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"Exegetical Education": Overcoming Obstacles in a Collaborative Journey Toward Meaning

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Overcoming Obstacles in a Collaborative Journey toward Meaning

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Abstract

A practical problem often arises in gospel doctrine classes 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. Indeed, exegetical education (EE) could aid in understanding and using the text. Practical action research was employed in a small-scale study to explore these claims. Interviews held with three teachers explored their practice of exegetical forms of instruction. EE was formalised during a pilot stage. A reflective journal was kept during a further implementation of EE in specific gospel doctrine classes. Finally, a focus group interview was held with students to explore their experience of EE as implemented. The data obtained was analysed using network analysis. The findings support the claim that EE contributes to the relevance of the text in classroom discussions. These findings paint a metaphorical picture of EE as involving a journey that has various obstacles that must be overcome: a journey akin to an obstacle course. Ideally, the journey starts with a 'living' text and ends with 'living' truth. Further research could explore whether the consistent use of exegetical homework assignments encourage independent learning and improve class discussions.

Keywords: Exegesis, Discussions, Network Analysis, Independent Learning, Meaning, Peer Learning

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Introduction

This paper is a critical reflection on recent research introducing Exegetical Education (EE).[1] It specifies the research problem that EE was intended to resolve, the methodology employed, and the main research findings. A major metaphor that emerged was that learners, like readers, embark on a journey - a journey overcoming obstacles.

The Research Problem

The gospel doctrine class[2] discusses a pre-selected scripture block and attempts to apply its teachings to modern life (Brigham Young University, 2007). The classes are demographically diverse and can contain clear invitations to act in improved ways. However, the text is often used only as a stepping stone in discussing a pre-identified theme. Hence, *the text can become irrelevant* in the thematic discussion. The following claim indicated a potential solution to this textual non-relevance problematic:

> *"a simplified ... 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)

EE expands this proposal through *systematic questioning* to encourage appropriate explication of text (Beale, 2012), and *peer-learning* to encourage appropriate application of it (Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008). This paper addresses two research questions:

> Does EE aid in understanding scripture in gospel doctrine class?

> Is EE *"a useful way to structure ... discussion"* (Huntsman, 2005, p.110) in gospel doctrine class?

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[1] The intervention took place in certain gospel doctrine classes within the Dublin Ireland Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in early 2014.

[2] This 40 minute class is held each Sunday for adult members.

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Review of Literature

Reading Scripture

Exegesis is the process of explaining the original meaning of texts through sensitivity to its original language, culture and context and any historical, literary and cultural addendums since its original production (Brigham Young University, 2006; Tvedtnes, 2006). It attempts to remove these accretions and arrive at the text's original intent (Bradshaw, 2014). In contrast, *eisegesis* involves the unwarranted reading of modern ideas into the ancient text (Huntsman, 2005). Exegesis consists in asking the following relevant questions (see Table 1):

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

Table 1　　　　Types of Exegesis (*Source*: adapted from Huntsman, 2005)

Exegesis, a branch of hermeneutics (Davey, 2010), recognises *"that in reaching a common understanding with others, we must allow ourselves to be transformed"* (Misak, 2008, p.434). Since exegesis presupposes eisegesis (Zanardi, 2003; Rowbottom & Aiston, 2007), *"the space of linguistic consciousness ... in which meanings and reasons exist ... is a space that we occupy together"* (Korsgaard, 1996, p.145). The reader's input is *as important as* the writer's in the meaning-making process (Burke, 2010; Fish, 1980).

The use of stories, including myths and metaphors, to generate *"shared meanings"* is culturally commonplace (Jarvis, 2012, p.48). Enacted or experiential stories (e.g., creation dramas or religious rituals) are particularly effective in the spiritual *"learning process"* of

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matching theory and practice (Wickett, 2005, p.158). We can contrast the *"surface approach"* of those who view themselves *"as empty vessels … to be filled"* by memorising the text against the *"deep approach"* of *"learners"* who act *"as creators of knowledge by examining the text in relation to the world"* (Jarvis, 2012, p.50). EE aims for the latter since it attempts to connect what we learn in the text (when read right) with what we experience in the world (when lived right) (Everington, 2013; Rust, 1997).

Believers *and* sceptics are prone to read sacred texts incorrectly. Believers may read merely to confirm already held beliefs, thus implying *"that reading is unnecessary since it produces nothing new"* (Handley, 2011, p. 94). The 'meaning' is instead determined *a priori* by appeal to religious tradition thus making the actual text both immutable and, ironically, irrelevant (McConkie, 2009). On the other hand, the sceptic may believe that *"the reader ... produces all meaning, the text being radically excluded from the process of meaning-making"* so that interpretations *"are ultimately solipsistic illusions"* (Handley, 2011, p. 99). These polar positions ignore the text as a genuine meaning-maker since it is not genuinely investigated. Indeed, *"the ethical 'moment' of reading"* is located *"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"* (Norris, 2007, p. 46). Both positions are ethically extreme, since, either there is too much reader responsibility or else there is not enough.

The answer to such scriptural misreadings (or non-readings) is *"mutuality"* (Handley, 2011, p. 99). Scripture combines both the sacred and the secular, both the human and the divine (Brigham Young University, 2006). Although the sceptic is unlikely to be swayed by this the believer should seek to collapse the *"binary opposition between sacred and secular reading*

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practices" in an attempt to reach a mutual position (Handley, 2011, p.95). EE consists in *"a kind of dialogue between a dynamic, receptive, and changeable reader and a dynamic, receptive, and changeable text"* (Handley, 2011, p. 103). Since present readings are an interim position between past and potential readings (Davey, 2010), *"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 scriptural canon cannot be closed to new readings - it *must* be open: such openness is normatively mandated (Beale, 2012; Frederick, 2011). This view of scripture is a prime reason, "Latter-day Saints *read the Bible differently* from the way others read it" (Jackson, 2005, p. vii; Huntsman, 2009).

Teaching Scripture

The most important responsibility when teaching scripture is to model reading for enlightened meaning. It is only through close, careful and consistent reading that a student can notice the 'hidden' connections of meaning that a text contains (Ferrell, 2009; Greidanus, 1999). Group readings, convened after individual readings, which then converge onto similar meanings, are more likely correct since, *"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"* (Nibley, 1964, p. 142). This communal calibration of meaning is an essential component of EE.

Furthermore, the close relationship between reader and text is augmented by the close relationship between fellow readers, or in religious education, fellow travellers. As Wickett (2005, p.166) 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 ... with ... learners ... [giving them] ... opportunities for deeper learning experiences and spiritual growth".*

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EE acknowledges the distinction between *"common cultural meaning"* (e.g., traffic signs or church rituals), and *"personal meaning"* which is unique and unshared (Leontiev, 2013, p. 30). Indeed, classroom EE finds its greatest expression in the *"meaning ... emerging in the communication, in the conversational space between individuals"* (Leontiev, 2013, p. 30).

Exegetical Education as a Pedagogical Process

The metaphor of 'covering content' suggests that the teacher stands as an obstacle in the way of students *discovering* content (Weimer, 2002). Hence the dictum: *"Aim not to cover the content but to uncover part of it."* (Weimer, 2002, p. 46). EE rejects the false dichotomy between active learning and content coverage (Alexander, 2009). 'Direct instruction' must be augmented with active questioning of students about how they approach texts, tasks and topics (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007; Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006; Kuhn, 2007; Schmidt, Loyens, van Gog, & Paas, 2007; Sweller, Kirschner, & Clark, 2007). EE is a student-centred, question-driven analysis of a particular scriptural text (see Figure 1).
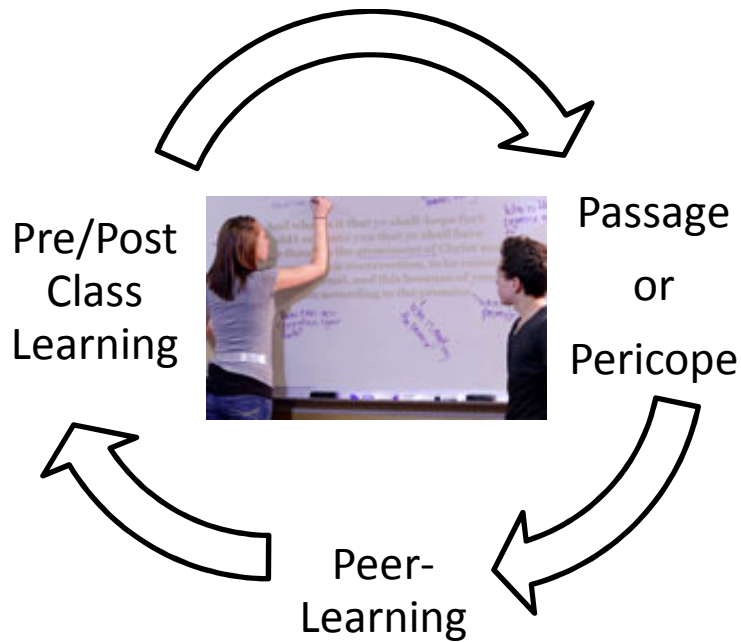
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Figure 1   The Pedagogical Process of EE

The following questions *illustrate* exploring texts meaningfully:

> *"What have you underlined on these pages? … Is it all equally important? … How [do] you decide what to underline? … Are there other things you might do with important texts besides underlining it? .... How does the material I've presented relate to what you read? … Does [it] contradict what's in the book? ... Have I provided examples to illustrate concepts ... in the book?"* (Weimer, 2002, pp. 60-61).

Since *"most skills (and reading skills are a good example) exist along a continuum ... it is not too difficult to have students responding to [a] text at different levels"* (Weimer, 2002, p. 69). Hence it is important to *individualise* learning activities occasionally to encourage *personalised* meanings (Bednar, 2011; Leontiev, 2013). Finally, EE 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

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- *Purposeful*: classroom talk is planned and steered toward specific educational goals

Such learning climates *"are created by action, not by announcement"* (Weimer, 2002, p. 101).

Research Methodology

Practical/interpretative action research was particularly suited to the research questions because rather than a case study of an existing phenomenon, this was a change study of an emerging phenomenon (Hadfield, 2012; McGlinn, 2009). Justification is found in the Aristotelian distinction between the following three forms of knowledge: *technē, phrónēsis* and *episteme* (McAteer, 2013). *Technē* and *phrónēsis* are two different modes of *"practical, as distinct from theoretical, knowledge (episteme)"* (Chia & Robin, 2009, p. 105). *Phrónēsis* is also associated with *praxis*: therefore, it is practical knowledge that flows from the situated reality of a person seeking to become wholly *"immersed in the activity"* (Chia & Robin, 2009, p. 108). Practical action research, like practical theology, seeks *"practical wisdom, or phrónēsis"* as the *"desired outcome"* (Graham, 2013, p. 50; Miller, 2008). A description of practical/interpretative action research 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

4. Evaluate and revise for further research

The research problem was *"how to make the text more relevant to the meaning-making purpose of the class?"* The research plan was to introduce EE in specific classes. This included decisions to interview specific teachers and preparation of the lesson outlines.

After a preliminary pilot stage, EE was implemented in nine gospel doctrine classes,[3] and monitored via participant observation and a self-reflective research journal (Cousin, 2009; Ezer, 2009). The interviews[4] were included in the implementation and monitoring stage although an ethical and evaluative stance was applied during these events (Craig, 2009; Nolen & Putten, 2007). The research data was then evaluated for recommendations for practice (McNiff, 2013), which could be used to revise and restart the research process.

Data Analysis and Findings

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 of EE had two themes that emerged, based on its definition (see Figure 2).
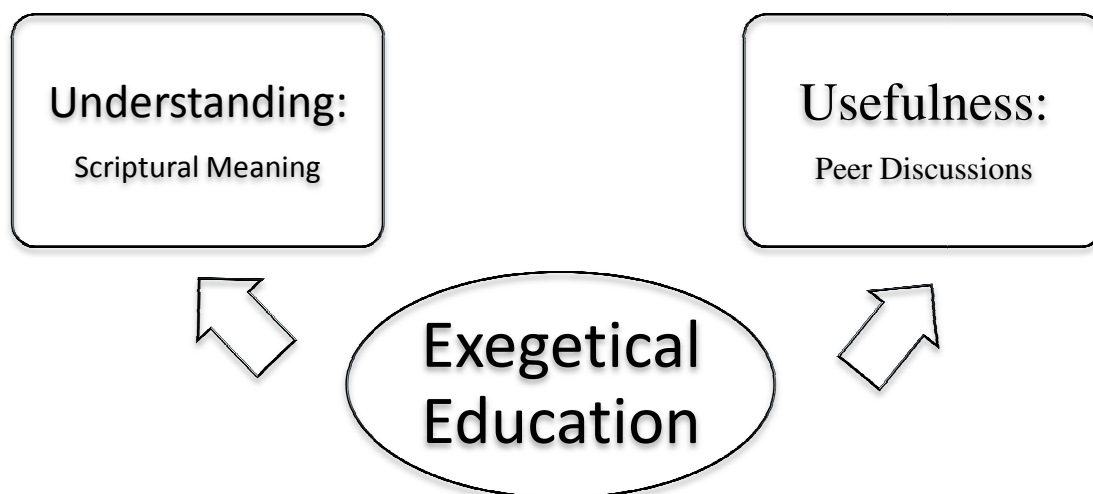

Figure 2   Network Analysis - Exegetical Education

Selected statements from the teachers and students interviewed are used to justify the research findings. Statements from Teacher Z come from the researcher's reflective journal.

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[3] The course of study was Genesis through Deuteronomy (Bokovoy, 2014).
[4] These interviews were held with three individual teachers prior to the intervention and a student focus group of six students, post intervention.

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Exegetical Education and Understanding

Two issues that flow from attempting to understand scriptural meaning were content

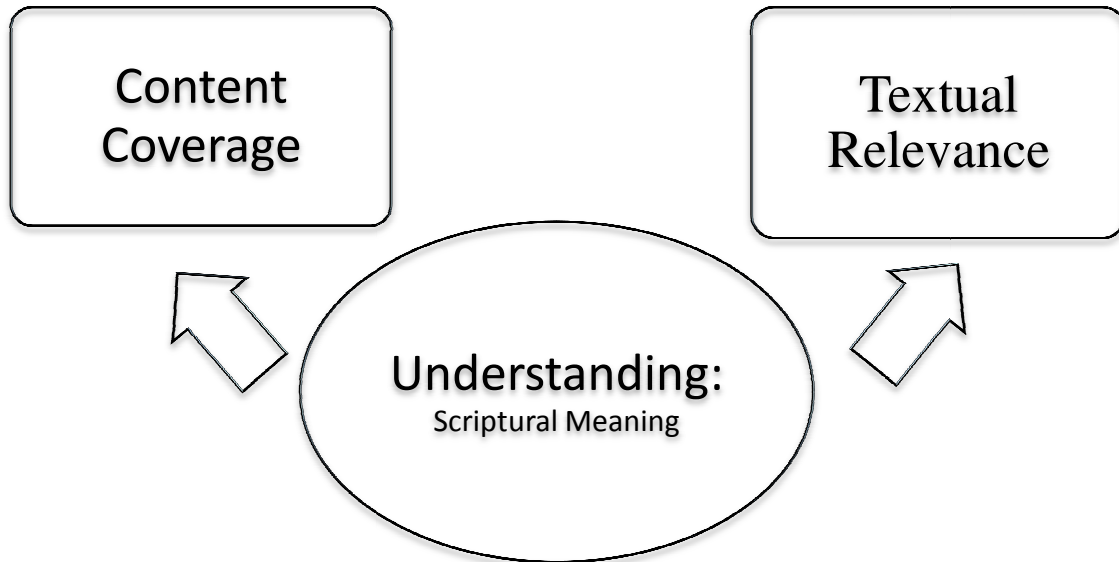coverage and textual relevance (see Figure 3).

Figure 3   Network Analysis - Understanding

Content Coverage

EE requires extensive pre-class content coverage by the teacher:

> *90% of the work done by the teacher is done outside the classroom. I read the*
> *text ... asking exegetical questions … this takes repeated readings.*
> [Teacher X, 7th December, 2013]

> *Asking these questions means I can do less work in the classroom and the*
> *students can do more ... it means more work before class and less work in class.*
> [Teacher Y, 21st January 2014]

This naturally leads to a consideration of the extent of exegesis within the classroom. The

evidence suggests that its use in class is *illustrative* rather than exhaustive:

> *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. You*
> *want to illustrate the method. That's better than covering everything.*
> [Teacher X, 7th December 2013]

> *Exegesis ... can be a useful starting point. The main guide to the extent of*
> *exegesis is the lesson objective. It is important to limit the amount of exegesis to*
> *a few scriptures. This allows sufficient questioning to encourage a good*

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discussion but also ensures that the objective can be easily illustrated.
[Teacher Z, 15th March 2014]

Indeed:

Do not to be concerned about covering everything you've prepared. The objective is the goal not to cover the entire content.
[Teacher Y, 21st January 2014]

Textual Relevance

Exegesis makes the text more relevant, making it more understandable and more useful:

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 III, 24th May 2014]

It connected the scriptures to how we are living today ... 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.
[Student II, 24th May 2014]

The researcher also noted this increased relevance:

I had the students break into groups and look at three scriptures sequentially to discuss context and progression of thought. After they reported ... we looked at a final scripture as a group. The ensuing discussion was noticeable more effective. Teaching scripture in sequence is very illuminating.
[Teacher Z, 19th January 2014]

I used a timeline to begin the class. It focused on events in the life of Abraham. The class had to provide the details. This helped identify gaps in knowledge and give a lens to the scriptures we were reading – especially the command, "Do the works of Abraham!" It helped with showing that we can apply what they did then to what we do now.
[Teacher Z, 16th February 2014]

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Exegetical Education and Utility

Figure 4 shows two themes in relation to classroom discussions that can be framed as

challenging because they are potential threats to the utility of EE in generating genuine peer-
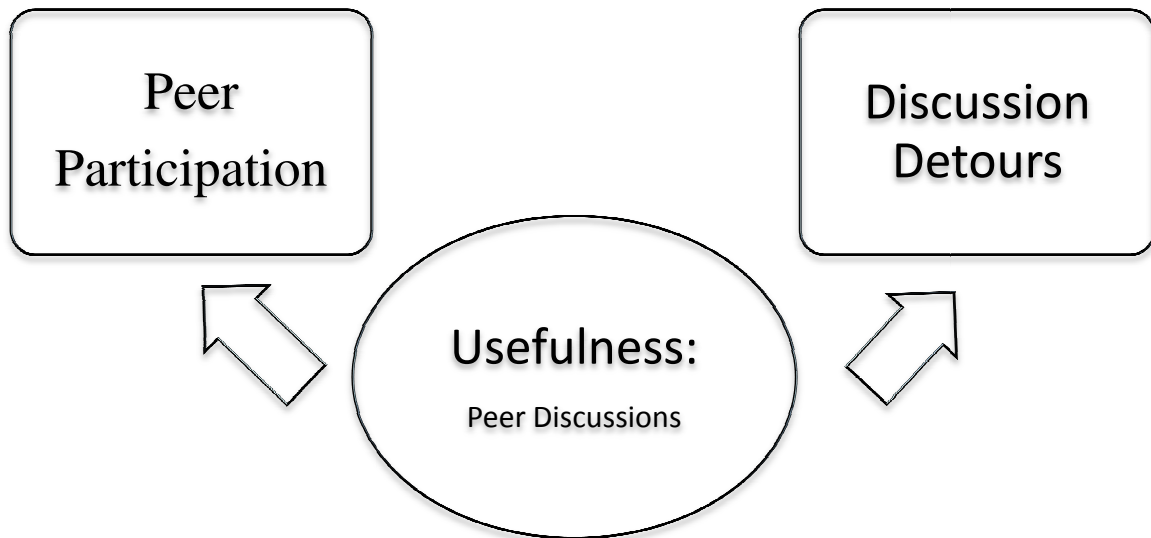
learning.

Figure 4   Network Analysis - Usefulness

Peer Participation

EE encourages more attention from students:

> *It makes them more interested ... 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 Y, 21st January 2014]

However, patience is important when implementing EE because there is a natural hesitation,

at least initially, to contribute to class discussions:

> *Sometimes there is the challenge that no one wants to speak – no one wants to*
> *appear foolish. I wait. Then I re-ask the question. I wait again. Someone*
> *ventures an answer.*
> [Teacher X, 7th December 2013]

> *First, don't be afraid of silence. Don't rush to fill it with your own thoughts and*
> *experiences ... First wait. Usually, silence is a sign the class is thinking. Let*
> *them think. So wait for the answer ... you need to be prepared to let them think,*
> *let them work and let them answer.*
> [Teacher Y, 21st January 2014]

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Sometimes a peer-learning activity is the solution to the fear surrounding exegesis because it

connects the text to some commonality that unites the class:

> *I've found that what really makes the difference is when one of their friends, a peer ... has had the same experience, the same question or the same confusion. Then they are eager to discuss it and to explore their feelings about it.*
> [Teacher Y, 21st January 2014]

The *initial* responsibility for EE discussions to proceed rests with the teacher but then *shifts*

to the students:

> *The teacher ... 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 ... They also begin to ask better questions, suggest other scriptural connections and prepare more thoughtful and meaningful experiences.*
> [Teacher Z, 23rd March 2014]

Striking the right balance between the two strands of EE is not always successful:

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

Discussion Detours

This leads to a consideration of the opposite challenge - students dominating 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 ... answer every question. So you have to be prepared for silence on the one hand and talkativeness on the other.*
> [Teacher Y, 21st January 2014]

The teacher can use the text as a tool to diffuse potentially explosive classroom exchanges

rather than generate them, thus guiding the direction of discussions:

> *It can become confrontational. That is a real risk ... The person who insists on reading the text a particular way, isn't going to move and isn't going to learn ... they aren't willing to move into unknown territory ... [But] you can say, "Ok ... from a critical reading of the text ... what are your reasons?" You have to*

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> *always point back to the text. What is the text saying?*
> [Teacher X, 7th December 2013]

This can also be used for tangential discussions. Respecting the flow of discussions without wanting to arrive at the final destination too quickly was a struggle for the researcher:

> *You do sometimes interrupt people while they are speaking. It is almost like you have somewhere else you want to go … if you ask a question you should let people answer and wait until they are finished ... and let them know that you respect their contribution.*
> [Student I, 24th May 2014]
>
> *[My] resistance to encouraging discussion reflects itself in the common tendency to cut people off – to stop them talking by agreeing with them and continuing on with my own thoughts.*
> [Teacher Z, 12th April 2014]

The instructor does not choose *between* presenting content and conducting peer-learning activities: the instructor has to *balance* them (Alexander, 2009).

Discussion of Findings

The data represents a wide range of qualitative views, some complementary and some contradictory (Thomas, 2013). That was not surprising since this research was dealing with how particular persons experienced a particular intervention (Cousin, 2009). Indeed, uniformity of opinion would be an invalid result: diversity of opinions and of perspectives is to be expected and respected (Berg, 2009). The following four findings illustrate the notion of journeying implicit in EE:

> Finding 1: EE employs exegesis as the (starting) point of departure, envisions the lesson objective as the (ending) point of destination, and utilises peer-learning as the journey vehicle.
>
> Finding 2: EE gives the text greater relevance and helps bridge the gap between understanding and utility (i.e. between theory and practice).
> Finding 3: EE can involve the introduction of various obstacles to fruitful, open and respectful class discussions.

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Finding 4: EE presents a way to overcome discussion obtacles and can improve discussion meaningfulness.

Understanding of Scriptural Text

EE encourages reflection on the meaning of the scriptural text and its impact on how one should live (Lee, 2013). Since such experiences cannot be programmed, a corresponding between one variable and another cannot be quantified (Thomas, 2013). EE makes demands on the instructor who must prepare appropriate passages, questions, and learning activities prior to classroom delivery (Huntsman, 2005; Weimer, 2002). This includes anticipating possible controversies, misreadings or potential problems (such as necessary threshold knowledge) in the student's comprehension of the text (Huntsman, 2009), and preparing 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.

A consistent return to the text to explore the controversies or misreadings can produce new insights, new connections and novel applications (Noddings, 2007). It can, most importantly, encourage further questioning by students (Jones, Estell, & Alexander, 2008). Failure to anticipate these potential roadbloacks to reading for meaning is a serious pedagogical failure, and reduces the impact of the text in meaningful discussions (Alexander, 2009). Consistent exposure to EE encourages students to be better prepared, to ask tough questions of the text and of the class, and to reflect on personal experiences (Wilcox, 2014). Crucial learning moments can occur that indicate that a connection between "them, there, then" and "us, here, now" has be achieved, which is one of the prime purposes of EE (Huntsman, 2005).

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Usefulness in Peer Discussions

Crafting peer-learning activities around the exegetical discussion of a particular text increased its utility in generating practical applications (Hilton, 2012). With exegesis as a 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 revelance of ancient texts more apparent (Huntsman, 2009). When the teacher asks more that just exegetical questions (about *understanding* the text), but also asks practical questions (about *using* the text), the students are *more likely* to actually use the text since they understand it (Bednar, 2011).

Criticism of enquiry-based education (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006), ignores the potential *inclusivity* of pedagogical practice when an appropriate balance between subject-centred *and* student-centred learning and teaching is maintained (Alexander, 2009; Sweller, Kirschner, & Clark, 2007). EE *cannot* be student-centred *without* being simultaneously subject-centred (Huntsman, 2005). Indeed, to ensure the student-centredness of EE, an instructor could ask *them* to determine the texts to read, the questions to be addressed or the real life problems to be discussed (Hilton, 2012). The instructor could encourage advanced students to tutor others in their text marking systems (Jacobs, Aili, Xishuang, & Yongye, 2008). In each case the discussion or activity will also be subject-centred.

In relation to non-contributing students, several recommendations emerged. First, continue with exegesis - it can generate curiosity and contributions ... eventually. Second, plan both personal and small-group reflective opportunities for the students, and occasionally, have

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them report on these to the class (Jarvela & Jarvenoja, 2011). The contributors may increase over time with more reticent students eventually gaining the confidence to participate.

Course Corrections: Overcoming Obstacles

EE is useful as a form of practical theology (Graham, 2013) - it encourages a search for practical wisdom (Winch, 2006). Therefore, practical action research and EE, which both seek practical wisdom, provided an appropriate marriage of theory and practice, epistemologically and methodologically (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). The findings support the claim that EE enhances the relevance of the text in daily living (Jarvis & Parker, 2005). EE 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).

A suitable metaphor consistently seen throughout this research is that of a journey from a particular point of departure (textual exegesis), which despite the need to overcome obstacles, finally arrives at a particular point of destination (the lesson objective). Ideally, this obstacle course journey starts with a 'living' text and ends with 'living' truth (Wood, 2007). These obstacles are actually barriers to learning, and include:

1. *Exegetical reading:* The need to 'overcome' cultural distance to 'arrive' at original meaning of an ancient text.
2. *Instructor preparation:* the need to balance between presenting and peer-interaction.

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3. *Student participation:* The need to get 'discussions' off the ground, i.e., to overcome the fear of students to engage exegetically and their tendency to remain silent by encouraging them to arrive at full mental and verbal participation.

4. *Discussion direction:* The need to overcome distractions or detours in discussions and to avoid confrontational communication.

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations for practice follow directly from the main research findings noted previously.

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

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: 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 which texts are discussed exegetically.

Recommendation 3: Prepare for the possibility of various obstacles to open, honest and respectful discussions of a text.

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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 4: Utilise the tools of EE (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.

Delimitations

This research study sought to illustrate rather than generate explanations (Berg, 2009; Thomas, 2013). The study was small-scale and very context-dependent but this was appropriate since it sought to address a practical problem within that context (Craig, 2009). Although some control measures were put in place (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005),[5] the primary aim was to comprehend the intervention *as experienced* and this was achievable within the sample explored (Ezer, 2009). The main limitation of EE is that texts must play a central role in curriculum delivery and it must be plausible to subject these texts to various competing interpretations (Huntsman, 2005). Several texts (such as computer textbooks,

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

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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.

Further Research

This research study illustrated the potential of EE within a particular context over a short period of time. Although this research study consistently employed two strands of EE it did not consistently employ another important 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). EE could also be employed in other text based disciplines to determine if similar results are found. Obviously, given the unique context of religious education and its inherent connection with meaningfulness and living, the results would not be expected to be precisely similar. However, the essential elements of EE can be transferred to other text based instructional settings.

Conclusion

EE is not universally transferable because it depends, crucially, on the centrality of text in curriculum delivery. However, in appropriate text based disciplines, EE can strike a balance between subject *and* student centredness, can bridge theory (textual comprehension) *and* practice (applicability), and can improve the experience of learning *and* teaching in the classroom.

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