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February 6, 2014

Why Go To the Library? Pedagogical Reflections [Poster]

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WHY GO TO THE LIBRARY?

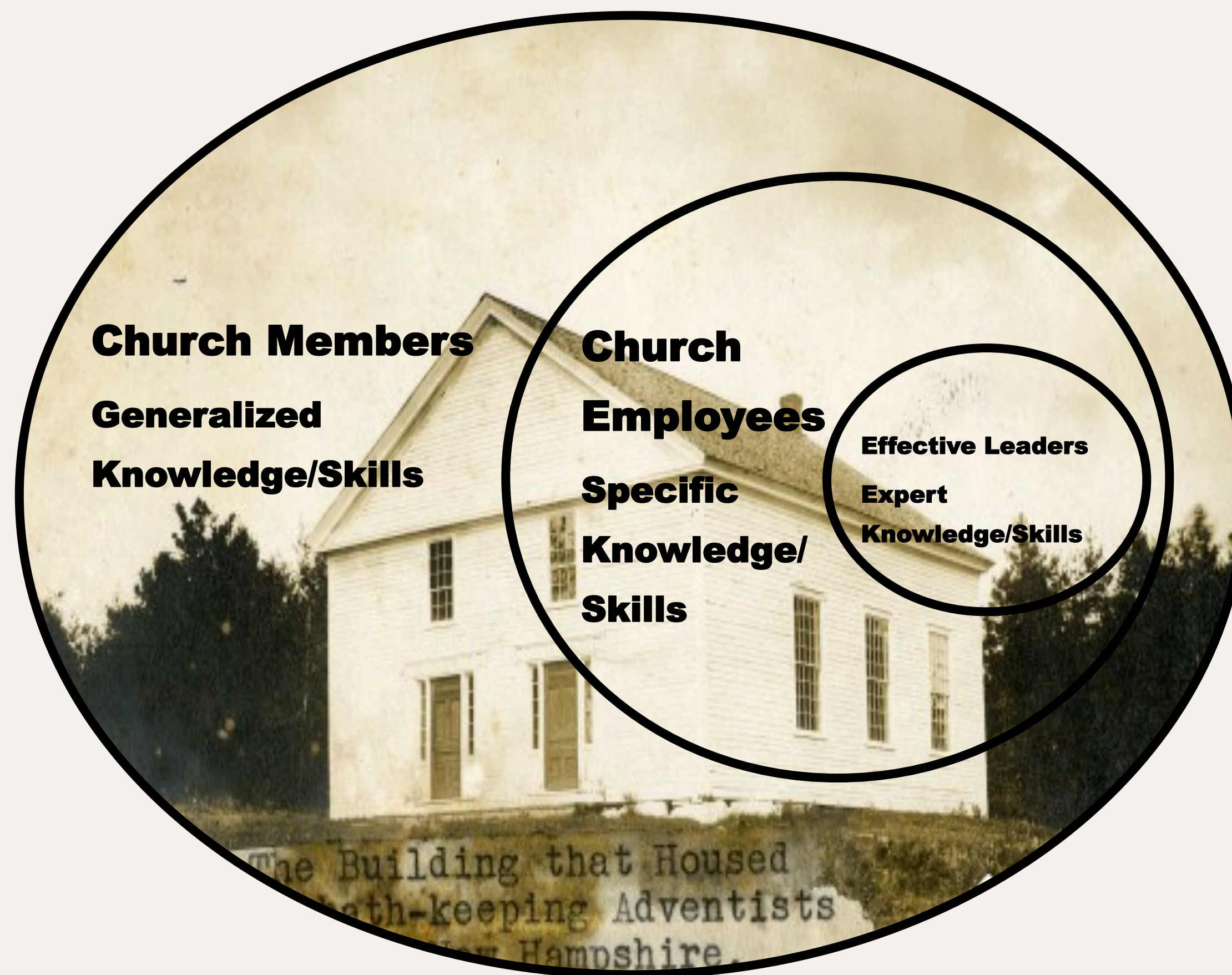
PEDAGOGICAL REFLECTIONS

By Terry Dwain Robertson, Seminary Librarian

10th Annual Seminary Scholarship Symposium, February 6-7, 2013

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, MI

Church as Community of Practice



Community of Practice, Expertise and Theological Education

Seminary Mission Statement

“We serve the Seventh-day Adventist Church by preparing effective leaders to proclaim the everlasting gospel and make disciples of all people in anticipation of Christ’s soon return.”

Paraphrasing Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), the Seventh-day Adventist Church Community of practice is a group “of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.” (p. 4). All church members, by virtue of their faith in Jesus Christ and commitment to His body, belong and are part of the group. Within this larger community of practice, a much narrower group includes those employed by the denomination in a variety of capacities, including pastors, evangelists, administrators, educators, chaplains, service personnel, just to name a few. This community of practice has expectations for a more specific set of knowledge and skills pertaining to individual roles. These again can be subdivided into areas of expertise, highly developed knowledge and skills within a focused area of knowledge/practice.

For purposes of this poster, it is suggested that the learning which takes place in the Seminary engages students in the formation of expertise. The Library provides a service that supports this transformation. Appropriate information literacy skills enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the process.

Abstract

Why should Seminary students “go to the library”? Because of the ubiquity of online resources, it is increasingly possible to complete the degrees without setting foot in the building that is full of books. This is so even though many classes require readings or research papers that anticipate the use of the library. Surprisingly, some assessment feedback from students suggests that this mode of independent text based activity is not necessarily appreciated as time well spent.

One proposal for responding to this trend reflects on the question of “time.” Time is a constraint of the human condition. We lack the means of going back in time, making more time, being at two places at the same time, and there is yet to be found a serious student (or faculty member) who has enough time. It is suggested that the primary function of the library, including both content and technology, is to transcend these time constraints.

This poster assumes that the library involves much more than floor space in a bricks and mortar building, and that it has become increasingly virtual. So, what is the pedagogical purpose for requiring the use of library resources, however envisioned, whether physical or virtual?

This poster illustrates three pedagogical functions achieved through the competent use of library resources:

1. Memory — testimony about times, places, events and people not accessible through first-hand perception.
2. Mentoring — knowledgeable experts share what they know so novices can form expertise as well.
3. Discipleship — novice learners are invited to follow along as experts debate and work together on open problems.

Implications: Library assignments would benefit from a more intentional framing of how the particular assignment fits into this memory/mentoring/discipleship paradigm. Key questions:

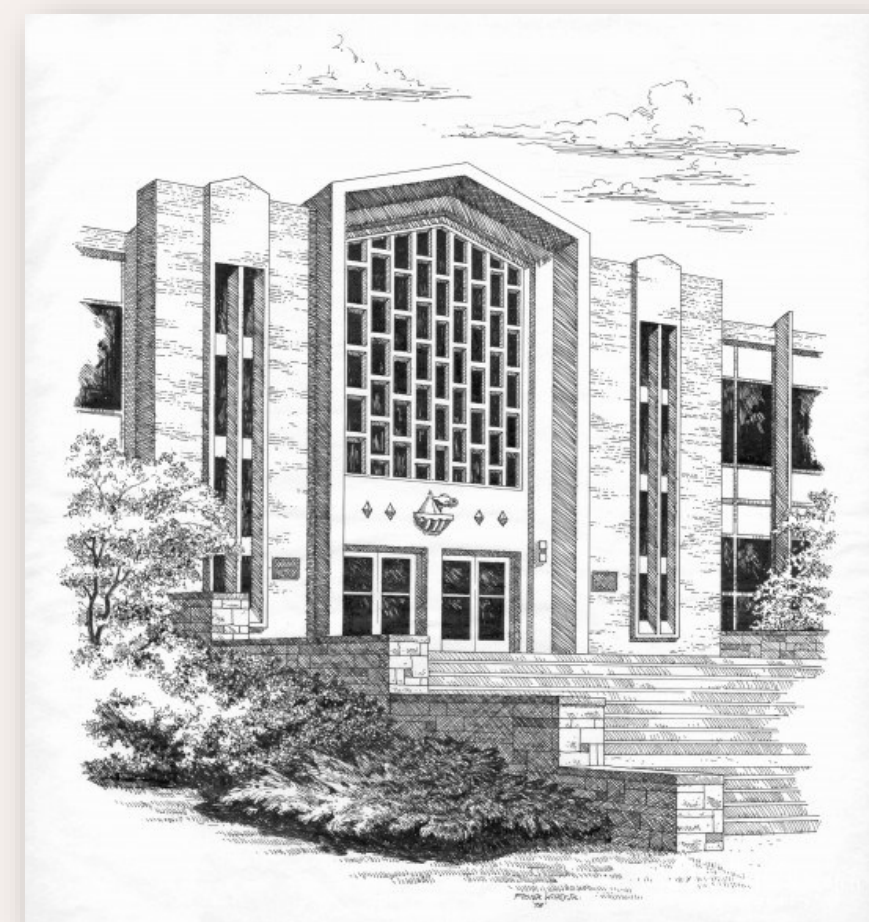
Students: Why are you reading this particular source? Is it to acquire standard factual knowledge, or to learn from the wisdom of a mentor, or to engage with experts tackling a challenging problem?

Professors: What are you expecting your students to experience as they access particular sources? Are you expecting them to become familiar with the status quo, or to think through a significant theme with the guidance of a mentor, or might it be to gain the cognitive and rhetorical skills that may contribute to a scholarly conversation?

Definitions

1. **Testimony:** a message that someone intentionally communicates. The focus is on the human agent, not on truthfulness, value or quality of content. (Pritchard, 2010, p. 80)
2. **Expertise:** the special knowledge or competency a person has (including tacit knowledge as well as extended factual and performative knowledge) that sets them apart in the community and empowers them to contribute in some meaningful way to the community. (Collins & Evans, 2007, p. 14)
3. **Communities of Practice (CoP):** “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4)
4. **Information Literacy:** the general competencies required to identify an information need, find information, evaluate the information, use the information ethically to purpose (ACRL, 2000).

2 Peter 1:12-15: “So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. (NIV)



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Library Resources as CoP Remembering

Memory — testimony about times, places, events and people not accessible through first-hand perception.

Through reading books and using media, I can vicariously participate in historical events, visit places I cannot go, meet people from another time, and understand languages my parents did not speak.

The class of library resources best representing this function would include Reference Books: summations of current knowledge, primarily for factual information, a tool that enables novice learners to acquire essential knowledge efficiently. The pedagogical purpose is to be informed about the discipline.



Library Resources as Mentoring into the CoP

Mentoring — the wisdom of the sages of past times is packaged so the students as readers can learn, grow, and be transformed.

Through reading library resources and using media, I can vicariously engage in learning from those disciplinary experts who have gone before and are worthy of

emulation. I have the opportunity to begin where they left off, and thus carry forward the creation of knowledge that furthers and strengthens the disciplinary community. It is as though the voices of

the authors continue to be heard and appreciated.

The class of library resources best representing this function would include monographic books: extended development of a topic which may also assume readers might not be experts yet. The pedagogical purpose is to be mentored into the discipline.

Library Resources as Discipling for the CoP

Discipling — experts working together on a problem, through their publications referencing each other’s contributions, invite students to watch, listen, and become engaged in the process of expanding the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge.

Through accessing these library resources, I can observe experts at work, researching, experimenting, documenting, discovering. I can use them as models as to what I can do when engaging in the same quest for knowledge.

The class of library resources best representing this function would include the journal literature, generally more immediate and focused communications anticipating peer experts as readers. The pedagogical purpose it to become a practitioner of the discipline.

