



Digital Commons @ George Fox University

Faculty Publications - Department of
Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic
Arts

Department of Communication Arts

10-8-2020

Faith Integration as Servant Leadership in the Communication College Classroom

Kevin T. Jones

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/comm_fac

Faith Integration as Servant Leadership in the Communication College Classroom

✍ ROBERT WOODS / 📅 SEPTEMBER 1, 2018 /

📖 MEMBER PUBLICATIONS: LONG & SHORT FORM ESSAYS ([HTTPS://WWW.THECCSN.COM/CATEGORY/MEMBER-PUBLICATIONS/MEMBER-PUBLICATIONS-LONG-AND-SHORT-FORM-ESSAYS/](https://www.theccsn.com/category/member-publications/member-publications-long-and-short-form-essays/)) /

📰 NEWS: OTHER ([HTTPS://WWW.THECCSN.COM/CATEGORY/NEWS/NEWS-OTHER/](https://www.theccsn.com/category/news/news-other/)) /

💬 LEAVE A COMMENT ([HTTPS://WWW.THECCSN.COM/FAITH-INTEGRATION-AS-SERVANT-LEADERSHIP-IN-THE-COMMUNICATION-COLLEGE-CLASSROOM/#RESPOND](https://www.theccsn.com/faith-integration-as-servant-leadership-in-the-communication-college-classroom/#respond))

Faith Integration as Servant Leadership in the Communication College Classroom



(<https://www.theccsn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/JonesKevin.jpg>)

[Kevin T. Jones \(https://www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/comm_arts/faculty/jones.html\)](https://www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/comm_arts/faculty/jones.html), Ph.D.

Professor of Communication Arts, George Fox University

Abstract: The integration of faith and learning is often misunderstood. While the phrase is often used in Christian college circles, defining the phrase has proven challenging at times. While students may think it is just praying before class, there has to be more to it than just that. This essay defines integration as servant-leadership. Drawing upon critical pedagogy and the writings of several faith-based leadership authors, combined with real life experiences, I argue that the integration of faith and learning is a state-of-the-heart mindset of a true servant-leader.

Key Words: Critical Pedagogy, servant-leadership, hidden agendas.

Cite as: Kevin T. Jones, "Faith Integration as Servant Leadership in the Communication College Classroom," *Journal of Christian Teaching Practice*, 5(1), 2018, <http://www.theccsn.com/faith-integration-as-servant-leadership-in-the-communication-college-classroom/>.

Introduction

In my first few years of teaching, whenever a class would moan or complain about an assignment or something I asked them to do, I would jokingly hold the grade book in my hand and say, "Who has the grade book in his hand? Now what was that you were complaining about?" My actions would elicit a modicum of chuckles and the class would settle down and we would move on. I thought nothing of this behavior and merely used it as a means to emphasize how I, the teacher, had asked the class to do something. One semester on my course evaluations, one student wrote, "Kevin always threatens us with our grades if we don't do what he asks. He is on a total power trip and uses his power over us all the time." I was stunned. I never intended my actions to be a power trip, but I suddenly realized how the action could be viewed in that way.

About that same time, the Dean of the school where I was teaching sent around a note to the entire faculty with a quotation from child psychologist Haim G. Ginott that noted,

I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized.[1]

That semester I had a pedagogical epiphany. I realized that my classroom had become an incubator for power struggles without even realizing it. Not long after that experience I was introduced to the works of Parker Palmer and my epiphany grew into a philosophy of learning that I was committed to developing and implementing in my teaching. My classroom had to become void of power struggles.

As I searched scripture to look at how Jesus taught, I saw that His teaching was driven by His personhood. Jesus was the ultimate servant. Not only did Jesus commit acts of service such as washing the feet of His disciples, but He also served all of humankind when He died for all of our sins. I began to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Jesus had the ultimate authority—He was God. Yet His power was exercised in various ways depending on what the situation called for. Jesus was able to discern when and how power should be used. One form of power Jesus used was His service. He met needs where He found them and as a result gained influence (or power) over people. Through service, he wielded power.

I came to realize, that to be a teacher I had to be a servant. If I approached teaching with a servant's heart, then abusive power should not creep into my classroom. Power is not innately negative. In fact, power in the form of instructor credibility becomes critical in a positive learning environment. When power is abused, manipulated, or corrupted, it becomes negative. Threatening students' grades to silence their voices or innovative thoughts is not a correct use of power. Using the power that can come from knowledge and learning to help direct constructive conversations, expand minds, or broaden and enlighten students' intellects is a good use of power. To have the skill and ability to know how to use power in a constructive manner can make a teacher a true servant—a person committed to serving students by moving them closer to discerning truth.

This, to me, became the ultimate goal in the integration of faith and learning. My life as a person of faith was to be so devoted to Jesus that I desired to serve Him daily. In the same vein, my teaching was to be so devoted to my students that I also served them. To integrate faith and learning was to take on the role of servanthood. In this essay, I will explore some of the different parts of the equation that comprise my ideas on the integration of faith and learning. I will first begin with an explanation of critical pedagogy and how the tenets of this learning theory created a foundation for my integration of faith and learning. Second, I will build upon the concepts of critical pedagogy by noting various biblical truths that I incorporate into my teaching. Finally, I will show how I apply my fusion of critical pedagogy and biblical truth to a communication classroom. This connection is crucial because I argue that the discipline of communication mandates awareness that to be made in the likeness of God means to be able to communicate. To develop the skills of communication is to become more of what God created us to be.

To better understand the integration of faith and learning in the communication classroom, it is necessary to understand the role of critical pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy

Prior to joining the faculty at my current university, I taught at a small, secular private university. During my time at that school, I was blessed to have received several teaching awards. When I was interviewing for my current position, I was asked what I thought had led to so many awards. I shared a few of my ideas, which included trying to be a servant to my students. The questioner responded, "Well, much of what you say is sort of expected here at a Christian school."

He was right. Displaying the heart of a servant is expected at a Christian college but at a secular school, having a faculty member with a Christ-centered servant's heart was rare and stood out. However, while much of my philosophy of teaching reflected biblical principles, it originated for me in critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy involves a belief that teachers and students must constantly question their world, both inside and outside the classroom. Critical pedagogy is committed to the transformative power of education. It places a strong emphasis on diversity.[2]

Paulo Freire calls educators to name, to reflect critically, and to act.[3] Joan Wink marks these three phrases as the best definition of critical pedagogy.[4] Critical pedagogy has its roots in the work of Freire, a Brazilian educator who worked to develop a method of teaching literacy to indigent farm workers in order to empower them to vote. Freire published his theories of social justice and education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [5] Critical pedagogy works against the norm that would reproduce current power structures or devalue inquiry, skepticism, and disagreement.[6]

Essential to critical pedagogy is the concept of **critical consciousness**. Critical consciousness is "an awareness of the invisible oppression in society through education and activism." [7] Historic examples of invisible oppression are extensive. The issue of slavery in Great Britain and the United States is one example and the issue of suffrage is another. Gloria Ladson-Billings reminds us that it is far easier to see "invisible oppression" through a historic lens than it is to recognize it in the here and now. Today, critical consciousness might encourage individuals to question "English only" policies in the United States or the use of tracking systems in education. Critical consciousness is a necessary element of critical pedagogy. Awareness is essential and comes through the disequilibrium of questioning discourses.

Another essential component of critical pedagogy is an awareness of **hidden curriculum**. Henry Giroux added strength to our understanding of critical pedagogy in his work on hidden curriculum.[8] This concept builds on Freire's belief that much of what is taught is unquestioned.[9] Hidden curriculum notes that much of what is learned in school is not part of the official curriculum, but rather involves subtle socialization in norms and mores of social interaction. Hidden curriculum supports the needs and mores of the dominant culture. Wink lends clarity to how it appears in our schools:

The hidden curriculum can be seen in schools when little boys are called on more than little girls, when only Eurocentric histories are taught, when teenage girls are socialized to believe that they are not good in math and sciences, when heroes but not heroines are taught, and when counselors track nonwhites to classes that prepare them to serve.[10]

Hidden curriculum can be intentional or unintentional. Power struggles between teacher and student can move a teacher to engage hidden curriculum as a way to maintain and/or force power. In my opening story of "Who holds the grade book?" the hidden curriculum was unintentional yet very real to some of the students. This type of instruction can be very dangerous in our schools and foster prejudice.

A third component of critical pedagogy is that of **dialectic**. *Dialectic is the tension between opposing thoughts, ideas, concepts, values and beliefs.*^[11] The position of dialectic is a normal part of the learning process. While binary systems inform us and often are at the root of technological advances, in education we find that holding opposing tensions is often at the root of profound understanding. Consider the honest thinking of Winston Churchill who stated, "I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught."^[12]

Dialectics are important in the learning process. Wink explains it this way: "A dialectic involves seeing and articulating contradictions; it is the process of learning from the oppositional view. Dialectic brings to light a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple facets of the opposite. As we learn while teaching and teach while learning, we are in a dialectical process."^[13]

Often, the dominant paradigm in the classroom is that the students are there to

learn from the teacher. The teacher is present to "profess" or dispense knowledge and wisdom. When teachers see that they can learn from the students and students can see the teacher willing to learn from them, then the dialectical process is set in motion. Additionally, once this give-and-take learning process is cultivated between teacher and student, then students are better able to see and engage in learning from each other.

It is impossible to discuss critical pedagogy without discussing literacies. Critical pedagogy recognizes the many forms of literacies that inhabit our world. Refusing to limit the discussion to the reading and writing of language, literacies imply all of the ways in which individuals and societies make sense of their world.^[14] Literacies are defined as reading, writing, and reflecting.^[15] They are the underlying ways of knowing, thinking, and making complex meanings. Forms of literacies include academic literacies, functional literacies, workplace literacies, and emergent literacies. This list is not exhaustive. The literacies we use to understand the complexities of life are extensive. There is great power in literacies, power to name the world around us.

Equally powerful is the **ability to silence**. Silence can be present in a classroom when particular issues are not discussed, when students are discouraged from talking, or when attention is not given to the lives and experiences of students. While silencing may not often be consciously intended, it is often consciously felt by the individual or individuals whose voices have been stilled. Wink explores it in the following,

Often,

Those who have more, silence those who have less;

Those who are from the dominant European American culture silence

Those from the non-European American cultures;

Boys silence girls;

Men silence women.

Often,

Men don't know it;

Boys don't know it;

European Americans don't know it, and

Those with more don't know it.^[16]

Critical pedagogy is dedicated to giving voice to each individual who inhabits a classroom or a community. It is about the thoughtful, analytical understanding of power and how it forms our institutions and us.

Integration of faith and learning involves a clear hidden agenda. Sometimes the role of faith is clearly spelled out in a class discussion ("How should we, as people of faith, react to social injustice?"). However, at other times, professors plant seeds and allow the students to connect the dots to establish their own faith journeys (assigning a paper in an interpersonal class and asking the students to describe what conflict style they think Jesus used). As a servant, I want to navigate dialectic with grace and create a safe place. Often, we address "secular" material that may appear to contradict Scripture (diversity and inclusion, for example). My job is to minimize the tension the topic may create so that all voices are heard. The role of literacies is exactly what the integration of faith and learning is all about. How do we draw upon the literacies deemed "secular" without discounting those texts? I try to integrate the two worlds. Finally, the very nature of a Christian college has the ability to silence. Often, an opposing voice is shunned or deemed "un-Christian" for expressing a viewpoint. My role as a servant when integrating faith and learning is to make sure that these four areas are addressed, nurtured, and allowed to thrive.

Of these four tenants of critical pedagogy, I find hidden curriculum worthy of greater attention. Hidden curriculum argues that much of what is learned in school is not part of the official curriculum but rather involves subtle socialization in norms and mores of social interaction. I have often had students who do not attend class on a regular basis yet are smart enough to be able to do well enough on tests and papers to excel in the class. (I

do not have an attendance policy in my classes.) I share with these students that learning is much more than being able to memorize vocabulary and recall reading to get an “A” on a test. Real learning involves the accountability of attending class daily, even when one does not feel the need to or does not want to.

Hidden curriculum embraces the idea that a college diploma represents much more than the grades received to earn that diploma. In my 30+ years of teaching, I have given countless job and graduate school references. In all those years, I have never had a person ask me, “What is the student’s GPA?” Instead, I am asked about a former student’s character, integrity, ability to work with others, accountability, responsibility, etc. We may not specifically set out to teach these social norms, but they certainly are part of our classroom culture. The only way I can address those topics in a reference conversation is because I have or have not observed those topics in the student in the classroom. These social norms are part of the hidden curriculum that we hope is learned during the process of writing papers, reading assigned textbooks, studying for exams, working with peers in class and in group projects, and navigating college in general. Additionally, as teachers, we expect our students not to engage in academic dishonesty. Yet, when they do, we take it upon ourselves to try to turn the incident into a teachable moment where valuable life lessons and morals are learned; this is where hidden curriculum comes to life.

As a servant leader, I try to focus more on the *process* of leaning rather than just *giving a grade*. I consider the *process* to be part of Giroux’s hidden curriculum.^[17] I do not want a student to just *get an “A.”* I want him or her to engage in the process that fosters the learning of social norms and mores. That process becomes what the student transfers to the “real world” upon graduation.

As a faculty member at a Christian college, the teaching of this hidden curriculum is not just important, it is mandated by my calling. Every summer I speak to the parents of incoming first-year students at our annual early summer registration events. I am asked to give a guest lecture to demonstrate to parents the potential difference between a classroom experience at a private Christian college versus a public state institution. Since a private education is so much more expensive than a public education, my school wants me to address the question, “What makes the private education worth the extra expense?” I try to identify the difference as being the integration of faith and learning—a major reason why most of the students and parents are seeking a Christian education. I demonstrate how the integration of faith and learning model calls for faculty who view teaching as servant leadership, where the hidden curriculum drives the classroom experience with a positive faith-based outcome.

Public education classrooms tend to fall short of the servant-leadership model because modernism has tried so hard to detach knowledge from the person. In their work *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, authors Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobson noted that Nancey Murphy “calls herself a postmodern philosopher because she rejects the modernist notion that in order for any belief to be deemed ‘knowledge’ it has to be formulated and defended solely on the basis of objective facts and impeccable logic, wholly removed from the personhood of the scholar.”^[18] As a person of faith, I cannot separate my faith from my learning. Likewise, I cannot separate my beliefs from my personhood. Therefore, the hidden curriculum I seek moves the students’ faith journey in a forward, positive direction.

Another component of critical theory worthy of further attention here is dialectic. Wink notes that dialectic is the tension between opposing thoughts, ideas, concepts, values, and beliefs.^[19] As I integrate my faith (servanthood) into my learning (classroom), then I have a duty (dare I say a calling?) to make sure my teaching and scholarship do not reflect a threatening dialectic. There are going to be different ideas and potential tension in the classroom, and I need to ask myself, “What am I doing to diffuse the situation?” As a servant, I believe that I have a responsibility to integrate thoughts, ideas, and concepts and to work to remove any negative power differential that emerges in the classroom.

This reflects the often-taught notion of making sure our classrooms represent a “safe-space” where dialogue (versus monologue) takes place and ideas are exchanged freely. Classroom structure has the potential to breed an unsafe culture. A professor is “in charge,” who “gives a grade” (versus the student earning a grade), so students are often afraid to question or challenge the instructor. There are times when this power differential is abused. Years ago, I taught at a school where a colleague viewed his role in the classroom very differently than I did. I was told the story by several students that one day in class, this professor returned some exams to the class. Several students were confused as to why they had all missed a particular question. One student bravely raised her hand and asked the professor why the answer to this question was marked wrong. Misunderstanding the question of clarification as a question of challenge, the professor responded, “Do not challenge my professorship. If I say the answer is wrong, then it is wrong.” Needless to say, once this story spread throughout the department, no one ever asked a question in this professor’s class ever again.

Dispelling the power differential in the classroom requires skills that coincide with servant leadership. The Socratic method reflects this approach where we discover the answer to a question, rather than *I*, the professor, *tell* you. If the tension of dialectic in the classroom is not addressed, then the classroom is a breeding ground for fear. Students fear the instructor and fear learning. Confronting dialectic allows me to confront and reduce fear.

Perhaps the greatest motivator for me to eliminate fear in my classroom comes from 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind.”^[20] According to the verse, fear is a spirit that is not from the Lord. God does not have fear to give, as there is not any fear in heaven. Therefore, if I am bringing fear into my classroom, I am not bringing Christ into the classroom with me. If my students are experiencing fear, they are not experiencing Christ. If there is fear, then I am not serving. As noted previously in this essay, power is not innately negative. It is the abuse and misuse of power that causes the problem, not unlike my colleague who flexed his professorship power to shut down questions and therefore dialogue in his classroom.

Years ago, I learned the difference between power based on confidence and strength versus misused power. One extra-chilly morning, I informed my then five-year-old daughter that she could not leave the house without a jacket. She responded curtly and explained that she was, indeed, NOT going to wear a coat. My gut instinct was to pull rank as the parent and demand she wear her jacket. I braced for battle when I had a revelation. I realized that I was the parent, and I had the power in this conversation, and my daughter was not leaving the house without a jacket. That was a revelation for me—I knew that at the end of our discussion, she was going to wear a jacket that day not because I wanted to make her life miserable but because it was the right thing to do. The revelation gave me incredible peace. I was able to let go of my desire to pull rank and rather than *make* or *force* her to wear the jacket, I was able to involve her in the discussion. I asked her to share with me all the options she could think of to stay warm that morning. She felt so empowered by her ability to participate in the conversation that she began to list many choices to stay warm. She had some elaborate, imaginative answers (like building a movable fort around her with a heater in it). After exploring the feasibility of many of the options (or lack of feasibility like the fort!) she decided to just wear the jacket.

Not every parenting situation provides the luxury of such extended conversations, but the interaction was transforming for me. I realized the role that power could play in our relationship. In situations such as parenting or as a professor in a classroom, at the end of the day, I have the power that allows me to control the situation, which gives me the confidence not to feel the need to flex my power muscles. Properly used power allows me to enter my classroom filled with confidence and strength (power), love (God's forgiveness), and a sound mind (clear thinking and reasoning).

Servanthood

In his popular book *The Purpose-Driven Life*, author Rick Warren wrote a section on "How a real servant acts" in which he challenges the reader to remember that "we serve God by serving others."^[21] As a result, servants make themselves available to serve, pay attention to needs, do their best with what they have, do every task with equal dedication, be faithful to their ministry, and maintain a low profile. As a teacher, following these guidelines of servanthood in the classroom is a major part of integration for me.

Warren also challenges the reader to think like a servant.^[22] This is done, Warren explains, by thinking more about others than thinking about ourselves; thinking about others' work; basing others' identity in Christ; and thinking of ministry as an opportunity, not an obligation. If I can manage to keep these challenges in the forefront of my teaching, then my faith becomes integrated into my classroom.

One of the ways I have tried to put this into practice in my classroom is with an "assignment recycling" policy I use in many of my courses. As people of faith, we are all a work in progress. We are extended grace beyond measure to allow us to make mistakes, learn from those mistakes, be forgiven of the mistake, grow as a person and as a Christian, and move on. I extend a little grace in my courses to help my students navigate their own journey through my recycling policy. I believe that learning is a process, not a final performance. Therefore, I allow students to recycle tests, papers, and presentations. If students do not like the grade they received on a test, I give them a two-week window to recycle the test. I give the student the exact same test and then average the new test score with the old test score. I have the same policy with papers and presentations but with some different parameters since these assignments are different from tests.

This creates an enormous amount of work for me, but I see it as part of my servanthood. I believe that by recycling an assignment, a student learns to correct errors and learn from the recycling process. This fosters a learning process in the student. I also believe the recycling policy demonstrates grace. One bad test score does not have to define the student, just as one sin does not have to define a Christian life. I also believe the recycling policy reduces the power differential in my classroom. If students are having a bad day, struggling to recall information, just got dumped by their significant other, or just cannot understand the assigned material, they do not have to fear a bad grade. If their grade falls short, they know they can *be forgiven*, receive some *grace*, and recycle the assignment and salvage their grade. Learning becomes a process, part of their academic journey, just like a faith journey is a process filled with grace. Dialectic tension is reduced in the classroom and the culture is *safe*. My recycling policy is one way I can see my teaching as a ministry and serve my students.

While servanthood may sound like the opposite of leadership, nothing could be further from the truth. In his work, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, John C. Maxwell addressed many insights regarding leadership. Maxwell noted a very important Law of Connection.^[23] I have often argued that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. Maxwell's Law of Connection addresses that mindset by noting that leaders must touch a heart before they ask for a hand. Additionally, Maxwell argued that you "can't move people to action unless you first move them with emotion. The heart comes before the hand."^[24]

Maxwell extended this argument when he stated that "the stronger the relationship and connection between individuals, the more likely the follower will want to help the leader."^[25] In order to serve my students and integrate my faith with learning in the classroom, I need to make connections; I need to love them with my heart and let them know that.

Several years ago, an act of racism took place on my college campus that garnered international news attention. In the fall of 2008, when Barack Obama was running for the presidency, some students thought it would be funny to hang a life-size cardboard cutout of Obama from a tree (actually right outside my second-story office window). My school participates in a program called "Act 6" where we provide scholarships for students of color who have potential for leadership and success in college but lack the resources to pursue an education. On the cardboard Obama cutout was placed a sign "Act 6 Reject." News trucks from around the country converged on our campus for days and the negative publicity was a nightmare for the administration.

The students involved were discovered and suspended from school. One of the students involved happened to be one of my advisees. The day the student had to leave campus, he came to my office to tell me what had happened. My initial gut reaction was to scream, "What is wrong with you!" But as the student shared his pain and regret with me, I merely prayed in my mind, "Jesus, what do I do? How do you want me to respond here?" A voice in my head clearly said, "Just love this person and forgive him."

I was given an opportunity to serve through love and forgiveness—basic tenets of being a person of faith. Now I am not saying it was easy, but it was the right response of a servant. I was able to love this student by just sitting and listening and actually saying very little. I hugged the student and said I was so sorry this had all happened, letting him leave campus knowing that at least one person on campus did not hate him. That student and I are still friends to this day. When that student decided to run for a political office a few years ago, he came to me and asked for help writing speeches and other press material. I agreed, and he won! The entire incident tested whether or not I really believed in serving through love.

In addressing the role of servanthood in integration, I am forced to evaluate the role that the misuse of power can play in the classroom (misused power being the opposite of service). The work of Parker Palmer serves as an excellent base for an exploration of this type.^[26] In Palmer's work, I am reminded of how the classroom can mask a culture of fear and once I realize that, I can quickly turn my attention and energy to uncovering the culture of truth that is right in front of us.

Acting as a servant is not without cost. If I am truly acting as a servant of God, then I run the risk of attacks from the enemy. The last thing that Satan wants is for God to be glorified in the classroom and for His love to be preeminent. I have had to learn to watch out for the pitfalls that accompany a servanthood approach to the integration of faith and learning. I have found the work of Warren Wiersbe to be most helpful for this piece of the equation. In his book *On Being a Servant of God*, Wiersbe noted discouragement and depression as two of Satan's chief devices for getting Christians/servants on detours.^[27] Academia is a very good place to get discouraged. Teaching loads, service expectations, advising needs, and numerous other distractions can become a breeding ground for discouragement and/or depression.

Any teacher who truly cares about teaching is a potential victim of the fallacy of approval and/or perfection. This is particularly true when it comes to student course evaluations. When I began my teaching career over 30 years ago, I obsessed over and memorized every word of every student course evaluation. I could have a class of 25 students and receive 22 positive reviews. But the three students who gave me negative reviews were the ones I would perseverate over. I would read those three evaluations over and over and get more and more discouraged. I felt I was not a good teacher unless I was liked by every student, and I needed every student's approval to feel successful and believe that I was making a difference.

After a few years of these semester self-flogging rituals, a friend encouraged me to "look at the lives you did change. Jesus did not convert every person He encountered, He was even betrayed by those who pretended to love Him. Since Jesus could not win over *everyone*, was He a failure?" The answer, of course, is "No!" Over the years, I have learned that not everyone will like me and that is OK. The fallacies of approval and perfection are tools the enemy used to discourage and depress me so I was unable to serve with a full heart.

Wiersbe admonishes the servant that, "No matter how old you are, count for something."^[28] This challenge encouraged me to make a difference every day in the classroom, regardless of whether or not *everyone* likes me. Even if I only make a difference in one person, that one person is whom God has called me to serve this semester. Who knows where God will call that one person? I have had students go on to work in the White House and the State Department, hold political offices, go into full-time ministry work, and answer countless other callings. Not every student likes me, but the students I do connect with remind me that I do count for something.

Communication and the Likeness of God

I consider it a privilege to be able to teach communication studies. To communicate is to experience and live out being in the likeness of God. I, in essence, get to teach and train students to be more like the image of God. Allow me to explain.

In the past decade, scientists have determined that human beings and chimpanzees share as much as 97% of the same DNA.^[29] While evolutionists may view this discovery as further proof that human beings evolved from lesser primates, as a creationist, I have to ask, "What about that other 3%? What does that tell us?" The answer to that question provides the basis for my integration of faith and learning.

Among the many differences in that mere 3% is the discovery that human beings actually possess DNA designed to allow for the engagement of hearing acuity. Hearing acuity is what allows for the replication of sounds—human beings can hear sounds (i.e., words) and repeat them. In other words, human beings possess DNA designed to allow for the creation of speech. This ability to speak leads to the ability to communicate. Human beings are the only members of the animal kingdom who can speak, and that gift is due to our DNA construction. Therefore, to be made in the likeness of God is to be able to speak and thus communicate.^[30]

In Psalm 139:14 the writer declares, "I will give thanks to thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." While it is easy to marvel and wonder at how our bodies are wonderfully made and praise God for sight, hearing, a beating heart, or childbirth, giving thanks to the Lord for the gift of communication may not quickly come to mind. But it should.

If being human and being able to speak is to be made in the likeness of God, and being able to speak is a gift from God, then why is good, healthy communication such a problem for so many people? I find the answer to that question in Genesis 1:31. After God made everything, He looked at all He had created and said, "It is good." God made humans and God made communication and called them both good. Therefore, if God calls something

good, I have to conclude that the Enemy calls it bad and Satan sets out to find ways to destroy whatever is good. I believe that many communication problems are little more than spiritual warfare.

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul reminds us, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of darkness, against rulers of this world." I believe that whatever God calls good, Satan is devoted to contaminating. To study communication is to study how to develop and perfect that gift which the Lord has given to us. To study communication is to study being made in the likeness of God. For a person of faith, the study of communication IS the integration of faith and learning. It is becoming more and more of who God made us to be.

I begin every course I teach with this discussion. I show each student how God has wonderfully made them with this gift of communication. I tell each student that the enemy has found many ways to keep us from fully experiencing and living out this gift. I then tell them that during the next 15 weeks, we are going to explore how to perfect the gift we have been given better and why the world is so anxious to hire good communicators. The world wants people who are living out the likeness of God.

Conclusion

Needless to say, the "Who has the grade book in their hand?" scenario no longer exist in my classroom. I now see the dangers and harm associated with such comments and actions. In order to fulfill my calling as a teacher, I am to approach every student and every class meeting with a servant's heart. I must remove the culture of fear and replace it with a culture of love. When I combine that culture of love with a classroom based on learning how to be more in the image of God, I believe there is a true integration of faith and learning taking place.

Author bio:

Kevin T. Jones has been teaching at the college level for more than 30 years and has served various communication organizations in a variety of ways. Kevin is the past president of the Religious Communication Association, the Northwest Communication Association, the Kentucky Forensics Association, and the Kentucky Communication Association. He is also the founder and past president of the National Christian College Forensics Association.

Kevin earned his BA in communication studies from Biola University, his MA in speech communication from the University of California at Fullerton, and his PhD in rhetoric and public address from Louisiana State University.

Kevin taught at Azusa Pacific University (Calif.) and Chapman University (Calif.) before coming to George Fox University in 2008. He teaches courses such as Public Speaking, Persuasion, Interpersonal Communication, Rhetorical Criticism, Small Group Communication, and Spiritual and Ethical Dimensions of Communication. Additionally, Kevin serves as the Department Internship Supervisor.

When not in the classroom, Kevin engages in research and scholarship about rhetoric and pop culture. His publication topics have ranged from the role of televised debates in the presidential election process, the September 11th Missing Person posters, the religious rhetoric of Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential campaign, and Muted Group Theory and the #MeToo movement. Kevin is currently involved in exploring communication skill deficiencies in at-risk middle school students and writing curriculum to address those deficiencies.

Kevin is an avid bicyclist and lives in Newberg with his wife Michelle and their four children. They attend and are involved in Newberg Christian Church.

NOTES

[1] Haim G. Ginott, *Teacher and Child: A Book for Parents and Teachers* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) 15.

[2] Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Critical Pedagogy," *Critical Pedagogy* (Research Starters Education, 2008); Geneva Gay, "Mirror Images on Common Issues: Parallels between Multicultural Education and Critical Pedagogy," in Christine Sleeter and Peter McLaren, eds., *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 155-190; Sonia Nieto, *Language, Culture, and Teaching: Critical Perspectives for a New Century* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002).

[3] See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

[4] Joan Wink, *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2005).

[5] Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970.

[6] Billings, *Critical Pedagogy*.

[7] Ibid., 3.

[8] Henry Giroux, "Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition," *Critical Perspectives in Social Theory* (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983).

[9] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970.

[10] Wink, *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*, 47.

[11] *Ibid.*, 47.

[12] James C. Humes, *The Wit and Wisdom of Winston Churchill* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 24.

[13] Wink, *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*, 41.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*, 58.

[17] Giroux, "Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition."

[18] Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54.

[19] Wink, *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*. 20.

[20] All biblical quotes are taken from the King James Version.

[21] Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 257.

[22] *Ibid.*, 265.

[23] John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 99. 24.

[24] *Ibid.*, 101.

[25] *Ibid.*, 102.

[26] Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2007).


[27] Warren Wiersbe, *On Being a Servant of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

[28] *Ibid.*, 83.

[29] *Discover*, December 2003. Much debate has transpired over the accuracy of this number. Some scholars have challenged the process of calculating the percentage. Regardless of how the number was achieved, the point here for the purpose of this essay is that while there are some DNA similarities between human beings and chimpanzees, there are differences between the two species that are very important and matter a great deal. Hearing acuity DNA is crucial to being human. For more information on the debate over the calculation of the percentages, see <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-aig/aig-c018.html> (<http://www.christiananswers.net/q-aig/aig-c018.html>) and <http://creation.com/greater-than-98-chimp-human-dna-similarity-not-any-more>.

[30] Some primates have been taught to communicate through sign language, but only to humans and not to other primates. Primates never communicate with language, to humans or to each other. The ability to speak is solely human.

0
SHARES

 Share (<https://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theccsn.com%2Ffaith-integration-as-servant-leadership-in-the-communication-college-classroom%2F>)

 Tweet (<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=Faith%20Integration%20as%20Servant%20Leadership%20in%20the%20Communication%20College%20Classroom&url=https://www.theccsn.com/faith-integration-as-servant-leadership-in-the-communication-college-classroom/&via=theccsn>)