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Exploring Exegetical Education in Mormon Gospel Doctrine Class

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Exploring "Exegetical Education" in "Mormon" Gospel Doctrine Class

Declaration

This thesis was presented in part fulfilment of a Master of Arts in Higher Education Degree at Dublin Institute of Technology. It was entirely my own work and all contributions from others were properly acknowledged.

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Abstract

"Mormon" gospel doctrine classes present a practical problem since the scriptural text is often bypassed in favour of thematic discussions. The use of exegesis might overcome this problem by reinstating the text as a genuine source of meaning since it gains greater applicability in modern times when its original context is fully appreciated. Indeed, "exegetical education" (the combination of a systematic study of a text through questions and subsequent application via peer-learning activities) could be a useful way to structure classes, study and discussions.

Practical action research was employed in a small-scale study to explore these claims. Interviews were held with three practitioners of specific exegetical forms of instruction. Exegetical education was practiced and formalised by the researcher during a pilot stage. A reflective journal was kept by the researcher during a further implementation of exegetical education in nine gospel doctrine classes (over a period of four months). Finally, a focus group interview was held with six students from the classes to explore their experience of exegetical education as implemented.

The data obtained was analysed using network analysis and the findings were compared to the expectations raised by the review of literature. The findings illustrate the usefulness of exegetical education in structuring classes, study and discussions. These findings support the claim that exegetical education contributes to the relevance of the text in classroom discussions and independent study. A further action research cycle could explore whether the consistent use of exegetical homework assignments encourage independent learning and improve class discussions.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

To comprehend the impetus for this research it is essential to understand the unique research context involved (Cousin, 2009), the history and positionality of the researcher (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010; Thomas, 2013) and how these combined to inspire the research aim (Ezer, 2009). The specific research question grew organically out of a cross-section of intellectual influences and was targeted toward a pressing practical problem (Huczynski, 2004), experienced in many gospel doctrine classes of the Dublin Ireland Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Practical action research was considered the most suitable research methodology to employ (Craig, 2009; McNiff, 2013).

This introductory chapter attempts to clarify the context and the research questions addressed. It also offers a definition of the main pedagogical practice adopted by the researcher during this initial action research cycle, and highlights in what way this method should address the research problem (Huntsman, 2005). A discussion of ethical considerations unique to this research is reserved for Chapter 3.

1.2. The Research Context

The research took place within the context of the gospel doctrine class of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and addressed the problem of how to make the scriptural text more relevant. The gospel doctrine class, which lasts for a period of 40 minutes, is held each Sunday for all adults members aged 18 and over. The class discusses a previously selected scripture block (usually the length of several chapters), and attempts to apply its teachings to modern life. The students come from diverse demographic and psychographic backgrounds and therefore the classes tend to be very devotional in nature. This means that the class focuses on the experience of the scriptural themes in daily life. The ensuing discussions can be very rich, abundantly meaningful, and can contain clear invitations to act in improved ways for both teacher and students.

However one drawback can be that the text is used merely as a stepping stone to the discussion of a pre-selected or pre-identified theme. That is, in a certain sense *the text can become irrelevant* to the discussion of the theme, and certainly it does not play as major a

role in the ensuing discussion as it could or should. This problem appeared to be a possible candidate for an action research study, especially as an exploration of a way to improve pedagogical practice.

1.3. The Research Rationale

The problem of how to make the text more relevant and meaningful to the lives of individual students was the starting point for this action research study. It grows out of the prior experiences of the researcher (as a young missionary in Scotland from 1991 – 1992) with a teacher who had expertise in making scripture both inherently meaningful and relevant to modern life (McConkie, 1985; 1988). This teacher was accustomed to teaching college students, and his method of scriptural exegesis was both faith-promoting and intellectually challenging (McConkie & Millet, 1985; 1990).

A simplified version of this methodology of searching scripture for meaning prior to applying it to life, one that respects the distinct mandate within Sunday School to encourage verbal discussions, could potentially deal with the previous problem identified. Support for this proposal was found among academic literature from within the organisation (Huntsman, 2005; 2009). Experience of such a systematic study of ancient texts was also gained by the researcher during his undergraduate studies in philosophy at Trinity College Dublin. The same basic method of questioning the text to include discussion of its historical origins and transmission (Davey, 2010) seemed to the researcher a possible way of making the text transcend the usual superficial[1] discussion experienced in gospel doctrine class (Bednar, 2011; Intellectual Reserve, 2012).

The proposal was that "exegetical education" could increase textual relevance and the meaningfulness of peer discussions. Since this would involve a pedagogical intervention by the researcher, this research could not be a case study but would be a 'change' study (Cousin, 2009; Craig, 2009). The change would be at an "individual" rather than "institutional" level (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010, p. 83). Interpretative action research was chosen as the appropriate methodology to explore this research question especially since it was intended to gain "an in-depth understanding of the meanings of others who are part of the practice problem" (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010, p. 84).

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[1] In relation to the text itself.

The research was further motivated by the researcher's role as the Stake Sunday School President. This role involves the supervision of the provision of quality learning and teaching in all organisations in the Stake (Intellectual Reserve, 2010, p. 99). Since gospel doctrine class specifically involves extracting themes from scriptural texts: the adoption, exploration and evaluation of exegetical education in this context appeared, to the researcher, to be "a useful way to structure classes, study, and discussion" (Huntsman, 2005, p. 110). This research study explored this utility claim.

This research study was especially interested in exploring whether this pedagogical change makes the scriptural text more relevant to the class discussion, i.e. more useful in the exploration of existential meaning. Hence, it also sought to explore the following pedagogical claim:

> "Teaching students to ask and answer these [exegetical] questions themselves trains them in how to study the scriptures more systematically" (Huntsman, 2005, p. 108).

The Sunday School organisation is intended to foster such systematic self-study of the scriptures and to encourage learners to become independent (Broad, 2006), agent-acting (Bednar, 2011) students of scripture. This research was guided by the following definition of exegetical education**:**

> **Exegetical education** is the **use of questions** to systematically study the original meanings of a text and the **use of peer-learning** to appropriately discuss and apply its meanings to modern daily life (adapted from Huntsman, 2005; Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008).

Therefore, in this research, exegetical education was both scripture-centred and student-centred.

1.4. The Research Aims

The primary aim of this action research was to discover recommendations for practice about the implementation of exegetical education (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010). This implementation would be by the researcher and the primary focus would be on the researcher's own experience with this implementation (Bednar, 2012; Ezer, 2009). The researcher's aim to improve his personal practice was a guiding rationale for the

exploratory and descriptive nature of this research (Bridges & Smith, 2007; Cousin, 2009; Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010). A secondary research aim was to explore the effect of exegetical education in training students to engage in independent systematic study of the scriptures (Huntsman, 2005; Broad, 2006; Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004).

The justification for these aims was given by the review of literature as noted in the following two strands, concerning first, exegesis, and second, peer-learning:

> Since canonical texts have a history, it is permissible to use hermeneutical tools to understand, analyse and apply those texts in our individual lives (Baker, 2007; Frederick, 2011). Exegesis is a formal method of asking questions of a particular text (Bokovoy, 2014). Exegetical education involves systematic questioning to encourage appropriate exploration and explication of text, and subsequent peer-learning to discuss how to appropriately apply the textual concepts in lived experience (Beale, 2012; Huntsman, 2005). Through "this questioning process, students can better "lead out" (exegesis) the original meaning without unduly "reading in" (eisegesis) their own preconceived notions" (Huntsman, 2005, p.109).

> Peer-learning (in the form of questioning) both within and outside the classroom can aid in the learning process of all students (Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008). Peer-learning social groups can place both motivating and de-motivating pressures on individual learners (Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011; Floysand, 1999) and can, if managed wisely (Jaques & Salmon, 2007; Leonard & Swap, 1999; Novak, 2012), reinforce the effective use of questions to encourage both participation and learning among class members (Bednar, 2011; Broad, 2006).

1.5. The Research Question

The fundamental research question was:

> *Is exegetical education "a useful way to structure classes, study, and discussion" in 'Mormon' gospel doctrine class?* (See Huntsman, 2005, p. 110).

The primary focus was on the explicit introduction of exegetical education itself and whether that was a "useful" intervention given the research problem. The usefulness of exegetical education was explored in relation to the following three areas:

1. Improvements to pedagogical practice (classes).
2. Influence on personal study patterns (study).
3. Enhancement of peer-learning (discussion).

These four main conceptual categories[2] were used to guide the initial interviews, the researcher's subsequent intervention and reflective journal and the final focus group interview.

1.6. Summary of Chapter

Given the role of the researcher as the Stake Sunday School President, with the attendant responsibility to improve learning and teaching practice, and the specific problem of textual relevance in gospel doctrine class, it seemed that an action research intervention employing a modification of exegesis could result in a more meaningful study and discussion of selected scriptural texts. The literature review suggested that this objective could be realised and the research design had to involve the construction of appropriate methods, instruments and analysis to measure the success or failure of the action research intervention.

1.7. Summary of Thesis Chapters

Chapter 2 links the practice of exegesis with meaning-centred education and learner-centred education as a means of respecting the text's original meaning and the student's personal application of it. It argues that exegetical education is simultaneously student and subject centred

Chapter 3 justifies the use of practical action research as the best means of introducing and exploring the utility of exegetical education in a particular context and specifies the research methods employed and the ethical issues that arose and were resolved.

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[2] Exegetical education, classes, study and discussion.

Chapter 4 presents the means of data analysis and the findings that emerged therefrom. It relates these findings from diverse data collection points and specifically explores points of divergence. It focuses on exegetical education in relation to the structure of classes, study and discussion in Mormon gospel doctrine classes.

Chapter 5 examines the research findings in comparison to the expectations that emerged from the literature review. It explores the answer to the research question and critically reflects on points of divergence in the data.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by noting the primary recommendations for practice and by offering further recommendations for research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Since the research problem concerns how to make the discussion of ancient sacred texts more relevant to the lived experience of modern students this literature review must provide an overview of the extensive consideration of textual interpretation by scholars interested in learning and teaching from a variety of texts (Davey, 2010; Madison, 1999). Textual interpretation, known as exegesis, is a subset of hermeneutics, and has connections with the philosophy of language (especially meaning), epistemology and the philosophy of mind (Baker, 2007; Burke, 2010).

Within the intellectual tradition of hermeneutics there is an extensive treatment of exegesis, especially in regard to reading ancient texts (Beale, 2012; Bokovoy, 2014). The literature consulted included textbooks, conference papers and journal articles on the topics of exegesis and educational research. This review consists of two main sections and relates exegesis (or textual analysis) to the process of meaning-making and the teaching of sacred texts. It also considers educational scholarship to assert the connection that exegetical education has to meaning-making and to peer-learning, and to contextualise it in the specific environment for this action research study.

2.2. Textual Analysis

There is a long scholarly tradition of textual analysis in the history of western thought, including, for example, the interpretation of legal, literary, philosophical and religious texts (Davey, 2010). This activity is usually seen as a branch of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, or "the work of interpretation", used to be regarded as a mere philological aid to philosophy "or as a prelude to theology" (Davey, 2010, p. 693) but due to the influence of Gadamar, Heidegger and Ricoeur this is no longer the case (Madison, 1999). Instead, hermeneutics can be viewed as the philosophical approach to life (Davey, 2010). Indeed, the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy was precisely due to the increasing importance attached to interpreting language (Lepore & Smith, 2008).

Derrida famously argues for the death of the author, including the hold that authorial intent has over the meaning of a text (Norris, 1987). Given this loosening of the grip of authorial intent on the meaning of a text, it becomes open to multiple interpretations, meanings and uses that cannot be envisioned by the original author (Burke, 2010). Similarly, the notion of radical interpretation, or the indeterminacy of translation, is also found in the analytic philosophical tradition (Davidson, 2006). Quine (1960) argued that there is always an element of indeterminacy in meaning between two speakers – even speakers of the same language (Lepore & Smith, 2008; Misak, 2008).

Naturally neither of these claims implies that a reader confronted with a text is entirely free to create their own meaning (Norris, 2007). Such radical relativism is problematic especially where the author is available to suggest intended meanings of the passages (Baker, 2007; Bradshaw, 2014; Burke, 2010). Yet even where the author expresses a particular view – the reader can legitimately add to that meaning or digress from it (Fish, 1980). Hermeneutics "is the elaboration of the insight that in reaching a common understanding with others, we must allow ourselves to be transformed" (Misak, 2008, p. 434).

Therefore meaning is not static or unchanging, nor is it purely mentalistic (in the mind alone) or truly monologic (i.e. in the mouth of one person). Since it takes dialogue to create meaning, a community can co-construct it (Wittgenstein, 2000; Lepore & Smith, 2008). This means that the reader's input is *as important as* the writer's in the meaning-making process (Burke, 2010). No text is read neutrally: each is read through the filter and lens of the beliefs, assumptions, values and life-histories of the reader (McConkie, 2009). Additionally, meaning inheres in a communal practice. Indeed, "the space of linguistic consciousness – the space in which meanings and reasons exist – is a space that we occupy together" (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 145).

2.2.1. The Process of Exegesis

Since the understanding and exploration of exegesis is fundamental to this research study it is essential to discuss and explain it here. As a component of "hermeneutical work", exegesis "enlarges the scope of our vision, suggests new meanings, and encourages further conversations" (Noddings, 2007, p. 76). Exegesis is the process of explaining the original

meaning of texts, usually sacred texts, and involves treating those texts as subject to the normal processes of historical editing (Beale, 2012; Bokovoy, 2014; Brigham Young University, 2006). The process of exegesis can be defined as the attempt to 'draw out' the original meaning of a particular text through systematic questioning of the text (Huntsman, 2005; 2009). This drawing out, or discovery of meaning, is accomplished through sensitivity to the original language, culture and context of a text and the historical, literary and cultural addendums that have occurred since the text's original production (Bokovoy, 2014). Exegesis is the methodological process of stripping away these historical accretions to arrive at the unvarnished original intent of the text (Bradshaw, 2014). It is an attempt to explain the original context without reading into the text modern sensitivities or biases (Beale, 2012).

Exegesis is usually contrasted with eisegesis. Eisegesis is seen as failed exegesis because it involves the unwarranted reading of modern ideas "into" the ancient text. It is to transgress the boundaries of the original context, culture and meaning of the text (Huntsman, 2005). For example, Shakespearian scholars debate and argue over the motives, meaning and madness of Hamlet with a sense that what they say must respect the text (even when they disagree about the importance of authorial intent or of reader-response) (Baker, 2007; Norris, 2007; Rust, 1997; Shipway, 2011; Smith, 2003).

Exegesis consists of systematically asking the following relevant questions of a text (Beale, 2012; Huntsman, 2005). First, who wrote it and to whom was it written? This seeks to identify the author and the intended audience. Second, when and where was it written, compiled, edited, and transmitted? This asks about its history through time, which is diachronic exegesis. Third, what does it say and how does it say it? This asks about the particular style and genre of writing and associated purposes – or synchronic exegesis. Finally, asking why it was written leads to existential exegesis.

Two other issues loom large in exegesis. Is exegesis purely descriptive (so that the reader has no influence on the meaning of the text) or is it prescriptive (so that the reader's response does affect the valid meaning of the text)? Exegetes' are not merely interested in who wrote it - they are also interested in who read it then and, more especially, in who is reading it now. The reader has at least as much influence over the meaning of the text as the

original writer. Hence readers should apply the process of systematic questioning outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Types of Exegesis

Prescriptive (Who) →	Diachronic (When & Where) →	Existential → (Why)
	Synchronic (What & How) →	

(*Source*: adapted from Huntsman, 2005)

The following objections to such pure exegesis present themselves. The quest for the original meaning of an ancient text appears to be similar to the quest to find the ultimate foundation upon which to rest epistemology, metaphysics, and morality (Kant, 2001; O'Grady, 2002). It seems to be an attempt to get past the "appearance" of the thing to the thing itself … to get past the perception of meaning to the meaning itself (Madison, 1999; Moran, 2000). Such an attempt is doomed to failure (Moran, 2010). Surely, if there is some unique meaning that is available to the original author and the original audience (and it is highly doubtful that there is a one-to-one correspondence of meaning even between these two original participants), it is so highly specialised (localised) to the unique culture and context that we would be unable to transport ourselves to get inside it (Quine, 1960; O'Grady, 2002)?

In practice, just as in the supposed scientific method, all observation actually presupposes theory or is theory-laden (Rowbottom & Aiston, 2007), so too in the method of textual interpretation, all exegesis presupposes eisegesis (Zanardi, 2003). It is impossible to read any text in a neutral or purely objective fashion (McConkie, 1995; Davey, 2010). Each person reads from particular perspectives and for particular (perpetually changing) purposes. Additionally, each person cannot help but read with their own historical biographies fully in play (Fish, 1980; McConkie, 2009); these constraints, working with the historical biography of the text and the community of fellow readers, create a mutual co-mingled meaning (Bandura, 1986; Wittgenstein, 2000). What a reflective and critical reader can do is test interpretations for obvious falsifiability (Shipway, 2011; Tsohatzidis, 2007). A critical reader can rank diverse interpretations for plausibility and can admit that creative readings can be sincere, genuine, meaningful and enriching (Townsend, 2014; Werret & Read, 2007). To develop this further we need to consider the process of meaning-making.

2.2.2. Meaning-Making Reading

The use of stories to generate "shared meanings" is common to all human cultures (Jarvis, 2012, p. 48). The use of such stories, including myths and metaphors, in education is also long established (McDrury & Alterio, 2002). Indeed, the utilisation of enacted or experiential stories (such as creation dramas or religious rituals) is commonplace in cultures and is particularly effective in the spiritual "learning process" of matching theory and practice (Wickett, 2005, p. 158). These are clearly intended to be communal meaning-making experiences. Indeed, as Bruner (as cited in Jarvis, 2012, p. 48) states:

> "our capacity to render experience in terms of narrative is not just child's play, but an instrument for making meaning that dominates much of the life of culture – from soliloquies at bed-time to the weighing of testimony in our legal system."

This process of meaning-making through experiential narrative undoubtedly includes the use of particular texts for particular purposes and in particular contexts (think of the bed-time story book or the legal brief). An important element of religious meaning-making is the use of special, sacred texts known as scripture (Beale, 2012; Brigham Young University, 2006). Exegesis grew out of the need to explore the original meaning of these texts given the cultural (and definitional) distance that separated the modern readers (and misreaders) of these texts and the original authors (and audiences) of them (Davey, 2010; Madison, 1999).

The immediate worry in such meaning-making activities is that the meaning may actually be a fabrication of the **real** meaning of the text.[3] To counter this worry, an attempt must be made to ensure that the meaning, in some important sense, **flows** from the actual text. Indeed, the very possibility of knowing that one has misread a text (or is misreading it) presupposes some awareness of what a plausible reading of the text is even before such a reading has occurred (Davey, 2010). Moreover, to "accept a given interpretation as a legitimate reading presupposes a prior understanding of what it would be for something to be a credible reading in the first place" (Davey, 2010, p. 707).

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[3] Of course, the use of "real" here to express this semantic concern implies that a text has only one objective meaning, which is simply not the case (McConkie, 2009; Davey, 2010). Actually, there is not merely one right way to read a text **and yet** neither can genuine reading (i.e., when done right) be radically relativistic (Davidson, 2006; Frederick, 2011; O'Grady, 2002; Tsohatzidis, 2007). The one right way and the many (only) relative ways are both extremes at opposite ends of the same pole of misreading (Burke, 2010; Norris, 2007).

Jarvis (2012) notes these two ways of reading texts by contrasting the following two learning approaches: The "surface approach" of those students who saw themselves "as empty vessels that had to be filled" by memorising the text can be contrasted with the "deep approach" of those "learners" who "saw themselves as creators of knowledge by examining the text in relation to the world" (p. 50). It is this experiential knowledge that exegetical teaching is intended to encourage. Exegetical teaching is an attempt to connect what we learn in the text (when read right) with what we experience in the world (when lived right) – it is an attempt to match both textual theory and experiential practice (Davey, 2010; Everington, 2013; Huntsman, 2005; Rust, 1997).

2.2.3. Moral-Making Reading

There are moral risks attached to reading scripture (Handley, 2011). Both believers and sceptics are prone to approach sacred texts with preconceived ideas. Believers may read the text merely to confirm already held beliefs, thus implying "that reading is unnecessary since it produces nothing new" (Handley, 2011, p. 94). Sceptics may see scripture as a purely human artefact with the ability to produce "perpetually diversified meanings or 'truths' that are merely idiosyncratic for each reader but never transcendent" (Handley, 2011, p. 95). Hence the believer and the sceptic both misread the sacred text and miss the will of God that could be revealed to them in a more accurate, but risk-taking, reading of scripture (Huntsman, 2005; McConkie, 1995; 2009). Taken to extremes these polar positions both ignore the text as a genuine meaning-maker.

In the first place, the fundamentalist believer tends to hold to "an absolute and transcendently correct reading" obtained prior to actual reading of the text (Handley, 2011, p. 98). This transcendental pre-reading divests the text of any human stain, ignores its historicity, and actually limits its potential to generate God-sanctioned additional meanings (Bokovoy, 2014; Hardy, 2010; Holland, 2006). The "meaning" of the text is instead determined *a priori* by appeal to religious tradition (McConkie, 1995) thus making the text both immutable and, ironically, irrelevant. In the case of the secular sceptic (i.e. one who endorses a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Davey, 2010; Madison, 1999)):

> the determinism tends to lie with the reader who produces all meaning, the text being radically excluded from the process of meaning-making. The inherent risk of being answerable to an authority or a source of knowledge outside oneself is bypassed in the interest of a meaning that is simply chosen. Acts of interpretation in such a model are ultimately solipsistic illusions because the agency of discernment is the only agency at work (Handley, 2011, p. 99).

In either case the text is actually ignored,[4] or at the very least, not genuinely investigated. Similarly, commenting on this ethically dangerous dualism, Norris (2007) asserts that Derrida "locates the ethical 'moment' of reading … in precisely this space between the twin poles of an interpretative freedom that is responsible only to itself and an outlook of extreme conservatism in that regard which totally renounces any such freedom – any room for the exercise of autonomous judgement, within whatever 'responsible' constraints – for the sake of absolute fidelity to the text in hand" (p. 46). More often than not, this feigned "fidelity to the text" is actually more likely loyalty to a traditional reading of the text (in whatever discipline). Again, both positions are ethically extreme. On the one hand, there is too much reader responsibility and on the other hand, there is not enough. Essentially, these "twin poles" involve misreadings (or non-readings) of the text in question.

The answer to such extreme (or even subtle) misreadings of scripture is "mutuality" (Handley, 2011, p. 99). It is to accept that scripture combines both the sacred and the secular, both the human and the divine. Although the sceptic is unlikely to be swayed by this the believer should seek to collapse the "binary opposition between sacred and secular reading practices" in an attempt to reach a mutual position (Handley, 2011, p. 95). For the genuine disciple-scholar (Werret & Read, 2007), or the theological critical realist (Shipway, 2011):

> "This mutuality of God's language and human language, between God's omniscience and our limited imagination, makes up the very structure of continuing revelation" (Handley, 2011, p. 100).

This mutuality is the co-mingling of exegesis with eisegesis that was argued for earlier. It asserts that one must search for the original meaning[5] but also recognise the presence of numerous other imported (and imposed) voices and biographies (including the reader's own agency, historicity and bias) in the way the scripture is constructed and transmitted (Bokovoy, 2014; Brigham Young University, 2006). This transmission is a fundamental element of its translation, i.e., its interpretation (Davey, 2010; Davidson, 2006).

A critical believer must recognise that God can use a text touched with human imagination to give rise to genuine spiritual meaning (Bytheway, 2006; Skinner & Marsh, 2002; Smith,

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[4] Even if seemingly idolised (McConkie, 1995).
[5] Which for the believer **includes** the meaning that God, as the ultimate author, has intended (Bednar, 2011; McConkie, 2009).

2009). So, rather than denying either the human or divine elements of scripture one should seek to uncover or discover both (Bradshaw, 2014; Spencer, 2012). In essence, genuine exegetical education consists in "a kind of dialogue between a dynamic, receptive, and changeable reader and a dynamic, receptive, and changeable text" (Handley, 2011, p. 103). This respects the hermeneutical insight that "narrativity precedes narrative" and that present readings of texts are an interim position between past and potential readings (Davey, 2010, p. 706).[6] The "meaning" is never fully disclosed and is always "open" to future and further transformations (McConkie, 2009). Indeed, "each time we read the scriptures we are entitled to see things that were not evident in our previous readings" (McConkie, 2009, p. 43). This means that the canon of scripture cannot be closed to new readings – it **must** be open: such openness is normatively mandated (Beale, 2012; Frederick, 2011; Wilcox, 2003)! This is a critical and crucial Latter-day Saint view of scripture and is a prime reason for why "Latter-day Saints read the Bible differently from the way others read it" (Jackson, 2005, p. vii; McConkie, 1998).

If there are moral risks in reading scripture there are certainly moral risks in teaching scripture. These moral risks cannot be avoided though they can be navigated wisely (Campbell, 2001; Everington, 2013). The most important responsibility that rests with a teacher is to model appropriate reading of scripture for enlightened and enlightening meaning.

2.2.4. Teaching Sacred Texts

The overriding purpose of textual teaching is to encourage close reading of texts. It is only through such close, careful and consistent reading of a particular text that a student can notice the 'hidden' connections of meaning that it contains or can call forth (Ferrell, 2009; Greidanus, 1999; Nibley, 1954). Such teaching can encourage correct readings of scripture, discourage immoral misuses of 'proof-texts', and generate profound personal meaning-making experiences for individual students (Bednar, 2012; Brigham Young University, 2007; Brigham Young University, 1995; McConkie, 2009). A collaborative approach to

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[6] Interestingly, some have asserted that a "narrative" contrasts with a "story" because it is about the person that relates it – it comes from their "point of view" (Brown & Baker, 2007, pp. 89-90). In terms of the sharing of scriptural stories in the classroom, this suggests that to become "narrative" they must become part of the "point of view" of the reader – the reader must be **transformed** by the recounting in some way, so that it (the story) becomes part of their narrative. (Bednar, 2014).

reading for meaning is among the best approaches although even in such a case the interpretation is still tentative and fallible. Hence,

> The longer the text continues to give forth consistent and connected meaning, the greater the probability that it is being read rightly; and the greater the number of people who derive the same meaning from a text independently, the greater the probability that the meaning is the right one. It should never be forgotten, however, that the interpretation of an ancient text never rises above the level of a high plausibility – there is no final certainty. (Nibley, 1964, pp. 142-143)

The plausibility of particular meanings and readings is increased by the independent intersubjective meaning derived by many readers over many years (Davidson, 2006; Parry, 2001; Smith, 2003). Group readings, when convened after appropriate individual readings, which then converge onto similar meanings are more likely to be correct or, at least, not obviously wrong. This assertion is the basis of the practice of exegetical education as envisaged in this research study.

2.3. Exegetical Education in International Education Context

It is also important to consider whether the literature supports the further claim that explicit teaching in this manner can assist in building confidence in a student's own ability to engage in independent, self-directed, self-regulated, self-motivated personal learning. In this regard, exegetical education has connections to other international educational practices, including meaning-centred and learner-centred education. It is useful to consider these to frame the pursuit of peer-learning as an essential component in exegetical education.

2.3.1. Exegetical Education and Meaning-Centred Education

That exegesis is particularly effective in producing meanings which have a genuine connection with a particular text suggests that exegetical education should have characteristics in common with the recent pedagogical practice known as meaning-centred education (Kovbasyuk & Blessinger, 2013).[7] For example, the social construction of religious meaning in a community of learners involves a complex combination of the following dimensions of meaning: hermeneutics, phenomenological, philosophical, and sociological (Kovbasyuk & Blessinger, 2013). This makes the meaning derived from

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[7] See http://www.meaningcentered.org/.

classroom textual teaching (through both exegesis and eisegesis) "very personal, contextual, relational, integrative, holistic, and dialogical" (Kovbasyuk & Blessinger, 2013, p. 14; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

Social constructivism advocates the making of meaning as a form of sense-making (Jarvis, 2012; Jarvis & Parker, 2005; Noddings, 2007). An argument can be made that 'Mormonism' is particularly effective at making sense of life (Givens & Givens, 2012). Meaning-centred education is not merely epistemological, but also experiential, existential, ontological, and axiological. It is education of the whole person (Werret & Read, 2007; Wickett, 2005; Wilcox, 2014; Wood, 2007). It constructs meaning for their entire life-in-world. Since the exegetical method of teaching is particularly aimed at finding meaning, and since exegesis always presupposes or involves eisegesis (Zanardi, 2003), it seems appropriate to see this method as encouraging the creation of both collaborative meaning and personal meanings.

Furthermore, the close relationship between reader and text is augmented by the close relationship between fellow readers – or in the case of religious education – fellow travellers. As Wickett asserts:

> "Recognizing our own spiritual dimension will help us to understand the spiritual dimension of others. This can occur in the context of close, personal or 'intimate' relationships. We must strive to build these close relationships in our work with the learners, in order for them to have opportunities for deeper learning experiences and spiritual growth" (2005, p. 166).

This statement was in the context of general education and so its prescription is even more vital in the context of religious education. Close collaborative learning groups can produce great works of exegetical meaning (Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011). Additionally, as this meaning-centred exegetical education involves the use of questions it is a form of inquiry-based learning (Lee, 2013) and is learner-centred (Weimer, 2002). It, like exegetical education, respects the distinction between "common cultural meaning" and "personal meaning" (Leontiev, 2013, p. 30). The former are communal shared meanings (including traffic signs or church rituals), while the latter are unique to the individual and, therefore, unshared (Leontiev, 2013, p. 30). Finally, meaning-centred education acknowledges that the meaning spectrum stretches from "the Meaning" at one pole to "meanings" at the other by accepting that meaning can be conceived "either as something objectively existing out there in the world, as something existing only in our mind, or as something emerging in the

communication, in the conversational space between individuals" (Leontiev, 2013, p. 30). It is this "conversational space" that classroom exegetical education attempts to occupy (Korsgaard, 1996; Noddings, 2007).

Latter-day Saint Sunday School pedagogical practice also shares features with core reflection (Korthagen, Kim, & Greene, 2013) pedagogy because it recognises the value of a positive psychology approach that focuses on the strengths of students (and teachers) rather than their weaknesses. So rather than prescribing the one and only way to read scripture, this exegetical method is open to divergence, to co-creation and to changing meaning (Everington, 2013). It looks for positive readings of scripture and is fully compatible with diverse and creative ways of discovering or generating these meanings (Holland, 2006; Ferrell, 2009; Ostler, 2001). It can therefore facilitate the particular strengths and talents of individual students, just as core reflection mandates (Korthagen, Kim, & Greene, 2013).

As practiced in this research, exegetical education also involves both student-centred learning (Weimer, 2002) and story-centred learning (McDrury & Alterio, 2002). It attempts to respect the need for holistic education (Miller, 2008), "higher order" questioning (Kerry, 2008, p. 95) and cooperative learning (Jacobs, Aili, Xishuang, & Yongye, 2008). The fundamental features of exegetical education are that it is scripture, story, sense and student centred. This fundamentally connects exegetical education with specific movements in international educational practice (Crick, Stringher, & Ren, 2014; Huat & Kerry, 2008). Having discussed the scripture or text centred nature of exegetical education it is important to consider the student-centred nature of it.

2.3.2. Exegetical Education and Learner-Centred Education

Weimer (2002) advocates the following five key changes in practice to encourage learner-centred learning:

1. The balance of power
2. The function of content
3. The role of the teacher
4. The responsibility for learning
5. The purpose and processes of evaluation

In the context of exegetical education as practiced in Latter-day Saint Sunday School, although each of these have some influence, 2 and 3 are most important for the teacher and 4 is most important for the learner. Given that each student has as much access to church resources as the teacher (and in some cases may have more content expertise or church experience) there is not a clear distinction between expert and student and so the shift in the balance of power (key change 1) will not be as dramatic in this context as it would be in traditional academic classrooms. Additionally, since there is no formative or summative evaluation of students by the teacher in these courses, key change 5 can also be ignored. The changes to the roles of content, the teacher and the student are the three most important changes in practice in exegetical education. It is important to consider these three key changes in turn.

First, the role of content

Weimer (2002) argues for an extensive shift in the function of content in the classroom. For example, the metaphor of covering content suggests that the teacher stands as an obstacle in the way of students discovering content. Hence the dictum: "Aim not to cover the content but to uncover part of it." (Weimer, 2002, p. 46). We do not have to choose between the false dichotomy (Alexander, 2009) of active learning and content coverage (Weimer, 2002, p. 47), nor is this a recommendation to pursue "content free courses" (Weimer, 2002, p. 46). Rather the shift is in the use of content – the role or function it plays in developing active and engaged learners. Direct instruction will still play a part in content delivery (Gill, 2008) but it must be augmented with active questioning of students in how they approach texts, tasks and topics; and innovatively, how the teacher also approaches these (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007; Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006).

For example, Weimer (2002, p. 60) suggests the teacher can use the following questions about how students have marked a text: *"What have you underlined on these pages? ... Is it all equally important? ... Let's talk a few minutes about how you decide what to underline? ... Are there other things you might do with important texts besides underlining it?"* This is directly applicable to teaching texts for meaningfulness. Following a short lecture the teacher can ask, *"How does the material I've just presented relate to what you read last? Let's see if we can articulate that relationship ... does what I've said contradict what's in the book? Does it agree? Have I provided examples to illustrate concepts present in the book?"* (Weimer, 2002, p. 61).

The value of this questioning approach is that it encourages students to reflect on their own reading, acting and learning (Zimmerman, 1998). It also models the essence of exegetical education (Huntsman, 2005). Naturally, the question of "how much content is enough" (Weimer, 2002, p. 67) must still be addressed. This question is directly relevant in gospel doctrine class since it is impossible to cover all the content in the curriculum manuals. Since some content deletion is inevitable it is important for the teacher to reflect on the reasons for particular choices. Examples of such reasoning will be noted in this research study.

The exegetical education as formalised in this research takes account of the danger of dismissing all content (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006) because it utilises a form of direct instruction (Gill, 2008), demands content expertise of the teacher (Huntsman, 2005) and invokes peer discussion toward a particular text and its content (Hilton, 2012). Hence it follows a middle path that encourages both content coverage and active learning (Hemlo-Silver & Barrows, 2006; Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007). As to how to tailor exegetical education to a class of mixed ability it is essential to realise that "most skills (and reading skills are a good example) exist along a continuum, and so it is not too difficult to have students responding to text at different levels" (Weimer, 2002, p. 69). This means it is important to personalise learning activities occasionally to encourage the discovery of personalised meanings (Bednar, 2011).

Second, the role of the teacher

In the context of creating a learner-centred classroom, Weimer (2002) suggests the following principles to guide and define the role of the teacher:

1. Do learning tasks less
2. Do less telling
3. Do more design work
4. Do more modelling
5. Do more peer-learning
6. Create a learning climate

Each of these is relevant to the role of the teacher in exegetical education. First, the teacher must delegate more of the learning tasks to the learners rather than replicating the results of the teacher's own personal learning. The teacher can still do some learning tasks in the

classroom but there should be a noticeable shift in the amount the teacher does. Second, and relatedly, the teacher must do less telling. Weimer (2002, p. 84) relates the interesting example of giving students time to read the course syllabus, and then giving them a ten-question quiz, first as individuals, second as pairs (with the syllabus book) and finally, as an entire class. This encourages active engagement with the text rather than the usual ignorance of it if the teacher just tells the student what is in the syllabus. Third, the teacher must do more design work in place of explicit content-coverage. Hence, the teacher will do more work prior to the classroom in designing learning activities than in the previous teacher-centred classroom. Fourth, the teacher must model some learning activities especially for novice student practitioners. In this research study, the teacher will model the exegetical method of questioning texts and the fruitful conclusions that flow therefrom. Fifth, the use of questions, scripture searches and life stories will encourage and facilitate greater peer learning. Sixth, the teachers must create a positive learning climate if students are going to have positive, productive and peer-centred learning experiences. Although collaborative in nature, these learning climates "are created by action, not by announcement." (Weimer, 2002, p. 101).

Third, the role of the student

Naturally, in learner-centred education the student is primarily responsible for learning. Three principles that can encourage this are (Weimer, 2002):

1. Who is responsible for what in the teaching-learning process?
2. Logical consequences, not discipline.
3. Consistency in word and deed.

The intent of each of these is to model the behaviour that is expected and to give students an opportunity in the classroom to do the same (rather than assuming that they will do it outside class). This can allow students to establish responsibility for their own learning, recognise the logical consequences of their actions as learners and receive the rewards of consistency between their potential and their achievement and between the teacher's educational aspirations and actual classroom actions. The students in this research study will continue to experience forms of instruction other than exegetical education. These students will be particularly able to comment on the effect of exegetical education thus increasing the richness of the research data.

2.3.3. 'Mormonism' in the Mainstream

Finally, as regards the international context, this research took cognizance of the fact that many view Mormonism as attempting to move into the "Christian" mainstream without corresponding changes in key doctrine (Blomberg & Robinson, 1997; Millet & Johnson, 2007; Millet & McDermott, 2007; Millett, 2007). Relatedly, although some Christians advocate seeing Christ in the Old Testament as valid exegesis rather than invalid eisegesis, they do not afford the same scholarly courtesy to Latter-day Saint scholars whom they accuse of reading "Mormonism" into the Bible (Brigham Young University, 2001; Brigham Young University, 2005; Brigham Young University, 2009; Bytheway, 2006; Ferrell, 2009; Gaskill, 2005; Huntsman, 2009; Judd, 2011; Jackson, 2005).

Hence, just as one religion's heresy is another religion's orthodoxy, so one religion's exegesis is another religion's eisegesis (Bucur, 2014; Millet & McDermott, 2007). Some Latter-day Saint scholars differ on the results of the historical-critical method and so differ on how they would answer purely exegetical questions (Bokovoy, 2014; Bradshaw, 2014). This means that exegesis is a valid example of the interpretive approach in religious education because the answers to these questions, and the theological implications that flow therefrom, are internally contested (Everington, 2013; McConkie, 1998; 2009).

2.4. The Specific Context: Gospel Doctrine Class

Having considered exegetical education in an international educational context, it is essential to focus on the very specific context involved in this research. Huntsman has asserted that exegesis is a useful way of conducting "classes, study and discussions" (2005, p. 110). He has provided some sample structures in this initial paper and has also provided localised examples on aspects of the gospel of John in two later papers (Huntsman, 2006; 2009). Others have also provided exegetical papers on various books, chapters or verses of scripture that are faithful to a Latter-day Saint perspective (Brigham Young University, 2001; Brigham Young University, 2009; Brigham Young University, 1998; Bytheway, 2006; Draper, Brown, & Rhodes, 2005; Parry, 2001; Smith, 2009; Spencer, 2012). Each of these is primarily targeted toward religious instructors in Institutes of Religion or the interested educated lay-person. None of these is specifically designed for use in Adult Sunday School. Hence, these resources had to be simplified and modified for use in the Gospel Doctrine class.

However, there are some useful resources universally available. The Latter-day Saint teaching resources readily accessible[8] to teachers (and students) in Sunday School both advocate and illustrate the use of questions to encourage participation, reflection and meaning-generation. The main training manual for teacher improvement suggests the use of the following questions forms: Factual, Reflective, and Applicable (Intellectual Reserve, 1999, pp. 68-69). To these can be added Emotive questions. A factual question relates to historical facts. Reflective questions encourage personal *pondering* by the student. Applicable questions relate to how a particular idea should be practiced or applied in actual living. Emotive questions explore the impact of topics, ideas and stories on the *feelings* of students.

Each of these kinds of questions can be used in the following manner: as Preparatory, Follow-up, and Restating questions (Intellectual Reserve, 1999, p. 73). This has to do with the timing, placing and purpose of questions in the classroom (Ifenthaler, 2012). Each of these can effectively be used in teaching text as a vehicle to meaning for life. Teachers are encouraged to avoid *Yes/No* and controversial questions and to limit the overuse of merely factual questions. This can be seen as a clear indication to avoid too stringent a form of exegesis (where the instructor only asks factual questions of the text). Exegesis can be a foundation upon which to layer the other more reflective, emotive and applicable questions that are central to devotional religious education. Typically then, in a devotional setting, exegesis is the beginning point of departure rather than the end point of arrival. The formalisation of exegetical education used in this research respects that. Other teachers in this organisation have given examples of the role of the teacher as a question asker rather than question answerer (Hilton, 2012; Hilton & Wilcox, 2013; Packer, 1974).

Packer (1974, p. 68) advocates the practice of teachers answering questions with questions because this allows students to learn how to answer "their own question by answering" the teacher's question (See also Bednar, 2011; 2012; 2014). Factual questions can be foundational but reflective, emotive and applicable questions go further (Bednar, 2014; Hilton & Wilcox, 2013). Factual questions are not sufficient for the kind of searching that leads to commitment, to community and to shared meanings (Kovbasyuk & Blessinger,

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[8] These are usually available in the local unit library. Each student receives a lesson manual at the start of the year and each teacher receives the teacher manual. Each of these manuals can be found online at www.lds.org.

2013). Of course, the fact that a teacher asks "many" questions but answers only a "few" himself (Packer, 1974, p. 65; See also Bednar, 2012) does not mean he can enter the classroom without any answers (McConkie, 1998; Holland, 2012; Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006) or lead a discussion without any idea of where it should go (McConkie, 1975; Hilton, 2012). The teacher must be discplined in both preparation and presentation – in both curriculum design and classroom delivery. Bednar (2011; 2012; 2014) often invites students to complete their own learning via an extensive text-based homework assignment[9] – this respects their agency and encourages them to become individual and personal exegetes.

Finally, many creative suggestions about how to introduce questions into the classroom can be found within the Sunday School organisation (Intellectual Reserve, 1999, p. 70), including:

- Place written questions under chairs to be taken out randomly at various points in the class.
- Have students write questions anomymously and then discuss some of them as a class.
- Have a student role-play a character from the text and have other students interview him/her in character.
- Give questions to some students this week for them to report on next week.
- Place one big question on the whiteboard for discussion by class.
- Randomly assign students to small groups tables with questions (i.e. in the form of puzzles or problems) for them to tackle and then share as reports to the class.
- Search particular scriptures looking for questions and then answer them prior to looking at how the scripture addresses the question.
-

To these can be added the following practical suggestions:

- Use a question and answer panel (composed of students) while the teacher acts as moderator.
- Write several questions (as suggested by the students) about a particular theme on the board and then search the scriptures to find answers to these questions.
- Have student groups develop a poster addressing a particular question and then see if other groups can discern the intended question and answer.
- Finish the class by noting any unanswered questions and assign these as homework to be reported on in the next class.

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[9] Typically, this involves inviting them to read the entire Book of Mormon to note, mark, collect and systematize its teachings on a particular theme and to summarize this as a one page answer. In essence, he is encouraging them to engage in a literature review and to construct an abstract or summary of their personal reflections and findings.

Exegetical education, which involves the systematic questioning of text, promises to be active, engaging and meaningful. This research study explored this promise.

2.5. Conclusion

The main assertion of this review of the relevant academic literature is that exegetical education ensures the revelance of selected texts in the teaching process. Since exegesis has connections with meaning-making it can be utilised in meaning-centred education. This makes it a valid, sound and promising teaching technique where the primary aim is to generate personal meaning from communally shared texts. Additionally, it can be modified and simplified to be used in an overtly devotional setting (such as the Latter-day Saint Sunday School gospel doctrine class) and it supports the move toward student-centred learning. Finally, it potentially improves the personal study patterns of indvidual students thus assisting them in the lifelong process of becoming independent, self-directed and self-regulated learners.

Chapter 3 – Research Design

3.1. Introduction

Although the very notion of research *design* can be questioned (Chia & Robin, 2009; Thomas, 2013), and the research in this case has been designed flexibly (Cousin, 2009; Thomas, 2013), it is widely agreed by social and educational researchers that research should be planned and implemented in a reflexive and responsible manner (Bridges & Smith, 2007; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005; Craig, 2009; Ezer, 2009; Johnson, Yip, & Hensmans, 2012). The attempt to define, design, do and describe the research as it proceeded (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005) involves an explanation of and justification for the use of practical action research to examine the research question. It is also essential to specifically respond to objections to the notion of insider or participant research, especially concerns over the supposed surrender of objectivity (the neutral observer), reliability (generalisation) and validity (accuracy) (Cousin, 2009; Ezer, 2009; Eden & Huxham, 2002). The positionality of the researcher (Thomas, 2013) was actually not a shortcoming in this research study – it was a strategic vantage point that provided unique (and insider) perspective (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010).

3.2. Defining the Research

In hindsight, it is clear that the research aims and the proposed pedagogical practice preceded the formulation of the specific research question. Table 3.1 shows the connection between the proposed pedagogical practice (the intervention of exegetical education) and the initial research aims.

Table 3.1: Connection of Practice with Research Aims

Practice	*Research aims*
Exegetical education:	Recommendations for classroom practice
Scripture-centred →	→ Understand text
Student-centred →	→ Utilise themes
Exegetical education →	→ Independent imitation of systematic study?

The initial research question was

What are the experiences and effects of classroom exegetical education in Latter-day Saint gospel doctrine classes?

The literature review and the action research intervention itself provided substantial justifications for the utilisation of exegetical education, and also emphasised the type of experiences and effects that the research was seeking to explore. These are captured in the assertion that exegetical education is "a useful way to structure classes, study, and discussion" (Huntsman, 2005, p. 110). Therefore the research question became:

Is exegetical education a useful way to structure classes, study, and discussion in 'Mormon' gospel doctrine class?

These four conceptual categories[10] guided the coding and theme selection for the initial individual interviews, the researcher's journal and the student focus group interview.

3.3. Designing the Research

Given that the specific research question and the attendant research aims were exploratory about a pedagogical intervention, it appeared critical that the research study itself must be exploratory, and as a study of change, it appeared suitable as an action research study (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010). Section 3.3.1 will first explain the epistemological position of this research and then explain the practice of action research and its connection to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. The history of action research as practiced, developed and transformed by such practitioners as Lewin, Corey, Elliot, Stenhouse and Whitehead (McAteer, 2013; McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010) is ignored as this history is not central to the appropriate justification for action research (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Shipway, 2011; Silverman, 2010; Steup, 2010).

The intelligibility of a particular concept or practice is not determined by its origin or cause, but rather by the reasons that can be brought forward to justify it (Grayling, 1998; O'Grady, 2002). Critical theory provides such an intellectual justification for action research (Giroux, 2001). It is essential therefore to consider it as a preamble to the specification of the type of action research that is employed in this research study. Section 3.3.2 will then delineate the

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[10] Exegetical education itself and the three areas mentioned above: classes, study and discussion.

specific data collection methods utilised, including the units and instruments of data collection and analysis.

3.3.1 Methodology

This research study relies on the validity of first-person authority to discover beliefs, emotions and behaviours (Jacquette, 2004; Lyons, 2001). Hence interviews were an appropriate method of data collection (Baker, 2002). The data collected initially from interviews was further collaborated by participant observation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). Although this research relied on an interpretative paradigm (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Eaterby-Smith *et al*., 2008) and social constructivism (Jordan *et al*., 2008; Schunk, 2000), there was an explicit rejection of the radical relativism inherent in postmodernism's denial of meta-narratives (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; O'Grady, 2002).

This action research study attempted to straddle a middle position between two extremes – one epistemological and the other methodological. Epistemologically, it involved an integration of pure positivism and individualistic interpretativism (Martin, 2007). Although positivism results in genuine objective (mind-independent) knowledge the attempt to build firm *foundations* for social science is mistaken (Thomas, 2013; Moran, 2008). The claim that *only* a positivist paradigm can result in genuine knowledge or (the stronger claim) that it can *only* result in genuine knowledge should be rejected (McConkie, 1998; Misak, 2008; Rowbottom & Aiston, 2007). On the other hand, radical relativism (such as is implied in postmodernism) which denies any claim to objective truth or mind-independent reality should be similarly rejected (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Norris, 2007). Social constructivism recognises that in *some* situations, in *some* scenarios, meaning and truth can be socially constructed (Bandura, 1986; Davey, 2010; Davidson, 2006; Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011). This is especially true for certain population samples that share unique identifiers (Tsohatzidis, 2007). Hence, relativism is itself relativistic – it is true some times and in some things (O'Grady, 2002). However, to deny the very *possibility* of a meta-narrative seems to be a presumptuous mistake (Callister, 2000; Givens & Givens, 2012; Johnson & Duberley, 2000; McConkie, 2010).

A qualitative methodology seeks to generate insights rather than generalisations (Bridges & Smith, 2007; Thomas, 2013), and explore practice rather than present explanations (Cousin,

2009; Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010). Practical/interpretative action research was particularly suited to the research question because rather than presenting a case study of an existing phenomenon, it was a change study of an emerging phenomenon. Action research can be justified as an appropriate research method of Critical Theory. Roughly, the Frankfurt School[11] held that "critical" theory differs from "traditional" theory in that it seeks to change or transform society, including the unjust structures that enslave others – hence it is inherently emancipatory (Giroux, 2001; Honneth, 2010). Heavily influenced by Hegel's *Master/Slave dialectic* and Neo-Marxist in its outlook it sought to "change" the world rather than merely understand it (Noddings, 2007).

Educational researchers (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005; Cousin, 2009; Craig, 2009; Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010) note three general forms of action research, namely (Carr & Kemmis, 1986):

> *Technical Action Research*
> *Practical/Interpretative Action Research*
> *Emancipatory/Critical Action Research*

The justification for practical/interpretative action research can be found in Aristotle's distinction between the following three forms of knowledge: *episteme, technē,* and *phrónēsis* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Graham, 2013).[12] *Technē* and *phrónēsis* are two different modes of "practical, as distinct from theoretical, knowledge (*episteme*)" (Chia & Robin, 2009, p. 105). *Phrónēsis* is associated with *praxis* – hence it is a form of knowledge that comes through a form of action that flows from the situated reality of a person who is seeking, either consciously or not,[13] to become wholly "immersed in the activity" (Chia & Robin, 2009, p. 108; Graham, 2013). Habermas (as cited in Johnson & Duberley, 2000, pp. 117-122) posits three knowledge-domains and corresponding interests (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Table 3.2 indicates these and other features:

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[11] The Frankfurt School stems from a loose joining of a variety of thinkers including Horkeimer, Adorno, Marcuse & Habermas (Giroux, 2001; Noddings, 2007).

[12] It is natural to associate *technē* with the technical, *phrónēsis* with the practical/interpretative and *episteme* (theoretical) with the emancipatory/critical forms of action research.

[13] Although Chia & Holt (2009) argue that it is not conscious, in this research study it will be regarded as a conscious form of action (Flyvberg, 2001).

Table 3.2: The Three Knowledge-Constitutive Interests

Science Type	Cognitive Interest	Social Domain	Purpose
Natural science (empirical-analytical)	Technical	Work	Prediction control
Cultural science (historical-hermeneutic)	Practical	Language/culture	Understanding/consensus
Critical science	Emancipatory	Power/authority	Enlightenment

(*Source:* Mingers, 1992, as cited in Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 120)

Given that this action research study was primarily concerned with "the human practical interest that arises out of the need for inter-personal communication" it best fit the "historical-hermeneutic sciences" which "facilitate the apprehension of the meanings of actions and communications" (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 118). Practical action research, like practical theology, seeks "practical wisdom, or *phrónēsis*" as the "desired outcome" (Graham, 2013, p. 50; Hall, 2010; Miller, 2008).

This research study occupied the cultural rather than the critical domain as it fell short of the full aim of "critical theory" which "seeks to show the practical, moral and political significance of particular communicative actions" (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 122). Although this research study respected the "moral" implications of exegetical education (Handley, 2011), it ignored the "political" significance of introducing it within Sunday School (Giroux, 2001), and instead focused on the practical "purposive" action involved in implementing exegetical education (Chia & Robin, 2009, pp. 108-11; Graham, 2013). Yet this research study could conceivably occupy a middle or "integrative" methodological position between practical and critical action research (McGlinn, 2009, p. 42), especially if in a further action research cycle the political implications were addressed. McNiff and Whitehead (2011) argue that critical theory did not go far enough into the change territory because it "aimed only for understanding, not for action" (p. 47) and so they assert that action research has moved beyond critical theory into what they denote as "living" theory (p. 15). Methodologically, this research study combined elements of practical and critical action research because it aimed to influence the "cultural" and "living" understanding of the research participants (McGlinn, 2009).

The four main (and overlapping) steps of action research are shown in Figure 3.1.
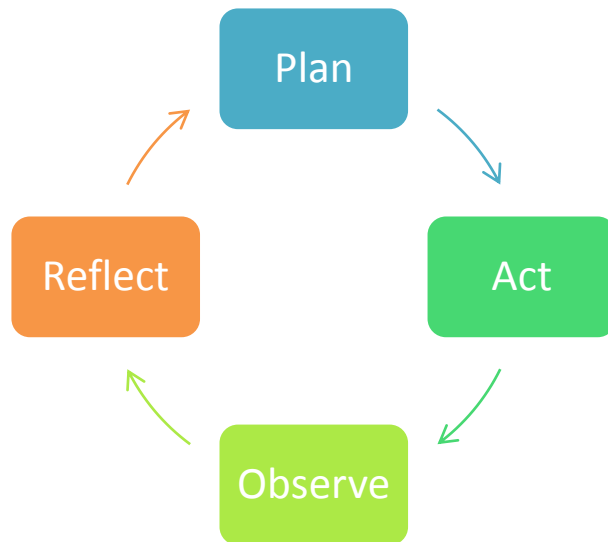

Figure 3.1: Simplified Action Research Cycle.[14]

The cyclical and continuing nature of action research is captured in the following graphic:
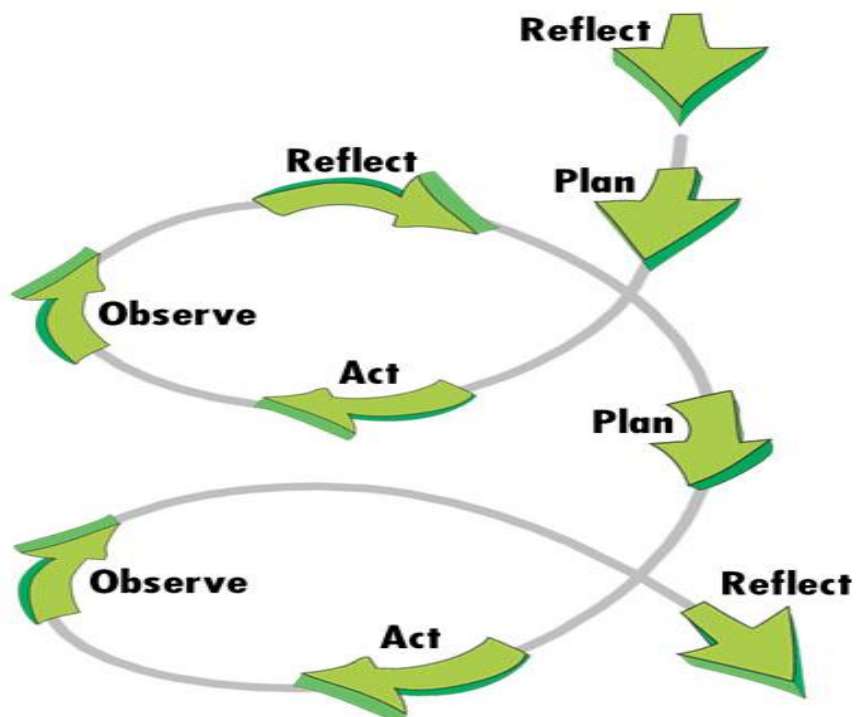

Figure 3.2: The Cyclical Nature of Action Research.[15]

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[14]   Adapted   from   graphic   on   http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet26/yelas.html   and
http://www.informationr.net/ir/1-1/paper2.html. [Accessed June 10th 2014]

A more sophisticated description of the same process can be adapted from the spiral process suggested by Foreman-Peck & Winch (2010, p.87):

1. Specify the problem and/or purpose.
2. Plan an intervention or action.
3. Implement and monitor this intervention (which combines the act and observe stages from Figure 3.1).
4. Evaluate and revise for further research.

After stage 4 it is possible to re-start the action research cycle. In this specific action research study *the problem* was "how to make the text more relevant to the meaning-making purpose of the class?" *The plan* was to introduce exegetical education over a period of ten lessons. This also involved a preliminary literature review of exegetical teaching and constructing lesson plans for the actual teaching occasions. The *action stage* involved the implementation of exegetical education in the study of Genesis through Deuteronomy in Latter-day Saint gospel doctrine classes.[16] The *observation stage* involved participant observation of the researcher's own practice and of the learning effects naturalistically revealed in class (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). These observations were captured in a self-reflective research journal updated by the researcher after each exegetical education intervention. The individual and focus group interviews were also included in the observation stage although obviously it was important to take a reflective stance during these events (Cousin, 2009; Craig, 2009; Eden & Huxham, 2002; Ezer, 2009). The *reflective stage* was taken during the data analysis and resulted in the generation of recommendations for practice. These recommendations could then be used to start the process again leading to a second action research cycle.

3.3.2. Data Collection Methods

Several methods of data collection were utilised in this research. First, it was proposed to conduct semi-structured 'everyday' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005, pp. 267-268) interviews with an expert practitioner[17] about his training, use and understanding of

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[15] Available on http://celt.ust.hk/teaching-resources/action-research. [Accessed July 25th 2014]
[16] These books of the Old Testament are particularly engaging sections of scripture to analyse in the attempt to establish sources (Bokovoy, 2014; Bradshaw, 2014).
[17] 'Expert' from the viewpoint of the researcher.

exegetical teaching and the effects on student learning, and two adult teachers who were specifically selected as they naturally teach by asking questions (Huntsman, 2005; Thomas, 2013).[18] This allowed the exploration of whether "a simplified and confessionally prescriptive exegetical model consisting of asking historical, literary, and theological questions enables a student to read what the text says rather that what the student thinks it says" (Huntsman, 2005, p. 124).

This was accompanied by extensive participant observation (as recorded in a reflective journal) as the researcher implemented exegetical education in his own classroom teaching. Finally, a student focus group interview was held. These students were present during the implementation of exegetical education and were purposively chosen on the basis of being present during the 10 classes taught by the researcher. The focus group interview included a gender mix and involved students with a wealth of church educational experience. Each of these students had also been present in classes that do not use explicit exegetical education during this time period. The data findings from the three initial interviews, the literature review and the reflective journal were used to guide the themes for discussion in the focus group. These themes primarily focused on the four conceptual categories mentioned earlier: exegetical education, classes, study and discussions.

Triangulation of data collected should ensure *reliability* of results and ensuing recommendations for practice (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005; Cousin, 2009; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Although a commitment to an interpretative paradigm lessens the importance of reliability (viewed as 'repeatability') (Thomas, 2013), triangulation should assist in reducing bias (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010). Multiple in-depth interviews should ensure the *validity* of the individual results obtained (Evensen & Hmelo, 2000; McNiff, 2013) especially since the interview questions were guided by the essential components of the main research question and the researcher's own natural bias is geared away from the use of peer-discussions (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006; McConkie, 1975; McConkie 2000).

However, the main purpose of this research study was to *illustrate* whether exegetical education is a useful means of improving practice rather than establishing generalisations (Cousin, 2009). Educational research seeks to offer sensible, useful and experiential

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[18] They explicitly follow a form of prescriptive and existential exegesis although neither of them would call it that.

explorations rather than explanations and as such can guide decisions and inform practice (Bridges & Smith, 2007; Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010). One can question the 'myth' of a special scientific method (Rowbottom & Aiston, 2007) no matter how authoritatively assumed it is (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). The key attribute of genuine research is that it be reflective and systematic (Craig, 2009; Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010).

Table 3.3 summarises the main data collection methods used and the motivations guiding them.

Table 3.3: Data Collection Methods.

Teacher Interviews	Self-Reflective Journal	Student Focus Group Interview
Three teachers who practice the use of exegetical-type questions in their Sunday School teaching.	Reflection on the participant observation and implementation of exegetical teaching.	A purposive sample of students who participated in the implementation of exegetical education as guided by the researcher.

3.4 Doing the Research

Using the four-step model of action research (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010) the research study involved the following stages.

The Planning Stage

The implementation of exegetical teaching by the researcher in a pilot stage took place during October – December 2013 (see Table 3.4). It involved teaching four classes where exegesis was practiced, considerable examination of related literature on exegesis was undertaken, and a survey was designed, passed to students and completed by them during class time and then modified (Andres, 2012).

Table 3.4: Research Pilot Stages

Location and (Student Numbers)	Date	Data Collection Method (Exegetical Content)
Clonsilla (45)	13th October 2013	Initial Survey Participant Observation
Dundalk (15)	27th October 2013	Amended survey Instructor/Facilitator (Malachi 4:4-5 & D&C 2)

Clonsilla (42)	3rd November 2013	Instructor/Facilitator (D&C 18:2-5 & D&C 20:1-20)
Bray (11)	10th November 2013	Participant Observation
Clonsilla (53)	24th November 2013	Instructor/Facilitator (2 Nephi 33:2-4)
Clondalkin (36)	8th December 2013	Instructor/Facilitator (D&C 107:2-4)

The survey, although amended, was discarded[19] and interviewees were purposively chosen at this stage (Cousin, 2009).[20] Permission to interview was sought in October 2013 and consent forms were signed on the actual occasion of the interviews (Eden & Huxham, 2002; Nolen & Putten, 2007). The initial interview (7th December 2013) further informed the research aims, objectives and actions (Craig, 2009) and together with the four pilot classes and the review of literature (Huntsman, 2005) resulted in the formalised method of exegetical education as elucidated in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Formalisation of Exegetical Education

In-class **pericope** →	In-class **peer-learning** →	Post-class **personal** learning via **homework** questions
Understand **texts**	Utilise **theme**s	
(Huntsman, 2005)	(Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008)	(Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Bednar, 2012)

Figure 3.3 is a graphic illustration of the process of exegetical education as formalised during the pilot stages:

Figure 3.3: The Pedagogical Practice of Exegetical Education

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[19] Although the sample was large enough to be representative the survey was too qualitative in design to be completed during a class period and was too vague and rigid to get rich data. The observations by the researcher of in-class activities and the student focus group were used to gather reliable and valid data about the experience of students exposed to exegetical education. All anonymous survey sheets were shredded.

[20] These were chosen as practitioners of questioning and each was chosen as having unique qualities in relation to the practice of exegetical education. The interviews captured the unique strengths of each of these instructors.

The Action Stage

The second interview (22nd December 2013) took place on the same day as the first exegetical education intervention (at which the interviewee was present). The action stage involved teaching nine gospel doctrine classes using exegetical education and a three hour training session with Sunday School leaders and teachers on the importance of making the text meaningful via exegesis and peer-learning. Continuing reflection (Ezer, 2009; Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010) on the use of exegetical education improved the process (Eden & Huxham, 2002) over the period of these ten classes and also highlighted the need for extensive preparation in the design of peer-learning activities (Weimer, 2002). The third interview (21st January 2014) took place after three classes using exegetical education were used and it informed the practice of peer-learning immensely.[21] Table 3.6 illustrates the implementation stage during which the researcher was the instructor/facilitator and utilised participant observation as the source of data collection. The reflective journal was updated on the date of intervention.

Table 3.6: Exegetical Education: Class Delivery by Researcher

Location and (student numbers)	Date	Exegetical Content
Mullingar (38)	22 December 2013	1 Nephi 14:7 3 Nephi 27
Finglas (83)	12th January 2014	Abraham 3 Moses 4:1-4
Dundalk (26)	19th January 2014	Genesis 1:26-27 Moses 2:26-27 Abraham 4:26-27 Moses 6:8-9
Stake Centre (12)	8th February 2014	Alma 5:44-49 Alma 12:9-10 D&C 50:13-22
Clonsilla (57)	9th February 2014	3 Nephi 18:1-12
Mullingar (43)	16th February 2014	Genesis 12:1-3 Genesis 17:1-8 Abraham 2:9-11
Clondalkin (51)	9th March 2014	Abraham 1 Genesis 22 Jacob 4:5
Terenure (66)	23rd March 2014	2 Nephi 3:14-16 2 Nephi 4:1-2 Genesis 37:1-11 Genesis 39:9

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[21] For example, the use of re-directing questions back to the class and especially the use of timelines (the latter was used to great effect on the 16th February and 13th April 2014).

Sligo (19)	13th April 2014	2 Nephi 3:9-10 Exodus 1-3; 5-6; 11-14; Acts 6:25 D&C 8:2-3
Bray (17)	27th April 2014	Numbers 11-12

The Observation Stage

The observation stage took place simultaneously with the action stage (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010) and involved recording qualitative observations in the researcher's reflective journal (Cousin, 2009; Ezer, 2009). This captured rich data relative to the immediate perceptions of the researcher-as-facilitator regarding the use of exegesis in teaching the classes. It also assisted with the planning of upcoming classes, learning activities and recurring themes for further research and reflection. The official observation stage concluded with the student focus group interview held on the 24th May 2014.

The Reflection Stage

Elements of the reflective stage begun during the action and observation stages but were finalised after all the data was collected (Craig, 2009). Acknowledged by Cousin (2009) as a legitimate data analysis technique, the interviews recordings were repeatedly listened to and recurrent themes were noted – these excerpts were transcribed and analysed for qualitative data (Ezer, 2009). The final group interview took place after listening to the recordings several times but before the excerpt transcriptions took place. Therefore some key themes guided the focus group interview (Barbour, 2008). The reflective stage extends beyond the data analysis and comparison with literature (Eden & Huxham, 2002). It extends to the discussion of findings and comparison with the original implications of the literature review (Thomas, 2013). It brings the research question into sharper focus which would re-focus some of the data collection methods used.[22] The recommendations for practice noted later are the direct result of the reflection stage and could be implemented in a new cycle of action research (Cousin, 2009).

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[22] For example, the focus group interview could have captured more data if it had taken place after the completion of data analysis. Other issues highlighted by the data analysis were not fully addressed in the final focus group interview.

3.5. The Ethics of Action Research

Ethics concerns the duties of the researcher toward those researched (Thomas, 2013). Although there are ethical considerations for all research projects (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005), there are particular ones that are important in insider action research (Bridges & Smith, 2007; Cousin, 2009; Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010). It is imperative to acknowledge the ethical threats posed by action research and to formulate appropriate mechanisms to deal with them (Eden & Huxham, 2002). This section will note these and the plans that were in place. Nolen & Putten (2007, pp. 402-403) comment on the following three general ethical issues:

1. Informed consent of participants.
2. Confidentiality of participants.
3. Autonomy of participants.

To these can be added:

4. Honesty of participants (Berg, 2009).

The following ethical protocol guided this action research. Each interviewee was informed about the formalisation of exegetical education and of the intent to implement it. They were further informed about their rights as participants to this research. The interviews were stored electronically in the sole possession of the researcher and were disposed of after transcription of data. The interviewees have not been identified (even to each other) so as to respect their right to remove themselves from the research. If any participant had requested removal from the research their data would not have been included – the consent form acknowledged that they could remove their consent for inclusion prior to a pre-agreed date. Had that happened the research would have been limited to the interviews that remained and the observations of the researcher.

Additionally, the research does not disclose any personal details about any member of any of the ten classes subject to the action research intervention. Finally, the research study, especially during the focus group interview (Barbour, 2008), respected the honesty of participants and did not encourage uniformity of either thought or action (Everington, 2013). Researcher bias was reduced during this action research study through the use of triangulation: the teachers interviewed were co-researchers and regular informal contact

was maintained with them; the reflective journal was honest about the difficulties in introducing peer-learning and discussions; and finally the students interviewed in the focus group were also students of other teachers during the research study.

3.6. Conclusion

Action research is the systematic study of a change intervention for improvement to practice. It follows a clear spiral of steps and explores the usefulness of particular practices. This action research study has three main units of analysis (the researcher, other teachers, and the students) and as such has delivered rich data exploring the experience of these participants in the research. Additionally, this was a highly reflective and flexible process which has led to both positive and negative recommendations. This duality is evidence of the validity of this study because it preserves the rich dichotomy and complexity of lived experience.

Chapter 4 – Data Analysis and Findings

4.1. Introduction

The analysis of the data collected through the various research methods is a crucial aspect to the action research cycle (Craig, 2009). It was guided by the literature review and by the recurring themes from the initial interviews (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Three teachers were purposively chosen as prime subjects of study on the use of exegetical questioning in Latter-day Saint gospel doctrine class (McNiff, 2013). Each have extensive church experience and are adept at using questions as an effective teaching tool. These three assisted the researcher's own preparation for the use of exegetical questioning (Craig, 2009; Cousin, 2009). The researcher then implemented exegetical education and kept a research journal to account for his impressions, reflections and observations (Ezer, 2009). This was followed up by a small focus group interview with six students to ascertain their views on the impact of the exegetical method as practiced by the researcher (Barbour, 2008).[23]

The presentation of the analysis revolves around the four core conceptual categories: exegetical education, class, study and discussion. Themes emerged under each and these were classified (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005) using both network analysis and theme mapping (Thomas, 2013). This process was aided by the laddering process that was attempted during the interviews (Baker, 2002). Excerpts rather than full transcripts of the initial interviews and the final focus group interview were produced (Cousin, 2009). It was discovered that repeatedly listening to the recordings of the conversations (rather than transcribing them in full) did aid in the identification of recurring themes and divergent dialogue (Cousin, 2009). This also permitted the research question and associated conceptual categories to focus the mind on recurring themes.

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[23] The focus group took place after all the ten classes using exegetical education were completed and each of these students had attended all of these classes. Hence there was a clear amount of shared knowledge. After explaining the nature of my intervention, they were asked to comment on anything that they noticed that was different, better, or needed improvement.

4.2. Network Analysis and Theme Mapping

Network analysis involves revealing connections between a core concept and related themes (Thomas, 2013). It treats the core concept as a trunk with the related themes as branches stemming from it. The core concept explored in this research study was exegetical education, with the three main branches emerging being classes, study and discussion. The network analysis aided in the placement of appropriate themes branching further off from these main ideological shoots and led natually to the theme mapping represented by selected quotes from the interviewees and the research journal. Figure 4.1 shows the first level of such a network. These conceptual categories informed and guided the questions in the initial interviews, the observations of the participant researcher, and the focus of the final group interview.
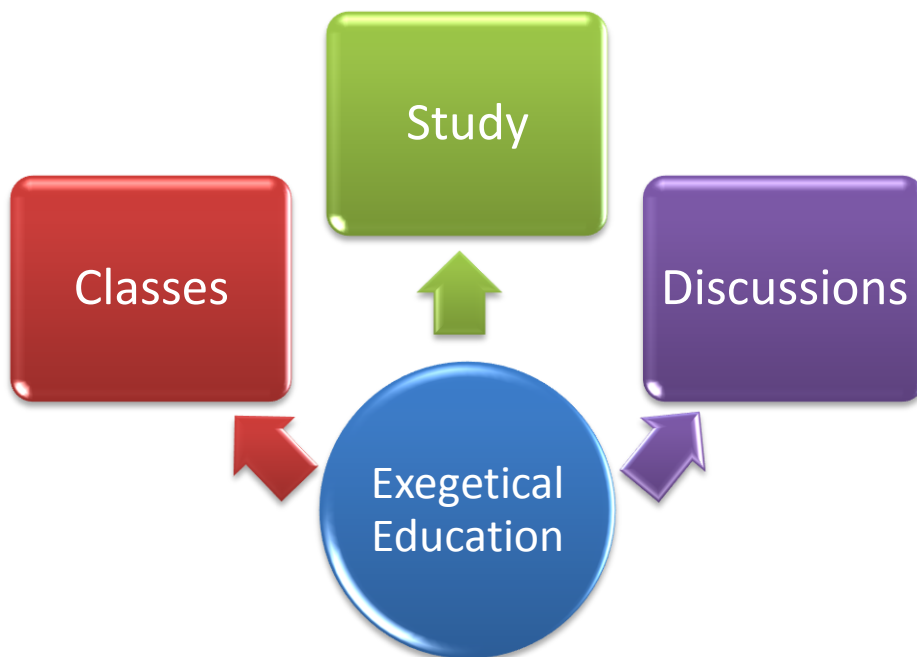
Figure 4.1: Network Analysis – Exegetical Education

Themes emerged under each of these first level conceptual categories (Classes, Study and Discussions) and these, in turn, were used to explore the usefulness of exegetical education. The overall themes that emerged are diagrammed in Figure 4.2.
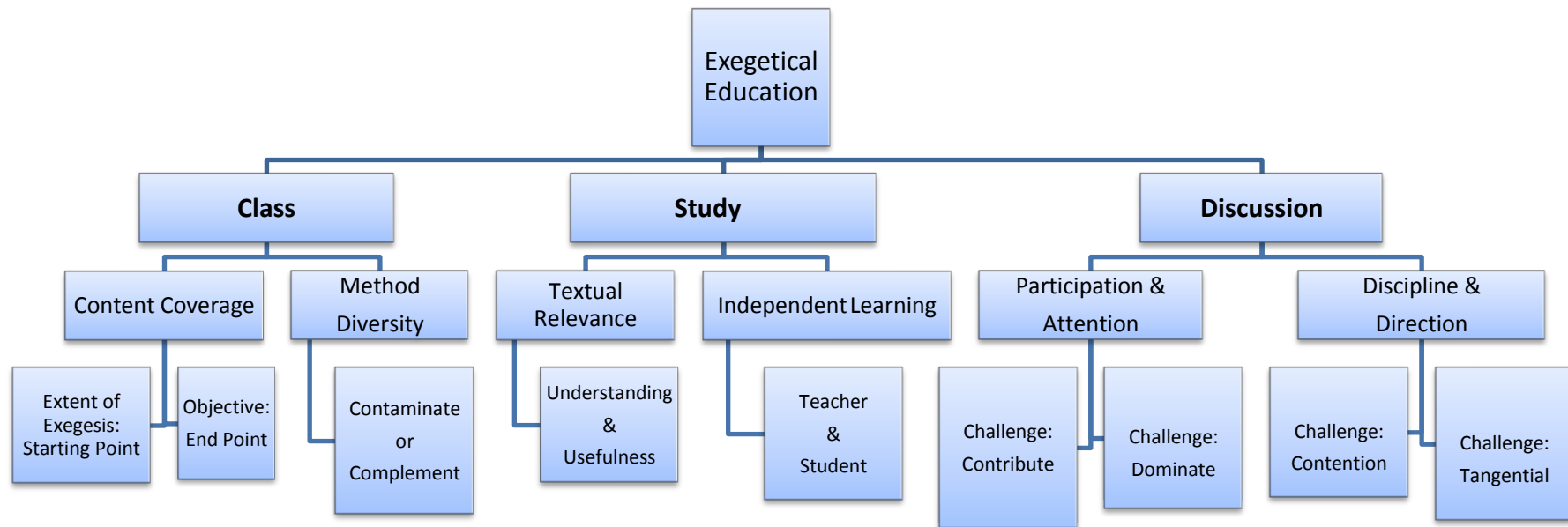
Figure 4.2: Network Analysis – Conceptual Categories and Emergent Themes

As can be seen, six main themes emerged on the third level. These themes were utilised to analyse divergence in the data in relation to the subthemes on the fourth level. Figure 4.2 contains nine boxes on this level which concern a total of twelve issues.[24] The data presentation proceeds by noting the main themes that grew out of the individual conceptual categories and supporting data is presented to justify the findings drawn from each (Thomas, 2013). The quotes used to justify the findings come from the three initial interviews (Teacher A, B and C), the reflective journal as exegetical education was implemented by the researcher (Teacher D), and the six students who participated in the focus group interview (Student A, B, C, D, E and F). Transcripts of the four interviews can be found in Appendices A through D.

4.3. Exegetical Education and Classes

The first conceptual category that can be used as a lens to view the usefulness of exegetical education is that of classes – is it useful in conducting classes? Figure 4.3 highlights the main themes that emerged from the data on the concept of class structure, content and delivery.
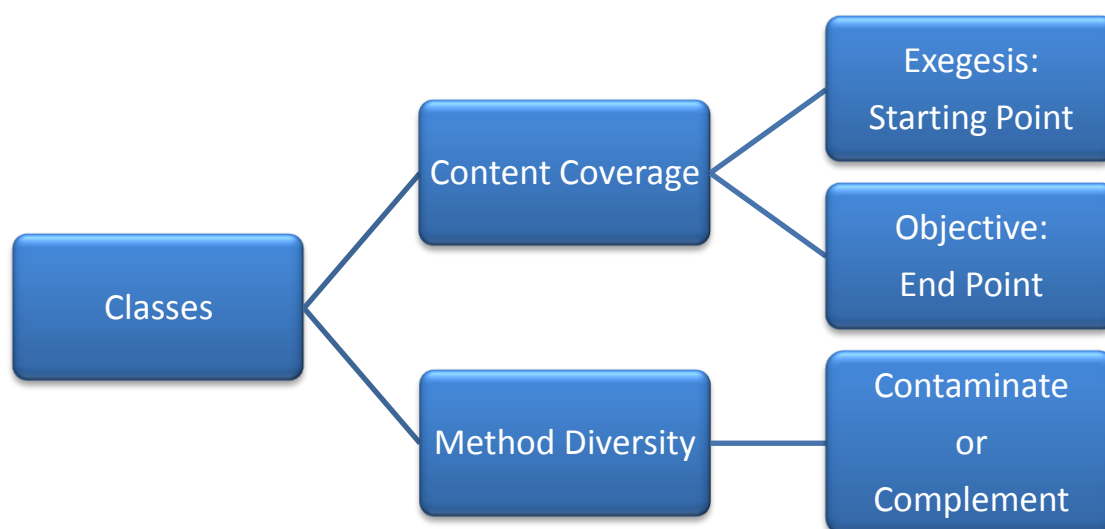
Figure 4.3: Network Analysis – Classes

The data provides evidence that exegetical education requires extensive pre-class content coverage for the teacher but that its use in class is to illustrate the practice of systematic

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[24] For example, teacher and student independent learning are, in fact, two separate issues noted in the data, although they obviously converge in some respects.

scriptural scrutiny. Indeed, it provides an alternative to the extremes involved in the debate over the importance of content coverage. In relation to the content coverage required by the teacher consider the following extracts from the initial interviews:

> *90% of the work done by the teacher is done outside the classroom. I read the text numerous times noting important patterns, correlating with other important external sources and asking exegetical questions ... I have to attempt to strip back over 2,000 years of accrued context to arrive at the original context – the author, the audience, and the contemporary culture – and this takes repeated readings. If I have time I will look at variant readings and whether scholars have an opinion on which is the earliest. I need to avoid being anachronistic ... About 90% of the work for this method is in preparation – learning about the text – getting that content knowledge ... You can't teach what you don't know. This is real mental work and it takes time. I could do it easily when I wasn't working – I could do my own commentaries. But when you have a full time job, a family, church callings and hobbies it gets difficult to get the time to cover everything beforehand.*
> [Teacher A, 7th December, 2013]

Another teacher agrees that the main work precedes the class:

> *I would usually prepare the questions before the class. I do so much work thinking about the lesson objective, the scriptures, the stories and other methods that I don't want to go into class and do the work all over again. I want them to do the work. Asking these questions means I can do less work in the classroom and the students can do more. And that is when they learn. They learn by doing, or remembering or thinking much more than if I stood up there and just told them. So it means more work before class and less work in class than if I was simply up there giving a lecture.* [Teacher C, 21st January 2014]

This naturally leads to a consideration of the extent of exegesis within the classroom. The data shows that there was consensus on the fact that exegesis can be a starting point or an illustration of good practice rather than the essence of the entire class. For example:

> *Exegesis is the starting point. Its purpose is to generate discussion and to lead to meaning. If reading only a few verses achieves that it has been a success, I think ... I think the main goal is to introduce nuggets of information, or insight, nuggets of inspiration. You want to illustrate the method – to get the juices flowing to whet the appetite. So you need to be prepared and then go into class and try to find one or two real nuggets. That's better than covering everything.* [Teacher A, 7th December 2013]

> *Well, it can't all be just asking questions. You have to make presentations too. You have to be focused and to teach principles. Don't just talk about people – talk about the principles that the scriptures teach. So you have to move from a lesson about people to a lesson about principles. You start with the people in the scriptural story.*

Then you discover the principles that they lived by. Then you can move back to a lesson about people – the people in the class – and how these principles apply to them. [Teacher B, 22nd December 2013]

Similarly, an excerpt from the research journal dated 15th March 2014 notes the connection between exegesis as a starting point and the lesson objective as the end point:

There are limits to the use of exegesis. It would be unwise to devote the whole class to pure exegesis. It can be a useful starting point ... The main guide to the extent of exegesis is the lesson objective – because if it relates to experience or to emotion it will not be sufficient to merely cover the relevant scripture passages and what they mean. It will be imperative to relate it to actual modern experiences. In connection with this I have found that it is important to limit the amount of exegesis to a few scriptures or to one theme or one chapter. This guides sufficient questioning to encourage a good discussion but also ensures that the objective can be easily illustrated.
[Teacher D, 15th March 2014]

Indeed, a student noted that exposure to exegesis changed the way they began approaching scripture and also how it can aid in achieving a certain hoped-for end point or objective:

I started asking, "What does this mean?", "Is that really the best word?" The fact that there are different translations or that things can be changed gives me hope when I read a phrase or word that I don't like or don't feel fits that maybe there is a better word or it has a different meaning. I wouldn't have thought about the scriptures that way if I hadn't learned more about their history and how they have been changed. [Student F, 24th May 2014]

This seems to indicate that the formalisation of exegetical education in this research study as inclusive of both textual exegesis (via discussion) to understand the text and peer-learning to utilise it was a wise methodological and pedagogical move. Such a formalisation is commensurate with the evidence that the extent of exegesis is guided by the lesson objective and that it should be regarded as a starting point for meaningful discussion. Indeed, as one teacher cautioned

Do not to be concerned about covering everything you've prepared. Sometimes teachers stop a good discussion because they say, "We don't have time. We have to move on. We have a lot more to cover." I think that is wrong. The first thing I do with a new course is look at the objective ... I point out the objective to the students and tell them this is why we are doing what we do. I can prepare 10 different activities or things we will discuss and they will all highlight the same objective – and it is the objective that they really need to learn. So suppose in the class I only get to discuss two rather than all ten? Well, as long as the objective has been

achieved and has been recognised then this is a successful lesson ... So for me the objective is the goal not to cover the entire content. [Teacher C, 21st January 2014]

The connection of exegetical education with other methods of instruction was a point of divergence among the research participants. For instance:

I don't use a lot of visual aids or videos. I might if I wanted to show a visual structure such as chiasms or parallelisms. So the blackboard can be useful to highlight certain linguistic features but I find that visuals (such as pictures or movies) tend to contaminate the text. They give the impression that we know how people dressed or looked etc. when frankly we don't. I want to ignore the unknowns and concentrate on the text itself. [Teacher A, 7th December 2013]

I also don't like when teachers overuse the blackboard too much or use too many visuals. I've already said that I think the mind is the most fascinating teaching aid that we have. Writing too many things on the board can distract people from thinking because they are too busy looking. [Teacher B, 22nd December 2013]

These views contrasted with the views of other teachers:

Actually, I see this as complementary with different methods. I use variety. I think it is important because otherwise students get bored and the class gets too predictable ... So I use different methods. But I can always ask questions. So for example, I can use a story and ask a question, or I can use a picture and ask a question about that, or a scripture passage, or a quote ... I can always use questions in whatever method I'm using. But variety in teaching methods is important. If I use the blackboard it is usually to do a timeline or a simple picture. I've found the timeline really helpful and the students have told me, "We really like the timelines." So asking questions about a scripture is one method among many – but you can always use questions because that is the essence of teaching – asking and answering questions. [Teacher C, 21st January 2014]

An extract from the research journal dated 13th April 2014 asserts the flexibility of exegetical education:

Although I would gladly sit in a purely exegetical class and am happy to attend lectures led by those with content knowledge, I do recognise the need to use variety ... I'm improving in connecting exegetical teaching with other diverse methods. One can take an exegetical approach to all sorts of teaching techniques and so it is widely transferable. It is compatible with diverse styles of teaching too. [Teacher D, 13th April 2014]

A student from the focus group interview confirms this reflection:

I liked the use of group activities. It helps to see what others think. I noticed you made more of an effort to get others to talk to share their feelings. That was good. It was more varied. [Student D, 24th May 2014]

The main finding that can be drawn from this is that exegetical education is compatible with diverse styles and methods of instruction. Although in each of these cases it involves student discussion it is also compatible with other visual, audio, reflective and participatory methods. Where there is fear that some other method will "contaminate" the text this can be noted by the teacher with appropriate disclaimers.

Finding 1: *Exegetical education employs exegesis as the (starting) point of departure, the lesson objective at the (ending) point of destination, and peer-learning as the journey vehicle.*

Finding 2: *Exegetical education is compatible with diverse delivery methods and multiple teaching techniques.*

4.4. Exegetical Education and Study

The themes that emerge from the consideration of study as a lens through which to view the usefulness of exegetical education can be seen in Figure 4.4.
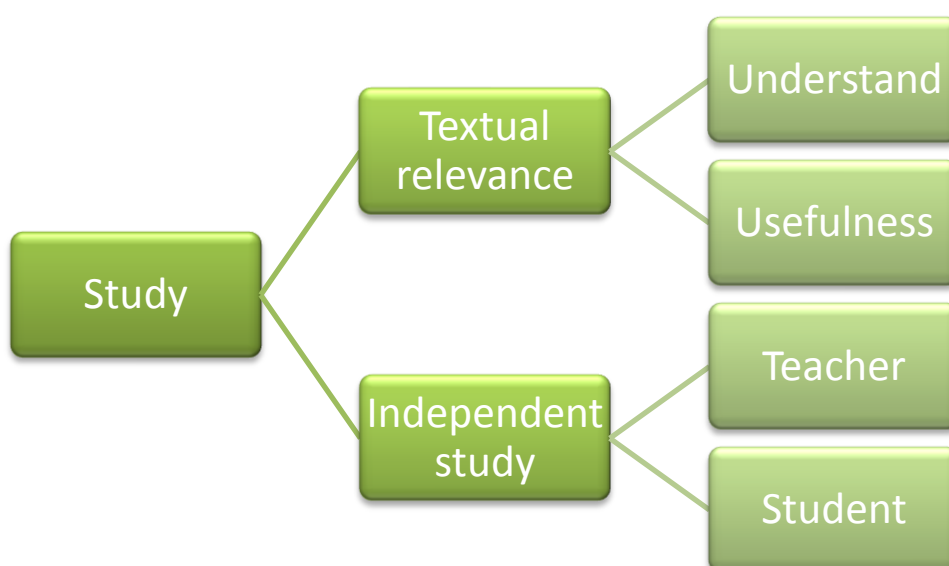

Figure 4.4: Network Analysis – Study

The research problem began with the question of how to make the text more relevant. There is strong evidence that exegesis makes the text more relevant – it makes it more

understandable and more useful – as both the teachers and the students agreed. For example:

> *Yes, I thought the exploration of the scripture was better – I started to see more how you read them and why you get so much more out of them. You are always asking questions and are not afraid to suggest an answer and then look for evidence that the answer is true.* [Student A, 24th May 2014]

> *I understood the scriptures we were reading better. They connected to the lesson topic more. They made more sense to me. I could see that they were relevant to us today.* [Student F, 24th May 2014]

> *I do think that it was more relevant. It connected the scriptures to how we are living today ... That connection with modern questions occurred to me again and again ... That reminds me of something that I liked about this – usually we just talk about how to apply the scriptures but this allowed us to actually understand first and then talk about how to apply them. It makes them more meaningful. It makes it stick.* [Student C, 24th May 2014]

> *I think just teaching the scripture didn't make it more relevant to me – although I understood it better. But the class discussion did. Hearing people's experiences with the principle helped me realise that the modern gospel is so similar to the ancient one. Yes they had a different culture and everything but there are many things we share in common.* [Student E, 24th May 2014]

This indicates again the need for both exegesis and peer-learning but also indicates that students found the ensuing discussions more relevant because they understood the text better. The reflective journal also indicated the increased relevance of the text in the class discussion due to the prior exegetical study of the text:

> *The exploration of the text first led the students to appreciate the text in a new way ... Secondly, it led to previously unnoticed connections with other texts as a result of some genuine questions from the students ... preparing to teach exegetically prepared me to anticipate certain questions and comments and also prepared me to include peer-learning in the classroom activities.* [Teacher D, 12th January 2014]

> *Today I showed the progression of learning by looking at how the same scripture was treated in four different sources. Each new scripture added a new idea to the same concept. This was a particularly effective way of teaching because it showed the progression and added to the insight that one gets from scripture. I had the students break into groups and look at the first 3 verses to discuss context and progression of thought. After they each reported on this we looked at the final scripture as a group. The ensuing discussion was noticeable more effective than if we hadn't done the previous work. It also led to a genuine question which I had anticipated and at this point we were able to consider another scripture and gain*

insights that we wouldn't otherwise have seen. Teaching scripture in sequence is very illuminating. [Teacher D, 19th January 2014]

Today I used a timeline to begin the class. It focused on events that happened to Abraham or things that he did. The class had to provide the details. This helped identify gaps in knowledge and also helped give a lens to the scriptures we were reading – especially the command "Do the works of Abraham!" It was a very effective technique that came from approaching the material exegetically. It helped with showing that we can apply what they did then to what we do now. [Teacher D, 16th February 2014]

The experience of the researcher as exegetical education was implemented and the feedback from the students during the focus group interview is illustrative evidence that explicit exegesis can assist with understanding an ancient text better and can encourage a more relevant and meaningful discussion about how to apply or use it in real life. Confidence that this would be the case came from the initial teacher interviews:

It made me really think, forced me to pay attention, to justify my reasons and to really read the text ... I found I could replicate it in my own study. [Teacher A, 7th December 2013]

I find that questioning helps you really search for an answer. So this is the way I teach because this is the way I learn. [Teacher B, 22nd December 2013]

I suppose that this is something that I've notice in really great teachers – the teachers from whom I've learned the most. They ask questions. They don't always provide the answer. Really they are teaching you how to learn. [Teacher C, 21st January 2014]

It has already been noted that a teacher who uses exegetical education will do more independent study prior to class. The reflective journal indicates that exegetical education also increases the tendency of the teacher to do independent study after class. The following two excerpts indicate that this was a regular occurrence for the researcher:

My mind has been running over the questions that were asked and the answers that were given in the class on Sunday. Having reread the scriptures again I have explored new connections and also raised more interesting questions. We can indeed learn more from a text we have read many times – especially when we read it in the light of other passages also. It helps with deepening our understanding with even the simplest concepts. [Teacher D, 15th January 2014]

I had an interesting insight today as I was teaching. It occurred as we turned to a scripture at the close of the class that I felt prompted to turn to. It is one that I know very well and have taught new things about regularly for the last 20 years. I read it

and a student (who is also a teacher) raised an interesting question. The question caused me to see things in the text that I hadn't noticed before. The use of a new question can bring new insights even to those who consider themselves experts. It was an exciting moment. [Teacher D, 13th April 2014]

A final consideration under the category of study addressed whether it encourages independent study by students. The teachers indicated that exegetical education influences some:

It makes a difference for some ... I find that they come better prepared. They've done the reading. They come with questions. They raise issues that I hadn't even planned on raising. That's when the class gets exciting – because there is genuine asking and genuine learning. [Teacher A, 7th December 2014]

I think it has good effects. But it does depend on the students and what they do with it. For example, I've found less resistance from some students as I've continued with this week after week. Some of them actually come up and said that they've been thinking more about it ... Some of them read more than just the assigned scriptures, they also read the manual. So they are doing more reading. These are students reading the teacher's manual to prepare for class. [Teacher B, 22nd December 2014]

An excerpt from the research journal dated the 23rd March 2014 indicates that consistent exposure to exegetical education encourages independent learning:

I have found that those who have been consistently exposed to this method of teaching are most eager to experience it again, are eager to contribute their own views on the scriptures and are more willing to come privately and discuss questions with me. They also begin to ask better questions, suggest other scriptural connections and prepare more thoughtful and meaningful experiences. I think consistency in being exposed to this method is important. [Teacher D, 23rd March 2014]

There was a suggestion from one student that exegetical education does influence independent study:

I've gone out of class and wanted to study things myself or read the lesson for the next week so that I would be better prepared. I've noticed that I wonder about things as I read. [Student F, 24th May 2014]

The following statement indicates that in the view of some students the application aspect should be done independently:

I wonder though is it something best done in private. Joseph Smith said, "I teach correct principles and they govern themselves." Maybe we should let people govern themselves. Let them figure out how to apply the scriptures to their own lives. Maybe we should focus more on understanding scriptures. I think I would prefer if that was the focus. [Student B, 24th May 2014]

This important point must be critically considered in Chapter 5.

Finding 3: Exegetical education does give the text greater relevance and helps bridge the gap between understanding and utility (i.e. between theory and practice).

Finding 4: Exegetical education requires that the teacher do extensive independent study and encourages most students to do the same.

4.5. Exegetical Education and Discussions

Figure 4.5 shows the results of network analysis on the category of discussions. Two main themes emerged from the data on the impact of exegetical education on classroom discussions – these were the participation and attention of students and the discipline and direction involved in exegetical discussions. The issues that arose from these themes have been framed as challenging because they are potential threats to the usefulness of exegetical education in generating genuine peer-learning. Interestingly, exegetical education provides a solution to each of the potential problems also.
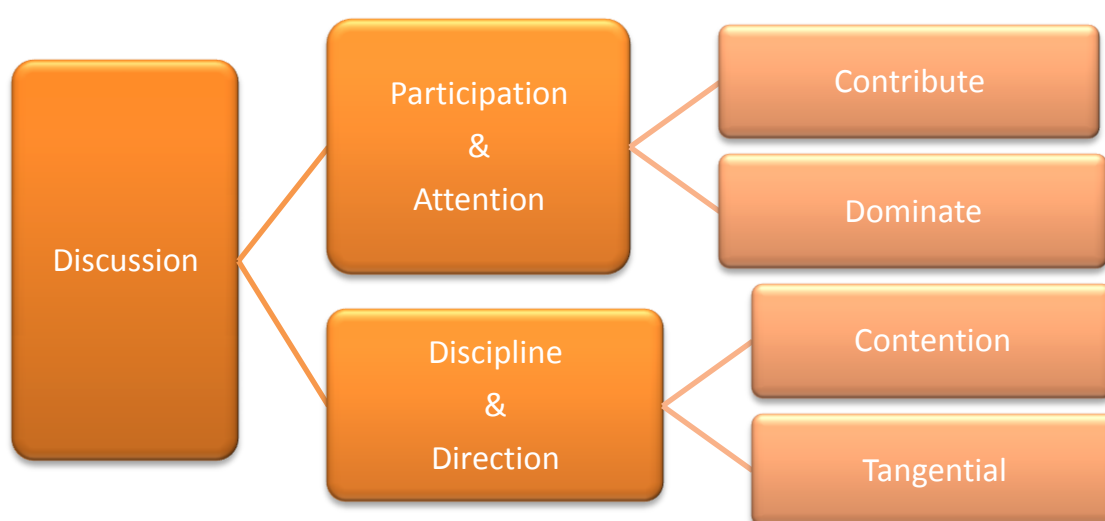

Figure 4.5: Network Analysis – Discussions

There was general agreement among the teachers that exegetical questioning encourages more attention from students, even when they may be initially fearful of contributing:

It forces them to think. It challenges their assumptions. It requires them to look at the text and ask, "Why that word?"; "Why that phrase?" [Teacher A, 7th December 2013]

It forces them to think. It makes them more active and attentive. I don't accept the usual answers. If someone says the usual ... I ask, "Yes, but why?" ... What did it mean to them and what does it mean to you? It makes them really pay attention and forces them to think for a deeper answer. [Teacher B, 22nd December 2013]

It definitely makes it more active. It makes them more interested. I am more interested in connecting this text, or story or visual aid with what the students have experienced or with what the lesson objective is than I am with finding one right interpretation of a passage of scripture. That is why I try to ask creative questions or ask them in a creative way. It also makes them more connected. They see that they share things in common with each other – not just with the people we are reading about. [Teacher C, 21st January 2014]

Connected with this increased attention, however, is an increased hesitation, at least initially, to contribute in class discussions. This is primarily due to the fact the questions are initially exegetical and only then experiential or emotive. The teachers suggest the following solutions to this challenge:

When I use this method ... sometimes there is the challenge that no one wants to speak – no one wants to appear foolish. But I wait. Then I re-ask the question. I wait again. Someone ventures an answer and I either remind them of what we already know about the context or I restate their answer back as another question. Either way, I am forcing them to think about what they are thinking by looking at the text and asking themselves – "What does it mean?" [Teacher A, 7th December 2013]

Sometimes when they are afraid to answer because they think they are the only one to have had a question, a doubt, or a puzzling experience, it helps that I relate one from my own experience. This wakens them up to the possibility that others have experienced what they have. But I've found that what really makes the difference is when one of their friends, a peer, either has had the same experience, or the same question or the same confusion. Then they are eager to discuss it and to explore their feelings about it and what it means that the scriptures, or the prophets, are dealing with it too … Another challenge is that students have different abilities or different difficulties. This makes some very hesitant to participate. We need to widen the range of participants. Sometimes silent reflection can be useful – like using a scriptural journal in the class. [Teacher C, 21st January 2014]

Patience and persistence are important in the implementation of exegetical questioning. Sometimes the peer-learning activity is the solution to the fear surrounding the exegetical questioning because it connects the text to some commonality (for example, an experience, a question, or an emotion) that unites the class. This requires that the teacher have knowledge of the text and of the students too:

> *First, don't be afraid of silence. Don't rush to fill it with your own thoughts and experiences. And don't attempt to re-ask the question in a 'new' way. First wait. Usually, silence is a sign the class is thinking. Let them think. So wait for the answer. If it becomes obvious that they are struggling, then ask a stage-setting question. This will help remind them of experiences they had that relate to the scripture story. Then you will get answers. You can also redirect, or, if you know enough about the students, remind them of a previous experience one of them has had. So you need to be prepared to let them think, let them work and let them answer.* [Teacher C, 21st January 2014]

A disciplined and confident teacher can overcome the initial reluctance of students to answer exegetical questions:

> *You ask a question and nobody says anything because they don't want to look foolish or stupid. You need to prepare for that. You can restate the question. You can invite them to look at the scripture again. You can ask a preliminary question. Eventually people start speaking.* [Teacher A, 7th December 2013]

An extract from the research journal dated the 23rd March 2014 indicates that both the teacher and the students share responsibility for exegetical peer discussions to proceed:

> *The teacher also has to prepare appropriate learning activities for the students to think about the text and about ways to apply it. But its success is also accelerated by the preparation of the students. With consistency, the students learn to expect to be asked questions about the text rather than have the teacher tell them the answers. Those who read are better prepared for participation.* [Teacher D, 23rd March 2014]

This indicates that the *initial* responsibility rests with the teacher but then shifts to the students. Exegetical education increases the ability of students to contribute positively:

> *I have found that those who have been consistently exposed to this method of teaching are most eager to experience it again, are eager to contribute their own views on the scriptures and are more willing to come privately and discuss questions with me. They also begin to ask better questions, suggest other scriptural connections and prepare more thoughtful and meaningful experiences. I think*

consistency in being exposed to this method is important. [Teacher D, 23rd March 2014]

Finally, the research journal suggests the following potential long-term solutions to the challenge of non-contributing students:

Plan personal reflective activities – which will give [non-contributing students] the opportunity to contemplate and find meaning. It might be possible to ask some of them to relate their thoughts, feelings or experiences with the text after a few opportunities to do this reflection privately. This can be done in small groups first. After a while they might start doing this of their own accord in class. Such planning requires a long-term view of exegetical education. But asking interesting, unexpected and creative questions can attract the silent students to pay non-verbal attention to the discussion. [Teacher D, 27th April 2014]

The data from the focus group interview is a good lens to introduce the other side of the challenge. Some students liked the increased peer learning:

I liked the use of group activities. It helps to see what others think. I noticed you made more of an effort to get others to talk to share their feelings. [Student D, 24th May 2014]

I like that you re-directed questions back to the class ... Then when someone answers you add to the answer and we learn even more. [Student B, 24th March 2014]

Naturally a focus on increasing contribution will not be appreciated by everyone, especially if the right balance is not struck between the two strands of exegetical education:

Sometimes the class was a bit too conversational. It is almost as if we are hearing about other people's lives rather than about the people in the scriptures. [Student C, 24th May 2014]

This leads to a consideration of the opposite challenge – when one student (or a group of students) dominates the discussion:

The other challenge is on the other side. You might get someone who is too eager to talk. They dominate the discussion. They take over answering every question. You need to be disciplined. This is why asking specific students can be helpful (though always ask the question, before you say the name – that way, they are all thinking). So you have to be prepared for silence on the one hand and talkativeness on the other. Asking stage-setting questions or redirecting questions or even just dropping

the question and moving to another activity to illustrate the principle can deal with these. [Teacher C, 21ˢᵗ January 2014]

An extract from the research journal dated 12ᵗʰ January 2014 notes that such must be dealt with sensitively:

> *Today there were several comments from one student that were tangential, controversial and potentially contentious. Eventually, I have to deal with them through the use of a disclaimer – "We appreciate the comments and insights that you've shared but the lesson objective doesn't require us to discuss _____ now. Each person can read more about it themselves. Today we need to talk about _____, instead." This worked quite well. In a smaller class it would be possible to break into small groups and do a peer-learning activity. That would also help diffuse such potential tense situations.* [Teacher D, 12ᵗʰ January 2014]

The use of exegesis is challenging and this is unavoidable although some controlling techniques can be used:

> *Sometimes it felt like we were getting too deep into the scripture and sometimes it almost raised controversial questions. I felt uneasy when that happened though you did control it well.* [Student A, 24ᵗʰ May 2014]

There is great onus on the teacher to control the direction of discussions so that they do not become confrontational. This requires preparing a 'soft Socratic" response or turning to peer-learning activities:

> *It can become confrontational. That is a real risk. It is also the biggest challenge because it is the exact opposite of what you want to have happen. So you have to be careful. You don't attack the answer – you tease out the reasons behind it and then you look at those. You follow a soft Socratic method. "Can you think of any examples where that isn't true?" So they are searching and looking for truth. That re-focuses the confrontation for a look for truth. It is best to invite the class to contribute rather than just one individual who may think you are picking on them.* [Teacher A, 7ᵗʰ December 2013]

In using exegetical education it is important to use the text as a tool to diffuse potentially explosive classroom exchanges rather than generate them:

> *The person who insists on reading the text a particular way, isn't going to move and isn't going to learn. They want to hear you say what they already believe. And so they aren't willing to move into unknown territory. Now there are two ways you can deal with that. You can say, "Ok ... from a critical reading of the text ... what are your reasons?" ... Then you are having a discussion about how to read scripture*

and that is a potentially very fruitful and interesting discussion. The other way of dealing with this is to turn it into a fight. To get so caught up in this one issue, this one text that it gets contentious. And that is the exact opposite of what you want to happen. So you have to be in control of your emotions. You can't get angry. You can't get personal. You have to always point back to the text. What is the text saying? [Teacher A, 7ᵗʰ December 2013]

This same approach can be used for tangential discussions. Hence, using the text gives the class and the discussion greater structure and is useful is both directing and disciplining the discussion. Although it can generate potential challenges and is therefore harder than the traditional technique of using the text as a mere springboard, exegetical education actually has the resources and tools to provide the solution to these same challenges. It can assist students in being more attentive and improve the quality of their contributions and it can also bring discipline and direction to the discussion that ensues. Exegetical education can assist in making the text more relevant and in making the discussion more meaningful.

The most difficult challenge for the researcher was the inclusion of peer learning as an integral part of exegetical education. Maintaining teacher discipline was most difficult for the prime researcher as indicated by the following quote from one of the students:

> *You do sometimes interrupt people while they are speaking. It is almost like you have somewhere else you want to go … I suppose if you ask a question you should let people answer and wait until they are finished. Wait until you are sure they are finished and let them know that you respect their contribution.* [Student B, 24ᵗʰ May 2014]

The reflective journal also notes this tendency:

> *Reflective practice is hard because it is easier to fall back into traditional patterns. Although I have always used questions and always encouraged participation, if I am honest, it is not my favourite way to learn or to be taught. This resistance to encouraging discussion reflects itself in the common tendency to cut people off – to stop them talking by agreeing with them and continuing one with my own thoughts. I am sure it is annoying to some and it will take real effort to correct it but the really great thing about "exegetical education" is that it is more satisfying to me personally as an instructor (because it respects and concentrates on the text) but also more satisfying to the learner as it involves peer discussion. It really feels like the best of both worlds.* [Teacher D, 12ᵗʰ April 2014]

In effect, the researcher accepts that learner-centred education should still be concerned with content delivery and that an instructor/facilitator does not have to choose between them (Alexander, 2009).

> *Finding 5: Exegetical education can involve the introduction of various obstacles to fruitful, open and respectful class discussions.*

> *Finding 6: Exegetical education provides the tools to overcome discussion obtacles and can improve the meaningfulness of discussions.*

4.6. Conclusion

As can be seen rich data was collected from the teacher interviews, the reflective journal and the student focus group interview. The data represents a wide range of opinions and yields numerous findings. Some of these qualitative views are complementary and some are contradictory (Thomas, 2013). That is not surprising because this research is dealing with how particular persons have experienced and enjoyed a particular intervention (Cousin, 2009). Uniformity of opinion would be an invalid result (Ezer, 2009). Diversity of opinions and of perspectives is to be expected and respected.

Chapter 5 – Discussion of Findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the research study in relation to the researcher's own perspective and the literature review. In this discussion, respect is shown for diverse opinions and recommendations are offered based on that. The first section briefly recapitulates the purpose for the research study, and the following sections compare the research findings with the literature review. The penultimate section discusses the importance of using action research as the methodology and the final section concludes with the answer to the research question.

5.2. Purpose and Findings of Research Study

The initial problem was that the scriptural text in gospel doctrine class is often only used as a springboard to a thematic class discussion and is therefore less relevant to both students and teachers. The following claim seemed to indicate that exegesis could be a solution to the problem: "a simplified and confessionally prescriptive exegetical model consisting of asking historical, literary, and theological questions enables a student to read what the text says rather that what the student thinks it says" (Huntsman, 2005, p. 124). The main research findings in relation to the usefulness of exegetical education are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Synopsis of Research Findings

Classes	Study	Discussions
Exegetical education involves exegesis as the starting point, the lesson objective as the end point, and peer learning as the journey.	Exegetical education does give the text greater relevance and helps bridge the gap between understanding and utility (i.e. between theory and practice).	Exegetical education can involve the introduction of various obstacles to fruitful, open and respectful class discussions.
It is compatible with diverse delivery methods especially during the peer-learning activities.	It requires that the teacher do extensive independent study and encourages most students to do the same.	It also provides the tools to overcome these obtacles and to improve the meaningfulness of discussions.

5.3. Research Findings and Literature Review

Several of the research findings compare favourably with the expectations raised by the literature review. The review of literature concentrated on the two strands of exegetical education, namely, exegesis and peer learning. The following two sections will address how the research findings illuminate the literature review

5.3.1. Exegesis and Textual Relevance

It was asserted that exegesis involves the transformation of both the reader and the text as a ongoing meaning-making relationship (Davey, 2010; Handley, 2011; McConkie, 2009). It was further asserted that exegetical education would increase the relevance of the text beyond mere understanding because it would be posible to use peer-learning activities to increase the utility of the text in real life (Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011; Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008). The research data *illustrates* these expectations. The researcher and several students verify that exposure to exegetical questioning of the text increased the tendency to reflect on the meaning of the text, its connection with other passages and other ideas and, finally, its impact on how one should or could live (Christianson & Bassett, 2003; Covey, 2004; Lee, 2013). Obviously, such experiences cannot be programmed, and a one-to-one corresponding between one variable and the other cannot be established quantitatively (Thomas, 2013). However, the experience of explicit exegesis clearly illustrates that exploring a text to discover meanings prior to discussing applications in a collaborative classroom setting is a practical solution to the problem of how to make the text more meaningful (Bednar, 2014). There are further illustrations that post-class personal pondering followed on occasion for both the instructor and the students (Hilton, 2012).

Exegetical education makes demands on the content knowledge of the instructor (Huntsman, 2005). The teacher has to prepare appropriate passages, questions, experiences and learning activities prior to the classroom delivery (Weimer, 2002). It is important to anticipate possible controversies, misreadings or potential problems (such as necessary threshold knowledge) in the student's comprehension of the text (Huntsman, 2005), and to prepare actitivies or questions that will resolve these (Crick, Stringher, & Ren, 2014). Such obstacles to exegetical exploration are actually opportunities to illustrate the value in this method (Coombs & Elden, 2004; Davis & Gray, 2007). A consistent return to the text to

explore the controversies or misreadings can produce new insights, new connections and novel applications (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Noddings, 2007). They can most importantly encourage further questioning on behalf on the students (Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008). Failure to anticipate these potential roadblocks to reading for meaning is a serious pedagogical failure, and reduces the impact of the text in meaningful discussions (Alexander, 2009; Jarvis, 2006).

Exegetical education makes demands on the student and consistent exposure to such an approach prepares them to anticipate such an exploration in further classes (Bednar, 2012; Weimer, 2002). This in turn encourages them to come to class better prepared, to ask tough questions of the text and of the class, and to really reflect on similar or dissimilar experiences that they have had (Wilcox, 2014). It was not unsual during the course of the action research intervention to hear a student say, "I've felt that way" or "I know how he [a person in the scripture] feels!" (Wickett, 2005). These moments indicate that a connection between "them, there, then" and "us, here, now" has be achieved, which is one of the prime purposes of exegetical education (Huntsman, 2005).

One downside to exegetical education is that attempting to utilise "a simplified and confessionally prescriptive exegetical model" (Huntsman, 2005, p. 125) in an overtly devotional and worshipful community class such as gospel doctrine may occasionally give license to the more academically trained and theologically educated students to delve too deeply into the origins or historicity of a particular text. Gospel doctrine class is not the place for such questioning, especially if overtly doubtful of the text. Such problems rarely arose in this action research study but it could be a potential problem. This is one reason for balancing exegesis with peer-learning (Alexander, 2009; Jarvis, 2012). It is important to consider the text and what it means (and what it does not mean) but then to bracket further exploration of the text and instead move to a consideration of its applicability. It ought to become confessionally prescriptive and that implies a class discussion about how to live the text in a modern setting – how to apply it to modern times.[25]

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[25] Certain textual themes such as Adam (and Eve) receiving "coats of skins" or Abraham placing Isaac on the altar of sacrifice, can have metaphorical applications which are meaningful to modern times.

5.3.2. Peer-Learning and Meaning-Making

It was asserted that given the usefulness of exegesis in explicating the possible and plausible meanings of a particular text, and the ability of hermeneutics to encourage additional meanings, that the use of learner-centred activities would be complementary with meaning-centred education (Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011; Weimer, 2002). Clearly peer learning activities could take place without explicit exegesis, and in some respects gospel doctrine class is already usually learner-centred (Intellectual Reserve, 1999). In this research study, it was discovered that crafting peer-learning activities around the exegetical discussion of a particular text increased the utility of the text in generating practical applications (Broad, 2006). Following exegesis as a general starting point, the learner-centred discussions which followed were more relevant and exhilarating than is usually experienced (Hilton & Wilcox, 2013).

The lesson objective was noticeably clearer, the intertextuality more explicit and the sense of modern relevance of ancient texts more apparent (Huntsman, 2005). The greatest challenge of exegetical education is to include peer-learning activities that illustrate how to use a text in practical ways (Jarvis & Parker, 2005). However experience informs this practice – for example, reading exegetically prepares a teacher to ask, "What is a novel way to use this text or to get students to explore it exegetically?" When the teacher asks more that just exgetical questions (around the meaning of the text), but also asks practical questions (around the usefulness of the text), they are more likely to start thinking about how to use the text in meaningful peer-learning activities (Bednar, 2014). Witnessing such peer-learning activities adds to the confidence of the teacher that such activities can have an impact on usually silent students and involve them in new explorations of the scriptural text.

Learner-centred or student-centred education has been subject to some criticism (Gill, 2008). This criticism ignores the potential inclusivity of pedagogical practice (Alexander, 2009) when an appropriate balance between subject-centred and student-centred learning and teaching is maintained. Exegetical education cannot be student-centred without simultaneously being subject centred (Huntsman, 2005). The subject is the scriptural text and exegesis is a method to explore that – thus making the text central – but exegetical education, as envisaged and practiced in this action research study, always involves the use

of peer-learning activities. It is a form of "dialogic teaching" which involves the following principles and practices (Alexander, 2009, pp. 112-13):

- *Collective*: address learning tasks together.
- *Reciprocal*: all listen, share and consider alternative viewpoints.
- *Supportive*: a trusting environment that encourages the free exchange of ideas.
- *Cumulative*: ideas are built up and chained into one another.
- *Purposeful*: classroom talk is planned and steer toward specific educational goals.

So, for example, to ensure and increase the student-centredness of exegetical education, an instructor could ask the class members to determine the texts to read, or the questions to be addressed or the real life problems to be discussed (Weimer, 2002). The instructor could encourage advanced students to tutor others in their text marking systems (Huat & Kerry, 2008). In each case the discussion or activity, if approached exegetically, will also be subject-centred (Alexander, 2009).

In relation to the issue of the non-contribution of students, several recommendations emerged from this research. First, continue with exegesis – it has great power to generate curiosity and eventually, contributions (Huntsman, 2005). Second, plan both personal and small-group reflective opportunities for the students, and occasionally, have them report these back to the class (Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011; Weimer, 2002). The contributors may increase over time with more reticent students eventually gaining the confidence to participate.

5.4. Research Findings and Action Research

It was noted that two of the teachers interviewed used prescriptive and existential exegesis while the initial interview was with a practitioner of diverse forms of exegesis. Generally, scriptural discussions in gospel doctrine class are thematic (Brigham Young University, 2007; Brigham Young University, 2009), rather than exegetical (Huntsman, 2005). Such is problematic because it lessens the understanding and potential utility of the text (Davey, 2010). This action research study involved an expansion of exegetical education (beyond those forms employed by the interviewees) in gospel doctrine classes of the Dublin Ireland Stake and exposed more students to this method. This allowed the researcher to gain actual

experience with the use of exegetical education and permitted the researcher to observe the "dialogic teaching" (Alexander, 2009, p. 112) within the class and the discussion in comparison to the previous thematic discussions (Berg, 2009).

This research study employed practical action research primarily, although it also sought to employ elements of critical action research, especially since the researcher has a supervisory or mangement role in relation to the provision of quality gospel learning and teaching in the Stake Sunday School organisation. Interviewing three other teachers and six other students allowed triangulation of the research observations, data, and findings. Such triangulation lends soundness and validity to the research – making it more trustworthy. Practical action research has been a suitable methodology to explore the usefulness of exegetical education in the gospel doctrine class.

5.5. Conclusion

This research study has concluded that exegetical education is a useful way to structure classes, study and discussions in gospel doctrine classes. Indeed, it is useful as a form of practical theology (Graham, 2013) – it encouraged a search for practical wisdom (Hall, 2010; Winch, 2006). Therefore, practical action research and exegetical education, which both seek practical wisdom, provided an appropriate marriage of theory and practice, epistemologically and methodologically (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Exegetical education increased the relevance of the text, not merely in isolation, but in the context of a collaborative search for meaning (Frederick, 2011). Since it includes exploring the text as a starting point for peer-learning activities which centre on generating meaning and relating shared experiences, it is both subject-centred and student-centred (Alexander, 2009).

This practical action research study has provided evidence that exegetical education is useful as a means of making the study of a scriptural text more meaningful in a class and ensuring that the ensuing discussion is more relevant, meaningful and impactful (Bednar, 2011). The general expectations of the literature review have been realised and the research question has been appropriately addressed.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This final chapter suggests recommendations for practice in light of the original research aims and objectives. These recommendations flow from the practical action research employed as the intent of such "practical action" is to gain insight[26] into and improve practice (Eden & Huxham, 2002). It is also important to note avenues for further research (Thomas, 2013). Exegetical education can be further explored in this particular context, can be transferred to other academic contexts and can have diverse manifestations.

This practical action research study into the usefulness of exegetical education has concluded that it is useful as a means of structuring the preparation of the teacher, the curriculum delivery of the class, and the meaningfulness of the discussions (Huntsman, 2005). The findings also support the claim that exegetical education enhances the relevance of the text in daily living (Jarvis, 2012; Jarvis & Parker, 2005)

Exegetical education offers an appropriate pedagogical package to overcome the false dichotomy sometimes posited between being subject-centred and student-centred (Alexander, 2009; Weimer, 2002). It encourages the use of peer-learning activities to explore the relevancy of texts for meaning and application (Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008). It is essential that exegetical education is practiced in an inclusive manner (Alexander, 2009) as this is the best way to ensure self-reflection and self-regulation (Leontiev, 2013; Winch, 2006; Winne, 2005; Winne, 2010)

6.2. Recommendations for Practice

The following six recommendations for practice follow directly from the six main research findings noted in Table 5:1:

Recommendation 1: Utilise exegesis as a starting point, the lesson objective as an end point, and peer learning as the journey.

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[26] That is, *phronesis* or practical wisdom (Winch, 2006).

The teacher should prepare creative exegetical questions that encourage students to pay attention to the specific language of a text. Alignment between the passage, the proposed learning outcome and the peer-learning activity should be pre-planned and coherent.

Recommendation 2: Employ diverse delivery methods especially during the peer-learning activities and even during the initial exegetical exposition.[27]

Exegesis can be employed in new ways in each class. For example, the use of Q&A panels, timelines, posters, interviews, re-enactments, guest appearances etc. are innovative ways of approaching texts with exegetical questions – what did it mean then and what can it mean now? Peer-learning activities should be similarly diverse and are only bounded by the imagination of the instructor.

Recommendation 3: Utilise the increased textual relevance involved in exegesis to bridge the gap between understanding and utility (i.e. between theory and practice).

The essence of learner-centred education is that learners set their own learning goals and the learning agenda. The lesson objective should be used to guide the extent of exegesis not vice versa. This implies that the needs of students should determine what texts are discussed exegetically.

Recommendation 4: Exegetical instructors should do extensive independent study and must allow in-class presentation time for those students that have done their own independent study.[28]

Exegesis requires preparation but the burden can be shared with other participants. Opportunities to present or direct portions of the class (using exegesis of personally chosen scriptures), should be extended to class members.

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[27] Exegesis permits several creative and unique approaches to textual analysis and it is imperative to employ such creativity in the exposition of a text (Herbert, 2010; Hogan, 2010; Sefton-Green, Thomson, Jones, & Bresler, 2011).

[28] This will occasionaly involve revisiting a theme or passage for further insight (Huntsman, 2005).

Recommendation 5: Prepare for the possibility of various obstacles to open, honest and respectful discussions of a text.

> Particularly obscure or difficult passages may induce fear in students (e.g. Isaiah, Revelation, or historical passages), so that they hesitate in contributing. Controversial or long passages may encourage overt contention or tangential discussions. Prepare for each of these by changing the balance of exegesis and group activities (depending on the likely problem) and plan simple ways to introduce (or reduce) complex or controversial ideas.

Recommendation 6: Utilise the tools of exegetical education (i.e. textual analysis and peer-learning) to overcome any discussion obstacles and to improve the meaningfulness of discussions.

> The answer to potential problems is found in the appropriate balance of exegesis and peer-learning. Obstacles can be overcome by using them as opportunities to explore the text exegetically. If necessary, take a step back, change the passage or activity, and arrive at the same destination using an alternative route.

Two other essential recommendations also follow from the practical action research:

Recommendation 7: Every class activity should have an exegetical element as this ensures that the text is both respected and utilised. It also enshrines exegesis as an essential component in understanding and using any text.

> Examples include asking students to find appropriate passages to deal with a particular problem, or to imagine a particular problem that a text can be used to address. Peer-learning activities should always require that a scriptural text be consulted in order to solve the particular problem set.

Recommendation 8: Consistency is the most important quality in the employment of exegetical education. If exegesis is consistently used it will improve the usefulness of the text in the lives (i.e. learning) of the students.

Each time a text is used, exegetical questions should be addressed. Although the class cannot address every potential question when a text is considered, it can address at least some of the important exegetical questions.

6.4. Delimitations of Study

This research study sought to explore illustrations rather than generate explanations or create generalisations (Berg, 2009; Thomas, 2013). The study was small-scale and very context-dependent but this is appropriate since it sought to address a practical problem within that context (Craig, 2009; Eden & Huxham, 2002). Although some control measures were put in place[29] (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005) the primary aim was to understand the benefits, utility and experience of the intervention (Huntsman 2005) and this could be achieved within the sample explored (Ezer, 2009).

6.5. Further Research

This research study has illustrated the effectiveness of exegetical education within a particular context over a short period of time. Several further research possibilities present themselves. These include:

A follow-up with the trained instructors on their implementation of exegetical education and resolution of any learning roadblocks they have experienced. It is anticipated that some instructors/facilitators would be more comfortable with different aspects of exegetical education. For example, some instructors/facilitators might be more comfortable with exegetical questioning as they have greater knowledge of the text in question (Bokovoy, 2014; Bradshaw, 2014). An exploration of how to improve these instructor's independent and in-class use of exegesis to gain understanding would be a useful collaborative action research study in that case (McAteer, 2013). Other instructors/facilitators might be more comfortable with the peer-learning activities (Jaques & Salmon, 2007; Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011) and it would be useful to observe whether these activities always employ an exegetical element. Participant observation and either individual or focus group interviews with these facilitators would be a useful next step in this particular context (Craig, 2009).

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[29] For example, all participants were exposed to diverse pedagogical practices.

Although this research study consistently employed two strands of exegetical education (as formalised in Table 3.5), it did not consistently employ the last strand: homework assignments. Therefore, a further practical action research study should introduce this additional element for a period of time and then another student focus group interview should be conducted to ascertain the impact of such (Cousin, 2009). It would be expected that the explicit use of homework assignments every week would increase the tendency of students to become self-directed, independent and self-regulated learners (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).

Finally, exegetical education could be employed in other textual-based disciplines to determine if similar results are found. Obviously, given the unique context of religious education and its connection with meaningfulness and living, it would not be expected that the results would be precisely similar. Utilising texts in other disciplines often means different things than was envisaged in this research study. For example, the ability to utilise a text might mean the ability to notice and argue that it has relevance to a particular case as a precedent (such as in law) or it might mean the ability to see intellectual connections between previously unconnected texts (as in philosophy) so that the utility aspect of this study might have a different manifestation in other disciplines. However, the essential elements of exegetical education can be transferred to other text-based instructional settings.

The main limitation of exegetical education is that texts must play a central role in curriculum delivery and it must be possible to discuss various interpretations of the text. Several texts (such as computer textbooks, recipe books or other technical instruction manuals) might not have the same need for exegetical exploration and might not have the same possibility for divergent readings.

6.5. Conclusion

Several recommendations were offered as actionable practices for improvement in connecting textual relevance with student utility. Further avenues for research within the particular research context could be pursued. It would also be possible to transfer exegetical education to some disciplines although the student utility would have a different

manifestation within such. Finally, it was acknowledged that exegetical education is not universally transferable. It has particular purposes and depends, crucially, on the centrality of text in curriculum delivery. In such text-based teaching, exegetical education can strike an appropriate balance between subject and student centredness, can bridge theory (textual comprehension) and practice (living applicability), and can improve the experience of learning and teaching in the classroom.

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Appendix A: Teacher A – Questions and Interview

> ***Aim of Research:*** The emphasis will be on the effectiveness of exegetical teaching to both *understand texts* and *utilise them* in real life.
>
> ***Research Question:*** What are the justifications for classroom exegetical teaching and what are the experiences and effects of such (especially on pre-class and post-class learning) from the perspective of an expect practitioner, the research practitioner, and a sample selection of participant students?

> Apostolic: "*I personally do not know of a principle more central, important, or essential to spiritual learning than the principle of acting as agents and not being acted upon as objects. I invite you … to engage in various learning experiences so you can increasingly "stand independent" (Doctrine and Covenants 78:14) and learn how to find answers to your own questions.*" Elder David A. Bednar. *Increase in Learning*, pp. xii-xiii.

> Academic: "*Religious educators, furthermore, should seek to become skilled at asking questions that help students learn and understand essential doctrine and then find ways to integrate the doctrine into their students' life experiences (p.107). Teaching students to ask and answer these questions themselves trains them in how to study the scriptures more systematically (p.108). Explicitly following the exegetical model in our classes and teaching students to do so in their own studies provides a useful way to structure classes, study, and discussion (p.110).*" Huntsman, Eric D. (2005) Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text. *Religious Educator, 6(1),* 106-126.

Definition of exegetical teaching:
Exegetical teaching is the use of questions to systematically study the original meanings of a text and to appropriately apply its doctrines to modern daily life.

Origins of strategy
1. When did you discover this method of scriptural scrutiny and how would you define it?
2. Where you formally trained in it or is it just a natural feature of how you study?
3. Is there a particular person that influenced you to 'read' scripture this way?
4. What convinced you that those without formal training could use this method?

Use of strategy
5. Have you contrasted this method of learning and teaching with other methods?
6. If so, what have you found?
7. Have there been any challenges or obstacles to your use of this teaching method?

Perceived effects of strategy
8. Do you think people read scripture differently as a result of this teaching technique?
9. Do you find students are better prepared to participate in class as a result of this exegetical teaching?
10. Do you have suggestions for how the strategy could be improved?

AR: Thanks for letting me conduct this interview

A: You're very welcome.

AR: So as you know I'm conducting research into the use of exegesis. I let you know about Huntsman article and I've forwarded you the questions so hopefully we can have a fruitful conversation about that. Other questions may arise as we proceed and if there is anything that I've left out let me know. Ok, so first question: When did you discover this method of scriptural scrutiny and how would you define it?

A: Ok, a two pointer there! When did I first discover it? I saw it practiced by two professors and found that it really stimulated me – it made me really think, forced me to pay attention, to justify my reasons and to really read the text.

AR: Was that in a religious class?

A: Actually, no! It wasn't in a religious class – I saw it first in a political science class and then in a near eastern culture class.

AR. Was it based on reading texts?

A. Yes, we would read a particular text on international relations and look for the underlying theories or assumptions in the text.

AR: So it was similar to my experience in philosophy – we would take a text and then analyse it for the core ideas but also look at the intellectual context in which it was written. Is that what you did?

A: Yes, for example, we looked at the Vietnam War and at the time there wasn't such a thing as an executive order – so there is no precedent for this. So you can't impose modern policies on earlier international relations. You have to respect the specific context and culture of the time.

AR: So the connection to exegesis is obvious – you are trying to locate the text and the theory into its own time?

A: Yes. You have to strip away all the additional ideas that have crept into how we understand this and get back to the original position.

AR: So how would you define exegesis?

A: How would I define it? That is actually very difficult to do. I would say that exegesis is the attempt to return to the original meaning of a text – to strip away all the cultural addendums that we have added and arrive at the original position of the author and the audience. So in gospel doctrine class often the teacher reads a scripture and relates it to an inspirational or uplifting experience that they have had. That can be very good but sometimes it leaves some students cold. Exegesis challenges us to understand the text. So take the parable of the talents – it is purely down to an accident of word choice that this is used to encourage us to develop our talents. That is not the original meaning. I sometimes

challenge this reading by saying, "I can sing, does this mean if I don't keep singing I will lose the ability to sing?" So exegesis is an attempt to be honest with the text – to let it say what it really says.

AR: Ok, so what about the criticism that you can't really get to the original meaning – that you can't let the text simply say what it says - that we inherently read everything through a filter of our own experiences and cannot become neutral enough to read the text for its original meaning? What do you say to that criticism of exegesis?

A: Well now you are talking about hermeneutics. We started talking about exegesis and now we have drifted into a conversation about hermeneutics. I'm not saying that exegesis is easy. In fact it is very hard. I think about 90% of the work done by the teacher is done outside the classroom. So, for example, before I teach gospel doctrine, I read the text numerous times noting important patterns, correlating with other important external sources and asking exegetical questions myself first. I have to attempt to strip back over 2,000 years of accrued context to arrive at the original context – the author, the audience, and the contemporary culture – and this takes repeated readings. If I have time I will look at variant readings and whether scholars have an opinion on which is the earliest. I need to avoid being anachronistic. So yes it is idealistic but it is the most honest way to approach the text – not "What do I think the text is trying to say?" but rather "What, given what we know about the time, history and culture in which it appeared, does it actually say?"

AR: Ok, so exegesis is difficult but it is important. It is a bit like the Socratic Method – it is difficult to define things like "justice", "virtue", "piety" or "beauty" but we have to raise the question and then challenge the answers that come? We have to get involved in the search for the original meaning, however hard it is to get at it?

A: Yes, exactly.

AR: Ok, so question two; where you formally trained in it or is it just a natural feature of how you study?

A: Neither actually. I wasn't trained in it and it is not a natural feature of how I study. It was something that I saw modelled and it really impressed me. I wasn't trained in it but have tried to mimic their method. Obviously, they didn't call it exegetical teaching. But it was a prominent feature of their teaching and I found I could replicate it in my own study and I attempt to use in my teaching.

AR: Ok, so you have kinda already answered this question - Is there a particular person that influenced you to 'read' scripture this way?

A: Not one particular person but several professors that used this method in a way that impressed me. I found that I could study in this way too.

AR: Next question … and you have already answered this one too, what convinced you that those without formal training could use this method?

A: Well, I did!

AR: Let me ask the next two together. Have you contrasted this method of learning and teaching with other methods? And if so, what have you found?

A: Yes, I've contrasted it with other methods. I've already mentioned the one about finding a key word from a passage and then relating that to some inspirational or important experience that the teacher has had. Some people find that interesting and edifying and it has its place. I'm not saying that is a bad method. But some people are left unsatisfied with that method and exegesis is good for them. I also find that exegesis works better with the Bible than the Book of Mormon. People come knowing they don't know much about the Bible and with this method they learn. They are willing to admit that they don't know and so want to learn. With the Book of Mormon, they feel that they already know it. The Book of Mormon is "plain and precious". It's simple. Also, they are no known external sources like with the Bible (I mean, do you look at the Incas?) so it is easier to do exegesis with the Bible. I've always said, and will always say, that the Book of Mormon doesn't lend itself to exegesis

AR: Ok, but you have used exegesis with the Book of Mormon. I remember being in a class where you were teaching about Abinadi and how he brought bad news to the people and the priests of Noah put him on trial and quoted a passage from Isaiah that suggested that prophets only bring good news. Ergo, Abinadi was a false prophet! In fact, you didn't teach it like that. You asked, "Why are they using this passage from Isaiah?" You let the class struggle for the answer. Then you asked "Why did Abinadi respond as he did?" Again, you let the class struggle to suggest an answer. I thought it was a more meaningful way to teach it – it made more sense – to ask of all the passages why is he quoting this one? So it was very exegetical.

A: Yes, that's true. What you do with the Book of Mormon is internal exegesis – internal textual analysis – why is he quoting him, why that phrase and not this one, what does it mean in this context, knowing what has happened just before? And so on. So you can do some but there are a lot of unknowns.

AR: I've noticed that you usually just stand there with the text (sometimes in Greek) and ask questions of the class that focus them on the text. You don't often use the blackboard, or pictures or videos. Would you comment on that?

A: Yes that is true. I don't use a lot of visual aids or videos. I might if I wanted to show a visual structure such as chiasms or parallelisms. So the blackboard can be useful to highlight certain linguistic features but I find that visuals (such as pictures or movies) tend to contaminate the text. They give the impression that we know how people dressed or looked etc. when frankly we don't. I want to ignore the unknowns and concentrate on the text itself.

AR: Ok, so this is a method that gives the text pre-eminence? It focuses attention on the text and if a visual (like a map or a poetic pattern or a utensil) helps with illustrating that then you will use it – but otherwise it "contaminates" the text?

A: Yes – we sometimes pretend to know things we don't and because people have seen movies etc they think they know more than they do – by giving the text central place we can explore what is known and what it not. When I use this method, which is always challenging and sometimes confrontational, sometimes there is the challenge that no one wants to speak – no one wants to appear foolish. But I wait. Then I re-ask the question. I wait again. Someone ventures an answer and I either remind them of what we already know

about the context or I restate their answer back as another question. Either way, I am forcing them to think about what they are thinking by looking at the text and asking themselves – "What does it mean?"

AR: Ok, question seven. Have there been any challenges or obstacles to your use of this teaching method?

A: There are three main challenges. First, the problem of students not contributing. You ask a question and nobody says anything because they don't want to look foolish or stupid. You need to prepare for that. You can restate the question. You can invite them to look at the scripture again. You can ask a preliminary question. Eventually people start speaking. Second, that it can become confrontational. That is a real risk. It is also the biggest challenge because it is the exact opposite of what you want to have happen. So you have to be careful. You don't attack the answer – you tease out the reasons behind it and then you look at those. You follow a soft Socratic method. "Can you think of any examples where that isn't true?" So they are searching and looking for truth. That re-focuses the confrontation for a look for truth. It is best to invite the class to contribute rather than just one individual who may think you are picking on them.

AR: Well, I've noticed that people are initially hesitant but they always contribute eventually. And usually the contribution is more genuine, more heartfelt, and more significant. And you are always very sensitive with the answers. I think you agree with people for the most part or re-direct them softly.

A: Well, I try. I think you have to be positive and supportive. Most people want to learn and they want to figure out what it really means.

AR: Certainly that has been my experience in your classes. I was thinking besides being very good at this particular method of asking questions – which is not easy for everyone – there is something else that you seem to have – you seem to have confidence that you can deal with any answer because you know enough about the text. You have what they call in the academic literature "content knowledge". Some teachers wouldn't be as confident because they wouldn't feel as comfortable with their content knowledge.

A: That is the other challenge – the third challenge that I mentioned earlier. About 90% of the work for this method is in preparation – learning about the text – getting that content knowledge that you talked about. You can't teach what you don't know. This is real mental work and it takes time. I could do it easily when I wasn't working – I could do my own commentaries. But when you have a full time job, a family, church callings and hobbies it gets difficult to get the time to cover everything beforehand. I think the main goal is to introduce nuggets of information, or insight, nuggets of inspiration. You want to illustrate the method – to get the juices flowing to whet the appetite. So you need to be prepared and then go into class and try to find one or two real nuggets. That's better than covering everything.

AR: Yes, I agree. I think going into a class where you learn one new thing is better than a class that just repeats things you already know. Ok, so we've talked about the method and your preparation, let's talk a bit about the impact you've noticed on the students. Do you think people read scripture differently as a result of this teaching technique?

A: It makes a difference for some. Those who are open and willing to challenge their previous views or what they have heard others say will like it. But the diehard person, the person who insists on reading the text a particular way, isn't going to move and isn't going to learn. They want to hear you say what they already believe. And so they aren't willing to move into unknown territory. So, for example, the person who says, "I think 'talent' means 'talent'!" in the parable of the talents can be hard to deal with. Now there are two ways you can deal with that. You can say, "Ok, if you can show me from a critical reading of the text, why you believe that, or what reasons you have for that, then I'm willing to accept it as a possible reading. (Of course, it might be possible, but not be very plausible, ha ha!). So what are your reasons?" Then if they just say, "Well, that's how I've always read it." Or "That's how the prophets read it." You can point out that the principle is a true one but this scripture shouldn't be used to teach it. Other scriptures will teach it but why misuse this scripture. Then you are having a discussion about how to read scripture and that is a potentially very fruitful and interesting discussion. The other way of dealing with this is to turn it into a fight. To get so caught up in this one issue, this one text that it gets contentious. And that is the exact opposite of what you want to happen. So you have to be in control of your emotions. You can't get angry. You can't get personal. You have to always point back to the text. What is the text saying? But for some students they have already made up their minds and this is not the prime question for them and so they won't travel with you. They won't budge. But the others are willing and so I find that they come better prepared. They've done the reading. They come with questions. They raise issues that I hadn't even planned on raising. That's when the class gets exciting – because there is genuine asking and genuine learning. We are learning together. We are having a real discussion.

AR: Ok, great. So to follow on, do you find students are better prepared to participate in class as a result of this exegetical teaching? From what you've just said, obviously some of them are?

A: Maybe not initially. But exegesis is something they get used to. It forces them to think. It challenges their assumptions. It requires them to look at the text and ask, "Why that word?"; "Why that phrase?" They begin to trust that it is a safe learning environment and they want to raise questions or share ideas. Then they are sharing things they experienced that either confirms or questions what we are reading and how we are reading it and that is really great. That is wonderful. It is for the sake of those discussions that I follow this method.

AR: Ok, so we are at the final question. Do you have suggestions for how the strategy could be improved?

A: I think it could be formalised. That would be the best way to improve it: to have some formal way of doing it. Still it is important to be flexible. When I go into class I don't know how much of the scripture reading we will get through and that doesn't bother me. Because when I'm flexible to the inspiration of the Spirit and to the way the questions and answers are going there is more important learning taking place. So exegesis is the starting point. Its purpose is to generate discussion and to lead to meaning. If reading only a few verses achieves that it has been a success, I think. I sometimes think that when we teach a text it becomes a reflection of the teacher.

AR: I agree with that – I think that every class will be different even using this method because every teacher is different. The apostles to me are good examples of that. They can

see some things differently from others. Ok, so do you have any final comments or is there anything that we should have discussed and haven't?

A: No

AR: Yes, I think we've been pretty comprehensive. If anything occurs to you afterwards that you want to add let me know. Plus is it ok if I let you have a look at my conclusions and you could comment on those?

A: Yes, that would be fine.

AR: Ok, thanks a lot.

A: Thanks.

Appendix B: Teacher B – Questions and Interview

Aim of Research:
To explore the effectiveness of exegetical teaching in helping students both *understand texts* and *utilise them* in real life.

Research Question:
What are the justifications, experiences and effects of classroom exegetical teaching in adult Sunday school contexts?

Apostolic:
"*I personally do not know of a principle more central, important, or essential to spiritual learning than the principle of acting as agents and not being acted upon as objects ... engage in various learning experiences ... and learn how to find answers to your own questions.*"

Elder Bednar. *Increase in Learning*, pp. xii-xiii.

Academic:
"*Teaching students to ask and answer these questions themselves trains them in how to study the scriptures more systematically ... Through this questioning process, students can better "lead out" (exegesis) the original meaning without unduly "reading in" (eisegesis) their own preconceived notions.*"

Huntsman, Eric D. (2005) Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text. *Religious Educator, 6(1),* 106-126.

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1. You use questions when teaching the scriptures, why do you do that?
2. How do you generate these questions?
3. Are there any particular kinds of questions you use?
4. Is there a lot of preparation with this form of questioning?
5. What impact does using questions to explore the scriptures have on the students?
6. Do students study scripture differently as a result of this teaching technique?
7. Do students participate differently in class as a result of this exegetical teaching?
8. Have you contrasted this method of learning and teaching with other methods?
9. What are the challenges to the use of "existential exegesis"?
10. Have you recommendations for the implementation of "existential exegesis?"

Interview 2 – Teacher B – 22nd December 2013

AR: As you know I am researching the introduction of explicit exegetical questioning within gospel doctrine. You were present for the lesson today and so have some idea of the change I'm attempting to implement. Basically exegesis involves the use of questions to systematically study a selected text to discover the original meaning prior to applying it to modern life. It is the attempt to arrive at the original context from which the text arose and to note any amendments over time. I wanted to interview you because you employ forms of what are known as prescriptive and existential exegesis – which is simply that you raise questions about the scriptures in a way that attempts to first, understand the scriptures themselves and second, to impact on the way people choose to live as a result. I appreciate your willingness to conduct this interview and have some questions prepared which I've sent to you previously.

B: Yes, I got them and I've thought about them briefly.

AR: Ok, good. So, we might add additional questions or follow up on additional themes. Anyway, first question, you use questions when teaching the scriptures, why do you do that?

B: I think we learn through questions. I like to question everything. I find that questioning helps you really search for an answer. So this is the way I teach because this is the way I learn. Also I don't think there is anything as powerful as the human mind, as our imagination. Questions let us use our imaginations – they awaken our imaginations. I love novels and I read a lot but there is nothing as exciting as the scriptures. These people are real people with real problems and God helps them. He answers their questions. He encourages them to ask questions. He sets up situations that cause them to ask questions (for example, think of Job). Because he wants them to ask! He wants them to learn. I think it is exciting. And that excitement is what I try to get across by asking questions.

AR: So questions cause people to think in ways they wouldn't otherwise? To question why they believe what they believe – to question what they take for granted? Is that right?

B: Yes that is true. A question helps you explore why you believe what you believe. In the scriptures we are reading about real people. It is important to ask why they believe and behave the way they do – it is important to place them in the actual circumstances that they are facing and try to place ourselves in a similar situation to compare how they respond to how we might respond.

AR: How do you generate these questions?

B: I do this naturally whenever I read the scriptures. We need to humanise these people, to see them as real people, to understand their beliefs. Then we can start asking why what they experienced matters to us and whether there is anything we can learn from it. I always think about what I am reading and try to put myself into their situation, into their shoes before I put them in my situation, into my shoes. I don't usually get the questions from the manual. I usually get them from my own reading of the scriptures. It is like putting flesh and blood on the scriptural characters. That makes it a very exciting thing – a very real thing. We are reading about people like us. In some ways they become like friends.

AR: Are there any particular kinds of questions you use?

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B: Maybe not particular kinds but probably certain types of question. For example, I ask things like, "What is going on? How is he feeling? Why is he doing this? Why did he say that or do that? What does it mean?" It helps to make it more real. The questions come naturally to me as I read and they are things I want to know. For me you can really only understand the scriptures if you ponder and pray about them. And that means asking questions. Of course, it helps to understand a bit about the culture and the circumstances that they lived in or else you might not know what questions to ask or how to get the answers.

AR: What do you do in situations where the answer is not easily obtained from the text alone?

B. First, if they answer is not available in the scriptures I look to the manual for additional information about the culture and circumstances. Sometimes that will fill in the blanks. Other times, you have to be honest that the scripture doesn't answer the question that you have so you have to be careful about speculation. In that case, after explaining the culture and circumstances, I would ask the class how they would feel, or what they would think, or what they would do. So you can use your own insights to explore the people in the scriptures. As long as you admit that you are speculating that is ok.

AR: What impact does using questions to explore the scriptures have on the students?

B: It forces them to think. It makes them more active and attentive. I don't accept the usual answers. If someone says the usual, for example, "We should keep the commandments" – I ask, "Yes, but why?" – "Why, this commandment?" or "Why this doctrine?" What did it mean to them and what does it mean to you? It makes them really pay attention and forces them to think for a deeper answer. I am a bit tough because I don't let them off with easy answers. I question everything.

AR: What effects does it have on student participation in class?

I think it has good effects. But it does depend on the students and what they do with it. For example, I've found less resistance from some students as I've continued with this week after week. Some of them actually come up and said that they've been thinking more about it or that they were really good questions or that they hadn't thought about it in that way before. And some of the students that were most resistant at first are now defending me in the class. They are saying, yes, that is a good question and I agree with you about that. Plus I think we are better prepared now. They know that I won't ask easy questions. Some of them read more than just the assigned scriptures, they also read the manual. So they are doing more reading. These are students reading the teachers manual to prepare for class and I think that is great. But I still surprise them with questions or activities that are not in the manual! They never quite know that to expect. The other thing that I've noticed is that they always want to start on time. They are always ready to begin. I think that is because they know that they will learn, they will get a chance to contribute, they will feel the spirit and they will enjoy the experience. So, yes, I think it is working.

AR: Do you have students asking questions of each other or of the entire class?

B: Yes, occasionally. People want to share what they think, especially when they have done the reading. Sometimes the discussion becomes so open that people raise questions of those

who have shared feelings and thoughts. They ask questions because they want to understand. Other times it is because they don't understand something in the scriptures or in the church and they wonder if others understand it better.

AR: That's interesting. So this is a method that is being duplicated by students. The fact that you say that they don't know what to expect suggests that the questions you are asking are not merely natural questions? Is there a lot of preparation with this form of questioning?

B: The questions come naturally as I read and think about it and I genuinely listen to the answers that the students give. This is the way I naturally study and learn and it is a natural way of teaching for me.

AR: Have you contrasted it with other methods?

B: Yes, I have seen many different methods used in teaching. Some of them are less that ideal. For example, I detest when a teacher reads too much – reads the manual or whatever to the class. Who wants to listen to someone reading? I can do that at home. We want to hear what people think, what they feel, what this means to them. So anything that helps in getting straight to that is good. I also don't like when teachers overuse the blackboard too much or use too many visuals. I've already said that I think the mind is the most fascinating teaching aid that we have. Writing too many things on the board can distract people from thinking because they are too busy looking. Sometimes a discussion can be a distraction too. A concept can be over discussed, over analysed. What matters is getting to the core of it and seeing how it applies to you personally.

AR: What are the challenges to this use of "existential exegesis"?

B: The main challenge is that it forces people to think. Because I ask questions that are not covered in the manual people have to look at their own lives and at the scriptures for answers. The usual answers won't work. And since people don't know beforehand what I'm going to ask, they can't prepare for the questions, except by reading and raising their own questions. The main challenge is getting people to not give the usual Sunday School answers ... getting people to think for themselves. You have a brain, use it. You've had experiences, remember them. You've had revelation, share it. That is the main challenge.

AR: Are there any other challenges? For example, have there been challenges from leaders who ask you to employ a different method?

B: No, I've never experience that. There is a strong inclination among leaders to encourage participation in classes – that's what they want to see about all. Asking questions does encourage people to participate. Thinking is a form of participation. It is actively paying attention to something.

AR: Have you recommendations for the implementation of "existential exegesis?"

B: Well, it can't all be just asking questions. You have to make presentations too. You have to be focused and to teach principles. Don't just talk about people – talk about the principles that the scriptures teach. So you have to move from a lesson about people to a lesson about principles. You start with the people in the scriptural story. Then you discover the principles that they lived by. Then you can move back to a lesson about people – the

people in the class – and how these principles apply to them. So having no questions is too like a lecture and having too many questions can become too interactive or too tangential. Experience helps you improve. The best way to learn how to teach is to become a teacher. Some students like to stick to the basics. We need to delve deeper. That is true of teachers too.

AR: Ok, so balance is important – the questions are tools or instruments they are not the destination or goal?

B: Yes, that's right. Asking questions gets people to think and that is the main purpose. They are the tool that I prefer to use but they are not the purpose of the class – although, if others realise the power of asking questions and do so in their own study then that is a greater achievement that just helping people have an spiritual experience in class.

AR: Ok, I think we've covered every question I had written down. Is there anything else that you would like to say – anything that we haven't covered?

B: No… not really.

AR: Well, if you have any further recommendations as you continue to practice this, or any further insights will you relate them to me?

B: I will.

AR: Would it be possible for me to relate my findings of using this "exegetical method" to you so that you could review them and confirm or disagree with them? Would that be ok?

B: Yes, sure.

AR: Ok, thanks. And thanks again for letting me conduct this interview

B: You're welcome.

Appendix C: Teacher C – Questions and Interview

Aim of Research:
To explore the effectiveness of exegetical teaching in helping students both *understand texts* and *utilise them* in real life.

Research Question:
What are the justifications, experiences and effects of classroom exegetical teaching in adult Sunday school contexts?

Apostolic:
"*I personally do not know of a principle more central, important, or essential to spiritual learning than the principle of acting as agents and not being acted upon as objects ... engage in various learning experiences ... and learn how to find answers to your own questions.*"

Elder Bednar, *Increase in Learning*, pp. xii-xiii

Academic:
"*Teaching students to ask and answer these questions themselves trains them in how to study the scriptures more systematically ... Through this questioning process, students can better "lead out" (exegesis) the original meaning without unduly "reading in" (eisegesis) their own preconceived notions.*"

Huntsman, Eric D. (2005) Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text. *Religious Educator, 6(1),* 106-126.

1. You use questions when teaching the scriptures, why do you do that?
2. How do you generate these questions?
3. Are there any particular kinds of questions you use?
4. Is there a lot of preparation with this form of questioning?
5. What impact does using questions to explore the scriptures have on the students?
6. Do students study scripture differently as a result of this teaching technique?
7. Do students participate differently in class as a result of this exegetical teaching?
8. Have you contrasted this method of learning and teaching with other methods?
9. What are the challenges to the use of "existential exegesis"?
10. Have you recommendations for the implementation of "existential exegesis?"

Interview 3 – Teacher C – 21st January 2014

AR: As you know I am researching the introduction of explicit exegetical questioning within gospel doctrine. Exegesis involves the use of questions to systematically study a selected text to discover the original meaning prior to applying it to modern life. It is the attempt to arrive at the original context (including culture and circumstances) from which the text arose and to note any amendments over time. I wanted to interview you because you employ forms of exegesis that are known as "prescriptive" and "existential" exegesis: That is you attempt to explain the original meaning of a scripture by asking questions about its original author and audience etc and then you attempt to apply that to our modern "lived" experience (existential exegesis) and what we *ought* to do given these scriptural truths (prescriptive exegesis). I appreciate your willingness to conduct this interview and have some questions prepared.

C: Yes, I've been reflecting on my teaching and it is interesting that we are having this conversation since I've just finished giving the teacher improvement course. So the questions you sent me gave me a good opportunity to reflect on why I teach the way I do.

AR: Yes, that's right – you just finished teaching that course. I'm sure it was interesting to teach. Ok, so I'll just go straight into the questions I have. You use questions when teaching the scriptures, why do you do that?

C: I suppose that this is something that I've notice in really great teachers – the teachers from whom I've learned the most. They ask questions. They don't always provide the answer. Really they are teaching you how to learn. When I was at college I realised that the process of checking sources, getting quotes and putting them together in new or challenging ways was the way I prepared to give talks in church. It wasn't really that different from how I prepared talks or lessons. They key was always to ask a question and to look for an interesting way of answering it. When I give talks or lessons I always try to get people to realise that this is something that they have some experience with but also something that they can have questions about and that they can find answers. It is wonderful learning that your questions can have answers.

How do you generate these questions?
C: I would usually prepare the questions before the class. Some are from the manual. Some come from my own reading or experience. Some come from putting myself in the shoes of my students and asking myself what questions would they ask. You have to take the experience of the student's into account. I have taught adult gospel doctrine class and the young single adults in the class are hesitant to ask questions but in this young single adult gospel doctrine class, among their peers, they are less afraid to ask a question. What has often surprised me is the simplicity of their questions. Sometimes you can be surprised that they don't know something. So there is no point in me asking the questions that I want to know the answer to – I need to ask questions (or invite questions) that they want to know the answer to. I have to attempt to find out what they already know so that I know what they have to learn, understand or experience.

AR: So you have to do some exegesis with the students themselves? You have to first understand them before you try to get them to understand the scriptures?

C: Yes, that is essential. The whole reason you are teaching is so that they can learn – and that means you need to understand them first.

AR: Ok, re there any particular kinds of questions you use?

C: I ask the usual kinds – who wrote this? When did he write it? What was happening at the time? Who was he speaking or writing to? The answers to these questions may not be the same – or, for example, the Book of Mormon contains things said to a particular audience at a particular time and place but the writing is actually to people in our time. I also try to ask questions that connect the scripture to modern concerns, to modern experiences. Asking these questions is a kind of journey – it involves a lot of work. I do so much work thinking about the lesson objective, the scriptures, the stories and other methods that I don't want to go into class and do the work all over again. I want them to do the work. I prefer that they can think of an experience that they've had with the scriptural concept – so I would usually try to connect the scripture to a common experience – either one that I've had or one that they have had.

AR: You've mentioned that you do this because it means less work for you in the classroom. But it occurs to me that this implies that you do a lot of work outside the classroom, before you even go into the class. Is that right? Is there a lot of preparation with this form of questioning?

C: Yes there is a lot of preparation. Asking these questions means I can do less work in the classroom and the students can do more. And that is when they learn. They learn by doing, or remembering or thinking much more than if I stood up there and just told them. So it means more work before class and less work in class than if I was simply up there giving a lecture.

AR: Ok, so you begun addressing this already but if you would comment further, what impact does using questions to explore the scriptures have on the students?

C: Sometimes when they are afraid to answer because they think they are the only one to have had a question, a doubt, or a puzzling experience, it helps that I relate one from my own experience. This wakens them up to the possibility that others have experienced what they have. But I've found that what really makes the difference is when one of their friends, a peer, either has had the same experience, or the same question or the same confusion. Then they are eager to discuss it and to explore their feelings about it and what it means that the scriptures, or the prophets, are dealing with it too.

AR: So you've found that it improves the way they read the scriptures?

C: Yes. It makes them want to search them to find themselves in the scriptures, to find things they can relate to. It makes the experience of others (including those in the scriptures) more meaningful to them.

AR: So do they participate differently in class as a result of this exegetical teaching?

C: Yes, it improves the discussion, I think. It definitely makes it more active. It makes them more interested. That is what is exciting about teaching in this way. I am more interested in connecting this text, or story or visual aid with what the students have experienced or with

what the lesson objective is than I am with finding one right interpretation of a passage of scripture. That is why I try to ask creative questions or ask them in a creative way. It also makes them more connected. They see that they share things in common with each other – not just with the people we are reading about. It is a form of "likening" [See 1 Nephi 19:23] the scriptures unto themselves.

AR: In your experience, do students study scripture differently as a result of this teaching technique?

C: I would hope that it helps with their personal study of the scriptures but that is a very difficult thing to know, a very difficult thing to measure. But I would certainly hope so. What I have noticed is that they are eager to contribute to the discussion and they are quicker to relate experiences that they have had (possibly suggesting that they are thinking about the topic before class or just that they trust the class environment more). That makes my job easier. The other thing is that they are asking each other questions. They are addressing questions to the class because they have learned that rather than answer their question directly, like most teachers would, I will redirect them to the class. So it is almost as if they are saying – here's a question for class discussion and it is a question that I've been thinking about, that really matters to me and I would like to hear your opinions and thoughts on it. I think that is positive that they realise that they can learn from each other. After all, that is one of our main objectives in Sunday School. I suppose these things might indicate that they are using this method to study their scriptures better but I can only speak confidently about what is happening in class – and they appear to trust each other more, themselves more and the method of asking questions more. That is good.

AR: So that is an example of the improvement in class discussion. They are asking questions of each other. Do these questions relate more to the meaning of the scriptures or to experiences that the student's themselves are having?

C: That's a good question. There is a mixture of both. I do think they discuss the scriptures better but they are mostly asking about how to apply it in their daily lives. The questions are more devotional and practical than exegetical. At least, that's what I remember as I reflect on it now. They want to know how to live the gospel and overcome their challenges as young single adults.

AR: Yes, well I'm exploring that aspect too. The real question is whether the exegetical questioning first, the exegetical foundation makes the devotional and practical aspects, the application, more meaningful or more significant. Would you comment on that?

C: Well, it is easier to use a scripture you understand. I have found that personally. As Elder Bednar said about how to overcome practical challenges, "What doctrine or principle, if understood, would help this person behave the way they already know they should? What doctrine or principle, if understood, would make it easier to obey?" So I do think that understanding can be motivation to live it and asking questions helps us understand it and then connect it to experiences we've already had.

AR. Great. Sometimes we see teachers that use only one method of teaching. Sometimes we see teachers that use a great variety of teaching. You are one that uses great variety in your use of methods. Have you contrasted this method of learning and teaching with other methods?

C: Actually, I see this as complementary with different methods. I use variety. I think it is important because otherwise students get bored and the class gets too predictable. We all remember teachers where we say, "Here comes the 'Can you give me an example of that?' teacher or the 'Have you had an experience with this?' teacher. So I use different methods. But I can always ask questions. So for example, I can use a story and ask a question, or I can use a picture and ask a question about that, or a scripture passage, or a quote from a General Authority. I can always use questions in whatever method I'm using. But variety in teaching methods is important. If I use the blackboard it is usually to do a timeline or a simple picture. I've found the timeline really helpful and the students have told me, "We really like the timelines." So asking questions about a scripture is one method among many – but you can always use questions because that is the essence of teaching – asking and answering questions.

AR: That is intriguing to me – because I want to explore that. I'm finding that is the case too. This method is very versatile. It is a good way to accommodate the need for different methods and also the use of class discussions. But that doesn't mean it is easy – you've already mentioned that this involves a lot of work for the teacher. That can be a challenge. Are there other challenges to the use of "existential exegesis"?

C: Yes, the preparation involved for the teacher is a challenge. There are also several challenges in the classroom that you need to be prepared for. First, don't be afraid of silence. Don't rush to fill it with your own thoughts and experiences. And don't attempt to re-ask the question in a 'new' way. First wait. Usually, silence is a sign the class is thinking. Let them think. So wait for the answer. If it becomes obvious that they are struggling, then ask a stage-setting question. This will help remind them of experiences they had that relate to the scripture story. Then you will get answers. You can also redirect, or, if you know enough about the students, remind them of a previous experience one of them has had. So you need to be prepared to let them think, let them work and let them answer. The other challenge is on the other side. You might get someone who is too eager to talk. They dominate the discussion. They take over answering every question. You need to be disciplined. This is why asking specific students can be helpful (though always ask the question, before you say the name – that way, they are all thinking). So you have to be prepared for silence on the one hand and talkativeness on the other. Asking stage-setting questions or redirecting questions or even just dropping the question and moving to another activity to illustrate the principle can deal with these. But you have to be prepared, you have to be courageous, you have to be wise.

AR: It occurs to me as you speak that often we only identify one person dominating a class as a problem, but if you are teaching a class of 30 or more and you commonly only have 5 people talking and they are the same 5 people then you have a collective illustration of the same problem – this group is dominating the class discussion. That is something that can be a challenge – not unique to exegetical teaching – but to the use of class discussion. How would you deal with that?

C: Actually, I think that is related to another challenge - that students have different abilities or different difficulties. This makes some very hesitant to participate. We need to widen the range of participants. Sometimes silent reflection can be useful – like using a scriptural journal in the class. Sometime you can break the class into small groups. Sometimes you can ask specific people the original question or ask a follow-up question (like, "would you agree with that?" Or "have you had experience with that?"). You have to

be careful not to embarrass someone so you need to have an environment of trust but you certainly want to encourage all to participate.

AR: Ok, so final question. Have you recommendations for the implementation of "existential exegesis?"

C: Well, the big key is to implement it consistently. You can learn to turn any situation into a teaching opportunity if you are flexible and prepared. As I've already said you should use variety because it appeals to different learners. But you can always use questions with those different methods and learning activities. So consistency is important in implementing this. The second thing is not to be concerned about covering everything you've prepared. Sometimes teachers stop a good discussion because they say, "We don't have time. We have to move on. We have a lot more to cover." I think that is wrong. The first thing I do with a new course is look at the objective and each week when I teach I try to keep the objective in mind. I point out the object to the students and tell them this is why we are doing what we do. I can prepare 10 different activities or things we will discuss and they will all highlight the same objective – and it is the objective that they really need to learn. So suppose in the class I only get to discuss two rather than all ten? Well, as long as the objective has been achieved and has been recognised then this is a successful lesson. But imagine if I insist on bulldozing through all 10 but the objective is unclear – then the student might remember some of the things we discussed or some of the activities we did but they will not have learned the real lesson … they will not have reach the objective. So for me the objective is the goal not to cover the entire content.

AR: So the objective is the final destination and exegesis is an appropriate starting point? But it is easier to get to the destination if you start right?

C: Yes, that's true. But don't confuse the journey or the vehicle that gets you there for the destination. The objective is the destination. Finally, as well as preparing what you teach you need to prepare how you will teach it. The key is to ask, first, "What do my students need to learn?" and second, "How will they learn it?" Sometimes we spend too much time preparing the content and not enough time preparing the way to deliver it. So we can implement this by being consistent, not trying to cover all the content, and by asking how it will be learned by the students – what will they do in this class. That will make it more active, attentive, reflective, and remembered.

AR: I think that is a real challenge. It is easy to get so carried away with preparing and then covering the content that we don't prepare the best way to deliver and discuss the content. So I will be trying to prepare appropriate delivery methods too. Ok, is there anything else that you would like to mention?

C: No … I think that covers it.

AR: Well, I think I've asked everything I wanted to know.

C: If another question comes to mind afterward, feel free to ask me again.

AR: Thanks, I appreciate that. And thanks again for the comprehensive and insightful interview.

C: No problem.

Appendix D: Focus Group – Questions and Interview

Explanation of Exegetical Education

Exegetical education is an attempt to "correctly understand how a principle applied "to them, there, then" before applying it "to us, here, now" through asking these questions:
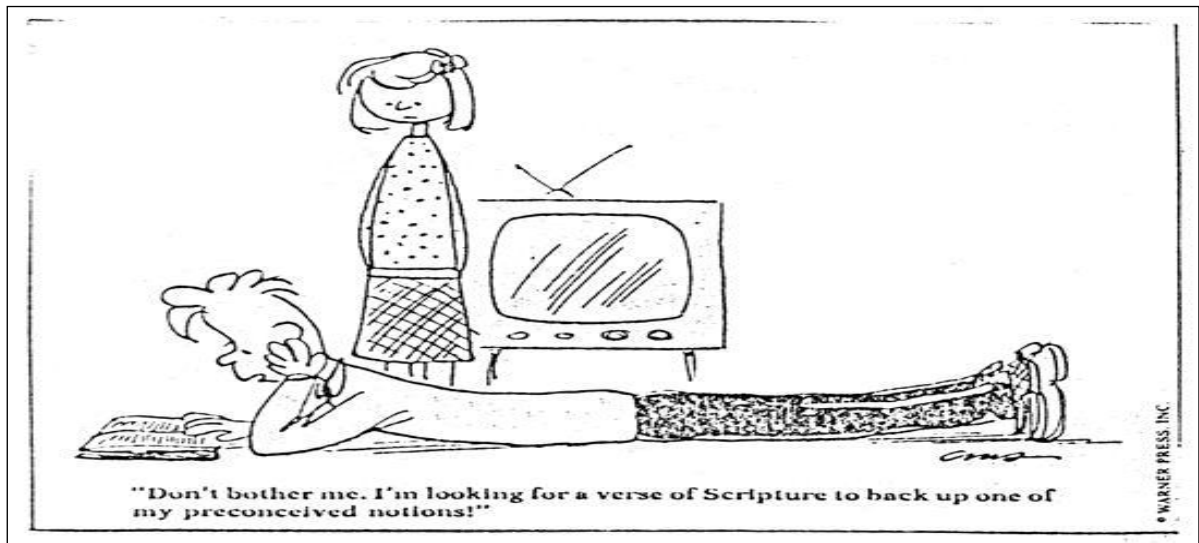
Prescriptive (Who) →	Diachronic (When & Where)	Existential → (Why)
	Synchronic (What & How)	

Research Aims:
To explore the effectiveness of exegetical education in helping students both *understand texts* and *utilise them* in real life.
Research Question:
Is exegetical education a "useful way to structure classes, study, and discussion" in Adult Sunday School contexts?

"Don't bother me. I'm looking for a verse of Scripture to back up one of my preconceived notions!"

Through this questioning process, students can better "lead out" (exegesis) the original meaning without unduly "reading in" (eisegesis) their own preconceived notions."

Questions for Focus Group Interview

1. Did you notice anything different?
2. Was there anything that was better?
3. Was there anything that was worse?
4. Did it make the scripture more relevant?
5. Were the peer-leaning activities effective in helping apply the scriptures?
6. What would you recommend about implementing this method?

AR: Thanks for joining me for this focus group interview. I appreciate the sacrifice involved in being here and hope that you feel that it is worthwhile. As you each know I've been employing a slightly more explicit exegetical method for exploring scripture in gospel doctrine over the last few months. I've given you each a hand-out that explains the nature of what I've chosen to call exegetical education. It is based on the notion of using questions to explore the scriptures so that we can understand them in their original context and then apply them appropriately to our modern circumstances. It is an attempt to overcome our modern assumptions about what life was like back then and to treat the text honestly and respectfully. The hope is that the resultant gospel doctrine class discussion will be more meaningful, relevant and even appreciative of what is contained in the scriptures and what the ancient prophets have given us. There is a list of questions there and we may discuss additional questions if they arise. Feel free to talk directly to each other and to raise questions of your own. Finally, feel completely free to answer honestly as this is an attempt to improve my personal practice as a teacher – each of us can continue to improve how we teach and how we engage students.
Ok, so with that preamble, let me ask the very first question, did you notice anything different?

F: At first, I didn't notice anything different. But then after a few weeks I noticed that your questions were different. They seem more meaningful – more focused. They were based on the scripture and asked specific questions about it. They required that we look at the verse and really think about what it says.

C: Yes, I would agree with that – except that I did notice right away. You usually ask about something like, "So what does that mean to you?" or "Do you have any feeling about that?" while now you asked about particular phrases – the questions were more specific, more focused, more prepared. I also noticed that you still used these to talk about feelings and meaning as you discussed the same things as before but they were easier to understand.

E: I noticed that you were trying harder to generate a discussion. You weren't giving the answers away. Breaking the classes into groups and setting challenges for us that involved finding answers to the questions by looking at the scriptures was noticeable.

B: I think it was more obvious why you saw certain scriptures as connected. Turning to the topical guide or asking us to find a relevant scripture to support a particular idea or to resolve a particular problem was also more fun. It is always good to learn how to use the scriptures.

AR: Ok, thanks. So, was there anything that was better?

B: Better than what? What you usually do or than how we usually read and discuss the scriptures or than the use of other different methods? What are we comparing this to?

AR: Good question. Whatever you want – I'm looking for your opinions about it. Ok, so how about the following suggestion – maybe when you tell us what, if anything, was better you should say what it was better in comparison to. That would help us understand what you mean.

D: Well, in comparison to usual gospel doctrine class discussions, I liked the use of group activities. It helps to see what others think. I noticed you made more of an effort to get others to talk to share their feelings. That was good. It was more varied. The group activities also let people who don't like to contribute in front of the whole class to participate.

B: Ok, so in comparison to your usual way of dealing with questions, I like that you re-directed questions back to the class. You always give additional comments and additional insights but you do encourage the class to answer too. Then when someone answers you add to the answer and we learn even more. It is great to have a few people answer because people can learn from one another and then you start to see things that you hadn't before. So several times I saw new things in the scriptures that I wouldn't have seen without the class discussion.

A: Yes, that's true and it relates to what I saw as an improvement. I thought the exploration of the scripture was better – I started to see more how you read them and why you get so much more out of them. You are always asking questions and are not afraid to suggest an answer and then look for evidence that the answer is true. You treat the scriptures like a treasure map and go looking for hidden treasures. I think the questions challenged us to dig to find our own hidden treasures.

F: That's true. I felt like I understood the scriptures we were reading better. They connected to the lesson topic more. They made more sense to me. I could see that they were relevant to us today. The scriptures are a lot more flexible than we sometimes realise.

AR: Ok, very good. There are a range of improvements there. But there has to be another side. So next question: was there anything that was worse? Again, if you want to mention what you are comparing it to that would probably help.

C: I'll start this on and compare it to what you used to do. I'll be honest, I prefer when you do the teaching. I mean nobody else that I know knows the scriptures as well as you so I prefer when you just tell us what it means. You have such great insights. Sometimes the class was a bit too conversational. It was like being in the corridor and listening in to personal conversations instead of being in a class. It is almost as if we are hearing about other people's lives rather than about the people in the scriptures. I think we could learn more doctrine the other way.

B: Ok, this is not really something worse. But you do sometimes interrupt people while they are speaking. It is almost like you have somewhere else you want to go. I don't mind because you usually say it better but I suppose if you ask a question you should let people answer and wait until they are finished. Wait until you are sure they are finished and let them know that you respect their contribution. There was some improvement in this especially with the use of re-directed questions but you did seem to get so excited sometimes that you cut people short. It is not a big deal in a way – except that if you ask questions you should wait for people to give their full answers.

AR: Ok, so I don't want to be funny by cutting you off but I am aware of that tendency. It is the result of how I learned to teach – through lectures on the one hand and through seminars on the other – I find it hard to combine the two. The other thing is that I do get excited and so I suppose when I agree with people I want to develop what they say further and so I can cut them off through politeness. Although, I'm trying to work on that and the

benefit of the peer-learning activities is that they overcome that tendency. Alright, in the spirit of that, doesn't anyone have anything else to add as a potential deficiency of this method?

A: Yes, I have something. I was confused by some things. Sometimes it felt like we were getting too deep into the scripture and sometimes it almost raised controversial questions. I felt uneasy when that happened though you did control it well. It was like the class was encouraging speculation about deep doctrine.

AR: Alright. Next question, did it make the scripture more relevant?

C: It is always relevant when you teach. You always use the scriptures. I don't remember you teaching without using the scriptures. But I do think that it was more relevant. It connected the scriptures to how we are living today. I remember thinking when you were teaching about Joseph of Egypt and prostitution that this could apply to any sexual issue, for example, gay marriage. In fact that concept can apply to any covenant we have made with God. That connection with modern questions occurred to me again and again.

E: I think just teaching the scripture didn't make it more relevant to me – although I understood it better. But the class discussion did. Hearing people's experiences with the principle helped me realise that the modern gospel is so similar to the ancient one. Yes they had a different culture and everything but there are many things we share in common. We worry about our children and our families. We struggle to understand God and our place in this life. We are tempted and resist because of promises we have made with God and just like the people in the scriptures are examples to us so other Latter-day saints are examples to us.

AR: Were the peer-leaning activities effective in helping apply the scriptures?

F: I think so. I've really enjoyed them. I've gone out of class and wanted to study things myself or read the lesson for the next week so that I would be better prepared. I've noticed that I wonder about things as I read. Usually I'm thinking, "Why can't I see the same things as Michael? Ha, ha! But I starting asking, "What does this mean?", "Is that really the best word?" The fact that there are different translations or that things can be changed gives me hope when I read a phrase or word that I don't like or don't feel fits that maybe there is a better word or it has a different meaning. I wouldn't have thought about the scriptures that way if I hadn't learned more about their history and how they have been changed.

C: That reminds me of something that I liked about this – usually we just talk about how to apply the scriptures but this allowed us to actually understand first and then talk about how to apply them. It makes them more meaningful. It makes it stick.

B: Yes, but I wonder though is it something best done in private. I mean, remember what Joseph Smith said, "I teach correct principles and they govern themselves." Maybe we should let people govern themselves. Let them figure out how to apply the scriptures to their own lives. Maybe we should focus more on understanding scriptures. I think I would prefer if that was the focus.

AR: That comment reminds me of what Elder Bednar said about the difference between doctrine, principle and application. He said we spend too much time focusing on application and not enough time on doctrine. I would actually agree with that. In a sense,

exegetical education is an attempt to have your cake and eat it too. It is about appropriate applications of doctrine – after the doctrine is actually understood – and only then. Anyone else want to say anything about the group activities?

E: Yes, can I just say that one of my favourites was the Q&A session. It was an interesting way of encouraging us to ask questions and it was really good fun. It is nice to break into small groups but I also like when the whole class has a discussion. So that was good.

AR: Great. What would you recommend about implementing this method?

A: I think you need to know the scriptures really well to do this. Some people are not as comfortable with that as others. Plus you shouldn't have to know everything about a scripture to feel confident or comfortable discussing it. The scriptures are for everyone. So I think I would want this to be used in a simple way. And I think it should be used with other teaching techniques.

C: It reminds me of the new "Come, follow me" program for the youth. Obviously it is a bit more complex because we've read more of the scriptures and we've had more gospel experiences than they've had but it is essentially the same method. So it is a good example of how to do the same thing with adults.

AR: Yes, I think it is very similar. It is the same process.

B: I wonder whether you should provide training on this. Aren't you the Stake Sunday school President? You could train teachers throughout the stake?

AR: Actually, we've held a 3-hour training course on it already. Not every teacher was at it but most of them were.

B: Oh, in that case, you should follow up with them.

AR: I will. And it is already practiced by some of the teachers in the Stake in various forms. The emphasis on group learning activities needs to improve. Ok, does anyone else want to say anything?

E: I like the focus on the scriptures. I'm not a scriptorian but I do enjoy learning about them. It helps me feel the spirit and know that they are inspired. I could feel the spirit very strongly in the classes as we discussed what the Lord wanted us to learn from these scriptures. That was nice.

A: It is good to actually see examples of how to study scripture and I like the way we sometimes talked about how to mark or notice things in the scriptures. It was also interesting when you said, "Ok, use the topical guide and find a scripture that deals with this. Now don't just find a scripture that mentions this theme. Find a scripture that actually responds to the imaginary situation that we've described. What scripture would help a person in that situation? So find a scripture and prepare to share it with the class." The few times you did that were great.

AR: Ok, well, we've discussed everything that I've listed. Does anybody have anything else they wanted to say? Ok then. If anything else comes to mind you can mention it to me later. So thank you all very much.