"My gentle Wesleyan brothers have sounded the educational trumpet once again by reminding every church leader, 'Your congregation is a learning organization.' Shout it from the housetops! Their unifying perspective untangles us from worship wars and avoids the temptation of ministry silos. Their synthesis of educational history and the social sciences' contribution to learning theory will serve well those entering church ministry. When I send students looking for a one-sentence philosophy of church education, I hope they find, 'Ministry was meant to be shared by the many, not hoarded by the few.'"

—**Michael Lawson**, Dallas Theological Seminary

"Maddix and Estep give us a carefully crafted text that hits just the right chords for teachers, pastors, and Christians called upon to disciple others. It concentrates on the important things, yet it avoids overdosing the beginner. You will be shocked at the amount of good stuff these pages contain! Most importantly, *Practicing Christian Education* delivers as advertised, introducing the reader to the leading theories and best practices of this crucial ministry."

—**Mark H. Heinemann**, Dallas Theological Seminary

PRACTICING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

AN INTRODUCTION FOR MINISTRY

Mark A. Maddix
and James Riley Estep Jr.

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Contents

Appendix 15.A: Christian Education Budget Template

	Projected Budget	Actual Expenses
Sunday School Curriculum		
• Preschool		
• Elementary		
• Youth		
• Adults		
Wednesday Night Youth Group		
Wednesday Night Children's Program		
Parents' Meetings		
Vacation Bible Study		
Mission Trips		
Teacher/Leadership Training		
Preschool Programming/Materials		
Elementary Programming/Materials		
Youth Programming/Materials		
Young Adult/Singles Programming/ Materials		
Adult Programming/Materials		
Refreshments		
Supplies (Paper, Pencils, Crayons, Tape, Etc.)		
Educational Media Equipment		
Library Resources		
Reference Materials (Bible, Concordances, Etc.)		
Retreats		
Summer Camps		
Transportation		
Background Checks		
Total Budget		

Adapted from www.umcdiscipleship.org/downloads/force?entry_id=2806.

16

A Path toward Spiritual Maturity: Curriculum

For far too many Christian educators, *curriculum* conjures images of packages received from publishers that contain a quarter's lesson plans, along with a lot of handouts, wall charts, and a student book. For others, it may be a DVD or flash drive accompanied by a leader's guide and participant booklets, following the deadly motto, "If you can read, you can lead." Curriculum is actually far more important, should be more influential, and represents everything from the metanarrative of Christian education in your congregation all the way down to what is occurring in every session of small groups, classes, training sessions, and whatever else may constitute your Christian education ministry. Practicing Christian education requires not only a map but also directions for the journey. That is the curriculum.[1]

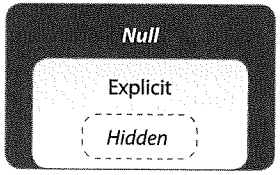
The Latin root of *curriculum*, *currere*, literally means "to run," like a runner on a track. Hence it came to mean the course of study, the track the student would follow from beginning to end. This is why the word can be used to describe everything from the packet of materials purchased from a publishing company to the intentional learning experiences of a congregation. The curriculum is like a *prescription*, a prescribed track, what you should learn.[2] It is about both who should learn what and how they should learn it. James Plueddemann's seminal question "Do we teach the Bible or do we teach students?" reflects these two basic curriculum questions.[3] Reflecting back on chapter 10, the three basic forms of objectives (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) integrate with one another, providing a comprehensive learning

experience for believers. Therefore, learning experiences can be a path toward discipleship; "the curriculum, as a key or instrument of education, must guide the learner to be and become a 'response-able' disciple of Jesus Christ."[4] Curriculum is a practical tool in the hands of a Christian educator, just as a map, compass, and destination are essential for the explorer. The real question is, are we using it or are we neglecting it?

You Can't Teach Everything

Every church has a curriculum. The question is, how aware is the church of it and is the church making constructive use of it? We know what we want people to learn, either directly or indirectly, as well as what we choose not to teach. In curricular terms, this includes the *explicit*, the *hidden*, and the *null* curriculum (fig. 16.1). The *explicit* curriculum is the directly stated information about the curriculum, such as when a church seminar openly states the content and the intended learning objectives. It is what the Christian educator says you should learn from this class, seminar, or group. Because it is the most visible, outer layer of the curriculum, many assume it is the *only* layer of the curriculum; but there are actually two more layers.

Figure 16.1
Three Curricula



The *hidden* or implicit curriculum is what is intentionally taught, but *indirectly*, not explicitly. It is what is learned in addition to what is explicitly taught. It is what you learn by participating in the educational setting somewhat indirectly, apart from the intentional instruction. For example, if you are a very punctual person, rarely late with anything, perhaps you learned punctuality not from the explicit curriculum of a seminary class but by being in a class wherein the professor would not accept late work. Hidden curriculum is what individuals are intended to learn *beyond* the explicit curriculum.

The *null* curriculum dwarfs the others. You cannot teach everything, and this curriculum is null because it is composed of all that was intentionally omitted. The reason for the omissions may be theology, tradition, church

practice, the intellectual or faith level of the learner, the teacher's lack of knowledge on the subject, or that what was omitted could not be covered in the available time.[5] Ironically, the null curriculum is what the learner is not supposed to know; it's the curriculum's black box. Practicing Christian education engages all three curricula in the church. Whether consciously or unconsciously, by plan or not, we operate with a curriculum in our ministry.

Curriculum can be misunderstood as boring. Classes and groups, lesson plan packets, learning aids and materials, and outlines of content with accompanying teaching methods, not to mention assessments, don't necessarily excite anyone. However, thinking of curriculum in that fashion is like describing a vacation as cars, tires, gas stations, en-route hotel reservations, maps or GPS, and road signs. Boring? Described like that, it would be. However, the destination makes it worth the effort. Curriculum in the church is our road map toward discipleship, Christian formation, and a vibrant faith within the church. D. Campbell Wyckoff captures this best, writing, "The task of Christian education is the nurture of the Christian life. In order that such nurture may be effective in accomplishing its purpose, the church as a rule rejects reliance upon haphazard means and adopts a reasoned and planned teaching-learning process for its education work. A curriculum is a plan by which the teaching-learning process may be systematically undertaken."[6]

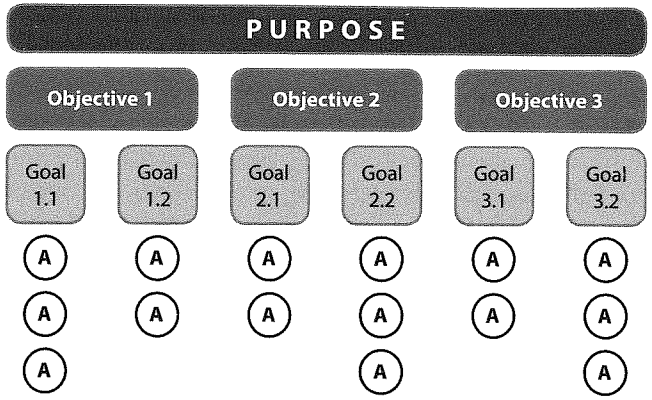
Practicing Christian education requires us to design curriculum. As Christian educators, we are responsible for providing the road map, the next steps in the spiritual pilgrimage.

Thinking Curricularly about Ministry

Typically we think of lesson plans as individual, stand-alone, usually independent lesson plans. Real curriculum planning requires an opposite process, one that starts not with writing lesson aims but with looking more broadly at learning in the church or the specific education ministry in which we serve. Figure 16.2 illustrates the four levels of thinking required for a comprehensive, disciple-making curriculum: purpose, objectives, goals, and aims.

While writing a lesson plan for children's church, youth group, or Sunday school may start with a lesson aim, curriculum requires us to do the opposite. Reflective of the mission of the church, or of your own specific education ministry, what is the church's or ministry's *purpose*? In a sentence or two, how would you explain why you are doing this ministry, program, or study? Purpose arises from theological convictions, from the congregation's mission, and from understanding the overarching needs of believers. For example, if

Figure 16.2
Purpose, Objectives, Goals, and Aims



someone participated in the youth group or small group ministry for three years, generally speaking, what would change about them from the time they entered the ministry? That's the purpose. It's why you are doing it. Just as when Google Earth starts by showing the planet Earth at a distance and then spins slowly toward the requested location, before you start writing lesson plans, get your bearings by thinking of the overarching, big-picture purpose of the lesson.

Objectives break the purpose down into more tangible, sometimes measurable components. Like an exegetical paper, they often are an itemized explanation of the curriculum's purpose. Returning to our map analogy using Google Earth, the earth spins on the webpage to the continent before zooming into the desired location. If the purpose is a broad, general statement seemingly impossible to accomplish in a single educational endeavor, the objectives break it down into more manageable components that can be more readily addressed. Depending on the curriculum's purpose, the objectives may reflect the learning domains: cognitive, affective, and/or volitional. These arise from a more precise categorizing of the desired learning.

Depending on the size of the curriculum, subject matter, or duration of the study, objectives may be delineated further with *goals* (plural) associated with each of the objectives. These become even more measurable components, each one related back to a particular objective. If we use Google Earth's more practical application, Google Maps, goals are the part of the directions that show the entire travel path in a basic line-map from point A to point B. Like objectives, goals are more measurable and are an explanation, a domain-specific, measurable learning goal.

But what about the turn-by-turn directions? That's the part with which we are most familiar. *Aims* are the intended outcomes of individual lessons, with multiple aims further supporting the goal with which the aim is affiliated. "Turn right in 100 feet, and then in 200 feet, turn left . . ."; a lesson aim is a very narrow, often singular, measurable, stated learning outcome. Lesson aims are the single steps along the curriculum path that move us through the goals and objectives toward reaching the purpose of the whole curriculum.

Curriculum Examples

What if the *purpose* of an adult Bible study is to become a people of prayer? That's a broad statement of intent—far too broad to give significant direction to what each class session should contain. The *objectives* of the curriculum break down its intent further, such as follows:

Objective 1: Participants will understand prayer better (cognitive)
Objective 2: Participants will value prayer more (affective)
Objective 3: Participants will practice prayer more often (active)

It is not always necessary to have an objective from each of the learning domains, but in this case it aids the example. The objectives give further direction to the curriculum, but there must be further delineation for Christian education to really inform lesson aims. The *goals* of the curriculum further delineate the objectives. For example:

Objective 1: Participants will understand prayer better (cognitive)
Goal 1.1: Prayer in the Old Testament
Goal 1.2: Prayer in the New Testament
Goal 1.3: A theology of prayer

Objective 2: Participants will value prayer more (affective)
Goal 2.1: Participants will experience different kinds of prayer
Goal 2.2: Participants will know the value of prayer

Objective 3: Participants will practice prayer more often (active)
Goal 3.1: Prayer as a spiritual discipline (e.g., *lectio divina*)
Goal 3.2: Prayer postures and practices

Notice how the goals break out the intent of the learning objective into more specific areas of study, but always relate back to the objective, which in turn relates back to the purpose of the class's study. What about the *aims*? Under each goal will be the lesson plan(s) (often plural) for each class session or gathering. Each time, a lesson will be used with an aim of focusing on the intended, most specific learning outcome. For example, Goal 1.2 might have three lessons associated with it, such as follows:

Objective 1: Participants will understand prayer better (cognitive)

Goal 1.2: Prayer in the New Testament

Aim 1.2.1: Students will be able to explain the prayer practices of Jesus as described in the Gospels

Aim 1.2.2: Students will be able to describe the role of prayer in the book of Acts

Aim 1.2.3: Students will know the different uses of prayer from Paul's Epistles and the General Epistles

Each lesson aim builds upon the other aim(s) to support a learning goal, which in turn supports an objective, all culminating in the fulfillment of the class's purpose in studying prayer. Without such a road map for study, learning is hit-or-miss, and you may not even know whether it is on target, since without a curriculum there are no right or wrong directions to take—you're just teaching to be teaching, not knowing what to expect around the next corner. Practicing Christian education requires Christian educators to think of not only the individual class session, wherein the lesson plan with its aim will guide the hour of study, but also the more encompassing context of the purpose, objectives, and goals that the lesson aim supports. If not, the answer to "What should we learn after three years in our Bible study?" is a disappointing "At best, 156 hours of lessons with no intentional, predetermined cumulative learning effect."

Doing Curriculum Supervision

The principal question of curriculum supervision is who makes the curricular decisions. Typically, the Christian educator is the lead person in the process of planning the curriculum of the church—but they are not the only person whose voice needs to be heard in this regard. Determining the purpose, objectives, goals, and sometimes even the lesson aims of a program, class study, or group dialogue is often not the sole property of the Christian educator

but includes some of those affected by the decision itself—that is, teachers, sponsors, facilitators, and volunteers. Curriculum supervision is a collective process that can become a catalyst for improvement and innovation.[7] But what items require supervision?

First, determine the content's scope and sequence. Once Christian educators and/or their team decide on the content, two rudimentary decisions must still be made about the content. *Scope* refers to how much of the content can actually be covered. Limiting factors like the time given for instruction, setting, age-appropriate concerns, learning capabilities of the students, and even support resources affect what parts of the content are actually covered in the curriculum. This is the scope of the curriculum. Of course, if one sets the desired scope, often some of the limiting factors can be removed or addressed. But in what order should the content be covered, and how much should be covered in each session? This is *sequence*. It may be determined by chronology or common themes, or move from the part to the whole or from the whole to the part. The sequence serves as the rationale for the structure of the content in the curriculum.

Second, select the most effective organization of material. Leroy Ford describes three basic ways of organizing the curriculum's content.[8] (1) The *anchor model* uses a common topic or theme to anchor the content, while goals or lesson aims are relatively independent of one another. If the objective serves as an anchor, then the goals, while independent of one another, are connected by a common theme. (2) The *linear model* differs from the anchor in that each goal or lesson aim builds on the previous one; it is a progressive arrangement that must be taken in order to have its full effect. In this instance, it is not just a common theme that organizes the curriculum but the intentional relationship of the content that builds upon the previous material and will be built upon by the next one. (3) Finally, the *wheel model* provides several advantages. As with the other models, a common theme serves to unify the content, but while the lessons are not progressively sequential, meaning they have to be taken in order, they do relate to one another, so they are interdependent. As the curriculum specialist, the Christian educator will need to determine which model best fits the formation of objectives, goals, and/or lesson aims in the curriculum.

Third, develop resources in support of the curriculum. Churches and their ministries do not have unlimited resources. Managing resources to maintain and advance the curriculum is crucial for a vibrant ministry of education. Resources such as personnel, finances, teaching/learning aids, technology, and learning resources for volunteers all support the congregation's curriculum. This often requires policies and procedures to be established as part of

the supervision of curriculum, especially in regard to the appropriate use of financial resources and personnel.

Fourth, establish a basic means of assessing curriculum. Many Christian educators shy away from assessment, even of curriculum. However, a lack of assessment leads to chronic, long-term weakness in the curriculum, meaning it's not going to transform participants and make them into disciples as hoped and expected. Without oversimplifying the matter, it is really a three-step process.

1. *What was the desired outcome?* In this case, we can assess aims, goals, objectives, and even the purpose statements, since all of them are statements of anticipated outcomes.
2. *What was the actual outcome?* To assess is to evaluate how something actually functions—not just what it is supposed to do but what it actually does.
3. *How do the two compare?* How did the curriculum's actual performance compare with the desired or anticipated performance? Did it measure up?

This process does require the Christian educator to ask some very straightforward questions, often in the form of a survey or a conversation with people in the group or class. Surveys are often used to gather quantitative data—that is, numbers. They ask someone, for example, "On a scale of 1 to 5 do you feel . . ." and then use some basic statistics to calculate the average response. Interviews or focus groups are the most common means of gathering qualitative data—that is, information in the form of words, not numbers. Asking a class about their curriculum or a small group about the DVD series and writing down their impressions is a good way to assess the curriculum's actual performance and the teacher's abilities. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods is best for accurately measuring the curriculum's performance.

Maximizing the Use of Prepackaged Curriculum

Most Christian educators and their ministries still rely heavily on prepackaged curriculum—packets of materials, DVDs with student booklets, or a subscription to a streaming curriculum service with downloadable PDF handouts. These prepackaged curriculum pieces are typically of a high quality and are an invaluable resource to the education ministry, since they bring expertise and ease of use and save volunteers time. However, just like clothes purchased off

the rack, they are not tailored to fit, and the content is likewise generic since it was designed for a general audience and not your specific congregation.

Most congregations need to rely on prepackaged curriculum because they do not have a Christian educator on their ministry staff, nor do volunteers have the time or expertise to develop their own curriculum. But what are some ways the church can make the most effective use of packaged curriculum, maximizing its learning potential? First, teachers can be instructed on the use of curriculum, helping them simply be more familiar with what is in it and walking them through how to use it. Second, the packaged curriculum could be supplemented: used as the basis of teaching but with other activities or materials added to it. Different learning activities or even a deeper Bible study could be prepared, with the original prepackaged curriculum as the basis. Third, while it may not be suitable for more advanced study, prepackaged curriculum could be used for more basic levels of study, perhaps for new believers or even nonbelievers. Remember, it is not made to fit every situation or congregation, but in the hands of an equipped and trained teacher, it can be used effectively in the group or class.

Conclusion

Every Christian educator, ministry of education, and congregation has a curriculum. But the degree to which that curriculum can be articulated, or the degree to which we intentionally make use of it in developing the Christian education ministry, becomes the real question. Curriculum development may seem tedious and even unnecessary, but practicing Christian education requires that we articulate the purpose, objectives, goals, and aims of the congregation, the ministry, or even the programs that comprise our ministry.

Reflection Questions

1. Does your congregation provide a path to maturity with an explicit curriculum? Why or why not?
2. What is your congregation's explicit curriculum? Hidden? Null? How would you know it's null?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being low, 5 being high), how would you rate the curriculum supervision in your congregation?
4. How does your church use prepackaged curriculum?

Suggestions for Further Reading

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17

Equipping for Service

"Why waste time training others to do what I already know how to do?" You just placed yourself in the same shoes as Moses in Exodus 18 and the apostles in Acts 6. In both cases, their God-given mission was thwarted by their inability to delegate, to share the responsibility, to equip and resource others to become part of the ministry of God's people. Ministry was meant to be shared by the many, not hoarded by the few. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers," why, for what purpose? "*To equip the saints* for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–12, emphasis added). Moses could not do it all himself. The apostles could not do it all themselves. Paul admonishes the church at Ephesus to realize that those who are in leadership have the principal responsibility of equipping others to do what they are doing, and as others grow, they can assume the mantle of leadership in the church. Practicing Christian education means that as we observe individuals maturing in their faith, we are also equipping them to serve as part of their faith formation.

Too Busy to Train Others?

Perhaps you're still laboring under the delusion that it's just easier if you do everything yourself. Training is not a high priority even when it is done. Jeffery Kiker and David Meir describe the rationale that Toyota Corporation has for training and equipping its workforce, making it one of the