy to be raised in the Proverbs 22:6 meaning of “the way she should go.”

To allow Missy to exercise her gift, Mrs. Allen planned, by way of instructional strategy, for her to contribute to the class at least 3 or 4 times a week. These contributions were in the form of stating her opinions or judging the quality of a work (i.e., painting, music, a story) according to standards used by the class. Mrs. Allen also made sure that Missy had the last word once a week in a debate or small group setting. Missy was given the role of ensuring that the group completed the task according to the teacher’s directions and rules.

Mrs. Allen reasoned that in addition to designing instruction to maximize Missy’s gifts she also had to encourage growth in areas of Missy’s weaknesses. One way Mrs. Allen planned to accomplish growth was to have Missy summarize a discussion between two or three peers without adding her own comments. Listening to other’s opinions for extended periods of time would bring a balance to her need to have the last word. In a small group situation, Missy was given the role of encourager, meaning that she would be supportive to other group members but not directive.

Mrs. Allen also realized that because she had different and even “opposing” gifts from Missy, she personally had to control her own initial resistance to and irritation with Missy’s communication style. Mrs. Allen knew she had to monitor her own actions to be sure they were from an attitude of love, not anger or frustration.

Lastly, when Missy needed reprimanding for being overbearing, Mrs. Allen made sure that she explained both the strengths and potential downside to Missy’s style. If negative consequences became necessary due to repeated rule breaking, Mrs. Allen made sure Missy understood the reason for the punishment from both a rule and a values position. In fact, Missy’s prophet gift enabled her to understand consequences when administered from a set of spoken and/or published standards.

With this background information, Mrs. Allen concluded that the best time to talk with Missy about her potential for causing hurt feelings or dissension would be in quick informal conversations. Mrs. Allen also knew that she needed to let Missy know periodically when she appropriately used her prophet gift.
When Missy adapted her communication style to her given role and the needs of others, Mrs. Allen was quick to affirm this to Missy.

Mrs. Allen believed that implementing strategies consistent with the nurturance model would make the school year a success for all concerned. Missy would feel fulfilled yet would grow in areas of need. The students would benefit from Missy's gift without being put down or bullied and Mrs. Allen and Missy would surely develop a positive relationship with each other. In this way, Mrs. Allen would grow as well. Anecdotal reports are that this is exactly what happened over the course of an academic year.

Obviously, love undergirded the above scenario so that Missy, Mrs. Allen, and the class in general grew in proper ways while negative behaviors were diminished. All parties were thus nurtured as the model predicts.

**Conclusion**

The nurturance model proposed herein has credibility from several different perspectives. For one, teachers recognized professionally as excellent share certain qualities in common that fit the qualities predicted by the model. Second, an actual occurrence in the classroom guided by the model produced positive results. Third, the model not only has biblical compatibility, it serves to unlock treasures that make godly edification the ground for teaching just as it is for all human relationships.

In this application of the Second Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:39) to education, we likely have a paradigm shift. Rather than orienting education to the concept of putting knowledge in learners, the model promotes a more humanizing orientation of drawing out inherent godly motivations and diminishing ungodly motivations – both being biblically sound actions. Coincidentally, student learning then becomes a natural by-product attendant to the higher priority of godly character development. What appears as a positive reconceptualization of educational strategy obviously needs more development but this initial step certainly appears to be a promising start.

**References**


Author Note: The authors thank Gloria Ross and Jackie Bruso for typing the manuscript.

Editors Note: Robert Herschell, of Christian Heritage College, Brisbane, Australia, has developed teacher-training activities for this chapter similar to those presented at the end of Chapter Seven. These activities can be found on a CCT-E website maintained by Co-editor, Stephen D. Holtrop at Huntington College, Huntington, Indiana. The URL for this important resource is http://www.huntington.edu/education/nurturing.htm.