

## Erin Gordon: Philosophy of Teaching

*The earth is the LORD'S and all it contains,  
The world, and those who live in it.*  
Psalm 24:1 (NASB)

God created humans as learning beings. Our brain and senses have been intricately designed, priming us from birth for learning (e.g., Dehaene, 2020). We are open to knowledge of our Creator and the world and people which He created. The role of the teacher in Christian education, therefore, is to bring students into relationship with their Creator and His creation through collaborative inquiry. As the earth and “all it contains” (Ps. 24:1) belong to the Lord, the fields of inquiry are as limitless as our Creator.

Palmer (1998) defines teaching as creating “space in which the community of truth is practiced” (p. 95). Three key words in this definition are *space*, *community*, and *truth*. For Palmer, space includes the environment (physical and emotional) and the subject matter. Space is a place where opposites are held in tension. For example, Palmer states that “space should be hospitable and ‘charged’” (p. 74). All students should feel safe and welcomed within the learning environment. At the same time, cognitive dissonance can cause discomfort and risk—yet this is a normal part of the learning process. The teacher must work to hold these two tensions together as the absence of either can jeopardize learning.

In addition, space must be made for the learner and the subject matter. Students bring their own experiences, worldviews, beliefs, and background knowledge into the learning space. They are joined in this space by experts and scholars whose academic contributions span thousands of years. The learning space must hold all of these voices in tension so that the individual is not drowned out nor the streams of the discipline ignored.

Learning occurs within community. Community is defined as relationships. As learners, we form relationships with the material we are studying and with those that we are learning with. The Hebrew word for “know,” *yada'*, implies relationship. To know God is to be in relationship with Him. To know His creation is also to be in relationship. Constructivist theories of learning claim that knowledge is socially constructed through personal experience and reflection (Bada, 2015). Though constructivists believe in a personal truth rather than absolute truth, the emphasis on the personal and social processing of knowledge is helpful for understanding the role of community in learning. Learning occurs through active engagement in a “community of truth.”

Reformed theologians view all truth in the world as being God’s truth (Hughes, 2003). If all truth belongs to God, then truth is something that is knowable. Rather than an objectivist perspective of truth in which truth is interpreted through the experts, Palmer

(1998) suggests a subject-centered approach. Each learner in a community has a personal relationship with the subject and with one another. This is the definition of a community of truth. Far from being static, this community is dynamic.

Scripture tells us that “for now we see in a mirror dimly” (I Cor. 13:12). We continually seek to know the truth, though we cannot fully know in this life. Jesus commands us to “seek first” His kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33). The Greek word for seek implies inquiry, investigation, and searching. Truth is not a commodity but is something that is treasured and sought after. This implies continual relationship through active engagement on the part of the learner.

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## References

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