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Developmentally appropriate practices

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The early childhood classroom must be a place where children have the opportunity to make sense of the world around them as they engage in meaningful learning experiences. Traditionally, developmentally appropriate practices would be used in order to support children's meaningful learning experiences since children are the main focus. However, the current shift to teacher qualification is replacing developmentally appropriate practices to a more academic focus. This impingement is not developmentally appropriate and tends to rush children through the early stages of their development. Therefore, let us take a snap-shot at a developmentally appropriate learning environment and the teachers' role in a developmentally appropriate classroom.

The Value of Learning Centers/learning through play



Block center provides for:

- Learning about sizes and shapes
- Designs and structures
- Learning about weight, balance, height, and depth
- Social skills and team-work
- Imagination
- Language skills
- Creativity

Dramatic play center provides for:

- Language skills
- Social skills and working together
- Role playing
- Creativity
- Imagination/pretend play
- Cooperation

Art center provides for:

- Individual creative expression
- Art appreciation
- Fine motor development
- Color recognition/discovery (mixing)
- Independence
- Learning about 3D designs and textures

Math/manipulative center provides for:

- Learning concepts such as: classifying, sorting, and problem solving
- Working on fine motor skills/
Working on reinforcing already mastered skills
- One-to-one correspondence
- Social interaction
- Memory and recall

THE VOICE

Science center provides for:

- Free exploration
- Opportunities for discovery
- Problem solving
- Formulating a hypothesis
- Testing the hypothesis
- Learning new vocabulary
- Finding solutions

Sand and water provides for:

- Opportunity to learn concepts such as: empty-full, heavy-light, more-less, etc.
- Measurements with spoons, cups, etc.
- Opportunities to learn concepts such as sink-float

Library center provides for:

- Opportunity to learn new vocabulary
- Comprehension skills
- Book orientation
- Engaging in communication and language/literacy development
- Print awareness
- Memory and recall

HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AROUND THEM



The teachers' role-Facilitator

The teachers' first role is to see things from the child's point of view. In other words, see the world through the eyes to the child. Secondly, the teachers' role is also to realize first and foremost that her/his role is to facilitate, NOT TO TEACH!!! (as in providing academic lessons in a particular subject-matter methodology).

Facilitators scaffold children's learning, looking for teachable moments as well as observe children in order to better plan for their learning. Observing a child during play experience provides a facilitator with valuable insight into the developmental level of the child or children that she/he is serving. It also provides insight into challenges that the child or children might be experiencing, which leads into determining what developmentally appropriate activities might assist that child.

As facilitators interact with children during play time, she/he also serves as a vital resource for children during this time. She/he models appropriate pro-social skills as well as work one-on-one or with a small group in strengthening meaningful experiences, using open ended materials.

Center time is also a valuable time for facilitators to observe and determine how the centers are functioning as well as children's use of the learning centers. Facilitators can determine if centers are:

- Providing opportunities for children to use all areas of the curriculum.
- Providing meaningful hands-on developmentally appropriate experiences.
- Providing meaningful conversations.

These observations can lead to improvements and adjustments needed in curriculum, planning, and classroom activities. This is the essence of quality early childhood experiences.