

Educational Theories Inherent in Jesus Christ's Pedagogical Techniques and their Implications for Implementing the Early Childhood Curriculum

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Abstract

Effective teaching strategies tend to engender holistic development of learners. The study therefore, explores the educational theories inherent in Jesus Christ's pedagogical techniques and their implications for implementing the early childhood curriculum. The four New Testament Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) translated into English from the original Greek are primary sources of data for this study. Documentary analysis procedure was used to unearth the teaching strategies of Jesus Christ. The study revealed that Jesus used various forms of instructional strategies. On many occasions he used parables, questions and poetry to achieve his teaching goals such as critical thinking, internal change and harmonious living. Even though he had frequent interactions with individuals and small groups, he also lectured large crowds. Though he hardly ever used re-enactment as a teaching technique, he used it with such dexterity that it has become an essential teaching tool for his followers. His private and public use of prayer gave his learners content but also a model to follow. For learning in the affective domain he used apprenticeship. By the means of humour and silence, he modeled both how to teach and how to live. It was recommended to early childhood teachers to use teaching techniques which would help promote effective learning among the children. Finally, it was recommended to the teachers to be conversant with the kindergarten curriculum and to see to it that children-centered methods are employed to enhance effective teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms.

Key Words: Pedagogical Techniques, Dexterity, Flurry, Shred of Doubt, Sync and Re-enactments

Introduction

The close of the twentieth century brought in its wake a flurry of speculations about the people who have greatly influenced the course of human history during the second millennium. The Time Magazine concluded that without any shred of doubt the single most powerful figure in all human history has been Jesus of Christ (December 6, 1999). Whereas many would doubt this conclusion, only a few would deny Jesus a place among the great teachers of all time in the world. As a founder of Christianity, Jesus has greatly shaped and continues to shape political, intellectual, social and spiritual thoughts worldwide. The life and teachings of Jesus have over the years been subjected to critical scrutiny and as well been questioned, rejected, acknowledged and depicted for over two thousand years. Even though, virtually everything about him including his very existence as a historical person, is a subject of scholarly debate. Jesus's reputation as an effective teacher remains intact. Even cynics who tend to question his message often start by acknowledging his teaching prowess because of the effectiveness of the teaching strategies he employed in the course of educating his followers (Martin, 2017).

However, the issue of what constitutes effective teaching has been an area of interest to many researchers. Pratt (1999) in a study examined the relationship between a teacher's actions, intentions and beliefs and how it influences his work as a teacher. The findings of the study revealed that the implicit theories of teachers and their cultural orientation impact on their choice of instructional strategies. However, Apps (1996) in a study addressed the external technicalities of teaching as well

as the emotional and the spiritual life of the teacher. In a similar vein, Palmer (1998) acknowledged the need to strike a balance between the teacher's intellectual, emotional and spiritual paths. These studies suggest that the concept of teaching can be perceived from a holistic perspective. On the basis of this notion of teaching, the study explores the teaching strategies of Jesus Christ, taking into account the context within which he taught, the learning environments, he created, and most significantly, how he conveyed the content within those teaching contexts.

As a founder of one of the world's great religions, Jesus is an individual whose life has influenced several disciplines. Nevertheless, the main focus of this research and debate in the past has been on the spiritual and religious implications of Jesus's teachings. This study is a complete departure from the previous ones because the study focuses on Jesus' life and teachings from the point of view of adult education. For instance, the episode of the adulterous woman who was brought before Jesus is cited as an example, of Jesus's use of silence as a teaching technique. The moral and spiritual connotations are not at the heart of the discussion in this case. However, it is extremely difficult to separate a teacher's beliefs that constitute the central part of the teaching context from the teachers' character. Pratt (1992) has argued that "actions, 'intentions' and beliefs" constitute a dynamic and independent trilogy (p. 206). Pratt further asserts that "what" and "how" of teaching cannot be separated from the "whom". Even the "when" and "where" that is the historical period and the geographical location play a major role in the equation.

In a conscious or unconscious manner, every teacher makes decisions with respect to how to teach. Some may stick to carefully worked out lesson plans, others in a spur of a moment may open their mouths and start talking, some teach by doing whereas others tell stories or recite poetry. In today's technological world, a teacher may post a lesson on a website or employ power point technology to present or convey information to learners in a classroom setting or across the globe. This suggests that a number of teaching pedagogies abound as there a number of teachers.

In the case of Jesus Christ, the picture is an outstanding one: a teacher with a motley of teaching strategies at his disposal; a teacher who tends to run away from crowds and fame, but never misses a chance to talk with individuals and teach small groups, a distance educator who sets up a participatory re-enactment as a teaching strategy for prospective learners. He is a teacher who had a knack for playing with words which tended to silence his critics but often asks questions instead of answering them. Here is a teacher whose effective teaching is worthy of exploring.

Any curriculum is reflected in and shaped by the techniques used to support its implementation. As a result, teaching strategies figure prominently in the day-to-day activities of teachers and pupils. No meaningful teaching and learning takes place without adequate use of teaching methods (Wright, 1999). In view of the issues raised in this write up, the study would seek to explore the teaching techniques being used by early childhood educators in Ghana. This study is therefore premised on the view that some other factors, other than parables, influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. Early childhood educators can import life history data of Jesus Christ and his pedagogical teaching into their classroom events (Godson, 1983). The degree (how well) these pedagogical techniques can influence implementation of the early childhood curriculum is of great concern to the research community and this needs to be investigated.

Statement of the Problem

Even though previous researches point to the effectiveness of Jesus' use of parables as pedagogical technique, there is limited research regarding other strategies he used (Guilherme, 2017; Matthews, 2014; Reed, 2003). From the literature, a number of studies have been done to determine Jesus' pedagogical techniques but it seems a few of such studies have explored other equally important techniques used by Jesus (Pratt, 1999). This has often resulted in individual researchers focusing

(relying) extensively only on parables of Jesus as the main critical pedagogy (Apps, 1996) as against other equally important techniques Jesus used (Martin, 2017; Pyne, Scott, O'Brien, Stevenson & Musa, 2014). Since the existing research findings (literature) have not dealt extensively with the topic under study it becomes important to explore those other pedagogical techniques of Jesus and their implication for teaching-learning at the early childhood level (Matthews, 2014).

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the pedagogical techniques Jesus employed in teaching his followers (audience).
2. To identify major features of Jesus Christ's pedagogical techniques which are similar to the teaching strategies of the early childhood curriculum.
3. To examine the Educational principle Inherent in Jesus Christ's Pedagogical Techniques that can be employed in teaching at the early childhood level

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the educational principles inherent in Jesus Christ's pedagogical techniques and their implications for implementing the early childhood curriculum in Ghana.

Research Questions

1. What are the pedagogical techniques adopted by Jesus Christ in teaching his audience?
2. What are the major features of Jesus Christ's pedagogical techniques which are similar to the teaching strategies of the early childhood curriculum?
3. What are the educational principles inherent in Jesus Christ's pedagogical techniques that can be employed in teaching at the early childhood level?

Significance of the Study

This study is intended to sensitize policy makers, educational administrators, and curriculum planners on the need to plan towards effective implementation of the Religious and Moral Education in Basic schools. The findings of the study would guide early childhood educators to explore teaching strategies that are available for teaching-learning at the early childhood level. The teachers would then become motivated to use teaching techniques that will:

- Lead early childhood children to develop special love for academic work (learning).
- Promote critical thinking of their pupils. It should help to develop the thinking faculties of pupils.
- Give enough room for pupils' participation or involvement in lessons.
- Assist pupils to apply the knowledge they acquire in their daily lives or activities.
- Arouse interests of pupils in the teaching-learning activities/Motivate them to learn
- Make their lessons as practicable as possible.

Delimitation of the Study

Although there are many other teaching strategies contained in the Bible, this study was limited to exploring the pedagogical techniques used by Jesus Christ as found in the New Testament Bible. Examining all the teachings in the whole Bible would have been difficult.

Limitation of the Study

The design might have had problem in terms of sample size, instrumentation and internal and external validity which deals with the generalizability of findings to the wider Bible text.

Literature Review

Teaching is the conscious and deliberate effort by teachers to impart information, knowledge and skills to pupils, with the intention that they will learn what they are taught on good grounds (Akinpelu, 1981, p.190). It involves a deliberate, systematic efforts to inculcate desired behaviour patterns such as knowledge, skills, habits, sensitivities, attitudes and values and to do away with undesired ones (Tamakloe, 1992).

Teaching is a process by which one interacts with another person with the intention of influencing the learning of that person. It is the interplay between the teacher and the learners. Teaching, as a useful and practical art calls for intuition, creativity, improvisation and expressiveness. Teaching methods are those strategies which a teacher uses to effect learning. Learning on the other hand, are those experiences which the teacher puts the learners through as a result of what he (the teacher) does. If the learning experiences result from the teacher's method, then the effectiveness of these experiences depend largely on the appropriateness of the method the teacher has used. If he/she uses the 'wrong' method then it is likely to result in inappropriate experiences for the learners

Early childhood education

Early childhood education consists of activities and/or experiences that are intended to effect developmental changes in children prior to their entry into the mainstream school (Pascopella, 2004). Early childhood education programmes include all type of educational programme that serves children in the pre-school years and is designed to improve later school performance. Such programmes aimed at preparing young children for formal school. Early childhood education programmes produce significant gains in children's learning and development (Barnett & Jason, 2003).

Methodology

The study adopted Naturalistic/Interpretivist paradigm. It is based on the principle that individuals construct their own knowledge and understandings about the world and its phenomena. It is purely qualitative

Historical research design was used to explore the picture of Jesus Christ as a teacher as found in the biblical accounts that has been historically accepted by the Christian church. The design established facts and drew conclusions about Jesus Christ as a teacher in the past and their relevance present and future (Arthur, 2012; Cresswell, 2009). The Bible provides sound evidence about the past.

The four New Testament gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), Bible commentaries, and other Christian literature translated into English from the original Greek are primary sources for this study. Currently the bible has been translated into a least 2,303 languages (Reed, 2003). Unless, otherwise noted, the quotations in this paper are from the New International Version widely seen as a thorough and scholarly translation.

Data were collected through documentary analyses. This involved extensive study of the four gospels of the New Testament Bible. The purpose of the documentary study was to help in determining various methods used by Jesus Christ in order to reach his audience. The Bible contains the life of Jesus in his own words (Godson, 1983).

The documentary analyses procedure was used to unearth the teaching strategies Jesus used to educate his followers as derived from the data gathered. All the steps of content analysis as suggested by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) were followed in analyzing the content of the four New Testament gospels using the summative content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation of the four gospels. It involved a strict, systematic and rigorous analysis (scrutiny) and verification of documentary data (Krippendorp, 2004). For instance, it involved counting concepts, words or occurrences in the documents, coding, analysing and reporting them (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998).

Results and Discussion

The question about the techniques Jesus used to teach is at the heart of this study. Pratt (1998) defines teaching techniques as “activities that are meant to help people learn – a means of helping them to do something with the content (p.17). Jesus employed various forms of teaching techniques such as parables, questions, poetry, lectures, re-enactments, prayer, apprenticeship, humor and silence. Jesus employed these techniques to achieve his teaching goals. This list is arranged in a descending order: Jesus employed parables and questions most often and reenactments least often.

For educators of modern times, this study reveals Jesus as a teacher who tended to use specific tools for particular goals. Parables, questions, poetry, lectures were employed to develop the cognitive skills of Jesus’ audience. The last three techniques – humor, apprenticeship and silence, are less about “doing” and more about “being” because these instruments help to develop learners’ attitudes, feelings and perspectives about issues (Meir, 2001; Stein, 1981). Jesus taught and employed apprenticeship as the main teaching tool with his close followers. In the accounts of the four gospels, he used humour less often and silence only three times. Prayer is a bridge between the two groups of techniques. In one breath, Jesus used it to draw people together to engender his goal of friendly living. However, his own intense prayer life was also a model which underscored the need to live a worthy life. His constant use of prayer in his personal life, not just when he taught, blends into his use of apprenticeship as a teaching technique (Meir, 2001; Stein, 1981).

The diverse sections which define this part of the paper provide details about how Jesus achieved his teaching goals by this choice and use of variety of teaching techniques. Each begins with observations about the ways educators perceive each of Jesus’s teaching techniques. Documentary analysis involves summarizing and reporting written data. It has to with strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination and verification of the content of the written texts. It also focuses on language and linguistic features, meaning in context, is systematic and verifiable and also transparent and public (Flick, 1998; Mayring, 2004). The detailed analysis of the data is provided below.

Parables (Storytelling): Truth in a Nutshell

The parables (stories) of Jesus are justifiably famous, widely acknowledged as powerful, concise and insightful. The parables used by Jesus constitute the surest way of having insights into the person of historical Jesus but also constituted a critical part of his entire educational enterprise (Meir, 2001). Jesus used parables to promote critical thinking and created active listeners who had to think more deeply in order to make the connections that Jesus was making. They stimulated internal change by providing new ways to look at the world and that the downsides inherent in the use of parables, the possibility of confusion or misunderstanding did not diminish the power of parables in Jesus’s teaching. There are 61 of these parables of Jesus in the Gospels. The parables were about things, plants, animals, or people. They were stories about situations that could have happened to almost everyone. The parables were meant to teach spiritual truths, and each parable taught one truth.

Stein (1981) defines the word ‘parable’ as an earthly story with a heavenly learning. In Hebrew literature the word is used to refer to resemblance or comparison (Young, 1999) and the Greek version ‘parabole’ means to place alongside (Donahue, 1988). Metaphors, similes, similitudes and allegories can fittingly be described as parables (Stein, 1981).

Comparison is a key issue that is at the heart of parables. Jesus used parables in everyday realities to portray a word picture of an abstract theological concept. This is sync with the assertion by Donahue (1998) that “Jesus spoke a language of the familiar and concrete which touched people in their everyday lives but which pointed beyond itself and summoned people to see everyday life as a carrier of transcendence”(p.10). The parables of Jesus are comparisons in a story form that had a wider appeal across ages and cultures. For instance, the parable of the lost sheep is a story of the lost being found, a worry and sadness being changed into rejoicing (Mt. 18:13). Both the desolation of loss and the happiness of finding resonate with all manner of people.

On the superficial level, the parables are simple stories about everyday issues however, to describe them in this limited sense without probing the deeper meaning underlining the issue is likely to diminish their power and relevance. Always underneath the surface lies another layer of meaning, another possibility to delve into. For example, in the parable of the lost sheep, the deeper meaning explores profound theological concepts such as the reality of human separation from God, the unconditional love of God, his desire for relationship, the possibility of forgiveness and the cosmic nature of that relationship. Parables have wider appeals that could speak to the less educated and yet could also engage the mind of the scholar on a deeper level (Young, 1989). Possibly, Jesus would express this perception in another way and say that a parable hides “these things from the wise and learned and reveals them to little children (Mt. 11:25). Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30–36 was given in answer to a question that was meant to trap Jesus. The parable taught a spiritual truth without causing an argument.

Stories and parables have several purposes. They can only serve as useful pedagogical tools if only they can assist the teacher achieve his or her educational goals. The parables of Jesus provided an environment for learning at the deeper level. The stories immediately caught the attention of the learners, they engendered critical thinking skills by challenging the accepted view of reality, and encouraged the active participation of learners, and as well facilitated internal and external change. They built in the learners’ previous experience, allowing for learning to continue long after the teaching time was over. In short, they were ideal teaching which served Jesus’s purposes.

The parables were attractive because of the imagery and the poetic language Jesus used. The listeners could easily identify with the people and the activities in them: a lost coin, wedding feast, and a farmer sowing his seed.

Another goal of Jesus’s teaching was to help learners develop critical thinking skills which were needed to help people see issues in new ways. Many of the parables that Jesus told were meant to call into question established order in society and to develop critical thinking of the listener (Meier, 2002; Thompson, 1978). This stem from the fact that parables are meant to tease the mind of the audience into active thought to enable a learner draw meaning from the scenario that has been created. In addition, parables call for active participation of the learner. As Crower (2002) has observed that “there is never ready-made message that is transmitted from one to another, it is a construction” (p.10).

Finally, in using parables, Jesus was acknowledging the essence of effective education which recognizes the need for a lesson to build on learners’ previous experiences and knowledge. In his parables Jesus used objects and story subjects that were familiar to his learners such as birds, fish, sheep, water wine, fig trees, seeds and grains.

Good Questions: Instruments for Critical Thinking

Teachers learnt and practiced the art of asking relevant questions to encourage learning long before Jesus began to teach in Palestine. Socrates, a Greek philosopher is famous for using questions to develop critical thinking. Like Socrates, Jesus used questions extensively in the course of interacting with his followers. Gunn (1998) observes that the four gospels recorded more than one hundred different questions posed by Jesus. In Socratic teaching, the focus is on giving students questions but

not answers with the sole aim of developing a critical minded person who is eager for discovering rather than helping a learner to acquire a body of information about a subject (Paul, 2005). However, learners tend to acquire factual information as well.

Jesus used questions in the Parable of the Good Samaritan and also when He gave the Sermon on the Mount. By doing this, He helped His listeners understand the full meaning of His teaching

Jesus' questions were considered prodding and provoking. Gunn (1998) has outlined the features of several questions Jesus usually posed to the scribes and described them as original, practical, personal, rhetorical, stimulating, definite, searching, silencing, clear and brief. For instance, Jesus once asked the scribes: "Why are you thinking about these things" (Mk. 2:8). However, an attempt to determine the nature of the questions reveals the complex and multi-layered nature of Jesus's questioning techniques: Jesus asked what seems to be a practical question when two men, disciples of John the Baptist, began to follow him. The gospel of John describes the episode:

Turning around Jesus saw them following and asked "What do you want?" they said, Rabbi, where are you staying "Come", he replied, "and you will see" so they went and saw where he was staying and spent the day with him (John 1:37-39).

From an analytical perspective, on one level, Jesus asked a straightforward practical question and the men responded with a practical and an evasive answer. The invitation Jesus extended to them suggests more than an opportunity for them to see where he was living, rather it offered a possibility for a deeper relationship as they spent the rest of the day with him. Another example, of Jesus questioning technique unfolds in an episode recorded in Luke's gospel:

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have a dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping; she began to wet her feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself "If this man were a prophet he would know who he is touching and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner" (Lk.7:36-39).

After telling his host a story, Jesus asked him "do you know this woman?" Apparently, the question was purely a rhetorical one. In responding to Jesus's question, Simon, the host was more emphatic in his response. However, Jesus challenged Simon to see the woman in a new perspective but not as a despised outcast but someone who has done something Simon could not do. In one breath, Jesus's question was a rhetoric one but in another breath he was urging Simon to new insights and personal change in his attitude towards the woman and by implication towards all manner of people Simon considered outsiders. Thus, questioning was an effective tool used to help people think critically. The probing nature of the questions encouraged internal change. According to Gunn (1998), Socrates often used long series of leading questions to bring an idea to the fore however, Jesus questions were short, sometimes unanswerable, always challenging the learner to think more deeply to see anew, rather than to come to a particular conclusion. Hence, Jesus often used one or two short questions to engender complete attitudinal change in his followers. When telling them not to worry about their daily sustenance, He asked, "Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25). Another time Jesus wanted to teach His disciples about civic responsibility. He asked them several questions, including one that was directed to Peter. (See Matthew 17:25.) Jesus did not need Peter's opinion, or his thoughts on taxes, but He wanted Peter to think about the subject. This was an important part of Peter's learning. When telling them not to worry about their daily sustenance, He asked, "Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25). Another time Jesus wanted to teach His disciples about civic responsibility. He asked them several questions, including one that was directed to Peter.

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Poetry: An Ancient Form with Pedagogical Intent

Poetry is an art form with a long tradition as a pedagogical tool however; it is often neglected in modern western education which focuses on science-based knowledge. Those who are in favour of using poetry learning recognizes its power to assist memorization, to convey abstract thought and emotional intensity to sharpen creative thinking, to engender intellectual understanding of difficult situations, and to provide the means to deal with emotive issues (Bhgwati, 2001). The use of poetry forms an integral part of Jesus' teaching techniques because it creates empathy and understanding at a deeper level; it expresses the inexpressible and gives words to the inarticulate (Trueblood, 1964). Jesus words commonly termed as Beatitudes fit this description:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh (Lk. 6:20-1).

Jesus' Lectures: Lively and Learner-Centred

In religious education, the lecture format is the sermon. According to Gunn (1998), the difference between academic lecture and sermon is that the former appeals' mainly to intellect while the latter appeals' mainly to the emotions (Gunn, 1998). Jesus' speeches in the synagogues were usually in the form of lectures. Whenever, he taught outdoors, the format varied but it sometimes took the format of a lecture. At one instance for example, Jesus sat down and taught the people from a fishing boat. Jesus used formal teaching sessions whenever crowds of people came to hear him. Frequently, people interrupted his teaching by asking questions or requesting healing. On several occasions he stopped teaching in order to feed hungry listeners (Mk 6:30-44). At times, the Pharisees arrived during lecture time to ask hostile questions designed to trap him (Mk 10:11-2).

His lectures soon became a dialogue or small group discussions, sometimes Jesus responded to learners needs by abandoning his lecture and going with them to meet their request. The ebb and flow of people interrupting, demanding and questioning gave a dynamic lively dimension to the situation. Even lengthy public discourses were enlivened by Jesus' constant interactions with individual and smaller groups within the crowd. His discourses were interspersed with stories, poetry, and humour and probing questions. His approach to teaching encouraged active involvement of learners even when he was speaking to large crowds. In fact some scholars believe that Jesus only used lectures when no other methods seemed feasible and actually preferred to teach small groups and individuals (Gunn, 1998). Jesus did not seek to enlarge his audience and often tried to escape from the large number of people who wanted to hear him. Jesus put a low priority on lecturing: individual needs and individual dialogue became his priority in his public discourse. Perhaps, he could fittingly be described as reluctant lecturer, preaching to large groups when they came to him, but always willing to stop his speeches to meet individuals. In Matthew 7:28-29 that when He finished speaking, "the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." Jesus knew how to use lectures.

Re-enactment in Education: A Slice of Life

As teaching tool, re-enactment differs from the role-play teaching technique, which tends to be spontaneous at least on the part of the learners. Re-enactment requires preparation on the part of the learner because it takes several rehearsals to equip learners' with the requisite competencies to enable them re-enact an episode. For example, in the course re-enacting a war dance in certain traditional societies in Ghana, participants dress in war attires similar to warriors of old and as well move in a battle-like formation.

Jesus' use of re-enactment: Building on tradition of the Seder meal, the first pass over meal was re-enacted. Hence, it became part and parcel of Jesus' religious practice. As he celebrated the Passover just before his death, Jesus used enactment to create another layer of memory through the symbol of bread and wine.

Symbolic re-enactment is certainly a useful teaching technique for creating the type of change Jesus hoped for such as helping learners to identify with Jesus in his death, believers could experience the forgiveness of sins and the inner transformation which are requirements for living in the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: The Cosmic Shift from Earth to Heaven

Prayer is defined as "the solemn request or thanksgiving to God or an object of worship (Morain, 2001). In religious education, it is appropriate to use prayer as a technique of teaching and a means of engendering certain learning experiences. The gospels reveal that prayer constituted a key component of Jesus' life and thinking. Even whenever Jesus was busy, he found time to pray as he sought for strength. Jesus' last words comprised a sympathetic prayer for those who had masterminded his death. "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk. 23: 34). At the request of his learners, Jesus taught them a prayer for daily usage which is currently used widely in church service and as a model for correct prayer. Thus, Jesus used prayer as a means to remember his teaching, as a way to engender unity among disciples and as a hands-on demonstration of a practical aspect of living in the Kingdom.

Apprenticeship: An Age – Old model for Learning

Jesus' teaching goals were the same for all his learners; a new way of thinking, acting, feeling and being. However, he had an inner circle of disciples whom he had gathered together to live with him and to continue to teach his message after his death. His purpose with this group was two-fold: first to ensure their understanding of his message. Second, to turn them into teachers: He appointed them by "designating them as apostles that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mk. 3:14). In doing so, Jesus was following the ancient traditions of teaching by apprenticeship. His choice of this teaching style was justified on the grounds that these eleven adult learners who were already established in their various professions became such effective learners that they helped change the world.

Jesus and his Apprentice

Jesus offered his disciples the opportunity to become his disciples by calling them. Their apprenticeship was informal but comprehensive and life-changing. For the next few years after they joined Jesus' group, they lived with him as he moved from place to place. They observed his interactions with all manner of people. They were ear and eye witnesses of his teaching including explanations that he provided to questions that were posed to him. By allowing them to live with him, Jesus was fulfilling the criteria laid down by Fuller and Unwin (1998) for apprenticeship learning, which included ensuring that individuals have access and experiential knowledge.

In line with this Jesus often sent his disciples in groups of two for teaching practicum (Lk. 10:1-23). Thus, they were given a platform to develop their practical and intellectual capacities through the application of concepts and theories in practice. As they watched his interactions with learners and experienced the learning atmosphere he created, they learnt people skills. They saw in real-life situations a teacher who was compassionate, challenging and compelling even in difficult situations.

The Humour of Jesus: More than Jokes

Provided it is not used to hurt or humiliate other people, a sense of humour is useful. In teaching, it is an answer to boredom and a mechanism for creating a congenial atmosphere for learning. However, it helps learners to look at familiar ideas from different perspectives. Hence, it is an effective tool for developing critical thinking skills. It is a teaching tool with great potentials. Until lately, Jesus'

extensive use of humour has been a neglected aspect of teaching, partly because it is often obscured by translating from the original languages into modern ones (Morain, 2001). Jesus used hyperbole and irony to convey certain important issues in his teaching. A closer look at these devices helps to portray how their usage contributed to the explanation of certain concepts.

Hyperbole: Derailing the Humdrum Train of Thought

As a literary device, it serves several purposes: It paints highly exaggerated picture in order to surprise and amuse the listener; it allows a listener to believe a reality by depicting a greater falsehood; and it leads the listener into the world of the narrator through a sympathetic appreciation of the narrators' perspective (Morain, 2001).

According to Stein (1978), Jesus' use of hyperbole is a characteristic of Semitic speech. It certainly produces startling images: a lustful man plucking an eye (Mk 9:47), a camel struggling to go through the eye of a needle (Mk. 19:24). One memorable use of hyperbole came as Jesus advised those with a judgmental attitude. He asked why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your eye." (Mt. 7:34). The hyperbole creates a cartoon-like image of a large piece of lumber sticking out of someone face. The discrepancy of self-righteous do-gooder and his less handicapped brother amuses the listener but also creates new ways of thinking about attitudes and actions of people.

Irony: A Study in Contrasts

Irony is normally categorised as a humour, even though it may contain a tragic side to it. According to Stein (1978), irony is a subtle use of contrast between what is actually stated and what is more or less wryly stated. Stein distinguishes between two types of irony and finds examples in Jesus' teaching. In the story of the rich fool (Lk 12: 16-20) for example, the irony emanates from an event or result that is opposite to what one would normally expect: the surprising conclusion to the carefully made plans of the rich man. A second type of irony exists when the intended meaning of a statement is the opposite of the literal meaning. An example is found in Luke 7:34-35. Jesus's critics are complaining about his association with "sinners". Jesus describes these holier-than-thou critics as 'wisdom's children'. Thus, as a teacher, Jesus used irony to point out the possibility of change and of reversing the irony so that what is not true becomes true.

Silence is Golden

As it is usually common in many cultures, the teaching of adults is word-based and sound-filled profession. The lecture method which is a dominant teaching technique in many classroom settings tends to encourage a learning situation filled with the sound of the teacher. In a scenario where the learners become active participants they tend to generate more sound. This sort of learning context does not make room for learners to reflect on issues which are at the heart of the learning context. Because most learners live in a sound saturated environment, the concept of silence in learning context might seem alien. Even for those who acknowledge the need for silence, the reality of silence may prove distressing. Both teachers and learners may see silence as failure through the lack of skill in the teacher or lack of excitement from the learners. Nonetheless, meticulously use of silence is a powerful tool because it encourages listening, removes barriers between teacher and learner and creates space for multiple ways of knowing instead of word-based knowledge acquisition. Teachers who fear repressive silence may equate noise with active learning. However, sometimes educators need to step back from activity and reconsider the possibility of silence.

From the description of the Gospels, the learning environment in the New Testament times was a word-based one. Heated arguments, comments from the crowds, spirited debates and clever verbal exchanges marked intellectual encounters between Jesus and his learners. Jesus arguing with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law brings to the fore the emphasis on logic and verbal dexterity in public discourse. In these learning contexts, Jesus silences are striking, considering the fact that he

never appeared at a loss for words or lacked the verbal skills to interact with the most learned scholars of the day.

The first recorded episode which highlights Jesus' use of silence as a teaching tool depicts a scene of life and death:

At dawn he (Jesus) appeared again in the temple courts; where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses, commanded us to stone such a woman. Now what do you say? They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If anyone of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her". Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until Jesus was left (Jn. 8:2-9).

Jesus was a celebrated religious teacher hence, everyone expected him to have a clear moral response. He had earlier taught about sexual morality, setting high standard for thought and behaviour. However, the crux of the matter was how he would respond to the question. His silence was deliberate. By ignoring the question, he handed back to them the decision regarding the women's fate. However, his comment compelled them to do introspection about their own moral standing. His silence freed them to re-examine their own lives and behaviour and came to a conclusion as to whether they had shortcomings or not in matters of the nature. However, it takes a teacher who is well-informed about the relevance of silence as a pedagogical tool to provide the opportunity and space for such learning to occur. In this episode in question, each of Jesus' learners recognized their own hypocrisy and went. Each had experienced a profound unique opportunity for profound learning through the gift of Jesus' silence.

Jesus use of discussions

Jesus had discussion with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4). Jesus began by asking the woman for a drink of water. He gently guided her as she tried to get off the subject until she learned who He was and what He wanted to teach her. When Jesus's disciples found Him talking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus said to them, "My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Jesus knew His responsibilities and how to fulfill them.

Conclusion

Teachers cannot ignore the question of which techniques are useful for facilitating learning. In every learning context, teachers must decide how they will teach various subjects. Whether they lecture, ask questions or create space for silent listening, teachers are promoting learning by one means or another. Jesus employed a variety of teaching techniques, each of which enhanced some aspects of his teaching goals. Parables, questioning and poetry helped to develop critical thinking skills, making it possible for learners to think in new ways. Poetry and parables also provided strong memory aids. In the same vein, re-enactment enhanced remembering and, along with parables made it possible for learners to explore the minds and hearts of other people thereby engendering empathy and breaking down barriers between different groups of people.

Moreover, Jesus employed humour to engender unity amongst the people and as well challenged them to think critically. Even Jesus' lectures were learner- centered because the needs and concerns of individual learners were what mattered most to him. In the course of using apprenticeship as a teaching technique, Jesus opened his life for critical scrutiny by his disciples and as well turning them into teachers who carried his message to the nooks and crannies of the known world. He used prayer to emphasized unity and model humility. For Jesus, even silence became a powerful tool to create an

unforgettable learning experience. Although, techniques tell only a part of a teachers effectiveness, their use by Jesus suggest that they can help achieve teaching goals, particularly when those goals include change in the affective domain.

Recommendations for Implementing the Early childhood curriculum

- Early childhood educators should use methods and techniques which encourage critical thinking among children.
- Stories and parables can only serve as useful pedagogical tools if only they can assist early childhood educator to achieve his or her educational goals.
- Teachers are expected to augment their efforts by using appropriate parables, poetry and other stories that promote learning.
- Arresting the attention of the learner is one of the major concerns of early childhood educators since most of Jesus's teaching took place outdoors, outside of a structural learning context, he needed to attract peoples' interest and hold their attention for long enough to engage their thinking.
- Another goal of Jesus's parables was to develop internal change in the learner and to reorient the learner towards God. Parables tend to achieve this goal because emphasis is placed on a new perspective about reality.
- By beginning with the familiar, the early childhood teacher can more readily move to the unfamiliar.
- Early childhood teachers should encourage problem solving activities among pre-school children in order to promote children's intellectual development.
- Early childhood educators should select appropriate learning experiences that will motivate young children to learn.
- Re-enactment requires preparation on the part of the learners to enable them re-enact an episode.
- In religious education, it is appropriate to use prayer as a technique of teaching and a means of engendering certain learning experiences.
- Very young people should be given the platform to develop their practical and intellectual capacities through the application of concepts and theories in practice.
- It is recommended to early childhood educators to remain compassionate, challenging and resolute even in difficult situations.
- In teaching, a sense of humour is an answer to boredom and a mechanism for creating a congenial atmosphere for learning.
- A sense of humour is an answer to boredom and a mechanism for creating a congenial atmosphere for learning. It is an effective tool for developing critical thinking skills. It is a teaching tool with great potentials.
- Sometimes early childhood educators need to step back from activity and reconsider the possibility of silence.
- Sometimes early childhood educators need to possess verbal skills to be able to interact with their learners.

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