

Religious Education Theory and Practice Syllabus

APCE 2026

Course Information:

This course begins in early December with online readings done individually by participants. This is self-paced reading with instructor prompts for each reading to aid in notetaking. A pre-course paper (3-5 pages) on the participant's experience in educational ministry as both a learner and leader will be due a week before the in-person class begins. There will be a recorded Zoom Meeting in early January to discuss the paper and the coming in-person class. Class will meet in-person from Monday, January 19 (afternoon start) until Wednesday, January 21 (ending at lunchtime). There will be a final educational design paper due one month after the course ends on February 21, 2026.

Instructor Information:

Kathy Dawson

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Course Description

This course looks at the foundations of educational ministry in Scripture and church history. It emphasizes the relationship between theory and practice in the way we teach in faith communities today and asks participants to craft their own theology of educational ministry for their contexts. This course also develops skills such as curriculum evaluation and lesson planning that will aid educators in their pursuit of educator certification and in their ministries.

Guiding Question for the Course: What models of teaching and learning are most effective and theologically sound in growing Christian faith in your particular contexts?

Learning Outcomes for the Course:

Given the class sessions, readings, and assignments, by the end of the course, the learner will:

1. Understand the theories and decision-making practices that are implicit in the writing of lesson plans for particular age groups

2. Understand what education in the church is called to be through the writings of Hymans, Brueggemann, Kim-Cragg, Seymour, Nodding, Osmer, Lee, Griggs, and others.
3. Integrate previous experience and course readings into developing an emerging theology of Christian education for ministry
4. Develop Christian education skills such as: analyzing resources, writing a lesson plan, and leading a discussion.

Course Materials:

Required Text: Seymour, Jack L. *Teaching Biblical Faith: Leading Small Group Bible Studies*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015.

Required Online Reader: Each required item has been scanned or linked to the pre-course reading repository. No more than one chapter or article has been used from any given source to stay within copyright fair use practices.

A sampling of resources:

Berryman, Jerome W. *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, Volume 1. Living the Good News, 2002.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Creative Word: Canon as Model for Biblical Education*, 2nd Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

Griggs, Donald L. *Teaching Today's Teachers to Teach*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.

Hymans, Diane. "Education and Evangelism: Is the Connection Essential?" in *Christian Education as Evangelism*, edited by Norma Cook Everist. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Kim-Cragg, Hyeran Kim. *Story and Song: A Post-colonial Interplay between Christian Education and Worship*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012.

Lee, Boyung. *Transforming Congregations Through Community: Faith Formation from Seminary to the Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

Noddings, Nel. "The Aims of Education" from *The Curriculum Studies Reader*, 6th Edition, edited by David Flinders and Stephen Thornton. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2021.

Osmer, Richard Robert. *Teaching for Faith: A Guide for Teachers of Adult Classes*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992.

Roberto, John. "Generations Together: A Vision of an Intergenerational Church" in *Generations Together: Caring, Praying, Learning, Celebrating & Serving Faithfully*. Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2014.

Wimberly, Anne Streaty. *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994

Course Requirements:

- 1. Class Participation and Reading Notes:** Readings will be available beginning in December and should be completed before the in-person class begins on January 19, 2026. It is anticipated that all participants will be present for the full time of the course in Pittsburgh from the afternoon of January 19-January 21 (ending at lunchtime). There will be a Zoom informational meeting scheduled for early January that will be recorded, if you are unable to attend.
- 2. Pre-Course Reflection Paper (3-5 pages):** Participants are asked to share their experiences as a learner and a leader in educational ministry. Feel free to include important memories of particular faith-related educational experiences that have become integrated into your teaching. **Due: Monday, January 12, 2026**
- 3. Theology of Educational Ministry (1 page):** This is meant to be a continuous task (indeed, lifelong!). Think about choosing one scripture, theological doctrine or sacramental notion that might form the basis of your statement. Write on ONE PAGE the body of your theology of Christian education (double spaced, standard margins, 12-point font, no cover page). Craft this for your average lay member of your church. It is expected that you will use footnotes/endnotes from the readings that match or contrast with your ideas. These do not count into the one-page stipulation. **Due: Wednesday, January 21, 2026.**
- 4. Curriculum Evaluation Tool (1-2 pages):** You will decide on criteria that are important to your context and craft a tool for evaluating resources for a particular age grouping (children, youth, or adults). The reading from Building Faith website will aid you in this task. You will be given in class time to complete this assignment and use it on several resources from different publishers.
- 5. Educational Design with Extensive Rationale (5+ pages):** After completing the in-person portion of the course, you will be given the opportunity to put what you've learned in practice, by creating one lesson plan (1 hour in duration) with an extensive rationale detailing the decisions you've made, the foundational theory underlying your plan. It is expected that the instructor of this course should be able to pick up your plan and be able to teach it in your stead with all handouts, slides, presentation outlines included. **Due February 21, 2026.**

Course Outline for In-Person Sessions

Monday, January 19, 2026 (1:00 PM-6:00 PM)

Community Building Activities

Syllabus Overview

Biblical, Historical, and Theological Foundations of Educational Ministry

Through a variety of teaching methods we'll address the readings by Hymans, Brueggemann, Kim-Cragg, and begin the Seymour text. This will be a combination of mini-lectures, small group work, artistic experiences, and modeling of several Bible study methods.

Tuesday, January 20, 2026 (9:00-12:00)

Pedagogy and Curriculum Theory

Through engagement with the readings of Lee, Osmer, Roberto, and more from the Seymour text, we'll experience and explore different modes of teaching and learning, assessing which might appeal to different age groups and which might be beneficial for an intergenerational setting.

Tuesday, January 20, 2026 (1:00-6:00)

Curriculum Evaluation Tool Creation and Analysis of Resources (Draws on previous reading sources and the Building Faith website)

In this session we'll bring together what we've learned to create curriculum evaluation tools that incorporate what we're looking for biblically, theologically, educationally, and practically in the resources we use or create. Participants will be given in class time to create their evaluation tools and then use them to assess a variety of resources for a particular age group (children, youth, or adults). Those interested in creating an intergenerational tool will also have a sampling of resources to assess.

Lesson Plan Writing Tutorial (Draws on Noddings and Griggs Readings)

In this tutorial we look at one model for writing lesson plans and play some educational games with the portions of the plan that often give educators some difficulties. This is in preparation for your post-class

assignment. You will have access to a recorded version of this tutorial as you write your final paper.

Wednesday, January 21, 2026 (9:00-12:00)

Educational Ministry and its place among other ministries within the church

In this session we will begin by looking at how educational ministry relates to worship, mission, and evangelism within the church.

This is a return to Hymans, Lee, and some of the models of Seymour seeing educational ministry not within a silo, but part of the larger work of the church. I'll also be sharing some of what we're learning through the Wonder of Worship project at Columbia Theological Seminary in this regard.

Sharing of Theological Statements

We'll end our time with the sharing of our one-page theological statements, first in small groups and then eliciting any common themes that were heard.