



UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HOW WE TEACH AND WHAT WE TEACH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR A CHILD- CENTERED APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

- Education Background
- Work Background
- Current Role



AGENDA

- General Overview of Topic
- Overview of Final Project
- Hands-on Trial of Approach/Case Studies
- Planning Time
- Conclusion



BARRIERS

- Thematic curriculum based on children's interests.



MIXED MESSAGE

- Is there a mixed message coming from education vs. real-life teaching experience?



EDUCATION

- Child-centered Education
 - Child is at the center of the teaching and learning process capable of high achievement. Embraces the whole child and developmental domains
- Developmentally Appropriate Practice
- Performance and Learning Standards
- Individualized teaching with differentiation



EDUCATION

- Promotion of Early Childhood best practices
 - constructivist approach
 - discovery learning
 - experiential learning
 - hands-on learning
 - trial and error learning
 - sensory learning
- Play is Vital
- Teacher's Role is to guide learning



REAL-LIFE TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Mandates for specific educational programs/curriculum
- Universal Education including level, time and experiences
- Administrative Details pushed to the forefront
- Play is Trivial – good if there is time, nice if you can fit it in
- Teacher Provides Direct-Instruction of material



THOUGHTS?

- Phenomenon sometimes restricted to K-2 environments, but there are examples of these constraints and mixed messages in the earlier preschool years too.
 - What do we make of these?
 - How do we reconcile the two?
- Who is here today?



MY EXPERIENCE

- My grad students – sometimes both experiences
- Too often current position and goals would come to forefront and students feel it necessary to shove child-centered ideals to the back
- I decided to work on a way to help them keep their ideals with their current or future constraints



WHAT (CONTENT) AND HOW (PEDAGOGY)

- Developmentally-based Learning and Performance Standards are VITAL, but why?
 - Help us plan for developmentally appropriate activities
 - Help us ensure we are touching on the different necessary areas of the curriculum and development and that children are both building appropriate skills and gaining appropriate knowledge
 - Ensure there is some consistency among the different settings in terms of what children know and are able to do



THE “HOW”

- BUT, because these identify what children should be able to do, the what – does this mean they also tell us how we must teach?
- Does this leave room for a curriculum based on children’s interests or a thematic integrated curriculum?



RESISTANCE

- When I pose the idea of creating a curriculum based on the children's interest, I often find some resistance:
 - Children will only learn one thing
 - Children will not branch out
 - Children need to learn more than they will learn through their interests only
 - Children will lack exposure to other parts of their world if only addressing their interests
- Basic ideas of isolation in terms of content, yet I see it as the opposite – as an opportunity to extend and expand their world



OTHER EXCUSES FOR NOT MAINTAINING CHILD-CENTERED CURRICULUM

- Having too little time
- Wanting to prepare children for the expectations of later grades
- Citing requirements of school districts and having too much information to cover in the given year
- Not knowing how to assess children's learning in using this type of approach
- Expecting concerns from families (Geist & Baum, 2005 in *Young Children*).



THOUGHTS

- Take a few minutes and discuss these barriers:
 - Are they real?
 - How do they affect you in your own practice?



CONCLUSION: WE CAN DO BOTH

- While there is a mandate for the “what,” oftentimes there is not a mandate for the “how” and we can plan for both!
- The level that we can integrate may vary based on our situation:
 - Equal integration of all subject areas
 - Focus on a few more pressing subject areas or developmental concerns



HOW DO WE PLAN FOR THE “HOW”

- **Levels of How:**
 - **Whole Immersion:** Sometimes we use a theme like transportation, five senses, seasons, holidays, etc. and we teach what we need to teach through these
 - One step further may be Reggio Emilia approach, Project Approach, Emergent Curriculum - Shoes
 - **Partial Immersion:** Sometimes we are given more of a scripted curriculum and we simply find the aspects of the curriculum that coincide with the way our students learn best and tap into it more fully



OBSERVATION

- Observation is crucial to knowing how to plan for child-centered education
 - Premise is knowing children and observation helps us know:
 - What they know and are capable of
 - What their interests are
 - How they learn best
- Observation Paper – planning



WHAT THE “HOW” IS BASED ON?

- Children’s interest – i.e. thematic work
- Gardner’s intelligences
- Strengths
- Learning styles
- Modalities
- Content



BENEFITS OF THE THEMATIC INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

- Allows us to use different parts of the curriculum
- Helps children build additional skills and learn new information
- Helps diversify the information and connect ideas
- Easily reinforces material and helps expand prior knowledge



HOW DO I DO THIS: FINAL PROJECT

- Final Project is a thematic monthly plan with a rationale
 - **Age Group:**
 - **Month:**
 - **Theme(s):**
 - **Objective(s):** write these in terms of what children will be able to do
 - **Changes to the Environment:** paragraph about how you will change the classroom environment during the month (i.e. changes to the dramatic play areas, configuration of the room, adding a center, etc.)



FINAL PROJECT (CONT.)

- **Literacy Connection:** paragraph on how you are integrating literacy into the theme
- **Music, Movement & Fingerplays:** paragraph on how you are integrating these into theme
- **Home/School Connection:** paragraph on how you will reinforce the learning by utilizing parents and home life and communicating with parent
- **Special Materials Needed:** list of special materials



ACTIVITY PLANS

- **Activity Name:**
- **Plan:** (2-3 sentences of procedure)
- **Type of Activity:** (i.e. Whole Group, Small Group, or Individual)
- **Facilitators:** (i.e. teachers, parent, and/or professional from another field, etc.)



ACTIVITY PLANS (CONT.)

- o **Individualization:** (1-2 sentences on how you will handle children of varying abilities or children with special needs. Think carefully about what skills are needed to complete your activities and how you will modify for a child with deficits in these areas (i.e. fine motor delay, hearing impaired, attention issues, social delay, etc.)



ACTIVITY PLANS (CONT.)

- o **Domains: (Please list all that apply for this activity)** (i.e. Art, Block Building, Cooking, Dramatic Play, Gross & Fine Motor, Health & Nutrition, Home/School Connection, Language Development, Literacy Link, Math, Music/Fingerplay, Outdoor Activities, Phonemic Awareness, Sand & Water Table, Science, Social Studies, Technology, Trips, Writing, Other-please explain)



ACTIVITY PLANS (CONT.)

- **NYS or NAEYC Standards Addressed:** (list all that apply)
- **Assessment Method:** (i.e. observation and documentation, portfolio, individual conversation, test, etc. Make sure your assessment is diverse so you are measuring achievement in a number of ways..)



RATIONALE

- The “Why” – need to know pedagogy, theory and best practices and be able to easily articulate it in own words.
 - Theme
 - Types of Activities
 - Age Group
 - Types of Experiences
 - Inclusion of things like technology, parent involvement, children with special needs



TRY IT

- I will give you a case study about a theme and a set of standards and will give you a chance to practice this. Try to fill out the top part for your scenario and then go through the motions of 1 activity
- Include 3-4 talking points that you might use for a rationale



SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

- How did it work?
- What might you change? How might you individualize?
 - Homework
 - Extension Activities
 - Objectives for Individual Activities
 - Daily Schedule



CONCLUSION

- Children will only learn one thing
 - Actually more opportunities to extend knowledge and increase diversity of learning and skill-building
- Children will not branch out
 - We can help them branch out by teaching them to be inquisitive and see connections among ideas



CONCLUSION

- Children need to learn more than they will learn through their interests only
 - Learning through their interests offers an opportunity for them to be engaged in their learning – being engaged in their learning allows them to learn more
- Children will lack exposure to other parts of their world if only addressing their interests
 - It's our job to expand on their prior knowledge and extend their knowledge



CONCLUSION

- Having too little time
 - It takes more time to plan this way, but in the end, you save time because children learn in a more sustaining way as they are more engaged, learn through different means and mediums, and tend to remember information more easily
- Wanting to prepare children for the expectations of later grades
 - What is developmentally appropriate for one age may not be for another. If we want children to read by the end of Kindergarten do we prop them up with a book at 6 months to prepare them for what will be expected?



CONCLUSION

- Citing requirements of school districts and having too much information to cover in the given year
 - Much information can actually be covered in this manner as long as preparation is careful and thoughtful. In fact, making connections among different aspects of the curriculum can help with retention.
- Not knowing how to assess children's learning in using this type of approach
 - This is why we plan for it and we link it back to standards. We are clear about what we hope to accomplish beforehand so we can utilize good assessment methods throughout.



CONCLUSION

- Expecting concerns from families
 - It's our job to both listen to and continue to educate parents. They want what's best for their children and so do we! We can help them understand what is developmentally appropriate and how what we do in the classroom leads to the desired goal
 - We can use the language we built creating the rationale to help us in justifying our choices to both administrators and parents.

