Teaching with Intention: Planning and Playing with Purpose
Part 1

Sue Bredekamp, Ph.D
New Mexico PreK Institute
December 2009

Overview

- The early childhood context is changing rapidly, presenting new challenges and opportunities.
- Early childhood curriculum and teaching can be improved to reflect new knowledge.
- Fundamental values of early childhood education can be retained and enhanced.

Current Trends in ECE

- Movement toward universal, voluntary Pre-K for 4's and even 3's
- Calls for alignment of Pre-K to grade 3
- Greater emphasis on early learning standards, curriculum, and outcomes
- Calls for "scientifically-based curriculum" in funded programs with literacy emphasis
- Increasing concerns about the achievement gap – already present at preschool entry and widens
Fundamental Values of ECE

- The whole child – A Child Development point of view
- The value of play for learning & development
- Importance of relationships and sense of community
- Valuing and teaching each child as an individual
- Respecting linguistic and cultural diversity
- Promoting relationships with families

“Developmentally Appropriate Practice” means:

- Meeting each child where he or she is, and
- Helping each child reach challenging and achievable learning goals
- Using teaching strategies that vary for and adapt to the age, experience, interests, and abilities of individual children.

Developmentally Appropriate

- Predicts when children generally reach certain developmental and learning accomplishments
- Predicts what children can do and understand within age ranges
- Predicts what content will be of interest as well as challenging and achievable
Making Decisions about DAP

- What is known about how children develop and learn
- What is known about individual children
- What is known about the social and cultural context in which children live

Intentional Teaching

- Intentional teachers have a purpose for the decisions they make and can explain that purpose to others
- Intentional teaching is a multifaceted, multidimensional concept that conveys many of the personal and professional qualities of an early childhood educator

Intentional Teachers Are:

- Caring and committed
- Enthusiastic and engaged
- Curious and creative
- Respectful and responsive
- Passionate and patient
- Purposeful and playful
- Focused and flexible
- Aware and accountable
- Informed and effective
- Listening and learning
TEACHERS MATTER

- Curriculum is a research-based plan that describes learning experiences and teaching strategies related to children's acquiring important learning outcomes (PLANNING).
- To be effective, teachers must assess individual children's learning and development (PURPOSEFUL), and
- Adapt curriculum, including learning contexts, groupings of children, and their teaching strategies and interactions with children to help them continue to make progress (INTENTIONAL).

What teaching strategies are most effective in Pre-K?

- "...Research indicates that many strategies can work. Good teachers acknowledge and encourage children's efforts, model and demonstrate, create challenges, and support children in extending their capabilities, and provide specific directions and instruction.
- All of these strategies can be used in the context of play and structured activities."

(Eager to Learn, 2000)

Children Learn through Play, But...

- There are many different types of play - sensorimotor, play with manipulatives, dramatic play, block play, outdoor play, rough and tumble play, games with rules
- Different types of play have different benefits
- Teachers have important roles in supporting children's play
- Not all play is equally valuable - some play is chaotic and repetitive
- Play is not the only way that children learn.
Balanced Curriculum

- Children learn valued content through investigation and focused, intentional teaching (NAEYC/NAECS).
- In large-scale early education observational study in England (EPPE, 2003), most effective preschools provide both teacher-initiated group work (including small group pre-planned experiences), and
- Freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities, supported by teachers.

Effective Early Childhood Curriculum and Teaching

- Comprehensive
- Integrated (meaning-centered)
- Balanced (investigation and focused, intentional teaching)
- Developmentally appropriate
- Recognizes and capitalizes on diversity
- Differentiates and individualizes instruction based on ongoing assessment

Capitalizes on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

- Engages and builds on children’s existing understandings
- Helps children make sense of new learning in relation to what they already know and can do
- Supports children’s cultural identity and competencies
Builds Broad Cognitive and Social–Emotional Processes

- Abilities that undergird development and learning across domains and subject areas
- Development in all areas is simultaneous and integrated—no domain is more important than another
- These domain-general processes include: relationships, language, memory, executive function, and self-regulation

Self-Regulation = Key to School Success

(Loyd, et al., 2006)

- The ability to STOP doing something that is UNNECESSARY, even if you want to continue
  And to START doing something that is NECESSARY, even if you don’t want to
- Underlies performance in ALL areas from reading to getting along with others
- Self-regulation predicts school success over and above cognitive skills and family background

Teachers Can Support Development of Self-Regulation

Tools of the Mind (Sodrova & Leong)

- Children take part in sustained, teacher-supported socio-dramatic play
- Teachers encourage mature play by engaging children in making written “play plans”
- Mature dramatic play engages children in all the activities that build self-regulation:
  - Being regulated by another person
  - Regulation of another person
  - Regulation of one’s self
- In other activities, children are usually regulated by adults
TOOLS OF THE MIND
Research Findings

- Play plans increased the level of self-regulation, both cognitively and socially, and resulted in less fighting and arguing and more on-task behavior.
- Children scored significantly higher than the control group on literacy skills in both preschool and kindergarten.
- Significantly increased executive function.

Home-School Study of Language and Literacy (Dickinson & Tabor, 2001)

- Children benefit from both well-organized group times and free choices times.
- The benefits vary by learning opportunity and teaching behavior in each setting.
- During group times, teachers' explanatory talk and cognitively challenging vocabulary relates to children's kindergarten scores.
- During play times, children benefit when teachers engage in one-to-one conversations and when they have opportunities to talk with peers.

Dickinson & Tabor (continued)

- The study found consistent links between kindergarten measures and the total number of words and the variety of words that children used during free play.
- Across all three years (ages 3 to 5) they found associations between the amount of time children engaged in pretend play and their performance on outcome measures.
CONCLUSIONS

In early childhood education today, what matters is:

Both process - when and how children are learning, and
Content - what children are learning

Both need greater attention if young children are to benefit from early childhood programs - the most important early childhood value of all