



## **TEXAS RISING STAR WEBINAR SERIES:**

### **ELEMENTS OF A CURRICULUM**

**RECORDED DECEMBER 10, 2015**

#### **NOTES**

The topics that will be addressed during these webinars include:

1. The General Overview: Curriculum and Early Learning Guidelines
2. What are the elements of a curriculum?
3. How to write and implement a lesson plan
4. Bringing together the TRS Guidelines for Curriculum into classroom planning

#### **Learning objectives**

*By the end of this webinar participants will be able to:*

- Identify what is a curriculum
- List 3 reasons for using a curriculum
- Examine the 5 elements of a curriculum
- Review a sample curriculum for scope and sequence

#### **What is a curriculum?**

##### **Written Document**

Category 3 of the TRS Child Care Provider Certification Guidelines describes a curriculum as a written document or plan. This is a blueprint for planning and implementing an early childhood program. It addresses all aspects of child development and of building partnerships with families.

It provides a framework for what children need to learn and how they will learn it.

##### **Goals for Children's Development and Learning**

In today's discussion, the goals for children's development and learning can be considered early learning guidelines or standards. These goals relate to the knowledge and skills that children need to know and often, refer to what children are able to do. Objectives can then be developed based on the interests, abilities, and needs of the children, along with suggestions provided in the curriculum.

## **Scope and sequence**

Researchers Clements, Sarama, Spitler, Lange & Wolfe have shown that a key aspect of impactful instruction is that it follows a progressive approach or scope and sequence. With this progressive approach children are introduced to new skills and activities that mirrors the natural trajectory of a child's development. (Clements, Sarama, 2012; Clements, Sarama, Spitler, Lange & Wolfe, 2011).

A scope and sequence provides this pathway or map for the curriculum.

Let's define scope and sequence. The scope is the breadth and depth of content to be covered at any one time such as, a week, month, term, year. Think about it as all that you do in a given time period.

The sequence: is the order in which content is presented to learners over time. So it would be the order in which you do identified activities and games.

Another way to think about the scope and sequence is to think of it as an outline of standards and a recommended teaching order for a particular area of learning.

## **Intentional to support learning**

A curriculum should also have planned and intentional activities. It should list of all the ideas, concepts, and topics that will be covered in detail with materials needed and instructions fro teaching children.

## **Achieved Child Milestones**

A curriculum should show child progression through milestones from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Young children develop very quickly from infancy to school age in all areas. Starting with birth, there are developmental milestones or guides, available to help teachers understand and know what to expect from typically developing children. In Texas these milestones are referenced as indicators in the Infant and Toddler Early Learning guidelines and as outcomes in the prekindergarten guidelines. These were discussed in detail during our first webinar. Remember the terms indicators, outcomes and milestones are often used interchangeably in the literature.

## **3 Reasons to use a curriculum**

There are three reasons to use a curriculum.

- It provides a structural tool for organizing information
- It's supported by research that provides information on effective strategies
- And a curriculum helps teachers intentionally use activities to teach specific skills.

Let's dig a little deeper into each of these reasons.

### **Why should teachers use a curriculum?**

- Well, curriculum provides teachers with a structural tool or to create intentional and developmentally appropriate classroom instruction.
- As caregivers, we hold in our hands the opportunity and responsibility of setting the tone for children's learning experiences.

Think about that for just a moment. With a curriculum in place, when a teacher leaves, you can be assured that the learning for the children will continue to progress. The research on early childhood curriculum says.....

On the surface, the activities of many preschool classrooms can appear quite similar—with children engaging in art, play, physical movement, books, blocks, and other toys and games. Yet, the extent to which these activities are instructional, organized, managed, and intentional, so that critical areas of development are promoted. This is a distinguishing feature between high and low quality programs. Organizing instruction for clear developmental impact is not an easy task. For example, research shows that a key aspect of impactful instruction is that it follows a progressive approach when introducing young children to new skills and activities. (Clements & Sarama, 2012; Clements, Sarama, Spitler, Lange & Wolfe, 2011). Teachers do not always know who skills progress over time. They will rely on a curriculum to help them understand development.

Organizing instruction in a progressive way, in which the developmental impact is maximized, requires intentionality. Decisions must be made regarding what to teach. Teachers should think about these questions to help them become more intentional: what are the most fundamental/important skills that linked to later learning, what order should these skills be taught, how do I pace learning within and across skills, how do I structure activities to ensure the 'right' level of difficulty (Bodrova & Leong, 2006; Middleton & Spanias, 1999), and how do I assess and measure progress, especially, for this age?, what is an acceptable benchmark; what reflects meaningful growth?

Also, when teachers have to think about the lesson content of a curriculum. Ask yourself if there is enough information and activities available in the curriculum for all my children to adequately learn the information.

## **5 Design Elements of a Curriculum**

To develop meaningful effective learning opportunities for children, it is recommended that you look for these five design components: aligned, balanced, integrated, relevant, and developmental.

### **Is the curriculum Aligned?**

Lesson content can be aligned with the state standards, Infant, Toddler and 3 year old early learning guidelines and the Prekindergarten Guidelines. Curriculum planners and teachers should be able to understand what the standards mean and how standards look in the classroom. By understanding the standards, teachers ensure that children actually spend instructional time learning what is needed for success in their daily experiences. Taking time to understand the standards will help teachers become more effective, by providing a clear understanding of what children need to know.

The lesson content or activities can be aligned to the early learning guidelines. For infants, toddlers and three year olds you can align them to the ITELGs. The four domains of learning are: Social Emotional, Physical Health and Motor Development, Language and Communication Development, and Cognitive Development.

For preschool aged children 4 and up you can align them to the PreK guidelines. There are 10 domains of learning. Later in the presentation we will go through a process to identify learning goals and objectives for the children's learning and development.

## **Vertical alignment across ages and stages**

Vertical alignment across ages and stages is important.

There is a state available guide, the Texas Early Learning Pathways document is a guide that aligns the Texas Infant, Toddler, and Three-Year-Old Early Learning Guidelines and the Revised Texas Pre-kindergarten Guidelines. It also:

- illustrates how very early development relates to later school readiness
- provides recommendations for activities and caregiver behaviors that support children's healthy development
- serves as a starting point for conversations about children's growth and how loving, caring adults can support their development

What the Texas Early Learning Pathways document does not provide an exhaustive list of children's developmental skills, a full curriculum, complete developmental checklists, or assessment tools. Our knowledge of child development is constantly growing. There is more to be learned about important milestones in development. What this document does highlight are the knowledge and skills that infants learn and it's correlation to the development of future skills.

Let's look at this diagram a little closer. This is a sample page showing the pathways of language and communication development for young children. It begins with the component area of communication and speaking in the language and development domain of learning for Infants, toddlers and threes and then progresses to the skill domain of language and literacy for prekindergarteners 48 - 60 months. Let's take a deeper look at Expression with communication and speaking what does this look like in an infant - makes sounds, older - points, uses signals, sounds, and words, toddlers, use 1 to 3 words, 3 years - uses multiple words to communicate, prek - uses language for different purposes.

## **How Is the curriculum Balanced?**

Let's think, the more experiences a child has, the more opportunity for connections and learning in the brain. Children need to have regular exposure to each content area. They should be exposed to a balanced curriculum that addresses all areas of child development.

Teachers need to provide opportunities for vocabulary, and oral language, both are key predictors of later reading success. Mathematical and scientific skill development opportunities should be offered regularly. Teachers should think about the whole child and expose children to a balanced curriculum that offers activities in development.

These include:

- Social Emotional
- Cognitive
- Language and Literacy
- Physical Health and Gross Motor

## **Is the curriculum Integrated?**

An integrated curriculum is the purposeful planning, of strategies and learning experiences to facilitate and enhance learning across key content areas.

It's important to help learners see how to integrate the content areas. While integrating curriculum, teachers can also enhance learning by intentionally providing opportunities for children to talk about what they are learning. Teachers should ask themselves: How can I make connections to other information that will help the children understand better?

### **Is the curriculum Relevant?**

Children are sense making and problem-solving beings. Themes are meaningful to children. Teachers should allow sufficient time for children to learn, process, and implement concepts.

Children need to know how or why something is important in order to understand new information. Relevant curriculum is flexible so that teachers can make meaningful connections between new information and information that children may already know and understand. Teachers need to keep in mind as they plan activities, they will need to begin where the children are at and strategically support and scaffold their learning so that children are successful. This happens as teachers provide rich, meaningful opportunities.

### **Is the curriculum Developmental?**

Understanding the developmental needs of the children across all the domains of learning is critical. Use learning experiences, activities and instructional strategies that are interesting and engaging. Children are active and want to be engaged. Young children are developing rapidly across all the domains. Research, practice and just plain common sense confirm that educating the whole child is the best way to prepare children. Giving children the opportunity to demonstrate their thinking in multiple ways can provide teachers with a more accurate picture of a child's development. This information will allow teachers to provide curriculum and instruction that will engage children and meet their developmental needs.

Children's development will vary as a result of their exposure to opportunities. Teachers need to find time to carefully observe children's abilities in these four development domains. As children grow these domains become more detailed with more skills for children to understand.

### **Scope and Sequence**

The scope and sequence of curriculum assists the teacher to ensure that children meet specific developmental benchmarks or outcomes.

The scope refers to the broad and integrated areas of child development and the content areas of the curriculum. (DEC, March 2007) The development of children can be thought of as the domains of children's learning which would include cognitive, social/emotional, language and physical domains. The activities and learning experiences that children engage in will stimulate and promote the growth and development in their understanding. The content areas of the curriculum can be described as the knowledge and skills in specific areas. These include social, emotional language and communication, literacy, math, science, social studies, creative arts and technology. (TX Core Competencies, 2013). The scope helps to bring organization to the curriculum.

According to Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC) “Sequence is described as the order in which content is to be taught and learned.” (DEC, 2007). Another way to think about sequence is developmental progression. Developmental progression is similar in that it describes the skill, behaviors, and concepts that children will demonstrate as they progress towards a given goal within an age period. (HSEL0F, 2015). In other words, when you think about the sequence there is an order to the way the curriculum is presented. Teachers should ask themselves: Do the activities follow a given order to support children’s growth and development? This is more than isolated activities that are chosen from a book or list of activities, but rather the activities will build from skill levels to skill level over time. Many commercial curriculums do include a scope and sequence. By using these you take the guess work out of having to figure out alignment with standards and activities that you are planning.

## **Themes**

Some providers may have themes which drive the activities that are done with the children. That is a great start for developing an Emergent Curriculum.

If you are developing your own theme it is recommended that you match your themes to an early learning guideline/outcome.

For example:

The theme “My Neighborhood” could be matched to Exploration, Discovery, Memory and Social Studies.

### **Infants**

- Smile in recognition of familiar caregiver  
Older Infants
- Moves to explore areas around them (crawls, walks)

### **Toddlers**

- Goes to the correct location for familiar activities (table for snack)

### **3 year olds**

- Begins to understand where things are located (teacher at school, Grandma’s house in big building)

### **PreK**

- Identifies common features in their environment (own street name, name of town)

In the TRS guidelines, the learning activity is typically thought of as learning activity or an -instructional strategy that the teacher has intentionally planned and designed to facilitate the objective (child behavior, skills, knowledge) that will lead to the overall goal for the child’s growth and development. The instructional strategies are the ways in which a teacher is able to deliver the activities. The lesson plan and curriculum is an important tool in guiding the daily experiences of the children.

In thinking about “My Neighborhood” An activity might be for children to identify and label the map of the classroom.

## Objectives

The objectives are typically considered child behaviors, they define what children should know or be able to do (demonstrate). In our previous example, the children were identifying and labeling a classroom map.

When teachers think about objectives they need to keep in mind that all children grow and develop at their own rate.

Teachers may use the PreKindergarten Guidelines to find an objective. Note in our previous example, we were able to find an objective that matched our activity for four year olds.

Keep in mind that there can be multiple objectives for an activity.

If you have a commercial curriculum, chances are there is a developed scope and sequence included. However, it is essential that you “dig in” or familiarize yourself with all of the resources included within the curriculum.

Remembering that the child is the center of the educational process, let’s consider why we are spending time on understanding curriculum by discussing the following:

- Curriculum effectiveness
- Actively Engaged Children
- Specific learning goals
- Learning: Exploration and Play
- Building on Prior Knowledge

Let’s begin with curriculum effectiveness

### **Curriculum Effectiveness:**

- We can gauge curriculum effectiveness. By looking at the scope and sequence and at how well children progress throughout the year. We can make decisions around what teachers are implementing.
- We can ask ourselves, Is it meeting the mark?

### **Active Engagement:**

- Are children active and engaged in the activities that are provided? What are they doing and saying?
- How are they involved?

Giving children the opportunity to demonstrate their thinking in multiple ways can provide teachers with a more accurate picture of a child’s development. This information will allow teachers to provide instruction that will engage children and meet their developmental needs. Teachers can use instructional strategies that are interesting and engaging.

### **Specific learning goals:**

- Are goals clear and shared by all?
- Are the activities aligned to the goals?

- Is the curriculum organized around principles of child development?

The goals provides an overview or broad statements of expectations for children's learning and development. (HSELF, 2015) & ILL ELDS, 2013). These goals set the stage for children to be ready for school and life.

#### **Learning Through Exploration and Play:**

- Is learning done through exploration, play, and focused, intentional teaching?
- What can you provide as evidence?
- Are the children doing the playing or the teacher?

There should be a balance between teacher and child center instruction.

#### **Building on Prior Knowledge:**

- Does teaching build on prior learning experiences (home, community, culture, language)?
- Asking children to share their own experiences and/or ideas about a concept should be done at the start of a lesson and throughout.
- Children have much to offer to the learning that takes place; we have to be sure to give them the opportunity.

#### **Benefits**

When a curriculum is implemented the benefits for children are huge. These include:

- Consistent implementation of content. Research supports providing information to young children in chunks. Using a theme throughout the classroom will help make connections for children as they explore materials that relate.
- Provides an opportunity to plan. Planning is key for thinking through what teachers need to provide to children so that the children have opportunities to continue to build learning skills.
- Allows for accountability of learning opportunities. Following a curriculum will aid in discussions between directors and teachers, and between teachers and parents. When parents have questions about what their children are learning, teachers can provide intentional activities and strategies that have been used with children.
- Offers guidance for implementation. Helps teachers think and plan needed supplies/materials, activity instructions/directions, space in the classroom, etc.
- Focuses on child learning. Provides intentional learning objectives so that teachers can focus on what the child knows and needs to know.

You many be asking yourself? How are the benefits of using a curriculum determined? Once teachers start using a curriculum, progress monitoring of children will help to determine if the curriculum has benefited the children.