



Learning Lifeline

A LETTER ABOUT LEARNING FROM ESTHER WILKISON

When kids fall behind, it's tempting to speed up the pace of learning. However, accelerated learning doesn't work any better than accelerated baking. If you turn your oven up as high as it will go, cookies come out looking like charcoal. Rushing ahead might give an appearance of learning gains, but in the long term it leads to burnout and cripples motivation.

Yet, how do we bridge the gaps to prepare students for what's next? That question set me on a multi-decade quest to discover many methods that effectively move learners from where they are to where they need to be—without holding back students who are ready to move forward. The online courses I'm developing will hold more specifics, but I want to give you a few of the strategies that pack the greatest punch when it comes to transforming learners. For this week, here's the first key strategy.

Make Learning Relational

I have often heard the statement, "People don't care what you know until they know you care." Jesus' students often struggled to understand His teaching, but they had ample evidence that He cared for them. He took time to address their fears, answer their questions, and discuss their concerns.

When Jesus called His disciples, He called them by name. Often, when observing in classes, the only time I hear a teacher call a student's name is to reprimand misbehavior. We don't know how often Jesus called His students by their names, but this practice can help build relationships while also gaining a student's focus. According to research*, hearing our name breaks our attention from what it was focused on, even if we want to keep our current focus. Intentionally using an individual's name—when he or she is not in trouble—is a step in the direction of showing that you care.

Teaching cannot always be individualized, but making learning relational means noticing and meeting individuals' needs. Jesus knew which of His students had a mother-in-law who needed healing, which one was hiding in a tree, and which one was alone at lunch because of a lifetime buildup of shame. He let the Spirit direct Him to individual needs without feeling like He had to do for all what He did for one.

Jesus chose students who were not at all the academic cream of the crop. While His time with them was short, He never hurried. He took time to listen. His goal was never just information, but formation. When Jesus' students were fully trained (formed), they became like their Teacher (Luke 6:40). Did you have a leader in your past who took time to get to know you? How did that form you as a learner?

Taking time to build relationship bridges may sound like it will take time away from bridging learning gaps, but the safety and security of being loved actually affects the brain so it can stop responding in fear from pressure to better absorb what is taught. Designate a few minutes at the beginning or ending of each class or day to build personal relationships with those you influence. See how it influences student participation, motivation, and learning.



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Next time we will discuss another Key Strategy. Until then, may God give you creativity as you deepen your relational connections.

*Moray N . 1959. Attention in dichotic-listening— affective cues and the influence of instructions. *Q J Exp Psychol.* 11:56–60.