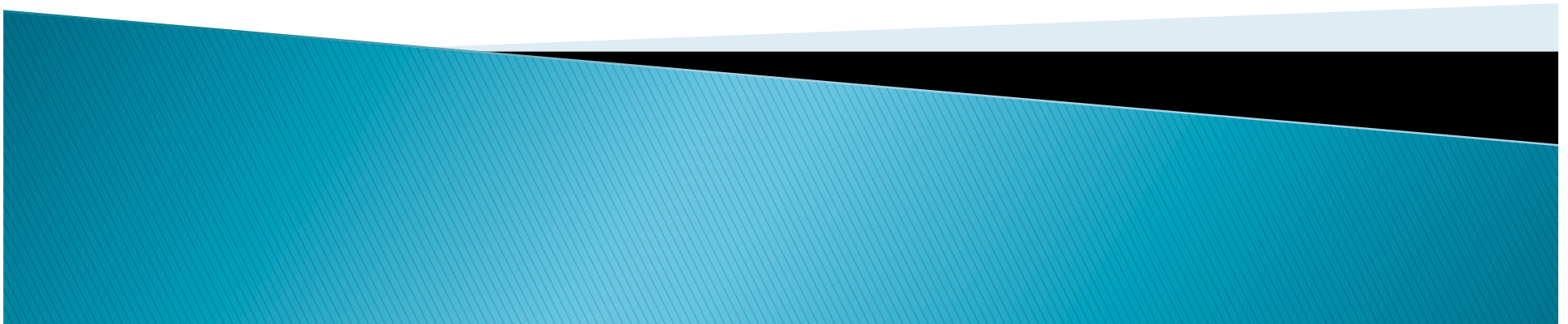


Implementing Research- Based Curriculum in the Classroom: Take a lesson from the way we teach young children

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Missed Opportunities

- A few years ago in a Head Start teacher told me that when her program also became a Universal Pre-K program, a consultant came in and told her she had to take down much of what she had up on her wall, as it was not in compliance with the new program. The consultant began moving around the furniture and changing around the classroom. When I asked the teacher why, she did not know. While I feel confident there was a sound and researched reason for the movement, the consultant did not share the reasoning behind it and the teacher did not ask. Therefore, the act became fairly meaningless because the teacher did not understand how this furthered her goals for the children in her classroom. Moving furniture or altering the environment itself is not enough.



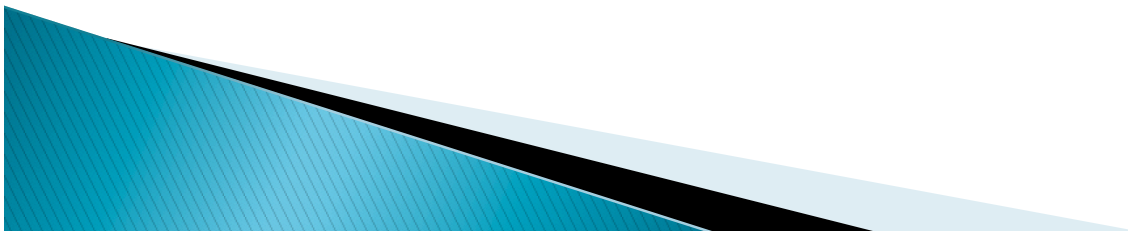
Missed Opportunities

- Last year we had someone come in from UPK who observed our classroom and wanted to make some changes to the room. She requested that some toys needed to be labeled or relabeled because she didn't like the way it was displayed. She didn't like the way our choice chart was laid out as well and wanted that relabeled. I was new to UPK at the time and all the rules and thought some of her requests were just suggestions so I didn't end up doing it the way she wanted it to be done (I also thought some of her suggestions didn't make sense to me either, hence why I left it as is). Anyway, when she came back to observe her classroom, she was not happy because none of her "suggestions" were executed.
- I still don't really know to this day. I am assuming it was based on research but as you know the rules are constantly changing and its hard to keep up to date with what is expected...I learned a lesson though, that when UPK lady comes in, they are not suggestions; they need to be done right away...until the next change occurs.



Taking a lesson: Questioning

- *The preschool children sit in a circle on the carpet with the teacher. The teacher passes around a bag and asks each child to touch what's inside and to describe what it feels like. They say that it is cold and hard and slippery. Then she asks them to guess what it is. Eventually one child guesses correctly that it is an ice cube and the teacher pulls it out of the bag and lets the children look at it. The children ask the teacher why ice is cold. They ask why it is slippery and wet. They ask how ice is made.*



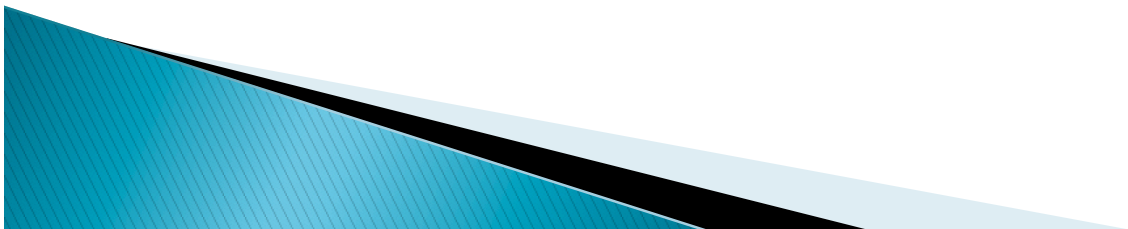
Another missed opportunity...

- *Many years ago I was teaching in a third grade class in Brooklyn. It was when the Balanced Literacy program and the Writers' Workshop were being incorporated into the classroom. I was interested in both programs and was willing to use both. However, without any warning I was given a staff developer. This person spent five mornings a week in my classroom and made many changes in the environment. It honestly turned me against the changes. The concern seemed to be more about the appearance rather than the actual results and work of the children. I requested some model lessons be done in order for me to observe and learn more about the programs, but I only received two or three of these. I did not feel that I could question the approaches. I often felt that I was being used to make a "model classroom". The following year I specifically requested that I not have someone in my room on a regular basis and that request was granted. I was also allowed to go to training with instructors from Teachers College. It was here that I was able to ask questions and describe some of the methods I had previously used.*



Taking a Lesson: Practicing

- *Then the preschool teacher tells the children that they are going to be making their own ice cubes. She points them to a station where there are small pitchers of water, ice cube trays, and food coloring. She allows them to experiment with color and fill the trays up with the water. Then she helps the children put the trays in the freezer. The children check on the trays every half an hour with the teacher to see what is happening. When they are frozen, the teacher helps the children take the cubes out of the trays and put a few of them on a table on paper towels. Some others are put into small cups of water while others still are used to paint with. The children question what will happen if the ice cubes are left out on the paper towels. They question what the colored ice cubes will do to the cups of water. The teacher asks them to guess and then she notes their guesses on flip chart paper. The children go about the rest of their day, some painting with ice cubes while others work in different centers. They come back every so often to check on their ice cubes, see how they are melting, and to see how the colors are blending together. When they are completely melted, the children and teacher examine the colors left behind on the paper towels and the cups of newly colored water.*



Seized Opportunity

- *My school just implemented a new program called The “100 Book Challenge”. At first, we were a little skeptical. It was another program they were throwing at us, and we were not sure if we were going to like it, let alone be able to find the time in the day to implement it along with everything else they wanted us to do in a day. What made implementing this program easy for me, was the fact that they allowed us to get an overview of the program first, each grade received information about the program, and then a meeting where a program developer actually came in and explained how to implement the program, offered management ideas, as well as individual support and modeling if needed. It was great, because by the time this woman came in to model the lessons for us, we had already been given a lot of information, which allowed us time to put it into practice and ask questions that could help us become comfortable with this program ourselves. We were not pressured to implement all the components of the program, because they knew and understood that it was a lot to take in all at once. Instead they encouraged taking it one step at a time, and left it up to us, which parts to implement based upon our schedules and the needs of our children. By the end of the year, we were able to implement the whole program, but we didn't have the stress of having to know everything all at once.*



Taking a Lesson: Reflecting

- ▶ *Finally, the preschool children discuss with the teacher how water that is frozen gets hard and then melts again when it thaws. They talk about how they use ice cubes at home in their drinks or to keep things cold. They talk about how ice forms on the streets or icicles form on buildings when it is cold out – as cold as it is in the freezer – and how when it gets warmer, it melts. They talk about going ice-skating.*



Another Opportunity Seized

- *When my school wants us to implement a new program, they usually send in staff developers who know the program best to provide us with the basis for the program. Depending on the feedback from their presentations, my principal will send the staff development team for training, and our staff development team will work grade by grade relaying the information they received from training. If teachers are still struggling, they will come into the classroom to demonstrate how to implement the program, or they may send the teacher to visit another teacher and observe how its implemented in their classrooms until that teacher feels comfortable with the program. My administration is very understanding of the fact that many of the programs they present us with do not always fit into the time constraints of our day. They do allow for flexibility. Just this year we initiated a new reading program. They knew that it would take time for us teachers to get use to the program, as well as all the components that go along with implementing it; they did allow us to just pull pieces of the program that worked best with our daily schedule as well as the needs of our children. In fact, during observations, they wanted to see how we worked it into our literacy block based on the suggestions offered from our professional development team. However, this upcoming year, because it is going to be the second year, they will be expecting us to implement the entire program because we have had enough time to familiarize ourselves with it, and all the components that go along with it.*

