

THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF CURRICULUM THAT TRANSMITS NAZARENE CORE VALUES

John K. Bondy
Korea Nazarene University

Introduction

Christian Education has not always been consistent with its dedication to curriculum development. These inconsistencies can be found in various areas including a lack of training. Many seminaries require little if any training in curriculum development or childhood education for pastors. Countless children's workers and leaders, while deeply dedicated to the work of Christ, are woefully deficient in their understanding of the critical role of curriculum. These inconsistencies have caused children's curriculum to become Bible-lite or generic. Anybody can have curriculum. However, the curriculum of any denomination should reflect its distinct core values. This study focuses on the quality of curriculum for children's education in the church. Particularly its purpose provides impetus for rapprochement with curriculum and denominational core values. The thesis of this work is that all fundamentals of the doctrinal core values can be provided in the curriculum for children.

Official denominational high quality curriculum is essential to the future of Christian education. No one argues the reasons for producing curriculum that integrates doctrinal distinctives and core values. However, researchers have never examined denominationally developed curriculum for its correlation to denominational core values. While this work specifically focuses on denominationally developed children's curriculum in the Church of the Nazarene, it can be applied to any major denomination. Nazarene material is generally Bible-based cognitive and orthodox material, which leaves little room for integral doctrines of the church, compromising other essential core values. In addition, it is plausible that when curriculum is developed cooperatively with several denominations it will not be inclusive of denominationally distinctive core values, such as Wesleyan holiness, heritage, traditions, missions, global awareness, sacraments, rituals, and symbols of the church. Since developers produce curriculum in consortium with several major holiness groups, there is a need for evaluation. Deliberate implementation of the core values is necessary to utilize official curriculum to educate its children about the core values for two reasons.

The first reason is because of children's acute spirituality and learning readiness. It is well known that most of those who give their lives to Christ, do so before age eighteen. Theorists of the 21st century argued that children's cognitive development is different due to a lack of quantitative experiences. Children who do not have the opportunity to learn the core values during their formative years may not continue to be part of the church, or fully understand God's purpose for their lives. The Bible shows God's interactive work with children. God gives children to the church so that God may be known (Mercer, 2005).

Second, curriculum remains an influential medium for children to be exposed and to learn the core values and holiness traditions. The publication of the core values itself does not automatically function alone to transmit them to the next generation. Effective curriculum should be developed because children are the urgent task of the church and family. Every denomination has a vested interest in their children who are vital and critical to the future of the church. Curriculum modifications are needed to provide a complete correlation to the core values to maintain the church's integrity, global identity, and provide doctrinal essentials for all children.

Three observations on current phenomenology of the church provide significance for children's curriculum evaluation. First, the church is in danger of losing its heritage. The ability to guide the church into the future lies in the power of the church to provide a heritage for its children. During the holiness revivals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the founders of the holiness movement including Methodist, Nazarene, and Holiness churches were actively living what they also taught. They were *sanctification natives*. Their children (the depression generation in USA and the later baby boomers), however, became *sanctification immigrants*. They were exposed to their parents and understood it secondhand. They could talk about it using the words or jargon of the experience of sanctification. These *sanctification immigrants* became parents of today's children, who are no longer familiar with or being exposed to living the life of holiness. The concepts are not even espoused in denominational curriculum of the Church of the Nazarene. This generation has become *sanctification aliens*. Children today are no longer hearing the heritage of holiness, seeing it displayed in their homes, or given opportunities to learn about it. They struggle with the experience of sanctification, much less being able to explain what it means. The curriculum never exposes it or the teachers never mention it. There is nothing to aspire to. A declining level of theological knowledge is the trend today. Childhood theology has to consider beliefs and practices within the community of practice or "habitus" holistically. (Mercer, 2005, p.31). Children are rapidly and increasingly being exposed to other post Christian non-Biblical doctrines, cultic philosophies, and eastern meditations. Popular actors, sports heroes, and musicians exhibit secular views and are propagated by the digital age in new and enticing ways. Their selfish, sinful, secular views on life are seldom in line with those of evangelical Christians, yet their influence through media forms is powerful. Highly visible mega churches with digital power exude great influence, but can be generic and Bible-lite in nature. Historically, they are not founded on solid orthodox, doctrinally distinctive identities; but tend to be market driven with visual, enticing allurements of shallow proportions. Even the church is influenced by the post-Christian digital age. God's legacy and church heritage are easily forgotten as exemplified throughout history in the Bible.

Second, today's family problems are complex. High divorce rates plague many emerging countries with single parenting, working mothers, and an increasing number of people merely cohabitating. Children need to know the core values, because they may not be in church as adolescents. The influence of the world is luring them through digital media. Without the protection of strong Christian homes with parents who exemplify Holiness, they will not continue attending church as teenagers or experience the power of Christ in their lives.

The third observation revolves around struggles with the curriculum. Specifically, the first challenge is propagating denominational core values, while working with the Holiness cooperative in designing curriculum outlines and providing curriculum that will be purchased by other Holiness denominations. While nothing is better than unity in the body of Christ, the challenge of maintaining the unique nature of each denomination is also important. Solutions must be sought in ways to work together, yet maintain each unique denominational identity. Unity does not mean ecumenical widget stamping of a generic Christian, but rather a diversified Christianity that exemplifies the love and power of God.

The next challenge of the curriculum developed out of the abundance of child theorists in the late 20th century who have contributed to Christian education. Many of these theories caused a reaction of the curriculum developers, to not include various spiritual concepts in children's curriculum. It became normal to consider certain biblical abstract concepts improper for certain

levels of child development. Theorists gradually began to have more influence than the Bible as the model for education. Larry Richards found that the behavioral sciences were a rich source of questions but a poor source for answers (Richards, 2005). This research provides an argument from recent theorists that children can learn more abstract principles than previously thought from Piagetian and Neo-Piagetian theorists. This study argues that children are important to the church, can be part of the church, and can actively be involved in learning its heritage.

Another challenge in the development of children's curriculum is the lack of generational loyalty. Past generations were loyal to the church and understood the long range implications of leadership in using denominational curriculum. Generation Xers and digital natives look to pragmatic solutions for the moment. The current sentiment is that they do things their way. A dynamic individualism rather than denominational community based on loyalty and commitment prevails. Some children's departments with no connection to balanced official denominational curriculum are utilizing more entertainment modes of curriculum or approaches. A rotation system of workers, who lack commitment to children's ministries, causes a discontinuity of leadership. Workers do not miss out on what they want to do. In principle, it is not a Christlike ministry, but a selfish, pragmatic driven ministry.

The last challenge of Nazarene curriculum is to propagate a positive image. Sometimes, if the curriculum is perceived as the denomination speaking, it is not positively received. Untrained pastors and leaders would rather purchase "Bible-lite" material from the internet with its cute bells and whistles that also waves a lower price tag. Human nature tends to desire the new, exotic, and even erotic in the digital media age. Curriculum is generally chosen for its ease of use and its appeal to the media entertainment oriented generation of children. Non-denominational curriculum must cast a broad theological net to be marketable and offers a lite theology that reduces Christianity to the "lowest common denominator" (Mercer, 2005 p. 147).

Recent Trends in Children's Curriculum Studies

This section reviews recent trends that impact curriculum development. One problem was that the churches' curriculum development began when the theorist started to have more influence than the Bible in modern Christian education. During the latter part of the 20th century, theorists advocated developmental theories that influenced Christian education to leave out abstract Bible concepts for children. Christian education must be considerate of theorists, but do not build Christian educational foundations totally on their work.

Recent theorists are supportive that children can learn more than previously thought. Pascal Boyer (2006) studied how religious representations are acquired by children. According to Boyer, three conditions must be fulfilled for children to acquire religious concepts. First, they must possess the tacit principles that inform intuitive ontology. Second, they must be sensitive to violations of these principles. Third, they must use non-violated background assumptions to produce inferences about religious entities. Boyer (2006) maintained that religious ideas are highly contagious. Christian education needs to reflect on the social conditions of current culture, considering some of Boyer's findings that children are able to learn more than previously thought.

Jerome Bruner influenced curriculum development in the latter part of the twentieth century. Bruner explained and advocated a spiral curriculum proposing natural ways of cognitive development and it is in this spirit that children can learn any subject, at any age, in some form (Bruner, 1977). It is imperative to utilize Bruner and expose children to doctrinal concepts in developmentally appropriate levels in the curriculum. It is important to note that curriculum has a

threefold realm of influence. It reaches and teaches not only children, but also influences teachers and the home. Theological concepts formally thought too abstract for younger children can be developed in the curriculum for the benefit of the teachers and the home and to expose the concept to the children.

Methodology

This qualitative research investigated the correlation between the official curriculum of a holiness denomination and its core values. Specifically, it sought the relationship between elementary curriculum produced by the Church of the Nazarene and its denominational core values. The *Core Values* include three sections: Christian, Holiness and Missional. They are foundational to the church's sixteen Articles of Faith in the manual. These three sections correspond with orthodox, orthopathos, and orthopraxis. The *Core Values* also align with the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The *Core Values* were defined as the dependent variable and the curriculum as the independent variable. A content analysis of the curriculum included unit and individual lessons, objectives, teacher resources, and parent connections to find the strength of correlation. Biblical texts, unit memory verses, and faith words were examined for the frequency of the elements of the core values of the denomination. Over 2,400 pages were analyzed for evidences of the core values elements shown in table 1.

Table 1: Elements of the *Core Values*

	<i>Core Values</i>	Articles of Faith (Church of the Nazarene)
	CHRISTIAN (Orthodox) Cognitive	
1	Trinity & Trinitarian Creeds	#1,2,3,5,6,8,9,15,16
2	Lordship of Jesus Christ	#2,5,6,7,8,9,12,13,15,16
3	Scripture	#4,12,13,14
4	Church Universal	#11
5	Wesleyan Holiness Heritage; Quadrilateral	#11
	HOLINESS (Orthopathos) Affective	
6	Holy God; The Holy Spirit	# 1,3,10
7	Entire Sanctification (Second Work)	#8,9,10
8	Christlikeness; Holiness Life	#2,10,11
9	Empowering Love for God & Neighbors	#3,10
	MISSIONAL (Orthopraxis) Behavioral	
10	Calling to Mission	#2,7,8,9
11	Worship	#11
12	Evangelism & Compassion	#11
13	Church: Discipleship (Bible Usage, Prayer)	#11

The span of curriculum for the inquiry included elementary curriculum produced from 2001-2006. Elementary includes curriculum designed for children ages six to twelve and are identified as three levels: early elementary, middle elementary and preteen. The study analyzed a complete two year cycle, fall 2004 to summer 2006.

Results of Research

This study found that the denominationally developed curriculum is high quality material in many ways. It held a strong correlation with the Christian orthodox section of the *Core Values*. However, it revealed a tragically weak correlation to the Holiness (Orthopathos) section, while many elements of the Missional (Orthopraxis) section were missing. The curriculum did not develop many of the *Core Values* elements, especially in the Holiness and Missional sections, known as the distinctive elements of the denomination. These results do not indicate that the curriculum is ineffectual, but rather gives those who develop it opportunity to continue enhancements to make it more practical in propagating denominational core values.

Conclusion

The research revealed seven major findings. First, there was a strong correlation between the curriculum and the Christian (orthodox) section of the core values. The curriculum researched was par excellent as an exclusively Bible based high quality, user friendly, and developmentally appropriate material. Second, a tragically weak correlation was found in the area of the holiness (Orthopathos) section that included elements of the Church universal (creeds etc), Wesleyan Holiness, heritage, traditions, entire sanctification, and missions. There are no heritage stories or exposure to the history of the denomination. John Wesley is never mentioned. Third, children are not learning global awareness and about other world regions within the denomination. Fourth, evidence of the Wesley Quadrilateral is virtually non-existent throughout the curriculum. Fifth, entire sanctification, one of the essential doctrines of the Church of the Nazarene as part of the holiness movement is virtually non-existent. It is not even included in resources for teachers. Sixth, missions are offered one time in one unit, but there is no other exposure or relationship to missions throughout the rest of the curriculum cycle. Generally, the children are not challenged to practice Christian ministry and to take an active role in the church. There are few opportunities for children to give to denominational offerings or serve in the church. The curriculum appears to be light in the educational affective domain. Seventh, the sacraments, rituals, symbols, and references to the church Christian calendar are not included in the curriculum. Does the Church of the Nazarene no longer believe in the sacraments?

This research concluded that the curriculum did not have a complete correlation to the core values. However, the research revealed that all of the core values could creatively be facilitated and taught in the curriculum. Children need to hear and see their parents, teachers, and pastors model and speak of their heritage within their own denomination. First, children need *exposure* to the concepts and they need to hear about people who testify to sanctification and have lived their lives demonstrating the power of a holiness lifestyle. Second, the teachers and children need *education* of the foundational heritage and the doctrines of the church integrated into the curriculum. If it is truly denominational and not generic, then it will be a higher quality curriculum. Denominational curriculum should not be part of a market driven, non-denominational package, which is generally cheaper, more colorful, and attractive with cute toys and gimmicks. Pastors and leaders need training to understand the critical importance of children and quality denominational curriculum. The quality of Christian education depends on the correlation of its curriculum has to

its denominational core values. Children should be the church's first priority and quality children's curriculum needs to remain as the central foundation of the church for the future. Let the church rise above the statement from the George Barna institute, that children are no longer important to the church (Barna, 2003). The general church, as well as local children's budgets must show that they support children. The current budget for children in most local churches is dismal. The challenge is for church leaders of each denomination to show support in producing quality denominational distinctive curriculum. Third, the children need to *experience* and be involved in the life of the church. They need to experience firsthand the doctrines of salvation, sanctification, and holiness as part of their spiritual formation. There are numerous opportunities for children to give, to serve, and to grow spiritually in the church. The curriculum needs to incorporate ideas for serving and living the life of holiness into each lesson. Finally, children need to be *equipped* with leadership training to fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

The church today faces three challenges. First, the church's curriculum has been influenced by the secular theories of the 20th century. Mainline denominations have been caught in the middle of influential theorists and their ambivalent portrayals of childhood (Mercer, 2005 p. 147). The Bible explicitly shows that God interacts, protects, and intervenes in the lives of children. Also revealed in the Bible are many examples of God calling children to servant leadership. Children should be actively involved in ministries and can learn all spiritual precepts through the help of the curriculum teachers and the Holy Spirit. God not only created children he knows them by name. Finally, the Bible expounds God's commands to the family and community to teach spiritual concepts through various media. The Bible never implies that children need to be withheld from certain spiritual concepts. Children are God's first love. He reveals His purpose to the world through children.

The second challenge is the changing generational paradigms and attitudes. Digital natives are no longer loyal to the denomination. There is the lack of qualified trained volunteer workers in children's ministries. The digital age has opened many avenues of alluring venues for curriculum that does not contain denominational traditions and core values. Withholding abstract concepts is robbing children of essential tenants of their faith development. Fowlers and Oser's theories are reminders that there is more to religious thinking than cognitive engagement with theological ideas, that the development of religious thinking is an ongoing process closely interrelated with identity formation (Gottleib, 2006). Officially produced denominational curriculum is the authoritative instrument needed to give children foundational religious beliefs and must propagate the core values of each denomination.

As the third challenge denominationally produced curriculum has a three-fold need. First, it must provide children, teachers, and parents with denominational core values. Bruner once said that curriculum is more for the teachers than for the pupils (Bruner, 1977). Second, it must equip these same people (students, teachers, parents), with developmentally appropriate tools to teach the core values. Third, the curriculum will remain the center of the faith community if it informs and incorporates a complete correlation to the core values. Parents, teachers and students who are living out faith in their lives are those who influence the world for Christ.

In postmodern culture the need becomes even more urgent to provide curriculum that teaches the vital concepts to faith development early in childhood. What elements of improvement are needed for curriculum to reach the 21st century digital native? As a denomination that provides its best for children the curriculum needs to incorporate three essentials.

First, the stories of holiness heritage in the Church of the Nazarene must be provided in its denominational curriculum. The current curriculum researched exclusively contains Bible stories and is strong in the orthodox section of the core values. However, children are not learning history of their own church. These stories should be incorporated throughout the entire church community. Children will hear stories of how lives have been changed. Pastors and leaders should share them beyond the identified curriculum. Children should be included in the stories through various forms of educational media and within the body life of the community. All too often children are segmented into areas void of the family gathered in community. They make too much noise to be in the worship service and are relegated to children's church; sometimes watching videos and high tech media, generally designed to be easy and entertaining. The children's church lessons are often unrelated to the Sunday school curriculum. The stories should also be connected to the global work of the church. With globalization, Christianity is not a local concept. No stories in the curriculum researched, considered those with disabilities or from other world areas.

Second, the curriculum needs to incorporate the orthopathos or the heart response. This would include providing symbols not only of its denomination, but of the Christian faith. Symbols of the Christian faith and calendar are needed to give tangible evidence of Christianity. Moments of personal worship and devotion are needed for decisions to be made in response to God's call on each child's heart. The most important symbols are those of the sacraments. Other symbols are emblems, flags, and drawings that are incorporated with Christian meaning.

Third, the curriculum needs to provide opportunity for the orthopraxis part of the core values. Christian practice and reflection on that practice, would include a time and section in each lesson designed to cause reflection on the previous lesson and how each student had lived out the truth called for in that lesson during the week. The church often misses opportunities for children to serve within its own community. Learning by involvement is crucial to spiritual growth. Children need to learn to obey their parents and practice holy living at home. Each lesson needs to incorporate a time of personal review and discussion of the previous week at the beginning of each lesson. The curriculum needs to motivate students to faith in action and not just faith connection. Leaders and teachers need to be trained in providing follow up reflection discussions that give time and grace for students to share their relationship with God and how their faith in action is working.

In summary, if the curriculum does not contain the core values of the Church of the Nazarene, the church as it is known, is at risk. Denominational core values are dead if they are not established in the curriculum. Christian education cannot escape the critical responsibility of training its children with denominational doctrinal distinctives. Curriculum has always been the foundational structure for Christian education. If it is not propagating denominational distinctives, children will suffer and lose their heritage. The church will lose its heritage. They will no longer be committed to the Church of the Nazarene, causing a leadership vacuum of young leaders who know the heritage of their denomination. Children are the church of today.

References

- Barna, G. (2003). *Transforming children into spiritual champions*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Boyer, P. (2006, June 7). Functional origins of religious concepts: Ontological and strategic selection in evolved minds. Malinowski Lecture, 2000" accessed 7 June 2006 at http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~anthro/blurb/b_boyer.html. 208-209.
- Bruner, Jerome S. (1977). *The process of education*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

- Gottlieb, E. (2006, Spring). Development of religious thinking. *Religious Education Journal* 101, 242-260.
- Mercer, Joyce A. (2005) *Welcoming children: A practical theology of childhood*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- Richards, Larry, (2005) Thoughts on Christian education, theology and the behavioral sciences, *Christian Education Journal*, 2, #1 162-165.