

A CHILD GOES NORTH

CURRICULUM
GUIDE FOR
PRESCHOOL
CHILDREN

Fifth Edition

Barbara J. Taylor



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A CHILD GOES FORTH

A CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Seventh Edition

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**A CHILD
GOES FORTH**

To Young Children Everywhere

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the
 day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

Walt Whitman
From "Autumn Rivulets"
in *Leaves of Grass*

Preface

In Walt Whitman's poem "Autumn Rivulets," a child becomes part of all he sees and does. Children of all ages are curious, imitative, and growing, and the title *A Child Goes Forth* reflects this involvement of children with the world around them. Part of what has made *A Child Goes Forth* a successful text for early childhood education courses is the book's emphasis on the individuality of each child, and in this edition there is greater emphasis and clarity on providing programs and activities that are *developmentally appropriate* for the children. In order to do this, parents and teachers should understand and insist upon the components necessary for good environments for young children—within and outside the home. Adults should not be intimidated by commercial materials, academic pressures, or loud-spoken (but uninformed) adults. My philosophy is that all facets of a child's personality—social, intellectual, spiritual, physical, and emotional—are interrelated, and that a relaxed, unstructured atmosphere is most conducive to effective learning.

The revised seventh edition of this curriculum planner for teachers of young children retains the strengths of the previous editions while adding information that makes the book more up-to-date, comprehensive, and challenging. Current research has been included, new topics have been addressed (computers in the classroom of young children, and anti-bias curriculum), and social studies now includes holidays and field trips. The book is still full of practical and meaningful tasks, activities, and games for youngsters.

Throughout this text, the teacher is generally referred to as "you" or "she," the child as "he." This has been done for convenience' sake and in no way implies that all teachers are female (or that males make inferior teachers) or that all children are male. Unfortunately, men have had a certain reluctance to enter an occupation that has been traditionally "female"; men in the field of education are often teaching older children or in administrative positions. Nevertheless, young children need and want male teachers, and one hopes there will be an increasing trend toward more men teaching young children.

Reflecting current changes in preschool curricula, the seventh edition of *A Child Goes Forth* covers ages 2 through 5 years. To help in understanding and meeting the needs of different age groups, the book highlights developmental characteristics for each age group and shows how these relate to planning, curriculum, and general expectations. Where children of mixed ages (family grouping) are housed together, it becomes very important for teachers to understand and plan for differences in skills, interests, and needs. When the curricula do not meet the needs of the children, it is *the curricula that need modification—not children*.

The bibliography has been updated; however, classic references of earlier editions have sometimes been used because of their importance to the field or to note similarities or changes over time.

I have approached lesson planning in a flexible way, by suggesting activities that will encourage the children to investigate, hypothesize, and solve problems for themselves. The four components of the plan (opening, gathering, activity, and closing) lend well to planning, and can be extended or varied as appropriate.

I encourage centers to move toward the two-teacher model, with both teachers having primary responsibility for planning and guiding different parts of the day. Each can then rotate in the role of lead or support teacher easily and efficiently.

Because hands-on experience is so important in learning, adults as well as children need opportunities to practice. Each chapter begins with the main principles and ends with suggestions for applying the principles taught in that chapter. These applications will be more valuable to some teachers or settings than to others. The applications are not intended to be assurances of learning, but merely to direct thinking into productive channels. Applications that are inappropriate can be modified or deleted, or more appropriate ones can be substituted.

The importance of nutrition for growth, development, and learning in young children is more and more evident. For this reason, Chapter 11 includes basic information about nutrition, how it influences behavior, ways to involve children in food preparation, and how to help them enjoy eating and mealtimes while establishing good lifelong food patterns.

I would like to thank the following reviewers for their suggestions: Greg Bell, Indiana University/Purdue University, Fort Wayne; Phyllis Click (emeritus), Moorpark College, Moorpark, California; Marlene R. Evans, C. H. E., Arizona Western College; Linda Kelly, Yorba Linda Methodist Nursery School; and Margaret King, Ohio University.

I hope this new edition will motivate all adults to plan well, teach effectively, and reap the joy that comes from being a part of the lives of young children.



Contents

Preface	ix
1. Good Environments for Young Children	1
Main Principles	1
How Young Children Learn Best	2
Misconceptions about Behavior and Learning Styles	4
Other Influences	7
Developmentally Appropriate Practices	10
Application of Principles	16
References	16
2. The Value of Play	19
Main Principles	19
Development During Years 2 through 5	19
Physical Development	19
Social Development	21
Emotional Development	23
Intellectual Development	24
Adults' Perception of Play	26
Safety in Play	28
Outdoor Play	28
Role of the Teacher	29
Values for Children	30
Planning the Area	33
Application of Principles	35
References	35
3. Planning the Curriculum	39
Main Principles	39
What Young Children Are Like	39
2-Year-Olds	40
3-Year-Olds	40
4-Year-Olds	40
5-Year-Olds	41
Summary	41
Components for a Well-Rounded View of the World	43

Role of the Teacher	44	
Suggestions for Teachers	48	
What to Plan	49	
A Good Lesson Plan	50	
<i>Daily Planning Outline</i>	52	
<i>Lesson Plan Checklist</i>	53	
<i>Lesson Plan</i>	57	
Application of Principles	58	
References	58	
4. Creative, Artistic, and Sensory Expression		61
Main Principles	61	
Values for Children	62	
Role of the Teacher	66	
Values of Specific Activities	70	
Suggested Experiences	71	
Developmental Examples	92	
Application of Principles	93	
References	94	
5. Language Arts		97
Main Principles	97	
General Overview	98	
Listening	99	
Speaking	106	
Reading	109	
Writing	114	
Role of the Teacher	117	
Computers in the Young Child's Classroom	119	
Application of Principles	126	
References	126	
6. Music and Movement Education		133
Main Principles	133	
Music—Developmental Characteristics	134	
<i>Learning Through Music and Movement</i>	137	
Teaching Songs	139	
<i>Introducing Rhythm Instruments</i>	140	
<i>Activities to Increase Music Abilities</i>	141	
Movement Education	142	
Application of Principles	146	
References	147	
7. Science		149
Main Principles	149	
Role of the Teacher	150	
<i>Values for Children</i>	152	
Activities to Increase Awareness of Social Science	155	
Activities to Increase Awareness of Biological Science	157	
Activities to Increase Awareness of Physical Science	164	
Application of Principles	170	
References	170	

8. Social Studies, Anti-Bias Curriculum, and Field Trips	173
Main Principles	173
Social Studies	173
<i>Values for Children</i>	174
Anti-Bias Curriculum	174
<i>Values for Children</i>	175
Birthdays	183
Halloween	184
Thanksgiving	185
December Holidays	186
Valentine's Day	186
Easter	187
Fourth of July	187
Exercise for Teachers	188
Field Trips	188
<i>Values for Children</i>	188
Essentials for Field Trips	189
Checklist for Field Trip	190
Suggested Plan for a Field Trip	195
Suggested Field Trips	196
Summary	197
Application of Principles	197
References	198
9. Mathematics	201
Main Principles	201
Stage of Development	203
Learning Opportunities	204
Appropriate Mathematical Experiences	206
<i>Activities to Increase Mathematical Conceptualization</i>	208
Application of Principles	212
References	212
10. Transition Activities	215
Main Principles	215
Good Transition Activities	218
Routines	221
Teaching Suggestions	222
Application of Principles	239
References	239
11. Food, Nutrition, and Health	241
Main Principles	241
Nutrition	242
Hyperactivity	248
Food Preferences of Young Children	249
Food Preparation	249
<i>Checklist for a Food Experience</i>	253
Snack Suggestions from Basic Four Food Groups	254
Enjoyment	256
Food-Related Experiences	258
Health	259

Application of Principles	259
References	260

12. Guidance Techniques for Teachers and Parents 263

Main Principles	263
The Ultimate Goal: Self-Control	264
Listen to Children and Talk with Them	264
Plan Successful Experiences	264
Send and Receive Clear Messages	265
Reinforce Actions You Want Repeated	266
Use a Positive Approach	267
Provide Guidelines for Behavior	268
Show Respect for Children	270
Guide Through Love Instead of Fear or Guilt	270
Be a Good Model	271
Be on Guard for Warning Signals	271
Avoid Power Struggles	273
Offer Legitimate Choices and Accept Decisions	273
Encourage Independence	274
Provide Acceptable Avenues for Release of Feelings	275
Help Children Learn Through Participation	275
One Final Note	275
Application of Principles	275
References	276

APPENDIX A. Characteristics of Young Children 277

APPENDIX B. Suggested Curriculum Topics 282

APPENDIX C. Lesson Plans 289

APPENDIX D. Recipes 296

Recipes for Creative and Artistic Expression	296
Recipes for Food	298

APPENDIX E. Additional Sources, Books for Children, Record Sources, and Publishers 304

Index 329

CHAPTER 1

Good Environments for Young Children

MAIN PRINCIPLES

A good environment for young children includes:

1. Knowing the optimum methods, sequences, and timing for their best learning.
2. Recognizing and modifying misconceptions about their behavior and learning styles.
3. Attention to all aspects of their lives (home, school, religion, other).
4. Acknowledgment and promotion of developmentally appropriate programs.
5. Integrating the areas of curriculum.

How often have you heard the statement, “Children are our best resources,” and then wondered just what was meant or how to best utilize this statement? If this statement had reference to a child in a family, a child in a community, or a child in the confines of the world, it could mean that the hopes of the family, the community, or the world reside in the abilities and performance of that child. Take, for example, the role of the “expecter,” who assumes that great rewards, returns, and benefits will occur (internally and externally) for individuals or groups. Then take, for another example, the role of the “expectee.” Is there to be assistance, guidance, and encouragement along the way, or must the child stumble and progress as best as possible? Sometimes the messages that are sent and those that are received are quite different—depending upon the frame of reference, confidence, and desired outcome of the sender and receiver. Expecting too much, too soon, and without thinking through the myriad implications and complications, may invite premature failure or total disaster.

Adults who work with young children are really involved with the “pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.” Young children are tender, malleable, trusting, lovable, curious, and teachable. It is as if the teacher or parent were seated at the potter’s wheel, about to take the clump of clay and mold it into a thing of beauty and value. At the same time, the adult does not have the privilege of molding a child into a preconceived idea

of “perfection”; rather, the adult must help the child to capitalize on his individual talents and abilities so he can live happily and healthily in his world and feel good about himself and his contribution.

This chapter identifies some of the important considerations in providing good learning and living environments for young children.

Throughout this text, the teacher is generally referred to as “you” or “she,” the child as “he.” This has been done for convenience’ sake and in no way implies that all teachers are female (or that males make inferior teachers) or that all children are male. Unfortunately, men have had a certain reluctance to enter an occupation that has been traditionally “female”; men in the field of education are often teaching older children or in administrative positions. Nevertheless, young children need and want male teachers, and one hopes there will be an increasing trend toward more men teaching young children.

HOW YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN BEST

In early European history, children were treated like adults, were dressed like adults, worked like adults, and were considered adult in all ways except size. They were expected to carry their full share of responsibility in providing for the family. In some cases, children performed tasks that adults could not: they crawled in small openings while working in mines, spent long hours in the fields, and survived on less food and sleep.

In the past century, observation and research have revealed that children are not miniature adults. They have feelings similar to adults, such as fear, joy, and pain, but their learning patterns are different from those of adults. Piaget, the Swiss epistemologist, formulated a model for the stages of intellectual development in children as follows (1974):

Stage 1: Sensorimotor (0 to 24 months of age)

Stage 2: Preoperational (2 to 7 years of age)

Stage 3: Concrete operations (7 to 11 years of age)

Stage 4: Formal operations (11 years of age on)

The first, or **sensorimotor**, stage involves learning through the five senses, the emerging ability to control one’s body movements, and a combination of both. Children under 2 years of age mouth and touch everything, listen intently, have a keen sense of smell, and notice even the smallest thing on the floor. They are into everything in or out of reach. They crawl into small or dangerous spaces without fear; nothing is safe from them.

The second, or **preoperational**, stage is the focal point in early childhood education, representing expansion of the first stage. During the years of 2 to 7, children are somewhat self-centered and still oriented toward learning through the senses and body skills. They broaden their scope of activity from the home base to other individuals and experiences. Their best learning is done through hands-on experiences. They live in a “here-and-now” world and need concrete experiences—things that they can explore through the five senses and opportunities to interact with things that are real and present. They imitate, question, and practice. From birth, they have been thinkers; during the second stage they begin to handle abstract concepts, although the ideas of past and future are difficult for them.

In addition to concrete experience and sensory involvement, children in this stage learn best when language is used to increase vocabulary and ideas, when opportunities to practice problem solving are provided, when activities are appropriate for their level of development (not too easy or too difficult, but challenging), and when they have interactions with other children and adults. Other aspects to consider are individual



Children learn best through involvement with others and materials.

readiness, opportunities, materials, support, freedom to explore, degree of involvement, variety of experiences, and repetition. Practice, guidance, and motivation are important to children as they learn about themselves and their environment. Hopefully, most of their experiences will be positive so that they develop self-confidence.

The third and fourth stages (**concrete** and **formal operations**) are beyond the scope of this book; however, the reader may find value in investigating these later stages. Many child development texts or articles in professional journals would be good sources of information.

Helping children develop good work habits is also important in learning. Stipek (1983) compiles several studies relating to work habits and formulates the following basic conclusions:

The children who learn most are those who persist at tasks rather than giving up as soon as the task becomes difficult, who pay attention to the task and select tasks that offer some challenge rather than the easiest available or ones that they could not possibly do, and who work on a task alone without unnecessary request for help. . . . The teachers of children with good work habits gave fewer directions, responded to children's questions more, and offered unrequested information less (pp. 25, 28).

Thus, developing good work habits depends on three things: the child, the task, and the adult.

Children need opportunities to work on their own and feel rewarded from their own efforts. They may need some guidance in the tasks undertaken, but the most rewarding thing is how they feel personally. They should feel good because of their efforts and results. The adult must plan well. This is simplified by knowing what to expect of children in general and each child in particular. The adult should expect children to succeed and convey confidence in and to them. The adult should meet their needs rather than his own by being unobtrusive and nondirective. The children should be allowed to take the initiative. Praise that comes from the adult should be more related to attempts and progress than to final outcomes. According to Stipek, a teacher or parent who rewards "less-than-optimal performance" prevents children from developing an understanding of a relationship between effort and performance. For example:

A group of preschool children were involved in a planting experience. They had a bucket of dirt, individual containers, spoons, bulbs, seeds, and a small watering can. Unnoticed by the children, the teacher became distracted. The children busied themselves with the task at hand. Shaun filled his container. Then, realizing it might not be a good idea just to lay the bulbs and seeds on top of the dirt, he emptied his container. This time he put the seeds and bulbs in the bottom and filled the jar with soil. Thoughtfully, he looked at the jar. Evidently deciding that this also was not the best idea, he spooned the dirt out until he reached the bulbs and seeds. The bulbs were easily retrieved, but the seeds became a problem. Carefully, he spooned the dirt onto the table. At first he tenderly stirred the dirt with his spoon but finally resorted to using his fingers to pick out the seeds one by one. Then he remembered how they had used cotton balls when they sprouted seeds previously. He got some small, white cotton balls from the shelf, lightly dampened them at the sink, and returned to the activity. He picked up each seed and placed it on a cotton ball. This time, as he filled his jar, he was very precise in placing the dirt, bulbs, and seeds. When the jar was full, he patted the dirt gently and slowly poured water from the can. His masterpiece was finished! By now the teacher had returned and was quietly observing the different skills and methods of the children. Shaun showed her his jar and told her of his different attempts at planting the bulbs and seeds and how he had finally succeeded. One could tell from the look of satisfaction on his face that Shaun was pleased with his planting experience. The teacher's smile and interest confirmed his ability to solve his problem.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BEHAVIOR AND LEARNING STYLES

In general, when 2-year-olds are mentioned, first thoughts are of behavior:

$$\text{age} + \text{negativism} = \text{"terrible 2s"}$$

While negative behavior might be expressed more vigorously at 2 years than at most other ages, this is not the only age when a person is negative. Some individuals never get beyond this stage. But because negativism is so often associated with the young child, this concept is briefly explored here.

At 2 years of age, children are striving for independence but lack the knowledge and skill to get it. They may constantly use the word *NO!*, even when they want the opposite; they may become rigid or limp all over, use aggressive behavior, such as biting, kicking, and scratching; they may run away or, worst of all, throw a tantrum. They cannot verbalize feelings or desires, so they revert to behavior—with vigor. To them, negativism is felt but may often be short-lived. It does get results. Instead of ignoring or playing down the behavior, adults often force more negativism before attending to the behavior. The 2-year-olds then see that negative behavior has to be increased in intensity or duration in order to get results.

Hurlock (1964) has an early but still applicable and interesting discussion on negativism. She states that this tendency can result from aggressive discipline, intolerance toward normal childish behavior, refusal by the child to carry out requests when and how the adult requires, adult interference, inconsistent training, early toilet training, or reaction of people to different tempos. Negativism begins at about 18 months of age, reaches a peak between 3 and 6 years of age, and then recedes rapidly. The decline results partly from social influences, partly because children learn that compliance is to their advantage, and partly because parents learn to show more respect for the children. Negativism is usually more frequent and more severe in poorly adjusted children but also appears in well-adjusted children. Between the ages of 4 and 6 years, children change resistance from physical to verbal forms. They also pretend not to hear or understand, refuse to see the point, insist on reopening issues, complain or act irre-