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CURRICULUM IN PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS

By Jeanie McNabb

Curriculum use with three- and four year-old children is a controversial subject. Some state departments of education, such as Ohio, have established the first academic standards for preschoolers. These preschool standards address language and math skills as well as science and social studies. However, the standards aren't mandatory and failure to meet them won't keep children from transitioning into kindergarten. Ohio hopes to change that and therefore reduce the number of children who begin kindergarten unable to meet the expectations of classroom teachers. Those unprepared children become likely targets of kindergarten retention, which has increased dramatically on a national level. According to "Escalating Kindergarten Curriculum" (Shepard & Smith 1999), "In some districts, as many as 60% of kindergartners are judged to be unready for first grade. These children are provided with alternative programming: developmental kindergarten (followed by regular kindergarten) transition or pre-first grade, or the repeating of kindergarten."

Many educators believe that preschool curriculum adopted by the district is the solution to this dilemma. Instead, perhaps, the focus should be on what children of this age need and what specific curricula can provide. In "Developmental or Academic", David Elkind (2001) states: "Learning about the world of

things, and all their various properties is a time consuming and effortful process that cannot be hurried. The concept of early childhood education has been echoed by giants of early childhood such as Froebel, Montessori, Piaget and Vygotsky. It is supported by developmental theory which demonstrates that the logical structure of reading and math require reasoning abilities on the part of the child. Longitudinal studies give evidence that the benefits of early childhood education are more social than they are intellectual. The educators, who have established early childhood as a legitimate age for guided learning, have also been quite explicit as to the nature of early instruction. They have all emphasized the importance of manipulative experiences...Froebel, Montessori and Steiner all created rich, hands-on materials for children to explore and conceptualize. Each of them acknowledged that the capacity to discriminate precedes the capacity to label, and that the understanding of quality precedes that of quantity. While each of these giants of early childhood recognized different aspects of learning in the young child, they were less in agreement as to the role of the teacher. The giants of early childhood, and those who have followed after them, agree that education must start with the child, not with the subject matter to be taught."



Today's demands for teacher accountability and measurement of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), drive classrooms as never before. Curriculum for three- and four year-old children can and should address imbedding IEP goals in the curriculum, child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities, and opportunities for exploration and imagination. Some of the preschool curricula include environmental checklists, adaptations for children with specific disabilities, ideas for engaging parents, and readiness activities such as early literacy and numeracy. Any review of preschool curriculum should include how current the research is and if it is valid for this age group; the population on

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which the curricula was normed; whether teachers using the curricula have to be trained or can learn through self-review; and, perhaps most importantly, if it meets the needs of individual teaching and learning styles.

Curriculum is a tool that for most teachers provides a structure for the classroom and a method for ongoing assessment and documentation. Curricula can support the needs of both new and more experienced teachers. If you are interested in learning more about the various choices available, the Preschool Network has purchased a variety of curricula developed for preschool children. Some of these include High Scope, The Creative Curriculum, Hawaii Early Learning Program (HELP), The Carolina Curriculum, the Brigance, and several others. Please call Sophie, Kathleen, or Jeanie - we would be happy to discuss the various choices available.

A different controversy might make the issues over curriculum seem lighter. In Tokyo, Japan, "some schools here this month began trials in which students carry chips and can be traced by radio. The chips send signals to receivers at school gates; a computer shows when a student enters or leaves." (2004, September 29). *The New Zealand Herald*. Now that gives accountability a whole new meaning!

Shepard & Smith. (1999). *Escalating Kindergarten Curriculum*. ERIC Digest.

Elkind, David. (2001). *Developmental or Academic*. Education Matters More.

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: **Harriet's Corner...**from the Special
: Education Bureau, NM Public Education
: Department, Harriet C. Forman, Preschool
: Consultant
:

Hello Colleagues,

October saw our State Director of Special Education, Sam Howarth, move to the NM Department of Health as Director of Long Term Services Division, which houses the Family Infant Toddler (FIT) Program. We were very sorry to see Sam leave us, and we wish him well in his new position. We know he's an outstanding addition to the Department of

Health. His position at the NM Public Education Department has been posted, and we'll keep you informed when the new director is hired.

Last month, a group of researchers from the National Early Childhood Transition Center (NECTC) came to Albuquerque to hold a forum on the experience of New Mexico's linguistically and culturally diverse population in transitioning from IDEA Part C to IDEA Part B Services. New Mexico was one of two states chosen to host a forum. The Connecticut forum focused on the experiences of children who are severely involved. About 48 participants from five school districts met in Albuquerque and spent a day sharing their recent experiences. The participants included family members, Head Start managers and teachers, FIT early intervention managers and service providers, and school district special education directors, principals, preschool and kindergarten teachers. They came from the communities of Anthony, Taos, Gallup, and Espanola. The researchers were extremely impressed with the information they gathered here, and they promised to share a summary report with us. For more information on NECTC checkout: <http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc/>.

We have been working on the Governor and Lt. Governor's upcoming initiative promoting voluntary, universal, and high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for New Mexico's four year-olds. The plan is still in development and to be submitted to the legislature. It would require communities to create Early Learning Community Councils, representing all stakeholders, to develop a plan that builds on existing services. Programs could be located in community-based settings (private, faith-based or non-profit). These include Head Start, school-based settings or a combination of both. A key requirement will be the inclusion of children with special needs in the pre-kindergarten classes. High-



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need communities and those ready to start will likely be given priority. A multi-year phase-in plan is proposed. What an exciting time to be in the Early Childhood World!

If you have not yet seen the technical assistance document the Special Education Bureau has published, *Autism Spectrum Disorders: Guidance on providing supports and services to young children with autism spectrum disorders and their families*, check with your Special Education Director. The document will be available soon on our website.

Have a restful and delicious Thanksgiving break!



Book Review

Sourcebook for Children with Attention Deficit Disorder: A Management Guide for Early Childhood Professionals and Parents
Clare B. Jones, PhD. Communication Skill Builders, The Psychological Corporation. 1998.

Teachers who work with children with attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder WANT ideas—ideas for helping these children learn the expectations of the classroom; ideas for assisting them with completing assignments; and ideas to keep them from disrupting other children. In addition to providing a nice overview of the disorder, this manual offers strategies for communication with parents, ways to increase these children's ability to attend, activities for the classroom and a suggested reading list. This is a resource that classroom teachers will find themselves using frequently for practical, logical and easily implemented interventions.

Classroom Activity: “What a Kid!” Lists

Learning to sequence is one of the most difficult concepts for children with ADD/ADHD. Here is a simple classroom activity that will help organize the day, teach sequencing and can be adapted to meet objectives as well.

Goals:

1. The child will learn to sequence activities.
2. The child will plan activities in an organized manner.

Materials:

- Paper
- Colored pens
- Green, yellow, and red gummed circles



Instructions: Make a visually animated list of three activities the child should complete during independent time. Color code the list using the gummed circles or number the items to encourage the child to complete the activities in order. Provide a colored pen so the child can cross off each item as it is completed. Offer incentives for completing the list.

“What a Kid”
Ashley

1. <u> X </u>	Puzzle Center	
2. <u> </u>	Computer	
3. <u> </u>	Library Center	

Professional Development Opportunities

Check out the early childhood training calendar on the CDD Early Childhood Division website at:

<http://cdd.unm.edu/ec/calendar.html>

Collaborative Planning & Co-Teaching:

Presented by Dr. Richard A. Villa & Dr. Jacqueline S. Thousand
December 10, 2004, Ruidoso Convention Center, Ruidoso, NM
For more information call: (505) 454-1472 or (505) 426-2085

DEC International Conference

December 5—8, 2004
Chicago, IL
www.dec-sped.org

Internet Chat: *Classroom Environments*

That Work: Preventing Problem Behavior
Thursday, November 18, 2004, 6—7 PM MST
For more information see, <http://csefel.uiuc.edu/chat.html>

Project SET Seminar: *Effective Program Characteristics, Planned Teaching Opportunities & Engagement of Young Children with ASD*

December 1, 2004 at various locations broadcast via teleconferencing. For more information call: (505) 272-3012

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