

Muriel I. Elmer and Duane H. Elmer. *The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 223 pages.

Muriel and Duane Elmer offer a supportive gift to Christ-centered teachers who lie awake wondering if anything said in class took root. Putting their vast experience as professors, missionaries, and trainers to paper in *The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences*, they unfold an educationally tested, compelling framework for educators and ministry leaders who seek to foster deep, transformative learning. Drawing on neuroscience, learning theory, and Christian theology, the authors propose a five-stage model that progresses from information retention to habit formation and ultimately transformation. The five stages of the learning cycle are (1) Recall—remembering content and information, (2) Recall with Appreciation—valuing the information, (3) Recall with Speculation—pondering how to use the information, (4) Recall with Practice—beginning to change behavior, and (5) Recall with Habit—consistently applying the learning (p. 7). Each chapter builds on this cycle, integrating theory with practical strategies for educators.

To situate this structure, the Elmers place their model in dialogue with other frameworks. Adult educators familiar with other paradigms, such as David Kolb’s four-stage model, will find some similarity and at least one critical difference: rather than beginning with experience to discover truth, the Elmers work from fact to flesh, beginning with what can be known and moving toward transformed ways of being. Critiquing the limitations of lecture-only methods, the authors encourage teachers to light the fire of connection between content and related student needs, to stoke up emotions and values, and to spread curiosity into forward-thinking applications. The approach aims to build character, integrity, and wisdom.

The central thesis of the book espouses effective teaching that changes how a learner lives. This must engage not only the cognitive domain but also the affective and behavioral dimensions of learning. The teacher’s task, therefore, is to help learners integrate these connections. Equipping the reader to build informed, emotionally aware learners who take up the challenge to apply learning into their life, the authors promote experiential practice, role-playing, simulations, and skills training. The authors contend that sustaining new habits requires a learner’s belief in their own success and the opportunity for dialogue and sharing with learning partners. This helps learners deal with “temporary failures” (p. 132) and barriers that are naturally expected in the process of change. The authors lament the tendency to leave applications to students once class ends. They assert that learners require the ongoing guidance of the teacher to foster the reflective formation of habits that reflect the students’ internalized values and wisdom.

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The book's strength is the incorporation of Christian theology (discussions on the Bible's treatment of "remembrance" and "community"), educational theory (Mezirow's transformational learning theory), and social science (Charles Duhigg's habit formation paradigm and Ajzen and Albarracin's reasoned action approach to changed behavior). Its Christian perspective makes it an accessible text for professors of Christian education and ministry as well as church-based teacher trainers. The authors' excitement about discoveries in neuroscience enhances their discussion of the depth and credibility of God's design for human transformation.

While this model would enrich models of theological reflection, the book might have benefited from a deeper theological foundation. It weaves in scriptural ideas in fresh and illustrative ways, yet there is room to develop a fuller theology of how God transforms learners, perhaps drawing more explicitly from pneumatology alongside neurobiology.

For instructors serving students in pastoral care, internships, mentored formation, and other reflective and practical ministry training courses, this book offers usable ideas, scaffolded processes of reflection, and an outline to help students develop a plan for their ministry training. *The Learning Cycle's* emphasis on how to lead learners to work with information, let it inform their own experience, and counter their occurrent barriers to transformation aligns well with the goals of all forms of supervised ministry. In fact, for professors who long to be more than instructors and to learn to live what they teach, practicing *The Learning Cycle* as a reflective framework may also prove integral to their own upward spiral of growth.

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