

## Choosing Curriculum

This is a time of year when many of us are considering a renewal or fresh direction in choosing curriculum for the coming year, and frequently I am asked for advice in this process.

As a resource writer myself, I obviously consider the quality and values of the material used to be significant, but in some ways there are more important principles that I think can be pursued, regardless of the book on your shelf, the themes across a term, or the particular ideas used to implement.

These form either the criteria I would employ in choosing a curriculum, or the process by which I would modify anything I was using.

- 1) **Curriculum is a deceptive term.** It gives the impression that we are heading into school, and going to work our way across the years with a direct pedagogy towards a knowledge and skill based end. Our commitment to our children is not so much to educate them, though they will undoubtedly learn much, but to mentor and walk with them in the Kingdom. This is more about being peace makers, showing mercy, maintaining purity, mourning, rejoicing and hungering for righteousness than achieving a learning outcome. Pursue times with children in which they will grow in being in the ways of the Kingdom, not just learning about the Kingdom.
- 2) **The Bible is the central curriculum** of all of our faith and discipleship. Let it be the rich text from the word of God that shapes your community – hopefully from the oldest to the youngest. Many communities are now endeavouring to bring the entire age spectrum and all the various combinations of sub-groups on to the same page, aligning small groups, youth groups, children's programs and preaching and orientating around common Bible passages, anticipating that if God has something to say to us as a body, he will be including all of us in that. This is both an expression of unity, and a practical medium by which conversations happen across generations and other demographic dividers.

In seeking to be a biblically oriented community, we must also ask how the text works in our gatherings: for children, young people and adults alike, we need to read more than just quick sound bytes of snappy verses.

While the quick pithy grab is an entrenched form in our media culture of communication, and may seem contextually appropriate, we do well to distance our handling of the Bible from the genre of easy sell, impulse buy, marketing slogans. To reduce our Bible engagement to quick grabs, will lead to just as quick drops.

The Bible not only contains stories – big epic, multi-act dramas and mini cameos, but is story, of itself. Howard Gardner, the guru of Multiple Intelligence learning theory, calls stories the greatest tool in the leader's toolkit.

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There is an interesting movement among secular educators re-embracing the story as a resource for developing mature critical ethical thinking. If you are interested to see what this looks like in the secular sphere, take a look at ***Thinking Stories to Wake Up Your Mind***.

It's great, but compared with the resources of the Bible – its contrived and episodic.

<http://www.thinkingclassroom.co.uk/BookShop/Books/ThinkingStoriestoWakeYourMind.aspx>

- 3) **Small groups or little learning communities** are multi-functional. They are sites of specific wisdom sharing, they allow for listening, which in turn cultivates our capacity to articulate our theology and share our good news story. They are places of natural pastoral care, prayer accountability and empowered but supported exercising of our gifts. A three year old with a gift for words is unlikely and would be inappropriately set with the responsibility of maintaining the thread of an hour long liturgy for a large group. But in a small group, she can exercise her narrative and proclamatory gift.
- 4) **Attention to experience and process**. We are shaped by our life experiences, as much as by the words spoken over and around us in the midst of experience. It could be said that words are simply one element of the larger matrix of experience. In evaluating a curriculum we need to keep a feel for the way things are done – is the orientation **individual** or **communal**? **collaborative** or **competitive**? **open to the Spirit** or **closed answer maxims**? Directed towards **conforming difference** or **confirming diversity**?
- 5) **Serve and Give**. The greatest resource of the Christian faith community is the gifts of the spirit, generously lavished around each of us to enable us to serve one another and our world lovingly and sustainably. How does the curriculum you use release those with gifts of shepherding, those with gifts of administration, encouragement, intercession, prophetic word, teaching and strategic vision? Let us not limit the task of discipling to 'teaching', and thereby limit those who might participate in discipling our children to those with a gift of teaching, but rather release the gifts of God for the people of God in all the multiplicity of God's creative spirit poured out to love and serve the world.

Be encouraged to spend time discussing these ideas with your leadership, your team, your family, or with me!