

# Teaching Styles For Postmodernity

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If you would like to wax eloquent at your next social gathering, use the phrase "postmodernity" Every-one from intellectuals to marketers has an opinion about what it means and what it will do to western civilization. Not that such dialogue should be avoided-but most of the talk is "modern"-modern analysis, modern diagnosis, modern assaults...

It seems as though the shots being fired at postmodernity are like those of a law enforcement officer walking a simulation firing range. While the officer's skills are honed at recognizing civilians and criminals, less than 15 percent of law enforcement officers ever encounter gun fire while on duty. In a similar way- I wonder whether the energy spent sharpening skills for shooting postmodern thought may be better invested in developing skills for teaching the postmodernist who come our way The focus of this little paper will be to suggest ten key strategies for teaching postmodernist. The debate of the evils of postmodernity will be left to those who never quite make it off the range and into the streets.

## 1. Story

Because the modernist has a liking for impersonal facts-statistics, objectivity rules of interpretation - the knee-jerk reaction in postmodernity is attentiveness to the personal. Effective educators will be those who tell stories that allow their learners to empathize, identify with the tension caused within the story. An effective postmodern story will not resolve with the educator-but will jump start interaction and personal declaration of the learners.

Jesus used stories, parables and life situations as regular staples in his teaching menu. This should let us in on an encouraging insight-the world Jesus taught was closer to that of the postmodern's approach to life than the modern's. We can therefore look to the Scriptures with greater correspondence for cultural methodology with postmodernist than with moderns.

## 2. Play

Postmodernity values experience. What is unsaid here is that postmodernist seek positive experiences. With this in mind a strategic teaching device is play - a way for the postmodern to have a positive experience with what is being taught.

Let's say, for example, that you want to teach a group of students about the responsibility of caring for the needy It would be a powerful learning experience to give student a street persons experience: give them 25 cents, 4 addresses around town that they must get to, 6 hours before they are allowed back at the church, and prepare them with a prior shopping trip to a used clothing store where you pick out the ragged clothes they must wear for the day Afterward, debrief: how they were treated at a mission? What were their fears? Did they feel a sense of freedom?

## 3. Create

Postmodernity is often characterized as open, pragmatic and pluralistic. With this bent in mind - it would seem to militate against the very ethos of the worldview to teach the one way to think about God, the Bible and creation. It would be more fruitful to challenge the postmodern to creatively express what they sense. Using modeling clay pipe stem cleaners, drawing, poetry, plays or dramatic sketches are all ways to help the "non-propositional" oriented articulate.

#### **4. Role Play**

Since the postmodern environment is tolerant and multifaceted, the postmodern's built-in skepticism surfaces when moderns suggest an interpreter's responsibility is to get to the author's intended meaning. The postmodern first of all is not convinced that the interpreter can divest himself of all his filters and put on the author's perspective unbiased. The postmodern furthermore is not convinced that there is ultimate value in losing his individualism, if not uniqueness in seeing what the text means to him. Therefore, role-play maybe a better way to lead a postmodern learner into trying on the author's or audience's clothes. To invite the learner to be in prison, uncomfortable and hungry and writing an epistle that celebrates the joy of living will let the role player journey through self-discovery to consider the profound work on God in the life of Paul.

#### **5. Questions**

Have you noticed the witnessing tools of the moderns? They contain laws, steps, diagrams and text. A stick point to relationships among many young adults is the hesitancy to make a commitment. There is a growing anxiety about anything lifelong. Consider someone who is equipped to follow up on the following questions versus pulling out a tract in the lunchroom:

- \* If God did exist and wanted a man to have ultimate meaning, how would he make himself known throughout humankind?
- \* Has anyone ever changed your life? Were -- involved in the changes? Have you ever had a painful experience that produced a good result in your life? If God is personal, what would he want from humans?
- \* If people are valuable, what would God design as an after-life experience?
- \* Would you choose a product based on its worst unit or its best? Do you think people reject Christianity based on Christ or lesser replicas?
- \* If the devil existed, how do you think he would affect the world and humankind? If God is all knowing, doesn't it make sense that you don't understand all he does? If you were God, what kind of prayers would you answer?

#### **6. Group**

There is an ironic tension to the postmodern condition. There is a radical individualism to someone who has an experience gate to truth, but radical individualism creates a thirst for community. Use groups to solve problems, discuss, etc. Small groups are not just pragmatic-they are a felt need of a postmodern.

#### **7. Sensations**

Experience is a valued gate to learning. The postmodern is not in debate over evidence. A postmodern is not asking, "What do I believe?" but "who do I trust?" This means that a postmodern young person may very well be in a youth group for 8-14 months before making any faith commitment. What is being evaluated is the truth index of the community - do they practice what they proclaim? Is Jesus a person to be loved or a proposition to be acknowledged? This is why an effective educator will - bring sensations to the learning experience. When speaking of a blind man being healed-having students remove blindfolds from one another can allow all to discover on an equal footing and internalize at the Holy Spirit's cadence.

#### **8. Serving**

In the roar of-immediate feedback from media, computer games, emotions... two cries go nearly unheard. One is, "Help me! I am busy about nothingness." The absence of meaning looms large on a student who plays video games, cooks fries, and despairs over an 'out', wardrobe that was 'in' only three weeks ago. The second cry is, "Help me! I am losing my ability to focus." Students who can get the immediate feedback of joy and/or significance by watching a hungry person eat a meal they

prepared, listening to a younger student read a word they've taught them, seeing the smile of an elderly person shopped for, can experience a pull mightier than the nothingness, stronger than the short term.

## **9. Mentoring**

Individualism, relationship and skepticism all war against one-on-group teaching. Many postmodernist are looking for a mentor. *Mentor* does not mean "wise one in whom body of truth is deposited." *Mentor* means person who will believe in me and has managed to get where I would someday like to be." The power of this relationship lies in the fact that the mentor is already down the road-in essence, has no reason to invest in the mentoree other than the mentoree. This is read as a commitment. Remember; commitment is hard for the postmodernist-so for someone who "doesn't need them" to commit to them is in itself a potent value latent message of hope. The shared experiences and availability for their teachable moments will posture the mentor to be about the business of life change rather than data transfer

## **10. Student Presentations**

The idea that someone who learns to "distribute" learns more than a person who simply learns to "consume" has been a principle of the ages and popularized by Stephen Covey as a habit of a highly effective person. I want to emphasize the reason for students teaching one another. It causes them to do three things. First, they must learn to articulate the material in their own words. Second, it causes them to think about what they want their peers to understand, believe or do with what they are presenting.

Third, it cat's them to care about the material. Postmodernity allows for the ultimate (a news update on an international conflict) to be put on the table as peer to merchandise (a commercial for lunchmeat). When a student presents significance, it is heightened especially in the presenter's mind, but also in a peer's mind. Since spiritual enfolding can take a year or more, the guest who sees his or her peers caring about spiritual things as though they mattered is a critical part to crossing the trust threshold. Students can present one-on-group through art forms, one-on-one... the possibilities are endless. The average student may not be able to carry a crowd for 30 minutes but the average postmodern crowd does not want to be carried that long by a presenter. Use student presentations throughout your meetings in 2 - 7 minute doses.

## **Conclusion**

Most of the ideas presented in this paper have been advocated for years. The reason for the advocacy is what has shifted. In earlier days youth workers were encouraged to vary teaching methods because students need stimulation. I am calling for many different teaching methods because students do not believe the same way. The era of "because I'm the dad" is over in parenting *and* in teaching. Students will believe what they experience. It is therefore the Christian educator's responsibility to develop learning strategies that call for his or her learners to encounter the truth of Jesus Christ.

I want finally to say that the only thing at risk with postmodernity is modernity. The gospel is not modern. The gospel is premodern and may very well be better suited to a shift away from modernity. Christian leadership in an emerging postmodern era will be biblical, holistic (local and global), pluralistic (allowing for process and the mixed multitude) as well as pragmatic. This paper is a challenge to stop the whining about postmodernism and start winning the postmodernist.