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TEN COMMANDMENTS OF TEACHING:

A CULMINATING EDUCATION PROJECT

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Introduction

During a senior capstone course in instructional methods, teacher candidates participated in a discussion regarding what the essentials are for good teaching in light of biblical principles—a discussion integrating biblical principles and content knowledge acquired as they progressed through the College of Education. Genesis 1:26-28 indicates that mankind was created to rule over God’s earth in His name. Arguably, this mandate is the basis for all civilizations and cultures. From this perspective, one purpose of school could be to give students power tools for exercising dominion; school prepares students for work and their work declares the Glory of God. As a result of these instructional conversations, the teacher candidates embarked on the following task: create a checklist (i.e., Ten Commandments) of enduring educational principles supported by biblical principles that should be adhered to for successfully educating students who are prepared to go into every person’s world. Following are four lists created for the areas of Classroom Management, English Language Learning, Special Education, and Interactive Learning.

Ten Commandments for Classroom Management

by Kirah Heffner, Michelle Paulson, Aimee Scott, Emily Tennison

1. **Thou shalt communicate clearly and early on.**

Early communication with parents, students, and faculty members sets the tone for the entirety of the school year. A teacher's first words with parents can open or close the door of communication for the rest of the year, and viewing parents and faculty as teammates working together to improve the educational experience of the student is critical. Creating and maintaining a good rapport is an essential step to establishing this team mentality. As Matthew wrote, it is by "your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). Positive, early communication lays the foundation for positive interactions both inside and outside the classroom as the year progresses.

2. **Thou shalt implement the Law of Least Intervention to minimize distractions appropriately.**

The Law of Least Intervention promotes the idea that one should address classroom management problem as quickly and quietly as possible. This avoids embarrassment, power struggles, and classroom distractions. The Bible says in Colossians 3:21 (AMP), "Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or exasperate your children [with demands that are trivial or unreasonable or humiliating or abusive; nor by favoritism or indifference; treat them tenderly with lovingkindness], so they will not lose heart and become discouraged or unmotivated [with their spirits broken]." From this, one can see the benefit of being delicate with discipline so that students are built up rather than torn down.

3. **Thou shalt document as a key to successful classroom management.**

Within the classroom environment, documentation becomes an extremely important factor in determining classroom success. A biblical principle that supports the practice of documentation is 1 Corinthians 14:40, which says, "Let all things be done decently and in order." Documentation as it relates to classroom management is helpful and

important in assessing students' behavior. When documentation is done in an organized way, benefits arise, such as determining the trigger of a behavior and setting up an appropriate consequence for the behavior. Documentation is also helpful in maintaining positive communication with parents and administrators. Accurately documenting their students' behaviors can help teachers achieve successful classroom management.

4. Thou shalt implement a discipline plan.

A classroom discipline plan is imperative to classroom management for several reasons. Proverbs 29:18 states that “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” Just like this verse, a classroom cannot be managed without a plan. The students in one's class need to have structure and rules in order to succeed; the consequences of a lawless classroom is equivalent to chaos. Conversely, students who follow the teacher's discipline plan enjoy a safe classroom environment, which supports a caring community of learners.

5. Thou shalt establish love as the foundation of discipline.

The Lord cares about the character of His children. For this reason, Hebrews 12:6 says, “It's the child He loves that He disciplines: the child He embraces, He also corrects.” Teachers should use discipline as a means of molding and correcting their students' behavior; however, without love as the motivator, this correction can become harsh and empty reprimands. Teachers must be intentional to act out of the love defined in 1 Corinthians 13: Love that is patient, kind, humble, honoring, and not easily angered. This atmosphere of love and respect can naturally eliminate many classroom management issues.

6. Thou shalt give students specific encouragement and make positive recognition the most active part of the discipline plan.

Students need to be given specific encouragement that will help to build their self-efficacy. Empty, non-specific praise—especially if repeatedly dispersed to everybody—does not help students to become better learners. Encouragement and positive recognition motivate students to give their best effort. Teachers should consistently look for ways to

build up their students, and as Hebrews 10:24 says, “Consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”

7. Thou shalt provide accommodations to avoid potential classroom distractions.

By observing and identifying triggers, teachers can help provide accommodations that stop those triggers from happening. This way, potential outbursts and meltdowns can be avoided. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus tells us, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” By taking the time and care to provide accommodations for students, teachers are acting as peacemakers. Accommodations prevent many problems from happening and create a more comfortable and supportive environment for students as well.

8. Thou shalt study the law in order to discipline with excellence.

It is God’s will that “every person be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1), thus honoring the earthly laws and their creators. By studying and obeying the legal aspects of classroom management, teachers not only show respect to the governing authorities but also equip themselves with the knowledge of how to implement appropriate discipline in their classrooms. A thorough understanding of the law also protects the teacher from naive legal blunders.

9. Thou shalt show mercy and uphold justice, implementing consequences as necessary.

Micah 6:8 says, “The Lord God has told us what is right and what he demands: ‘See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God.’” In the classroom, there are times when it is appropriate to show mercy, but it is also important to teach students that rules must be implemented and justice must be upheld. The Bible teaches that God is both merciful and just. Similarly, teachers should understand the balance between showing mercy and justice in the classroom.

10. Thou shalt train your students towards independence.

Teachers should train their students to be independent learners, not

just in the classroom, but also in their future. The Bible says in Proverbs 22 :6, “Train up a child in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not part from it.” This biblical principle is especially important because education benefits people for their entire lives. By training students to be successful, independent individuals, teachers are creating a better future for them.

The Ten Commandments for English Language Learning

by Averi Lange, Gabriel Stark, Mary Irwin, and Sarah Hunt

1. If thy students do not understand what is said, thou shalt not repeat the same thing in a louder voice.

ELL teachers ought to speak in a manner that is reasonable, supportive, and well-paced enough for ELL students, but if a teacher becomes frustrated, it could be tempting to raise his or her voice or to speak in an irritated tone. However, a teacher’s raised voice would likely do more damage than good, especially within the context of teaching English language learners. Students may feel intimidated, which may hurt self-esteem and may turn the student away from wanting to learn English. “The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools” (Ecclesiastes 9:17).

2. Thou shalt honor thy students’ cultural backgrounds and customs.

Paul stated that for the sake of connecting to people around him and to share the gospel with them, he did not bind himself to his own culture. To the Jews, he became a Jew, to those under the law, he became as one under the law, to those outside of the law, he became as one outside of the law (although not outside of the law of Christ), and to the weak, he became weak (1 Corinthians 9:20-23). ELL teachers must respect their students’ cultures and languages and not elevate the English language and American culture in comparison.

3. Thou shalt use actions and other visuals when communicating with ELL students.

The Bible states that we should show love through our actions, not just our words (1 John 3:18). So much more can be expressed through actions, pictures, and physical items than expressed only through words. It is said that “actions speak louder than words” and “a picture is worth a thousand words.” For ELL students, sometimes actions or other visuals are needed in order for them to understand not only English grammar and vocabulary but also that the teacher is patient and understanding of the difficulties ELL students face.

4. Thou shalt not forbid thy students from speaking in their mother tongue.

As John wrote about the Body of Christ, he spoke of its immense diversity. He described it as a great multitude that no one could number, being from every nation, from all tribes, peoples, and languages (Revelation 7:9). Christian ELL educators must recognize the beauty of varying languages. Though English is the language being taught, the teacher must respect the students’ native languages and not forbid ELL students from utilizing their first languages, which might even be used to help them learn English.

5. Thou shalt not embarrass ELL students in front of the class.

Rather than putting ELL students on the spot and expecting quick responses from them so the teacher can move on to other students, the ELL teacher should practice patience by giving students time to process answers in a constructive and supportive environment. James wrote that as we are to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger (James 1:19). This is important to remember so that ELL students feel safe and supported within the classroom.

6. Thou shalt not isolate thy ELL students from the rest of the class.

Although ELL students can have a hard time communicating in a classroom, this does not mean they should be separated from their classmates. They will learn better when they are surrounded by English speakers. Also, they are part of the classroom community and, like every other student, have something valuable to contribute. In 1 Corinthians

12:20, Paul writes about the body of Christ: “There are many parts, but one body.” Each member of the Body of Christ brings different strengths and weaknesses to the community, but they are still part of the larger community.

7. Thou shalt not use complicated language when communicating with ELL students.

When teaching English language learners, ELL teachers should not be verbose; oftentimes, more words can lead to more confusion. Ecclesiastes 6:11 points out, “The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?” If ELL teachers communicate in simpler terms and use words the students know, there will be far better understanding from the student.

8. Thou shalt teach meaningful and useful language.

ELL students need to be taught English for the contexts that will be useful to them. If that is a formal classroom setting, then academic language would be appropriate. If it is an adult night class for families new to the country, basic communication for situations—such as grocery shopping—would be useful. In 1 Corinthians 14:10, it says, “There are many languages in the world. All of them have meaning to the people who understand them.” ELL students must be able to use language that is meaningful to them so they can meet their potential and their needs.

9. Thou shalt assess ELL students fairly.

An assessment must measure only what it claims to measure in order to be valid. For example, a history test should assess a student’s knowledge of history, not the student’s ability in the English language. Luke 16:10 states, “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much.” Teachers must give valid and honest assessments to gain the trust of their students, colleagues, and administrators. For ELL students, many tests in various subject areas can turn into language tests simply because they need to be able to comprehend the language on the test before they can answer content questions. If this is the case, the test becomes invalid. 1 Corinthians 8:9 says, “Be careful that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.” Just as

Paul warns Christians not to cause new believers to stumble, teachers must not use language that causes their students to stumble.

10. Thou shalt be a model of proper language use to thy students.

At all times, teachers must model the appropriate and correct use of English because students learn from the teacher's language usage. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord . . . and so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." The believers in the church of Thessalonica patterned their lives after Jesus and Paul; then others patterned their lives after those in Thessalonica. ELL students usually pattern the way they speak after their teacher. As they grow, their friends, younger siblings, or even parents, will learn to speak from the students. Thus, it is important for teachers to model proper language use.

Ten Commandments for Special Education

1. Thou shalt not label the students by their disability.

The woman at the well was surprised that Jesus talked to her because Jews generally had nothing to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" (John 4:9 NLT). In Jesus' culture, Samaritans were not supposed to speak to Jews and vice versa. Yet, this passage shows that Jesus chose to speak to a Samaritan woman, despite her label. Teachers are to be like Jesus in this way and remember that each student is not a label but is, instead, a person with needs and the right to be respected.

2. Thou shalt set appropriate expectations for each student.

The Lord will not let His people be tempted past what they can bear, "...but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV). God doesn't set expectations that cannot be reached without His help. So teachers should ensure that they set expectations that students are capable of achieving, but teachers also must avoid setting expectations that don't challenge their students or help them to grow and learn.

3. Thou shalt make accommodations for students by changing methods of instruction.

This passage (Exodus 7:1-7 ESV) showing how God provided Aaron to speak for a stuttering Moses reveals a perfect example of what it means to accommodate for the needs of students in a classroom. God provided Moses with someone who would speak for him because Moses struggled to speak. Special education teachers should be aware of the needs of each student and make appropriate accommodations to help each pupil succeed.

4. Thou shalt show unconditional regard for each student despite challenges.

God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8 NLT). Jesus loves us despite our sins and imperfections, and thus teachers with special needs students need to show love and regard for each student by encouraging him or her in learning, no matter how difficult the challenges might be.

5. Thou shalt not provide false or overly generalized information for the sake of convenience.

“For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man” (2 Corinthians 8:21 ESV). It is imperative to abstain from personal opinions, preconceived judgments, and assessments without evidence. A teacher of integrity stays on the path of strict facts that will benefit the student. An educator needs to assess students’ progress honestly rather than to pass them along to the next level because it’s easier.

6. Thou shalt establish and maintain a positive relationship with parents to ensure the student’s needs are met.

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3 ESV). The needs of the students do not end when they walk out of the school building but instead are carried into their home lives, as well. With that knowledge in mind, special education teachers must remain humble, be patient,

and make every effort to be unified with the parents as they embark on the journey of educating the student, both in school and at home.

7. Thou shalt be a constant observer and note taker for the sake of the student.

Teachers should notice details about each student in order to minimize or ward off potential problems that might occur later. The Shepherd who went looking for his lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7) would not have noticed a sheep from his herd was missing if he had not been a keen observer, and if the Shepherd had not noticed the sheep was missing, the sheep might have become lost or injured. Teachers working with students who have special needs should caringly note changes they have noticed in order to help their students.

8. Thou shalt celebrate successes, no matter how small.

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV). Just as Christians are to give thanks in all circumstances, teachers celebrate and give thanks for small successes as well as big leaps in learning. Acknowledging academic progress and new skills encourages students to strive for additional goals.

9. Thou shalt lead students in activities to help them become functioning members of society.

The Bible clearly admonishes us to teach the young and to value learning. Proverbs 1:4-5 says, “They give wisdom to the child-like, and much learning and wisdom to those who are young. A wise man will hear and grow in learning. A man of understanding will become able.” And Jesus taught “Do for other people whatever you would like to have them do for you” (Matthew 7:12 NLV). In the same way, teachers must ensure that their students with special needs learn skills that will help them once they leave the classroom and enable them to become functioning members in the society in which they live.

10. Thou shalt be a positive line of communication between you and others to ensure that appropriate education is being provided. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 ESV)

Two are better than one.... Proverbs 27:17 (ESV) says, “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another,” and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV) says, “Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” Each of these verses demonstrates the essentialness of more than one person involved in life situations. It is important for school faculty to have good communication between one another regarding a student, in order to provide the best education for each student and to help each pupil achieve success.

Ten Commandments for Interactive Learning

by Kelle Rowe

1. Thou shalt create self-sufficient students by scaffolding their learning.

“Then I will not be ashamed when I look [with respect] to all Your commandments [as my guide]” (Psalm 119:6 AMP).

2. Thou shalt utilize strategies that accommodate each person because students have diverse needs.

“To the weak, I became [as the] weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means [in any and every way] save some [by leading them to faith in Jesus Christ]” (1 Corinthians 9:22 AMP).

3. Thou shalt encourage collaboration and group work in the classroom.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (AMP) says, “Two are better than one because they have a more satisfying return for their labor; for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and does not have another to lift him up.”

4. Thou shalt frontload instruction to impact the students’ comprehension of complex texts.

“The wise will hear and increase their learning, and the person of understanding will acquire wise counsel and the skill [to steer his course wisely and lead others to the truth], to understand a proverb and a

figure [of speech] or an enigma with its interpretation, and the words of the wise and their riddles [that require reflection]” (Proverbs 1:5-6 AMP).

5. Thou shalt use previous knowledge to help build meaning with newly acquired information.

“As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all kinds of literature and wisdom; Daniel also understood all kinds of visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17 AMP).

6. Thou shalt ask students questions to engage them in deeper, more critical thinking instead of asking leading questions that require less thought.

Matthew 7:7 (AMP) says, “Ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you.”

7. Thou shalt teach responsibility in order to develop independent readers, writers, and thinkers.

“Train up a child in the way he should go [teaching him to seek God’s wisdom and will for his abilities and talents], even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6 AMP).

8. Thou shalt utilize instructional practices that facilitate students’ engagement in self-questioning.

James 1:5 (AMP) advises, “If any of you lacks wisdom [to guide him through a decision or circumstance], he is to ask of [our benevolent] God, who gives to everyone generously and without rebuke or blame, and it will be given to him.”

9. Thou shalt teach students to read and question through different disciplinary lenses, including English, math, history, and science.

“Happy [blessed, considered fortunate, to be admired] is the man who finds [skillful and godly] wisdom, and the man who gains understanding and insight [learning from God’s word and life’s experiences], for wisdom’s profit is better than the profit of silver, and her gain is better than fine gold” (Proverbs 3:13 AMP).

10. Teachers shalt model metacognition, so that students will learn how to think about their own thinking.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (AMP) challenges readers to “Test and evaluate yourselves to see whether you are in the faith and living your lives as [committed] believers. Examine yourselves [not me]! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves [by an ongoing experience] that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test and are rejected as counterfeit?”

Dr. Charlene Martin earned her B.S. Ed. in Elementary and Special Education (1980) from the University of Nebraska – Omaha and M.A. in Christian School Curriculum at Oral Roberts University (2004). She earned her Ph.D. in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum (2012) from the University of Oklahoma. She has over 20 years of experience in public education, including work as a literacy consultant for a national education foundation. Dr. Martin has taught in the area of literacy education and professional education for 15 years at Oral Roberts University.

