

# Being challenged and changed

## What Does This Mean?

Laying ourselves open to being challenged and changed by what we learn means making ourselves vulnerable. It means asking what something has to say to me and to my community. This way of viewing learning makes both knowledge and the learner active and draws them into a relationship. In the Bible, knowledge is linked to wisdom, which is practical learning for living well in God's world, and that wisdom derives from an all-wise God ([1 Kings 3:9](#)). It calls for us to be challenged and changed not only in terms of intellectual curiosity but also in terms of our wider way of life. When openness to change leads us through God's help to turn away from wrong choices and patterns and toward God's intentions for us, it becomes repentance.

*Please make me wise and teach me the difference between right and wrong. Then I will know how to rule your people. ([1 Kings 3:9](#)) King Solomon*

One way in which we resist vulnerability is through focusing only on mastery. "Mastering" information makes us active while the information is passive. Information can become one more thing we consume and collect, to see who has the most. This attitude can go with an unconscious position of superiority and may leave us untouched by what we learn.

*We are well-educated people who have been schooled in a way of knowing that treats the world as an object to be dissected and manipulated, a way of knowing that gives us power over the world. Parker Palmer*

Learners can exercise restraint and humility rather than jumping to judgment, recognizing that some information can change us and make us wiser ([Proverbs 17:27](#); [Proverbs 1:5](#)) and that we need to grow in compassion, not just power and control.

*Hasty conclusions are the mark of a fool; a wise man doubteth; a fool rageth and is confident; the novice saith, "I am sure that it is so"; the better learned answers, "Peradventure, it may be so; but, I pray thee, inquire." Jeremy Taylor*

## What Does This Mean in School?

In school, teachers and students can cultivate an attitude that is not superior or consumerist or only about mastery. Strategies might include the following:

- Looking at what we reward and examining the questions we ask—do they focus on the challenging elements of the lesson or only on recalling information?
- Thinking carefully about how we introduce what we are studying.
- Modeling being challenged and changed: “When I first read this poem it made me angry, but then I thought about it some more ...”
- Instead of immediately asking for students’ opinions, allow them some thinking time to gain appreciation before they offer comments.

Younger students can create agreed-upon “rituals” that remind them to stop and consider before giving opinions, such as using the American Sign Language gesture for humility. Recognizing that we can be challenged and changed by what we learn puts a duty on teachers to present material wisely and fairly.

Think of a time when learning changed you. It may have been a story, a poem, a work of art, a piece of information, or a learning experience. What caused the change? Think of a lesson in which it is particularly important that students be open to being changed or challenged in some way. How could you introduce that material to communicate a different attitude?



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