

What Does “Curriculum” Mean in the Context of Working with Infants and Toddlers? And How Do We Verify How Curricula are Being Used?

CCPRC 2015

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Acknowledgments

- This presentation is based on work being conducted through a collaboration between the Network of Infant Toddler Researchers (NITR) and INQUIRE.
- This collaborative project involves a working group that includes Allyson Dean, James Elicker, Kerry Kriener-Althen and Diane Paulsell in addition to Marty Zaslow, Rachel Chazan-Cohen, and Helen Raikes. The work of this collaboration is coordinated by Tamara Halle, Kathryn Tout, and Jennifer Abrams. The presenters thank the members of the working group for their contributions to the summary of the working group's discussions that are reflected in this presentation.
- The working group thanks the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation of the Administration for Children and Families for the funding for this collaborative project.

Your Experiences

- Have you been asked to use a curriculum for I/T?
- What questions do you have about choosing an I/T curriculum?
- Have you been asked to verify the use of I/T curricula?
- What issues are you confronting in choosing, using, or verifying the use of an I/T curriculum?
- What resources do you need?

Why recent focus on curricula for infants and toddlers?

- I/T are the new frontier in school readiness
- Increased federal and state funding for quality I/T care
- Increased professionalization for the I/T workforce
- Recognition that I/T are different
- More federal, state, and professional accountability systems are asking for programs serving I/T to use an evidence based curriculum

But there is some discomfort

There is both discomfort about the use of the term “curriculum” for infants and toddlers and ambiguity about what it means for this age group

- It evokes an image of didactic instruction not appropriate for this age group
- So much individualization seems needed that it seems difficult to envision a unifying plan or framework

The *what* and the *how*

For older children, the *what* and the *how* of teaching are separated.

Curricula: the *what*, the package of content and methods of presenting them; the materials and physical environment

Pedagogy: the *how*, the lived experiences in the teaching/learning process

In our review of definitions of I/T curricula, we found a blurring of the *what* and the *how* of teaching. Given the increased importance of relationships in the 0-3 years, I/T curricula must include both aspects

Key aspects of I/T curricula:

The What

Planned activities aimed at supporting and extending I/T learning. These activities must be based on the child's interests, abilities, and internal sleep/wake schedule.

Environments that are designed intentionally to support development and these activities in particular.

- developmentally appropriate materials aimed at supporting and extending development;
- planning of space to be both safe and conducive to active engagement;
- and geared to the interests and abilities of the infants and toddlers in the room.

Key aspects of I/T curricula:

The How

Knowledge: Planned activities and environments are based on knowledge of trajectories of development as well as underlying processes and mechanisms for supporting development.

Responsive interactions. Planned activities occur in the context of ongoing and supportive relationships with both infants/toddlers and their families.

Process of individualizing This includes:

- (a) the ongoing assessment of individual children;
- (b) planning for activities to extend learning based on the infant/toddler's interests and goals for his or her development
- (c) implementing of activities and reflecting on I/T response; which brings one to documentation and repetition of the cycle.

WHAT

Activities

Responsive
Interactions
&
Supportive
Relationships

Environments

Knowledge

Individualizing:

- Assessment
- Planning
- Implementa
tion



HOW

Implications for Practice and the Role of the Educator

Child leads: I/T has his or her own learning agenda, and the role of the educator is to discover it and structure activities and the environment to extend and support

“In high-quality infant-toddler programs, the interests of the child and the belief that each child has a curriculum are what drive practice.” (Lally, 2000).

Implications for Practice and the Role of the Educator

Tensions exist within the I/T world between proponents of a “hands off approach” versus a supportive and facilitating approach.

“[A]n infant always learns. The less we interfere with the natural process of learning, the more we can observe how much children learn all the time.” (Resources for Infant Educators, 2007).

“The adult’s role is not to teach, but to observe and reflect on what infants/toddlers are experiencing and how they learn—and then to support the process through interactions, their relationship with the child, and provision of experiences in an environment that contributes to the child’s success.” (National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative, 2010).

Implications for both in-service and pre-service training

Competencies and knowledge:

- Successful implementation of a curriculum rests on the teacher's deep knowledge of I/T assessment and development
- Relationships with I/T and families are key. Capacity to form relationship is essential. Must have regular communication with parents both about daily routines and needs as well as about longer-term goals for child development

Verification of curricula use

Verification of the **what** is fairly straightforward:

- involves requesting documentation that a specific previously developed curriculum, or a curriculum framework, is being used that meets articulated criteria (e.g., chosen from a set of approved pre-developed curricula; aligned with Early Learning Guidelines).

Verification that the **how** of an infant/toddler curriculum is actually occurring is harder:

- ongoing process of identifying goals in light of the interests and development of the child
- recurrent assessment of the progress of the child in light of the identified goals
- implementation of an infant/toddler curriculum is occurring within the context of supportive and sustained relationships with I/T and families

Most current QRIS are focused on the tool and not the process

Examples of verification of both the how and the what: Head Start

Head Start Monitoring Protocol: not just for documenting that an appropriate curriculum has been selected, but that it is being implemented through a process that involves ongoing assessment of children and the articulation of developmental learning goals and progress towards measurable objectives

- staff interviews
- observations

Examples of verification of both the how and the what: NAEYC

NAEYC accreditation: written documentation and observation

What:

- Reviews of program and classroom portfolios are used to confirm that the program has a written statement of philosophy and has selected a curriculum framework that is consistent with the philosophy
- Direct observation confirms that materials and equipment are used to implement the curriculum in a way that reflects the diversity of the children and families, and that is safe while at the same time encouraging exploration, experimentation and discovery.

Examples of verification of both the how and the what: NAEYC (continued)

How: confirmation that a process involving individual child assessments is used in planning

- Lesson plans
- Direct observation to confirm that the curriculum guides the development of a daily schedule that is both predictable and flexible and responsive to the individual needs of children

Examples of verification of both the how and the what: New Mexico (I/T and preschool)

Ongoing documentation of the cycle of child assessment and goal setting for individual children within the context of state ELG

Study of the verification process is in process but at present focuses specifically on the preschool age range.

What is missing?

a focus on the implementation of curricula within the context of supportive and sustained relationships

- Educator-I/T
- Educator-family

How can we address relationships?

- Written documentation of a staffing plan that focuses on caregiving continuity
- Direct observation of responsiveness in interactions. New measures:
 - Infant CLASS & toddler CLASS
 - Q-CCIIT
- Written documentation of communication with parents
- Parent and staff report of relationships. New measure:
 - Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality Measures

Implications

We've highlighted what aspects of I/T curricula should be looked for by programs, states and other stakeholder entities

- I/T curricula must address both the **what** and the **how**
- I/T curricula are based on following the interests and abilities of the child to a greater extent. They are not a prescribed/invariant series of adult-initiated and -directed activities or lesson plans.
- I/T curricula are relationship based – learning happens in the context of responsive interactions. The focus on relationships extends beyond the classroom to work with parents and families.
- I/T curricula include the process of assessment/documentation, planning and implementation.

Your thoughts

- Does this change your thinking in any way?
- What did we miss?
- What are implications for professional development?
- Is there a need to consider how pre-developed curricula for infants and toddlers can fit within this framework?
- What are implications for research? What research is needed to study I/T curricula?