

New Paradigms in Lifespan Faith Development

1:30 Gather in groups of 2 as people enter and respond to the question –
What is the purpose of Lifespan Faith Development?

1:40 Readings by Liz: by the Rev. Dr. Angus H. MacLean

Helen:

Gail: by the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker

1:45 Liz introduce Panel and give synopsis of the Curriculum Advisory Committee work

The Paradigm shift is from a focus on the information we expect from curriculum to personal spiritual engagement with it.

2:00 Gail speaks of the practical dynamics of new paradigms

2:15 Helen speaks of the theory grounding new paradigms

2:30 Gail and youth speak of Coming of Age programming

2:40 Closing Readings/

Gail: by Marge Piercy

Helen

Liz: by Walter Bruggemann

Evaluation of Trends and Developments in our Religious Education Program

An address delivered at the 123rd Annual Meeting of the Unitarian Sunday School Society in 1950 by Universalist Dr. Angus H. MacLean Professor of Religious Education at St. Lawrence University.

He was speaking of training for ministers, but I ask you to think of your Sunday school teachers and its implication for their training.

Among our most resistant bottlenecks is an antiquated theological education. Students study doctrine, ancient documents some of which had better be left to the moth and the rust, comparative religions, ecclesiastical history. They study everything \that has ever been believed. They know what everyone believes now, but, too often they go to their work without more than the vaguest idea of what their own message and mission might be. They go, too often, filled with unarticulated protest, antipathies and uneasiness of spirit, and with undiscovered powers of wisdom and spirituality. I am sure that there is a better way of dealing with the message of the church,...

Essex Conversations

UUA Curriculum Advisory Committee

UUA Philosophy Statement

Faith Based curriculum

Bible to Child to UU Principles to Faith Teacher Development planning

As many of you know, the UUA Department of Religious Education called together religious educators of all stripes in 1999 and 2000 to enter into a conversation around the questions: As we enter the 21st Century, what is the core of our evolving Unitarian Universalist Faith? What is your vision of the goals of our lifespan religious education? And, What are the vital components for Unitarian Universalist curricula? The resulting essays are published as the Essex Conversations.

As I look to the future of Unitarian Universalist Religious Education I am heartened by that which is old, that which is new, that which we have borrowed from others, and that which is altogether something else. It is informative for all of us to become aware of our religious education history and it is equally important for us to respond to the new ideas generated within our Unitarian Universalist Religious Education community. We have gained tremendous knowledge and understanding from philosophies, practices, and curricula that we have borrowed from people like Tom Groome, Maria Harris, Gabriel Moran, Mary Boys and Sharon Parks. Now we are looking at some things that are altogether different. But not so altogether different as we have learned by reading our history.

The UUA changed the name of the department of religious education to the Lifespan Faith Development Staff Group for very foundational reasons. From the Essex Conversations came the realization that the goal of our programming is the engagement of individuals of all ages with their faith and their experiences. The Curriculum Advisory Committee was created to bring ideas and advice to the Lifespan Faith Development Staff Group at the UUA as they began the work of developing curriculum for the 21st Century.

The first thing the Curriculum Advisory Committee established with the UUA Staff Group was the commitment to make the new curriculum “be” Unitarian Universalist not just “about” Unitarian Universalism, and that it be faith based. We wanted it to be grounded in our own theology and philosophy of education. The people we have borrowed from are outstanding and have given us considerable grounding in what we have been developing during the last two decades. Now we need to stand on our own two feet and claim that our Unitarian Universalist theologies and philosophies are substantial enough to ground our religious education.

1. Our first task for the UUA staff was to have them develop a statement of religious education philosophy. They wrote a six paragraph statement, of which I will share with you a synopsis to give you an understanding of what they have created and some glimpse of what to expect in the curriculum.
2. The purpose of religious education is the transformation of our selves and our communities through spiritual, ethical, and faith development. It is a lifelong process of meaning making inherent in our humanity.

3. Our spirituality calls us to be in relationship with the Transcendent, to engage our best selves, to appreciate life as a sacred trust, to connect with ever-deepening, ever-widening circles of relationship, to witness awe and mystery, and to do justice.
4. Liberating religious education promotes critical consciousness, and engages us in a process of inquiry, reflection, and action to transform our communities and ourselves. Religious education helps us see beyond our own limitations, and in this way, is inherently anti-oppressive.
5. In the context of Unitarian Universalism, religious education facilitates activities of meaning making, spiritual growth, religious identity, and ethical development. It is the responsibility of the entire covenanted religious community, as learners and teachers, to create, support, and engage in these activities for individual and communal transformation.
6. As religious liberals, the Sources of our Living Tradition offer rich content and context to explore. As we seek to be faith-keepers, we celebrate the people, ideas, events, and heritages that identify and define us.
7. We are guided by our Principles in creating relationships of trust, inclusion, affirmation, and participation in our learning communities.

Next we looked to Unitarian Universalist theologians and educators for a framework on which to build the concepts for the curriculum. Loosely taking ideas from Unitarian James Freeman Clarke we developed four strands of the framework: **ethical development** for building moral and ethical character; **spiritual development** involving practices and responses to a longing for a sense of the holy; **religious development** for experiencing and internalizing a Unitarian Universalist identity, and **faith development** for the processes of meaning making, a sense of purpose, and core values of life.

Within this framework we think educators can organize our Unitarian Universalist and faith stories, create models of pedagogy and practice that is congruent with being Unitarian Universalists. We developed goals for each of these strands and began the work of exploring the curricula's structure, experiences, and pedagogy. We generated a great list of things we wanted to see in the new curricula.

We were feeling pretty smug until Barry Andrews, chair of the committee said quite calmly: "Even if we develop the most creative, engaging curriculum ever, there is no assurance that congregations will use it as we create it. Some may continue to use existing curricula."

So we jumped out of the box and remembered some of the history and much of our own experiences as religious educators. We took into account children and youth's interests and learning styles, the abiding questions that are inherent in faith development, the need for making our Unitarian Universalism both an internal experience and an external understanding. And we took into account the need to involve the parents, indeed the whole congregation in the educational enterprise.

And, I remembered Walter Breuggemann's words that we must pay attention to

continuity and discontinuity in our endeavors; to honor our heritage's values and identity, and make room for freedom and innovation.

We came up with quite a list of new ideas: workshop modules for senior high and adults; multiple learning formats to honor diverse learning styles; small group ministry; social justice opportunities; cookbooks for suggestions on how to adapt curricula and encouragement to add your congregation's specific traditions; worship, music, art, drama, and dance resources; audio visual and computer components; study guides for teens and adults; graded and group graded lessons to address the vast range of sizes in our religious education programs; and resource guides developed around themes. We took into consideration theological diversity, size and geographic location of congregations, cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity. We understood that we needed to develop teacher guides and training sessions, parent guides and child advocacy guides for those with special needs.

That in a nutshell is what the UUA has begun working on. Helen, Gail, and I have also begun working on changing the way we train teachers. I began to listen to religious educators complain that teachers were not able to move deeper into the theologies and concepts in the various curricula. So we are working on a process for what we call teacher development. It will be an ongoing process maybe like small group ministries for teachers where they can bring a critical discernment to their life experiences through an engage with their faith development and thus with the curriculum they are teaching.

In an historical movement we have gone and are going from Bible based in the first century of our Sunday School Movement, to child based as a response to the Progressive Education movement in the early 1900's, to UU Principles based following the 1982 RE Futures Report, to faith based coming out of the Essex Conversations. This faith based programming incorporates the others into what is hoped will provide opportunities for children, youth, and adults to put together their life experiences and a discernment process to gain an understanding of their faith development that validates their life experiences and their religious tradition.

By Walter Brueggemann

Every community that wants to last beyond a single generation must concern itself with education. Education has to do with the maintenance of a community through the generations. This maintenance must assure enough continuity of vision, value, and perception so that the community sustains its self-identity. At the same time, such maintenance must assure enough freedom and novelty so that the community can survive in and be pertinent to new circumstances. Thus, education must attend both to processes of continuity and discontinuity in order to avoid fossilizing into irrelevance on the one hand, and relativizing into disappearance on the other hand.