

## Early Childhood Development Guide

On December 12, 2007, former President Bush signed Public Law 110-134. This law, "Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007," reauthorized the Head Start program. Congress required the expansion of Program Performance Standards in this reauthorization. Thus, revisions to the previous Head Start Act were specified in this law as well as authorization of Head Start through September 30, 2012 (ECLKC, 2007). The emphasis was on cognitive, social, and emotional development to promote a child's school readiness. The Child Outcomes Framework is an identification of goals for all children who participate in Head Start programs. These goals encompass a learning environment for children that enhances language, literacy, mathematics, science, social and emotional growth, creative arts, physical and health development. The families of the children should also be provided educational and other related services.

The reauthorization (1998) placed emphasis on the importance of achieving quality standards. Curriculum is a core component of meeting this goal in any Head Start or early childhood program. Early childhood teaching staff can benefit greatly from curricula resources that address the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Because curriculum is essential to effective instruction for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, a need for an early childhood product surfaced. The intent of the Product Development Team at Mentoring Minds was to develop a curriculum-planning tool that would guide early childhood teachers as they design purposeful learning environments for children and their parents. Thus, the *Early Childhood Development Guide* was created.

Research shows that parents and families can make a difference in the education of their children. The U.S. Department of Education (1994) emphasized family-school partnerships in legislative initiatives: GOALS 2000 and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This joint effort strengthened the partnerships of families, schools, and communities in helping all children reach high standards. Schumacher (2003) reported the necessity of Head Start programs building relationships with parents from enrollment of their children to departure as required by performance standards.

Parental involvement includes the provision of "family literacy services." More specifically, the Head Start guidelines (IRA, 2007) require "interactive literacy activities between parents and their

children" and "training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children." Ideas that promote literacy development between parents and children are specified throughout the Early Childhood resource. The importance of training parents is also noted in the curriculum planning tool.

Henderson & Berla (1994) found that the involvement of parents and families have a favorable effect on academic achievement, attitudes, and attendance of children. The suggested activities connect schools and families and help children be successful in school. Research by Epstein & Dauber (1993) shows a connection between school climate and the involvement of parents. Families must be encouraged to participate and develop relationships with the teachers and other families. Schools must work to improve the personal growth of families by educating parents on child development and parenting skills (Schumacher, 2003). The *Early Childhood Development Guide* identifies multiple suggestions on how to create a positive climate by educating parents /volunteers and providing the necessary supports to help them become partners in the education of children.

Wolverton (2001) and Taylor (2001) both agree Program Performance Standards are an integral part of Early Head Start and Head Start programs. Both reveal that while not all Head Start curricula mirror each other, all programs must complement the performance standards and child development principles. The cultural beliefs and the environment of the children served affect the curriculum. The learning experiences of the program must be tailored to fit the individual needs of the attending children while meeting the Performance Standards. A section in the guide delineates these program standards.

Taylor (2001) describes Head Start as "the nation's laboratory for innovations in the early childhood field." She states that Head Start can meet the mandates of the Program Performance Standards proposed by Congress. A quality Head Start program is not defined by the type program offered, but by the end result, which should be an improved educational experience for all attending children.

Research reveals that the teacher is likely the most important factor affecting student achievement (Wright, Horn, and Sanders, 1997). This finding is a result of a study involving approximately 60,000 students. It clearly implies that education can be improved by improving the effectiveness of teachers. Haycock (1998) studied this research and that of others, leading her to share that differences in student

achievement existed between students placed with a highly effective teacher and those placed with a highly ineffective teacher.

Effective teachers must model, teach, demonstrate, and allow students to practice the expected behaviors. Using a variety of communication techniques facilitates the success of all types of learners as they comprehend the “how” of what behaviors are expected. Numerous studies were conducted to determine the value of teaching students using their preferred learning styles (Dunn, Griggs, Olson, Beasley, and Gorman, 1995). The finding indicates educational interventions matched to the learning styles of the students would favorably impact student achievement.

Classroom/Behavior Management is a section within the *Early Childhood Development Guide* that contains ideas to help educators plan a safe, secure classroom environment. More specifically, these ideas:

- equip new and experienced teachers with tools for teaching young children
- offer practical, proactive strategies for behavior management
- facilitate communication with parents and volunteers
- promote a safe, secure, positive learning environment
- increase opportunity for academic success
- engage children in appropriate social interactions
- help plan effective lessons that focus on student mastery of early childhood outcomes

Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2003) reviewed over 100 studies on classroom management to determine the effects on student achievement. The analysis yielded many findings. One major finding revealed is individual teachers do impact student achievement. Well-managed classrooms do not appear overnight. It takes effort and a commitment from every teacher to create effective classrooms on a school-wide level. Studies indicate teachers can learn how to change student behaviors and focus them in a more positive direction. The *Early Childhood Development Guide* seeks to create an environment where teaching and children flourish. The suggestions in the Classroom/Behavior Management section help teachers plan productive learning experiences.

Creating a classroom learning environment that allows children to feel comfortable to take risks and promotes feelings of security and belonging is a vital ingredient for effective early childhood programs. Attention must be given to the arrangement of furniture, equipment,

and space to enhance learning. While planning, consideration is also directed toward the development of positive behavior. Challenging behaviors may be present that cause disruption of learning activities (Beh Neas, 2003; Eberhardt-Wright, 2002). Teachers of young children must employ strategies to help young children exhibit self-control.

Approaches to Learning is another section in the flip chart. This section is a required domain identified by Performance Standards. The three divisions of the domain are Initiative and Curiosity, Engagement and Participation, and Reasoning and Problem Solving. Activities and/or strategies, that develop the designated indicators in each of these areas, are suggested for teachers based on developmentally appropriate practices. The Southern Regional Education Board (1994) noted such practices must reflect knowledge of child development stages. Therefore, suggestions denote children are different and consideration is given to the uniqueness of individual children. According to the Board, appropriate early childhood programs should demonstrate active exploratory experiences, combination of individual and group experiences, self-initiated hands-on activities, continual and supportive interaction among and between adults and children, and rotation of passive and active experiences.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1996) notes learning experiences must be meaningful and authentic as opposed to an isolated skills' focus. Piaget (1963) shared that children only comprehend when they make discoveries and are involved in learning that is personal to them. The quality of engagement among children affects their learning (Almqvist, et.al., 20007). When engagement increases, the level of involvement and interests of the children in higher-level thinking is noticeable. These findings have implications for constructing a problem-solving framework for early childhood learners.

A problem-solving environment teaches children responsibility and shows them their ideas have value (Thompson, 2007). Teachers and parents must provide time for children to make choices and learn from the choices made. These adults observe, listen, and ask questions that enhance the problem-solving process. The classroom and the home can serve as problem-solving environments. Talking out situations, asking open-ended questions, and using manipulatives offer ways to promote problem-solving opportunities for children (Elliott, 2007; NAEYC, 2003). Play provides a stimulating environment that develops skills, including independence, thinking, self-esteem, and

multiple social skills (e.g., cooperation, team work, sharing, taking turns) (Elliott, 2007; Hacker, 2008; NAEYC, 2003). The suggestions in the flip chart comply with these findings.

Programs in Head Start and Early Head Start collaborated with the Head Start Bureau to seek appropriate avenues for working with the diverse population of students and families. This search initiated an English Language Learners Focus Group to solicit ways to address the needs of children in early childhood programs. Several reports were shared regarding available research on English Language Learners (ELLs) in Head Start. An ELL Focus Group Report (2002) stated that "approximately 27% of the children served by Head Start speak a language other than English at home, and more than 140 languages are represented in Head Start programs nationwide." English learners are the fastest growing population in our public school system (Leos, 2004). Pearlman (2002) notes that by 2015 more than 50 percent of the public school K-12 student population in the United States will be English language learners. These statistics indicate the necessity of improving services to address language, literacy, and cognitive development of early learners.

Based on teaching ELLs and conferring with numerous teachers and specialists, Samway and Taylor (2008) note that teachers should encourage native language communication in the home. Parents of English language learners should be involved in the education of their children. The parents are making a cultural adjustment and opportunities to ease this transition must be provided to the parents. King and Fogle (2006) advocate ELL parents communicating to their children in their home language. This communication supports cognitive and linguistic development. Freeman and Freeman (2001) stress the importance of accepting the primary languages and cultures of ELL students as they are learning English. Understanding and showing value for the cultures of all learners help to overcome any misinterpretations and reduce anxieties that may exist. Acceptance of and utilization of the home culture of ELLs may lead to increased performance and improvement in attitude (Garner, LaLonde, & Moorcroft, 1985). English language learners come to school with a wide range of life and educational experiences due to their diverse backgrounds.

Environment plays a vital role in the instruction of ELLs. Students need many opportunities to interact with language and not merely an introduction to English. Swain (1993) advocates an environment that promotes and encourages participation and invites English language

learners to become active learners. Teachers who use strategies that increase participation maximize the potential for learners to demonstrate what they know. The increased participation helps ELLs begin to experience feelings of academic success. Canagarajah (2006) indicated the necessity of shifting to process-focused practices versus those that accent only product or correct responses. These process-focused practices promote increased involvement of students.

Numerous individuals report the importance of using visual, auditory, and tactile aids to make content more understandable to ELLs (Carey, 2007; Herrell & Jordan, 2008; Samway & Taylor, 2008). Realia, demonstrations, gestures, and other media serve as valuable support to concept development. Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean (2000) found that using the native language of students as a vehicle to draw upon prior knowledge is an effective strategy. As ELLs learn content more successfully, their self-confidence in their academic abilities increases which leads to increases in their motivation to learn.

The Product Development Team reviewed the literature surrounding early language development and ELLs to determine appropriate practices. Recommendations made by the Early Head Start National Resource Center @Zero to Three (2001) that support the home languages and cultures of students who are English language learners were also considered. Cruzado-Guerrero(2005) noted the recommended practices align with the required Performance Standards of Early Head Start programs. Activities and suggestions are identified within the *Early Childhood Development Guide* to support the language development and strategies for English language learners.

'Language Development' is the first domain in the Child Outcomes framework for Head Start. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) stress language development as one of the most essential experiences occurring in a child's first five years. During these early years, language develops at a fast pace. Thus, emphasis is placed on both receptive and expressive language.

Dickinson and Tabors (2001) note the connection between language and literacy skills. In addition to speaking, read alouds support language development by building vocabulary and comprehension that children may not usually hear. Research data from a Head Start survey yield an increase in receptive language, yet findings on the national average are higher (ACYF, 2001). Implications from this research indicate receptive language experiences must continue in Head Start and early childhood programs. Acquisition of language is a strong

predictor of future reading and writing success for children. Activities and suggestions are identified within the *Early Childhood Development Guide* under the Language Development and Strategies for English Language Learners tabs.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2002) notes the importance of a solid foundation in the early years to prevent obesity in children. This organization reports there is evidence that children today are at risk of becoming inactive and overweight when they reach adulthood. NASPE advocates that early childhood programs must offer planned daily physical activities. More specifically, this national association published *Active Start* in 2002, a report that recommended 30 minutes of physical play each day for toddlers. Such learning experiences should also include health-related activities. Wall and Rudisill (2004) stated teacher attitudes are important in regards to play. Their research suggests teachers demonstrate interest and enthusiasm toward physical activity with young children. When teachers model and engage in play with children, then favorable health benefits for children result.

After a literature review, justification surfaced for the inclusion of gross motor skills, fine motor skills, and health practices in the curriculum planning guide. The Product Development Team perused the physical activity guidelines developed for children birth to five years by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2006) and Domain 8 of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (2000). Suggestions given in the *Early Childhood Development Guide* for the section, Physical Health and Development, align with these health-related indicators and/or skills.

Children in early childhood programs are diverse in their makeup, representing a variety of cultures and ability levels. Teachers must provide an environment where students grow, develop language, and learn. Children should be provided opportunities to experience learning in ways that interest them. Classroom learning centers allow students to problem solve and explore through hands-on activities and open-ended instruction. It differs from a passive approach of listening to a more hands-on learning styles approach. Learning centers allow children to work in small, flexible groups and take an active role in the learning process (Gregory and Chapman, 2002). Effective early childhood programs focus on active learning because a high degree of learning takes place when students are active rather than passive. Learning has to be important, relevant, and useful to early learners. Differentiated learning requires teachers to be flexible in planning for

instructional needs. Learning centers offer a way to actively engage all students in the learning process. Each learning center is based on the needs of targeted standards that the center is designed to meet.

The remaining tabs in the curriculum planning guide are Social and Emotional Development, Literacy, Mathematics, Science, and Creative Arts. All of these sections are identified domains in the Performance Standards for Head Start. Activities and strategies are suggested that develop the indicators specified in each domain.

The Center for Evidence-Based Practices (CEBP) is an applied research center of the Orlena Hawks Puckett Institute. The CEBP provides researchers and practitioners with opportunities to work together to identify and promote adoption of practices informed by research. Promising practices are being documented in many early childhood centers so that other early childhood programs could replicate these practices. These research-to-practice activities of CEBP can lead to improvement in the education and development of children and assist in healthy family involvement. The Product Development Team reviewed program reports from Wisconsin's Early Childhood Excellence Initiative (2002) and other states prior to defining ideas in the *Early Childhood Development Guide*.

Lally (2008) noted that the curriculum and supportive materials must be responsive to individual learning preferences and attitudes of the children. *The Early Childhood Development Guide* offers a planning format broad enough to allow children to be active learners, to make choices, and to follow their interests. Strategies and activities in the guide assist teachers in planning curriculum that is motivating and responsive to the needs of children.

The *Early Childhood Flip Chart* is a resource that offers information and strategies to assist teachers in the effective delivery of early childhood instruction. This resource guides teachers in implementing academic, behavioral, and instructional strategies that lead to student success. The flip chart contains the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework with strategies and/or activities that address all domains and indicators in the early childhood curriculum. The contents feature bulleted information organized into 14-tabbed sections. The sections are: How to Use the Flip Chart, Strategies for ELL, Parents/Volunteers, Classroom/Behavior Management, Approaches to Learning, Language Development, Physical Health and Development, Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Creative Arts, Social and Emotional Development, and Performance Standards.

This educational tool serves as a curriculum planning guide for teachers of young children (3-5 years of age). The ideas contained help develop language and early literacy skills. The academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of children are addressed through the strategies and activities offered in this resource. This flip chart offers a multitude of suggestions for developing appropriate curriculum, including managing the classroom, teaching English language learners, organizing learning centers, addressing core subject areas, and working with parents and volunteers. An understanding of strategies and of standards can adjust the potential level of teachers in early childhood programs. The *Early Childhood Development Guide* is a rich source for assisting all staff as they differentiate instruction to accommodate student learning.

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