Including Young Children: A Case for Narrative Theology and Liberation Pedagogy in the Classroom

Abstract
Churches too often exclude children from the ecclesiological vision. Children often are not welcome in corporate worship, and church school pedagogies often undermine the insights children have about faith and scripture. This problem is underlined when one looks at the widely-published curricula that utilize banking pedagogies and focuses on right belief. In this paper, I propose a pedagogy with more integrity, more authentically aligning our liberation theologies with teaching that creates spaces for our young people to encounter God through narrative and relationships. By creating safe classrooms where children are empowered to claim their faith through narrative theology and liberative pedagogy, we will live into the inclusive eschatological vision of God’s kin-dom.

Main points of the analysis that will be presented
• The eschatological vision laid out in Luke 4:14-21 includes the goal for all to be liberated from systems of oppression, including ageism.
• Children are often marginalized from the church’s ecclesiological vision and workings. They are removed from corporate worship, and church school pedagogies undermine the insights children have about faith and scripture.
• Sunday school teachers are not trained to facilitate church school in a way that recognizes the worth of children in ecclesial life and the eschatological vision of God’s kin-dom.
• Curricula materials given to church school teachers reinforce these problems. Lessons seeking the correct answers to reading comprehension questions is not the path to rich encounters with God.
• Narrative theology changes the way one views the authority of scripture. It allows more space for openness toward the Spirit, the “other,” and ourselves.
• Narrative therapy puts narrative theology into practice. This creates empathy and social-emotional intelligence.
• Liberation theology sees God at work in marginalized groups and calls us to change the systems of oppression in our communities. When we teach from a place of liberation, the students are empowered to lead their formation.
• When students are included as active agents in the learning process, instead of being poured into, it creates an ownership of faith, a level playing field for the faith journey, and the total inclusion of all ages in the ecclesial body.

Description of methodology
• Literature-based review and analysis
• Conceptual analysis
• Insights from a community of practice
Selected bibliography of primary sources


Halverson, Delia. *How Do Our Children Grow?: Introducing Children to God, Jesus, the Bible, Prayer, Church*. St. Louis: Chalice, 1999.


