

TCHR2003 Assessment 1: Curriculum Studies in Early Childhood Education

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Background

In early childhood education, the curriculum is the pre-planned and emergent learning activities, events, or learning experiences through which a child comes into contact with the environment and other people (Adam et al., 2023). It includes activities such as play-based learning and intentional teaching, which target the child's overall development, including cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development, which fits the developmental stages and educational purposes (Cohrssen, 2023). In early childhood education, the curriculum acts as a map that shows educators how to design child learning experiences. This paper explores how educators employ play to teach children and emphasizes the role of the educators as well as the interactions they have with children, and this is followed by how all the aspects fit the principles and practices of education.

1. Definition of Curriculum in Early Childhood Education

In early childhood education, the term 'Curriculum' defines the planned yet pretty flexible framework that outlines all the learning-teaching processes and interactions to facilitate child development. According to EYLF (2022), curriculum refers to all the activities in the child's environment, whether planned in advance or not, that impact the learning and development of the child (Cohrssen, 2023). These learning and social development areas, such as language, mathematics, and others, are incorporated into the curriculum to assist children's learning and development (ACARA, 2022). Additionally, the National Quality Standard (NQS) is crucial for the formation of understanding that early childhood education and care services should provide environments that reflect children's learning development and the children's interests (ACECQA, 2020).

2. How Educators Use Play to Plan and Implement Curriculum

Children learn through play, which is an essential aspect of learning, particularly in the early years, because several developmental activities are initiated through play.

Discussing Vygotsky's social constructivist theory of learning, it is necessary to point out that play is an essential activity for a child's cognitive and social growth, as learners construct knowledge in collaboration with their peers as well as with adults and objects from their surroundings (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). In this respect, the educators monitor the children at play to make necessary recommendations in developing a curriculum to suit the learning-teaching process that will foster problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and social skills.

According to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), play is promoted as the central approach to learning because it empowers children and engages them in the learning process. EYLF Practice: Learning through play demonstrates how educators in the early years foster conditions under which children can learn through exploration and practice (EYLF, 2022). This process enables children to engage in their learning and choose what they want to do while guided by the teacher's assistance.

Moreover, the EYLF Principle 4: High expectations and equity also insists on the requirements to effectively plan play-based learning activities and ensure children's equity by recognizing that every child has the potential (EYLF, 2022). In this way, it is possible to keep the focus on each child and see what aspects he or she could use in play, as well as the areas that may require further development; then, choosing the play activities appropriate for the given age, the educator provides the kid with the necessary stimulus for the further development of his or her skills.

Play supports group learning based on the EYLF Principle 2 about Partnerships, which states that the children should engage with the help of peers and teachers to extend their learning process. Using social skills during learning enables children to engage in

constructive play, share ideas, help them settle disputes, and make friends. During this joint music engagement, one of the most critical roles is of the educator, who helps children learn, encourages children to ask questions, introduces new terms, and provides support that can enrich children's learning (Edwards, 2017).

The National Quality Standard (NQS) Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice in Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA, 2020) stresses the child-focused teaching-learning process in which learning is engrossed in purposeful activities and active learning through play. Play-based learning integrates with these standards by establishing a context that emphasizes children's interests (Cohrsen, 2023).

Furthermore, play learning promotes the needs of the Australian Curriculum Foundation Year, consolidating English, Mathematics, and The Arts, among other activities. For instance, when enacting a story or performing a play, the children are learning language development (ACARA, 2022), or when playing with blocks or counting games, they are learning mathematics (ACARA, 2022). When the curriculum is integrated with play, students get an ennobling atmosphere that fosters the natural urge of curiosity and assists them in developing the necessary abilities to have a proper foundation for education and character development (Adam et al., 2023).

3. Critical Reflection on Teacher and Children's Interactions

a) EYLF Principles and Practices

In this video, children and an educator examine natural materials outdoors. The video centers on the teacher's responsibility to facilitate long-term, interactive student dialogues. While watching the video shared above, it is possible to identify several principles and practices specified by the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) that an educator can use

to facilitate learning. One of the EYLF principles presented here is EYLF Principle 1: Secure, Respectful, and Reciprocal Relationships. For positive interactions, the educator interacts positively with children and ensures they provide a secure environment. They get comfortable and assured of spending their time learning in the area, making them even explore more freely (EYLF, 2022). ‘Secure’ relationships are established here, where the educator permits the children to guide the learning process and scaffold open-ended questions, making the learners think critically as the educator listens and responds to their queries carefully. It fosters respect from both sides and assures children of being valued in society (Barblett et al., 2021).

The educator demonstrates the EYLF Practice: Purposeful interaction, facilitating the child’s learning activities with planned yet open-ended intervention. In this case, the educator supports the learning process by extending children’s knowledge and introducing specific ideas at the right time but not controlling the process too much (EYLF, 2022). This approach particularly applies to the NQS Quality Area 5: Relationships with Children, which focuses on initiating and engaging in mutually appropriate, sensitive, and responsive interactions that promote children’s sense of belonging, well-being, and identity (ACECQA, 2020). A child is supported while encouraged to be independent and to express himself or herself. The educator always tries to follow the child’s learning interests and achievements and be fair in dealing with all the children (Adam et al., 2023).

b) EYLF Learning Outcomes

While analyzing the video, one can identify that the children enact two core ways from the EYLF Learning Outcomes set. First, they align with the first learning outcome of the program: Children have a sense of self. This is evident from how they vigorously get involved in the activity and flow with the ideas without much restrictions (Barblett et al.,

2021). For instance, one child becomes the leader of the building task and decides who will do what; when one needs help, he or she seeks it. These behaviors show the child's independence and competence, one of the available elements in forming a coherent and stable personal identity (EYLF, 2022). Enumeration and freedom of expression are among the guiding principles of the educator, which help the children in terms of identity formation.

Secondly, the learning outcome shown is number four- Children are confident and involved learners. This is seen in the way they work together to provide solutions during the activity that involves construction as they conduct trial and error. Hence, good participation continued determination to tackle the challenges, and willingness to try out new approaches illustrate learners' confidence (Xiao, 2022). Precisely here, the educator is making use of a range of questions that will help the children to think critically and avoid giving them ready-made answers; this goes well with the EYLF since it aims at nurturing curiosity, perseverance, and problem-solving skills in children (EYLF, 2022). This approach helps in cultivating their self-learning ability and the ability to work consistently on tasks.

c) Australian Curriculum Learning Areas

As demonstrated in the video clip, the process of children playing with blocks relates to several learning areas of the content of the Australian Curriculum Foundation Year, with mathematics being one of the most prominent. When the children are using the blocks, they are, in a way, engaged in spatial thinking and learning as well as problem-solving exercises (Barblett et al., 2021). They have to comprehend things like balance, shape, size, and relation in space to be able to design a structure (Xiao, 2022). These actions are consistent with the achievement of the Australian national curriculum's mathematics learning area, particularly geometry and geometry understanding of space (ACARA, 2022). In manipulating the blocks, they are playing with different forms and shapes, which, in the process, teaches them the

topographical nature of objects. This exploration enhances their early mathematics learning in areas such as shape recognition, size estimation, and result forecasting depending on the structure (Adam et al., 2023).

Another is The Arts learning area, with emphasis on the Visual Arts. When children build their structures, they're in a creative process that can be compared to fine art. This aspect of the activity entails design aspects, aspects of composition, and aesthetics that the children use while learning how to arrange the blocks in a manner that is pleasing to the eyes and practical (Xiao, 2022). The students are challenged to free their minds and find out various ways in which the blocks can be constructed, meaning that they are not only encouraged to engage in creative thinking but are also taught how to engage in creative problem-solving (Barblett et al., 2021). This integration of visual arts not only fosters children's artistic growth but also enables them to express their thoughts and feelings in their respective works of art (ACARA, 2022).

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