

Tips for Translating your Faith into your Teaching Environment

By Kathleen Bacer, Ed. D

This paper expounds on some strategies that I hope will encourage the development, integration and translation of your faith into your teaching environment.

It has always been a special joy and challenge throughout my walk with Christ to integrate my faith into my teaching. I realize first and foremost that my own personal faith and walk with Christ must be developed and integrated into the aspects of my own life before it can permeate and shine through my teaching. Coming from 19 years of teaching in a public school system without the freedom that Azusa Pacific University embraces, I appreciate and value the opportunity we have to integrate our faith as a required part of our curriculum. The integration of our faith into the teaching profession, whether in a public or private teaching environment is an incredible journey of allowing God to practice His presence in our lives and a willingness to let the Holy Spirit use us in new and exciting ways.

There is much debate about how to integrate our faith and exactly what are the best ways to do that. Does it involve simply sharing a scripture, opening class with prayer, reading a devotion, singing a song, sharing praises and/or personal testimonies or does it involve a much more systematic approach of aligning your discipline with the principles of the Word of God? Should it lead others to a deeper walk with Christ or one for the first time? What beliefs does the integration of your faith nurture and sustain? I believe to a certain extent, we will always grapple with these questions, but most importantly I believe our answers will come from an open heart to what God is doing in our lives and the lives of our students. Thus, I have found that the integration of my faith throughout my teaching emerges as each teaching and learning environment unfolds. Matthew 5:14-16 encourages us with

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

A starting place (In the beginning ☺).

Just as we immerse ourselves in our academic disciplines so that we can effectively create a teaching/learning environment, so must we also immerse ourselves in a relationship with God to develop and nurture our faith so that it shines through our academic content and can touch student's lives. Currently we commit ourselves to keeping up in our specific academic areas. Just as there are dimensions to keeping our teaching current, so are there dimensions to keeping our faith alive. A commitment to studying and applying God's word, communion and prayer, and collaborating or fellowship with our colleagues is our foundational starting place. The best strategy I have found is to just immerse myself in God's word on a daily basis to create that hunger and thirst to learn His ways, to experience His presence, to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." as the apostle Peter challenges us in 2 Peter 3:18.

If you find yourself not wanting to be anywhere without His word, then your journey has begun! I liken it to the process of marinating – soaking ourselves in the word and presence of God. I love the challenge that is written in Deuteronomy 6: 4

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and gates.

Out of our own personal study and application of God's word comes a new sense of communion and prayer that will enable us to share or integrate our faith with others - much like the sharing of our content knowledge! Think of this strategy when you are preparing a lesson and conducting action research. In this you are equipping yourself as an educator and thus we must also equip ourselves spiritually. Just as I feel I will never fully master technology as it is ever changing, so also I find there is so much for me to continually learn in my walk with God. Our call to integrate our faith is a life-changing and life-long learning experience.

Tip: You will find as you spend time in His word each day, He will faithfully guide you with wonderful truths to share with your students. I am amazed at how often they blend in perfectly with what I am teaching. It is a God thing!

Creating an environment for sharing your faith

As an educator, I have always felt it extremely important to create a dynamic learning environment, one that nurtures and sustains learning, one that inspires and challenges students, and one that makes learning so enjoyable that students will continue their quest beyond my introductions. Can the integration of our faith carry the same agenda? I pray so! As you create a learning atmosphere of trust, and safe risk taking, bridging the gap between student and professor, you can also create an environment of tender soil for sharing your faith. At the graduate level this involves a great amount sensitivity and respect for your students, as you seek to inspire and challenge them – no different than your academic teaching though!

Just as students learn in many different ways through different methods and modalities, so also can the integration of our faith be expressed and shared in many different ways. As you create that safe learning environment, so shall the sharing of your faith (and theirs!) emerge in beautiful and exciting ways. Just as a learning environment builds, so does an environment that nurtures faith.

Tip: If students are able to see that I am growing too, it encourages them to grow – same with learning – if they see I am a life-long learner and do not propose to know it all, it inspires them to learn and continue the quest both academically and spiritually.

Aligning your Curriculum with Issues of Faith

This is the fun part! Some disciplines are more challenging than others. But I have found no matter what I am teaching, the deeper I am in the Word of God and the more knowledgeable I become with my curriculum – the easier the two align. Let me share as it may just unlock some creative ideas for your discipline/curriculum. When I taught in teacher education (foundations of education and the math/science methods courses) I found an emergence of themes from scripture that became applicable to the courses. A faith theme approach blended nicely with my teaching. For example, when I was teaching about classroom management I interwove strategies Jesus utilized throughout his teachings. He captured the attention of thousands without any media gadgets!

I wondered how I was ever going to align some of our educational technology classes with issues of faith until I started looking at them through a different lens. See table 1 as an example of how I aligned our new MA in Educational Technology online program. As a side note each student receives a Bible as part of their entry care package. I envision this to be utilized (just like their computers) as a primary tool throughout the program.

Table 1 – MA in Ed Tech Online Faith Integration

Course #	Course Title	Main faith theme	Supporting themes
EDUC511	Foundations in Educational Technology	Faith Foundations	Faith/faithfulness Promises of God Walking with God/Jesus Jesus as Shepherd, Savior Hope in Christ Relationship with God Surrender God's sacrificial love
EDUC 517	Telecommunications	Prayer	Communication with God The Lord's Prayer Calling on God Vision and Prayer Work and Prayer Listening to God Hearing God Returning to God Fellowship of God
EDUC 520	Applications of Technology Supported Curricular Tools	God's Resources	Daily Living Fruit of the Spirit Life in Jesus Walking in faith God's care Godliness Patience, Peace, Perseverance, Persistence, Perspective Holiness
EDUC515	Emerging Trends	God's Omnipresence	God's/Jesus' presence Drawing Near God's supremacy Communion with God God with us Holy Spirit
EDUC523	Applications of Hypermedia	God's Power	God's strength Armor of God God's provision Comfort Renewal Grace God's protection Forgiveness
EDUC524	Instructional Design and Development	God's Design	God's purposes Divine help God's guidance Value of life Hope Waiting & stillness Trust and Trusting God

Course #	Course Title	Main faith theme	Supporting themes
EDUC 518	Global Learning/Cross Cultural Classrooms	Our Mission	Evangelism Light of the world Encouraging others Discipleship Salvation Serving God Kingdom of God Compassion
EDUC 527	Special Topics: Integrating the Internet	Aroma of Christ	Christ likeness Growth God's attributes, character, majesty Seeking and Knowing God Intimacy with God Worship
EDUC 526	Practicum in Educational Technology	God's Word, Our practicum	Word of God Wisdom Obedience Victory Praise Thankfulness Freedom Spiritual Growth

Just a couple of other ideas

- Create a series of devotionals around a powerful passage of scripture. (Lord's Prayer, beatitudes, lifestyles of a believer, names of God) For example I once did a series on the Lord's Prayer focusing on one verse each week. Wow, did the prayer life in that class emerge! Another time I was teaching classroom management and wisdom in problem solving student issues. I build a series on the beatitudes. By the end of the 9 weeks students had been able to experience the depth and breath of a passage of scripture. I made cards each week with the verse for them to carry throughout the week.
- Focus on one scripture blended with anything that God is impressing on your heart from the needs of your class. One term I focused on the Armor of God as we were digging into utilizing technology to equip students in the teaching/learning process. It was exciting to see students talking about it throughout the class.
- Start a file with categories so that if those needs/issues arise in your classes you will have resources already developed.

- First night of class I have students fill out an “operating systems” sheet, which tells me a little about them. It also includes a question of “Anything special you would like me to include through our faith sharing.”

One final example:

There are many different ways to express our faith. You will have to decide what it is you want your students to walk away with – just like with your curriculum. I teach a culminating class in our program called “Applications of Educational Technology.” It is our practicum class with all the final requirements for the master’s degree. It is a class where they are now to put all their learning into action, so to speak. As I began working with groups of students and teaching this class, I wanted to encourage them to also make God’s word become their practicum. This inspired a little booklet that my father and I wrote together, which I now use throughout this class. See Appendix A.

I find if I keep my heart tender and marinated in God’s word, you never know what will happen. Let go and let God! It always works☺.

Adding the Dimension of Prayer

Prayer in class and throughout your class usually emerges after you have established a learning environment in which the students feel they can be vulnerable and honest with each other. It also emerges after an element of trust has been established. Prayer many times is a very personal and private expression of our walk with God. I have found, especially at the graduate level, that this doesn’t always emerge after nine weeks. Interestingly enough though, I have found this dimension develops a depth in my online environments. Students open up in private journals and I am able to “pray with them” online. It is beautiful when barriers crumble and online sharing transcends time and space.

Sharing other Literature as a Vehicle for Sharing God’s Truths

Devotional books, poems, stories, articles can also be a great tool for teaching biblical concepts and truths. In the online arena, many multimedia expressions of faith are also emerging which I have found very useful. I have included some of my favorites in Appendix B.

If God is using a particular book in your life, oftentimes you will be amazed at how applicable it might be to your class. I have learned that sometimes, if my faith integration plans are too set, I lose the spiritual teaching moment, so to speak. For example, I was teaching a Global learning class and basically had my faith integration plans mapped out for the whole course. God had different plans for me that term! In my personal life I was reading John Ortberg’s book, *“If you want to walk on the water, you’ve got to get out of the boat.”* The book was blessing the socks off of me, but I felt I couldn’t share it with the class because it really did not tie in with what we were studying. For some reason I

abandoned that idea and one night went in and shared from the book. The class was profoundly touched (just like I had been). The next week I left the book in the car and proceeded with my "planned" lesson. The students immediately asked me where the book was? Wasn't I going to share more? I ended up getting the book out of the car and sharing more. To make a long story short, by the end of the class all the students had bought the book and shared with me how their lives had been transformed. As with any lesson plan - sometimes we have to reroute it. I learned to listen to God. He is very creative and has lots of ways of teaching us!

Utilizing Technology to Develop and Encourage Student's Faith

If you teach online or use online tools to supplement your classes such as eCollege or Blackboard, you will be pleasantly surprised with how easily spiritual discussions can emerge with your students. If you create an inviting environment in which students can feel a private and personal connection with you online, many faith issues can emerge which sometimes do not in a face-to-face classroom. Think about creating a place where students can share their spiritual journey and you can mutually challenge and nurture growth. The use of threaded discussions, online journals, virtual environments where you can share synchronously (instant messaging, a virtual office/chat room) and email can all be effective means of facilitating faith communications. God transcends time and space with us!

In conclusion

The challenge we have before us at Azusa Pacific University to translate our faith into our teaching environment is an incredible one at that. If we will allow God to translate himself in our lives and through our teaching then pretty exciting things will occur. My prayer for all of us here at Azusa Pacific University comes from Colossians 3:16-17

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Scripture used throughout paper was from The Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright 1973,1978,1984 by International Bible Society.

Appendix A

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Abel, N. & Bacer, K. (2001) Glendora, CA: Personable Ministries

God's Word - Our Practicum

*Christ living in us
becomes the superior translation of the Word of God!*

Never before in history has the Bible been made so clear by various translations and paraphrases. Of all these versions, there is one that is as far superior to the others as the sun is to a candle! When God's Word is translated into a life—a letter written on the heart and expressed by word and deed—to be heard and seen by all, this is the superior translation! It is this translation that becomes our practicum—the practical application of God's Word in our life. This is the translation that will touch those around us for their welfare and for the glory of God.

The profession of truth and knowledge of the Word of God can give the appearance of being a Christian, but the practice of that truth and knowledge is what translates Christianity and God's Word from an abstract idea into living reality! In this way God's Word becomes the defining practicum of life itself!

As you articulate your perspective on Educational Technology to others, it is my heartfelt prayer that you will also reflect the life of Christ—in obedience to God's Word:

“As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved (*by Him*), clothe yourselves with compassion (*or be genuinely touched when others are hurting*), kindness (*or goodness with a smile*), humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another (*Simply put, avoid all situations that may irritate or distress one another*). (*Freely*) Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these (*other*) virtues put on (*aga'pe*) love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” (*Col 3:12-14*).

This *aga'pe* love is a unique word unknown outside the New Testament and is the characteristic word of Christianity. This kind

of love does not depend upon feelings or emotions. It is a decision of the will—a choice—as we make the Word of God the practicum for our lives!

The inspired Paul said of himself, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ is living (*or is lifted up*) in me. The life that I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me” (*Gal. 2:20*).

We, like the apostle Paul, can become a living translation of the truth and lovingly express and present Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

How will others know that the truth of God’s Word is our practicum? If we live with the boldness that is energized by a simple child-like, and trusting obedience to the Word of Almighty God, then others will know!

May you, as my dad always says, “marinate” yourself in the Word of God! “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the Name of (*and in dependence upon*) the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (*Col. 3:16-17*). In this way the Lord will become the Practicum of life itself; and you will experience the abundant life Jesus died to give us. *He said*, “... I have come that those who follow Me may have life, and have it in abundance—to the full, (*till it overflows*)” (*Jn. 10:10*).

As you move into areas of leadership with technology in your schools, and touch the lives of those in “your world”—“Let your light shine before others in such a way that they may see your good works (*or your praiseworthy, noble and good deeds*), and glorify your Father Who is in heaven” (*Matt. 5:16*).

“And now, O Israel (*or the chosen of God*), what does the LORD (*The Almighty Self-Existent One—Who is*) your God require of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your (*mind and*) heart and with all your soul (*or with your entire being*)” (*Deut. 10:12*).

May our lives translate Who Christ is. Whatever we do, together or apart, may it always be to speak the truth in love, never to compromise with sin and error, and in all things, whether by word or deed, to behave in such a way that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be honored. May we so live and share the truth with each other and with those in “*our world*” that in everything we are saying, “Jesus is alive—because He lives in us!”

In *Hebrews 4:12* we are reminded that “The Word of God is living and active.” May it be so in us! May God’s Word be our practicum for His glory and for the eternal blessing of those in “our” world!

***Christ living in us also becomes the practicum
that makes life itself meaningful!***

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Appendix B

A Few Favorite Resources

Arthur, K. (1977). *Lord, I want to Know You*. USA: Multnomah Books, a division of Questar Publishers, Inc,

Barnes, E.(1996). *Fill my cup, Lord with the Peace of Your Presence*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers

Brummett, N, (1998). *Simply the Savior*. Eastbourne, England: Kingsway Communications.

Hoff, B.J. (1993). *Faces in the Crowd*. USA: Warner Press Inc.

Ortberg, J (2001). *If you want to walk on the water, you've got to get out of the boat*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Tada, J.E., & Dravecky, D & J. (Eds). (2001) *NIV Encouragement Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Tada, J. (1993) *Diamonds in the Dust*. Grand rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Tada. J. (1999). *Holiness in Hidden Places*. Nashville, TN: J. Countryman, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Webbels, L. (Ed) (1998) *In His Presence: Daily Devotionals through the Gospel of Matther*. Lynwood, WA: Emerald Books.