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The Whole Child:

The Importance of Considering All Aspects of a Young Child

by

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Final Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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Abstract

This paper synthesizes information from several researchers and well-known educators, philosophers, and theorists in the field of early childhood education. I intend to show that all sides of a child's life, including social, emotional, familial, cultural, and cognitive capabilities be taken into consideration before making any decisions regarding the education or welfare of that child. Educational and intervention strategies are discussed, and examples of developmentally appropriate practice are given. The paper ends with a guide for teachers of children ages 3-5 to use when planning a program designed to benefit the whole child.

Part I: Historical Perspective

Introduction

In ancient times, early childhood education consisted of learning from one's parents and relatives how to survive and to get along in the relatively uncomplicated society. In ancient Greece and Rome, education was only for males, who were religiously trained. Even monarchs could not read or write their own names. As society advanced technologically, young boys began to be trained in an apprenticeship to a craft, although many were still illiterate. Nobles and the wealthy sent their sons to be educated in the humanities. It was only as recently as the 15th century that educators began to advocate the education of women and the poor.

John Locke, considered by many to be the founder of modern educational philosophy, was the first philosopher to realize in the 1600s that children are unique individuals, with their own needs. Locke felt that children were a "clean slate," to be written upon by their elders and mentors. Although we no longer feel that children are born "neutral," Locke made significant advancement into modern education and had an effect on the methods used today. Locke was followed by Rousseau, who advanced the idea that children need to explore their environments, and Pestalozzi, who stressed the idea that learning needs to be integrated. It is amazing that some feel that these ideas, which are nearly 300 years old, are new and revolutionary.

Early childhood education began in Germany in the 19th century with Friedrich Froebel and his kindergarten concept. Froebel felt that children under age 6 should have a happy education, learning by playing and exploring. Froebel brought early education to

the United States, where now his ideas are incorporated in kindergarten classes in almost every public school in the nation. It took the crisis of World War II to make the child-centered care center a reality in the U.S. Due to the high absenteeism of women on the job in shipyards during the war, the Kaiser company provided quality nursery care to children of shipyard workers so that the war effort would not slow down (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1993). It is unfortunate that these centers closed after the war ended, because they were models of developmentally sound centers. Perhaps it should be considered a crisis today that so many women are forced to work to make ends meet. Modern corporations should be made aware of Kaiser's example so that the same quality can be emulated for contemporary working mothers and their families.

There are three people and philosophies that had significant impact on my understanding of early childhood education and on developmentally sound education as we now know it. These ideas germinated more than a century ago, but in reading them one has the sense that they were written for contemporary use. So much has advanced in this period of time since the turn of the century: technology, industry, medicine, defense strategies, the standard of living, global communications, and society in general. If we have accepted all of these changes, why are we so slow to encompass an educational revolution as well? Many of our schools still employ teaching methods, such as memorization of passages and obscure facts, and drill and practice, which date back to the time prior to the birth of our country. Fortunately, more and more teachers and parents are recognizing the fact that American public schools need to be ushered into this century in order to educate for the future. What follows are the ideas and ideals of John Dewey,

Maria Montessori, and Jean Piaget. as they relate to the whole child in early education and intervention.

John Dewey

John Dewey had definite ideas about several subjects, including education, which he published around the turn of this century. Dewey was the first philosopher to implicate the importance of educating the whole child. At his lab school at the University of Chicago, Dewey was committed to a curriculum of a community where the children “lived, participated, and contributed” (Kliebard, 1995) to their own education and to society.

Dewey’s ideas are still radical to those who believe in time-honored teaching methods. Dewey’s ideal school would involve ideal parents responding to their child’s needs in the loving home environment, and the education would center on what interested the child. Intelligent parents would engage the child in meaningful conversation, supply what is needed, and correct any misconceptions (Dworkin, ed., 1959). Basing a public school on this model is what Dewey strove to do in education.

As early childhood educators, this sounds very familiar. Many early educational settings are home-like and teachers use the interests of the class to guide the framework of the curriculum that is taught. This curriculum is the vehicle which delivers instructional concepts in a way that is meaningful to the children involved. In fact, the position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) includes Dewey’s basic philosophy: “How young children learn should determine how teachers of young children teach. The word *teach* tends to imply *telling* or *giving*

information. But the correct way to teach young children is not to lecture or verbally instruct them. Teachers of young children are more like guides or facilitators. If learning is relevant for children, they are more likely to persist with a task and to be motivated to learn more” (Bredekamp, ed., 1987).

Dewey was adamant about having a child-centered, rather than a subject-centered school experience. Regarding separate subjects for each area of instruction he states “Facts are torn away from their original place in experience and rearranged with reference to some general principle. Classification is not a matter of child experience; things do not come to the individual pigeonholed” (Dworkin, ed., 1959). Indeed, all of life outside school seems to be one continuous experience. The mind does not sort experiences into subjects such as reading, writing, and social studies. In life all is integrated, which is another important aspect of learning at the lab school run by Dewey.

Again, Dewey would likely share the philosophy behind the position statement of the NAEYC: “The curriculum is integrated so that learning occurs primarily through projects, learning centers, and playful activities that reflect the current interests of children” (Bredekamp, ed., 1987). In other words, curriculum is developmentally appropriate if the program allows a child to explore his world in a variety of ways. Many learning centers are made available for children to use all senses in discovery and learning. Children are free to integrate activities: perhaps math and science merge when the kids make their own playdough and mix colors, or writing and social studies come together while creating a class post office for dramatic play. Dewey stressed the importance of these real and meaningful activities in his model school.

Whereas Dewey was mostly a philosopher (his lab school closed after he lost interest), the ideas of Dewey are expanded and put into practical and popular use by Maria Montessori, whose schools are still being run in the United States as well as in other countries.

Maria Montessori

Montessori, like Dewey, did not start out her career as an educator. Maria Montessori began her life's work as a physician, out of which grew her interest in children and their care and education. Montessori was also a believer in the education of the whole child, as she had an interest in the "physical, spiritual, and emotional health of children" (Lillard, 1996).

Maria Montessori was partially responsible for the return to early childhood education in the 1960s. Montessori schools became synonymous with a quality preschool education. A Montessori school shows all the qualities we have come to value in early education today: child-centered curriculum, appeal to the interests of the children, meaningful learning tasks, and providing sensory (manipulative) learning materials.

In addition, Maria Montessori left us with the principles which represent her philosophy of education. These principles have also transferred over to other methods of early education.

Montessori felt that the general goal of education was to achieve "the development of a complete human being, oriented to the environment, and adapted to his or her time, place and culture" (Lillard, 1996). The first and most basic principle of Montessori education is respect for the child (Morrison, 1995). If the teacher has respect for his or

her students, a child-centered, interesting approach to teaching should naturally follow. By having respect for the children, a teacher is more open-minded to individualizing education for each student and recognizes his or her uniqueness. This idea has impacted early education today by providing the rationalization we need for eliminating workbooks and worksheets, and the demand that children sit and listen to the teacher give a prescribed lesson. Instead, many preschool teachers rely on lessons that have meaning to their own group of children using manipulatives, and follow the children's interests in how to present the material and at what time of the year.

Another principle of Montessori education which has left its mark on preschool education is the idea of "sensitive periods." Montessori believed that children's minds were sensitive to learning certain behaviors or skills at certain times in their development, and that these times varied from child to child. Therefore, children were not pushed to learn a certain skill when others were learning it. A Montessori teacher observes his or her students to find out when the child is ready for a given lesson. This may or may not coincide with the development of other children, so a child may or may not have the lesson or introduction to a skill with a group. Developmental education, as it is featured in many preschools in the United States today, also has its foundation in the belief of sensitive periods. Children are given opportunities to learn skills when they are ready. Nothing is forced upon them so that they are made to feel like a failure if they cannot yet function at the level of other students. Early educators believe that developmental education builds self-esteem because the child is successful at his developmental level. It is in this way that children go on to the next level of competence.

The last three principles of Montessori education which impacted on early childhood education are the concepts of the absorbent mind, autoeducation, and the prepared environment. The prepared environment involves careful decisions about the arrangement of the classroom and the materials in it. A preschool teacher chooses arrangements and materials that will stimulate the children's interests and motivate them to find out more about a topic. The classroom will contain materials which the children are able to use, without the aid of an adult, and they may obtain at will and put away after use. The prepared environment naturally leads to the discussion of the absorbent mind and autoeducation. Montessori, as well as many early childhood professionals today, believed that children's minds naturally take in knowledge from the world, and cannot help but learn. Autoeducation means educating oneself in a prepared environment. Children have choices and need to learn how to make appropriate choices in a safe and secure environment. "Freedom is the key to the process of development" within responsibility and self-discipline (Lillard, 1996). "Children who are actively involved in a prepared environment and exercising freedom of choice literally educate themselves" (Morrison, 1995). The NAEYC has based its position statement regarding developmentally appropriate practice on the principles of Montessori: "Teachers prepare the environment for children to learn through active exploration and interaction with adults, other children, materials...Children select many of their own activities from among a variety of learning areas the teacher prepares...Each child is viewed as a unique person...Experiences are provided that meet children's needs and stimulate learning in all developmental areas..." (Bredekamp, ed., 1987). Even though a particular preschool may not formally use

Montessori education, if it provides a child with certain manipulative materials which gives the child immediate feedback when he shows an interest in a certain subject, allows children to make choices within a controlled environment, and cultivates the child's innate motivation to learn, it is using Montessori's basic philosophy. It can be said that the ideals of Maria Montessori are the cornerstone of contemporary early education.

Jean Piaget followed and complemented Montessori by describing in detail the developmental stages children take in growing. Understanding the work of Piaget in turn helps us to comprehend Montessori's "sensitive periods."

Jean Piaget

From Piaget we get the classic stages of development in young children. It is from these stages that the term "developmentally appropriate practice" was created. In other words, we use whatever methods of teaching and learning fit a particular child's level or stage of development.

Piaget also gave us a constructivist view of development, which means that "children construct their knowledge of the world and their level of cognitive functioning" (Morrison, 1995). Because the constructivist viewpoint involves active learning on the part of the students in order to build their knowledge structures, the NAEYC also endorses Piaget's theories in its position statement: "Curriculum planning emphasizes learning as an interactive process" (Bredekamp, ed., 1987). Piaget felt that in constructing knowledge, the learner is presented with cognitive conflict. "As the learner begins to ask questions of the fragmented facts, a scheme of interpretation begins to emerge" (Forman,

1987). As the learner's scheme takes shape, a child in a developmentally appropriate classroom will be allowed the time and resources to make sense of and accommodate the new facts.

One successful preschool program that is based on the work of Piaget in the area of intellectual development is called High/Scope. This program incorporates the constructivist theory using three basic principles: Active participation by the students, daily planning by the teachers based on careful observation of the children, and developmentally sequenced goals and materials for the children (Morrison, 1995). Much like a Montessori program, a teacher's role is to know at what level a child is starting, provide an environment in which children can make guided decisions, and to guide children in their daily work.

Any program which is based on Piaget has four common themes, which really sum up and put Piaget's ideas into practice. First of all, adults must realize that adult thinking is very different from children's thinking, and we must not try to impose our thinking onto the child. Secondly, the children in the program must be involved in active, meaningful learning. Another theme is that learning should involve concrete experiences and should occur with many children and adults. The last theme common to Piaget-based programs is that new learning experiences must be based on past experiences in order to be successful (Morrison, 1995). These descriptions fit into the NAEYC's statements regarding developmentally appropriate practice. Therefore, preschool programs that subscribe to the theories of Bredekamp, et al. (1987), are also subscribing to the philosophies of Jean Piaget.

However, there are those who disagree with the teachings of Piaget, saying that Piaget's theories of development are too rigid and structured. Indeed, there are many children who can do more than they should be able to at a given Piagetian stage. Also, some say that given an alternate point of view, a child may seem to miss a certain stage in its entirety. For example, it has been shown that 3-year old children are capable of non-egocentric thought, in contrast to what Piaget says about this age child. A three-year-old realizes that a picture must be facing you in order for you to see it. This demonstrates that he is able to take another point of view in this instance. Also, it has been shown that 3- and 4-year olds can be taught conservation of volume (Harris and Liebert, 1992). A preschooler may not be able to conserve because he has not had any experience with it. If the child is given that experience, his cognitive capabilities are probably developed enough to accept the explanation.

Although some may not agree with the details of Piaget's work, many have still been influenced by the basic framework of the stages of development. For example, it is due to studying Piaget that I am able to understand the cognitive and social differences among the children in my kindergarten classroom. As a result of this knowledge, each child is handled individually. Piaget showed us that each child is not at the same level of development at the same time, and what they are generally capable of at their given level. It is through the research of Jean Piaget that I am capable of helping each child in my classroom to be successful in one way or another.

From personal experience, I know that most early educators draw from many varying philosophies to implement their unique program. Many early childhood programs

are an eclectic blend of what works in a particular location, with a particular group of children, on a particular day. It is imperative that teachers be educated in the history of early childhood education and become acquainted with differing ideas so that they have a bank to draw from, and make their program the best it can be.

Part II: Social Theory

Early Education and Intervention

Many studies have been carried out to determine whether early intervention and education programs such as Head Start have any efficacy, with either short or long term effects.

When the “War on Poverty” was declared in the 1960s, the amount of governmental funds spent on the Head Start program was rationalized by the belief that, in the long run, not as much money would have to be spent on other relief programs such as welfare and unemployment (Kirk, Gallagher, and Anastasiow, 1993). “Project Head Start began in 1965 as a demonstration program aimed at providing educational, social, medical, dental, nutritional, and mental health services to preschool children from a diverse population of low-income families” (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1995). The program intended to serve the needs of the whole child and his family. The three main objectives of Head Start were to provide compensatory education for “inadequate early life experiences,” parental involvement to include parents in “planning teaching, and decision making,” and community control to provide “local support and participation” (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1995). Over the ensuing decades, however, funding for social relief programs skyrocketed, rather than dwindled.

In the 1970s and 80s, reports appeared in the popular media, stating that Head Start was not doing the job for which it was created (Cicirelli, 1969), and may be a

financial burden on the American taxpayers. The reports claimed that while children enrolled in Head Start showed some gains in IQ scores initially, that advantage equaled out with other age-mates a few years after entering kindergarten (Haskins, 1989 in Harris and Liebert, 1992). With such scientific data at hand, some skeptics became open opponents of the early childhood program and called for its demise. As is often the case with media reports, the whole truth was not given. Even though huge gains in IQ were not found, Head Start may still have some merit. Indeed, one set of researchers for Westinghouse and Ohio University conceded at the outset that their study concentrated only on certain areas: "The very real limitation of our study should be established at once. The study did not address the question of Head Start's medical or nutritional impact. It did not measure the effect of Head Start on family life. It did not assess the impact of Head Start on the total community, on the schools, or on the morale and attitudes of the children while they were in the program. The study is therefore a limited and partial evaluation, but one based on solid, useful, and responsible research" (Cicirelli, 1969). This essential piece of information was left out of reports to the general public in newspapers and television news bulletins. Thus a wonderful and very useful and positive humanitarian service could have been destroyed, but some Americans are angry that their tax dollars are still funding an "ineffective" program. The myth that Head Start is not effective persists somewhat to this day, and is even published as fact in contemporary textbooks used by some teacher training institutions (Harris and Liebert, 1992). Many of the positive reports about Head Start which are published in professional journals need to appear in popular publications as well.

At the same time, groups of early educators were starting to push for lengthening the span of early intervention, wanting to lower the enrollment age from 3 years to just a few months of age. These early childhood professionals claimed that intervening earlier in a disadvantaged child's life would be more effective and prove more efficient in the long run than reaching a child at a later time, after the child is already in trouble. The early educators also wanted to lengthen the time of involvement to include the early school-age child who had attended Head Start (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1995).

Lengthening intervention time would mean spending much more money on the program, of course, rather than less. As a result of the two opposing forces and the fact that they are not a high priority in federal affairs, the issue is in somewhat of a stalemate. That is, while birth through three intervention and school-age programs exist, they are rare. In 1994 money was provided through a bill passed by the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion to fund studies to explore ways to provide services to children from birth through age three and follow through programs for those children who have entered school (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1995). The Head Start program itself is screaming out for funding to be able to service the thousands on waiting lists. In fact, with statistics provided by the Children's Defense Fund (1994), Head Start is only able to serve 36 percent of those eligible (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1995). Also, there is a continuing and overwhelming need for quality, affordable child care for children from every socioeconomic level (Harris and Liebert, 1992).

As the debate about whether or not to continue to fund Head Start wears on, more and more research is showing that early intervention and education is making a difference

in disadvantaged children and their families. Those disadvantaged may be at risk because of economic conditions, perhaps the parents are unemployed or underemployed.

“Researchers have identified three general categories of conditions that put children at risk: genetic disorders, events occurring during pregnancy and birth, and environmental conditions” (Garwood & Sheehan, 1989, in Kirk, Gallagher, and Anastasiow, 1993).

Perhaps the child has only one parent, or is living with another relative. Maybe the parents are handicapped physically or mentally in some way that has caused the child to lag behind peers. Sometimes the child himself has a handicap of some sort. Some children live in homes where drugs, alcohol, gambling, promiscuous behavior, and/or violence is the norm. Many children live with two or more of these factors combined and prove to be at even higher risk of school and life failure. Children who receive little positive attention or who sit in front of the television all day, every day, are certainly environmentally deprived. They lack the social, emotional, and physical experiences of a child who has two loving and doting parents that provide a positive and nurturing environment for their children. But “Brown (1985) notes two significant findings: 1) that Head Start children were less likely to be placed in special education classes, and 2) that early intervention programs were associated with a significant increase in IQ and school achievement” (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1995). Unfortunately, it does not seem that the reports which show that preschool family and child intervention and education are worthwhile are being published as widely as the earlier report condemning early childhood education.

Although certain research may have found that IQ scores tend to equalize with the scores of classmates once a child enters kindergarten, the research did not indicate

whether the scores stayed higher than when the child first entered the Head Start program. If IQ was not measured upon entering the program, this cannot be an effective evaluation. If a child has gained and retains anything cognitively, this cannot be ignored.

Another argument against the negative reports is that Head Start, along with many other early intervention programs, is committed to providing parent education and support, as well as challenges and new experiences for the child. If we evaluate the entire program on the basis of IQ scores only, we are ignoring some potentially important gains as a result of the program. Because of parent education and support, the child may go home to a more loving and nurturing environment. The parents may also be better equipped to be more appropriate role models for their children. In turn, the children may be more capable of having their own stable friendships and relationships. Or maybe the child just has a safe place to be for six hours a day. All of these reasons are significant enough in themselves and that growth cannot be measured by an IQ test alone. In order to effectively and fairly assess the value of the Head Start and other programs similar to it, a longitudinal study would need to be carried out. The study would have to include evaluations such as whether the Head Start children had lower incidences of teen pregnancy, high school dropout rate, violent behavior, arrests and jail sentences, drug use, and other anti-social behaviors. Also to be considered are the rates of acceptance to higher education institutions, college degrees, and higher paying jobs. If the children who received services when they were in preschool show better gains or are equal to their peers (of similar backgrounds) who received no services, then the program is well worth the time and monetary expense. "It would be much cheaper for us to prevent (a person) from going

into poverty than to pay for the very expensive consequences, including her child being in poverty and the loss of ...self-esteem” (Hodgkinson, 1993). The previous statement was made in regard to a story which to the author was telling in order to prove a point: it is much less expensive in the long run to provide affordable day care to a working mother than to pay for her welfare check to support her family if she is not working.

Indeed, there are many studies that have been carried out which demonstrate the effectiveness of early intervention programs. “The importance of early intervention...is to provide those protective factors of quality physical and emotional care that promote self-esteem and self-efficacy. These factors are the keys to a positive outcome for children in any intervention program, whether it be for the disabled or nondisabled” (Rutter, 1989; Kolvin, Miller, Scott, Gazontz & Fleeting, 1990, in Kirk, Gallagher, and Anastasiow, 1993). Sadly, these reports are not as well known as those that denounced Head Start. Studies have found that in addition to the goals outlined by many early intervention programs, other highly beneficial outcomes have been documented: “Surprisingly enough, it seems some early childhood intervention programs, which have primarily focused on improving educational achievement by building more adequate social skills and helping parents provide for their children’s basic physical and emotional needs, have shown the unexpected benefit of reducing later delinquency and criminal activity” (Struck, 1994). Researchers found that although other types of juvenile delinquency prevention programs were not working, groups of children who had attended preschool centers with multi-faceted approaches were doing better overall than those who had not attended such early education institutions. A preschool with a multi-faceted approach is one such as Head

Start, the Perry Preschool Project, and the Syracuse University Family Development Research Program, aim to serve the preschooler and his or her family (Zigler, Taussig, and Black, 1992, in Struck, 1994). The child is provided with a quality developmentally appropriate curriculum, parenting classes are offered, support groups exist for parents, health checks and immunizations are provided, and educational literature is available for caregivers. In short, these programs cater to the whole child and the whole family, as opposed to solely educating the child's mind and sending him home. "These authors emphasize the importance of helping families and their respective members get basic physiological, emotional, and belongingness needs met. In this way, ... children within such households will be better able to attend to cognitive, esteem, and educational needs" (Struck, 1994).

One study which was carried out reviewed the program at the Houston Parent-Child Development Center. At first, the center showed very positive and promising results from its classes, home visits, and workshops for parents in addition to the preschool classes for children. However, the program showed results tapering off and behavior reverting back to what it was before participants entered the program. "The tapering off of behavior change and child management skills were attributed to the cessation of services at the project's end" (Struck, 1994).

The implications of this research seem astoundingly obvious: state and federal governments need to set priorities that include attending to the basic human needs of all Americans (including children) and providing them with education and information which will arm them to become productive citizens. This means starting at the very beginning by

providing the best intervention services known, regardless of cost, because otherwise we will probably spend more money later on services for problems that could have been prevented. The federal government was on the right track when they passed bills such as PL 94-142 in 1975, the Handicapped Infants and Toddlers Program in 1986, and IDEA in 1991. PL 94-142 provides funding for handicapped children ages 3-5 to receive intervention and treatment of various problems. The Handicapped Infants and Toddlers Program expands the realm of PL 94-142 to include children from birth through 3 years who have handicaps. IDEA provides funds for demonstration and outreach programs and added social work services and training for those serving and educating handicapped children (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Thurlow, 1992).

NAEYC guidelines suggest that in order for a program to be developmentally appropriate, the parents and family need to be involved in the child's education: "The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes that a high quality early childhood program provides a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families. Parents should be encouraged to participate. Teachers are responsible for establishing and maintaining frequent contact with families" (Bredekamp, 1987). A teacher who maintains contact with a family is more likely to get better results in raising the child's self-esteem, cooperation from the family, and keep an open line of communication. Some parents are intimidated by schools and teachers, or they had a negative school experience and do not wish to return to the school for any reason. Home visits by the teacher sometimes serve to make the parents feel less uneasy about having to

talk to the teacher. It also gives the teacher a chance to see the child in his own environment, thus getting a new perspective on the child. A parent may feel freer to talk and relate information about her child during a home visit. In addition, a teacher has a chance to be a role model at this time, by talking to the child and siblings, asking questions to facilitate conversation with the child(ren), and maybe by bringing a book or game to share with the family. Anything that draws parents closer to the teacher and to the school in a positive way will have a significant impact on the way the student sees the school. A more positive experience in preschool will lead to success in other areas and future years in school, which leads to a lower high school dropout rate and higher earning power in the world of work.

There are several different ways that early intervention can be achieved. I have already mentioned Head Start and other age 3-5 preschool programs. These services are delivered primarily in a school setting, although there are some home-based Head Start programs. Frequently birth through three programs are done by home visitation also. In addition to keeping the infant or toddler in a familiar environment, trained staff usually provide services to parents at home as well. They may model or demonstrate effective discipline techniques, games, reading, and general child care. They provide support for frustrated care-givers and model ways to foster a child's language development. Some programs have parent resource centers where there are support groups, reading materials, parenting classes, and sometimes even provisions for adult education. Many intervention

services also provide access to health care, information, and immunizations (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1995). These programs may be in the form of clinics, visiting district health nurses, or school nurses.

To achieve success and foster good family relations at an early age is to buy an insurance policy for harder times in school and in life. Teachers and parent advocates need to get the word out: Early intervention and education programs work!

Part III: Current Research

Academic versus Developmental Education

“In many cases, concerned adults, who want children to succeed, apply adult education standards to the curriculum for young children and pressure early childhood programs to demonstrate that children are ‘really learning.’ Many programs respond by emphasizing academic skill development with paper-and-pencil activities that are developmentally inappropriate for young children” (Bredekamp, 1987). The NAEYC guidelines specifically suggest that a program is not appropriate for young children if it is not based on the knowledge of how children learn. Several prominent early childhood researchers, including Piaget (1950, 1972), Montessori (1964), Erikson (1950), Elkind (1986), and Kamii (1985), have discovered that “children learn by doing.” More specifically, children do not learn by completing abstract tasks which involve drilling, memorizing, and writing out answers. The most effective methods of early instruction are guidance (by the teacher) and discovery (by the student), child-centered (rather than teacher-directed or worksheet related) tasks, and hands-on, manipulative activities which are concrete, not abstract. “Programs should be tailored to meet the needs of children, rather than expecting children to adjust to the demands of a specific program” (Bredekamp, 1987).

In her book, Joyful Learning, Bobbi Fisher describes her kindergarten classroom and how it is developmentally appropriate: “...*there is an abundance of print around the room...(the children) are involved in planning and managing their learning.* No longer do they spend time doing worksheets; instead they are engaged in authentic literacy

demonstrations and involved in their own reading and writing process... *I trust the children as the authorities of their own learning.*" Mrs. Fisher follows the position statement of the NAEYC almost to the letter in describing her role in the classroom, the physical environment, and her beliefs about what is developmentally appropriate: "I view my role as planner, observer, and teacher so that my beliefs about how children learn are realized in my classroom. I plan so children develop as authorities of their own learning. I organize the physical environment and daily routine to encourage participation in a variety of experiences that are interesting, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate. I plan opportunities that offer rich literacy, math, social studies, and sciences experiences, and which facilitate the children's social, emotional, and physical growth" (Fisher, 1991).

Children learn more from experiences that are interesting and meaningful because the experience has a direct impact on their life at that moment. The children understand material which is presented in a developmentally appropriate method because it relates to them in their own unique situations. For example, a child might have to learn to write by completing worksheets correctly, forming each letter exactly, erasing mistakes and starting over. A child who is not ready for this type of instruction may feel frustration at not being successful at the task, and may be easily bored because the task is unappealing. On the other hand, a child in a classroom that employs developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), may use several different media for learning how to write and practicing related skills. Shaving cream is a favorite of preschoolers because it is smooth and slippery. It (along with fingerprint or pudding) can be used to allow small muscles become accustomed to the motions used in handwriting. A good way for children to practice

actually forming letters is to first practice them in sand, salt, or cornmeal. The coarseness of these media allows the child to recall more easily how to form the letter. These methods are more appealing to young children because most like and need to have tactile experiences so that skills are brought to a concrete level. An early childhood educator is always observing children to know when they are ready for certain skills to be introduced. In addition, time should always be given for the children to use any type of new material in free play or exploration. This gives children a chance to discover various properties of the material. Discovery experiences are more meaningful to most people than direct instruction because the person has a stake in the discovery. A person has truly learned if he has ownership in the learning through discovery.

“Long ago the American schoolhouse adopted the unwritten policy that students should leave their worries on the doorsteps of their private homes...It also made possible the complete separation of the curriculum of school from that home” (Martin, 1992). For young children, school and home should be able to merge without difficulty. Kids need to be able to feel secure at school as well as at home, and vice-versa. If early educators are aware of the needs of the whole child, they will recognize that young children need to be shown a lot of love and understanding. They thrive on the positive physical attention of hugs, pats on the back, sitting on the teacher’s lap, and generally being in close proximity to an adult while exploring their world. At home, when all of their physical and emotional needs are met, children learn naturally through contact and interaction with their environments, as well as by having a good role model. They learn to get dressed by getting dressed. Feeding oneself is learned by undertaking the task. Learning to tie shoes

is learned by tying shoes. Good parents and care-givers spend time with their children, even if they have to make a special effort to do so. Through their examples, children are learning constantly. A child may learn to brush his teeth or comb his hair by watching an adult. The preschool should be an extension of ideal home learning, or provide that setting if it is missing. If a child does not come from a home where love is given unconditionally, or where the child feels what he does is inconsequential, he has to be shown that he can be successful and make a difference in the world. Much time is provided for academic tasks in later grades, but preschool is a time for learning through exploration, manipulation, discovery, and successful experiences.

In order to provide a home-like environment in preschool, we cannot encourage kids to “leave their worries at the doorstep.” Trying to repress feelings will only result in the feelings coming out at a later, less appropriate time. For example, if we ignore a child’s worry that his mom is sick, the child will probably act out in some way, or show little interest in play or learning activities. The child may cry easily or even become physically ill himself. But if we allow children time to feel emotions and give them tools for the articulation of problems and worries, we are providing experiences that are meaningful to them at that point in their lives, which is the cornerstone of developmental education.

Developmentally appropriate curriculum is recognized and respected in other countries as well as in the United States. According to Schliefer (1995), the Curriculum for Preschool Education of the Quebec (Canada) Ministry of Education has set its overall objective as “...allow(ing) the preschool child to pursue his own path, to encourage his

abilities, to develop relationships with others, and to interact with his environment.” In Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy, children are allowed and encouraged to pursue their own creativity: “Education has to focus on each child—not each child in isolation but each child seen in relation with other children...family...teachers...school...community...and the wider society” (Gandini 1993). In Germany, Waldorf Schools are “both interdisciplinary and multi-sensory,” employing Froebel’s philosophy that education begins with whatever the child brings to the preschool experience (Gordon and Williams-Browne, 1995). France provides one of the “most ambitious and comprehensive systems of free public education in the world, starting with two-year-olds” (McMahan, 1992). France, too, follows developmental guidelines for its public preschools. The three specific objectives of the *ecole maternelle* (literally “maternal school”), or preschool starting at two years old, involve helping the child to adjust to a school atmosphere, to establish social relationships with peers, and to spark an interest in many areas, including language, art, physical skills, science, and math. “The *ecole maternelle* is specifically *not* geared to teach young children to read, a mission that is entrusted to the *cours preparatoire*, the equivalent of first grade in the United States” (McMahan, 1992).

We early childhood educators need to look to examples set by other cultures and at our own roots in early education when there is pressure by parents, colleagues, or administrators to be more academic in our philosophy and classroom practices. We need only to look to the ideas and ideals of Piaget, Montessori, Froebel, Steiner, Emilio, and others to know that we are on the right track and providing the most educationally and developmentally sound experience that we are able to furnish for the children that we

serve. Kindergarten began in the United States not as a place where children would be able to learn to read before they entered school, but to learn to explore their environment, and to learn to get along with others in a school setting. Just as important, preschool education in America began as a way to provide environmentally deprived children with a good start to their education, not as a place to complete a set of academic tasks. For reference, we need to look at the beginnings of Montessori education, Head Start, and state-funded developmental pre-kindergarten programs such as those in New York State. No amount of influence should cause early educators to stray from the philosophy of developmentally sound education. Instead it is our job to educate parents, administrators, and colleagues as to the importance of DAP, and that the ways that young children learn are different from older children and adults. We need to ease the feeling in others that children need to learn more “facts” and “skills.” We need to impart our own passion of the subject to those who are most influential in lobbying for and creating policies and legislation that will affect our work in the classroom.

Familial Interaction: Socioeconomic Status, Parenting Styles, and Family Culture

The existence of low socioeconomic families was a primary reason for the commencement of many preschool programs in the United States, as we have already seen. Low income is one of many “risk factors” which have been identified over the years as having an effect on the schooling of children, which in turn affects higher education, employment, and the family of the child raised in an environment containing one or more risk factors. Having an income at or below poverty level often means that a family’s risk factors are compounded. Many people having a low income are not educated enough to

hold higher paying jobs. A lack of education has been shown to lead to other unsound behaviors such as a lack of prenatal care, child abuse, and not spending time interacting with children. "Although child abuse occurs at all socioeconomic levels, it is almost seven times more common in homes where the annual income is under \$15,000 than in homes where the income is higher" (Sedlack, 1989, in Harris and Liebert, 1992). "Faced with persistent financial concerns and other stressors, low-income parents show less nurturance, less responsiveness to the social emotional needs of their children, and more reliance on physical punishment and coercion to gain obedience than middle-income parents do" (Garner, Jones, and Miner, 1994). Babies born into poverty are shown to smile less than those who are at an economic advantage, and they also take less interest in their surroundings. This is due to the fact that disadvantaged mothers are less likely to spend time smiling at their children or participating in verbal exchanges (Harris and Liebert, 1992). If a child starts off with such a handicap, he or she is likely to fall farther and farther behind age-mates in development. Thus, by the time school starts, there is an ever-widening gap between the lower-income child and the middle-class child.

But such cycles can be broken with early intervention and education of the parents as well as the children: "Early educational enrichment is one powerful tool to break the cycle of low achievement, school dropout, and dysfunctional adult behaviors" (Honig, 1995). Honig, in her research at Syracuse University, has shown that there is a need for several types of interventions which all work together and complement one another in aiding families in poverty. Implementing curricula that enhances a child's self-worth and fosters empathy was shown to cut down on violence due to negative social interactions.

Honig started a program that taught boys how to care for young babies and children. The boys felt a sense of accomplishment and also came away being able to show and understand emotions more easily. She also advocates organizing national home outreach programs, in which trained personnel make home visits to at-risk families to demonstrate positive adult-child interactions and good nutrition, attaching health care centers to child care centers, adapting public schools as child care sites, and supporting a more socially positive media message. Parents with low literacy levels need support in order to “promote a passion for learning,” and we also need to work harder at preventing unwanted pregnancies and ensuring prenatal care (Honig, 1995). Of course all of these suggestions can only be implemented with strong support and cooperation from the many existing community, state, and federal agencies.

Another aspect of the child to consider when working with young children is the parenting style by which the child is being raised. There is a wide variety of philosophies used in homes of all cultures and socioeconomic levels. For example, a child who has been raised in a home with a middle income level may make a smooth transition from home to school because he is accustomed to making decisions and learning independence at home. His parents may encourage exploration, reading and language development, and physical skills. He adjusts well because expectations and values at school generally match those of a middle income household. On the other hand, a child from a low income household is again at a disadvantage just by being born into his environment. Lower income households, in general, lean toward a more autocratic and controlling form of child rearing in which the child is not allowed to make decisions and is expected to follow

orders. "Lower-class socialization...is less warm and more concerned with control and direction, the result being that in order to achieve independence, the lower-class adolescent is more likely to have to resort to unsponsored acts" (Adams, 1986). Again, developmentally appropriate early education can help by encouraging children to explore their environments and provide a safe arena for that exploration. Developmental education also fosters independence and decision-making by presenting the child with teacher-guided choices about his own education. The child may experiment to find his own level of comfort and independence. This helps the child to make more appropriate choices in adolescence and adulthood.

Although "cultural differences across the world are diminishing due to technological advances and increased contact with other societies" (Harris and Liebert, 1992), there is still a need to understand that different societies have different goals for their children. Because the goals are different does not necessarily mean that one culture's objectives are more important than another's. A society such as China may demand obedience and respect from their children because that is what those children need to succeed in that country.

In the United States, many parents encourage independence in children because that is what our children need be able to achieve. Educators need to be aware that cultural and subcultural values, even within the United States, may negatively affect schooling if the individual teacher does not take differences into account when teaching. As an example, if a child has been raised to expect that decisions will be made for him, he may not feel comfortable taking initiative in the classroom to make appropriate choices for

himself. A teacher should recognize this and take actions to help the child ease into decision-making. Good teachers observe children and note where they have difficulties and what strengths they have. If a child has a problem in a certain area, the effective teacher will analyze the situation to figure out why the problem is occurring. The teacher will then decide what course of action is best, based on that child and his background, the school environment, and school and community values. Analyzing the situation is taking into account all sides of the child's life, or looking at the child as a whole person, to discover what course of action will benefit the most.

Part IV: The Whole Child: The importance of Considering All Information Before Making Decisions Regarding Children

Curriculum

In general it is professionals who make most decisions regarding curriculum. However, parents and occasionally other community members are allowed to sit on committees designed to oversee curriculum in a given school district or early childhood center. Although teachers and administrators may ultimately decide what is to be included to teach at a given level, outside pressures have inevitable influence on the choices. It could be that a group of parents want their children to learn to read at an early age because they've read articles or heard news reports, or it could be something such as the launching of Russian space craft which generated a national push to teach more math and science in the schools.

In early childhood education, professionals need to constantly be reminded that developmentally appropriate curriculum is best, and that young children learn in a different manner than older children and adults. Early educators need to be abreast of new research which pertains to early education and keep up-to-date on intervention strategies. In addition, they should be aware of how to investigate services that may be available to children. Having the support and input of colleagues with similar philosophies and attitudes toward preschool children, toddlers, and infants will strengthen a program. Early childhood professionals themselves need to be champions of quality, affordable child care, and of competitive wages for child care workers and teachers. One of the easiest ways to accomplish these goals is to join an early childhood professional organization, such as the

National Association for the Education of Young Children, and to attend professional meetings, inservices, workshops, and conferences relating to the subject. It is in this way that teachers of and advocates for young children will have the backing they need to stand ground against those who would attempt to make an early childhood program more "educational" or "academic." It is through early education groups and associations that educators will be armed with the information they need to educate the public and other educators.

In 1988, an Idaho task force outlined Appropriate Practices for Idaho Kindergartens. The first section of the guide addresses curriculum at the kindergarten level, but also lends itself very well to earlier educational encounters, such as preschool or Head Start. "The kindergarten program focuses on children's state of being rather than their state of becoming" (French, 1988). This statement is really what sets early education apart from higher level learning. It acknowledges that the young child learns in an environment that is child-centered, rather than teacher- or fact-centered. It deals with issues involving different levels of development, abilities, and experiences. "Kindergartners need curriculum goals that nourish positive feeling toward learning" (French, 1988). It is crucial that the first experiences with formal schooling are positive, as it is extremely difficult to "undo" a negative attitude toward school once it is established. Young children should want to come to school, to a safe place which fosters growth and challenges varying levels of abilities and interests. Every day that a child succeeds he feels better about his level of competence and is more likely to stay in school when things get tough. Finally, "Kindergartners need curriculum goals that foster

competence in all areas of development—physical, social, emotional, creative, and intellectual” (French, 1988). This objective addresses the whole child, and the importance of seeing the child in this way. “As a result of the teacher’s knowledge about how young children learn, the classroom is rich in experience and participation.”

“Appropriate curriculum planning is based on teachers’ observations and recordings of each child’s special interests and developmental progress” (Spodek, 1987).

Extremely important to early childhood education is considering all aspects of a child before presenting an educational experience. Only through observation and information gathering can a teacher find out exactly what type of curriculum is appropriate for students. Therefore, although the teacher may follow curriculum guidelines, it is his/her responsibility to make it appropriate for each child in the room. The professional needs to engage in extensive “kid-watching,” to get to know the family and the child’s background, and learn which children are friends and normally interact socially.

By knowing each child as an individual, the teacher may then “prepare the environment for children to learn through active exploration and interaction with adults, other children, and materials.” Learning cannot be “inhibited by adult-established concepts of completion, achievement, and failure.” and “...children feel successful when they engage in a task they have defined for themselves. Activities should be designed to concentrate on furthering emerging skills through creativity and intense involvement” (Spodek, 1988).

According to Carta (1994), “there are no easy answers about what is or what is not developmentally appropriate or effective or efficient. These determinations can only

be made for the individual child.” She recommends a team of professional and family members be involved in deciding what is best for each child. The team must ask a series of questions regarding each educational practice commonly used at the individual site to determine individual appropriateness: “Does it result in the child’s becoming more independent? Does it produce an identified outcome such as a child’s mastery of an IEP objective? Is it more or less efficient than another practice or way of learning? Is it ethically defensible? Does it comply with relevant policies? And finally, is it a practice valued by family members and other consumers?” Carta therefore sees the importance of considering all relevant information about an individual before making decisions regarding early childhood curriculum.

Socialization

Many children now come to preschool already having dealt with making friends and being around age mates for extended periods of time, due to the fact that so many mothers are in the work force and the children regularly attend day care. Even so, a good number of kids come to school ill-prepared to handle various social situations. Perhaps they have just had no experience interacting with other children, or maybe their lives are lacking appropriate role models. On the other hand, a child may already be armed with several tools for making friends and playing with other children, either from experiences with siblings or play groups.

A teacher needs to be aware of what the child’s life was like before he or she entered the classroom, and also what the child’s environment is when he or she leaves for the day. Billy, for example, is a kindergartner who is continually making inappropriate

choices and is very impulsive. so he is not a very attractive friend to other kindergartners in the class. Since I have been on a home visit to Billy's house, I know that his father has been in and out of mental institutions, is an alcoholic, and abused Billy before getting a divorce from Billy's mother. The mother related that she was addicted to drugs for several years and worked as an exotic dancer to pay the bills when Billy was younger. Billy's mom is now pregnant again and is ill because of the pregnancy. She is finding it difficult to spend a lot of time with Billy, even though she is not working. Since I know what Billy's background is, I can work with him to form a behavior plan for him at school so that he can interact more appropriately with other children. Perhaps some positive interaction will raise his self-esteem so that Billy is able to succeed in other areas as well. Before I gathered the information about Billy's home life, I was less accommodating and less patient with him. Just knowing a little bit about the child has done a lot for how I, as Billy's teacher, see him as a human being, rather than just as an unruly child in my class. Also as a result of my visit to Billy's home, I began asking the school psychologist for advice in this matter. The psychologist is now corresponding with Billy's mother to try to make home life somewhat easier. This is the sort of intervention strategy that will hopefully affect how Billy interacts with others and is the direct result of colleagues with similar goals working together.

It is very important that teachers know how children learn to socialize with their peers and with adults. Once a teacher is aware of the different stages of socialization, she is able to provide opportunities for the children to experiment in developmentally appropriate ways in the safe environment of a classroom. If the child makes an

inappropriate choice, the teacher is there to guide the child to make a better choice, and to handle any adverse situations that arise. Bredekamp (1987) states that children come into the world ready for social contact and are inherently curious about others, especially those their own age. They want to form friendships and relationships with people but they are at a loss as to how to go about doing so. "Children's relationships can at one minute seem very sophisticated as they imitate a gentle, patient, or generous adult. At other times, fatigue, anxiety, or other distress overwhelms such young children. Adults must expect this great variability in social interaction and be prepared to guide children toward their own solutions."

The importance of making good decisions regarding socialization in an early childhood classroom is evident by the fact that children who are socially competent are more self-confident. The more self-esteem a child has, the more likely it is that he or she will perform well in school in later years. A child needs to be given a safe and accepting, guiding environment in which to test his social competencies. "In an accepting kindergarten environment, the teacher models the behaviors of empathy toward others, generosity, sharing, helping, cooperating and respecting others' rights" (French, 1988). These are behaviors that are valued in our society, and if a child can be successful in cultivating them early, he or she has a better chance of having positive relationships, which in turn boost self-esteem and general self-worth. In short, successful socialization at an early age can make the difference in having a productive or unproductive school career and can be the basis for a personally and socially fruitful and meaningful lifestyle.

Teaching Methods

How a teacher decides to relate knowledge in the classroom depends heavily on how he or she implements items in the previous two sections, curriculum and socialization. According to Seifert (1993), "It is important to find strengths and goals in many early education theories." In other words, it is not healthy for a teacher to subscribe solely and partially to a certain author, philosopher, or theorist without being willing to consider other points of view. The reality is that, even in a private or rural school where a group of children seems relatively homogenous, children come from a wide variety of backgrounds, contain an even wider intermixing of genetic factors, and differing socioeconomic status further complicates the whole picture of a child. All of these facts work together to produce the children a teacher sees in the classroom every day. Each child comes with a totally unique set of needs and wants. Therefore, it is virtually impossible that a certain method of teaching or philosophy of learning is going to meet all of the needs of every child in that teacher's class! It is vital that teachers have a working knowledge of the basics of child development theory and a good background of the way young children learn. If an early childhood teacher is not sufficiently prepared, he or she may succumb to the whims of those less informed on the subject, and is not able to make the best decisions for the students he or she comes in contact with every day. In addition, every teacher needs to keep up-to-date by attending workshops and conferences specifically geared to early childhood education. Here the early educator is able to network with a variety of individuals in the same circumstances, and be validated in his or her work. Above all, a

teacher needs to be open to new ideas and ways of accomplishing the goals set for each child.

“In a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program, the teacher limits the amount of time spent in whole-group instruction and devotes large blocks of time to individual and small-group instruction... (and) ample time is allowed for spontaneous play” (French, 1988). Since developmental education is child-centered, the teacher allows the children to guide the course of their education to a certain extent. Therefore, it may seem that the teacher does not know what he or she will be doing in the classroom next month, next week, or even tomorrow. A fundamental plan and set of goals needs to be in place for the long-term (week, month, or year), and then the teacher can determine the day-to-day activities as learning proceeds. Many times educators adjust their plans as the school year progresses. Recently a first grade teacher, who has been teaching for thirty years, asked in what order I introduced the letters of the alphabet in kindergarten. At first, I was somewhat embarrassed because my only answer to her was “I don’t know. I make it up as I go along.” Later in the day I began thinking about why I “make it up as I go,” and exactly what practices I use in my kindergarten classroom. It is because I implement child-centered education in my classroom. The children are being exposed to letters and words throughout the day as we start out with calendar activities, sing songs and read poems from charts, go on to choose centers and activities that contain labeled materials, write names on projects, share work with one another, and read books. My long-range plan is to introduce all of the letters of the alphabet during the year, but I do not really think the order matters. What matters is the topics my children are interested in at a given

point. I can then relate certain letters to their experiences at that time. For example, around Halloween, the children were fascinated with pumpkins and were “reading” many pumpkin stories. So I introduced the letter ‘P’ that week, and the kids loved finding the letter ‘P’ in the stories which attracted their attention. I am making decisions in my classroom based on my daily informal evaluations of the children, their experiences, and my teaching. I still have my lesson plans written out a week in advance, and I include goals and objectives for those lessons, but I reflect and make changes accordingly with my class.

“Success in the early grades does not guarantee success through out the school years and beyond, but failure in the early grades does virtually guarantee failure in later schooling” (Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, 1992). The basic underlying goal for all preschool education (and beyond) should be to execute successful experiences for all children. In a child-centered, developmental classroom, a child should be able to get the individual support he needs in order to do just that. That is why teachers need to be empowered to be able to make critical decisions about teaching strategies in their own classes, and to be able to consider all aspects of a child before deciding which methods to use.

Part V: A Guide for Teachers of Young Children

Introduction

It is essential that all teachers of young children consider the child as a complete person, looking at all aspects of his or her life before making any decisions regarding education. Teachers, as is understandable because of their huge responsibility, may forget that each child is his own special person with unique needs and gifts. We may not focus on the fact that each child has a life outside school. The child is not only a member of the school community, but also a family member and may belong to a church, group, club, or team community. Since teachers spend a large chunk of waking hours with each child (in many cases more time than parents themselves), we have a profound effect on children. We, therefore, need to take it upon ourselves to use this time efficiently to make a positive impact on the kids with whom we spend so much time.

This guide is intended for those who teach or care for children ages 3-5. It deals with five areas a teacher must consider before making decisions regarding his or her classroom or center. Each area includes examples and rationale for this philosophy.

Developmental Needs for Children Ages 3-5

Often early childhood educators hear the debate of academic versus developmental education for preschool and kindergarten children. Indeed, many of us are plain sick and tired of hearing about the controversy. Or, maybe you feel as I did before I started researching the subject. I thought that developmental education was just “what we do” now. I really did not completely understand why, although I felt it was right. Little did I

realize, in my naïveté, that some teachers and school districts who advocate developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) are still handing out worksheets and workbooks. Indeed, there are school districts in the United States which permit kindergarten teachers to teach without Bachelor's degrees much less a certification in early childhood education (Robinson and Lyon, 1994). Recently, I read the goals for kindergarten from a handwriting program used by a school district in Idaho. Incredibly, one of the objectives listed "children can color within the lines" as a desired outcome! (McGraw-Hill, 1987)

There are many questions and myths still surrounding DAP, which I will address here in a question and answer format.

"Don't children need structure in their school day? By implementing DAP, do the kids do whatever they want, whenever they want?"

"There are no easy answers about what is or is not developmentally appropriate...the determinations can only be made for the individual child" (Carta, 1994).

Developmentally appropriate practice means that teachers take into account a child's developmental level of cognition, physical ability and social and emotional maturity before planning the child's educational experience (Bredekamp, ed., 1987). It also means that the child and the group's interests are continually assessed in making teaching plans. DAP does not mean letting children do "whatever." Students are encouraged to make choices within a framework of carefully planned activities designed to contribute to a child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth. Children do not simply run wild. Therefore, teachers also need to be highly involved in activities with their students. A

good teacher is constantly monitoring and adjusting to the children's needs and desires, while engaging them in fresh and challenging tasks.

For example, while teaching a class of Kindergarten through second grade students, I noticed that they loved writing notes to each other. To encourage their love of writing while avoiding disruption by passing notes at inappropriate times, I sent for the writing program instituted by the U.S. Postal Service, Wee Deliver. This package, available free-of-charge to every school in the United States, provides a complete kit to start a class- or school-wide post office. Each child participates at his or her own rate of development. Individuals have their own "address" that must be correct in order to insure delivery. Younger children participated as well as older students. With this program, writing and reading really took off in my classroom. The kids would beg for more time to write letters, and as each child was ready, I helped with paragraphs, punctuation, and proper form. I am sure my students will remember more from this experience than any formal writing or spelling lessons. They were using authentic materials for genuine learning at their own pace. This is developmental education, where children create meaning from their activities and experiences (Spodek and Brown, 1993).

"How do I implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum in my classroom?"

One of the most important elements of DAP is observation. A teacher needs to be "tuned in" to her students, constantly assessing and re-assessing what is appropriate for the individual or group. Listen to what children talk about and make notes, participate in and facilitate their activities, observe which toys and books they choose regularly, and

provide an environment with materials that foster learning. Also very important is to ask children what they like! Children will learn more from what they are interested in and what has meaning for them personally.

The room should be set up so that the child has opportunities to practice reading, writing, math skills, art, fine and gross motor skills, and dramatic play every day. Within these areas and activities, children should be able to make choices. Should I play with blocks or puzzles? Should I make a house or tower with the blocks? Read or listen to a story? Paint or cut? Play house or store? Young children feel important when they are able to make choices. They feel they are worthwhile and competent.

“Can I still have my ‘circle time’ and scheduled activities throughout the day?”

Yes. Two elements which are key to making DAP work are structure and community (Dodge, Jablon, and Bickart, 1994). In coming together for circle time children feel that they are valued members of a group. During meeting time a teacher is able to model many activities, including social norms and behaviors. Children have a safe place to role play situations and share their work. “The opportunity to participate as a contributing member of a community is essential for children’s well-being and academic success. A classroom community enables teachers to address children’s basic needs, promote their resilience to hardship conditions teach the values of respect and responsibility, and foster their social and academic competence” (Dodge, Jablon, and Bickart, 1994).

Circle time is also a place where the teacher should outline the schedule for the day. Young children feel much more secure and sure of themselves if they know what will

happen during the day, and in what order. The day goes more smoothly because children know what is expected of them and they are less likely to feel uneasy. "Without a predictable structure, people often feel insecure and unsafe because they don't know what is expected or how to act appropriately. When the structure is clear, it is easier for everyone to work and to feel productive" (Dodge, Jablon, and Bickart, 1994).

"How can I find out more about DAP in my classroom?"

The bibliography at the end of this section lists some practical manuals that you can put into use right away. Each of these books were written by people who have actually used the activities or methods with great success, and have had support from colleagues, administrators, and parents. The bibliography also lists the address to write for the Wee Deliver in school post office kit.

Literature for Children

It has been proven that reading to a child every day will significantly improve cognitive skills, and will most likely instill the child with a love of literature. "In one study, twenty classes of Harlem 7-year-olds were read to for twenty minutes a day for one school year. At the end of that time, the children were tested and compared with a control group that had not been read to. The experimental group showed significantly higher gains in vocabulary and reading comprehension" (Trelease, 1982). Even more encouraging is the case of a child with Down Syndrome whose parents read ten books to her every day. She is now in a regular elementary classroom, on grade level, loves to read, and has a "phenomenal" vocabulary (Schwartz, 1995).

It has been said that learning to read is the single most important task for a child (Trelease, 1995, in Schwartz, 1995). Reading is the key to unlocking every other subject in school, including math. If a child cannot read math symbols, she cannot participate in the traditional classroom. If a child learns to like books early in his school career, he is more likely to be enthusiastic about learning.

Teachers have an enormous responsibility in this respect. We must make a commitment to read to children every day, using a wide variety of subject and content material. We must immerse our room in print and model reading constantly. We must encourage children in their reading approximations and praise their efforts.

A developmentally appropriate classroom should use poems, songs, stories, fables, sayings, rhymes, riddles, and a variety of non-fiction to demonstrate reading. Every poem, song, etc. that is recited should be written out in enlarged print and posted around the room for children to practice during their free reading time. A classroom which is immersed in print gives a child many opportunities throughout the day to become engaged in using print as a means of communication (Fisher, 1991).

Even if you do not have a large budget, it is essential to purchase a few high quality books. "Regardless of a child's background, a good selection policy should provide a wide range of quality books and diversity of materials for all children" (Huck, Hepler, and Hickman, 1993). Buying used books is a great way to expand your classroom library. I am always on the lookout for yard sales, library sales, and thrift stores. Although I use my own money, the books cost only \$0.10 to \$0.50 each! I always have in mind a few good authors or books I would like to have, and now my collection has

expanded to a couple hundred books! In addition, I have a great library for my own children and nieces and nephews. I have listed below a few of my all-time favorite books to be included in an early childhood library. These books and others are also recommended by: Bobbi Fisher (1991), Diane Trister Dodge (1994), Charlotte Huck (1993), and Jim Trelease (1982 and 1989). For more extensive lists of great literature for children of all ages, consult the books by these authors listed in the bibliography.

My Favorites:

Animals Should Definitely Not Wear Clothing by Judi Barret.

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault.

The Cows Are in the Corn by James Young.

Drummer Hoff adapted by Barbara Emberly.

Growing Vegetable Soup by Lois Ehlert.

It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles G. Shaw.

The Missing Tarts by B.G. Hennessy.

Over in the Meadow illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats.

The Three Billy Goats Gruff illustrated by Ed Parker.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle.

The Child and His Family and Friends

As mentioned earlier, we need to recall that each child is a unique being with life experience different from that of any other. This is very much a product of his immediate social environment, namely his family and friends.

The family is one area in which a teacher may have limited control, but must deal with whatever he or she is faced with. A child's family experience may be positive and supportive, but it may also be challenging or unsupportive. It is helpful to know different kinds of parenting styles which occur in various homes, in order to understand a child's background and be able to plan education to meet that child's needs. If a child lives in an unsupportive home, a teacher may be able to help the child by referring him or her for some sort of intervention. There are many various groups in communities for children of divorced parents, groups for single parents, and classes that help parents to be able to deal with their children effectively. If it is warranted, the teacher is legally obligated to report any suspicions of child abuse or neglect, and/or the teacher might alert Health and Welfare authorities to a potentially hazardous situation. In early childhood education, many professionals are trained to carry out home visits, during which the visitor has a chance to discuss any concerns the parents have, as well as to demonstrate appropriate interaction with children and activities for them. A teacher should be familiar with resources in the school district and community so that the child is helped in every possible way, if necessary.

There are three basic types of parenting styles (Baumrind, in Harris and Liebert, 1992). A parent may use just one or any combination of the three in raising their child. Most parents do not usually know the name for the style they use. Much of the time they are using the style used with them. Sometimes people may educate themselves through books, TV, advice from others, or parenting classes.

The first parenting style is authoritarian. In this method, the parent requires that the child obey orders unquestioningly. There is no give and take, and the punishment is often severe for transgressions.

Another style is permissive. Basically, the child does whatever he wants, when he wants, if it does not interfere with the parent's agenda. Parents may seem "nice," but the child really has no guidance or security.

The third style of parenting is called authoritative. In this style, a parent takes control, but the child has some input into the rules and regulations of the home. If a child can prove a point rationally, a parent may take it under advisement.

It has been shown that children of parents who use the authoritative style of parenting are better off socially and emotionally than children of other parents. Kids who are raised under the authoritative style show more responsibility, self-reliance, assertiveness, and are more friendly. Kids raised under the other two parenting styles are very much alike in their behavior. They are more discontented, distrustful, and self-centered (Baumrind in Harris and Liebert, 1992).

Children are extremely impressionable people, so it is critical that no matter what sort of background the child is bringing to his school experience, teachers need to

encourage positive peer relations in the classroom. “Peers contribute to the emotional well-being, classroom performance, school adjustment, and social skills and competencies” (Ladd and Coleman, 1993). Having friends reduces stress because there is someone to share with and lean on. Having a companion also makes one feel valued and needed. The classroom setting can encourage peer relations. Children need places where they can gather to discuss work and share ideas without teacher intrusion. It has been shown that less peer interaction occurs when the teacher is present (Ladd and Coleman, 1993). The classroom can be arranged to include places and times for group and individual work and play. For example, there might be a large area for block play, to allow for cooperative building. Also, the dramatic play, writing, and art areas should be big enough for children to collaborate on work, or to discuss their work with others. On the other hand, there should be smaller areas for children to write, read, or create independently and quietly, if they so choose.

The Child and Society

“Early education fosters early friendships and social skills” (Ladd and Coleman, 1993). We already know that a child who can interact positively with peers and be accepted socially is on his way to becoming a relatively happy and competent adult. But how does that relate to the rest of society? How can we encourage the child to become a happy and competent adult who is also a contributing member of society? Is it really necessary to start with preschool age children?

The United States has traditionally been a place where many cultures have come together to form the uniquely American way of life. However, people have pushed aside

their cultural heritage in order to become the “average American.” This has produced a number of hostilities between groups of people because one group may not necessarily fit the definition of “American” held by another group.

In the U.S. today, some are hoping that a broader, multicultural point of view will prevail, which would serve to celebrate all cultures that encompass the meaning of “American.” Therefore, “teachers need to work together to produce a curriculum which incorporates the lives and experiences of many different kinds of people” (Martin, 1992). Many teachers are white and from middle-class backgrounds. “By the year 2000, the majority of ...students will not share this background” (Hauser, 1995). We need to be aware that this affects our thinking profoundly. What we may feel is right is not necessarily the way to do things in another culture or another economic background. We, as teachers of young and impressionable children, need to evaluate our own philosophy, and to keep our minds open to interpretations. We have to be aware that what we may perceive as misbehavior, may just be the child acting upon what he knows. Certain children may not know that they are to remain quiet in the library, for example, if they have not been exposed to that information. This simply illustrates the need to keep our minds open to the fact that different cultures and economic backgrounds expose children to different areas and views of life.

Teachers should not force kids to adapt to the traditional “school way,” or middle-class way-of-life when in school. Teachers themselves need to change according to the situations of his or her students. For example, studies have shown that Native American children may need to work alone and be given specific direction in order to succeed, while

native Hawaiian children may need to be given the opportunity to work in groups to solve problems and be successful in school (Heath, 1989, in Harris and Liebert, 1992). This may differ somewhat from a “traditional” American school which may expect a child to follow directions independently and to sit with desks in rows facing the teacher. Again, educators have to be very observant and communicate with the children in order to achieve high quality education in their classrooms. Kids are often yearning to understand the world in which they live, which affects them directly. Traditional school curriculum does not match this need, and is many times secondary in importance. As a result, schooling may seem superficial and/or artificial (Martin, 1992). It is our duty as early childhood educators to make school curriculum relevant to the lives of our students by being able to relate to them at their cultural as well as developmental level of understanding. It is also our responsibility to value all cultural variations within our classroom (including economic differences), and to help children place value on similarities and differences. It is only in this way that all children will feel as if they are able to make a significant and worthy contribution to our society.

Early Education and Intervention

Studies have shown that “children who participated in preschool programs have lower rates of retention (in a grade) and special education placements than those who did not attend.” Those who benefited from early education and/or intervention are also more likely to get a high school diploma, and have higher life aspirations in general (Spodek and Brown, 1993).

Many have heard the reports that initial gains in I.Q. scores as a result of attending a Head Start program equalized with those of their peers after only two or three years in regular elementary school. These reports are discouraging, but they are also misleading. What the reports do not state is that the children who attend Head Start programs are often at a greater disadvantage than their peers to begin with. Even if I.Q. scores are the same after a few years, they may have been lower than their peers' scores if they had not attended Head Start. Also, an I.Q. score is only one measure of success. The research did not report the lowered incidences of juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, or absenteeism from school. These are all real and positive outcomes of quality early education.

Many of the children who attend programs such as Head Start are disadvantaged in some way, whether it is economically, culturally, emotionally, or physically. An early educational program allows them a chance to succeed in an area they might otherwise never get to experience. It also allows the children's disadvantages to be equalized to some extent. They are given a chance to interact with peers and adults in a safe, trusting, and supportive environment. Early education and intervention programs do work. Educators need to be aware of this fact and become active advocates of their methods and philosophy to ensure that funding is available for such worthwhile ventures.

We need to remember that no single program is better than another. Quality programs are a result of a well-designed curriculum, and professionally trained and committed staff. We should be open to various methods and philosophies which will apply to our situations, communities, and students. "Teachers' perceptions of children's abilities seem to have an undeniable effect on children's success in school" (Spodek and

Brown, 1993). If early childhood educators can keep all this in mind as we face our classes every day, we are doing a great service to each child with whom we come in contact.

Books for a Developmentally Appropriate Classroom

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Address for the Wee Deliver in-school post office:

Wee Deliver Literacy Program
U.S. Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW, Rm. 10541
Washington, DC 20026-3100

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