



## Which comes first?

**For generations we have argued about which came first the chicken or the egg. I recently read an article that seems to finally put this questions to rest. The article said, “the body of a hen is the only thing that produces the right chemicals and calcium to make the shell of an egg.” So, it seems that we must have a hen to make the egg because the shell cannot come from anywhere else.**

**In recent years with so many resources available to children’s ministers the question has arose “which comes first the message or the method?” Hopefully most of us would say it’s the message, but let’s examine this questions further.**

**For over 25 years in children’s ministry, I have used and taught the method of “theme and repetition” as a great way to teach children, keep their attention, and have them retain what we teach. The theory behind this method of teaching is below:**

**Studies show that the attention span of children is one minute per age of child. Therefore, if you have 5 year olds you have approximately 5 minutes to get your message across before you lose their attention. If you have 10 year olds you have approximately ten minutes before you lose their attention. It’s been said that with this generation we probably have less than one minute per age of child.**

**Because of this short attention span, I endeavor each week to put the theme in a sentence of around 10 to 12 words. Usually the theme will be a verse out of the bible, which I want the children to remember.**

**Because people enjoy change, especially children, we use a variety of methods each week to present this theme. The theme for the week stays the same throughout each service, but we change methods every 5 to 10**

minutes to keep up with the short attention span of the children we are ministering to. In each segment of the service we should endeavor to repeat the theme in one way or another.

Some of the different ways we will use to repeat this theme are:

- 1 Music/songs
2. Bible stories
3. Games
4. Object lessons/illustrated sermons
5. Skits/drama
6. Puppets/full body costumes
7. Video clips and presentations

I have found that teaching with this method, it is important to start off with the most exciting thing first, usually an exciting intro followed by an icebreaker skit or game. This is to grab the children's attention and let them know that what we are doing is more important than anything they could ever want to do. Once we start off with the excitement, it is important to keep transitions flowing smoothly. Dead spots are great chances to lose the attention of children and maybe even loose control of the class. We gradually lead the children into serious instruction. Then give them a chance to respond to the theme with a time of altar ministry. This is the time we allow the Holy Spirit to move in the lives of the children, and encourage them to seek a deeper relationship with God. After the ministry time we will usually end in a time of excitement again, usually a review game or a high impact skit that reviews the theme. This will leave the children with a charge to take this message home.

I have used this method for over 25 years of teaching children and usually I have a very limited amount of discipline problems, and a very high amount of children that retain the theme of the lesson. I have been able to go into inner city areas where children have even smaller attention spans and keep the attention of a large group of children for around an hour. People have remarked that they had never seen these children set still this long before. I first learned this method of teaching from attending Willie George conferences, when I was first starting out in children's ministry.

As a creative person I have been tempted throughout the years to use really cool new methods that have nothing to do with the message like lights, video, and special effects which is not necessary wrong however, if we have a really cool service and the children are not retaining what is being taught and are not being ministered to then what is the point. All these methods are to be used to reinforce the message.

When I first started out in Children's ministry, I read an article by a Christian magician that said, "That we should always develop the Gospel message first, then come up with a trick or illusion to reinforce the message. If we come up with a really cool illusion, then try to put a gospel message to it, it will usually become watered down and be more about the illusion and performance instead of the message."

I have endeavored to always hear from God and get the message that he wants me to present first. Then find creative ways to teach and reinforce this message that makes it exciting for children, so that they retain it.

When writing Jubilee Gang programs, I usually start off with a subject that has been stirring around in my heart for a while. After studying this subject and taking notes, I then turn it into something similar to a sermon outline. From there I start adding more creative elements like object lessons, power point, video, and media. Then I start adding things like skits, and games. The last thing I usually do is come up with a big intro, where I choreograph lights & video to make the program exciting for children with short attention spans. Lights are to enhance the experience not be the experience, especially in a church setting. Check out an article I wrote called [Lighting and Tech in Children's ministry](#) that talks about this further.

The bible says in Romans 10:17 "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" The word of God is the only thing that produces faith in the heart of children.

By all means use all the modern technology available to reinforce your lessons, help keep kids attention, and enhance the learning experience. However, don't let it become the main attraction by developing a really cool show then adding a little gospel to make it Christian. Let us always put first things first when it comes to ministry.

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