



WEE LEARN CURRICULUM

VARIANCE OF STRENGTHS

Concluding a thorough review of the WEE Learn curriculum for three- and four-year-old children, several strengths as well as areas in need of attention have been identified using two bases of knowledge in the field: (1) research evidence from various sources, and (2) Florida's Performance Standards for Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Old Children. Discussion entails components of the review ranging from basic organization of the curricular materials to the inclusion of important topics relevant to child development and early care and education.

Grounded firmly on faith and based heavily on evidence-based practices, programs using the WEE Learn philosophy and curriculum are equipped with a strong, biblically based framework which supports families, children, teachers, and administrators. The materials include information on a range of elements key to providing high quality child care for the children and families in programs implementing the curriculum.

Interpretive Analysis

The following narrative is based on interpretive analysis from the reviewers. Information pertains to: materials, instruction, and theoretical foundation.

Materials

The materials are organized in several methods. The complete curriculum package includes the following materials: (1) the *Weekday Early Education Administrative Guide*, (2) the *Teaching in Christian Weekday Early Education*, (3) the Curriculum Guide for Three-Year-Olds with accompanying teaching pictures, (4) the Curriculum Guide for Four-Year-Olds with accompanying teaching pictures, and (5) the Curriculum Guide for Five-Year-Olds with accompanying teaching pictures. Woven into the discussion are examples of activities that

represent and demonstrate the variance of strengths documented during analysis. All curriculum materials were used for analysis and examples from all books are provided below.

To the developer's credit, the information in the curriculum was easy to read and understand. The format flowed in organized sections and units/sections were easily found given a table of contents section and colorful, clearly labeled tabs demarcating each individual unit (24 units in each curriculum guide for three- and four-year-olds).

Further demonstrating clarity and ease of use, the curriculum provides specific recommendations on selection of classroom materials for each of the Guides. Within each unit, a multitude of important child development issues have been accounted for and guidance is clearly articulated. For example, as guided by Gardner's theory of multi-intelligences, a diversity of activities for all types of learners are presented:

- ▶ Linguistic intelligence or word smart: Retelling Favorite Stories,
- ▶ Logical-mathematical intelligence or number/reasoning smart: Working Sequence Puzzles,
- ▶ Spatial intelligence or picture smart: Making a Leaf Poster,
- ▶ Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence or body smart: Rolling a Football,
- ▶ Musical intelligence or music smart: Moving to Music,
- ▶ Interpersonal intelligence or people smart: Telephoning Friends,
- ▶ Intrapersonal intelligence or self smart: Creating a wordless book, and
- ▶ Naturalist intelligence or nature smart: Learning About the Moon.

Although the materials are well-organized and account for children's early learning and development in several ways, there are some areas that may benefit from slight modification. First, the table of contents section in both guides are titled and presented differently. For the purposes of consistency and ease of use, one method, specifically as found in the guide for four-year-olds, might be followed. On the whole, the logic of organization found in both guides is consistent and provides an easy-to-use format for readers.

Another suggestion for consideration is related to expanding the use of the curriculum. As sensitivity to cultural and ethnic diversity comes to the forefront of quality early education, accounting for those children from families whose primary language is not English, and ensuring that the materials can be used in a variety of programs is important. Currently, the WEE Learn curriculum materials are not available in other languages, which defaults the complexity of

translation onto the teachers and administrators of the programs. It may be worthwhile to translate curriculum materials in Spanish and other languages.

Throughout the materials, administrators and teachers are well-guided and examples are often used to introduce new concepts. For administrators, direction is provided on beginning a program, as well as developing policies and procedures. Clear guidance is also provided to teachers on important topics such as their role in the classroom, the importance of a child's home life, and how to plan a daily routine. Moreover, given the strength of the information provided to teachers in the *Teaching in Christian Weekday Early Education* book, it is recommended that potential purchasers are informed of the benefits of purchasing and/or reading this book prior to their use of the curricular guides for all age groups.

Instruction

Through clear terminology, the developers clearly communicate an emphasis on the importance that children learn about their worlds in unique ways. The curricular materials encourage and guide teachers on organizing the environment with a variety of centers that support learning throughout daily routines including:

- ▶ Art Center
- ▶ Author's Corner
- ▶ Block Center
- ▶ Book and Listening Center
- ▶ Home Living Center
- ▶ Music Center
- ▶ Nature And Science Center
- ▶ Puzzles and Manipulatives Center
- ▶ Sharing Group Experiences (planned as a group session to discuss children's play experiences after the activity).

A strong acknowledgement of children's individual learning styles is presented in the *Weekday Early Education Administrator's Guide* and the *Teaching in Christian Weekday Early Education* books. For example, in chapter 10 of the Administrator's Guide, the developers clearly indicate this philosophy, "Each individual child grows mentally, physically, spiritually, socially, and emotionally at his own pace" (p. 93).

Beyond the emphasis placed on providing individually and age-appropriate activities for all children, the curriculum also firmly accounts for the unique needs of children with various developmental disabilities and special health care needs. In addition to providing specific guidance on arranging and planning activities within the nature and science, blocks, books and listening, and puzzles and manipulatives centers, examples of planned activities for teaching sensitivity and appreciation of children with special needs include *Wonderfully Made Children with Special Needs* and *Sharing Group Experiences*. Given that the concept of inclusion reaches far beyond the incorporation of an activity (e.g., learning about wheelchairs), the WEE Learn curriculum communicates the inclusion of all children in their everyday teachings based in Christianity. Daily routines include lessons about others and learning about the unique relationships in their lives.

Theoretical Foundation

Overall, the activities successfully intertwine modern theoretical concepts with Christian philosophy as found in several examples throughout the materials. One example of this can be found in the importance placed on how children gain meaning by listening. This developmental statement is evidenced in research and supported in the curriculum. Hearing a Bible story or listening to music about Jesus' life are both examples of how teachers can ensure they support children's early learning by means of Christian testament.

Theories help adults make sense of their worlds in three distinction ways: (1) through description of the phenomena, (2) explanation of the processes involved, and (3) prediction of outcomes. Regardless of focus, theories provide us with a framework to organize our worlds and those around us. With strong recognition of the importance of theory, the WEE Learn curriculum has not fallen short as many curriculums developed for young children often do. Concepts from several theories can be easily identified to the trained eye with a basis in the work of several theorists including Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development, Erikson's Stages of Development and Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Without a doubt, the developers of the curricular materials interpret the world of children's development through one or more of these theoretical frameworks. However, what is missing from this well-developed theoretical foundation are clear directions and guidance for teachers who

may or may not have understandings of the role of theories, have knowledge about specific theories, and/or have had experiences with young children and their families.

The developers of the materials may find it beneficial to clarify the philosophical framework and incorporate theoretical ideas and/or concepts as they appear in the content. Although the primary and most vital foundation of the WEE Learn materials is the teachings from the Bible, readers may also gain deeper understandings of their multiple roles working with young children (e.g., teacher, co-worker) when provided with clear theoretical guidance with specific concepts.

Performance Standards

To assess whether the materials of the WEE Learn curriculum aligned with the Florida Performance Standards for Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Old children, an extensive analysis was conducted per domain and per unit of each of the Guides. Activities and information were documented relevant to each of the seven developmental domains as found in the Florida Performance Standards, although identified at varying levels of detail and depth. The following analysis is based on the following domains: physical health, approaches to learning, social and emotional, language and communication, emergent literacy, cognitive development and general knowledge, and motor development.

Physical Health

The curriculum had a number of activities covering learning areas associated with the physical health and well-being of children. The activities ranged from children learning from teachers about hygiene and good nutrition, to activities where children can play an active role in their learning through play experiences such as washing fruits and vegetables. Some examples can be identified in the following activities:

- ▶ Reading Books About Being Healthy,
- ▶ Washing Fruit and Vegetables,
- ▶ Nature and Science Center,
- ▶ Visiting with a Dental Hygienist,

- ▶ Practicing Hand Washing,
- ▶ Learning About Eating Nutritious Foods ,
- ▶ Learning About Keeping Teeth Healthy,
- ▶ Learning About Visiting the Doctor, and
- ▶ Learning About Exercise and Rest.

The materials have a solid foundation on the critical issues of not only ensuring children’s physical health and well-being, but also the importance of involving children in activities that encourage and support self-help skills, hygiene, and early nutrition skills that will serve them as they grow older and experience different environments.

Approaches to Learning

This domain is based on the understanding that children learn in different ways and should display specific intentions such as curiosity and persistence in their play and interactions. The information for teachers and administrators in the WEE Learn curriculum is very sensitive to this developmental issue, as demonstrated through several activities either encouraging these skills in children or supporting their efforts. Taking into consideration that children learn in different ways, the WEE Learn curriculum is based on the notion of center time. Selected examples can be found in the following activities:

- ▶ Art Center - Creating a Sparkle Design,
- ▶ Block Center – Going Camping,
- ▶ Book and Listening Center - Reading a Book About Family Activities, and Listening to a Book on Tape,
- ▶ Homeliving Center - Preparing for a Picnic,
- ▶ Music Center - Listening to Various Instruments,
- ▶ Nature and Science - Making Sink-and-Float Gelatin,
- ▶ Puzzles and Manipulatives Center - Sequencing Pictures,
- ▶ Sharing Group Experiences - Talking about Various Kinds of Families, and
- ▶ Outdoor Time Activities - Going Camping.

Ensuring time and opportunity for children to explore their environments, make individual choices, and experience new situations is well covered in the materials. This emphasis can also be found in the *Weekday Early Education Administrator’s Guide* and the *Teaching in Christian*

Weekday Early Education books. For example, terms such as creativity, freedom of movement, discovery, and individual interests are all an integral piece of the WEE Learn philosophy.

Social and Emotional Development

The social and emotional development of children is a complex process which is highly dependent on the child's development in other domains. The WEE Learn curriculum provides for several opportunities for children to not only learn about interactions and relationships with others, but also be involved in the processes through play, planned activities, and encouraged adult-child interactions on a daily basis.

However, the WEE Learn curriculum was not as strong in this area of children's development and has provided less clear direction for teachers and administrators. In relation to this standard, several areas were under-represented in the materials. The following sections of the Performance Standards were noted as being less present in the curricular materials as compared to other sections.

In general, information was not completely absent from the materials, rather, the guidance offered relevant to a select few of the Performance Standards in this domain were less developed. A handful of the Performance Standards, for both three- and four-year olds, are solely dependent on a teacher's observations of that skill. For some teachers, observing children's behavior is a natural skill and daily occurrence. For others, however, knowing what to expect from children, both in behavior and in interaction, can be a new experience, an experience that may need added direction. Regardless of skill level, planning for observation is a critical expertise teachers need as children develop and master new skills. Not only can observations skills serve teachers in better understanding where each child is and where they need to go, but keen observation skills can assist teachers in the early identification of potential developmental delays or other special health care need.

Information is needed that can help teachers gain a framework on what to expect from children. By providing teachers an idea about how a three- or four-year old might behave in certain situations (not necessarily that they will), teachers can be equipped with information to be

more skilled observers. The following indicators in the Social and Emotional domain were subject to this recommendation:

Self-Control- Follows simple classroom rules and routines with guidance.

Interaction with Others- Showing empathy and caring for others.

Social Problem Solving- Seeks adult help when in need to resolve conflicts.

Relationships with Familiar Adults- Responds appropriately to adults and forms positive relationships with familiar adults.

Language and Communication

This domain was highly represented in the curriculum materials as many activities were included to allow children opportunities to express themselves in various mediums including speaking, listening, drawing, singing, and providing children time to interact with others and teachers in one-on-one settings as well as group sessions. Examples of targeted activities include the following:

- ▶ Listening to a Storyteller,
- ▶ Talking About Photographs of Friends,
- ▶ Making Christmas Cards,
- ▶ Reading Predictable Books,
- ▶ Recording a Story, and
- ▶ Telling a Flannel Board Story.

Cognitive Development and General Knowledge

Overall, there is substantial guidance for teachers on children's attainment of knowledge. Additionally, a variety of individually and age-appropriate activities are provided that relate specifically to cognitive development and general knowledge. However, outside of the actual activities and topics in the materials, a minor recommendation relates to the use of terminology in the sections relevant to a child's cognitive and general knowledge skills. Throughout the curricular materials, the developers have chosen to use the term "mental" to refer to the skills and development in a child's ability to think, interpret, and learn. On the contrary, the state of Florida and other states have identified the term "cognitive" to refer to these processes in a child's mind and personality. For consistency purposes and to ensure that readers do not correlate the term

“mental” with either negative or unfounded perceptions (e.g., mental health, mental disorders), it is suggested that the term be replaced with the more widely acceptable term, “cognitive.”

Motor Development

The curriculum was strongly aligned with this domain in the Performance Standards for three- and four-year old children. Analysis revealed a multitude of opportunities for children to develop their motor skills including indoor and outdoor time, with a range of opportunities from running and climbing to working carefully with scissors and keys. Examples of such guidance can be found in the following examples:

- ▶ Making a Kite,
- ▶ Filling a Nesting Bag,
- ▶ Making Fingerprint Flowers,
- ▶ Making a Footprint Butterfly,
- ▶ Music Center,
- ▶ Following Musical Steps,
- ▶ Imagining with Musical Feet, and
- ▶ Clapping Names.

Emergent Literacy for Four-Year-Olds

Upon guidance by the Florida Department of Education, Office of Early Learning, revisions have been made to the Florida Performance Standards relevant to four-year-old children. Although the revisions have been a recent event, the curriculum materials still demonstrate evidence which support the revised standards. Because the *Emergent Literacy* domain has not yet been completed, only a limited review of this domain was possible. However, the curriculum includes clear indicators in the area of emergent literacy which includes emergent reading and emergent writing.