

Children's Interests and Needs

How do we plan a curriculum? What is the basis for our planning?

The Early Years Learning Framework promotes a play-based curriculum, which is both emergent and intentional.

Curriculum: all the experiences, resources and interactions that are provided in an early learning setting.

Play-based: if we can't observe children at play and allow them the freedom to express themselves how can we know what excites them, what provokes them or what they are passionate about? Children need many **open-ended play choices**, not a structured approach to curriculum planning based on the interests and needs of the educator.

Open-ended: this is where children lead the direction the play takes and an experience is not limited by the choices and actions of the educator. The educator's role is to provide many choices for children and allow them the **freedom** to develop their play and change the environment accordingly (like taking small blocks to the home corner to use as food, for example) and improvise their own resources (like using tablecloths as capes, for example).

Emergent: This is where spontaneous and planned curriculum choices are made by the children and educators based on children's **ideas, interests, strengths and curiosities**. These can be as simple as a conversation or as complex as a sustained learning project over many weeks.

Intentional: the educator makes careful decisions about children's experiences spontaneously and over time so that optimum learning can occur. Using what they know about the children's interests and strengths educators provide curriculum choices for learning to occur which cater for all children's **developmental needs**.

Projects: how would you define a project?

"We understand the importance of project works with preschool children, since through the process of investigation, children construct their learning and develop their initiative, their curiosity, their inventiveness, and confidence in themselves. They create a community in which they can give and receive ideas, suggestions, and rules—dispositions that will be useful throughout their lives."

(Elizondo & Valencia, 2007)

<http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v8n1/elizondo.html>

Theory linked to a play-based curriculum

Link to theory:

Vygotskians believe that educators should stock the play area with toys and props that have multiple functions and encourage children to make their own props (in Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p149)

Link to theory:

According to Vygotsky and Elkonin, continuing make-believe play over several days pushes children to the highest level of their ZPD by requiring more self-regulation, planning and memory (in Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p144)

Link to theory:

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) believed that children should have long periods of free play, child-directed or guided play that involve exploration and discovery through open-ended experiences (in Kearns, 2010, p27)

Link to theory:

Constructivist theory sees young children as natural scientists, working hard to build theories about their world as they play (Chaille & Britain, 2003)

Theory linked to an emergent curriculum

Link to theory:

John Dewey (1859-1952) argued for a more meaningful and enriched curriculum drawn from the child's own experiences and saw communication as the key with which meaning is created and shared (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009, p245)

Link to theory:

In a *constructivist* classroom the task is to provide a supportive environment in which children can ask their own questions and have the means to look for the answers (Chaille & Britain, 2003, p21)

Link to theory:

The *pedagogy of listening* draws on the work of Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy where staff develop an *emergent curriculum* based on children's interests and inquisitiveness (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009, pp117-119)

Link to theory:

A *constructivist* curriculum model can be said to emerge from children's interests and ideas as it "should be derived from children's own thought processes and activities rather than a topic or theme chosen by an adult" (Chaille & Britain, 2003, p20)

Link to theory:

Howard Gardner (1943-present) believes that an individual's strengths will influence how they learn and that intelligence involves mixed abilities. Educators can work from children's strengths to plan for their learning and development (in Kearns, 2010, pp39&44)

Link to theory:

Piaget (1896-1980) recognised that EC programs should be child-centred and the role of the adult is to follow the lead of the child and provide interesting experiences and materials for exploration, discovery and interaction (in Kearns, 2010, p27)

Theory linked to intentional teaching

Link to theory:

Katz (1989) argued that to be curious and full of wonder is the key to successful learning. Open-ended questions encourage children to be curious about the world around them (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009, p159)

Link to theory:

Vygotsky's (1886-1934) theory of the *zone of proximal development* calls on educators to provide activities just beyond what the child can do on his own but within what the child can do with assistance (in Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p45)

Link to theory:

Vygotsky (1886-1934) believed that the best learning occurs when competent adults interact with a child to help them reach a higher level of competence in relation to a skill, understanding or disposition (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009, p371)

Link to theory:

Vygotsky (1886-1934) describes *The Zone of Proximal Development* as the distance between what a child knows or is able to do now and the potential for further development with adult guidance "What a child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (in Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p40)

References

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