

by Christine Yount Jones

# THE CURRIC- ULATOR

With our amazingly easy tool, you'll take the guesswork out of curriculum evaluation!



**Picture this:** You've just reviewed the curriculum offerings from 10 different publishers. They all promised amazing life change! The best Bible experiences! Exponential spiritual growth! Kids who will beg to come to church! ● ● *And a pony!*

After surfing websites until your eyes burned, visiting your Christian bookstore with a toddler in tow, wading through stacks of catalogs, and trying to figure out how scope and sequences compare, you've narrowed the offerings to your top-three choices.

### Congratulations!

So you or your unsuspecting assistant ordered samples, opened the nondescript shipping boxes, and poured the materials out onto a long, cold table.

Now you sit here, along with a few choice team members or your Christian education committee, and stare at the pile. Where do you begin?

Why not start with the packaging? Seems like a good place to start—after all, you can judge a book by its cover, right? The only problem these days is that we curriculum creators have been imitating each other for so long that the colors, the images, the names—all the same.

Okay, that wasn't any help!

Try this: Circle the table, rub your chin, and take another approach. Read the promotional copy. The first one promises that it's all about building relationships. That's good! You believe in that! But, wait, it's a plug-and-play curriculum. How will kids watching a video build relationships?

Hmmm... How about the second one? It promises experiential learning. That's good! (After all, chances are that if you subscribe to this magazine, you most likely subscribe to our R.E.A.L. Learning educational philosophy, too.) You know that with experiential learning, kids experience a lot of hands-on learning. You plop down and open a teacher's guide—only to find that the guide is full of the teacher talking but kids barely

touching anything. Sigh...now what?

Circle the table in the other direction. This time cross your arms and...pray! ● ● Ask God to help you discern the differences and choose what's most effective for leading children into a powerful relationship with Jesus. Now, close your eyes.

And open them again because The Curriculator may be the answer to your prayers!

That's right! We've boiled the curriculum-selection process down to a veritable science! No longer do you have to guess or wonder if a curriculum delivers effective learning experiences for children.

Ladies and gentlemen! With The Curriculator, all the guesswork is gone and you can actually dissect any lesson to determine if it's your best choice!

● ● Choose only one curriculum from the pile to evaluate. (And because I want to be upfront with you, I'll let you know that I'm using examples from Group's curriculum—mostly!)

Pray/  
Pray/  
Pray!

Where's  
the pony?!

More about  
R.E.A.L.  
later

## [STEP 1] What's the Goal?

You can tell a lot about most curriculum simply from the name. Take, for example, FaithWeaver.

**Title:** FaithWeaver (It's strong: you get the sense that it's about weaving faith into something.)

**Tagline:** Families explore the same Scripture each week (So it's weaving faith into families...even clearer!)

Let's try that again with Buzz.

**Title:** Buzz (Something to do with bees? Not much help, is it?)

**Tagline:** The instant Sunday school—where all you prepare is your heart (Okay, we're getting closer. We know it's going to be easy for volunteers, but we need more information.)

What does the name and the tagline tell you about the goal of this curriculum? Take a look at the scope and sequence. Choose only one quarter so you don't get overwhelmed. Based on the Bible stories covered and The Points, determine what the goal of this curriculum is. Write the goal in the box below.

SS=what kids  
learn

### THE GOAL

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# THE CURRICULATOR

## [STEP 2] What's the Point?

**Spoiler Alert!**  
Points not from Group }

Apply these principles to the curriculum you're using. Take a look at the Bible Points for the actual lessons. What's the focus of these? Is this what you want kids to learn: "God can use anybody to share his message"? Or how about this: "When there's a job to be done, first you have to see it"?

**Strong Points** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Weak Points** \_\_\_\_\_

Grab the scope and sequence and choose one quarter. Count how many Points are strong—and how many are weak. Write the number in the

appropriate blanks. Why does it matter? The Points are your lesson objectives, so ensure that they're strong. Because if they aren't, what's the point?

Are you ok with this?

That's educator lingo!

Hub?

### Hidden Curriculum

The Point could have a hidden message. Evaluate the following carefully:

"Remember God is with you when you do the right thing."

Turn over the text below to see the life-long message kids may learn from this point:

And, therefore, God is NOT with you when you do the wrong things! Yikes!

If you agree that Christianity is about a relationship rather than a subject, is that enough time for kids to build relationships with you and one another?

## [STEP 3] What's the RELATIONAL quotient?

Now let's dig into the educational philosophy that we hold near and dear—R.E.A.L. Learning. The first part of R.E.A.L. is Relational. Not only do we believe strongly in the Relational part of R.E.A.L., but it looks like other curriculum providers do, too. Or does it?

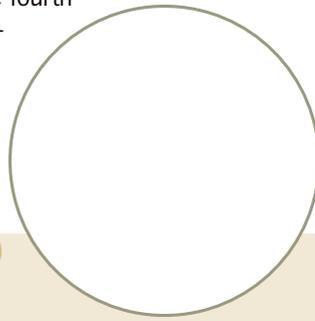
Did you know that 93 percent of all talk in educational settings is teacher talk? How can relationships form in the remaining 7 percent?

To determine if this curriculum promotes relationships, pull out the teacher guide. With a highlighter, read through the entire lesson and highlight any word that signals that relationships are happening—like the ones in the margin.

100-93=7

- Talk about
- Share
- Discuss
- Tell someone
- With a partner
- Work in groups

Now look more closely at the highlighted words. How much of the lesson is spent in those relational activities? Imagine that your lesson is a pie. Would the time be one-fourth of the pie? One-half? Color in the circle to create your pie chart.



Pie, anyone?

Are you ok with this?

## [STEP 4] What's the EXPERIENTIAL quotient?

Here's a gripping statistic—people remember 90 percent of what they experience and only 5 to 10 percent of what they hear! So why is the majority of classroom time filled with teacher talk?

Let's figure out just how experiential your curriculum is. Use this Curriculator Ruler as a measurement of how many experiences are in the lesson. Follow these steps:

Measure each experience where kids are *doing* something as an inch of experience. You can also count the inches where the teacher is telling the kids what they'll do. Now measure the inches where the teacher talks.

**Experiences** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Teacher Talk** \_\_\_\_\_

Are you ok with this?



**[STEP 5]**  
**What's the APPLICABLE quotient?**

Does this curriculum lead kids to apply God's Word to their lives? We could call this the "so-what?" quotient. Kids want to know that the Bible isn't a book of stories that happened a long time ago. They want to know how it's applicable—or relevant—to their lives today. How do you help them see that?

Great questions! And great questions are really hard to create, so that's why we see a lot of really bad questions in curriculum—even sometimes in ours. And when we see them, we swoop in with our scalpels and remove them!

So what makes a good question or a bad question?

Good questions are open-ended so there can be many answers, or lengthy answers that make kids think. 😊

Bad questions are closed-ended so they usually have only one right answer and are answered in one word—or less.

So let's take our scalpels and determine how many questions in one lesson are good (open-ended) or bad (closed-ended).

Follow these steps:

- Cut out all the questions and lay them on the table.
- Read each question and determine if it's closed- or open-ended.
- Make a *closed* pile and an *open* pile. Place the appropriate questions in each pile.
- Now count the questions in each pile and write the number in the appropriate box.

Are you ok with this?

**Closed-Ended** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Open-Ended** \_\_\_\_\_

**[STEP 6]**  
**What's the LEARNER-BASED quotient?**

It's sad, but true. We teachers and writers like to teach—and write lessons—based on how we like to learn. The problem with that is we risk reaching only those kids who are just like us rather than reaching ALL kids. So what can we do to ensure that our lessons are learner-based for all kids?

We've found a handy-dandy tool in the multiple intelligences theory, developed by Howard Gardner. To use this chart for your review, go to Web Exclusives at

📍 [childrensministry.com](http://childrensministry.com).

For now, the best way to determine if a lesson is learner-based is to ask your learners. Teach the lesson to kids and then ask them the following questions.

- What did you like about this lesson?
- What did you not like?
- What did you learn?
- Tell whether you'd recommend that our church use this kind of lesson again.

Once you have the kids' answers, determine whether this lesson is learner-based.

**Kid-Approved?**

\_\_\_ **Yes**  
 \_\_\_ **No**

Are you ok with this?

👉 **You're not finished yet.** Review steps 3-5 to determine the strengths and weaknesses of this lesson's R.E.A.L. Learning. We believe strongly that all four elements of R.E.A.L. are equally important. Look for lessons that nail R.E.A.L. in its entirety so kids learn and grow the most.

Now that you've evaluated one curriculum, it's time to do it again with your other top choices. Then compare your results to determine the most effective curriculum to help your children grow in their relationship with Jesus! **cm**



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