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# Beyond the Classroom

*Enabling Students to Practice What They Learn*

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**M**y educational journey involved years of classroom learning. I accumulated extensive knowledge, especially in the area of Christian ministries. As I look back, there were few opportunities to practice what I was learning in the classroom. Even the assigned homework did not connect with the real world. I obtained information and could send it back on an exam, but it did not translate into serving God and others. I could exegete biblical texts, but there was a big gap between discerning the accurate meaning of the text and applying it in my life. Now as a professor, I aim to enable students to practice what they learn. I want to bring a closer connection between learning and practice.

My area of teaching is Christian ministries, falling into the realm of practical theology. You would think that praxis would come naturally in my area. But unless there is intentionality, the practice may be little more than an academic exercise, rather than a transformative learning experience.

Starting with the learning outcomes in the syllabus, I build in opportunities to practice the teaching. For my upper-class undergraduate course, Seminar in Ministry, one learning outcome is: "By the end of the course, the student will have exercised ministry skills in a class context." To facilitate this, we each take turns to pray at the beginning of class. We first ask for prayer concerns and bring those to God. We encourage each other inside and outside the classroom. Pastoral case studies are assigned to each student. When they present their findings, inevitably students bring up similarities with situations in their own church or ministry setting. Each student studies a major pastoral issue and presents it in a teaching form applicable to the class. Students not only learn ministry skills, but they practice them in class.

Transformative learning involves intentional awareness of the process. Learning with students is an excellent form of practicing what is taught in the classroom. After teaching the Seminar in Ministry course for some time, I felt something was missing. While we discussed many topics related to living as a servant-leader, we needed a service project that we could experience together. Consequently, I began to include service projects in the curriculum.

On a few occasions, we served marginalized people at a downtown Toronto location. We helped to prepare a meal, shared a devotional, and talked with people. I vividly remember slicing onions, eyes burning, and thinking, "What am I doing here? I'm a professor." I caught myself in that God-moment and realized, "I need to be here to learn with my students how to serve others." It was a transforming moment for me as I recognized that I must practice what I preach and teach. During these service opportunities, we are pulled out of our comfort zone and serve together as a team. We become aware of our gifts, our inadequacies, and the need for others in serving together. Following the service project, students write about their experience and include theological reflection.

Most rewarding after teaching over twenty years is to have former students tell me they continue to practice in their daily lives and ministry contexts what they learned by experience in class. They often mention our times of praying together and serving the marginalized as a team. This assures me that the teaching has extended beyond the classroom and into the lives of my students. **D**



**DANIEL L. WONG'S** current interests are ministries in a multicultural world and Asian North American preaching and ministries.