
A VISION FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Structuring the Model in Your Church

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Potter's Publishing

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Once upon a time...all Sunday schools and much of their curriculum looked the same. The purpose of standard curricula was to form a common theology and faith for children, youth, and adults. By the 1980s curricula were frustrating teachers and children were bored with Sunday school. The Search Institute Study (1990), *Effective Christian Education*, confirmed that congregational efforts in promoting adult faith maturity was disappointing and that changes were needed.¹

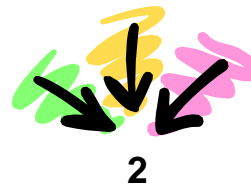
My question became: Was doing Sunday school the same way making sense? In the 1990s, experimentation in meeting children's needs for faith and spiritual formation led to a specific vision for a transformative Sunday school and curricula called the Workshop Rotation Model.²

A congregation's theology and context for ministry always shape Christian education and curricula. Congregations wanting transformative Christian education need three essentials:



First, leadership must have a vision for spiritual formation of its learners, children, youth, and adults, as children of God.

The life outcome and the goals of any new curricula will focus on faith maturity and nurturing the learners' spiritual gifts by doing ministry. The life outcomes desired and methods used, however, must be congruent.



Secondly, future curricula will be grounded in a solid educational theory. Gardner's multiple intelligences theory is one that promotes differentiated learning.³ Christian educators will call on a congregation's members to provide rich and meaningful experiences of faith. The educational process calls for the creation of stimulating environments and sustained personal relationships. Faith communities will call on adults to serve as coaches to a learning group so that participants experience true learning.⁴



Third, future curricula will integrate key theological and spiritual concepts across learning experiences⁵ and environments.⁶ New curricula will promote significant learning experiences so learners make "faith-connections" between key theological concepts, key Bible stories, and their lives.

The Workshop Rotation Model⁷ is a platform for making those "faith-connections" and forming a "faithful and spiritual learning community". Its approach and curricula assists a church in "morphing" to the realities of today's living and its context for ministry. Its curricula includes a strong theology, but one that is adaptable and strengthened by a church's ministry sensitive to its context. A congregation's theology can use any of the

theological approaches⁸ its leadership sees relevant to their context. Future curricula will be adaptable in its theological concepts, use of Biblical stories, and promote life-connecting environments with the experiences of the learners. In the future, curricula will be made available on adaptable electronic media.

Today's "high tech, high touch" reality is a theological and spiritual opportunity for re-doing our educational ministries to reach out to families, our communities, and our world.

The Workshop Rotation Model and its curricula can be a way to restore the "eco-system" of home, work, schools, and church..

It also recognizes the realities of today's living and time needed to nurture faith.

Today's realities call for curricula designs that value people's time commitments, but deepen their faith experiences through focused activities over a sustained period. Church leaders must ready their people for hearing the call to use their gifts and abilities in experiences that will link learner's faith to life.

The Workshop Rotation Model and its curricular approach are beginning to have a life of its own. It is developing like the World Wide Web. People in the new millennium are challenging a church's ministry by wanting

intimacy with God yet a God who is wholly other, and wanting to make significant contributions in a limited amount of time. Today's models and curricula developed for the future will anticipate and prepare the church's members for faithful and Spirit-led expressions of ministry by people of all ages and abilities. Curricula must connect with a learner's multiple intelligences and the Spirit's multiple gifts for the "doing of ministry" as a faithful practice. New education models and curricula in the new millennium must assist in making the Body of Christ a more proximate reality. †

Rev. Dr. J. Robert Claus (Bob) started using the Workshop Rotation Model in 1989 as the Associate Pastor at Southminster Presbyterian Church, Arlington Heights, Illinois. His wife, Joyce, who holds a Masters degree in curriculum and instruction, was the first advocate for use of "best practices" for the Model. Bob's D.Min. Thesis (1998), the first on the Workshop Rotation Model, identifies the underlying theological principles for transforming a church's educational ministry using this model.

In 1997, Bob and Joyce formed the Potter's Publishing to make integrated curriculum available for the Workshop Rotation Model. The first publishers of Workshop Rotation Model curriculum, and to date the only one using an adaptable CD format, they can be found online at www.potters-publishing.com.

In the Year 2000, Bob and Joyce moved to Morris, Illinois, where he currently serves as the Pastor for the First Presbyterian Church.

- 1 Roehlkepartain, Eugene C., *The Teaching Congregation*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).
- 2 The origins of the Workshop Rotation Model are from the Spirit. The Spirit seemed to settle simultaneously on two Presbyterian congregations in Barrington and Arlington Heights in Illinois. Neil MacQueen, my colleague in Barrington, has led in the use of computers in Christian education. My wife, Joyce, has written the first integrated curriculum for the Workshop Rotation Model. The Workshop Rotation Model began with children, but its principles an application are transferable to youth and adults. It is only a matter of time.
- 3 Gardner, Howard, *Frames of Mind*, (New York, BasicBooks, 1983), pp. 73-326. In his seminal work, Gardner identifies seven intelligences: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, body kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Since that time, he has added the naturalistic intelligence.
- 4 True learning is defined as "the transfer of what was learned in one context into another context." The Biblical root for this kind of learning is found in Matthew 11:29, the only Gospel reference to learning in the New Testament.
- 5 Jenson, Eric, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, (Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD, 1998), especially "Enriched Environments and the Brain."
- 6 See pictures of transformed classrooms at www.potters-publishing.com.
- 7 The Workshop Rotation Model is based on creating learning environments where video or media production, drama or puppets, art, computer or games, and Bible can be used to increase learning activity in a child's brain. Other workshops could be geography, cooking, mission, or current faith issues. It works by rotating learners through five to seven different workshops, classroom environments designed to help learners make multiple connections through integrated curriculum. Teachers are responsible for one lesson plan for a period of four to six weeks, adapting the context to the age appropriate level for graded classes.
- 8 Seymour, Jack and Miller, Donald, editors. *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999

