

ABSTRACT

Humor in Video Bible Stories: A Study of Humor and Child Development

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This study investigates the impact of the use of humor in religious stories on a child's ability to remember, understand and paraphrase content, as well as the overall enjoyment. This study also seeks to determine how age and program type affect the variables listed above. Participants watched one of two videos teaching the story of Saul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus found in Acts 9:1-22. Results indicated that there was no significance on the inclusion of humor with a child's enjoyment, nor the remembering, understanding, or paraphrasing scores. However, age was a significant covariate on remembering, understanding, and paraphrasing. Also, program type had a significant impact on remembering and paraphrasing. Previous exposure to the story increased overall scores, which suggests that repetition is key to a successful learning experience.

Humor in Video Bible Stories: A Study of Humor and Child Development

by

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DEDICATION

To all of the future filmmakers that will use their gifts to share the love of Christ with children all over the world

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This study was conducted to explore the relationship between the use of humor in video Bible stories and a child's ability to remember and understand information from those stories. Many churches are turning to video resources as a way to educate children using modern technology. Video Bible stories are rising in popularity as an easy way to teach children in Sunday school classrooms. Because of this, it is essential to understand what elements of mediated Bible stories are most helpful when teaching children. The following project investigates what factors affect a child's ability to learn and enjoy the content presented.

Many researchers have found that humor in collegiate classroom lectures does improve test scores throughout a semester (Garner, 2006; Hackathorn et al., 2011; Kaplan and Pascoe, 1977). However, there is little existing research suggesting that these concepts are also applicable to elementary children. This research study will examine if the incorporation of humor in video Bible stories improves an elementary-age child's ability to remember, understand, paraphrase, and enjoy content through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956).

This research exists to further our knowledge of how children understand video Bible stories, so that content creators can utilize media in the most effective way to help children start a relationship with Christ. Child evangelism is important. Studies by the Barna Group (2004) state that 43% of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their

savior do so before reaching the age of 13. After peaking during the childhood years, the percentage of salvations continues to drop throughout adolescence, young adulthood, and adulthood. Only 13% of all American Christians committed their lives to Christ between ages 18 and 21, and only 23% made that commitment after age 21. The Barna Group (2009) also states that children and teens that engaged in regular religious activities were more active in adulthood church commitments and were less likely to significantly change their religious beliefs as an adult. Correlation does not prove causation, but these findings suggest that the odds of remaining in one faith over a lifetime are positively enhanced by childhood spiritual activity.

In order to investigate how the incorporation of humor can impact a child's understanding, it is crucial to have a foundational understanding of several cognitive, learning, moral, and faith development theories, as well as a knowledge of the currently available curriculum market.

CHAPTER TWO

Child Development Theories

In order for Christians to be as evangelically active as possible, it is vital for us to consider how theories used by educational psychologists can enhance how we teach children about Biblical truths.

Bloom's Taxonomy

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom created a framework for assessing the cognitive learning levels of K-12 and college students. In 2001, a group of scholars updated the taxonomy to label the concepts with verbs and gerunds instead of the original nouns (Armstrong, 2010). First published under the title *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*, Bloom's Taxonomy was introduced as a way to communicate about and measure goals set forth by educators (Krathwohl, 2002). The model consists of six categories: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Each level builds on the foundation of the previous level. A student must first master remembering before advancing to understanding, understanding before applying, and so forth.

This study utilized the lowest two levels of Bloom's Taxonomy to analyze how children understood the content presented. The first level, remembering, requires students to retain information and facts regarding the story. In essence, this level is strictly basic memorization (Hackathorn, 2011). To master this level students must be able to recall facts, names, and places. The remembering level is imperative as it provides the initial

foundation for all future comprehension of a given subject. However, this level does not require any real in-depth understanding of the concept (Hackathorn, 2011). The second level, understanding, tests for a deeper insight that was not previously present in level one. Students must be able to summarize, compare and contrast, and infer based on their initial remembering of details.

Due to the nature of this study, only the first two levels of Bloom's Taxonomy were considered. Ideally, with religious education, the application level would be reflected in the changed behavior of children and the practical application to their own lives. Since each child participating in the study only had one research session, it would be difficult to present data regarding the application of religious teachings.

Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

Jean Piaget is arguably the most well-known child development theorist. His work established the groundwork for the future development of constructionist theory. Piaget believed that children were little scientists that learn through the interaction with their environments (Bentham, 2011). Therefore, any experience a child has fuels future cognitive development. However, Piaget considered age to limit what skills a child could learn. He called this concept "maturational readiness." The ability to master new skills increases as a child grows older. For example, a four-year-old can learn how to read, while an eighteen-month-old cannot (Bentham, 2011). Piaget used this idea to develop his four stages of cognitive development. For this study, the concrete operational stage will be the center of focus.

Sensorimotor (Birth—2 Years)

Trial and error are the basis of the first stage of Piaget's cognitive development theory (Piaget, 1964). Children in this age group experience learning by immediate responses to interactions with their environment. Concrete items advance cognitive development by allowing the child to hold onto objects and learn hands-on. Trial and error as a learning style does not disappear once a child grows older. Many adults still use hands-on learning to better their understanding of concepts (Bentham, 2011).

Preoperational (2—7 Years)

In this stage, children begin to develop language skills. There is an increase in memory and imagination. However, thinking is egocentric, meaning a child is unable to see something from another's point of view. Piaget tested this theory with the Three Mountain Problem (Ackermann, 1996). In this experiment, he set up three mountains of different heights and physical appearance. He put a child on one side and a doll on another. The child was shown ten photos representing different viewpoints and asked to pick the one that is what the doll would see. In this age group, children picked the photo that looked like their viewpoint, demonstrating that they were acting with egocentric thoughts (Boom, 2011).

Concrete Operational (7 – 11 Years)

Children are now able to pass the Three Mountain Problem test and move towards a less egocentric thought process. Thinking that occurs in this stage is very literal. Children are able to process and understand real concepts significantly more than

hypothetical concepts. Also, children begin to think logically about concrete problems (Piaget, 1964).

Formal Operational (Adolescence – Adulthood)

The final stage incorporates abstract concepts that were previously too hypothetical to understand. Children have developed a more complex vocabulary and can understand concepts rather than just concrete objects (Piaget, 1964).

Piaget theorized that humans have a natural tendency to organize information into logically related topics. He named these groupings of behaviors and thoughts schemas. With the introduction of a new topic, the learner creates a schema. For example, Angela has a dog, and her dog schema includes facts such as “a dog is a four-legged animal.” Now when she sees a cow for the first time, she automatically assumes it is a dog because it has four legs. Piaget called this process “assimilation.” In this example, Angela took the new information and forced it to fit into her previously existing dog schema. Then her father tells her that the cow is not a dog. Angela now experiences disequilibrium because there is a new idea introduced that conflicts with what she already knows. As her father teaches her that the cow is a different kind of animal, Angela begins to understand and experiences accommodation (Yount, 1996). Piaget believed that the introduction of new information would force a child to alter the original schema or create a new schema.

From a Christian perspective, Piaget has some interesting ideas that could be useful in the Sunday school classroom setting. One significant application is the idea of including the learner in the learning process. That is, center the teaching around the learner rather than around the teacher (Schultz & Schultz, 1993). Piaget’s theories suggest that children develop their own ideas through a process called pure discovery.

However, at the extreme, this deemphasizes the need for teachers to teach and focuses more on the teacher providing activities for children to discover concepts independently. In a Christian context, this extreme could cause issues of *eisegesis* which is when people read their agendas into what scripture says (Yount, 1996). However, if we utilize directed discovery, children are encouraged to learn through the teacher's direction. Jesus often used techniques similar to those of modern discovery learning teachers. When Jesus called Peter out on the waters, Peter discovered an understanding of faith (Matthew 14:25-33). Jesus could have lectured Peter about faith, but instead, He provided an opportunity for Peter to discover it (Schultz & Schultz, 1993). As with most things, there is an appropriate balance of instruction and personal discovery that needs to happen in a classroom. Teachers should not talk at students but should guide students through the lesson. Teachers should also be mindful of their students' moral development as they offer faith-based instruction.

Moral Development Theory

In addition to his research on cognitive development, Piaget studied moral development of children (Piaget, 1932). Piaget used anecdotes to research how children responded morally to the situations presented. From this, he developed a three-stage theory of moral development. The first stage, pre-moral, included children below age five. During this stage, children do not have any regard for rules and are more focused on having fun. The second stage begins around six or seven years old and lasts until about age nine. Piaget titled this stage "moral realism" because children know the rules and depend on them to define right and wrong. The final stage, moral relativism, begins around age ten. In this stage, the rules become flexible based on the motives behind the

actions (Piaget, 1997). Piaget's research paved the way for Lawrence Kohlberg's moral reasoning development theory (Kavathatzopoulos, 1991).

Kohlberg's research on moral development led him to create a three section/six-stage structure (Freese, 1986). Kohlberg believed that these stages were fixed and sequential (Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). The first section, preconventional morality, occurs when moral decisions are made in one's own interest (Yount, 1996). The preconventional morality section is made up of the first two stages: punishment/obedience and instrumental/relativist. In stage one, the punishment and obedience stage, people determine what is good or bad based on personal consequence. Stage two, instrumental and relativist, is more focused on what another person can do for you. People in this stage are focused on making deals that benefit themselves.

Stage three and four make up the conventional morality section. During conventional morality, children begin to see outside perspectives as they move from an egocentric thinking pattern. Moral decisions are now more focused on the group as a whole rather than the individual. Stage three, entitled "good boy, nice girl," is focused on the approval of those in authority. In this stage, children desire to please their parents, so they choose good behavior. Stage four, Law and Order, takes the need for approval and applies it to acceptable behavior set forth by society. Individuals in this stage make moral decisions based on what society says is right or wrong (Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977).

The third section, postconventional reasoning, is where the most complex decision-making process happens. In this section, people rely on the ethical principles they have chosen to determine good and evil. Stage five, social contract, focuses on what is best for the community. Individuals collectively create laws that protect the individual,

meaning that the group consensus is what determines right and wrong. Finally, the sixth stage, the universal ethical principle, makes decisions after weighing all related factors.

As with most theories, there is significant criticism regarding Kohlberg's theory. Some of these criticisms point out the male gender bias of the testing, how decision-making is different from behavior, or how moral values are different from social conventions (Yount, 1996). In any discussion of childhood development, Kohlberg's theory is worth considering.

Psychosocial Theory of Personality Development

Erikson also contributed to the literature on development theories and was best known for his psychosocial development theory. His eight-stage theory covers a person's entire lifetime and provides interesting insight into how we perceive ourselves and the world around us.

The first stage of Erikson's development theory occurs in the first years of a person's life. During this infancy stage, children learn basic trust vs. mistrust. The impressions and awareness that form in early childhood influences the foundation of theological concepts in later life. For example, children formulate feelings about trust and mistrust long before they understand what it means to trust God (Wakefield and Clark, 1986).

The second stage, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, begins as children learn more about their bodies and their abilities to do certain tasks on their own. Usually, this stage occurs between ages two and three. Children may doubt their abilities if they are not given proper encouragement during this stage.

The third stage, initiative vs. guilt, exists among children ages four and five. Before this stage, a child has learned that she *is* a person. Now, that child must discover what *kind* of person she is going to be (Erikson, 1980). In this stage, children often seek ways to help their parents and try new things. Find ways to help their parents also fuels the need for parental approval found in Kohlberg's third stage.

Erikson's fourth stage, industry vs. inferiority, occurs between ages six to eleven. In this stage, children develop a can-do attitude and focus on expanding their social environment to include friends. Also, during this stage, children develop physical, emotional, and academic skills. If children do not succeed in this stage, they begin to feel inferior to their peers (Yount, 1996).

The fifth stage, identity vs. identity diffusion, occurs during adolescence, ages thirteen through eighteen. Children begin to question who they are and what they believe. If they cannot figure out the answers to these questions, many children begin to feel lost.

The following stages make up the three stages of adulthood. Stage six, intimacy and distantiation vs. self-absorption, exists during young adulthood from about eighteen to thirty. In this stage, young adults chose between close relationships and self-segregation (Pendergraft, 2017).

In stage seven, generativity vs. stagnation, adults either pour into and care for future generations or they become self-absorbed and apathetic (Erikson, 1980).

In the eighth and final stage, integrity vs. despair and disgust, senior adults contemplate their lives and decide if they are satisfied with what they have accomplished. If they are, they move to a place of integrity. However, if they are disappointed in their accomplishments, they look back with despair (Yount, 1996).

Erikson later added to his theory, stating that leaning too far to either side of the spectrum is unhealthy. He labeled an imbalance of the positive trait “maladaptive” and the negative trait “malignant.” Erikson also created “adaptive strengths,” the proper balance between the two traits, for each stage: (1) hope, (2) will, (3) purpose, (4) competence, (5) fidelity, (6) love, (7) care, and (8) wisdom.

As always, there have been some critiques of Erikson’s theory such as the male gender bias and the subjectivity of the research. However, Erikson does provide help in better understanding all walks of life. Erikson’s theory provides ways for curriculum developers to design classroom activities that incorporate the personality elements of specific age groups.

These theories have laid a foundation for a secular understanding of child development. It is also essential to consider a theory that many Christians use when studying how people develop in their faith.

Faith Development

James Fowler defines faith as the “universal quality of human meaning-making” that is found where individuals place their trust. Fowler’s definition includes religions such as Christianity but can also be expanded beyond religious practices (Fowler, 1981). That being said, Christianity is a type of faith, and thus we should consider how Fowler’s faith development theory potentially impacts how we teach.

Fowler’s faith development theory is divided into seven stages: primal, intuitive-projective, mythic-literal, synthetic-conventional, individuative-reflective, conjunctive, and universalizing. Much like Erikson’s theory, Fowler’s stages range from birth through

senior adulthood. Before Fowler, there was little research on faith development that extended past adolescence.

Stage zero, the primal faith stage, establishes the foundation on which a person's faith will be built. Infants in this stage form "preimages" that will influence future stages. Next, the intuitive-projective stage begins at age three. During this stage, children are unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. The mythic-literal faith includes children between the ages of six and twelve. During this stage, children begin to distinguish between fact and fantasy and view faith as something to be experienced. Fowler found that during this stage, children perceive everything to be concrete and literal, which is similar to Piaget's findings for his concrete-operational stage. Also, during this stage, children rely on fairness to separate right and wrong behaviors (Andrade, 2014). Stage three, synthetic-conventional faith begins at age twelve and is when a child adopts an all-encompassing belief system. People in stage four, the individuating-reflective faith, begin to evaluate and dissect their chosen belief. Young adults often leave the church during this stage. Stage five, conjunctive faith, usually occurs in mid-life adulthood and is marked by the formerly religious returning to the church. Finally, stage six, universalizing faith, is a stage that few people reach. Fowler uses Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., as an example of how a person in stage six faith lives (Yount, 1996).

When applied correctly, these theories provide insight to understand better who we are and how we develop. These theories can now be used by creators and educators to develop curriculum that better suits the children we are teaching. The cognitive and moral development theories discussed above provide a foundational background to

understanding how children process information. It is also crucial to understand how children learn. The work of Jerome Bruner and the aforementioned Bloom's taxonomy are two learning theories most relevant to the present research.

Jerome Bruner

Jerome Bruner was an American psychologist and educator who introduced many child development theories (Bruner, 2006). He also was a key player in the incorporation of Piaget's cognitive development stages into the classroom. Bruner was inspired by Piaget and Vygotsky, thus some of his theories are very similar (Smidt, 2011). In his book, *The Process of Education*, Bruner states that anyone at any stage of development can learn any subject if it is presented properly. If Bruner's theory is correct, this is substantial.

Bruner believed that learning should take us somewhere and allow us later to go further more easily (Bruner, 1960). Bruner introduced three aspects of the act of learning. The first, acquisition of new information, happens when an individual encounters information that is counter to or a replacement from what is already understood. The second, transformation, is the manipulating of the new knowledge to make it fit new tasks. Finally, evaluation, is a self-check if one has correctly manipulated the information to the task (Bruner, 1960).

According to Bruner, teaching fundamentals to a child requires a combination of deep understanding and patient honesty (Bruner, 1960). It is also important to present the subject in terms of the child's way of viewing things. With this in mind, video curriculum could become very useful in learning environments. Children are already familiar with watching television and movies. They understand how TV shows are structured. Perhaps

utilizing a medium that is already familiar will allow an easier understanding of the content presented. Bruner even mentions films and TV in one of his books referring to them as devices for vicarious experience or dramatizing device. Both of these terms signify how the learner is brought closer to the concept through the medium. Bruner also believed that an important ingredient in the process of learning was a sense of excitement about discovery (Bruner, 1960). Much like Piaget, Bruner believed that active student involvement in instruction was most beneficial to the learner (Takaya, 2008).

In congruence with his implementation of Piaget's theory of cognitive development in the schools, Bruner introduced a concept called a "spiral curriculum" (Bentham, 2011). Bruner's instructional method subjects a learner to the same concept year after year but at a higher complexity. LifeWay's *The Gospel Project for Kids* curriculum executes this concept well. The curriculum follows the entire Bible chronologically. After completing the curriculum, teachers start over. By this point, children are older and taught using the upper-level curriculum.

These theories provide an excellent understanding of how children understand the content. They also give information for creatives on how to develop children's content. It is also important to evaluate some existing content. The following paragraphs explain three of the existing Christian children's content market.

Existing Market Types

There are three main markets for Christian kids' curriculum: the filmmaking production companies, the curriculum producing publishing companies, and the churches creating original content for their ministries. The secular media work hard to teach children what Christians would consider to be immoral behaviors (Warren, 2005).

Christian parents are trapped with little content for their children that promotes good behavior. Frankly, the few Christian shows that exist hardly compete with the production quality of secular mainstream media. The Christian market has not kept up with the innovations of contemporary Hollywood media. Companies spend billions of dollars on original content for kids each year. Many Christian media companies believe that children's content is too risky of a market. The only creator to truly have success is Phil Vischer, the creator of the 20-year-old program *VeggieTales* (Aubry, 2015).

VeggieTales

Phil Vischer founded the production company, Big Idea Entertainment, in 1989 and released the first *VeggieTales* episode in 1993. Episodes used the fun from Saturday morning cartoons to teach Sunday morning values to kids (Big Idea, 1993).

Disney and Vischer shared a mission of making people happy, but Vischer desired to go one step further and “spread God’s truth through products that creatively and technically exceed the best Hollywood has to offer” (Tatum, 1997). The team at Big Idea understood that God was calling them to enter into the media market to help children be the best they could be.

To many in Hollywood, your kids are viewed simply as another ‘exploitable demographic.’ Thus, we are faced today with an abundance of shows that program to the lowest common denominator—shows that teach our kids how to be more sarcastic, disrespectful and aggressive, shows that teach them how to be better toy buyers and better kick boxers. But very few shows that teach our kids how to be better kids. (Big Idea Productions, 1999)

These words, although 20 years old, remain true. *VeggieTales* is a phenomenal show that helps children understand Biblical truths. The show incorporates humor for both the child and the adult audiences. Although the show never portrayed Jesus as a vegetable,

children learned how to be better Christians and better kids. They learned respect for authority, how to deal with emotions, and how to interact with people that look or talk differently. Along with this, kids also learned about classic Old Testament Bible stories. Through *Josh and the Big Wall*, children learned the story of how Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and they learned the keyword obedience. *Esther... The Girl Who Became Queen* teaches children courage while they learn the amazing story of how Esther saved the Jewish people.

Parents trusted they could turn on VeggieTales and leave the room without having to worry about inappropriate content on the screen (Warren, 2005). Word of mouth success stories spread like wildfire. By 2002, VeggieTales was the most successful direct-to-video series in history (Vischer, 2006).

Another factor that influenced the massive success of VeggieTales was Phil Vischer's target audience ideology. Vischer did not want his show to be limited to a Christian audience. An unchurched child could watch a VeggieTales episode and successfully keep up with the story because Vischer purposely designed shows to assume little religious knowledge. VeggieTales is accessible to beginners that know nothing about Christianity or the Bible. This ideology follows the nature of Christian doctrine, which is to reach out to the nonbeliever (Warren, 2005). When Big Idea first started, videos were released through the Christian bookstore market. However, this distribution path limited the number of non-believers that would have access to the videos. In 1995, sales were at 130,000 units. Eventually, Big Idea expanded the distributor list to include stores like Wal-Mart and Target. With this expansion, the sales skyrocketed in 1998 to 5.5 million units. (Bartoli, 1999).

VeggieTales is structured in the way of typical broadcast television. There are built-in “commercial breaks” where Larry comes out and sings a silly song. Throughout the episode, characters sing catchy songs that reinforce main ideas from that particular lesson. At the end, Bob and Larry recap what happened in the show and relate the moral lesson to a Bible verse from their computer named Qwerty. Bob and Larry always sign off with the encouraging line, “God made you special, and He loves you very much.” The repetition of this line instills the truth God created each child, and He loves each and every one of them.

Christian Publishing Companies

Publishing houses such as LifeWay and Group make many different kids' Bible curricula. These curricula often come as box sets. Depending on the publisher, these boxes usually contain leaders' guides, student workbooks, audio tracks, posters, and decorations. Sunday School boxes are sold by topic, length, and style. Vacation Bible School sets are usually sold by topic and theme. Like most creators, publishers traditionally write content within a specific denomination. Consequently, many churches use the same publisher year after year, trusting that the publisher remains faithful to their doctrine of belief. One reoccurring issue is that publishers do not have a way to know what is going on in each classroom. Every church, every age, and every child is different. Often companies write curriculum for very small churches, but large ministries purchase the content. Thus, economic circumstances put pressure on the program directors to rework the content for their children.

Church Produced Curriculum

Some churches have moved away from the traditional publisher created curriculum and shifted to making their content. Creating in-house content allows churches full control over what their children are learning. Most churches do not distribute their original content outside of their church network. One church to consider is Craig Groeschel's Life.Church ("Life.Church," 2019). In 2018, Life.Church reached thirty-two locations across the nation. With a church this size, the central media team provides content to all other campuses, so that people can travel to any campus and have a similar experience. Life.Church also has an open network where they share curriculum for all age groups for free. The elementary age curriculum is a show called Konnect. The Konnect curriculum incorporates scripture memorization, practical life application examples, and Bible truths with hard topics. Konnect also incorporates an extended version of the video that includes small group questions and worship songs all in one video file. In addition to this, Life.Church also provides a service rundown page which has media cues, talking points included.

Research Questions

Based on the theories and research presented above, this study seeks to examine four research questions. The study was designed according to the first two levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Questions were asked with the notion for remembering and understanding.

RQ1: Will a story presented with humor increase learning at the remembering and understanding levels of Bloom's Taxonomy for children ages 8-10 compared to a story told without humor?

According to Piaget, cognitive development is closely related to age. This study considers the potential factor of age on the learning scores.

RQ2: How does a child's age impact remembering, understanding, and ability to accurately paraphrase the story?

Jerome Bruner introduced the concept of spiral curriculum, which utilizes repetition of content over several years to increase comprehension. For this reason, it is important to investigate the following question:

RQ3: What effect does previous exposure to a story have on remembering, understanding, paraphrasing, and enjoyment?

If children's learning environments affect comprehension scores, companies may need to develop content targeted for specific environments in order to be most effective to those students.

RQ4: Do the children's remembering, understanding, and paraphrasing scores depend at all upon the type of program (e.g. church-sponsored after school-program, private Christian academy, etc.) the child attends?

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

The four research questions were investigated using a randomized, controlled experimental design conducted in the field; the field being on-site at the churches and schools where the participants were in attendance.

For this study, students watched one of two videos. Both videos followed the story of Saul's transformation on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22). One of the videos used humor to tell the story. After watching a video, children were asked questions regarding the story. These questions were based on the first two tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy, remembering and understanding. Children were asked to define words from the video and to repeat information about key facts. Answers were coded and checked for accuracy after the study was complete.

Participants

Participants ($n = 102$) were recruited from local private schools and church programs. The schools consisted of a low-income after-school church program (LI), private independent Christian schools (PCS), and a church-based school (CBS). Parents of participants were required to read and sign an IRB-approved online parental consent form for their child. Children gave verbal assent at the start of the study and were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point. Each child was assigned a unique ID number, so names could be separated from the survey answer data.

All participants were randomly assigned to condition after parents gave consent. Randomization guarantees that each participant has the same chance of being assigned to a condition. Doing this helps eliminate any differences between the two groups that may have occurred without randomization. Each participant watched only one video, either the humorous or serious video. Response data was collected through an online survey by the principle investigator (PI) or research assistant. Research was conducted at participants' respective school or church.

Stimulus Material

Two short films were created for use in the study. Each video communicated the story of Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22). One video was humorous, Video A, and the other, Video B, was serious. Video A was an original short film written and directed by the PI. To create this film, the PI outlined key points in Acts 9:1-22. After identifying the main ideas, the PI summarized the story with the word "transformation." With this, she created the story of two scientists trying to create a transformation libation. As they work, these scientists tell the story of Saul's transformation to Paul. After writing the script, the PI recruited actors, found props, and designed the set (See Appendix A). Video A had a 5 minute 40 second runtime. Video B was a 2 minute 23 second runtime. Video A was an original short film written and directed by the PI. It included both live-action and animated content. The animated content was created using Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Character Animator. Video B was created using animated visuals from videos released by Saddleback Kids and original dialogue from the PI.

Measures

Remembering was measured using questions about basic story details. For example, “what was Saul like at the beginning of the story?” Understanding was measured using comprehension questions, such as “what is the main idea of the story?”

The questions regarding remembering and understanding were designed using keywords associated with each level of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

Paraphrasing is a second test for understanding but was scored as a separate category. For this data, a child was instructed to retell the story of Saul becoming Paul with as many details as possible. The researchers used an iPad to voice record the responses. After data collection was complete, the PI checked the details related by the children against a list of plot points from the story. Scores were given based on the number of details a child was able to remember without guidance.

In all three of these areas of study, answers were coded by level of correctness. Depending on the question, responses were assigned a number. If the child was completely incorrect, no points were given for that answer. Partially correct answers received one point, and completely correct answers received two points. For example, children were asked to describe in their own words what persecuting means. Children that said “I don’t know” or “being rude to someone” received zero points. One point went to answers that were partially correct, such as “killing” or “hurting people.” Children that said “hurting someone because of what they believe” or “killing Christians” received the full two points. This scoring method was used for all answers.

For enjoyment, participants were asked how much they enjoyed the show, and how much they would like to see another episode. Both questions had five answer

choices that were emoji faces ranging from super sad through super happy. These answer choices were then assigned a number from one to five, the most enjoyment score being a five.

In order to run additional analyses, information was collected regarding the participant's age, gender, grade, and study location. Participants were also asked how often they attend church and if they had heard the story of Saul's conversion previously.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and linear regression procedures were used to analyze the research questions.

Research question 1 examined the relationship between humor and a child's ability to remember and understand content (Table 1). Hypothesis 1 predicted that the use of humor would increase a child's learning on the lower two tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy, remembering and understanding, compared to a story told without humor. One way to measure understanding is the child's ability to paraphrase content. For the purposes of this study, data regarding paraphrasing is reported separately. A multivariate ANOVA procedure indicated that there was no main effect of the incorporation of humor on a child's remembering, understanding, or paraphrasing score.

Table 1

Two -Way MANOVA Results: Condition

Variable	<i>Humor M(SD)</i>	<i>Serious M(SD)</i>	$F_{(1, 94)}$	Sig.	η^2_{part}
Remembering	7.20 (2.38)	7.47 (1.65)	0.59	$p = .444$	.01
Understanding	8.08 (3.36)	7.84 (2.83)	0.29	$p = .589$	.00
Paraphrasing	8.59 (3.87)	8.04 (3.29)	1.13	$p = .291$	.01
Enjoyment	6.80 (0.77)	7.03 (0.52)	2.96	$p = .088$	.03

There was also no main effect of humor on enjoyment. Overall, children enjoyed both videos (Figure 1).

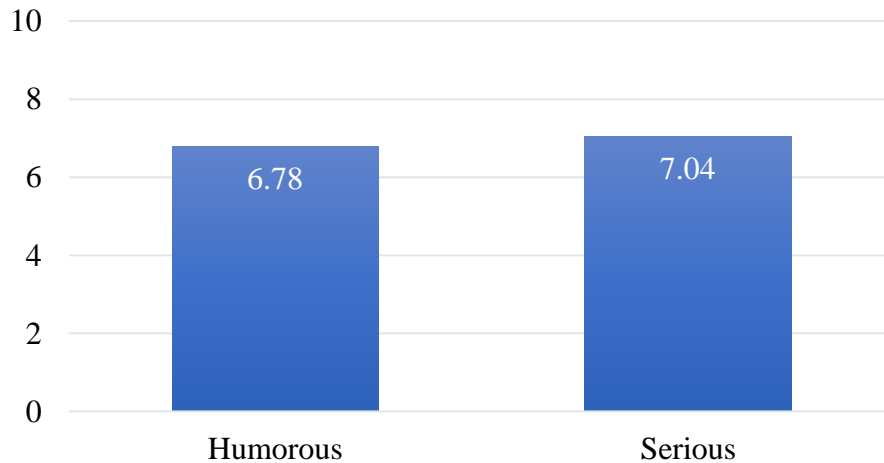


Figure 1. Enjoyment Score Across Conditions.

Research question 1 also provided interesting data regarding Piaget’s theory of the concrete operational stage. Children were asked what it means to be a new creation, which is a question that required students to have a deeper understanding of an abstract concept. Over half of the children were able to respond in a way that showed a real understanding, which is contrary to Piaget’s belief.

Research question 2 investigated the relationship between age and a child’s remembering, understanding, and paraphrasing scores (Table 2).

Table 2

Regression Results: Effect of Age Across Conditions

Variable	B	SE B	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.	R^2_{adj}
Remembering	0.77	0.25	0.289	3.07	$p = .003$	.08
Understanding	1.61	0.36	0.406	4.51	$p < .001$	.16
Paraphrasing	1.46	0.42	0.328	3.49	$p = .001$	.10

A regression analysis indicated that age was a significant predictor of remembering ($\beta = .29, t(103) = 3.07, p = .003$), understanding ($\beta = .41, t(103) = 4.51, p < .001$), and paraphrasing ($\beta = .33, t(101) = 3.49, p = .001$).

Research question 3 studied the relationship between previous exposure to the story on a child's enjoyment and remembering, understanding, and paraphrasing scores. A multivariate ANOVA procedure indicated that previous exposure to the story was a significant covariate on remembering, understanding, and paraphrasing (Pillai's Trace = .43, $F_{(1,102)} = 17.63, p < .001$). Children that had previous exposure to the story were able to remember more facts, understand at a higher level, and include more details while paraphrasing the story. Previous exposure was not a significant covariate on enjoyment.

Research question 4 examined the effect of the type of program on enjoyment and remembering, understanding, and paraphrasing scores. According to a multivariate ANOVA procedure, there was a main effect of the type of program on remembering and paraphrasing. There was no significance on understanding or enjoyment. Upon further investigation, there was a significant difference on remembering between the low income after school program and the private independent Christian school as well as the church-based school. However, there was no significance on remembering between the private independent Christian school and church-based school. There was also a significant difference on paraphrasing between the church-based school and the low income after school program (Table 3).

Table 3

Two - Way MANOVA Results: Program Type

Variable	<i>Private School M(SD)</i>	<i>Church-based School M(SD)</i>	<i>Low Income Program M(SD)</i>	$F_{(2, 90)}$	Sig.	η^2_{part}
Remembering	7.81 (1.65)	8.72 (1.71)	5.26 (1.76)	8.85	$p < .001$	.16
Understanding	8.72 (2.80)	9.00 (3.01)	5.43 (2.90)	2.03	$p = .138$	.04
Paraphrasing	8.91 (2.52)	9.94 (3.57)	5.65 (4.20)	3.94	$p = .023$	.08
Enjoyment	6.94 (0.62)	6.83 (0.64)	6.96 (0.78)	0.25	$p = .780$	.01

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

“There is no good reason to doubt the fact of the importance of conversion in childhood”

—Augustus Strong

Jesus loves kids. He wants them to have a personal relationship with Him. In Matthew 18, Jesus emphasizes the seriousness of child salvation saying if anyone causes a child to stumble, that person should be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck. Also, in this same chapter, Jesus says that one must humble himself like a child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Being a Christian is so much more than knowing events and stories from the Bible. The main concern for Christian educators should be helping children grow closer to the all-powerful, all-knowing, and loving God. In Christian education, we are concerned with both acquisition of biblical truths and behavior that applies those truths (Freese, 1986). When the focus is set on rote memorization, we take our eyes off what it means to have a relationship with Christ. Bible verses and stories are not helpful if a child does not understand what they mean. Rote memorization is not true learning, but rather a mere achievement (Eberle, 1986). However, understanding scripture encourages a deeper relationship with the Lord and promotes obedience (Schultz & Schultz, 1993).

Creating Curriculum

When creating Christian curriculum for children, creators must remember what is important. Christian education curriculum should lead children to Jesus as Savior, guide them in relational growth with God, and equip them for effective service in the will of God (Clark, 1986). Doing so will launch children into the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy as they begin to apply biblical truths to their own lives.

Begin with the Bible as the base. The Bible should be the main inspiration behind the teaching. Find key themes within the scriptures to create a base for the stories. Center the curriculum around Christ. Be accurate and true to the scriptures (Clark, 1986). Relate Old Testament stories to what Christ has done in the New Testament. LifeWay's curriculum *The Gospel Project for Kids* does an excellent job of communicating similarities between the Old and New Testament by providing a section about where Jesus is found in the story. For this study, the stimuli were created with Acts 9:1-22 as the core. The writer included the most basic level of information, assuming the child did not know anything about the Bible.

Children enjoy variety. The results of this study show that humor did not have a significant impact on ability of a child to remember, understand, and paraphrase information from the presented story. Also, the inclusion of humor was equally enjoyable as the serious film (See Figure 1). Because both videos were enjoyable, and scores were not influenced by humor, there are more opportunities for content creators to use both types of videos. Doing so creates variety in the curriculum, so children do not grow bored with the same routine.

Repetition is important. The largest influence on a child's performance was previous story exposure. If children heard the story before, they had higher scores. It is important to build repetition into the curriculum from the start. Curriculum developers should incorporate several presentations of the same story in order to solidify the content. Perhaps this means providing one humorous and one serious version of the story, or even including games that focus on key plot points within the story. Often, volunteer Sunday school teachers do not have time to come up with activities for their students. Therefore, it is the creators' responsibility to write in fun games, songs, crafts, etc. that reiterate key points from the lesson.

In this study, program type seemed to have a significant impact on remembering and paraphrasing scores. These results appear to indicate that children learning in faith-based environments are repeatedly learning Bible stories, thus increasing their ability to remember the content. Repetition combined with guided instruction will eventually lead to a deeper understanding of content and move the child into higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Higher levels include concepts such as application. The hope is that children learn concepts well, so that they can apply those concepts to their lives and live out strong biblical truths.

Along with repetition, it is helpful for students if teachers present new content by connecting it to old content. Again, *The Gospel Project for Kids* masters this concept. The curriculum is structured mostly chronologically where children build new knowledge onto the story they learned in the previous week. When we view this technique through the lens of Piaget's cognitive development theory, we see that this allows children to build off of previously established schemas to make the new material more meaningful.

As the child learns new information, either pre-existing schemas evolve, or new schemas are created. Piaget's schema concept was not tested in this study but seems to be effective in personal experiences at local Sunday school classrooms.

Other findings in this study suggest that age does have a significant impact on the remembering, understanding, and paraphrasing scores. As children grow older, they are able to remember and understand more, which improves the ability to summarize what they have learned. Considering Bruner's work, older students that are exposed to the same stories year after year may have even higher scores since they will have the advantage of the combination of being cognitively able to handle more information and repeated content.

According to Piaget, the students participating in this study should fall into the concrete operational stage, where thinking is more literal and concrete and abstract concepts are more difficult to process. During the video, students heard 2 Corinthians 5:17 which says that those who are in Christ are new creations. Following the video, students answered asked what it meant to be a new creation. Surprisingly, over half of the students answered "by believing in Jesus" or something similar. The correct responses indicated the children developed an abstract concept out of a concrete question.

According to Piaget, this should not be possible based on the ages of the participants (1964). Due to these results, it seems imperative that Christian educators should assess the performance levels of their students and not limit what they think a child can do because of behavioral science theories (Wakefield and Clark, 1986).

Also, in this study, there seemed to be an impact of program type on remembering and paraphrasing, but not on understanding or enjoyment. The remembering score was

significantly lower at the low income after school program (LI) than at the private independent Christian school (PCS) and the church-based school (CBS). However, there was no significance between the remembering scores of the PCS and the CBS. These results might suggest that children in the PCS and CBS are succeeding at rote memorization but failing to fully understand the deeper meaning.

Limitations

As with most research, there were some unavoidable threats to validity in this study. The main threat was the differences in videos. At the core, the videos had the same scripted words for the story of Acts 9:1-22. However, the humorous video incorporated the Bible story inside a fictional story of two scientists trying to make a transformation libation, whereas the serious video just told the Bible story without any additional plots. The humorous video was also about 3 ½ minutes longer than the serious video. Children that watched the longer video may have lost focus, thus missing information that was tested later in the research. Another potential issue was the style of videos. The serious video was all simplistic animation. The humorous video was a combination of animation and live-action humans. The children could have related more to one video or the other depending on what they are used to watching.

Future Research

Future studies might explore the effect of parasocial interactions and relationships in video Bible stories. Also, future research may investigate how group environments impact overall scores. The exploration of viewing behaviors within church classroom environments as opposed to school classroom environments would be intriguing. In any

case, it is crucial that Christian researchers and scholars continue to find ways to help children learn and understand Biblical truths, so that the future generations can strengthen their relationships with Christ.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Production Documents

Below are the pre-production and production documents that the author used to create the humorous video stimulus.

Creative Brief

Show Overview

Saul to Paul is a short film teaching the story of Acts 9:1-22 through live-action and animation silliness. In this episode, children learn that God's love is transformational. Professor Gerb and Caroline, two whacky scientists, teach children about becoming a new creation in Christ.

Audience Target

Saul to Paul is created for middle-elementary children, ages 8-10. This show is designed for use in a Sunday school setting.

Format and Genre

Short Narrative – Christian Children's Curriculum

Concept Treatment

Professor Gerb wants to make a transformation libation that will turn him into anything he wants. Caroline tells him that reminds her of a man in the Bible, Saul, who went through a huge transformation. Caroline and Gerb illustrate the story of Saul becoming Paul, Acts 9:1-22. As they talk through the story, animations appear on the chalkboard behind them. Caroline demonstrates how Jesus Christ transforms us with a science experiment and the memory verse, 2 Corinthians 5:17. The purpose of this short film is to teach children about Jesus Christ's transformational love.

Talent

Professor Gerb – A goofy scientist that is always coming up with new ideas.

Caroline – A smart, playful scientist that is there to keep Professor Gerb on-track.

Style and Design

- Video
 - Live action and animation
 - Tripod and Dana Dolly
- Sound
 - 2 Sony Lavalier microphones
 - Boom microphone
 - Zoom audio recorder
 - Original music
 - Music licensed through Sound Stripe
- Graphics
 - Animations created with Adobe Photoshop and Character Animator
 - Title card created in Adobe After Effects

Location

- First United Methodist Church of Waco
- The classroom is originally decorated in a 1950's diner style. To make this room into a science lab, we will repaint the walls to give a cleaner look, bring in new furniture, and add science décor to shelving and walls.

Proposed Timeline and Budget

Preproduction will begin spring of 2018, with production in early August. Post-Production will be completed by October of 2018.

Delivery Requirements

Children will watch on an iPad 3 (1280x720p, H.264)

Saul to Paul

cast/crew list

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR: CHRISTINA GRAY	CAMERA ASSISTANT: JOSH OVERTON
FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: HARRISON YOUNG	PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: ANDY RACOTI
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: GARRETT HARDY	VIDEO ENGINEERS: RON GARRETT, BOBBY FRILLOU
WRITERS: CHRISTINA GRAY	AUDIO OPERATORS: RICHARD BACA
SUPERVISING PRODUCERS: COREY CARBONARA, DAN SHAFER	BEHIND THE SCENES
PRODUCTION MANAGER: TORI EWING	PHOTOGRAPHER: JOSH OVERTON
SET DESIGNER: CHRISTINA GRAY	MUSIC COMPOSER: AARON HERNANDEZ
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR: MADDIE HOINKA	EDITOR: CHRISTINA GRAY
CAMERA OPERATOR: GARRETT HARDY	COLORIST: LAURA CASADONTE
	TALENT: CAROLINE MAY, NATHAN "GERB" GERBER

Cinematography Notes

CAMERA: ARRI AMIRA

- ISO: 800
- F-STOP: 2-2.8
- COLOR TEMP: 3200 K
- SHUTTER: 180 °
- LENS: 20mm
- FPS: 23.976
- RESOLUTION: UHD (3840×2160)
- COLOR LUT: None (Arri C Log)

CAMERA: ARRI AMIRA

- ISO: 800
- F-STOP: 2-2.8
- COLOR TEMP: 3200 K
- SHUTTER: 180 °
- LENS: 35mm
- FPS: 23.976
- RESOLUTION: UHD (3840×2160)
- COLOR LUT: None (Arri C Log)

CAMERA: ARRI AMIRA

- ISO: 800
- F-STOP: 2-2.8
- COLOR TEMP: 3200 K
- SHUTTER: 180 °
- LENS: 50mm
- FPS: 23.976
- RESOLUTION: UHD (3840×2160)
- COLOR LUT: None (Arri C Log)

LIGHTING DIAGRAM 2 SHOT

APPENDIX B

Saul to Paul Script

Below is the script for the short film Saul to Paul.

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