

Embodied Education

Learning Biblical Hebrew as Spiritual
and Pastoral Formation

Hinneh Mah Tov

Psalm 133.1

“Behold how good and pleasant it is
when kindred dwell together in unity!”



Western Theological Seminary

Founded in 1866

Grammar and Translation Method

“The idea behind GT is that by teaching all the grammar and linguistic features of the language, accompanied by intensive vocabulary list memorization, the student will be able to decipher and translate texts put before them.” (Brian Schultz, SBL presentation, 2014)

A Brief History

- ◆ Summer 2006 - Tom and Dr. Carol Bechtel take 6 WTS students to Israel to take an interactive biblical Hebrew class
- ◆ Fall 2006, Tom and Carol implement interactive Hebrew pedagogy just learned in August - a complete transformation of the entire curriculum in one summer.
- ◆ 5-year trial period. We completely redesigned the class every year for five years until we were satisfied with the curriculum and our ability to achieve our SLOs.

Early Metaphors



Building the plane while flying it

Early Metaphors



Building the plane while flying it



Baking fresh bread daily

Early Metaphors



“Can we at least use
the same recipe?!?”

Goals of the Traditional Course

- ◆ Learn basic elements of Hebrew grammar
- ◆ Learn several hundred most common Hebrew words
- ◆ Learn how to translate various kinds of biblical texts
- ◆ Become acquainted with major exegetical methods and theories
- ◆ Learn how to faithfully interpret OT texts in ways that lead to responsible teaching and preaching
- ◆ Learn how to write an exegetical paper

Formational Goals

- ◆ We want:
 - ◆ The Scriptures to dwell within our students and ourselves
 - ◆ Our students and ourselves to dwell within the Scriptures
 - ◆ To sympathetically engage the Hebraic worldview, opening ourselves to be changed by it
 - ◆ To change our collective relationship with Scripture



Welcome to Hebrew Class!





Holistic Involvement
Seriously Playful, Embodied Learning

Holistic Involvement: Intellectual Engagement

- ◆ Textbook
- ◆ Grammar Rules
- ◆ Oral verb conjugation drills
- ◆ Vocab words/quizzes
- ◆ Paradigms/verb quizzes
- ◆ Translation/verb parsing
- ◆ Exegetical/Theological
Conversation



Practicing writing and verb drills on lap boards.

Holistic Involvement: Physical Engagement



Walking the path while singing Ps. 37.5.

- ◆ Scripture Enactments
- ◆ Jonah Dialogues
- ◆ Scripture Memorization (full-bodied with hand/body motions)
- ◆ Singing and Dancing
- ◆ Games
- ◆ Interactive Exercises
- ◆ Shabbat Celebrations

Holistic Involvement: Emotional Engagement

- ◆ Scripture enactments
- ◆ Art Exegesis
- ◆ Humor and play
- ◆ Safe space where risk-taking is possible
- ◆ Creating and managing student anxiety



Abraham and Isaac, Rembrandt 1634

Holistic Involvement: Multi-Sensory Engagement



Visualization of Isaiah 2.1-5

- ◆ Word Pictures
- ◆ Art Exegesis
- ◆ Props and costumes
- ◆ Aleph-Bet on walls
- ◆ Use of lap boards
- ◆ Teachers demonstrating vocab words

Holistic Involvement: Relational Engagement

- ◆ Games
- ◆ Collaborative learning
(small groups, pairs)
- ◆ Reading labs (reading in
small groups together)
- ◆ Theological
conversations
- ◆ Play



Singing the “mayim” song!

Classroom Environment:



Visualizing Genesis 1 together

- ◆ Small class sizes (10-18)
- ◆ Encourage Mistakes (“check your pride and need to be right at the door”)
- ◆ Hebrew Names
- ◆ Room setup (no desks)
- ◆ Performance (motivate to prepare)
- ◆ Playful and Safe, a community of trust



The Epic Raid on the Greeks

The (re)Capture of the Ark

The Epic Raid on the Greeks



We marched down to
the Greek classroom to
take back what was
rightfully ours!





The Epic Raid on the Greeks

The (re)Capture of the Ark

“Pleasure in the classroom is feared.”

bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 145.



Collaboration
The work is better when done together.

Collaboration

- ◆ Hebrew teaching team - 5 teachers work closely together to design, implement, and improve the course.
- ◆ Team-teaching - every course section is taught by two teachers: a faculty member and a co-teacher. Teaching responsibilities are shared.
- ◆ Student Reading Lab Leaders teach their peers in pairs, and meet weekly with faculty to plan weekly labs.
- ◆ Students collaborate together on projects, preparing for and performing dialogues, translations, in-class grammar presentations, and developing Scripture enactments.

Collaboration: Vulnerability

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. . . . If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.”

- Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*

Collaboration: Intimacy

“One thing is clear to me: The temptation of power is greatest when intimacy is a threat. Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love.”

- Henri Nouwen, In The Name of Jesus

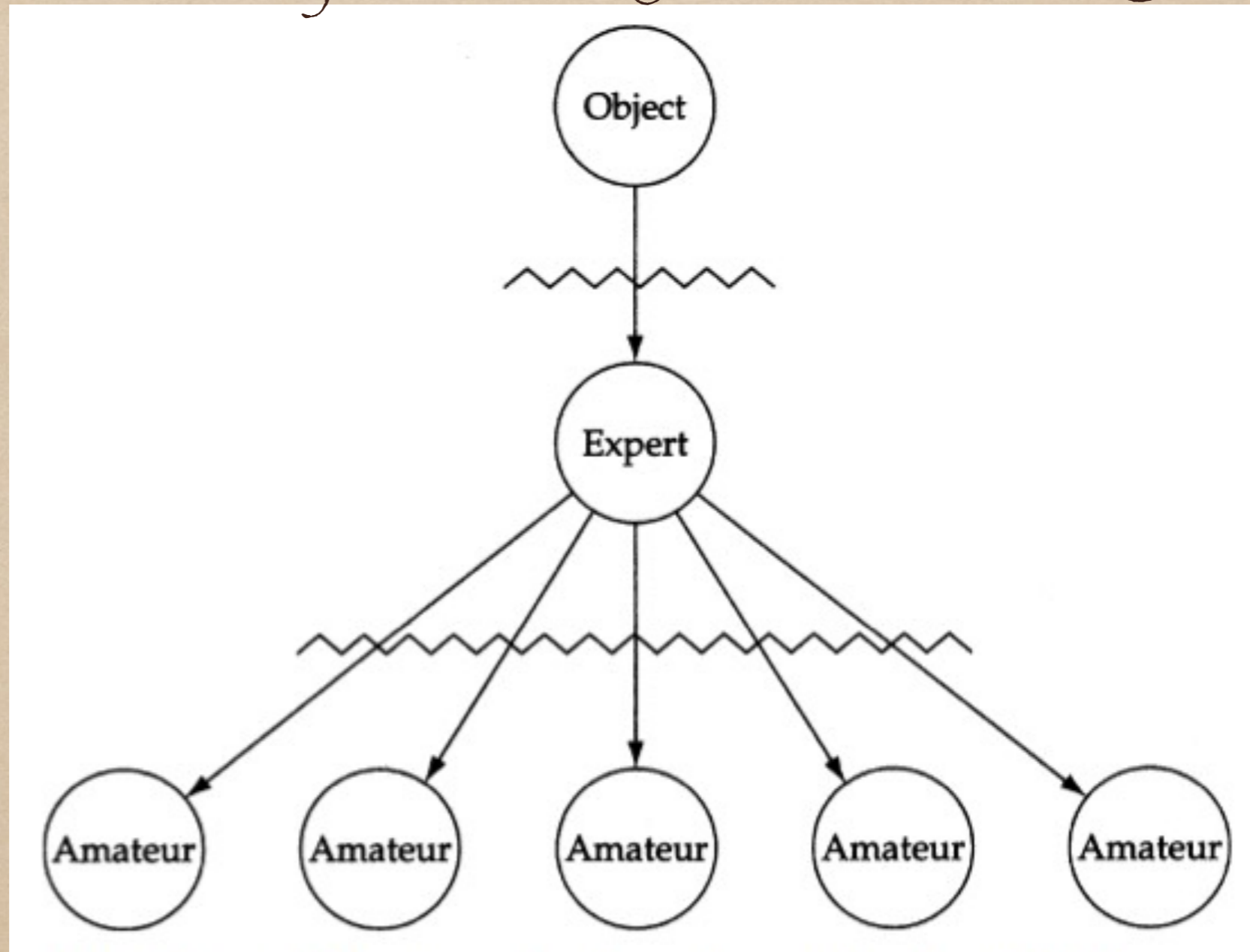
Formational Grading

- ◆ An attempt to remove competitive elements from the grading system, while remaining part of the system.
- ◆ Reduce student anxiety
- ◆ Motivate by content not grade
- ◆ “Grading” assignments becomes an opportunity to begin a conversation through substantive feedback, not reduce the student to a letter or number.



Learning in a Community of Truth

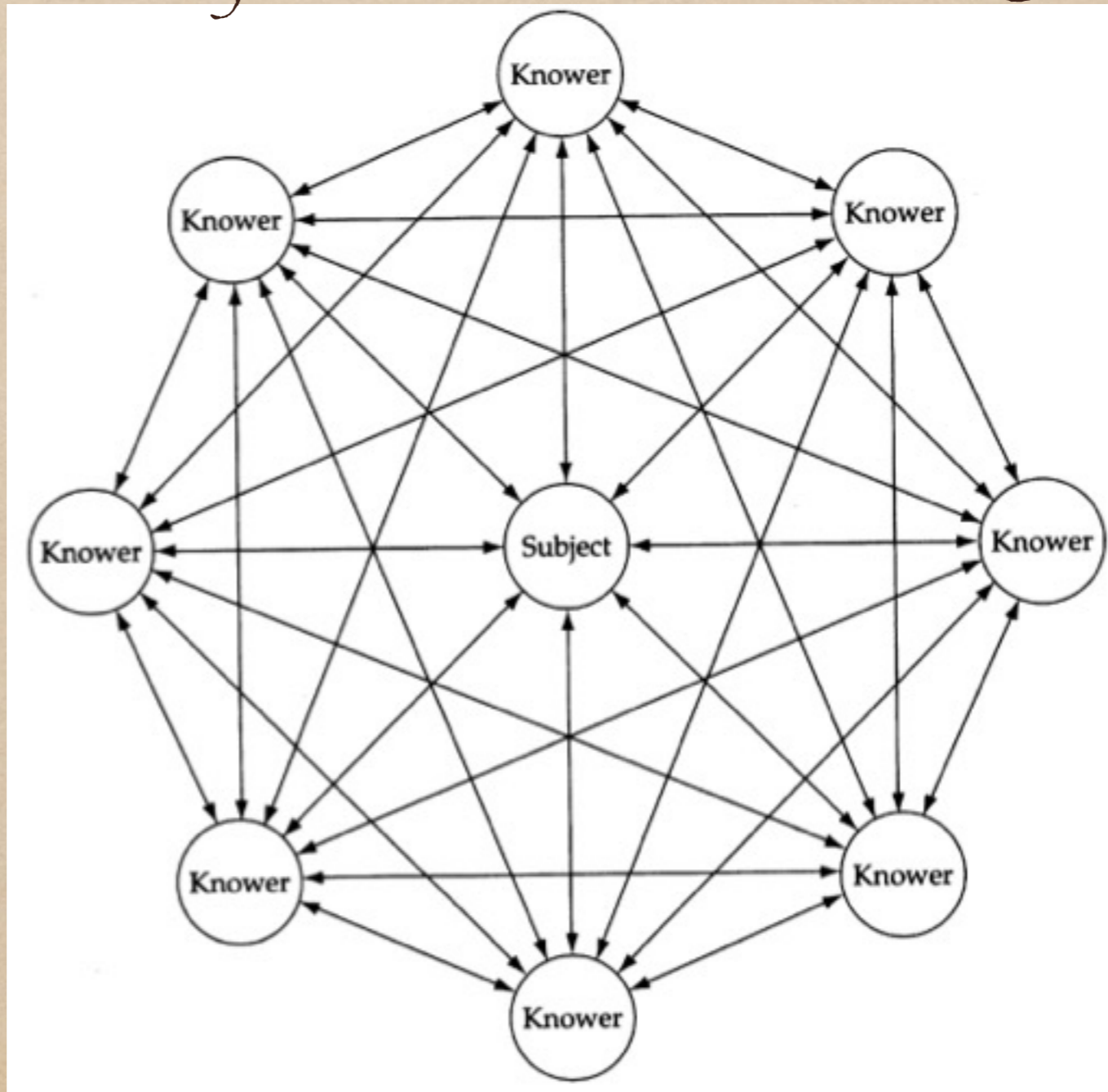
The Objectivist Myth of Knowledge



Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 100

Learning in a Community of Truth

Subject-Centered Learning



Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 102

Learning in a Community of Truth

“We say that knowing begins in our intrigue about some subject, but that intrigue is the result of the subject’s action upon us. . . . Once we have heard that call and responded, the subject calls us out of ourselves and into its own selfhood.”

- Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 105

Genesis 22.1-14

A translation for performance:

And it happened, after these things, that God tested Abraham.
God said to him:

“Abraham!”

And he said:

“Here am I.”

And God said:

“Take your son, your only son, the one whom you love. Isaac.
And go to the land of Moriah, and offer him up there as a burnt
offering upon one of the mountains about which I will tell you.”

Abraham got up early in the morning. He saddled his donkey. He took two of his servants with him, and his son, Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he got up and went toward the place about which God had spoken to him.

On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Then Abraham said to his servants:

“Remain here with the donkey. I and the boy will go on as far as that place. We will worship there, then we will return to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it upon Isaac his son. He took in his hand the fire and the knife. And the two of them walked together.

Then Isaac said to Abraham, his father. He said:

“My father!”

And he said:

“Here am I, my son.”

And he said:

“Behold, we have the fire and wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

And Abraham said:

“God will provide for Godself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

And the two of them walked together.

They arrived at the place about which God had spoken to him.

Abraham built an altar there. He arranged the wood. He bound Isaac, his son. He placed him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Then Abraham stretched out his hand, and he took hold of the knife in order to slaughter his son.

But the angel of the Lord cried out to him from heaven saying:

“Abraham! Abraham!”

And he said:

“Here am I!”

And the angel said:

“Do not stretch your hand out towards the boy. Do nothing to him. For now I know that you fear God, for you did not withhold your son, your only one, from me.”

Then Abraham lifted up his eyes—and behold!—a ram, behind, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went; he took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering, instead of his son.

And Abraham called the name of that place

“The Lord will provide.”

Indeed it has been said up to this very day, upon the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.

Scripture Enactment
The Binding of Isaac
Genesis 22.1-14

Photo Credits

- ◆ Building the Plane While Flying It; <http://eekim.com/eekim/>
- ◆ Fresh Bread: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/sourdough-our-daily-bread-photos-1411064430>
- ◆ Abraham and Isaac: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rembrandt Abraham en Isaac, 1634.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rembrandt_Abraham_en_Isaac,_1634.jpg)
- ◆ Objectivist Myth of Knowledge and Community of Truth: <https://medium.com/mpc-reads/building-the-path-to-intellectual-autonomy-336820bdde38>
- ◆ Photos of Hebrew Class taken by Megan Rice
- ◆ Photo of WTS Sign taken by Carla Capatosto
- ◆ Photos of stuffed animals taken by Travis West