




An Early Childhood Educator's Guide to
a Whole-Child Approach

Characteristics and Benefits of a Whole-Child,
Play-Based Approach to Early Education



A 'whole-child' education prioritizes the full scope of a child's developmental needs as a way to advance educational equity and ensure that every child reaches their fullest potential."¹

Learning Policy Institute



Introduction

How do children learn?



How do children learn?

It's a fascinating and complex question with a surprisingly straightforward answer: every way they can.

Whenever we talk about a “whole-child approach,” we mean that teachers are providing instruction and assessing growth in ways that leverage the essential truth that human beings are pre-wired to develop and learn in every way they can. A “whole-child approach” means intentionally addressing all aspects of child development, often multiple aspects simultaneously, rather than limiting learning and assessment of learning to the development of isolated skills. A whole-child approach helps every child reach their fullest potential through developmentally appropriate instruction, engagement, and assessment for such diverse subjects as

- social-emotional development;
- cognitive development;
- physical skills; and
- content areas such as language and literacy, math, science, technology, social studies, and the arts.

Proven. Effective. Aligned.

The Creative Curriculum is grounded in 38 research-based objectives for development and learning. These objectives are aligned with state early learning guidelines and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, so you can feel confident that you are meeting the expectations for instruction that are outlined in these important requirements while focusing on the needs of each individual child.

[Learn More →](#)



Introduction | How do children learn?

A comprehensive, whole-child curriculum supports children in growing the extensive root system of foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities that will prepare them for later success in school and in life. Children and adults don't use these skills in isolation, so teaching them in that way limits their potential as foundational skills that children can then apply to novel contexts and new problems. A whole-child approach doesn't neglect content learning (such as literacy, math, science, and social studies); rather it integrates those skills throughout the curriculum to create a more meaningful, deep, and long-lasting approach.

A key differentiator between a whole-child approach and one that prioritizes the development of skills in isolation is that, in a whole-child environment, concepts and skills are introduced, modeled, and practiced in meaningful contexts. Subsequent guided practice is intended to help children learn to transfer new skills, to help them be successful elsewhere.



Why does a whole-child approach matter?

A whole-child approach actively engages children in developmentally appropriate learning experiences across a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills, and abilities in a way that is representative of how these capacities are used in real life.

When children are deeply engaged in meaningful experiences that are challenging but not frustrating, they are less likely to exhibit behaviors that disrupt learning. A whole-child approach starts with engaging each child in meaningful, enjoyable experiences, thereby reducing challenging behavior in the classroom.

Instruction within a whole-child approach matters, and so does assessment. When teachers assess children's learning with a whole-child approach in mind, they recognize and respect the fact that children demonstrate what they know and can do in multiple ways.

Lastly, a whole-child approach is backed by research. A recent study in *Applied Developmental Science* (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2019) states that

"the brain and human capacities grow over the course of the entire developmental continuum and across the developmental spectrum (physical, cognitive, affective) in interactive ways."²



Play, a core tenant of the whole-child approach, is increasingly recognized for its critical role in children's development. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (n.d.) has published

"Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence."³

This finding is corroborated by California Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond (2021):

"Play-based learning is the most effective approach for supporting children's health, learning, and overall well-being."⁴

The whole-child approach to early education is significant for its successful outcomes on two fronts. First, it builds academic skills that children can transfer to new contexts. Second, it helps children embrace positive feelings about themselves, their relationships, and their learning. The two outcomes are sometimes thought to compete, as other approaches to early education often focus on one at the expense of the other. The power of the whole-child approach is its regard and support for both.

In short, a whole-child approach just makes sense. It's how children learn.



"All aspects of the educational environment support all of the dimensions of children's development... We stress that all of these are interactive and interrelated and that these aspects of education must be designed to work together in a tightly integrated fashion."²

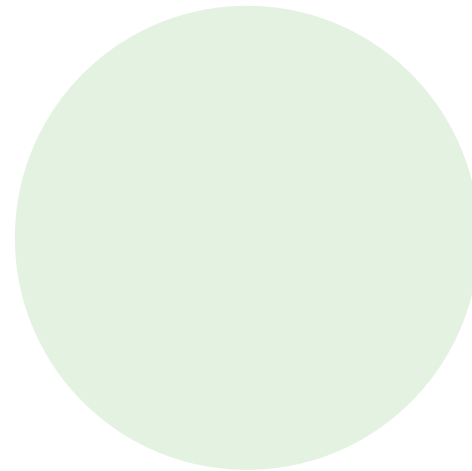
Applied Developmental Science

What's in this guide?

Though a whole-child approach benefits children of all ages, this guide dives deep into the especially valuable impact of a whole-child approach for early childhood programs that serve children aged three to six years old. The guide provides

- descriptions of whole-child instruction and assessment across content learning areas and developmental domains;
- a dedicated section on individualizing support for all children, including those with identified disabilities;
- ideas for creating a welcoming learning environment that celebrates and honors diversity;
- support for minimizing disruptive behaviors through the development of social problem-solving skills and active engagement in learning;
- practical strategies for implementing a whole-child approach in your classroom;
- an introduction to long-term, project-based studies that engage children in meaningful, cross-curricular learning through The Creative Curriculum; and
- a checklist for selecting the best whole-child curriculum for your program





Chapter 1

Language and Literacy



Language and Literacy

Nurturing comprehension and decoding skills for a lifetime of reading and learning

Careful, intentional, and explicit guidance in phonics and phonemic awareness is an essential component of any effective program for helping children learn to read. We know that the complex processes of language development and literacy learning begin long before children engage in activities that adults typically think of as “learning to read.” Teachers can build on children’s earliest understandings by introducing experiences that engage children’s innate need to communicate with others.

Embedding reading and writing experiences throughout each day helps children gain meaningful exposure and practical engagement with language and literacy in ways that make sense to them. A whole-child approach includes both intentional support for developing academic skills (e.g., phonics and phonemic awareness) and a focus on fostering a love of stories and books.



Research-based, measurable language and literacy objectives from The Creative Curriculum

- Listens to and understands increasingly complex language
- Uses language to express thoughts and needs
- Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills
- Demonstrates phonological awareness, phonics skills, and word recognition
- Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet
- Demonstrates knowledge of print and its uses
- Comprehends and responds to books and other texts
- Demonstrates writing skills



Chapter 1 | Language and Literacy

At the heart of a whole-child approach is giving children opportunities to learn and practice skills in context, including reading and writing. When teachers model and discuss language and literacy as strategies to communicate, children are guided to embrace reading, writing, speaking, and listening as powerful tools they can use to express their ideas and build relationships. Displaying a variety of print materials throughout the classroom and building in ample time for multiple read-aloud experiences each day helps children create connections to books, characters, and new ideas for solving problems; helps them develop a functional understanding of concepts of print; and offers opportunities for building rich vocabulary.





A whole-child approach: What does this look like in the classroom?

Whole-child classrooms include a balance of teacher-directed and child-led experiences throughout the day to give children sufficient opportunities to interact with language and literacy in authentic ways.

Dive Deeper

Explore these resources for more information on a whole-child approach to language development and literacy learning.

- [Educating the Whole Child: Teaching Children to Read →](#)
- [Educating the Whole Child: Writing Instruction →](#)
- [Language & Literacy Reviewer Guide →](#)
- [See Language and Literacy in Action Within The Creative Curriculum →](#)

Reconsider...	Try...	For example...
labeling the classroom with commercially prepared signs only.	inviting children to help you create labels for important parts of the classroom.	when you create signs for each interest area, ask the children if they would like to help decorate them or create their own to post alongside yours.
having children practice writing their names on worksheets.	giving them authentic, multiple opportunities to practice writing their names each day.	have children sign a daily attendance log.
isolating reading and writing to one area of the classroom or a single time of day.	stocking your interest areas with a variety of reading and writing materials.	include clipboards, paper, and writing instruments in the Dramatic Play area so children can imitate people who use writing, such as a server at a restaurant or a nurse at the doctor's office.
reading books aloud only once.	repeated readings with varied interactions.	start by asking children about the pictures they see during a "book walk" and, once children are familiar with the story, progress to having them retell it as you turn the pages.

Chapter 2

Mathematics

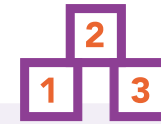


Mathematics

Finding the math in everyday, hands-on experiences

A functional understanding of mathematics concepts is essential to daily life. While instruction in the subject cannot be left to chance, it can easily be made a part of everyday classroom experiences and children's play. Children need a learning environment that intentionally incorporates opportunities to manipulate, draw, compare, describe, sort, and explore interesting materials and guidance in connecting those experiences to mathematics concepts.

A whole-child approach leads educators to intentionally design a learning environment rich with mathematics materials and activities with a mathematical focus. As we show children the real-life applications of math—and how investigative learning can make it fun—we help children build the skills that they will use every day, even without realizing it.



Research-based, measurable mathematics objectives from The Creative Curriculum

- Uses number concepts and operations
- Explores and describes spatial relationships and shapes
- Compares and measures
- Demonstrates knowledge of patterns





Dive Deeper

Explore these resources for more information on a whole-child approach to mathematics learning.

- [Educating the Whole Child: Mathematics Development →](#)
- [Mathematics Reviewer's Guide →](#)
- [See Mathematics in Action Within The Creative Curriculum →](#)

A whole-child approach: What does this look like in the classroom?

Educators can embed mathematical thinking into the everyday rhythm of their classrooms by involving children in solving the mathematics problems they encounter every day.

Reconsider...	Try...	For example...
relying solely on store-bought manipulatives.	engaging children and their families in helping you stock your Toys and Games area with collections of "found materials" that children often come across in their everyday lives.	children can count, compare, and create patterns with materials such as milk jug caps, buttons, or small stones. Discuss how the patterns they create relate to other patterns they notice around them.
complimenting a child's creation.	intentionally pointing out the patterns, shapes, or designs you see and asking them what else they notice about their art or construction.	point to or name some of the shapes in a child's block construction and ask how they chose those shapes to be part of their design.
relying solely on props and costumes.	recreating real-life mathematics scenarios in children's socio-dramatic play.	include play money (or invite the children to create their own currency) in your Dramatic Play area so children can pretend to work at and visit a store. A child might tell another child, "Hot dogs cost a dollar."
stocking your Block area with blocks and props only.	including paper and writing utensils so children can plan their constructions before they build or document their designs as they work.	after a child creates something they love, you can invite them to draw it so they will always remember it.



Chapter 3

Social–Emotional Development



Social–Emotional Development

Teaching essential skills for a lifetime of social–emotional well-being

A whole-child approach puts social–emotional development at its very core. The positive relationships educators foster with children and their families will have a greater, longer lasting impact than any other measure they take. Teachers support children’s social–emotional development through every interaction, as the teacher positively engages and responds to each child. As children are engaged and treated with respect, they can replicate that behavior to form positive relationships of their own.

Social–emotional development must be purposefully addressed in the learning environment. In The Creative Curriculum, social-emotional skills are intentionally integrated into the learning experiences, the studies, and even the classroom’s physical environment. Numerous Intentional Teaching Experiences, a core daily resource within The Creative Curriculum, expressly target social–emotional development in both large and small groups.



Teaching Strategies has been committed to providing intentional support for children’s social–emotional development for more than 40 years. Our connected ecosystem for early childhood education supports social–emotional development with curricula such as The Creative Curriculum and [AI’s Pals](#), [assessment](#), [professional development](#), and [family engagement](#). Additionally, [Noni](#) offers innovative support for building trauma-sensitive classrooms.

[Learn More About the Only Connected Ecosystem →](#)





A whole-child approach: What does this look like in the classroom?

As a teacher, you model social-emotional skills through every interaction, with the words you choose, the tone of your voice, your body language, and your facial expressions. Teachers offer children the chance to practice those skills in a low-risk setting and through developmentally appropriate learning opportunities.

Dive Deeper

Explore these resources for more information on a whole-child approach to social-emotional development.

- [Educating the Whole Child: Social-Emotional Development →](#)
- [Intentional Interactions: Social-Emotional Skills in Everyday Experiences →](#)
- [Six Positive Messages to Guide a Year of Teaching and Learning →](#)

Reconsider...	Try...	For example...
picking books based on an academic theme only.	sharing books and stories that have rich social-emotional ideas.	as you read, help children identify the problem in the story, empathize with the characters, and sort out their own feelings.
foregoing play time for seated learning.	crafting a daily schedule that prioritizes time for play, both indoors and outdoors.	make sure your daily schedule includes uninterrupted blocks of at least 60 minutes of indoor choice time and at least 40 minutes of outdoor choice time each day.
offering different experiences to children of varying ability levels.	simply tweaking an experience so that every child who wishes to participate may do so at a level that is challenging but not frustrating.	when playing a memory matching game, start with only two or three sets of possible matches. Offer more possible matches to children ready for a bigger challenge. For children who need greater support, separate the matches into two piles so that the child knows to draw one card from each pile.
independently making adjustments to the daily schedule to respond to unforeseen circumstances.	modeling reactions to teach children how to come up with practical solutions.	if it rains, you can say "I'm so disappointed that we can't go outside to play today. I really wish we could. What could we do inside that would be just as fun?"



Chapter 4

Including All Children



Including All Children

Individualizing instruction to meet the needs of each child

Just like all children, those with disabilities deserve high-quality learning experiences intentionally crafted and implemented by responsive, caring adults. Also like all children, children with disabilities benefit from an instructional approach that honors and values each child as a whole human being with thoughts, feelings, knowledge, skills, and abilities.

How can I use a whole-child approach for children of varying ability levels?

One universal truth about all children—though perhaps especially evident in children with disabilities—is that all children are the same and all children are different. A comprehensive curriculum that prioritizes individualized support for each child, regardless of demonstrated skill levels, provides the most inclusive approach. Therefore, a comprehensive whole-child curriculum should be rooted in developmental progressions of learning that span the entirety of the early childhood years (birth to age eight). Curricular frameworks that focus solely on a more limited range of ability levels are not effective if children start either below or above the few levels described.



The Creative Curriculum provides developmental progressions of learning that span the entirety of the early childhood years and offers detailed guidance to scaffold and individualize learning to support each child's growth.





Dive Deeper

Explore these resources for more information on a whole-child approach to educating children with disabilities.

- [Educating the Whole Child: Support for Children With Disabilities →](#)
- [Supporting the Strengths and Needs of Children in Special Education Programs →](#)
- [Watch How to Support Learners with Various Skill Levels →](#)

A whole-child approach: What does this look like in the classroom?

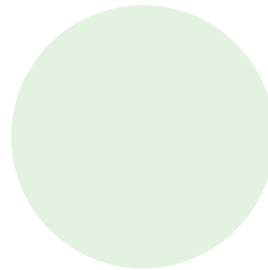
Effective educators offer learning experiences that all children may participate in, grow from, and enjoy.

Reconsider...	Try...	For example...
relying only on the classroom routines you've used in the past.	asking families about the routines they find most effective at home.	if a family says their child benefits from a countdown, place a timer where the child will always know to look for it.
thinking that having solid routines means focusing on one type of learning.	offering learning opportunities in multiple styles to satisfy the human brain's need for both routine and novelty.	consider how you can incorporate auditory, visual, and kinesthetic activities when introducing new concepts.
asking all children to demonstrate their learning in the same way.	encouraging children to represent their learning in the way that best suits their strengths.	some children may want to tell you what they've learned, while others may draw, journal, or repeat a learned skill.
setting up your classroom the same way each year.	allowing children and their needs to help dictate how their space is set up.	a classroom with a lot of open space may benefit children with mobility issues, while smaller, defined spaces may help discourage running for more active children.



Chapter 5

Recognizing and Celebrating Diversity



Recognizing and Celebrating Diversity

Helping every child feel safe, welcomed, valued, included, and represented

Recognizing and embracing diversity means acknowledging and honoring the many ways that children and families are alike and the many ways that they are different. Differences can include (but are not limited to) race, culture, first language, religion, life experiences, and family structure. A classroom that embraces a whole-child approach intentionally welcomes, values, and includes all children and families.

The teachers leading these classrooms intentionally practice inclusion by making sure that every child has the opportunity to try all learning experiences and work and play in all parts of the classroom. They offer children opportunities to help one another. They help children notice and appreciate diversity in their small world so that they have the tools to embrace it in the larger one. They empower children who are multilingual learners by using a culturally and linguistically responsive approach.



What are we learning about diversity through a whole-child approach?

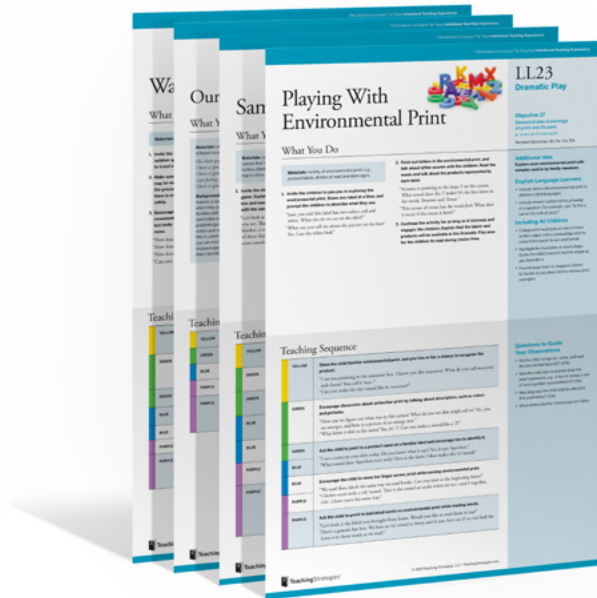
In The Creative Curriculum, children explore and experience diversity concepts such as

- learning the language to describe themselves and their family,
- recognizing their own feelings and the feelings of others,
- noticing and describing what they have in common with each other and how they are different,
- practicing social skills of treating each other with fairness and kindness, and
- gaining confidence to stand up for themselves and others.



Chapter 5 | Recognizing and Celebrating Diversity

The whole-child approach of The Creative Curriculum is based on both inclusion and individualization and helps children learn to care for and about themselves and their world. Our materials offer strategies for embracing diversity and using language that is as inclusive as possible. You'll find guidance for adapting learning experiences to ensure they are reflective of the children's community and "Including All Children" sections with support throughout daily plans and Intentional Teaching Experiences. Children will see themselves and their family in our diverse Children's Book Collection and in our intentionally chosen study topics that celebrate the diversity of your local area. For example, topics such as clothes and buildings can be easily tailored to fit your specific community.





A whole-child approach: What does this look like in the classroom?

Make celebrating diversity a hallmark of your classroom by bringing it close to home and relevant to children.

Dive Deeper

Explore these resources for more information on a whole-child approach to embracing and celebrating diversity.

- [Educating the Whole Child: Recognizing and Celebrating Diversity →](#)
- [Fostering Inclusivity in Early Childhood Education →](#)
- [Our Culturally Responsive Approach →](#)
- [Un enfoque culturalmente sensible →](#)

Reconsider...	Try...	For example...
only discussing traditional community helpers and jobs.	highlighting a variety of roles in your local community.	have family members visit the classroom as community experts to talk about their jobs related to the study topic.
always providing answers to children's questions.	allowing children to research and discover the information on their own.	provide a variety of books on different topics that you can read together when children have questions
celebrating "Christmas Around the World."	incorporating holidays and celebrations that are relevant to your community.	invite families to share their diverse holiday traditions throughout the year.
stocking the Dramatic Play area with generic props.	incorporating objects that are familiar to the children and their families.	invite families to send in empty food containers or household fabrics so children can interact with authentic parts of their classmates' lives.



Chapter 6

The Arts



The Arts

Encouraging creative expression through process and effort in a variety of artistic experiences

As both a creative outlet and a means of demonstrating what children know and can do, arts experiences are highly valuable in every classroom. Intentionally providing developmentally appropriate opportunities in the arts helps strengthen children's critical thinking and nurtures each child's creativity. Arts activities support the development of all domains of learning, such as connecting mathematics skills and knowledge of science to the creation of visual art or embedding new vocabulary in a made-up song.

In arts education—as in all early education—the value of the experience and opportunity for learning lies not in the final product but in the process of exploring and creating. Our goal is to ensure children feel confident and capable as they engage in classroom experiences. Rather than modeling the “right way” of creating something, a teacher can focus on the process or details of a child's work (e.g., “I notice you used the circle-shaped blocks. Can you tell me about that?”). This helps children learn more about their own processes and explore the meaning behind their art.



Research-based, measurable arts objectives from The Creative Curriculum

- Explores the visual arts
- Explores musical concepts and expression
- Explores dance and movement concepts
- Explores drama through actions and language



**Dive Deeper**

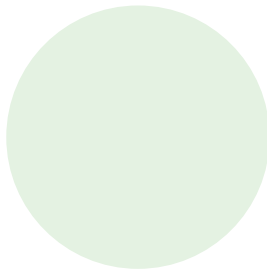
Explore these resources for more information on a whole-child approach to the arts.

- [Educating the Whole Child: The Arts in The Creative Curriculum](#) →
- [Is It Art? The Importance of Loving the Process](#) →

A whole-child approach: What does this look like in the classroom?

Artistic expression can be embedded in the normal interactions and rhythm of your classroom as you incorporate the arts across all learning domains.

Reconsider...	Try...	For example...
relying on commercially prepared music chosen only by you.	incorporating music the children and their families already love.	you might invite families to come in and play (or send in recordings of) their own musical instruments.
setting up classroom experiences in advance.	engaging the children in your set-up process.	asking children to help you gather materials gives them an opportunity to participate in more of the artistic process.
guessing what a child's artwork represents.	asking them to describe their creation in their own words.	instead of saying, "What a lovely home you drew!" say, "I noticed you worked hard on our drawing! Can you tell me about it?"
offering only paper and writing utensils or paint as materials in your Art area.	using natural items to create classroom artwork for authentic, open-ended experiences.	rather than making a tree from handprints, help children gather leaves or twigs and let them use them as either "canvas" or "brushes" to create their own artwork.



Chapter 7

Promoting Pro-Social Behaviors



Promoting Pro-Social Behaviors

Exploring the role and power of positive guidance in a whole-child classroom

When we're looking at the whole child, behavior is just a part of that child and isn't separate from any other aspect of a child's development and learning. Behavior is not something to be managed; it is something to be modeled.

Just like adults, children feel deeply. However, unlike adults, children have neither the past experiences that can offer perspective nor the resources that could help them address their own needs. When teachers understand children's behavior as communication, they are better equipped to influence children's behavior in positive ways, while at the same time minimizing challenging behavior.

Rather than attempting to manage or control children's behaviors, educators can model positive reactions and interactions every day in their classroom. Children learn to display compassion, empathy, and respect by being treated with compassion, empathy, and respect.



How does a whole-child approach differ in addressing behavior?

In a classroom implementing The Creative Curriculum, teachers make intentional decisions to set up children for success, including the learning experiences they plan, the environment they create, the materials they add to the classroom, and their words and body language. Some strategies include

- designing a schedule that includes transition times to help children adjust from active times to quiet times,
- fostering independence by arranging interesting materials so children can access them on their own during play and then put them away when they are finished,
- providing developmentally appropriate activities that keep children engaged in positive behavior even without teacher direction,
- modeling and reinforcing positive decision-making, and
- using "I notice" statements to acknowledge when you see children helping each other.



Dive Deeper

Explore these resources for more information on a whole-child approach with studies.

- [When It Comes to Challenging Behaviors, Consider the Source →](#)
- [6 Positive Messages to Guide a Year of Teaching and Learning →](#)
- [Everyday Amazing: Understanding Behavior and Supporting Positive Interactions Webinar →](#)

A whole-child approach: What does this look like in the classroom?

When it comes to influencing children's behavior, positive guidance goes further and is longer lasting than attempting to manage children's behavior.

Reconsider...	Try...	For example...
tracking daily behavior through a posted behavior chart.	helping children to recognize their big feelings and modeling how to act on them responsibly.	you may say to a child, "You seem upset. How can I help you?"
starting the day with a worksheet.	engaging children with a unique activity in the morning.	you may use a question of the day to set a positive, thought-provoking precedent for the day.
enforcing time-outs.	creating a safe, quiet, dedicated "calm-down space" for children.	a child who has had tough morning may choose to spend time in the calm-down space before joining large-group time.
having a large, open space in your room where children are drawn to run.	arranging classroom furniture to create smaller interest areas where children can focus.	a small, dedicated space for the Music and Movement area can help children release energy without disrupting the play of others. (Note: Remember any special considerations necessary to accommodate children with limited mobility or who require assistive devices so that all children may participate in all parts of the classroom.)



Chapter 8

Bringing It All Together With Studies



Bringing It All Together With Studies

Engaging children in deep learning by integrating all developmental and content areas through investigation

Studies—a hallmark of The Creative Curriculum—are long-term, project-based explorations of topics that children find interesting and can explore firsthand. Study explorations are excellent examples of a whole-child approach and leverage children's natural curiosity and need to "learn by doing." Study-related learning opportunities compel children to synthesize existing knowledge, skills, and abilities from across all content areas and developmental domains and connect them to new experiences. Studies differ from units and themes in several important ways, including the fact that study topics lend themselves to hands-on investigations of readily available materials.

The study approach allows children to engage in deep, firsthand investigations of topics that are relevant to them. They include a variety of readily available materials that children see and use in their everyday lives and that can be easily explored firsthand. Children develop skills across all learning domains as they investigate a topic in various ways. They learn science and social studies concepts and apply related skills through authentic contexts. For example, when studying pets, children can learn about life cycles and habitats.

How does a study work in a classroom using The Creative Curriculum?

Studies are designed to challenge children and be easy for teachers at any level of experience to implement in their classrooms. For each study, educators will take the following steps.

- **Organize Materials**—bring together research tools such as books, materials, and technology and arrange for field trips and visiting experts (in-person or virtual)
- **Facilitate Investigations**—investigate specific, open-ended research questions that encourage more discoveries and help children share findings and ideas
- **Document Findings**—encourage children to document what they have learned through drawings, writings, diagrams, maps, graphs, collections, or constructions and display their representations throughout the classroom



Chapter 8 | Bringing It All Together With Studies

A key characteristic of the study approach is that the learning experiences included in a study are conducted by children and designed to help them discover answers to questions that they find meaningful. Investigation questions address rigorous topics that require active engagement and deep thinking to figure out, such as “How does this work?,” “Where does it come from?,” “How can we use this?,” or “What’s this part for?” The Teaching Guides that describe each study also include curated selections of learning experiences designed to address specific content skills in literacy and mathematics, while the study topics themselves often relate to science and social studies concepts.





Dive Deeper

Explore these resources for more information on a whole-child approach with studies.

- [Educating the Whole Child: Cognitive Development →](#)
- [6 Reasons to Embrace Project-Based Learning in Early Childhood Classrooms →](#)
- [Studies vs. Themes: 5 Ways They Differ →](#)

A whole-child approach: What does this look like in the classroom?

Whole-child learning doesn't come in segmented blocks; it opens worlds to children by showing them the power of investigation.

Reconsider...	Try...	For example...
constraining learning to a classroom.	suggesting additional resources for continued at-home learning with families.	suggest families go for a walk together to search for examples of your study topic or to look for natural materials to add to your classroom.
letting any single theme take over your entire day.	incorporating your study topic into only a few parts of your day over a longer period of time.	giving children free choice time allows them to develop and explore their own interests.
investigating themes for which there are no relevant materials for children to explore (e.g., outer space or dinosaurs).	using topics that children can experience firsthand.	exploring trees or boxes will also allow learning to continue after the study concludes.
introducing a short-lived unit on "the five senses."	reminding children how they can use their senses to investigate and learn about any topic.	when studying trees, you may go outside to touch, see, smell, and hear trees and later taste a piece of fruit that grew on a tree.



Chapter 9

A Whole-Child Approach Checklist



A Whole-Child Approach Checklist

What to Look for in a Comprehensive, Whole-Child Curriculum

- ☐ Addresses all areas of development and learning that research has shown to be essential for children's success in school—social-emotional, physical, language and literacy, cognitive, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, and arts
- ☐ Provides integrated, developmentally appropriate learning experiences in which children can engage all their senses and leverage skills from multiple areas of development simultaneously through hands-on, project-based learning
- ☐ Provides developmental progressions of learning that span the entirety of the early childhood years (birth to age eight) to define the path that children follow when developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities predictive of school success
- ☐ Provides detailed guidance to scaffold and individualize learning to support each child's growth, enhanced by an ongoing formative assessment feedback loop (even for skills outside the widely held expectations)
- ☐ Offers tools and resources that empower families to support and reinforce learning at home, including a family app; two-way communication; and automated, multimedia playlists
- ☐ Provides the freedom to be responsive to children's needs and interests with the guidance to know how
- ☐ Provides guidance for establishing a physical environment that intentionally invites learning
- ☐ Encourages everyday practices that model positive decision-making and treating others with compassion, empathy, and respect (rather than relying on artificial behavior systems)
- ☐ Provides multiple forms of guidance and support within the curriculum when and where teachers need it, including through embedded microlearning; product tutorials and tours; a built-in professional learning community; and flexible courses provided in a variety of formats, including all CDA and CCDF training
- ☐ Provides guidance for creating a positive classroom community where each child and family can see themselves reflected within the physical environment and planned learning experiences
- ☐ Provides instruction and practice of reading and writing skills through meaningful, authentic classroom experiences throughout the day within a literacy-rich environment
- ☐ Provides instruction and practice of mathematics skills through meaningful, authentic classroom experiences throughout the day, within a numeracy-rich environment that meets the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics recommendations
- ☐ Ensures that support for social-emotional development and mental wellness is fundamental to the curriculum and embedded throughout the day
- ☐ Encourages process-focused exploration of the arts across all domains of learning, which strengthens critical thinking and respects and nurtures children's creativity
- ☐ Offers a tool to measure and understand fidelity of implementation to guide effective implementation of the curriculum
- ☐ Offers a dedicated curriculum for every part of the early childhood education field, including infants, toddlers, and twos; preschool; transitional kindergarten; kindergarten; and family child care

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