



## Child Development / Cognitive Development Integrated Curriculum



Dear Elizabeth,

My grandson's preschool teacher said he's going to learn social studies, art and reading all at the same time. But shouldn't this kind of teaching wait until he's older?

- **Joan Calderon**

### Elizabeth's Tips



**Elizabeth Sanchez**

Host

- All of your child's learning is connected
- An integrated approach to learning is natural
- Give your child activities & projects based on his interests

### Expert Advice



**Mike Salas**

Preschool teacher for 16 years

#### **What is an Integrated Curriculum?**

Integrated curriculum is basically adding another element to existing materials or activities. What usually ends up happening is the child adds that element to their play or exploration. And that stimulates more curiosity and possibilities, which exercises their thinking skills.

#### **How an Integrated Curriculum Helps Children Learn**

An integrated curriculum is a great idea for kids under the age of five because children become more engaged in different activities that combine different skills. This type of learning is more meaningful for the children as each one feels positive about their accomplishment in the scheme of the overall project. This is a more balanced learning approach as opposed to learning an isolated subject.

#### **"Layered Learning"**

Integrated curriculum is sometimes referred to as layered learning. An example would be like a three-layer dip. Take a song, for example. Your bottom layer is rhythm, which is math, then the melody, which is music, and the lyrics, which is language. Add some tambourine or maracas and you add another layer, physical development.

Research shows that this is one of the best ways to layer learning for children, but it doesn't mean you can't take advantage of spontaneous teachable moments. Just because something comes up unexpectedly and doesn't fit into the plan, that doesn't mean you

shouldn't miss the teachable moment.

### **Does an Integrated Curriculum Create Confusion?**

Some parents may fear that an integrated curriculum might somehow cause children confusion because they're dealing with more than one subject. But it really doesn't create confusion. The key is to keep it simple. As children develop their skills you can challenge them a little by adding another small element, like putting that grocery list in an envelope, which exercises fine motor skills.

### **Advantages**

There are plenty of advantages to this approach of teaching. You are encouraging children's thinking skills. And once you as a parent or caregiver practice blending things together, you find it easier to think of things to add to an activity. Through one experience you are helping to develop a variety of areas in children's development.

### **Can Parents Use This Approach at Home?**

It's very possible that parents are already doing integrated curriculum without realizing it. One of the first things we do with children is we sing to them, and there we have rhythm and language, which are roots for math and reading skills. Add numbers like the song "5 Little Monkeys" and you have blended, or integrated counting with language.

Now for 3, 4, and 5 year olds you can give your child a small clipboard with a pad of paper and a pen and they can make their own grocery list when you're doing yours. Or we can have 3 good sized containers that we label with a piece of paper "wood", "plastic", and "metal". Throughout the day they can put whatever they find in the appropriate container. We've integrated sense of touch, or sensory, to pre-reading skills to even math because there's a possibility that one container will get full and there you have some measuring.

### **When Choosing a Preschool**

It's important if you're looking for a preschool or program for your child that you see that the curriculum is integrated and engaging. One way is by making sure the adults are asking open-ended questions of the children. That they're taking a theme and expanding that theme in many ways. For example, art and science can be connected, as well as math and literacy. Props are being used to integrate with reading and singing exercises to expand a child's language skills.

### **Both Planned and Spontaneous?**

An integrated curriculum can be both planned and spontaneous. You are adding the element, so you've done some planning. The spontaneous part is what your child does. Sometimes something happens that you never would have expected. One time I made a pad of paper for a child to draw on. She went around the room scribbling on a paper, tearing it off, giving one to every adult in the room. I mentioned it in passing when her mom picked her up that evening, and her mom tells me she got a ticket on the way to school that morning. This three- year-old gave those pieces of paper to everyone without a word. Who knew?



**Marsol Ward**

Assistant preschool  
director

I really believe in an integrated way of learning because it's fun. It keeps the kids interested and focused. With thematic learning, the kids feel knowledgeable enough about the subject to answer simple questions, which make them feel important and included.



**Andrea Rangel**

Child care provider for 16  
years

An integrated curriculum is really a great way to teach kids, especially young children because it's natural for kids to learn this way and their experiences will be much more meaningful. The curriculum keeps all of the kids of varying ages connected, engaged and stimulated. It helps with developing their social skills and encourages the kids to learn while having fun. This environment also teaches them patience and courtesy to others. I can take a single theme like the ocean, and instead of just focusing on one thing, we branch out and all of a sudden, we're learning about animals, and science, and colors, and art, and the kids love it, and I see how they're making the connections to big world we live in.



**Martin Sottile**

Father of two

An integrated curriculum is easier on me as a parent because it works for my children. They don't know they are learning math or science or reading skills. For my twins, it's all about having fun, learning and discovering new cool stuff. So my children have never had a problem integrating more than one subject. They may have a short attention span and become distracted at times, but that's normal. The key is repetition. What they may not be interested in or confused by today, may hold their interest when revisited again in the future.

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