

Reflection Paper 2: Revising a Published Curriculum Using Three Approaches

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In this paper I will describe a lesson from a published curriculum, prepare a complete revision for use in a religious education context using the gym, park and wilderness models of curriculum development, address teachers to guide in their selection of an appropriate model to use in their practice, and reflect on what I have learned through this exercise.

I have selected a book we bought to teach my step-daughter first Penance and Eucharist published by Pauline Books & Media. There are four main sections in the book dealing with belonging to God's family, help to live God's way, Jesus giving Himself to us and special sessions. I will be using lesson nine, *We Enjoy God's World*, to do this exercise. The entire book has pictures and colorful illustrations with items in each lesson to connect the dots and color, material to read, questions to answer, and other activities. Lesson nine has several different headings. It starts with *We Share* and the question, "Of all the things that you have, which one do you like the most?" The next section is entitled *We Listen* which has a list and short explanation of the seventh through tenth commandments and relates the story of Zaccheus to the first of the commandments dealt with to illustrate a concrete example of what one would do, if stealing, to correct this. It then goes on with information on Blessed Titus Brandsma which the child can connect dots, color and read, with the central theme appearing in the newspaper he is holding on which the title "stand up for the truth" is printed. The next part of this lesson is entitled *We Choose*. This presents a situation in which a little girl wants to help children in a poor place and it relates that her Bible story-book was given to her little brother and asks if Kara can give the book to the poor with a couple other questions about what Kara can do and what they would do. The next area is entitled *We Grow* and asks the child to think

about what would be different if everyone lived by the commandments. Finally, *A Prayer* concludes, with 8 words to unscramble.

In the gym model of curriculum development, the lesson might be presented in this fashion. First, we would determine what our educational objectives were for the class. We could decide the objective is to relate each area covered to the title of this lesson, *We Enjoy God's World*, in order to teach this lesson. In determining each section of this lesson, the outline could be fit into a time-line providing for a number of minutes in each area including an introduction or closing, if desired. The present structure and order of the lesson would work nicely for the gym model. An example of a time-line for a usual 1-hour class could be as follows, in time order: Intro/We Share (5 min), We Listen (20 min), Blessed Titus Brandsma (5 min), We Choose (10 min), We Grow/Evaluation (10 min), and A Prayer (10 min). It would be very important to keep to the lesson plan so that watching the clock and keeping on schedule would become one of the duties of the teacher or assistant. *We Share* could be presented by providing examples of favorite things and the importance of sharing. Having the students' answer the question with their favorite thing could be related to sharing their things with others because enjoying God's world includes sharing. *We Listen* is the largest part of the lesson which has an examination of the rules to enjoying God's world. The focus here in the gym model is to have the students memorize these four commandments and explore how to obey and follow them. The point in light of the goal selected is we can enjoy God's world more if we obey the commandments. The information on Blessed Titus could be expressed in a minute, giving the child a couple minutes to connect the dots and color. It could be pointed out that standing up for truth and doing what we really believe

is right is a way to enjoy God's world. *We Choose* would allow the teacher time to ask the children questions to which he or she could either solicit or provide the answers, stating the answers in terms to relate it to our main objective. *We Grow* could be addressed by getting the children to think about what the world would be like if everyone followed the commandments. The teacher could use this time to evaluate the knowledge they acquired and ask the child to think about what would be different if everyone lived by the commandments. If they were having trouble answering, the teacher could demonstrate this by pointing out that no one would steal their things if everyone obeyed the seventh commandment, especially helping the one whose things were stolen in order to enjoy God's world. *A Prayer* could be accomplished by allowing the kids a minute to try to unscramble the words and then going over all of them. The teacher could then lead all the children in praying this final prayer or could allow each student a line each.

Some of the peculiarities of the gym model of curriculum development stem from Tyler's four areas of education: why (purposes), how (experiences), organizing (effectiveness), and measurement (testing). Tyler fits the scientific approach by creating a hypothesis of educational objective(s) which his approach then effectively organizes, imparts, and measures the success of passing on the learning objectives by testing in some way (Doll 52). Evaluation of students in the gym methodology would necessarily include some kind of memorization and memory recall in written or verbal tests. The written could include fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choices and matching columns of information. The verbal test might include a discussion with a chance for students to provide answers. This kind of approach with its measurement places a high value on informational knowledge learned in the classroom and does not address the level of

understanding or orientation to an incorporation of this new knowledge into previous understandings to gain a synthesized knowledge. Now I will examine how this same curriculum might appear if done using the park method for curriculum development.

The park approach to curriculum development is a student-centered method that begins with the students needs and accesses the past to meet these needs to provide for the student's growth. As such, it draws on what the child brings within their experience and present knowledge and builds upon that foundation resulting in the growth of the child. The lesson has pictures, colorful illustrations, connect-the-dots, items to color, material to read, and questions to answer. Using these many times sparks the children's imaginations and desires and could be a good place to start. If one were to start with the pictures and activities, in this case, *Blessed Titus* and *A Prayer* as particular titles and the other pictures in the lesson, these could be done incorporating the theme of the lesson, *We Enjoy Gods' World*. If used in light of the question from *We Share*, encouraging discussion about what the pictures tell the children about the theme could bring out some unexpected answers, furthering learning. While doing this, one could allow time interspersed in the discussion for coloring and unscrambling the words. After this, they could go into *We Listen* in which the commandments could be explained as helping enjoy God's world, after which maybe a children's version of the story of Zaccheus could be read, allowing the children to interact with the story by pretending to be a character in the story, or by acting it out as a class. In *We Choose*, the children would be allowed to answer the questions and, if the class enjoyed it, they could have two of the children be the characters, Kara and her brother, and let the rest of the children discuss the answers to the questions in light of the actors' actions. The teacher would need to give instructions

to each participant so that they could see the effect of the sister taking back something already given among other desired lessons. *We Grow* could be used to play the name the commandment game in which each student who can name a commandment gets a star and as each commandment is named, it is written on the board and the children are encouraged to explain why everyone obeying this commandment would make the world different. This would be a fun activity to help the children relearn the commandments while at the same time providing small prizes. At the end of the class, each student would be given a line from *A Prayer* so that the entire class would have a chance to pray.

This method of curriculum development does not necessarily follow the organization of the lesson plan as it is laid out in the curriculum developed by the Daughter's of St. Paul, but would be a natural progression in the starting point that was chosen because it goes from something the children were interested in, into the other parts of the lesson and permits time for them to interact with the theme and other subjects in experiencing the material of the class. This method, by design, is less a plan that cannot be deviated from as much as a chance to explore God's wonderful world we all share, highlighting the theme even by design. Anyone who uses this method must be able to take a new approach or be able to adjust the approach to the subject based on the reaction of the students and the input that comes from them so that the learning will remain student-centered with student growth as its aim. This approach also encourages the student to relate other knowledge or experiences to the subject being investigated so that the span of knowledge explored can be expanded in depth, length, width and breadth. The student actually learns more information, but within a context of relevance for the

students, not as a logical by-product of a progressively logical approach to the subject as in the gym model. Now I will discuss the wilderness model of curriculum development.

The wilderness model is also called the *emergent curriculum* inspired by the development of chaos and systems theory, evolutionary biology, and quantum physics. In this method of curriculum development, I get the impression that as an emerging and evolutionary method of curriculum development, any plan that is drawn up is subject to revision, change or replacement on-the-fly by the instructor based on student interest and question. Some of the ideas William Doll expresses on the CD are that as change is used as the basis for ultimate being, the students explore ideas from teachers' questions without a correct answer, assuming there is only one. It is important to make connections and interconnections between ideas with the starting point as unimportant. It is paramount the instructor be able to listen so that the connections between ideas can be pointed out and made in the students' minds. With this as a background to understand this method of curriculum development, Doll even states that he is suspect of a curriculum that is too rigid, almost making this method of curriculum development a non-syllabus curriculum development, as his remarks bear (Curriculum). This shows the difference between syllabus and curriculum, the former being a scheduled list of events and the latter the content.

A teacher who uses this method to either develop a curriculum or to just show up in the classroom with ideas to present *We Enjoy God's World*, would need to be well-versed in a variety of different areas so that he or she might be able to address all subjects that surface. The curriculum might start with the question, how do we enjoy God's world? There is no worry about a particular direction in the class since this approach

assumes every idea and thought is connected and interconnected in some way. The children do not even need books, though the pictures might remind them of things they might bring to the ensuing discussion about the question. This would mean this kind of class could be done in a room or outside in the grass. One important note is that the teacher cannot bring expectations of right or wrong answers with them into the class, but must be willing to explore each student's thoughts as they develop the ideas and learn. As they go from subject to subject, depending on the emerging or evolution of the classroom thought, the teacher should encourage and point out linkages between subjects as they are broached and explored. For example, as the class explores the question above as a starting point, there will be several answers such as playing soccer, eating, sharing my candy with my friends, going to church and getting all 'A' grades in school. We would explore the answers and how they reflect the context in which this class is meeting. This could bring linkages between the answers to reflect a more expanded way of thinking of the theme and its meaning for the student's lives. The teacher could then introduce the question of the seventh to tenth commandments with a review and short explanation of them. Ensuing discussion and exploration of these and their implications into living might evoke answers creating inter-connections with ideas evoked in the first discussion. The linkages may lead the instructor to tell, read, summarize or have students act out the story of Zaccheus and allow the students to interact with it. The interaction brings on more discussion and linkages, exploring in other ways the central lesson. Giving them a few minutes to unscramble the words in the prayer allows a short break so that students can have a variety of activity. The teacher could ask if anyone has any thoughts on the eight statements in the prayer, permitting more connections to be made.

The complete original curriculum may never be completed because the natural progression of connection and interconnection in discussion may take the group in a different direction while exploring the topic. Now that I have explored these three methods of curriculum development in light of this lesson, I will address teachers to guide their choice of method in developing their curriculum to use in their classes.

Religious educators, each of the three models in developing a curriculum I will outline focus on different things and accomplish different goals. Choosing the best one for your educational practice is important so that you might be able to better plan and execute your class, maximizing the benefits for your students. The three models are called gym, park, and wilderness. The ***gym model*** takes its starting point from the educational objectives you have for the particular class. This highly structured model is based on a lecture format where the student comes to gain new knowledge from the teacher who gives it. Usually, this kind of class has a rigid time-structure and the students must fit into the outline. There is not much time provided for discussion, if any is allowed at all. The ***park model*** is a student-centered method with the goal being the growth of the student. In this method, the structure is more flexible and liable to modification as students are provided time to look at their present understandings and interact with the new information presented. Discussion is integral to this process which allows synergistic learning to take place, where the discovery of two people can be combined to learn something new that the teacher had not intended. For this reason, the teacher has to be able to think on his or her feet and be well versed in the subject matter they are teaching. The ***wilderness model*** is a method based on chaos theory and allows the teacher to start wherever he or she wants. The requirements for teacher flexibility and

expertise in a wide-area of study are greatest in this method. It is paramount in this method for the teacher to listen and be willing and able to explore ideas with the students and be able to make connections and interconnections between different ideas. For an RCIA class, for example, while the gym method would handle the time element well, the park model or some form of it such as Thomas Groome's praxis approach would work best because it allows for synergistic learning and for the student to grow in understanding from the present to the future in the classroom (Groome Ch 9 & 10).

The first major impression on me is that the exercise cleared up much confusion I had about the wilderness model. Throughout the class, it seemed the park and wilderness models were close in approach. After this exercise, I have a much clearer distinction between these two methods of curriculum development. I also learned I was correct in associating Groome's praxis approach with the park method. The level of expertise required for each model seems to be an ordinary level of understanding in using the gym method, a higher level of expertise for the park model and the highest level using the wilderness method because the curriculum developed will necessarily be a generalized guide or even simply ideas and thoughts the teachers shares with no syllabus or outline to guide the class at all. The wilderness model may be useful in the hands of an expert, but this model reminds me of a group of friends getting together and talking about a variety of subjects with each person being open to new ideas and without the teacher or expert who can answer every question, assuming there is only one correct answer. It seems the underlying assumption in this model is that there is not necessarily one correct answer, but interrelated truths that we examine and recognize connections with other truths. I would imagine that being in a wilderness model-applied classroom would be exactly that,

a discovery event in which we make connections between different ideas and build a base of knowledge from the participants' interests and the direction in which the conversation goes. I also noticed that a time structure can be used in the park model, but because this method has a different goal than the gym model, student growth, topic coverage can be curtailed or modified to accomplish this goal, if needed. The teacher really has to be alert and aware in using this method because this method requires the teacher call from students their present understanding and build on that so that the student come away with a greater, more integrated understanding than they had before the class. This seems to be part of the teacher's responsibility, to assist students' to integrate the new information into the present understanding.

Works Cited

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