



4

Meet Student Learning Needs: Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word

Part 4 of a 4-Part Series

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Table of contents

Facilitator guides

Meet student learning needs	1
Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject	2
What makes a good facilitator good?	3
Frequently asked questions	4
My plan for facilitating Session # _____	5

Session guides and readings

Session 1: How can you meet your students' learning needs in order to help them connect God's world and Word?	6
Reading 1: DEAL with your students' learning needs	7
Session 2: How can you help your students better understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word?	8
Reading 2: Help students see the importance of connecting God's world and Word	9
Session 3: How can you help your students better understand that God's Word can be connected to the part of God's world they study in class?	10
Reading 3: Get students to understand that God's world and Word are connected	11
Session 4: How can you help your students understand the biblical principles that connect to what they study?	12
Reading 4: Help your students understand more biblical principles	13
Session 5: How can you help your students experience engaging instruction?	14
Reading 5: Get your students engaged	15
Session 6: How can you provide time during class for your students to reflect on how God's world and Word are connected??	16
Reading 6: Provide time in class for your students to reflect	17
Session 7: How can you demonstrate your commitment to meeting your students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word?	18
Reading 7: Demonstrate your commitment	19

What can you do to get started using this kit?

- Look at the session guides, noting the title and goal of each session.
- Read "Session 1: How can you meet your students' learning needs in order to help them connect God's world and Word?" (page 6) and "Reading 1: Use the IDEAL process to meet your students' learning needs" (page 7).
- Read through the facilitator guides, especially "Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject" (page 2) and "Frequently asked questions" (page 4).

Meet student learning needs

If you want to help your students connect God's world and Word, meet their learning needs. "Learning needs" are anything your students need in order for learning to happen. To better connect God's world and Word, your students might need to understand more biblical principles and to have time to reflect. Meeting your students' learning needs involves defining the needs, exploring the needs, taking action, and looking at the results.

As a result of completing these 7 sessions, you will...

1. Define and meet your students' learning needs.
2. Help your students better understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word.
3. Help your students better understand that God's Word can be connected to the part of God's world they are studying.
4. Help your students understand more biblical principles that connect to what they study.
5. Provide the engaging instruction your students need in order to connect God's world and Word.
6. Provide time during class for your students to reflect on how God's world and Word are connected.
7. Demonstrate your commitment to meeting your students' learning needs.

I would enjoy learning about how you are meeting learning needs to help your students connect God's world and Word. Please email me at [<learnmore@closethegapnow.org>](mailto:learnmore@closethegapnow.org).

—Michael B. Essenburg



Michael

I'm passionate about helping students connect God's world and Word.

Key ways to do this include targeting connections, using assessments, using questions, and meeting student learning needs.

Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject

We want our students to connect God's world and Word. When 5th graders study health, we're excited to see them write things like, "The first step in being healthy is to have a good relationship with God." And when 10th graders study racism as portrayed in *Night* (a Holocaust memoir), we feel good to see them write things like, "I have no right to choose whether I should help or not; the day I chose to follow my consistent and loving God, I threw away the option of apathy."

What's our goal? To have each of our students proficiently connect God's world and Word in each subject.

What helps teachers achieve this goal? Having their learning needs met, for example:

1. Getting support, encouragement, and accountability.
2. Experiencing engaging instruction.
3. Having time to reflect on the importance of helping students make connections and on how to help students make connections.
4. Having concrete examples of how students are connecting God's world and Word. And having concrete examples of how other teachers help their students connect God's world and Word.
5. Having repeated opportunities to apply their learning.

These materials (part of a 4-part series) are designed to help teachers achieve the goal of having each student connect God's world and Word in each subject. In each session (suggested length of 60 minutes), teachers will:

1. Support each other as they report on progress they've made on their action steps.
2. Read about and discuss a key question like "What do you want your students to learn?"
3. Commit to action steps they will take before the next session in order to help students connect God's world and Word.
4. Pray for each other.

What helps administrators achieve this goal? Being able to provide professional development that results in each teacher helping each student to connect God's world and Word. And being able to provide professional development that is cost-effective, easy to set up, easy to facilitate, and aligned with accreditation standards.

These materials are designed to help administrators achieve the goal of having each student connect God's world and Word in each subject. To use these materials, no outside expert needs to be called in. Instead, an administrator or a classroom teacher can serve as facilitator. To use these materials, no extensive preparation is required—the facilitator can just review the materials, make copies of the session guide and reading, and use the guide to help participants move through the session. And to use these materials, no big blocks of time have to be set aside. Instead, smaller blocks of time (say, 60 minutes) can be scheduled over several weeks.

Take action: Help each student proficiently connect God's world and Word. You can do this by reviewing the materials, using the assessment in Session 1 to determine which sessions to include, finding a facilitator, developing a schedule, and inviting teachers to participate.

What makes a good facilitator good?

A good facilitator facilitates from his heart, from beliefs about growth:

1. *God is growing His people, and the Holy Spirit is at work in each believer.* God is already at work in the lives of each of His people. While God may use me to help a person grow, it's God who is actually growing each of His people. As a facilitator, I encourage each person to listen to God.
2. *People want to grow and are empowered to grow by those who believe in them.* You and I both want to grow. And people who believe in us empower us to grow. I know this. I've experienced it in my own life. You have, too. When people believe in me, I can do more. As a facilitator, I believe in people. So, I listen (instead of talking), ask questions (instead of advising), and encourage (instead of critiquing). Remember, Barnabas believed in Paul.
3. *Growing is more about motivation than information.* We all know good things that would help us grow. We know we should do these good things—but we don't. Simply put, knowing doesn't equal doing. As a facilitator, I empower people to focus on good things they want to work on.
4. *People grow as they take responsibility by defining, committing to, and achieving goals.* So as a facilitator, I don't take the responsibility for defining goals; instead, I empower people to define their goals. I don't take the responsibility for committing to goals; instead, I empower people to commit to their goals. I don't take the responsibility for achieving the goals; instead, I empower people to achieve their goals. Make sense?

Based on these beliefs, a good facilitator uses key skills to help others grow:

1. *A good facilitator listens* (instead of talking). He gives his full attention to what others are saying, looks interested, sounds interested, and targets understanding (not judging). He listens a minimum of 80% of the time.
2. *A good facilitator inquires to provoke reflection* (instead of advising). He asks questions ("What helps students make connections?"), makes inviting statements ("Tell me more about...."), and recognizes that effective inquiry means that others talk at least 80% of the time.
3. *A good facilitator focuses others* on achieving the session goal and on determining and achieving their own action steps (instead of suggesting action steps).
4. *A good facilitator encourages others* (instead of critiquing). He does this by asking for clarification ("What do you mean by...?"), by giving affirmation, and by restating things ("So, you're saying....").

Finally, a good facilitator prepares. Before each session, he makes sure he understands the significance of the session title and the goal, familiarizes himself with the session content, determines the length of the session (I suggest 60 minutes), makes photocopies and room arrangements, and develops a facilitation plan (see page 4).

So, what makes a good facilitator good? A good facilitator facilitates from his heart, uses key skills, and prepares. Why? In order to empower participants to take action to help their students connect God's world and Word.

Take action: Find ways to provide more effective facilitation. You can do this by assessing how you're doing as a facilitator, talking with a colleague, and determining 2 action steps you will take.

Frequently asked questions

1. What's the thinking behind the sequence of the sessions?

Session 1 provides an overview and includes a self-assessment. Sessions 2-6 unpack the self-assessment in Session 1. Session 7 targets commitment.

2. Do participants need to do the sessions in order?

Generally speaking, sessions should be completed in order. But the bottom line is to do the sessions in whatever order helps participants help students connect God's world and Word.

3. Do participants need to do all sessions?

No. Participants only need to do the sessions that help them move forward on helping students connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word. If the self-assessment data from Session 1 indicates that participants don't need to complete a given session, then consider skipping that session.

4. What's the recommended number of participants?

You need enough participants to have good interaction and not so many that it feels impersonal. The number of participants could be from 2 to 20. I recommend 6 or more.

5. How long should each session be?

As long as it takes for participants to report on previous action steps, reflect on the session goal, and commit to new action steps that target the session goal. I suggest 60 minutes per session. Here's a sample schedule for a 60-minute session: Connect (7-10), Focus (3-5), Read (5-10), Discuss (25-35), and Commit (10).

6. How much time should there be between sessions?

Enough time for participants to carry out their action steps. I suggest one week.

7. What's the thinking behind the structure of the session guides?

The structure is designed to help teachers apply what they learn. Teachers move from reporting on action steps, to learning, to committing to action. The structure works well for professional learning communities.

8. What modifications can the facilitator make to the session guides?

The facilitator can make whatever modifications will help participants move forward on helping students connect God's world and Word. For example, the facilitator can delete questions, include an additional reading, or show a video.

9. What's the thinking behind the sequence of discussion questions in the session guides?

The discussion questions follow a set sequence. The questions start with facts, move to feelings and experiences, then move to analysis, and conclude with commitment to action.

10. Do participants need to discuss all the questions in each session guide?

No. The questions are designed to get participants talking, to help participants think about the session question, and to help participants make progress on the session goal. If the participants can do this without discussing certain questions, then don't have them discuss those questions.

11. In what sequence should the 4 parts of this series be used?

The 4 parts of this series should be used in whatever sequence helps participants help students connect God's world and Word. Here's one sequence: (1) *Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word*, (2) *Use Assessment*, (3) *Use Questions*, and (4) *Meet Student Learning Needs*. Here's another sequence: (1) *Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word*, (3) *Use Questions*, (4) *Meet Student Learning Needs*, and (2) *Use Assessment*.

12. What's the bottom line?

The bottom line is to get teachers to take action, to do something to help students connect God's world and Word. If teachers can achieve the bottom line more easily without using these materials, don't use them.

My plan for facilitating Session # _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ - _____ Location: _____

Session content (✓ the box if your response is "yes")

- ☐ I understand the significance of the session title and the goal.
- ☐ I have familiarized myself with the session content by reading through the session guide and reading.

Logistics (✓ the box if your response is "yes")

- ☐ I have reserved a place to meet.
- ☐ I have enough desks/chairs.
- ☐ I have enough copies of the session guide and reading.
- ☐ I have informed the participants of things they need to bring.
- ☐ I have selected a seating arrangement.
 - ☐ A circle ☐ Groups of 2-4
 - ☐ A U-shape ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Facilitation plan: Fill in times, select the group size, and select an option.

Time	Section	Group size	Options
_____ - _____	Connect with others	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Focus on this session's goal	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> Read the goal aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Read	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> One person reads aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Take turns reading aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Read silently <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Discuss the reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Commit to action	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

**Suggested times for 60-minute session: Connect (7-10), Focus (3-5), Read (5-10), Discuss (25-35), and Commit (10).*

Session 1: How can you meet your students' learning needs in order to help them connect God's world and Word?

Connect with a colleague

1. What is something encouraging that happened in your class(es) recently?
2. What are your students studying about God's world and how people are using it?
3. What is satisfying/unsatisfying about helping your students connect God's world and Word?

Focus on this session's goal

To define and meet your students' learning needs in order to help them connect God's world and Word.

Read

If you want to help your students connect God's world and Word, meet their learning needs. "Learning needs" are anything your students need in order for learning to happen. For example, your students might need to understand more biblical principles in order to better connect God's world and Word. To explore sample learning needs and a 4-step process for meeting your students' learning needs, read "Reading 1: DEAL with your students' learning needs."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What do you like/dislike about meeting your students' learning needs in order to help students connect God's world and Word?
3. What is one of your students' learning needs? (See sidebar in the reading.)

Define your students' learning needs

To define your students' learning needs, complete this assessment. Rate each item, using the following scale: 4: *Strongly agree* • 3: *Agree* • 2: *Disagree* • 1: *Strongly disagree*

To better connect the part of God's world my students study and God's Word...

- ___ 1. My students need to understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word.
- ___ 2. My students need to understand that God's Word can be connected to the part of God's world they are studying.
- ___ 3. My students need more biblical principles that connect to the part of God's world they are studying.
- ___ 4. My students need to experience engaging instruction.
- ___ 5. My students need time in class to reflect.

Reflect on your self-assessment data with a colleague

1. How many 4s, 3s, 2s, and 1s do you have?
2. What excites/concerns you about your data?
3. To help your students make better connections, what is one self-assessment item you want to make progress on? What are your reasons for selecting that item?
4. What 3 or more things could you do to make progress on that item?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to define and meet your students' learning needs to help them connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 1: DEAL with your students' learning needs

You're sitting in your classroom thinking: "How can I help my students get this? I'm supposed to help them connect God's world and Word. Maybe I should talk with Tom. Michelle mentioned a good book and a workshop next month. I wonder if we should work as a department to develop some curriculum. What would be the best way to start?"

Stop. Don't start by talking to a colleague. Don't start by reading a book or attending a workshop. And don't start by writing curriculum.

How should you start? By DEALing with your students' learning needs:

- **Define** your students' learning needs. Define what your students need in order to connect God's world and Word (*see sidebar*). How can you define your students' learning needs? By looking at your students' work and by talking with students, parents, and colleagues. Then, select one learning need you want to address.
- **Explore** ways to address the student learning need you selected. Pick one and make a plan to address it. *Now* get the training and support you need.
- **Act.** Just do it! Tell your students what you are doing and why.
- **Look** at the results. Discuss them with students and colleagues.

What happens when a teacher DEALs with her students' learning needs?

Define your students' learning needs: Kim teaches English 10. She wants all of her students to proficiently connect God's world and Word in essays and presentations Kim gives her students a survey. One student need has a noticeably higher response rate—that to really connect God's world and Word, students need to connect their lives with God's world and Word.

Explore ways to address the student learning need you selected: Kim decides to develop an assessment for her poetry unit that requires her students to connect their lives, poetry skills, and biblical teaching.

She collaborates with a colleague to develop the following assessment: Using the poetry analysis skills we practiced and the creation-fall-redemption-restoration framework we applied to poems, critique the lyrics of a favorite song (what the lyrics say, how they say it, and what God might think of what they say).

Act: At the start of her poetry unit, Kim explains the unit assessment and has her students brainstorm a list of songs. She also explains why she developed this assessment—to respond to their survey data.

Look at the results: At the end of the unit, the students write the essay. After submitting the essays, students complete a 5-item survey. Sixty-two percent of students indicate that the essay helped them connect God's world and Word. Kim assesses the essays and is pleased with the results, particularly excerpts like, "In all these situations, it was so much easier to blame God and accuse Him for what was going on, rather than looking at the conditions from a different perspective...."

Take action: Help your students connect God's world and Word by defining and meeting your students' learning needs. To get started, discuss this reading, define your students' learning needs (*see sidebar*), choose one learning need to address, and take 2 action steps to address the learning need you chose.

To connect God's world and Word, do your students need...

- ☐ To understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word?
- ☐ To understand that the part of God's world they are studying can be connected to God's Word?
- ☐ To learn about specific biblical principles that connect to what they are studying?
- ☐ To know what good connections look like?
- ☐ To connect their lives with God's world and Word?
- ☐ To understand how you teach from a biblical perspective?
- ☐ To know what key vocabulary words mean?
- ☐ To experience engaging instruction?
- ☐ To have time to reflect?
- ☐ To practice connecting God's world and Word?

Session 2: How can you help your students better understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is one thing that is going well in your class(es)?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one way you help your students understand the importance of what they're studying?

Focus on this session's goal

To help your students better understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word.

Read

The more your students understand that something is important, the more likely they are to learn it. So how can you help your students better understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word? To learn more, read "Reading 2: Help students see the importance of connecting God's world & Word."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is encouraging/discouraging about helping your students understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word?
3. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high), how important do your students think connecting God's world and Word is? Explain your thinking.
4. Explain your thinking for each of A-E: On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high)...
 - A. To what extent do you teach lessons on connecting God's world and Word?
 - B. To what extent do you give your students assessments that require them to connect God's world and Word?
 - C. To what extent do you grade students on connecting God's world and Word?
 - D. To what extent do you talk with students about how effectively they're connecting God's world and Word?
 - E. To what extent do you demonstrate to your students the importance of connecting God's world and Word?
5. What could you do to help your students better understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to help your students better understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 2: Help students see the importance of connecting God's world & Word

You overhear one of your 11th grade social studies students: “This doesn’t seem important. We don’t get graded on this. When I wasn’t doing well in science, Mrs. Lindley talked to me. But since my teachers don’t grade me on this, I don’t know how I’m doing. And since they don’t grade me on this, teachers can’t know how I’m doing. Maybe that’s why they never talk to me about how well I can connect God’s world and Word. Do they really think this is important?”

You think: “Yes, we think connecting God’s world and Word is important. This is a Christian school. We are Christian teachers. How can she think we don’t think making connections is important? Just because we don’t assess it, grade it, or talk with students about low performance? Why does she think that? Well, maybe she doesn’t think it’s important because we don’t really treat connecting God’s world and Word like we do other things we consider important.”

You decide to DEAL with your students’ learning needs to help your students connect God’s world and Word.

Define your students’ learning need: You think it would be good to check the validity of your student’s comment. After all, she might have been having a bad day, be in the minority, or be right on target. You ask some of your other 11th graders how important they think connecting God’s world and Word is. It quickly becomes clear that in terms of school, they don’t think it’s very important.

Then you decide to look at what your instructional practice communicates about the importance of connecting God’s world and Word. You look at a recent 25-lesson unit on civil rights. While you didn’t teach a specific lesson on connecting God’s world and Word, you did address it at various times for a total of 15 minutes—but then you realize that this is about 1% of the unit’s instructional time. You gave 9 assessments during the unit, and when you look closely at them, you notice that none of your assessments required students to connect God’s world and Word.

You think, “No wonder they don’t see the importance of making connections—no lessons on this, 1% of instructional time on this, and no assessments on this. I need to help my students better understand the importance of connecting God’s world and Word.”

Explore ways to address the student learning need you selected: You know that the more your students see this as important, the more likely they are to learn it. So, you ask yourself, “How I can help my students see the importance of connecting God’s world and Word?” Then you ask your students, “What could I do to help you see the importance of connecting God’s world and Word?” Finally, you identify the key things you can do—teach more about making connections, give more assessments requiring students to make connections, and make a bulletin board on connecting God’s world and Word.

Act: You develop an assessment, a journal prompt which you’ll have your students do tomorrow in class as they finish their study of how minorities are treated: What are some connections between how minorities have been treated and what God’s Word says about loving our neighbors, racism, and/or discrimination?

Look at the results: You’ll have to wait to see the results of the journal prompt. You’re already planning to follow-up on the journal entry with a bulletin board, a 45-minute lesson, and an assessment. You think, “I think I’m treating connections as more important. This should help students better understand the importance of connecting God’s world and Word.”

Take action: Help your students see the importance of connecting Gods’ world and Word. To get started, discuss this reading and identify 2 action steps you will take.

Session 3: How can you help your students better understand that God's Word can be connected to the part of God's world they study in class?

Connect with others

1. What is something that happened recently in class that made you smile?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one way you help your students understand the connections between different things they study in your class?

Focus on this session's goal

To help your students better understand that God's Word can be connected to the part of God's world they are studying.

Read

Ever feel like your students don't understand that God's Word connects to the part of God's world that they're studying? That your students think the Bible applies at home, church, and the "spiritual" parts of school—but not to what they study in school? I've felt this way. And there's good news—there are things you can do to help your students better understand that God's Word connects to what they study. To learn more, read "Reading 3: Get students to understand that God's world and Word are connected."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What positive/negative experiences have you had with helping your students understand that God's Word connects to the part of God's world they're studying?
3. Explain your thinking for each of A-D: To what extent do your students think God's Word connects to...
 - A. Their home life?
 - B. Church?
 - C. The "spiritual parts" of school?
 - D. The parts of God's world they study in class?
4. How could you help your students to better understand that God's Word connects to what they study?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to help your students better understand that God's Word can be connected to the part of God's world they're studying?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 3: Get students to understand that God's world and Word are connected

Me: You're not looking upbeat. What's going on?

You: Well, my students don't seem to get it—that God's Word connects to the part of God's world that they're studying. My students get Bible class, devotions, chapel, and proper behavior. I know that at home and at church they talk about living for Jesus and telling others about Jesus. But they don't get that the Bible connects to what they learn in class. And I did give a lecture about this at the start of the year. I want to talk about how to help my students get this—that God's world and Word are connected.

Me: Tell me more.

You: Well, on assignments, they show their thinking without referring to the Bible. Or they come up with object lessons instead of really connecting the Bible to the learning. Sometimes I feel like they don't think God's Word can or should be connected to what they study. Like I'm trying to do something that's not really possible. Sometimes it's discouraging.

Me: So your students think the Bible applies at home, at church, and to the "spiritual" parts of school?

You: I guess so. I mean, they're good kids, but they just don't seem to get it. I've been praying about this. I want my students to get this. During this coaching session, I'd like to develop an action plan to help my students understand that God's Word connects to the part of God's world they study.

Me: You've identified your goal and you've been praying about it. Want to explore options?

You: Yes.

Me: How could you help your students understand that God's Word connects to what they study?

You: I could tell them how I connect the Bible to what I teach. I could put posters up that have relevant biblical principles on them, have them apply biblical principles to a case study, and memorize and apply a verse during our next unit. I could also have them learn what the Bible teaches about wealth. I could have guest speakers talk about how God's Word connects to their jobs. I could ask my students questions like, "How can I be a wise steward?" And I could have them read articles written by Christians who are connecting God's world and Word.

Me: OK, you've identified 8 things you could do.

You: That's right. I think I'd like to start with one thing and go from there.

Me: What action steps would you like to take?

You: I think I'd like to start by getting them to just do it, by just getting them to connect God's world and Word. I'd like to start with having them apply 2-3 biblical principles to a case study related to content in our next unit. So, I need to develop a case study, identify some relevant biblical principles, and then develop a lesson. I think I'll ask Tomoko to help me with this.

Me: Sounds good. You've done quite a bit of thinking. What insights did you have during our session?

You: I discovered that there are quite a few things I can do to help my students understand that God's world and Word are connected. Quite encouraging. See you next week.

Take action: Help your students better understand that God's world and Word are connected. To get started, discuss this reading and identify 2 action steps you will take.

Session 4: How can you help your students understand more biblical principles that connect to what they study?

Connect with others

1. What is one way your students are growing?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one biblical principle your students can connect to a part of God's world they study?

Focus on this session's goal

To help your students understand more biblical principles that connect to what they study.

Read

To better connect God's world and Word, your students need to understand more biblical principles. To learn more, read "Reading 4: Help your students understand more biblical principles."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is comfortable/uncomfortable about helping your students understand biblical principles that connect to the part of God's world they study?
3. Let's use the 5-step process to determine one or more additional biblical principles that connect to the part of God's world that your students study:
 - A. What is something your students study about God's world and how people are using it? Tell me about that.
 - B. Which one or more items from the following list naturally connect to the part of God's world your students study? God, people, morality, death, history, creation, fall, redemption, restoration, loving God/neighbor, caring for creation, making disciples, being part of the Church, respect/disrespect of authority, sanctity of life/murder, sexual purity/promiscuity, private property/theft, truth telling/bearing false witness, contentment/covetousness, servanthood/selfishness
 - C. What does God's Word say about these items that naturally connects to the part of God's world your students study?
 - D. How could you state what God's Word teaches in terms of one or more biblical principles?
 - E. What Bible verses support each biblical principle?
4. How can you help your students understand the additional biblical principle(s) you identified?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to help your students understand more biblical principles that connect to the part of God's world they are studying?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 4: Help your students understand more biblical principles

You're thinking to yourself, "I want my students to go further. They get the basics—God created a good world, we sinned and messed it up, Jesus died for our sins, we should work to restore God's creation, and we should love God and our neighbors. To go further, they need to understand more biblical principles."

What can you do to help your students understand more biblical principles? You can identify more biblical principles and then determine how you can help your students understand those principles.

Here's a 5-step process you can use to determine one or more additional biblical principles that connect to the part of God's world that your students study:

1. Think of something your students study about God's world.
2. Identify one or more items from the following list that naturally connect to what your students are studying. (For example, my science students' study of cells fits with creation.) Here's the list: God, people, morality, death, history, creation, fall, redemption, restoration, loving God/neighbor, caring for creation, making disciples, being part of the Church, respect/disrespect of authority, sanctity of life/murder, sexual purity/promiscuity, private property/theft, truth telling/bearing false witness, contentment/covetousness, servanthood/selfishness.
3. Ask yourself, "What does God's Word say about these items that naturally connects to what my students are studying?"
4. Ask yourself, "How could I state what God's Word teaches in terms of one or more biblical principles?"
5. Ask yourself, "What Bible verses support each biblical principle?"

Now, how can you help your students understand the additional biblical principle(s) you identified? Start by asking yourself, "What are some good things I do to help my students learn?" Answer the question. Then use your answer.

I recommend that you have your students work in small groups to study a given biblical principle during class. For example, have your students...

- Read the principle, note the key words, state the principle in their own words, and brainstorm what it means and what it doesn't mean.
- Study the supporting verses, note the key words, and reflect on the study notes.
- Brainstorm connections between the biblical principle and what they are studying.
- Explain to someone not in their small group what the biblical principle means and how it connects to what they are studying.

Take action: Help your students understand more biblical principles that connect to what they study. To get started, discuss this reading and identify 2 action steps you will take.

Here are some biblical principles teachers at an international Christian school help their students understand:

Elementary school:

All truth is God's truth (Acts 17:16-31). God created food for us because He cares for us (Gen. 1:11-12, 1:29-30; Exod. 16:12, 16, 20; Matt. 15:29-35). God wants us to get along with others (Matt. 7:12).

Middle school:

Be content with what God provides (1 Tim. 6:6-10, Prov. 30:7-9, Phil. 4:12-13). God expects His people to obey Him (1 Sam. 15:22, Mic. 6:8). Impact the world for Christ by using your gifts (Eph. 4:1, 11-13). Respect what is praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

High school:

God calls us to join Him in His work of restoration (Mic. 6:8, Isa. 1:17, Jer. 22:16, Hos. 6:6). God is sovereign (Gen. 12:2-3; Isa. 25:8, 61:1). Our bodies are God's, and to be used by and for Him (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:13-20, 10:31; Phil. 1:20).

Session 5: How can you help your students experience engaging instruction?

Connect with others

1. What is one thing you like about teaching at this school?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one thing you do to get your students engaged in learning?

Focus on this session's goal

To provide the engaging instruction your students need in order to connect God's world and Word.

Read

Connecting God's world and Word is hard work. To make these connections, your students need to be engaged in learning. To get engaged, your students need to experience engaging instruction. To learn more, read "Reading 5: Get your students engaged."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What do your students do when they are engaged/disengaged during a lesson?
3. How do you feel when your students are engaged/disengaged during a lesson?
4. How does being engaged help students learn? help students connect God's world and Word?
5. What instructional strategies do your students find engaging/disengaging?
6. What 2 or more engaging instructional strategies can you use?
7. How can each instructional strategy get your students engaged in connecting God's world and Word?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to provide the engaging instruction your students need to connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 5: Get your students engaged

You're looking at the data from an assessment you gave last week. In the assessment, your Science 8 students were to connect the impact of technology and what God's Word teaches about contentment (1 Tim. 6.6-10), possessions (Prov. 23.4-5), selfishness (Jas. 2.1-7, 15-16; 4.1-3; 5.1-6), and Moses giving up wealth (Heb. 11.24-25). The scores are OK, but the connections your students made weren't as deep and solid as you hoped they would be. You think, "I thought this might happen. The students didn't seem that into it. I wonder why."

You head for the workroom, where you see a colleague who tells you about something she heard a student say in the hall between 3rd and 4th periods: "Learning what the Bible teaches is boring. Well, Bible class isn't boring, but the way teachers teach about the Bible in other classes is boring. Mostly lecture."

Mostly lecture—that's exactly what you didn't like about a recent workshop you attended on assessment. The workshop description had looked good, the handouts had looked good, but the delivery was a bit mind numbing. Way too much lecture. Not enough discussion. Not enough cooperative learning. Not enough case studies.

"It would have been so much more helpful," you think to yourself, "if we had drawn pictures, done some role play, and done some brainstorming. It's amazing how the choice of a poor instructional strategy can wreck a workshop. The workshop I took on differentiation was better because I was more engaged. And I was more engaged because the presenter didn't lecture."

"That's why my students weren't into it," you think to yourself. "That's why they weren't into connecting God's world and Word. Too much lecture. Not enough engaging instructional strategies."

You sit down, get out a piece of paper and a pen, and brainstorm a list of engaging instructional strategies:

- Asking questions
- Brainstorming
- Case studies
- Compare/contrast
- Cooperative learning
- Discussion
- Drawing pictures
- Graphic organizers
- Role play
- Journaling
- Simulation
- Storytelling
- Testing hypotheses

You look over the list and think about which instructional strategies your students would find engaging—role play, discussion, cooperative learning, and brainstorming. You think about your next unit on water, and you decide that you'll especially use discussion, cooperative learning, and brainstorming when teaching your students about connecting God's world and Word.

You think, "Discussion will help them process connections—the more they talk about connections, the more they will think about connections. Using cooperative learning will get students working together to make connections. And I can have them work together to brainstorm connections between God's world and Word."

Take action: Provide the engaging instruction your students need to connect God's world and Word. To get started, discuss this reading and identify 2 action steps you will take.

DEAL with your students' learning needs:

Define your students' learning needs. Select one need to address.

Explore ways to address the student learning need you selected.

Act. Just do it!

Look at the results.

Session 6: How can you provide time during class for your students to reflect on how God's world and Word are connected?

Connect with others

1. What is one good thing that happened recently in your class(es)?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one way you encourage your students to reflect?

Focus on this session's goal

To provide time during class for your students to reflect on how God's world and Word are connected.

Read

To connect God's world and Word, your students need time to reflect. You can provide time for reflection during class by putting reflective activities (for example, discussion, journaling, and case studies) into your lessons. To learn more, read "Reading 6: Provide time in class for your students to reflect."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. During the last week or unit, when did you provide students with time to reflect? to reflect on connections between God's world and Word?
3. How do you feel when you're given/not given time to reflect?
4. How do your students feel when you give/don't give them time to reflect?
5. How does having time for reflection impact student learning? impact students connecting God's world and Word?
6. How can you provide time in class for your students to reflect on the connections between God's world and Word?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to provide your students with the time they need to reflect on the connections between God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 6: Provide time in class for your students to reflect

It's 9:17. You have 3 minutes to wrap up first period, and you're feeling good about the lesson. You started with a devotional on Luke 1.5-17 and God's faithfulness. You reviewed the questions on the water cycle that your students answered for homework, being sure that the basic information was covered thoroughly. Then you had your students work in small groups to research rainfall in 3 deserts and share their findings with the class.

Now, you carefully explain tonight's homework—to read chapter 7 and write out answers to chapter questions 1-3, 6, and 8. The bell rings. As your students leave you say, "Thanks for a good class. Be sure to think about how what you studied today is connected to God's Word."

Your students head toward their lockers, and you focus on getting ready for 2nd period. Down the hall by the lockers, one of your students says quietly to another, "I like this biblical perspective stuff. But to really get it, I need time to think about what I'm learning. We don't really do this in class. And I've got sports after school and homework at night. When am I supposed to find time to reflect?"

It's now 4:27. You're sitting in a staff meeting. You're enjoying being with your colleagues—you liked the devotional on Isaiah 40.25-31 and how God cares for you. The majority of the meeting dealt with making sure everyone was on the same page regarding the choir festival on Friday (about half of your students will be participating) and the student-led conferences that will be held in 2 weeks. Your principal closes the meeting by saying, "Thanks for a good meeting. Please keep thinking about how you can help your students connect God's world and Word."

When you get back to your room you think to yourself, "When am I supposed to find time to think about how I can help my students make connections? Why didn't we do that in the meeting? It's so much easier to reflect on connections in a group—I get to talk to others and ask them questions."

Then it hits you. During first period, you did just what your principal did—you didn't give time for reflection. You didn't give your students time to think about how God's world and Word are connected.

Why didn't you give time for reflection? Maybe because you felt pressure to get through the material. Maybe because making connections isn't stated in the curriculum and you don't plan to assess it. Maybe because you didn't get time for reflection when you were a student. Or maybe because you weren't sure how to effectively get your students to reflect on how God's world and Word are connected.

You ask yourself, "What can I do to provide time for reflection in class?" You brainstorm some options, including building discussion, journaling, and case studies into your lessons.

Take action: Provide time during class for your students to reflect on how God's world and Word are connected. To get started, discuss this reading and identify 2 action steps you will take.

To provoke reflection during class, ask open-ended questions:

Elementary school:

How can you care for others? How can you see God's creativity in autumn? How can you serve others through music? How can you maintain your body as God's temple? How does math help you learn about God? How is God's creative power revealed in nature? Why is order important?

Middle school:

How can you be a wise steward of your gifts? How can you use poetry for God's purpose? How does belief affect art? How does science impact society? What does it mean to obey God? What is healthy self-esteem? What is truth?

High school: How can you discern what is best? How can Photoshop be used ethically? What is good? How should Christians respond redemptively to evil? What does it mean to be people of justice? What kind of universe do we live in? Who is your neighbor?

Session 7: How can you demonstrate your commitment to meeting your students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. In terms of student learning, what is one thing you are excited about?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is something you are committed to? How do you demonstrate your commitment?

Focus on this session's goal

To demonstrate your commitment to meeting your students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word.

Read

People who are committed demonstrate their commitment. Teachers who are committed to meeting their students' learning needs demonstrate their commitment by teaching their students biblical principles and key vocabulary. To learn more, read "Reading 7: Demonstrate your commitment."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What are your students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word? (See sidebar in the reading for sample student learning needs.)
3. What are you doing to meet your students' learning needs?
4. What excites/frustrates you about demonstrating your commitment to meeting your students' learning needs?
5. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high), to what extent are you demonstrating that you're committed to meeting your students' learning needs? Explain your thinking.
6. What can you do to further demonstrate your commitment to meeting your students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take to demonstrate your commitment to meeting your students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)



I would enjoy learning about how you are meeting learning needs to help your students connect God's world and Word. Please email me at learnmore@closethegapnow.org.

—Michael B. Essenburg

Reading 7: Demonstrate your commitment

People who are committed demonstrate their commitment. For example, if you see someone recycling paper and plastic, riding her bike instead of driving her car, and writing blog entries about taking care of the environment, you think, "Wow! She's committed to going green."

Conversely, if you see someone who isn't recycling, isn't riding her bike, and isn't writing blog entries on the environment, you don't think, "Wow! She's committed to going green." Why? Because you know that people who are committed take action, and you know that people who don't take action aren't really committed.

In Christian education, we're committed to helping our students connect God's world and Word. We know that meeting learning needs helps students make connections. So, we're committed to meeting learning needs to help our students make these connections.

Teachers who are committed to meeting their students' learning needs demonstrate their commitment by...

- Teaching their students biblical principles, for example, human beings are created in God's image and language is a gift from God.
- Showing their students work samples that demonstrate how to effectively connect God's world and Word.
- Giving assignments that require their students to connect the part of God's world they study, God's Word, and their lives, for example: "Write a 500-word critique of a favorite song from a biblical perspective. Explain the author's meaning, the literary and poetic techniques the author uses to communicate the meaning, evaluate that meaning from a biblical perspective, and weave in your response to the lyrics."
- Regularly explaining how God's Word informs their selection of content, assessment, and instruction. For example, they explain to their students that they are going to learn about ecology because God commands us to take care of His world.
- Teaching key vocabulary—image bearer, temple of the Holy Spirit, and worldview.
- Giving their students regular practice in connecting the part of God's world they study and God's Word.

Ask yourself 4 questions:

1. What are my students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word?
2. What am I doing to meet my students' learning needs?
3. To what extent am I demonstrating that I'm committed to meeting my students' learning needs?
4. What can I do to further demonstrate my commitment to meeting my students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word?

Take action: Demonstrate your commitment to meeting your students' learning needs regarding connecting God's world and Word. To get started, discuss this reading and identify 2 action steps you will take.

To connect God's world and Word, do your students need...

- ☐ To understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word?
- ☐ To understand that the part of God's world they are studying can be connected to God's Word?
- ☐ To learn about specific biblical principles that connect to what they are studying?
- ☐ To know what good connections look like?
- ☐ To connect their lives with God's world and Word?
- ☐ To understand how you teach from a biblical perspective?
- ☐ To know what key vocabulary words mean?
- ☐ To experience engaging instruction?
- ☐ To have time to reflect?
- ☐ To practice connecting God's world and Word?