

TATS eUpdate  
Curriculum and Instruction

**Curriculum Defined**  
2007

An effective early childhood curriculum can be defined as an educational program that implements principles of developmentally appropriate practices that are based on current knowledge about child development and learning. The curriculum selected and the delivery methods used are critical to the overall development and learning of the child. Curricula can be adapted to meet the needs of all children, including those with special needs. The curriculum used in an effective preschool program includes, but is not limited to, specific activities that are planned for children in a classroom. These activities may include learning centers, circle time, small group activities and outside play. Learning experiences are embedded in all parts of the curriculum, including unplanned experiences, or teachable moments, that occur in a classroom each day. An effective curriculum should include all of the experiences that a child has at school or in a program.

**Best Practice**

Three national organizations have provided guidance on curricula and learning environments for young children. The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children has published research-based best practices for early intervention/early childhood special education (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, and McLean, 2005). Here is what they say about curriculum and learning environments for young children with special needs.

1. A primary function of early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education (ECSE) is to promote children's learning and development.
2. Children's experiences of interacting with the social and physical environment have a primary influence on their learning and development.
3. The field now has a good deal of research for guiding practitioners' decisions related to organizing and influencing children's experiences

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) presented the following indicators of effective curriculum in a joint position statement published in 2003:

- Children are active and engaged
  - They are active cognitively, physically, socially, and artistically and develop positive attitudes toward learning
- Goals are clearly defined and shared by all stakeholders (administrators, teachers, and families)
- Curriculum is evidence-based
  - It is based on developmentally, culturally, and linguistically relevant research evidence and organized around principles of child development and learning
- Valued content is learned through investigation and focused, intentional teaching
  - Content is tailored to children’s ages, developmental capacities, language, culture, abilities or disabilities
- Curriculum builds on prior learning and experience
  - It is supportive of background knowledge gained at home, in the community, and within the culture, and is inclusive of children with disabilities
- Curriculum is comprehensive
  - It encompasses critical areas of development, including:
    - Physical well-being and motor development
    - Social and emotional development
    - Cognition and general knowledge
    - Subject matter areas such as science, mathematics, language, literacy, social studies, the arts
- Professional standards validate the curriculum’s subject matter content
  - The curriculum meets relevant professional and state standards
- Research supports that the curriculum is likely to benefit children.

### **Reflection**

1. Does your school district or program have an identified early childhood research-based curriculum?
2. Does the curriculum address the following areas of child development: motor skills, cognition including literacy, communication, social skills and self-help skills?
3. Is the curriculum adapted if needed, for children with disabilities?
4. Is the curriculum aligned with state standards?

*Learning is a social process that occurs through interpersonal interaction within a cooperative context. Individuals, working together, construct shared understandings and knowledge.*

David Johnson, Roger Johnson and Karl Smith

## References and Resources

Cook, R.E., Klein, M.D, & Tessier, A. (2004). *Adapting Early Childhood Curricula for Children in Inclusive Settings* (6<sup>th</sup> ed). Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children

The Division for Early Childhood is a division within the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) which promotes polices and advances evidence-based practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities. This page provides links to journal articles and publications related to the field of early childhood exceptional education.

<http://www.dec-sped.org>

The Educational Development Center Inc.

The Center consists of 335 projects organized into 12 Centers. The Center for Children and Families has activities related to Early Childhood including a major research component looking at quality indicators.

<http://www.edc.org>

Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Standards

The standards reflect the latest research on child development and developmentally appropriate practices for four-year-old children. Benchmarks in the domains of Language and Communication and Emergent Literacy further explain what Florida's children should know and be able to do at the end of the VPK experience.

<http://www.fldoe.org/earlylearning/perform.asp>

Grow to 5

Produced by the Florida Department of Education. Thirteen modules provide training and resources to families, early childhood educators, health care providers and other who work with young children. Topics include planning an effective program, working together, health care, nutrition and feeding, intellectual, speech/language, motor, and social/emotional development, behavior skills, inclusion, families, and transitions.

<http://www.firn.edu/doe/commhome/pub-home.htm>

Klein, L. & Knitzer, J. (2006). *Pathways to Early School Success: Effective Preschool Curricula and Teaching Strategies, Issue Brief No. 2*. National Center for Children in Poverty as a division of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) & National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). (2003). Early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation: Building an effective, accountable system in programs for children birth through age 8. [www.naeyc.org/resources/position\\_statements/pscape.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/pscape.pdf)

**National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**

A national organization of early childhood educators and others dedicated to improving the quality of programs for children from birth through third grade, including those with disabilities.

<http://www.naeyc.org>

Sandall, S., Hemmeter, M. L., Smith, B.J., & McLean, M.E.(Eds.) (2005) *DEC Recommended Practices: A Comprehensive Guide for Practical Application in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education*. Division for Early Childhood, Council for Exceptional Children.

**School Readiness Performance Standards**

These are performance standards for three, four and five year old children developed by the Office of Early Learning in the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation to address school readiness issues.

[http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/oel\\_performance.html](http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/oel_performance.html)

**Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS)**

Statewide project providing technical assistance and training to programs in Florida serving prekindergarten children with disabilities. Website provides information and resources on curriculum and instruction, evaluation and assessment, family involvement, inclusion, program effectiveness/quality, and transition, as well as, linking early childhood partners.

[www.tats.ucf.edu](http://www.tats.ucf.edu)



TATS eUpdates are a service of the Technical Assistance & Training System Communities of Practice. The TATS eUpdates are intended to provide current information related to best practices or trends in the education of young children with special needs in the areas of Transition, Program Effectiveness, Inclusion, Curriculum & Instruction, Evaluation & Assessment, and Family Involvement. For more information about the TATS Communities of Practices and the TATS eUpdates, please log on to <http://www.tats.ucf.edu/practice.php>.