

FB FAITH BUILDERS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, INC.

"Discipling the head, heart, and hands"

Issue 103

Spring 2012

IS FORMAL TEACHER TRAINING NECESSARY?

An exploration of a systematic approach to teacher training, by Paul L. Miller
Reprinted from the Faith Builders newsletter, Issue 38, September 1995

FROM THE ARCHIVES: The year 2012 marks the 25th anniversary of the first classes offered by Faith Builders. We are grateful for how God has led and blessed this work. As a way to remember His faithfulness, we plan to reprint several articles from past newsletters. These articles have been formative in what Faith Builders has become. The article republished in this edition was adapted from a colloquy presentation by Paul L. Miller. The August 1995 colloquy where Paul presented dealt with the Teacher Training program at FBEP. Paul's presentation was transcribed, refined and then published.

Perhaps I should introduce my presentation by explaining my own experience. In this way, if you think someone with college education is unable to be objective, you may quickly dispatch with the need to read my ramblings. Come to think of it, though, the opposite idea that those who have no such education are not qualified to speak might also cut off certain people.

I grew up on a mid-western dairy farm and enjoyed milking cows very much. But I also had a "thorn in the flesh." The work of the dairy was too much for my "Perthes' disease" hip. Selective Service gave me a physical exam in 1954 and found me 4-F (physically unfit for military service).

With my parents' blessing and following the interest of my two older brothers who were in teaching at that time, I began to prepare for a career of teaching in elementary education. Five years later, I was awarded a bachelor's degree in elementary education from a Mennonite college. Life unfolded and the years went by. After sixteen years of teaching I faced the opportunity of teaching in high school. Soon afterward, I entered a four summers' course of study leading to a master's degree in Christian School Administration.

Now after a total of 36 years of teaching, I am seriously asking myself when I should

slow down and stop teaching school. You may ask, "Did you enjoy all these years of teaching?" Well, not always. But one thing has occurred. The longer I've stayed at it, the harder it is to think of quitting. I am enjoying it immensely now. Let me address the three questions given to me.

1) Can people teach without being taught how to teach?

I think the answer is: Yes, some can. A further observation might also be given. Some who go through a teacher-training course still do not teach effectively. Does that prove that further training has no value? I don't think so.

Let's think about that large group in the middle who might survive teaching but who could have more competence and therefore more confidence if they had some additional education, whether formal or self-taught. What are some of the requisites for effective teaching? Early in teaching, the aspiring teacher must learn to "connect." He must learn not only to talk but also to pause, and to listen. He must regard his students as a potentially responsive group of fellow human beings and not simply as so many bumps on the horizon of his classroom scenery. He must look for and make eye contact. He must recognize when boredom glazes his listeners' eyes, realizing that often the ears turn off at the same time the eyes do. I acknowledge



that this "connecting" cannot be mastered simply by taking a college course. To connect requires a vocabulary that's not too difficult. It also requires the use of explanations that draw on the experiences of the student—not simply those of the teacher.

To connect requires conveying to the student that he is held in positive regard by the teacher. The teacher must convey by word and attitude, "I like you; I'm for you; and I believe you want God's best for yourself." The teacher whose actions seem to say he does not like his students cannot teach.

To maintain the respect of the student also requires that the teacher have some depth in his subject deeper than he expects many of his students to master. Obviously, the teacher can obtain this in a formal class-

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room setting or outside of it. The tendency for the self-taught person is probably to be less thorough, more spotty in this pursuit of further knowledge, but it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, some prestigious institutions now have honors programs that allow the capable, self-motivated student to pursue individualized learning tracks, under the general tutelage of the instructor and to gain college credit in doing so.

The teacher must lead his students. That assumes that he is walking ahead of them. If he were moving pigs, he might drive them. But since he is leading God's lambs, he must lead them.

The one who expects to exert appropriate control and influence by simply walking among them, sharing small talk and secrets, thinking that "coziness" and "buddy-buddy" relationships are best, will in time be disappointed by a lack of respect from his students.

I quote a teacher friend on the need for patience, "The ability to explain something for the umpteenth time in an interested way, without impatience, is not easy." But it is essential.

2) What is the situation in our schools? Why does it exist?

Many school boards and school administrators, secular and parochial, experience a shortage of competent teachers. Many of them, especially among parochial schools, experience a high turnover. The reasons for turnover are many: some teachers are not satisfied with the school's curriculum, some want to get married, some feel overworked by the many tasks of teaching, some try too hard to please and give up in despair, some are not given satisfactory wages and must stop to catch up financially, and on and on.

I wonder whether school has become, in some of our settings, a thing we must go through, instead of a part of preparation of our precious children for life's opportunities. Some patrons see school attendance as a privilege. Others see it as a necessity, while others see it as an intrusion upon more important matters. While school is not in itself the life of earning a livelihood for the student, it must be considered something worthy of his time and careful effort to prepare him for a fulfilling life. A noble view of the Christian's stewardship of life can settle for nothing less.

I believe that in most of our schools,

spiritual qualifications rank above academic qualifications. This is good. One whose loyalty to Christ, to God's Word, and to the church is clear can upgrade his academic strengths. A deficiency in these areas, however, cannot so easily be overcome, for they are matters of the will, which may elicit the response, "I will not."

How feasible is it to have an eighth-grade graduate teach eighth grade? Or a twelfth-grade graduate teach twelfth grade? Obviously, it is different than having someone say, "I've been a patient; now I'm ready to be a doctor." But we must acknowledge that something more important than experience qualifies the teacher. One who would impart knowledge must have knowledge to impart, and one cannot gain knowledge unless he pursues knowledge (Proverbs 4:1-13). Knowledge does not simply come knocking on our door. The teacher or home schooling parent who must "bone-up" to help a student handle his lessons is also modeling diligence in life-long learning as an ideal. It is not a disgrace to learn more so that we can teach more.

I believe I'm safe to say that there is a tendency in our schools to be satisfied with such basic and necessary conditions as these: covering the material of a given grade level, keeping good classroom order, and having the specified number of days in school each year. Meeting these conditions is good, but if we are not concerned whether or not "students' fires are lit," I believe we are failing in

some measure in our tasks before God. While the primary goal of education is more than "learning a bunch of stuff," this acknowledgment should not be an excuse for slovenliness (1 Timothy 12-16).

Is it possible that if our schools received the kind of primary concern our churches receive we would get a better result? For example, if at least one of the parents stopped by to visit once a month for an hour, would the teachers experience a greater student interest and greater sense of support and therefore obtain greater results than the way it is now?

3) How much and what kind of training is needed?

I find no uniform answer to this question that satisfies me. A blanket endorsement of all higher education seems less than prudent to me in light of the dangers that lurk there. I affirm the work of Faith Builders Educational Programs. I simply do not identify with a blanket taboo of all post high-school study. Dangers lurk in over-protectiveness, too. One could ask, for example, how many eighth-grade graduates are lost to the church through trying to pay off a farm? We are aware that we have lost people who never attended high school.

Grade-school children are still at an age when simple answers and pat solutions work quite well. Older adolescents don't respond well to such teaching techniques. A spirit of inquiry, basic to further learning, already pervades the mental processes of these older

JOIN US FOR SUMMER TERM 2012

We are accepting applications for Summer Term June 25 – July 27, 2012. This five-week term offers classes in the following categories:

Pedagogy

Foundations of Education | Steven Brubaker
Principles of Teaching | Patrick Heatwole
Child Development | Jonas Sauder
Principles of Teaching II | Patrick Heatwole
Teaching Language Arts | Sharon Yoder
Teaching Literature | Jonas Sauder
Storytelling | Jonas Sauder

History/Theology

Anabaptist History | Stephen Russell
Church History: Early & Medieval | Stephen Russell
Nonresistance | Stephen Russell

Practical Ministry

Helping the Hurting | John Coblenz

Math/Science

High-school Algebra | Earl Koch
Algebra or Calculus | Earl Koch
Joy of Mathematics | Earl Koch
Mathematics for Elementary Teachers | Esther Bean
Biology | John Mark Kuhns
Chemistry | John Mark Kuhns

Music

Music Fundamentals | Dwilyn Beiler
Music History & Appreciation | Dwilyn Beiler
Choir | Dwilyn Beiler
Beginning Class Voice | Brandon Mullet
Beginning Choral Conducting | Brandon Mullet
Music for Elementary Teachers | Crista Bontrager
Teaching Music - Secondary | Dwilyn Beiler

The Summer Term application is available online and from the office.

students. While absolutes are often respected, these absolutes are also questioned, even by students who are asking humbly and are not rebellious.

Can we not then take a stronger grip on our future and make education our servant? Does education above eighth grade actually indicate vanity or laziness? After all, most people can manage most of their daily survival skills with the reading, writing, and arithmetic of grade school.

I do not believe everyone should pursue a college degree—or even a high school diploma. But I believe that, as Christian families, we can prayerfully look at a person's aptitudes and limitations and help him choose a work that requires education beyond grade school. I cannot recommend such searching as something which the individual ideally struggles through alone. If his primary loyalty is to the church of which he is a part, it will be no imposition to ask for his brothers' input—and certainly their prayers—as he undertakes further development of his God-given potential.

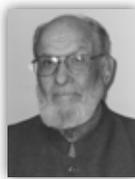
Anyone who has worked with dull tools and then with sharpened tools knows that the work goes much better with sharper tools. In fact, we are more likely to injure ourselves

with dull tools than with sharp tools. Should we not then help an eager worker sharpen his tools for the tasks God is calling him to do? I think we should.

In answer to the question raised in the title of this essay, "Is formal teacher training necessary?" my answer is, "No, not absolutely." But to the question, "Is further learning necessary for the effective teacher?" my response is an enthusiastic "Yes!" Furthermore, I believe that unless we sincerely seek to equip our teachers for these tasks, we will see a serious erosion of academic strengths or scriptural convictions—or both.

May God give us His wisdom and blessing for these tasks!

Author's note: I realize that many schoolteachers are women, but I found it convenient to use the masculine pronouns throughout this essay. I hope this is all right. I first wrote a version of this article in 1995. I did retire from teaching in 1999, after 40 years. Recently, I have had the privilege of going back and teaching one high school Bible class three days a week, to my immense enjoyment and satisfaction.



NEWS FROM FAITH BUILDERS

Engagements

- » Lori Weaver & Durrel Eby

Weddings

- » Amy Gingerich & Merlin Yoder - Nov. 26
- » Asael Montania and Johanna Goertzen - Dec. 3
- » Hosanna Yoder & Melvin Stoltzfus - Dec. 10
- » Rebekah Miller & Javon Miller - Dec. 17

Births

- » Joe and Crystal (Good) Miller, second son, third child, Thomas Christopher 11/28
- » Kendall & Janelle Myers, first son, second child, Gideon Sattler 11/23
- » Martin & Marlene (Wenger) Schmucker, first child, daughter, Gloria Leigh 12/12

Personnel Needs

- » We are accepting applications for a full-time paid network administrator. This person would be responsible for the management and support of the Faith Builders computer network. Applicants should demonstrate the ability to plan and implement solutions, provide end-user support, and oversee technical services. This job is based on the Faith Builders campus in Guys Mills, PA.

- » We seek a maintenance volunteer willing to serve a one-year term beginning June 2012. Basic skills in mechanics or one of the building trades are preferred but not required. Typical responsibilities include building upkeep, basic vehicle maintenance, remodeling projects, school equipment repairs, lawn and landscape care and janitorial work. This person can be married or single, young or old.
- » We are seeking a volunteer to operate Christian Learning Resource, the campus bookstore. Responsibilities include customer service, order shipping, inventory management, and marketing assistance. Computer skills are required. Experience in customer service and sales is desirable. The term begins in August 2012, and is a minimum of one year, preferably two years. For more information please contact Matthew Mast at 814-789-4518 ext 403 or matthewm@fbep.org.

If you are interested in any of these opportunities please contact our office for more information.

Student Essays

Selections from *Introduction to Worldviews*

This essay is one of three recently made available on the Faith Builders blog. The essays were completed last December in the course *Introduction to Worldviews*, a class that seeks to identify and wrestle with some of the fundamental questions of life and existence. They may be read in their entirety at: www.fbep.org/blog. Please email our office at fbep@fbep.org if you prefer to receive the essays by email.

Life Out of Death

The man was dead.

As his life slipped away, the man's sisters had cherished hope for the arrival of their friend. They were sure the teacher could cure their brother's sickness. But the days had slipped away until death's cold hand extinguished the last flame of their hope. Their brother was dead.

Four days had passed. If time heals grief, it is a slow medicine. The teacher had come. He found the deceased man's family and friends, mourning. The teacher was moved and wept. Together, they went to the grave. Someone took away the covering of the tomb. The teacher prayed.

We live in the space between sunrise and sunset in bodies that hurt, surrounded by people and things that fail us. The clouds of trouble and disappointment drift across our joys, and death darkens the horizon of our days. How can we know what is true? What is good?

The teacher was speaking. What had been a place of death and sorrow, the grave of a friend, was filled with the command to live.

"Lazarus," Jesus cried, "come forth!"

Although the earth is warped by evil, God wants us to know the truth of Himself. He is our good Father, Master, and King. Jesus came to reveal God to us, to give us a picture of Truth that we can grasp. Significantly, nowhere in the Gospels did Jesus attempt to argue for or prove the existence of God. He referred to Genesis and the creation and appears to take it for granted that there not only is a God; but that it is possible, even imperative, that we know God because God is the truth. He demonstrated to us both by his life and by his teachings what God is like.

Knowing Truth

When questioned about Himself, Jesus stated that He came to the world for the purpose of bearing witness to the truth. What does it mean to know truth? His teachings emphasized that truth is not simply something we would be aware of. Truth would engage us, powerfully work out in our lives, and set us free.

This excerpt only gives an overview of the subject of the entire essay. To read the whole essay please visit the Faith Builders blog at www.fbep.org/blog or request it by email from fbep@fbep.org.

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Kiat Luksanasakulchai and daughter Nueng celebrate Kiat's 21st spiritual birthday during Winter Term

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Summer Term 2012 | June 25 – July 27, 2012

» See course listing on page 635.

College Student Seminar and Retreat | July 5-8, 2012

» Guest speakers Richard Bean, Jonas Sauder, and Kendall Myers. Register at www.fbep.org.

Teachers Week 2012 | July 31-August 3, 2012

» General sessions by Anthony Hurst, Kyle Lehman, Melvin Lehman, Jonas Sauder, and Chester Weaver, plus forty workshops and ten hands-on work sessions.

Teachers Conference | October 12-14, 2012

» "Hearts of Integrity, Hands of Skill." Keynote addresses, informal interaction, and workshops.

Administrators Conference and Retreat | October 12-14, 2012

» A weekend for school leaders to interact and grow; to be held in Meadville/Guys Mills, PA.

INVITING STUDENTS FOR FALL SEMESTER 2012

We are accepting student applications for the 2012-2013 year. There are currently openings for 11 new students in the Institute for next year, with room for 6 new students in the Teacher Apprenticing track and 5 new students in the Christian Ministries and General Studies tracks. Applications are reviewed in January, March, and May. The application packet is available on our website. Parents, pastors, and school boards: we invite you to identify men and women in your churches and communities who would benefit from studying at Faith Builders and encourage them to apply.