

A SAMPLE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

Any early childhood service should have a planned curriculum, because anything and everything that happens to a young child is a learning experience.

It's important then for any service to develop that curriculum and to do so within a framework of values, beliefs, and basic principles. This is in order to ensure that the learning experiences occurring are positive, not negative, for young children.

What follows is an outline of generally accepted good practice for that framework, a starting place for the development of your own curriculum.

AN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEFINITION OF CURRICULUM

The curriculum is the sum total of all children's direct and indirect learning experiences in early childhood settings.

Developing the curriculum involves deciding what these experiences will be.

A VISION FOR DELIVERY

Any early childhood group should:

- affirm that it is the right of each and every child to be enriched in an environment that acknowledges and incorporates the values and language of their mother tongue.
- affirm the right of each and every child to happiness, health, and respect so that children's full potential will be developed within a caring environment.
- affirm the belief that high quality early childhood education benefits children, families, and society.
- believe that access to quality early childhood education services is a universal right of children and families.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM

There are fifteen principles basic to the curriculum of an early childhood setting. Any curriculum developed should enable all children to experience an environment in which:

1. They Learn Who They Are.

So that all children can develop a feeling of self-worth, they must learn to understand, appreciate, and be confident in their own culture, and the culture of their country.

2. They Are Safe.

Safeguards must ensure that children are not hurt physically, emotionally, or socially and do not experience abuse or discrimination.

3. They Are Healthy.

All aspects of health, mental, physical, and spiritual, must be given equal value to enable the well-being of children and adults. Practices such as balanced nutrition, medical care, stress-management and positive attitudes to self will enhance this growth and development.

4. They Relate Positively to Others.

Children need a positive environment. This encourages them to develop fully as individuals and as members of their community. Children must witness and experience relationships which are positive, peaceful, and affirmative.

5. They Enjoy Themselves.

Effective learning is satisfying. It can be challenging and disturbing. It can also excite and stimulate. It can be fun.

6. They Learn in Appropriate Ways.

The environment must facilitate children's curiosity, active exploration, and include both self-paced and directed learning. The importance and power of play must be recognized. There must be time for children to think and dream.

7. They Respect the Natural Environment.

We, as guardians, have a responsibility to conserve our world and make sure that our children enjoy, witness, respect, and experience first-hand the beauty of their environment. Conservation is an important principle to be learned at an early age.

8. There Are Goals for Children.

Careful on-going observation of children's developmental progress will enable adults to establish appropriate goals for children's learning and to provide a responsive environment in which children experience both success and challenge, and where the potential of all experience for learning is recognized.

9. Learning is not Limited by Gender.

Learning should encompass and take realistic account of women's experiences and attitudes as well as men's.

10. Learning is Not Limited by Race or Color.

The curriculum will recognize, respect and respond to the aspirations of all cultures which make up the society of the country they live in.

11. Decision-Making is Shared.

Information is shared and decisions are made on a consensus basis involving staff, children, and parents. In this way people are empowered.

12. Conflict is Resolved Peacefully.

The future of our world may well depend on our ability to resolve conflicts peacefully. The process of peaceful resolution is learned through role modeling and direct teaching of skills. It is important that children witness and experience these behaviors.

13. The Importance of Home and Family is Recognized.

Early childhood education is a partnership between other adults and the family. It must provide a support system which acknowledges and respects 'parents' as the prime educators. Ongoing communication and interaction between the home and early childhood setting can positively foster children's learning.

14. Adults Are Learners.

Recognition must be given to the importance of learning as a life-long process and the relationship between ongoing adult learning and increased quality of experience for children.

15. People Are Accountable.

Children have the right to implementation of these fifteen basic principles in any early childhood setting.

from Maris O'Rourke, Human Development, Head, Education Sector, World Bank, 1998.