

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool A Comprehensive, Integrated Curriculum and Assessment System

To ensure positive outcomes for children who attend pre-kindergarten, programs need an appropriate and effective curriculum and assessment system. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) recently published definitions of appropriate curriculum and assessment and provided indicators of effectiveness. The Joint Position Statement, *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs Birth Through Age 8* (2003) provides clear guidance for determining whether a curriculum and assessment system is likely to produce positive outcomes for children, preparing them for success in school and in life.

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool Is Comprehensive

The definition of comprehensive curriculum presented in the Joint Position Statement differs from narrower approaches that define curriculum as a sequence of lessons. Comprehensive approaches to curriculum are based on an understanding of the complex social/emotional, physical, and cognitive development of young children and take into account the way preschool-aged children learn. A comprehensive curriculum provides guidance on the many factors that lead to a high-quality program and presents all aspects of teaching young children effectively. This thorough guidance contrasts with approaches that give teachers a rigid script to follow.

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool is a comprehensive curriculum, linked to an assessment system, that fully meets the criteria for appropriateness and effectiveness. It addresses teachers' need to know **what** to teach and **why**, and **how** children learn best. With such a curriculum, teachers can respond to the individual needs and learning styles of all of their children. It is one of the only curriculum and assessment systems that is inclusive of all children—those developing typically, children with disabilities, and English language learners.

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool specifies the literacy, math, science, social studies, arts, and technology content to be taught, based on published standards. It relates directly to the subject area curricula used in elementary schools, so children's learning in preschool forms the basis of all of the learning that will follow.

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool Is Scientifically Based

The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool is a scientifically based, research-tested model. To date, four studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of *The Creative Curriculum[®] for Preschool*. The first, an evaluation of the Department of Defense Sure Start program (Abbott-Shim, 2000), involved nearly 100 children in 10 randomly selected classrooms using *The Creative Curriculum[®]*. Trained data collectors administered classroom observations, child assessments, and parent questionnaires to determine the quality of classroom teaching practices and to assess children's developmental gains.

The second study, conducted by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE, 2001), also examined developmental gains for children in classrooms using *The Creative Curriculum*®. The results indicated **positive average gains in three developmental areas: social/emotional development, cognitive development, and physical development.** The third study, sponsored by the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), is an ongoing effort to evaluate child outcomes and program quality in Head Start. The Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) conducted in 2000 used a random sample design. FACES researchers found that *The Creative Curriculum*® was the most widely used curriculum and that programs that used an integrated curriculum showed greater gains in several cognitive and social/emotional areas. A fourth study has recently been conducted by Philliber Research Associates for The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. This evaluation of children enrolled in 14 childcare centers found significant gains for children who were in classrooms receiving *The Creative Curriculum*® intervention.

***The Creative Curriculum*® for Preschool Is a Complete System**

The Creative Curriculum® system includes the following:

- A review of current research and learning theory, described in practical terms so that teachers can understand and explain to others the reasons for their instructional approaches.
- An overview of child development knowledge and the many ways that children are unique, including temperament, learning styles, interests, life experiences, culture, and special needs.
- Strategies for setting up a learning environment—the context for teaching. It shows teachers how to select and organize materials and to arrange a classroom; how to create a balanced schedule and routines; and how to build a classroom community, teach social skills and conflict-resolution strategies, and handle challenging behaviors.
- The content to be taught—the knowledge and skills children are expected to learn in literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology. The content is based on standards in each subject area and correlates well with elementary school curricula and state early learning standards.
- A wide range of instructional strategies so that teachers can take full advantage of multiple opportunities for intentional teaching during large- and small-group times, teachable moments, and long-term studies.
- An assessment system, linked to *The Creative Curriculum*® for Preschool, that uses a valid and reliable tool, *The Creative Curriculum*® *Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5*. The Continuum defines the **scope** of what children are expected to learn for each of the 50 Creative Curriculum objectives and the **sequence** in which children are likely to progress. It includes Forerunners, which are examples of what children who are not at a typical level of development—perhaps due to a disability, developmental lag, or lack of experience—would be likely to do in relation to each objective. This strength-based approach makes the assessment system useful in planning instruction for all children.
- Guidance and resources to help teachers build a true partnership with families—one that is based on respect for differences and for the value that each partner brings to supporting children’s learning and their success in school.

Supplemental materials include *Literacy: The Creative Curriculum® Approach* and *Math: The Creative Curriculum® Approach* (in press) and *Study Starters: A Step-by-Step Guide to Project-Based Investigations in Science and Social Studies* (in press). These resources provide teachers with more detailed research, background knowledge, strategies, and activities to support children’s learning in the content areas.

***The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool* Links Curriculum and Assessment**

Assessment is the process of gathering information about children to support their learning. Teachers obtain useful information about each child’s knowledge, skills, and progress by observing, documenting, analyzing, and evaluating work samples over time. A unique strength of *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool* is its strong link between curriculum and assessment.

- The curriculum goals and objectives form the basis for the assessment instrument so teachers assess children based on the material that is taught.
- Teachers know what to look for and how to support children’s development.
- In each content area teachers see what they can do to teach a particular concept or skill and how this teaching links to specific objectives of *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool*.
- Teachers can generate Individual Child Profiles for school files and Child Progress and Planning Reports for families.

The online version of the assessment and planning system, CreativeCurriculum.net, streamlines the assessment process for teachers, offers them a wealth of planning resources including activity plans which are linked directly to the curriculum objectives, and provides outcome data for administrators.

***The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool* Meets the Criteria for Effectiveness**

The charts on the following pages list the criteria for effective curriculum and assessment established by NAEYC and NAECS/SDE. They show how *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool* and *The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum Assessment System for Ages 3-5* address each.

***Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation
Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs Birth Through Age 8***

A Joint Position Statement of the National Association for the
Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in
State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE)

Recommendations

CURRICULUM

Implement curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all children.

Indicators of Effectiveness	How <i>The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool</i> Meets This Indicator
Children are active and engaged.	Teachers plan meaningful experiences to engage children’s minds and bodies in learning experiences throughout the day in interest areas, small- and large-group times, daily routines, and long-term studies.
Goals are clear and shared by all.	The goals and 50 objectives of <i>The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool</i> are organized into four developmental areas: Social/Emotional, Physical, Cognitive, and Language. These goals and objectives are based on child development knowledge and content standards. They provide the direction and basis for curriculum planning and assessment.
Curriculum is evidence-based.	<i>The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool</i> is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically relevant for 3- to 5-year-old children, including those with special needs. It is grounded in the child development theory and research of Vygotsky, Gardner, Maslow, Erikson, Piaget, and Smilansky, as well as research on brain development and resiliency.
Valued content is learned through investigation; play; and focused, intentional teaching.	Teachers use a range of instructional approaches, from child-initiated play to teacher directed instruction. They offer children opportunities to investigate the world around them and to learn through purposeful play. On the basis of assessment information, they build on what children already know and teach them important concepts and skills in an intentional way during large-group, small-group, and individual instruction.

CURRICULUM, continued

Indicators of Effectiveness	How <i>The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool</i> Meets This Indicator
Curriculum builds on prior learning and experience.	Teachers find out what children know and can do through ongoing assessment: observing, conversing, and discussing with families. This information serves as a starting point for determining the new concepts to be learned.
Curriculum is comprehensive.	<i>The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool</i> is comprehensive and addresses all areas of development: social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. It also includes all subject-matter areas: literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology.
Professional standards validate the curriculum's subject-matter content.	Content for the curriculum was based on national standards of the various professional organizations. A recent review by the Florida Center for Reading Research indicates that the literacy "content information provided for teachers is aligned with current research."
The curriculum is likely to benefit children.	Research indicates that <i>The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool</i> , when implemented as intended, will result in positive child outcomes. (See the Web site, www.TeachingStrategies.com for a research summary.)

ASSESSMENT

Make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific beneficial purposes:

- 1) *making sound decisions about teaching and learning,*
- 2) *identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and*
- 3) *helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.*

Indicators of Effectiveness	How <i>The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool Developmental Continuum Assessment System</i> Meets This Indicator
Ethical principles guide assessment practices.	Ethical principles underlie <i>The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum Assessment System</i> . Children are observed over time, and decisions are not made based on a one-time, narrow assessment.
Assessment instruments are used for their intended purposes.	The primary purpose of <i>The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3–5</i> is to guide curriculum planning and instruction. A secondary purpose is to gather reporting information for program planning and improvement.
Assessments are appropriate for the ages and other characteristics of children being assessed.	<i>The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3–5</i> is a strengths-based assessment tool designed for children ages 3–5, including children with disabilities and English language learners. The instrument includes Forerunners, examples of what children who are not developing typically—perhaps due to a disability, developmental lag, or lack of experience—would be likely to do in relation to each objective.
Assessment instruments are in compliance with professional criteria for quality.	Two studies have validated the technical merits of the assessment tool. One determined the content validity, and the second determined the construct validity and reliability of the <i>Developmental Continuum</i> .
What is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant.	The assessment is comprehensive in that it includes social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language developmental areas. Objectives related to content areas are included in the assessment. The <i>Developmental Continuum</i> correlates well with state early learning standards.

ASSESSMENT, continued

Indicators of Effectiveness	How <i>The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool Developmental Continuum Assessment System</i> Meets This Indicator
Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning.	Information learned using the <i>Developmental Continuum</i> enables teachers to guide children’s progress related to each objective. Teachers find out where a child is along the learning path described by the <i>Developmental Continuum</i> and then provide appropriate activities to help a child progress.
Assessment evidence is gathered from realistic settings and situations that reflect children’s actual performance.	Assessment evidence is based on observation and documentation collected during day-to-day classroom activities rather than in a contrived testing situation.
Assessments use multiple sources of evidence gathering over time.	Documented observations and work samples, including examples of children’s writing, artwork, photographs, and audio and/or video clips are collected as part of everyday experiences over the course of the school year. This data, along with input from families, helps teachers evaluate children’s progress using the <i>Developmental Continuum</i> at three “progress checkpoints” during the year.
Screening is always linked to follow-up.	N/A. The <i>Developmental Continuum</i> is an on-going, observational assessment tool, not a screening instrument. Screening instruments are selected by local programs. However, teachers may use the data obtained through the use of the <i>Developmental Continuum</i> Assessment System as one source of information when determining a child’s need for further diagnostic testing and evaluation by trained individuals.
Use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests is limited.	The <i>Developmental Continuum</i> is not a norm-referenced test. Norm-referenced testing is a decision made by the local program.
Staff and families are knowledgeable about assessment.	Training on the <i>Developmental Continuum</i> is available for teachers, assistants, and administrators at the local level and through national conferences. Teachers can generate Individual Child Profiles for school files and Child Progress and Planning Reports for families. Through CreativeCurriculum.net, the online assessment system, teachers can communicate and share assessment information with families as desired.