

## FFWPU UK: Reflections On Teaching In Sunday School And Children's Summer Camps

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Hear from our brother Chris L. B. on his experiences and highlights in this series of Sunday School Teacher reflections...

'The aims of the children's summer camp and Sunday school for the younger age group has been to help children to identify their original mind, through their friendships and engagement with games and the natural world, and to maintain a distinction between this and some of the influences around them that lead in the opposite direction.

For teenagers, the summer camp and Sunday school events have been great training grounds for leadership and responsibility enabling seniors to pass down good influences to their juniors. These are all normal areas of growth within a family, but the larger dimension of the church community provides a wider range of experience - of uncles, aunts, older and younger brothers and sisters - that might not exist in their immediate family. Such environments also lay a foundation for "BC" identity, though I am less convinced about the value of this since a exclusive focus on this can limit the range of friendships and interactions that children can benefit from in school and the broader society in which they grow up. This sense of identity has of course created the basis of friendships that are the driving force for HARP

workshops and other children's events, which has been particularly vital for smaller communities around the country (in fact most communities have very limited numbers of connected families and depend very highly on the arrangements and resources provided by the larger communities in London).

With regards to the contents of teaching, the idea of "Principle education" is completely different for younger children, as for younger and older teenagers compared to adults. It has often been difficult to change habitual ideas in this regard - 1st gen members tend to have fixed ideas about workshops, some of which have passed into HARP workshops. Just to re-educate staff members and Sunday school teachers with some vocabulary (such as "lessons" or "study time" instead of "lectures", or "games" instead of "sports") has been an ongoing battle, but more importantly it is vital to adapt the content and methods of teaching.

For primary school children, the main content should be stories and activities rather than abstract instructional ideas. It has been invaluable that people like Tim A., William H. and others with professional teacher training have been able to provide significant input in this area. And now a new generation of trained teachers is adding more experience and fresh ideas to the mix. I have been very inspired by the creativity of teachers (such as Cathy J., Christabel H., Sam R., Elliot Y., Dawn P. and several others) who have contributed their energy in the summer camps. I would be glad to see these influences spilling over into the "Peace school" developments.

However, in all progress, it is best to link past experience with current thinking - the new generation of teachers would also greatly benefit from the guidance given by Tim A. and William H., not simply to use their materials but to build on some of their ideas. Tim wrote a "Teacher's Manual" that summarises a great deal of what he learned from developing and teaching his "curriculum".

Another great set of resources from the past are the games that Mike S. developed and published - I have pdf versions of his books. William's ideas are best encapsulated in the lecture recordings, all of which are available on the FFWPU website in the Education section. To a large extent, these creative influences have been naturally passed down the generations, but sometimes it is good to be reminded of their roots.

In fact, we used to have a Roots Night at the summer camps, with testimonies of parents and elders, with photos or video shows of early church history, the path of missionaries or the background of Cleeve House etc. Unfortunately, this has been gradually squeezed out of the program - it was always difficult to get elder members to understand how to engage young children. However, such content could also be brought into Sunday programs - though perhaps best for the older (teenage) children.

In general, a basic pedagogical framework that seems essential to remember is that children engage with stories at a young age, rather than abstract directives about how to behave - they learn what to do by observing their elders. It is only later, in their early teenage years, that they start to form frameworks of ideas that make "sense", into which the memory of stories may find their place.

That's all for now - I hope some of these thoughts are useful.'

Chris L. B.