

Annéli Machin and Annette Wilkinson

University of the Free State

Innovative teaching and learning of biblical Greek: A contextualised application of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning

Abstract

Teaching biblical Greek as compulsory module to tertiary theology students can be challenging. When students doubt the general value of studying this ancient language or experience anxiety during the learning process, they are prevented from attaining higher cognitive levels of learning with the result of students failing to master Greek efficiently. This situation emphasised the need for innovation in the classroom. An exploration of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning (Fink, 2003a) yielded a flexible, learner-centred approach that could engage students from many subject areas

in deep and significant learning. The aim of this article is to illustrate how Fink's taxonomy can be applied to the teaching and learning context of biblical Greek and possibly other language modules. Two examples from the Greek classroom are also presented to attest the applicability of Fink's taxonomy as a framework for creating innovative and significant learning experiences for students.

Keywords: Biblical Greek, innovative teaching, Fink's taxonomy, taxonomy of significant learning, New Testament exegesis, higher education

1. Background and introduction

The Greek language is one of the best-documented languages of the world, with direct knowledge thereof over a time span of some 3 000 years (Palmer, 1980:3). Written examples thereof extend back to 1300 BCE, and millions of Greeks across the world are still speaking and writing the language (Duff, 2008:9). In the course of this long history, the Greek language naturally changed and evolved in many ways (Countryman, 1993:1). Adrados (2005:xvii) elaborates when he says, “there are many varieties of the Greek language, and the study of their history is fascinating: from their Indo-European origins to Common Greek, and, subsequently to the small regional dialects and the literary scientific languages”.

However, despite its rich history and the fact that biblical Greek (one variety of the Greek language) is often presented to tertiary theology students as a *compulsory* module, contemporary students are not always eager to study the ancient versions of the Greek language without knowing *if* and especially *why* it is necessary. In addition, according to Ruck (1968:i), “unfortunate experiences in the learning of classical languages have turned more than one student away from learning in general”. More than three decades after Ruck’s publication, a study during 2010/2011 in the researcher’s (with reference to the first author) department at a South African university confirmed that negative experiences during the teaching and learning process still lead to anxiety and lack of enthusiasm to learn biblical Greek. Literary studies and group interviews with current and previous students of this language yielded possible factors and deficiencies in teaching methods that contribute to the negative experiences of students. These factors and deficiencies include the failure to pass, the lack of clear outcomes, inappropriate teaching methods and the inability of lecturers to deal with a range of different student needs, abilities and learning styles within one group. The negative experiences that result from these factors probably fuelled the preconceptions that “Greek is difficult” and “not relevant”. It was also evident from the group interviews that some students doubt the significance of studying Greek as part of their theology studies. According to them, an abundance of commentaries and electronic resources can assist them adequately to translate Greek texts and conduct exegesis of New Testament passages (Machin, 2011). The students, however, tend to lose sight of the fact that they need a solid foundational knowledge before the information from commentaries and resources can have any significant meaning. Students must be able to analyse different translations critically and engage in discussions regarding textual issues, such as the function of certain words or clauses (Anderson, 2004:433; Anhalt, 2006:45).

The lack of motivation to obtain foundational knowledge and the lack of understanding the general value of studying Greek prevent students from attaining higher cognitive levels of learning, such as application and integration. All these factors result in students failing to master Greek efficiently.

Jaskyte, Taylor & Smariga (2009:111) emphasise the important role the innovative teacher can play in remedying the situation:

A creative (or innovative) teacher is seen as the one who is consistently curious and constantly seeks out new ways to improve her or his teaching abilities. In addition to improving their skills, teachers must also increase their understanding of student needs and preferences and constantly seek out new ways for transmitting knowledge.

In addition, Cowan (2006:100) points out that every teaching encounter and learning experience should be purposeful and should promote student engagement and development. As lecturer of biblical Greek, the researcher was challenged to explore innovative ways of teaching with the aim of constantly improving the teaching of the language as a compulsory module to contemporary theology students. The teaching and learning process should not only increase students' understanding of the learning material and change the way they think about themselves, the Greek modules and the future application and integration of their knowledge, but also motivate them to become lifelong learners of this ancient, but very vibrant language.

During a survey of innovative teaching approaches, the researcher came across Fink's taxonomy of significant learning (Fink, 2003a). This taxonomy yielded a flexible, learner-centred approach that could engage students from many subject areas in deep and significant learning. The aim of this article is to illustrate how Fink's taxonomy can be applied to the teaching and learning context of biblical Greek to bring about innovation and significant learning. The discussion commences with an overview of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning, followed by a contextualised application of Fink's taxonomy to biblical Greek. Two illustrative examples from the Greek classroom are also presented to attest the practical applicability of Fink's taxonomy as a framework for innovative and significant teaching and learning of Greek. The problem of teaching biblical Greek effectively to current students is addressed by a variety of innovative teaching methods today, (for example, the online *Living Language Method* for Greek as espoused by Sebastian Carnazzo) (Website: *The Academy of Classical Languages*). While the existence of these teaching approaches is acknowledged, the aim of this article is to explore the usefulness of Fink's taxonomy.

2. Fink's taxonomy of significant learning

2.1 The need for significant learning

According to Fink (2003a:17), higher education is in need of educational programmes that result in more significant kinds of learning. Important kinds of learning (such as learning how to learn, leadership and interpersonal skills, ethics, communication skills, character, tolerance, and the ability to adapt to change), however, do not necessarily emerge easily from the cognitive domain of the well-known taxonomy of educational objectives formulated by Benjamin Bloom and his associates in the 1950's (Fink, 2003a:29). With regard to the need for more significant kinds of learning, various scholars announced a paradigm shift in terms of how higher education views pedagogy. One paradigm shift

came as a result of initiatives by various researchers that began in the 1970's. The observations of these researchers, according to Fink (2003a:18), revealed that some students seek a personal, meaningful understanding of the material being studied (deep approach to learning), while others are content to simply reproduce the information presented during the course (surface approach). In another paradigm shift described by Barr and Tagg in 1995, institutions focus more on the learning paradigm (producing learning) and less on the teaching paradigm (providing instruction) (Fink, 2003a:17). "The mission is not instruction but rather that of producing *learning* with every student by *whatever* means work best" (Barr & Tagg, 2004:1 of 19). Fink (2003a:18) entirely agrees with this view of Barr and Tagg, but adds that the real need for institutions is to "produce *significant learning*".

The need for new kinds of learning, according to Fink (2003a:29), goes "well beyond the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy and even beyond cognitive learning itself". Greater attention should be paid to the affective domain – the *experience* of students when they learn. Against this background, Fink (2003a:30) advocates his new broader taxonomy of significant learning.

2.2 Addressing the need for significant learning

Fink (2003a:6, 30) defines learning in terms of *change*. If there is no change in a learner after the teaching process, no learning has occurred; some kind of lasting change in terms of a learner's life provides evidence that *significant learning* has taken place. Fink's view of significant learning shows resemblance with Biggs and Tang's view of deep learning, where students focus on the underlying meaning of the content to seek integration between different components and undertake an active search for a personal understanding of what they have to learn (Biggs & Tang, 2007:22-24; Fink, 2003a:18). This view is in contrast with the notion of surface learning, where students skid along the surface, memorising facts and making sure that they are able to reproduce the necessary content during assessment (Biggs & Tang, 2007:20). Fink (2003a) urges lecturers to go beyond information dumping and challenges them to incorporate different kinds of learning and activities in their teaching with the aim of changing students' lives and creating significant learning experiences.

In summary, three elements characterise a significant learning experience, i.e. students are *engaged*, students' efforts result in significant and *lasting learning*, and the learning *adds value* to their lives (Fink, 2009:1-2). Students need to be engaged during the course, either through pre-class homework assignments or participation in class activities. However, this process has to lead to a product (learning) towards the end of the course. Students have to learn something that will last and that will add value to their lives. Significant learning should enhance their individual lives, enable them to contribute to the community and environment around them, and prepare them for the world of work (Fink, 2003a:6). According to Brackenbury (2012:16), Fink "did not report any data on whether or not such *lasting* experiences occurred". Brackenbury (as do the authors), however, concurs that Fink's taxonomy leads to *significant learning* experiences.

Fink's perspective on learning compelled him to ask the following important questions (Fink, 2003b:8; 2009:1): *What would I like the impact of this course to be on students, two to three years after the course is over? What would distinguish students who have taken this course from students who have not? How can I intentionally teach in a way that gives students a "significant learning experience"?*

Fink (2003a:xii) describes his taxonomy of significant learning as "a road map to a variety of significant kinds of learning that goes beyond understand-and-remember and even beyond application learning". This taxonomy consists of six components (major types of significant learning) with some subcategories. These components and/or categories are not hierarchical, like in Bloom's taxonomy, but relational (even interactive) and each component adds distinct value to the learning process of the students (Fink, 2003a:31-32; 2003b:8). This characteristic enables teachers who find ways of helping students achieve one kind of learning to enhance student achievement in other kinds of learning. Learning how to *apply* knowledge and concepts effectively, for instance, can make it easier for students to *care* about the subject (Fink, 2003a:32). A visual representation of Fink's taxonomy is presented in Figure 1 and it is followed by a brief explanation of each component.



Figure 1: Fink's taxonomy of significant learning

Source: Fink (2003a:30)

i) *Foundational Knowledge*

Fink describes foundational knowledge as “understand-and-remember” learning and its value is evident in the fact that it provides a basic understanding, which is necessary for other kinds of learning. The need for students to *know* something, in other words, their ability to understand and remember specific information and ideas, underlies most other kinds of learning (Fink, 2003a:31; 2003b:9). Students, therefore, not only need a thorough comprehension of facts, terms, formulae, principles and/or concepts that constitute a specific module, but also an ability to remember this information for future use (Fink, 2003b:11). When formulating learning goals relating to foundational knowledge, the lecturer has to realise that not “everything” is extremely important (Fink, 2003a:31). “The key here is to limit yourself to identify only what is really important for students to have in long-term memory one to three years later” (Fink, 2003a:79).

ii) *Application*

Students need certain skills to engage in intellectual, social or physical action in order to master the content of a module or to manage complex projects. Lecturers have to determine the required skills that will enable students to perform the relevant actions effectively. Required skills can include communication skills and the ability to utilise technology, as well as critical, creative and practical thinking skills (Fink, 2003a:31; 2003b:9, 11). For teaching, the value of application learning lies in the fact that it allows other kinds of learning and actions to become *useful* (Fink, 2003a:31). When setting learning goals, lecturers should ask the following questions (Fink, 2003a:80):

- What is it you want students to be able to do in relation to this subject, one to three years after the course is over?
- What situations are students likely to be in, where the learning of this course will be relevant? In those situations, what would you like them to be able to do?

iii) *Integration*

When students are able to recognise or make connections and understand similarities and/or interactions among ideas and perspectives within a specific course and between different courses, an important kind of learning occurs (Fink, 2003a:31). In addition, the material they have learnt during a course should also be integrated into their own personal, social, and/or work life. The value of integration lies in Fink’s belief that this act of making new connections gives students *power*, especially a new form of intellectual power (Fink, 2003a:31). The learning goals set by lecturers should consequently reflect what kind of connections they want students to make in their courses and how these connections are going to be integrated into the everyday life of the students and/or to other closely related subjects (Fink, 2003b:9, 11).

iv) *Human Dimension*

Lecturers can also add value to their students' learning experiences by informing them about *the human significance* of what they are learning (Fink, 2003a:32). If they gain a new understanding or learn something important about themselves or about others and also discover the personal and social implications of what they have learned, it enables them to function and interact more effectively (Fink, 2003a:31). Learning goals should reflect the importance of *what* students should learn about themselves and others (Fink, 2003b:9, 12). What students learn and/or the way in which they learn, give them a new self-image (an understanding of themselves) and a new self-ideal (a vision of what they want to become). In addition, they will also gain insight into acquired theories and content and the way it will affect their interaction with other people in relation to the subject (Fink, 2003a:31, 80).

v) *Caring*

"When students care about something, they then have the *energy* they need for learning more about it and making it a part of their lives" (Fink, 2003a:32). This quotation summarises the caring component of the taxonomy – nothing significant will happen without the energy for learning. If learning experiences can have a positive impact on students' feelings, interests and values in relation to a module, it can probably also change the degree to which students care about the subject for the better (Fink, 2003a:32). Lecturers have to identify and then specify the changes or values they want the students to adopt during the learning experiences when they formulate learning goals and outcomes for a module (Fink, 2003b:9, 12).

vi) *Learning How to Learn*

In order to be successful during and after their studies, students have to learn something about the process of learning itself. According to Fink (2003a:32), this kind of learning, "enables students to *continue* learning in the future and to do so with effectiveness". Students should not only be taught how to be good students, but also how to learn about a particular subject and how to become self-directed learners (Fink, 2003a:32; 2003b:9, 12). This component of Fink's taxonomy emphasises the need for a long-term view on learning, where lecturers identify the most relevant and important topics in their courses and present them through different kinds of learning (Fink, 2003a:56). Fink believes such an approach increases the possibility that students will keep on learning, even after the course has ended.

Fink holds a similar view to Spence (in Fink, 2003a:1), namely, that the need for more and better higher education will only be met if lecturers become designers of learning experiences and not only teachers. He consequently advocates the use of his taxonomy of significant learning in the process of course design. This raised the question whether Fink's taxonomy can be applied to the teaching and learning context of a language, such as biblical Greek, to design innovative and significant learning experiences that impact students and their learning even years later.

3. An application of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning to the teaching and learning context of biblical Greek

Basic principles from the components (and subcategories) of Fink's taxonomy were applied to the teaching and learning context of biblical Greek in order to determine whether the taxonomy can be used to enhance language teaching.

i) *Foundational Knowledge*

Foundational knowledge of biblical Greek is essential if students wish to read and interpret this ancient language with comprehension. A basic introduction to the history and development of the language can assist students to understand where the language of the Greek New Testament originated and who the original speakers and writers were. Knowledge of the Greek alphabet, core grammar paradigms/principles, vocabulary (consisting of the words with the highest frequency in the Greek New Testament) and key concepts and terminology (such as tense, mood, case, parse, explain), enables students to analyse the biblical texts. According to Steyn (2001:376-377), students and ministers also need a solid foundational knowledge of Greek to be able to use theological reference works that contain Greek words, such as commentaries, dictionaries and computer programs. Black (1998:11) confirms the need for foundational knowledge when he states, "the depth of your preaching or teaching from the New Testament depends in large part on how well you handle the original Greek". According to Du Toit (2004:51), the text (in original language) should be supreme during exegesis and therefore mastery of the code (the vocabulary, syntax and literary conventions) in which the text was originally written is essential to exegesis. As mentioned in the discussion of Fink's taxonomy, foundational knowledge is necessary for other kinds of learning to take place. When applied to biblical Greek, this segment can be referred to as *Essential Building Blocks*.

ii) *Application*

In order to reach the learning outcomes and objectives set for a module, students should master specific skills through the effective application of the foundational knowledge they have gained. Skills relating to Greek include the reading, translation and analysis of texts, the ability to use relevant resources and technology, as well as thinking skills. When students read and/or translate Greek texts, they have to apply their knowledge of grammar, paradigms and vocabulary, and also need competence in consulting other available resources or using electronic tools. In addition, when analysing and evaluating original Greek texts and their translations, students require analytical, critical, practical thinking and hermeneutic skills. In acquiring all the skills mentioned in this paragraph, students have to practise how to *use* their basic knowledge or the essential building blocks of the language. It is consequently suggested that the *Application* segment can be described as *Practise Learning* in the context of biblical Greek.

iii) *Integration*

If students know and understand the purpose of studying Greek from the start, they would be more motivated to study the language. The aim of studying Greek is not confined to the Greek classroom where they have to write vocabulary tests or do translation exercises. Students need to understand *why* the study of the language is necessary; it is essential that students recognise and understand the link between studying (compulsory) Greek and other disciplines or realms within their theology studies. *Making Connections*, therefore, is the most appropriate description of what *Integration* means in the Greek classroom. The specific connection between biblical Greek and New Testament exegesis is crucial and students should be made aware of this connection as early as possible. Depending on their overall programme, students often only start with exegesis in their third year of theology studies, but already complete the compulsory Greek modules in their second year. The everyday life of the students and the world they are going to work in is another important connection to be made during their Greek study.

iv) *Human Dimension*

Significant learning of biblical Greek also requires interaction with other people during the learning process. Students not only need to learn the content of a course, but also how to discuss this content with various people. Communication skills are therefore very helpful when students discuss textual issues with one another in the classroom or when they have to communicate their insight from exegesis or text interpretations to their congregation members as ministers in future. Students have to learn how to share information with different kinds of people in specific contexts – teenagers and elderly people, for example, obviously demand different kinds of attention and approaches. Involvement in group work and projects that reflect various authentic situations enhances learning within this *Human Dimension* category. When applied to the context of biblical Greek, this segment can be referred to as *Interaction with Others*.

v) *Caring*

Even if students are able to make the connection between biblical Greek and exegesis as discussed earlier, they are not necessarily (automatically) positive about studying the language. Students often lack intrinsic motivation to learn this ancient language (often perceived as difficult), especially when they enrol for Greek just because they need the credits or because they are told to do so. Lecturers should therefore address this lack of intrinsic motivation through the creation of significant learning experiences that stimulate new feelings, interests and values towards biblical Greek. A more positive attitude towards the study of the language will be evident when students realise, for themselves, the value of Greek for their studies and future work in ministry. The *Caring* segment can therefore be described as *Changing Values* within the context of biblical Greek.

vi) *Learning How to Learn*

For students of Greek, learning should go beyond the required foundational knowledge and the ability to apply and integrate this knowledge while registered for the module. Students have to understand the process of learning itself and teaching methods should encourage students to become independent and lifelong learners of biblical Greek. This will enable them to make long-term connections to exegesis and prepare them to analyse texts or answer questions relating to the interpretation of texts far beyond the classroom. The aim of teaching should not only be to help the students to pass, but rather to equip them with the necessary skills to become continuous learners of Greek. Consequently, within the context of biblical Greek this segment can be referred to as *Lifelong Learning*.

Figure 2 represents the authors' version of Fink's taxonomy as a result of the application of basic principles from this taxonomy to the teaching and learning context of biblical Greek. The original components and subcategories were renamed to reflect the specific content (and context) of the language module.

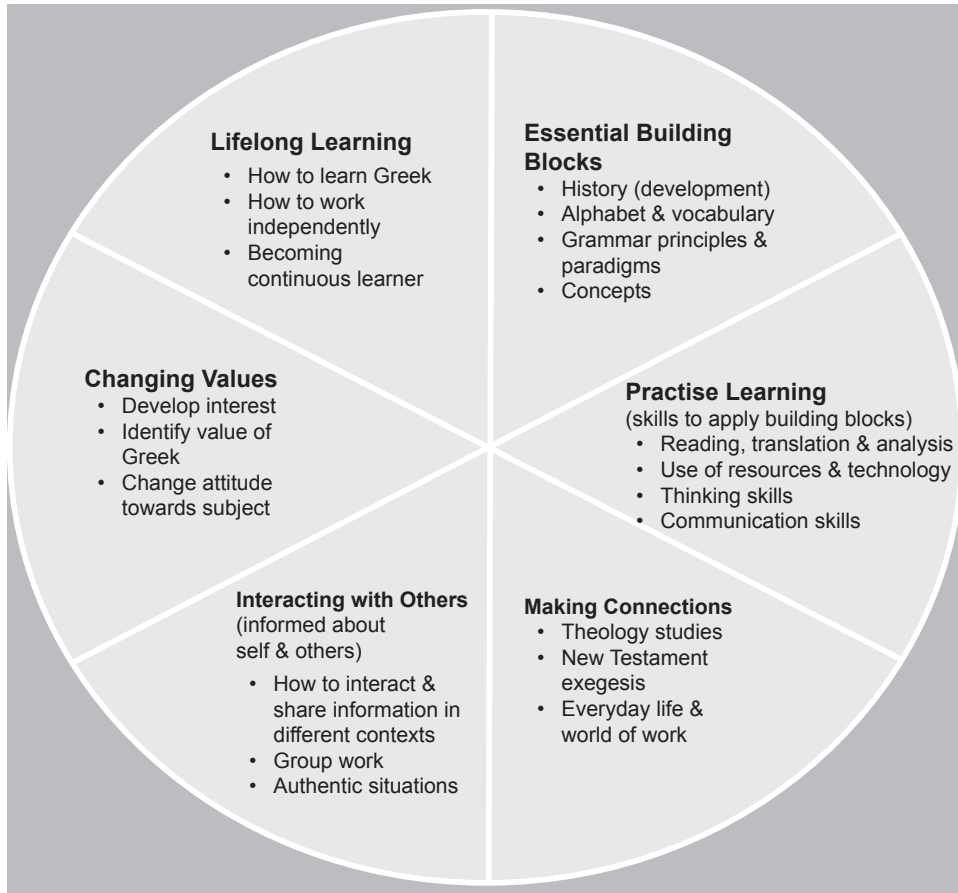


Figure 2: A contextualised application of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning to the teaching and learning context of biblical Greek

Source: Machin (2011)

According to Fink (2003a:81), lecturers' aim should be to include as many kinds of significant learning as possible when they design specific learning activities or goals for their courses. The two examples presented in the next section illustrate how Fink's taxonomy can be applied (contextualised) to provide a framework for creating innovative and significant learning experiences in the biblical Greek classroom.

4. Contextualised application of Fink's taxonomy as framework for innovative and significant teaching and learning

At the university where the study was conducted, students complete their two years of compulsory Greek studies six months prior to commencing with New Testament exegesis. Within this context that lacks opportunities to integrate biblical Greek with Theology studies, the following two examples were seen as innovative. The focus of the examples and the discussions afterwards is not to provide theological interpretations or a memorandum for the assignment, but to indicate how principles from Fink's taxonomy were applied.

4.1 Example 1: Introduction to New Testament exegesis

The researcher invited a New Testament lecturer to visit the first-year class halfway through their first semester of Greek. Working from a New Testament exegesis perspective, he had to show the students that knowledge of Greek is indispensable for the translation and interpretation of the biblical language. The students each had a Greek/English Bible with critical textual apparatus in class and various other translations were also available – either in print or on cell phones and other electronic media. Three different passages were used as examples. The relevant verses were read from different Afrikaans and English translations and the students were asked to make initial assumptions about their meaning and to take note of any differences. The possible meaning of the text and variations in translations were identified and discussed succinctly. The lecturer then turned to the Greek text and focussed on specific verbs/words or notes on textual criticism that might have led to the variations or emphasis on specific meaning. First, he based his discussion and explanation of differences on basic grammatical rules and/or structures, in order to make the literal meaning clearer before theological interpretations were included as a second level of evaluation. He then assisted students to evaluate the text and translations based on the grammatical and theological evidence before they decided on the meaning and version closest to the Greek text.

Various components and subcategories of the adapted taxonomy, based on Fink's taxonomy, were included in this activity. The visiting lecturer was a New Testament scholar within the Faculty of Theology and responsible for teaching New Testament exegesis to third, fourth and fifth-year students. **Connections** were therefore made with their Theology studies in general and one field, New Testament exegesis, particularly. Exegesis will not only be an integral part of their studies but also of their ministry/work in future. Students had **interaction** with another lecturer and with each other during an activity that also gave them a sense of an **authentic situation**.

In order to take part in the discussions students had to apply **essential building blocks** (*foundational knowledge of grammar, concepts and background*) and engage in **practise learning**. Texts were read and translated and different *resources* (printed and/or electronic texts, grammars and other sources such as commentaries) were

utilised or referred to during critical reasoning, evaluation and discussion of these passages in class.

One student asked the lecturer how “ordinary” people/congregation members were supposed to know which of the many translations are closest to the original or the best version to read. His answer was simple: “You have to teach them and you can only do that if you are able to read and interpret the (original) Greek text”. This student is now a third-year student and has continued with Greek though it is no longer compulsory. She still refers to that period during which she realised just how important the study of Greek was. The original aim of the learning activity was to emphasise the importance of Greek studies for New Testament exegesis, but in the end students’ mind-sets and **values were changed**. Students realised the *value* of biblical Greek and the altered *attitude* towards their studies helped to bridge the gap between knowledge of grammatical facts and its application to exegesis. The changed value and attitude also challenged some of the students to **keep on learning**.

4.2 Example 2: Mrs Jones and Romans 5

One of the outcomes for second-year Greek is to read, analyse, translate and evaluate selected passages from the Greek New Testament. Over the years it became clear that students are not really translating the texts for themselves. Since an abundance of translations (and computer programs generating the translations) are available, they merely memorise or use an existing translation. Even if the lecturer tries to reach the objectives by having the students read and analyse the text line by line in class, students would seldom reach a point where they are able to discuss grammatical issues or evaluate the text as a conceptual part of a bigger whole. The fact that they already have a translation, nullified (for them) all efforts of working systematically through a piece of Greek text. However, “[i]f you wish to study the New Testament, it helps greatly if you are able to read it in the original language” (Dobson, 1997:vii). Without exposure and a thorough introduction to the original text of the New Testament, the theology and Greek student will not be able to derive sensible information from the richness contained in these writings (Steyn, 2001:381). In order to challenge students to study the New Testament text in Greek first, and then to draw important information and conclusions regarding the meaning of the text, the following innovative assignment was implemented.

As part of their formative assessment, students had to complete a written assignment on a selected New Testament passage during the first semester. For the purpose of this example Romans 5:1-11 will be used and adapted excerpts from the assignment given as examples of what the students had to do.

The following scenario was outlined in the assignment:

You are a minister and requested the members of your congregation to read and reflect on Romans 5:1-11 in preparation for a special service. Mrs Jones, an elderly member in your congregation, wrote you a letter (with the assistance of her granddaughter

who studied Greek, of course!), asking some questions regarding the passage they had to prepare. You have to read her letter and carefully consider and answer all her questions. Take note of the fact that Mrs Jones read various versions/translations of the prescribed text and based her questions on these translations. Where applicable, you have to refer to the relevant translation(s) in your answers. Therefore: answer all her questions and submit your answers as a written assignment (see instructions and rubric included). You also have to include your own reflection on the assignment and give an indication of the value (if any) it added to your reading and understanding of this New Testament passage. On submission there will be an opportunity to discuss your answers and share your views on Romans 5 (and the assignment) with your fellow students.

Questions asked by Mrs Jones that the students had to address included the following:

*Question 1: Discuss the historical and biblical **context** of Romans 5:1-11.*

*Question 2: Provide **literal translations** (directly from the Greek text) of selected verses. Include grammatical and semantic comments on Greek words and comment on the translations of these verses, especially where it seems as if verses were translated differently in various translations.*

Question 3: A commentary on Romans describes Δικαιοθέντες in verse 1 as a “divine passive”. Please explain the term and its function, and identify and translate all other occurrences of the “divine passive” in the passage.

The assignment reflects an **authentic situation**. The scenario and questions addressed in the assignment relate in various ways to situations students are likely to encounter in exegesis during the rest of their studies or when they enter ministry in the future. Even if they do not specifically ask their congregation to prepare a certain passage for a sermon (like the minister in the assignment asked Mrs Jones’ congregation), people (friends or family) from different ages and/or backgrounds can come to *them* for answers. They could also be asked to elaborate on the meaning and interpretation of a biblical passage during an informal discussion with a fellow student. Apart from generating an answer, students have to keep in mind *who* they address. There would be a vast difference in the way they address their peers and the way they have to answer Mrs Jones. The prescribed New Testament passage was no longer studied only for the purpose of providing a translation during assessment. The students were able to **make connections** with their everyday lives and world of (future) work. As ministers they will not only stand on the pulpit and share their knowledge, they have to **interact with others** on different levels and share information. In the written assignment they had to “interact” with an elderly woman and during the discussions in class they interacted with their peers.

To address the questions Mrs Jones asked, students had to formulate and present answers using their grammatical knowledge (**essential building blocks**) as well as theological reasoning and critical thinking (**practise learning**). The discussion of the historical and biblical context of the given text encouraged the students to **make connections** to the world of the New Testament and study the text with its literary context in mind. Critical thinking and reasoning were not only required to discuss the context but also to address the other questions. Knowledge of basic Greek vocabulary, concepts and grammar principles and the application of these aspects are necessary to make an analysis and literal translation of the text (**essential building blocks, practise learning**). The following Greek phrase – εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν – is used to explain:

εἰρήνην - feminine noun: accusative case, singular; meaning: *peace* (object of verb)

ἔχομεν - verb: present tense, indicative mood, active voice, 1st person plural; meaning: “to have” or “to possess”; literal translation: *we have*

πρὸς - preposition: can be followed by nouns in the accusative, dative or genitive case; has different meanings with different cases; here followed by τὸν θεὸν (noun in accusative) and can therefore mean: *for, against or with*

τὸν θεὸν - definite article and masculine noun: accusative case, singular; meaning: *the god/God*

The following literal translation of the phrase is possible after the analysis:

εἰρήνην <i>peace</i>	ἔχομεν <i>we have/possess</i>	πρὸς <i>for/against/with</i>	τὸν θεὸν <i>the god/God</i>
-------------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------------

Further application and integration are necessary to synthesise the different parts of the phrase into a meaningful translation (**application/practise learning**). Students have to interpret the function of the cases and choose between multiple meanings based on context or sometimes just on what would be “good” English. Students have to realise that “peace” is the object of the verb because of its case (accusative), and that “the god/ God” forms a prepositional phrase with *for/against/with*. Two possible translations would be, *We possess peace against the god or We have peace with God*. The rest of the verse refers to *being justified and through Jesus Christ* in close connection with the word meaning the *god or God*. From the context, *God* will therefore be a better translation of τὸν θεὸν. With regard to the rest of the phrase, a *choice* for *we have peace* can be made because it is more in concordance with the way people speak. After considering all of these aspects, meanings and interpretations a decision is made to translate the phrase with, *We have peace with God*.

The same approach of analysis and reasoning can be followed when a student has to consider differences between translations (as requested by Mrs Jones). Only one word from the given text is used to explain and this also addresses the third example question:

Δικαιωθέντες - verb: a *passive* participle, aorist tense; meaning: *to justify*; and in passive sense, *being justified by ...*

1933 Afrikaans translation (OAT): *omdat ons geregverdig is* (because we have been justified)

1983 Afrikaans translation (NAT): *God het ons vrygespreek* (God justified us)

It seems as if the NAT ignored the passive voice of the verb and added “God” as a direct subject, whilst the syntactical subject (agent) of the passive verb is not mentioned in the Greek to be “God”. This is probably what bothered Mrs Jones and she wanted to know the reason for the difference, if any. The answer lies in the term divine passive referred to in another question by Mrs Jones.

In order to answer Mrs Jones and to determine the meaning of divine passive, the students had to consult commentaries on Romans, or other resources explaining theological terminology (use of resources). A divine passive implies that the action of a passive verb is carried out by God – God is the obvious agent of the passive verb, even though not indicated as such in the Greek. With reference to Δικαιωθέντες in verse 1, the context of the verse allows for the assumption being made that this is a divine passive, indicating that God is the one who justifies.

Mrs Jones also asked for semantic comments on words. Answering her questions, therefore, also required reference to a semantic lexicon and/or various dictionaries to reflect on and evaluate the different meanings ascribed to words (***use of resources, translation, critical thinking***).

One objective of the assignment was to help students realise the value of studying Greek for exegesis and ministry (***changing values***). Students were therefore asked to reflect on the assignment and give an indication of the value (if any) it added to their reading and understanding of this passage. Some of the students indicated during their reflection that the assignment made them aware of what is expected of them and therefore altered their approach/attitude towards Greek. The presentation of the assignment during the *first* semester of the students’ second year provided enough time to approach the remainder of their studies differently and to engage them in more ***independent learning activities*** that will motivate them to ***keep on learning***.

5. Conclusion

Students need to have significant learning experiences during their tertiary training (Fink, 2003a). The authors of this article came to the conclusion that a contextualised application of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning can be used successfully to provide a framework for creating significant learning experiences for biblical Greek – experiences involving module content being conveyed to students through new and various kinds of learning, and students being engaged in learning-centred, rather than traditional subject- or content-centred approaches. When this framework was applied, there was evidence that language learning in the Greek classroom improved. Detailed evidence is presented in Machin (2011). For the purpose of this article the evidence is summarised briefly. The application of Fink's taxonomy to Greek teaching at university level led to learning that went beyond memorising translations. The mechanical use of resources to find answers was limited and higher cognitive levels of learning were reached through innovative application and integration of knowledge. Some factors contributing to negative experiences were also addressed by learning experiences based on the authors' version of Fink's taxonomy. A better understanding of why a study of biblical Greek is important, enhanced students' motivation to study Greek, and the inclusion of various kinds of learning helped to address different student needs and learning styles. All six components of Fink's taxonomy add distinct value to the learning process of students in general and are useful in the planning of teaching and learning experiences for biblical Greek at university level. Not only can the contextualised application presented in this article enable language lecturers to create valuable learning experiences for students; it can also encourage them to constantly evaluate and improve their own teaching and the understanding of their students.

References

- Adrados, F.R. 2005. *A history of the Greek language. From its origins to the present*. Leiden: Brill.
- Anderson, P.J. 2004. Next year?: Evaluating a model for second-year college Latin. *The Classical Journal* 99(4): 433-438.
- Anhalt, E.K. 2006. Translation and interpretation for intermediate and advanced students. *The Classical World* 100(1): 45-48.
- Barr, R.B. & Tagg, J. 2004. From teaching to learning – a new paradigm for undergraduate education. http://critical.tamucc.edu/~blalock/readings/tch2_learn.htm. Date of access: 20 July 2010.

- Biggs, J. & Tang, C. 2007. *Teaching for quality learning at university. What the student does.* (Third edition). Berkshire: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Black, D.A. 1998. *It's still Greek to me. An easy-to-understand guide to intermediate Greek.* Michigan: Baker Books.
- Brackenbury, T. 2012. A qualitative examination of connections between learner-centered teaching and past significant learning experiences. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 12(4): 12-28.
- Carnazzo, S. The Academy of Classical Languages. <http://academyofclassicallanguages.com>. Date of access: 11 September 2014.
- Countryman, L.W. 1993. *The New Testament is in Greek. A short course for exegetes.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Cowan, J. 2006. *On becoming an innovative university teacher. Reflection in action.* (Second edition). Berkshire: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Dobson, J.H. 1997. *Learn New Testament Greek.* (Revised edition). England: Bible Society.
- Duff, J. 2008. *The elements of New Testament Greek.* (Third edition). Cambridge: University Press.
- Du Toit, A.B. 2004. New Testament exegesis in theory and practice. *Acta Theologica* 24(1): 45-63.
- Fink, L.D. 2009. Preface. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 119: 1-7.
- Fink, L.D. 2003a. Creating significant learning experiences. *An integrated approach to designing college courses.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fink, L.D. 2003b. *A self-directed guide to designing courses for significant learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Jaskyte, K., Taylor, H. & Smariga, R. 2009. Student and faculty perceptions of innovative teaching. *Creativity Research Journal* 21(1): 111-116.
- Machin, A. 2011. An innovative approach to the teaching and learning of Hellenistic Greek as classical language: planning and validation. Unpublished M.A. dissertation. University of the Free State.

Palmer, L.R. 1980. *The Greek language*. London: Faber and Faber.

Ruck, C. 1968. *Ancient Greek. A new approach*. (First experimental edition).
Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The M.I.T. Press.

Steyn, G.J. 2001. Teaching Ancient Greek in Africa. *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 83(2):
364-381.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Annéli Machin

Department of Greek, Latin and Classical Studies (I/B 97), University of the Free State,
PO Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300.

Email: machina@ufs.ac.za

Annéli is lecturing biblical and classical Greek in the Department of Greek, Latin and Classical Studies, University of the Free State. She conducts research on the teaching and learning of Greek, and on New Testament and Patristic Greek literature.

Annette Wilkinson

Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of the Free State,
PO Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300.

Email: wilkinac@ufs.ac.za

Annette is a professor researcher at the Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of the Free State. Her interests and experience include postgraduate supervision and professional development of academic staff. She conducts research on the scholarship of teaching and learning.