



Carol E.Catron
Jan Allen

EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM

Carol E. Catron

Jan Allen

University of Tennessee, Knoxville



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Preface

We began writing this book in 1985 when we decided that a comprehensive, play-based, developmental curriculum for children was not available for teachers who wanted to match educational philosophy with program focus, to link individual developmental assessment and curriculum planning, and to integrate all aspects of the program for young children, including those with special needs.

Our major purpose in writing this book is to help teachers provide the highest quality programs possible for children, parents, and teachers. Our focus is on creative play curriculum as a means of optimizing children's total development in the areas of personal awareness, emotional well-being, socialization, communication, cognition, and perceptual motor skills. Creativity is not simply an additional developmental domain; the potential for creative development is inherent in all domains and is an integral part of a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Creative processes are essential for

children to fully realize skills in problem solving and the generation of innovative ideas; play is the method through which creative potential is fostered and developed.

We have drawn from several sources to develop the creative play curriculum model. Our educational backgrounds in the disciplines of child development, early childhood education, and teacher education made it possible to use the theoretical and empirical knowledge from these fields to draw conclusions and suggest implications for curriculum development and implementation. From our teaching and administrative experiences in public and private kindergarten, preschool programs, Head Start, child care cooperatives, and university laboratories, we learned what was effective classroom practice when research and theory failed to provide the answers. This has allowed us to combine research and theory with practical guidelines for using and evaluating curricula.

CONTENT

This text covers basic principles and current research in early childhood curricula; however, it also is a comprehensive guide to planning programs with a play-based, developmental curriculum for children from birth to age 5. This creative play model presents an integrated, individualized curricular approach that helps teachers to be sensitive to and plan for young children with a variety of developmental and cultural backgrounds.

Several special features contribute to the usefulness and comprehensiveness of the book.

 A major feature is the emphasis on creative play to support children's learning and development.
 In addition to presenting an overview of other curricula models, this text describes using cre-

- ative play to implement the various components of this curriculum model. This book allows the reader to understand the specific steps in implementing a play-based philosophy of young children's learning in a program setting.
- Another feature is the comprehensive nature of the curriculum that demonstrates the complex and interrelated components of the visible and invisible curriculum. This benefits students and practitioners by outlining all the components necessary to plan and implement an effective early childhood curriculum and the relationship of each component to the overall program.
- A third feature is the integration of developmental assessment and curriculum planning. A developmental checklist is included that is de-

signed to correlate with curriculum objectives. In the text, assessment information is presented to support the belief that curriculum planning and child assessment are integrated and complementary processes rather than separate or parallel functions. Students and practitioners can understand the importance of using information about children's development in both activity planning and child assessment.

 A fourth feature is the integration throughout all curricular components of information for programming for young children with special needs. Adaptations for use of the curriculum and activities for children with special needs are included throughout the book to help early childhood teachers plan for meeting the needs of all young children, including those with special needs, throughout the program.

 An additional feature is the inclusion of sample forms and charts that can be reproduced and used in early childhood programs.

ORGANIZATION

The book is organized into four major sections. Part I, Early Childhood Curriculum, explains the purpose of curriculum in early childhood programs and influences on curriculum development. It presents several curricula and describes various components of a curriculum. A specific curriculum model, creative play, is described in detail and is the organizing framework of the remainder of the book. The creative play curriculum model is a flexible, openended model that is easily adapted by teachers for a range of age groups from infancy through preschool and for a variety of populations of children.

Part II, *Invisible Curriculum*, presents information about early childhood program aspects that significantly affect the teaching and learning environment yet are not always visible to the observer and, unfortunately, not always carefully planned. These program aspects must be thoughtfully considered and designed before the program is ready for children and families. In this section, there are separate chapters on the role of the teacher, family involvement, classroom management and guidance, classroom design and organization, and the outdoor

play environment. These chapters include both theoretical and practical application information for teachers.

Part III, *Visible Curriculum*, focuses on the more obvious dimensions of early childhood programs: curriculum activities and child observation and assessment. This section includes a chapter on each developmental domain with a section of classroom activities for each age group.

Part IV, *Professional Issues in Early Childhood Curricula and Programs*, highlights issues for teachers striving to implement quality programs for children. These issues include working environments, staff interactions and relationships, development of a professional identity, and moving beyond mandates and minimal standards to creating excellence in early childhood programs.

The appendices of the textbook contain developmental assessment instruments, including a developmental checklist, instruction manual, and guidelines for writing child observations, all of which are easily reproducible for use by students and practitioners.

PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES

Each chapter begins with a vignette that describes various practical situations and dilemmas with children and families. These "real world" examples encourage readers to critically analyze the situation and consider ways to address the problem. A list of questions following each vignette identifies issues that should be examined before choosing a course of action. Each chapter ends with a suggested solution to the problem. The vignettes are examples derived from our own experiences in early childhood programs and are designed to help readers make the linkage between information and implementation.

Each area of children's development is presented in a separate chapter and linked with practical information to help teachers support and facilitate this developmental domain. Curriculum activities for each domain are described at the end of chapters 10 through 15. Also key terms throughout the text are italicized and defined for the reader. Examples for practical application are included throughout the text with lists of guidelines that suggest program evaluation criteria and implementation ideas.

Preface

TERMINOLOGY

We use the terms child care, preschool programs, and early childhood education interchangeably to refer to programs that serve children from birth to age 8. The book's emphasis is on programs for children from birth to age 5. We define these groups, for curriculum planning and environmental design

purposes, as: infants, 6 weeks to 15 months; toddlers, 15 months to 3 years; and preschoolers, 3 to 5 years. Most programs provide a variety of multi-age groupings; teachers should choose and adapt activities and teaching techniques that are appropriate for a specific classroom.

PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

This textbook reflects our lifelong professional commitment to creating the best learning environment for young children and our own struggles with securing adequate funding for early childhood programs, designing growth-promoting environments for teachers as well as children, searching for solutions to teacher burnout and turnover, working effectively and compassionately with children and

families under stress, and educating administrators and politicians about the needs of children and families. The heart and soul of our writing is a concern for providing excellent programs for children, parents, and teachers. Our hope is that this concern for the quality of young children's lives will have an impact on curricula in early childhood education programs.

Author Profiles

Carol E. Catron is director of the Child Development Laboratories and a faculty member in the Department of Child and Family Studies at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her doctorate is in early childhood education from George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. Her research and writing interests are in the areas of play therapy, curriculum development, staff development and evaluation, and storytelling with young children. She also is involved in child advocacy efforts through professional organizations and agencies and serves as a mentor and a validator for the NAEYC's (National Association for the Education of Young Children) Academy of Early Childhood Programs.

Jan Allen is associate professor in the Department of Child and Family Studies at The University of Tennesee, Knoxville. Her doctorate is in child development from Purdue University. Her most recent research has focused on teacher-child interactions in child care, early childhood educators' satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and children's role as participants in research in early childhood programs. Her interests in public policy and parent education have also focused on child care and families, children and stress, and child advocacy. Her publications include journal articles and book chapters on child care, children's fears, preschoolers' moral reasoning, and child sexual abuse.

Contributing Authors

Bobbie Beckmann is a special education teacher in the Maryville Public Schools and a former special education coordinator in The University of Tennessee Child Development Laboratories. She has a master of arts degree in speech pathology from the University of Tennessee and holds a certificate of clinical competence in speech-language pathology. Her areas of expertise are diagnosing and treating children with diverse developmental levels and facilitating the mainstreaming of preschool children with special needs.

Kathy Carlson is coordinator of the preschool program in the Child Development Laboratories, Department of Child and Family Studies, The University of Tennesee, Knoxville. She has a master of science degree in home economics from Purdue University and a master of science degree in child and family studies from the University of Tennessee. Her areas of interest include classroom design and organization, preshoolers' writing process, art, music, and emergent literacy. Her most recent research includes assessing preschoolers' writing skills and assessing preschoolers' emergency telephone skills.

Amy R. Kerlin is a child care consultant and former coordinator of the toddler program in the Child Development Laboratories, Department of Child and Family Studies, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She has a master of science degree in child development from the University of Tennessee. Her areas of interest include toddler prosocial behavior, environmental organization, parent involvement, and child guidance and behavior management.

Anne Miller Stott is coordinator of the toddler program in the Child Development Laboratories, Department of Child and Family Studies, The University of Tennesee, Knoxville; she previously was infant coordinator and CDL program coordinator. Her master of science degree is in child and family studies from the University of Tennesee. Her areas of interest include parent-teacher relationships, curriculum development, health, nutrition, and illness in child care settings. Her most recent research has focused on parents' expectations for child care programs.

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Melinda Sutton, who was primarily responsible for typing, editorial assistance, and production of many revisions of the manuscript, contributed her time and expertise as well as her support and encouragement to this project. We could not have done it without her! Also involved as support staff in this endeavor were Mary Kruyer, Michele Pagano, and Melissa Mustard, whose efforts supported the final preparation of the manuscript.

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We are appreciative of the patience, encouragement, and support of our families, friends, colleagues, and students who were gracious enough to "bear with us" during the writing and production of the book. And finally, this book could not have been written without the insight into children's development learned from Sharon, Jimmy, Christy, and especially Kermit, who as a wise and delightful three-year-old shared the secrets of childhood that have become the heart of this book.

C.E.C. J.A.

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ONE_

EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM



Role of Curriculum in Early Childhood Programs

