

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research paper is to focus upon the development of curriculum and instructional strategies in early childhood education. When the members of the schools are focusing upon the development of curriculum and instructional strategies, it is comprehensively understood that they need to be well-aware in terms of various methods, approaches, strategies and procedures. In addition, one of the important factors that needs to be focused upon is, these strategies need to be beneficial to the students. Research has indicated that in order to promote student learning and enrich the overall system of early childhood education, it is vital to bring about transformations in curriculum and instructional strategies. The major transformations can be brought about through making use of modern, technical, scientific and innovative methods. In the present existence, in nursery schools as well, the teachers are making use of technologies and other materials, such as, technologies, flashcards, pictures, images, charts, models and so forth. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include, the process of development of curriculum and instructional strategies, factors influencing the development of curriculum and instructional strategies, and issues in the development of curriculum and instructional strategies.

Keywords: *Development, Curriculum, Early Childhood Education, Instructional, Learning, Strategies*

The development of curriculum and instructional strategies is one of the areas that is of utmost significance in augmenting the system of education and achievement of academic goals. In nursery schools, the teachers have the main objective of ensuring that they make provision of knowledge to the students in terms of academic concepts in a well-organized manner, which would contribute in helping them to enhance their knowledge and competencies and bring about improvements in their overall quality of lives. Early childhood development and learning have been the focus of extensive research and initiatives over the past few years. Early education is seen as equal to the early level of education. Early education curriculum is a pedagogical tool, particularly for the teacher employed in nursery schools (Early Education Curriculum, 2011). This is apparent that teachers need to be well-equipped with the curriculum and instructional strategies. Therefore, they need to render a significant contribution in the development of curriculum and instructional strategies.

In order to develop the curriculum and instructional strategies in an appropriate manner, it is vital for the parents and teachers to work in co-ordination with each other. The reason being, parents are the first and foremost teachers of their children. They know best, what measures need to be formulated and what approaches and strategies need to be put into operation to lead to

effective growth and progression of their children. When the parents make visit to nursery schools in order to get their child enrolled, they discuss various aspects, such as, curriculum and instructional strategies, teaching-learning methods, teaching-learning materials, timings, and observe the school environmental conditions. When they form the viewpoint that their child will be able to learn better, they get him or her enrolled. Parents are also provided with the opportunities to give ideas and suggestions to the teachers in development of curriculum and instructional strategies.

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The process of development of curriculum and instructional strategies is multi-step, cyclical and ongoing in nature. The process develops from evaluating the existing program to designing an improved program, to implementing a new program and back to evaluating the revised program. The components of the curriculum development process have been stated as follows: (A Guide to Curriculum Development, n.d.).

Planning

Convening the Curriculum Development Committee – Convening of curriculum development committee is the initial stage of the function of planning. Curriculum development committee consists primarily of teachers, who represent various schools and grade levels in the district, administrators, members of the community and researchers. These individuals need to work in collaboration and integration with each other. When these individuals are working in collaboration with each other, they are able to exchange ideas and perspectives that would be worthwhile and beneficial in the generation of desired outcomes. It is vital that knowledgeable and experienced chairpersons need to render a significant contribution in supervising, directing and leading others in the right direction.

Identifying Key Issues and Trends in the Specific Content Area – Research needs to be conducted in terms of issues and trends of the discipline both within the district and across the nation. This research allows the curriculum committee to identify the issues and trends that would be supportive to the needs assessment that should be conducted and the philosophy that needs to be developed. Research initiates with the discussion among the committee members, regarding timings, factors, measures, policies, approaches and preparation of reports. Furthermore, the members of the committee need to widen their perspective and gather information by making visits to other schools that are recognized leaders in education.

Assessing Needs and Issues – The development of the curriculum needs to be viewed as a process. In this process, the teachers need to implement the teaching methods in accordance to the needs of the students. When the needs of the students are met in an adequate manner, it is regarded as an important factor in augmenting student learning. The curriculum developers need to conduct research in terms of the areas, which need to be focused upon in the development of curriculum

and instructional strategies. In the assessment of the needs and issues, information also needs to be collected in terms of natures and attitudes of teachers, administrators, parents and students.

Articulating and Developing

Articulating a K-12 Program Philosophy – In articulation of a K-12 program philosophy, there are certain questions, which need to be answered. These include, why one has to get engaged in learning? What are the guiding principles upon which program is built? What are the beliefs on which teaching and learning methods are based upon? What are the essential questions and in what ways will the assessment methods need to be implement to make improvements in academic programs and student learning. The program philosophy provides an amalgamating framework that justifies and gives direction to discipline-based instruction. The curriculum developers need to possess skills and abilities to construct a draft philosophy guiding the K-12 program.

Defining K-12 Program, Grade-Level and Course Objectives – The main objective of the K-12 program philosophy is to describe the values, standards and principles, which are necessary to implement the curriculum and instructional strategies in an appropriate manner. The grade levels of the students and course objectives are regarded as significant factors, which are necessary to carry out the task of development of curriculum and instructional strategies in an effective manner. The curriculum developers need to take into account these factors, within the course of implementation of their job duties. It needs to be ensured that curriculum and instructional strategies need to be worthwhile in helping the educators to perform their job duties well and enrich the overall system of education.

Developing and Sequencing Grade-Level and Course Objectives – Educational institutions have various goals and objectives. Two important objectives are to promote student learning and to bring about up-gradation in the system of education. In order to achieve these objectives, paying attention towards development of curriculum and instructional strategies is regarded to be of utmost significance. In the field of early childhood education, the curriculum and strategies should be formulated in such a manner that the students should not only acquire an efficient understanding of academic concepts, but they should develop motivation and interest towards learning. Therefore, taking into consideration grade-level and course objectives in crucial.

Identifying Resource Materials to Implement Programs – The utilization of materials is regarded to be of utmost significance in the development of curriculum and instructional strategies. One of the most commonly used materials is use of technology. In the present existence, not only in formal schools and in higher educational institutions, but in the system of higher education as well, the teachers are making use of technologies in imparting understanding to the students in terms of lesson plans and academic concepts. In addition, books and other materials are also put into operation to develop the curriculum and instructional strategies and implement programs.

Identification of Assessment Methods to Measure Student Progress - Identification of assessment methods is regarded as significant to measure student progress. When the teachers have taught a lesson plan to the students, they need to find out how much they have learned. This can be found out through the identification and implementation of assessment methods. In the field of

early childhood education, the commonly used assessment methods are, class assignments, homework assignments, competitions and tests. The assessment methods are not only considered worthwhile in finding out how much the students have learned and understood, but also the effectiveness of the goals and objectives can be assessed, which would meet the needs and requirements of the students.

Implementing

Putting the New Program into Practice -After the individuals have worked in the formulation of measures and approaches that are necessary in the development of curriculum and instructional strategies, they need to implement them to see whether they are worthwhile or not. The implementation of curriculum and instructional strategies are done by the teachers. When the teachers need to impart knowledge and understanding to the students in terms of academic concepts, they need to make sure that they implement the curriculum and instructional strategies in an appropriate manner. Therefore, the function of implementing is regarded as significant in finding out whether curriculum and instructional strategies have proven to be worthwhile or not.

Evaluating

Updating the New Program – One of the common methods of periodically updating a curriculum guide is through grade-level meetings designed to share the materials, activities, units, assessments and even student work that support the achievement of curriculum objectives. These approaches are regarded as invaluable professional development opportunities, wherein the teachers assume ownership of the curriculum they are responsible for putting into operation. In this way, the guide becomes a growing resource for more effective implementation of the program. Resource teachers are particularly efficacious vehicles for the preparation and distribution of these updates. In other words, it is vital for the educators to up-grade their knowledge and competencies, so they are able to update the new program and curriculum and instructional strategies.

Determining the Success of the New Program – The educators need to up-grade their knowledge and understanding in terms of the factors that are necessary in determining the success of the program. The curriculum development cycle ends and initiates with the careful evaluation of the efficiency and influence of the program. The curriculum development committee needs to periodically gather data and information in terms of perceptions of program strengths, weaknesses, needs, preferences for textbooks and other learning materials and topics and objectives that do not seem to be operating in an efficient manner. The information that is collected from the data that represents the overall performance of the students is closely connected to the daily instructional strategies. Teams of teachers, responsible for the specific discipline could accomplish this by sharing the samples of assessments, performance tasks, student work, chapter plans and curriculum methods.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Factors influencing the development of curriculum and instructional strategies have been stated as follows:

Age Groups of Students – In nursery schools, the age group of students is from two plus until five years of age. When the students get enrolled in nursery schools, they are two plus. At this age, they will not be able to acquire an understanding of the academic concepts and are given playthings. The students, who are in between three and five years of age are imparted information in terms of academic concepts and other areas, such as, drawing, painting, scribbling, physical activities, sports, alphabets, numbers, vehicles, colours, shapes, and so forth. Therefore, age groups of students are considered vital in enabling the educators to develop curriculum and instructional strategies.

Needs of the Students – The needs of the students is another factor on the basis of which the development of curriculum and instructional strategies is focused upon. The major needs of the students are up-gradation of cognitive, intellectual, gross motor, fine motor, and social skills. During the stage of early childhood, the parents as well as the teachers need to focus upon up-gradation of these skills among students. Therefore, the educators need to ensure that curriculum and instructional strategies should not only impart knowledge and understanding to the students in terms of academic concepts, but also focus on up-gradation of cognitive, intellectual, gross motor, fine motor, and social skills.

Academic Goals – In the field of early childhood education, the academic goals are to make provision of sufficient knowledge to the students in terms of lesson plans, promote their effective growth and development and augment the overall system of education. In order to achieve these academic goals, it is apparent that educators need to focus upon the up-gradation of curriculum and instructional strategies. These strategies are regarded as significant in making provision of knowledge to them, encouraging their participation in academic as well as creative activities and achievement of personal as well as professional goals. Therefore, it is vital to take into account the academic goals in the development of curriculum and instructional strategies.

School Environmental Conditions – The schools are different in terms of environmental conditions. Some schools are large in size and have large number of students, teachers, classrooms and playground. Whereas, some schools are small in size, have lesser number of students and teachers, lesser number of classrooms and may have courtyards, but not a large playground. Research has indicated that in large schools, the students are able to participate in activities and learn various concepts. Whereas, in small schools, the participation of students in tasks and activities is limited. Therefore, school environmental conditions are also regarded as important factors in the development of curriculum and instructional strategies.

Morality and Ethics – Apart from making provision of knowledge to the students in terms of lesson plans, the curriculum and instructional strategies need to focus upon providing knowledge in terms of morality and ethics. The factors of morality and ethics impart information to the students in terms of honesty, righteousness, truthfulness, and decency. For example, English lesson plans need to be formulated in such a manner that students are not only able to up-grade

their English language skills, but also generate information in terms of positive traits, such as, helpfulness, co-operation, honesty, truthfulness and so forth. Hence, in this manner, the curriculum and instructional strategies also focus upon morality and ethics.

Interactive Abilities – Research has indicated that just listening to teachers within the classroom will not render a wholehearted contribution in facilitating learning among students in a wholehearted manner. In order to augment understanding of the academic concepts on a complete basis, it is vital for the teachers to promote effective interaction. Within the classrooms, activities need to be promoted, where the students would work in pairs or groups of three. When they will work in groups, they will be able to acquire an efficient understanding of the academic concepts as well as augment their interactive abilities. Therefore, it can be stated that curriculum and instructional strategies need to be developed in such a manner that would enhance interactive abilities among students.

Development of Motivation – In nursery schools, in some cases, students do not develop interest and enthusiasm towards learning. When they come to school, they feel apprehensive and express willingness to go home. In other words, they lack the motivation towards learning. It is necessary for the students to develop motivation towards learning and they need help and support from teachers. Therefore, in order to develop motivation among students, it is vital for the curriculum developers to develop the curriculum and instructional strategies in such a manner that students develop motivation and their mind-sets get stimulated towards learning.

Overcoming Challenges and Difficulties – Students in nursery schools experience number of challenges and difficulties within the course of academic learning as well as in the achievement of educational goals. It is comprehensively understood that in order to overcome challenges and difficulties, they need to obtain support and assistance from their parents and teachers. But apart from obtaining assistance and support from parents and teachers, the curriculum and instructional strategies need to be developed in such a manner that the students are able to overcome challenges and difficulties on their own. For example, when they are taught how to draw straight lines or write alphabets, they will be able to overcome the difficulties by getting engaged in regular practice. Therefore, regular practice is one of the ways of overcoming challenges and difficulties.

Implementing Innovative Teaching-Learning Materials –In nursery schools, with advancements taking place and with the advent of modernization, it is necessary to implement modern and innovative teaching-learning materials. Research has indicated that when the teachers make use of traditional teaching-learning materials and use the same methods again, the learning tends to become monotonous. When the students find learning monotonous, they do not feel interested. Therefore, it is essential for the teachers to make use of modern and innovative teaching-learning materials. The innovative teaching-learning materials that are used in nursery schools are, computers, lap-tops, charts, pictures, flashcards, diagrams, images and models. Therefore, it can be stated that innovative teaching-learning materials influence the development of curriculum and instructional strategies.

Using Technologies – In the present existence, not only in the formal system of education and in higher educational institutions, but in the field of early childhood education as well, use of technologies is regarded to be of utmost significance. The teachers are not only making use of technologies in imparting knowledge to the students in terms of lesson plans, but they also need to make use of technologies in preparing themselves and in the development of curriculum and instructional strategies. The internet is regarded to render a significant contribution in generating awareness in terms of various factors and concepts that are necessary to carry out one's job duties satisfactorily and in preparing students. Therefore, it can be stated, using technologies is regarded as important in influencing the development of curriculum and instructional strategies.

ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

In the development of curriculum and instructional strategies, there are number of issues that need to be taken into consideration by the educators and curriculum developers. It is vital for them to reinforce the positive aspects in terms of the issues and eliminate the negative effects. The issues have been stated as follows:

A Direction for Student's learning based on Values and Norms – A direction for student's learning based on values and norms indicates that when students are imparted information in terms of lesson plans, emphasis is put upon values and norms. Information in terms of values and norms are regarded as significant in augmenting student learning and achieving academic goals. Over the past decade, there has been emergence of the global trend towards the formulation of the frameworks of curriculum and instructional strategies based on academic goals. In this case, the individual student is regarded as the subject. This focus upon the child is in accordance with the human rights principles that need to take into account the uniqueness of the students and with the socio-cultural theories that observe the students as connected to specific contexts and cultures. Treating nursery school students with respect and courtesy is also an important aspect that makes provision of knowledge and understanding to them in terms of values and norms (Five Curriculum Outlines, 2004).

Giving Independence to Students – In the development of curriculum and instructional strategies, the educators need to give independence to the students. This indicates that when the students are trained in terms of academic concepts, they should be allowed to make their own decisions. The teachers need to provide them choices, where they should be able to make selection of their own topic. When tests are organized within the classrooms, then usually students are provided with options. When the students are given independence, the pressure and anxiety, which they feel due to academic learning gets alleviated. In nursery schools, the students are young and this is apparent that they will not be able to give any ideas and suggestions to their teachers in terms of academic learning. But when they are given class assignments, homework assignments or tests, they are provided with options, where they can make selection of the topic in accordance to their abilities. Therefore, it can be stated that giving independence to the students will help them in feeling comfortable within the school environment.

Students Benefit from the Combination of Associative and Logical Analytical Thinking – One of the areas of controversy that has emerged in the development of curriculum and instructional strategies has been from the opposition that has been proposed between associative (narrative) thinking and logical analytical thinking. Although the existence of both these aspects is common in the daily lives of students. In different programs, one or the other will often become more visible. The logical analytical thinking is regarded as central, whereas free associative thinking is more in evidence in the Te-Whariki and Reggio Emilia. In order to augment one's skills and abilities in creative subjects and in natural sciences, the students need to acquire an understanding of both ways of thinking. The teachers and the curriculum developers need to ensure that both types of thinking are encouraged in terms of lesson plans, academic concepts and tasks and activities that students get engaged in. Therefore, it can be stated that students benefit from the combination of associative and logical analytical thinking (Five Curriculum Outlines, 2004).

The Same Learning Goals at Different Levels of Education but at Different Levels of Complexity – In nursery schools, the students should be provided with knowledge and understanding in terms of various concepts. The students should learn the same pre-school as later in compulsory school. Apart from academic concepts, they need to acquire an efficient understanding in terms of values, norms, and principles. In nursery schools, based upon the research studies, there are three classes, i.e. play group, pre-nursery and lower kindergarten. The lesson plans and academic concepts that are imparted to the students in play group should not be the same as in pre-nursery and lower kindergarten. When the students will be imparted different concepts as they grow, they will be able to perform well academically. The job of the educators must be focused on directing the awareness towards the objectives and issues among students. This perspective is to be shared by the other members of the educational institutions as well, where the major focus is to lead to effective growth and development of students (Five Curriculum Outlines, 2004).

A Continuity of Perspectives through Early Childhood Education Curriculum and Schools – The primary focus in the field of early childhood education is to take into account the needs and requirements of the students, their learning abilities and their academic goals. Continuity theory has replaced the need for debating the merits of the activity and disengagement theories (Cech, & Martin, 2012). When the educators are able to generate awareness in terms of these factors, they will be able to contribute effectively in the formulation of early childhood education curriculum and instructional strategies. The other important aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is, educators aspire to enhance the reputation and standing of the schools within the community. They aspire that the members of the community should consider the school as good and encourage enrolment of their children. Therefore, continuity of perspectives is regarded as one of the important issues that needs to be taken into account to enhance the reputation of the schools. It is vital to have continuity in perspectives throughout the implementation of early childhood education curriculum and schools.

The Learning should be focused on Creating Meaning – The learning which is implemented in nursery schools should focus on meaning and significance. When the students get

enrolled in nursery schools, they understand that they need to acquire an understanding of lesson plans, values, norms, ethics, and principles. Understanding of these factors will enable them to perform well academically, meet the expectations of their parents and teachers, enrich their lives and emerge into productive citizens of the country. In order to meet these goals, it is necessary to ensure that curriculum and instructional strategies should be meaningful to the students. The learning that takes place among students in terms of academic concepts, play, extra-curricular and creative activities should be meaningful and favourable. It is the job of the educators and curriculum developers to ensure that learning should focus on creating meaning. Furthermore, they need to ensure that students take pleasure in learning and it should not prove to be tedious and cumbersome to them. Therefore, it can be stated that when learning is focused on creating meaning, it is beneficial in enriching the overall system of education.

Curriculum and Instructional Strategies need to look into Future – When it is stated that curriculum and instructional strategies need to look into future, it indicates the curriculum and instructional strategies need to take into account the future goals and objectives of the schools. Research has indicated that in some cases, when the child is three or four years of age, he or she is provided training in terms of various areas, which would enable in bringing about improvements in his or her overall quality of lives and enhancing career prospects. These areas include, dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, drawing, painting, sports, games, physical activities, acting and role playing. The parents are well-aware of the areas in terms of which their children are competent. Whereas, educators in schools generate awareness in terms of the competencies of the students, when they observe their participation in various activities. When the teachers understand that students are competent in the performance of particular tasks and activities, they need to develop the curriculum and instructional strategies in a manner, which would enable them to hone these competencies in future. Therefore, it can be stated that curriculum and instructional strategies need to look into future.

A Quality Program should be based on Culture– The quality program needs to be based on culture and learning research. It is comprehensively understood that from the stage of early childhood, students need to be imparted information in terms of norms, values, standards and principles. In other words, they need to understand all the aspects that comprise the culture. In schools, all members, including teachers, staff members and students are different from each other in terms of caste, creed, race, religion, ethnicity, cultures, age, gender, personality traits and socio-economic backgrounds. The educators need to encourage collaboration and integration among students, belonging to different cultures. When the students communicate with other students, belonging to different cultures, they are not only able to understand academic concepts satisfactorily, but they are also able to generate awareness in terms of other cultures. When the formulation of curriculum and instructional strategies takes place, it is essential to take into account the concept of culture. Therefore, it can be stated that quality program should be based on culture and it will contribute effectively in augmenting the overall system of education.

Competencies and Abilities of Educators and Staff Members – In nursery schools, there are number of individuals employed. These include, principals, head mistresses, teachers and other

staff members. When recruitment and selection of these individuals takes place, it is vital to take into account various factors. These include, educational qualifications, competencies, aptitude, personality traits and experience. It needs to be observed that the individuals are suitable for the jobs and will be able to carry out their job duties appropriately. The educators are the ones, who need to possess the required educational qualifications and competencies, as they are required to impart knowledge to the students in terms of academic concepts and lead to their effective growth and development. The educators need to make sure, they implement the teaching-learning methods and instructional strategies in such a manner that would be beneficial to the students. Furthermore, they need to possess an approachable nature. Therefore, it can be stated that competencies and abilities of educators and staff members are considered to be of utmost significance in achievement of goals and objectives and up-grading the overall system of education.

Curriculum should focus on Learning, Play and Other Concepts – It is comprehensively understood that in nursery schools, learning begins with play. The need to integrate play into the early childhood curriculum has been supported by child development research since past decades (Bodrova, 2010). It is comprehensively understood that participation in play activities will familiarise the students with the school environmental conditions. When they get enrolled in schools, they are given playthings. When the students learn and understand play activities, at the next level, they are provided with information in terms of concepts, such as, drawing, colouring, scribbling, shapes, environmental concepts and so forth. When the students have acquired knowledge in terms of these concepts, at the next level, they are imparted information in terms of advanced concepts, such as, writing letters, solving mathematical calculations, Hindi alphabets and words and so forth. Furthermore, advancements also take place in art and craft activities. Therefore, it can be stated, when the development of curriculum and instructional strategies takes place, they need to focus on learning, play and other concepts such as, alphabets, numbers, drawing, colouring, painting, scribbling and so forth.

CONCLUSION

The development of curriculum and instructional strategies is one of the areas that is of utmost significance in augmenting the system of education and in the achievement of academic goals. The process of development of curriculum and instructional strategies involves four stages. These are, planning, articulating and developing, implementing and evaluating. Factors influencing the development of curriculum and instructional strategies are, age group of students, needs of the students, academic goals, school environmental conditions, morality and ethics, interactive abilities, development of motivation, overcoming challenges and difficulties, implementing innovative teaching-learning materials and using technologies. It is vital for the educators to generate information in terms of these factors on a regular basis, if they are to carry out this task in an appropriate manner.

In the development of curriculum and instructional strategies, the number of issues are, adirection for student's learning based on values and norms, giving independence to students, students benefit from the combination of associative and logical analyticalthinking, the same

learning goals at different levels of education but at different levels of complexity, a continuity of perspectives through early childhood education curriculum and schools, the learning should be focused on creating meaning, curriculum and instructional strategies need to look into future, a quality program should be based on culture, competencies and abilities of educators and staff members and curriculum should focus on learning, play and other concepts. When one is acquiring an understanding in terms of these issues, it is vital to ensure that positive aspects are reinforced. Whereas, the negative factors, which prove to be impediments within the course of implementation of tasks and activities and achievement of academic goals should be alleviated. Finally, it can be stated that the educators and curriculum developers need to augment their knowledge and competencies in terms of development of curriculum and instructional strategies in an appropriate manner.

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