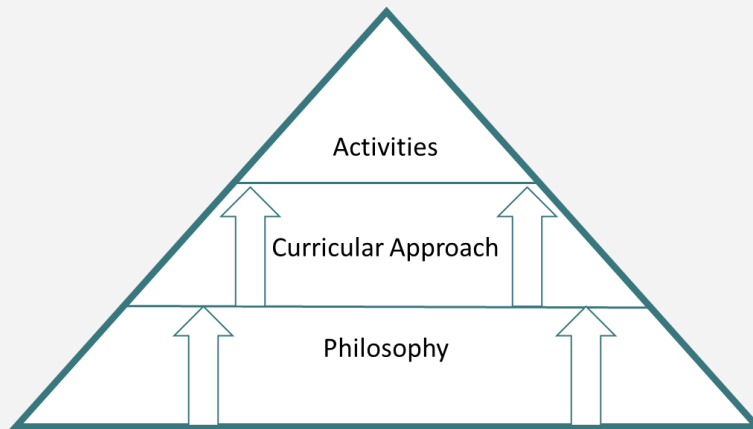


What is Curriculum?

A question often asked of early care and education programs is “What is your curriculum?” It can be tempting to think about curriculum as a package or book or collection of planned activities that might be fun to use in your program, or that might help to easily meet standards and requirements. However, the better question to begin with is “What is your philosophy?”

Start with your philosophy

The curriculum of your program involves the standards you are working to meet, the plans for what you will do to meet those standards, and then what actually happens based on the group of children in your care. You must consider what you believe about children, development, care, and learning, before you select and implement a curriculum. These beliefs make up your philosophy and form the foundation for everything you do in your program.



Your philosophy of care, teaching, and learning informs the curricular approach you use, the role you play, the arrangement of your environment, and the activities and routines in your program. Aligning these is essential for meeting the goals you have for your program and the individual children in your care. For example, if you believe children learn best through play, choice, discovery, and hands-on experiences, you won't choose a curricular approach that involves a great deal of directing, explaining, or demonstrating things *for children*. *You will choose a curricular approach that involves providing a range of play experiences from which children choose throughout the day.*

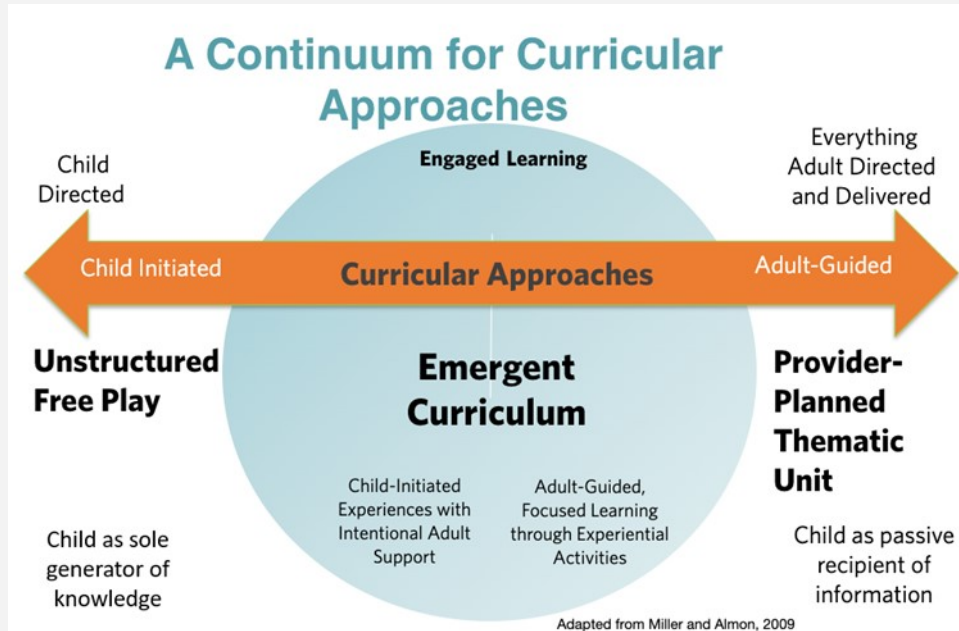


Pause and Reflect:

What are 3 key beliefs you have about how children develop and learn best?

A continuum of play-based curricular approaches

Within play-based approaches, there is a range of ways to approach curriculum that reflects more specific details of your philosophy. This continuum of play-based curricular approaches ranges from completely unstructured free-play initiated entirely by children to adult-directed and planned thematic units. In between is an array of ways that is a blend of these two.



Your philosophy might be play-based and include beliefs that children learn best when there is more structure determined by adults. The curricular approach you choose might include thematic units that you decide and plan, and that involve play activities. Or your philosophy might be play-based and include beliefs that children learn best when their questions and ideas are included in the activities that are planned. So, you might choose an emergent curriculum approach which includes observing and talking with children about their interests as a way to decide the play activities that will be offered.



Pause and Reflect:

Where on the continuum of curricular approaches lines up with your key beliefs about children's development and learning?

Activities offered align with your philosophy

The specific activities you choose for your program should reflect your curricular approach and your philosophy. If your philosophy includes the beliefs that children learn best through exploring and trying things out for themselves through playful experiences, you will choose open-ended kinds of activities. You will offer these opportunities many times for children to have a number of experiences building on their learning.

For example, a craft activity that results in each child's project looking exactly the same, or that involves adults directing or helping children to place the pieces a certain way, does not align with a philosophy that children learn through exploration, discovery, and play. An activity in which children can explore using paper and glue to learn about how these materials work, that may or may not result in each child creating a final product, is more aligned with this philosophy.

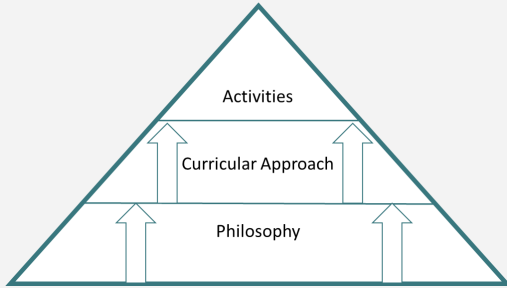


Pause and Reflect:

Reflect on an activity that you offered recently in your program. How does it align with your philosophy and curricular approach?

Resources

- Bodrova, E. & Leong, D.J. (2015). Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian views on children's play. *American Journal of Play*, 7 (3), 371-388.
- Copple, C. & Bredekamp, S., Eds., (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*, 3rd ed., Washington, DC: NAEYC.
- Jones, E. (2012). The emergence of emergent curriculum. *YC Young Children*, 67(2), 66.
- Jones, E & Nimmo, J 1994, *Emergent Curriculum*, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Washington DC, p. 3. 2
- Jones, E., & Reynolds, G. (2015). *The play's the thing: Teachers' roles in children's play*. Teachers College Press.
- Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). *Crisis in the kindergarten: Why children need to play in school*. Alliance for Childhood (NJ3a).
- Stacey, S 2009, *Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Education: From theory to practice*, Redleaf Press, Canada, pp. 5-6.



Planning sheet

After you have completed all the pauses and reflects, use this planning sheet to refine your philosophy and curricular approach, then reflect and plan possible types of activities.

Types of Activities



Curricular Approach



Philosophy

