

Visual Valet:

What's that?

Great suggestions

I wish I could say 'All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten' like Robert Fulghum, but I never went to kindergarten. I know I missed some important topics in secondary school – like trigonometry – which almost torpedoed my university study of science and calculus. I didn't even learn all I need to know when studying theology and education. I received no instruction on how to connect God's world and God's Word – especially in the classroom. Did you?

I wanted to represent Christ well in my classroom, but had no real idea how a chemistry teacher could do that. I'm thankful that the Visual Valet came to my rescue.

Teachers are busy – despite rumours of long holidays. Preparation time is limited. New demands come from all directions. Resources always seem stretched. Teachers can use all the help they can get – as long as the help doesn't require more time *now* – with all the benefits in the future. Who couldn't use a personal assistant, a valet, an unobtrusive helper with great suggestions and few demands?

The Visual Valet is just such an assistant. Though it may not be sophisticated enough for philosophers and educational theoreticians, I found that it helped me develop as a distinctively Christian thinker and teacher. Like a Swiss army knife, it may be incomplete and unsuitable for large projects, but I've found it extremely valuable for many daily tasks.

Let me introduce you to my assistant and tell you why I appreciate the Visual Valet (VV).

The VV wears three different outfits depending on the work at hand. But VV can quickly change when you need another kind of help. I've called the three basic ensembles the Christian Framework, Biblical Integration Guide and Big Question Guide.



After teaching for two years in a public school in Canada, Harold Klassen joined the staff of Black Forest Academy, a school for missionaries' children in Kandern, Germany. From 1977–1998 he taught various subjects including chemistry, physics, maths, Bible, and computer science. He was also the High School Principal for six years.

Since 1998, Harold has worked at the German and international offices of Janz Team. He is the Director of Transforming Teachers (www.transformingteachers.org) and author of the Visual Valet: Personal Assistant for Christian Thinkers and Teachers. As an educational consultant he works with Christian teachers worldwide. For more information contact him at: hklassen@janzteam.com

Harold and his wife, Betty, have four children living on three continents.

When I'm personally trying to get the 'big picture', VV as Christian Framework reminds me that God has been and always will be involved with His world and my life. When I'm trying to think about my teaching and the ways the content and methodology relate to the big picture, the Biblical Integration Guide is best. The Big Question Guide directs my thinking when I'm trying to determine how to introduce truth to the discerning, responsible learners I'm trying to develop.

As a diagram, the VV is 'unforgettable' without being obtrusive. It is expandable. Being simple and concise encourages its involvement every day as well as on special prepared occasions. Individuals will develop their own specific techniques as they begin to think biblically. However, an assistant can help to get started. Once a foundation is in place, it will be possible to evaluate resources that will enhance and further develop distinctively Christian patterns of thought.

As a Christian young person I was taught how to have devotions, study the Bible, and lead worship. But I had to figure out for myself how these 'religious' activities related to what I did in school. Consciously or unconsciously, it was easy to assume there was no connection. Certainly learning how to make the connections did not happen automatically. I wish I had experienced Christian teachers who demonstrated how it was done. But I didn't learn this in kindergarten – or anywhere else. Without help from the VV, it is all too easy to perpetuate the kind of teaching learned from my teachers who left God out of the classroom.

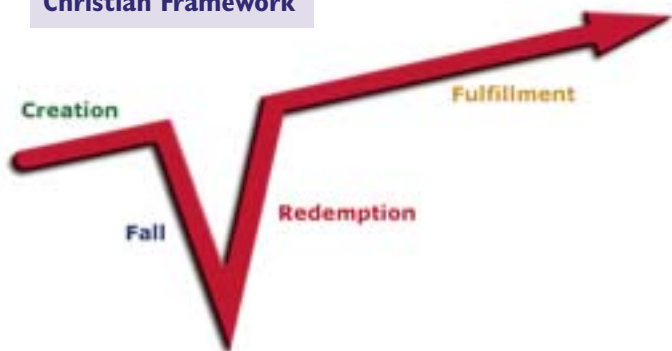
Right Foundation – Christian Framework

The story of God's creation can be divided into four chapters illustrated by the VV: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Fulfillment. The Christian framework or biblical worldview illustrated by this diagram can include all God has revealed about what He has done, is doing, and will do in the universe, as well as His work in each individual's life. This picture of God's activity is a modification of diagrams in DeVern Fromke's *The Ultimate Intention* (1964, p73).

My natural inclination, when trying to connect the Bible with the subjects I taught, was to look for ways to add the Bible to the subject. VV pointed me in the opposite direction. What I taught needed to find its place in the ‘big picture,’ the continuing story of God’s involvement with His creation.

Without a clear framework to understand the ‘big picture’, it was difficult to relate anything to it and impossible to clearly communicate the relationships to anyone else.

Christian Framework



I had collected a lot of ‘spiritual gems’ through the years. However, they were so haphazardly arranged in my mind that they were rarely applied personally, shared with someone else, or perceived as valuable. I found it difficult to ‘be ready to answer’ anyone who asked questions about my faith (1 Peter 3:15).

The Visual Valet provides a framework for organising what God says about Himself and His creation, allowing fragments of biblical knowledge to relate to each other and interact with other concepts. When others use this common framework we can share insights and collaborate more effectively. As a guide for making the connections that are central to biblical integration, it is suggestive rather than prescriptive. It is possible for people of different interests and abilities to profitably use the same model. Most importantly, VV is simple enough that it can also assist students to relate all of life and learning to God and His Word for themselves

Right Connections – Biblical Integration Guide

To move toward Christ-centered living and learning, I must begin to recognise the connections between what the Bible has to say and everything else that I am, know, and do. Because I have little experience bringing together the biblical and non-biblical, it is very helpful to have something like the Visual Valet to remind me of biblical truth and suggest where I should look for connections. The connections are suggested by four words in the Visual Valet: reflections, distortions, revelations, and applications.

The Visual Valet provides a framework for organising what God says about Himself and His creation

I look for reflections of God because I anticipate His revelation of Himself in whatever part of His creation I am studying. I expect that whatever I am studying has been spoiled, misused and misunderstood because of sin, so I am alert for distortions rather than accepting everything gullibly. The Bible is more than a devotional guide as it helps me distinguish reflections from distortions. Now I’m looking for God’s good purposes so that careful academic study will have an eternal value beyond transcripts and employment.

Biblical integration is not about finding the ‘right verse’ or ‘the only’ Christian way to deal with every class and every subject. It is about fitting everything we know and teach into the very BIG picture of what God is doing. It is about expressing God-given uniqueness and creativity while being the teacher He has called me to be (Matthew 28:19-20).

Biblical Integration Guide



Right Questions – Big Question Guide

The Visual Valet directs me to equip students to make informed personal decisions about the key questions of life, as well as introduce truth where it may not yet be wanted.

Jesus’ practice, particularly in a hostile environment, was to ask penetrating questions. I may not be able to explicitly share all or any of my own Christian thinking – my Christian framework or the connections I’ve discovered between what I’m teaching and what God is doing – but I can ask critical questions. Postmodern thinking may reject the reality of absolute truth, but it is often able to do so because of sloppy thinking rather

than careful analysis. By teaching students to consider inconsistencies and the consequences of the thinking of the media, authors, historical figures, and themselves, the Holy Spirit will have something He can use in their life and they will be without excuse (Romans 1:20). Change may not come immediately, but part of the foundation for Christian thinking will have been established. Even if it is rejected now, the student may later find like Paul, it is hard 'to kick against the goads' (Acts 26:14).

Everyone has some idea of what is good, beautiful, true and valuable as well as what is bad, ugly, false and worthless. These are closely related to what a person thinks about the purpose of life and the universe. But we must also consider how we make the right choices – and why we so often make wrong choices – as well as the consequences of the choices. By focusing on teaching materials in the classroom and learning to analyse what they reveal about these 'Big Questions', students will have many opportunities to consider their own thinking.

The VV helps me avoid 'brainwashing' students by unwisely using my position of authority or my relationship with the students. Students will be encouraged to take responsibility for their choices and will have a basic tool to evaluate the bewildering variety of new input, which they will continually encounter. Sooner or later, the students will ask their teachers about their personal answers and such honest questions can receive open answers in the classroom or in private conversation.

If I am being transformed in my understanding of God and His purposes, I will have a transforming impact on my students (Luke 6:40). As I teach from the radically different perspective revealed in the Bible, my excitement about the meaning and purpose of 'common' things will be contagious. A thankful spirit will stand in stark contrast to the selfishness that is so rampant. Humility and love can bring life and hope into situations of darkness and despair – even if I cannot quote the Bible or use Christian vocabulary. In fact, even in Christian environments, too many Bible verses usually produce a negative rather than a positive response.

Everyone made in God's image has been given the opportunity and responsibility to personally decide the foundation upon which they will build their

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Big Question Guide



lives. Change is never easy and usually takes longer than anyone would like. I have to have patience and creativity if I want to make a difference in the lives of my students. The Visual Valet has been changing my thinking and teaching. I hope it can assist you also.

For more information about the Visual Valet including suggestions, worksheets and examples, you can download the complete *Visual Valet: Personal assistant for Christian thinkers and teachers* at <http://tinyurl.com/VV-download>. On the Transforming Teachers website (www.transformingteachers.org), I have been collecting articles and links to resources designed to help other Christian teachers learn what they may have also missed in kindergarten – how to connect God's world and God's Word in the classroom.

■ Harold Klassen

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Janz Team

Janz Team is an association of national mission organisations in Brazil, Canada, USA, Belarus, France, Germany, Portugal, Switzerland and the UK. Creative evangelism, Christian education and compassionate empowerment are common themes with a strong emphasis on music. A new ministry group, TeachBeyond, is being created to mobilise, equip and send teachers to be involved in missional Christian education – intentional involvement in what God is doing in education to draw people to Himself. Janz Team UK has a special emphasis on Eastern Europe. Their staff in Romania are working with English camps and a sanctuary ministry for mothers and children. They have regular involvement with the College of Theology and Education in Moldova and support micro-economic development there. They also participate in LinGO English camps for 18-to-30 year-olds in Moldova, Belarus and Latvia. In addition, they have staff at Black Forest Academy (www.bfacademy.com), Janz Team's school for missionary children in Germany.

More information can be found at www.janzteamuk.org or you can contact them at jtuk@janzteam.com