



EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

Curriculum Guide

2012-2013

Introduction

“Once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors, once they are helped to discover the pleasure of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode.”

- Loris Malaguzzi

The philosophy of the ECC is based on the belief that each child is unique. Therefore, our aim is to implement a curriculum that supports the healthy development of every child.

The ECC's curriculum incorporates a combination of a number of theories of child development and early childhood education and integrates the Lebanese curricular standards.



The Importance of the Early Years

The early years from birth to age five represent the most decisive phase in the development of children's initial competencies that will influence their future learning experiences.

The human development during these years is incredibly remarkable to an extent that some people refer to these years as the *magic years*.

The increase in the number of brain research and the growing interest in understanding the effects of the neurological functioning during the early years of a child's life have raised the awareness to the importance of providing quality care and developmentally-appropriate experiences for children before formal schooling.



The Importance of the Early Years

Children are born with a readiness and an eagerness to learn. From birth to age five, children grow an incredible amount of **dendrites**, which are brain cell tendrils that develop when learning takes place by joining one cell to another in significant ways. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)

Therefore, when children are exposed to various types of activities that engage them in meaningful experiences and a high level of delight and accomplishment, their brain cells form **stable associations** between their experiences and the feelings of success that are provoked (Gopnic, Meltzoff & Kuhl, 1999).

However, when the instructional activities include rote learning, boredom, pure memorization, lack of critical thinking and intellectual stimulation, the child's brain cells associate ongoing negative feelings with school and learning in general.



The Importance of the Early Years

Thus, it is extremely important that children's early school experiences are enriched ones that promote **problem-solving** and **critical thinking** and at the same time provide a **healthy environment** for children where they can build trusting relationships with adults and peers and develop positive social interactions.

This will secure that children will acquire the most important abilities that will enable them to deal with adulthood expectations.

By providing such enriched learning experiences, teachers make the difference in children's lives and growth.



NAEYC and NAECS/SDE

Joint Position Statement on Curriculum, Assessment & Program Evaluation

One important influence that inspired the ECC's curriculum is the joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) on developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education.

This joint position statement focuses on the idea that a curriculum is much more than a series of fun activities. Actually, a curriculum is an integration of various elements including objectives, content, educational approaches, and instructional strategies. The curriculum is also affected by several aspects, such as the community's values, research results, cultural expectations, language differences, and specific characteristics of children.

NAEYC and NAECS/SDE emphasize the importance of establishing curriculum decisions based on the following essential elements:

- **Age appropriateness** in which curricular decisions are developed based on research findings about children's growth and development
- **Individual appropriateness** in which decisions take into consideration that every child has unique strengths, interests and needs that must be addressed
- **Social and cultural appropriateness** in which decisions are meaningful, relevant, and respectful of children's backgrounds and provide a multicultural content

NAEYC and NAECS/SDE

Indicators of Effectiveness

The eight indicators of effectiveness of NAEYC and NAECS/SDE Joint Position Statement (2003) that greatly influenced the ECC curricular decisions are the following:

- Children are active and engaged*
- Goals are clear and shared by all*
- Curriculum is evidence-based*
- Valued content is learned through investigation, play, and focused, intentional teaching*
- Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences*
- Curriculum is comprehensive*
- Professional standards validate the curriculum's subject-matter content*
- The curriculum is likely to benefit children*

About the ECC Curriculum



The ECC curriculum represents a *non-traditional style* of teaching that is designed to meet the needs of every child.

It is grounded in an eclectic approach that brings together various early childhood education theories based on current research findings.

As opposed to the direct instruction approach that focuses on teaching isolated and separate concepts regardless of children's interests and background knowledge, the curriculum at the ECC is child-centered and follows the *Project-Based Learning* approach.

Project-Based Learning Curriculum



The ECC curriculum is integrated so that learning occurs primarily through child-selected projects and play-initiated activities, with a variety of learning opportunities to explore different materials and resources.

Projects that are realized at the ECC are in-depth investigations of ideas which evolve from children's interests and passions.

Throughout a project, ECC teachers guide the children in the process of completing the project phases and help them in selecting the materials needed to carry out the work. The instructional materials are usually concrete and meaningful to children.

Project-Based Learning Curriculum



Children at the ECC learn how to be responsible by taking the initiative in the project. They begin to explore and investigate while teachers assist them by continuously providing them with the appropriate learning resources that include the space and materials for learning, in addition to the arrangement and sequence of the project phases.

Parents, guest speakers and various LAU community members also take part in the projects.

Thus, the ECC curriculum focuses mainly on listening to children's ideas and feelings, sharing with them the responsibility of learning and organizing curricular decisions taking into consideration their interests and choices.

Objectives of the ECC Curriculum

The ECC curriculum aims to:

- Stimulate curiosity, inquiry, investigation and critical thinking in the classroom
- Develop intrinsic motivation in children and a lifelong interest in learning
- Engage children in a naturally stimulating environment where they could use all their senses to learn
- Empower children with the skills of looking for information and searching for answers instead of totally depending on teachers' instruction and direction
- Honor children's individual abilities and talents
- Address children's varied learning styles, readiness levels and abilities
- Tolerate the natural pace of children's learning to emerge instead of being totally guided by the clock
- Encourage cooperation, peer work, and team spirit among children

Role of the ECC Teachers

Teachers plan the curriculum by integrating instructional goals with daily emergent reactions to children's questions and ideas. They also create different situations within the daily activities, routines and purposefully designed play experiences to trigger children's curiosity and motivation to learn.

Teachers act as co-learners and researchers by initiating a problem or topic of study, observing children's responses and behaviors regarding the topic and then documenting these responses. This helps them in organizing the process of learning and planning further work and investigations.

Teachers continuously examine, compare, analyze their observations and prepare instructional activities and projects accordingly.



How Is the ECC Curriculum Beneficial to My Child?



The ECC curriculum expands children's **curiosity and intellectual growth** through reinforcing their self-satisfaction of learning by doing and discovering on their own.

The ECC curriculum builds on every child's individual strengths and works on enhancing his/her weaknesses.

It supports children in becoming **self-confident and matured individuals** who are in a continuous state of eagerness to learn about the world around them.

How Do We Do This?

We mainly see children as individuals who have “preparedness, potential, curiosity and interest in constructing their own learning... and in negotiating with everything the environment brings to them.” (Gandini, 1992)

This is done through:

- *High expectations of children’s abilities and potentials*
- *Engaging and meaningful experiences for children*
- *Thoughtful questioning that raises children’s high levels of critical thinking*
- *Continuous reflective feedback to children’s ideas*
- *Children-initiated investigations and explorations*
- *Various learning centers inside every classroom*
- *Daily assessments of children through careful observations and ongoing anecdotal records*
- *Children’s webs with individual interests and needs for every child*
- *Ongoing display of documented projects and classroom activities with evidence of student learning*
- *Learning celebrations with student-led conferences*
- *End-of-year portfolio celebrations*
- *Regular activities involving LAU community members and ECC families*
- *Continuous professional development of ECC staff members*

Why?

Because research shows that this is how children learn best. Actually, children barely show any growth in learning when they are directly taught by teachers who dictate knowledge to them.

Children only learn when they apply information in meaningful situations that are interesting to them.

*That is why their **cognitive stimulation** will continuously be our top priority at the ECC.*



ECC Instructional Activities & Materials



The ECC classrooms provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children and are divided into various **learning centers** including blocks and construction, manipulatives, puzzles, science discovery, reading, music, art, dramatic play, sensory and sand and water centers.

By actively being engaged in these learning centers, children explore and understand various ideas related to early math, science and language through activities that have been purposefully designed by teachers to enhance children's problem-solving and critical thinking.

ECC Instructional Activities & Materials



The daily schedule is flexible and at the same time addresses the individual needs of all the children.

It provides time and support for transitions, includes both indoor and outdoor experiences, arranges for large and small group time, and takes into consideration the child's need to rest.

ECC Instructional Activities & Materials



Teachers always plan activities that take into consideration children's prior knowledge and their interests in the subject. Therefore, the instruction focuses mainly on a combination of concrete and intentional activities, child-initiated and meaningful play experiences, active exploration of the learning environment and positive and nurturing interactions with peers and adults.

As a result, the teachers act as **facilitators** in the classrooms who ask open-ended questions in order to enhance children's creativity, motivation and interest in the learning process.

This type of instruction will ensure a healthy, safe and secure environment for children.

ECC Instructional Activities & Materials



Every instructional activity is designed to provide the opportunity for each child to interact with the materials in an individual way. Activities are concrete, hands-on and relevant to children's lives. Children learn about themselves and the world around them through games, stories, songs, creative art, dramatic play, and investigations.

The children have time to dance, sing, run, explore, create, observe and investigate. They also have the opportunity to explore values, learn social skills and develop self-confidence.

Depending on every child's abilities, ECC teachers **differentiate** the learning activities and instructional practices to accommodate their individual needs.

ECC Instructional Activities & Materials



The materials at the ECC are purposefully chosen to support children's learning, interests and skills.

These materials:

- are rich in variety and level of challenge*
- reflect the lives of the children*
- encourage exploration, experimentation, and discovery*
- promote social interaction between children.*

The Role of Play at the ECC

Early childhood educators all agree that play is a major component of a high-quality and developmentally appropriate curriculum because it enhances the **cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, creative and physical abilities** of young children (Alliance for Childhood, 2007; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).

Toddlers and preschoolers usually have brief attention spans when participating in teacher-directed activities, specifically when they are treated as passive learners. However, they show an extended attention span when they are involved in self-initiated play experiences.

Play is highly essential in the early years because it enables children to enhance their critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and leadership skills.



The Role of Play at the ECC

Children actually acquire various concepts and apply their knowledge about the world through the experimental and innovative mechanism of play.

Actually, when children engage in various forms of play such as **physical play**, **object play**, **dramatic play**, **constructive play**, and **games with rules**, they:

- Have several chances to use real-life examples of the world in a new situation which is essential for future learning
- Integrate different forms of learning by using their cognitive, linguistic, social, motor and creative skills
- Are more intrinsically motivated to learn because they are involved in experiences that interest them



The Role of Play at the ECC

Similarly, *symbolic play* in which children represent certain items (e.g. spoons) with other items (e.g. microphones) enables children to acquire the concept that words and objects can be replaced or matched with other words and objects. This concept is a key factor and a prerequisite for cognitive development and early literacy (Dias & Harris, 1994).

Also, children show a great tendency to start using new vocabulary words when they manipulate various objects while playing.



The Role of Play at the ECC

*As a result, teachers at the ECC continuously create **play experiences** in the classrooms and carefully observe how children play. They intentionally facilitate children's play in order to ensure that the instructional objectives are met and that children are progressing in all the developmental stages.*

Through continuous and careful observations of children while playing, teachers evaluate each child's individual needs and modify their plans to address these needs.

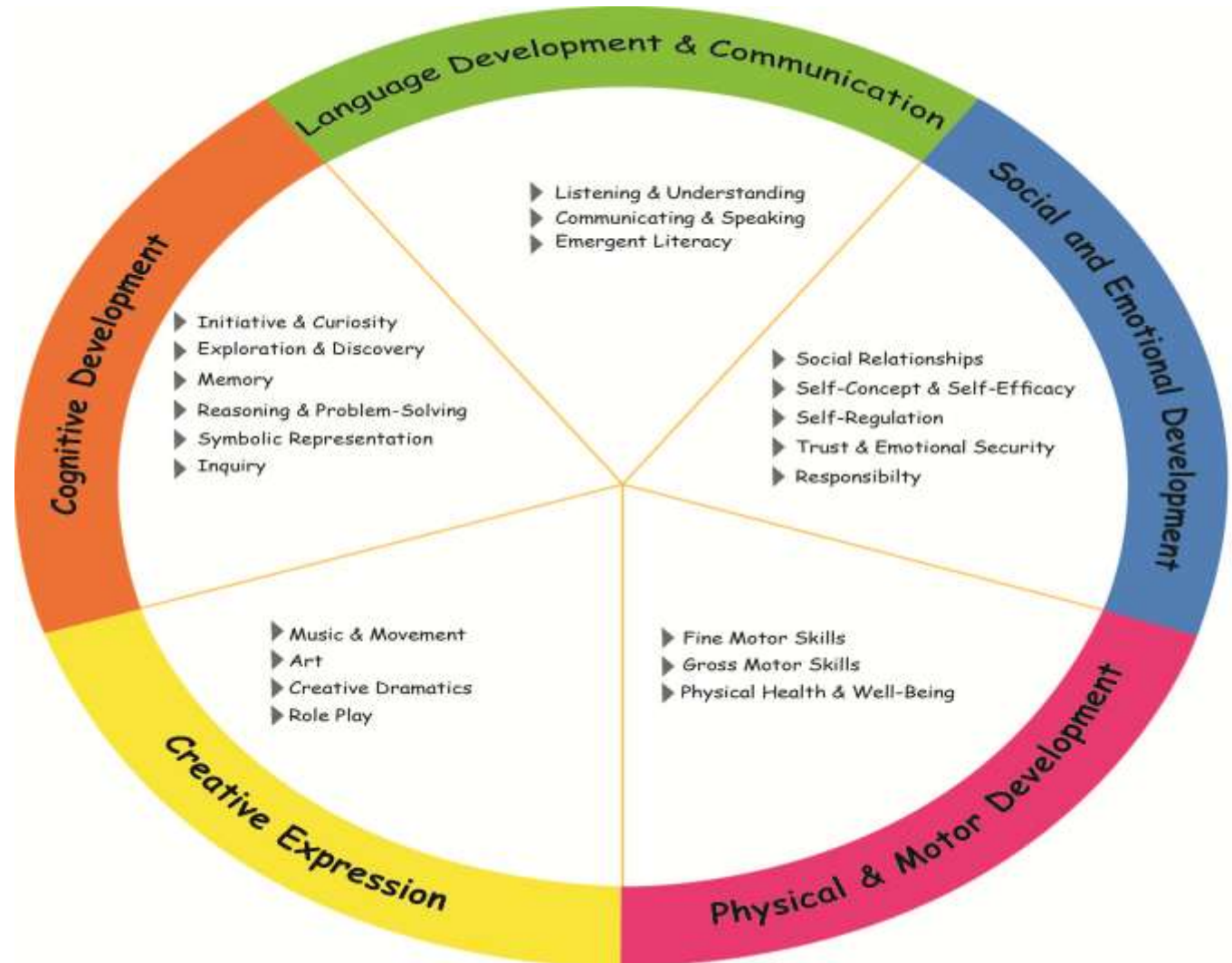


Five Domains of the ECC Curriculum

The ECC curriculum is multi-dimensional and therefore values all the five developmental domains of young children.

Each domain includes:

- sub-domains
- standards
- benchmarks
- learning outcomes



Curriculum Domains

I. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION



Children will improve their communication skills by communicating, listening, and responding to stories, songs and rhymes in small and large groups.

Children understand that print in general has a meaning and purpose and begin to use scribbles and drawings to express their ideas and needs.

A highly attractive reading nook in every classroom gives every child the joy of becoming familiar with books and being able to handle them correctly.

Curriculum Domains

II. COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT



Children become familiar with the cognitive skills of sorting, matching, ordering, sequencing, patterning and counting which are considered the basics of early mathematics.

As they develop their cognitive abilities, children begin to acquire simple skills for investigation, exploration and manipulation through hands-on activities and manipulatives such as blocks and construction toys, puzzles, beads, links and board games.

Also, children become more familiar with simple scientific concepts by using the challenging science manipulatives such as magnifiers, magnets and binoculars.

Curriculum Domains

III. SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Within a loving, safe and nurturing environment, children will develop self-confidence, autonomy and respect.

They start to understand how to take part in a group, share materials, establish friendships with other children and show respect to others.

Through guided activities, continuous modeling, storytelling and role-playing, they start to show acceptable manners for expressing their feelings and needs and showing respect to the feelings of others.

Children are also constantly encouraged to become responsible for their own actions.

Curriculum Domains

IV. CREATIVE EXPRESSION



Children are given multiple opportunities to express their ideas and feelings through art, music and movement and dramatic play activities.

Children will be engaged in painting, drawing and collage activities to explore colors, shapes and different textures.

They will also have a chance to respond to music and stories, and to participate in imaginative role-play and in dressing up, both individually and in groups.

Curriculum Domains

V. PHYSICAL AND MOTOR DEVELOPMENT



A variety of indoor and outdoor activities such as running, jumping, balancing, throwing and catching balls, climbing and biking allows children to strengthen their motor abilities.

Similarly, children are guided in the development of their fine motor skills through multiple activities that encourage using and handling a variety of writing tools and small objects with increasing control and precision.

The activities that help children in enhancing the movement of their fingers are coloring, cutting and pasting, painting and drawing, bead threading and lacing, modeling with clay and play dough, playing with sand and water.

Sample of the Organization of Each Domain at the ECC

Domain

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Communicating and Speaking

Sub-Domain

Standard

Standard 1:

Demonstrates communication skills in order to express self

Benchmark 1.1:

Engages in verbal & nonverbal communication to express self

Benchmark 1.2:

Participates in conversations

Benchmarks

- Uses gestures and movements to express self and to indicate wants and needs
- Uses words to communicate wants and needs
- Vocalizes during play
- Uses single words meaningfully
- Names some objects or persons upon request.
- Identifies items or people in pictures/photographs.
- Increases the number of single words used in vocabulary.
- Uses name to refer to self.
- Begins to use pronouns to refer to self or others.
- Repeats rhymes and participates in singing songs

- Attempts to initiate interactions with others
- Begins to carry on a simple conversation.
- Attempts to ask simple questions.

Learning Outcomes

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