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BALANCED PERSPECTIVES IN EDUCATION

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BYPASSING THE CARDBOARD BARRIERS

When one boy's teacher told him he was "addled," he took his pestering "why" questions home to his mother and developed his own basement laboratory. The result? 1,093 patented inventions, including the light bulb, the phonograph, and the microphone.

Thomas Edison never seemed to have trouble thinking "outside the box"—much to the annoyance of his teacher and to the credit of his mother's patience. Today, everyone acknowledges that his inquisitive, creative, and persistent thinking revolutionized our world.

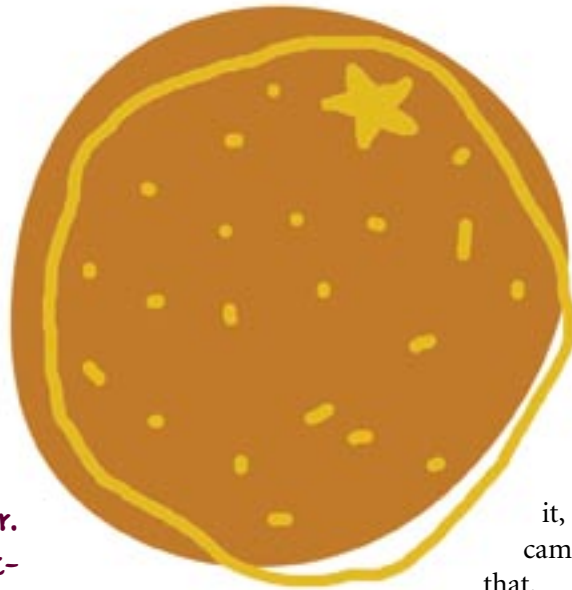
We teachers transfer our thinking patterns and living patterns to our students—whether we realize it or not. If we are content with the status quo and lack of creativity, we subtly commend the same in our students. However, our

flexibility and creativity can encourage students to expand their horizons.

Of course, while working to bypass cardboard barriers, students need to be reminded that not all "boxes" are bad. For example, in the classroom, some "boxes" are necessary to keep things running smoothly: schedules, dress codes, standard procedures, and good manners. But while lists, systems, and procedures can be helpful, beware lest they stifle students' abilities to discern and make decisions on their own.

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How They Learn: Words, Pictures, and Actions



I am not a teacher. I'm an artist, a "picture person." But when our third child, Christopher, finished kindergarten without knowing the alphabet, numbers, or colors, I was determined to help my son learn. During the summer, I made the letters of the alphabet from chenille wire and tried to teach him that way. It was like trying to communicate with someone who did not speak my language. But the shaping of the wires into letters did seem to help him learn.

I will never forget the day when I was beginning to get discouraged about making Christopher understand the names of the colors. We were sitting at lunch, and I picked up an orange and said to him, "Do you know what this is?"

He replied, "An orange."

I said, "Okay, now what color is it?"

I could actually see the light go on in his little head. He said, "Orange!" Yes, he got

it, and the other colors came more easily after that.

Later, I started using a reading program to help him learn some of the letter sounds. I remember that he had a hard time understanding how to pronounce the short *i*. A hand scratching an arm was pictured with the short *i* sound as in *itch*. He got that—a difficult concept made easier by a picture. The Lord was helping me to see that the media most familiar to me—pictures and three-dimensional objects—made concepts more clear to Christopher.

Since I work part-time, I was able to help Chris in the evenings to make up for what he had not grasped in the classroom. The Lord graciously provided encouragement and help to me from knowledgeable people at BJU Press. I used the home school editions of the BJ textbooks, kept a close watch on Chris's assignments and tests, and communicated regularly with the classroom teachers.

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One night Chris and I settled in to study for his Bible class. I wasn't looking forward to the topic—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the wives, and the children. I personally had a difficult time studying the Old Testament because I can't remember names. But there, in the Bible Truths worktext, was a family tree complete with small pictures of Bible-time men and women. I was reading aloud with him the names by the pictures—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—and counting the sons—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 sons. The twelve tribes of Israel! Seeing the names paired with the pictures and grouped as a family tree, Chris could make the connection (and both of us could remember the names). That was when I realized that art was a more effective teaching tool than I had thought.

In the third grade Chris had been tested for learning disabilities, but none were revealed. The tests did show, however, that he could not process information given in a classroom setting where lecturing is the main method of presentation. I began to check into the ways that people learn.

Auditory learners learn best by hearing. I call them "word people." Then there are visual learners, who learn by seeing and can actually visualize and remember things as pictures in their heads. They are what I had been referring to all these years as "picture people."

Kinesthetic learners, the most difficult to teach in the traditional style, may be called hands-on or action people. Our son does learn best by actually doing things. His knowledge of cars comes, I'm sure, from the time he has physically worked on cars with his dad, who is an automobile mechanic. From the age of ten, Chris has been able to do a great brake job!

After recognizing Chris's specific approach to learning, I developed a list of techniques to use in helping my kinesthetic/visual-learner son. Perhaps they may help teachers with such students too:

Label pictures. The visual learner integrates the words with the picture, and he produces one unit in his brain. He will remember by actually seeing that grouping in his head. When I produced a diagram of a knight and his armor for *Reading for Christian Schools 6*, I used what I had learned from helping our son. The diagram introduces unfamiliar terms so that the student will be able to read the accompanying story with understanding.

When making study guides, **type important facts and names in bold.**

Encourage highlighting while studying.

In grade 6, Chris received the B scholarship award. He began seventh grade with a good attitude about his studies. He receives help from teachers who understand how he learns, and I continue to work with him at home. His organizational skills have improved, he knows how long he must study, and he plans ahead for that time. Past successes have motivated

Make graphs.

Arrange events on a timeline so that the student can get the big picture.

Have middle school and high school students take notes while listening, in the books if possible. The act of writing the words and looking at them helps children to recall the information.

Group things together to study in little bites. For example, as Chris studied for a history test, the whole chapter of information overwhelmed him. I helped him to break down the chapter on the Renaissance into four groups: Writers, Arts and Music, the Church, Education. We used one piece of paper for each group. Drawing pictures where possible and highlighting important words allowed him to "see" the information in a logical order.

Use pictures that compare. A visual comparison will make a fact memorable. (For example, show the size comparison of two rockets with pictures.)

Chris to keep striving. Those successes have also been a real encouragement to his teachers, which include my husband and me!

*Kathy Pflug is an illustrator at BJU Press. She illustrated the Press novels *Pulling Together*, *Iceland Adventure*, and *Rambunctious Rattler*, and her work appears in hundreds of student texts.*

The Test of a Good Test

(Tips for creating Good Tests)



Before you type up that test for next week, try taking this quiz:

1. What should influence the way I construct the test?

- a. Time limits
- b. Difficulty of material
- c. Types of questions
- d. Number of questions
- e. Reading level of students
- f. All of the above

2. What is the purpose of the test?

- a. Review
- b. Mastery
- c. Grading
- d. Inform future instruction
- e. Test the knowledge of the material that has been taught
- f. All of the above

3. What are some good rules for making any test?

- a. Keep questions short and to the point.
- b. Be sure that the directions are clear, complete, and concise.
- c. Avoid using words like always and never.

- d. Go over directions with students before the test begins.
- e. Use a variety of questions on each test.
- f. All of the above

(Answers: 1—All of the above; 2—All of the above; 3—All of the above)

Whether you have been teaching twenty years or twenty weeks, these tips can be useful:

In general

Write items that have only one correct answer.

Do not provide clues to the correct answer.

Keep the same kind of questions on the same page.

Place easier questions at the beginning of the test to ease anxiety.

Write tests soon after the material has been taught so that the information and the way you presented it are clearly in your mind.

There are always those students who need to be encouraged to think more creatively—the type whose pets keep showing up as main characters in every creative writing assignment, who demand overly detailed instructions, and who want the teacher to do all of the mental work for them.

Your educational materials should allow you the freedom to be creative in the classroom. Are your students always memorizing facts, or are they challenged to think on their own? Equipping them with critical thinking skills and a biblical framework will enable them to make wise decisions and successfully encounter life's perplexities.

Not every attempt at thinking “outside the box” will result in a patented invention, and not every box need be discarded. But if a lack of creativity or fear of change keeps us in old, familiar surroundings, we will never make the difference that we could. Burrowing out of the unnecessary boxes may be a bit of work, but aren't we glad Edison pursued the light?

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR TEACHING OUTSIDE THE BOX

STAND IN ANOTHER PERSON'S SHOES (your student, the neighbor down the street, the grocery store clerk) and look at your classroom from his angle.

READ AND RESEARCH WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE. Do not limit your scope to your own personal experience.

DREAM BIG AND PLAN THAT WAY. If and when practical considerations force you to scale down, shave off the flourishes without losing the essence of your idea.

NEVER BE AFRAID OF SUGGESTIONS FROM OTHERS, no matter who those others happen to be (they could be students!) or how they present their ideas.

HOLD BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS WITH OTHER CREATIVE TEACHERS. Everyone gets inspired.

Stephanie Ludlum, formerly a staff writer for BJU Press Marketing Communications, is now teaching English at BJU Academy.

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Schools and has served the Lord faithfully as a youth pastor, music director, assistant pastor, family ministries director, Christian school vice president, and now as the senior pastor of Grace Gospel Church. He has ministered in Bible and missions conferences in the Philippines, Mexico, South Africa, Suriname, New Guinea, and Hong Kong and continues to conduct Family Life Enrichment Seminars and speak at camps and retreats.

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In elementary grades

Give students guidelines for writing their answers to short-answer questions.

Give a sample item to avoid confusion.

In upper-level grades

Be sure to allow adequate space for working math problems if the work is to be shown.

Be careful that questions do not show bias. For example, if a question is based on having prior knowledge of a sporting event, it could be biased against those who do not follow sports.

Test for more than factual knowledge.

Test for comprehension and application, and when appropriate test for inference and evaluation.

Before you hear your students asking each other about how they did on the test, you might want to ask yourself the same thing.



Choices,
Choices,
Choices

True and False

- Questions should be written so that the answer is not blatantly true or blatantly false.
- There should be only one concept per statement.
- Do not take a true statement and add “not” to make it a false statement.
- Avoid long, complex, and involved statements.

Multiple Choice

- Statements should assess ability to reason, discriminate, interpret, analyze, infer, and solve problems.
- The statements should be simple, not tricky and ambiguous.
- Each test item should be independent so that an answer to one question is not given in another question.

Matching

- The matching section must have two parallel lists of words or phrases (premises and responses) that require the student to find the correct match.
- There may be more responses than premises.
- Each section should be placed on the same page. For example, putting part of the matching section on page 2 and the rest on page 3 can confuse the students.

Short Answer

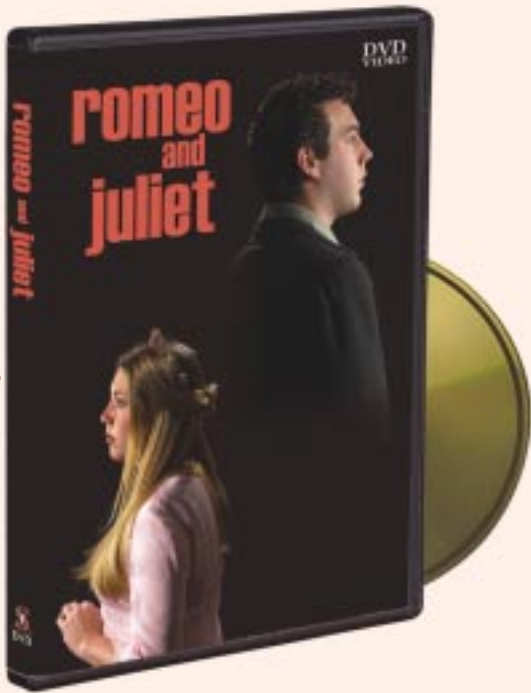
- Questions must require the students to supply the answer and not just recognize it.
- Short answers are best for assessing factual knowledge and comprehension.
- The blanks should all be the same length so as not to give a clue to the answer.
- Make allowances for unexpected, but reasonable answers.

Essay

- Essays are most useful in assessing higher-level thinking skills.
- Ask students to recall, add, apply, explain, or analyze information about a stated idea.
- Be sure that essay test questions are explicit, concise, and clear.
- Make sure that the students have a clear understanding of the ground rules and the criteria that will be used for grading.
- Plan and organize each essay question and decide what points you are looking for in the question.
- Prepare the evaluation-scoring key in advance. Some of the elements might be organization, communication, clarity, word choice, and mechanics.
- Set guidelines, such as how many words, how much space may be used, and what the time limit is.

Joan Hill is a former elementary teacher and principal and currently teaches education courses and observes student teachers for BJU.

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Level 3, *A Father's Promise*—teaching guide and novel (124479, \$14.49); teaching guide (124461, \$8.49); novel (031229, \$6.49)

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“One never can see, or not till long afterwards, why any one was selected for any job. And when one does, it is usually some reason that leaves no room for vanity.”

-C. S. Lewis