

My beliefs about Play-Based Preschool

I have been searching for a school to take me on as an Early Years Homeroom teacher. I've been studying, watching, sitting in classrooms, and teaching preschool – Grade 2 for seven years. I am fascinated and energized by 3, 4, and 5-year-olds. I have excellent, strong relationships with my students. I want to give the HR position everything because I know I will reap and enjoy the benefits.

What does a fantastic, practical, play-based learning preschool class look like? What do the teachers do? What skills do they have? How does the teacher always put the child first? What activities are you engaged in?

An excellent, compelling, play-based learning preschool class prioritizes the holistic development of each child while fostering a love for learning in a nurturing and engaging environment. Here's what I would do:

Child-Centered Approach: Teachers in a play-based preschool class prioritize the child in all aspects of planning and implementation. I recognize that each child is unique and has different interests, abilities, and learning styles. I take the time to observe and understand each child, adapting their teaching methods to meet individual needs. I use EY basement data to assist my teaching and learning. (This document is also linked on this page).

Skilled Educators: Teachers in a play-based learning preschool possess diverse skills. They deeply understand child development theories and how to apply them in practice. For example:

Extensive research has been conducted on play-based preschool education due to its importance in early childhood development. While I don't have access to real-time data or studies beyond January 2022, I can provide insights into some general findings up to that point. (I am addicted to ResearchGate and try to read relevant research once a week) Here is my summary of play-based education advantages:

Recent Research and Publications: Recent research on play-based preschool education include studies from various academic institutions, educational organizations, and early childhood education researchers. Journals such as Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Journal of Early Childhood Research, and Early Education and Development often publish studies related to play-based learning. To find the latest research articles, it's advisable to search academic databases like Google Scholar or databases specific to education.

Characteristics of Play-Based Preschool Education:

Play is central: Play-based preschool education prioritizes child-directed play as a primary mode of learning. Children learn through activities, such as art, building blocks, imaginative play, and outdoor play, to explore and learn about the world around them.

Child-centered environment: The classroom encourages exploration, creativity, and problem-solving based on children's interests and developmental levels.

Social interaction: Play-based learning fosters social skills development through interaction with peers, cooperation, and communication.

Integrated curriculum: Learning experiences are often integrated across multiple domains, including cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language development.

Teacher's Role and Skills:

Facilitator of learning: Teachers in play-based preschools act as facilitators, observing, guiding, and supporting children's play experiences rather than directing them.

Understanding child development: Teachers should deeply understand child development theories and know age-appropriate practices to effectively scaffold children's learning. For example:

Several child development theories can inform age-appropriate practices for scaffolding children's play-based learning in preschool settings. Some key theories include:

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development: Piaget emphasized the importance of children's active participation in constructing knowledge through interaction with their environment. According to Piaget, children go through four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. Educators can provide hands-on experiences and materials matching children's developmental stages in preschool settings.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory: Vygotsky stressed the role of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development. He introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which refers to the difference between a child's ability to do things independently and with assistance. In preschool settings, educators can scaffold children's learning by providing just enough support to help them accomplish tasks slightly beyond their current abilities.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory: Bronfenbrenner proposed that development occurs within the context of interconnected systems, including the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), ecosystem (settings indirectly influencing development), and macrosystem (cultural values and societal norms). Preschool educators can consider these systems when planning learning activities, ensuring they are culturally relevant and responsive to children's needs and backgrounds.

Attachment Theory: John Bowlby's attachment theory emphasizes the importance of secure relationships in promoting healthy development. Preschool educators can create nurturing and supportive environments that foster secure attachments between children and caregivers, providing a foundation for exploration and learning through play.

Based on these theories, here are some age-appropriate practices for scaffolding children's play-based learning in preschool which I believe work:

Provide Open-Ended Materials: Offer a variety of open-ended materials such as blocks, clay, and art supplies that allow children to explore and create based on their interests and imaginations.

Encourage Pretend Play: Encourage imaginative play by providing props and materials, such as dress-up clothes, dolls, or play kitchens, that allow children to engage in pretend scenarios. Join in!

Facilitate Peer Interactions: During play, create opportunities for children to collaborate and communicate with their peers. Encourage sharing, turn-taking, and problem-solving skills through group activities and games.

Offer Guidance and Support: Observe children's play and offer guidance or assistance when needed while allowing them to lead the play. Use open-ended questions to stimulate critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Create a Safe and Responsive Environment: Ensure the learning environment is safe, supportive, and inclusive of all children's needs and abilities. Adapt materials and activities to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences.

Integrate Learning Across Domains: Plan activities integrating various developmental domains, such as cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development. For example, a sensory exploration activity can promote sensory processing skills and language development.

Foster Curiosity and Inquiry: Encourage children to ask questions, explore their surroundings, and seek answers through hands-on experiences. Provide opportunities for investigation and experimentation, such as science experiments or nature walks.

By incorporating these age-appropriate practices informed by child development theories, preschool educators can effectively scaffold children's play-based learning experiences, fostering holistic development across multiple domains.

Observation and assessment: I must be skilled in observing children's play to assess their developmental progress and identify individual learning needs.

Communication and collaboration: Effective communication with children, parents, and colleagues is essential. Teachers often collaborate with parents to support children's holistic learning and development.

Flexibility and creativity: Teachers should adapt their teaching approaches based on children's interests and needs. Creativity is crucial in designing engaging learning experiences and environments.

Overall, play-based preschool education emphasizes the importance of child-initiated learning, active exploration, and social interaction in fostering holistic development during the early years.

Cognitive Development: Play-based learning encourages problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Research suggests that children who engage in play-based preschool education tend to demonstrate better cognitive development, including language skills, mathematical understanding, and spatial reasoning.

Social and Emotional Development: Play-based learning environments promote social skills such as cooperation, negotiation, and empathy. These settings allow children to learn how to regulate emotions, resolve conflicts, and develop positive relationships with peers and adults.

Physical Development: Play-based activities often involve movement and physical interaction, essential for developing fine and gross motor skills. Research indicates that children participating in play-based preschool programs improve their physical coordination and strength.

Creativity and Imagination: Play-based learning fosters creativity and imagination by allowing children to explore various materials and scenarios freely. Studies have shown that exposure to open-ended play experiences enhances children's creative ability and develops imaginative thinking skills.

Long-Term Academic Success: Research suggests that play-based preschool education's benefits extend beyond early childhood. Children who have a strong foundation in play-based learning are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes toward learning, higher levels of school engagement, and better academic outcomes in later years.

Reduced Stress and Anxiety: Play-based preschool environments typically have lower stress and anxiety levels than more structured settings. Playing play can help children feel more relaxed and confident, leading to overall well-being and emotional resilience.

Parental Involvement and Engagement: Play-based preschool programs often involve parents in their children's learning experiences. Research indicates that parental involvement in play-based activities strengthens the parent-child bond and supports children's learning and development.

It's important to note that while play-based preschool education offers numerous benefits, the quality of the program and the support provided by educators play significant roles in maximizing these benefits. Ongoing research explores how play-based learning influences child development and the most effective ways to implement play-based practices in early childhood education. Play-based educators are adept at creating stimulating learning environments that encourage exploration, creativity, and critical thinking. They also have strong communication and interpersonal skills to interact with children, parents, and colleagues effectively.

Facilitators of Play: Rather than dictating the play activities, teachers act as facilitators, guiding and scaffolding children's learning experiences. They provide a variety of open-ended materials and resources that spark curiosity and imagination. Teachers encourage children to explore, experiment, problem-solve, and collaborate through play.

Promotion of Social-Emotional Development: Promoting social-emotional skills is a crucial aspect of play-based learning. Teachers help children develop empathy, communication skills, conflict-resolution strategies, and self-regulation through interactions during play. They also create a supportive and inclusive classroom community where children feel safe expressing themselves and taking risks.

Integration of Academics: While play is central to the learning experience, teachers also meaningfully integrate academic concepts into the activities. For example, a pretend play area might be a grocery store where children practice counting and sorting items. Storytime sessions can enhance language development and literacy skills. Math concepts can be explored through building blocks or pattern recognition games.

Outdoor and Indoor Exploration: A well-rounded, play-based preschool class provides outdoor and indoor play opportunities. Outdoor play allows children to connect with nature, develop gross motor skills, and engage in imaginative play in larger spaces. Indoor play areas are carefully designed to stimulate different areas of development, with various centres for art, sensory exploration, dramatic play, and construction.

Continuous Assessment and Reflection: Teachers regularly assess children's progress through ongoing observation and documentation of their play experiences. They use this information to adjust their teaching strategies and provide targeted support as needed. Additionally, they collaborate with parents to share observations and insights about their child's development, fostering a solid home-school partnership.

In summary, a fantastic, effective, play-based learning preschool class is characterized by child-centered practices, skilled educators, play facilitation, social-emotional development promotion, academic integration, diverse play opportunities, and continuous assessment and reflection.

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