

# A Nine-Point Lesson Plan Format for *Christian Education*

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**T**his article provides a model approach for designing lesson plans that are both professionally sound and biblically integrative.<sup>1</sup> It has been the authors' experience that Christian school teachers often desire lesson plan guidance, whether in developing their own syllabi, or when adapting lesson plans from required texts and curricula. We have found very little guidance in Christian education literature on how to design lessons that combine excellence in academics with biblical fidelity.

By incorporating best practices in teaching and biblical integration from professional development literature, we have concluded that each lesson plan needs nine essential components—Learning Outcomes, Purpose, Learner Attributes, Principles, Plan, Plan Efficacy, Practice, Citizenship Equipping, and Assessment—and thus have developed a “9P” Lesson Plan format. This model can be used by teachers to plan an individual lesson, a unit of instruction, or a syllabi for an entire academic semester or year. Administrators can use the model for activities as diverse as vision casting and teacher evaluation.

## Learning Outcomes

The first component is Learning Outcomes (aka Product). Teachers must ask themselves: What am I seeking to produce in the student *after* and *because* of my instruction? Stating educational outcomes in behavioral terms, using action verbs as opposed to presumed internal states, helps to move the focus of the teaching-learning process from planning and teaching to *learning* and *assessing*. In other words, the teacher must take the time to articulate, not just imagine or think about, what the final outcome should be.

Researchers advise that these outcomes statements reflect the different categories of learning to properly guide instructional events and assessment practices.<sup>2</sup> Research indicates that different types of learning call for different instructional approaches and assessment strategies. For instance, the following three learning goals—memorization of multiplication tables, creation of rhythmic poetry, and adoption of certain moral values—actually engage three distinctly different mental and emotional processes, and accordingly will require different instructional approaches and assessment strategies. Thus, teachers and students need to know the destination of their educational journey before setting out on it.

## Christian Distinctives

Given the large number of explicit admonitions in the Bible that translate into outcome statements: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39, NKJV)<sup>3</sup>; “Count it pure joy” (James 1:2); “Trust in the Lord” (Proverbs 3:5)—this component enables exemplary biblical fidelity.<sup>4</sup>



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But as will be more obvious in the discussion that follows, statements of behavioral outcomes must be seen as indicators of more highly valued internal dispositions that are literally matters of the heart.<sup>5</sup> And because this is an area that God judges, Christian educators must be even more diligent in ensuring that the fruit they seek to cultivate in their students is biblically grounded.

So, to tie everything together with regard to Learning Outcomes, the savvy Christian educator will ask himself or herself these questions: (1) What am I seeking to *produce* in these students *after* and *because* of instruction (the fruit), and (2) How can the Bible and its principles be integrated into this lesson?<sup>6</sup> For *all* things must be done to the glory of God (Colossians 3:17).

### **Purpose**

The second component, Purpose, is defined as the rationale

for choosing a particular learning outcome. Historically, education has served purposes as diverse as socialization, morality, social mobility, vocational enhancement, social reform, national defense, and spirituality. This component helps keep education focused on whatever answer is provided to the question: *Why teach this specific content?* Equally important, this component also helps keep the student focused on the question, *What am I to learn?*

### *Christian Distinctives*

A clear distinctive of Christian education is that it is driven by biblical injunctions, so educators must constantly remind themselves to keep their purposes for any given lesson as biblical as possible. Accordingly, this component should be heavily infused with relevant biblical expectations. An entire set of educationally developed skills (learning outcomes, etc.) are implied, for instance, by 1 Peter 3:15 in order for the learner to properly share—not just know about—the gospel message. For instance, skills of apologetics, logical reasoning, rhetoric, and affirming speech are all invoked by this Scripture verse. This component helps sensitize teachers *and* learners to the fact that the Bible requires of Christians some very specific processes and outcomes.

### **Learner Attributes**

Third in our discussion is Learner Attributes (aka internal Properties of the learner), or the prior knowledge, experience, and attitudes that shape the learner's receptivity to the instruction. In other words, what does each *student* bring to the learning process that either assists or hinders the teacher's instructional efforts? Teachers should take this into account in various ways, including pretesting, but oftentimes do not. Paradoxically, learners cannot learn anything without first knowing something. Prerequisite learning, aptitudes, developmental limitations, motivation, and other internal influences affect learner readiness and should dictate educational methods.

### *Christian Distinctives*

Christian education should be guided, at least in part, by the fact that humans are created in the likeness and image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). This means that education must not be conceived of as primarily the “pouring in” of instructional content, but instead the drawing out (as the Latin for educate, *educo*, indicates) to fully manifest the inherent *imago Dei* qualities in the student.

For instance, when properly presented, mathematics becomes much more than an academic exercise about numbers. It becomes a matter of obedience to God, who commanded dominion over the physical environment (Genesis 1:26, 28). And what He commanded, He, by definition, placed as an undeveloped desire in humans via *imago Dei* qualities.

## *Teachers must ask themselves: What am I seeking to produce in the student after and because of my instruction?*

Distressing as it may be to consider, the Learner Attributes component reminds the teacher of the need to consider the impact of the sinful nature inherent in each of God's children. For instance, children will at times resist learning and behaving appropriately, thereby calling for preventative and corrective action by the teacher. The sinful nature is part of the internal attributes of the learner, and secular education methodologies do not specifically acknowledge this biblical teaching.

An additional and practical aspect of the Learner Attri-

buting is its ability to help the teacher fashion and guide instruction as suggested by Proverbs 22:6. Natural aptitudes are important indicators of God's intended path for the student and should be used to help guide educational priorities. This component addresses the responsibility to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6) by ensuring that the purpose of each lesson is *biblical*.

### **Principles**

The fourth component reminds us that teaching by Principles—cause-and-effect relationships, regularity, and generalizability statements—is key to effective education. While one index of academic attainment is the accumulation of facts and information, often a more pertinent learning goal is the ability to discern con-

### *Christian Distinctive*

Teaching through the use of principles instills wisdom in students, as exemplified by Solomon's ruling on the infant dispute in 1 Kings 3:16-18. Christian education should, as much as possible, base all of its content and processes on biblical principles. The Bible is, in fact, heavily infused with principles relating to the physical world: reaping what you sow (2 Corinthians 9:6); or the spiritual realm: seeking first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33); or both: doing everything for the glory of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). Good resources are available for this difficult task of identifying biblical principles within academic subject matter,<sup>7</sup> making the task much easier than might be imagined.

### **Plan**

Fifth, the Plan describes *how* a particular lesson should be taught or presented. This important component is where the teacher chooses and describes the most appropriate educational process by which students will acquire the intended learning outcome. Integral to the Plan are factors such as professional wisdom, common sense, student knowledge, and research findings.<sup>8</sup> Building upon the Learner Attributes component, preferred teaching methods should be moderated by student learning variables. In fact, a valuable aspect of lesson planning is to anticipate the variety of student responses to the subject matter.<sup>9</sup>

### *Christian Distinctives*

Integration of academic content and biblical



principles, as well as the methodology of integration, should be integral to the plan—for at least three reasons. First, the teacher needs to be articulate and intentional regarding his or her integration of biblical principles and academic content in order to promote biblical understandings.

Second, this helps students experience and learn the integration process rather than being the mere recipients of its outcomes. And third, a clear understanding of the process for deriving and applying principles allows for a clear assessment of the biblical validity of the principles.

### Plan Efficacy

The sixth component addresses plan effectiveness (aka Power). Here the teacher consults professional literature to judge, prior to teaching, whether the lesson plan is most likely the one with the highest probability of success.<sup>10</sup> The chosen plan should comprehensively address all the facets affecting the teaching/learning process, such as individual differences, medium of instruction, and learner needs.

*The second component, Purpose, . . . . helps keep education focused on whatever answer is provided to the question: Why teach this specific content?*

### Christian Distinctives

Given the Christian's spiritual empowerment to move God's "hand" over natural events and human hearts, this section presents the perfect opportunity for describing biblical truths (forgiveness, generational sins, practice of spiritual disciplines, etc.) that are typically not recognized as relevant by secular educators. Moreover, this is the very place to incorporate concepts such as the influence of the Holy Spirit<sup>11</sup> and Christian interpersonal relationships because of their significant contribution to pedagogical effectiveness.

### Practice

The seventh component, Practice, deals with the actual activities engaged in by students to help ensure that learning is permanent. Retention is significantly aided by activities that provide diversified practice.<sup>12</sup> This is a crucial area, given the rapid rate at which learning is lost without reinforcement and practice. Further, different types of practice are known to affect retention differently. Thus, practice should be part of



lesson plan considerations.

#### *Christian Distinctives*

Practice takes on special meaning in Christian education because Christianity places a high value on doing as opposed to just gaining information. But ultimately, Christianity is not just about staying busy. Acting from right motives would seem to represent the highest point of Christian living as reflected, for instance, in God honoring the *cheerful* giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

#### **Equipping for Citizenship**

Statements of educational outcomes typically focus on the individual learner. This eighth component (*Perspective*) helps ensure that the teacher focuses on the contributions of education to the nation's, not just the learner's, benefit. For instance, a basic function of both public and private schools is to equip young citizens for the good of that nation.

#### *Christian Distinctives*

Typically, people assume that the intent of Christian education is the development and edification of each student and preparation for citizenship in the nation where he or she lives. But Scripture also places the individual within the context of a spiritual community (i.e., the Body of Christ), which has its own educational needs and purposes (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-13). More specifically, Christian education should prepare the learner for citizenship in the high-

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est of all nations—God's Holy Nation (1 Peter 2:9). Although infrequently addressed in Christianity, the Church universal is supposed to be characterized by unity of divine proportions (cf. John 17:21), which transcends all ethnic diversities (Romans 11) to constitute "one new man" (Ephesians 2:15). Thus wherever possible, lesson plans should indicate how the planned activities contribute to the development of this community as well as to that of the individual and the temporal nation. After all, "Education is by a kingdom for citizenship in that kingdom."<sup>13</sup>

#### **Assessment**

Our final component is Assessment (*Proof*)—how the student will be evaluated regarding both progress toward and attainment of learning outcomes. Without this activity, education is incomplete. Each student's educational attainment should be assessed as specified in the Learning Outcomes component, with special attention given to the specific responses expected. For instance, assessing a student's ability to explain what a topic sentence is versus the student actually writing a proper one. To paraphrase a cliché, we are most apt to get what we *inspect*, as opposed to what we merely *expect*!

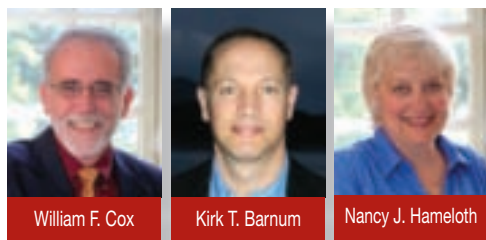


As research and testimonials reveal,<sup>14</sup> Christian youth often know correct answers to biblically based questions, but do not always do so well in living by them. This obviously calls for assessment to be more specifically targeted to realistically fashioned outcomes expectations. Here, too, Christian educators must analyze the practicality of their learning outcomes, which brings our nine-point lesson plan format full circle.

**Summary**

Use of this 9P lesson plan format should result in more effective and biblically aligned education. Some of the lesson plan components (Purpose, Principles, and Plan Effectiveness) likely require more intentionality on the part of the teacher than may have heretofore been exercised. The Learner Attributes and Citizenship Equipping components require a practical application for some philosophical issues (relating to the nature of the learner and learning purpose) that are unique to Christian education. While our examples are somewhat truncated, the content of the Learning Outcome, Plan, and Assessment components preserve the integrity of the three-step process of curriculum alignment (compatibility of objectives, instruction, and assessment) essential to all instructional planning.

Within Christian education, inclusion of the Purpose, Learner Attributes, Principles, and Citizenship Equipping components will promote strong biblical fidelity in the lesson planning process. All in all, attention to the Christian education particulars of each component will help fulfill God’s call to teachers and administrators to make and equip disciples. Sample reference sources and the example lesson plans available online in Appendices A and B will aid further in applying the recommendations in this article. See <http://circle.adventist.org/download/ninepointlesson.pdf>.



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