

Teaching for Transformation Overview

See the Story ← → Live the Story

The Teaching for Transformation (TfT) program provides a framework for the development of authentic and integral Christian learning experiences that are grounded in a transformational worldview with a focus on seeing and living out God's story. The TfT program's design practices and tools are being used by over 50 schools worldwide (Canada, United States, Africa, and Central America) to develop powerful Christian school learning experiences.

"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'"

Abraham Kuyper

The biblical truth that resounds in our Christian school's curriculum is that all things in the world belong to God. It is important that we not presume that this truth is obvious or apparent to all. The task of a Christian school teacher is to help reveal God's grand story in all things. A teacher's task is one of Christian-story telling, of seeking out and helping students to "See the Story" in all areas of study. We do this by teaching under the principle of all things. Teaching for Transformation binds together all subjects and activities, providing a framework for the education we provide and what we want graduates to be. It helps us live out our mission by providing definitions of what it means to be a disciple (head), why we have discipleship habits (heart), and how we practice being a disciple (hands).

God created all things. Even after the fall, which indeed affects and infects all things, creation remains good. Redemption impacts all things, redirecting them to their God-designated purposes. Someday, all things will be fully restored, but the work of renewal begins now, and we are privileged to be co-workers with God in this process. It is into this story that teachers are called to invite each student. Through TfT, teachers design learning experiences that help students discover God's story and His fingerprints in all things, with the hope that every learning experience will become truly transformational for every student.

Explore (Head) – Desire (Heart) – Practice (Hands)

While there is a high level of intentionality in the TfT program that contains many unique core design practices and tools that all teachers are expected to use, the following three Core Practices serve as the foundation of the TfT program.

Core Practice # 1 – Storyline

Every Christian school classroom must have a powerful and compelling vision of the Kingdom that creates a longing and a desire within every student to play their part in God's unfolding story of creation-fall-redemption-restoration.

"And once you live a good story, you get a taste for that kind of meaning in life, and you can't go back to being normal; you can't go back to meaningless scenes stitched together by the forgettable thread of wasted time. The more practiced stories I lived, the more I wanted an epic to climb inside of and see through to its end."

Donald Miller

TfT believes that every unit and every learning experience tells a story. The TfT program tries, using the story discovered in each unit of study, to create a powerful and compelling image of God's story. The TfT program invites students to imagine his or her place in God's story – now. The TfT program does this by connecting the story of each

unit with opportunities to tangibly practice living in the grand narrative. Each student and teacher will begin to create a personal “storyline” and articulate how they see themselves living in God’s epic drama.

SCCS School Storyline: Serving God and Others as We Work and Play

Concept	Description
Creation	The biblical story tells us that God created and sustains all things. God gave life and controls all things. He made mankind to have special relationships with Him and gave mankind His creation mandate that directs human life. The creation is good, which refers to the physical and biological creation and also the cultural strands that God has woven into its fabric. Here the focus is on what God intended things to be like, the way it ought to have been.
Fall	The biblical story tells us that all things have fallen as a result of sin and that every facet and part of the world is twisted by evil. The consequence is pain and suffering, brokenness and idolatry. Therefore, all things, human life and culture, have become distorted and shaped by idolatry. The widespread effects of sin are obvious, but God is still faithful and promises liberation from this bondage.
Redemption	The biblical story tells us that although man fell into sin, God had a plan of redemption through the sacrifice of His Son. Christ came to earth to restore creation from the distorting influence of sin and redeem all things so that we could get back on track with God’s original design and purpose. Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, who holds all things together, the power of sin has been dealt with. Now, as redeemed people, we look forward towards and participate in the restoration of the whole creation.
Restoration	The biblical story tells us that we are called to live in the light of this coming restoration as faithful redemptive agents responding to God’s invitation to work towards ongoing redemption, as we fulfill our original mandate to take care of and develop His creation. God is sovereign in His ongoing work of redemption, and He calls us to join Him as His redemptive people, His agents of restoration. In response to Christ’s past and ongoing redemptive work, and with the active presence of the Holy Spirit, we can gratefully respond by living a life of service and partnership as all things move towards complete restoration. This will not be fully realized until Christ returns. One of the tasks of the Christian school is to call students to be involved in God’s redemption and transformation of His world and to set up sign posts to the coming Kingdom.

Core Practice # 2 – Biblical Throughlines

Every Christian school classroom must have an articulate and inspiring student profile that invites every student to imagine how to play their part in God’s story.

“The primary goal of Christian education is the formation of a peculiar people, a people who desire the kingdom of God and thus undertake their life’s expression of that desire.”

James K. A. Smith

What a complex challenge to imagine what it is to be a “peculiar” person in God’s story! SCCS has identified 11 biblical Throughlines to help us imagine who we are as peculiar people. When schools invite students to actively contribute to the formation of Christian culture, we need to challenge each student to develop Kingdom-building characteristics.

These biblical characteristics help us all, teachers and students, to understand what our roles are and what our calling is. They provide us with chances to practice, opportunities to develop discipleship habits.

Teachers use Throughlines to connect each unit's learning outcomes to God's story, as a type of "thematic Velcro", carefully choosing, together with the students, one or two Throughlines they want to learn about as they explore the topic. This process shifts the learning focus away from "what" the student needs to know to "who" the student is called to be. These Throughlines characteristics weave through the Bible and describe a calling to "be", not simply to "do". They can also be considered "wholines" because they describe who we are. Interestingly, TfT teachers often find that the students absorb the "stuff" of the unit better because they have a meaningful context for the learning.

Throughlines are big picture ideas around which we can organize curriculum. Throughlines are qualities/characteristics that we desire students to develop as God is revealed to them in all things. They are discipleship concepts that guide our living. These characteristics describe how we can become part of the restoration of creation. They answer, "How NOW shall I live?" Throughlines weave the big ideas into a transformational worldview. A key component of the TfT program is that teachers are challenged not simply to tell the students about the Throughlines but to provide actual opportunities for the students to "live" the chosen Throughlines in each unit.

And what does God call us to "be"? He calls us to be Servant Workers, to be Justice Seekers, to be Earth Keepers, to be Community Builders. He calls us to be Creation Enjoyers, Truth Finders, Order Discoverers, and Beauty Makers. And in all of these, He calls every disciple to be God Worshippers, Word Appliers, and Image Reflectors. Here we get a wider picture of the roles that God has called us to be as Christians.

Throughline	Description
God Worshiper 	<p>Students understand that worshipping God is about celebrating who God is, what God has done and is doing, and what God has created. It is literally about standing in awe and wonder of Him and His promises. Students see this worship as a way of life and appreciate God's all sufficient grace and their faith journey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning Target: I can worship God in all parts of my life. <p><i>Deuteronomy 6:4-9: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children..." (NIV)</i></p>
Word Applier 	<p>Students weave The Big Story into all areas of life and apply the stories of Scripture, seeing God's faithfulness in the lives of His people, including their own. They will understand the summary of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. They are reminded that every square inch we explore, learn, discern, or encounter in education and life is informed by a strong understanding of the Bible and will discern and inform decisions with Scripture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning Target: I can apply God's Word in all areas of life. <p><i>Colossians 3:16: "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." (NIV)</i></p>
Image Reflector 	<p>Students bear the image of God in their daily lives. Being an image bearer isn't something we do. It is something we are. We learn to see God's image in others. The more Christ-like our actions are, the more clearly Christ's light shines in a dark world. Students are nurtured in the characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning Target: I can develop my talents and gifts to reflect God and serve others. <p><i>Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (NIV)</i></p>

<p>Truth Finder</p> 	<p>Students will understand that when other “things” are more important to us than our relationship with God, they become idols. They need to learn to analyze a worldview by asking questions about what is being portrayed in regard to culture, values, and belief systems. Students will be challenged to identify, understand, and discern the idols of our time and times past and then to respond as modern day prophets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Target: I can recognize idols in my life and choose to focus on the true God. <p><i>Romans 12:2: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (NIV)</i></p>
<p>Earth Keeper</p> 	<p>Students will respond to God’s call to be stewards of all of creation, including mankind. They will reclaim and relearn how to respectfully treat the world/universe and all things contained in it, which respects God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Target: I can respect and care for all parts of God’s world. <p><i>Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” (NIV)</i></p>
<p>Beauty Maker</p> 	<p>As image bearers of a creative God, students will glorify and praise God by creating that which is beautiful and pleasing to Him. This offering of creativity isn’t optional – it’s a joyful duty that students offer as a sacrifice of praise. Creation shouts that our God is a God who loves diversity, complexity, and creativity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Target: I can glorify God through my creativity. <p><i>Colossians 1:16: “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.” (NIV)</i></p>
<p>Justice Seeker</p> 	<p>Students will act as agents of change by identifying and responding to injustices. The world is not as God intended it to be. Everything is tainted by sin. We need to respond to God’s call to act as agents of restoration, His disciples, respecting the stories and hurts of others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Target: I can see injustice and try to respond with love and fairness. <p><i>Micah 6:8: “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (NIV)</i></p>
<p>Creation Enjoier</p> 	<p>Students will discover, understand, and celebrate God’s beautiful creation and give testimony to the presence of God in creation. Ordinary things become extraordinary when seen in new ways. We see joy in the interrelated creation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Target: I can discover, enjoy, and celebrate God’s creation. <p><i>Psalm 65:8: “The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.” (NIV)</i></p>
<p>Servant Worker</p> 	<p>Students will work actively to heal brokenness and bring joy to individuals and to culture. Being an image bearer means having the ability and responsibility to discover, respond to, develop, use, and improve the world God has placed us in. Students cultivate the desire and ability to offer hope, healing, and restoration to the world and its people, using our talents and gifts to serve God and others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Target: I can bring joy and healing to others through service. <p><i>1 John 3:16: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.” (NIV)</i></p>

Community Builder 	<p>Students will be active pursuers and builders of community in their classrooms, their neighborhoods, and in the global village they are part of. Our classrooms will be communities of grace where students will walk and work together in peace. We seek to be loving and joyful in our work and play.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Target: I can understand and build community. <p><i>1 Corinthians 12:12: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." (NIV)</i></p>
Order Discoverer 	<p>Students see God's fingerprints all over creation. God has created order out of chaos. There is purpose, and we are able to discover the order. God has a plan, and we are part of that plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Target: I can see and rejoice in God's fingerprints throughout all of creation. <p><i>Psalm 19:1-4: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (NIV)</i></p>

Core Practice # 3 – FLEX – Formational Learning Experiences

Every Christian school classroom must provide authentic (real work, real people, real need) opportunities for students to practice living the Kingdom story. This practice then becomes a habit, with habits shaping who we are and what we do.

"It is nothing but a pious wish and a grossly unwarranted hope that students trained to be passive and non-creative in school will suddenly, upon graduation, actively contribute to the formation of Christian culture."

Nicholas Wolterstorff

"A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something that he can learn no other way."

Mark Twain

Wolterstorff suggests, strongly, that students must be given the opportunity to do God's work NOW – to be active and creative in God's story. Meaningful work creates a sense of purpose in their lives, and draws students more powerfully to God's story. As the name suggests, Formational Learning Experiences are designed to form the students' hearts and actions as well as their minds, equipping students to become people who live and breathe God's story. Research and experience suggest that formational learning best emerges from experiences that get at our gut and touch our heart. James K. A. Smith writes in *Desiring the Kingdom* that "Education is not primarily . . . concerned with providing information; rather, education most fundamentally is a matter of formation, a task of shaping and creating a certain kind of people. These people are distinct because of what they love and desire – the kingdom of God."

We promise to design formational learning experiences that:

- **Invite** every student to explore their role in the Kingdom story
- **Nurture** every student to desire to be a peculiar people
- **Empower** every student to practice their life's expression

Other Important Concepts

- My/Our Deep Hope
- Essential Questions
- Field Work (not Field Trips)
- Learning Targets
- Reflection
- Baraka vs. Babel
- Specific, Kind, Helpful Feedback
- We are a people who try. Failure is OK. Failure leads to learning and growth.
- Protocols
- "Rule of 60" – not all curriculum is equal
 - Worthwhile – should know it for 60 minutes
 - Important – should know it for 60 days
 - Essential – should know it for 60 years