

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Developing Children's Ministry



SESSION 14

Evaluating Curriculum, Events,
and Ministry Programs

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Evaluating Curriculum, Events, and Ministry Programs

SESSION OVERVIEW

Evaluating Curriculum Resources

Evaluating Events

Evaluating the Children's Ministry Program

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand how to evaluate curriculum.
- understand how to evaluate your event effectiveness.
- understand how to evaluate your overall children's ministry.

INTRODUCTION

The definition of curriculum has shifted from strictly referring to the actual printed material to everything that contributes to an individual's learning, including specific events and the overall programming of a children's ministry. Curriculum describes not only a book that teaches concepts to a child, but also the environment, attitude, and abilities of the teacher, the culture, and the child's peers. Children learn both intentionally and unintentionally, directly and indirectly. Not everything can be packaged for purchase. The curriculum of the church includes resources, events, and the overall ministry.

EVALUATING CURRICULUM RESOURCES



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For the sake of this study, we will refer to curriculum resources as materials that are published, purchased, and implemented by teachers. We'll look at some characteristics of these published materials and discuss a process for choosing resources that are appropriate for our circumstances.

First, leaders should learn some of the language of curriculum producers. Often, curriculum producers use the term “scope” to define the range of material covered. In Christian education curricula, the scope of our study rests primarily with the Bible. When curriculum publishers talk about scope, they mean precisely what portions of the Bible the curriculum will cover, or whether the curriculum will cover a period of church history or a set of personal issues. The term “sequence” defines the ordering of the scope of the curriculum into manageable, often sequential, units. Publishers create a document that is called a “Scope and Sequence” to help teachers understand the total range of passages and themes that will be covered and what age level the materials are for.

By looking at the scope and sequence for all age levels, you can see publishers normally take great care to expose children to all the relevant and age-appropriate stories and concepts of Scripture over the course of their childhood. Some curricula repeat the same theme at different age levels. Spiraling means revisiting the content in new ways at new age levels. It would be limiting for a child to hear the story of Jonah every quarter. It would take valuable time they could be using to learn other stories about obedience to God. However, it would be equally limiting if children were exposed to the story of Jonah when they were three and were never given another opportunity to think about what obedience to God looks like. Reviewing the Scope and Sequence provides the opportunity to assess the curriculum for balance, thoroughness of coverage of the whole Bible, and spiraling for review and depth coverage of important Bible basics. It will also allow leaders to get a quick visual representation of the appropriateness of the themes covered.

A curriculum resource is developed in response to standards students are expected to meet, content they are expected to know, and behaviors to which students are expected to conform. A published curriculum attempts to match age-appropriate activities and learning methodologies to the standards or objectives and specific content of the lesson. In Christian education curricula, the Bible is always the basis of the content, though it may be framed as a theme without quoting the specific Bible passage it is drawn from (especially at the nursery and preschool levels).

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Curriculum development includes a complicated process that requires understanding of human development, learning theory, knowledge of methodology, content expertise, and creativity. It requires the ability to organize the big picture, add the details, and express all the material through effective written communication. Usually the process involves teamwork between writers, editors, and reviewers before it is published. Because of this review process, there are a few things we can expect from published curricula:

- Materials are generally developmentally sound.
- There is a strategy behind the activities.
- Editors pay careful attention to a particular theological position.
- The writers and editorial staff strive to connect a variety of resources to the material printed in the teacher's guide to make teaching a lesson simple and effective.

However, curricula resources may also differ in several important ways:

- Their philosophy of learning and the effectiveness in implementing the philosophy.
- The level of emphasis on different styles of learning and teaching.
- Physical presentation.
- Effectiveness of the supplementary material available or required.
- Cost.
- Degree of teacher friendliness/ease of preparation.
- Theological/church orientation.

The last item on this list, theological and church orientation, may well be the first thing children's leaders should consider. Unfortunately, this is often the subtlest of all the characteristics listed. Since there are so many things on which Christians agree, it can be very difficult to tell where points of disagreement may be found.

What difference do these theological differences make to little children? The answer to that question was discussed early in our course. Small differences in the foundation of children's faith become magnified as they grow and mature. If their foundation is built on what our tradition sees as poor information or tiny misconceptions about God, we run the risk of building a misdirected faith. Most

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teachers do not have the theological background to think through the long-term consequences of small theological details. This is the main reason to recommend denominationally-developed curriculum as the primary source of Christian education in the church. In addition to being educationally sound, it is carefully reviewed for theological consistency.

If leaders or volunteers choose to use supplemental curriculum resources for other programs in the church, they are responsible for the theological consistency of the curriculum chosen. If they don't have a strong theological background, they will need support from someone who does. In fact, in making choices about curriculum for a program, it is important to have support from a variety of individuals to ensure that the curriculum purchased really meets ministry needs.

The Basics of Evaluation

A step-by-step plan for choosing a curriculum resource includes the following actions. First, ask yourself these questions: What are your program goals and missional values? How is the curriculum to be used? What is the type of program, the purpose of the program, and the program goals? Who will teach this curriculum? Will the teachers have a strong personal commitment and strong background to bring into this program? Or, will we be recruiting and training brand new volunteers? Who will be taught? What are the characteristics of this group of children? Is this program geared toward outreach? Will it be church kids on an evening after a day of school? Will it be a group of preschoolers in a morning Mom's Day Out program? What makes this group unique? What are the particular needs of this group?

In addition, ask: What are our assets and limitations in this context? Do we have enough space available, or are we working in an inadequate facility for activities such as group games? Are most workers otherwise involved in choir practice or other activities during this time slot? What will make this program easy to administer? What may be a challenge? What is the budget? While dollars shouldn't drive decisions, there is no point in evaluating a curriculum over your budget. Knowing the available financial resources is an important part of making good decisions. Answering these questions indicates a readiness to take the active steps of beginning a curriculum adoption process.

Second, extend the work force. Choose several people to work on curriculum review and adoption. Should leaders include parents? Teachers? Board members? Children (with parental supervision)? Decide whether the resources will be evaluated individually or collectively.


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Third, evaluate. To evaluate means “to give value to.” Review with the team the program purposes established. Make a list together of what the ministry wants to accomplish. What are the needs of the teachers? What results would the congregation like to see? Make a list. This list will be the basis for selecting curriculum. Your needs and values will be different from those of the church across town. Listed below is a sample of one group’s evaluation for a children’s church curriculum:

We believe children:

- *Need opportunities to build Christian friendships.*
- *Worship best through active participation.*
- *Need engaging, appealing music that leads them into worship.*
- *Worship best with life-applicable and meaningful activities.*
- *Worship best with open discussions that foster creative thinking.*
- *Worship best with multi-sensory, age-appropriate activities that reflect multiple learning styles and intelligences.*
- *Need to experience how biblical truths reveal the nature of God.*
- *Need a plan to take biblical truths into everyday life.*
- *Need opportunities to make faith commitments.*

We believe teachers:

- *Need easy-to-prepare materials.*
- *Rely on good background information, including Bible commentary.*
- *Need clear directions.*
- *Need good questions to ask.*
- *Want a clear presentation of required preparation.*
- *Need to feel confident the theological perspective is sound and in accord with our denominational doctrine.*

When you have your ideas recorded, arrange them in order from most important to least important. Make note of the values that cannot be compromised or made up for by teaching staff. For example, a curriculum may not have good Bible

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commentary, but teachers have access to a strong commentary in the church library. We can compromise on that value being present in the curriculum, if teachers make use of the library resources.

Fourth, explore the existing curriculum. Study programs already in use. What features do we want to keep? What topics are being covered effectively? If we are replacing the current curriculum, what features should be changed? What features should be maintained? We need to know what we are looking for in a replacement. We might decide there are new reasons to keep the old curriculum!

Fifth, examine three or more curriculum resources if they are available. Obtain sample copies of the material. Ideally, compare lessons that appear very similar. Look for a common Bible theme or Scripture passage at the same age level. The decision to look at three different options helps leaders avoid being forced into an “either/or” decision-making process. We should also have samples of different age levels if the goal is a graded curriculum; we can determine if the quality is consistent for every level. Most publishers make sample copies available for comparison when contacted. Many publishers now have samples online, though often, they may not be representative of all lessons (picking their best material to display). In some parts of the United States and other developed areas, a local Christian bookstore may help you, even providing space for your meetings. One possible solution includes borrowing used curriculum from other churches, which provides a larger variety for comparison.

Once leaders collect samples, list the titles across the top of your grid. For every curriculum, look for evidence of each of the valued characteristics. Keep a chart or other means for comparison. The evaluation will probably create a pattern that will help with a final decision. Accepting lower quality in one area may be compensated for by a benefit in another area. Evaluation may take several meetings depending on how you approach it. Take time to read through the lessons. Use several sessions to decide how your values are being addressed. This is quite different from the strategy of curriculum adoption that relies on a pretty cover and a couple of fun activities!

Once you have decided on a new curriculum, you need to invite the teachers to examine the curriculum selected, and train them to use it properly. The best curriculum in the world is only as effective as the teachers who use it. Let teachers know why the curriculum best serves your church, how to use the features of the curriculum effectively, and how you are supporting them to manage the features that may need additional work.

**NOTES***Five Reasons NOT to Change Curriculum*

Why should the decision to change curriculum not be made lightly? Each time we change curriculum resources, we get a different scope and sequence. A scope and sequence is designed carefully to give balance over time. Constant change in curriculum resources deprives children of the benefits of that design. Children may encounter an unbalanced view of Scripture; both the Old Testament and New Testament are significant and tell important parts of our faith story. While using the same curriculum may seem boring to teachers, the material will be always fresh to each new group of children. It is better for a bored teacher to change grade levels rather than to change the curriculum to suit the teacher.

Remember, trading curriculum means trading one set of limitations for another. No curriculum is perfect for every setting or every group of children. If teachers learn to supplement the materials they use, any curriculum can be made MORE effective. If you keep switching the curriculum, you just uncover different needs for supplementation. The process of change always requires a learning curve, causing teachers to be less effective for a season of teaching. At times the learning and teaching transition may be worthwhile for an important change. However, too frequent change means more time being less effective, so children's learning may suffer.

Finally, changing curriculum is costly, time-consuming, and messy. All of this inconvenience will appear worthwhile if the change serves goals and accomplishes the ministry's strategic plans. However, changing should never be done on a whim!

EVALUATING EVENTS



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It is not unusual for children's leaders to work hard planning events for the year, spending time and energy building relationships and feeling overwhelmed. In the whirlwind of activity, the one aspect that often is overlooked is the formal evaluation of the events. For many leaders, the only evaluation of events is to count the number of children who attended and the number of complaints received. We balance the pro (number of children) against the con (number of complaints), and decide whether to do the event again next year. This process tells us relatively little and gives very little help in adjusting activities. Our only goals based on this information may be to reduce complaints or increase numbers of children. Ministry is far too important to reduce it to numbers or negativity!

The first secret to helpful evaluation is to match our purposes to our observations. Determine the main reasons we do an event, and think about the unanticipated benefits or complications that could help in the future. Decide what we really need to know. The second secret is to keep evaluation simple. We will not follow through if our plan is too complicated or time consuming.

The first step toward evaluation happens before the event, and the second step happens immediately after, before you forget details of the day. An acronym that might be helpful in establishing goals and evaluating if the goals were appropriate and were met is SMAC:

- S – Are the goals specific?
- M – Are the goals measurable?
- A – Are the goals achievable?
- C – Are the goals compatible with the overall purpose of the children's ministry program?

This acrostic works primarily in English but the idea of keeping goals specific, measurable, achievable, and compatible with the ministry's vision helps leaders stay on target with specific goals.

One disadvantage from using this model may be providing goals that prove too specific. An alternative kind of evaluation tool uses a "Before, During, and After" model. This approach is more holistic, focusing on the processes rather than just the program. The evaluation works on a scale between successful completion and needing more work prior to hosting the event a second time. The processes



include promotion, staff recruitment, budgeting, resource allocation, purposes, scheduling, providing meaningful experiences, dealing with crises, finishing the event well, and following up with guests. In addition, the evaluation includes several open-ended questions to elicit further feedback. A sample chart might look like the following:

Sample Evaluation: Before, During, and After Event

Event Name: _____

1. Promotion: Was it effective, well-done, and adequate to get results?

Success Needs Work

2. Staff recruiting: Did we have enough staff in enough time for adequate training?

Success Needs Work

3. Budget: Did we stay on budget?

Success Needs Work

4. Did we budget adequate resources?

Success Needs Work

5. Program: Did we stick to our purposes?

Success Needs Work

6. Did we begin and end on time?

Success Needs Work

7. Did we offer quality throughout the experience?

Success Needs Work

8. Crisis Management: Did we deal effectively with any problems that arose?

Success Needs Work



9. Finishing well: Did we work together to close the event?

Success

Needs Work

10. Did we follow up with guests and others?

Success

Needs Work

11. What good things came from this event?

12. What needs follow-up efforts? (Discipline issues? repairs? replacements?)

13. What comments have you heard from participants and others?

14. Should we do this event again? Why or why not? Was it a worthwhile investment of time and energy?

15. Are there any suggestions or ideas if we do this again?

Leaders evaluating a specific event sometimes find it difficult to determine if the long-term results of an event will accomplish our overall purposes. When evaluating events, try to determine the following:

- Are the results in line with our efforts?
- Did we accomplish what we wanted to accomplish?
- Are there any unanticipated benefits or consequences from the event?
- What can we learn from this experience? Are we working effectively? What can be done to improve the process for other events?
- Will repeating this event yield similar, greater, or compounded results? (For example: Can we have a greater impact by doing certain things more effectively? Will doing this event another time add to the effect on the children who participate?)

Answering these questions will provide a springboard to future planning and at least provide a hint at the long-term efficacy of events of the same nature.

EVALUATING THE CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PROGRAM



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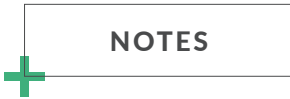
Leaders cannot evaluate the overall children's ministry without first establishing goals. As noted previously, two criteria prove foundational to all other goals: The needs of the children within the ministry and God's vision for the ministry. Ultimately all Christian education should lead individuals into a relationship with Jesus Christ, into the life of the church, and into a life of service to God and people with the help of the Holy Spirit. This overall vision should provide a foundation on which other goals may be developed--spiritual, ministry, physical environment, people we work with, and the place of children in family and church. Examples of goals for each of these strategic domains might include the following:

Spiritual Goals

- Transformation—Provide opportunities for children to experience God in such a way that it will change their lives.
- Christ-like Character—Provide opportunities for children to glorify God and reflect the nature and character of Jesus Christ.
- Community—Provide opportunities for children to work together in the Body of Christ to accomplish God's purposes and serve each other in love.

Ministry Goals

- A Bible-based, Christ-centered, learner-focused curriculum that allows the children to participate in the learning process and provides opportunities for application in and participation with the home.
- Age-appropriate presentation of the plan of salvation.
- A balance of worship, instruction, fellowship, and opportunities to lead and serve.
- Program coordination with a plan from nursery to sixth grade that ensures coverage of the Old Testament and New Testament themes and using different learning styles and methods of instruction appropriate for each age level.
- Understanding by parents, staff, volunteers, and children of the policies and procedures within children's ministries, and a sense of cooperation as they partner together for children's growth.
- Familiarity with the Word of God and how it enriches our lives.



- Opportunities to reach out to the community.
- Purposeful and intentional discipleship.

Physical Environment Goals

It may seem beyond a children's leader's domain to worry about—or even offer suggestions about—facility changes. However, classes and meeting places for children usually remain under the supervision and suggestion of the children's leadership. Consider the listed aspects of the facility needed to establish the most effective environment for children and workers.

- Adequate floor space that reflects the needs according to the age of the children.
- Furnishings such as tables and chairs appropriate in size and number for the space of the room and age of the children.
- Room temperatures not too hot or too cold.
- Toilet facilities nearby and small enough for children to be able to use.
- Adequate lighting.
- Appropriate technology.
- Gathering rooms that are safe, clean, welcoming, and stimulating.

Personnel Goals

One of the most significant aspects of leading children's ministry includes helping adults who nurture children. Leaders are challenged to recruit, train, motivate, monitor, and retain volunteers and staff. Here are some suggested personnel goals:

- A plan to obtain long-term commitments in order to build effective relationships between the teachers and students. (One church in Indianapolis asks for a three-year commitment of their workers.)
- Continual training and opportunities to grow personally in Christ.
- Required attendance at certain basic training classes.
- Opportunities for teachers' personal spiritual growth.
- Recruitment of enough adults to provide the necessary supervision and teaching of the children.



- Qualified leadership plans, supervision, and evaluation of the children's ministries.
- Clearly-written job descriptions.
- Ongoing efforts to recruit volunteers.

Congregational and Family Goals

- Children develop meaningful relationships with peers and adults in the church community.
- Children know and are known by church leadership.
- Children's needs play a vital role in church decision-making.
- Children are seen as integral contributors to the church mission and vision.
- Parents receive support and ongoing training in accomplishing the difficult tasks of Christian parenting.
- The schedule of church events compliments and does not complicate family life.
- Ministry at the church encourages parents to participate meaningfully in children's ongoing spiritual nurture.
- Communication is adequate and healthy.

Evaluating the Ministry

These goals serve merely as an example. Hopefully, based on our previous lesson, we will develop similar goals based on our vision for ministry and our understanding of our church context. Ultimately, goals like those mentioned provide the direction for evaluation. The purpose of evaluation revolves around identifying areas of strength and areas for growth. Sometimes, we become blind to our own strengths and weaknesses. It is helpful to get input from others. A strong, useful evaluation requires input from multiple sources: your own perceptions, your volunteer staff, your senior pastor, parents, and children. If you are using this evaluation as an opportunity to pare down or add more activities, you will have to connect the actual activities you offer to your goals.

It would be most beneficial to leadership and the program if you appoint a board to oversee the evaluation. This relieves you from having to be thinking about evaluation while trying to operate the day-to-day ministry. This group should understand goals, children, and the mission of the church. Evaluators will want to review the program, answering questions such as:

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- Is the program meeting established goals? If so, which goals are being met?
- Are some of the goals being overlooked in favor of other objectives? Why?
- What are the greatest strengths and weaknesses of the ministry?
- Are there better strategies that could be used to be more effective in reaching ministry goals?

We might ask different individuals to evaluate different sections of our goals. For example, ask parents to evaluate the areas of church community and family goals. Also, list all the programs and events offered in the last year, and ask parents to rank order them as to their impact on their children's lives and growth. List the parent activities conducted, and ask parents to evaluate which were most helpful to them. Ask volunteers to evaluate the ministry goals and recruiting goals. List all the training and spiritual development opportunities offered. Ask volunteers to rank them in terms of their usefulness.

When all the evaluations have been gathered, you can then compare personal observations to the data collected. Discuss this information with the pastoral overseer and the group who gathered the evaluations. We may think this process appears too time-consuming, difficult, and unnecessary, especially if people seem pleased with the current ministry. Children's leaders sometimes rotate evaluations so that each year's assessment will not prove to be overwhelming. However, not only will annual evaluations help keep the ministry effective and on track, but they will help guard against excessive criticism if it arises. We will know that our decisions have been based on solid goals and consistent evaluations conducted by a board of overseers.

Regardless of curriculum resources, events, or the comprehensive program, make a conscious decision right now to view evaluation as a helpful tool for ministry. When done regularly and well, this process will prove invaluable, not something to be dreaded or feared.

APPLICATION

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1. Ask to borrow a leader's guide from your church's children's ministry. It can be a current one or even one from the past. Write an evaluation of the curriculum. Explain the strengths and weaknesses, and decide if you would adopt the curriculum and why.
2. Select one event and ask one other person who participated to go through an evaluation of that event.
3. Interview leadership about their strategies for evaluating programming in children's ministry.

EXAM

**NOTES**

1. Curriculum refers to those materials we use to teach children.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. Key terminology for curriculum resources is/are:
 - A. Scope.
 - B. Level.
 - C. Sequence.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.

3. Curriculum resources are developed based on:
 - A. Standards.
 - B. Appearance.
 - C. Age-appropriate activities.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.

4. Developing curriculum resources is a fairly simple process most leaders can accomplish on their own.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. While often the last consideration, theology and church orientation should be the major consideration.
 - A. True
 - B. False

6. Curriculum resources should be selected based on:
 - A. Missional values.
 - B. Limitations.
 - C. Group needs.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.

7. Comparing multiple curriculum resources only confuses the process of evaluation.
 - A. True
 - B. False



8. Event evaluations should:
 - A. Match goals.
 - B. Always use SMAC.
 - C. Be simple.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.

9. Leaders cannot evaluate the children's ministry without first establishing goals.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. We evaluate ministries to determine strengths as much as weaknesses.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Leaders alone should undertake evaluating the children's ministry.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Should our church have a clear process for evaluating curriculum? Why?
2. If our church needed to establish a “scope and sequence” for teaching the Bible, how might we develop one that respects age-appropriate education?
3. Most evaluation of a ministry event occurs after it happens. What might be some strategies for evaluating an event before it is over?
4. Who should evaluate the children’s ministry curriculum and programming? What would be required if we established a committee and a process?

Review your answers with your mentor, then respond to the following:

How many responses focus on supporting children (particularly in areas where they are not yet fully self-reliant), and how many answers focus on empowering children?

Which of these answers support the goal of living Christlike relationships? Why?

What do we need to add to our list to make our approach more comprehensive, more faithful? Which do we need to incorporate into the role of the children’s leader as one who both supports and empowers Christlike relationships with children?