

How can Van Brummelen's Christian Curriculum Orientation help a teacher plan lessons from a Christian perspective? By Jaime Gibson B music MMTA

The function and goal of schooling is so much more than teaching students about topics that the school or the government has chosen for students to study. In "Steppingstones to Curriculum" 2002 p6, Van Brummelen says the underlining basis for making curriculum decisions should be determined by several key factors which include encompassing the overall predetermined goal of the school, making sure the school is leading students to discover meaning and therefore the school is helping humanity head towards a just and compassionate society. In looking at these tasks you can see that the role of the school is so much more than just education when seen through the eyes of a Christian educator. To effectively understand what is the Christian Curriculum I will examine three other opposing types of curriculum, the role of Jesus as teacher, what the bible says about the responsibility of teachers.

Van Brummelen's view of the Teacher as a curriculum planner discusses how the teacher is a filter working with a framework and that the teacher should always be "interpreting, revising and adapting guides and other published programs to suit the needs of your school and students" (Brummelen, 2009 p66) There is a weight and importance that the teacher must understand coming from the need for them to continually revise and assess the effectiveness of their resources and lesson plans for the unit as a whole and the individual classes.

There is a strong correlation that Van Brummelen acknowledges between the importance of a teacher being aware of the weight and importance of the teacher acknowledging their responsibilities, classroom management and organisation and what can happen if they are not willing to continually improve their teaching style and lessons, and what the Bible says about the role of a teacher in a student's life. Van Brummelen reminds us (Van Brummelen, 2009 p66) of Jesus saying in the Bible in Luke 17:1-2

¹ Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. ²It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.

The argument is put forward, which I agree with, that teachers can lead students astray in many ways, not just the obvious one of teaching them to sin through one of the seven deadly sins wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. Teachers can also

lead students astray by teaching in a way or with content that would stop students from learning and modelling the truth as portrayed by Jesus in the Bible. Therefore in planning class lessons the teacher should enable the students to be reminded of what the Bible says about how we should approach life and live it as Christians. If there is an opportunity to discuss Christian World views and how they are different to world views, or other that is being presented in a lesson, than it should be discussed. Upon having read two of Van Brummelen's books I feel the discussion should be open and participation from the students encouraged. To not do so could lead to the class feeling the teacher is perhaps being moralistic rather than presenting an opportunity for students to learn about our Christian Faith and world view.

Van Brummelen further reminds the Christian teacher that "teachers of the law are like stewards ("owner of a house") who bring out of their storerooms new treasures as well as old (Mathew 13:52)" (Brummelen, 2009 p66). Teacher's are a steward of knowledge and it is up to us in our lesson planning to be very careful with what we present and teach. We are to choose content that will make our students lives better. As adults we have all experienced times when we have made the wrong choices and know the consequences.

This level of thought and processing of knowledge, curriculum and content is an overwhelming task which is acknowledged by Van Brummelen (Brummelen, 2009 p66) "You cannot yourself develop or even analyse all curricula. Within the context of a biblical worldview, however you choose content and strategies that lead students to consider what Paul calls "excellent or praiseworthy" things (Philippians 4:8)"

Van Brummelen's Christian Curriculum Orientation is taught in "Steppingstones to Curriculum" and is brought about as it is not possible to teach a curriculum without some sort of orientation and view. As Christian's we adopt the Christian world view and curriculum orientation as we see the world through the eyes of Jesus and the Bible. There are four types of Curriculum orientation discussed by Van Brummelen: traditional, process/mastery, experiential and Christian orientation. It is suggested that a Curriculum orientation lays a foundation for basic worldview assumptions and how these would affect a view for the students education, a strong line of the thought on knowledge and of the person as a whole and how the teacher would plan programs for the student and finally the general aims of the curriculum (Brummelen, 2009 p25).

The traditional orientation would be seen as a school whose curriculum consists of carefully put together subject matter in the traditional subjects and where the school would emphasise hard work, strong ethics and discipline. Students are expected to store the knowledge they learn and use it to apply to rational thought throughout their schooling and

life. As Van Brummelen says these types of schools "... Believe that the basic feature of humans is their ability to reason." (Brummelen, 2002 p26).

The process/mastery orientation is a form of curriculum focus that is geared towards the production of an education that has a predetermined outcome. Knowledge is thought of as being an objective, impersonal, value-free commodity to be sought out in this style of education. Everyday living skills and practical requirements for a student to easily obtain a job later in life are regarded highly and are the focus of the curriculum to the detriment of a lot of thought on past history and what benefits can be gained from the study of it. In the Process/Mastery orientation students can be treated as less than human objects due to the focus on efficiency.

Experiential orientation assumes that students are good by birth and that they are masters of their own destiny (Brummelen, 2002, p31). This thinking contains large elements of the Constructivism Teaching style that includes the thinking that for learning to be meaningful it requires students to be actively involved and that knowledge is personally or socially put together. The biggest problem as a Christian teacher that I have with Constructivism is "There are no right or wrong answers, but only discrepancies that we help children to resolve" (Brummelen, 2002 p35). As mentioned earlier in Luke 17:1-2 God expects the teachers to teach students the ways that Jesus taught and to impart knowledge that will keep them from sinning. This means that as Christian Teachers we have strong views on what is right and wrong for everything around us and in our curriculum.

The Christian Curriculum Orientation starts with a Christian World View, which is the belief in a creator that informs everything else. "For Christians, the physical cosmos and human beings within it are the deliberate creation of one Lord. Life is no accident; it was intended. Our individual lives, therefore, will only find their true purpose when we connect with our source, God." (Dickson, 2007). Faced with this revelation there is no way that any of the previous three curriculum orientations can be the one and only method for me to teach from. John Dickson goes on to remind us that Jesus was a teacher and that his words were so powerful they went on to become proverbs in our culture such as Matthew 5 "turn the other cheek" and "it is more blessed to give than to receive" Acts 20:35

The role of the teacher in planning lessons within a Christian Curriculum is to help students attain a knowledge and skill background that allows them to grapple with important issues and concerns. The teacher is to share biblical truths and know that they themselves do not have all the answers but are sharing with the students how to find the right answer to problems and His will for their lives. The content of the curriculum should

be founded on “the student’s experiences of God’s created reality. Teachers choose content related to students’ experience in the past, or they allow students to consider and explore an aspect of God’s creation at the beginning of a unit or topic.” (Van Brummelen, 2009, p37)

Van Brummelen identifies five criteria for governing the choice of curriculum content and therefore lesson planning.

1. Choose content in your lessons that is relevant to the students lives
2. Look at your nation and culture and choose question to study that are relevant to them
3. Examine with the students the strengths and weaknesses of their cultural heritage
4. Always be helping your students to develop skills that will help not just in the classroom but also in society. Include in this the ability for students to be able to look at situations from various viewpoints
5. “Develop attitudes, values, dispositions, and commitments based on a careful consideration of the world views affecting culture” (Van Brummelen, 2002 p38)

In summary we can see from examining what the Bible has to say on the role of a teacher and mans Process/Mastery, Experiential and Traditional curriculums that a new type of curriculum was needed in order for a Christian Teacher to fulfil the role that God has planned for them. In examining the criteria that makes up the basis of a Christian curriculum I have identified there are several concepts that a teacher should keep in mind at all times when teaching such as; the focus should be on how they can enable students to see their world through a Christian world view and how we can equip them to succeed not just in the present but in the future and not just for themselves but for the betterment of their society.

Bibliography

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