

FOUR EXAMPLES FROM LOCAL CHURCHES: PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY



(Example #1)

PURPOSE

The ultimate purpose of the Children's Ministry of Covenant Presbyterian Church is to glorify God. We believe that He has called us to glorify Him by:

- Assisting parents in the Christian nurture of their children.
- Proclaiming the gospel in word and deed to children in our church and community.
- Equipping the saints for ministry to families and children.
- Communicating and implementing Biblical principles for ministry.

We strive to do these things in faith, in obedience to Jesus Christ and the Word of God, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

PRINCIPLES

Several Biblical principles shape the ways in which we go about accomplishing our purpose.

First, we believe that God has chosen the family to be the primary context and means for the Christian nurture of children. God has given to parents the rights and responsibilities of teaching, protecting, guiding and loving their children according to the Scriptures. Our role as the covenant community is to assist, not replace, parents in the process of teaching and training children.

Second, we affirm that the Christian nurture of children happens best when the family has strong relationships and significant involvement in the local church. Reformed theology emphasizes our corporate identity and the importance of the covenant community. We encourage families to make spending time with our Covenant church family a high priority. We are eager to fulfill our responsibilities as the Body of Christ and delighted that our Lord has entrusted us with the privilege of caring for and teaching His children. We recognize that God has given tremendous resources for ministry to the church and we labor to use those resources faithfully and effectively.

Third, we believe that ministry is inherently relational. We teach and train children in the context of relationships. Ministry is much more than programs, lessons and activities. Ministry is personal. It is investing our very selves into the lives of others. It is living out the truth even as we speak it. Ministering to children means getting to know them so that we can communicate the gospel in meaningful and creative ways. Since building relationships is so important, we ask for a one-year commitment in most of our teaching ministries.

Fourth, we have a team ministry. All Christians have spiritual gifts to be used for the common good. Our church family is blessed with a diversity of gifts, abilities and personalities. No one sort of person is sufficient to accomplish the many things involved in children's ministry. We need many people from all age groups with a wide variety of interests and talents, all working together, for balanced and effective ministry. We endeavor to staff all of our ministries with teams which work together to teach and lead, two or three teachers for each class.

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Finally, we distinguish between essentials and appearances. The Biblical and Reformed theology which helps to define Covenant as a particular church will always be the foundation of our children's ministry. The specific details of our children's ministry may change now and then as our church family grows numerically and spiritually, but the foundational concepts and purposes will not. Our ministry to children will include worship, instruction, evangelism, service and fellowship. Exactly what these things look like in the life of our church family will vary, but the essence of the ministry will not because it is rooted in God Himself and in who He has called us to be.

SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION

We believe that the Bible speaks clearly to the importance of teaching children. Some of the verses that shape our ministry priorities are:

Genesis 17:7

Deuteronomy 6

Psalm 78

Proverbs 22:6

Malachi 4:6

Matthew 19:13-15

Luke 1:17

Acts 2:38-39

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Purpose Statement and Core Values (Example #2)

Purpose

The purpose of Hope Church's Children's Ministry (CM) Program is to enable the Children of Hope to grow into fully functioning members of the Body of Christ; specifically, the family of Hope Church.

In light of this we seek to enable the kids to

1. Understand and embrace the gospel of Christ
2. Experience and practice their part in the covenant (Church) community:
By enabling them to participate and contribute at their level.
By experiencing the blessings and meet their responsibilities.
3. Integrate church teaching into every area of life.
4. Be challenged and equipped to bring the hope of the gospel to a lost and dying world.

CORE VALUES

Grace Driven

We desire to simultaneously encourage regular attending Kids (Covenant Kids) to grow in grace while being ready each week for the first time visitor, being ready to integrate unchurched and non-believing children into any Children's Ministry activity.

God-ward Focus

The CM teachers will direct each lesson toward teaching children about knowing God in Christ and then consistently demonstrating how this is the focus of all of Scripture.

Covenant Community

The church as our Covenant community is the extended spiritual family of every child, where each one can find belonging and identity.

We desire to equip families to grow in their knowledge of God and live out daily obedience to Christ in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods.

We will encourage and expect the children within our covenant community to participate, to contribute and show respect to all people, young or old, within the covenant community.

Effective Communication

We believe that the church's responsibility is to communicate gospel truths in a manner that is age appropriate and accounts for multiple learning styles and God given personality types.

At every age level we should seek to communicate the gospel in a manner that is interesting, comprehensible, age appropriate and applicable to the children's lives.

In every area of our program utilizing curriculum and materials that are consistent with our core values (grace-driven, God-ward in focus, and covenantal).

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We desire to be intentional and purposeful in every teaching opportunity to bring glory to God.

We desire to make the focus of Bible teaching not just moral lessons or Bible stories, but to teach them to know God and to know Christ. Every lesson should show to the children the character of God and the grace of God.

Teacher Expectations

Teachers should have a living, genuine relationship with Christ. Teachers should be active participants of the Hope Church Covenant Community. Teachers must have a love for teaching children the Gospel. Teachers should joyfully work together, submitting to each other in love, as part of the CM team.

Current Applications for Hope's CM Program

Nursery (0-2 1/2yrs) Music, Bibles Stories, and Loving Covenant Care

Toddlers (2 1/2-4yr olds) Being part of God's family, God as our heavenly Father and Jesus as God's gift.

Preschool/Kindergarten (4-6yr olds) Their place in God's family, Jesus as the only answer, learning to serve the Savior.

Primary (1st-3rd grade) Study of God's word from Genesis-Revelation, loving Jesus as he is portrayed in the gospel, and living and growing in God's word.

Junior Youth (4th-8th grade) Learn how to make godly decisions by looking at the events of the Bible in order, studying parental authority, relationships, the church, and God's sovereignty at work in their lives.

Sr. High Youth (9-12th grade) God's covenant plan to redeem them, what God wants them to know about daily living, through applying God's word to today's world.

Second Hour Kids Quest Catechism Club 3 new classes (Toddler-8th grade) Memory program to learn essential Bible truths to deepen their understanding of God and how the Bible tells us to live.

Program Stats

Current children in program (55 kids)

Current volunteers (30 teachers/quarter) 17 per week

Children's Ministry leadership team

What's New?

*Strengthening existing program adding more structure

Added 8-10 new adults, utilizing teenagers, and juniors as aides in the program.

Moving our junior youth (4th-8th grade) teaching time to second hour

Added new second hour catechism program

Added weekly senior high girls/boys Bible studies

Monthly junior youth (4th-8th grade) events

Monthly senior youth (9th-12th grade) events

Future Applications for Hope's CM Program

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Coming Year Priorities

- Encourage the teachers to incorporate their stories of faith into their teaching and time with the children.
- Provide opportunities for our children to experience and practice their part in the Hope church community.
- Provide a stronger link between the home and church by equipping families to glorify God together, and integrate God's Word into every area of life.
- Provide the resources for our children to worship and practice their faith as part of the church family.

It is our hope that these values will be taught from the pulpit to the parents, teachers, and to the children. That the adult members will model covenant living to the children and they will be given opportunities to participate in the covenant community and embrace their faith and place in God's family. It is for God's glory that we intentionally, passionately see our collective responsibilities in the passing on of our faith to the next generation. We expect the results to be that our children grow into fully functioning members of the Body of Christ.

CM Leadership Team Plan of Action

Strengthen existing programs and plan for the growing participants in the children's program (40 kids 3rd grade and under 20 kids 4th grade and up).

- Provide the junior youth (4th-8th grade) resources and opportunity to participate in worship
- Prepare the kids to sit in worship
- Prepare the parents for the transition
- Provide adults and a place for the children if not sitting with their parents
- Provide resources for the children to listen, remember, and apply the sermon (a children's bulletin and faith journal)
- Provide, within their second hour class, a time for sermon review with an emphasis on understanding and integrating scripture into every area of life. Followed by continuing in the catechism program.

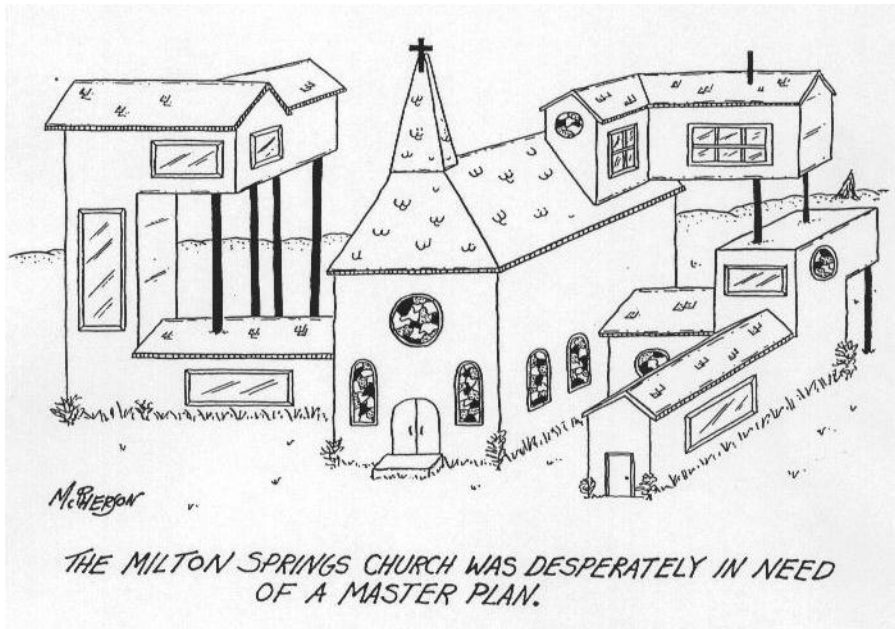
*Teacher training in telling God's story, disciple making, the power and priority of prayer, kids in service, and the covenant community

*Parent training-resources and equipping for the responsibility of raising the next generation of faith

*Provide opportunities for the children to participate and contribute to the church, using their gifts to serve in the children's ministry program, the worship service, and in extending mercy to those in need

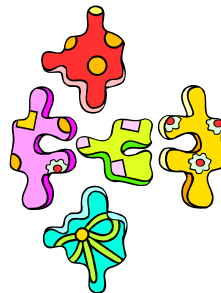
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KIRK OF THE HILLS
Philosophy of Children's Ministry
Rev. Barksdale Pullen
(Example #3)



Just what is a philosophy of children's ministry? A mission statement? A vision statement? A purpose statement? Are they all the same thing? Does one build upon another? Are they simply nifty catch phrases so the children's director has something to do?

What is a philosophy of ministry?



Think of it as a jigsaw picture. Each piece represents some element of your worldview, the resources of the local church, and the vision God has laid on your heart. When all the pieces are put together, you have a picture of the children's ministry for the local church.

Why is it important?

Simply stated, a philosophy of children's ministry is important for two reasons:

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1. It gives direction to the ministry. Resources are limited and we must decide where the Lord is leading the ministry. Sometimes we are faced with several good ideas, but only one will really fit into the philosophy of children's ministry at a local church, so the philosophy gives a grid to evaluate ideas.
2. It gives the children's director a guide in which to organize his/her time.

So, what pieces are needed? When constructing a philosophy of children's ministry I like looking at the following pieces:¹



Doctrine of Authority

It is important to note that we need to put the pieces together from a Reformed perspective. As Susan Hunt has reminded us, "*We must think through an issue theologically, because our ministry is a reflection of our theology.*" For example, if we begin with the piece of a low view of Scripture (Basis of Authority) this can lead us to a distorted picture; from choosing unbiblical curricula to deciding how we will discipline children.²

Marc Anthony, in explaining the philosophy of ministry, writes,

The first and most fundamental Piece, the Basis of Authority, is Holy Scripture. The Word of God is the "basis upon which all thinking rests." A high view of Scripture is the Christian educator's ultimate frame of reference. A high view is one that accords with Christ's view of the Bible. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). In John 10:35 the Savior states unequivocally, "The Scripture cannot be broken" and in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."²

What is our *basis of authority*? In the *Westminster Confession of Faith* the first chapter is dedicated to our understanding of the Holy Scripture, we read:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manner, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment

¹ Anthony, M. J. (2001). *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*. Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Academic. Pp. 26-28.

² Ibid, p. 26.

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and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased. (I.1)

And

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. (I.6)

In a word the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, states,

The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

In the Presbyterian Church in America, our Basis of Authority is found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice and the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of the Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.



Who are our children?

The first place we turn is God's revelation itself in Genesis 1-3. Here we see the story of the creation of humankind and draw out the doctrine of the image of God. From the image of God we see several characteristics of children that affect our relationship with them:

Active and Purposeful – Human beings act in the world in a way as to make sense of things around them, to make connections, and see relationships to order to more effectively have dominion. As teachers enter the classroom they need to take advantage of this created tendency in students as they develop learning strategies.

Rational – Human beings seek to perceive and understand the world around them. They have the ability to reason.

Creative – Human beings form and make things and ideas from the world around them.

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Moral – Human Beings act in a way that is according to standards of right or wrong and thus bring about justice or injustice.

Finite, Fallen, and Redeemed – Teachers must recognize that although they reflect the image of God, they do not do so perfectly because that reflection is marred by sin. However, since the teacher is redeemed, the Holy Spirit that gives them the power to act in a righteous manner as their relationship with Him grows.

Free and responsible – Human beings make judgments according to their own purposes, acting within the bounds of our nature and are responsible for our behavior.

Exercise dominion – Human beings think, create, and act in purposeful ways to exercise control in the world around them.

Social – Human beings are created to live in relationship with God, with others, with each other, and with creation.

Merciful & Just – Out of God's love for them human beings are to extend mercy and justice to others.

Dependent – Human beings are created to live in dependence upon God for their very existence, and upon other and creation.³

Understanding children is found in the fact that we are all created in the image of God, yet that image is tarnished by the effects of the Fall.

In working with children we also recognize that these characteristics become more fully developed as the child matures. We have the example of the Lord Himself who is God, but who was born as a human being. When we read in Luke 2:52 that 'Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men, (NIV)' we tend to have an acknowledgement of what that means; however, it is not spelled out in detail. Therefore discernment is needed on the part of the teacher in working with children at different levels.



Why are we here? (purpose statement)

What is our perspective on the *Purposes and Goals*? So often in children's ministry we think in terms of education that is passing on the stories of the Bible and the theology of the

³ The list of characterizations was taken from Graham, Donovan L. 2000. *Teaching Redemptively - course material from EDU 221*. Lookout Mountain, GA: Covenant College. p 71-72. (Donovan Graham has recently authored *Teaching Redemptively*, published by Purposeful Designs ACSI)

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Catechism, which is good and proper. Our ministry, however, should be much more than passing on head knowledge. Robert Pazmiño defines Christian education:

...as the deliberate, systematic, and sustained divine and human effort to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith. It fosters the change, renewal, and reformation of persons, groups, and structures by the power of the Holy Spirit to conform to the revealed will of God as expressed in the Old and New Testament and preeminently in the person of Jesus Christ, as well as any outcomes of that effort.⁴

In other words, we are training the whole child, inculcating into their lives a Christian world and life view.

From this point, we begin to develop the general purpose of the local church. As you enter into this area of tangibly building the children's ministry based upon the first two pieces, I think there is an important distinction to keep in mind. The children's ministry of the local church is both a *support* and *stand-alone* ministry. By support ministry I mean that often the children's ministry is called upon to provide support to the other ministries of the church by means of childcare. That does not mean simply babysitting, but we must realize that when the church is doing an outreach event, the children's ministry may be required to provide childcare. But children's ministry is also a stand-alone ministry in that children are members of the covenantal community and are capable, and willing, to participate in the life of the church. For example, the children's ministry can carry out outreach events such as concerts and Backyard Bible Clubs to reach the local neighborhood. (We hope that these events are carried out in conjunction with the other ministries of the church. The point is to be pro-active, not simply reactionary to the other ministries.)

So, how do we develop the general purpose of the children's ministry of the local church? We begin by remembering the basic tenets of our covenantal theology and understand that we minister to the whole person.

What are some of the basic tenets?

Classically there are several components to Reformed theology; however I believe these are the most pertinent to our consideration of education:⁵

Glory of God – This is one of the fundamental characteristics of God. 1. God's goal is all that He does is His glory, in the sense of (a) displaying His moral excellence to His creatures and (b) evoking their praise for what they see and for the benefits that it brings them. 2. Human beings' goal in all of their actions must be God's glory in the sense of doxology by word and deed. 3. God so made us that we find the duty of

⁴ Based upon the Reformed Distinctives of Great Commission Publications' curriculum.

⁵ Ferguson, Sinclair B., David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer. 1988. *New Dictionary of Theology*. The master reference collection. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press., p 271-272

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doxology to be our supreme delight, and in that way the furthering of our own highest good.

Sovereignty of God - The biblical idea of God's sovereignty includes all that is involved in the divine kingship, and this means at least three things: Ownership of all Creation, Authority over all Creation, and Control over all Creation.

Redemptive-historical Perspective - The Reformed approach to the Bible is to see it as the complete, unified counsel of God. Therefore, Reformed theologians interpret every small portion of God's Word in the context of the whole.

A God-ward Focus - As human beings encounter any biblical truth, it teaches us about God and ultimately elicits worship from us as we discover him to be sovereign Creator, Redeemer and King.

Christ centric - The subject of Scripture is God's unfolding story of salvation, and Jesus is its focus.

What are the implications of these tenets? What are the results of training the whole child?

In my opinion, the purpose of Christian education is to glorify God by enabling individuals with the tools necessary to see all of life from the perspective of our relationship to God through Christ, and behave according to the rules of our relationship with Him.

First, this definition recognizes that ultimately all we do is an attempt to glorify God—not only in deed but also in word and thought. For an individual to glorify God is not to imply that we as humans can glorify Him, but rather we demonstrate His glory by bringing attention to *all* that He has done.

Second, the definition recognizes that our most basic relationship is with God, and the Holy Spirit regenerating us only restores that through Christ. This aspect of the definition recognizes the culmination of the covenant in creating a proper heart orientation in the person.

Third, this definition asserts that from a proper relationship with God flow the other basic human relationships – self, others, creation – all of which are governed by God as we reflect the character and activity of God in creation. In order to do this in a way that glorifies God, we must properly inquire of society, all creation, and ourselves.⁶

How is this goal of education accomplished? How can the covenant be applied to the educational process? It can be seen in the context of the covenant, the restoration of the four basic relationships.

Relationship #1 Personal with God

The first relationship is a person's relationship with God. It must be acknowledged that in all redemptive activity, it is God who must initiate and apply the atoning work of Christ. Perhaps in the restoration of this relationship this unilateral action is seen most clearly. Sin alienated humanity from God, yet the

⁶ The basic formulation of this definition came from Dr. Allen Curry, Professor of Christian Education at Reformed Theological Seminary. Curry, Dr. Allen. 2002. "Covenant Education" PCA Children's Ministry Conference. Atlanta, GA.

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promise of God that He would take us as His people required that He send one who would redeem that relationship by paying the penalty of sin. From a deepening relationship with God, one goes through the process of sanctification, one is conformed more to the likeness of His Son, which in turn transforms one's heart that would seek to reflect the character and activity of God in creation. As the Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden and were faithful servants and obedient children, so as I seek the face of God I too can be a faithful servant and obedient child.

Relationship #2 Personal with Personal (The Teacher)

The second relationship, knowing myself, is applicable as I enter the classroom as teacher. What is the role and function of the teacher? How should we think about teachers? What methods would I use? How would I seek to enable learning in my students? Norman Harper, former professor of Christian Education at Reformed Theological Seminary, said, "The most important thing any teacher brings into the classroom is his or her own redeemed personality." The implication is that a restored relationship with God, through Christ, will have an effect on the process of education and my role as a redeemed teacher. My character as a redeemed teacher should reflect the following⁷:

Image of God – I recognize that I am made in the image of God and that implies that as I go through the process of education I seek to reflect the character and activity of God.

Finite, Fallen, and Redeemed – I recognize that although I reflect the image of God, I do so imperfectly because that reflection is marred by sin. However, since I am redeemed, the Holy Spirit gives me the power to act in a righteous manner as my relationship with Him grows.

Giftedness – I realize that God has gifted me with certain abilities for His glory. Part of my task is to seek to develop these gifts and maximize them in the education process.

Sanctification – From a Reformed perspective sanctification 'is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.'⁸

Prophet, Priest, and King – The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* explains how Christ executes the offices, and in turn we should strive to reflect these same characteristics as we teach. "Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation. Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us. Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us

⁷ The list of characterizations was taken from Graham, Donovan L. 2000. *Teaching Redemptively - course material from EDU 221*. Lookout Mountain, GA: Covenant College. P. 106-107. (Donovan Graham has recently authored *Teaching Redemptively*, published by Purposeful Designs ACSI)

⁸ PCA, Stated Clerk of. 1983. *The Confession of Faith with Larger and Shorter Catechism*. Brevard, NC: Committee for Christian Education and Publications of the Presbyterian Church in America., Question 35

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to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.”⁹

Shepherd – This Biblical metaphor assists me as a teacher in caring for the sheep under my care by setting boundaries and providing for their needs. Depending upon the child’s age and abilities, he/she will require more or less shepherding.

Justice & Mercy – As I seek to discipline my students I need to be just in the administration of this discipline, and seek restoration of the relationship with myself and the other students as quickly as possible.

Humble Walk with God – As I seek to counsel with the students and act and react in different situations they need to see that there is a difference in my countenance – a redeemed personality.

These traits should influence my character, but they should also influence my practice of education. What is the role of the teacher? What methods should the teacher use?

In my role as teacher I acknowledge that students develop, following the model of Jesus who “grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52 NIV). As I ponder my role I realize that wisdom is required, because human beings are unique creations with different gifts and abilities that require me to be creative to reach my students. The Psalmist assists us when he writes, “Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior” (Psalm 25:5 NIV) Here the Psalmist describes a progression in the teaching process. At first I may be a dispenser of knowledge to young children or introduce them to a new subject area. However, as the child attains a knowledge base, then my role as teacher shifts to that of a guide creating opportunities for the student to explore and experiment in a subject area, thus recognizing the developing image of God in the student. Then my desire would be that of the writer of Hebrews that the students would master the subject area and become teachers themselves, in turn teaching me as I seek to grow in wisdom and stature. Therefore, there is not one role that I would assume. I would rather be sensitive to the nature of the student my role will develop—from a dispenser of knowledge, to a guide, to a co-learner with the student.

When I consider the various methods to employ, I again recognize the diversity in the students, their giftedness and abilities. In a sense the methods are as varied as the children themselves. For those children with learning disabilities I will explore ways to teach that will reach them at their strengths and build skills for life-long learning. For students who are mentally or physically impaired, again I will seek to call upon the creative aspect of being made in the image of God to teach in an atmosphere requiring extensive modifications. For the regular education environment I again seek wisdom in the teaching process. Several general methods¹⁰ can be gleaned in all of these situations:

Lecture – This form of teaching can be useful for dispensing a knowledge base quickly in a logical manner on which the student can build later.

⁹ Ibid. Shorter Catechism Questions 24, 25, 26

¹⁰ The list of characterizations was taken from Graham, Donovan L. 2000. *Teaching Redemptively - course material from EDU 221*. Lookout Mountain, GA: Covenant College. p 176-177. (Donovan Graham has recently authored *Teaching Redemptively*, published by Purposeful Designs ACSI)

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Discussion – This form is useful to pool information from the group and share experiences to gain a better grasp on the information.

Case Studies – This form of teaching is useful for allowing the students to use their knowledge base and apply it.

Small Group – Human beings are created to be in social relationships, so in this method the students can take a project, or task and each contribute meaningfully to the solution.

Hands-on Experience – This method recognizes the need for students to apply the material they have learned.

Meaningful Tasks – This idea recognizes that the goal of education is to equip students with the tools necessary to have dominion; therefore tasks are not picked simply to fill time.

The restoration of the second relationship, to know myself, has a great effect on the educational process. As I conform more to the image of Christ, this will have a measurable effect on my role as a teacher and on the methods that I employ in the classroom.

Relationship #3 Personal with Others (The Student)

The third relationship, my relationship with others, is applicable as I enter the classroom and view the students. How do I understand the nature of students? What do I assume that the students are like? We see in the covenant of creation that human beings were created in the image of God, and that is my starting point for viewing my students and me. Part of my task as a teacher will be to assist them in redeeming that image that has been marred by sin so that they are equipped with the tools necessary for dominion, reflecting the character and activity of God. I also recognize that this redeeming activity is progressive – that the individual will develop morally, physically, spiritually, cognitively, and affectively.¹¹ From the image of God we see several characteristics of the students that affect my relationship with them.

Relationship #4 Personal with Creation

The fourth relationship, my relationship with creation, is applicable as I enter the classroom and prepare to teach the curriculum. What realms of knowledge would be studied? What are the broad

¹¹ Downs, Perry G. 1994. *Teaching for Spiritual Growth*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House., p 69.

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content concerns, given the nature of students? How would I organize curricula? From Psalm 19 and I Kings 4 we receive guidance:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
3 There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
4 Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world. (NIV)

and

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.... He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom. (NIV)

From these passages it would appear that all of creation is open to our investigation, so that we may have dominion in a manner which is glorifying to God.

The fourth relationship, my relationship with creation, is also effected by Christ's reconciliation. Therefore, as a Christian teacher I see all of creation open for investigation as I seek to educate my students to properly bear the character and activity of God in creation.



What do we want to accomplish? (Vision)

In many ways this piece is dependent upon your local church's vision.

One church developed a three-year plan to cover the basics of Reformed theology at various age levels, because they realized that every three years or so their church members were transferred to another base or job. Is there a segment of your community you want to reach? Do you need to find people who would like to begin an outreach to children using English as a Second Language (ESL)? Do you need Spanish-speaking Backyard Bible Clubs? Are there a special needs children who need a Sunday school class? Are your children available in the summer for summer camps, or do the children in your church go away for the summer? Do the children in your church have a good Bible foundation and need to be encouraged to live out their faith? Is there Biblical illiteracy in your church and you need to lay a good foundation?

FOUR EXAMPLES FROM LOCAL CHURCHES: PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY



In developing a vision spend time in prayer and in counsel with others in the church that have a heart for children. Often as you pray and think about the greatest needs in your congregation *and* the gifts that God has placed in your congregation, the vision begins to take shape. Another point to keep in mind – the vision may change with time, so do not be locked into the ministry looking only one way.

For example, in the church where I serve the general purpose statement for the church is:

As the **family** of God,
We **worship** the Triune God,
Teach the truth of God's Word,
And equip His people to **reach** the world.

However, for this year the Session as adopted a passion, or vision, statement that all the ministries are to work toward, it is:

To see the gospel increasingly characterize our relationships as a church family, and compel us to communicate and demonstrate the love of Christ to those in our community who do not yet know him.

So how does the children's ministry embrace this vision this year to facilitate an inreach and an outreach component? Remembering that the children's ministry is both support and stand-alone, consider some of the following ideas:

- ☺ Church-wide Family Camp Weekend
 - Event for the fall
- ☺ Pre-school VBS and Elementary BYC
 - Consider in-reach and outreach
- ☺ After school programs using Fun with Faith Clubs
 - Concentrate on area public and private schools where members' children attend
- ☺ Focus on being visitor friendly, especially on Wednesday nights
- ☺ Special summer camps and schools. (For example, art camps or special needs summer school.)
 - Take advantage of school teachers who have summer off to provide week-long camps
- ☺ Cut some programs and encourage families to spend that time together. Provide Sunday schools in spring to assist family with summer family ideas for building community in the church and reaching out to their neighborhoods.
- ☺ Etc....



– How are we going to accomplish this? (Structure)

FOUR EXAMPLES FROM LOCAL CHURCHES: PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY



Once again the answer to this question is dependent upon the structure that is in place, or how willing the leadership is to change the present structure. For example, is the best time for a mid-week program on the traditional Wednesday night, or are there circumstances in the community that would make Tuesday night the better choice for reaching your community, or should there be a mid-week program at all? Are we trying to accomplish different things on Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening, or are we trying to do the same thing three different times? Is the Wednesday night group of children the same as the Sunday morning group of children? Should Wednesday evening turn into a sports ministry for outreach using programs such as Upward Basketball? How many programming opportunities do we have?

For me, programs are simply vehicles to build relationships. So I am willing to change the vehicles to meet the needs of the community to build more effective relationships with believers and non-believers. This might mean having:

- ☺ Backyard Bible Clubs, or having a Vacation Bible School
- ☺ Two Sunday School opportunities
- ☺ Mid-week program
- ☺ Summer Camps or day camps
- ☺ Art, music, craft, or sports camps

The basic idea is to take the vision and work backwards to determine what is needed to accomplish the task. Ask questions such as:

- ☺ What people are needed?
- ☺ Money?
- ☺ Space?
- ☺ Supplies?
- ☺ Approval?
- ☺ Support?



Implementation

Put it into action. Begin by getting the leadership on board with your philosophy of children's ministry. Then move on to key people in your ministry, and be prepared to modify the vision based upon their input. Then recruit the appropriate people and resources needed. And always promote the ministry to the congregation *and* parents. After all, it is a covenantal community.



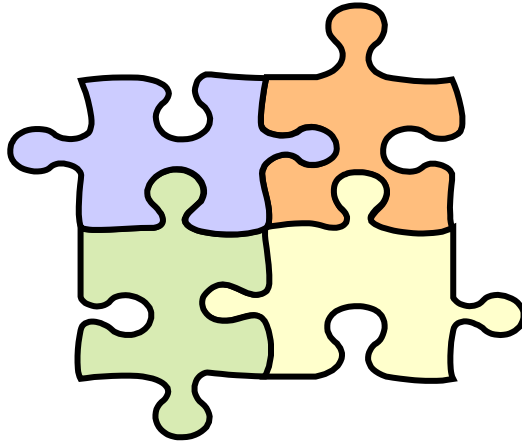
Did we accomplish our task?

Evaluate...Did we accomplish the task? Do we need to modify the philosophy?

The Lord will bring new people into your church with new gifts, the community will change, and you will change.

FOUR EXAMPLES FROM LOCAL CHURCHES: PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

The main thrust is that our children's ministry should not be simply babysitting or reactionary, but rather deliberate in what it is trying to accomplish.



FOUR EXAMPLES FROM LOCAL CHURCHES: PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY



PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY (EXAMPLE #4)

Vision for Children's Ministry

Rev. Tim McCracken

"Without a vision people perish"

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

When I arrived at Oak Mountain the children's ministry was doing some great things, but it needed more specific direction. As I had done at the church where I previously worked, I began the process of adopting a vision for the children's ministry. It is not as intimidating as it may sound. By building on the philosophy of why we do children's ministry and mixing in a little imagination, you can come up with a vision to fit your situation.

The first step is to obtain the vision statement for your church. If it is not written, ask your pastor or leaders what their vision is for the congregation. Taking this information begin praying for guidance and wisdom as to how you can incorporate the church's vision into a vision for the children. Summarize the church's statement into a short, one sentence statement that is easily remembered (if it has not already been done for you). At Oak Mountain the mission statement is "To glorify God by equipping its members to evangelize the lost with the gospel of grace and to disciple the entire congregation in living out the gospel of grace, resulting in growing relationships with God, the Body of Christ, and the lost." The shortened version is, "Preaching the gospel to ourselves, to one another and to a lost world." It was upon this statement about which I began to pray even before I arrived at OMPC. As you study and pray over your church's mission statement, ask the Lord for wisdom and creativity to mesh the church and children's vision into a unified whole.

The second step is to go back to the philosophy of children's ministry and search the Scriptures asking, "Why do we do children's ministry?" I went to the following Scriptures. Some are obvious and some need some explanation as to why they would be considered.

Genesis 17:7

Deuteronomy 6

Psalms 78

Proverbs 22:6

Malachi 4:6

Matthew 19:13-15

Luke 1:17

Acts 2:38-39

I am assuming your church's vision has a Scripture basis so we will not spend any time discussing that issue. We chose Psalm 78 (read passage) as the passage to direct our vision and focus what we wished to accomplish through the children's ministry at Oak Mountain. After much prayer and consideration the vision statement took shape and became "Partnering with parents to preach the Gospel to the next generation." It is this Scripture passage and vision statement that guides all that we do in the children's ministry at Oak Mountain.

The third step, and possibly the hardest, is to bring everything into compliance with your vision or discarding it. Get away from the programs and the daily grind and take some time to pray and evaluate every program, considering how it fits into the vision. Almost every program will probably need to be tweaked to fit, or some may need to be terminated. After you have looked at each program, set up a time to meet with the leadership to present your vision, reasoning, and plan for how it will affect the

FOUR EXAMPLES FROM LOCAL CHURCHES: PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY



children's ministry and the church. Be prepared! Assure any skeptics of your desire and direction, but be ready to submit to any disagreements they may have with your vision and accept their input. Once the church leaders are on board and approve the vision the task becomes getting it out to the church population.

Put your vision statement on **EVERYTHING** you do! If you send out a letter to visitors, have your statement on the bottom, put it in the church newsletter or your children's ministry newsletter, make a brochure about the children's ministry and plaster the vision all over it and give it to every one who asks, and even to the ones who do not ask. We made t-shirts with the statement on it for everyone of our Sunday school teachers to wear the first Sunday in the fall, further advertising the vision statement. Every chance you get, tell someone your vision statement. Whether it's on a web site or in a conversation in the hall, eventually people will hear it. Hopefully they will then begin to own it. At the Inquirer's Class or Membership Class, ask permission to have five minutes to tell the new members about the vision and answer any questions they may have about it or the children's ministry. One great opportunity I have at Oak Mountain is at our monthly visitors dinner when the pastor opens his home to people who have been visiting for a few weeks. He has some staff there to answer any questions about the church. At these dinners I am given the opportunity to share our vision and answer questions about it. Drill, so to speak, the vision statement into every volunteer you have and get them excited about what is happening in the children's department. Above all, however, continue to bathe it in prayer. Begin to gather like-minded people around you that are starting to grasp the vision, and these people will become your team. A great way to introduce the vision statement is to have a "Kid's Day" at the church in which the children are involved in the worship service(s). Ask your pastor to use the vision text you have chosen as his sermon base for the morning. Allow him to promote what God has laid on your heart and pray He will bring others into your ministry. Be patient. It will take time for the vision to begin to sink into the hearts and lives of others. Remember Jesus' parable in Mark 4:26-29:" He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scattered seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain- first the stalk, then the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

As the vision begins to grow and develop and the people begin to see the field that is white for harvest, begin asking for people to partner with you in carrying the great commission to the least of these. This team will become your greatest asset. When you follow Ephesians 4: 11-12, this team will help spread the children's ministry to more people, and help lighten your load in the process.