

The Living Curriculum

The Living Curriculum “is a philosophy, a process and a program of spiritual support to assist children, teens, families and the church community.”

It seeks to draw the lesson from the student through experiences, stories and creative expression. Through the living curriculum approach lessons are created that will relate to real issues in a person’s life and through a process of questions & discussions, helps them to connect with God and their indwelling Christ spirit.

A Living Curriculum

- Lives in the question
- Uses the vehicle of story and/or experience
- Is issue based
- Is engaging
- Is an adventure
- Elicits creativity
- Involves everyone
- Always has debriefing

Unity Worldwide Ministries Educational Philosophy

Myrtle Fillmore believed our mission was not to “entertain the children, but instead, to draw them out.” The Living Curriculum is an approach or philosophy which affirms that the curriculum—that which is to be learned or known—lives within the adult, child or teen, themselves. It moves us past the belief that teachers have all the answers and need to impart them to the students. Instead, there is a realization that all of us are uniquely unfolding on our spiritual path, having access to the Spirit within.

To assist in creating a meaningful, effective experience or lesson using the Living Curriculum philosophy, here is a six-point checklist as a guide:

- Identify which issue, theme, or need is currently active in your group’s lives.
- Choose a story, movie passage, song, Bible story, or experiential activity that will introduce the issue/theme and help the participants connect to it.
- Find a method to explore the issue or theme in order to make it relevant:
- Use open-ended questions, worded to avoid yes/no answers, to progress from safe, “out there” answers to more internal “in here” answers. [See Discussion Question Guide Below
- Choose an open-ended activity to awaken the story within, for example: art activities, music, movement, games, journaling etc. Expressing spirituality is a multi-sensory experience.
- Allow time for participants to share, if they choose, what the experience awakened in them. Encourage action related to the story.

Issue Based Lessons

“Living Curriculum is issue-centered. Life is all about issues that we are trying to make sense of. By focusing on issues in our lives through the common experience of sharing story, we become engaged and involved as we examine these issues. This approach leads to exploring spiritual principles and truths and to an awareness of how they are operating in our lives.” ~ *Unity Worldwide Ministries, Youth and Family Ministry Guide*

The Living Curriculum Components

Issues in Stories

- Our lessons are based on issue because real life has issues.
- We use stories that help our children/teens figure out how to make their way in life, move into life with grounding principles are their foundation. This gives them insight into how to step into life in a more powerful way.
- The stories help us find common ground for our issues.
- The tension in the story is about real life.
- Use the Bible to illustrate modern issues from our daily lives.
- The stories are our mythology and contain universal wisdom.
- You are every character in the story.

The Intention

- Defines the intention of the lesson. They can be described as measurable learning objectives, for example: The intention is to describe, to explore, to create, to apply, etc... *For assistance in creating learning objectives, refer to “Bloom’s Revise Taxonomy” handout in Module 6.*
- Includes universal principles; Bible or sacred quotes; affirmation statements
- All parts of the lesson reflect and reinforce the issue and intention to be explored.

Sacred Circle

- This is the transition between arrival and moving into the lesson experience. It helps to create community and belonging and includes a variety of activities, such as:
 - Activities that welcome
 - Activities that build community
 - Activities that encourage collaboration
 - Activities that invite deeper internal exploration

The Story

- What story, movie passage or experiential activity are you using to introduce the issue or theme and help the children create a connection to it? Any lesson connects better when the participants can have a common experience or see themselves in the story. Then, the discussion is more apt to stay focused on what they have shared together.
- **Rive Collins describes stories in this way:**
“Stories and storytelling lie at the heart of the human experience. Stories have been passed down from generation to generation, both in spoken and written word, and continue to help form and shape who we are.

Stories help us reflect on the past, explain our present, and imagine our future. Sewn across time, story-threads bind individuals to families and families to the world, enabling us to experience healing in our lives and envision a beautiful and just world.

Stories have the power to enrich our lives, shape the way we perceive and experience the world, and reveal the wonders of the human spirit.

Stories and storytelling can be powerful tools in healing, building and nurturing relationships, as well as in planting seeds of hope and light for the future.”

▪ **Selecting the Story**

~ Unity Worldwide Ministries, Youth and Family Ministry Guide

- After identifying the issue, look for a story that illustrates the issue.
- Consider which story best presents the issue on an age-appropriate level.
- Occasionally you may want to consider a different type of story experience, such as a 3 to 7-minute video clip that illustrates the issue, or an experiential activity that dramatizes the issue.
- The story, video clip, experiential activity or object lesson gives everyone a common experience and a base for discussion.
- Some stories have several points so you will want to be clear on the direction you wish to go. In a small program, a story that can be discussed on several levels works well because everyone can hear the story together and then break into small groups for an age-appropriate discussion and creative experience. You will probably need to word questions differently for each age.

▪ **We Use Stories Because Our Life is a Story**

- Our lives are made up of stories. Some of us easily tell our stories and others hold them close, revealing little. But no matter how we choose to share them, the stories we tell help us to make sense of our world.
- Sometimes our life experiences can feel so difficult that our imaginations begin to shut down. We allow fear to be our guiding force and we can no longer envision ourselves any place other than where we currently appear to be. Change seems impossible.
- A story, as metaphor, provides us with a safe haven through which we “come to ourselves.” By speaking in terms of the symbols, characters and events of the story, we can teach ourselves about the issue without ever seeming to discuss the “topic.”
- Unlocking our imagination is one of the essential keys to regaining access to our amazing ability to create the life of our dreams. Join us as we explore the power of story and the art of imagination.

The Questioning Strategy

- “Using the questioning strategies of A Living Curriculum means not being concerned about getting the “right” answer. We, as teachers, need to recognize that life is process. Our role is to acknowledge a child’s answers as they are learning and growing in life’s process. We want to continue to ask the questions as long as possible to allow each child time to grapple with their own questions and to seek their own answers. For God is within and we want to learn to go within for answers that are for our highest and best good.” ~ Unity Worldwide Ministries, *Youth and Family Ministry Guide*

1. “What is Happening in the Story?”

By asking these questions we have a chance to hear what facts the listener actually picked up and which ones they missed. You want to focus the children on what actually happened in the story not their interpretation of it for now. We are looking for the facts.

Examples of possible questions:

- What happened first? Then what happened?
- What do we know about (a character, the location...)?
- Describe what was going on between...
- What else happened?

2. “How are the Characters Feeling About What They are Experiencing?”

We begin to move out of the story bubble and begin to invite the children to think about what the characters might be feeling because of the experiences they are having.

Examples of possible questions:

- How do you think the disciples were feeling when the storm began to rock the boat?
- What do you think they wanted to do when they saw Jesus sleeping?

3. “How is This Happening in the World?”

This is a “bridging question.” It shifts the focus from the story to the present time. By doing so, the child begins to see how the story connects to life. The question is also impersonal. It is about someone else. Keep in mind that the younger the child the smaller their world.

Examples of possible questions:

- How do you see this happening in your friend’s life / your school / your community?
- How is this happening in the world right now?

4. “How is This Story Happening in Your Life”

As the story comes alive within each child, the facilitator will begin to sense children straining to talk about it in terms of their lives. This is when it is time to step out of the story world bubble and into the world. We use the following types of questions: “*How is this story an event in your life?*” With this question, a person begins to go beyond the story and considers applying a concept to what is happening to them. This step guides one to see themselves as part of the story.

Examples of possible questions:

- Tell me about a time you experienced a storm?
- How are you like...?
- Who do you identify with in the story? Why?
- When has something like this happened to you? Describe it.

5. “How Will You Use This Experience in Your Life?”

The main purpose of our teachings is to be able to apply them to our lives.

Examples of possible questions:

- What can you do this week that will help you understand how to...?
- Tell me a story about how this idea can change your community in just a small way.

6. “How Would You Like It to Be?”

This final question involves encouraging the children and teens to go beyond how something shows up in the world or in their life. It asks them to consider ways in which something could be different. It helps them explore alternatives and possibilities. Then they can see that they have a choice – allow something to continue and do something about it.

Examples of possible questions:

- What would you have done in this situation?
- What power do you have to change things?
- How would you change the ending of this story? How else could this have turned out?

The Creative Experience

- The creative experience immediately follows the story experience. Its purpose is to invite the children into an exploration of what the story and lesson meant to them personally.
 - Is open ended
 - Allows the children individual expression
 - Is directly connected to the lesson intention
 - Takes into consideration the different learning styles of children
 - Is age appropriate
 - Helps to connect both head and heart

Types of Creative Experiences

- Quiet and meditative
- Loud and active
- Art based
- Games/Movement
- Science based
- Some creative experiences are blended into the storytelling portion of the lesson,
- Creative experiences can be set up in stations around the room so the children can choose the activity they most resonate with.

Active Learning

It is quite simply learning by doing. It is an adventure; it is fun and interactive; it involves everyone even the observers; it is student based with the students making their own discoveries, it is process-oriented and the experience is evaluated through discussion. It is also relational because the students must interact with one another. The benefits include:

- Learning becomes an adventure with surprises.
- Everyone gets involved in the action.
- Learning depends on students making discoveries.
- Process of learning is as important as end result.
- A discussion debriefing the experience helps students apply the learning.
- Learners interact with each other learning relational skills.

In order to help the students to get the most from their experience, you must help them interpret their experience. Active learning takes on power when we reflect on the experience.

During debriefing we ask:

- What just happened here?
- How can we learn from it?

The Closing

- Allow time for the children to share what the lesson meant to them. Also encourage them to continue exploring the issue or theme on their own by asking them to take a particular action that is related to the story. Help them to make the lesson relevant to their lives.