

The Issue in Teaching is Learning

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Could it be said that it is a waste of time to teach without knowing that learning has taken place? I may know something; but to learn has an integrative feel to it. The Greek concept of *praxis* which means the merging of contemplation and participation/action

Learning suggests a starting point. Learning begins when we are jarred from this starting point. Learning is the place from which we journey.

It is one thing to know the content for yourself. It is quite another thing to “turn it around” so to speak so that others might learn.

In the first centuries of the Christian church, it was the practice of students to seek out a fabled teacher, in order to hear and presumably interact with the knowledge accumulated by that teacher. When *students* felt they were ready, they would leave. It was customary for the community to have a farewell gathering at which time the departing student would read a speech in honor of the teacher. One of these speeches is recorded in Volume 6 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. The student's name is given as Gregory the Wonderworker (an epithet some of you who graduate will also richly deserve). The teacher is Origen, the famed principal of the school of Alexandria and one of the fathers of the early church. In spite of all the attempts at regulation, the battles over curriculum, and the many frustrations experienced by teachers and students, the reality is that when students remember their educational experiences, they remember teachers.

Gregory's final words to his teacher are recorded and express what students through the generations have felt for those teachers who have had that special “magic”, that unusual capacity to touch their lives. Gregory said that one of the reasons for seeking out Origen was the opportunity to have fellowship with such a man. Of his teaching he said, “[He probed] . . . what is most inward in us, he put us to the question, and made propositions to us, and listened to us in our replies; and whenever he . . . detected anything in us not wholly fruitless and profitless and waste, he set about clearing the soil, and turning it up and irrigating it . . . and brought his whole skill and care to bear on us . . .” His closing words were “. . . this admirable man, this friend and advocate of the virtues . . . [has made] us lovers of virtue . . . And . . . [has] created in us a love . . . for the beauty of righteousness . . . how shall I in words give any account of what he [has done] for us. . .?”

Perspective: An apparent trend in higher education is a shift from teaching to learning. While the requirement to state course and program outcomes gets silly at times, the question of what and how people are actually learning is important. However, a focus on learning is difficult to achieve in institutional structures that are based on completion of a sequence of courses in a limited period of time—and where the need to complete a number of credit hours can frustrate learning. So the issue for the next 20 years is not program improvement or fine-tuning of the modes of education (classroom based, online, formal, nonformal) but rather inquiry into the nature of learning and how it is best supported. *Explore and imagine* BHC as a catalyst for learning. What is happening? How do students describe *learning*? How do faculty and associates support *learning*?