

Narrative and Christian Education

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Abstract

Story is often viewed as nonessential fluff, especially with an increased emphasis on efficiency. However, this project explored how developmental research and practical theology make it clear that Christian education, especially when ministering to children, ought to emphasize how children fit into the metanarrative, or Story of God and God's people, as found in scripture. Specifically, my research explored Christian education as it is centered around the Biblical narrative, using a pedagogy that affirms narrative as an effective cognitive tool that leads students to understand reality and externalizes their internal understanding of abstracts. Finally, I clarified that Christian education must use narrative to bring socialization and learning together to develop Christians, connecting the stories of people to the Story of God and inviting people into critical participation.

Scripture and Christian Education

Without caution and alertness, well-meaning ministry leaders can fall into teaching moral lessons or superficial summaries. Rather, the Bible must be central to any ministry, particularly regarding teaching children. Without the divine testimony of the Bible, and God's action through it, children's ministry is at best no more than child supervision and entertainment, and at worst, giving moral lessons without grounding children in the Story of God and God's people. It is only through the story of God's faithful past action that there is hope in the Christian faith. Through the Bible's collective memory and assurance of God's continued faithfulness and its direction to the conversion of persons and institutions, the use of scripture within Christian education centers ministry on the Story of God.

One of the Bible's essential roles is to give God's people a collective memory, which develops personal identity in an identifiable community with a history and vision. Through continual return to the memories of the community, the past is preserved, and the present and future can be understood through that lens of hope and the faithfulness of God. When believers learn of God's historical character and deeds, hope for the future and trust in God's character develops. When ministry is subverted, focusing on moral lessons or framing the Bible as children's stories, the life-giving power of the narrative is lost. Children know that their bedtime stories are not real, nor are they expected to change their lives based on them, and without care, the same can be said for Bible stories. Rather, scripture ought to be read as the historical narrative of the community of believers in both children's ministry and in the larger church body, toward communion with one another and with God.

Narrative and Secular Pedagogy

Narrative as Cognitive Tool

- Story form is intrinsic to humanity
- Narrative creates emotional connection
- Stories invite audience to develop mental image

Narrative and Reality

- Understanding place within reality
- Emphasis on extreme limits of reality
- Invites into sense of wonder

Narrative as Teacher

externalizes internal understanding of abstract concepts

Narrative and Christian Education

Purposes and Paradigms

- Centered around Kingdom and Story of God
- Introduce to Jesus Christ
- Invite into life of faith and action
- Paradigms: Socialization and Critical Education

Narrative and Metanarrative

- God's people as complex and ordinary humans
- Faith tradition as Story of God and God's people
- Connection to metanarrative only through Story of God through Jesus Christ
- Push against single moral lesson

Holding Beliefs to Critical Participation

- Holding together scientific understanding with religious belief
- Movement to critical participation

Application: Preschool Unit Plan



- “Telling a part of the Story of God”
- Emphasizes interconnectedness of Scripture
- Uses child-appropriate language, but remains true to order, adding clarifying but not creative details
- Uses direct quotes when appropriate, especially from characters
- Engages Kieran Egan's *somatic* and *mythic* cognitive tools
- Read directly from scripture
- Points out source of story, invites to listen for specific matching language
- Reminds that the story comes from a bigger story- God's story

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