

## Philosophy:

The thoughts expressed here are my own, and I have developed them over many years of working with children, both as a piano teacher and as a Children's Church volunteer. I have gleaned many of my ideas through valued time spent with others who love children and have devoted themselves to teaching.

Remember: *We are teaching Children, not Sunday School- there's a huge difference.*

If children sense that we are interested in them; that we care about the things they care about, we will be able to influence them. The relationships we build with the children will leave a deeper impression with them than any craft or object lesson we come up with. If it matters to our students, it should matter to us!

I'd like to share some of the things I've learned through my years of teaching. I'm not an expert, but I've learned a few things along the way. I've had great successes, and had some real lows along the way; and I hope to help you avoid some of the pitfalls that can happen when we take on the challenge of working with children. As you work in your children's program, keep in mind the following items.

## Planning Lessons-

Good lesson planning is key to an enjoyable class time. Interesting and engaging lessons don't happen by accident; failing to plan is planning to fail.

We need to understand how children learn so we can best communicate our message to them. Simply delivering the material is not the goal; our goal is to help our students understand and absorb the information, so they will know more about *who* God is, and who *they* are in relation to God.

The object is not to have the children sitting quietly and listening to us as we recite information to them. We want the children to be thinking, asking questions, discussing and engaging with us, each other and the Holy Spirit. That rarely looks neat and quiet. We need good boundaries in the classroom so we don't degenerate into chaos, but a strong lesson plan will create an environment where children have the freedom to learn and ask questions.

If Plan A isn't working don't be afraid to scrap it and go to Plan B. ***Sometimes you just need some sort of short wiggle buster activity to refocus the class, other times, you may need to have some materials on hand that you can use to switch it up.*** One of the most effective lessons I had with my students was a day when they were just not engaging with the materials I had planned for the day. I scrapped my lesson plan and drew a timeline on the board. I asked the students to review the history of the Bible from creation onward. The timeline had no beginning and no end, and we added all of the events we could think of. We added the birth of

Jesus, and the birth of the children in the class. Then we talked about how sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, which affected all people, and how Jesus covered all of that sin on the cross. We had a great discussion of the gospel that day, and the same kids who were “bored” became fully engaged because I needed them to help me fill in the time line. They could each add the stories they remembered. I don’t recommend doing this on a regular basis; generally the better your plan, the better your lesson will be. I do believe that day was an exception and was a lesson to me about the Holy Spirit’s ability to step into my own weaknesses and meet my needs as a teacher. However, having that lesson as a backup plan helped take a time that could have been completely frustrating for everyone, and created an opportunity to see how the Bible holds eternal truths, and how each of us has our specific place in eternity.

*How much activity do I need to plan?*

As a loose guideline, you get about 1 minute of attention span for each year of age, so if you have a classroom of 4 year olds and you are planning 10 minute activities, you will find it difficult to keep them on track. Many short activities with a change of location in the classroom will help the children refocus. You may cover the same thing 3 or 4 times, in different ways or locations in the classroom; the repetition helps anchor the material for the children.

*What about curriculum?*

Choice of curriculum is key- you need to make sure you choose one that will work well for your group. The level of experience of your teachers, the size of your church, how regularly your students attend, etc. Look for lessons that have differing activities each week which are flexible, and that you can adapt to your group. You may need to try a few before you find a curriculum that really works for your group- that’s ok. Most are sold in quarterly semesters, so you’re really only committing to 13 weeks at a time. If you’re really overwhelmed by the selection, contact BCBC’s office and ask what some of the other churches in your area are using. We can put you in touch with others in the Conference who can let you know what’s working well for them.

*Learning Modalities-*

Learning modalities are how we best absorb and process information. There is plentiful information available online about learning modalities, and I will not attempt to provide a comprehensive explanation of each here. Here is an overview, which should help develop a balanced lesson plan. If this is a new concept to you, I encourage you to do a little study on this topic so you can ensure each lesson has something which will relate to each modality.

Understanding the learning modalities (Visual, Aural, Reading/ Writing, Kinesthetic) helps you plan a balanced lesson. We all have a dominant learning style, but most of us use a combination of more than one modality. The VARK model is one model which explains the various learning styles and how to engage learners with each style.

Additionally, we may receive information using one modality and process using another. So for example; I receive information visually and through reading/ writing and diagrams, but I tend to process information aurally (so I talk to myself a lot!)

For a comprehensive description of each learning modality, refer to:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning\\_styles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_styles)

**Traits of auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile learners.**

<p><b>Auditory learners tend to...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enjoy reading and being read to.</li> <li>• be able to verbally explain concepts and scenarios.</li> <li>• like music and hum to themselves.</li> <li>• enjoy both talking and listening.</li> <li>• Use phrases like “I hear what you’re saying”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Visual learners tend to...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have good spelling, note taking, and organizational skills.</li> <li>• notice details and prefer neatness.</li> <li>• learn more if illustrations and charts accompany reading.</li> <li>• prefer quiet, serene surroundings.</li> <li>• Use phrases like “I see what you mean”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Kinesthetic learners tend to...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be demonstrative, animated, and outgoing.</li> <li>• enjoy physical movement and manipulatives.</li> <li>• be willing to try new things.</li> <li>• be messy in habits and surroundings.</li> <li>• Use phrases like “We need to tackle that; let’s hit the ground running”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tactile learners tend to...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prefer manipulatives when being introduced to a topic.</li> <li>• literally translate events and phenomena.</li> <li>• tolerate clutter.</li> <li>• be artistic in nature.</li> <li>• Use phrases such as “Let touch base on that; I feel we need to...”</li> </ul>

*How do I use modalities to build a lesson plan?*

A balanced lesson plan will include activities that use each of the modalities. Repeating chants or singing songs will reach your aural learners. A physical activity such as tossing a beach ball while asking and answering questions will engage the kinesthetic learners in the group. A white board with a time line will anchor historic events in the mind of the visual learners. Use a combination of activities in your lessons to ensure that each style of learner can benefit from some materials presented in their predominant learning style. Using a variety of styles will provide enough change to keep all of the children interested and engaged, and there's great value in helping children learn to learn using the different modalities. Adapt your lesson plans from your curriculum to ensure movement and interest.

Think of several ways to present the same information. Is there a song that tells the story? With older children, look for worship songs that cover the same theme as the lesson; if the story is about trusting the Lord, maybe a song like "I Will Follow" by Chris Tomlin would work.

***A lesson planning committee is a great way to work as a team of teachers, to create interesting lesson times. Use colored post it notes, and brainstorm about ways to cover material; memory verses, songs, movie clips, crafts, etc. Write all verses on one color, movie clips on another, crafts on a different color, and so on. Think of more activities than you think you'll need, and then build a number of balanced lessons, ensuring you have a variety of activities from each of the different categories. A lesson with many different colors of post it notes will cover a variety of learning modalities and keep things interesting. Use the multiple activities to make 2-3 lessons out of the ideas and gain the benefits of staying on the same story for more than one week. The colored post it notes ensure that you are building a balanced plan over several weeks.***

With pre-school children 2-4 years, I love to use flannel graph materials. It allows each child to hold a piece of the picture (tactile), they can wait for their turn while they listen to the story (Aural), then they can help build the picture (visual). After I tell the story I ask the children to tell it back to me. They decide which part of the story they want to tell, and they can build the picture with the flannel board.

*Warm up Activities-*

As I plan a lesson, I always start with a short time of sharing with the children. I gather them together and I ask them what's new with them. It does a couple of things; it helps me get to know the children and what they are interested in, I can get a feel for where the children are at on that particular day, it helps reduce the interruptions later on in the class because each child has had a chance to share. Ask the kids what's "cool" in their world; what is the current pop culture fad? Being interested in what they care about communicates you value them.

With pre-school kids, using play dough or coloring pages as a warm up activity allows the children to settle into their class time. If you have new children to register or someone is having a bad day, or you have a crier to calm down, the other children can spend some play time easing into the class. As you sit with the kids, ask them to share what's new in their lives, ask them if there's a story they'd like to tell. After they've shared, work into the rest of your plan

## **Worship with Kids-**

### **Psalm 8**

<sup>1</sup> LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> *Through the praise of children and infants  
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.*

<sup>3</sup> When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,

<sup>4</sup> what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?<sup>[c]</sup>

The Living Bible states it this way:

*Ps 8: O Lord our God, the majesty and glory of your name fills all the earth and overflows the heavens.*

*You have taught the little children to praise you perfectly. May their example shame and silence your enemies! (TLB)*

Jesus quoted this Psalm in *Matt 21:14-16*

*14 And now the blind and crippled came to him, and he healed them there in the Temple.*

*15 But when the chief priests and other Jewish leaders saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the little children in the Temple shouting, "God bless the Son of David," they were disturbed and indignant and asked him, "Do you hear what these children are saying?"*

*16 "Yes," Jesus replied. "Didn't you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, 'Even little babies shall praise him!'"*

### **Luke 10:21**

New International Version (NIV)

*21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.*

There are pros and cons to having a separate worship time with the children.

Some cons-

- many families want to spend the worship time with their kids,
- it makes the service longer for the teachers; they'll have the children for more time
- it takes time to source the music, create power points, etc
- not everyone feels comfortable leading music in front of a classroom of people
- song choice is key in keeping children engaged

Some pros-

- it's a lot of fun
- you can integrate children's music into the regular worship time with the rest of the family
- it's a great way to get the wiggles out
- it helps them to memorize scripture
- it is a great opportunity to focus on who God is

Some things to keep in mind about planning worship for children:

Most important: Be energetic, not apologetic! If you convey at any point that you don't love the music and value worshipping together you'll lose the kids. Target the older boys in your class to ensure the rest will engage. If you can win the 10-12 year old boys, the rest of the class will follow.

Ask your middle school kids what they are listening to, and who the "cool" Christian artists are. They'll give you great ideas.

Choose age appropriate music for the age group. If you are leading a large group, with all of the children, aim your music at the oldest kids, as they will lead the younger children and help you "sell" it to the young kids.

There are so many resources on line for videos, presentations, sign language- you really can keep it as simple or go as big as you like. If you have musicians who are willing to lead, ensure you can use them effectively. Ensure the leaders have the ability as well as the desire to lead. As leaders of your Children's Church, you need to uphold a standard and ensure the quality of the music/ worship will allow the children to worship God, and learn about who He is in the process. Choose the music leader carefully and monitor how the children respond/ participate. If the children do not engage, or misbehave during the music time, you need to re-evaluate the structure and content.

## **Classroom management-**

Discipline is not the enemy of enthusiasm. Consistency will provide security for the students. A good set of boundaries, and consistent application of the rules actually help students feel safe and secure in the classroom. If they know you won't allow them to misbehave, they will also know that you won't allow others to misbehave. If children know where the boundaries lie, and that they are firmly enforced, they will stay within the boundaries.

Use SMARTie rules- they are easy to remember, and they cover nearly every situation. If you think of the typical challenges with misbehaviour, they will fall into one of these 5 categories. You can post them in the classroom, and even your youngest students will be able to understand them.

S- Safety first

M- Manners are important!

A- Attention to tasks

R- Respect for self and others

T- Take care of our things

## **Attention grabbers-**

Teachers in school use clapping patterns to get the attention of groups of children. The children all know this, so use it in your classroom. Clap a simple, short rhythm and wait for the children to echo it back to you. You may need to repeat it a couple of times, but school age children from kindergarten on know that they are supposed to echo the clap, stop talking and listen to their teacher. You'll have their full, focussed attention and you'll be able to direct them to the next activity.

Use recorded worship music in the background when the kids are working on their activities. It's a great way to evaluate whether a song will be a "hit" if you want to add it to their worship time. You can also use the volume of the music to regulate the volume in your classroom; if they can't hear the music, their voices are getting too loud.

Teach active listening to children; Eyes on speaker, not talking, listening only to teacher and listening for directions. Keep the subject simple, give clear directions.

Keep boundaries firm.

Walk around the classroom and position yourself near the disruptive students. Standing next to disruptive students will just refocus them and let them know you're aware they're not paying attention. You don't need to draw attention specifically to the child, most of the time, your presence near them is enough to redirect them.

Talk to the parents of your difficult students; not to complain, but to find out if they're aware of any techniques you can use to help manage their child's misbehaviour. It is critical you do not make accusatory or judgemental statements; simply ask with the intention of learning how to best direct the child, so they may learn as much as possible.

### **Myth busting-**

*Myth 1-Every lesson plan should include a craft or take home page.* How often do you wind up throwing out crafts that have been left behind? There may be better activities that will help anchor the lesson. Could the kids decorate sugar cookies instead? Or make "gingerbread" houses with graham crackers and candies at Christmas? What about a giant growth chart that shows Goliath's height at 9' and then you can measure the children against it?

*Myth 2-You can't teach a large group across a wide age range.* Use large group/small group teaching. Use your older students to enact stories, do dramas or role playing. Teach the large story in a large group. Break into smaller groups, divided more by age and develop questions and discussions that will help the children draw from the lesson at their level. You may decide to develop age appropriate activities or crafts for the groups

*Myth 3- Teachers need to be able to do it all-* Not true! If you have someone in your church who likes to craft, ask them to develop the crafts each week for you. If someone enjoys reading stories, have them do that. Some people are really good at crowd control in the background, but don't want to speak in front of a group. Find a way to invite volunteers into the classroom that will allow them to serve at their current level of challenge, and serve in the way God has made them.

*Myth 4- Teachers need to be very knowledgeable and have all the answers.* Wrong again... That's what good curriculum is for! It's totally fine to tell the children you want to ask the Pastor for an answer to questions you don't know the answer to. Don't allow the Devil to lie to you and make you feel inadequate for the task.

### **Child Safety Policies-**

You need to have measures in place to protect the children who come into your care. Pedophiles don't look like creepy, scary monsters. The truth is they tend to be quite likeable, and they are master manipulators; of children, but also of the adults around them. How many

of you are tired, and have been teaching for longer than you'd like, because there just aren't enough volunteers? That's the norm in most of the churches I know! Pedophiles know this too- so when they arrive in your church they set about doing 2 things; gaining your trust, and then gaining access to your children.

Good structure which includes a police background check and application process lets people know that you take security seriously. Here are a couple of things to consider:

- Class room set up should include windows in the door and no hidden areas/ corners.
- No classroom should have less than 2 adults in it at any time. The 2 teachers/ volunteers shouldn't be related to each other.
- Any ministry involving children or youth should have Security Policies in place to protect vulnerable children and provide structures that minimize both the chances of abuse and false allegations against workers in the ministry. Most liability insurance policies require some sort of policy to be in place. Very often, if such a policy is not required it is recommended and the insurance company will provide a discounted rate if the policy is in place. If there is ever an accusation or question of abuse in your church, you will need to prove due diligence on your part. You need documentation as evidence to show you took reasonable steps to ensure the safety and security of the children in your care. Having safeguards in place also protects your workers from false allegations of abuse. As a ministry, it is important to do your due diligence and put measures in place to ensure each child who is part of your ministry is protected, and that your workers are equipped to keep those children safe. Sample policies are available from BCBC. A training record with a sign off by the volunteers should be kept in the church office.
- Criminal Record Checks should be required of anyone who is seeking to work in Children's Ministry.
- A formal application form/ process should be in place; good structure discourages abuse.

I hope some of these ideas are useful for you. Remember to have fun with your students! You will learn a lot from them.

Blessings!

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