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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Another Look at Final Exams

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In my last post, I advocated for open source final exams, which focused on one's ability to sort through the mass of information readily available on an iPhone. The response to that post was overwhelming, so I offer a follow-up conversation. Below I have paraphrased some of the more challenging questions with my responses.

"My school can't take his approach, because we're preparing students for ordination exams, where they wouldn't get to use all of those resources."

If your denomination needs you to prepare students for ordination, then I agree, you must give exams that reflect the actual ordination test. But in the long run, do such ordination exams measure adequate preparation for ministry? If we serve these communities, perhaps we should be initiating conversations on whether such ordination exams are effective for the denominational goals. Shouldn't religious studies professors have some voice in the educational requirements for ministry?



Preparing for a traditional final

Photo credit to Kim Unertl

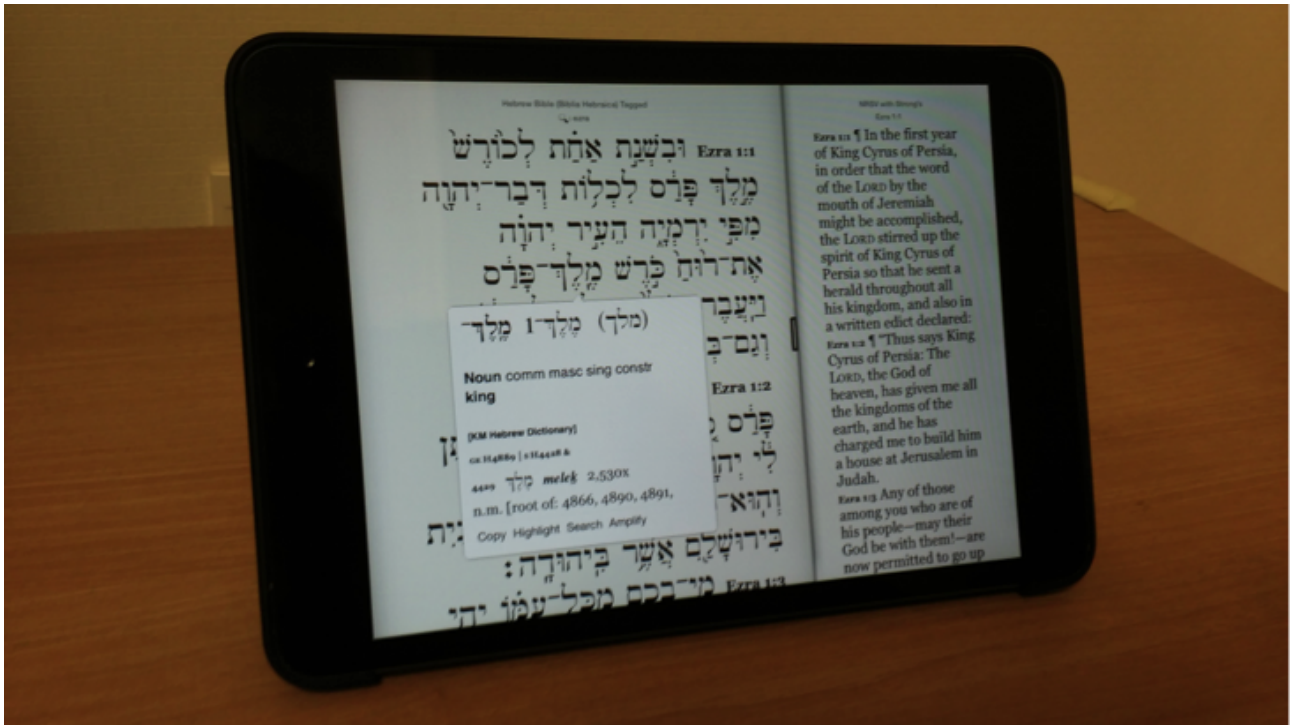
“According to Bloom's Taxonomy (revised), students need to learn at levels 1, 2, and 3 (memorization, explanation, comparison/transfer) before they can do levels 4, 5, and 6 (analysis, evaluation, synthesis). Quizzes and short writing assignments can help students build a foundation for the kind of synthetic exams he's talking about.”

I can't believe that we got through four months of this blog without a reference to Bloom's Taxonomy. I think that a balanced approach of traditional assessment methods along with open source cumulative exams can be a great strategy. Now, if someone will just drop a Parker Palmer quote, our education blog soul will be complete.

“What about certain classes where memorization is necessary, like biblical Hebrew?”

I think language education as it relates to theological education needs some major revision with the emergence of helpful tools like Accordance. All Hebrew students should memorize certain paradigms, but consider that memorization in biblical languages is a means to an end. Students memorize in order to translate/read better. A final exam should not test

memorization, but the ability to do something with what they have memorized. What if you just gave the students a passage to translate and exegete, and allowed for a lexicon and grammar. (If you suspect that cheating is an issue, then warn the students that you'll be changing a few words from the biblical texts!) What if you designed questions that require students to use their Bible Software in a way that demonstrates proficiency in language?



A Game Changer for Biblical Language Finals

“There is still something to be said for the over-learning that is required to produce immediate responses.”

Absolutely. For example, a pastor should have a minimal biblical and theological literacy at least. But we need to consider carefully whether the learning objectives of a particular course necessitate a traditional final exam, something more along the lines of my suggestion, or perhaps a combination of both.

“For some reason, I just don’t feel comfortable about doing this type of exam.”

I get it. I think it’s wise to have a sense of your institutional culture and whether or not you may experience negative pushback as well as unwanted repercussions. I am fortunate to have an environment that encourages and rewards this type of innovation. But here as a visiting professor in Korea, I would NEVER give an open book, open source exam. It would be

considered invalid academically.

“This is brilliant. I completely agree with Roger.”

Um, thanks, mom.

<https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2015/01/another-look-at-final-exams/>