

## DISCOVERING WATER

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The cliché goes, “Fish discover water last.” That which is most obvious often lies undiscovered. The traditional classroom model, with the teacher up front lecturing and leading class discussions, has been tweaked and fine-tuned. The question is no longer, “How can I make the classroom model better?” but, “Is the classroom model the most effective way to learn?”

Different disciplines lend themselves to different styles. Teaching a religion class is much different from teaching a welding class. Some courses are theoretical and conceptual rather than technical. It is almost like there is a continuum from the head to the hand. On one end, the methodology of questioning, pondering, discussing, and writing seems the only way, whereas in highly technical areas, a hands-on approach seems best.

In trying to understand the principles of effective teaching, we often turn to our church experience. We use “classroom” experiences from the temple, general conference, or other church meetings as models for effective teaching. But are these the most effective models for learning all subjects? And are these really the only models our Heavenly Father uses to teach his children? I suggest that they are only a small portion. Our life experiences, especially those at home, are the Lord’s most effective classrooms. Elder J. Ballard Washburn stated:

We go to the temple to make covenants, but we go home to keep the covenants that we have made. The home is the testing ground. The home is the place where we learn to be more Christlike. The home is the place where we learn to overcome selfishness and give ourselves in service to others. (*Ensign*, May 1995, 11)

The school of experience, with each of us making choices and learning to become like our Heavenly Father, is the water that many discover last in the search for academic models. This school is less about buildings and chairs than it is about choices and living. The end result is not the ability to conceptualize, but to act—to be good along with being good for something. As the familiar primary song says, “Teach me all that I must do.”

While teaching the people in Ammonihah about the plan of salvation Alma declared that God had given men commandments and then placed them “in a state to act according to their wills” (Alma 12:31). In order to teach effectively, most academic models should strive to place the students in an environment in which they are accountable to act.

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Some may say, “Well, I am not sure the students are ready to be turned loose?” Such an attitude recalls the story of two second-grade boys standing outside during recess when they noticed a jet fly overhead. The one boy turns to the other and says, “That is an F-16 Falcon which can travel up to speeds of 1320 miles per hour at 40,000 feet and can carry up to 20,400 lbs. of air-to-air and air-to-ground weaponry.” The other boy responds by saying, “Lockheed Martin acquired the F-16 from General Dynamics in March 1993. It is an awesome plane!” Just then the bell rings; one boy looking at the other says, “Well, back to class to string those darn beads.” Our students are ready and eager to be “turned loose,” and we often don’t give them enough credit.

How do institutions of higher education prepare students for a career and life? Higher education can no longer be just a rite of passage in our society, in which students’ only goal is to get over it, through it, or around it in some fashion. Oftentimes a college education is viewed like a disease in which the victim is trying to get over it as soon as possible. It is not enough just to have gone to college. We are living in an ever changing and complex world, in which skills coupled with character will be demanded. Instead of perpetuating the gap between the academic and real world, we need to blur the distinction between where formal education ends and where a student’s real life experience begins. We must begin to think outside the classroom box.

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We must produce graduates who can make an immediate contribution and not have to be re-tooled. Ongoing re-tooling will always be part of a career, however it should be minimal immediately after graduation. If higher education cannot produce graduates with the skills needed, nothing will stop major corporations from taking students directly from high school and assuming the colleges’ role. Today there are over 4,000 corporate universities throughout the world. (David Bluckett, University of Greenwich, 15 February 2000)

As the Department of Business Management prepares for the challenges and opportunities of the four-year transition, there has been considerable discussion concerning curriculum, program offerings, staffing needs, and teaching methodology. The area receiving the most attention has been teaching methodology. Many long-held assumptions about learning and the “right way to do things” have been challenged.

Here are some questions we may ask ourselves as we contemplate preparing students for their “state to act.”

- What will the students do in class today? rather than What will I teach? Or maybe, What is the purpose of their coming to class today? Could greater learning take place through an out-of-class assignment?

- At the end of the semester what will the students be able to do? What indication is there that skills and competencies are improved or achieved?
- What real-life experiences can I incorporate into the course curriculum?
- How can conceptual content be taught in a way in which active student participation is used versus listening to a lecture?

#### WHAT WE ARE DOING IN THE BUSINESS MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

What is the most effective way to prepare Business Management graduates to make meaningful contributions in society? This question has been given considerable attention since the transition announcement. Since its beginning, Business Management education has never been able to adequately escape the classroom/lecture model, even though business is becoming more technical. But to our great advantage, today's technology is making location irrelevant.

Beginning in Fall 2001, the Business Management Department will begin the process of putting students in a state to act. A process of integration, practical experience, and alliances with industry will begin.

1. Integration of Business concepts: As students enter the Management program they will have the opportunity to participate in the Integrated Business Core (IBC). The core will place students in learning teams. Finance, Organization Behavior, and Marketing will be taught together in a time block three days a week. A substantial amount of reading will take place with personal and interpersonal accountability for content mastery.

2. Opportunities to practice and experiment: As part of the IBC, students will develop and implement a business plan. They will form actual companies, with students presenting their plans to an outside professional finance committee to obtain funding. The students/employees then will implement their business plan by starting a company. The proceeds will go toward such things as scholarships and community service projects.

3. Creation of mutually beneficial partnerships with industry through these five components: Advisory Councils, Conferences and Seminars, Mentoring Programs, Internships, and Students helping businesses through consulting projects.

Some ask, "How do you know if this hands-on method will work?" Maybe the best explanation is through parallel examples. Will welding steel in class help welding students weld steel outside of class? Will having culinary arts students organize menus and market their product help them as they create menus and market restaurants outside the college experience? Will having students run actual companies help them run

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actual companies? Maybe, like fish, we have had a hard time locating the obvious.

We are engaged in the most significant change to take place at Ricks College since its founding. In a very real sense Ricks College is being re-founded. President John Taylor prophesied:

You will see the day that Zion will be far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters. You mark my words and write them down, and see if they do not come to pass. (*The Gospel Kingdom* 275)

His term “far ahead” suggests that we will not just fine-tune current academic models, but re-think, re-invent, and revolutionize. ☺