

logic? What happens in that circle? Remember how God's sovereignty is expounded in our schools. God is glorified in that. Use your education to support that. When you have a chance, listen to Rev. Brian Huizinga's sermon from January of 2015 entitled "Observing the Day of Rest." He clearly points out how close the maintenance of the schools and the gospel ministry really are. He also makes the statement, "The maintenance of our schools is one of the purposes of our six days of work."

You are called to be a member of God's church. At some point, you may be given the calling of mother,

father, minister of the gospel, Christian school-teacher, church office-bearer, school board member, or any kind of laborer. Your education prepares you to fill those roles. Be willing to serve. The people whom God used to give you your education were. You can say that you are thankful for your education, but when you use it for God's glory, then your educators really want to say, "Congratulations."

Ron Schipper is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church and has served on the Board of Adams Christian School in Wyoming, Michigan.

Rick Mingerink

DYING ON THE VINE

The desire for knowledge is dying. No, not a real death, but a metaphorical one. Knowledge, now so easily obtained, is disparaged. With high supply and low demand, her value has plummeted. In that sense, she is dying. She is dying, and we would do well to mourn her loss in our culture.

The opening letter of Uncle Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood is worth considering. Screwtape, an experienced devil, is giving his young apprentice, Wormwood, advice in deceiving a certain man. Screwtape writes:

It sounds as if you supposed that argument was the way to keep him out of the Enemy's [the enemy here is God—RM] clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier. At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning. But what with the weekly press and other such weapons we have largely altered that. Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily "true" or "false," but as "academic" or "practical," "outworn" or "contemporary," "conventional" or "ruthless." Jargon, not argument, is your best ally....
(The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis)

Jargon, not argument, is your best ally. That is

an interesting lesson for C.S. Lewis to begin with, is it not? Jargon is specialized language that is difficult to understand. It is a word with deep technical meaning but thrown around with relative ease.

Unlike jargon, an argument is setting forth true or false propositions or statements with the necessary evidence for proving its truth value. In its simplest form, argument is reasoning. It is the ability to reason that sets humans apart as the pinnacle of God's creation. Argumentation is a good thing.

Jargon, not argument, is your best ally, says Uncle Screwtape. Jargon can be as influential today as any well-formed argument. Instead of convincing a man through argumentation, it is so much easier to convince by applying a big word or by using a jargonized label. When someone labels a man, woman, or child with a specialized or technical word, it does not matter what argument you may have against it or evidence to the contrary, you begin with a significant disadvantage.

We live in an age when jargon, not argument, is valued. Arguments require knowledge. They require a depth of thinking. And this takes me to the main point of this article. Knowledge is losing value in our culture, both abroad and close to home.

There is an increasing disregard for knowledge in education. I know that seems absurd. One would think knowledge is the chief commodity of a school. But knowledge as the content of one's knowing is increasingly disparaged in the sphere of education. Instead, an emphasis is being placed on *learning*. Educational success isn't measured in the depth or breadth of knowledge acquired, but in the activity

of the learning process. Although the words *learn*, *learning* or *learner* are valid concepts in education, when used in the place of *knowledge*, a new meaning is established whether we know it or not.

To illustrate, pretend a certain man received an enrollment flyer in the mail from two local schools: West Elementary and East Elementary. Similar statements were printed on each flyer:

The goal of West Elementary School is building and developing the *knowledge* of students in an ever-changing world.

The goal of East Elementary School is building and developing the *learning* of students in an ever-changing world.

Would this man really come away with a different understanding of what each school is saying? Probably not. If he even noticed the difference (which he likely wouldn't), he would probably attribute it to simple nuance of language. It is not, however, a matter of nuance. Because we do not carefully recognize the difference, the replacement of *learning* for *knowledge* is happening quickly and quietly.

What did the man miss? Knowledge is the *content* of our thoughts; learning is the *process* by which that knowledge is acquired. One does not acquire learning. One only acquires knowledge. *Knowledge* is a noun; it identifies a thing. *Learn* is a verb; it identifies an action. Knowledge is the *substance* of our knowing; learning is the *activity* of acquiring this substance. They are very different concepts.

Why does this matter? Knowledge and learning are not interchangeable. The words are not synonyms by any stretch of their meaning. And the real issue is rooted in the fact that the use of *learning* over *knowledge* is deliberate. There may be some people or schools making the mistake out of ignorance, but there is theory behind it.

Since the end of the modern era, certain schools of thought emerged that developed a suspicious view of knowledge. It is too objective. It is too passive. It is too apolitical. Yet more concerning, it suggests an existence of truth.

Increasingly, knowledge is considered a mental construction. As a construct, it is formed in the mind through the learning activity. The focus of a teacher, then, is to build quality learning activities. By emphasizing learning over knowledge, theorists and all those who follow them are creating an environment which minimizes *content* and exalts the *activity*. If this were a play from Shakespeare, it would be a tragedy.

I will use a certain Miss Ignor Amos as an illustration. Miss Amos wants her children to be *learners*. She just came back from a conference over the weekend and is on fire for student learning. At this conference, a dynamic speaker lauded the importance of students analyzing and applying their learning to real-life situations. The passionate speaker extolled the usefulness of getting students to create their understanding.

In her classroom the next day, Miss Amos gives her students (whom she now calls *learners*) newspaper clippings about the disappearing rainforests. After a brief introduction to the topic, she has them write a paragraph on what it would be like to live in a threatened rainforest. The students write vociferously. They are engaged with the activity because they are all imagining themselves in a rainforest. *So far, so good!* she thinks. One of her better students writes the following:

Living in the rainforest would be awesome. I think living in the rainforest would be awesome because I like rain. Whenever the rain comes down in the forest, I would run through it and jump in the puddles. I would be sad if people cut down my rainforest. If the trees were cut down, I would only be left with the rain and not the forest. But I would still have puddles to jump in, so I think I wouldn't be too sad. I think living in the rainforest would be terrific.

Wow, she thinks, *I really like how my student connected the beginning of the paragraph with the end. My students really are good learners!*

But Miss Ignor Amos is terribly mistaken. She does not have learners; she only has students who can express their feelings on the subject but have little knowledge of it. Her students may have ordered words on paper, but the words are meaningless. The message they give is substantively bankrupt.

Miss Ignor Amos' student who wrote that paragraph applied nothing in the written piece because that poor student had nothing *to* apply. That student had no knowledge because Miss Amos did not teach the child any facts about the rainforest. Miss Amos did not teach any facts because the conference she attended said nothing positive about facts. It taught, rather, the quickest way to disengage learners from their understanding is to give them facts. They must imagine and create. The conference said learners would create their own knowledge by being active in the learning process.

Tragically, it injures our children and students to

subvert knowledge with poorly constructed activities. I'm convinced this problem is significant. We would do well to understand it fully. The emerging educational philosophy in the United States cries, *Skills! Activity!* What our children really need is knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, and then more knowledge. They need to know facts, not factoids, about God's vast universe. Of course, skills, too. Knowledge and skills are hard to separate anyway. But, a deep pool of knowledge will do more to shape a child properly than finely crafted skill sets.

The importance of acquiring knowledge, sometimes even in rote, is hard to mask. Consider the small squiggle of a line we call "a." It makes a specific sound. There is nothing in that squiggle that infers any meaning. A child must simply memorize the fact and, thus, obtain the knowledge that that squiggle of a line is the letter "a" which makes a specific set of sounds. No learning activity can be structured that causes a child to construct that knowledge in his or her head without a teacher explicitly teaching it as a fact and then expecting them to memorize it.

Memorization is a naughty word these days. Often, the word conjures up images of children sitting in perfect rows with a stern teacher (usually a prudish, unmarried female with a tight hair bun) walking up and down the rows ready to rap the knuckles of the first child to break order (usually a nice boy who just happens to be a little restless because he has ADHD). But the idea of memorization doesn't have to conjure such images. It would be a shame if we teachers think memorization or even building deep knowledge in our students must be cold, always rote, and boring. It can be carried in many exciting vehicles. It can be carried with riveting stories, interesting manipulatives, or fascinating experiments. It can be cultivated and refined with probing questions and proper discussion. Whatever method is appropriate and effective, memorization of facts and the acquisition of knowledge should not be relegated to the dust bin of history. It is in its very essence the education of our children.

When we memorize facts, our brains build a *schema*. This schema is a web of connected facts previously learned which forms a foundation for understanding. From that schematic, we will continue to assimilate more facts. It will begin to grow. Soon, schematics connect to other schematics, and we are not only able to assimilate more facts more readily, but we are able to better analyze, apply, demonstrate, and critique the vast sea of information around us. That cannot be done if we don't have knowledge.

Brain researchers and cognitive scientists know this. They have produced numerous studies showing the importance of knowing facts. Children need to know facts. They need knowledge.

Our own experience validates this, too. The more you know about a topic, the more easily you can assimilate new facts into your mental schema on that topic. A Civil War nut will read a biography on Stonewall Jackson and draw out more knowledge than the person who knows very little of the Civil War. The Civil War nut has a profound schematic of the Civil War in their brain, and all the little facts presented in the book can attach themselves to his or her prior knowledge. To someone who knows little about the Civil War, so much of the book's content will go right over their head. It will also be the reason why reading such a book can be exhausting to the person with little knowledge. The brain is in hyper-drive trying to make sense of what is being read. The expert's brain, not bogged down with every piece of information in the book, is able to mine the deeper items with relative ease. Knowledge builds, and the more you know the more you are *able* to know.

Consider who are the most susceptible to lies. The ones who have little knowledge, that is, the ignorant. We are all ignorant in some way or another, but it is harmful to remain in this state if we can leave it. The ignorant don't have the storehouse of knowledge to discern truth and falsehood properly. Instead, they are swayed by popular opinion. They are usually issue-oriented. They cling to talking points. They are easily convinced. They rely on their feelings. They are persuaded with jargon, not argument.

But more importantly, when you have a deep and broad schema, you can discern new information more effectively and appropriately. If you are presented with a piece of information that contradicts what you already know to be true, you will reject it. It will not become a "truth" in your schema, thus, your understanding of the topic will not be tainted with falsehoods. Jargon does not easily crack the

wall of knowledge.

Consider who are the most susceptible to lies. The ones who have little knowledge, that is, the ignorant. We are all ignorant in some way or another, but it is harmful to remain in this state if we can leave it. The ignorant don't have the storehouse of knowledge to discern truth and falsehood properly. Instead, they are swayed by popular opinion. They are usually issue-oriented. They cling to talking points. They are easily convinced. They rely on their feelings. They are persuaded with jargon, not argument.

The word of God is not silent. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men [shall be—RM] ...ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Learning is never the goal.

Learning is never primary; it is always in service to knowledge. Learning is simply the activity which gets us what we need. And knowledge is what we need. It is always *knowledge* of truth.

Let us be lovers of knowledge. If we are, then we will be lovers of learning. Don't let knowledge die on the vine. Pick it. Eat it. Pass it on to our children and students. When they have deep wells of knowledge to draw from, they will be better equipped to live in and throughout this world as Christians in all spheres of life. Let's extol knowledge and return her to her once exalted position.

Rick is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and is the principal of Adams Christian School in Wyoming, Michigan.