

Young Children as Explorers: Interactive Learning Experiences (2004)

This curriculum, designed for young children ages 3-6, focuses on math, science, and social studies and includes integrated activities to use with over 30 software titles. *Young Children as Explorers: Interactive Learning Experiences* addresses learning standards established by the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, National Research Council, and National Council for the Social Studies; provides ideas for adapting activities for children with disabilities; contains suggestions and activities for family involvement; and includes resources for adaptive equipment, software, and supplies. The book is 8.5" x 11" and contains 343 pages. Available from Document and Publications Services at Western Illinois University. Cost is \$35 plus shipping. Call 800/322-3905 and ask for Diny.

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Overview

Children are born explorers. As infants and toddlers, they watch, listen, feel, smell, and taste to understand their world. As preschoolers, they continue exploring, experimenting, and making discoveries, seeking information that builds on what they already know. Children construct explanations that make sense based on personal experiences, knowledge, and beliefs (Anderson, 1996; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Hutchinson, 1995; Kamii & Ewing, 1996; von Glaserfeld, 1995), then integrate and interpret new information in relation to existing mental models (Abbott & Ryan, 1999; Driver, 1995).

As constructive learners, children depend on concrete, observable events (physical knowledge) to help them ‘figure things out’ (Van Scoy & Fairchild, 1993). They learn best when they participate in an integrated curriculum incorporating meaningful activities that connect their learning across traditional curricular areas (Campbell, 1992; Roser, Hoffman, & Farest, 1990; Short, 1991; Wakefield, 2000). Teachers can do a great deal to empower children as they provide them with opportunities to engage in real activities that challenge their thinking (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). When children are provided with rich, interesting experiences during their early years, they view learning as a positive experience and begin to develop skills and strategies that are the foundations for lifelong learning.



Children exploring a pumpkin

Recent educational reforms focus on reading, but today’s young children also need mathematical literacy, scientific literacy, and global literacy. To function effectively as adults in a global society, children need a foundation of high quality experiences in math, science, and social studies (Jacobson, 2001; Johnson, 1999; National Association of the Education of Young Children & National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2002; National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century; 2000; National Council for Geographic Education, n.d.). Providing those experiences is not as daunting as some adults may think.

Math is more than numbers, addition, and subtraction. Identifying patterns, developing spatial awareness, and collecting, analyzing, and reporting data are all part of mathematics. Families and teachers can help children develop mathematically through everyday experiences, such as setting the table, sorting objects based on different attributes, or building with blocks. Math also has its own vocabulary—*taller, shorter, heavier, lighter, more, less, same*—these words all have mathematical meaning, and young children can understand the concepts attached to these words.

In addition to exploring math concepts, young children conduct scientific research throughout their day. They make mud pies, play in water, make things move, and ask questions. Through involvement in these and similar activities, they see changes in materials, develop understandings about the properties of objects, and try to make sense of their world. The elements of science affect children every day and, like mathematics, science has its own

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vocabulary. The topic of weather alone has many words and concepts for children to understand. Is it *hot* or *cold*, *dry*, *wet*, *windy*? The home and classroom are ideal settings for children to safely explore many scientific concepts, such as change, constancy, movement, and life cycles.

Young children can also learn concepts related to social studies, an integrated field of study that draws upon specific disciplines of geography, history, civics, and economics, to name a few (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994). The goal of social studies is to help children become responsible, participating citizens in a democratic society. Teachers and families can help young children meet this goal by providing them with opportunities to develop rules, vote on choices, and participate in community activities.

Whether children are learning math, science, or social studies concepts, technology tools can assist them. Children can use computers to create drawings, interact with stories, make graphs to communicate findings, and produce multimedia projects related to classroom learning activities. Other technologies used in early childhood classrooms include digital cameras, scanners, video cameras, computer microscopes, and robots. Assistive technologies help children with disabilities participate in the same activities as their peers without disabilities



(Hutinger, 1996). While groups such as the Alliance for Childhood (Cordes, 2000) believe that computer use is inappropriate for young children, prominent early childhood groups support the use of computers. These include the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1996), the International Society for Technology in Education (2000), the Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Early Childhood (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000), and the National Research Council's Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The authors of this curriculum support the appropriate use of technology in early childhood classrooms.

Appropriate use of technology includes using open-ended and interactive software, with content related to children's everyday experiences. Some positive outcomes resulting from appropriate technology use include increasing cognitive abilities, improving problem solving, enhancing communication, developing fine motor skills, developing creativity, working cooperatively, and taking turns. (Haugland, 2000; Hutinger, Betz, Clark, & Johanson, 2003; Hutinger, Clark, & Johanson, 2001; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996).

Today's technologies provide numerous opportunities for global interactions. Many families who have computers in their homes E-mail relatives who live across town, across the country, or even across an ocean. This connection provides families with limitless learning opportunities. E-pals, instead of pen pals, now link children to friends in other lands. The Internet provides teachers and children numerous ways to make connections with people from other cultures.

Overview of Contents

Chapter 2 discusses the preschool classroom environment, describes learning centers, suggests materials, and provides information on using centers to address math, science, and social studies standards. The chapter includes a description of the technology and offers effective management strategies.

Chapter 3 is devoted to integrated activities related to topics commonly explored in early childhood settings. The activities support benchmarks, outcomes, and standards established for the general curriculum. *Young Children as Explorers* uses software as a starting point, much the same as other curricula use children's literature as the basis for activities that introduce, support, or enhance a concept.

Chapters 4-6 cover family involvement, adaptations for children with special needs, and resources. Ways to involve families in their child's learning and examples of family workshops are discussed. Various adaptations and information about purchasing peripherals and software are provided.

The index contains an alphabetized listing of math, science, and social studies standards and refers readers to the pages on which activities addressing each standard are found. See Figure 1 for the list of national standards for each content area.

Figure 1. National Standards for Math, Science, and Social Studies

Standards for Mathematics Pre-K–2	
Content Standards	Process Standards
Number and Operations	Problem Solving
Algebra	Reasoning and Proof
Geometry	Connections
Measurement	Communication
Data Analysis and Probability	Representation
<i>National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, 2000</i>	
Science Content Standards K–4	
Unifying Concepts and Processes	Earth and Space Science
Science as Inquiry	Science in Personal and Social Perspectives
Physical Science	Science and Technology
Life Science	History and Nature of Science
<i>National Research Council, 1996</i>	
Thematic Strands for Social Studies Curriculum Standards K–12	
Culture	Power, Authority, and Governance
Time, Continuity, and Change	Production, Distribution, and Consumption
People, Places, and Environments	Science, Technology, and Society
Individual Development and Identity	Global Connections
Individuals, Groups, and Institutions	Civic Ideals and Practices
<i>National Council for the Social Studies, 1994</i>	

About Young Children as Explorers: Interactive Learning Experiences

Young Children as Explorers: Interactive Learning Experiences was developed as part of a model demonstration project entitled Early Childhood Curriculum Support: Predicting, Listening, Observing, and Recording—Integrating Technology (ECCSPLORe-IT).¹ The ECCSPLORe-IT model of integration was based on evidence that an integrated curriculum benefits children with and without disabilities (Czeraniak, Weber, & Sandmann, 1999; Gurganus, Janas, & Schmitt, 1995; Kataoka & Lock, 1995; Machado, 1995). The curriculum’s suggested teaching strategies incorporate meaningful math, science, and social studies content into children’s daily activities while integrating other curricular areas such as language arts and expressive arts. Appropriate adaptations (e.g., using low- or high-tech assistive devices, arranging the environment to provide access, or altering an activity so a child with disabilities can participate) increase opportunities for success.

The activities in *Young Children as Explorers* were developed, tested, and revised during a 4-year period in five Early Childhood Special Education classes and one blended preschool classroom in Illinois. Children who participated in the activities ranged in age from 3-6 years old and had mild to moderate disabilities or were identified as at-risk for academic failure. Results indicated that children with disabilities accomplished more than their teachers or families thought possible. Participation in ECCSPLORe-IT activities led to significant improvements in children's problem solving, critical thinking, decision making, communication, and social skills, as well as significant improvement in 52 of 59 benchmarks addressing standards identified by national math, science, and social studies organizations. Children also demonstrated proficiency in using technology, increased attention to software applications, and showed increases in self-awareness, in awareness of their surrounding environment, and in engagement in ECCSPLORe-IT activities (Hutinger, Betz, Clark, & Johanson, 2003).

Designed to meet the national standards for math, science, and social studies shown in Figure 1, the activities in *Young Children as Explorers* are meant to serve as starting points and idea sparkers. They are not intended to be an exhaustive list of all activities that can be used within the study of a topic. Whether the classroom follows a thematic or project approach, *Young Children as Explorers* can be used to help children study an area of interest in-depth and over time.

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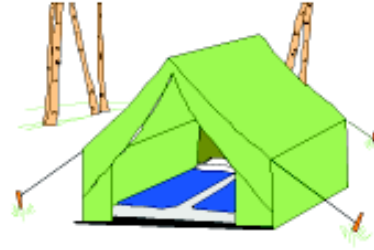
¹ The ECCSPLORe-IT Project was funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Research and Innovation to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities Program (PR#H324M980132).

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Arthur's Camping Adventure



Software Description

Discover nature and wildlife science in outdoor environments when you join Arthur and his friends for a wild camping adventure. Their teacher, Mr.

Ratburn, twists his ankle and the camping trip begins to look like an adventure for Arthur and his classmates. They discover that the bag of snacks is missing and the radio is broken. As talk turns to rescue, options are suggested and a list of needed items is generated. It becomes apparent that it will be up to Arthur to save the day. Join Arthur as he climbs mountains, hikes paths, and explores forests in search of the things he and his friends need. Use problem solving and critical thinking skills to help Arthur collect the items and lead his friends to safety.

System Requirements

Macintosh

- PowerMac System 7.5.1 or Higher 120 MHz
- 16 MB of RAM
- 50 MB available hard drive space
- 640 x 480, 256 colors
- Quad speed (4X) CD-ROM drive

Windows

- Pentium 166 MHz
- Windows 95/98, NT/2000
- 16 MB of RAM
- 50 MB available hard drive space
- Super VGA display card with 640 x 480, 256 colors
- Windows compatible sound card
- Quad speed (4X) CD-ROM drive

Optional

- External speakers
- Printer
- Touch screen

Teacher Notes

Arthur's Camping Adventure

Introductory Activity

The excitement of a camping trip appeals to many young children. Share the book *Camping In the Temple of the Sun*, by Deborah Gould, with the children and discuss the camping adventure. Compare camping experiences of the children with the exploits of the family in the book.

Ahead of Time



Erect a small tent in the dramatic play area and furnish the area with camping supplies, add water and floating toys to the sensory table, put “glow in the dark” stars on the ceiling, and place old CB radios (or something similar) and tools in the manipulative center. Install *Arthur's Camping Adventure* on the classroom computer.



Materials

- *Arthur's Camping Adventure*
- Books about camping and camping equipment

Computer Activity

Introduce the software to the group and explain that they will be searching for specific articles. Children can then explore the software during free time and center time.

Child Outcomes and Standards Addressed

Children will:

- Identify animals living in a wooded environment and recognize those that are nocturnal.
Math: Data Analysis and Probability; Representation
Science: Life Science; Physical Science
Social Studies: People, Places, and Environments
- Experience camping and understand how it differs from other accommodations.
Math: Problem Solving; Connections
Science: Life Science; Science as Inquiry
Social Studies: Culture; People, Places, and Environments
- Observe constellations in the night sky.
Math: Geometry; Connections; Representation
Science: Earth and Space Science; Science as Inquiry
Social Studies: Global Connections
- Identify animal and plant life commonly found in wooded areas.

- Science:** Science as Inquiry; Life Science; Science in Personal and Social Perspectives; History and Nature of Science
Social Studies: People, Places, and Environments; Global Connections
- Understand the safety issues related to camping and hiking.
Science: Science in Personal and Social Perspectives; Science as Inquiry
Social Studies: Culture; People, Places, and Environments; Individual Development and Identity
 - Develop and improve map-reading skills.
Math: Number and Operations; Problem Solving; Connections; Representation
Science: Science as Inquiry; Physical Science
Social Studies: People, Places, and Environments

Related Activities

Math

- Supply several pairs of (clean) hiking boots. Put the boots in a pile and ask children to match boots into pairs, to arrange them from smallest to largest or vice versa, and to sort them into piles of little, middle, and big sizes. If children use *Millie's Math House* software, this activity may be familiar.
- Create a graph using *Graphers* or *The Graph Club* showing the children who have been camping in their bedroom, in the yard, or at a campground.
- Prepare a map, with landmarks clearly marked, for the children to follow during a hike. Provide a copy for each child. During the hike, stop frequently to check on progress.
- Compile a list of supplies and amounts to pack of each to go camping. Tent camping does not always have access to electricity.
- Prepare a recipe from the "Camp Cooking for Kids" collection at the end of this activity. Provide children the opportunity to measure and stir the ingredients.



Science

- Use authoring software to create a book about children's camping stories.
- Collect leaves, pebbles, twigs, and pinecones. Provide glue and sturdy tagboard and encourage children to create a collage on the tagboard using materials found while "camping."
- Talk about stars and then make stars. Help children punch holes in a juice can lid (hammer and nail works) then tape the lid to a flashlight. Turn off the classroom lights and shine the flashlight on the wall and see the stars twinkle, twinkle.

Teacher Notes

- Talk about the stars in the night sky and then create constellations, suspending the stars from the ceiling or attaching them to the ceiling and walls (add the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper to your night sky).
- Play "nature" tapes during quiet time. Encourage children to listen for different animal sounds, such as crickets, frogs, and owls.
- Collect acorns, pinecones, gumballs, and seed pods with children during a hike. Help them identify to which trees they belong.
- Play with puppets and encourage children to pretend to be the animals. Encourage them to talk about what the animals eat, where they sleep, and when they are awake.
- Add a *Birdsong Identifyer* with Bird Song cards and Fabulous Frog cards to the listening area so children will have the opportunity to hear the songs of birds and trills of frogs.

Social Studies

- Take a walk in a park or wooded area. As you walk, draw a map with paths and landmarks.
- Read and discuss books about camping and hiking, both fiction and non-fiction.
- Use *Amazing Animals* software and provide materials so children can print masks of different animals.
- Prepare "Campfire Stew" (beans and cocktail wieners) for snack.
- Sing camping songs.
- Ask children to bring sleeping bags and flashlights to school. Have a campout during naptime.
- Gather around a campfire during circle or story time. Use paper towel tubes and crumpled yellow, red, and orange tissue paper to make a campfire. Put rocks and/or logs around it for sitting.
- Discuss camping and hiking safety. Talk about the woods, birds, animals, and plants which grow there. Discuss safety factors in the woods. Remind children not to approach wild animals or pick plants.



Family Activities

- Provide a take-home backpack that includes camping gear (water bottle, first aid kit, bug spray (also known as water), flashlight, and cookware or a mess kit).
- Provide the recipes, found at the conclusion of this activity, for families to use with their children during camping trips.
- After dark on a clear night, visit an area that is undisturbed by artificial lights, and study the night sky. Point out the "Big Dipper" (Ursa Major) and the "Little Dipper" (Ursa Minor).

Related Software

- *Adiboo Discover Nature, Animals and Planets*
- *Amazing Animals*
- *The Backyard*

- *Busytown Best Activity Center Ever*
- *Fisher-Price Ranger Trail*
- *The Graph Club*
- *Graphers*
- *I Spy Junior*
- *Just Me and My Dad*
- *The Magic School Bus Explores Bugs*
- *Stanley's Sticker Stories*

Related Internet Sites

National Geographic for kids: www.nationalgeographic.com/kids
Scholastic: www.scholastic.com
NASA: earthobservatory.nasa.gov/
NASA: kids.earth.nasa.gov/

Children's Literature

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Teacher Notes

Wolff, A. (1999). *Stella & Roy go camping*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Camp Cooking for Kids

Bacon and Eggs in a Paper Bag

Ingredients:

- 2 strips bacon (thick)
 - 1 paper lunch bag
 - 1 egg
 - 1 stick
-
- Cut bacon strips in half and place in the bottom of the paper bag, covering the bottom (use thick strips of bacon since thin ones will stick to the paper bag when cooked).
 - Crack egg into paper bag on top of the bacon.
 - Fold lunch bag down three times and poke a hole through the folds with the stick (or some other sharp/pointed object). Put the stick through the hole so the bag hangs from the end of the stick.
 - Hold over hot coals. The grease from the bacon protects the bag and cooks the meal.

Gorp Balls

Ingredients:

- 1/3 c. each raisins, apples, apricots, dates, and coconut
- 1/2 c. sesame seeds
- 1/3 cup walnuts
- 2 c. peanuts

For the glue use:

- 1 c. chocolate chips
- 1/3 c. honey
- 1/2 c. peanut butter

Shape into balls.

Trail Mix

Ingredients:

- 4 c. Chex cereal
- 1/2 c. dried fruit bits
- 1/2 c. raisins
- 1/2 c. peanuts
- 1/2 c. M&M's

Put into a large zipper bag and mix.

Striped S'mores

Ingredients:

- Marshmallows
- Fudge-striped shortbread cookies

Toast marshmallows until golden brown. Place between bottoms of two cookies.

Campfire Popcorn (for one)

Ingredients:

- 1 t. of oil
- 1 t. of popcorn

- In the center of an 18" x 18" square of heavy or doubled foil, place oil and popcorn.
- Bring foil corners together to make a pouch.
- Seal the edges by folding, but allow room for the popcorn to pop.
- Tie each pouch to a long stick with a string.
- Hold the pouch over hot coals.
- Shake constantly while corn pops and until all corn has popped.
- Season with butter and salt.

Twisters

Ingredients:

- Biscuit mix
- Milk or water
- Honey, butter, or jam

- Follow directions on the biscuit mix box for making biscuits, using a little less liquid than called for.
- Twist the dough around the end of a green stick.
- Hold the stick and rotate slowly over hot coals until light golden brown.
- Remove the twister from the stick.
- Dip into honey, butter, or jam and enjoy.