

KIDBIZ Resources

Making A Difference In The Life Of A Child

Articles by Patricia Dischler available for reprint with tagline:

Patricia Dischler is an author, professional speaker and consultant helping those who care for and about children to make a difference. Learn more at www.patriciadischler.com.

CREATING A CURRICULUM

By Patricia Dischler

Creating a plan for the education and development of the children in your care can be both rewarding and daunting. As the stakes are raised in each state to provide the highest quality of care possible for today's children we are asked to rise to this challenge and create effective curriculum. With choices ranging from pre-packaged options to starting your own one lesson plan at a time it can be difficult to be sure you are on the right track.

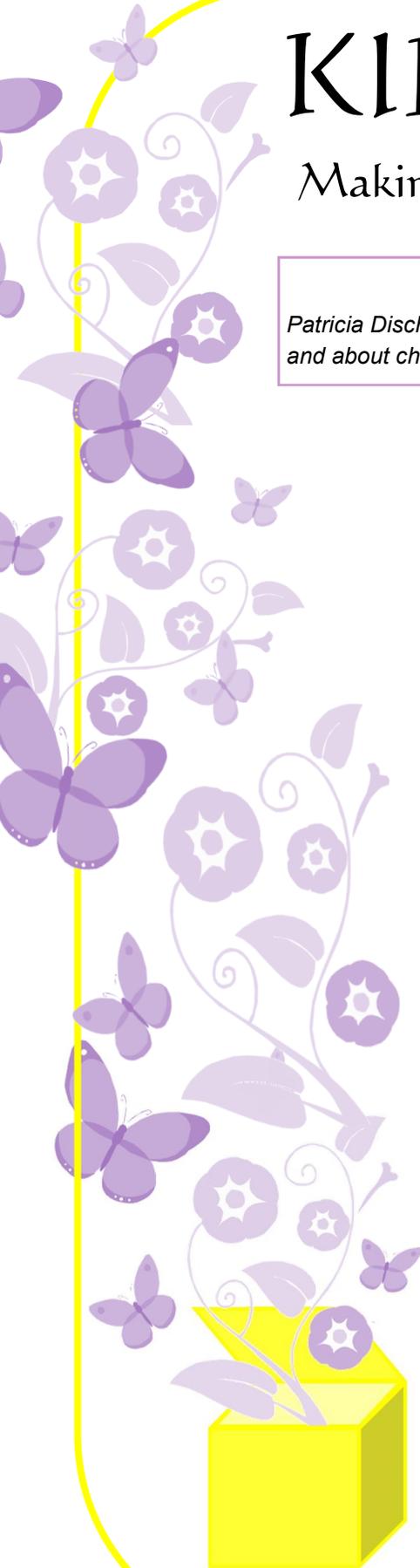
With the goal of any effective curriculum being that we see results in a child's development, it follows that the place to start is in understanding what developmental goals you have for the child. Once this has been determined, you can use this information to either enhance or customize a pre-packaged curriculum, or begin to build your own lesson plans one week at a time from the myriad of activity resources available. Let's take a look at how to use these two steps to get you on the road to a great curriculum!

Developmental Goals

Developmental goals can be identified by assessment programs that come in basically two forms: a checklist of milestones the child has reached or attempted, or a tool to observe and record what the child is currently doing. Both are useful tools, choose the style that you feel the most comfortable with and that helps you to assess where a child is developmentally and where they need to go next. Some providers prefer to have a straight forward checklist to assess if a child has reached all of their goals, telling them the areas that still need to be worked on. Others prefer to record only what a child has accomplished already, telling them which areas no longer need work.

You may find parts of each that you would like to use. For example, use the observe/record technique to get a good assessment of where the children are, what they CAN do. Then use this to fill in a check list style developmental record. Rather than only checking off what they've accomplished create three columns to check: not attempted/emerging, progressing, or mastered. This can give you a better sense of where they are on their journey to reaching their goals.

Many states have created their own early learning standards or guidelines. These should be taken into consideration when creating a curriculum, and depending on the standards, may be a useful assessment tool for you to use.



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Regardless of the style of assessment tool you use, for the purpose of creating a curriculum what you need it to do for you is to provide a plan. A developmental record essentially becomes your curriculum, it will be the list of goals in each subject area that you have for the children in your care. Look at several options.

After deciding on a basic style, the next step is to find one that reflects your mission statement. As a professional you want more than a curriculum that is educationally sound, you want one that is as unique as you are. You want to create a curriculum that reflects your mission statement and philosophy for your daycare and lets your personality shine through.

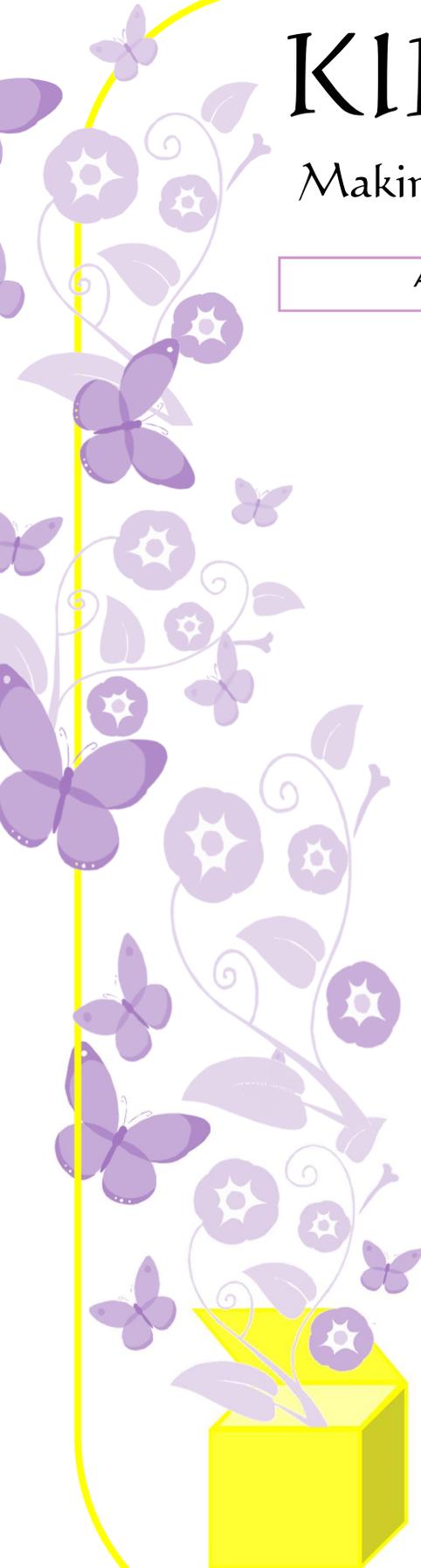
There are many styles available. For example, if creativity is a priority in your school, be sure the developmental record will show the milestones for developing creativity such as capacity for "pretend play", ability to make choices, solve problems, create ideas, etc. If your emphasis is on preschool academics be sure the developmental record reflects those milestones, such as memory, an interest in the written word, and understanding math concepts. A good one will actually reflect all these concepts, but what you are looking for is the amount of emphasis for each, does the record you're considering give enough coverage to the issues you feel are important? Will you be able to use it to accurately assess whether or not you are reaching your goals with the children? Using the creativity focus again as an example, you would want a developmental record that included more than one line assessing this skill; you would look for one that goes into the details of the skills used to express creativity.

You will need a developmental record for each age that you care for. For instance, if you care for two year olds you should have a one year developmental record to follow while they are two. This applies to every age. This is also where it can get complicated for family day care providers who care for children of different ages. Using a "school year" that coincides with the public school year helps to figure what year each child should be in so that they progress towards being prepared for their kindergarten year. Once in the school system, children are grouped by their "school year", not their birth date.

Once you have found a developmental record or assessment tool that you like and that reflects your philosophy and mission statement, you have your base curriculum! This is your plan for what you will be teaching the children for one year. If you care for different ages, arrange the developmental records by year in a binder from infant through pre-k for a complete early childhood curriculum. Wasn't that simple?

Lesson Planning

Now that you know WHAT you want to teach the children, it's time to do the real work and make a plan for exactly HOW you will teach it to them. These will be your lesson plans. Typically done one week at a time they will show the specific activities that you will offer in order to promote the children's growth towards the specific goals you have outlined in your curriculum.



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The biggest mistake a provider can make is to throw one together quickly for the sake of having one or buy one lesson book and decide that's it. This should be a well-thought through process that reflects your long term commitment to this profession. Parents do, and will, notice the difference. Posting any old plan on a parent board isn't enough, and posting one that doesn't reflect what you are actually planning for the day is a breach of trust that will ultimately kill your business. Parents may not even read your posted lesson plans. But don't let that fool you into a false sense of comfort. What's important to the parents isn't what you plan it's what you do. The plan is for you, the results of the plan are for the parents. They will know by the stories their children tell, the developmental milestones their children reach and the physical evidence in your room what activities were executed. They will see the difference between an orderly and thoughtful progression of learning and a haphazard one. In order to maintain a high quality reputation you will have to maintain a high level of learning for children in your environment.

The good news is two-fold. First, no lesson plan is carved in stone, you can always change what doesn't work. And second, if what you put together does work, it can be used over and over for years to come. The bulk of lesson planning a full year curriculum is a job that may take a long time to finish, but will save you countless hours in the lifetime of your business.

A truly successful curriculum will not simply "copy" a theory or plan from a book, but will apply to an individual child care provider and the individual children in their care. No two children are the same, and neither should be their plan for learning.

Take what you can learn about child development and assessment, pair it with exciting and creative activities that interest the children in your care and you will undoubtedly have an effective curriculum that benefits not only the children, but your business as well!

Patricia Dischler is an author, professional speaker and consultant. This article is based on her book *Teaching the 3 Cs: Creativity, Curiosity & Courtesy*. For more information visit: www.patriciadischler.com

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