

The Teacher and Educational Psychology (Part One)

For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee” (Prov. 2: 6 -11).

Objectives

At the end of this lesson the student should be able to:

1. Identify four basic categories of learning theories developed over the past century or so and provide a brief explanation of each.
2. Gain a basic understanding of the different educational psychologists and their theories and how these theories are relevant or impact us today.
3. Determine which theories and practices are most beneficial in an adult Christian education environment.
4. Explain the difference between wisdom and knowledge in a Christian education setting.
5. Distinguish the differences between discipleship, mentoring, along with the value and importance of each.
6. Begin the process of becoming a mentor or a mentee.

Introduction

In the past century educational psychologists and practitioners have provided multiple theories that afford insight into how learners acquire, organize, adapt, adopt, and utilize knowledge or skills. These theories have been classified as:

TABLE ONE
 LEARNING THEORIES

Behaviorism	The learner is passive and responds to external processes such as positive reinforcement. Learning is a process of reacting to external stimuli (rewards, punishment, and so forth).
Cognitivism	Learning goes beyond the external and is an internal process involving memory. Learning is a process of acquiring and storing information. Learner is viewed as an active participant in the learning process. Emphasis is on the building blocks of knowledge.
Constructivism	Learning builds on personal experience. Knowledge is constructed from the action of scaffolding. Prior knowledge is remixed to current context. Scaffolding is the support given during the learning process which is tailored to the needs of the student. This may include, but is not limited to, resources, guidance, coaching, guides, and so forth.
Connectivism	Learning is self-directed, and works within social networks. Learning is a process of recognizing and connecting information sources. Knowing where to find the information is more important than knowing the information. Learning may reside in non-human appliances (computers, Internet, blogs, and so forth).

The majority of this lesson deals with cognition. Behaviorism deals mostly with children so it is not as applicable to adult education. Cognition is the mental activity of thinking, remembering, and learning. Cognitive psychology is popular today with a primary focus on memory. There is no particular or single theory that explains everything about learning and behavior. This lesson seeks to identify cognitive learning theories and demonstrate how they can be utilized in a discipleship program for new believers in the local church or our students in the Bible school classroom.

Cognitive Learning Theories

Unlike behaviorism which utilizes extrinsic motivations of punishment and reward the theories of cognitivism seek an approach to learning that gives more attention to intrinsic (internal) motivations concerning what is going on inside the learner's brain. Knowledge is actively built by the learner based on his current cognitive structures. Knowledge becomes a process of active discovery. Learners are not considered to be merely "empty vessels" with open minds ready to be filled by an instructor dumping content through rote learning and repetition. The instructor fosters and facilitates learning through discovery providing resources and guidance as they assimilate and accommodate new knowledge. The underlying principles of cognitive development study how learners think, process information, and gain knowledge. Individuals are actively involved in knowledge acquisition and can be in control of the learning process. People tend to organize the things they learn and new information is easily acquired when the learner can readily associate it with things already learned. Education is like building blocks.

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget was the first to make a systematic study of cognitive development and described his work as genetic epistemology or the origin of thinking. Now, that's a gigantic word. "Epistemology" is the study or philosophy of knowledge. It answers questions like "What is knowledge? How is knowledge acquired? What are the obstacles of knowledge? How do we know things? What do we know? Why do we know? What are the limits of knowledge? How do we know what is true?" It is knowledge in the sense of knowing how to arrange what is known in some sort of sensible order. Basically, it is the knowledge of knowing. Biblically, what we know affects what we love and do. What we love affects what we know and do. And what we do affects what we know and love (Matthew 7:24-26). Biblical epistemology makes a connection between knowing and doing; belief and behavior; convictions and conduct; and between learning and living (Dr. Naugle, *Developing the Christian Mind*).

Piaget believed we are born with a basic mental structure that is genetically inherited on which all consequent learning and knowledge accrual is based. He posited four main stages of intellectual development of children which include: (1) sensorimotor (birth to two years of age), (2) preoperational (from two to seven years of age), (3) concrete operational (from seven to eleven years of age), and (4) formal operational (adolescence into adulthood). None of these stages can be skipped and each child goes through stages in the prescribed order.

Piaget thought of "schemas" as the basic building blocks of cognitive behavior; a way of organizing knowledge comparative to index cards that could be filed away in the brain, directing us how to respond to incoming information. As an individual matures the building blocks or index

cards increase telling the individual how to respond or react to incoming information. Assimilation is the process of taking new information into already current schema (cognitive frameworks) while accommodation involves altering existing schema in light of the new information.

Piaget did not relate his work directly to education but various features of his theory can certainly be applied to both teaching and learning. Within the classroom active methods, problem-solving opportunities, cooperative and collaborative learning strategies, as well as individual activities, and the centrality of working together should be used to foster learning. With students in our classes, teachers should encourage students to explore hypothetical questions, real-life situations, and social, biblical or ethical issues. Participants can work in pairs or in small groups discussing such issues or do individual research. In teaching use charts, Power Point presentations, and materials that present the material to be studied in a logical, step by step fashion.

Piaget's theory provides valuable insights for Christian educators because it provides a connection between the external and internal. The lessons taught in our classes do not have to be unconnected to the frustrations and realities of life. Students do not have to travel through life alone but can mature and learn through healthy, godly social interaction. As Christian educators we can be acutely aware of developmental psychology and integrate it into our teachings of theology and biblical themes. The purpose of Christian education is development and we cultivate people so they can become like Jesus Christ. "Cognitive development theory has convinced Christian educators that children learn best with other children their age doing developmentally appropriate activities...The fundamental difficulty is that spiritual development is not essentially cognitive development" (Catterton, 2005, 330). The same holds true for adult students. Spiritual development and formation is not necessarily age specific as advocated in Piaget's theory.

Piaget centered on the universal stages of cognitive development and did not consider the impact social environment and culture may have on learning. Lev Vygotsky believed learning was passed down from generation to generation. Knowledge was received as a result of guided social interaction. Learners worked with their peers and mentors to solve issues. Cognitive development could be best understood when taking cultural and social contexts into consideration.

Ausubel's Learning Theory

David Ausubel believed understanding concepts, principles, and ideas are best achieved through deductive reasoning (goes from general to specific). Learners must relate new knowledge to the relevant concepts they already know accomplished through well organized and pertinent knowledge structures. His theory consists of three phases:

1. Advance organizer (clarify the aim of the lesson, present the lesson, relate to student's prior knowledge);
2. Presentation of learning material (organize the new material in a logical order, and present the material by using examples and engaging students in meaningful learning activities);
3. Strengthening cognitive organization (relate new material to the advance organizer and promote active reception learning) (Learning Theories, FPMIPA).

Situated cognition claims that "knowledge is situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used" (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989, 32). A culture and community of learners can be developed. This is excellent in the Bible school setting as we create a culture of learning and spiritual growth.

Cooperative Learning Theories

Learning is a shared educational task or experience between students and teachers providing the opportunity to learn from one another. Cooperative learning advocates or establishes constructive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, critical thinking skills, collaborative expertise, individual accountability, and team processing (Wilson and Peterson, 2006, 11). Proponents of this branch off of constructivism posit learners learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process working in collaboration with others. Cooperative and collaborative learning strategies are addressed in other Advance Educators lessons so will not be greatly expounded upon here.

Information Processing Theories

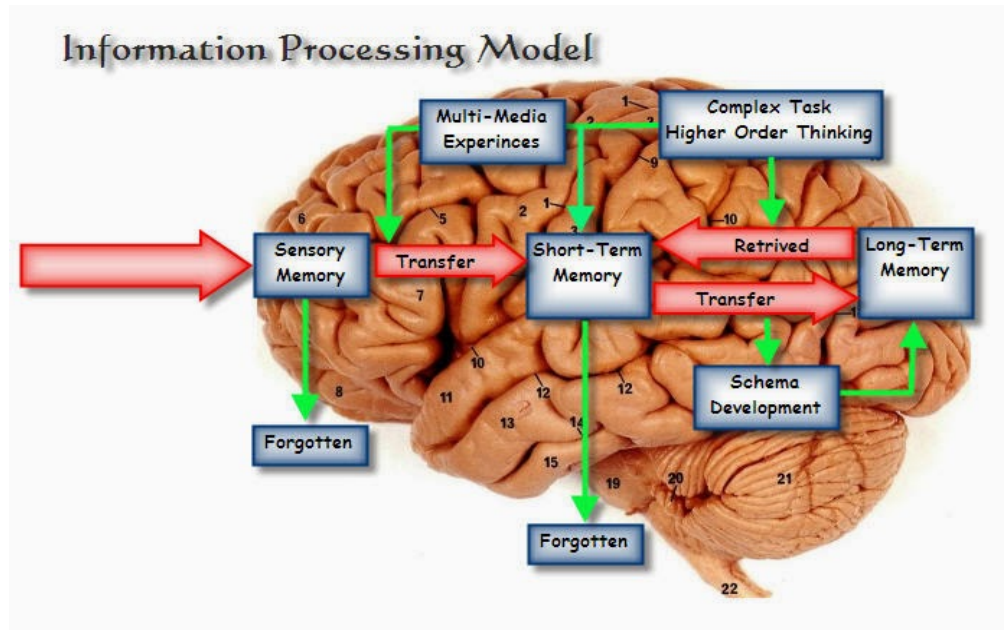
The brain is an incredible network of information processing. The learner is perceived to be the processor of knowledge much like a computer is. Information is received as input, processed in short-term memory, encoded, transferred to long-term memory, and can be later retrieved as output of something learned. The computer-mind metaphor compares how the computer

technology identifies how the human mind handles information. A computer codes and stores information, uses it, and retrieves information as output. The human mind operates in a similar way as described in Table One that follows:

TABLE TWO
 THE HUMAN MIND AS INFORMATION PROCESSOR

Sensory Input	Information disappears quickly unless transferred to short-term memory. Sensory memory is associated with the five senses and holds information in memory long enough for further processing.
Selection Attention	This refers to the learner’s ability to select and process certain information while, at the same time, also ignoring unnecessary information.
Short-term Memory (STM)	Short-term memory holds about seven items and can be increased through “chunking” techniques. Content from long-term memory could also be activated to make sense of the new information.
Chunking	This allows the individual to encode information into long-term memory.
Encoding	This permits the learner to process incoming information to knowledge or concepts already in long-term memory.
Long-term Memory	Information here is organized, meaningful (useful), and permanent. Anything to be remembered for a long time needs to be moved from short-term to long-term memory.
Retrieval	Previously acquired information is brought back to mind in order to make a response or to understand new information (Chapter Two, Learning Theories).

FIGURE ONE
Information Processing and the Brain



(Jared M. Griffin)

The information processing approach in the classroom is made up of the following principles:

- Gain the students attention.
- Bring to mind prior learning.
- Point out important information through providing handouts, writing on the board, or using power-point presentations.
- Present the information in a logical manner in a logical sequence. Go from simple to complex when presenting new material.
- Show students how to categorize or chunk related information. Connect new information to something they already know.
- Provide for repetition of learning by stating important principles several times in different ways. Attempt to move the information from short-term to long-term memory (Huit, 2003, 1).

Bruner's and Vygotsky's Constructivist Theories

Lev Vygotsky thought learners learn best through problem-solving experiences shared with others. Culture teaches learners what to think and how to think. Curriculum should be designed

to allow for and promote interaction between the learners and learning tasks. Through the social cognitive theory we can effectively learn from one another by observing one another. This allows a learner to gain knowledge, put learning into practice, and to alter behavior. A learner can acquire new knowledge and behaviors by simply observing a model or mentor. They are observable in real-life situations or environments and real-life peers, teachers, pastors, and supervisors worthy of emulation.

The word “disciple” comes from the Greek word *mathetes* which means “learner.” New believers learn to be like Jesus and to do like Jesus (Acts 1:1). In II Timothy Paul enlightened Timothy on the teaching and cognitive learning strategies of developing new believers as disciples and learners. He was to teach the sacred truths and principles he had gleaned and pass them on to the next generation. “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). Like Lev Vygotsky the Apostle Paul believed learning was passed down from generation to generation. Knowledge was received as a result of guided social interaction. Instruction needed to be done in such a way that it could be repeated so that each disciple would develop his own disciples. An ideal discipleship program would be one that prepares the new believer to be reproducible through being able to teach what they have been taught. “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40-41).

Constructivism stresses the importance of learners being actively involved in constructing knowledge. It assesses what a student already knows and moves on from there. The instructor provides a variety of experiences, open-ended questions, guiding learners in problem-solving in “real-world” problems. Curiosity, discovery, exploration, experimentation, and discussion are all encouraged as part of the learning process and encourage new understanding. All of these factors are important considerations to be included in a program for new believers and are consistent with the situated cognition theory.

An effective discipleship and preparation program for those desiring to enter the Bible school or for new students should focus on spiritual disciplines, not just what to know as a believer but also what to do. This includes, but is not limited to, (a) understanding and obeying the plan of salvation, (b) reading and studying God’s Word (2 Timothy 2:15), (c) meditating and memorizing important Scriptures; (d) praying, (e) fasting; walking and living in holiness, (f) sharing one’s testimony and witnessing to God’s goodness, (g) finding a place in body ministry; and (h) becoming equipped for works of service. Each of these fosters a change in one’s mind, heart, and behavior. Prayer is one of the primary spiritual disciplines and is vital to the believer’s life. Jesus taught His disciples to pray through modeling prayer. Prayer can be made a priority through

praying with the new believers, for their needs, for their families, and for their struggles. Meditating on Scriptures and memorizing pivotal Bible verses are strengthened through the principles derived from the information processing theory.

Discipleship, spiritual formation, and basic Bible school instruction should be process-oriented rather than merely program-oriented. The discipleship process is not like a manufacturing line where new believers are sent through a ten or twelve step process without consideration for individual development or needs. The process should include careful evaluation of current spiritual maturity, determining where the person is on his spiritual journey, developing a process to take the believer from where he is now to where he needs to go, fostering spiritual growth as a life-long journey, and guiding new believers to become mature believers. New believers can experience growth through the modeling of mature believers who have travelled faithfully on the journey to Christian maturity and spiritual formation. This shows the social-cognitive theory at work.

Disciplers illustrate a lifestyle of discipleship that is intentional (I Thess. 2:7-8), impactful (Matthew 28:18-20; I Thess. 1:6-8), and incarnational and also invites disciples to personal discovery and involvement. The discipleship process found in the verses of 2 Timothy 2 calls upon disciples to be: (a) strong (vs. 1), (b) equipped (vs. 2), (c) tough (vs. 3), (d) focused (vs. 4), (e) disciplined (vs. 5), (f) hard-working (vs. 6), (g) thoughtful (vs. 7), (h) studious (vs. 15), (i) pure (vs. 20), (j) ready (vs. 21), and (k) able to teach (vs. 23). New believers need to understand where they are in their spiritual formation and where they are going.

“Cognitive apprenticeship methods try to enculturate students into authentic practices through activity and social interaction in a way similar to that evident-and evidently successful—in craft apprenticeship” (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989, 37). Apprenticeship is developed through situated modeling and coaching. Coaches model their knowledge, activities, and strategies for students. They first do the task and then empower learners to do the same task independently. This is much like the tentmakers and apprentice or masters and apprentices where a system of training a new generation of practitioners of a profession is developed using on-the-job training.

A mentor is a spiritual leader that has opted to take an active role in the spiritual growth and development of the new believer. The instructor sets the example for others to follow. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7). “I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church” (1 Cor 4:16-17). “Let no one despise you for

your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). As we come together to study God’s Word the instructor or mentor can answer questions, provide counsel, provide encouragement, indicate spiritual applications, and so forth. Rather than teach church rules and regulations he can teach doctrine, biblical principles, and endeavor to be a godly model. Believers needed to be in the Word of God on a daily basis. They were to be equipped for ministry. Disciples were paired with disciplers; new believers with seasoned believers. One-one-one relationships are pivotal in encouraging, guiding, teaching, and mentoring new believers in Christ. In this one-on-one relationship mentoring and modeling take place.

New students need to be shown how to pray and how to study and read the Bible to glean life principles and practices for themselves. “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). They need to be assimilated into the body and learn how to effectively function there. They need to learn to read, study, memorize verses, and meditate on God’s Word and foster the ability to hear from God. Sometimes these attributes or disciplines are not established in the local church so have to be learned and emphasized in the basic level of our Bible schools. The courses of our certificate level meet these needs and much more.

Instructors can divide their lesson or lecture into fifteen minute segments which is about the length of time an adult can concentrate on information being presented. After each segment students can be asked to turn to the person beside them or get in a small group answering a question that can be handled in three minutes. This encourages the participants to cognitively process the content covered and incorporates cooperative learning strategies into the discipleship program.

Teaching and training is not designed as the end but as the springboard for new believers to be launched into the work of the ministry or works of service.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...” (Eph. 4;11-15).

Believers are encouraged to apply what they have learned in real-life and real-time ministry. They need to be effective both in traditional ministry and in the modern marketplace. Christians are called to influence all of culture to the glory of God. “And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

Many educational programs are deficient in the area of hands-on learning. Through incorporating the principles found in cognitive learning and information processing theories learning can be greatly enhanced. Learning environment and opportunities in the 21st century necessitate students being actively engaged in learning tasks and interacting with each other. Learners cannot be asked to learn passively and alone when we are competing with all sorts of engaging technology and digitally-based programs and applications. Educators should provide opportunities for discussion and interaction while helping learners think for themselves. “Learners are not passive recipients, but active builders” (Yount, 2010, 251).

Bruner’s constructivist theory proposes three modes of representation: (1) enactive (action-based; 0-1 years); (2) iconic (image-based; 1 – 6 years); and (3) symbolic (language-based; 7 years onward). These indicate ways knowledge is stored and coded in memory and suggest new material follows a progression from enactive to symbolic even with adult learners. The assertion is all learners can learn any material as long as it is organized properly. Both Bruner and Vygotsky emphasize a learner’s social environment and both agree adults play an active role in the learning process. Instructors in the classroom should encourage students to discover principles by themselves. And instruction should be structured so information can be easily grasped by the learner.

Piaget focused on the universal stages of cognitive development and did not consider the impact social environment and culture may have on learning. Lev Vygotsky and Bruner did not think in terms of stages of cognitive development but saw it as a continuous process. Vygotsky believed learning was passed down from generation to generation and argued knowledge was best received as a result of guided social interaction. He pointed out that the most effective form of social learning did not come from the teacher interacting with the students but from students interacting with each other. He called this the “zone of proximal development” where people learn best from other people just a little ahead of them in knowledge and experience. Older students can effectively interact with and teach younger ones. Learners learn best through problem-solving experiences shared with others and in a social context with someone more skillful available and actively engaged in the learning process.

Erikson's Theory of Personality Development

Erik Erikson developed a personality theory that individuals pass through several distinct stages of development throughout life from birth to death and thought these stages of development to be universal in scope. He placed substantial importance on an individual's social environment and its impact on the person's psychological development. In our classes students are grappling with developing their personal identity. They are determining the meaning of life, where they are going in life, and their life purpose or mission. Instructors can help students on their individual journey to see the larger picture and find meaning and direction in the midst of their spiritual formation.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg proposed how morals develop and suggests that age has no impact on moral development. One can be an adult and still have the moral level of a young child. He thought in terms of rules obeyed by reward or punishment, rules obeyed because they are in agreement with self, and those obeyed if others agreed. In spiritual formation in our classes the faith journey is impacted by upbringing, cognitive/moral development, and external circumstances each impacting a person differently with no two people being alike. Kohlberg's theory is marked with a gender bias toward males since his study only looked at males and takes into consideration a Western viewpoint rather than looking at other cultures around the globe.

Cognitive Learning Theories and the Christian Worldview

Generally speaking, cognitive learning and information process theories are not in conflict with or a challenge to a biblical worldview; the framework through which Christians make sense of their world. Such theories are in alignment with God's Word as long as they do not violate the premise that one's primary existence is to love and serve God in obedience to the commands of His Word. Our epistemology goes beyond the intrinsic ramifications and ponderings of cognitive learning recognizing that God is omniscient and possesses all knowledge with wisdom also coming from Him (James 3:17; Proverbs 2:6, 9 -11). Acquisition of knowledge or information processing allows one to collect, remember, and access information. Understanding allows one to abstract the meaning out of information but wisdom permits one to recognize which principles acquired should be applied in a given situation.

Constructivism and situated cognition are based on faulty, questionable assumptions that are incompatible with the Christian worldview. They hold that there is no unified, absolute truth or

singular view of reality. Truth and reality are a matter of personal perspective and reality has no single meaning because meanings are imposed or expressed by experienced people. Christians believe God created all reality with a purpose and that there is absolute truth. However, faulty assumptions do not render these learning theories useless. Various principles and instructional practices based on constructivism can and should be effectively embraced in the Christian education classroom. It is possible to use constructivist techniques while rejecting post-modern assumptions that there is no ultimate truth (Archer, 2002, 32-39). Jesus embodied constructivist applications when he asked questions in parables and stories such as the Good Samaritan. His disciples were involved in a cognitive apprenticeship for more than three years. Students can learn by doing, learn by discovery, and instruction should be adapted to the distinctiveness of each student.

The Christian worldview asserts that God reveals moral truths that must be obeyed and Kohlberg's theory fails to account for theological motivations for pursuing moral actions and decisions. However, aspects of this theory can be applied to Christian education programs for spiritual formation and moral development. In the preschool and elementary classes children need adults to affirm their positive moral decisions. Young people obey because of peer agreement. Many times they make moral decisions based on what their friends do rather than on personal conviction. Instructors need to challenge students to make personal moral and faith decisions through making life applications in each lesson they teach.

Conclusion

Jerome Bruner said, "We teach a subject not to produce little living libraries on the subject, but rather to get a student to think...for himself, to consider matters as a historian does, to take part in the process of knowledge-getting. Knowing is a process, not a product" (Bruner, 1966, 72). In the perspective of Bible schools "we teach not to create libraries of Bible facts, but to help students think biblically, to consider real-life problems from God's point of view" (Yount, 2010, 248). Instructors model servant leadership as they serve alongside new believers not just over them. They help Bible school students explore their talents, spiritual gifts, passion, and purpose.

Every Christian educator strives to do the utmost to aid students in their spiritual formation to enable them to advance in God's kingdom and find their unique roles in the body of Christ. Directional short-cuts gleaned from the various theories of cognitive, personality, psychological, and moral development can greatly assist on the journey rather than littering life's road with stumbling blocks that are incompatible with the Christian worldview.

Group Assignments

Divide class into small groups. Assign one name to each group (or allow them to draw name out of a basket). Discuss and find theories attributed to each name.

Given the names of the following educational psychologists and practitioners determine the contribution each made to the understanding of how students study and learn.

1. Jean Piaget
2. David Ausubel
3. Lev Vygotsky
4. Jerome Bruner
5. Erik Erikson
6. Lawrence Kohlberg

Individual Assignment

Have each student begin the process of finding someone to mentor and also someone to be a mentor to them by answering the following questions.

Someone to Mentor Me:

1. Who is my spiritual leader/father?
2. Does that person live close enough to work with me?
3. Is it possible to pray, study, and work alongside that person?

Someone for Me to Mentor:

1. Is there a younger person/someone less experienced that I would like to help?
2. Does the person live close enough to make this possible?
3. Do I have wisdom/experience in a certain area that would benefit someone else? If so, what would that be?

The Teacher and Educational Psychology (Part One)

Lesson in Review

1. List the four basic learning theories given to us in the past century by educational psychologists and practitioners about how learners acquire, organize, adapt, adopt, and utilize knowledge/skills.

2. Explain why the majority of this lesson deals with cognition.

3. What is the major difference between behaviorism and cognitivism?

4. Define genetic epistemology using some of the questions it answers in your definition.

5. What connection does biblical epistemology make? Support your answer with Scripture.

6. List the four main stages of intellectual development of children suggest by Piaget.

7. Identify and briefly explain the basic building blocks of cognitive behavior.

8. Briefly explain the differences between assimilation and accommodation.

9. Briefly describe an ideal discipleship program. Support your answer with Scripture.

10. An effective discipleship and preparation program for those entering Bible school should focus on what? This includes at least what eight things?

11. Explain why constructivism and situated cognition are incompatible with the Christian worldview.

12. Explain the difference between understanding and wisdom in the learning process.

13. List three things a Christian educator strives to do for his students.

14. Give a one or two sentence explanation of each of the four basic learning theories included in this lesson.

15. Relate how the human mind is like a computer as outlined in the information processing theory.

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