

The influence of educational philosophy on a proposed early learning environment ...

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



While developing a classroom with the parameters of utilizing the knowledge of educational philosophers it has been found that in order to do so effectively, it is best accomplished using an emergent curriculum and consideration for the individual child. Determining the best approach for implementing the proposed curriculum is guided by the Montessori, Gardner and Vygotsky theories focusing mainly on the ideas of scaffolding, open ended play and multiple intelligences.

When introducing the PA Early Learning Standards to the proposed plan, it is found that a variety of presentations of information can be given to children of different learning styles all while getting the same main idea across. Loris Malaguzzi, the creator and force behind the work that is proof positive of the benefits of early childhood education has said a great thing about how children learn, " Creativity seems to emerge from multiple experiences, coupled with a well-supported development of personal resources, including a sense of freedom to venture beyond the known. This is the heart of the educational philosophy with which my classroom for preschoolers is designed and which guides the tenants of approach for environment, curriculum and practice. Children learn through their experiences and we as their caregivers, build upon their knowledge to develop not just the whole group, but the whole child. In addition to the founding and current principles that run the early childhood environments found in Reggio Emilia, Italy, the ideas of Vygotsky, Gardner and Montessori will and do have influence over the environment that the children learn and explore in..

A founding tenant of their success in Reggio Emilia, is the employment of their emergent curriculum, otherwise what is known as a project oriented approach to the children's experiences (Malaguzzi, 2013). In other words, the children's interests guide their planned experiences, with their free exploration being the most opportune time to observe, record, and quietly reflect on their blooming interests. This is the scaffolding that Vygotsky so wisely explored and classrooms worldwide employ the technique of assessing prior knowledge and then building upon what they have learned with planned experiences.

By taking what is seen from these times, the teachers can come together to plan and negotiate experiences so there will be a better sense of what the children need to learn from what they want to know. Also popular to our counterparts in Italy, are the Montessori methods which focus greatly on hands on learning. The classroom that I envision is all hands on, with experiences geared towards the senses that in turn ensure a logical sense of order and reason to what the child takes in and gets out of their time in the environment. Much like the ideas behind the emergent curriculum, it is understood that Dr.

Montessori envisioned a child that showed us what they wanted to learn and it was the adults who geared their plans towards their interests. The idea that, " Children's emotional, social, and academic development improve when they are empowered through choice" (Shaw, 2012) gives rise to the notion that by allowing children the free choice to explore as frequently as possible we give them the power to enjoy their learning, and it is well understood that

when anyone, not just children, enjoy their experiences they take more from them.

To allow children to take something from their environment requires that the environment itself gives them a reason to enjoy it. Essentially by creating a requirement that the environments development caters to not just their interests but the means of learning that the children exhibit, we give the youngest learners the option of how to learn new things best. The idea of multiple intelligences brought about by Gardner, which is also found throughout the environments and planning in Reggio Emilia, is essential to catering to the whole child.

The theories proposed by Gardner are, of the various educational theorists, the least tested yet are still found in practical and standing use in early childhood settings around the globe (Smith, 2008). The overwhelming evidence of children who successfully approach, understand and build upon a variety of subjects when the setting takes into account that particular child's strengths grants his theories a reprieve from the traditional clinical trials that often accompany the proven success or failure of a theory (Smith, 2008).

Taking into consideration the theorists and philosophy of the previously discussed methods, the classroom would follow traditional center format with meeting times and typical transitions. Presentation of information that builds upon the groups prior knowledge would and should take the form of a variety of experiences, such as finger plays during meeting times, songs during

transitions, hands on materials for math, science, and language center, and introduction to practical experiences for dramatic, creative and block play that encourage their exploration of the theme or ideas that are of current interest.

Understanding that the project based approach is embedded within the ideas of the emergent curriculum, it is understood that many times some projects will range in time taken from hours to several weeks, if not longer. This being kept in mind, no particular set theme for a lesson plan should be set in stone, but rather a general topic of guidance that reflects their interest's will be all that is necessary. Presenting open ended materials that are a tenant of the Montessori philosophy will be the rule rather than the exception, and this will encompass all areas of learning.

Presenting traditional materials such a tactile letters, counters, pattern boards, magnatiles, as well as others, would be used in conjunction with specific ideas that are presented by the teachers. Instead of just tracing out the letters with our fingers, a teacher could present the picture of a frog much like one found outside and practice tracing the letters in sequence of the word frog. Reviewing ideas found within the PA Early Learning standards would require and exploration in many areas of academics that we break down in to simpler parts.

The simple aforementioned frog activity could easily relate to several language standards, but also keeps in mind that different children learn in different ways. Instead of just allowing a child to copy from a written word,

we take into consideration that some children may respond better by touch and by trying to use the tactile letters, we give a certain type of child a better understanding than the otherwise may have experienced.

The ideas behind this process would be followed throughout the entire learning environment in that free play would be frequent, if not dominant to the schedule. Allowing this type of learning gives the children the ability to explore at their own pace. In a side note, free play does not indicate a lack of observation, this free play is imperative to our understanding of what to introduce as their interests expand. Introduction of new ideas is not dependent upon formal meetings, but can include material rotation, field trips, parent involvement, or any number of explorative processes.

This type of play keeps in line with our emergent curriculum, in that if you present it, it will either take or it won't. If children show an interest in a direction or step that would be logical or following their current interests, the plan is then followed. If they show no interest, understanding or become easily frustrated or distracted with a new toy, idea, or concept, it is clear indication to the educators that their group or individual child is not ready for this step or direction.

Allowing this type of freedom rather than presenting ideas that were not created from the children's explorative interests themselves; we are getting a better insight into what makes up the child not just in a group, but as an individual. The idea of individuality is also key to the type of curriculum that would be essential to the preschool learning environment being created. The

observations and teachable moments found during ordinary play verses a formal assessment of the child's interests, will give a real insight into how the children learn.

Knowing how a child learns best is the basic principle to Gardner's multiple intelligences. As mentioned earlier that new ideas and concepts would not be introduced in a consistently formal way, opportunities for understanding not only a child's interests, but understanding why or why not that child took to a subject is imperative for individualized planning. When a child shows frustrations with a tactile learning experiences such as the language learning mentioned earlier, but the child is a noticeably busy and excited child outside or in a gym, perhaps encouraging the child to recognize those letters in sequence on wastepaper bins and encouraging throwing a ball in sequence into those bins may be a better learning experience. This will help the educators conclude not a failure of the particular initial experience, just a better way to build upon their current interests in areas more suited to their learning styles. Determining how to focus in on their learning styles would be related to the Pa Early Learning Standards which govern the necessity, and importance of learning for all planned experiences for any three to five year old child in a licensed day care in the state of Pennsylvania.

The standards govern a variety of learning concepts in the area of art, math, language, science, and require a specific set of information to be passed along in some form or another to the younger learners. In the area of fine arts there is a strong focus not just on creation, but on reception, performance and personal response. Essentially there is so much more to art

than just paints, clay and crayons. The importance of dramatic play and musical expression in many varieties should and will be expressed not just with toys or background music.

I would love to see culturally diverse instruments, cd players and tape recorders for exploration of their own creations, in addition to dramatic play props related to their interests, and a free and open art center with a variety of tactile and fine motor experiences in a creative station. The walls would be adorned with not just their art work, but professional and classical pieces that are frequently changed to accommodate their changing interests.

In opposition to the freedom of creation, math concepts are very finite and concrete and the understanding of these concepts being primarily one to one correspondence and simple number recognition are essential for school success. Beyond this, the state standards want to see that children are grasping basic algebraic concepts, statistical analyses appropriate for the ages served, reasoning, connections, communication, and problem solving,. What is great about this is that communication is not only encouraged in the standards but expected, so a simple math worksheet will not work.

Counters, pattern boards, relating math concepts to everyday situations, and inspiring discussion amongst smaller groups and individuals is imperative to our basic plan of working with an emergent curriculum. If we can light the spark of understanding, they can carry the torch to where they would like to learn next. More importantly, it's not just about having a math center; it is about providing those opportunities physical and verbally in all aspects of

play. Language is not just a means of communication, but a way to express feelings and thoughts.

For the younger preschool, the concept of being to express your needs in a means other than crying is new and there are so many possibilities.

Environmental print is essential, and important in order to achieve the goals set forth in the PA Early Learning Standards. Comprehension, pre reading skills, writing quality are all parts of the standards that must be addressed, but with various options for every child and style of learning that can and should be presented.

Labels for not just materials but for everyday objects, a variety of printed materials such as books, letters of all forms, plenty of paper types for writing and inspiring mediums such as sentence strips, letter stickers, envelopes, designed paper, and cards with words and their names preprinted on them, to allow interest and ownership of their work. Taking an interest in not just their classroom, but the outside learning environment is critical to the PA Early Learning Standards.

The science concepts that we cover will focus a lot on the environment outside our window and the means with which we can bring it back into the classroom. Leaf samples, rock types, living and not living samples, and sorting materials, as well as tools such as magnifying glasses, binoculars, tracing paper, pencils and crayons; all of these materials and more lead to open ended thinking and understanding the design and structure of the natural world around them.

Letting the children lead and then in turn letting the educators build upon their experiences to enhance their knowledge base is key to them moving on and understanding something on their own that is just a step above that we can build upon again. Building this knowledge base is essential to the curriculum and program that would be utilized in my preschool classroom. Catering to the individual children as well as the group will be in the plan presented and would cover the collective interests in the plan for their developmental stimulation. A base idea which is presented in a lesson can be broken down into a variety of sub plans for individualized learning. For instance, a math lesson could involve counting out butterfly wings. By introducing the pairs as individual parts, we are encouraging one to one correspondence, which is covered under standard Mathematical Thinking and Technology standard 2. 1. 1. Under that particular standard there are indicators related to rote counting, vocabulary and correspondence up to twenty, which gives quite a bit of flexibility to attend to a counting wings task and allows variation dependent upon the learner and the ability. For instance a child who is more interpersonal, dress up butterfly wings purchased from a discount store and counting amongst friends, logical learners may benefit from butterfly wing counters, and there is also the option for the bodily kinesthetic learner to have butterfly finger puppets.

For a child who has mastered the skills of counting, perhaps expanding to the notion that we can count in multiples, which would bring in a concept of patterns and allow the idea of two wings to one butterfly to assist in this plan. Moving beyond just the counting, children who are more creative can

color and cut out their own butterflies and then number them to be used as counters for the whole group. By providing multiple strategies under the same standard, you are addressing the needs and abilities of many within the group.

In the case that you want to introduce the life cycle of a butterfly, found under the Scientific Thinking and Technology standard 3. 1b. 2, you can present pictures of the life cycle at the creation center and allow them to use whatever materials they see fit to model the life cycle. Providing the opportunity for children to utilize different props and recreate the life cycle in the dramatic play center is another option for the interpersonal learner.

For those who are more linguistic, perhaps letting them dictate the ideas of how the life cycle occurs while they look at pictures, or if they are advanced in their writing skills assist them in sounding out the words they want to use and let them write it relatively independently. These are all ideas that can be expanded upon into other standards, centers of interest, and permitted across the age ranges served in the classroom. Through a variety of learning experiences, we provide our youngest learners with a chance to experience at their own pace and level.

By educators and experience providers choosing to let them explore on their own terms, we are giving them a grander opportunity to learn more effectively and utilizing the theories of those that inspired the ideas in Reggio Emilia and with the emergent curriculum approach, we are doing so with purpose. When we allow children to explore at their own pace, we are

really letting them show us what they want to know, and in turn we introduce what they need to know which is what allows us to truly develop the whole child.

References

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