

# A Living Curriculum

“As we plan our adventures for the Sunday Morning Experience, which we create for the children in our congregations, we need to ask ourselves how we can best serve them. ***We must move past the belief that we, the teachers, need to have all the answers and are required to impart this information to our children. We instead are called to move into the understanding that we are each on a spiritual path, each have access to the Christ within and each are looking for a place that will allow our inner knowledge to unfold in a way that is unique to each one of us.***” ~ Unity Worldwide Ministries

## **A Philosophy**

“A Living Curriculum is not one specific piece of material, but “is a philosophy, a process and a program of spiritual support which affirms that the curriculum—*that which is to be learned or known*—is not within any guide, but rather lives in the children and teens themselves. Myrtle Fillmore, cofounder of Unity, was the inspiration for this foundational belief as she shared her view about the “soul’s unfoldment.” She believed that our mission is not to “entertain the children, but to draw them out.” This approach honors the wisdom within each of us and uses storytelling and creative experiences to “draw out” the truth we already know. Each lesson relates to an issue in a person’s life and seeks to facilitate an experience of God connected to their life.” ~ Unity Worldwide Ministries

## **Vision of A Living Curriculum**

The vision of A Living Curriculum is to empower children and youth to use their spiritual wisdom to fulfill their soul’s purpose; to empower parents to see themselves as the prime spiritual educators of their children and youth; to empower facilitators to see education as a process, through which they effectively support the unfolding of the child’s spiritual nature and model the living of the spiritual principles; to empower a spiritual community to function with unity in diversity; to inspire a world educational community by its philosophy, process, programs and products.

## **A Living Curriculum is designed to:**

- “Draw forth” the truth mainly through experiences, storytelling and creative expression, rather than lecturing or the transmittal of information.
- Recognize that a group of people ‘meets at the heart of a story,’ and that as we tell the stories of our lives, we experience our unity.
- Be issue-centered, meaning that it is responsive to the issues that are happening right now in the lives of the people it serves. It is up to the Youth Ministry staff and facilitators to use the power of their intuition and imagination to perceive the needs of the classes they are serving and to adapt the materials accordingly.
- Honor the process of creativity as a primary human activity and that through creative expression, we experience our divinity as co-creators with God.
- The curriculum seeks at all time to facilitate an experience of God.

## 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*

### 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, for example: *The intention is to know; to understand, to explore, etc...*
- Includes universal principles; Bible or sacred quotes; affirmation statements
- All parts of the lesson reflect and reinforce the issue and intention to be explored.

# The Story

## **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 3-7 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.

## **Decide How You Want to Tell the Story**

- **Read it:** Either you or one of the children, *who is a strong reader* can share the story
- **Drama and/or Puppets:** Drama, and/or re-enacting a story, is an effective way to involve the children in the actual story. They can be the characters and experience, first hand, what it might have been like to be those people. Make sure the children are familiar with the story and instead of reading the story, invite the children to retell the basic elements of the story in a way that they understand them. They do not have to stick to the details of the story but can use some of the metaphysical interpretation or deeper meaning of the story in their reenactment. If they need help getting started then begin by reading some of the lines of the story and then prompt them to continue with statements such as: Then what happened, How do you think they felt, What would you have done, etc. Dramatizing the story in this way allows the children to really become part of the story and to begin to gain a deeper understanding of it and how they can use the story’s message in their everyday lives.

# The Exploration

“Using the questioning strategies of A Living Curriculum means not being concerned about getting the “right” answer. Yes, for the question, “What happened in the story?” some answers may be incorrect. But for the rest of the questioning process, the answers will vary depending on one’s experience. 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. You may think that using just the same four questions every week becomes very boring. Each can be worded in different ways.” Unity Worldwide Ministries, *Youth and Family Ministry Guide*

## **The Value in Questions**

Source: <http://kwwiki.wikispaces.com/Power+of+questions>

As facilitators we need to appreciate the role and power of questions because...

- Questions are very strong attractors in the chaos of ideas, they gather, focus, attract and energize the conversation.
- Only questions have the power to break our current mindsets, they set in motion the deep reflection needed to alter our beliefs.
- It is the place and the space ‘between not knowing and our desire to know’ where we are most attentive, self-aware and alive. Questions hold the key to this special area.
- Compelling and quality questions drive knowledge creation and expansion in a fundamental way. Knowledge emerges around good questions.
- Questions energize and glue our conversation, draw people into the circle to participate and gather diverse opinions.
- Questions keep the conversation moving forward, awaken dormant discourse and may be used to guide the subject back on course.

## **The Questioning Strategy**

### **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. “What are the Characters Feeling or 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 Would You Like It To Be? Or How Else Could This 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 a exploration of what the story and lesson meant to them personally. It is helpful to offer more than one creative experience choice per lesson.

## **A creative experience:**

- 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

## **Types of creative experiences**

- Quiet and meditative
- Loud and active
- Art based
- Games/active
- Science based

## **Other points**

- Some creative experiences are blended into the storytelling portion of the lesson through drama
- Some creative experiences are part of the active learning 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**

- Learning becomes an adventure with surprises.
- Learning becomes fun and captivating.
- 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?
- How will we be different because of it?

# Types of Creative Experiences

## **Art Activities**

There are many ways to use art as a creative experience. Some ideas from Joanne Ramseyer, MA, ATR, LCPC

- After reading a story, invite the students to choose the part of the story that had the most meaning to them and create an art piece around it.
- As a group, invite each person to illustrate a piece of the story using torn tissue paper and thinned glue. When complete, put the pieces together and retell the story.
- Invite them to create new illustrations for an old story.
- Read a story almost to the end and invite the students to create art pieces that tell different possible endings.
- Create a booklet in response to any story.
- Create masks or puppets in order to retell the story.
- Illustrate different emotions.
- Create a new environment for the characters.
- Invite the students to create an image of one of the teachings in the story.

## **Food Activities**

What better way to help students recall stories and Spiritual principles than to connect them with food. How many of you are immediately transported back to a wonderful memory upon just the smell of certain foods. Using food and creativity helps make the lessons and principles real it is something the students enjoy doing.

## **Science Experiments**

The use of science experiments helps to ground abstract principles in concrete learning.

## **Games**

Use games to engage them in fun and to also offer a learning experience about what happened during the game.

## **Additional Ideas**

- Music listening, singing, movement
- Journaling, poem creation
- Role-play, skits and drama
- Puzzles, games and “hunts”
- Dimensional creations
- Nature explorations
- Service Projects

## Object Lessons

“Object Lessons are Visual Analogies. “It is using familiar objects to explain unfamiliar ideas, usually abstract principles. Many hard-to-understand truths can be symbolized by easy-to-understand objects.” ~ *The Joyful Child & Nurturing Spirituality in Children* by Peggy Jenkins and other sources. Examples:

### Beads & String

- Diversity: The string is God and the beads are people and when you put all the different people together, they form one unified presence.
- Lay your problems on God and He holds it all together.
- Looking at the hole that goes through the bead: We all have room for God (the string) to fill us with His love, which makes the connection stronger.

### Hammer

- Can be used to make a point (hitting the nail on the head) or can represent missing the point (not hitting the mark.)
- Can be used to remove things that are no longer needed.
- Can be used to build up or to destroy. It is our choice
- Just as we can direct our aim with the hammer we can also do so with our thoughts.

### Magnets

- What do we attract into our lives?
- How to stick to one another through problems.
- Positive affirmations: I am like a magnet because I draw good things to myself.
- What pulled you away from your path this week?

### Play dough

- How we can shape thought, character, and principles.
- God accepts different forms.
- God expressing through creativity.

### Building Blocks

- Different colors, shapes, uniqueness, balance – Used together creates something wonderful.
- Sum of the whole is greater than its parts.
- More than one way to accomplish things.
- Each block has its own function – they are all equal.
- They aren't functional until you use them, like our talents.
- If they are knocked down they can always be built back up.

## Closing Circle

Gather all children together again in a closing circle.

Invite children to do any of the following:

- Share any creations from today.
- Share one thing they learned today.
- Say what they might do differently this week as a result of what they learned today.
- Repeat today's affirmation.
- Speak today's Bible scripture.
- Say the Affirmative Prayer for Protection or the Prayer of Faith
- Close with prayer of gratitude for something in the day or something in their lives: “I am grateful, God, for \_\_\_\_\_.”