9 SCHEDULING AND CURRICULUM PLANNING

NAEYC Standards Considered in Chapter 9

See the Standards Correlation Matrix in the Appendix.

- *Standard 1a:* Planning a daily schedule and curriculum based on sound understanding of child development (See Components of the Early Childhood Schedule; Guidelines for Program Scheduling; What Is Curriculum?)
- *Standard 4c:* Using a variety of teaching approaches rather than always the same techniques during such activities as group times (See Components of the Early Childhood Schedule.)
- *Standard 4c:* Using a variety of teaching approaches rather than always the same techniques during such activities as group time (See Guidelines for Program Scheduling.)
- *Standard 4a:* Understanding that a well-planned schedule facilitates supportive relationships and interactions (See Guidelines for Program Scheduling.)
- *Standard 4b:* Planning a daily schedule and curriculum based on understanding of child development principles and research (See Guidelines for Program Scheduling.)
- *Standard 4d:* Engaging in reflective practice about the flexibility of the schedule and to plan curriculum that promotes positive outcomes for the children (See Types of Schedules.)
- *Standard 2c:* Understanding the value of family engagement in curriculum planning (See Family Involvement in the Curriculum.)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

9.1 Describe the standard components in a schedule for young children.

9.2 Examine guidelines for planning a developmentally appropriate schedule for children of different ages.

9.3 Determine how different schedules must meet the needs of different types of programs and must also meet teachers' needs.

9.4 Discuss the factors teachers must consider when planning a curriculum for an early childhood program.

9.5 Identify defining features of theme-based curriculum and how such a curriculum is developed.

9.6 Categorize ways in which emergent curriculum differs from the more traditional theme-based curriculum.

9.7 Explain how family engagement strengthens curriculum development.

A curriculum is much more than a collection of activities. It provides the framework for developing a coherent set of learning experiences that enables children to reach the identified goals. [The curriculum] must be effective and comprehensive in addressing all the developmental domains and important content areas. (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 42)

A curriculum and activities fit within a schedule, which provides an overall structure for the program. The schedule provides a sequence for the events of the day as well as the length of time various components will last. It also allows for many types of interactions: between child and child, between adult and child, and among small and large groups. In addition, the schedule provides time to engage in activities in a variety of environments (Hohmann, Weikart, & Epstein, 2008). But more than that, the schedule reflects your program's philosophy, takes into account the needs and interests of the children, and provides the security of a

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predictable routine for children and teachers. In fact, some professionals consider that the schedule can be much more intentional and significant, turning it into a meaningful ritual (Howell & Reinhard, 2015). Such a ritual personalizes aspects of the routine—for instance, always preceding or ending an element of the schedule with a song—by making it into something that is unique just to that group of children.

A curriculum is fitted within the structure of the schedule. Planning the curriculum is at the heart of your program, an opportunity for thoughtfully building on what the children already know, introducing relevant new topics, and creating a positive attitude toward learning. In this chapter, we will examine, in detail, guidelines for good scheduling and for effective curriculum planning. As part of the discussion on curriculum planning, we will consider two distinct approaches: the more traditional, theme-based curriculum and the emergent, project-based curriculum.

COMPONENTS OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHEDULE

Most early childhood programs contain some fairly standard elements. How these components are arranged and how much time is allocated to them reflects the school's, as well as the teachers', philosophy and goals. Consider, for instance, a program in which the children spend the bulk of their time in self-selected activities and another program in which the teacher directs and controls most of the day's activities. In the first, the philosophy and goals reflect a respect for the child's growing independence, increasing decision-making skills, and ability to draw what is valuable from the day's experiences. In the second example, the teacher feels a need to supervise the children's experiences closely to ensure that they gain specific skills and information. Both approaches are used, although most early childhood professionals prefer the former, where faith is placed in children's ability to learn and flourish in a well-planned environment. Let us examine the standard components of the early childhood program, keeping in mind that these can be arranged in a variety of ways.

Activity Time

The largest block(s) of time each day should be reserved for activities from which the children can select. **Activity time**, in many programs, is also called self-selected learning activities, free play, playtime, learning center time, or other similar names that connote that the children make choices about the activities in which they engage. This is the part of the schedule in which you insert many of the activities we will discuss in the next few chapters. A wide variety of well-planned activities should reinforce and support the objectives and theme or project of the curriculum. Each day's activities should also provide multiple opportunities for the development of fine and gross motor, cognitive, creative, social, and language skills.

Activity time blocks should last at least 45 minutes (and can be as long as 2 hours or more) to allow children ample time to survey the options, select an activity, get involved in it, and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) suggests that extended periods of time of at least 1 hour be allocated for children to engage in play and projects (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Many children will, of course, participate in more than one activity, but others will spend all of their time with one activity.

Activity time blocks also allow the teachers to interact with children individually or in small groups. Social guidance, informal conversations, well-timed questions, and careful listening give teachers the chance to learn more about the children in the class, develop relationships, introduce or reinforce concepts, evaluate the children's understanding of concepts, or assess developmental status. It allows for the development of personal connections, and the establishment of warm, nurturing interactions among teachers and children.

When planning the activity time block, consider safety and adequate supervision. Some activities require close attention by an adult, whereas others can be carried out relatively independently by the children. Such activities as cooking and woodworking require constant teacher attention, for example.

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Water and sand play, other sensory activities, messy media, and blocks also need more attention from adults. For each activity time block, it is important to consider the balance between activities that need more adult guidance and those that are more self-directed, particularly in relation to the number of adults available in the class. It can be easy to lose sight of safety needs in an effort to provide a wide variety of interesting and stimulating activities.

Large-Group Activities

Most programs include one or more times when all of the children and teachers gather together. **Large-group time**—variously called circle, story time, group, meeting time, or other similar names—can be used for many purposes. Some teachers tend to use it in the same way day after day, and others use such times to meet various objectives. Some programs have several group times, each serving a different purpose—for example, morning business (roll call, calendar), story, music or movement, or class meeting.

Group times offer the possibility of meeting a wide variety of objectives. For instance, they provide an excellent opportunity to introduce a new project or curriculum topic or to probe the children's comprehension of concepts and information. They can also be used for discussions, stories and books, songs, fingerplays, movement, socialization, poetry, games, dramatizations, sharing, relaxation exercises, planning and review, calendar or weather, and a host of other activities best carried out with the whole group. Book or story reading is probably the most frequently used group activity, though many other possibilities, which we will consider in the following several chapters, can also be incorporated during group times. Keep in mind that young children are motivated to become readers themselves when they have positive experiences of adults reading aloud to them (Fox, 2013).

As part of a research study (Essa, 2000), six preschool teachers were videotaped and their guidance techniques later analyzed. When children were engaged in self-selected activities, there were almost no behavioral concerns. What became quickly obvious, however, was that the bulk of behavior problems occurred during teacher-led group activities. Teachers were constantly reminding children to sit still, listen quietly, or "keep your hands to yourself." Closer examination of the videotapes showed that there was almost no opportunity for the children to be active participants because the teachers did all the talking, controlled the direction of the activities, and held generally overlong group times. In other words, the group activities, in contrast to the other parts of the curriculum, were not developmentally appropriate.

In traditional programs, group times are almost always teacher-initiated and led, although teachers often seek children's input. In fact, older preschoolers and primary children enjoy and are very competent in leading group activities—for instance, "reading" a familiar book, leading songs, and moving the group into transitions. Such opportunities to take over group leadership should, of course, never be imposed and should be conducted as the child chooses. Early childhood programs, particularly those based on an emergent curriculum approach, use group times in a different way. In keeping with the more egalitarian relationship between adults and children, group times provide opportunities for the genuine exchange of ideas and exploration of topics, and often involve subgroups of children, depending on their interests and involvement in the topic under discussion (Stacey, 2018).

Some teachers designate meeting time as a chance for children to solve problems. Such meetings provide an opportunity to acknowledge others' positive actions and behaviors as well as to engage in problem-solving of issues raised by the children, usually interpersonal conflicts. The teacher acts as facilitator, while the children learn how to resolve interpersonal issues in a productive rather than destructive manner. Class meetings create a very positive sense of community among the children, engender respect, promote cognitive development, and foster problem-solving skills that will be useful for years to come (Vance & Weaver, 2002). Vance (2013) notes that class meetings, which help create an environment that is safe for the children, have four components: opening, acknowledgment, problem-solving, and closing.

When guiding large-group (as well as small-group) activities, it is important to remember how children learn and what constitutes developmentally appropriate group activities. Children, as active learners, will gain more from activities that allow for their input, include active

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In small-group activities, the teacher focuses on a specific concept that is presented to a few children who are at a similar developmental level.

involvement, and encourage flexible problem-solving. Asking children to provide answers for which there is a "right" or "wrong," or "correct" or "incorrect," response does not support their developmental needs and their growing self-esteem.

Small-Group Activities

Some programs include a small-group activity time, during which five or six children work with one teacher for a short period, generally 10 to 15 minutes. This can be handled by staggering small groups throughout the program day or by having each teacher take a small group during a designated small-group time block. Usually such times focus on teaching specific concepts and are geared to the abilities and interests of the children in the group (Hohmann et al., 2008). Children are often grouped by developmental level for small-group activities, although Hohmann and her colleagues recommend that small groups represent a cross section of the classroom population to promote cross-learning. In a small-group setting, the teacher has an opportunity to pay close attention to each individual child. As you might expect, careful planning is crucial for successful small-group activity times.

A somewhat different type of small-group activity is an integral part of emergent curriculum programs (Cadwell & Fyfe, 2004). This type of dialogue, although facilitated by the teacher, is not as teacher-directed as the small-group activity previously described. Nonetheless, teachers are full participants in such conversations with small groups of children, asking open-ended questions, stimulating thinking, and provoking discussion. The purpose of such dialogue is "to explore the children's ideas" (p. 85). What is especially important is that teachers listen carefully to gain insight into the children's process of thinking.

Outdoor Activity

A large time block for outdoor play should be part of the daily schedule. Some adults think of outdoor play merely as a time for children to expend excess energy and for teachers to take a rest. But outdoor time contains far too many valuable opportunities for learning and development to be dismissed in this way. When you think of outdoor play as an integral part of the early childhood experience, it becomes natural to allocate at least 45 minutes to this time block. Outdoor time requires planning in the same way that indoor activity does and involves the same kinds of teacher–child interactions. Also keep in mind our discussion in the Take a Closer Look section in Chapter 8 about how important it is for children to spend time in natural, outdoor environments.

Just like during activity times, the teacher's role when outside includes setting up a stimulating environment, providing for each child's individual needs, guiding children's behavior, providing a variety of experiences, taking opportunities to clarify concepts, and encouraging exploration and problem-solving. In addition, some unique safety concerns require special attention in an outdoor play area. An important skill that you, as the teacher, should develop is the ability to scan, to keep an eye on the entire outdoor play area. It is particularly important to pay attention to the fronts and backs of swings, slides, climbing equipment, tricycles and other wheeled toys, and the area in and around the sandbox.

Time for outdoor play may be affected by the weather, although the weather should never be used as an excuse for not going outside. Children thoroughly enjoy the snow, for instance, if they are properly clothed. Children do not catch cold from playing outside in the winter.

If inclement weather does prevent the children from enjoying outside time, alternative activities should be made available inside so that children can expend energy and engage in large motor activity.

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Many schools have a selection of large motor equipment, such as tumbling mats or an indoor climbing apparatus, to use on rainy days. If this equipment is in a relatively restricted space, then small groups of children should use it throughout the day rather than having the entire group involved at one time.

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Meals are an important part of the early childhood day, meeting children's nutritional needs and providing opportunities for independence, learning, and socialization.

Cleanup

It is wise to schedule 10 to 15 minutes, particularly after activity times, for children and teachers to participate in putting the classroom back into order. When cleanup time is included in the daily schedule, it conveys that this is an important component of the program.

Meals

Sharing food provides a unique opportunity for socialization and learning; thus, almost every program includes at least one snack, if not several meals. A 3-hour program usually includes a snack time around the halfway point of the day. The timing of meals, however, should be dictated by the children's needs, not by a rigid schedule, especially for infants. If it appears that some children get to school having had breakfast several hours before or not having eaten breakfast at all, then an early morning meal should be provided. An alternative, particularly if children's arrival at school is staggered over several hours, is to have a snack available for a period of time, enabling children to eat as they feel the need to refuel.

Timing of lunch will depend on the ages of the children, the length of time they are at the center, and when morning snack was served. Younger preschoolers may need lunch at 11:30 a.m. and be ready for a nap by noon. How much time is allocated for each of these meals will depend on the children in the group and the type of meal; generally, however, 15 to 20 minutes for snacks and 20 to 30 minutes for lunch is adequate. Most children can comfortably finish a meal in this period of time. We will discuss meals more fully in Chapter 15.

Nap or Rest

In full-day programs, children should have time for sleep or rest during the middle of the day, usually sometime after, though not immediately following, lunch. Allocating 1 to 2 hours for this time is usually enough (see Chapter 15 for a more detailed discussion). Also, be aware of your local regulations for rest time, because some states include specific requirements.

Transitions

The times between activities are as important as the activities themselves. Failing to plan how children will get from one area to another—from group to the bathroom to snack, or from cleanup time to putting on coats to going outside—can result in chaos. We will discuss transition techniques in more detail in Chapter 15 in the context of group guidance.

GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAM SCHEDULING

These components of the early childhood day—activity time, large-group activities, small-group activities, outdoor activity, cleanup, meals, nap or rest, and transitions—can be arranged in the daily schedule in a wide variety of ways. Let's examine some guidelines that will help in setting an effective schedule.

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Alternating Active and Quiet Times

Children need time both to expend energy and to rest. A useful rule in scheduling is to look at the total time in terms of cycles of activity and rest, boisterousness and quiet, energy and relaxation. Categorize the descriptions of time blocks listed in your daily schedule in terms of active times (for example, activity time, outdoor play, large-group activities that involve movement) and less active times (for example, story, small-group activities, nap, snack).

In applying this guideline, think about providing the opportunity to be physically active after quiet times and to slow down after active involvement. Also consider the total consecutive time that children are expected to sit quietly. Thus, reconsider a schedule in which children sit at a large-group activity from 10:00 to 10:20, then move into a small-group activity from 10:20 to 10:35, followed by a snack time until 11:00. Such a schedule ought to include an active break within that hour, rather than having children shift from one relatively inactive period to another. Similarly, when children have been engaged in active exploration, a quieter time should follow. One caution: Do not expect children to move immediately from very active involvement, such as outdoor play, to being very quiet, such as nap time. For such times, plan a gentler transition that helps children settle down gradually.

Balancing Child-Initiated and Teacher-Initiated Activities

Most early childhood programs provide large time blocks in which children can make decisions about the activities in which they will participate and how they will carry them out. Most programs also include times when teachers direct activities. Typically, activity time and outdoor time accommodate child initiation, whereas small- and large-group times generally involve teacher initiation. Some functional activities, such as snack, nap, and cleanup, require children to follow the direction of adults and thus do not entail children's initiative. According to DAP, "adult-guided experience proceeds primarily along the lines of the teacher's goals but is also shaped by the children's active engagement; child-guided experience proceeds primarily along the lines of the children's interests and actions, with strategic teacher support" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 17).

A balance between child and teacher control must be carefully considered. When young children are allowed to decide how they will spend their time, they develop qualities such as autonomy, judgment, independent decision-making, social give-and-take, initiative, exploration, and creativity. In addition, children are also expected to develop a reasonable amount of compliance, understand the rules of group behavior, and accept the authority and wisdom of adults. Generally, when adults convey respect for and trust in the ability of children to make appropriate decisions, children will reciprocate with enthusiastic participation in adult-initiated activities. Of course, teacher-initiated activities must be developmentally appropriate and engage the interest of the children. Most of the day's activities should, however, be child-selected and allow children to move from activity to activity at their own pace.

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It is important to consider the children's overall activity level. Sometimes, a particularly active group of children needs additional time outdoors. Alternatively, you may want to plan more activities that let children expend excess energy indoors.

Activity Level of the Children

By nature, young children are active and must have many opportunities to expend energy. Some children, however, are more active than others. Occasionally, you will find that you have a group in which a large portion is particularly active. If this occurs, a schedule that has worked for you in the past may not serve as well because the needs of the children are different. In such a case, adjusting the schedule as well as the classroom arrangement and the types of activities planned will help the

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class run more smoothly. You might, for instance, carry out some activities, which are traditionally indoor ones, outside and plan either a longer or an added outdoor time block.

Developmental Level of the Children

As children get older, their attention span noticeably increases; thus, your daily schedule should reflect the group's ages and developmental levels. For older children, plan longer time blocks for small-group, large-group, and activity times. However, younger children require added time for meals, nap, and cleanup. With a group of very young children, you may also want to schedule regular times for toileting—for instance, before going outdoors and before taking a nap.

The length of large-group time can be particularly problematic. The time allocated to such activities will depend on the ages and attention spans of the children. Children can, of course, sit for a longer period of time if the activity captivates their interest, but, generally, a well-paced, shorter group time is more rewarding for all. As the program year progresses, reassess the length of group time and adjust it according to the children's interest.

Group Size

Group size may also influence the schedule. Particularly with a large group of children, creative scheduling can be used to allow for more individualized attention to children. One example is a church-supported child care center where the one large room, in which more than 50 children of varying ages spend the day together, dictates scheduling considerations. Although the children and teachers share the same indoor and outdoor space, the director has created five subgroups of children and teachers who alternate use of the outdoor area, the indoor large motor area, and the wide variety of other learning centers. Thus, while one group is involved in a music activity, another will be outside, while the other groups are engaged in self-selected activities. The children know that they will also have a chance to participate in the other activities because space, teachers, and time blocks are rotated for different groups of children.

Arrival and Departure of Children

How children arrive and leave the center—whether over staggered periods of time or at about the same time—has to be taken into account in scheduling. In most child care centers, the early morning period, until most or all of the children are at school, and the late afternoon period, when children start leaving for home, require some special considerations. The arrival or departure of children makes carrying out teacher-initiated activities difficult because the teacher and other children are interrupted frequently and because the arriving or departing children will not get the full benefit of the teacher-led activity. Thus, self-selected activities, in which children can control engagement and disengagement, should be available during such times. In programs in which all the children arrive at the same time, however, the first activity might be a teacher-initiated group time to introduce the plan for the day.

Seasonal Considerations

In geographic locations where the weather varies considerably from season to season, you may want to adjust the schedule according to the time of year. For instance, during winter in a New England child care program, it would be difficult to keep to a schedule that contains three outdoor time blocks when each involves helping children get into and out of their snowsuits, boots,

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The schedule may need to be rearranged according to the weather. If winters are severe, it would be difficult to help the entire group get in and out of full snow gear several times a day. Think about your own part of the country. What climatic conditions might affect the schedule during different seasons?

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STORIES FROM THE FIELD

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTING

Theresa Danna Douglas

Kathryn, Kindergarten/ EDK (Title I Extended Day Kindergarten) Teacher

How am I going to blend the DAP philosophy of early childhood education with the academic demands of a public school system? This question was much discussed between my fellow students and me as we progressed through our early childhood education coursework. Now that I am in my second year of teaching kindergarten at a Title I, K–6 public school, this question is more relevant than ever as I create lesson plans and interact with the children in my classes.

My school district has a list of concepts and skills titled "Critical Content" that needs to be taught throughout the course of the year. Critical Content is based on state standards as well as district standards and is deemed necessary for children to be prepared for first grade. My curriculum is driven by this Critical Content in that I need to ensure that my students master a range of skills in the areas of literacy, reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. My students should read at a specified level, demonstrate specific writing skills, and be able to demonstrate an understanding of addition and subtraction by the time they complete kindergarten. Doesn't sound much like a DAP approach, does it? Fortunately, my district understands that there are many ways to approach the teaching of these skills; not just one prescribed, scripted method.

As the teacher, I have the freedom to decide how I am going to approach the instruction of the Critical Content. Group projects are a way of allowing each child to use existing skills while scaffolding learning in other areas. For example, recently we have had several children absent with a nasty respiratory bug. Kindergartners' relationships are important, and it is stressful for children when their friends are absent for more than one day. During a discussion of their friends' illnesses, several children expressed an interest in learning about germs. This interest led to a short unit with a "project" component. After listening to a relevant read aloud, the children decided to create their own representations of germs using a variety of materials. We decided to make a "Germ Book" and used an interactive writing lesson to create the text. Math skills were used to determine the placement of the "germs" on each page. These tasks required teamwork and communication. The book was assembled, laminated, and is now in our class library.

Through this integrated lesson, the children met Critical Content in literacy, writing, math, science, and communication and had experiences in creative representation, social interactions, and fine motor skills. Remember, the driving force of this lesson was taken from the children's interests and classroom relationships.

Sometimes the demands of Critical Content can make scheduling a challenge. Because the attention span of 5- and 6-year-olds is short, I keep my children moving from table activity to carpet and back again several times. By scheduling frequent movement and changes of activities, fidgeting is reduced and learning is stimulated.

Unlike the upper grades, kindergarten does not have blocks where subjects are taught at a prescribed time. This freedom allows for flexibility. Because I have a group of children with a variety of life experiences, it is important to be flexible with my daily routine. This allows me to meet the diverse needs of my class. Having an early childhood education background has allowed me to have a better understanding of the children in my class from a developmental point of view. I feel I am working in a positive way to successfully meld DAP with the requirements and expectations of my district.

mittens, and hats. At the same time, a lengthy outdoor time is inappropriate when the temperature is below freezing or, for that matter, when it reaches 100 degrees. Yet once spring or fall arrive and the temperature is balmy, the schedule should allow for longer outdoor time. The weather can certainly affect your schedule, so a flexible approach and attitude are important when working with young children.

TYPES OF SCHEDULES

Scheduling for Infants and Toddlers

Scheduling for infants and toddlers takes into account somewhat different factors than does scheduling for preschoolers and older children. In an infant and toddler program, the schedule is initially set by the needs of individual children and gradually shifts toward a more uniform schedule as the children get older. An infant program has to revolve around the eating, waking and sleeping, and elimination patterns of each child. The daily program for each child is uniquely tailored around

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her or his physiological patterns. As they get older, children begin to eat at times more consistent with adult meals; sleep primarily at night with two daytime naps, then one daytime nap; and regulate their elimination schedule. Thus, by the end of the toddler years, children are ready to enter into a more uniform schedule that applies to the entire group. Babies, however, need to be on a **self-demand schedule**, in which infants communicate what they need and adults respond accordingly (Gestwicki, 2016a). One of the best ways to meet the needs of infants and toddlers and to help them make the gradual transition from an individual to a group schedule is to provide a consistent caregiver who remains with them throughout this period, usually for at least 2 to 3 years. This kind of **continuity of care** has been related to higher teacher ratings of children's self-control, initiative, and attachment, as well as fewer behavioral concerns (Horm et al., 2018).

Toddlers are in transition from a schedule in which each child's individual needs set a time frame to one that is more uniform and predictable. A dependable pattern for how the day progresses gives toddlers a sense of security and will prevent struggles between adults and children, creating a built-in rhythm that becomes a habit rather than something to be challenged (Gestwicki, 2016a). Nonetheless, the toddler schedule still allows for considerable variation, since individual children's needs, especially for rest, will vary. Built-in times for quiet, interspersed with opportunities for children to exercise their boundless energy are also important in a toddler schedule. Finally, plan carefully so that toddlers do not have to wait, since their capacity to wait is not yet well developed. Transitions in which toddlers are helped individually to move to the next activity will be more successful (Gestwicki, 2016a).

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Schedules for infants and toddlers need to be flexible and individualized, revolving around daily routines; in other words, very young children should be on a self-demand schedule.

Scheduling for School-Age Children

The guidelines for program scheduling we have already discussed are also relevant to school-age children, but we will mention a few additional elements that are appropriate for this age group. Scheduling for primary school children will vary according to the type of program they are in. They spend time in elementary school classrooms and many also spend time in before- and after-school care programs. In elementary school classrooms, similar guidelines for scheduling as were discussed for older preschoolers should be followed. For example, children should be provided opportunities for choice, for structured learning, and for being read to, even in second grade. They should have opportunities for outdoor play and exploration throughout the school day. In fact, research has shown that children who have multiple opportunities for outdoor play during the school day are able to focus more while in the classroom (Rhea & Rivchun, 2018).

Beyond their experiences in kindergarten and the early grades, many children are in some kind of arrangement before school, after school, on school breaks, and during the summer. Whatever the time frame, scheduling for this age group needs to take their unique characteristics, experiences, and abilities into consideration. As Carol Gestwicki (2011) points out, after-school programs should be less academic-focused and more like a neighborhood. She further suggests that mixed-age grouping, with an age range of 3 to 4 years, facilitates this neighborhood feeling. An after-school program might have some time scheduled for homework but should also include a snack and ample opportunities for play—both indoors and outdoors.

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A variety of activity choices from which children are free to select should be available. These include opportunities for physical activities, socialization, and creative expression. Breakfast in the morning and snack in the afternoon should also be available for children who are hungry. Large time blocks when children can engage in activities alone, with a friend, or with a group are needed to support children's growing sense of initiative, independence, and competence. DAP, in fact, suggests that school-age children need ample time to get deeply involved in activities and projects (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In addition, in a program that lasts all day, the schedule should provide for alternating times for physical activity and quiet.

Examples of Schedules

Obviously, the schedules of an infant program, a 2.5-hour preschool, a child care center, and a before- and after-school program will differ and must be designed to meet the unique needs of the children and teachers. Take the example of two children to illustrate how the program must meet children's needs. David attends a three-hour morning preschool program because his parents want him to have an enriching social and learning experience. He gets up around 7:00, eats breakfast with his parents before his father leaves for work, and plays for an hour or so before his mother takes him to school at the nearby recreation center. At lunchtime, his mother picks him up and he has lunch with her and his younger sister Tina, after which he reads or plays with his mother while Tina takes a nap. After dinner, Dad reads the children a story, and they go to bed by 8:00.

Rita, who lives with her single mother and two older sisters, has been in child care since she was 6 weeks old. She gets up at 6:30, and they are out of the house by 7:15, with or without time for breakfast. She spends the day at the child care center, from about 7:45 to 5:30 in the evening. After picking up her sisters, the family stops at the grocery store or sometimes McDonald's, gets home by about 6:30, eats dinner, watches some TV, and goes to bed. Clearly, the two children have very different needs that their respective early childhood programs have to meet.

Although the main scheduling consideration for full-day programs is the needs of the children, the schedule must also take into account the requirements of the staff. Early childhood teachers spend long and difficult hours working with their young charges, a job that can be tiring and frustrating as well as rewarding and energizing. Complementary to the schedule provided for the children has to be a schedule that provides rest, rejuvenation, and planning time for the adults. When the needs of the adults are considered, the children's needs will be met better, and teacher burnout is less likely to occur.

After examining standard components of the early childhood program, guidelines for scheduling, and differences between preschool and child care, you probably have concluded correctly that a daily schedule can be arranged in numerous ways. Figures 9.1 through 9.4 show four examples of schedules that consider many variables. Of course, any schedule you devise must meet the unique characteristics of your group and children, your philosophy, and your program.

FIGURE 9.1 ■ Full-Day Program for a Group of Four- and Five-Year-Olds

Time	Activity
7:30–9:00	Staggered Arrival: Teachers greet children and talk to parents; self-selected activities such as books, manipulatives, play dough, and blocks
7:30–8:30	Breakfast available
9:00–9:20	Large-Group Time: Introduction of day's activities; story or discussion related to day's topic
9:20–10:30	Activity Time: Self-selected activities from learning centers, or teacher-planned projects
10:30–10:40	Cleanup Time
10:40–11:00	Snack

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11:00–11:15	Small-Group Activity: Teacher-initiated, small-group activity to reinforce specific concepts
11:15–12:00	Outdoor Time: Self-selected activities
12:00–12:20	Large-Group Time: Recap of morning; story; music
12:20–12:30	Wash for Lunch
12:30–1:00	Lunch
1:00–3:00	Nap: Transition to nap and sleep for those requiring a nap
1:00–1:30	Rest: Quiet individual activity for nonsleepers
1:30–3:00	Activity Time: Self-selected activities, both inside and outside; as sleeping children wake, they gradually join others
3:00–3:20	Snack
3:20–4:00	Activity Time: Continued self-selected activities both inside and outside
4:00–4:10	Cleanup
4:10–4:30	Large-Group Time: Closing of day; story; movement activity
4:30–5:30	Staggered Departure: Self-selected activities until all children leave

FIGURE 9.2 ■ Full-Day Program for a Group of Two- to Three-Year-Olds

7:30–9:00	Staggered Arrival: Teachers greet children and talk to parents; self-selected activities such as books, manipulatives, play dough, and blocks.
7:30–8:30	Breakfast available
9:00–9:15	Large-Group Time: Introduce day's activities; story
9:15–10:00	Activity Time: Self-selected activities from learning centers, or teacher-planned projects
10:00–10:15	Cleanup Time
10:15–10:20	Snack
10:20–10:30	Toileting
10:30–11:15	Outdoor Time: Self-selected activities
11:15–11:30	Large-Group Time: Story, music, fingerplays
11:30–11:45	Wash for Lunch
11:45–12:15	Lunch
12:15–2:15	Nap: Transition to nap and sleep
2:15–2:45	Toileting, Followed by Snack
2:45–3:30	Outdoor Time
3:30–4:15	Activity Time: Self-selected activities
4:15–4:30	Cleanup
4:30–4:45	Large-Group Time: Story, puppets, movement
4:45–5:30	Staggered Departure: Self-selected activities until all children leave

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FIGURE 9.3 ■ Half-Day Program for Three- and Four-Year-Olds

8:50–9:00	Arrival
9:00–9:20	Large-Group Time: Introduce day's activities; story, music
9:20–9:40	Snack
9:40–10:30	Activity Time: Self-selected activities
10:30–10:40	Cleanup
10:40–11:00	Small-Group Activity
11:00–11:40	Outdoor Time
11:40–11:55	Large-Group Time: Closing and recap of day
11:55–12:00	Departure: Gather belongings; teachers talk to parents briefly

FIGURE 9.4 ■ Before- and After-School Program

6:00–8:30	Arrival: Breakfast available, self-selected activities; outdoor play, weather permitting
8:30	Board bus for school
3:00–4:15	Arrival: Snack available until 4:15; outdoor play, with organized games available
4:15–4:30	Large-Group Meeting, Discussion
4:30–6:00	Self-Selected Indoor Activities: Projects, clubs, activity centers, homework, and so on

Flexibility of the Schedule

The schedule provides the framework within which your program functions. You might think of the schedule as the skeleton and the curriculum and activities as the flesh that fills out and defines the character of the inner structure. A sound skeleton is vital to a healthy body, just as a well-put-together schedule is integral to a well-run program.

The daily schedule also provides security, because it gives the day a predictable order. A good schedule provides the predictability that children need, and they soon learn the sequence of activities. Thus, you can say to a child, "I know you are anxious for your mother to come. After we finish cleaning up, we will go outside. Later, when we come back inside, we will read a story, and then your mother will be here." The child can relate to this temporal time frame because he is familiar with the schedule.

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Although the daily schedule should be predictable, it also needs to remain flexible. If, for instance, the children are very engaged in the group time activity, you can extend it to build on their enthusiasm.

The schedule should also allow for flexibility rather than being rigidly followed. There are many occasions when the set time frame should be altered. For instance, if you find that the children are particularly engrossed in activity time, extend that time and shorten a later time block; the clock should not arbitrarily cut off involved play. If it has been raining relentlessly for 2 weeks and today is a beautiful, sunny day, plan to spend a large portion of the day outside so everyone can enjoy the nice weather. Similarly, if, despite your best efforts, the children are restless and uninterested in the group activity, shorten the time rather than allowing a negative

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situation to develop. In other words, use cues from the children—and your judgment—to adapt the schedule if it will improve the flow of the day and better meet the needs of the children. You might also ask the children what changes in the schedule they would suggest. Their insights will surprise you!

Some large early childhood centers, because they have multiple classes that share some common facilities, establish a centerwide schedule. Such a schedule makes flexibility of certain aspects of the day more difficult but still allows for some latitude. It may not be possible to alter the time allocated for outside play when classes rotate the use of the playground, or of meals if they share a common dining room; however, self-contained parts of the schedule, such as activity or group time, should be adapted as required.

WHAT IS CURRICULUM?

Now that we have discussed the daily schedule, let's turn to an examination of the **curriculum**, the content and substance of that schedule. The term *curriculum* has a somewhat different connotation in early childhood than in elementary, secondary, or higher education. In these settings, *curriculum* often refers to a course of study on a specific topic, such as a curriculum in history, social studies, physics, reading, or any other subject. Thus, students typically are in the midst of several curricula, which are not necessarily connected to each other.

In early childhood, the curriculum tends to be viewed more holistically, and all aspects of the program are integrated and related. Early childhood professionals view the curriculum as integrally tied to a concern for dealing comprehensively with "the whole child," the child's physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development. "This concern for children's overall development is an important distinguishing characteristic of early childhood education that sets it apart from most education for older children [which emphasizes] teaching basic knowledge and skills" (Moravcik & Feeney, 2009, p. 219). The foundation for sound program development is based on research and theoretical knowledge that helps us understand how children learn, what makes for a good learning environment, and what curriculum material is suitable for young children.

In particular, the curriculum is founded on the understanding that play is an integral part of children's learning and development and, as such, has to be an integral part of the early childhood curriculum. DAP underscores the importance of play as well. "Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 14).

A concern of many professionals is the proliferation of curricula and teaching materials aimed at accelerating young children's development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Falk, 2012). Advertisements for preschool programs as well as books, kits, and other teaching materials promise parents brighter children, toddlers who read and do math, or future Harvard graduates.

Many accelerated preschool curricula are based primarily on a downward escalation of the curriculum, presenting elementary school tasks and methods to younger children. David Elkind (1987) was one of the first educators warning that programs that focus on direct instruction in reading, math, ballet, or gymnastics for very young children should be considered "miseducation" because they put children at risk for short- and long-term stress and other problems. There is no research-based support for such practices; on the contrary, research tells us that they tend to be damaging to children's motivation to learn.

So, as you begin to think about an appropriate curriculum for young children, where do you turn? It might be helpful to remember that young children are eager, absorbent learners, curious and interested in learning as much about their world as possible. Children are equipped with a drive to explore and discover, an urge to see and feel and hear firsthand, and a thirst for new experiences in both physical and social realms. This suggests that we do not have to force-feed children what we think they should learn. Rather, we can plan a curriculum based on the faith that children's innate interest in their world will lead them to appropriate learning, given a suitable learning environment and knowledgeable, reflective adult guidance. The Take a Closer Look section provides a discussion of an international study that compares programs from different parts of the world. Note that these use the kinds of principles we've been discussing.

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TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM—A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The trends that have changed American life—including a greater number of dual-earner and single-parent families, increased mobility of families, increasing diversity, and a majority of young children in some kind of early childhood program—have also affected many other parts of the world. Countries across the globe grapple with similar issues as the ones America faces. Many countries have focused on the importance of high-quality programs for young children, which has led to international discussion and evaluation of early childhood education and care. In 2003, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development sponsored an assessment of various early childhood education approaches, focusing on programs from Italy, New Zealand, Belgium, Sweden, and the United States. The resulting report found interesting similarities and differences among the five included programs (Samuelsson, Sheridan, & Williams, 2006).

The study included the Reggio Emilia programs of Italy, which we discussed in Chapter 5 and will consider in more detail later in this chapter; Te Whāriki of New Zealand, a curriculum grounded in Maori traditions of deep respect for the universe and belief in its interconnectedness; Experiential Education of Belgium, which focuses on the degree of emotional well-being and the level of involvement of the child; the Swedish National Curriculum, a program solidly committed to laying the foundations of democracy; and the High/Scope cognitively oriented curriculum developed in Michigan, which is also discussed in Chapter 5. Each of these programs was deemed to be of high quality, although they differed on various dimensions.

The study defined *curriculum* as a framework or guideline for the overall program, not as a narrowly prescribed sequence of activities. In keeping with this definition, all five programs share the following characteristics:

- Describing children as active learners with a keen interest in their world
- Viewing children as having rights and as learning through communication and interaction
- Believing in the importance of cooperation with parents and viewing the family as a partner in the children's early education
- Emphasizing the need for staff to be reflective in order to develop a deeper understanding of each child and his or her experience
- Holding a value orientation—for instance, the emotional well-being of each person is valued in the Experiential Education program of Belgium, acknowledgment of indigenous values are part of New Zealand's program, and democracy is an underlying value both in the Swedish and Reggio Emilia curricula
- Emphasizing teacher competence, acknowledging the research that ties teacher education and training to program quality
- Focusing on a primary goal of giving children a good start in life

While all five programs share many commonalities, including their high quality, the study also found some distinct differences among them. There are variations in how children are viewed. The New Zealand, Swedish, and Italian programs view youngsters as competent children who collaborate with each other and with teachers, while the Belgian and American models view children as having different needs and possibilities at different ages, which teachers enhance through the curriculum. In keeping with this, there is variation on how the teacher is viewed in the educational process. The Italian and New Zealand approaches see children as competent and knowing how to learn, and they see teachers as supporting them in this endeavor; the American and Belgian programs consider that children's competence develops because of interactions with teachers. Another difference among the programs is the degree to which they emphasize the importance of the environment; all acknowledge its role, but while Te Whāriki provides no further details, High/Scope emphasizes that arrangement and organization are significant; Experiential Education focuses on the correct match between the child's potential and the environmental challenge; and Reggio Emilia describes the environment as a "third teacher," capable of considerable influence in the child's learning. Finally, the programs view assessment in different ways as well. High/Scope, for instance, includes a strong evaluation component while Reggio Emilia views assessment in less traditional ways.

The study concludes that all five programs have common values and objectives that are aimed at giving children a good start in life, even if they differ in some aspects. The analysis of these programs also focuses on a vision of what kinds of adults the children in such programs might grow up to be. Whether implicitly or explicitly, they all expect children to grow up as democratic citizens who contribute to their societies, know how to get along with others, and engage in lifelong learning.

Children's Development and Curriculum

What you include in the curriculum must be directly related to the children in your program. A curriculum that does not fit the comprehension level, abilities, needs, and interests of the children is meaningless. To plan an appropriate program requires knowledge about the age group of your class, about family characteristics and backgrounds, and about the individual variations among the children in the class.

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First of all, a sound understanding of child development is essential to curriculum planning. A general comprehension of what 4-year-olds are like is basic to planning for a class of fours. Not only does such knowledge tell you what to expect of this age group in terms of physical, cognitive, and social ability, but it also helps you understand what interests 4-year-olds often share.

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Having a sound understanding of child development gives you the background to plan developmentally appropriate activities.

Furthermore, the more you know about the backgrounds of the children, the more specifically you can plan a curriculum to meet the characteristics of the group. Any ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic, or regional factors unique to the group can be incorporated to enhance the curriculum and to help children feel good about their uniqueness.

In addition, your ability to observe children and glean information from your observations will help you in developing an appropriate curriculum for the individuals in the class. Topics and activities must be matched carefully to the general abilities of the children as a group, but variations within the group and individual needs must be recognized. If children with disabilities are included in your class, it is particularly important to ensure that your classroom provides an appropriate program for them.

As we continue to reinforce throughout this book, one of the most valuable guides in developing curricula is *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8*, published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This resource provides a philosophical rationale as well as specific and pragmatic information on appropriate and inappropriate practices when working with young children.

Culture and the Curriculum

Children come to your program with a cultural orientation that reflects their "family's way of living: their values or beliefs, language, patterns of thinking, appearance and behavior" (Jackman, 2009, p. 46). This culture may be different from that of the majority of the class or from yours, as the teacher. It is important, therefore, to include culture carefully and thoughtfully within the curriculum. Rebecca New and Margaret Beneke (2009), in addition to acknowledging the growing diversity among young children, also note that "children in these settings are . . . distinguished by what they share—a desire to learn in a way that respects their personal lives even as it prepares them to participate in an increasingly global society" (p. 305). We will discuss guidelines for an anti-bias curriculum in more detail in Chapter 14, when we consider socialization through the curriculum.

Types of Curriculum

The early childhood curriculum is the result of both long- and short-term planning. Many programs start with a master plan that covers a sizable period (a year, for instance), which is then filled in with details for shorter segments of time. These programs generally base the curriculum on a series of themes and are more traditional. In other programs, the curriculum is derived from the interests of the children; planning is generally more spontaneous and flexible in such programs. Such a strategy is called an emergent curriculum, and it includes the kind of program used in Reggio Emilia (see Chapter 5) and in other project-based approaches (e.g., Helm & Katz, 2014, 2016). In the following section, we will discuss both of these widely used approaches.

THEME-BASED CURRICULUM

Many early childhood programs are based on a thematic approach, also called a "traditional" early childhood curriculum (Moravcik & Feeney, 2009). Usually, the teacher decides ahead of time on a series

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Appropriate curriculum is based on the children's interests, abilities, and experiences. The children's fascination with animals can be encouraged as they learn about their needs through helping to take care of the classroom pet.

of themes that are relevant to children, which, based on his or her best estimate, would engage their interest. Such themes can range from familiar topics such as family, pets, and the grocery store to more remote ones such as dinosaurs and the night sky. Themes are also appropriate in supporting math and science concepts since many topics naturally lend themselves to such exploration (Roseno, Geist, Carraway-Stage, & Duffrin, 2015).

Content of an appropriate early childhood curriculum should be derived from the children's life experiences, based on what is concrete, and tied to their emerging skills. Consider that young children have been part of their physical and social world for only a very short time. They have so much to learn about the people, places, objects, and experiences in their environment. When you give careful consideration to making the elements of the environment meaningful and understandable to children, you need not seek esoteric and unusual topics. Children's lives offer a rich set of topics on which to build a theme-based curriculum, including learning about themselves, their families, and the larger community in which they live. Such an approach to curriculum-building fits within the ecological systems model we described in Chapter 3 (Essa & Rogers, 1992).

Children as the Focus of the Curriculum

The most crucial skills with which young children can be armed to face the future are feelings of self-worth and competence. Children are well equipped for success if they are secure about their identities, feel good about themselves, and meet day-to-day tasks and challenges with a conviction that they can tackle almost anything. The curriculum can foster such attributes by contributing to children's self-understanding and providing repeated reinforcement and affirmation of their capabilities, individual uniqueness, and importance.

Self-understanding comes from learning more about oneself—one's identity, uniqueness, body, feelings, physical and emotional needs, likes and dislikes, skills and abilities, and self-care. Children enjoy learning about themselves, so a focus on children as part of the curriculum can take up a significant portion of time. It is important, however, to ensure that planned activities are age-appropriate so they contribute to both self-understanding and positive self-esteem. Two-year-olds, for instance, are still absorbed in learning to label body parts; thus, activities that contribute to sharpening this language skill are appropriate. Older preschoolers and school-age children, however, are more interested in finer details. For example, they enjoy examining hair follicles under a microscope or observing how the joints of a skeleton move in comparison to those of their own bodies.

Family as the Focus of the Curriculum

The family is vitally relevant to children and provides another rich basis for curriculum topics. We can help children build an understanding and appreciation of the roles of the family, similarities among families, the uniqueness of each family, different family forms, the tasks of families, and relationships among family members. Similarly, an examination of the children's family homes, means of transportation, food preferences, celebrations, parental occupations, and patterns of communication also provide appropriate curriculum topics. You might invite family members to come into the classroom and share special knowledge and talents. In addition, children as well as teachers might bring photographs of their families to share.

Themes that focus on the family contribute to children's feelings of self-esteem and pride. They can share information about something central to their lives, while at the same time expanding their understanding of the family lives of the other children. While such learning strengthens children's

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emerging socialization, it also contributes to cognitive development. Teachers help children make comparisons, note similarities and differences, organize information, and classify various aspects of family structure. Such comparisons need to be nonjudgmental and value each child's family.

Community as the Focus of the Curriculum

Children's awareness of their world can particularly be expanded through themes related to the community. Young children have had experience with numerous aspects of their community, especially shopping, medical, and recreational elements. The community and those who live and work in it can certainly extend the walls of your program and offer a wealth of learning opportunities and curriculum material.

From the community and the people who work in it, children can learn about local forms of transportation; food growing, processing, and distributing; health services, including the role of doctors, nurses, dentists, dental hygienists, health clinics, and hospitals; safety provisions such as fire and police departments; communications facilities, including radio and television stations, Internet service providers, newspapers, telephone services, and libraries; and local recreational facilities, such as parks, zoos, and museums. Children can visit an endless variety of appropriate places through field trips. (In Chapter 15, we will discuss field trips in more detail.) In addition, community professionals can be invited to visit your class to share information and tools of their professions with the children.

You can help children begin to build an understanding of the community as a social system by focusing on the interrelatedness of the people who live and work in your area. For instance, people are both providers and consumers of goods and services—the dentist buys bread that the baker produces, and the baker visits the dentist when he has a cavity.

In addition, the larger physical environment of the area in which you live provides a setting worth exploring with the children in your class. Your approach will vary, depending on whether your community is nestled in the mountains, by the ocean, or in the midst of rolling plains. Most young children living in Kansas, for instance, will not have experienced the ocean. It is difficult to convey what the ocean is like to someone who has never seen it, and this is particularly true for children who rely on concrete, firsthand experience. Therefore, it makes little sense to plan a unit on "the ocean" when it is more than 1,000 miles away. Instead, focus on what is nearby and real in the environment, on what children have some familiarity with and can actually experience.

Developing Written Plans for a Theme-Based Curriculum

As we discussed earlier, the curriculum can be viewed as a comprehensive master plan. Once this larger curriculum is in place, units that cover shorter periods of time, daily lesson plans, and individual activities can be developed to fit into the curriculum. We will examine each of these elements. Also keep in mind that curriculum development must be a reflective activity through which teachers thoughtfully and intentionally plan experiences that promote positive outcomes for children.

Planning the Overall Curriculum

The preceding discussions—curriculum is based on enhancing the total development of children, is founded on a good understanding of children, and derives its content from children's life experiences—provide direction for curriculum planning. Many programs develop a master plan that spans a typical cycle of time—in most instances, this is a year—and defines some broad topics you wish to cover. Putting together a curriculum master plan requires thoughtful consideration. It should provide a flexible guide, which gives general direction for the year but also allows for input from the children and personalization to reflect the character of the class and its individual children and teachers as the year progresses.

Units

Units bring the broad curriculum outline down to a manageable size and provide unifying themes around which activities are planned. A unit can last any length of time, from a day or two to a month

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or more. It may seem practical to make all units fit into a 1-week framework, but keep in mind that it should be the complexity, interest-value, and relevance of the topic to the children that dictate how much time is spent on a unit. Furthermore, the length of units should be flexible so that you can spend more time if the topic intrigues the children or cut it short if the children seem ready to move on. A brief outline of steps in the development of a unit can be found in Figure 9.5.

Planning a unit should begin by carefully considering objectives. What is it that you want the children to learn about the topic? What concepts, skills, and information can this unit convey? Most important, are these relevant, age-appropriate, and of interest to the children and will the children enjoy them? Children have to be the starting point for planning.

A unit should begin with an introduction through which the theme is initially presented. The length of time spent on the introductory component will depend on the length of the unit and on how new the topic is to the children. Often, the introduction takes place during a large-group discussion time.

Introductory components will generally focus on a review of the children's familiarity with the subject or closely related areas and will allow for evaluation of what the children already know about the topic. Thus, if you plan a unit on the topic "bread," you can discuss, for instance, types of bread with which the children are familiar, the food group in which bread belongs (assuming you have already spent time discussing nutrition and the basic food groups), the process of baking (for those children who have helped their family make bread), and the different ways in which bread is used in meals.

Once the topic is introduced, new ideas or information can be presented logically and sequentially. New material should be presented first in a concrete manner. This often takes the form of a field trip, but concrete experiences can be brought into the classroom through objects or guests. In the case of the bakery unit, you may want to plan a field trip to a local bakery at the beginning of the unit so the children can see how bread is made; however, in-class experiences with bread baking can be a wonderful preparation for a trip to the bakery. In either case, it is best for a new concept to begin with the concrete, with firsthand experience.

Once children have had a chance to observe and learn through firsthand experience, they can begin to assimilate this information through subsequent activities. After the field trip, children should have opportunities to factually represent what they observed by talking about and dictating accounts of the visit to the bakery, drawing pictures of what they saw on the field trip, kneading bread dough, and otherwise recalling and replicating their visit. This factual recounting allows children to fix the experience in their minds.

FIGURE 9.5 ■ Steps in Planning a Unit

1. Identify appropriate objectives.
2. Introduce the new theme through review of familiar aspects of the topic.
3. Introduce new information.
    - First concretely, such as through a field trip
    - Through activities that recall the new experience, such as drawing pictures or dictating stories
    - Creative representations of the new experience, such as through art, dramatic play, or blocks
4. Summarize and evaluate.
    - Bread is baked at the bakery.
    - The baker is the person who bakes bread.
    - Many loaves of bread are baked at the bakery (mass production).
    - Bread is made of many ingredients.
    - Bread is taken by trucks to grocery stores, where it is sold to people such as those in the children's families.

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Children can begin to use new information in creative ways once it has been integrated into their existing memory and experiential store. They can play with the information through activities such as art, dramatic play, puppets, or blocks. This element of the unit offers a wide variety of possibilities that children can approach in their unique ways.

Finally, a unit is ended through a summarizing component. Children and the teacher review the major features of the unit and what was learned. The teacher can also engage in a final evaluation of how well the children have met the objectives.

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Follow-up activities help reinforce and clarify concepts learned on the field trip. After a visit to the bakery, the children are now kneading bread dough that will be baked in the school kitchen. How does such an activity reinforce what was learned at the bakery?

Lesson Plans

Daily **lesson plans** provide the working documents from which a program is run. A lesson plan is fitted into the structure set by the schedule, as we discussed earlier. At a minimum, the lesson plan describes each activity planned for that day, objectives for activities, and the time frame within which they are carried out. In addition, it can give information about which teacher will be in charge of the activity, in what part of the classroom each activity is to be carried out, and what materials are needed. Lesson plans can take many forms, but they should be complete enough so that any teacher can pick one up and know for any given day what activities are planned and why they are planned.

Activities

The smallest element of curriculum planning is the activity, the actual play in which the children will be involved. It is important to be aware of the objectives of a given activity as well as to think through how the activity will be carried out so that the children will gain the knowledge and skills you would like them to acquire.

EMERGENT CURRICULUM

Over the past several decades, considerable attention has been focused on the programs of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy (see Chapter 5). Many American schools have, in turn, adapted the lessons learned from the Reggio approach to their own programs. This alternative approach to a more traditional theme-based curriculum is often called an **emergent curriculum** because it emerges out of and is responsive to the interests of the children. Exploration of the children's ideas is then facilitated by thoughtful teachers (Sweeney & Fillmore, 2018). In addition, American educators have refocused attention on the **project approach**, which dates back several decades (Helm & Katz, 2016; Moravcik & Feeney, 2009) and shares many of the features that make Reggio Emilia's programs unique. The project approach, like Reggio Emilia programs, expands children's and teachers' learning through in-depth exploration of topics of interest to children and teachers.

Major Features of Emergent Curriculum

There are a number of integral components of an emergent curriculum that are particularly relevant to the programs of Reggio Emilia. Among these are the image of the child, the environment, the projects that make up the emergent "curriculum," and documentation (Gandini, 2004). Also vital is the role of the teacher as a reflective collaborator with children and colleagues. We will examine these elements of the emergent curriculum in this section.

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BRAIN SCIENCE

LEARNING BY DOING

An important function of a curriculum is to facilitate children's learning in a developmentally appropriate way. The science of learning identifies teaching strategies that help children learn and remember relevant and meaningful information and skills. Sousa (2016), in his book *How the Brain Learns,* reports the findings of studies that compared retention of learning after 24 hours when different teaching strategies are used. When children learned by doing—by using hands-on activities—they had a 75% retention rate. On the other hand, when children learned by hearing the teacher talk about a topic, the retention rate was only 5%. Children practicing a new skill initially store this new information in short-term memory, but with repetition, it moves into long-term memory storage. Thus, the brain changes structurally with continued practice of the skill. Furthermore, the younger the learner is, the easier it is for such changes to occur. It is important that children have ample opportunities to learn by doing, regardless of what kind of curriculum model is used.

Image of the Child

One of the most basic principles of the programs of Reggio Emilia is the importance of viewing children as competent and strong rather than as needy and weak. "All children, each one in a unique way, have preparedness, potential, curiosity, and interest in engaging in social interaction, in establishing relationships, and in constructing their learning while negotiating with everything in their environment" (Gandini, 2004, p. 16). This image of children ensures that teachers' expectations and interactions are highly appropriate. Recognizing their abilities, adults respect and encourage children's ideas and thoughts and use these as the basis for the curriculum. Teachers learn from children by carefully observing and listening to them. This sense of co-learning places children and teachers on an equal plane. Children are seen as powerful learners who are strong and competent, with a desire to experience their world and communicate with others, right from birth (Rinaldi, 2001). Visitors to Reggio Emilia remark on the visible evidence of how children are viewed as they observe highly competent, self-directed infants, toddlers, and children in action.

The Environment

Children deserve, and require, a thoughtfully planned, beautiful environment, what Lella Gandini (1993) calls an "amiable school" (p. 6). The environment sends the message that each classroom is a place where children and adults are "engaged together in the pleasure of learning" (Gandini, 1993, p. 18); thus, the environment is considered the "third teacher" (Saltz, 1997). The environment is very carefully arranged to be welcoming and aesthetically pleasing. Light, texture, color, and form all are carefully used to extend and expand learning (Ceppi & Zini, 1998). Furthermore, the environment is arranged to respect children's innate curiosity, drive to explore, and need to interact.

One of the unique aspects of Reggio Emilia environments is the inclusion of an art studio (*atelier*) as part of each school. This space includes a wealth of resource materials and media through which the children can express their learning. Art is considered an integral part of symbolic learning, a way for children to construct their ideas (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2005). In the atelier, children are encouraged to draw or sculpt what they have been thinking about as a way of explaining and clarifying their thinking process. Anyone who has seen the Reggio Emilia exhibit *The Hundred Languages of Children*, which has been touring the United States for several decades, marvels at the beauty and sophistication of the artwork of Reggio Emilia's children. Their art comes out of careful observation and thoughtful reflection about the topics and issues they are working on.

Projects: The Heart of Emergent Curriculum

Much of what goes on in classrooms that use an emergent approach is similar to the types of activities that take place in any high-quality early childhood program. Children engage in a wide range

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of self-selected appropriate activities such as with blocks, manipulatives, art materials, dramatic play props, books, and other materials. They interact with each other and with adults in a variety of meaningful ways. It is in the emergence of curriculum, however, that such programs differ from other, more traditional programs.

Ideas for curriculum content come from observation of children's interests and activities, not from what the teachers think the children should learn (Curtis & Carter, 1996). One of the hallmarks of the emergent approach is that teachers truly listen to and reflect on what the children convey. Teachers meet with small groups of children and engage in serious dialogue about things that are important to the children (Cadwell & Fyfe, 2004). Through open-ended questions, teachers can gain great insight into what matters to the children. Such discussions are frequent and ongoing. Children are encouraged to ask questions, and they find answers to these questions through their own exploration and investigation (Helm & Katz, 2016).

Eva L. Essa

A classroom project on using recycled materials led one 4-year-old to make a whimsical self-portrait out of a variety of items that might have been discarded. Soon, other children also created self-portraits, each coming up with a unique depiction of himself or herself. The children spent many weeks collecting and exploring ways to use recycled materials.

There are numerous examples of how children's ideas are converted into a curriculum—many of which have been documented in articles, books, and films. One classic example comes from Reggio Emilia, following a suggestion by the children that the birds in their school's yard would appreciate an amusement park. This idea has been documented in a video, *An Amusement Park for the Birds* (Forman & Gandini, 1994), which follows the project from its initial mention to its culmination 4 months later. Continued discussion and observation by the teachers shaped the activities of this project to keep the interests and enthusiasm of the children in focus. Topics such as the building of a town (Bayman, 1995), the collection and classifying of rocks (Diffily, 1996), bicycles, building construction, newspapers, and even the all-too-familiar neighborhood McDonald's (Helm, 1996) provide the basis for themes that engage and fascinate children and that provide the foundation for a wide range of learning experiences. If you are interested in reading about and learning from other projects, we suggest that you check out the NAEYC book, *The Power of Emergent Curriculum* (Wien, 2014).

Another project was initiated by a very curious and excited group of 3-year-olds whose teacher was pregnant (Essa, Walsh, Burnham, & Shipley, 2015). "Heike's Belly Project," which lasted more than 4 months, was clearly initiated by these children. The children engaged in numerous activities aimed at helping them discuss and express their ideas about what was happening in Heike's belly. "Thinking of children's theories as part of their meaning-making process…can guide how adults listen to children" (Essa et al., 2015, p. 30). Throughout the project, children's skills and knowledge were expanded. They wanted to keep track of the growth of the baby, so their mathematical skills were engaged. At one point, they created a doctor's office with blocks and other props. They wanted to let people know when the office was open and closed, so these 3-year-olds went in search of signs in their environment as a model. They found an open/closed sign and were very excited to find letters of their own names embedded in these, contributing to literacy skills. They listened to the baby's heartbeat with stethoscopes and saw a video of an ultrasound of Heike's baby. The children posited various hypotheses that grew out of their questions, for instance, in answer to how the baby would come out of Heike's belly (he would climb up a rope was one answer). These few examples from this project give you an idea of the numerous skills that the children had the opportunity to develop. Projects based on ideas initiated by the children and furthered by the teachers make up the heart of the curriculum in an emergent approach.

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Documentation

One other aspect of emergent programs, especially in Reggio Emilia, is the careful documentation of the children's work. **Documentation** involves keeping a careful record of the children's learning process in carrying out projects. "An effective piece of documentation tells the story and the purpose of an event, experience, or development" (Seitz, 2008, p. 88). Documentation can take the form of photographs, videotapes, transcriptions of audiotapes of the children's discussions, samples of their work, teachers' reflections on the learning process, and other visual evidence. Ani Shabazian (2016) explains that ongoing curriculum documentation is "the teacher's story of the children's process of understanding" (p. 76). Typically, documentation shows the progress of a project through several stages. Documentation should illustrate how the children began, carried out, and culminated a project (Katz & Chard, 1997). It is carefully arranged to be aesthetically pleasing as well as informative and is displayed in a prominent place in the school.

Documentation serves several purposes. Children, teachers, families, and the public can be informed through documentation (Forman & Fyfe, 1998; Seitz, 2008). Children gain a greater depth of understanding of the concepts they are exploring by revisiting the record or documentation of their work. Teachers, through examining and revisiting the learning process shown in the documentation, can extend children's learning by planning follow-up activities that represent a logical next step. Documentation also helps families see in much clearer detail what their children are learning and gives them the opportunity to expand that learning; they see not just the end product but the process involved. Finally, the public can be informed about the abilities and learning process of children, making the school an integral part of the larger society (Rinaldi, 1998).

Final Thoughts on Emergent Curriculum

An emergent curriculum provides an alternative to a more traditional curriculum. It is based on a strong belief in children's abilities and strength and is implemented in a carefully and beautifully arranged environment. Teachers are co-learners in an emergent classroom, learning from the children through attentive observation and thoughtful dialogue. Projects on wide-ranging topics of interest to the children engage their ideas and zest for learning. The progress of projects is flexible and leisurely, as children explore and teachers provide additional resources based on their observations. Finally, teachers organize materials they collect about each project into some form of documentation, which serves to help children, teachers, families, and even the larger community revisit and learn more about the process of learning. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of this curriculum is that it requires teachers to let go of control and to have faith in children and in their own abilities to develop experiences that are rich and powerful.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum should reflect the backgrounds, needs, and interests of the children. One excellent resource, as you plan a curriculum for your group of children, is their families. Frequent family–teacher communication and an open policy that conveys the school's emphasis on the importance of the family can encourage parents to be part of the early childhood program.

Family expertise and input can greatly enhance the early childhood program. Parents and other family members can provide information about special family, cultural, religious, or ethnic customs, celebrations, foods, or dress. They can visit the classroom to share occupational information or special skills. A family member who makes pottery, weaves baskets, plays an instrument, or knows origami will contribute a fascinating element to the classroom.

Some parents may be particularly interested in the direction and content of the curriculum and may want to offer suggestions or ideas. These should be welcomed and incorporated into the program, as appropriate. You may find that some of the families in your program are looking for evidence that their child is learning what she or he will need to succeed in kindergarten and the primary grades. It is hard for those who are not familiar with early childhood education to recognize the rich range of

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experiences and the rigor inherent in such programs. Especially for adults whose image of elementary school is one of children sitting quietly at desks and listening to the teacher, an understanding of developmental appropriateness can be difficult.

"By providing academically rigorous, developmentally appropriate instruction, early childhood teachers engage in learning experiences that help children learn the foundational knowledge and skills they need to succeed in elementary school" (Brown, Feger, & Mowry, 2015, p. 63). It is helpful to convey to family members that the teachers' understanding of children's developmental needs allows them to apply this understanding to the skills and knowledge children will need when they start elementary school. So many learning activities engage multiple concepts, skills, and modalities of learning. It could be helpful to walk through a classroom with a skeptical family member and point out the multiple learning opportunities, planned in an intentional and reflective way, that the teacher uses to help the children acquire important skills and concepts.

SUMMARY

Components of the Early Childhood Schedule

Learning Objective 9.1. Describe the standard components in a schedule for young children.

Most early childhood programs share some common elements as part of the daily schedule, including activity time, large group activities, small group activities, and outdoor activities.

Guidelines for Program Scheduling

Learning Objective 9.2. Examine guidelines for planning a developmentally appropriate schedule for children of different ages.

The schedule should be consistent and predictable but also flexible when needed. A number of specific strategies help teachers provide a classroom where children and teachers are productively engaged.

Types of Schedules

Learning Objective 9.3. Determine how different schedules must meet the needs of different types of programs and must also meet teachers' needs.

The age of the children, and whether a program operates full-day or part-day, will have an impact on the schedule and what it includes.

What Is the Curriculum?

Learning Objective 9.4. Discuss the factors teachers must consider when planning a curriculum for an early childhood program.

Curriculum involves the content and substance of the program. It needs to be directly related to the development of the children in the program.

Theme-Based Curriculum

Learning Objective 9.5. Identify defining features of theme-based curriculum and how such a curriculum is developed.

Theme-based curriculum, also called traditional curriculum, is generally fairly teacher-directed.

Emergent Curriculum

Learning Objective 9.6. Categorize ways in which emergent curriculum differs from the more traditional theme-based curriculum.

Emergent curriculum builds on the interests and ideas of the children.

Family Involvement in the Curriculum

Learning Objective 9.7. Explain how family engagement strengthens curriculum development.

Families can be great contributors to the curriculum and can help teachers better understand the family culture from which the children come. Teachers can also help family members learn about DAP and how it supports children's learning.

KEY TERMS

activity time
continuity of care
curriculum
documentation
emergent curriculum
large-group time
lesson plans
project approach
self-demand schedule

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KEY QUESTIONS

1. Visit an early childhood program and look at its daily schedule. What elements are included? Does the schedule seem developmentally appropriate in that it takes into account the needs of the children? Does it provide the kind of balance discussed in this chapter? Would you change anything in this schedule? Why or why not?
2. Consider the issue of child-initiated versus teacher-initiated activity. Do you agree that there should be ample time for children to make decisions and exercise independence, or do you think more teacher control is important? Note that not everyone agrees on this question. Discuss this question with others in your class, and consider both sides of the issue.
3. You probably know children like Rita, who spend most of their day in a child care center. How are the needs of these children met? How do they differ from a child like David? In what ways can the schedule take the children's needs into consideration?
4. What are your memories of your earliest school experiences? What kinds of activities were involved? Can you glean from your recollections what type of curriculum your preschool, child care, kindergarten, or first-grade teacher might have been following?
5. If there is a school in your community that follows an emergent, project-based curriculum, observe this school to look for elements of such programs, as discussed in this section. Do you see evidence of child-centered activities, projects, documentation, and a carefully arranged, aesthetic environment reflective of the children and teachers?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here are select additional books and articles on topics discussed in Chapter 9.

Copple, C. E., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Fraser, S., & Gestwicki, C. (2001). *Authentic childhood: Exploring Reggio Emilia in the classroom.* Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning.

Helm, J. H., & Katz, L. (2016). *Young investigators: The project approach in the early years* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

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