

Defining Quality Curriculum for Young Children

WHAT is “curriculum”?

Simply stated, curriculum it is what you want children to learn and what you plan to teach. Curriculum should be based on what is known about child development and learning for any given age range. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) means “teaching children where they are (developmentally), as individuals and as a group, and helping each child reach challenging but achievable goals ...” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) . Your *curriculum* guides you in determining these achievable goals; what knowledge, skills, and dispositions (attitudes) you want children to learn and develop. It is recommended that good curriculum be a written document that is *used* in planning experiences for children.

HOW is curriculum delivered?

The “how” part includes the methods, approaches and strategies you use to help children learn. Always search for methods that are “evidence-based”, meaning studies have demonstrated that the approach is effective in helping children learn. Examples of “HOW” include (but are not limited to):

- Intentional teaching
- Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)
- Scaffolding
- Thoughtfully designed learning environments
- Play-based experiences
- Child-initiated activities
- Teacher-directed activities
- Parent engagement
- Relationship-based interventions
- Routine-based or activity-based interventions
- Modeling
- Peer-mediated interventions
- Shared or dialogic reading experiences

WHY is curriculum important?

It’s important because it clearly describes what you want children to learn; what *child outcomes* you are aiming for. Curriculum describes the sequence - the “what comes next” for the child to learn and you to teach so that the child moves closer to your intended learning outcome.

WHERE is curriculum delivered?

It’s delivered anywhere children are engaged in learning and developing:

- At home
- In a classroom
- In playgroups
- On the playground
- In the car
- At the park

Checklist for Preschool Curriculum Decision Makers:

When evaluating published curriculum (or developing your own), consider these features, offered by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), in their publication, Preschool Curriculum Decision-Making: Dimensions to Consider (March 2007)*:

1. How does the curriculum define the roles of the teacher and the child in the learning process?
2. What domains of learning are addressed? Are they integrated or treated separately? Will the curriculum lead to achievement of state early learning standards?
3. Does the curriculum provide guidance for differentiating teaching for students with special behavior? Linguistic or learning needs?
4. Do the curriculum's developers provide an assessment system that is consistent with the teaching philosophy and learning content?
5. What research evidence exists to support the value or effectiveness of the curriculum?
6. Is the curriculum appropriate for all teachers, regardless of the qualifications? What kind of professional development is provided?
7. Are specific materials required to implement the curriculum?
8. Does the curriculum model provide guidance for such services as parent involvement and the transition to kindergarten?

*See the complete document at: <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/12.pdf>

Copple, C. & Bredekamp, S. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice, 3rd Ed.*, NAEYC, Washington, DC., 2009