

## The Early Years Learner Curriculum for Three to Four Year Old Children in the Philippines

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to develop a developmentally appropriate early years curriculum for three to four year old children in the Philippines based on best practices of the learning centers in Ontario, utilizing the developmental research and narrative inquiry approaches to curriculum development and data gathering. A diverse group of early childhood educators were sought for the interview using the purposive, criterion sampling method, with twelve fully participating, while a total of 51 responded for the survey. While respondents from Ontario favored child-led teaching experiences, Filipino educators are more subject-centered. However, when analyzed together, there are common best practices between the regions as well. The themes developed from the interviews and the results from the survey formed the foundations and the structure of the Early Years Learner Curriculum.

*Keywords: Early Years Learner, Curriculum, Children*

### INTRODUCTION

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In the past decade, academic preschools have been increasing in number all around the world, having four-year-old children practicing highly academic activities that would have been implausible thirty years ago at the early childhood level.

While preschool for three-to-four-year-old children in the country is not mandatory, this group of children should be attending preschool because this is a period when the human brain is in rapid development (UNICEF Philippines, 2018).

Children who are sometimes barely-three-years of age are now attending preschool in preparation for the more rigorous K-12 system (UNICEF Philippines, 2018).

While the fundamental importance of play in early childhood pedagogy has long

been recognized, the current expectation to produce learners who are ready for elementary school has resulted in teachers feeling compelled to teach young children using conventional instruction (Christakis, 2016). This type of teaching in kindergarten limits their opportunities to experience and learn about the world in their own terms (Wood, 2017).

The ever-changing education landscape raises the learning expectations and more than ever, there is a need for an early learning curriculum that moves towards meeting learning goals without compromising what is developmentally appropriate, and this lack of appropriate structure in place poses a challenge in the Filipino kindergarten classrooms.

## RELATED LITERATURE

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Literature confirms that a quality early childhood education program has great potential for addressing academic preparedness in K-12 education and beyond. However, that maximum benefit will only happen if and when key elements are considered including the developmental characteristics of the learners, developmentally appropriate practices, school readiness, sound curriculum content, fair assessment, and teacher training (Lasser & Fite, 2011).

When the unique developmental needs of early learners are recognized in the formation of the early childhood education curriculum, it becomes a more meaningful and enriching educational opportunity.

To enhance the development of the young learners, best practices must include among others, inquiry-based learning, music and storytelling, all while educators intentionally support, and integrate language learning opportunities into the different activities and play (Committee on the Science of Children, 2016).

Age-appropriate, nurturing, and play-based instruction recognizes that socially and cognitively, three- to four-year-old children learn by playing.

### **Significance of the Study**

With the outcomes of this study, curriculum makers may gain deeper insights on the choosing and designing of curricular materials and implementing strategies that could positively impact the classroom.

It may also provide textbook writers with information needed to promote the importance of a play-based approach to learning in written text.

Moreover, it provides Filipino teachers with new approaches anchored in best practices that promote student achievement and participation.

Filipino children as the direct recipients will be provided with a more holistic approach to learning and finally, the outcomes of this study may be used to add to and/or improve parent knowledge in creating a home environment that is more equipped to foster developmentally appropriate learning.

### **Objectives**

The researcher aims to develop the Early Years Learner Curriculum (EYLC) that will encourage holistic child development where activities will employ their hands, engage their emotions, and encourage their minds.

The following objectives were necessary to the researcher's curriculum development:

1. Identify and compare the developmental milestones of children in Ontario and the Philippines as the basis for the identification of the relevant features of the early learning centers in Ontario.
2. Identify the best practices of early learning centers in Ontario that can be adapted to the EYLC model for three-to-four-year-old Filipino children.
3. Design a developmentally appropriate curriculum for three-to-four-year-old children in the Philippines

### **Theoretical Framework**

As there is no one theory that can explain child development, this study is anchored on two predominant educational learning theories - cognitivism, and constructivism as advocated by (1)Jean

Piaget, whose theory of cognitive development promotes the readiness approach as an attitude to learning, (2) Albert Bandura whose social learning theory is based on the premise that learning is influenced by the give-and-take between the learning environment, behavior, and personal experiences of a learner, (3) Lev Vygotsky who asserts that learning is a socially constructed, reciprocal experience for the learner and (4) Urie Bronfenbrenner whose theory of development highlights how a child's development is affected by their social relationships and the world around them.

These proponents believe that young children initiate most of the activities required for learning and development, and are active participants in the learning process.

### **Scope and Limitation**

This study recognizes that while developmental milestones are globally accepted checkpoints in a typical child's development at a particular age, there is no one specific set that describes all children in the world.

Hence, this study specifically compared the developmental milestones defined by both the Province of Ontario's Ministry of Education and the Department of Education in the Philippines.

From among the identified best practices of learning centers in Ontario, only the ones that relevant to the Filipino culture and environment were included in the development of this curriculum.

Finally, this EYLC is predominantly based on non-academic, semi-structured activities that employ the hands, engage emotions, and encourage the mind to prepare three- to four-year-old Filipino children.

## **METHODOLOGY**

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This study employed a mixed methods approach when collecting information from participants in Ontario and the Philippines using the purposive criterion and convenient sampling methods.

Inclusion criteria for sampling specified that participants must be currently employed by an early childhood education center at the time of the study.

Data was gathered by the researcher through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the lived experiences of educators in a semi-structured interview through Zoom, tackling classroom management, curriculum content, activities, strategies and approaches, class size,

teacher training, and materials used among others. The interviews were concluded when a saturation point was reached.

Naturalistic classroom observations, initially intended to provide quantitative data to the study were not made possible as restrictions were raised in the province of Ontario due to the pandemic. Instead, an educator survey was developed and conducted among early childhood educators from both Ontario and the Philippines to gather insight on learning structures using a Google Form. The survey ran for ten days and closed with 51 responses.

Qualitative data from the interviews were transformed through interpretation

using a simplified version of Hycner’s five - phase explication process including (1) transcription of the interviews, (2) delineating units of general meaning, (3) delineating units of meaning in relevance to the questions, (4) forming themes through the clustering of units of general meaning, and (5) summarizing.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, median, and percentage distribution were used to characterize the quantitative data gathered due to the non-random sampling method utilized in this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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Findings of the study are as follows:

1. The two regions differ in the way they categorize the developmental milestones but are found to have similar expectations from three- to four-year-old children in the different domains.

2. Data also implies that educators from Ontario (56.9%) often to always emphasize indoor and outdoor play, hands-on tasks and other open-ended activities, storytelling, and utilize music among others as an approach to the teaching and learning process.

### *Median Responses of Respondents from Ontario*

Items	Rank	Median	Interpretation
Indoor free play	1-7	5.0	Always
Outdoor free play			
Storytelling			
Arts and crafts			
Pretend play			
Socratic method of questioning			
Open-ended activities			
Multisensorial, manipulative materials	8-11	4.0	Often
Music			
Daily structured routine			
Student - led class			

3. Educators from the Philippines were found among others to always utilize coloring pages, open-ended activities, pre-prepared

worksheets, and workbooks, and often to always favor subject – focused teaching.

**Median Responses of Respondents from the Philippines**

Items	Rank	Median	Interpretation
Storytelling	1-8	5.0	Always
Multisensorial, manipulative materials			
Music			
Guided or structured play			
Technology and screen time			
Pre - prepared activity sheets			
Coloring pages			
Workbook			
Indoor free play	9-11	4.5	Often to Always
Thematic teaching			
Subject - focused teaching			
Outdoor free play	12-17	4.0	Often
Arts and crafts			
Pretend play			
Socratic method of questioning			
Open - ended activities			
Daily structured routine			

4. When analyzed together, some of the best practices of the early learning centers in Ontario were seen to be practiced in the Philippines as well, although not observed or implemented as often. It

includes the use of multisensorial materials, indoor and outdoor play, storytelling, music, arts and crafts, use of the Socratic method of questioning, and a daily structured routine.

**Median Responses of Respondents from both Regions**

Items	Rank	Median	Interpretation
Multisensorial, manipulative materials	1-6	5.0	Always
Indoor free play			
Outdoor free play			
Storytelling			
Pretend play			
Open-ended activities			
Music	7 -11	4.0	Often
Arts and crafts			
Socratic method of questioning			
Daily structured routine			
Student - led class			

5. The next section is an overview of how both the qualitative and quantitative findings of the study form the structure of the Early Years Learner Curriculum (EYLC).

### ***The Early Years Learner Curriculum***

Based on the themes formed from the interviews, and the data collected from the survey, the researcher developed the Early Years Learner Curriculum (EYLC), integrating the two learning theories to the data collected, producing an extensive method

through the best practices of ECE centers in Ontario that culturally fit the Philippine kindergarten system.

Specifically, the Early Years Learner Curriculum (EYLC) is a semi – structured, child – led curricular system, which includes specific components such as: flexible schedules, domain-centered learning, and non-numerical assessment, all founded on the 3Es Principle, and the EYLC Pedagogy and Learning Structure.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Currently, there is no need for a standardized curriculum for three- to four-year-old children in the Philippines because the mandatory preschool education begins at five years. However, as schools offer classes for three- to four-year-old children, the researcher recommends that curriculum makers can take the results from this study and the implications presented as reference for future research towards the standardization and implementation of play- and domain – based, child – centered curriculum.

School administrators are recommended to encourage and support the research and development for more curriculum designs that are non-didactic in nature; doing away with workbooks and pre – prepared worksheets and encourage educators and staff to promote play and hands – on activities in their schools.

The EYLC believes that learning is not exclusively contained within the four walls of a classroom, but also in the home, and in the community. Therefore, the researcher urges parents, guardians, family members and the

community to support the continuity of learning by offering learning opportunities to their young children.

The development of the EYLC marks the first phase of a three-part developmental research project. The second phase will be a pilot implementation with an implement – and – document system to further develop the EYLC module.

The final phase will evaluate the implementation of the EYLC, specifically focusing on the module, teaching strategies, and assessment methods in order to make any necessary revisions prior to formal operation of the EYLC for use at the Kindergarten Department of Central Philippine University.

Finally, because the EYLC employs specific teaching strategies, the researcher envisions the development of a teacher training program specific to the EYLC offered at the College of Education at Central Philippine University, not only for educators but for parents and caretakers as well, in our district, in Iloilo City, and one day, the whole country.

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