

## **The Role of Curriculum in Early Childhood Special Education**

# **Early Childhood Curriculum**

***“While no single curriculum or pedagogical approach can be identified as best, children who attend well-planned, high-quality early childhood programs in which curriculum aims are specified and integrated across domains tend to learn more and are better prepared to master the complex demands of formal schooling.***

*Particular findings of relevance in this regard include the following:*

- *Children who have a broad base of experience in domain-specific knowledge (for example, in mathematics or an area of science) move more rapidly in acquiring more complex skills.*
- *More extensive language development—such as a rich vocabulary and listening comprehension—is related to early literacy learning.*
- *Children are better prepared for school when early childhood programs expose them to a variety of classroom structures, thought processes, and discourse patterns. This does not mean adopting the methods and curriculum of the elementary school; rather it is a matter of providing children with a mix of whole class, small group, and individual interactions with teachers, the experience of discourse patterns associated with school, and such mental strategies as categorizing, memorizing, reasoning, and metacognition.” (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000, pg. 8).*

Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, M. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Eager to learn: Education our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

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## **Indicators of Effective Early Childhood Curriculum**

- Children are active and engaged (cognitively, physically, socially and artistically active).
- Curriculum goals are clearly defined, shared and understood by all.
- Curriculum is based on evidence that is developmentally, culturally and linguistically relevant for the children.
- Valued content is learned through investigation, play and focused, intentional teaching.
- Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences.
- Curriculum encompasses critical areas of development, including children's physical well being and motor development; social and emotional development, approaches to learning; language development; cognition and general knowledge; and subject matter areas such as science, mathematics, language, literacy, social studies and the arts.
- When subject-specific curricula are adopted, they meet the standards of relevant professional organizations.
- Research and other evidence indicate the curriculum has beneficial effects for children's development.



## Early Childhood Curriculum: Frequently asked questions

### 1. What are curriculum goals?

The goals of a curriculum state the essential desired outcomes for children. When adopting a curriculum, it is important to analyze whether its goals are consistent with other goals of the early childhood program or with state or other early learning standards, and with program standards. Curriculum goals should support and be consistent with expectations for young children's development and learning.

### 2. What is the connection between curriculum and activities for children?

Whether for toddlers or second graders, a good curriculum is more than a collection of activities. The goals and framework of the curriculum do suggest a coherent set of activities and teaching practices linked to standards or expectations—although not in a simple fashion: Good activities support multiple goals. Together and over time, these activities and practices will be likely to help all children develop and learn the curriculum content. Standards and curriculum can give greater focus to activities, helping staff decide how these activities may fit together to benefit children's growth. Appropriate curriculum also promotes a balance between planned experiences—based on helping children progress toward meeting defined goals—and experiences that emerge as outgrowths of children's interests or from unexpected happenings (for example, a new building is being built in the neighborhood). While these experiences are not planned, they are incorporated into the program in ways that comply with standards and curriculum goals.

### 3. What are the most important things to consider in making a decision about adopting or developing a curriculum?

It is important to consider whether the curriculum (as it is or as it might be adapted) fits well with (a) broader goals, standards, and program values (assuming that those have been thoughtfully developed), (b) what research suggests are the significant predictors of positive development and learning, (c) the sociocultural, linguistic, and individual characteristics of the children for whom the curriculum is intended, and (d) the values and wishes of the families and community served by the program. While sometimes it seems that a

program's decision to develop its own curriculum would ensure the right fit, caution is needed regarding a program's ability to align its curriculum with the features of a high-quality curriculum (that is, to address the recommendation and indicators of effectiveness of the position statement). Considerable expertise is needed to develop an effective curriculum—one that incorporates important outcomes and significant content and conforms with research on early development and learning and other indicators noted in the position statement—and not merely a collection of activities or lesson plans (see also FAQ #7 in this section).

### 4. What should be the connection between curriculum for younger children and curriculum they will encounter as they get older?

Early childhood curriculum is much more than a scaled-back version of curriculum for older children. As emphasized in Early Learning Standards (NAEYC) & NAECS/SDE 2002), earlier versions of a skill may look very different from later versions. For example, one might think that knowing the names of two U.S. states at age four in preschool is an important predictor of knowing all 50 states in fourth grade. However, knowing two state names is a less important predictor than gaining fundamental spatial and geographic concepts. Resources, including those listed at the end of this document, can help teachers and administrators become more aware of the curriculum in later years. With this knowledge, they can think and collaborate about ways for earlier and later learning to connect. Communication about these connections can also support children and parents as they negotiate the difficult transitions from birth—three to preschool programs and then to kindergarten and the primary grades.

### 5. Is there such a thing as curriculum for babies and toddlers?

Indeed there is, but as the developmental chart about curriculum suggests, curriculum for babies and toddlers looks very different from curriculum for preschoolers or first-grade children. High-quality infant/toddler programs have clear goals, and they base their curriculum on knowledge of

## Early Childhood Curriculum: Frequently asked questions (cont'd)

very early development. Thus a curriculum for children in the first years of life is focused on relationships, communicative competencies, and exploration of the physical world, each of which is embedded in daily routines and experiences. High-quality infant/toddler curriculum intentionally develops language, focusing on and building on the home language; promotes security and social competence; and encourages understanding of essential concepts about the world. This lays the foundation for mathematics, science, social studies, literacy, and creative expression without emphasizing disconnected learning experiences or formal lessons (Lally et al. 1995; Lally 2000; Sendlak 2000).

### **6. When should the early childhood curriculum begin to emphasize academics?**

There is no clear dividing line between “academics” and other parts of a high-quality curriculum for young children (Hyson 2003a). Children are learning academics from the time they are born. Even infants and toddlers are beginning—through play, relationships, and informal opportunities—to develop the basis of later knowledge in areas such as mathematics, visual and performing arts, social studies, science, and other areas of learning. As children transition into K–3 education, however, it is appropriate for the curriculum to pay focused attention to these and other subject matter areas, while still emphasizing physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development, connections across domains, and active involvement in learning.

### **7. Should programs use published curricula, or is it better for teachers to develop their own curriculum?**

The quality of the curriculum—including its appropriateness for the children who will be experiencing it—should be the important question. If a published, commercially available curriculum—either a curriculum for one area such as literacy or mathematics or a comprehensive curriculum—is consistent with the position statement’s recommendations and the program’s goals and values, appears well suited to the children and effectively by staff, then it may be worth considering, especially as a

support for inexperienced teachers. To make a well-informed choice, staff (and other stakeholders) need to identify their program’s mission and values, consider the research and other evidence about high-quality programs and curricula, and select a curriculum based on these understandings. Some programs may determine that in their situation the best curriculum would be one developed specifically for that program and the children and families it serves. In that case—if staff have the interest, expertise, and resources to develop a curriculum that includes clearly defined goals, a system for ensuring that these goals are shared by stakeholders, a system for determining the beneficial effects of the curriculum, and other indicators of effectiveness—then the program may conclude that it should take that route.

### **8. Is it all right to use one curriculum for mathematics, another for science, another for language and literacy, another for social skills, and still another for music?**

If curricula are adopted or developed for distinct subject matter areas such as literature or mathematics, coherence and consistency are especially important. Are the goals and underlying philosophy of each curriculum consistent? What will it feel like for a child in the program? Will staff need to behave differently as they implement each curriculum? What professional development will staff need to make these judgments?

### **9. What’s needed to implement a curriculum effectively?**

Extended professional development, often with coaching or mentoring, is a key to effective curriculum implementation (National Research Council 2001). Well-qualified teachers who understand and support the curriculum goals and methods are more likely to implement curriculum effectively. So-called scripted or teacher-proof curricula tend to be narrow, conceptually weak, or intellectually shallow. Another key to success is assessment. Ongoing assessment of children’s progress in relation to the curriculum goals gives staff a sense of how their approach may need to be altered for the whole group or for individual children.

# Preschool Curriculum Models

Curriculum is a series of planned, systematic learning experiences organized around a particular philosophy of education. Although curriculum models vary, they each provide a framework to guide program implementation and evaluation. Variations among curriculum models reflect differences in values concerning what is important for young children to learn, as well as in the process by which children are believed to learn and develop (Goffin, 2000).

The type of curriculum used in an early childhood program must be based upon sound principles of child development, program philosophy, developmental appropriateness and the needs of the children in the program (Goffin, 2000). Curriculum models are essential in determining the program content, as well as in training and supervising staff to implement high-quality programs. In order to provide preschool programs of the highest quality, it is important that programs adopt a research-based curriculum model. The following are current curriculum models with validated research.

| Curriculum Models  | Principles  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Creative Curriculum</b> - used by Head Start, child care, preschool, prekindergarten and kindergarten programs.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on ten interest areas or activities in the program environment: blocks, house corner, table toys, art, sand and water, library corner, music and movement, cooking, computers, and the outdoors.</li> <li>• Helps teachers understand how to work with children at different developmental levels to promote learning.</li> <li>• Guides teachers in adapting the environment to make it more challenging.</li> <li>• Includes a parent component.</li> <li>• Training manuals and audiovisual resources are available.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>High/Scope preschool approach</b> - used in both public and private half- and full-day preschools, nursery schools, Head Start programs, child care centers, home-based child care programs, and programs for children with special needs.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the fundamental premise that children are active learners who learn best from activities that they plan, carry out, and reflect on.</li> <li>• Fifty-eight key experiences in child development for the preschool years are identified.</li> <li>• These key experiences are grouped into ten categories: creative representation, language and literacy, initiative and social relations, movement, music, classification, seriation, number, space, and time.</li> <li>• A central element of the day is the “plan-do-review sequence” in which children make a plan, carry it out, and then reflect on the results.</li> <li>• The daily routine also includes times for small and large group experiences and time for outside play.</li> </ul> |

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| <p><b>Montessori</b> – based on the work and writings of the Italian physician Maria Montessori. Her method appears to be the first curriculum model for children of preschool age that was widely disseminated and replicated.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the idea that children teach themselves through their own experiences.</li> <li>• Provides a carefully prepared and ordered environment.</li> <li>• Included in this environment are didactic and sequenced materials geared toward promoting children’s education in four areas: development of the senses, conceptual or academic development, competence in practical life activities, and character development.</li> <li>• Materials proceed from the simple to the complex and from the concrete to the abstract.</li> <li>• Sixty-three percent of class time is spent in independent activity.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Project Approach</b> - based on recent research about how children learn and the value of integrating the curriculum.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A project is an in-depth investigation of a specific topic with the main goal of finding out more about the topic rather than to seek answers to questions proposed by the teacher.</li> <li>• Either the children or teacher can generate the topic.</li> <li>• The questions to be addressed and investigated during the project are generated and developed by the children.</li> <li>• Project work should not constitute the whole curriculum but should address the more informal parts of the curriculum.</li> <li>• The project approach is similar to themes and units but themes usually consist of preplanned lessons and activities on particular topics selected by the teacher rather than the child.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Reggio Emilia</b> - emphasizes the involvement of children, staff, and parents in the learning experience.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergent Curriculum: An emergent curriculum is one that builds upon the interests of children. Teachers work together to formulate hypotheses about the possible directions of a project, the materials needed, and possible parent and/or community support and involvement.</li> <li>• Representational Development: Similar to the idea of teaching through the use of multiple intelligences, the Reggio Emilia approach calls for the integration of the graphic arts as tools for cognitive, linguistic, and social development.</li> <li>• Collaboration: Collaborative group work, both large and small, is considered valuable and necessary to advance cognitive development. Children are encouraged to dialogue, critique, compare, negotiate, hypothesize, and problem solve through group work.</li> <li>• Teachers as Researchers: Working as a member of a teaching team, the role of the teacher is that of a learner alongside the children. The teacher is a facilitator and resource.</li> <li>• Documentation: Similar to the use of a portfolio, documentation of children’s work in progress is viewed as an important tool in the learning process for children, teachers, and parents.</li> <li>• Environment: Within the Reggio Emilia schools, great attention is given to the look and feel of the classroom. The environment is considered an important and essential component of the learning process.</li> </ul> |

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|---|---|
| <p><b>Theme-Based Model -</b><br/>The recent brain research emphasizes the importance of forming patterns and helping children understand the connections to learning. Patterning information means really organizing and associating new information with previously developed mental hooks. A theme-based model encourages children to form those patterns.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A theme is an idea or topic that a teacher and children can explore in many different ways.</li> <li>• The theme is often based on the learners' culture, environment or shared experiences.</li> <li>• Themes should arise from the kinds of events that take place in the classroom on a daily basis.</li> <li>• Children should be involved in the planning stages.</li> <li>• Teachers can integrate literacy, social studies, math, music and art.</li> <li>• Themes work best when the teacher considers the total needs of the children and uses the themes to invite new learning.</li> <li>• Themes should be custom-designed to fit the teacher and the children.</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

Adapted with permission from:  
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## Instructional Models for Early Childhood Education

Susan L. Golbeck

What is the best approach for teaching young children? No question could be more pressing as teachers, researchers, and policy makers strive to make sure all children are “ready to learn.” Yet, as of now, there is no definitive answer. This Digest discusses the existing knowledge base on the differential effects of various approaches to early education. Concurrently, the field eagerly anticipates results from the recently funded Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research initiative, which will use randomized trials to examine a variety of preschool curricular approaches.

### Early Empirical Studies and Longitudinal Follow-up

The work began in the mid-1960s when Head Start was initiated. Well-implemented, conceptually coherent programs grounded in the scientific theories of the time were studied for their effects on children in the short and long term. Three studies are especially noteworthy (see Golbeck, 2001, for more detail about each study).

Miller and Bizzell (1983a, 1983b) studied (1) a traditional nursery school, also called Bank Street; (2) Montessori; (3) a direct instruction approach called DISTAR; and (4) a program called DARCEE, which blended specific pre-academic goals and motivational goals. Short-term effects of the programs were consistent with program goals. DISTAR and DARCEE produced the highest outcomes in pre-academic areas, while the more child-centered programs led to higher levels of inventiveness, curiosity, and social participation. However, by second grade, the boys from the Montessori program appeared to be outperforming other groups in reading and also showed a less severe decline in IQ. This advantage was maintained through middle school. Unlike the boys, girls seemed to fare better in the more pre-academic DARCEE program.

Karnes and colleagues (1983) studied five model approaches, including traditional, Montessori, and direct instruction. At the end of first grade, the children from the most highly structured pre-academic programs were most successful in school. But in a later follow-up, the original Montessori group contained the highest percentage of high school graduates, with the traditional program group close behind. Relatively low rates were shown for the other programs. On a composite indicator of success in school, the Montessori boys outperformed boys in other programs.

Researchers at the High/Scope Foundation compared their own Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, direct instruction, and a traditional, child-centered theme-based approach. Again, there was a slight advantage for direct instruction initially, but longterm data collected in adolescence showed higher levels of social adjustment for children in High/Scope and traditional programs (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). (These results must be viewed with caution because the developers were also the evaluators in this study.)

These studies have methodological limitations, but taken together, they present a pattern worthy of more exploration. To the extent

that there are any differences across prekindergarten programs at the beginning of elementary school, they tended to favor the more teacher-directed approaches. Yet, in the long term, children in the child-centered programs fared at least as well or better. In all three studies, children in the direct instruction program had slightly higher IQ or achievement scores immediately following preschool. By middle school, these advantages had eroded, and boys, especially, were floundering more than peers from at least some of the child-centered programs.

The success of the Montessori models studied by Miller and colleagues (1983a, 1983b) and also by Karnes et al. (1983) merits closer scrutiny. Although Montessori models vary, in these studies, boys actually outperformed children in other programs at seventh and eighth grades. Karnes reported that children from the Montessori program showed the highest levels of school success, although they did not necessarily show the highest IQ scores. Perhaps working independently and persisting—both components of Montessori—were important program elements. There may be similarities between instructional strategies found in the DARCEE program, the Montessori approach, and more recent Vygotskian approaches to instruction. The Montessori teacher appears to scaffold from a distance. She keeps extensive observational notes on individual children, using this information to decide when to introduce new materials in a demonstration lesson. She supports the child as he works with carefully structured didactic materials in a carefully sequenced instructional experience.

### Recent Research

Complementing these longitudinal studies is more recent work linking specific instructional variables in preschool and kindergarten classrooms to developmentally appropriate instructional practices. Diverse dependent measures have been studied, including child stress, interpersonal reasoning, and motivation for learning. Instructional techniques that emphasize drill, worksheets, and pre-academics, while minimizing child choice and decision making, lead to higher levels of child stress (Burts et al., 1990; Hyson & Molinaro, in Golbeck, 2001). The effects appear to be most pronounced among boys (Burts et al., 1992).

Motivational outcomes also vary as a function of preschool instructional practices. Although children in more academically oriented preschool programs fared better on achievement tests when compared to children in more child-centered preschool programs, the children rated their abilities lower, showed lower expectations for success on academic tasks, showed more dependency on adults, evidenced less pride in their accomplishments, and claimed to worry more about school. A subsequent study replicated these findings in preschool but suggested that these relationships become more complex in kindergarten, making it difficult to separate the type of instruction from the social context of teachers' behavior (Stipek et al., 1995, 1998; Stipek & Greene, in Golbeck, 2001).

## A Call for New Paradigms

Empirical support can be found for child-centered approaches to preschool instruction, especially if the emphasis is upon long-term goals and social-emotional factors related to academic success (e.g., self-regulation). Research suggests that there is an important role for play or active “meaning making” by the child in the classroom, but this must occur within an environment offering the teacher a clear instructional role (Case, Griffin, & Kelly, in Golbeck, 2001; see also Dickinson, 2002). As Stipek et al. (1995; 1998) note, the simple dichotomy between teacher directed and child centered is not adequate for characterizing the complexity of instructional practices in early childhood, and further research combining direct instruction with high nurturance is needed. There are varieties of child-centered approaches, and research shows they are not all equally effective. Similarly, there are varieties of teacher-centered approaches. The discrepancy between short-term and long-term outcomes suggests that there are benefits, and risks, associated with several of the approaches studied.

One way to pursue new paradigms for instruction is to ask teachers how they conceptualize their practices. Marcon (1999) queried teachers about their beliefs and practices. She found that when teachers were clear and their responses corresponded to a single coherent theory of young children’s learning and development (based either on a didactic learning approach or a more traditional developmental orientation), children fared better than when their teachers’ approaches were “eclectic” or inconsistent.

## Conclusion

Practitioners, researchers, and policy makers must envision new approaches to instruction integrating proven success with new research on early learning. Developmentally appropriate practices must provide a clear role for the teacher, a sequence of content for the child to learn, and opportunities for self-regulation (Ginsburg et al., in Golbeck, 2001; Roskos & Neuman, 2002). Furthermore, new approaches must acknowledge the complex ecology of young children’s learning and development. It is imperative to include (1) the interplay among emotions, social understanding, and cognition within the child (Hyson & Molinaro, in Golbeck, 2001; Pianta, 1999); (2) factors within the classroom such as socioemotional climate and the teacher-child relationship; and (3) the larger context of school, family, and community (Rogoff et al., 2001).

## For More Information

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# **Curriculum in programs for Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers, Kindergarteners, and Primary Grade Children**

The following Developmental Chart is a companion to the Position Statement on Curriculum, Assessment and Evaluation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) It can be found on the NAEYC website at <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/CAPEexpand.pdf>

The chart provides examples of ways in which each recommendation from the position statement can be implemented in programs for infants/toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergarten/primary age children.

It can be used by programs and individuals to understand and reflect on their implementation of curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.



National Association for the Education of Young Children, & National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (2003). *Position statement with expanded resources: Early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation: Building an effective, accountable system in programs for children birth through age 8*. Retrieved March 9, 2007, from <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/CAPEexpand.pdf>

# CURRICULUM in programs for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, kindergartners, and primary grade children

## POSITION STATEMENT RECOMMENDATION:

Implement curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.

### Infants/Toddlers

### Preschoolers

### Kindergarten/Primary

**Curriculum that is thoughtfully planned:** Whatever the children's ages, curriculum goals link with important developmental tasks and are comprehensive in scope. Teaching strategies are tailored to children's ages, developmental capacities, language and culture, and abilities or disabilities. A major shift as children move into kindergarten and the primary grades is toward greater focus on subject matter areas, without ignoring their developmental foundations.

Goals focus on children's development as they learn about themselves and others, as well as ways to communicate, think, and use their muscles.

Goals for infants address security, responsive interactions with caregivers, and exploration.

Goals for toddlers address independence, need for control, discovery, and beginning social interactions.

Goals focus on children's exploration, inquiry, and expanding vocabularies.

Goals address children's physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge.

Experiences provide for knowledge and skill learning in literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and the visual and performing arts.

Goals focus on children's emergent knowledge and skills in all subject matter areas, including language and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, health, physical education, and the visual and performing arts.

Goals continue to address all developmental areas including socioemotional development, and approaches to learning ("habits of mind").

**Curriculum that is challenging and engaging:** For all ages the curriculum leads children from where they are to new accomplishments while maintaining their interest and active involvement. Content that is engaging for children of different ages changes with development and with new experiences, requiring careful observation and adaptation.

Children can use their whole bodies and their senses as they manipulate toys and other safe objects and engage in play alone, with a primary caregiver, and at times with or near other infants.

Children's enthusiasm for exploring is supported by matching their interests with challenging curricula.

For toddlers, curriculum also focuses on their emerging abilities to play with other children.

Curriculum facilitates children's construction of knowledge through their interactions with materials, each other, and adults.

Curriculum promotes experiences in which children's thinking moves from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract.

Curriculum provides opportunities for children to initiate activities, as well as for teacher initiation and scaffolding.

Curriculum leads to children's recognition of their own achievements.

Curriculum promotes children's developing attitudes as "learners"—using their curiosity, creativity, and initiative.

Curriculum provides experiences in which children use oral and written language, mathematical and scientific thinking, and investigatory skills to build a knowledge base across disciplines and expand their skills repertoire.

Curriculum leads to children's recognition of their own competence.

The information in this chart is based on the recommendations of the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE Position Statement on Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation ([www.naeyc.org/resources/position\\_statements/pscape.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/pscape.pdf)). The chart provides examples of ways in which the recommendations of the NAEYC-NAECS/SDE Position Statement on Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation can be implemented in programs for infants/toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergarten/primary age children. The examples can best be understood within the context of the full position statement.

(chart continued on page 20)

# CURRICULUM chart (cont'd)

| Infants/Toddlers  | Preschoolers   | Kindergarten/Primary   |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically responsive:</b> Whatever the children's ages, curriculum fits well with their developmental levels, abilities and disabilities, individual characteristics, families and communities, and cultural contexts. Curriculum supports educational equity for children who are learning a second language. Curriculum for younger children makes cultural connections primarily through relationships, daily routines, and "rituals"; older children benefit from more explicit incorporation of culturally relevant materials and from topic-centered as well as integrated learning opportunities.</p> | <p>Integration across subject matter areas is high, while some "focusing" is appropriate (e.g., experiences devoted to learning about print and numbers).<br/>Curriculum planning and implementation—including the use of "props" for play and other representations—emphasize experiences that reflect the children's cultures and cultural values.</p>   | <p>Curriculum focuses on a continuum of learning in topic areas and integration across disciplines. The curriculum also facilitates adaptation of instruction for children who are having difficulty and for those needing increasing challenges.<br/>Children learn ways to develop constructive relationships with other people and respect for individual and cultural differences.</p>   |
| <p>Curriculum addresses the wide variations in infants' and toddlers' interests, temperaments, and patterns of growth and development.<br/>Curriculum planning and implementation emphasize understanding of and respect for home culture, efforts to incorporate home values and practices, and discussion with families about differences between their expectations and those of the program.</p>  | <p><b>Curriculum that is comprehensive:</b> Whatever the children's ages, the curriculum attends to a broad range of developmental and learning outcomes—across domains and subject matter areas and including experiences that promote children's nonviolent behavior and conflict resolution. For older children, the curriculum pays greater attention to specific content areas but without ever ignoring some domains in favor of a narrow set of other outcomes.</p> | <p>Curriculum and related instruction are increasingly focused on helping children acquire deeper understanding of information and skills in subject areas (e.g., language and literacy, science, mathematics, social studies, and visual and performing arts) within a comprehensive set of developmental outcomes.<br/>Curriculum helps children recognize the connections between and across disciplines and domains.<br/>Curriculum-based experiences encompass a variety of active strategies in which individuals or small groups explore, inquire, discover, demonstrate, and solve problems.</p> |

| <b>CURRICULUM chart (cont'd)</b>   |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Infants/Toddlers</b>  | <b>Preschoolers</b>   | <b>Kindergarten/Primary</b>  |  |
| <p><b>Curriculum that promotes positive outcomes:</b> Whatever the children's ages, the curriculum is selected, adapted, and revised to promote positive outcomes for children. Outcomes include both immediate enjoyment and nurturance and longer-term benefits. Curriculum for younger children pays special attention to those key developmental outcomes shown to be essential to later success—not focusing simply on earlier versions of specific academic skills.</p> <p>Curriculum promotes experiences that lead to documented evidence that infants and toddlers are learning about themselves and others, communicating their needs to responsive adults, gaining understandings of basic concepts, and developing motor and coordination skills appropriate for their ages. Outcomes also include evidence that each child is developing a sense of trust, security, and, increasingly, independence.</p> | <p>Curriculum provides experiences that lead to documented evidence that preschoolers are acquiring and applying knowledge and skills in physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge—as well as more specific skills important for later school success.</p> <p>Children demonstrate positive attitudes toward learning and their increasing abilities to represent their experiences in a variety of ways (e.g., through drawing/painting, dictating/writing, and dramatic play).</p> | <p>Curriculum provides experiences that lead to documented evidence that children are acquiring important competencies in literacy, mathematics, science, visual and performing arts, and other subject matter areas—as well as continuing to develop cognitive, physical, and socioemotional competencies. These outcomes are appropriate for children's ages as well as their interests and the communities in which they live.</p> <p>Children demonstrate positive attitudes toward learning and their increasing understanding of key concepts, skills, and tools of inquiry of the subject matter areas; their application of these understandings to various situations; and their understanding of the connections across disciplines.</p> |  |

National Association for the Education of Young Children/National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (2003, November). Early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation: Building an effective, accountable system in programs for children birth through age 8. Retrieved March 7, 2007, from <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/CAPExpand.pdf>



## **Questions for Reflection: Early Childhood Curriculum**

*These questions can be used for personal study and/ or as questions to guide study group discussions.*

1. Why should we be concerned with curriculum models for young children with disabilities?
2. What is the difference between educational activities, materials and curriculum?
3. What does research tell us about curriculum models and child outcomes?
4. What role do developmentally appropriate instructional practices play in early childhood curriculum?
5. How do motivational outcomes vary as a function of preschool instructional practices and how might that affect outcomes for young children with disabilities?
6. According to the NAEYC, what are indicators of effective early childhood curriculum?
7. What are the most important things to consider in making a decision about adopting or developing a curriculum?
8. When should early childhood curriculum begin to emphasize academics?
9. What is needed to implement a curriculum effectively?
10. How does curriculum differ between infant/toddler and preschool? Between preschool and kindergarten/primary?