

CHURCH MINISTRIES TO CHILDREN

Class notes for a class taught in the 1990's by Don Ratcliff

Introduction to the Class

Need to “connect” emotionally with child – This is not wasted time.

- Greet individually
- Help with coats
- Affirm them coming
- Call by name regularly
- Talk about week
- Look in eye regularly
- Be on their level (on knees)

If cold, distant – you’ve lost them. Be genuine – they can smell a phony immediately.

This connection will help you all the way through the lesson = read them constantly

- If bored, move to something else
- If wiggle, go to song with motions of other activity
- Don’t “just keep plugging”
- May only need to say name or question to draw attention back.

De-connect at end

- Thank you for coming
- Help with coats
- Say “see you next time”

Affection will last after the cognitive is gone. Genuine caring is more important than lesson content – but without content it isn’t Christian Ed.

Ignore your peers – if lookup from kids you will lose your focus.

When you watch – see what works and what doesn’t from others.

Watch laughing – too much distracts kids or may inhibit them.

Said “finish it at home”

Need to be flexible = take longer/shorter time as needed.

Don’t skip application, even if skip other things. Pace self – watch the time, but take more time with task if needed.

Why is children’s ministry important now?

Megatrends 2000 also predicts a major return to religion in years ahead, partly because baby boomers want their kids to get a religious education.

Newsweek (Dec.19, 1990, pp. 51-52) says, “couples with children are twice as likely to join a religious congregation.”

George Gallup in *The People’s Religion* (1990) says 90% of adults want religious training for their school-aged kids, only 69% go to church or do it themselves. (Gap between desire and provision). Even 73% of unchurched want kids to get religious training!

George Barna – Christian researcher – found spiritually healthy and growing churches always had good program for kids (User friendly churches)

Many more kids available for C. Ed. due to upswing in birth rate.

(Over 4 million during 1991 & again in 1992, stabilized at fairly high rate in 1990s and into 2000s)

The upswing may be accelerated because larger % of population is becoming Hispanic (may be largest minority shortly) and they usually have high birth rate.

Yet SS attendance is declining (although some are maintaining and S. Baptist's SS is growing). Biggest problem is staffing – volunteers are hard to recruit and hard to keep. (My book with Blake Neff).

Most common problem reported to curriculum companies.

(Little commitment, housewives in short supply today).

Also many pastors and other church leaders are indifferent – kids and SS aren't fashionable and they are more interested in morning worship. "We don't care enough about children."

Kids neglected today:

More likely to live in poverty than in the past

Shattered families (parents don't "stay together for the kids" anymore) effects of divorce.

Abortion shows low value of kids

Fewer mothers stay home with kids – also communicates low value

Baby boomers demand quality in everything (also noted by G. Barna) and our C. Ed. of kids is often low priority (except in thriving, growing churches) and thus low quality.

Other problems children face:

Little time with parents

Pressure on kids to grow up too soon [David Elkind *The Hurried Child*] – rushed to maturity by TV, pressure to date (at 9&10!), then forced to stay an adolescent when actually an adult!

Drug usage in elementary School

Latchkey kids (potential for ministry!) (Half of kids 10-15)

TV, video game, videotape "babysitting" (Couch potatoes – and more overweight; less active)

Family activities less likely as a result

Biblical Basis for Childhood Education in Church

Goals: Luke 2:40,52 (wholeness), Eph. 4:13-15 (maturity)

The Challenge: Deut.6:4-9, 11:18-25, Ex.12:26-28, Eph.6:4, Josh.4:6-8, Col.3:21

Jesus & children: Matt.11:16-19, Lk 7:31-35, Matt.18:1-6, Mark 9:33-37, Lk. 9:46-48, Matt.19:13-15, Mk.10:13-16, Lk. 18:15-17)

Children in praise & worship: Matt.21:15,16

Primary responsibility for religion training in parents: Deut.6:4-8, Ps. 78:1-8, II Tim. 3:14-16

(2 chapters given to this in Larry Richard's *Children's Ministry* (earlier titled *Theology of Children's Ministry*)

Research in Children's Ministry

Very little exists. Best sources:

The Teaching Church by Eugene Rohlkepartain (husband of Jolene) – Abingdon, May 1993.

Reports Search Institute study of 5 mainline denominations & Southern Baptists (over 11,000 adults surveyed).
 Funded by Lilly, done by Search Institute
 A few results influenced by more liberal orientation of the church.

Religion in Childhood and Adolescence by Kenneth Hyde – REP, 1990.

Huge resource, mostly European & British Commonwealth research. Reads like a dissertation. Sometimes doesn't apply to USA or CE (more for public school rel. ed.). I had a lot of input into it.

Again research often reflects mainline churches and some of it is old and doesn't apply today (or not to USA).

My handbooks – little CE research, but more secular research applied to CE.

The CE research is often not USA, rest is very applicable.

A few scattered studies

Usually reflecting USA, generally, not just evangelical.

Really need C.Ed research – on kids and other age ranges. 3 schools doing it that I know of: Trinity, Talbot, and Southwest.

Involvement

60% of church kids involved in C. Ed., but drops sharply in teen years [52% in jr. high, 35% in senior high, 28% for adult church-goers (Leon McKenzie say 4 to 10%)

Attitudes about religion

Girls are more positive

Boy's attitudes more related to that of parents

Kids that rated religion unfavorably often said it was due to poor teaching (done in England – knows that it isn't good enough to just have any kind of C. Ed. instruction – must be high quality).

Parental religiousness related to child's news of religion, but not related to school attended.

A positive change of attitude about religion required behavior change, not just religious ed.

Also improvement was more likely if attendance was voluntary.

The way CE is taught makes it more or less likely to change attitudes.

Spiritual influences (ranked by kids)!

1. Parents
2. School instruction (if religious schools)
3. Teacher example (in school)
4. Church instruction
5. Peer's example

Biggest problems in C. Ed. of kids

1. recruitment of leaders and teachers – 58%
2. lack of interest by parents – 53%
3. kids not attending consistently – 42%
4. schedules of children too busy – 42%
5. can't get children's attention – 25%
6. little motivation to learn – 15%

Pastoral Involvement

Only 42% of pastors have any involvement with children's C.Ed.

Yet 43% of teachers said they knew most of kids' names and another 32% said they knew some of the names.

When pastors were asked if they liked doing CE with kids, 29% said they would with 3-5 year olds, and 46% with 6-12 year olds. But asked if they spent 3 hours or more with kid's ministry, only 20% said they did with 6-12 year olds.

Volunteers

Eph. 4:11 +

Recent book: *The Complete Guide to Religious Education Volunteers*

Research on children's volunteers:

Most (91%) are women

Average age = 36

Nearly all (97%) enthusiastic about working with kids

Average lesson preparation time = 40 minutes

Average reading Bible only 1 or 2 times/month

Most have some college and almost half have college degrees

68% believe faith is very important aspect of their lives

77% are married

Must be sensitive to their time constraints and doubts about ability (the value of teacher training – they realize you don't expect perfection and they will get help)

Strengths and Weakness of Children's Teachers (assessed by C. E. directors)

90% - loving & caring

71% - enjoy what they do

69% enthusiastic

57% competent

55% deal with conflict well

52% keep discipline problems to minimum

38% have good Bible knowledge

41% expect a lot

39% aware of faith development & how it develops

37% want to learn about C. E.

30% know various styles of learning

33% encourage questions

27% know methods & education theories

24% understand denominational ideas

Clearly need training! But only 44% are interested in more teacher training.

Many teachers of Bible not aware of conceptual ability required to comprehend Bible. Tended to be compliance without internalizing beliefs. Older teachers more likely to produce confusion in children.

Only about 1/3 of children's teachers know any educational practices or theory about their age group. Teachers improve if they get training, but only half of churches have any training even once a year! Only half of C. E. teachers rated themselves as good teachers.

Faith maturity is low in children's teachers – only 32% have mature faith.

Search Institute found 3 things that maximize effectiveness of teachers:

1. Mature faith (only 32%)
2. Knowing educational methods & theory for their age of kids. (only 29%)
3. Teachers that really care

2/3 of teachers spend less than an hour in preparation for lesson
40% don't prepare at all! (self-report so may be higher)

Need to Appeal to Interests of Volunteers

Interests of teachers of kids in church (things they want to learn about)

- 79% Bible learning
- 66% better approach to C. E.
- 58% how to plan C. E.
- 55% faith development
- 54% techniques of teaching
- 51% educating parents
- 50% how to find better materials
- 50% history and psychology of denomination
- 48% how to evaluate C. E.
- 47% moral development and education
- 45% discuss with other Christian educators

But must balance needs of program with volunteer needs

Child Abuse in Churches

Alliance Guideline's booklet titled *Recruiting Volunteers*

Articles in *CEJ*

Great potential for legal problems here. Most likely – discipline (especially spanking), preschoolers (potty training), classes and situations with only one adult present, especially if 1 child with 1 adult.

Some churches screen volunteers via FBI checks! Might consider insurance for staff and vols. (in addition to standard liability insurance). Volunteer & staff applications should allow church to do police check of person – often can be done free.

Alliance Guidelines: (1992)

1. Always 2 adults in any class (may require combining classes)
2. If only 1 adult, door must be left open
3. Ratios: 1:4 preschool, 1:8 elementary
4. Keep records that include parent name and location in church, special needs, and who child can be released to
5. Volunteer sign in (especially in nursery)
6. Diaper changes always with another adult present
7. Restroom – one adult can't be in room with kids unless door left open
8. Sick kids not allowed
9. Vol. personnel form required (could include police check)
10. Kids can't be hugged extensively, kissed, on lap, inappropriately touched
11. Cannot give meds (only parent)
12. First aid boxes present and all workers know locations
13. Fire emergency procedures reviewed quarterly
14. Field trips require second adult (non-relative of teacher). Parental release needed. Have parent assist if possible
15. Child abuse/neglect policy on file (must conform to state's policy) must report to pastor or elder within 48 hours. Must be confidential.

Legally required? Debatable - might vary by state law. (School teachers must report, but are Christian educators considered teachers by State?)

Objectives Mission

Mission statement for children's programs in 58% of churches, 41% have learning objectives for kid's programs.

Mager says good objectives:

1. stated from student's perspective
2. tangible behavior (measurable)
3. gives criteria for achievement (90%, 1 out of 3 tries)
4. circumstances – in classroom, in real life, etc.

Need to Evaluate how Volunteers do

Highest teacher morale when evaluation is done regularly and constructively

80% of churches have at least an annual evaluation of children's program (possibly casual)

Children's needs evaluated in only 42% of churches

[Evaluation is based upon goals]

Need to reward volunteers

Banquets

In church (not a pin but let them talk about their job)

Time with them

Let them participate in decision making

Volunteers need:

Challenge

Job description (detailed)

Training

A break now and then – for personal growth, rest, stimulation, learning, and just a change of pace.

Parents

Research by Search Institute found that difficulty of getting parents involved in their children's C. E. was a major concern of Christian Ed. leaders (also keeping volunteers was major concern).

Fourth most common problem reported by C. E. directors was parent disinterest (53% of churches).

Only 21% of churches involve parents in program planning and decisions.

Only 8 to 9% have parent training classes and only 6 to 7% have classes on teaching parents to encourage faith in their kids.

Only 8% inform parents about how kids are doing in C. E. programs.

Need to develop parent/teacher teamwork.

Parents can be reached via kids – inactive members and church dropouts often want their kids to get C. E. 73% of people who don't go to church want their kids to have some kind of education about religion. They are especially likely to want kids in summer programs (camps, VBS, weekday clubs, etc.). Can use these opportunities to reach parents by providing opportunities for parents to interact with church people (open house, dramatizations, refreshments afterward, etc.).

Kids are effective evangelists too!

The beliefs and religious practices most likely to continue through life were learned at home.

Spiritual development is

Strong – if parents are religious

Very strong – if have religious parents and get rel. ed. in School

Little or none – from religious school without religious parents

The actions of parents, not efforts to directly influence kids towards the church, were most effective.

Study found that an 8-week program of family worship increased religiousness significantly.

Threats that God would punish child produced better behavior, but not acceptance of parent values.

If parents have control and acceptance and empathy, have greater intrinsic acceptance of faith.

Demands need to be stated clearly and with acceptance.

Religious commitment most likely with nurturing families, while harsh families associated with many problems.

If religious school had teachers that said one thing and did another, that negative influence outweighed parental influence.

Fathers more influential than mothers on religious behavior.

Parents that argue or fight a lot tend to have kids with lower religiousness – especially with boys (much less with girls).

Parental faith has a causative influence upon children's beliefs (all other factors much less influential).

Do parents influence God concept?

Several studies show view of opposite sex parent most influences concept of God, especially if child preferred opposite sex parent. But this decreases as get older. Tend to equate the ideal of the parent with God, not actual parent. (What kids wished parents were like).

God seen as distant because of father absence (due to work) for boys, because of gender for girls.

Those with good fathers had better concept of God, boys with poor father had poorer concepts of God than girls with poor fathers.

Feelings about God especially likely to be taken from view of parents, but mental picture of God more from what was taught.

Teaching Styles

Understanding of religion most likely when it is practiced by teacher (not just talked about)

Argument against teaching religion in schools

Discussions, even at age 6, associated with seeing God as forgiving and loving.

Eleven year olds – same age group SS learned more, girls learned more.

Most students see religion classes as things to be learned, but most did not perceive any value in C. E. for future.

Method of teaching not as important to learning as child's church attendance.

Recall of information should not be emphasized as much as attitudes about what is taught

Teachers influence children's religion far more than what they teach.

Kids with close, warm relationships tended to have more awareness of God's presence.

Sunday School more influential than attending religious day school in awareness of God and going to church.

Facilities

56% of church leaders say the space allotted kids program is adequate. Only 37% of churches have a resource center or library for children's C. E.

Churches have hidden curriculum – teaches cultural values via social norms, space and time usage – even arrangement of furniture (Ratcliff 1992 has more on this).

Teaching Bible

History understood only as facts (concrete level) until age 16. Concrete understanding of history begins at age 12! [Because so distant from their own experience].

Generally most topical areas follow Piaget's progression.

Better to teach episodes of Bible to preschoolers, not complete stories.

In teaching Bible, must consider developmental level of child (age & mental maturity)

And also realize kids understand different kinds of biblical material at different ages

Will consider more specifically what can & can't be understood in Bible by specific age ranges.

Evangelism

Do children easily change religious ideas as get older?

Goldman says that old, childish view of faith crystallize and get in the way of fuller understandings – causes rejection of faith at preadolescence and early adolescence [so don't teach religion before 12 years]

But Jim Wilhoit disputes this idea – points out that Piaget spoke of how concepts change with age and experience – not crystallized.

Rosenberg concludes that it can go either way" if child has a spiritual commitment, will integrate new understandings, not crystallize. If not committed, will reject childish religion and substitute non-religious views.

Shows importance of evangelism and ongoing commitment, not just learning information.

One study found that evangelical groups grew, not because of mass evangelism, but because children had been nurtured into a conservative belief system.

Children are the best evangelists (to parents, peers, and other adults).

Religious Experience

Includes reverence and awe, conversion, speaking in tongues, etc.

Nancy Smith (Rosemead) believes they begin in infancy.

Some believe everyone has such experiences, but our beliefs cause us to label them religious.

Stark found that salvation experiences were most likely to occur at 11-12 years of age (age of confirmation among Catholics).

Christian teens reported their average age of conversion was _____.

Religious experiences begin prior to school entry and continue throughout childhood.

2 out of 3 adults make decisions for Christ before age 18.

Average age at which teens were saved – 10.

Faith and Religious Development in infancy

Faith is at first undifferentiated – complete dependence on a power beyond self (caregiver). Faith builds on object permanence ("evidence of things not seen" – Bible).

Erikson says learns trust or mistrust in first 2 years – foundational to degree of trust and faith in God possible later.

Parents seen as divine – omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent.

Nancy Smith (Rosemead) says baby senses an Ultimate Background Object (UBO) – precursor to God concept. UBO seen in infant's trust in environment.

Object = mental representation of external world

Background object = primary identification figure (often mother)

UBO = more basic trust (sense of safety and security, taken for granted by child)

Not a concept, more an existential experience.

Assumes UBO is the infant's creation. Is God concept a human creation? Psychologists say yes, theologians say God is external reality. Both are true. (Spiritual development for child is in part bringing personal construction more in line with theological reality).

Young children develop a negative UBO – seen in monsters, boogie man.

Mother of infant mediates God to child

Counselors often serve as a UBO to clients

UBO is internal, God concept is externalized UBO

Affect is primary throughout infancy because no verbal language – need positive feelings regarding church.

Religious concepts of Preschoolers

Very little on the topic. A few years ago I searched psych. abstracts, diss. abstracts, social science index, only got a handful of studies, and they were almost entirely about older kids.

By writing best scholars, found 3 people who had really studied the topic in depth, none had published in English. Each wrote a section and I put it together to become your handout. Only such study of its kind (the researchers didn't even know about each other).

Concept of God [Tamminen & Vianello are best here]

Very literal, emphasis on providing for my needs (rather self-centered, only exists to serve child)

Freud thought concept of God came mostly from father, but research shows some correlation with mother concept as well.

Interest in religious activities related to mother's interest for both boys and girls. God is very human (anthropomorphic) to preschoolers, with physical limits, and lives in distant place (heaven). Ideas related to pictures (has a beard and a white gown). Near end of preschool years (5 & 6) see superhuman characteristics (magic qualities, but still human) God concept more gloomy & frightening if raised in non-Christian home. Usually a mixture of punishing and loving.

God's activity as creator predominate by age 6. Protector and helper were also commonly mentioned.

1/3 of 5 year olds affirm omnipotence to God, but most believe he is limited (can't save a plane because it's too heavy). Other attributes not affirmed until middle childhood.

Interested in crucifixion, but don't see spiritual implications (killed because of bad men).

Concept of denomination

David Elkind did only study of this with Protestants, Catholics and Jews. Related denomination to God, but nothing more.

Concepts of Prayer

Prayers vaguely understood, often recited as formulas (“now I lay me”), but sometimes spontaneous. Object of prayer (Jesus or God) depends upon training, preference for Jesus if sick (related to stories of Jesus healing sick?)

Six year olds believe God hears all prayers, but doesn’t grant all requests.

Limits of studies

Theory informs the way studies are set up. Mostly Piagetian (especially Viavello, Tamminen to some extent). Jaspard is mostly Freudian.

Method of study also affects result – more advanced if choose from options, less advanced if open-ended questions. Drawings more open to interpretations. Jaspard used parent journals as basis for data – parents may have been selective in what they wrote down (tend to record unusual behavior or statements, not routine).

Denominational slant? (Viavello & Jaspard = Catholic kids, Tamminen = Lutheran). No – no significant differences by denomination until 8 or 9 years old.

Grouping

Kids usually grouped by age, not interest.

Should we group by ability or age?

By age/grade = Richards

By ability/biblical knowledge:

Probably the social reality of kids calls for grouping by grade level (so in same class as at school) – but might individualize by ability/knowledge within classroom or if in megachurch with several classes for a given grade level.

Religious Concepts of Kids

Excellent source: *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence* – Ken Hyde (1800 studies!)

Few differences between religious groups (Protestant vs. Catholic vs. Jew) until age 8, not clearly different until 13 to 15.

Two key points of change across dozens of studies

About 7 years (± 1 year)

and (Roughly same age as Piaget’s stage changes)

About 11 years(± 1 year)

There are also transition periods – instruction may help child move to more advanced levels of understanding.

Most studied area = concepts of God (hundreds of studies, mostly in Europe due to religious ed. in public schools.

School-aged kids concept of God

Concept of God often unrelated to everyday life, harsh images of God often found.

Major change about 4th grade (age 10-11)

8-10 yrs.
God associated with strength,

11-14 yrs.
More personal associations

13-14 yrs.

beauty or goodness	(father, mentor, etc.)	
Authority & doctrine central. Confession of doctrine primary, physical needs secondary.	God as friend, less an abstract being	
God judges by concrete rewards & punishments (death, fire, flood)	Law & covenant emphasis, judges to uphold law	Sees God as not having favorites.
Visualizes God in terms of outward appearance, more like superman than God	God is semi-physical ghost-like	God not experienced directly by senses – his presence inferred.
God powerful & unpredictable	God is superhuman, less vindictive, more rational	Human traits attributed to God are analogies
God does not love everyone	God loves everyone	Feel very unworthy of God's love
God sees people as all good or all bad	Dichotomy is less strict, ex. during Exodus there were some good Egyptians. Universality of sin still not grasped	
90% sensed God being near	Decline in sense of nearness of God – 55% by age 15 or 16, Nearest when lonely & in prayer.	
8-10 Natural & artificial explanations of nature, a bit of each. (Phases of moon because clouds hide moon & God is hiding moon)	11-14 Naturalistic explanations of nature	
God personally intervenes	God doesn't directly intervene, but controls nature to influence people. Miraculous aspects of religion begin to conflict w/ the rational & scientific (conflict unresolved)	
God speaks physically & externally	Encounters w/ God are internal & mental	
Prayer 8-10 Prayers are magical – requests are central, Mechanics are emphasized (say it right to get you want.	11-14 Requests are secondary, Prayer less impulsive. Answers due to faith, no answer due to God saying “no”.	
Immediate answers expected, God believed	Results of prayer can be due to people & events	

To be physically present during prayer or “plugged in by wires” to heaven

outside of God. Attitude changes by person praying becomes important, not immediate effects.

Church

8-10

Church is defined as building, house God lives in.

Adults attend for rewards, habit, or protecting child.

11-14

Church defined by activity – worship, etc.

Attend church to get personal help, learn about God, pray. (fellowship & altruism become more important after 14 yrs.)

Denomination

8-10

Denomination distinguished from nationality, identified w/ actions such as rituals

11-14

Denomination linked with mental beliefs & non-observable factors

Conversion, Baptism, Membership

8-10

Literal & concrete

For all kids, baptism seen more literally for longer time & membership seen as something done, not a commitment.

11-14

More abstract & symbolic

Other areas with little or no study:

Bible

8-11 (± 1 yr.)

Logic but only applied to concrete situations
Bible stories seen to emphasize specific actions. Not abstract truths.

Above was British study, American study showed a large minority (41%) were in transition to more abstract thinking, though majority were concrete.

Very literalistic, sometimes overlooked central ideas & concentrated on peripheral

Spiritual significance overlooked

Concrete applications (peaks at age 9)
Level 2

12+

Concrete & abstract interpretations in tension from 12-14. Symbolic terms used more after 14.
Good Samaritan

Symbolism not completely understood, but clearly moving beyond the concrete “God as like ghost – not invisible”

Understands parable abstractly (by 11 yrs)
Level 3

Level 0 = no real understanding

Level 1 = repeat facts of story

Metaphor – one word used for another to show similarity “ship plows sea:” Metaphors used correctly quite early, not fully understood until teen years.

Analogy – things similar in several ways yet a different domain.

Can children understand parables & allegories?

More likely to understand if they understand the context & experience with content (done fishing to understand “fishers of men”).

At 10 to 12, if given specific example they can related to, more likely to understand (wouldn’t have full understanding at 10 with good example, but understanding is emerging then.

At 6 & 7 years, Good Shepherd metaphor not understood (although drawings & puppets helped them understand a bit)

Beechick found that analogies of actions were understood first, analogies of actors second, analogies of objects third.

Kids understand parables if can identify with a character in story.

Berryman says kids should be allowed to construct own meaning to parables, by playing with figurines associated with parable – even teaches parables to preschoolers! But seems to accept any meaning conferred – doesn’t evaluate for accurate meaning (as researchers do).

Emphasize imaginative & creative, not adult understanding.

They may have been parroting phrases without real understanding – phrases used like new vocabulary.

Example: child associates “you hit a home run” with success, (even as preschooler) but does not equate it with baseball until learns baseball. At first, after learn baseball, seems nonsensical, but as preteen see success common to both.

Children use metaphors before can explain them – very concrete use at 7 to 9 years.

Some understanding at age 10, but still couldn’t explain metaphors. Used sensory metaphors earliest (“trees touched the sky”).

Partial comprehension by 11 years – plateau at 11-12 years.

Near perfect comprehension by 13 years.

At 10-12 years can get some meaning from parables if concrete instruction is used.

Problems generalizing if not familiar with context and components, application possible at 10-12 if very familiar with components (e.g. “fishers of men” if very familiar with fishing). Must be familiar content and important to child.

Curriculum

80% of CE coordinators believe good curriculum is available for kids and most are happy with denominational curriculum (less happy with adult and youth curriculum).

Does this mean they are less demanding of kids’ curriculum because kids seen as less important?

Program Climate

In studies of religious schools, climate of school makes more difference than kind of curriculum or quality of instruction. Possibly true with churches too. Management style influences climate, as well as relating faith to life.

Knowledge about religion not related to attitudes about religion. (can’t just teach facts).

Support for home based religious activities required for school to make difference.

What does church reward? Likewise church needs to examine social & emotional climate – we remember people and attitudes for better than facts. Need good methods & curriculum in good environment, but climate is crucial. Key into environment and teacher's attitude to maximize effectiveness.

Programs

Children's programs tend to be traditional (SS, VBS, kids sermons & choirs). Very few churches have youth groups for kids or after school programs).

While most (85%) people say their church has a good program for children, only 1 in 10 pastors say the program is outstanding. What do church leaders feel are the strengths & weaknesses?

82% said kids' classes were "warm".

61% said the program results in spiritual growth.

74% said kids liked the programs. But only 45% felt the programs were really creative &

51% said that kids were challenged mentally.

Only half felt the needs & interests of kids were considered and less than half said felt adults in church felt kid's CE was a high priority.

What is taught?

89% said teaching Bible stories was strong emphasis, but Bible knowledge was emphasized in only 67% of churches. Bible memorization was emphasized in 20% (mostly mainline churches). Teaching moral values and applying faith to life found in about half of churches. Fellowship & social interaction emphasized in half of kid's programs. 21% had intergenerational ministry. About 15% emphasized theology or denominational history and beliefs.

Only 54% of CE directors say the kid's programs are administered and planned well. 60% believe the budget is planned carefully.

Kinds of children's programs:

72% - teaching religion

43% - development spiritually

33% - interpretation (of Bible?)

33% - community of faith

16% of churches coordinate curriculum across all ages (child to adult). Sometimes via uniform lessons, sometimes by church year, sometimes as special series (Advent)

Study of Catholic children's programs found 5 basic conclusions.

1. Good programs are not basically the result of having more money. Money helps, but planning, leadership & setting goals are more important. Can have good outcomes with limited funds.
2. Doctrine more likely to be taught to kids than teens (rather odd – more able to understand abstractly as teens) – but easier to lose teens, so tend to back off doctrine).
3. Families tend not to have religious practices at home as in past, but if it does, kids tend to have positive and strong view of God. Involvement of whole family that practices & discusses faith at home – teach parents how to do this.
4. Programs that work are structured well.
 - A. Goals written in concrete, specific manner
 - B. Training of teachers emphasized, especially doctrine

- C. Use church events as learning opportunity
- D. Good programs balance standard content of theology and Bible with practical living out of faith everyday. Teachers should be able to testify to own faith.

Some other findings:

- Effective programs have a Director of Religious Ed. that is an important person in church structure (pastor-DRE relationship needs to be good)
- Leader plans program with a group of lay people (not just professional, but get lay help)
- Develops sense of ownership responsibility.
- Religious activity by family rare – most kids say family never discusses religion and never prays together except at meals.
- Most kids want discussions on topics that interest them a lot. Second most requested addition is more activities outside.
- Certification of teachers does not affect student learning.
- Teachers seen as caring & competent by kids are more likely to have kids that learn (#1)
- Materials & procedures used also related to outcomes). (#2)
- Liking the program also affects outcomes. (#3)
- Practical application to life more important than cognitive acquisition of Bible/theology knowledge to outcomes in kids.

User Friendly Churches

Barna notes that spiritually & numerically growing churches inevitably have a top-notch children's program. What kinds of programs do they use?

No one strategy – varied curricula.

But they had in common/

- Focus on excellence

- Division by age or grade

- Either developed own curriculums or adapted a standard curriculum (didn't just use it)

- “Organized chaos” – let kids be kids, not pretending they are small adults or rigid – loosely structured but had boundaries (relaxed)

- Games & competitive activities - but focused on building a team, not just winning.

- Communication emphasized (assessed and addressed needs of group)

- Not just baby sitting/used technology (videos, computer graphics)

- Involved many adults, not just parents

Found that kids were better at evangelizing adults than adult ministries were! Need to teach kids how to relate to parents about spiritual issues. Also effective at spiritual renewal of parents – Barna says kids can breath new life into church via enthusiasm & spontaneity. Kids are good testing ground for new ministry ideas.

Sunday School

Cook, S. 1989 “An Instrument to measure attitude toward Sunday School.:" CEJ vol. 19. pp. 105-113.

Kids in 3rd to 6th grade believe SS is important, but feel it is far less than ideal.

Cook's research found that upper elementary kids see the ideal and reality of Sunday School differently.

The ideal – important & worthwhile

Own experience = boring, long & hard.

Perhaps this is why it is valued less, and less attended, as child moves into preadolescence.

Might use the Stuart Cook test in your church – see if your kids are same.

Children's sermon

Avoid object lessons

Requires abstract thinking to make application

Simplify according to kids (not make it just entertainment for adults) cute things to make adult laugh

Tangible applications – can get trivial.

Don't embarrass kids – can last a lifetime if congregation laughs at child's serious comment (affective) really abusive.

Use puppets, kneel so level with kids.

Intergenerational

Good occasionally, but used regularly must be too simple for adults or too heavy for kids (they think differently).