

NEWS FROM LYNNE PABST

Our Certified Christian Educator and POINT Partner

Announcement: *The “Mandated Reporter Training” is rescheduled for Saturday, June 27, 2020 from 9:00am-noon at Grove Presbyterian Church, Danville, PA. It is our hope that by that date Grove can safely handle a small face-to-face group. The training led by Joan Mosier through the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance is free, but registration is required. Pastors, CPs, CLPs, Church Staff and volunteers can use this to keep credentialing up-to-date. Register for this event by calling the church office 570-275-0692 or emailing nurture@grovepres.org. Coffee and light snacks are provided.*

Moving from Crisis Mode to Best Practice

For the last month and a half, the world has been operating in crisis mode creatively inventing new ways to function in an unpleasing situation -- solving the problems of how to teach without classrooms and student-teacher face-to-face environments, how to worship without being able to gather as a community in one place and how to work at home without all the conveniences of a well-equipped office. We have done well. We pulled together and made things work. We were forced to learn new skills and new ways of doing things. We adapted to establish equilibrium. We now have more resources and new competencies at our fingertips. We carried on. “Well done good and faithful servant.” But now as we very slowly come out of crisis mode, we need to ask, were the practices used when in crisis mode, the best practices to maintain? Following a hurricane, families can live in a shelter or a tent to survive but it is not the best type of long-term environment to support family life and dignity.

There are many practices to be examined but for now, let us just look at the virtual world, technology and children. During COVID19, churches and schools scrambled to get information virtually to children. Parents were told to connect their children with these opportunities. Parents trying to work at home probably were glad there was a video to entertain their child for an hour. Dolly Parton now reads your child a bedtime story. Principals, Teachers and Mayors are recording themselves reading stories. Parents have been bombarded with so much material they either are overwhelmed or are overwhelming their children by making them watch everything. Yes, even I recorded children’s sermons for our recorded worship services, created Zoom choirs and Sunday School, and asked Sunday School teachers to create a recorded Sunday School lesson.

We did what we needed to do to survive and stay in touch during a difficult time. But is it best practice? We need to be careful that we do not turn make-shift solutions into the new norm without vetting them. I am already hearing murmurings from higher education that since we found out students can achieve the same competencies online as they do in field work why don’t we put the whole program online? Parents, I ask you -- do you want your child to have a teacher who has never interacted with a group of real-life children? I am hearing how wonderful recorded worship is. It is there when I want to listen to it. I can sit in my pajamas and have my cup of coffee while worshiping. Doesn’t our God deserve more from us? I have a fear

that parents will have a difficult time, when COVID 19 finally passes, weaning their children off the many devices they have been encouraged to use during this time. That the stress of trying to get children back to the classroom and out with their friends again will result in some challenges.

I still am a firm believer, as Early Childhood Educators are, that face-to-face is best when possible. I still am a firm believer that two 10-minute segments of a parent interactively reading to a child face-to-face cuddled on the sofa is more beneficial than a day filled with passive watching of stories read online. This technology is a teaching tool. But it is exactly that, a tool. We need to have control of it and use it in a proper way lest it become harmful. The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the American Academy of Pediatrics have made position statements on media and young children to help guide its usage. A couple of guides stand out in both – developmentally appropriate practices, interaction and adult involvement. *The content and presentation must be developmentally appropriate.* I have seen some instances of inappropriate books being read online in very inappropriate ways by very well-meaning people. This is not beneficial to our children nor good use of technology. *The media segment must be interactive promoting activity on the child's part whether that be physical, cognitive or social-emotional activity.* Fred Rogers is sometimes criticized for the slow pace of his segments. While the children were not physically active, Mr. Rogers kept children cognitively, socially and emotionally active and engaged. Finally, *parents need to be aware of what and how their children are using and responding to media.* Technology is not a babysitter which replaces the parent or teacher. An adult must be present to discuss what was experienced through the technology and help the child develop critical filters.

As a Christian Educator here is what I have learned during this crisis and guidelines I have setup for my own Christian Education ministry:

Live is better than recorded – If at all possible, go with a live face-to-face venue rather than a recording. Some have been scared by the zoom-bombing and rightfully so. No one wants children suddenly exposed to something unpleasant. I have chosen zoom. As a safeguard, I set up a new link for each meeting rather than using the reoccurring meeting option.

When using Live make certain the children can see one another – It defeats the purpose is each child can see only you. Make certain that parents put on the gallery option. Call the children's attention to one another.

Keep it short (live 15-30 minutes depending on age; recorded 10 minutes) – Children's attention spans are short. Present a module of information and send the children off on an assignment/activity. The live is longer because you need to incorporate time for getting everyone on, saying hello and goodbye and social interaction.

Live or recorded keep it interactive – It is possible to make a recording interactive but it takes thought. Mister Rogers can be our model here, asking questions, showing different items, and giving children time to think and respond. Make certain that you acknowledge the children who are going to be viewing by name. Miss Nancy in Romper Room with Magic Mirror knew to do this. It individualizes the experience for them. In sum, follow all those best practices you would use in the classroom.

Think about your purpose and chose the correct method -- Live gives children opportunity to speak with each other and see each other. It allows for that more experienced learner and less experienced learner interaction to occur which was so important to Vygotsky's thinking. I would definitely use this when student exchange is part of the learning process. I chose live for continuing Kindermusik and choir gatherings because we learn so much from one another. Recorded allows parents to use when they want to use it. It can foster families gathering together and viewing as a unit. In telling a Bible story I would use recording. In fact, that is why I had no problem recording children's sermons.

Don't overwhelm the family – Maintain those “church traditions” or “routines” as you would if you were doing it face-to-face. This is not the time to add all sorts of new online resources bombarding families with too many options. Give them time to process the information intergenerationally.

I am glad I have developed new technology skills which give me more teaching strategy options and that our worship committee is looking at making live-streamed worship a permanent option for those who cannot come to worship. These are new tools to add to our toolbox making us better workers for Jesus. Let us take time to figure out the best practices for using these new found tools in nurturing and supportive ways.

Resources:

Guidance for Online with Children: <https://dey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidance-FINAL.pdf>

NAEYC Position Statement on Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs serving Birth through Age 8:

https://issuu.com/naeyc/docs/ps_technology_issuu_may2012?mode=window&backgroundColor=%23222222

AAP Tips for Media and Young Children: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/news-features-and-safety-tips/Pages/Children-and-Media-Tips.aspx>

AAP Statement: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162591>

For those who were interested in Storytelling, the Network of Biblical Storytellers International is holding it annual gathering virtually this year. Information is updated here:

<https://www.nbsint.org/festival-gathering/>