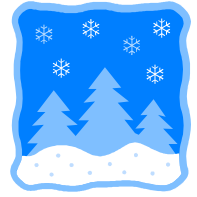




Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness

Mission: Every child in Pottstown will enter Kindergarten ready to learn and achieve



PEAK Classroom Connections

PEAK Classroom Connections: Creating a professional learning community for the early learning teachers in Pottstown to share ideas, improve instructional practices and implement researched-based best practices in the delivery of quality early learning experiences



January 2008

CHILD DEVELOPMENT QUIZ: The Amazing Brain

Take this True/False quiz and see how much you know about children's brain development.

1. Reading to a newborn infant is the best way to help a child read in the future.
2. Basic brain connections are laid down before birth.
3. Babies are born with the ability to learn all the languages in the world.
4. A baby's brain has the greatest density of brain cell connectors by age 3.

is talking, singing, and listening to music.

2. True: During pregnancy the basic hardware of the brain is laid out. However, the way in which those connections form with other parts of the brain and begin to "think" depends largely on exposure to their environment.
3. True: A newborn's brain is wired to seek out language. Babies learn to talk by hearing language.
4. True: There is a period of rapid synapse development in children's early development.

ANSWERS:

1. False: the MOST important thing is to provide a language rich environment-

Adapted from zero to three (www.zerotothree.org)

Classroom Dramatic Play Center

Most classrooms begin with their dramatic play center set up for a "house" or "kitchen" theme. Now is a good time to begin thinking about adding materials to change it up and reignite children's interest in that center. Even if children's interest isn't waning, you can use this opportunity to build on children's interests and introduce some new skill development to that center.

Keep in mind that the most important factor in determining what new theme to follow is the interest of the children in your classroom. The following are some suggestions and some accompanying props that are cheap and easy.

Restaurant- menus, order pad, pretend money, cash register, plastic food, old condiment containers, tablecloths, placemats, chef hat, waiter/waitress uniform.

Traveling: old suitcase, clothing items, toiletry case, old ticket holders, travel brochures and maps (AAA is great for these), camera

Birthday Party: buy birthday hats, favors, decorations at the dollar store to add to your kitchen area. Make sure to have plenty of writing materials so children can make their own invitations.

Doctor's Office- scrubs, stethoscope, "prescription pad", cotton balls, magazines, sheets of white butcher paper.

DROP PEAK A LINE

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Circle Time and Calendar

Bev Bos tells us that it takes 135 hours to (attempt) to teach a preschooler the abstract concepts within a calendar; yesterday, today, tomorrow, etc. Yet if you wait until about 1st grade, which is when the brain is better at processing such abstract concepts, it takes about five minutes!

If developmentally speaking, Preschool students are unable to understand such abstract concepts why do most teachers insist on spending so much time each day drilling them into children's heads?

When we truly understand child development we can see that the calendar is better suited for helping children with more developmentally appropriate concepts such as- counting, one to one correspondence, number recognition, and patterning. While concepts about months, days, and years are better left for the later years.

Instead use your opening circle time to sing songs and develop phonological awareness in children, introduce new materials in the classroom, talk with children about what is on their minds, make up stories, write for children to see, read books and interact as a class to build the feeling of community within the classroom.



Process vs. Product

When teaching anything in the Early Childhood classroom it is all about the process not the product. Teachers and parents can get hung up on this especially as it relates to creative arts. Remember, it is not important that a child bring home a picture or project that looks exactly like everyone else's.

- ③ Let children experiment with colors. What an experience children can have by mixing colors and figuring out how to make other colors!
- ③ Provide children with large sheets of paper to paint by moving their whole bodies.
- ③ Creative arts should not be a teacher directed activity.
- ③ Don't make models for children or pre-cut art projects.
- ③ Always ask children before writing on their drawings. And give them the opportunity to tell you where to write their dictation.

- ③ Try to resist praising children's artwork. If they ask you, "do you like it?", try turning the question back to them and asking them if THEY like it. Teachers often get in the habit of over-praising children- remember it's not about you.
- ③ Many types of art should be available and accessible to children every single day. They should be able to choose to draw, make a collage, paint or play with clay.
- ③ Sticky dot art- purchase colored sticky dots for children to use to create pictures in the art center
- ③ Make available different types of paper- newsprint, newspaper, tissue paper, construction paper, wallpaper, cardboard, butcher paper, etc.

Add new items to the art center periodically to see how children will use them. (will they paint with q-tips, use them as glue sticks or make a 3-D picture? Only when you let them use their imaginations will you find out)

- ③ Give children LOTS and LOTS of paper.

And try adding some of these items to your art center:

Bubble wrap, berry baskets, koosh balls, Styrofoam peanuts, rubberbands, squirt bottles, toothbrushes, large paper for cooperative murals, plastic tablecloth to protect tables, microwave meal trays, plastic forks, sponges, pipettes, mittens, paint samples from the hardware store.

What's so special about Play?

In a word? Everything!

Play is the most important job that young children have because through play children learn through all the domains—social, emotional, intellectual, physical and language.

Physical development: The rough and tumble of active play facilitates children's sensorimotor development. It is a natural preventive for the current epidemic of childhood obesity. Research suggests that recess also boosts schoolchildren's academic performance.

Academics: There is a close link between play and healthy cognitive growth. It lays the foundation for later academic success in reading and writing. It provides hands-on experiences with real-life materials that help children develop abstract scientific and mathematical concepts. Play is critical for the development of imagination and creative problem-solving skills.

Social and emotional learning: Research suggests that social make-believe play is related to increases in cooperation, empathy, and impulse control, reduced aggression, and better overall emotional

and social health.

Sheer joy: The evidence is clear—healthy children of all ages love to play. Experts in child development say that plenty of time for childhood play is one of the key factors leading to happiness in adulthood.



Teacher's Role in Play

A curriculum based on play requires an exceptional teacher in order to implement it.

- ⌚ Teachers need to be exceptionally astute observers to continually be assessing and adjusting the environment to suit the needs of their children.
- ⌚ It is the teachers job to listen to children and observe their interests. New materials should always be rotated through the classroom to keep children's interest level high. (when children stop being interested in something take it away to make room for something else)
- ⌚ Teachers must provide interesting materials that are open ended and engage all the senses.

ECERS and your classroom

Just a few reminders about ECERS in your classroom:

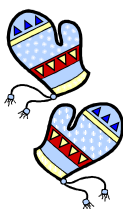
- All staff and children must wash hands upon entering classroom, before and after playing in water, and after wiping noses (in addition to the other obvious times)
- Bleach and water solution must be made correctly every single day. If it's too strong it could be hazardous to children's health and if it's made too weak it will not properly sanitize.
- Bleach and water solutions must be left on tables for 2 minutes before being wiped down.
- If you use the same sink for handwashing after bathroom and prior to eating the sink must be sanitized.
- Teachers should be engaging children in informal reading during free play every single day
- Many and varied art materials should be available and accessible (and used!) to children every day
- Drawing/writing should always be available to children
- Just as you change other items in the classroom, make sure to rotate your books to keep them interesting- but leave some of children's favorite reads out
- Children should be playing outside for at least 1 hour, in a full day program, as weather permits.

Winter Books & Activities

PEAK
Teacher Newsletter

The Mitten, by Jan Brett, is a great wintertime read in the Early Childhood Classroom. It also lends itself well to a number of classroom activities. The following is just a sample of what you can do with Jan Brett books:

- Use a white sheet to represent the mitten and have the class do a dramatic retelling of the story. Put the sheet in the dramatic play center so children can act out the story on their own.
- As a group write a letter to the author.
- Create a mitten matching game with either real mittens or teacher made paper mittens.
- Cut out pictures of the animals to create a sequencing game or a flannel board story.



The Snowy Day, by Ezra Jack Keats, is another great winter book with many activities for the ECE classroom.

- Have children make a list of their favorite things to do in the snow.
- Make a classroom winter mural- have children draw themselves in the snow. Have children glue cotton for snow and use other collage materials.
- Peter packed the snow in his pocket and it melted. Explore the world of things that melt in the water table.
- On a snowy day go outside to collect snowballs and put them in ziplock bags- what happens when you bring them inside?
- As you read the story have the children act out the different ways that Peter moves- dragging his feet, dragging a stick along the path, climbing a mountain, etc.
- Do ice cube painting: freeze kool aid into ice cube trays and insert craft sticks

Five Little Snowmen (action rhyme)

Five little snowmen standing in a row.

(Hold up five fingers; stand up straight like soldier.)

Each had two eyes and a carrot nose.

(Point to eyes; point to nose.)

Along came the sun and shone all day,
(Form sun with hands; wipe sweat from brow.)

And one little snowman melted away.

(Hold up one finger; slowly "melt" to the ground.)

Four little snowmen...



Take Time for YOU

HEALTHY HELP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Making a list of New Year's resolutions is a ritual for many of us. Each year we promise to improve or enrich our lives in some way. Many resolve to make more time for friends and family while others want to reduce stress or quit smoking.

No matter what your goals are, there are plenty of websites out there to help monitor your progress and reach success. Here are some online tools to help those making the ever-popular resolutions to lose weight, eat healthy, and exercise. Check them out and have a healthy and happy New Year!

USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

www.mypyramidtracker.gov

The USDA's MyPyramid Tracker is an interactive tool to help you assess your activity level and diet. By creating a FREE account, you can start your own food and exercise logs. Once you enter your daily food intake and your physical activities, you can view the information in different ways. You can see whether you meet the dietary guidelines or monitor your energy balance. The energy balance function helps you to see how your food intake relates to your energy expended throughout the day.

Peer Trainer

www.peertrainer.com

When it comes to achieving goals, having the support of a buddy can mean the difference between success and failure. A FREE account gives you access to food and exercise logs as well as chat rooms and blogs. You can track your progress online. You can form and join small group or a large support team.

Calorie King

www.calorieking.com/tools

So just how many calories are in the mocha latte? Search Calorie King's database to find answers to all of your food questions. Use the BMI calculator to determine your healthy weight. You can track calories burned and use the "Exercise Step Equivalence" tool to find out how much walking equals more rigorous activity.

All the best to you in 2008!

Adapted from Nursing Spectrum, Dec. 2007

