

"Scaffolding" the Principle

John Redmond
November 30, 2015



Instructional scaffolding” is an educational term that borrowed its imagery from bricklayers and construction workers. Scaffolding is a temporary structure for workers to stand and climb on so they can build, repair or restore a more permanent structure.

In educational terms, scaffolding is temporary support given to students to help them approach a complex subject by building on things they already know. A five-year-old student learns about animals starting with cats and dogs. They can then associate these understandings with lions and wolves.

Abstract concepts can be explained by similar substantial relationships. For instance: “The relationship between humans and God should be like the relationship between mind (heart) and body.”

All teachers use these tools both intentionally and subconsciously. Jesus used parables and Reverend Moon used many examples and analogies, often acting them out.

Where to place the scaffold

An important concept is that the “scaffold” be constructed in the “zone of proximal development.”

This means the teacher has to be familiar with the cultural, intellectual and emotional level of the student and use appropriate models to reach him or her. Instruction for elementary students that depends on them knowing advanced math will fail.

The Divine Principle text uses many examples and analogies appropriate to college-educated Korean Christian audiences and has been re-edited many times to strengthen the bridge to different cultures and audiences.



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The early American missionaries each wrote an interpretation of the Divine Principle to use in their work, and their early disciples often prefer those books to the current ones. They are known by their colors: the “Black DP,” “Miss Kim’s Red Book,” “The Green Book,” to name a few. *Essentials of the Unification Principle* is an excellent treatment that explains the Principle without scriptural references. It is a good resource for interreligious work or non-religious audiences.

Sang Ik “Papa San” Choi wrote *The Principles of Education* as a scaffolding text for the Divine Principle. This non-religious philosophical treatment of the Principle served as a bridge of understanding for American youth in the 1960s and 1970s who didn’t have a strong religious background or had an antipathy to organized religion. The Oakland Church in that period owed much of its success to that scaffolding effort.

Unification Thought, the CAUSA lectures and the IEF character education work in Russia and China all serve as scaffolding work for students to approach the larger topic of Divine Principle.

In the 1980s, the American Movement was placed under Korean leadership and Confucian-style memorization and “form” education was emphasized. In this type of education, the student is expected to conform to the expectations of the teacher and the text rather than discover and build on the underlying knowledge. I still remember the reaction of a good-natured young man at that time who had just been to another workshop. He said that if he had to listen one more time to a long lecture about why the fruit was symbolic he would implode. As we know, many of our young people have “voted with their feet” and been absent from any meaningful understanding of the Principle for many years.

Our movement has not been successful at witnessing for 30 years and it is time to reinstate American-style learning of the Principle, at least for Americans.

One problem is that the culture has changed since we were last successful at teaching the Principle in America. The current generation has little formal understanding of religion or philosophy and the culture that supported constructive spiritual behavior has been replaced by the YOLO (you only live once) culture for most young Americans. The concept of self-discipline or self-sacrifice is only tolerated if it leads immediately to a tangible benefit like more money or a better physique.

Additionally, the Internet is now the educational medium of choice and knowledge, information and analysis are all broken down into sound bites. “McWisdom” is the fast food equivalent of learning using YouTube and web sites. Long boring lectures and structured discussion are out as a popular learning tool and “just in time” learning is in. “Google it” has become a teaching methodology.

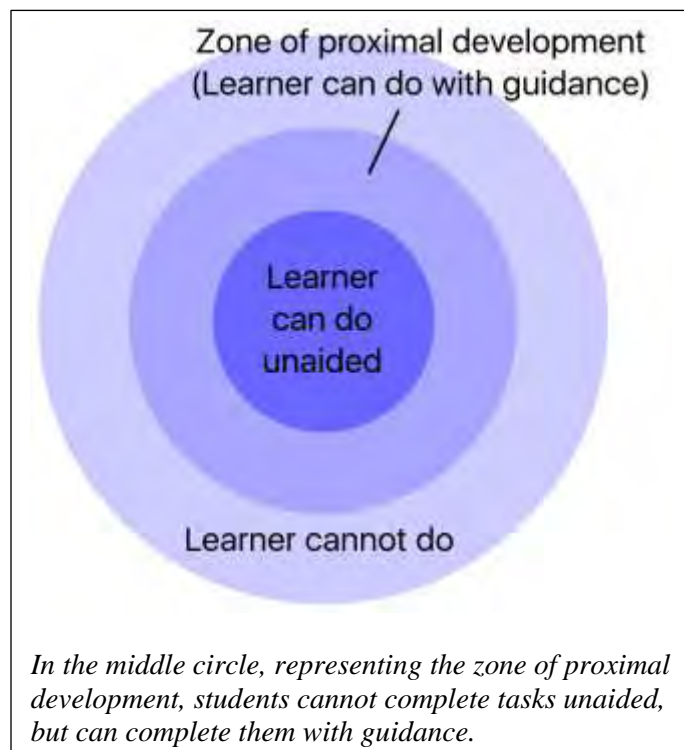
Other than college, the only types of learning that are well attended and that people are willing to pay for is experiential learning. Tony Robbins seminars, Landmark Education, concerts, large sporting events, and cruise ships all give the participant an organized learning experience they cannot get on the Internet or by themselves.

It is not enough to take our existing pedagogy and put it on the Internet. We tried that when VHS tapes were a new technology and we mailed thousands of videotapes of a lecturer and a blackboard around the country to ministers and priests. That alone may have labeled our movement as clueless and out of touch.

What is an appropriate educational strategy now?

If we look around American culture, many people are making decisions based on psychology and science. Religion seems to be a secondary influence. Additionally, there has been a rise in self-help systems that give people tools for a better life without requiring a specific religious belief. These are well-attended and people are willing to pay a significant amount of money for these insights. Examples are Tony Robbins seminars, Landmark Education and Stephen Covey’s 7 Habits work. There is no reason these learning tools can’t be incorporated to scaffold people toward understanding the profound insights of the Principle.

The Divine Principle is still a life-changing philosophical and religious framework for guiding one’s decisions. It has constructive life lessons on the intellectual, affective (emotional) and behavioral levels. There are educational strategies for each of these areas and the Divine Principle can be repackaged to fit in these modern learning containers.



Changing how we teach

The Divine Principle learning model traditionally used lectures for content delivery, living in centers to model healthy emotional connections to God and each other, and missionary work to experience the social and global applications of a life of faith.

The information transfer model more likely to prove effective today is to have content broken down to one-page concepts, with links to historical and foundational information. The learner can follow the links to find the scaffolding they need to build a comprehensive understanding. For affective learning, video vignettes (no more than two minutes) can model the emotional understanding that makes the Principle so compelling. God’s vulnerability to human free will, God’s suffering, the heart of creation, how Jesus is misunderstood — these topics can be conveyed through video

better than lectures.

The final step in learning is to experience the concepts of the Principle with other people and God. Online communities can support daily spiritual life. Indeed many Unificationists find more spiritual value in their email listservs or Facebook groups than they do in their local Sunday service.

Destination gatherings and service projects are where people can meet God together. In our movement,

the annual BCSF Sportsfests and Camp Shehaqua are events that young members make great effort to attend. The original Top Guns have an annual get together and UTS alumni often meet around the country. These meetings do not require central direction or funding, but are where people gather to develop their faith and strengthen relationships with friends.

All learning is ultimately individual. The best possible learning is done with an inspired and willing learner, infinite knowledge at your fingertips, and a coach who is sensitive to your needs and current knowledge. A well-developed Principle education system will have an appropriate expression for every culture, every age group, and every belief system. Like with Christianity today, there are as many explanations about the faith as there are Christians, but they are able to find common ground and common values amid a healthy creative effort.

This means that effective Principle education should have many expressions for every culture, age and economic group. This cannot be done by headquarters. It is best developed by a myriad of individuals who are inspired to bridge the gap between God and their fellow man.

I expect that this effort will have to be led by young Unificationists who are seeking a more modern expression of the parts of the Principle that speak to them. I'm aware of many efforts around the country to begin this process and think it is a necessary and healthy step in the development of a member-centered movement.

As blessed central families, we are called to make the foundation laid by True Parents our own, and we are responsible to God for the fruits we bear. If our movement is to be more than one generation we will need to master modern, dynamic communication systems to make our case. A healthy movement has active, dynamic activities in local areas with lots of experimentation and a strong linkage to national and global initiatives to identify what is most effective .

We don't have to wait for the future. It is right at our keyboards and on our smartphone cameras.

John Redmond is the proud father of four interesting children, and has high expectations for the American Unification movement.

Photo at top: *The 1984 restoration of the Statue of Liberty*