

January 2010

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Recommended Citation

Arthur, David (2010) "It's Not About Me," *TEACH Journal of Christian Education*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 2 , Article 19.

Available at: <https://research.avondale.edu.au/teach/vol4/iss2/19>

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It's not about me

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“Do you know which poster I like the best?” Meg* was always willing to discuss things at a deeper level.

“It's the one just below the clock,” she said. It was my own personal paraphrase from the book *Education*. “The true aim of education is to teach students to think, and not just reflect the thoughts of others.” Posters of meaningful expressions around the room are but one strategy to integrate faith and learning.

But should I even try this while teaching Economics in a very results-driven secular senior high school in China? Add to this a background as one of the sceptics of the concept in the early 1980s as well as the fact that there are only two ‘active, full time Christians’ on a staff of close to one hundred teachers. How audacious!

On arrival in the school five years ago, the meaning of life for this ‘chalkie’ was a bit hazy. Oh yes, I was there to teach a subject to students and from within the context of being a witnessing Christian. After all, what other choice does a Christian have? However what it is really all about has only become clear during the last couple of years.

Jeffrey*, one of the Chinese teachers, and the other active Christian has become a true friend and ‘comrade’, and the journey thus far has been a real growth experience for both of us. Our weekly lunch and prayer time, and brief chats in between times have helped us to build our faith and think of ways to quietly assist the small number of Christian students that have made themselves known to us. This mostly happens when we notice a cross hanging around a neck, or when we are tipped off by someone else. The Lord is leading us to where He is working—slowly, and at His pace. Our plan is to provide strong support and encouragement for these students as they witness in each of their classes.

So what is the strategy in the classroom? One of the themes that is introduced at the beginning of each course is the idea that each student is ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’, and that they owe everything they know and are to someone else—family, friends, teachers, and significant others. A response to this is encouraged.

A second theme arises from these probing questions: “Do you want to simply make lots of money, or do you want to make a difference in your world?” and “What does it matter if you become the richest person in the world but lose your life (and/or the quality of your life) while doing it?”

Thirdly, they are reminded that good stewards make the most of their talents, and may even take calculated risks to improve them. A pithy expression displayed on the board at the beginning of every class and the resultant discussion usually become variations on one or more of these main themes. The aim is to challenge their thinking. Do they know I am a Christian? Maybe, but maybe they do not. They certainly do know that I am different from the other teachers. They themselves have often told me that in my classes they learn about life and not just about Economics.

The whole process is an attempt to pass on the inspiration that Spirit-filled ‘significant others’ have injected into my own life. These are the giants on whose shoulders I stand, and in particular those teachers who have had a powerful influence over the years. It is also worthwhile to remind students that what we choose to do (and equally what we choose not to do) affects many people—perhaps thousands, even future generations. The really interesting part is that neither Jeffrey nor I know the ultimate results of our efforts. We plant the seed and sometimes we even get to water it, but it is God who makes it grow. We must never forget this reality.

Teaching in this school is a real challenge for both of us. Not necessarily in the subject matter, or even the difficult tasks we have to accomplish. The real challenge is to be people whose approach is positive (when things do not go our way!), who act with integrity, and whose manner is kind and caring.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that we are not working for the owner of the school, but for the Master, and that our entire *modus operandi* is to bring glory to God. One of my very clear memories from the past occurred more than thirty years ago in my first year at Avondale, indeed probably in the one of the first Education I classes. Dr Trevor Lloyd put a quote on the board that has never been forgotten. “One short life, ‘twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last”. What a challenge! And what a supreme privilege to be working for such a magnificent employer! **TEACH**

David notes that the answers to these ‘foreign’ students’ questions are still the same: “Yes—Australia is a beautiful country”, and “Yes—I like Chinese food!”

* Names have been changed.

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