

**Christian Religious Education:
Building Capacity through a Growing Philosophy**

Katrina A. Korb
Department of General and Applied Psychology
University of Jos
katrina.korb@gmail.com

Korb, K. A. (2014, April). Christian Religious Education: Building capacity through a growing philosophy. Paper presented at the National Association of Christian Religious Educators of Nigeria (NACREN) 38th Annual National Conference, Minna, Nigeria.

Introduction

I would like to start this paper by sharing a few stories of interactions that I have recently had with students at the University of Jos. All of these stories revolve around an underlying theme that I want you to be thinking about as you are listening. In each story, I want you to analyse the philosophy that each student has about education. By philosophy of education, I simply mean the beliefs that a person has about education. So as I am sharing each story, think about what the student's beliefs about education are in terms of what the overall goal of education is, and what the role of education is in their life.

Communication in an Examination

During the last examinations at UniJos, I was walking through the corridors of the Faculty of Education behind two students who were discussing the examination they had just completed. I overheard one student say to the other, "Supervision in that examination was so strict! They would not even let us communicate with each other!"

Now think about the beliefs of that student has about education. He clearly thought that he should be able to communicate with his mates during the examination. If he should be able to communicate to his mates during an examination, what does he believe is the purpose of an examination? It's clearly not to communicate his own knowledge of the subject, which is the true purpose of an examination. Based on his beliefs about the purpose of an examination, what do you think are his beliefs about why he is getting an education? What do you think he believes about the role of education in his life?

Pass Me, I Beg in the Name of God

The second story starts when my 200-level students were writing their examinations. Shortly after the examination had started, I saw two ladies openly talking to each other. I first gave them a warning. A few minutes later, I saw the two ladies talking to each other again, so I marched over and wrote *minus 10 points* on their scripts. Later, as I was marking the scripts, one of the young ladies wrote me a note at the back of her script. The note read, "*Please ma, don't minus any marks from my work. I beg you in the name of God. I don't want to fail this course. Thanks. God bless you.*"

When I totaled her score on the exam, out of 70 possible points, she only scored 10 points, even before I subtracted the 10 points for talking. That young lady earned 14% on her final examination, but still begged me to allow her to pass the course. In fact, she prayed to God that I would not fail her, even though she clearly did not understand the course material.

Let's think about this young lady's philosophy, or beliefs, about education. There are two points that I would like us to think about. The first is that she clearly did not have an understanding of the course content, but she thought she could still pass the course, and she even thought that God wanted her to pass the course. How can a student hope to pass a course when she does not have any knowledge of the course material?

The second point is that this young lady's goal for her education was this: not to fail the course. I will come back to this point later, but I want us to think about whether passing or failing courses should be the overall goal of an education.

I Have Been Here Long Enough

A third student came to my office begging for mercy. He had been admitted into the university in one course, I think maybe in medicine. However, he failed out of medicine, so

he was transferred into a different department, perhaps geography and planning. Then he failed out of geography and planning, so he eventually transferred into Psychology. However, after the transfer came through to the Psychology Department, he never properly registered in the Psychology Department. Since he never registered in our Department, for all practical purposes, he was not a student of the University of Jos and had not been a student since he was withdrawn from geography and planning about two years ago. This student then came into my office to beg to be allowed to register in the Department and complete his studies.

I have found that students like this oftentimes have many academic problems. Though the primary problem was that he had not registered in the Department, I was quite sure he also had poor academic performance, and probably even a few other personal problems. So I asked this student a number of questions to try to get at the root of the problem. Somewhere in the process of my questioning, the student said, “I deserve a degree.” Oh, really, I replied. “You have failed out of two programs, you do not attend class, you do not pass your examinations, and you have not properly registered in the Department. Why do you believe you deserve a degree?” His reply was, “I have been here long enough!”

This student’s philosophy of education is quite clear: If you are enrolled in school long enough – regardless of whether you attend classes, complete assignments, or pass examinations – you deserve a degree.

Certificate Philosophy

The underlying theme of these stories should now be clear. What were these students beliefs about the purpose of education? They wanted a certificate. The logic of this philosophy is simple: I need a certificate to get a job. It doesn’t matter what my certificate is in. It doesn’t matter what I learn in the classes. All that matters is the paper qualification that will allow me to get a stable government job.

The students also do not believe that education has a role to play in their life beyond just passing the examinations in order to get the certificate. What is taught in school is unimportant. Learning is unimportant. Instead, education is all about passing examinations for the certificate. I will call this Certificate Philosophy. Certificate philosophy reduces an education to its barest skeleton: passing examinations.

We well know that Certificate Philosophy is a problem in Nigeria, and we all complain about it, loudly and frequently. We also know the problems that result from Certificate Philosophy, which I will only briefly mention here.

- *Examination malpractice.* If you are only attending school to get a certificate, you can do anything to get that certificate, including exam malpractice.
- *Cramming.* To get a certificate, you must pass exams. The easiest way to pass exams is to cram. Nothing is actually learned, but crammed in for the examination and then forgotten.
- *Half-Baked Graduates.* This type of education produces individuals who have certificates but no knowledge or skills, resulting in certified accountants who cannot keep the simplest of financial books, individuals with certificates in home economics who cannot boil rice, and people with certificates in English who cannot speak in complete sentences.

It is disturbing to realize that the rot of Certificate Philosophy has now passed beyond formal education, and is permeating every aspect of our lives. I have a friend who is involved in

Bible Study Fellowship (BSF), which is a worldwide program of weekly Bible studies. Every week, those who attend the BSF meetings receive study notes with a set of questions for each day of the week to think about and respond to individually. The weekly BSF group meetings have an hour of lecture and an hour in small groups to discuss the responses to the questions that each person has thought about throughout the previous week. There is no certificate awarded in BSF; it is simply an opportunity for individuals to learn more about the Bible and grow in their walk with God. A formal goal of BSF is to “produce in all participants a vibrant relationship with God...through personally meeting Him by reading His revelation of Himself in the Bible.”

A few weeks ago, my friend was approached by a woman who was new to the BSF fellowship. This new person asked if she could copy my friend’s answers to the BSF questions! There was absolutely no need for this person to copy answers to the BSF questions. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. In fact, nobody even checks whether a person has written answers to each of the questions! The questions are simply designed to help a person think more deeply about the Bible passages that are studied that week.

My friend refused to share her answers because she wanted the new woman to think about and learn from the study notes. So this person went to a university student and asked her to give answers to each of the questions! Certificate Philosophy has rooted itself so deeply in this person’s mind that she felt she had to have answers at all costs, despite the fact that answers themselves will do this woman no good at all. Instead, it is the process of thinking about the questions that will lead to greater understanding about God, which will lead to a more vibrant relationship with God.

Growing Philosophy

We know that Certificate Philosophy is wrong and harmful, both to education and to society. But despite this knowledge and the outcry of many educators against Certificate Philosophy, it continues to persist and even grow stronger. Why?

Think of the evil spirit in Matthew 12:43-45 who leaves a man and goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. The evil spirit eventually returns to the house, which has now been swept clean and in order. However, since there is no other occupant in the house, the evil spirit returns with seven of its brothers and occupies the house again. In the same way, we can criticize and cry against the evils of Certificate Philosophy. However, Certificate Philosophy will keep returning until we have a better philosophy to occupy our house.

I suggest we replace Certificate Philosophy with Growing Philosophy. Growing Philosophy starts with the foundational assumption that God has blessed us with amazing gifts of his Spirit. Exodus 35:30-35 states:

See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship. And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers, embroiders in blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers – all of them master craftsmen and designers.

We can see from this passage that God filled these men with the Spirit of God. The Spirit manifested itself through skills, ability, and knowledge. Thus, one of God's gifts to us is skills, abilities, and knowledge. Also note that God gave Bezalel and Oholiab the *ability to teach others*. This means that God gives us his spirit to help us teach others skills, abilities, and knowledge. What a blessing it is to be a teacher!

There are two foundational principles of Growing Philosophy based on this passage.

First, God's Spirit is in us through our skills, ability, and knowledge. When we use our skills, abilities, and knowledge, we are glorifying God because we are showing the greatness and the excellent-ness of God's spirit. When we sing a beautiful song, we are glorifying God. When an artist creates a beautiful painting, he is glorifying God. When a medical doctor saves a human life, she is glorifying God. When a writer writes an excellent book, he is glorifying God. When an engineer designs a strong bridge for people to safely pass over a river, she is glorifying God. When a businessman runs a supermarket with integrity and professionalism, he is glorifying God. When an immigration officer processes passports and visas honestly and efficiently, she is glorifying God. When a botanist discovers a new plant, he is glorifying God. When teachers help a student learn something new, we are glorifying God.

We glorify God by using our skills, abilities, and knowledge. However, God does not transplant skills, abilities, and knowledge in us, fully grown and matured. Instead, the skills, abilities, and knowledge are planted in us as seeds when we are created in our mother's womb. It is not a certificate that gives us the skills, abilities, and knowledge to glorify God. Instead, it takes time, nurture, and practice for these to become fully developed. Therefore, the second principle of Growing Philosophy is that **the goal of education is to help a person grow their skills, abilities, and knowledge.** Education is the time in which the seeds of skills, abilities, and knowledge are nurtured through instruction and students are given practice to develop the gifts that God has given them. This is why I am calling it the Growing Philosophy: The goal of education is to help students' knowledge, skills, and abilities grow so they can be fruitful in society.

We earlier briefly mentioned three problems that result from Certificate Philosophy. If we replace Certificate Philosophy with Growing Philosophy, these problems will all but disappear.

- *Examination malpractice.* If the purpose of education is to grow your skills, abilities, and knowledge, then exam malpractice will be pointless. The purpose of an examination is to demonstrate how much you know about a course. If you have not learned everything in a class, demonstrated by failing an examination, then the best thing for you is to retake the class so you have a second chance to improve your skills, abilities, and knowledge. Thus, the examination should be a true reflection of what you have know about a course, not what someone else knows.
- *Cramming.* Cramming does *not* help you grow your skills, abilities, and knowledge. Instead of cramming, those with a Growing Philosophy will spend the time, hard work, and practice necessary to grow their skills, knowledge, and ability.
- *Half-Baked Graduates.* If students have the goal of growing their skills, abilities, and knowledge, then the final product of education will be skillful, knowledgeable graduates who will have the ability to be successful professionals.

Changing from a Certificate Philosophy to a Growing Philosophy

Our actions reflect our beliefs. It is not enough to simply say that we believe something; we must ensure that our actions reflect our beliefs. Sometimes, we say that we believe one thing, but our actions show that we really believe something else. Thus, to replace Certificate Philosophy with Growing Philosophy, we must replace some of our actions that reflect a deeply rooted belief in Certificate Philosophy.

There are many factors that contribute to a Certificate Philosophy from society, culture, parenting practices, and students' attitudes. However, I would like to share a lesson that I learned from my father. When I was in secondary school, I played a lot of basketball. Unfortunately, my team was not very good so we lost a lot of games. After we would lose, particularly when the score was very close, the easiest thing to do was to blame the referee. We would say that the referee made all of these bad calls, and if he would have just made the right calls, we would have won the game.

However, my dad would never allow me to blame the referees. When I would start to complain about the referee, he would ask me about my own performance in the game. Did I make any mistakes while I was playing? Was there anything I could have done better? Maybe if I had done those things better, we would have won the game. Yes, the referee had made mistakes, but so had I. I should not blame the referee for the loss unless I played a perfect game.

Thus, the lesson I learned from my father is that I cannot blame other people for a problem until I have examined myself and identified how my actions may have contributed to the problem. Thus, I agree that there are factors from society, parents, and students that contribute to Certificate Philosophy. However, there are also things that teachers do that contribute to Certificate Philosophy. Since I am addressing a room full of teachers, it is the teacher factors that I want to address in order to identify what actions we, as teachers, can take to replace a Certificate Philosophy with a Growing Philosophy. I will suggest six practical steps that teachers can take to help a Growing Philosophy take root in our society.

First, we can change our language. You frequently hear people talk about “being educated.” This language reflects a Certificate Philosophy because being educated is demonstrated by a certificate. To reflect a Growing Philosophy, I suggest we change our language to “I want to be learned” because being learned is demonstrated by how much a person has learned and how they put that learning into practice.

Being learned builds capacity. When we are learned, we can improve our lives. People who are learned in social sciences have a better understanding of other people and thus have better interpersonal relationships. People who are learned in the sciences have a better understanding of our environment so they can have better living conditions. People who are learned in languages can communicate better and be more persuasive of others. People who are learned in mathematics and economics can manage their family resources better and thus have better living conditions.

Furthermore, when we are learned, we can have a stronger impact on our church, government, and society. We can use our knowledge, skills, and abilities to help our churches grow and to disciple members to be salt and light in their communities. We can use our knowledge, skills, and abilities to hold our political leaders accountable for their promises and the management of Nigeria's resources. Those who are learned, not those who have

certificates, bring development to a society by creating employment opportunities, developing security strategies, improving infrastructure, and mentoring and engaging wayward youth.

Finally, being learned helps us reflect God's glory. John 15:8 says, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." When you see a learned person using their knowledge, skills, and abilities to develop God's kingdom, we give thanks to God because they are reflecting God's glory by their learning.

Second, we must have high expectations for our students' learning. There is an African proverb that says *Sugarcane is sweetest at its joint*. There is an American proverb that says something very similar: *Nothing good ever comes easily*. Both of these proverbs tell us that the best things in life require hard work and effort.

It is not easy to become a good football player. Years of practice, training, and discipline are necessary to become a good football player. It is not easy to build a house. Building a house requires a lot of hard work to lay the foundation, to raise the roof, and to install the fixtures. Even planning a wedding does not come easily. There are many preparations that must be made, and it requires lots of time, energy and hard work. So why do we think that becoming learned should be easy?

Another proverb says, *Knowledge is like a farm: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested*. Cultivating a farm takes a year of effort in preparing the seed, clearing the ground, planting, watering, and weeding. The harder the farmer works, the better the crop. The same is true of gaining knowledge.

Becoming truly learned requires years of reading, hard work, and practice. Gladwell (2008) has proposed a 10,000 rule, which means that it takes about 10,000 hours of effortful, specific practice for a person to be successful in learning a profession. Ericsson and colleagues (1993) broke that down into ten years of deliberate practice, studying for about 50-60 hours per week. How many of our students are studying 50-60 hours per week?

A student cannot become learned simply by attending classes and writing exams. Students have to spend hours outside of class reading textbooks and articles. The more you read, the more you know. Students should be completing homework on a daily basis to practice their skills. Students should also be writing essays about what they have learned so they can improve their communication skills. These are the things that are necessary to becoming learned, and they are not easy.

Knowledge is like a farm: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested. When we do not require our students to work hard to learn in our classes, we are robbing them of the wonderful opportunity to cultivate the knowledge that is necessary to be learned. However, we often find that students do not have to study outside of class to pass our classes, or they can study only a very little immediately before an examination. If students are in school from 8 to 2pm each day, 5 days a week, that is only 30 hours per week focused on cultivating knowledge. Furthermore, much of that time in school is not engaged in learning, but in preparations, passing time, and breaks. Time in school is only productive if students are in class and actively thinking about the course content.

Think about your school. How much time are students actively involved in thinking and practicing their skills? Compare that to the amount of time students spend in break times, waiting for classes to start, or even scheduled to be studying but are unsupervised by teachers? Frick (1990) found that students are engaged in learning 97% of the time when supervised by the teacher but only 57% of the time when working by themselves. This tells us that students are almost always working and learning when there is a teacher present to supervise and assist them. However, when we give students assignments to complete and then leave the classroom, students are only engaged in learning about half of the time. Teachers must be present and available to assist students in their learning.

Thus, having low expectations of students reflects a Certificate Philosophy because students only learn enough to pass the examinations. Teachers are contributing to a Certificate Philosophy when they allow students to pass exams by doing the barest minimum work, when they do not give students reading assignments, when they do not give students homework, and when they allow students to submit sloppy work and submit it late.

I want to take a brief tangent on reading assignments. For a number of years, I have been curious about whether Nigerian students learn better through lecture or through reading. Nigeria is an oral culture and education was traditionally done through oral storytelling and proverbs. That, combined with the low reading culture, made me think that maybe Nigerian students might learn better if they received information through lecture instead of through reading. So I did a little study to compare the two strategies of learning: reading and lecture (Korb, in progress). To do this, I had a three-page article about psychology. I randomly divided my students into two groups: a lecture group and a reading group. The reading group read the three-page article, and the lecture group had the exact same three-page article, but it was read to them by a lecturer. Afterwards, we gave both groups of students the exact same examination over the article.

When we compared the scores between the two groups, we found that the students in the reading group had better performance on the examination, by a very large margin. The students in the reading group earned an average of a B on the examination, but students in the lecturer group earned an average of an F on the examination. So reading plays a profound role in helping students to learn. If you think about this, it makes sense. Reading allows students to learn at their own pace, whereas a teacher sets the pace in a lecture. If a learner did not understand something she read, she can go back and re-read that sentence. However, you cannot rewind what a teacher just said.

Lecture does have advantages, too, so I do not want to say that students should only be given reading assignments with no classes. For example, students cannot ask a book a question, but they can ask questions of their teachers. Also, teachers are in a better position to teach concepts in a way that their own students understand whereas books are written for a large and oftentimes diverse population. However, how much reading do we require of our students? This study was a lesson for me. Before I conducted the study, I rarely gave students reading assignments because they were just too difficult to find. However, when I realized the distinct advantage that reading can have for students, I immediately started assigning articles to my students. It does require more work to find reading assignments, but giving our students assignments and reading activities that help them learn communicates a Growth Philosophy. Maybe some of us are being called today to do more writing so our students can have more relevant reading assignments to help them learn.

To return to our main point, having high expectations of students reflects a Growing Philosophy because we encourage students to learn and grow as much as they possibly can. However, learning is hard work, and many youth shy away from hard work. Youth are like cars. A car cannot move forward unless there is petrol in the tank to keep the engine running. Teachers must provide the petrol that students need to keep their cars moving forward. Few youths will study hard unless they have some outside force helping them to work hard. Teachers must be the force that students need to propel them into becoming excellent learners by having high expectations for our students' learning. In the years to come, it will be the teachers who made students work hard who will be the ones thanked the most.

To summarize, the second way that teachers can help shift to a Growing Philosophy is by having high expectations for their students' learning. We must require students to work hard by reading, studying, and practicing their skills. However, simply having high expectations of students is not enough - that would be like the Pharisees who tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders but who are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:4). Only having high expectations of students without giving students the support they need to fulfill those expectations would turn teachers into tyrants. Therefore, having high expectations must be partnered with providing support to help students meet those expectations. Teachers provide support by being available to answer students' questions, demonstrating the skills that students need to acquire, and providing students direction on where they can acquire the materials they need to learn.

Third, teachers must take every class period seriously because it is during classes that students grow. Oftentimes, when the academic session first starts, we take a lazy approach to class. Classes start slowly, and oftentimes not much teaching or learning happens in the first few weeks of class. However, as the examination period approaches, teaching becomes more and more intense. In fact, in the university, some classes don't even start until the week or two before examinations. Think about what this communicates to students: classes are not important, but passing examinations is central to education. The emphasis is not on learning and growing, which happens during class, but on passing examinations in order to get the certificate.

Furthermore, only teaching right before an examination is a very poor learning strategy. Learning takes time and hard work. When we reduce an entire academic term into just a week or two before examinations, we do not give students the time they need to learn the course content properly. Therefore, teaching only immediately before an examination forces students into a cramming mentality, not a growing mentality.

If we are going to adopt the Growing Philosophy, we must take every single class period seriously. In fact, we should take classes more seriously than examinations because it is in the classes that learning takes place. Students do not improve their skills, knowledge or abilities by writing examinations. They improve their skills, knowledge and abilities through the instruction that occurs in class. Therefore, one important way that teachers can help defeat the Certificate Philosophy is to take every single class seriously, including the very first class of the term. We must give students the time they need to learn properly by teaching steadily and continuously throughout the academic term. By so doing, we are communicating to students that learning is more important than a certificate. And, incidentally, academic performance will also improve because students will be learning better.

Fourth, teachers must give students feedback about the rightness or wrongness of their answers on examinations and assignments. In the university, students never see their examinations after they submit them. The only feedback students receive is the score they earned on the exam. They never know which answers were correct or incorrect; they only know that they earned a 52 on the examination. I imagine something similar happens in the primary and secondary schools. This also reflects a deeply rooted Certificate Philosophy. We are communicating to students that the most important part of an examination is not what they know or do not know, but the score they earned.

If we are going to replace Certificate Philosophy with Growing Philosophy, we must give students feedback on their performance on examinations and on assignments. Students should be more interested in what they can learn from their examinations than the score itself. Students should learn what they got correct on the examination (and thus know), and what they got incorrect on the examination (and thus need more time to study so they can learn it better). However, students cannot be interested in learning from their examinations if we do not give them this feedback. Teachers are contributing to a Certificate Philosophy when they only tell the students their scores on an examination, not giving them feedback about the right and wrong answers.

Policies sometimes prevent teachers from returning examinations to the students. However, this should not stop us from giving students feedback about their performance. A policy I have adopted is that after I mark a set of examinations, I will write up “Ideal Answers” which give the right answers to every test item. Then, I will not allow students to see their scores until they read the Ideal Answers. Then students can compare what they remember writing on the examination to the Ideal Answers and get some feedback about their answers that were accurate and those that were inaccurate.

Furthermore, we must also give students prompt feedback on their assignments. If students submit a project, we must return the project with feedback about what they did well and what they can improve. If it is a short test, then we need to give the students the answers to the test so they know not just their score, but the knowledge they have and what they need to study more. By doing this, we communicate to students that the knowledge and skills they are demonstrating on the examination is just as, if not more important than the score they earned.

Fifth, teachers should model joy in learning and growing. I do not have children myself, but our cook has a baby who is a year old who oftentimes comes with her to work. It is a genuine joy to watch him learn and grow. I sometimes laugh at myself because I become overjoyed when he learns a new skill which, really, is quite basic. One of the first things a baby learns to do is to search for an object when they do not see it. So I was bouncing with joy the first time that Yakaidi looked for a set of keys that he dropped. You can also imagine the joy when he said his first word, started standing up by himself, and so on.

We take joy in watching infants learn and grow. We should have the same joy when children and adolescents learn and grow. When a child brings home a piece of paper with the first sentence she writes correctly, we should be overjoyed. When an adolescent understands the Pythagorean Theorem, we should be joyful. When our students have the light of fresh understanding in their eyes, we should celebrate. When our students leave the classroom discussing what we covered in class that day, we should celebrate. There is no greater joy than when students tell us how they applied something they learned in our class to their lives.

However, most of the times, we only commend our students when they do well on an examination. Yes, we should be happy for students then, too. But we should be more excited when students gain new knowledge and skills than when they perform well on an examination. By taking joy in learning, not just in performing well on examinations, we are communicating a Growing Philosophy to our students.

Finally, teachers must make an effort to link every lesson to students' lives and experiences. One of the principles that differentiates Growing Philosophy from Certificate Philosophy is that what is learned in the classroom has a direct impact on students' lives and experiences. In Certificate Philosophy, what is learned in the classroom does not matter. You cram the material for the exam, and then it is forgotten because it has no further relevance or application to life. However, the Growing Philosophy rests on the belief that what is learned in class is directly relevant to life outside of the school compound. Students' lives should be changed and improved when they understand and apply what they learn in school. However, it is the teacher's responsibility to make lessons meaningful to students' lives and experiences.

Students cannot be expected to make the link between what is taught in the classroom and their daily lives. The very act of teaching implies that instructors are teaching students something they have never known before. If students are being introduced to a new idea for the first time, it will take all of their mental energies to learn the material. Only the very brightest students will be able to see how this new knowledge applies to their lives. Teachers are experts in the knowledge that they are teaching, so it is teachers who are saddled with the responsibility of not only communicating the new knowledge to students in a way that they understand, but also communicating how the new knowledge impacts students' lives outside of the classroom.

This is the point where I think Christian Religious Educators are in a position have the most powerful impact on replacing Certificate Philosophy with Growing Philosophy in Nigerian society. Every course taught in our schools has some application to students' lives, which is why the course is included in the curriculum in the first place. However, for some classes, the relevance to students' lives is less obvious. For example, the field of chemistry has important lessons about the composition of matter and how we can use the substances in our environment to improve our lives, such as making medicines and plastics. However, a student will rarely learn about balancing equations in chemistry class and then go home to her parents and say, "Look at that! That demonstrates balancing equations, which is what my chemistry teacher taught me in school today."

However, Christian Religious Education has a clear and direct link to students' daily lives. Every day, a student should be able to go home and explain to his parents how his CRE lesson applies to his life. For example, I randomly flipped through the CRE curriculum for secondary schools and came across the lesson *Human Response to God's Love*. That lesson has an obvious impact on students' lives because students need to know how they should respond to God's love on a daily basis. The lesson on *Communal Living in the Early Church* has lessons for us about hospitality and interacting with each other. *The Mission of the Church and Its Growth* should teach us about our own mission in this world. My point is that every lesson in CRE has a direct impact on how our students should be living. Therefore, CRE is the best course where the Growing Philosophy can take root and be fruitful. CRE teachers can be the champions of the Growing Philosophy and, as a result, change the church, society, government and each student's life.

Therefore, CRE teachers should make the link between the class material and students' lives clear in every single lesson. This communicates a Growing Philosophy because students will understand that as they are learning in the school, they are growing as human beings. By understanding how course material improves their lives, students will see the benefit of learning and will avoid just cramming according to a Certificate Philosophy.

When CRE teachers do this, a number of things will start happening. First, students will become more interested in the lessons, because we are always interested in things that are related to us. An increase in student interest will lead to an improvement in students' academic performance. Second, students will start adopting a Growing Philosophy in CRE, because they will understand that the knowledge in CRE helps them grow as individuals. Once they adopt a Growing Philosophy in CRE, then they will start to transfer that Growing Philosophy to their other classes.

When I was in JS2, I had a mate who always vexed my mathematics teacher. After every single lesson, this student would ask, "How will we ever use this in the real world?" Despite my teacher's annoyance, the student was actually asking a very relevant and useful question. We should want all of our students to ask this question of every lesson because this reflects a Growing Philosophy. Once we teach students to ask this question in their CRE classes, they will start asking the question in their other classes. Students will ask their social studies teacher, "How will we ever use this in the real world? How does this lesson affect my life?" Then the social studies teacher will have to start making his lessons relevant to students' lives and thus reflect the Growing Philosophy. Then the students will start asking the same questions of their science teachers, mathematics teachers, business studies teachers, and English teachers. Eventually, because of the powerful influence of the CRE teachers, all teachers will have to start demonstrating the relevance of the lessons to students' lives and experiences.

Third, when CRE teachers make the link between each lesson and students' lives and experiences, CRE teachers will impact society. We know the degree of youth restiveness that exists in our society today. Many young people are being affected by substance abuse, social delinquency, a lazy attitude toward school, disrespect, and lack of responsibility, amongst other vices. Christianity has the answer to every question that young people are asking today as well as the solution to all of the social vices that plague our youth. CRE teachers can powerfully transform the church, government, and society when students understand how the principles of CRE are relevant to the problems and issues that students face on a daily basis.

Conclusion

There is a phrase that educators sometimes use, the *hidden curriculum*. Being hidden means something that is out of sight, or not clearly noticeable. In schools, we are teaching our students much more than what shows up in students' notes or in their textbooks. The hidden curriculum includes the things we teach students, not through our lesson notes or discussions, but through our attitudes and actions. As teachers, our attitudes and our actions oftentimes speak louder than the words we say in the classroom. Our students are learning even from the actions that we do not think the students are aware of. For example, when we do not take every class period seriously, we are teaching our students a Certificate Philosophy. When we have low expectations of our students, we are teaching our students that they can be lazy. When we do not communicate how our lessons relate to students' lives, we are teaching our students that what is learned in school is only relevant for an examination. When the hidden

curriculum in our classroom encourages a Certificate Philosophy, we are robbing our students of the amazing opportunity to learn and grow as one created in God's image.

There is a poem by Shel Silverstein (1974) that illustrates what I am trying to communicate. But I have changed the poem slightly to reflect Nigerian currency instead of American currency.

My dad gave me one thousand naira bill
 'Cause I'm his smartest son,
And I swapped it for two sharp two hundred naira bills
 'Cause two is more than one!

And then I took the two two hundred nairas
 And traded them to Lou
For three fifties -- I guess he don't know
 That three is more than two!

Just then, along came old blind Bates
 And just 'cause he can't see
He gave me four twenties for my three fifties,
 And four is more than three!

And I took the fifties to Hiram Coombs
 Down at the seed-feed store,
And the fool gave me five kobos for them,
 And five is more than four!

And then I went and showed my dad,
 And he got red in the cheeks
And closed his eyes and shook his head--
 Too proud of me to speak!

This poem sums up the Certificate Philosophy to me. We have the amazing opportunity to learn and grow in education. However, we are trading the immeasurable riches of learning and becoming smarter, more knowledgeable, and more skillful human beings for a piece of paper that is worth no more than two hundred naira. Giving our pearls to pigs, indeed!

CRE teachers are the heart of society. Both words that describe your profession are have deep value. First of all, you are teachers. Just like Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus, God has given you his Spirit for the rare and wonderful opportunity to teach others. Teachers are the engineers of the most precious and valuable natural resource in Nigeria: our youth. Who is in a better position to build capacity than the engineers of our youth?

Second, you are Christian Religious Educators. The answers to all of the problems in church leadership, politics, and society are found in the understanding and application of Christian principles. The future of Nigerian society is in the hands of the CRE teachers. There is no other profession more important to capacity building than CRE teachers.

I want to close with a final Bible verse: "Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). Let us test every thought, every attitude, and every

action in the classroom. If it conforms to a Certificate Philosophy, we must avoid it as evil because it is robbing our students of something that is so much richer and fuller than a certificate. Let us adopt attitudes and actions that reflect a Growing Philosophy. When our teachers and students approach education with a Growing Philosophy, the nation of Nigeria will be transformed into a beautiful garden that is admired by everyone who enters its gates.

References

- Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Römer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance, *Psychological Review*, 100, 363-406.
- Frick, T. W. (1990). Analysis of patterns in time: A method of recording and quantifying temporal relations in education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 27, 180-204.
- Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company.
- Korb, K. A. (in progress). The Effect of Instructional Medium on Student Performance: A Comparison of Text and Oral Instruction in Nigeria. Paper being prepared for the 28th International Congress of Applied Psychology, Paris, France, 14 July 2014.
- Silverstein, S. (1974). *Where the sidewalk ends: The poems and drawings of Shel Silverstein*. New York: HarperCollins Books.