This document consists of the two 1999 issues of the newsletter of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE). Each issue contains a feature article and one or more short articles on topics related to early childhood education, calls for papers, announcements about Internet resources, news items about and lists of publications from ERIC/EECE, and articles from the Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Child Care. The feature articles are: "Integrating the Project Approach and Work Sampling" by Sallee Beneke (Spring), and "Another Look at What Young Children Should Be Learning" by Lilian G. Katz (Fall).
ERIC/EECE Newsletter. 1999.


Laurel Preece, Editor
Integrating the Project Approach and Work Sampling

Sallee Beneke

Early childhood teachers often look for a formula that will simplify the complex nature of teaching and reassure them that their students are well served. Consequently, in planning their curriculum, they often rely on books of activities or even entire units that have been developed for children in the general age range of the children in their class. For example, a teacher might select a unit about leaves from such a book and then implement each of the suggested activities, overlooking the interests or development of the individual children in her class. These types of books can be useful as a supplemental resource for planning, but they cannot replace an observant, thoughtful, and responsive teacher. When teachers rely on predetermined or packaged units and activities, the connection between planning, implementation, and assessment that is at the core of good teaching is ignored.

One of the characteristics of high-quality teaching is that the teacher is a decision maker who engages in a cyclical process of documenting/assessing, planning, and implementing. It can be helpful to think of a project as a place within time and space that children and teachers enter together. The role of both teacher and child is to learn, reflect, and do. The teacher watches each child; reflects on the child’s knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and then acts as a catalyst to stimulate growth in these areas. As a catalyst, the teacher needs to stay one step ahead of the child, so that she can use her perspective to stimulate each child’s learning, curiosity, or consolidation of ideas. She becomes a “child watcher” rather than a “child director.” When a teacher takes this role, it is possible for all the children within the project to have an experience that is individually beneficial.

Both project work and documentation practices are conducive to a classroom environment in which teachers can optimize their ability to make good decisions in the cycle of planning, implementing, and assessing children’s work and growth. I believe that the Project Approach functions well in this regard because it begins with the child’s interests and questions, because it focuses on concepts and processes rather than just “right answers” (Katz, 1994), and because children are encouraged to represent their understanding in many ways. In project work, the teacher is able to create an environment that is responsive to the children’s unique abilities and interests.

For example, as we began the project on cars described in Rearview Mirror, I had no preconceived notions about which aspects of cars we would ultimately study in depth or what products would emerge as a result of the children’s study. However, I was confident that through listening to the children’s statements and questions and through documenting their work, we would come to know what they understood and what they were curious about. We would be able to plan activities that would deepen their understandings and challenge their ability to apply skills.

In Rearview Mirror: Reflections on a Preschool Car Project, Sallee Beneke documents the work of a master preschool teacher, her co-teachers, student teachers, and very young children as they explore the automotive laboratory adjacent to their classroom at a community college in the Midwest.
Documentation practices, including curriculum-embedded assessment models such as the Work Sampling System (Meisels et al., 1994), complement the Project Approach because they help the teacher make logical connections between children’s current knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and because they help teachers plan optimal opportunities for further growth (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1998).

With Work Sampling, a teacher uses developmental guidelines and checklists, portfolios, and summary reports to document children’s skills, knowledge, behavior, and accomplishments across a variety of curriculum areas. Documentation practices, such as those used in the Work Sampling System, help the teacher connect with both the individual child and the group as a whole. They consist of the observation and documentation of each child’s use of concepts and integration of skills, rather than on-demand assessment of limited content and discrete skills.

Documentation is an ongoing assessment process that helps teachers think about what and how best to teach each child in the group. When documentation practices are not present in a teacher’s ongoing decision-making process, the cycle is incomplete—the connection between the characteristics of the child and “what to do in school tomorrow” is broken. The fit is likely to be missing between what could most benefit the child and what is planned as curriculum. When the connection between child and curriculum planning is not supported by teacher documentation and assessment practices, teachers often rely too much on cookbook-type curriculum packages and activity books.

For More Information

Helm, J. Harris (Ed.). (1996). The project approach catalog 2. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (ERIC/EECE No. PS 027 048)


This article was adapted from Rearview Mirror: Reflections on a Preschool Car Project, by Sallee Beneke. The publication, which documents the project with over 90 photographs, is available for $10 from ERIC/EECE. phone: 800-583-4135.

5th National Head Start Research Conference
June 28 - July 1, 2000

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with Columbia University and the Society for Research in Child Development, announces Head Start’s Fifth National Research Conference, Developmental and Contextual Transitions of Children and Families: Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice, to be held June 28-July 1, 2000, in Washington, DC.

The Call for Papers is available on the conference Web site. Proposals are due on July 15, 1999. All inquiries about the Call for Papers or the conference should be directed to Dr. Faith Lamb-Parker, Project Director, Columbia School of Public Health/CPFH, 60 Haven Avenue B3, New York, NY 10032.

Phone: 212-304-5251
Fax: 212-544-1911
Email: flp1@columbia.edu
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ERIC/EECE Newsletter, Volume 11, Number 1
High-Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers

Meeting the need for high-quality care for infants and toddlers is a priority in states, tribes, and communities across the country. To support this critical need, the Child Care and Head Start National Leadership Forum on Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers was convened in September 1998.

The Leadership Forum brought together approximately 250 participants—parents, providers, as well as other experts in the field of child development, research and health, and policy makers at the federal, state, and community levels. Forum participants focused on the following five issue areas: (1) partnerships with families, (2) health and safety, (3) building and sustaining an effective infant/toddler child care workforce, (4) capacity building, and (5) research and evaluation.

Although these issues were diverse, the following crosscutting strategies emerged:

1. Continue and expand public awareness and engagement strategies to inform and involve parents, employers, and other stakeholders on issues related to high-quality care.
2. Promote linkages within the child care and Head Start communities and forge new partnerships with groups typically seen as “outside” of the child care community to improve the quality of infant/toddler care.
3. Create child care environments that are models of comprehensive services, based on child-centered, family-focused efforts that make multiple services families may need easily accessible and linked through the child care setting.
4. Seek creative financing strategies and blended funding opportunities to supplement and maximize efforts that support high-quality child care.
5. Focus efforts to improve training opportunities and increase training qualifications for infant/toddler caregivers and expand training efforts that reach caregivers who are outside of the regulatory system.
6. Look for ways to increase compensation and benefits for infant/toddler care providers and to link training with compensation.
7. Examine licensing and regulatory standards to promote child development and ensure health and safety for all children.

Conference proceedings are being written by Zero To Three, for the Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, DHHS. The report, Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers, will be available from the National Child Care Information Center in June 1999.

For additional information or to order a copy of the report, please contact the National Child Care Information Center at 800-616-2242 or info@nccic.org, or visit the NCCIC Web site at http://nccic.org.

Home Environment Matters More, But Day Care Quality Still Important

What happens to children at home before starting school has about twice the educational impact of day care, a major new study concludes. But the influence of day care still is strong, and the quality of that care makes a significant difference in children’s readiness for school, the research shows.

The study, conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and nine other U.S. centers, evaluated the effect of day care on 1,364 children. Early education experts consider it the largest and most carefully controlled research of its kind.

"Because of major changes in the U.S. workforce, there’s been a lot of concern over the past decade about the influence of child care on very young children," said Dr. Martha Cox, a senior investigator at UNC-CH’s Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center and a principal investigator. “Unlike in the past, now more than half of women with children under age 1 are in the workforce. Our findings demonstrate clearly that better quality care before the school years tends to prepare children better to succeed in school later on.”

Researchers followed children in the study group from birth, observing interactions both at home with mothers and at day-care centers with staff. They also evaluated youngsters with various sophisticated tests of language and mental development and assessed the quality of their homes and care centers.

“We found that quality child care matters, even when you take into account other family and child variables such as income and education of the parents,” Cox said. “Children consistently performed better on measures of thinking and language development if they were in good day care than if they were in lower quality care.”

For more information on this study, visit the National Center for Early Development and Learning Web site at http://www.necedl.org or phone Lord Little at 919-966-0867 or email him at lords_little@unc.edu.
New Early Childhood Internet Journal

The first issue of ERIC/EECE's new Internet journal Early Childhood Research & Practice (ECRP) is now available at

http://ecrp.uiuc.edu

Published in February 1999, the journal is the first peer-reviewed Internet-only early childhood education journal.

ECRP is designed to make use of video, sound, hypertext links, searching capabilities, reanalyzable data sets, and the interactivity of the Internet, as well as text and graphics. ECRP combines the quality ensured by peer review with the flexibility and enhancements made possible by an electronic format.

ERIC/EECE is currently seeking submissions for upcoming issues of ECRP. Areas of interest include the development, care, and education of children from birth to approximately age 8. ECRP focuses mainly on applied research or on research with clear implications for practice. The journal addresses topics such as parent participation, policy, and emerging practices and issues.

Instructions for authors are available at

http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/authinst.html

For more information, contact the ECRP editors at ecrp@uiuc.edu.

ResilienceNet

Resilience is defined as the "human capacity and ability to face, overcome, be strengthened by, and even be transformed by experiences of adversity."

ResilienceNet is a World Wide Web site that contains a collection of information and resources related to the resilience of children and families in the face of various adversities. You can visit ResilienceNet at

http://resilnet.uiuc.edu

ResilienceNet provides a comprehensive worldwide source of current, reviewed information about human resilience. The Web sites with resilience resources that are linked to within ResilienceNet have been reviewed by a panel of experts according to a set of criteria for assuring the relevance and quality of the sites. ResilienceNet focuses on resilience in children, youth, and families.

ResilienceNet provides resilience-related information in many different forms, including comprehensive bibliographies of the resilience literature, descriptions of and links to relevant Web sites, and the full text of publications.

For more information, email the ResilienceNet Webmaster at

resnet@ericps.crc.uiuc.edu
Another Look at What Young Children Should Be Learning

Lilian G. Katz

The question of what should be learned must be addressed by all teachers at every level. In terms of broad goals, most teachers and parents readily agree that children should learn whatever will ultimately enable them to become healthy, competent, productive, and contributing members of their communities. But when it comes to the specifics of what should be learned next month, next week, or on any particular day, agreement is not so easily achieved.

The answers will depend partly on the ages of the learners. In other words, the question of what should be learned to some extent depends upon when it is to be learned. Although the what question deals with the goals and objectives of education, the when question involves considerations of what we know about the nature of development and how it relates to learning.

Four Categories of Learning Goals

The four categories of learning outlined below are relevant to all levels of education—especially to the education of young children:

Knowledge. In early childhood, knowledge consists of facts, concepts, ideas, vocabulary, stories, and many other aspects of children’s culture. Children acquire such knowledge from someone’s answers to their questions, explanations, descriptions, and accounts of events, as well as through active and constructive processes of making the best sense they can of their own direct observations.

Skills. Skills are small units of action that occur in a relatively short period of time and are easily observed or inferred. Physical, social, verbal, counting, and drawing skills are among a few of the almost endless number of skills learned in the early years. Skills can be learned from direct instruction or imitated based on observation, and they are improved with guidance, practice, repetition, drill, and actual application or use.

Dispositions. Dispositions can be thought of as habits of mind or tendencies to respond to certain situations in certain

Issues in Early Childhood Education: Curriculum Design, Teacher Education, and the Dissemination of Information

A symposium in honor of Lilian G. Katz

November 5–7, 2000

A symposium to celebrate Professor Katz’s distinguished teaching career will be held on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, from Sunday, November 5, through Tuesday, November 7, 2000. ERIC/ECE invites paper submissions in the following areas: (1) early childhood curriculum design, (2) teacher education, and (3) the dissemination of education-related information. Abstracts are due by May 15, 2000. For more information, contact ERIC/ECE or visit http://ericeece.org/katzsymposium/
ways. Curiosity, friendliness or unfriendliness, bossiness, generosity, meanness, and creativity are examples of dispositions or sets of dispositions, rather than of skills or items of knowledge. Accordingly, it is useful to keep in mind the difference between having writing skills and having the disposition to be a writer. To acquire or strengthen a particular disposition, a child must have the opportunity to express the disposition in behavior. Teachers can strengthen certain dispositions by setting learning goals rather than performance goals.

Feelings. Feelings are subjective emotional states. Some feelings are innate (e.g., fear), while others are learned. Among feelings that are learned are those of competence, confidence, and security.

Other Considerations

Learning through Interaction. Contemporary research confirms that young children learn most effectively when they are engaged in interaction rather than in merely receptive or passive activities (Wood & Bennett, 1999). Young children therefore are most likely to be strengthening their natural dispositions to learn when they are interacting with adults, peers, materials, and their surroundings in ways that help them make better and deeper sense of their own experience and environment. They should be investigating and purposefully observing aspects of their environment worth learning about, and recording and representing their findings and observations through activities such as talk, paintings, drawings, construction, writing, and graphing.

Risks of Early Academic Instruction. Research on the long-term effects of various curriculum models suggests that the introduction of academic work into the early childhood curriculum yields fairly good results on standardized tests in the short term but may be counterproductive in the long term (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). It is clearly not useful for a child to learn skills if, in the process of acquiring them, the disposition to use them is lost.

Variety of Teaching Methods. Academically focused curricula for preschool, kindergarten, and primary programs typically adopt a single pedagogical method dominated by workbooks and drill and practice of discrete skills. It is reasonable to assume that when a single teaching method is used for a diverse group of children, many of these children are likely to fail.

The Learning Environment. The younger the children are, the more informal the learning environment should be. Informal learning environments encourage spontaneous play in which children engage in the available activities that interest them, such as a variety of types of play and construction. However, spontaneous play is not the only alternative to early academic instruction. The data on children's learning suggest that preschool and kindergarten experiences require an intellectually oriented approach in which children interact in small groups as they work together on projects that help them make increasing sense of their own experience.

For More Information


This article was excerpted from an ERIC/EECE Digest available online at http://ericsearch.ed.gov/pubs/digests/1999/katle99.html or in print by calling ERIC/EECE at 800-385-4135.

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ERIC/EECE is currently seeking article submissions that discuss the development, care, and education of children from birth to approximately age 8. Early Childhood Research & Practice focuses mainly on applied research or on research with clear implications for practice. The journal contains articles on practice-related research and development, issues related to parent participation and policy, and emerging practices and issues.

The first two issues of ECRP as well as general information and author guidelines are available at:

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Child Care Issues of the Hispanic Community

The Latino population is among the fastest growing and youngest segments of American society. On November 30, 1999, the Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, will convene the National Leadership Forum on Child Care Issues of the Hispanic Community. This one-day Forum will focus attention on the critical need for high-quality, affordable child care in the Latino community given rapidly changing demographics and the unique challenges faced by Latino families.

The availability of formal non-parental child care too often falls short of meeting the needs of Latino families. For example, one California study found that among the state’s poorest communities, preschool supply in predominately Latino areas was half the average supply observed in other low-income communities. The supply of family child care homes was just one-third the average supply level observed in other poor communities. The gap in availability for Latino children was found to exist even in counties with more ample supply overall.

Latino children and families are found to experience lower quality child care than other children and families. For example, research has found that “Latino families are family oriented, endorse warm parenting practices, and emphasize collective forms of obligation over individualism and self-assertion” (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Hashima & Amato, 1994, as cited in Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996). The role of language and how it affects the child care selection process also has implications for many non-English-speaking Latino families. In general, studies have found that among low-income families, children with non-English-speaking parents are less likely to enroll in a child care center (Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996).

The Leadership Forum will explore these topics, encouraging participants to share innovative practices and providing an opportunity for small-group discussions among diverse leaders within the child care field. Participants will develop a list of key recommendations that will focus on improving aspects of the child care delivery system for Latino families. These recommendations will provide a framework for future action on the part of the federal government, state agencies, communities, and national organizations.

For More Information

For detailed information about the Leadership Forum on child care and Latino families, contact the National Child Care Information Center at 800-616-2242 or visit http://nccic.org.
ERIC/EECE Web News

Reading Pathfinder Web Site

The Reading Pathfinder, a new Internet resource, organizes Web and print resources related to the literacy development of children from birth through age 8 for use by parents, educators, caregivers, policy makers, program planners, and community members.

This new resource provides an innovative interface to Web-based resources on the topic of learning to read. The project combines the flexibility of accessing information via the Internet with an easily navigable structure formed around common questions about reading posed by potential users.

The Reading Pathfinder links readers to information on the process of learning to read, as well as to community, regional, and national resources that can help preschool programs, schools, and communities support children's literacy. Visit the Web site at:

http://readingpath.org

CLAS Web Site

ERIC/EECE works closely with the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Institute in the development of their Web site. The CLAS Web site has recently been redesigned to make it easier for users to navigate through the site and to search the CLAS collection.

The collection contains reviews of resources that have been examined by the CLAS review board. These resources are intended for professionals who work with culturally diverse young children, especially those with special needs, and their families. In some cases, CLAS provides the full text of the resource or a link to the full text of the resource on another Web site. The home page and secondary pages are available in Spanish as well as English. Visit the CLAS Web site at:

http://clas.uiuc.edu

QIC-D Web Site

The Quality Improvement Center for Disabilities (QIC-D), which serves six states (IL, IN, OH, MN, MI, OH), helps Head Start/Early Head Start grantees to serve children with disabilities, birth to 5, and their families by providing ongoing staff development. These training and technical assistance opportunities build upon program strengths and foster partnerships between the grantees and stakeholders in their communities. Visit the Web site at:

http://qicd.uiuc.edu