Universal
Early Childhood Curriculum Principles

Early childhood is the period of human life from conception and birth through age 8 or 9. These are formative years in children’s development and learning when a high-quality program can build a solid foundation for their success and fulfillment in school and life. The purpose of an early childhood curriculum is to guide such programs in offering experiences that optimize children’s well-being, development, and learning.

Recognizing the role of an early childhood curriculum and the critical importance of early childhood experiences, the Curriculum Working Group of the World Forum on Early Care and Education proposes a set of principles to guide the development and implementation of early childhood curricula throughout the world. These principles build on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and require interpretation and adaptation to fit each country and community.

**Relationships** - Care and education are inseparable. All young children learn and develop in the context of nurturing, responsive relationships with adults who provide them with stimulating, developmentally appropriate experiences, as well as positive relationships with other children.

**Environment** - Children learn from their interactions with people and their environment. The early care and education environment should be developmentally appropriate, allowing children to engage in positive and safe interactions. It may need to be adapted to ensure that children of all abilities can participate in experiences as fully as possible.

**Play as Children’s Work** – Play is integral to children's learning and development. The daily program includes ample opportunities for children to engage in open-ended as well as guided play experiences that enable them to take risks and gain a deeper understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them.

**Respect** – Family, gender, home language, culture, customs, and beliefs strongly influence children’s development. Adults demonstrate respect for these influences and for young children as individuals and take a genuine interest in what they say and do.

**Content** – The curriculum helps children develop a deeper appreciation and understanding of their community and the world around them and promotes curiosity about and responsibility for the natural and social world.

**Children’s Role in the Curriculum** – Children’s stages of development, needs, and interests are at the center of the curriculum. Children receive responsive care and have daily opportunities to make choices and explore topics that interest them.
Outcomes – The curriculum fosters children’s curiosity and lifelong love of learning and helps them develop essential skills and knowledge in all areas of development and learning: social-emotional, physical, cognitive, language, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science and technology, and the arts.

Inter-Relatedness of Development – All aspects of development and learning are inter-related and deserve attention.

Early Childhood Assessment – Ongoing observation and documentation of children’s development and learning during everyday experience enable adults to support each child’s learning and development and track each child’s progress.

Families and Teachers as Partners - Educators, families, and communities should work together in partnership for the benefit of children’s well-being and development.

Professional Development – Ongoing professional development for all staff members is essential to the successful implementation of any curriculum. A process for regularly reflecting on and evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the curriculum enables continuous program improvement.

Learn more at worldforumfoundation.org/curriculum