Curriculum and Assessment within High Quality Program Settings

Thanks to Peg Szczurek from DVAEYC
10/06
“Curriculum” is:

An organized framework that outlines the content that children are to learn, the processes through which children achieve the curricular goals, what teachers do to help students achieve these goals, and the context in which teaching and learning occur.”

Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995
“Curriculum” is:

The knowledge and skills to be taught in an educational program and the plans for experiences though which learning takes place. Vital is having a curriculum in a written form and actually using it to guide planning...

Schweinhart & Weikart 1997; Bowman, Donavan, & Burns 2000; Landry 2005
Curriculum and planning begin with a question.

“What should the children who come out of a program know and be able to do?”

For a specific group of children, the teacher asks: “What goals or outcomes do I want the students to achieve during the time that I am teaching them?”
Effective Curriculum

NAEYC has identified essential curriculum areas:

- Social/emotional development
- Language development
- Literacy development
- Mathematics
- Technology, scientific inquiry and knowledge
- Understanding ourselves and our communities
- Creative expression and appreciation for the arts
- Physical development and skills
Effective Curriculum

- Is NOT a collection of activities alone
- Is based on key outcomes for children
- Provides teachers with a useful framework for choosing learning experiences and materials
- Is written and addresses all areas of child development and learning
Common pitfall:

A center might select a specific “research-based curriculum” for use with the children – confident that it is the right choice, when in reality the curriculum was shown to be effective with school age children or children who differ in culture or language from the children for whom the curriculum is now being used.
Indicators of Effectiveness:

NAEYC recommendations:

- Children are engaged and active.
- Goals are clear and shared by all.
- Curriculum is evidence-based.
- Valued content is learned through investigation, play, and focused, intentional teaching.
- Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences.
- Curriculum is comprehensive – encompasses all areas of child development.
- Professional standards validate the curriculum’s subject matter content.
For high quality in programs...

- Teachers need to make the connection between curriculum and assessment.
- Use a variety of approaches and teaching strategies.
- Know how to integrate content while helping children develop and learn skills.
- Use curriculum as a framework for decision-making.
- Base all planning on developmentally appropriate practices.
Key Components of Quality Curriculum:

- Learning is at the core. At ALL times teachers keep in mind the goals that support the development of the children.
- A rich classroom environment serves as another “teacher” for the children. It must be organized and used in ways that make learning positive, engaging, active, and fun.
- Teachers and other adults build strong, caring relationships with the children through positive interactions, consistent follow through, and defining clear expectations for children.
Key Components of Quality Curriculum:

- Teachers regularly use observation and reflection to guide their teaching practices.
- Based on observations and documentation, teachers adjust and accommodate in the curriculum to support individual learners.
- Each learning experience is evaluated for:
  - Available materials
  - Activity length
  - Level of physical involvement: active vs. passive
  - Teacher directed vs. child initiated
  - Activity themes based on children’s interests and needs
  - Activity goals and goals for individual learners
So what is the difference between a curriculum and a lesson plan?

A lesson plan is an outline or road map for delivery of a specific lesson or learning experience. It has learning objectives for the activity. It should include also: materials needed, steps in the activity, use of time, teaching strategy, child’s role, connection to early learning standards, anticipated adjustments for individual learners. Curriculum is the comprehensive framework for all lesson plans.
What is DAP?

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) refers to teaching decisions that vary with and adapt to the age, experience, interests, and abilities of individual children within a given age range.
DAP generalizations...

- DAP meets learners where they are, taking into account their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development and characteristics.
- DAP identifies goals for children that are both challenging and achievable.
- DAP recognizes that what makes something challenging and achievable will vary, depending on the individual learner and the context in which the learning takes place.
Sources of Evidence for DAP:

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Intentional thinking about BLOCKS

WHO DECIDES?

Role of Teacher:
- How to enhance play?
- When is activity observed?
- How is activity documented?
- When are materials rotated?

Time:
- When are blocks used?
- How often? How long?
- What part of each day?
- How flexible is the schedule?
- How many times?

Space:
- Where?
- How is space arranged?
- What is the space size?
- How many share this space?
- Is the space safe?
- Inside or outside?
- Is it clear of pathways?

Materials:
- What type of blocks?
- Are they safe?
- How many kids will use?
- How many blocks per child?
- What props needed?
- How will children access them?
- When will they be rotated?

WHO DECIDES?
Considerations for DAP...

- What is age appropriate based on what we know about development within a given age range?
- What is individually appropriate based on each child?
- What is appropriate to the social and cultural contexts in which the children live?
Principles of child development and learning that inform DAP:

- All domains of child development – cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical, creative – are closely related. Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domains.

- Development occurs in an orderly sequence with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.

- Development proceeds at varying rates from child to child as well as unevenly within different areas of each child’s functioning.
Principles continued...

- Early experiences have both cumulative and delayed effects on individual children’s development and there are optimal periods for certain types of development and learning. For example: the first 3 years are optimal for language development.

- Development proceeds in predictable directions towards greater complexity, organization and internalization. For example: Children learn to navigate their homes and classrooms long before they understand right and left.
Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.

Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world.

Development and learning result from the interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both physical and social worlds that the children live in.

Play is an important vehicle for children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development.
Principles...

- Development advances when children have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills as well as when they experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery.
- Children demonstrate different modes of knowing and learning and different ways of representing what they know.
- Children develop and learn best in the context of a community where they feel that they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure.
Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum:

- Neither NAEYC or Keystone STARS endorse specific curricula.
- Curriculum outcomes in the early years must be age appropriate. There should not be next-grade expectations of mastery of basic skills routinely pushed down to the previous grade or age level.
- An effective developmentally appropriate curriculum provides for all domains of child development.
- Curriculum should include a broad range of content areas across disciplines and must be meaningful and intellectually engaging to the children.
- Curriculum builds on what the children already know and are able to do.
- Curriculum plans frequently integrate across subject areas to help children make meaningful connections.
- Curriculum promotes the development of knowledge and understanding, processes and skills, as well as how to use and apply skills.
Developmentally appropriate curriculum...

- Curriculum content has intellectual integrity, reflecting the key concepts and tools of inquiry in each subject area in ways that are accessible and achievable for young children.
- Curriculum provides opportunities to support children’s home culture and language while developing children’s ability to understand the shared culture of the program and learning community and the language of instruction.
- Curriculum goals are realistic and attainable for most children.
- When used, technology is physically and philosophically integrated in the classroom teaching and curriculum.
Assessment

- Curriculum is the plan for enabling children to reach desired outcomes; assessment is the process of examining children’s progress towards those outcomes.

- In other words... assessment is the basic process of discovering what the children in a classroom, individually and as a group, know and can do in relation to their optimum development and to the program’s goals.

- Assessment should not be used as a comparison of children within a classroom, but as a comparison on one child or group’s progress and growth over time.
Assessment...

- In the current climate, you may hear assessment used for almost any type of appraisal of children. Sometimes it is used very broadly to include all the various ways we might discover “where a child is” in development and learning. Common assessment methods include: observation, checklists, diagnostic tests, height and weight measurements, etc.

- Assessment is truly the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information.
Assessment...

- Deciding WHY we are assessing is the critical first step!
- What is the purpose for the assessment?
- What area/s of child development and learning should we assess?
- When is the appropriate time to assess?
- How can we gather information about what children know and can do?
- What does the information that we gather mean?
- What use do we make of the information?
Why assess?

- To monitor learning and development
- To guide planning and decision making in the classroom
- To identify a child who may need special services
- To report and communicate with others.
When to assess?

- Before or within 45 days of enrollment
- When forming a new group
- Day by day
- Periodically
- Before a new theme or curricular emphasis
- To address a problem or concern
To be developmentally appropriate...

Assessment requires attention to what is:

- age appropriate
- individually appropriate
- culturally appropriate
Assessment and curriculum

Assessment of individual children’s development and learning is essential for planning and implementing appropriate curriculum. In developmentally appropriate programs, assessment and curriculum are fully integrated, with teachers continually engaging in observational assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning.
Developmentally Appropriate Assessment Practices:

- Assessment of each child is ongoing, strategic, and purposeful. Results are used to benefit the child.
- Content of assessments reflect progress towards learning goals.
- Methods are age appropriate.
- Assessments are designed for a specific purpose.
Developmentally Appropriate Assessment Practices:

- Decisions that have a major impact on a child, such as enrollment or placement, are never made on the basis of a single assessment device or screening.
- Assessment takes into account children as individuals with varying learning styles and rates of learning. A child’s culture is considered.
- Assessment addresses both what a child can do individually and what a child can do with adult assistance.
Sound Assessment is...

- Reliable – it measures consistently and accurately. The procedure yields similar results if repeated or if done by different people.
- Valid – it measures what we want to measure and not something else. When valid, assessment results agree with other information gathered in other ways about the same behavior or skill.
Types of Assessment

Screening

✓ Identifies children who are at-risk for future learning
✓ Confirms teachers’ concerns about children or learning processes
✓ Needs to be linked to referral and follow-up
✓ Should be done multiple times and in multiple ways
Types of Assessment

**Program Assessment**

- Done to determine continuous improvement in the overall program; are program goals being met?
- Should involve the children, families, and the community.
- Goals and objectives for the program and assessment are aligned with standards.
Types of Assessment

Decision Making for Instruction

✓ Looks at progress over time and provides documentation of the learning
✓ Helps to determine what motivates individual children and the group – tells us what the children are interested in
✓ Motivates teachers to provide additional learning opportunities to enhance development
✓ Helps teachers choose materials and teaching strategies
✓ Helps to understand the thinking processes of children, not just what they learn, but how they learn
✓ Gives specific information on where and how to begin with skill development

Stephen Bagnato
Alignment...

Outcomes, standards, curriculum and assessment should ALL align.
Considerations to determine appropriate assessment...

- What is being assessed?
- How much detail is needed?
- What is practical?
- Is the information needed on one child or the group?
- Are you monitoring over time?
Authentic Assessment...

Can be defined as the process of documenting and evaluating development and learning, over time, using real life situations. That means assessing within the regular routines and activities of the day.
Types of authentic assessment:

- Developmental checklists
- Parent interviews
- Self-portraits
- Writing, drawing, scribbling samples
- Work samples
- Audio or video tapes
- Anecdotal records or other narrative records
- Observations
- Diagrams, sketches, photos
- Participation charts
- Frequency counts
- Portfolios
Think before you ask...

Selected vs. Constructed Responses:
We elicit a selected response when we have children choose from among a limited range of options. Ex: “Point to the red box.” Child is shown red, green, blue boxes.

We elicit a constructed response when we have children recall, combine, apply their knowledge and skills in a response that they build from scratch. Ex: Name all the things that you know are red.

Our aim should be to get children to respond in ways that both advance learning and help us find out what the child has and has not learned. This aim is fundamental in authentic assessment.

McAffee, Leong, Bodrova
What is portfolio assessment?

- In portfolio assessment, there is a systematic process for determining what goes into a portfolio, when and by whom, a piece of evidence is collected, and how it is evaluated.

- There must be a purposeful collection of evidence not just random pieces.
What is screening?

- Developmental screening is a brief assessment procedure designed to identify children who may have a developmental delay and should receive additional learning supports.
Screening...

- Serves as the first step in a prevention, evaluation, and intervention process to help children achieve their full potential.

- Focuses on a wide range of child development domains: speech, language, cognitive, perceptive, affect, gross and fine motor.
More on screening...

Developmental screening tests and readiness tests serve different purposes and measure different sets of skills. The major difference between the two is in the distinction between the ability or potential to acquire skills and current skill acquisition. These two types of tests work best when used to complement each other.
A bit about program evaluation...

- Every program should have a system of program evaluation in place.
- Programs should undertake regular evaluation for continuous improvement.
- Program goals and objectives become guides for evaluation.
- Evaluations are done with valid and reliable tools.
- Multiple sources of data are available and used.
- Children’s gains over time are emphasized.
- Teachers/directors are well trained in how to conduct and use evaluation tools.
- Results are shared publicly with families and community.
Words of caution...

- Teachers make many important recommendations and decisions about young children and their learning.
- All work must be done ethically.
- Important decisions about children are based on multiple sources of information.
- Families are involved in decision-making.
Bringing it all together!

How can we evaluate a program to ensure that assessment and curriculum are connected to Learning Standards and to PA Keystone Stars Performance Standards?
Things to look for...

Every program should have a plan that is created and written by a team of “stakeholders” that defines its policies, procedures, and practices for curriculum, assessment, instruction. Even if a program is using a “published” curriculum, there should be a written plan that says how this is being used.
Things to look for...

This plan should outline the entire framework and be able to show multiple sources of evidence for each item:

* program philosophy

* curriculum: goals and learning objectives on a continuum, how content is individualized, teaching strategies, classroom environment guidelines (rotation of materials, daily schedule, etc.), role of families, applying standards to curriculum, the planning framework (lesson plans, planning time, etc.)

* assessment plan: when, how, what, by whom, why for each type of assessment, documentation requirements, screening policy, parent conference practices, program evaluation plan
Words of Wisdom...

Alice: (From Alice in Wonderland)

“I think I should understand that better, if I had it written down: but I can't quite follow it as you say it.”
Resources


