

TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Peterson, Gilbert A., ed. The Christian Education of Adults. Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1984.

Chapter 7 “The Use of Impressional Methods” by Perry Downs.

IMPRESSIONAL METHODS

Teaching methods are best categorized according to the kind of involvement they elicit from students. Generally methods may be categorized as either impressional or expressional, depending on the sort of experience you want to provide for your learners. There is no best teaching method. Rather, it is critical to determine which method is the most appropriate for achieving your learning goals in each situation.

In the church a primary concern is the communication of content (propositional truth, normally the Word of God). Impressional methods are especially efficient for this purpose. Impressional methods involve the student through hearing, seeing, teaching, tasting, smelling, or touching. The purpose of these methods is to impress content or information onto the students by means of his five senses. Tasting and smelling were extensively used in ancient Hebrew education; today we focus on hearing, seeing, and, to a lesser degree, touching.

Probably the most common image of adult education in the church is that of a teacher employing an impressional method such as lecture. Lectures are often appropriate in that adults want new information and expect to receive content input from their classes. Indeed, the value of impressional methods lies in the fact that they are an efficient and effective means of transmitting content from teacher to student. If your objective is to communicate content to your students, you should choose an impression method. In addition to lecture, impressional methods include visual aids, demonstrations, and reading assignments. Each of those methods involves the student as a receiver of information by means of hearing, seeing, or touching.

Anyone who has been involved in adult education in the local church has from time to time seen classes in which content has not been presented in a stimulating manner. It is critical to understand that the problem lies not in the content (the Bible is not boring), but rather in the skill of the teacher. Because the content of Christian education is the eternal truth of God, we dare not allow poor methodology to hinder our communication. Rather, we must work to develop highly skilled teachers in the adult department, teachers who can transmit the content of Scripture effectively.

THE LECTURE METHOD

The most common impressional method used with adults is the lecture method. A lecture is an oral discourse on any subject, presented in a systematic, orderly way for the purpose of instruction. Depending on the skill of the teacher, lectures can be one of the most exciting and effective means of teaching – or they can be lifeless and ineffective. When the lecture method is

misused it can deaden the learning process. Research indicates that as a teaching method lecturing is especially effective in helping students to acquire factual knowledge.¹

1. VALUES OF THE LECTURE METHOD

There are several distinct values of the lecture method in relationship to adult ministry in the church. The first is that lecturing is an especially effective way to communicate content in a systematic way. In an adult Bible study or a theological lecture where precision and logic are important, a lecture can be one of the best means of guiding the students in acquiring the information.

The efficient use of time is a second value of the lecture technique. A carefully designed and delivered lecture can communicate a large amount of content in a relatively short amount of time. Especially in the Sunday school hour where time is at a premium, the lecture can be extremely helpful. When the curriculum calls for teaching extensive amounts of material, as in a Bible survey course, the lecture method should be considered.

The teacher has more direct control of the class when the lecture method is used. He is able to control the pace of learning, the terms being used, the direction and emphasis of the study, and the specific points of application. This may be especially significant in an adult class composed of people with a wide variety of backgrounds. By maintaining control of the class, the sensitive teacher is able to emphasize what will meet the needs of the majority of the students, and the danger of a small minority of students with special needs or interests dominating the class can be avoided.

2. POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH THE LECTURE METHOD

When considered in relation to adult education, there are two primary dangers in the lecture method, both of which can be avoided. The first potential problem is the high degree of skill required to be an effective lecturer. The primary reason lecturing is criticized as a teaching method is that many people have heard many poor lecturers. The problem resides not in the method, but in the person using the method. Therefore, it is important that teachers be skilled as lecturers if they choose to use this method. In a following section, specific guidelines for effective lecturing will be discussed.

The second potential problem with the lecture method is lack of active student participation. An improper assumption held by some adults in the church is that they are not responsible for their own spiritual development. That perspective may come, in part, from the fact that no demands are placed upon them to actively participate in their own maturing process. If the process of adult education is exclusively impressional and if the only expectation placed upon the student is to come and listen to a lecture, an unhealthy dependence on the "expert" for spiritual growth may result. Therefore, the teacher must use a variety of methods, some of which call for active involvement by the students, and must structure the lecture to promote independence rather than dependency in the adult learner.

¹ Frank Costin, "Lecturing Versus Other Methods of Teaching: A Review of Research," *British Journal of Educational Technology* (1972): 3-31.

3. WHEN TO USE THE LECTURE METHOD

As with all other methods, the key to deciding when to use the method is to determine its appropriateness to certain circumstances. First consider the teacher. If he is a skilled lecturer and enjoys lecturing, then it would be appropriate. It is important to consider the personality traits of individual teachers and to help them discover the teaching style that is most compatible with their own capacities and needs. Some people are excellent in small group discussions but are poor as lecturers. They should be made aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

A second consideration is the pupils. The number of people in a class and their competencies play a role here. Regarding class size, Ronald Hyman makes the following observation:

The minimum number of students for a lecture class is about fifteen to twenty. With less than this number it is difficult for the teacher to lecture, since the small number of students discourages him from presenting a formal address. Small groups invite, rather, an informal relationship where one person does not talk to others.²

In addition to class size, the background and abilities of the students should be considered. If an adult class is composed of new or uninformed believers, a lecture would probably be most appropriate. If, however, the students are quite familiar with the content, more active participation should be elicited by the instructor.

If the content is highly factual, technical, or simply new to the learners, then the lecture method is appropriate. If the purpose of the class is other than the communication of content (such as the development of skills or the exploration of personal life implications) then a method other than lecture should be used.

A final consideration is the context of the learning situation. Such factors as the time of day, the location, and the situation of the class should be considered. For example, an informal home Bible study would not naturally lend itself to lecture, but a larger Sunday school class meeting in the church building would. It must be remembered that not every educational setting is appropriate to lecture, but many are.

4. EFFECTIVE LECTURING

As mentioned earlier, it is important for the adult educator to develop his skill as a lecturer. There are a number of areas to work on.

Preparation. Because most adults in the church have some background in Bible and theology, the adult teacher must be willing to study his content carefully. Thorough preparation is the key. Effective use of commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and theological reference books will greatly enhance the quality and depth of the content presented by the lecturer. A good rule of thumb is that the teacher must study until he is excited about what he has learned. Wilbert McKeachie, in an excellent book for beginning college teachers, states:

Vocal variety, audibility, and movement are overt cues to your own enthusiasm, and if there is any teacher characteristic related to learning, it is enthusiasm. Enthusiasm

² Ronald T. Hyman, *Ways of Teaching*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1978), p. 24.

probably cannot be successfully faked, but it is possible to influence the degree to which your enthusiasm shows. Moreover, my enthusiasm about a lecture topic seems to be a function of the degree to which I've prepared for it. I find it hard to be enthusiastic about most lectures I've given before, but if I've reworked a lecture, learned some new things, and come up with some new ideas, I approach the lecture with much more enthusiasm.³

Preparation includes the organization of material. A properly organized lecture should have a clear, logical progression that guides the student's thinking and leads from an attention-gaining introduction, through a clear presentation of the content, and on to an appropriate conclusion. Relevant illustrations will illuminate and enliven the presentation. Preparation includes thinking not only about what will be said but also about how it will be said.

Effective preparation also includes anticipating questions that may arise in the minds of the students. Sensitivity to the class is necessary so that the teacher may then raise and answer those questions in his lecture. Because adults can and will think deeply regarding issues presented to them, it is important that the lecture does pose the difficult questions that may arise, and then deal with them honestly.

Presentation. Practices such as proper posture, eye contact with students, and voice control are important. It is not necessary to make a formal presentation (indeed, extreme formalism may hinder the lecture), but the lecture must be effective. If, for example, the teacher speaks so quietly that people cannot hear, the most effective preparation will be lost. Several factors can aid in effective presentation.

The teacher's attitude should be one of interest and excitement about the content. This will come as a result of good preparation. In addition, the teacher's attitude should be confident and positive. If the lecture begins with a note of apology ("I really shouldn't be teaching this") or negativism ("I don't know why we are supposed to study this") the mindset of the students will immediately shift against the class.

Concern. At the center of the teacher's attitude must be a sincere commitment of love to the class. Because the ultimate purpose of the class is ministry, the teacher must guard against the desire to impress class members with his expertise, or to demean them for their weaknesses. Rather, like the apostle Paul, his attitude should be: "Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thess. 1:8). It is highly appropriate for the teacher to pray for this love for his students and to see his lecture as his personal gift of love to them.

Not only must the teacher be excited about his lesson, but he must also be excited about his students. He should be concerned for their needs and sensitive to their response to the lecture. If particular points of the lecture elicit significant response (such as nodding of heads or frowns), the teacher should be willing to acknowledge the responses and deal accordingly with them. The purpose of any class is to teach students, not simply cover the content.

Teaching aids. Because the skill of effective lecturing is difficult to develop, the untrained teacher especially should avail himself of teaching aids as a supplement to the lecture. Prudent use of pictures, displays, chalkboards, or overhead projectors can greatly help the visual communication of a teaching situation. In addition, such audio aids as tapes and records can be used. Because a lecture is easily combined with other teaching methods, it is wise to do so.

³ Wilbert J. McKeachie, *Teaching Tips*, 7th ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1978), p. 24.

Chapter 8 The Use of Expressional Methods

If ever there was a teacher who had the right to be a pure lecturer, it was our Lord. As a result of His divine nature He had sufficient information to do nothing but impart information to His students for the three years of His teaching ministry. But the gospel records clearly show that He chose not to use the lecture method exclusively. Rather, His dominant mode of instruction appears to have been interaction and discussion with His followers. A brief survey of the gospels shows the numerous times that His students spoke as they learned. If Jesus is in any way an example for teachers of adults today, we can safely conclude that active student involvement is an important factor in adult education.

EXPRESSIONAL METHODS

An expressional method involves the student in talking or acting. It allows him to express his feelings, understandings, or reactions pertinent to the class. When communication from the student is desired, an expressional method should be used. Examples are role play, group discussion, reports, debate, student skits, and creative writing. Each calls upon the student to express his ideas or feelings.

Expressional methods are especially appropriate for adult education in the church because the adult has a great deal of information and background life experience that can and should be shared with the rest of the class. Because experience is an important part of Christian life, it is especially important for adults to share experiences with one another. Moreover, an expressional method makes the learner a more responsible participant in the educational experience, because more is expected from him than simply listening. He is called upon to be an active participant in the teaching/learning process. As was noted in chapter 6, that is a critical aspect of the adult educational process.

THE DISCUSSION METHOD

Perhaps the most common expressional method used with adults is group discussion. Due to improper use of the technique, many people have had poor experiences with the discussion method, but when it is used correctly it can be an exciting and productive teaching method. Based on the concept of expression, discussion allows people to discover for themselves scriptural content and its subsequent life implications.

VALUES OF THE DISCUSSION TECHNIQUE

Discussion allows the learners to generate knowledge themselves. Most adult learners will have a vast fund of experiences and data from which to draw in a discussion. Adults have the capacity to put facts and experiences together in new ways to create new information for themselves. As the students are prompted to work with facts through deliberation, argumentation, and judgment, they are able to come to new conclusions regarding their data. Adults have the ability to relate data to new situations by their own intellectual powers, and the discussion method prompts this process in the learner.

The discussion method also encourages students to think issues through for themselves. Because the learners are actively involved in the process, the teacher's role becomes that of an enabler rather than a teller. The teacher using this method is in effect telling his students, "If you want to know, you must exercise your own intellect." Rather than simply receiving answers from the teacher, the student is required to actively consider options himself.

This value is especially important to Christian education. As people grown in the Christian faith, they need to understand what is important – but also why it is important. By means of discussion, the teacher can help students to think through the reasons behind Christian content, and thus prompt a deeper level of learning. When a person needs to think through meaning for himself, the potential for that answer's being "owned" is even greater. Our goal is to produce mature Christians who are secure in the faith for themselves; discussion can be a very important means of accomplishing that end.

It is important to understand that a good teacher, when he leads a discussion, is teaching on two levels simultaneously. On the first level, he is teaching the principles of the subject matter by means of class presentation and questions. Simultaneously, he is also teaching the way of grasping and generating such principles. Therefore, the student is allowed to see not only the conclusions, but also the logic used to reach those conclusions. In reference to this concept of learning, Ronald Hyman states:

This notion is connected to the idea that an individual must expand and deepen his knowledge all through his life. He must do so early in formal school situations where teachers are present to guide him. Indeed, the *raison d'être* of schools is precisely to facilitate the student's effort in this task. But, since the person spends most of his time away from his teachers even during the years he attends school, he must be able to further his knowledge on his own, and to acquire knowledge when teachers are not around to teach him. Discussion in this way serves both the purpose of schooling and the purpose of preparing for a life after schooling is completed.¹

Further, the discussion method helps the student develop independent thinking, and this can then lead to personal independence. Through discussion the focus shifts from what to think to how to think. Because ultimately we want our adult learners to learn to think Christianly regarding any life situation, it is essential that we teach them how to think. The process of discussion can show how to think Christianly regarding the issues of life. The result is that students can gain a proper degree of independence from the teachers. While the Scriptures teach that all members of the Body of Christ are related to one another and need each other, there is also strong emphasis on the importance of a growing independence in a mature believer. For example, John reminded his readers in 1 John 2:27, "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." Continued dependence on a teacher will not result in spiritual maturity in our believers. We need to help students to think independently so they can have a growing faith that is also personalized. The ability of discussion to cause the student to think is an important means to that end.

The discussion method, with its emphasis on personal discovery, is highly motivating for the student. When a student begins to gain knowledge on his own and his confidence in his own

¹ Ronald T. Hyman, *Ways of Teaching*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1974), p. 75.

capacity to discover increases, it can be very stimulating to his learning. As our students begin to discover that they can make valid observations regarding a scriptural passage or develop good theological insights in regard to life issues, they become more motivated to think and to become more effective students of the Word. The reward of achieving personal insights is an enhancement of individual study.

The discussion method also provides for a variety of insights in class experience. Especially when we have competent adult learners, we should respect and value the input they can have. By allowing them opportunity to voice their concerns and ideas, the whole class can benefit from the value of their insights. Discussion is a very practical way of allowing the truth of 1 Corinthians 12, that we all have something to contribute to the Body, to be included in our teaching philosophy.

Finally, by means of discussion students can accomplish a more personalized application of the truth to their lives than we can effect through an impressional method. Discussion allows students to explore the meaning of a biblical truth in a much more intimate and personal way than by one-directional input by the teacher. The fact of the matter is that the class may be more sensitive to its needs than the teacher is, and the class may also probe more deeply into life implications than the teacher could ever do. Therefore, allowing the class to explore implications and to apply the Scripture itself may result in a more personalized application of the truth.

LIMITATIONS OF THE DISCUSSION METHOD

Although most limitations can be avoided by proper use of the method, it is important that we realize the potential problems that lurk within the discussion method.

Discussion requires that the group have prior knowledge of the subject matter. Prior Bible knowledge is almost always necessary. Without it, the discussion is only a pooling of ignorance rather than a growing and learning experience. Without sufficient information the class simply cannot engage in intelligent discussion. For example, the hypostatic union of Christ's humanity and deity cannot be discussed if the group does not know that Jesus is both God and man simultaneously. Therefore, we need to realize that not every group is capable of effectively discussing every subject.

Also, discussion can easily degenerate into aimless talk, if the leader is not careful or skillful. Unless it has been carefully thought through by the leader, a discussion can fail to reach a proper conclusion so that people know what to do or to think as a result of the discussion. Aimless comments and unrelated information may be included in the discussion until it becomes an exercise in futility rather than a dynamic learning experience. We have all had experiences in a discussion when at the end we wondered what we actually had accomplished. As will be shown later, a careful guiding of the discussion by the leader can avoid or avert this limitation.

It is also possible that even though the entire discussion group is in agreement, its conclusions will be wrong. A teacher may give up a large part of control of the group and not guide it to his conclusion. He may let it reach its own conclusion, regardless of what that may be. Normally, in an adult class that will not be a problem, but the potential is definitely there for the group to come to an incorrect conclusion.

The final limitation of the discussion technique is that it can be very time consuming. What the teacher can lecture on in ten minutes may take the group thirty or more minutes to discover for itself. Discussion is a slow process and cannot be used when there is a great deal of

content to be dealt with in a short amount of time. Discussion is not effective for a fifteen- minute Bible study. At some points the teacher may conclude that there simply is not enough time for an effective discussion. The teacher is best advised not to attempt a discussion in a short amount of time and thus frustrate himself and the class but rather to wait and have discussion when there is sufficient time to use the process properly.

EFFECTIVE DISCUSSIONS

There are four interrelated factors that can contribute to an effective discussion. Each factor must be considered when a discussion is being planned to insure the potential for success. These factors are the topic, the group, the physical setting, and the teacher.

The topic. An effective discussion topic must be something that the group is able to discuss and something that the members want to discuss. When the students find a topic challenging, interesting, and relevant, they will enthusiastically participate in discussion. If, however, they find that the topic is too ethereal to have immediate practical significance to them or if they think it is basically a closed issue, they will not participate in the discussion. The key here is to choose a topic that has immediate significance to the group and to pose the discussion question in such a way that the students might quickly see the issue's relevance. For example, if the class has been studying a doctrinal subject such as the holiness of God, a good discussion topic might be the question, How does the holiness of God affect our lives? No doubt the class will need some help in thinking through these issues, but if they have sufficient information regarding the holiness of God they will be able to begin to draw some specific conclusions as to how the doctrine affects their daily experience.

The group. If the group is not willing to discuss, the discussion technique will not work. A group needs to be willing to disagree, willing to be open-minded, willing to be objective, and willing to be honest. Willingness to disagree is not the same as being disagreeable. Rather, it implies that group members are not so concerned with the avoidance of conflict that they cannot or will not express an honest point of disagreement among themselves. Not all Christians agree on everything, and proper discussion of disagreements can be an important factor in the development of our understanding of the Christian faith. But if people are not willing to be open minded and objective and to state honestly their feelings, attitudes, and ideas, they will not be able to work together for deeper understanding. Therefore, the group must be willing to participate in the process and to speak honestly.

That kind of attitude needs to be fostered by the teacher. A warm, open, and trusting environment will create an atmosphere where it can be developed. But if the students do not trust one another or the teacher, they will not risk the involvement of open, honest discussion. We need to remember that discussions can be threatening until people feel comfortable in the process.

The physical setting. The actual "feeling" of a room will change according to the room arrangement. A formal arrangement of students in rows creates an attitude and atmosphere of observation by the learner. But a more informal circular arrangement will create an attitude of participation. If, for example, an adult class meets in the sanctuary where the pews are bolted to the floor, it may be difficult to develop an effective discussion. If it meets in a more informal setting where the chairs can be arranged in a circle, the atmosphere will be more conducive to effective group discussion.

The teacher. If a teacher is not willing to be open and honest, the group members will not have that willingness either. The teacher must be open and interested in the topic. The teacher must see the topic as of vital concern and important to discuss. His attitude and approach to the discussion will set the tone. Some teachers tend to monopolize and dominate a class, and this will greatly hinder discussion. But if the teacher's attitude is one of openness and warmth, this will help to set the class much more at ease, and effective discussion may result. For that reason, it is important for the teacher to know himself and to understand how his own personality traits will affect the dynamics and functioning of his class.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

The key to leading a discussion effectively is preparation on the part of the teacher. Leading a discussion properly requires at least as much, if not more, preparation than does the lecture method. A well-prepared teacher appears to be natural and almost spontaneous as he skillfully guides the discussion to the main issues by means of probing questions. In actually leading the discussion, the leader performs four functions: he orients the group, presents the problem, guides the discussion, and draws the discussion to a close with a summary.

The discussion leader orients the group by first creating a comfortable and relaxed mood. If the leader himself is relaxed and at ease, it will help to create an atmosphere that will promote free discussion by the group. In addition, the leader should also orient the group to any procedural instructions that might be necessary. These would include the basic ground rules and how the discussion will be run so that people will know what is going to happen and what their role in this discussion will be.

As the leader presents the problem, or the issue to be discussed, he needs to establish the topic's relevance to the group. A clear aim for the discussion should be presented, so that the group has a sense of progress and a goal towards which it is aiming. A clear presentation of the topic will do a great deal in setting the direction for the discussion so that the predetermined objectives will be met.

The leader guides the discussion, but does not dominate it. Careful guiding of the discussion includes keeping it on track. The leader needs to listen carefully to the content being discussed and must graciously keep the discussion from going down blind alleys and off on issues that are not really relevant to the topic at hand.

The leader must also provide logical transitions, so that the group can clearly move from point to point in the development of the topic. Transitions are provided by first offering a brief summarization of what has been said to that point, and then providing the next logical question in the line of the discussion. As a result of providing careful transitions during the discussion period, the group will have a sense of progress, and the learners will be satisfied that something is being accomplished.

Also included in guiding is the task of maintaining the process of the discussion. Because the goal of discussion is to draw people into the process, the leader must be aware of who is talking too much and who is not talking enough. The effective discussion leader must find ways to naturally and easily draw out the more quiet people and at the same time subdue the more talkative ones. As the discussion leader builds rapport with the group that task will be less difficult than it might be initially.

Finally, the discussion leader draws the discussion to a close with a summary. An important factor for satisfactory learning is to have some sense of closure and conclusion at the

end of a class period. By careful summarization of the discussion and insightful analysis of what was said, the discussion leader can provide that sense of closure for the students so that they know what the discussion accomplished. That does not mean that hard and fast conclusions must be reached but rather that the learners have at least a sense that something was accomplished. If the learners have a sense of direction and accomplishment they will feel that the discussion was a satisfying experience. Because adults desire to see results from their efforts, this final step is critical.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Another important strategy in the art of expressional teaching methods is the effective use of questions. Hyman observes:

Teaching involves questioning. It is virtually impossible to think of teaching (over a period of time) that does not involve questioning. In deed, questioning is the teacher's chief means of directing or channeling discourse. No doubt the teacher will ask fewer questions in a discussion than in a recitation. However, precisely for this reason he must be aware of the various types of questions. He must deliberately from the questions appropriate to the context of the discourse of the students involved. By varying his questions the teacher can elicit a wide range of responses, thereby developing in the students a broad set of cognitive skills.²

WHY USE QUESTIONS WITH ADULTS?

As the above quote indicates, there are a number of advantages to using questions in teaching, some of which are critical for the adult learner. The cognitive values of questions are obvious. The use of questions will cause students to think through the issues at hand. When a student is asked to think and respond to a specific issue, his involvement in the learning process will become much more active than it would be in simply listening to a lecture. Perhaps this is why our Lord used questions on a regular basis in His teaching ministry.

Kenneth Gangel suggests that questions are effective because they tend to promote student "ownership" of the class.³ As students become more actively involved in the process of the classroom, they feel a deeper sense of responsibility and association with it. By helping them become more active participants they will feel more that this is their class rather than the teacher's class.

Questions can also be important in adult education, for they tend to "stimulate students to think to seek out additional data on their own."⁴ In adult education, it is extremely important to build independence in our learners. The posing of stimulating questions that are not always answered in class can aid growth toward independence by creating within the students the desire to study on their own. That will help adult learners become more responsible for their own spiritual development.

² Ibid., p. 324.

³ Kenneth O. Gangel, *24 Ways to Improve Your Teaching* (Wheaton, Ill: Victor, 1971), p. 39.

⁴ Arthur A. Carin and R.B. Dund, *Developing Questioning Techniques: A Self-concept Approach* (Columbus, Ohio: C.E. Merrill, 1971).

A critical problem with some adult learners is that they feel insecure regarding themselves and lack confidence in their own ability to understand and feed themselves as believers. Therefore, it is important when working with adults to ask questions that allow the students to build up positive self-images. When the learners can successfully answer the teacher's questions, they quickly discover that they need not worry about their own abilities in regard to personal Bible study for spiritual growth.

A final reason for asking questions with adults is to "assess the degree of success in achieving the goals and objectives of the lesson."⁵ One of the most effective ways to determine whether learning has in fact resulted from a lesson is to question the students. By means of properly phrased questions the teacher may discover how much his students understand and whether or not his objectives have been met. Questioning can be an evaluative tool for the teacher as well as the student.

BASIC KINDS OF QUESTIONS

Although there are many complex classification schemes for identifying the types of questions that may be used in education, it is helpful to think in terms of broad categories in which questions may be asked. These categories are based upon the kind of student reaction the question is designed to elicit.

The identification question asks of the student, "What do you know?" It may be very simple, such as "Where did God send Jonah to pronounce His judgment?" or it may be rather difficult, such as "What was the place of Nineveh in the political structure of Jonah's time?" Both of those questions ask for a knowledge response; if the student has sufficient background information, he is capable of answering. The identification question is helpful in discovering what the students know and in providing opportunities for the students to affirm for themselves and for others that they are knowledgeable regarding the subject. (Of course, it may also be used to demonstrate to the student that he is not quite so knowledgeable regarding the subject as he thinks he is!)

The analytical question asks, "What do you think?" It seeks to gain a judgment or an analysis by the student. Rather than asking students to repeat information they have acquired, the analytical question asks them to deal with information in a creative way, so that higher levels of thinking result. Again, the question may be simple, such as "How would you paraphrase Jonah's experience in chapter two?" Or it may be complex, such as "If Isaiah had been sent to Nineveh instead of Jonah, what would have been different?" It demands more of students because it requires them to use their own minds in creative ways. Especially because of the mental capacities of the adult learner, analytical questions need to be asked with greater and greater frequency in the educational program of the church. That will help the student to become more adept at thinking in deeper ways regarding biblical and theological issues, and in analyzing his own life issues as well.

The value question asks, "How do you feel?" It probes not only the cognitive but also the affective realm of the students. Value questions are the most difficult for students to answer because they require delving into the more personal aspects of their own lives. An example would be "Have you ever been despondent over the actions of God in the way that Jonah was in chapter four?" Value questions ask students to divulge the more personal aspects of their own life experience, and therefore require a great deal of trust in the class. But the value of this kind

⁵ Ibid, p. 24.

of question is that it causes students to think through the deepest issues of their Christian lives, namely those that touch values and attitudes regarding the Lord. If the student senses that a value question is being asked from a basis of love and concern, he will feel free to respond openly. That can be extremely helpful in causing students to grow in their depth of understanding and commitment.

GUIDELINES FOR QUESTIONING

Just as with any other teaching method, the effective teacher needs to develop skills in the art of questioning. To enhance the effectiveness of questioning, first vary the kind and difficulty of your questions. Adults become bored with predictable teaching techniques. If the teacher always asks the same kind of questions of the same level of difficulty, students lose interest. Therefore, a helpful procedure is to pre-plan several pivotal questions in a lesson, questions that ask the students to respond on either a knowledge, thinking, or feeling level. Also, the teacher must be careful to design both simple and complex questions for the different levels of students in the class.

A critical skill in the art of questioning is that of giving students time to respond. The more mature teacher is not threatened by silence in the classroom, but is willing to allow students time to think. Especially when a more difficult thought question or a feeling question has been posed, students will need time to think. If the teacher is willing to wait, a more insightful answer may result.

Also, when asking questions, be sure to affirm all student responses. This does not mean that the teacher must treat an incorrect answer as though it were correct, but rather that the student must be praised for an attempt to respond. If the student is not personally secure, attempting to answer a question can be a rather frightening experience. If the teacher will affirm the student for his involvement and his attempt to answer, even the offering of an incorrect response can be a positive experience for him. Especially for adults who may have had years of experience at being silent in the church, this is especially important. It is the task of the teacher to be sure that responding to questions is a positive experience for the student.

One final suggestion: the teacher must ask many questions for which he does not have the answers. Again, Hyman offers insight when he states:

The reason for asking questions for which the teacher has yet no correct answers is to eliminate the pointless game wherein the student tries to guess what is in the teacher's mind. Moreover, these questions put the teacher and the student in the role of co-inquirers. For the student, this means stimulation. For the teacher, this means that he is taking on the role of acting as guide to the student and as a model of an adult inquirer exploring new ground.⁶

Because we are dealing with adult learners, we desire to foster both critical and creative thinking in our students. One of the best ways to do this is to pose questions for which there is no "right" or clear answer. Questions of this kind lead teacher and student together in attempting to discover answers, and put them on the mutual ground of learners. Although not all questions need to be of this type, it is important that the teacher pose questions that allow the learners to function as adults.

⁶ Hyman, pp. 325-26.

Given the nature of the adult learner, and the ultimate objectives of the educational program of the church, a high level of concentration on expressional teaching methods seems appropriate. Some students will resist, but for those who desire and need to be more actively involved in their own spiritual growth, teaching methods that cause them to contribute and respond are essential. Teachers in the adult department can foster more independent learning in their students by means of effective use of expressional methods.

The two most practical and productive expressional techniques for teachers of adults are discussions and questions. As with other methods, these must be carefully planned and skillfully executed. God's first recorded question, "Adam, where are you?" (Genesis 3) was designed to get Adam to evaluate his situation and get new information from that evaluation. God knew where Adam was geographically, psychologically, physiologically, sociologically, and spiritually. Adam, on the other hand, needed that information so that God could begin to do a new work in his heart.