God's Eclectic Instructional Design

PATRICK WALSH

Department of Accounting

In my attempt to be a good teacher, I have tried to learn from the master teachers—God and Jesus Christ. I noticed they use different teaching styles, and at first, I could not clearly tell why one method was used over another. Through some study I have found a framework to help analyze the master teachers' selection, which has helped guide my teaching method selection. First let's discuss some terms.

Yanchar and Gabbitas shared their thoughts about the term reflective eclecticism in instructional design.

An orthodox approach is when a teacher uses the same teaching method no matter the situation. An example would be a teacher who lectures no matter the course objectives or content. Eclecticism is when a teacher uses a variety of teaching methods. However, using an eclectic approach can become a form of orthodox teaching, which leads us to reflective eclecticism. Reflective eclecticism uses different methods intentionally, gathers feedback to know if the method should be kept, changed or modified. This same concept, using different terms, is taught in the manual, Teaching, No Greater Call, "Point out that a variety of methods can enhance and enliven gospel teaching and learning. However, we should not use different methods solely for the sake of variety. We should select methods that (1) help those we teach gain a clear and memorable understanding of gospel doctrines and principles and (2) are appropriate for the content of the lesson and the age-group of those we teach."

The challenge for us is using reflective eclectism and determine what teaching method is optimal given the situation. Reigeluth and Carr-Chellman provide a framework to help teachers select a suitable method given their situation. Understanding the conditions (facts of the learning situation) and values (opinions of the teacher/ designer) can help a teacher select an appropriate method. This acknowledges the balance teachers weigh between science and art when choosing a teaching method. The table below summarizes their framework.(See Figure 1)

As we consider the framework and complete the "Methods" section, it is important to note that there will be multiple methods that could work in a given scenario. Weston and Cranton provide a good resource (table below) to help match teaching methods with the levels of cognitive domain. A teacher would list the appropriate methods in

CONDITIONS (FACTS/SCIENCE)	VALUES (OPINIONS/ART)
Content – What is to be learned?	**Learning Goals** – How does the teacher prioritize learning outcomes?
Learner – What is the nature and characteristics of the learner?	**Priorities** – How does the teacher balance the effectiveness, efficiency, and appeal of instruction?[4]
Learning Environment – What resources are available?	**Methods** – What opinion does the teacher have of appropriate methods?
Instructional Constraints – How much time and funds are available?	**Power** – Who is given power over the learning? (student or teacher)

Figure 1– Balance between science and art when choosing a teaching method

the framework and select the teaching method they felt was the most beneficial. (See Figure 2)

With the framework, suggested teaching methods, and reflective eclecticism in mind, we will analyze how God selected the teaching method for the plan of salvation. In Moses 1:39 and Abraham 3:24-25 we learn that God's purpose is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man and that this life is a time to prove if we will follow His commandments. Figure 3 shows the completed framework.

The content is related to multiple levels of higher order cognitive thinking, application being the most important. That impacts the possible methods available. Based on God's goals and priorities He selected experiential learning as the optimal method. Role playing or a laboratory would be more suitable given a shorter timeframe of instruction. God has our lifetime to give us experiences that can be for our good (D&C 122:7). You will notice that lecture is not really an option given His goals and priorities. A lecture, which is not suitable for higher order learning, on the natural man would not have sufficed. Elder Maxwell shared, "Thus, enduring is one of the cardinal attributes; it simply cannot be developed without the laboratory time in this second estate. Even the best lectures about the theory of enduring are not enough. All the other cardinal virtues— love, patience, humility, mercy, purity, submissiveness, justice — they all require endurance for their full

development." This laboratory of a lifetime can help us "experience this might change in our hearts." (Alma 5:14).

COGNITIVE DOMAIN LEVEL	WESTON AND CRANTON'S SUGGESTED METHODS
Knowledge	Lecture, programmed instruction, drill and practice
Comprehension	Lecture, modularized instruction, programmed instruction
Application	Discussion, simulations and games, CAI, modularized instruction, field experience, laboratory
Analysis	Discussion, independent/group projects, simulations, field experience, role-playing, laboratory
Synthesis	Independent/group projects, field experience, role-playing, laboratory
Evaluation	Independent/group projects, field experience, laboratory

Figure 2– Selected teaching method

Below is a discussion of different teaching styles used by the master teachers and their servants. The conditions and values framework will be used as a guide to understand why a particular instructional method was selected. To be brief, a completed framework for these scenarios is not included.

CONDITIONS (FACTS/SCIENCE)	VALUES (OPINIONS/ART)
Content – Become like God – a higher order skill	Learning Goals – Priority on immortality and eternal life
Learner – Wide variety of learners with different backgrounds all having access to the atonement of Jesus Christ	Priorities –This life experience is not efficient because it takes a long time, but it is effective and appealing (at least for 2/3 of God's children)
Learning Environment – Families, community, earth	Methods – Experiential learning, discussion, role play, laboratory
Instructional Constraints – Life time and unlimited funds (building a world is pretty costly)	Power –The pendulum is on the learner side given the goals and priorities.

Figure 3– Completed framework

General Conference – This has a significant instructional constraint. They have 15 apostles + other leaders to cover 10 hours with learners who are all over the world. Their content is revelation from the Lord (Amos 3:7) and their goal is to teach the doctrine. Some suitable methods are lecture, programmed instruction, or drill and practice.

Their selected method is lecture. For their priorities they sacrifice effectiveness because they don't know if the audience is listening or will change as a result, but it is efficient and appealing (who doesn't like watching conference in their living room?). They hope the listeners will change (Mosiah 5:2), but this is a 10-hour class in a lifetime of experiences to work towards Heavenly Father's ultimate goal.

Parables – Jesus used a lot of parables (Matthew 13:3, 11, 13) in his teachings. His learners were those who had ears to hear (Matthew 11:15) and they were mostly non-readers. He could not assign them a lecture to read in preparation for a discussion during His visit, which limits His ability to move up the cognitive scale. Like general conference, He is sharing the words of His father to dispense knowledge and comprehension. Lecture, modularized instruction, and drill and practice would be appropriate methods. He chose analogies, which is a form of modularized instruction where the module fits the needs of the students and if they complete one module, they can go onto another. A parable can contain multiple modules depending on the learner, but this is still a method that only transfers knowledge and is on the low end of the cognitive scale. Other benefits of the parables are their connection to prior knowledge, they are efficiently remembered, and they can be easily shared with others.

Healings – In Matthew 9:1-8, Jesus heals a paralytic. His learners in this story are scribes and non-believers. Jesus is still sharing knowledge and lecture, drill and practice, programmed instruction would be sufficient. The method he chose was a mini-programmed learning method using a demonstration. In programmed instruction steps are built starting at the learner's current level and moving up to more advanced topics. You can see the steps Jesus uses as you note the order of instruction. Jesus first forgives the paralytic man's sins, which cause the scribes to think "This man blasphemeth." Jesus next acknowledges their thoughts and asks if it is easier to forgive sins or heal a paralytic to which he then heals the man. He started at their level and then moved up to the next step. If His learners were believers, the order wouldn't have been as important and a lecture could have been used instead of programmed instruction.

His Disciples – Jesus used the teaching method of experiences at various times to teach his disciples: Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-32), Jesus waiting until the fourth watch to help his disciples in the storm (Mark 6:46-54), and Peter denying Christ three times (Mark 14:29-31 & 66-72). Here His learners are believers with a good foundation of knowledge and He wants them to start to apply His teachings. Relevant methods for application are discussion, field experience, and laboratory. His learning goals and priorities led Him to select field experience for the teaching method. The disciples had to learn to apply His teaching in preparation to lead His church after His departure.

Hopefully this framework can help you when selecting teaching methods in your courses. Some may ask, "How does this framework fit within the Learning Model?" One of the Learning Model's purposes is to develop lifelong learners who are guided by the Spirit. Becoming a lifelong learner is higher up the cognitive domain. A teacher who values that learning goal will incorporate it into their course objectives, which will lead to active teaching methods to help the students "apply unto it" (D&C 8:4). We can use a variety of methods in the prepare, teach one another, and ponder/prove areas as we reflectively evaluate our teaching methods. This exercise is not an easy one and would be suitable to discuss with colleagues and teaching groups as we all seek to bless the lives of our students. ❀

References

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