



Effective Instructional Practices and the Role of Assessment

Advisory Committee on Head Start
Research and Evaluation

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Overview

- The early childhood context is changing rapidly, presenting new challenges and opportunities.
- Head Start leading the way
- Curriculum, assessment, and teaching need to be improved to reflect new knowledge/research.
- Fundamental values of ECE can be retained and enhanced.



Fundamental Values of ECE

- The whole child – developmentally appropriate practices
- The value of play for learning & development
- Importance of relationships and sense of community
- Valuing each child as an individual
- Respecting linguistic and cultural diversity
- Promoting relationships with families



Developmentally Appropriate, Effective Practices

- Meet each child where he or she is (on-going assessment)
- Use a wide repertoire of **intentional** teaching strategies that vary for and adapt to the age, experience, interests, and abilities of individual children
- Help each child reach challenging and achievable (i.e., developmentally appropriate) goals (Head Start Child Development & Learning Framework)

“Every small child is always an exception.” Loris Malaguzzi, 1993





Teachers Matter

- Curriculum is a research-based plan that describes learning experiences and teaching strategies linked to learning & developmental outcomes & trajectories

- To be effective, teachers must assess individual children's learning and development (know them well), and
- Adapt schedules, groupings of children, and their teaching strategies and interactions with children to help them continue to make progress

Effective Teaching Strategies

(Bredekamp, 2011)

Teaching Strategy

Most Effective Uses

Acknowledging & Encouraging

Influencing children to stay engaged, demonstrate desired behaviors and skills, and complete tasks.

Giving quality feedback

Expanding learning and understanding (how children come to solve a problem) rather than focusing only on the correct answer or end product.

Modeling

Modeling language -- repeating and extending children's verbal responses, describing their own and children's actions, and using advanced vocabulary. Promoting positive social skills and self-regulation.

Teaching Strategy

Most Effective Uses

Demonstrating

Showing the correct way to perform a skill or procedure while children observe the outcome. Teaching skills that require particular steps in a certain order.

Giving cues, hints, and offering assistance

Reminding children what they already know and can do, and helping them use that knowledge to gain new skills and understanding (building on prior knowledge).

Questioning

Asking open-ended questions that require children to analyze information or engage in higher-order thinking.

Co-constructing

Teachers and children thinking and talking together during a joint activity such as in a small-group or project, and all parties learning from the exchange.

Teaching Strategy

Most Effective Uses

Creating and adding challenges

Making learning situations harder by generating a problem or adding difficulty to a task so that it is a bit beyond what children have already mastered.

Direct or explicit instruction

Explicitly giving directions for completing a task; providing facts, verbal labels or other specific information; or providing instructions for a child's action or behavior.

Scaffolding – Using the above strategies in combination

Adapting instruction for individual children with different skill levels, cultural backgrounds & interests. Helping children acquire the skills to eventually achieve the same task independently.

What teaching strategies are most effective in preschool?

- “... 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)
- In large-scale observational study in England, most effective preschools provided both teacher-initiated group work (including small group pre-planned experiences) and freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities supported by teachers (EPPE, 2003).



Curriculum Content & Developmental Science

- Domain-general (foundational) processes apply across developmental areas and/or subject matter disciplines -- Underlying skills that **make learning possible** and predict success in school and life
- Domain-specific abilities apply to one or a limited number of domains of knowledge such as literacy or mathematics
- BOTH are important & are included in the Head Start Framework

Key Foundational Processes

- Underlie children's developing competence and predict success in school across the age-span from age 3 through grade 3:
 - ✓ Executive function
 - ✓ Self-regulation (part of HS framework)
 - ✓ Symbolic representation (in framework)
 - ✓ Memory
 - ✓ Attachment/positive relationships
 - ✓ **AND** all these involve language

Self-regulation

- Ability to “STOP doing something that is unnecessary, even if you want to continue and START doing something that is necessary, even if you don’t want to” (Boyd et al., 2003).
- Self-regulation measured in preschool predicts school success (literacy & math) over and above cognitive skills and family background (Blair & Razza, 2007; McClelland, Acock & Morrison, 2006).
- Problems in self-regulation are strongly related to learning difficulties and poor social relationships.



Representation

- A lay-person's definition: using one thing to stand for another.
- Mental representations are crucial for higher-level thinking.

- Verbal language is a representation of physical objects, experiences, feelings, and concepts.
- Written language is an obvious example of symbolic representation
- Developing symbolic representation is essential for reading & math – the most fundamental skills for school success.

Role of Play

- Vygotsky & play = the leading behavior in children's development, "the preeminent educational activity of early childhood"
- During play, children behave beyond their current level of independent mastery.
- Children develop representational abilities through pretend play using objects and actions as symbols & become more able to take another's perspective.
- Socio-dramatic play with its system of roles and rules is unique in its support of self-regulation.

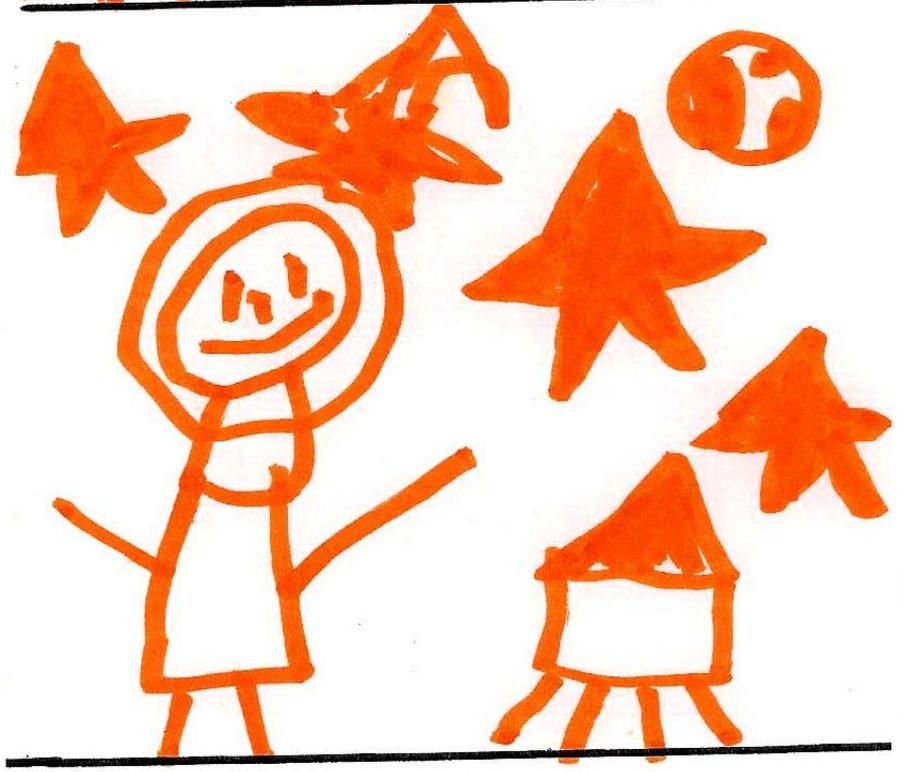
Teachers Can Support Self-Regulation

Tools of the Mind (Bodrova & Leong, 2007)

- 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.

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TOOLS OF THE MIND

Research Findings

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



Effective, Intentional Teachers:

- Use strategies that promote both domain-general & domain-specific abilities:
 - ✓ Small group work for children to engage in extended conversation, discover their own & others' ideas & negotiate different perspectives
 - ✓ Planning and “revisiting” opportunities
 - ✓ Ways of representing thinking and feelings
 - ✓ Teacher-supported socio-dramatic play AND
- Fewer experiences that interfere with or diminish children's capacity to self-regulate such as *extended* periods of passive, whole group instruction or waiting during routines and transitions.

THANKS!



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