



Child-Centred Curriculum Planning (0-5 years)

Self-Guided Learning Package

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About Self-Guided Learning Packages

Self-Guided Learning Packages can be completed in your own time and convenience and offer an alternative to attending training sessions. This package aims to develop skills and knowledge that will be valuable to you in providing quality education and care programs. Packages are often used for professional development by staff teams, networks and other groups of children's services professionals. You can work through the package with colleagues by reading the package together, discussing the information and collaborating to complete the one assessment task.

Gowrie Victoria Leadership and Learning Consultants are available to support you while working through the package. Feel free to phone or email if you require any assistance completing the tasks within the package. Phone 1800 103 670 (freecall) or (03) 9347 6388 or email psc@gowrievictoria.org.au

Child-Centred Curriculum Planning (0-5 years)

You have chosen to complete the Child-Centred Curriculum Planning (0-5 years) package. The aim of this package is to provide you with an opportunity to learn about the value of child-centred curriculum and how it can be implemented in a range of children's services.

A child-centred curriculum offers children the opportunity to make choices about what, how and whom they want to play. This approach enables children to initiate and direct their own play with the support of interested and responsive adults. In early childhood education curriculum, children construct their own knowledge from their experiences and interactions with the world around them. Educators foster children's growth and development by building on children's interests, needs and strengths within a safe and caring environment.

Introduction

Value of Play

In order to provide a child-centred curriculum, you need to understand the importance of play.

Learning through play:

'Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. When children play with other children they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking and build new understandings. Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. Play can expand children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn. In these ways play can promote positive dispositions towards learning. Children's immersion in their play illustrates how play enables them to simply enjoy being' (EYLF, 2009 p15).

'Early childhood educators take on many roles in play with children and use a range of strategies to support learning. They engage in sustained shared conversations with children to extend their thinking. They provide a balance between child led, child initiated and educator supported learning. They create learning environments that encourage children to explore, solve problems, create and construct. Educators interact with babies and children to build attachment. They use routines and play experiences to do this. They also recognise spontaneous teachable moments as they occur, and use them to build on children's learning (EYLF, 2009, p15).

Play supports children's sense of belonging, being and becoming. Play supports a child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development as it provides children with the opportunity to:

- Practise physical skills
- Release energy
- Develop positive social skills and behaviour
- Learn about themselves and others
- Build self esteem and confidence
- Learn and practise language
- Develop creativity, imagination and curiosity
- Pursue and develop their own interests
- Express their personality and uniqueness
- Explore materials, equipment and natural objects
- Develop problem solving skills
- Develop independence and autonomy
- Develop relationships and concepts
- Make connection between prior experiences and new learning.
- Ask questions

Holistic approaches to curriculum planning:

‘Holistic approaches to teaching and learning recognise the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. When early childhood educators take a holistic approach they pay attention to children’s physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspect of learning. While educators may plan or assess with a focus on a particular outcome or component of learning, they see children’s learning as integrated and interconnected’ (EYLF, 2009, p14).

Self Help Question 1

List any other benefits of play you have observed

What is a Child-Centred Curriculum?

A child-centred curriculum:

- Is planned and implemented with a focus on children learning through play
- Is based on children’s needs, interests, strengths, understandings and capacity.
- Reflects a range and variety of experiences to cater for children’s needs, interests, abilities
- Takes account of the need for children to pursue their own interests and play experiences
- Recognises the child’s voice, it captures the child’s ideas and intentions and recognises their learning strategies or learning goals.
- Is communicated appropriately to children, families and educators through written and verbal information
- Is sufficiently flexible to permit changes initiated by children and educators working together
- Reflects the interests and diversity of the children and the expertise of the educators
- Reflects the connections between children, families and communities and the importance of reciprocal relationships and partnerships for learning.
- Values the cultural and social contexts of children and their families

Self Help Question 2

Consider a curriculum, you have recently implemented. Write a brief summary of what occurred taking into consideration the points mentioned above.

How did the curriculum reflect the interests of the children? List three points.

Describe how the curriculum was communicated to the children and families.

What could you have done differently based on the information listed above?

Some approaches to Curriculum Planning that are not reflective of a child-centred curriculum

The egg carton curriculum - the use of novel or unusual art and craft activities, usually chosen because of educator’s interest, available materials or to impress parents. The emphasis is on the ‘end product’ rather than the processes or effort involved. Often the ‘products’ all look the same and there is little opportunity for children to be creative or make choices about how they use the materials.

Acceleration based on getting the child ready for the ‘next step’ rather than focusing on the current skills and interests of each child. The provision of materials and experiences is usually determined by skills children will need in the future, rather than their existing skills and interests.

Fill in the blanks or the ‘activity based’ model of planning where ‘one off’ experiences become the focus of the curriculum, and are used to ‘fill in the blanks’ on the planning format. Educators select materials and experiences because they have not been used or implemented for a while, rather than chosen to meet the individual needs and interests of the children.

Themes - curriculum is based on a particular idea or concept to ‘hang’ planning on, such as seasons, festivals or popular culture. This approach often follows a predictable format year after year and does not allow for the fact that children may not be interested in the theme at that time. Adults usually impose themes without consulting or collaborating with children.

Non- curriculum planning provides no guidelines for children’s needs, as educators believe the curriculum needs to be flexible with lots of free play. This may lead to children’s needs, interests and strengths being overlooked as well as children and educators lacking direction.

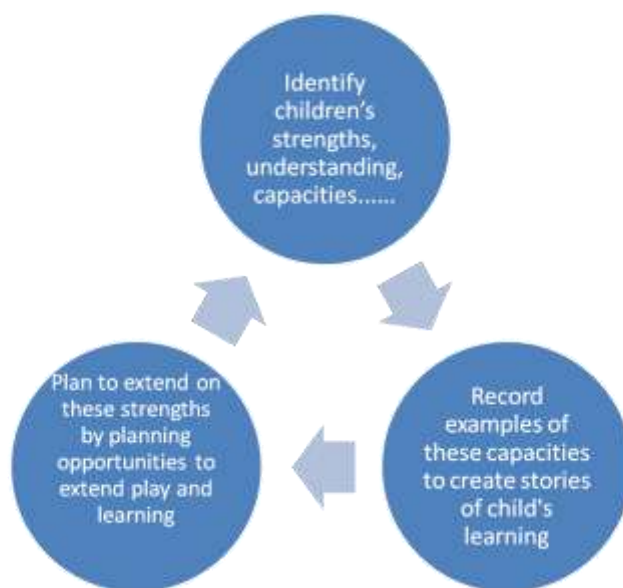
Behaviour based - the environment and experiences are chosen on the basis of maintaining control. Some experiences may not be offered because of the inappropriate behaviour of a ‘few’ children or because educators feel they will lose control of the group. This approach focuses attention on negative behaviour and disadvantages the majority of children.

These approaches take very little account of children’s needs, interests and strengths as the adults largely define and direct the program. In order to provide a child-centred curriculum, educators need to consider the following;

Strengths-Based curriculum approach:

Rather than focus on deficits and what does not occur, a strengths-based approach to curriculum relies on the positive resources and abilities that children and families have and uses these to enhance the whole experience of early childhood education and care.

Strengths Based Planning Diagram



A Child-Centred Approach to Curriculum

A child-centred approach:

- Is a curriculum designed to build on the unique needs, interests, disposition and strengths of each child
- Is where educators constantly notice individual and groups of children and use this information to recognise and respond with a relevant curriculum

- Is where the environment and experiences provided are matched to children’s developing skills and interests
- Provides opportunities for choice and decision-making
- Enables children to initiate and direct their own play
- Consists of experiences that are mainly open-ended, enabling children to develop creativity and problem solving skills
- Is where the educators structure the environment to encourage positive social interactions amongst children and adults
- Uses many opportunities to develop self help skills, independence and responsibility
- Is inclusive and responsive to diversity

Self Help Question 3

List two approaches and define what this looks like in practice?

Observing/Noticing children

In order to plan and implement a child-centred curriculum, educators need to gather and analyse information about what children know, can do and understand, their interests, skills and strengths. This is an integral part of the planning process, because it provides information that is used for making decisions about how educators respond to each child to build on their unique strengths, interests and knowledge and to support them in their learning and development.

As educators working alongside children a useful tool is

NOTICING, RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING

- Noticing* - What is happening? What seems important about this? ‘Noticing is more than observing. It involves deep listening to the many ways children express their ideas and intentions.
- Recognising* - What do educators understand from what they see – what learning is occurring? Recognising is the deliberate, thoughtful process of making meaning of what has been noticed.
- Respond* - How do we respond? What next? Responding is deciding how to act intentionally to progress children’s learning.

‘Educators use a variety of strategies to collect, document, organise, synthesise and interpret the information that they gather to assess children’s learning. They search for appropriate ways to collect rich and meaningful information that depicts children’s learning in context, describes their progress and identifies their strengths, skills and understandings.’ (EYLF, 2009, p17)

Some methods for gathering information are:

- Anecdotes and written observations
- Jottings, stories and pictorial journaling in daily diaries
- Audio/video recordings
- Photos
- Samples of children’s work (e.g. Children’s drawings, photos of children’s constructions, transcribed stories, conversations etc)

- Running records
- Narratives (e.g. learning stories)

Gathering information about children can be used in a number of ways, it can help educators to:

1. Plan effectively for children’s current and future learning
2. Establish a broad picture about the background of each child
3. Identify interests and skills of individual and groups of children
4. Understand children’s behaviour and patterns of play
5. Identify how children use the environment and participate in experiences
6. Consider ways to extend and build upon children’s play and interests
7. Understand how children interact with other children and educators.
8. Assess the effectiveness of their planning

It is the educators’ responsibility to ensure that they record and share information that demonstrates children are valued and respected as strong, competent and capable learners. This information enables educators to plan and create a rich environment to spark children’s curiosity and desire to explore, experiment and create and ensure a range of choices are made available to children both indoors and outdoors. The use of innovative methods to document children’s play and learning can also provide meaningful ways to connect with children and their families.

Self Help Question 4

List the methods you currently use to observe and gather information about children

Other than observing children directly, how can you gather valuable information and insights into children’s learning through a variety of other sources?

Consider a recent observation of a child or a group of children you have done. Describe what you **noticed** (*what was happening*)?

Describe what you **recognised** (*what learning was occurring*)?

Describe how you **responded** (*what next*)?

How could you improve the way you gather and document information to provide a more child-centred curriculum?

Selecting experiences and planning learning environments to support a child-centred curriculum

Learning environments

'Learning environments are welcoming spaces when they reflect and enrich the lives and identities of children and families participating in the setting and respond to their interests and needs. Environments that support learning are vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions. Outdoor learning spaces are a feature of Australian learning environments. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. Play spaces in natural environments include plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature. They foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education' (EYLF, 2009, pp15-16).

Indoor and outdoor environments should support all aspects of children's learning and invite conversations between children, early childhood educators, families and the broader community (EYLF, 2009, p16). They should promote opportunities for sustained shared thinking and collaborative learning. 'Materials enhance learning when they reflect what is natural and familiar and also introduce novelty to provoke interest and more complex and increasingly abstract thinking. For example, digital technologies can enable children to access global connections and resources, and encourage new ways of thinking. Environments and resources can also highlight our responsibilities for a sustainable future and promote children's understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment. They can foster hope, wonder and knowledge about the natural world' (EYLF, 2009, p16).

'Educators can encourage children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions to the learning environment. They can support engagement by allowing time for meaningful interactions, by providing a range of opportunities for individual and shared experiences, and by finding opportunities for children to go into and contribute to their local community' (EYLF, 2009, p16).

Selecting experiences and planning the environment is a process that should involve children, educators and families. The right balance of experiences will ensure children find the environment and program

inviting and engaging. It is imperative that environments be organised in such a way as to empower and enable children to be in control of their own learning. An environment with clear boundaries that is rich with open ended experiences and allows children to actively and independently engage in activities lends itself to positive interactions.

Some reflective questions to consider when planning the environment:

1. What are the interests of the children?
2. Does this environment enable children to discover, create, improvise and imagine?
3. Does this environment encourage children to explore and solve problems?
4. What are the children looking for each day and at different times of the day?
5. Are children offered opportunities to play by themselves, in small and large groups?
6. Are children offered opportunities to learn new and interesting skills in a safe and supportive environment?
7. Can children choose from a range of materials and equipment, and initiate their own play?

8. Are children offered the following range of balanced experiences within the curriculum?
 - Art and crafts
 - Physically active play
 - Science, maths and technology
 - Language and literacy experiences
 - Construction and games
 - Dramatic and imaginative play
 - Music and movement
 - Sensory play (water play, sand play)
 - Nature and environmental experiences

‘In a supportive active learning environment, children who are confident and involved learners are increasingly able to take responsibility for their own learning; personal regulation and contribution to the social environment, Connections and continuity between learning’s experiences in different settings make learning more meaningful and increase children’s feelings of belonging.’ Outcome 4 – Children are confident and involved learners (EYLF, 2009, p33).

When planning learning environments, reflect on the EYLF Outcomes 1 to 5, on pages 19 to 44, and consider how the environments created and planned support children’s learning.

Self Help Question 5

Identify and list some of materials or equipment that could be included in each of the interest areas listed above, e.g. Art and crafts may include assorted paper, drawing materials, paint, scissors, glue and tape, boxes, cloth scraps etc.

Physically active play:

Science, maths and technology:

Language and literacy experiences:
Construction and games:
Dramatic and imaginative play:
Music and movement:
Sensory play:
Nature and environmental experiences:

A high quality environment offers children a balanced range of materials and experiences that are open-ended, flexible and based on children’s interests. The environment is rich and responsive, and allows

children to have choices and make decisions about the program. Educators create play spaces that enable children to actively explore their interests, interact with others and develop real skills.

Implementing experiences

Children should always be actively involved in initiating and selecting experiences for the curriculum. Experiences should be planned and implemented with these considerations in mind:

1. Is this experience based on the children’s needs and interests? Have children been actively involved in the planning?
2. Is the focus on the process, rather than the product?
3. When and how should the experience be introduced?
4. What age range/developmental level is the experience suitable for? How can it be modified or extended to suit all interests and skill levels?
5. What space, materials and equipment are available and needed for this experience?
6. How will I present the experience to encourage children’s involvement and engagement?
7. What limits are appropriate for this experience?
8. Is the experience open-ended, flexible and does it provide children with choices?
9. How will educators be involved in this experience?
10. How can I extend or modify the experience?
11. How can I document children’s interactions and learning during this experience?
12. How can I assess this experience?

Self Help Question 6

Consider an experience you have recently implemented with a group of children. Write a summary of the experience, taking into account the questions listed above.

The adult role in a child-centred curriculum

Research has shown that children’s play becomes richer and more complex when adults support children in their play (Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning and Development Framework for Australia, 2010).

Although educators have an important role in facilitating and supporting play, it is essential for children to be involved in play experiences that they have chosen. Early childhood educators take on many roles in play with children and use a range of strategies to support learning.

Educators:

- *engage in sustained shared conversations with children to extend their thinking.*
- *provide a balance between child led, child initiated and educator supported learning.*
- *create learning environments that encourage children to explore, solve problems, create and construct.*
- *interact with infants and children to build attachment utilising routine times and play experiences to do this.*
- *recognise spontaneous teachable moments as they occur, and use them to build on children's learning.*
- *support young children through role modeling to promote positive ways to relate to others.*
- *'actively support the inclusion of all children in play, help children to recognise when play is unfair and offer constructive ways to build a caring, fair and inclusive learning community.'*
(EYLF, 2009, p15).

Educators need to plan and resource a challenging environment where they can support and extend children's play. This can be achieved by sensitive observation and appropriate intervention, being aware that it is sometimes important not to interrupt when children are deeply involved in their learning though play.

Allowing children to be spontaneous and to direct their own play experiences and then sometimes joining them, but on their terms (not taking over and directing), requires experience, along with a deep trust in the children themselves and in one's own knowledge base. That knowledge base is a mixture of personal and professional life experience, knowledge from training/study, mentors, reading books, sharing ideas with colleagues etc. It is also informed from learning from the children and families.

'Supporting children's play is more active than simply saying you believe that it is important. When children's play culture is taken seriously, the conditions which make it flourish are carefully created. Children's play culture does not just happen naturally. Play needs time and space. It needs mental and material stimulation to be offered in abundance. Creating a rich play environment means creating good learning environments for children' (Kalliala, 2006, p139).

Some strategies that Educators can use to support children's play:

- Allow children to choose their own play experiences. Provide a variety of interesting materials, equipment and props and allow children to decide which ones to explore and use during play.
- Mediating to help children solve a problem while allowing them to negotiate their own solutions. Encourage children to solve problems and think divergently.
- Let children determine how long they will play. Children need unhurried time to play. Avoid pushing children to continue with activities they have lost interest in or interrupting them before they have really finished a task, project or play experience.
- Provide experiences and materials that challenge various skill levels. This ensures the child will not become easily bored or frustrated with an experience. Add more complex materials as children become more capable and want to explore their interests further.
- Focus on the process, rather than the end product. Encourage children's efforts and avoid comparing children or doing tasks for them. Avoid providing examples of finished products or expecting children to create the same 'product'.
- Give children the freedom to be messy. Show children it is okay to be involved in messy play and encourage parents to be aware of the value of messy play.
- Participate when needed, notice when not.

- Be sensitive and responsive to children's play. Your interest, enthusiasm and encouragement will reinforce children's self-motivation and pride in their play.
- Arrange the room to encourage children to self regulate their behaviour. Clear boundaries, traffic patterns and self contained experiences will all assist children to do this.
- Help children to establish and maintain limits during play. Provide appropriate and consistent guidance. This will ensure that children play in a positive social environment that fosters cooperation and collaboration.
- Acknowledge the child as capable and resourceful
- Promote the value of play and the child's right to play

Further reading: Early Years Learning Framework – Principles and Practices, 2009, p12-18

- individual/group
- indoor/outdoor

'The degree of creativity and the possibility of discovery are directly proportional to the number and kind of materials in it' (Greenman, 1998, p107).

Natural/Recycled Materials

Commercially produced toys and equipment are often made from artificial materials such as plastic. Adults often choose these toys because they are durable, brightly coloured and easily cleaned. Children who only play with these toys are missing out on important sensory experiences and learning opportunities. Sensory stimulation derived from interacting with natural materials allows children to learn with and engage all of their senses. These senses include seeing, hearing, touching and smelling.

The use of recycled and natural materials can further enhance a child-centred curriculum as children can use the materials in many different ways. Children are free to explore the materials without the expectation of how they should be used.

The provision of recycled and natural materials can provide important learning opportunities for children.

- Materials can be used in variety of ways, limited only by imagination
- Children enjoy arranging and rearranging material from the 'real' world
- Materials can be used in conjunction with other equipment to provide more challenging and interesting experiences
- When combinations of materials are changed frequently, exploration and discovery are stimulated
- Co-operation and sharing of ideas is often enhanced when children are free to arrange and explore materials together
- Dramatic play is enhanced, as children take on a role relevant to the environment they have made
- When used carefully, the provision of these materials helps to maintain and expand children's interests and ideas
- Children can learn about the importance of recycling and caring for the natural environment.
- Will assist children to develop an increased understanding of the interdependence between land, people, plants and animals.
- Play spaces in natural environments foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education.

Children of all ages need to experience the natural world:

- To begin to feel a sense of belonging and responsibility for the world of living things, plants and animals
- As our awareness of environmental issues increases so does the value of environmental curriculum for children. Providing children with knowledge, skills and attitudes on environmental issues will assist them to become environmentally responsible. Participating in environmentally sustainable activities will provide opportunities for children to connect with and to embrace the natural world.

You can begin to develop a collection of natural materials to use with children. Here are a few suggestions:

- Cloths and fabrics: many fabrics are made from plant or animal fibres – cotton, linen, silk. You will find suitable fabrics for use in children's play in your home – old scarves, curtains and leftover scraps of material

- Natural materials: shells, pebbles, rocks, twigs, leaves, feathers, tree bark, gumnuts, seed pods (be sure to check if these are poisonous or too small for little fingers!) Log sections make great outdoor play materials
- Dolls: small knitted dolls, wooden carved dolls, peg dolls, cloth dolls, corn husk dolls, rope dolls make interesting changes from commercially produced dolls
- Animals: small wooden animals from different countries
- Blocks: wooden off-cuts make a change from commercially produced blocks.
- Boxes: shoe boxes, grocery boxes and packing boxes are great fun for imaginative play
- Cane baskets: these come in a great variety of shapes and sizes and can be used for dramatic play or storing materials.

Self Help Question 8

You are planning to set up a home corner using natural and recycled materials. Explain how you would set this up in the room? What would you need to consider and what resources could you provide?

Notice how children are using the materials you have provided. Describe why play is important to children? Also briefly describe the role of the educator during the children’s play and list two ways to extend on the children’s play and interests.

Diversity and Anti-Bias Curriculum

When planning the curriculum, it is important to consider an anti-bias approach in the provision of experiences, environment design, interactions and service procedures. This approach values and reflects diversity in all aspects of the curriculum by encouraging both children and adults to feel confident, competent and comfortable in dealing with diversity’ (Dau, 2001, p xxi).

‘Respecting diversity means within the curriculum valuing and respecting practices, values and beliefs of families. Educators honour the histories, cultures, languages, traditions, child rearing practices and lifestyle

choices of families. They [educators] value children's different capacities and abilities and respect individual differences in families' home lives' (EYLF, 2009, p13).

Making curriculum decisions that uphold all children's rights to have their cultures, identities, abilities and strengths acknowledged and valued are paramount. The curriculum can play a vital role in giving children positive messages about diversity, challenging bias and eliminating discrimination. Educators need to avoid using a 'tokenistic' approach that represents groups in stereotypical ways or simply offers 'one-off' activities or theme days. An anti-bias program promotes diversity by constructing an environment that:

- Reflects diversity positively through resources and materials
- Reflects individual children's needs (e.g. culture, developmental and community)
- Provides experiences that encourage children to explore, ask questions about aspects of diversity
- Challenges all negative attitudes and behaviours
- Encourages children to recognise and challenge bias in themselves and others
- Involves families, educators and the wider community
- Building strong links between home and the early childhood setting and developing partnerships between families and educators.

Self Help Question 9

Describe a range of strategies used in your service to promote diversity

List 3 experiences that you could implement that would encourage children to explore and ask questions about diversity?

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Assessment Task

1. List three points that define a child-centred curriculum
2. Provide three strategies of how you might implement a child-centred curriculum
3. What is the value of a child-centred curriculum? Provide three points.
4. Notice (observe) and gather information about the strengths and interests of an individual or group of children in your service. Write a brief summary of the information you have gathered and the methods used
5. Use this information to respond and provide an appropriate range of materials to enable the child (ren) to explore their interests.
 - List the materials you have provided and briefly describe how you have set them up to create an appealing play space and how the space reflected the child's voice. You may want to consider including a diagram or photo for this part of the task.
 - Briefly describe how this experience captures the child's ideas and intentions.
6. Continue to observe children during their play with the materials you have provided. Describe why play is important to children? Also briefly describe the role of educators during the children's play and list at least two ways to extend on the children's play and interests