

Curriculum development: An introduction

Quality child care is more than simply providing children with a safe environment and activities. Quality care implies and requires an understanding of child development, developmentally appropriate practices, and a caring, trained staff. This takes time and planning before children ever enter the environment.

Curriculum development approaches are based on varying philosophies and theories of child development. Research and experience have led 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) to recommend that educators “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.” (NAEYC and NAECS-SDE 2003)

Curriculum is much more than a collection of children’s activities. How children spend the child care day has long lasting implications. Decisions about curriculum, the planning process, and what it looks like in a classroom, all take into consideration many variables.



Considerations include the entire day, the environment, individual needs of the children who are involved, research, philosophy and required guidelines. An established curriculum needs to remain flexible. Routine and ongoing assessment can point out successes and any changes that may be required.

Curriculum development

The curriculum used is influenced by many factors. Goals need to be determined before a curriculum is created or chosen. The goals refer specifically to what is wanted for the children as a result of this curriculum. These goals should be very clear, shared and understood by all involved: administrators, families, and teachers.

The curriculum should be evidence-based, meaning based on practices found to be effective in research

studies. The curriculum needs to be appropriate and beneficial for the children with whom it will be used. It should be created using research-based principles of child development, and its content should be validated by professional standards.

In an effort to improve the quality of child care, many states have implemented early learning standards. Although there may be variations, they are research-based tools that identify developmental domains of young children. Learning and growth should be occurring within each of these areas, or domains. These standards, when used by providers as a guide to plan curriculum, assure that children are provided with experiences that allow them to develop and grow in all areas of learning.



Take a comprehensive approach

Children grow socially, emotionally, cognitively, and physically. A quality curriculum provides opportunities for children to develop and express themselves in each of these domains. This holistic approach assures that we are not focusing too much in one developmental area while forgetting to include other areas that are equally important to the child.

Through observation of children in care, caregivers learn about their interests, their strengths, and where they need to grow and develop. Providers can use these observations to make needed curriculum changes and to help the children grow and develop.

Resources:

NAEYC: "Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation – Position Statement." <http://bit.ly/1CrFCy8>

NCQTL: "Choosing a Preschool Curriculum." <http://1.usa.gov/1UF70i0>

References

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Engage children

Because each child develops in his own way and has individual interests, unique needs, and varying backgrounds, it is essential for child care practitioners to get to know each child. Observations of each child can help providers adapt the environment and activities for each child to meet his individual abilities, interests, and needs.

In order to plan for learning and to build upon individual interests, strengths, and skills, the practitioner should look at the environment and what activities are provided. Some questions to ask are:

What gets the child excited?

Are the activities appropriate for the developmental level of the child?

Is the routine of the day working for the child?

How is the child using materials and space in the room?

Are activities too challenging or too easy for the child?

An effective curriculum allows for flexibility to meet varying needs and interests of the specific children in care. Curriculum includes the entire day, activities both indoors and outdoors. It is intentional and planned but not planned so far in advance that it can't grow with the children.