

Using Video in Children's Church

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In the 35+ years that I have spent serving in children's church, and other children's ministries, technology has grown considerably. In the 1970s cutting edge technology included the latest filmstrips, use of 16mm movie projectors, and recording puppet scripts on a handheld tape deck the size of a cereal box. Today we think nothing of using projected video, Power Point presentations or music and skits recorded on a laptop, stored and played back with an iPod.

This paper will briefly address the use of video in children's ministries. Together we will look specifically at using video to enhance the sermon, theme, or message of the day in the children's church setting. With so many video and video supported curriculums on the market, how can you know what to use, how much to use it and when using video is appropriate?

Before we talk specifically about video let us look at what Roger Fields says in regards to the time a child may spend under your ministry at the church. Keeping in mind that the average child will spend about 40 hours this year in your church, Roger gives these guidelines:

1. Use teaching methods that involve kids. If they merely watch you put on a show then no amount of time will have an impact. HINT: video is not enough.
2. Teach kids God's Word in a way that produces personal faith. Ro. 10:17 still works. They need their own faith in it won't come through any presentation on values. Let them see what God is like and they might want to get to know Him.
3. Build a bridge to kids through relationships so you can support their faith. Get to know their names. Pray with them. Let them see God work.¹

¹ Roger Fields. *Rev Up the 40*. rogerfields.com. (Accessed April 27, 2010).

Notice that none of these guidelines speaks of fancy sets, elaborate skits, or the latest technology. All must be in place relationally before the use of technology can affect life-change in your children. When Roger's guidelines are followed, the addition of video and other audio-visual media will enhance your message.

In her discussion of the use of multimedia in children's church, Maribeth Fox writes,

Today's children are accustomed to receiving information electronically, through cell phones, and through the use of video, audio and text, often at the same time! Church leaders must understand that it is through the use of these technologies that they will best connect with children.

Church that speaks to children has to speak their language. If children are bombarded with different media in the other areas of their lives, it will be very difficult for them to sit still and listen to one speaker for any significant period of time. However, if that speaker combines speech with music or video or movement, etc, he will better maintain the interest of his audience.²

Regular use of presentational technology has become the norm in many children's churches. As a result, a host of children's church curriculums have been produced using video as a platform or major support item.

In his book, *The Fabulous Reinvention of Sunday School*, Aaron Reynolds pens, "tech can help take the message all the way to the back wall, regardless of room size."³ In the old days I would draw a picture on the largest poster board I could buy. Now I draw it, scan it, color it using Photo Shop, and insert it into a Power Point presentation to be projected on a large rear projection screen.

² Maribeth Fox. *Children's Church Ideas Using Multimedia*. Buzzle.com. (Accessed April 27, 2010).

³ Aaron Reynolds. *The Fabulous Reinvention of Sunday School*. (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2007, 197).

In regards to technology use, Reynolds explains, “While these bells and whistles can certainly help a lesson sing, it’s important to remember that they are tools to support a dynamic teacher.”⁴ You are that dynamic teacher.

How, why, and when should you use these tools? Let me give you some basic guidelines I’ve developed for use of video technology in the children’s church.

- **S**tay away from using lengthy video material. Moving pictures will even bore kids. It is okay once in a while to show a feature-length film, but on the average Sunday keep it short. Kids come to see and interact with you. They cannot interact in a meaningful way with a video.
- **P**urpose is paramount. Video must support your theme. Remember, the message is always more important than the method. I do not show a video clip for the fun of showing it. The clip must enhance the message.
- **R**ecord and edit clip to fit the message. There is nothing worse than a ten-year-old technician fumbling around in the sound booth trying to locate your scene on a DVD while the entire group waits. That is a lesson killer. Record and clip the footage to be used and embed it in the PPT.
- **I**nvolve the children in production of video support. If it is possible, use a home video camera or even your web cam to produce a video to support the message. Bible stories can be filmed as children or toys act them out. Puppet specials can be pre-recorded, and kids can produce life-application material.

⁴ Aaron Reynolds. *The Fabulous Reinvention of Sunday School*. (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2007, 204).

Here are two examples of this:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=durKNCaxlNk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NvguJs7oa8>

- **N**ever use it to fill time. We have no time to waste. This is why I even edit the video segment provided with curriculum. I heard one children's pastor recently say, "There was so much video support that I broke each lesson into two or three weeks. That way we could spread it out and use it all. There was just too much video for one Sunday."
- **G**ood video doesn't have to cost a lot. There is a great deal of video available online for free. (YouTube, Wingclips...) Use video capturing software (Handbrake, Tooble, MPEG Streamclip, I Movie, Movie Maker...)

Video is a great method to use in attracting the child's attention and in persuading a child to accept your message. In Len Wilson's book, *The Wired Church 2.0*, he reminds us that video is persuasive in nature. Wilson states, "Visual images do not analyze. They tell stories. Therefore all video is persuasive because it requires multiple hooks to have an impact on the senses."⁵ He goes on to write, "Video is persuasive in that it establishes the setting and creates emotional connections, drawing viewers to a point of action, which may then be communicated in more detail through text (speaking)."⁶ We see again that video can persuade but must be used as a communication hook along side of a live teacher/preacher who translates the value of the clip in his spoken message.

⁵ Len Wilson. *The Wired Church 2.0*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008, 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

Keeping the persuasive nature of video in mind, here are some further thoughts concerning when to use video. Use a DVD or video clip when...

- It says what you wish you could say. Sometimes another voice is good for you children to hear. Some video clips not only reinforce our message, but also speak to the children in a way that you cannot.
- It is the best method you can find to make the message clear in the minds of your kids. Your arsenal/basement/garage/children's church closet contains a variety of methods that can be used to reinforce the message. Develop your theme and message before choosing which illustrative method will best preach that sermon.
- It is noticeable that the kids are bored with your live presentation. Face it sometimes you can be boring. It is always good to have a clip or some other method handy in case the kids are not following what you are trying to tell them. (Be certain that your clip applies to your theme.)
- It is appropriate for an evangelistic or special emphasis day. There are times when using an entire DVD movie is totally appropriate. Many churches host a movie day once in a while. They choose a Christian kid movie to watch, advertise it, and encourage the kids to bring a friend. Be sure you are following copyright regulations when showing a movie in a public forum.
- It is needed to replace a worker who is missing in action. It is good to have Bible story on video to use in the case a key worker doesn't show up. Remember that this is not used just to fill time. Make certain that whatever video you use serves as a support to your theme.

Using DVD and video support in children's church is totally cool. Kids love it, adult workers enjoy it, and you can sit back and watch it while becoming refreshed and ready to apply it to the theme of the day. Concerning children and media, Dale Hudson writes, "They're a generation that hears with their eyes."⁷

Over use of video technology or any other method will weaken its effectiveness. Use it sparingly. It is a method that, when overused, will turn children away from the truth you are endeavoring to communicate. When looking through your DVD support that came with the curriculum, ask yourself this question, "Can I or one of my leaders do the same thing live?" If you answer is, "yes," then you may want to produce the lesson live. Video can never replace the value of live interaction between a dynamic leader and the kids.

Don't be a "vidiot." Learn to use video technology properly in your children's church. Rick Chromey challenges his readers saying, "Children's Ministries must learn to carve messages with scriptural, image-soaked metaphors."⁸ Include the use of video as method that will reach the culture of today's child. Illustrate your message in ways that are interesting to the children. "Post-modern communicators use stories, metaphors, and video clips to cast "eye"-deas."⁹ Video is one of the ways to cast a message and attract the attention of children when used properly. So as in everything children's ministries, do your best, involve the kids, and put your best footage forward.

⁷ Dale Hudson, *The Wired Child in Children's Ministry in the 21st Century*. ed. Heather Dunn, Amber Van Schooneveld, and Ann Marie Rozum. Loveland: Group Publishing, 2007, 40.

⁸ Rick Chromey, *Energizing Children's Ministry in the Smaller Church*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 2008, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

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