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Curricula portfolio

ECEY6010-BIRM

First section

Introduction

Egan (1978) examined the definition of the word "curriculum", and its various meanings as applied to education at the time. He explained that, at that time, there was no single way to define what curriculum was or was understood to be. He elaborated on how some people viewed it as a list of subjects, others as a set of learning goals, and still others considered it to encompass the entire range of experiences children have at school, including learning (Egan, 1978).

According to Barr et al. (2023), curriculum standards are best understood through three key approaches: a contextual curriculum, an emergent curriculum, and an expressive curriculum. An emergent curriculum is introduced and adopted by educators throughout the learning process, based on individual needs. An expressive curriculum allows students to express their interests and adopt personalised learning goals. Finally, a contextual curriculum incorporates inclusive approaches to learning, supporting individuals according to their background (Barr et al., 2023). Barr and Nygard (2014) describe two aspects of early education and care as being well studied globally, primarily due to the increase in working parents and the need to support families so they can continue working. Barr et al. (2023) further explain these aspects as being in the best interests of children, as they help facilitate proper development (Barr et al., 2023).

Play-based curricula

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum provides a statutory framework that guides educators in designing and delivering a curriculum tailored to the specific needs of their children and the settings in which they work. While educators are permitted to be flexible in their implementation of the curriculum, they must ensure that their approach benefits children's development and encompasses all seven learning areas outlined in the EYFS. Play-based approaches form the core of the curriculum for early years settings. Practitioners need to understand what play is, how to implement various types of play, and when to use each type according to the developmental needs of the children (DFE,2024).

Challenges of play-based curricula

According to Scheuer, N. and Cremin, T. (2025), it highlights the importance of studies needed for a play-based curriculum to provide the right environment for learners, alongside the necessity of educating educators on how learning through play is essential for children's cognitive and social development. Even though there has always been a demand for scholars to research play-based curriculum outcomes, prominent researchers such as (Vygotsky, 1978), (Piaget, 1952), and (Whitebread et al., 2012), along with more recent studies like (Lillard, 2013), (Lino and Parente, 2018), and (Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson, 2008), have continued to study play-based approaches and the best learning outcomes. However, it remains a significant challenge for educational settings to implement playful approaches to learning, establish a playful environment overall, and educate educators. Many institutions cannot afford to properly train teachers on how playful approaches are vital to children's academic learning. Nonetheless, the problem is still seen as seemingly absurd to understand the logic and need behind learning outcomes and the importance of play-based curriculum to be implemented, which clearly shows that it is completely forgotten. Cope and Kalantzis, (2009) (Cremin and Chappell, 2019), Kress (2010), and Pozo (2020) emphasise on that what appears here is that competitors are focused on achieving the standardised result, which suggests that educators are struggling to provide a playful environment, learning opportunities, and creative spaces for diversity (Scheuer, N., and Cremin, T., 2025).

The Creative Curriculum (USA)

Teaching strategies (2025) indicate that this curriculum is based in the USA and designed for kindergarten children up to the age of 8. According to Dodge, Colker, and Heroman (2014), The Creative Curriculum Preschool illustrates how arranging the classroom around the child can aid in their learning. Essentially, this curriculum encourages children to feel ownership over the materials, allowing them to organise them as they wish, thereby fostering a sense of belonging. Children can choose the types of activities they wish to engage in, ensuring that the materials are readily available for use. The role of adults in this environment is to support children with their ideas and employ the scaffolding method, making the learning environment more centralised. This curriculum also supports all the main domains of learning for every child, as required by the EYFS (DFE, 2021). Implementing this curriculum effectively

would help children engage in learning and boost their confidence. A strong implementation of this curriculum also aids teachers in conducting regular assessments, such as ongoing assessment, and it demonstrates less hassle overall (Teaching Strategies, 2025).

According to Gullickson et al. (2018), the creative curriculum is structured around a comprehensive daily schedule that includes pre-planned activities, designated time slots, and sufficient materials for each learning task. This organised framework is beneficial as it ensures that all children receive appropriate attention and opportunities for engagement across different areas of development. Additionally, one of the curriculum's key strengths lies in its theoretical foundation. It incorporates concepts from influential developmental theorists such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Howard Gardner, and Sara Smilansky. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the curriculum supports a holistic approach to early childhood education, aiming to enhance learning outcomes by addressing cognitive, social, emotional, and creative development. The biggest challenge of creative curriculums is that there's not enough studies conducted to report if the curriculum is implemented well and children benefiting from it. (Gullickson et al., 2018).

EYFS (England)

According to Barr et al., (2023) Over time, the quality of education and care has improved, becoming increasingly beneficial for children. In response to extensive research conducted both nationally and internationally, England has developed structured guidance for early years of education. This guidance is now formalised as a statutory policy, serving as a framework for best practices in early childhood education settings. Over time, it has been constantly reviewed and updated to reflect on emerging needs, societal changes, and evolving understandings of child development. This ensures that early year provisions remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse circumstances of children and families. Although different guidelines and framework exist in England, such the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and those issued by the department for education (DFE, 2021), these documents are in

themselves and are not full curricula. Rather they provide a structured set of standards and learning goals intended to guide early years providers. Educational settings that care for children from birth to five years old use these frameworks as a basis to design and implement their own specific curricula. This flexibility allows each setting to tailor their education to all approaches according to the unique needs, interests, and backgrounds of the children they have cared for. By developing their own curricula within the framework's broad guidance, early years educators can create learning experiences that support children's development and enable them to achieve the main outcomes. This approach ensures that while standards are maintained, there is room for adaptation and creativity to deliver high-quality education and care (Barr et al., 2023). According to Wood,E and Hedges,H. (2016) one of the key challenges of early years curriculum is that there is a lack of developmental theories behind to back it up. Most of the curriculum is based on learning through play, while this method supports childrens curiosity and which has led to more relaxed approaches to teaching, with less emphasis on structured lessons for math, science or literacy. This creates an ongoing debate about whether young children should be introduced to pre-planned or structured lessons based on core subjects. If yes, then how to.This as a result shows that teacher struggle to deliver meaningful content (Wood and Hedges 2016).

EYFS,The Creative Curriculum

Both EYFS (England) and The Creative Curriculum (USA) support early childhood development through child-centered, play-based approaches but differ in structure and implementation. The EYFS is a statutory framework, offering national standards and learning goals for children from birth to five, requiring settings to design their own curricula (DFE, 2021). It promotes flexibility, allowing adaptation to individual children's needs. The creative curriculum is a comprehensive, predesigned curriculum for children birth to eight, offering a structured schedule with detailed activities and assessment (teaching strategies, 2025). It integrates developmental theories guiding scaffolding and classroom organisation (Dodge et al.,2014).

Both emphasise child-led learning and play as central to development. The EYFS demands flexible play-based learning whereas the creative curriculum incorporates

various play types within planned activities. Similarities between the Creative Curriculum and EYFS include their child-led approach, and the learning areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage are emphasised in both curricula.

The creative curriculum's structured approach ensures consistency but may limit cultural adaptation. The EYFS encourages professional judgement and creativity but may challenge less experienced educators who need clearer guidance.

Effectiveness depends on implementation quality, educators' training and resources. EYFS offers flexibility within regulation, while creative curriculum provides a theory-based educational practice.

Conclusion

Curriculum design is foundational to holistic early childhood development. Both the EYFS and the Creative Curriculum prioritise play, individual learning and developmentally appropriate practices. The EYFS provides a flexible approach while the creative curriculum offers structured models. Each has its own strengths and challenges, but successful outcomes depend solely on effective implementation and educators' knowledge.

Section two

Introduction

In this section of the assignment, two forms of assessment methods used in early years settings are being explored, which align with the concept of a unique child. Assessment methods are as follows:

- Daily observation method
- Two years progress check

Definition of unique child

The early years foundation stage framework (2024) clearly states the definition of a unique child as that every child should be seen as an individual and have the ability to learn according to each individual because every child is ready to learn, achieve all the learning outcomes if the concept of a unique child is implemented in all education settings. According to the EYFS framework, every child should be seen as an individual,

different, and special in their way. To achieve the best outcome for every child in the UK shows in this framework that every child, regardless of their background, diverse cultures, or languages every child has the right to learn and that in England, according to this framework, every child from 0 to 5 has the full potential to achieve best learning outcomes as these first few years are the best time for children's development. It has had a major impact on their personalities during these first few years (DFE, 2024).

The Develop Matters (2023) document explains the importance of assessing every child at specific points and stages to identify the kind of support they may need, recognising that each child develops differently and sees them as an individual. It clearly defines the purpose of assessment as not to label children but rather to help educators understand how to support individuals in learning and development most effectively. The document acknowledges that every child is unique, and that practical assessment should reflect this individual. Rather than relying on a set type of checklist assessment paper to identify a child's uniqueness, practitioners need to use their professional knowledge and observation skills to create a supportive learning environment. This approach allows educators to tailor learning experiences that help students progress in their specific areas of learning development, with a focus on their pace and potential (DFE,2023).

- **Daily observations method**

Birth to 5 matters (2021) explains ongoing assessment as one of the best tools for practitioners and recognises it as most beneficial for children because it works better when children are calm in their environment and engaged in their everyday routine. Teachers should assess children while they are involved in everyday activities, which also saves precious time for practitioners. It allows them to be present rather than focusing on an excel sheet of checklists. Everyday day-to-day observations taking place while children are in their natural environments give teachers insight into their learning styles and show their interests. Assessing children while they are busy playing amongst friends, engaging with their surroundings, or using toys in different ways, for example a child could be seen using a particular toy differently because of the background they come from, provides a clear understanding of their development and shows the uniqueness of that child. Practitioners can then use their knowledge to guide them

further or support them in new learning approaches that are beneficial to the child (Early years coalition, 2021).

According to Gelir (2025) Epstein et al., (2014) highlights the purpose and importance of evaluation tools explaining that they are not just beneficial for children but also play a major role in helping teachers recognise and improve their teaching and learning approaches. It helps teachers to understand and review their approaches better. The author also explains that the aim of ongoing assessment in early year settings is to allow practitioners to respond to children's needs as they arise rather than waiting. This is also supported by Gullo (2005), Sadler (1998), Dunphy (2010) and Graham-Day et al., (2014), who all highlighted the value of being able to assess and adapt in real time (Gelir,2025).

Practitioners used the right approach rather than disturbing their play. This example highlighted the importance of teachers being able to conduct ongoing assessments and avoid disruptions while teaching new skills, such as communication skills. The author further highlights ongoing assessment approaches with the Steiner model, which, as a result, is known as child-initiated play.

One of the reflective activities by Glazzard J. et al., (2010) in chapter one, Steiner models reflective activity, where it shows a scenario in which children are playing but not using their communication skills and not waiting for their turns. Hence, the role of practitioners involved observation as an ongoing assessment, where they adopted the situation, asked if they could join in and created the environment to choose the character and model it. Practitioners used the right approach rather than disturbing their play. This example highlighted the importance of teachers being able to conduct ongoing assessments and avoid disruption while teaching new skills, such as communication skills where children learn to be able to express themselves. The author further highlighted ongoing assessment approaches with the Steiner model as a child-initiated play (Glazzard et al.,2010).

According to Trumbull, E. and Lash, A. (2013), according to sociocultural constructivist theory, the right environment where teachers are using this ongoing assessment is where children are given opportunities, so basically, the assessment benefits teachers and students to learn, and Heritage,2010 also agrees. An environment where teachers

and learners are using this to work as a team. This ongoing assessment might mean that learners need to take on unfamiliar roles and adapt accordingly. Benefits are extended while using this ongoing assessment tool as it goes beyond just assessing what the children have learnt; instead of how they learn and think and thinking how these different ways that can emerge could make them struggle. These assessment results allow teachers to plan for the next steps along with understanding the individual as a whole. This includes helping children to understand and assess the whole task and the requirements and helping them to understand and build confidence (Trumbull, E. Lash, A., 2013).

The Unique Child principle in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework recognises that every child is an individual with their own learning journey, abilities, and needs (Department for Education [DfE], 2024). Day-to-day, ongoing assessment encourages practitioners to observe and respond to children's learning as it occurs, resulting in teachers gaining deep insights into what individual children think, learn, and engage with. It does not just give the results of understanding the child; this tool helps the practitioners to identify individuals' learning needs and allows educators to adapt their teaching accordingly. It also gives children confidence in their learning. By focusing on real-time interactions and observations, formative assessment honors each child's background, interests, and developmental stage, aligning closely with the EYFS aim to provide inclusive and supportive environments that celebrate diversity and individual potential (DfE, 2024; Heritage, 2010; Black and Wiliam, 2009).

- **Two years progress check**

This assessment method is required by EYFS (DFE, 2022a) for every child who is in the care of any early year's education setting. It is compulsory for practitioners to do this check to monitor their progress. This assessment method consists of three areas of development, which are based on a child's personal development and how they communicate with others, and any other kind of physical disability. Ipsos (2023) highlights the importance of parents knowing and understanding how their child is growing is quite important as it shows a lack of involvement from parents just because they do not have knowledge of this, so a two-year progress check is worth it. One of the main reasons for this assessment is to work with parents to identify and know the child.

This assessment method is used to monitor children's progress in settings with the help of parents or carers to understand the child completely. It also helps parents to understand their child's growth development and gives them access to early intervention (DFE,2022a).

Anders,y et al., (2011) proves that checking at two years is beneficial to finding out children's future outcomes, either physical or mental. It definitely is worth finding out at this time of age so plans can be put in place to provide the support the child needs (Anders, Y. et., 2011).

Development matters DFE (2022b) states that practitioners are required to carry out this assessment as part of the legal requirements set out in the EYFS framework.

Practitioners are allowed to use their professional judgement to carry out this assessment. However, they are required to provide the results of the assessment to parents or carers or the local authority, if necessary, for example, if the child has any special educational needs (DFE, 2022b).

In conclusion, the use of these assessment checks such as daily observations and the two-year progress check links with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) principle of recognising each child as a unique learner. These checks are not simply tools for assessing a child's development, rather they are essential practices that allow practitioners to understand the individual needs, interests, and developmental progress of every child. By embracing the concept of the unique child, early years practitioners can create nurturing and effective learning environments that promote the best outcomes for all children.

Section 3

Blog

Curriculum change in early years of education is not simply something about adopting a new framework, it is about reevaluating our values and reimagining our approaches and putting the children at the center of attention. In an age where outcomes, assessments and accountability dominate, how can educators champion the play-based approach while responding to the demands of curriculum reform? As someone working in the early years sector i often reflect on the dynamic nature of curriculum. Egan (1978)

reminds us that curriculum is never static, and it is shaded by social shifts and environments evolving views about childhood. Today's policies, such as the early years foundation stage framework (DFE,2024), try to walk in a line between structure and freedom. The question that arises here is whether they walk it well. Are they giving enough opportunities and resources while setting rules in place?

Play is not a break from learning it should be recognised as it is a process of learning . decades of research from Piaget's cognitive stages to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which makes it clear that children learn best through play. Whitebread et al., (2012) found strong links between self-regulation and playful exploration, suggesting that play based approaches are not just enjoyable, they are developmentally important.

Now let us move on to understanding curriculum models; EYFS and the creative curriculum as in England, the EYFS proposes an adjustable approach that strongly emphasises on the concept of unique child and professional judgment of the practitioners. Practitioners are given freedom to develop their own strategies that can be used to form a curriculum within the national framework, embedding creativity and contingency. However, this freedom or authority given to practitioners can become a challenge without having sufficient training or experience as Cremin and Chappell (2021) agree with this.

In contrast to the USA based curriculum, which is known as 'the creative curriculum' offers a pre structured or pre planned curriculum which is formed based on the theory, focuses heavily on the learning environment and educator scaffolding principles (Dodge at al.,2010). While it provides clear guidance, its already set format risks overlooking the cultural and social dynamics of individual settings (Barr et al., 2023). Each model has merits, but their success depends on thoughtful and reflective implementation of the principles.

The biggest impact of curriculum changes falls on practitioners as curriculum reform places high demands on practitiners. Research by Scheuer and Cremin (2023) shows that ongoing professional development is key to effective play-based learning and teaching. Yet in many settings times and funding for CPD are limited. Theres also the issue of confidence which some educators particularly those who are new to the profession, may default to structured or adult led activities due to the pressure of school

readiness and checks which demonstrate children's progress. As Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argue, this can lead to a loss of confidence in play, especially when outcomes are prioritised over process. To truly embed play based approaches in curriculum educators need both theoretical basis and practical tools that include understanding how play links to assessment which is not only used as a tick box exercise but also seen as an ongoing narrative process.

In my opinion, we practitioners do need to bring this to researchers' attention. Yes, we do need to use a based assessment approach, for example, ing assessment where practitioners don't have to leave the child unattended and assess the child, but in reality, practitioners are facing problems with a shortage of funding and staff ratio where they are overloaded with burden and in all that sometimes they miss important information which could impact on day to day assessing the child's development because as we know that a key person who is designated to that child.

Effective assessment in a play-based curriculum does not interrupt play; rather, it flows alongside it. Daily observations and practitioners' notes allow educators to capture progress in real time. The EYFS's two-year progress check which is a legal requirement by the framework, also enables early identification and intervention when needed (Andres et al.,2011). But assessments are only useful when they honor the child's lived experiences. As Birth to five matters (2021) outlines that we must assess while the child's playing helps make meaningful interventions and individual development rather than sticking to the formal types of assessment.

So at the end of the blog, I would like to share my final thoughts on making space for play, implementing a play-based curriculum is not going to come without its challenges for example time, training and policy pressure they all play part, but it is possible.

Whether we are using the EYFS or the creative curriculum or a blend of both our aim should be as an early years practitioner should be the same which is to honor the child's right to play and to trust in their capacity to learn through exploration and to support educators in delivering in rich meaningful learning experiences. Curriculum reforms are a chance to bring back the actual stance which is child centered. If we get it right, we will not just reform policy, we will make a difference in transforming lives.

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