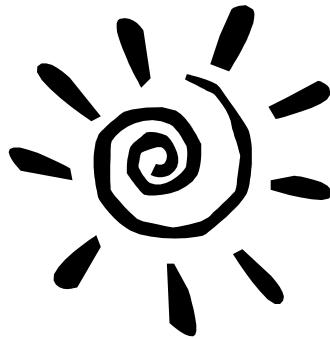


The Living Curriculum Philosophy



Living Curriculum

“A Living Curriculum is a new paradigm of spiritual education for the 21st century that honors the unique genius within each individual and seeks to draw it forth. This ‘unique genius’ was identified by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, co-founders of Unity, as ‘the Christ within,’ and they trusted this source of wisdom and knowledge more than any other.” (A Time of Family, Association of Unity Churches, Int'l)

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.

The Living Curriculum is not one specific piece of material, but “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.” (Association of Unity Churches, Int'l)

A LIVING CURRICULUM PHILOSOPHY

(A Time of Family, Association of Unity Churches, Int'l)

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:

1. “Draw forth” the truth mainly through experiences, storytelling and creative expression, rather than lecturing or the transmittal of information.
1. 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.
1. 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.
1. Honor the process of creativity as a primary human activity and that through creative expression, we experience our divinity as co-creators with God.
1. The curriculum seeks at all time to facilitate an experience of God.

The Use of Story in A Living Curriculum

1. Stories have always been an important part of education. A teacher uses story to illustrate a point and as an example when ideas and theories become vague. Teachers are increasingly helping students find a voice to tell their own stories and to learn from reflecting upon what they hear. The stories in the Bible are a valuable resource for learning to interpret our own stories.
1. In a Living Curriculum experience, a Bible or contemporary story is chosen because it embraces or bears a life issue of the class. A life issue may be as simple as: "I want to be my own person, and yet at the same time, I want to go along with the crowd."
1. 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."

Facilitating the Story:

Creating the "Story World Bubble"

After presenting the story, the facilitator invites the group to stay in the "story world bubble." The task is to create a "bubble" in which children can move around within the story. The facilitator guides this process through the use of open-ended, story-specific questions, through art experiences, body movement and/or drama activities that deepen the experience of the story. If a child tries to step outside of the story "by interpreting events or sharing a personal saga" the facilitator gently redirects the energy to the events and characters of the story itself. This first step is to give the students time to truly explore the story before making it personal.

The first type of questions to ask deal with:

"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?

Next we ask question about:

"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 is.

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?

Stepping Out of the Bubble

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:

- ◇ How do you see “Peter’s actions in yourself?
- ◇ How are you like...?
- ◇ Who do you identify with in the story? Why?
- ◇ When has something like this happened to you? Describe it.

If the lesson were about telling the truth some questions you might ask would be:

- ◇ How did you feel when you did not tell the truth?
- ◇ How might your responses have hurt someone else?
- ◇ How do you think Jesus might respond if you did not tell the truth?
- ◇ How would your parents respond?

“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 Living Curriculum Philosophy 5-Point Check List

This 5-point check list is a way to see if you are using the Living Curriculum Philosophy when you are presenting your lessons, no matter who created those lessons.

1. Identify:

What is the issue or theme that you want to explore? Issue-centered lessons engage the children and teens mentally and emotionally, both head & heart.

2. The Vehicle:

What story, Bible 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.

3. Explore:

This is where we use the questioning strategy. We are encouraging the children to explore this issue or theme in order to make it relevant to their lives. We can also use “wonder questions,” role-playing, puppets, visualization, meditative experience, etc...

4. Reflection:

What methods are you using to allow the children to express the parts of the story that have meaning to them? This needs to be an open-ended activity that will awaken the story in them, moving them from their heads to their hearts. Examples are: art activities, music, journaling, etc...

5. Sharing:

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.