



Promoting the inclusion of infants and young children with disabilities in child care

Participant Module

Considerations for Curriculum Planning



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Session: Considerations for Curriculum Planning

OVERVIEW

What this workshop should accomplish:

How does one decide what to teach, and/or how to set up and present learning experiences in early childhood environments? A curriculum is used as a framework for what you want the children to learn (goals), learning centers and activities are ways that you set up your physical space and provide teaching opportunities for the children in your program. Learning centers and activities support the curriculum goals. The classroom schedule enables children to have a predictable care routine. As children learn routines they can begin learning the skills necessary for independence. The schedule is established to promote a variety of learning experiences for children across the array of typical developmental domains. When we have children with special needs in our care how can we adapt the various parts of our program so that they are full participants in the routines and activities? Using the adaptations hierarchy we can provide full experiences for all children in our care.

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From this session, participants should gain understanding about:

- i Recognize the importance of using a curriculum
- i Recognize the importance of schedules and routines
- i Demonstrate understanding of learning centers and how children’s learning is enhanced through learning centers
- i Suggest ways to adapt the environment (including schedule, routines, learning centers, and activities) to meet all children’s needs

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BACKGROUND

Curriculum

Some early childhood programs follow a published or recognized curriculum such as Anti-Bias, Creative Curriculum, High Scope, or Montessori, while other programs may be structured by a center- or teacher-designed curriculum. Whichever the case, some form of curriculum is needed to provide a framework for the content that children will learn while attending an early childhood program. At its simplest form, a curriculum is a set of objectives that define the knowledge or information that children will be taught. Typically, curricula also include activities that can be used to teach children the content specified in the objectives. These activities provide ways for teachers to guide children's learning so that they learn the desired content and achieve the curriculum objectives. Activities are the method by which the content is taught. If a curriculum has as an objective the teaching of basic concepts like foods and fruit, activities such as having play fruit available in the housekeeping center, making banana milkshakes, applesauce, or orange juice for snack, visiting a grocery store, reading books about foods and fruit, or using fruit pieces as stamping tools in an art painting project would provide children with opportunities to learn about foods and fruit.

Themes

Some early childhood program curricula are based on learning centers, some on themes, and some combine center and theme approaches. Themes are overriding content areas that will be emphasized for

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specific time periods. Themes provide a way of integrating curriculum objectives, activities, and content areas of focus around a central topic. Themes can be based on concepts or on children's interests. Themes allow teachers to take into consideration the ages and experiences of the children in their care. The flexibility of themes also allows teachers to expand (or restrict) a planned theme based on children's interest and enthusiasm. A teacher who planned to spend two weeks on a theme of Thanksgiving, would structure scheduled learning activities around this theme. Children might shop for and prepare a Thanksgiving dinner, collect food to be distributed to needy people in the community, do art projects to make Pilgrim hats or turkeys, read stories about Thanksgiving, dress up in costumes of Native Americans or early settlers, or even "write" and stage their own Thanksgiving play. There are many commercially printed guides and curricula available which provide resources for teachers about theme-based activities and how to integrate learning objectives and activities into theme areas of focus.

Strategies for planning themes:

- < have planned goals and activities
- < provide opportunities for children to learn through self-directed learning and exploration
- < arrange the environment so children have opportunities to learn desired objectives
- < facilitate and promote children's participation and learning
- < observe and acknowledge children's accomplishments, discoveries, and social skills
- < provide instructional assistance or adaptations that will help promote children's learning.

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Learning centers

Learning centers provide ways of organizing the physical space of the classroom and for presenting content and activities. Many early childhood classrooms have permanent centers such as a reading corner or a housekeeping area. In others, temporary areas such as a water table or an art area may be set up when the children are participating in these activities. Some types of learning centers are more appropriate for children of particular ages. For example, having a housekeeping area in an infant-toddler room would not be likely to match children's interests and probably would expose children in that age range to dangerous circumstances. Having big carpeted areas or areas with mats and soft things (like foam rubber blocks) on which children can safely climb and tumble would be more appropriate for infants and toddlers. Other center areas may relate to managing children's physical needs. For example, an infant toddler room would include an area for diaper changing; a preschool room might include a snack/cooking center or a block corner. These types of centers are permanent parts of the physical structure of the program area.

The physical structure of the center, whether permanent or temporary, needs to meet certain characteristics. Children need to be able to work independently (without major teacher intervention) and safely. To accomplish this, teachers must carefully consider the materials that are made available (especially in relation to a child's age) as well as the complexity and structure of activities. For example, few three year-olds could plant a seed in an egg carton, for example, without any adult assistance but may be able to do so with adult facilitation if seeds and containers are large enough for children to manipulate easily. Few young children could cook on a stove safely, but many could manage making jelly bread by themselves. Materials that teachers make

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available for learning centers are important since materials (and activities) can promote safety, facilitate learning of curricula objectives, enhance creativity, or be used to illustrate a theme.

For most children, 30-45 minutes to explore activities in one or more learning centers is appropriate. Younger children will engage in more than one activity at more than one center since, as a rule, the youngest children are not able to attend to any one activity for as long a time as older children. Most center spaces are small so that only a few children can participate at any one time. Ideally, centers should fit approximately 4 or 5 children. This physical structure optimizes opportunities for children to interact together and play cooperatively. Teachers need to establish a structure (or rules) for how many children can be at one center at a time and provide children with props (such as a board on which children hang tokens or name tags) and ways of being able to know when the center will not accommodate more children. Certain centers may be more popular than others. For example, a computer center may be something that everyone wants to do!! In these cases, teachers may need to establish lengths of time that the popular center can be used by all children in the classroom.

The design of learning centers is made less difficult when teachers refer to reference guides or use formal curricula that are based on learning centers. Good design also results from critical evaluation of how an established center works with the children. Sometimes the best ideas are totally uninteresting to an particular group of children. Other times, even the simplest and least costly material can occupy their interests for long periods of time or may promote child-child interactions when least expected. Teachers need to watch how children participate in learning centers -- To which centers do children gravitate? Which materials do children seem to enjoy most? What activities or materials promote

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children's cooperative learning? When teachers observe they are able to stand back and evaluate "how things are working."

Materials for Learning Centers

Materials for learning centers do not have to be elaborate, commercial, or expensive. Some of the best materials are not costly. A book corner or reading area can be assembled from soft carpet or an inexpensive (but covered) mattress or old and clean throw pillows. The library area does not need to have a table and chairs or a special rack for books or even bean bag chairs. Commercially available equipment is nice but can be replaced on a more temporary (not as long lasting) basis with items children help design or make. Commercially available housekeeping area equipment like miniature stoves, sinks, and refrigerators are very nice. However home play equipment (like a plastic stove by Fischer Price or some other manufacturer) can be substituted or children can actually make stoves, sinks, and refrigerators from cardboard boxes or purchased tri-wall cardboard. Purchased plastic fruit or play foods are nice but real fruit and empty food packages offer children the same opportunities for pretend play. Teachers, parents, schools can all work together to collect materials needed for centers or to illustrate themes within particular centers. For example, teachers might ask parents to donate old clothing for dress up, send in clean food items for a grocery store or shoe boxes for a shoe store learning center.

Schedules

Most early childhood programs operate on the basis of a schedule that generally guides what children will do during the time period of the program. In child care programs, care can be provided on a daily basis for eight to ten plus hours. Preschool programs may operate for shorter

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periods of time and fewer days. Whatever the length of time or the number of days per week that a program operates, schedules are developed on the basis of slots of varying lengths of time. The length of time depends on the activity itself, the ages of the children, and the philosophy of the program. Schedules don't have to be exactly the same day after day, nor do all the time blocks need to be the same length. However, schedules provide predictable routines that help guide young children's behaviors and learn what is expected of them. The routine of a daily schedule provides children with security and helps them to know what to expect.

A schedule says what will happen when, the curriculum outlines the concepts and other information that children will be taught as learning objectives. Activities provide learning opportunities for children to explore materials, experiment, and direct their own learning so that they learn actively by doing rather than by listening and watching. Balance and variety are other important considerations in planning the schedule. The organization of every classroom should be based on some type of schedule no matter what curriculum a teacher (or program) may be using or whether or not the physical classroom space is organized into learning centers.

A good schedule will:

- T be flexible
- T be predictable
- T provide a balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities
- T balance active and quiet, and indoor and outdoor learning experiences
- T have a reasonable pace for children's participation
- T recognize developmental differences and attention span

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Transition

As teachers of young children, one of the most important and challenging roles is to guide children through many of the changes that occur throughout their day. Transitions are those times when children move from one activity to another. In order to prepare children for transitions, teachers have to plan, analyze the day, obtain and focus the children’s attention and eliminate disruptions. Transition times to consider:

- T as children arrive in the morning
- T gathering children for circle time
- T cleaning up
- T lining up to go to the bathroom, outside, or to lunch
- T settling down for rest
- T changing groups or activities
- T getting children’s attention
- T waiting
- T ending the day

Teachers need to think about what happens before transitions and what the following activity will be. How or what can you use to bridge the gap? Positive communication and modeling behavior are key components to getting children to do what you want without a lot of fuss. Unfortunately, in too many transitions much of the adult attention focuses on interaction meant to keep children’s behavior under control. It is important to recognize that many of these problems are related to developmentally inappropriate practices, such as having children wait for everyone to line up quietly before they walk out to the playground or trying to control their behavior with nothing to occupy their attention. Express simply and positively what you want the children to do. If there is wait time have a

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variety of finger play, short engaging songs, or short story telling activities available during the waiting periods. We all have experienced the boredom of waiting in lines with nothing to do. Our coping strategies may include bringing a book or magazine to read while we wait, but children are still developing the ability to find strategies that do not involve the types of interactions that can be problematic. During transition times be sure to give clear examples of what you expect the children to do and use short activities to keep children’s attention focused in a developmentally appropriate way. We can help children through times that can be difficult if we take these steps.

Tips for transition planning:

- T Give advance notice that change will be forthcoming
- T Give familiar cues (playing specific songs for clean-up; darken the room, back rubs during nap-time)
- T Give clear, simple, personal directions
- T Use an adult to begin the next activity (avoids wait time)
- T Minimize chaos by not moving whole groups at one time (have children move with purpose)
- T Give children classroom responsibilities or opportunities to assist peers

Setting the Stage for Inclusion

Child care and preschool programs can offer opportunities for children to develop relationships, learn, create, develop physically, and build self esteem. Each of these general areas are important developmental areas for all young children (and for adults, as well)! The overall program in a child care or preschool center should emphasize

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opportunities across each of these areas -- not just in learning. Some children may need an emphasis on opportunities to develop relationships with other children while, for other children, these friendships may develop more naturally. Other children may make decisions easily while children who are less secure or less confident may tend to follow the decisions made by others and may need more opportunities to make their own decisions. The overall physical and social environment (or "climate") of the program needs to recognize the individual differences among children and to provide opportunities and supports for them to grow across all of these areas. The physical environment of the program is reflected in the curriculum being used, the way the room is physically organized, the schedule for activities, and the activities or learning opportunities made available. The social climate is created through the ways in which teachers interact with children, the models they establish, the opportunities for children to interact with each other that teachers provide, and, overall, the supports, encouragements, and respect for others conveyed through the teacher.

Opportunities to develop relationships, create, learn, grow physically, and build self-esteem may occur naturally in classrooms and programs. More often, these opportunities develop out of careful planning and remembering to systematically build these developmental areas across curriculum and activities.

Summary

Curricula are a resource for teachers by providing a framework for the kinds of content that are appropriate and interesting for children as well as teaching methods and activities that are likely to be successful in promoting children's learning. One of the most difficult tasks for the

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early childhood teacher is designing effective curricula for the different ability levels of the children in the classrooms.

Learning centers are incorporated frequently into curricula or may be integrated into classroom curriculum and activities by a teacher. Activities within the learning centers are child-directed and versatile to include opportunities for children to work independently or cooperatively. Learning centers should be flexible in design, encourage understanding, promote acceptance and foster appreciation of others.

Themes need to be relevant for both the experiences and interests of young children. There are many different "categories" or types of themes around which teachers can integrate learning objectives and activities. In a fully integrated approach, the theme is built, or integrated, into each of the activities in which children participate during a day, week, or month -- whatever the length of time a particular focus will be maintained. While themes may be of high interest to children and promote the learning capabilities of all children in a group, to do them well requires creativity and planning from classroom staff. Materials need to be assembled ahead of time or made by teachers so that the theme is incorporated into everything that happens during the time period the particular theme is being used.

Schedules generally guide what children will be doing while attending the program. The schedule enables children to have a predictable care routine -- to know what is going to happen throughout the day. Typical schedules allow children opportunities for both structured and unstructured activities and are built to promote a variety of learning experiences. Schedules provide predictable routines that help guide young children's behaviors and help learn them what is expected.

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Session Outline

- I** Welcome the Group
- II** Theme Storming
- III** Learning about Learning
- IV** Scheduling
- V** Transition
- VI** Adaptations
- VII** Summary

How to Select Activity Goals

Learning skills will be reinforced as you engage children in interesting activities. There are at least three ways childcare staff can determine goals for activities when using themes:

1. The first way is to pick an activity and then determine the goal of the activity:

activity	playing with play dough
goal	to increase strength in hands

2. The second way is to pick a goal and an activity then determine a way to incorporate the goal into the activity:

goal	identifying the number 2
activity	treasure hunt
incorporate goal into activity	have children find 2 of the same items/objects in the room and bring them to circle time

3. The third way is to determine the theme, the goal, the schedule category and then decide upon an activity:

theme	animals
goal	how to care for a turtle, hamster etc.
schedule category	circle time
activity	show children a live turtle, how to feed, what kind of living space it needs etc.

Examples of Themes

	Water works	On the Avenue
Under the sea		
		Creatures BIG and small
Sticky, slimy & shimmer	Plants and Gardening	
	Ooshy and Gooshy	
Picture This!		Giant, Teeny, Tiny
I am BIG		
Crash, Bang, Boom		Muddy, Puddles, Soap & Bubbles
Meanies, Monsters, & Make-Believe	Surprises and Celebrations	All Tied Up
Through the Looking Glass		Pockets
Wheels	Things that Move	

When Playing in Centers Children:

- * Make decisions and choices
- * Use creative thinking and problem solving skills
- * Learn to value other children's ideas
- * Use language and expand their vocabulary
- * Develop responsibility through learning to care for items
- * Develop social skills while working with others
- * Take ownership of their play
- * Build a positive self image
- * Become more independent
- * Enhance their creative abilities
- * Learn how to make plans and carry them out, develop persistence

CONSIDERATIONS FOR LEARNING CENTERS

The Numbers

- * At least 4-5 centers per classroom
- * Room for 4-6 children in each center (carpet squares indicating numbers, badges, planning boards, photos)

Establish Boundaries (area rugs, screens, low boundaries such as shoe box dividers or low shelves)

- * Helps children know where to go and not to go
- * Helps children to know what to do
- * Helps children to learn to make decisions
- * Provides opportunities for learning

Adult Roles

- * Observer
- * Resource
- * Evaluator

Clean-Up

- * Organized storage
- * Experience for children
- * Routines and cues (pictures or symbols)

Introducing/Changing and Rearranging

- * Show materials every week
- * Describe play possibilities
- * Have children role play how to use the center
- * Arrange according to theme
- * Rotate materials every week
- * As needed, establish and communicate rules for the center are
- * Children can communicate what they are doing when they are moving from one center to another
- * Children can put away toys before moving to another area

Scheduling Considerations: Building a Schedule

Value	Scheduling Consideration
Most people especially children learn by doing	Build in a lot of time for children to explore toys and materials
Sometimes it is hard to calm children down after they are active (e.g. gym)	Schedule gym before lunch or after nap rather than right before nap
People need exercise	Schedule one gross motor period in the morning and one in the afternoon
Grandma’s law- eat your vegetables before your desert	Schedule activities children like best after activities children like least
Children watch too much TV	Limit time that children spend watching TV to no more than once a week in childcare
Children should enjoy learning	Plan activities that are fun
Children need to learn to learn	Plan problems that children can solve

Routine Plan

Schedule/Category	Activity Included in Lesson Plan	Theme Activity	Activity Goal	Materials Needed	Adaptations
Circle					
Art					
Blocks					
Library					
Music					
Housekeeping					
Science					
Writing					
Sand & Water					

Tips for Transitions

- T Give advance notice that change will be forthcoming
- T Give familiar cues (playing specific songs for clean-up, darken the room, back rubs during nap-time)
- T Give clear, simple, personal directions
- T Use an adult to begin the next activity (avoids wait time)
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- T Give children classroom responsibilities or opportunities to assist peers

Introduction to Adaptation Framework

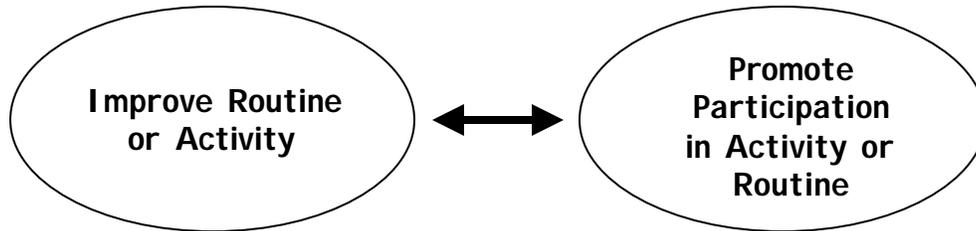
What does adaptation mean?

- i something that is changed or changes so as to become suitable to a new or special use or situation.
 - i change in behavior of an individual or group in adjustment to new or modified surroundings.
- As children with disabilities are included in traditional child care programs, teachers are finding creative ways to adapt toys, activities and learning centers to meet the needs of all their students. Adaptations are the primary way of meeting the unique needs of children with disabilities in child care programs. The whole purpose of adaptations is to prevent the adults from having to do everything. When adaptations are effective, adults can be doing the same things that they would do with all children, which is to facilitate their participation in activities and routines.

What approaches are used to adapt the environment or activity?

- i Environmental accommodations
- i Adapt activities, materials, and/or instruction
- i Have another child help
- i Have an individual child do something different
- i Have an adult help a child do the activity
- i Have an individual child do something outside of the room with an adult
- i **Remember your approaches should go from the least restrictive to more intrusive** (work the framework from top to bottom)

Facilitating Children's Participation



Environmental Accommodations

- Adapt Room Set-up
- Adapt/Select Equipment
- Equipment/Adaptations for Positioning

Select or Adapt Activity

Adapt Materials

Adapt Requirements or Instructions

Have Another Child Help-

- Peer Assistance/Tutoring
- Cooperative Learning

Have an Individual Child do Something Different

Have an Adult Help a Child Do the Activity

Have an Individual Child Do Something Outside of the Room (with an Adult)

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