

ECM Curriculum

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many . . . (Deuteronomy 11:18-21)



- ✓ **Faith development is the core of the curriculum in the Lutheran early childhood ministry (ECM).** All activities add to the spiritual life of young children. Multi-sensory activities that help a child understand God’s love for all people and his forgiveness through Christ Jesus are integrated into the curriculum.
- ✓ **Curriculum for young children comes from real life experiences carefully orchestrated and woven together by the teacher as a facilitator.** Formulation of an age-appropriate curriculum takes careful planning to include opportunities for growth in all major developmental areas as well as the creation of a place where children will feel happy, secure and loved.
- ✓ **Curriculum in the ECM is the totality of all experiences from the first hello to the last goodbye.** It includes Bible stories and worship, music, art, language, social studies, science, math, and physical development activities. Learning is integrated throughout the day’s happenings.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed the concept of the developmentally-appropriate curriculum, an approach intentionally adopted by many high quality early childhood centers, and one that has become the hallmark of quality in early childhood education. The concept of developmentally appropriate curriculum has three major components:

1. **A thorough knowledge of child development**—how children grow and what they can do socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically at each stage of development.
2. **Development of the learning environment appropriate to the ages of children in the group**—the developmentally-appropriate curriculum will look very different for infants than for three- or four-year olds.
3. **Development of the learning environment appropriate to the individual needs of each child in the group regardless of age**—in a group of three- and four-year olds, the developmentally-appropriate curriculum will include planning to meet the needs and preferences of each child in the group.

A visitor to a classroom in which teachers are involved in developmentally-appropriate curriculum will notice other characteristics too:

- The physical environment is safe and orderly, and contains varied, stimulating toys and materials.
- Children may select activities and materials that interest them; they learn by being actively involved.
- Adults show respect for children’s needs and ideas, and talk with them in caring ways.
- Parents feel respected and are encouraged to participate in the program.
- Staff members have specialized training in early childhood development, education and care.

Characteristics of Young Children

Curriculum development requires knowledge of the characteristics of young children. The following list generalizes such characteristics. Keep them in mind when making curricular decisions for the ECM.

Young children . . .

- need a Savior
- can grow in faith in God
- are egocentric
- want to feel important
- need to be active
- have short attention spans
- feel vulnerable
- Have difficulty distinguishing between real and make-believe
- are beginners
- are eager for stimulation
- learn through experience and exploration
- are trusting

B Goals of the ECM Curriculum

Through the ECM curriculum seek to have infants, toddlers and preschool-age children to:

- hear and see Jesus' love through loving care
- develop a positive self-concept
- experience meaningful child-adult and child-child interactions
- develop and use verbal language for communication
- learn social skills
- experience a variety of large and fine motor skill-building activities
- become aware of their physical environment
- discover self-directed perceptual motor play
- experience learning through all their senses
- increase their competence to do tasks
- role-play and pretend
- see themselves and others as God's children in his family



C Total Learning Through the ECM Curriculum

If the overall purpose of education is to foster competence in all aspects of life as a Christian, the curriculum must provide opportunities for total learning. This is accomplished when the teacher considers the areas of children's development: spiritual, emotional, social, physical, cognitive and creative. The overall goals of the curriculum will be to meet the needs of the children in each of these areas and at the same time keep the whole child in mind. The following are broad goals for the ECM.

Through the activities in the ECM curriculum the children will grow:

Spiritually

- realize their need for God's love
- know Jesus as their personal Savior
- see themselves as God's children
- feel secure in God's love and care
- develop a sense of trust
- respond to God's love

Emotionally

- develop a positive self-image
- be free to take risks; be comfortable with making mistakes
- develop a sense of security and trust
- show independence and self-responsibility
- channel emotions into appropriate and acceptable outlets

Socially

- learn to play, work and communicate with peers and adults
- adjust to group situations
- accept others even though they may be different than self
- develop a sense of community
- accept changes in routines and environment

Physically

- develop large and small motor coordination
- develop eye-hand and eye-foot coordination
- become aware of his/her own body

Intellectually

- continue to develop language usage and understanding
- develop focus and self-regulation
- complete tasks begun
- develop problem-solving skills
- initiate his/her own activities
- develop pre-reading skills such as:
- visual discrimination
- auditory discrimination
- understanding of symbols
- love of and interest in books

Creatively

- view himself/herself as a unique individual created and valued by God
- express ideas in his/her own unique way
- be free to create artistically using a variety of media
- develop his/her God-given talents and abilities



Curriculum Framework

In its 2009 position statement, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that developmentally appropriate practices result from the process of professionals

making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge:

1. **What is known about child development and learning**
2. **What is known about the strengths, interest, and needs of each individual child in the group**
3. **Knowledge of the social and cultural context in which children live**

Sue Bredekamp, the editor of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, states “teachers whose instruction is developmentally appropriate do not expect all children to learn the same things in the same way on the same day.”

Before beginning actual curriculum planning, it is essential to decide upon a framework to integrate activities. Understanding of child development and appropriate practice plays an important part in determining the curriculum framework.

Two methods, or models, of teaching predominate today. One is child-directed, the other is teacher-directed. Following is a comparison of teaching characteristics present in both.

Child-Directed		Teacher-Directed
Free to use	Time-Space-Materials	Teacher determines use
Follows child’s lead and interest: Serves as resource to the child	Teacher’s Role	Direct, initiate, evaluate and determine child’s performance
Actively oriented with experiments, exploration and questions	Instructional Framework	Step-by-step sequence using predetermined plans
Intrinsic desire to learn	Motivation	External, tangible rewards
Direct experience with knowledge used to accomplish play or a functional task	Concept of Learning	Drill in practice repetition for a skill
Maximum freedom to use teacher intuition, feelings, judgment	Methodology	Defined by a model

Contrasting the two methods, the teacher-directed curriculum is narrower, relating to specific, pre-determined tasks for children to perform. The skills are externally determined and presented to children, and the same concepts are taught to the entire group at the same time.

On the other hand, the child-directed curriculum permits the children freedom to act upon their own curiosity and ideas within a framework of consistency. Children are allowed to initiate their own actions and thus, the curriculum comes from the children.

Teacher-directed activities help children focus their full attention on one adult rather than on themselves.

They require children to inhibit their own egocentric desires and become part of a collective activity. This is very socially demanding for young children.

Therefore, the amount of time designated for group activities must be regulated according to the age of the group. Such activities will help prepare children to handle direct instruction in later years.

Consider also, that young children have a limited attention span and that research has indicated that young children learn more efficiently when they are allowed to experience first-hand the world around them. Direct-instruction programs run the risk of placing young children under pressure and stress.

The Importance of Play

Children learn best through play as they engage in real actions involving tangible objects. Children learn best through direct experiences with their world using all their senses. Play promotes growth in all areas of development in the following ways:

Spiritually

As their emotions are sorted through, children have opportunities to live out relationships of love and forgiveness with one another. Through play they learn they are linked with other children and adults. As problems are encountered, adults attempt to lead children to solve them as a reflection of Christ's love for them.

Emotionally

Children encounter a variety of experiences each day. Most will be rewarding and happy; some may be frustrating, scary, and stressful. These experiences lead to a wide variety of emotions. Play provides opportunities for learning to deal with feelings. Children grow in their awareness of and understanding of their feelings as they act out significant life experiences through symbolic play.

Socially

Through play children learn how to get along with others, share ideas, enter into groups, handle exclusion and practice cooperation. Stages of social ability in play include:

- **unoccupied play**—children watch others rather than play
- **solitary play**—children pursue their own activities within speaking distance of others
- **parallel play**—children play independently yet choose an activity like that of surrounding children; children play beside rather than with others
- **associative play**—children play with other children, converse about the activity, borrow and loan play materials, without organization or a common goal
- **cooperative play**—children play in an organized group for the same purpose and common goal; a division of labor is evident with members of the group taking on different roles

Physically

Play experiences emphasizing physical activity allow children to take risks within safe limits and practice exercising common-sense control.

Feelings of self-esteem are enhanced as children experiment with what their bodies can do and begin to feel physically confident.

Intellectually

Reviews of research show children put together knowledge from direct physical experiences with people and objectives in their world. Reviews also show that children who have been exposed to free-choice play experiences produce more and varied answers to problems than those who were exposed only to structured experiences. Through play children can practice newly acquired skills in repetition of self-initiated activities.

Creatively

As children have the freedom to play, their creative minds are at work. Children can be just what they want to be in their own minds. The creativity that comes with play leads children to become better problem-solvers.

Activities and materials are provided that will stimulate growth and learning through play recognizing that different forms of play will happen simultaneously throughout the class.

Outdoor Play

The outdoor environment must also be included in a preschool curriculum. Preschool children need daily opportunities for large motor development. The outdoor environment needs to be a safe place with opportunities for children to take risks. Outdoor play must be planned and supervised. This area should include activities and equipment that can be used independently along with materials to be used cooperatively.

In addition to large motor activities, children need opportunities to explore outdoors. Creative thinking occurs when art materials, sand, and water tables, and blocks are moved outdoors. Using existing materials in an outdoor setting will provide children additional experiences.

Curriculum Planning

Curriculum plans are based on the adopted objectives. The curriculum reflects the mission, philosophy, objective and goals of the ECM. All activities in the curriculum reflect the congregation's mission statement and beliefs about how young children learn.

When planning the curriculum, know the intended knowledge, skills, and attitudes the children should acquire. These are reflected in the goals set for each lesson or series of lessons. To set goals for daily lessons, ask:

Why?

- Why is this activity being done?
- Why is it important in the curriculum?
- Why choose this piece of equipment?

What?

- What is expected of the children?
Of each child?
- What can be done to make this activity appropriate for Twos? Threes? Fours? Fives?

How?

- How will children change or grow after participating in this activity?

Children in full-time care experience the same curriculum as those in a half-day preschool program. The curriculum continues for those enrolled in the full-day program. The Christian curriculum is integrated into the child's entire day and extended into the home.

H Approaches

Many models exist for developing an early childhood curriculum. These include, but are not limited to, a thematic approach to instruction, Reggio Emilia, the Project Approach, and High Scope. A brief summary of each example follows. Principles of child development and appropriate practice should guide a choice of curriculum.

Thematic

Themes are built around areas of children's interest often using children's literature as the basis for planning. Incorporating all domains of a child's development is included in the theme.

Reggio Emilia

Real life problem solving is encouraged in this curriculum. Special attention is given to children's symbolic language as they work through projects. Children are encouraged to demonstrate their understanding through drawing, writing, dramatic play, and through the use of a variety of art media. Teachers are constantly observing children to gain greater insight into child development.

Project Approach

Making sense of one's experience and to understand the world is the theme of the Project Approach. In this curriculum, themes or topics are generated by student interest. Children are active participants in the learning process. Teachers strive to integrate all areas of development into the theme.

High Scope

Active learning is the key component of the High Scope curriculum. Children engage in key experiences in a child-friendly environment. Positive adult-child interactions occur in a consistent daily routine.

More information on each of these approaches can be found through a local college or university. The internet can also be a source of information.

These models of early childhood education allow for open-ended scheduling. Sample routines are provided to match the length of day. (Cf. Appendix 8.1 Sample Routine Half Day, 8.2 Sample Routine Full Day or in the Chapter 8 folder)



Assessment

Reflective observation provides teachers with a plan for learning. NAEYC states assessment should involve “regular and periodic observation of the child in a variety of circumstances that are representative of the child’s behavior in the program over time.” (Developmentally Appropriate Practice, 2009)

Teachers use a variety of observational tools to document children’s growth and development. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Narrative Reports**—Typically short observations focused on one child. Facts and events are recorded in sequence as they occur. A brief conclusion summarizing the child’s development can be included.
- **Photographs**—Written permission necessary
- **Child Interviews**
- **Work Samples**—Typically these include journal samples, individualized artifacts, not commercially prepared worksheets
- **Anecdotal Notes**—Typically anecdotal notes are brief, concise statements of an observed incident

- **Videotapes**—Written permission necessary
- **Checklists**

Any or all of these observational tools could become part of a child’s portfolio.

Young children master skills at an individual pace. A child’s progress should be compared to his own previous performance and the teacher’s knowledge of child development. An individual child should not be compared to the group as a whole. Cultural and environmental contexts must be considered when assessing young children. On-going assessment may reveal children with special needs who require referral and additional exceptional education services.

Sharing assessment information with parents should be an ongoing partnership. However, planned opportunities to conference provide for important professional exchanges. The planning and closure are also vital steps for conferences. (Cf. Appendix 8.3 Parent Teacher Conferences or in the Chapter 8 folder)





Teaching Practices with Young Children

Appropriate	Inappropriate
Set up experiment to demonstrate how air works.	Show a film or give a mini-lecture on how wind helps us; worksheets follow.
Children draw/paint their ideas after hearing a story.	Give children copied sheets to color.
Encourage children to build a bus, boat.	Teacher builds/draws one for children to copy.
Demonstrate a new game, then lead children through steps to practice it.	Announce new game, then tell children how to play the game.
Ask child to look at her own work to see if there are other things to add or change. Ask if there might be other ways to do the task.	Tell child that what she has done is not right or good enough and she can do better next.
Redirect behavior to a more positive activity. "Chairs are for sitting; do you have an idea of a safe way to get what you need?"	"Don't do that!" "Get down!" "Don't stand on that chair!"
Remind child of rules/procedures. "We wear shirts when we paint." "Clay stays on the table."	Punish child by taking away privileges. Focusing on extrinsic rewards for following rules.
"I know you want to play with the truck. You'll have a chance to do that later."	"We're not doing that today." (Implying "because I said so.")



The Cooperative Classroom

- Play lotto and board games cooperatively by pairs of partners instead of single players.
- Use commercial cooperative board games. (Check the local teacher store for ideas.)
- Use "daily helpers" or "helping hands" for classroom chores. Chart and change daily.
- Encourage cooking activities to which everyone contributes. (Friendship salad, stone soup)
- Make clean-up time a team effort; give a five-minute warning signal; sing a special song.
- Select equipment and play materials that require cooperating and joint social play. (Rocking boat, wagons, water table, sand, ladders and boards)
- Pair shy/outgoing children, new child/familiar child for partner activity games.
- Make group collages and murals
- Schedule "sharing time" for children to show their selected items from home, nature, art work, books, music
- Model cooperative behavior with children and/or staff.

A. Sample Routine Half-Day

MORNING OR AFTERNOON

9:00-10:10 (12:30-1:40)	Arrival, greet each child Active work and play period; self-selected activities/interest centers
10:10-10:30 (1:40-2:00)	Clean-up Group time for activities, stories, finger-plays, music
10:30-10:45 (2:00-2:15)	Toileting and snack
10:45-11:00 (2:15-2:30)	Praise/worship time
11:00-11:20 (2:30-2:50)	Outdoor/gross motor activities
11:20-11:30 (2:50-3:00)	Review of day; goodbyes

B. Sample Routine Full-Day

7:00-9:00	Children arrive; Indoor self-initiated play activities
9:00-9:15	Transition; toileting, wash hands, move to snack tables
9:15-9:45	Breakfast or substantial snack
9:45-10:00	Praise/worship time
10:00-11:00	Small group, large group, story time
11:00-11:15	Transition; toileting, wash hands, prepare for outside
11:15-12:00	Playground
12:00-1:00	Wash hands; lunch
1:00-3:00	Nap time: children rest quietly. They engage in quiet activities as they awaken.
3:00-3:30	Snack time
3:30-4:15	Playground
4:15-5:15	Self-initiated play activities
5:15-6:00	Story time, play with puzzles and manipulatives until time to go home with families

C. Parent/Teacher Conferences

PREPARATION FOR THE CONFERENCE

1. Develop mutual respect by scheduling conferences at convenient times for both teachers and parents.
2. Establish a sense of equality with seating arrangements. Avoid physical barriers by sitting beside parents at a table where everyone can view the materials.
3. Prepare an agenda and send it to the parents. Include a statement of purpose and allow time for parent input, your input, and questions from both you and parents.
4. Assemble materials from across areas of the curriculum that demonstrate children's classroom work over time.
5. Invite parents to bring products their children have produced at home, demonstrating the value you place on parental teaching, such as charts of children's home responsibilities, craft projects, or food children have made, letters they may have written, any collections, or sets of favorite books.

THE CONFERENCES

1. Begin the conference on a positive note by praying for God's blessings on your work together.
2. Invite parents to share their children's meaningful achievements and the areas on which to focus at home.
3. Share with parents children's accomplishments at school.
4. Share your mutual academic and personal concerns.
5. Discuss ideas for resolving these concerns. Together develop an action plan.
6. Allow time for parental questions. If parents appear reluctant to ask questions, assist them.
7. Keep conference to allotted time. If you need more time, schedule a new conference.
8. End conference with prayer for God's continued blessings.

ENDING THE CONFERENCE

1. End the conference on a positive note, complimentary to the children involved.
2. Review conference highlights.
3. Restate your understanding of the action plan and any decisions mutually made.
4. Indicate how information or material parents have shared has helped you understand their children better.
5. Thank the parents for coming and inform them of the next conference period, next school event for parents, or next parent meeting or workshop.
6. Indicate your anticipation at seeing the parents again.

CONFERENCE FOLLOW-UP

1. Write a brief summary for your records. Include any and all parental suggestions/questions.
2. Follow through on your promises and inform the parents of your efforts.