

Appendix A

Creating a Living Curriculum Lesson

What is a Living Curriculum?

It is a philosophy, a process and a program of spiritual support to assist children, teens, families and the church community in successful living. A *Living Curriculum* is designed to “draw forth” the Truth mainly through experiences, storytelling and creative expression. Each lesson relates to an issue in a person’s life and seeks to facilitate an experience of God connected to their life.

When creating a lesson, don’t begin at the top of the suggested format (see sidebar). Rather, create using the steps listed below.

First identify the issue or theme.

A successful lesson springboards from an issue or theme that is of interest to the participants. When you engage them where their interest lies, your class is more successful than when you teach based on what you think they need to learn. Issue-centered lessons connect the children and teens mentally and emotionally, both their head and their heart.

Next consider what story, Bible story, movie passage or experiential activity creates connection with the issue or theme.

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.

After the story is selected, write your intention briefly.

Keep it open-ended so that the outcome can be different for each individual. Start with words like: to explore, to discover, to understand, to experience, to examine, to feel, to share.

Think through what creative experience will help them relate to the story or experience.

This might be a role-play, acting out a skit, journaling, an artistic creation, creating a song, a game, a visualization or meditative experience, etc. The purpose here is to move into the heart space rather than analyzing or discussing the story logically.

Suggested Format for Sunday Sessions

- Pre-session Activity

Welcome, Prayer & Opening Circle

- Prayer &/or Meditation
- Affirmation*
- Songs*
- Offering and Blessing*
- Beginning Experience

Lesson Exploration

- Story/interactive experience
- Creative Expression

Closing Circle & Prayer

* Placement of these items can vary. Sometimes the affirmation works well during the pre-session activity to begin to focus children. Or writing an affirmation may be a part of the creative experience.

Write questions in the Living Curriculum format.

Begin by reading the story or experiencing the movie clip. Then write a few open-ended questions relating to each of the following basic questions. (Open-ended questions are worded to avoid receiving yes-no answers.)

The four basic questions are designed to direct participants toward the intention. They intentionally move from asking for basic facts about the story to a deeper, more heart-centered expression of how the story is happening in the world and in their lives. They progress from safe, “out-there” answers to more revealing, intimate “in-here” answers. The basic questions are:

- What is happening in the story?
- How is this happening in the world?
- How is this story an event in your life?
- How would you like it to be?

What is happening in the story?

“What do we know about (a character/place in the story)?” or “How would you describe what is going on between . . .? What else happened?”

This basic question helps everyone review the specific details. Participants are invited to “stay with the facts and save interpretation for later.” This allows the story to move and breathe in them. This first part of the questioning process helps participants come to a common agreement about what actually is happening in the story and to notice details that might otherwise be overlooked. This step is “staying in the story bubble.”

The art expression, movement activity or writing can occur at this point.

Carefully word your instructions so the participants are free to create whatever they feel. Ex. “I invite you to express any part of the story that is moving in you by creating something with the art materials.”

This goal of this part is to awaken the story within each person to move the story out of the head and into the heart. You may also choose to place the creative expression later, after asking more of the questions.

Ask “bridging questions” to move the person out of the story bubble.

“How is this happening in the world around us?” or “How do you see this happening in your friend’s life/your school/your community?”

How is this story an event in your life?

“How is this story happening in your life?” “How do you see Tom’s action in yourself?” This step offers the group an opportunity to share their own personal stories both factually and from their hearts and deepens their sense of community in the process.

The final step encourages the children and teens to go beyond the story.

That means challenging them to see more than or beyond what is on the surface. It may be asking “How would you like it to be?” or “How can you do this differently?” This is the opportunity for them to “know the Truth” about the experience, to see it with the eyes of the Christ within. This step also helps them to realize that they have the power to choose to see and to do things differently.

After writing the questions, you are ready to fill in the remainder of your lesson.

Ask yourself questions like:

- What Unity principle applies to this lesson?
- What will I use for an opening prayer?
- What question might the teens answer during the opening that transitions into the rest of the lesson?
- What is an appropriate affirmation?
- What song/s might fit well with this lesson?
- What will be the order of the lesson?
- How will I close the experience? Affirmation? Prayer?

Then open yourself again to guidance from Spirit. Allow the lesson to “perk” awhile. And revisit it after a day or two.