

Module 4: Education Programs and Classroom Environment

Section C: Teaching Strategies and Diversity

Introduction

Part of your teaching strategies have already been established in earlier sections on supervision, understanding basic child development, creating an effective learning environment, and meeting the health and safety needs of the children in your program. This section will address the concepts of intentionally teaching, multi-cultural/diverse learning environments and working with children that have special needs. These concepts will help you add to your toolbox of teaching strategies to effectively support young children.

Learning Objectives

After you complete this section you will be able to:

- Define Intentional Teaching.
- List 4 early childhood teaching strategies to assist in the learning of young children.
- Explain what it means to promote diversity in your classroom.
- Discuss considerations when working with a child diagnosed with a special need.

Guiding Your Learning

As you work through this section look for teaching strategies to use in your classroom. Not all strategies can apply to every classroom so reflect on the age of the children, their stage of development, the classroom environment, and the number of staff in the room.

NOTE: The information contained in these sections are partial summaries of the DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations, are not intended to replace or provide an official interpretation of the Arizona Administrative Code and Arizona Revised Statutes for Child Care Facilities.

Summary of Key Arizona Child Care Licensing Standards

R9-5-101 Definitions

116- Supervision of children is defined as a staff responsibility. Each staff member is required to have knowledge of and accountability for the actions and whereabouts of the children in their care. Staff must have the ability to see or hear the enrolled child at all times, interact and provide guidance to each child.

Article 5 Facility Program and Equipment

R-9-5-501 General Child Care Program, Equipment, and Health and Safety Standards

A- 4. Children in care are placed in age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate groups and classrooms.

R9-5-501 Supplemental Standards for Infants

C. Teachers working with infants are required to play, communicate, hold, rock and respond immediately to each infant's needs. When six or more enrolled children are present in a facility, an infant may not be supervised by a teacher who is supervising older children.

R9-5-507 Supplemental Standards for Children with Special Needs

D. A licensee shall provide an enrolled child with special needs with:

- 1.** Developmentally-appropriate toys, materials, and equipment
- 2.** Assistance from staff members to enable the enrolled child to participate in the activities of the facility.

Teaching Strategies

Intentional Teaching

Intentional teaching can be defined as using teaching strategies that have a purpose, are thoughtful, and are based on the children's interests and abilities.

- Intentional teaching includes both adult-directed and child-directed activities.
- Early childhood teachers who use intentional teaching strategies create the environment for learning and facilitate the children's learning through exploring the environment.
- The intentional teacher knows when to expand learning activities and when to let the children play and discover on their own.
- The intentional teacher takes the time to guide young children through planned learning experiences.
- Intentional teachers guide the content of the curriculum activities to achieve teacher planned goals.

What are the intentional teaching strategies?

Early care and education teachers:

- Model behavior, interactions, activities and actions
 - Example: The toddler teacher models washing her hands after each toddler diaper change. The toddlers practice with the teacher.
- Demonstrate an activity
 - Example: The pre-kindergarten teacher demonstrates how to use a pair of scissors to cut out a paper shape.

- Asks open-ended questions
 - Example: The preschool teacher asks the boys playing in the water table, “What happens if you pour water into the floating box?”
- Speculate
 - Example: How many cups of water will you need to pour into the box before it sinks?
- Explain
 - Example: The pre-kindergarten teacher explains how to mix the playdough.
- Problem solve to extend learning
 - Example: The bridge keeps falling down. What will happen if we add a bigger block?
- Plan for knowledge building
 - Example: The teacher plans group and individual activities based on the children’s interests, strengths, and developmental stage
- Observe and document children’s learning
 - Example: Observe the children as they are engaged in activities. Record/document what they can do and use the information to plan for the next learning experience.

Examples: Applying Intentional Teaching Strategies

Infants

The daily routines provide infant teachers with opportunities to interact with each infant. During diapering encourage language development by naming body parts or singing songs.

Toddlers

Toddler teachers spend a great deal of time on the floor with the children engaged in various activities. Sitting down on the floor with something of interest and the children will usually join you. Once you have the children’s attention you might focus on fine motor skills by building with blocks or language development by reading a story and naming pictures. Toddlers are built with a curiosity to figure out the world around them. Your best strategy in working with toddlers is to observe what interests them and what they want to do. You can then provide an appropriate experience for them to explore that concept. For example, if a toddler is throwing books, give the child some soft balls to throw and maybe add a basket for him/her to aim the ball.

Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten

Planning for preschool and pre-kindergarten begins with observing the children during their daily activities. Observations may be recorded and compared to the development checklist or learning standards. Teachers use the recorded observations, developmental checklists and the Arizona Early Learning standards to plan appropriate developmental activities for each child. Talk to your Center Director about the process for using observations, developmental checklists, or learning standards to plan curriculum for young children.

Teachers combine the developmental activities with activities based on the children's interests. As an example: A classroom of 4 year olds visits the zoo. Returning from the field trip the children continue to talk about the zoo animals. The teacher responds to the children's interest by adding zoo animals to the block area, gathering books on zoo animals for the book area, and having the children write stories about the trip to the zoo.

School Age

The teacher's role as a facilitator increases as the children begin school. Teaching strategies for school age children include providing a child-centered environment that builds on the children's strengths, provides them with opportunities to be independent, and develops self-esteem through successful learning experiences. School age children develop social and emotional skills by interacting in their environment with peers and adults. Hands-on exploration and activities that encourage questioning and exploring are teaching strategies that work well with school age children. ***Involving the school age child in the planning and development of the program builds relationships between the teachers and the students and encourages the development of a collaborative environment.*** School age teachers can involve the children in planning by allowing them to:

- decorate the classroom
- create classroom rules
- plan weekly or monthly themes and specific activities
- assist the cook in planning afterschool snacks

Providing school age children with opportunities to be involved in the planning and implementation of the before and after school program is a key strategy in building relationships with the children and creating sense of community. Also, it allows them the independence and control they need during this developmental stage.

Creating a Learning Environment for Young Children

The following is an excerpt from ***Teaching Our Youngest***. Effective preschool classrooms are places where children feel well cared for and safe. They are places where children are valued as individuals and where their needs for attention, approval, and affection are supported. They are also places where children can be helped to acquire a strong foundation in the knowledge and skills needed for school success.

- Young children need teachers who welcome all children to their classrooms, including children from various cultures, whose first language is not English and children who have disabilities.
- Young children need teachers who take time to work with them individually, in small groups, and sometimes with the entire class—to help they develop their cognitive and social skills, their language abilities, and their interest in learning new things about the world.

- Young children need instruction to develop thinking, language, and early literacy skills needed for continued school success.

Effective preschool teachers and child care providers:

- Know when children can figure out new ideas and concepts on their own and when it is important to explain concepts to them step-by-step.
- Encourage children to participate in classroom activities and to honor the classroom rules.
- Listen to what the children say and expand upon their language, building their vocabulary and background knowledge.
- Know when to teach directly, when to provide time for exploration and discovery, when to practice skills, and when to encourage creativity.
- Plan activities that have a purpose and that challenge children.
- Know how to help children learn to work together and to resolve their conflicts.
- Encourage children to respect each other's time and personal belongings.
- Provide many opportunities for conversations between and among children and with adults.
- Know how to establish and maintain order in a classroom but in a manner that permits the children to learn how to participate in and enjoy learning.
- Arrange the classroom in a way that enhances their work with children and how the children spend their time.

A Diverse Classroom

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse. Child care centers mirror that diversity of languages, nationalities, races, cultures, and children with a variety of individual needs. As an early childhood professional you will be working with children who have different routines, traditions, languages, customs, and needs. It is important to remember that there are different ways of doing things and raising children. If a practice is different, it does not make it harmful or wrong. Early childhood professionals provide a role model for young children and need to demonstrate a respect for individual differences in appearances, languages, and beliefs. Getting to know the children and their families is a key factor in developing an understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives and individual needs. In the previous section we discussed creating an environment that felt like home to the teachers and children. To feel like home, customs and beliefs of each family must be represented in the classroom.

In the article *Diversity in Early Childhood Programs*, Francis Wardle states that diversity is important because it teaches children to:

- learn about their own backgrounds;
- learn about the backgrounds of people who are different from them;
- see themselves, their families, and their communities represented throughout the center;
- continually be exposed to activities, materials, and concrete experiences that destroy stereotypes;
- learn to enjoy, appreciate, and seek out differences;
- learn that harassment and intolerance is never acceptable, and
- discover that there are usually a variety of ways to solve a problem, complete a task, or answer question

It is easy for young children to think in simple terms that can lead them to think in stereotypes. It is one of your responsibilities of an early childhood educator to help challenge children's thoughts about the following:

- **Gender** – boys can dress-up in dresses; girls can become mathematicians;
- **Religion** – no one religion is the 'right' religion for everyone;
- **Race/Ethnicity/Culture** – every child can become anything she wishes: an Asian boy can become a basketball player, an African American boy a scientist, a white girl a doctor, etc. Further, children can comfortably belong to more than one racial or ethnic group (Wardle 1999)
- **Income/Poverty** – many famous people have overcome poverty, neglect, and difficult situations to become successful and fulfilled;
- **Language** – children can learn two or more languages at the same time. For some reason, we are unwilling to recognize that very young children can learn more than one language. We should look at bilingual and multilingual students as having a tremendous asset, not a deficit.

In the article *How to Integrate Diversity into a Preschool Classroom*, Parker Janney suggests the strategies below to promote diversity in your classroom. Many of these strategies can be used with all age groups.

1. **Post pictures of your families throughout the classroom.** This is the easiest way to make sure your classroom is diverse and representative of the children in your group. This also makes children feel more secure and families feel more welcome.
2. **Incorporate world languages.** You don't have to be fluent in another language to teach your students "Frere Jaques" or "Feliz Navidad." Learn some songs, poems or phrases in American Sign Language to teach to your students.
3. **Host guest speakers.** The best way for children to understand new information and appreciate diversity is for them to see it with their own eyes. Invite speakers to your classroom who can

talk about the culture, religion, race or country that they represent. Open the discussion to questions from students.

4. **Teach geography.** Decorate your room with maps and globes and get your students excited about their world. Daily exercises should include pinpointing the country, state and town where the class is located.
5. **Play music from other cultures.** Music provides students with a fun way to learn new languages. The preschool child's brain is a sponge, ready to absorb all kinds of new information. While children are busy doing crafts, eating snacks or napping, play music with diverse cultural origins. Before you know it, they will be reciting French nursery rhymes or African jams by heart.
6. **Celebrate global holidays, not just those celebrated in your country or community.** Children love parties, so give them an excuse to celebrate by introducing a wide variety of world holidays. Play games, eat food and sing songs typical of the holiday.
7. **Play dress-up.** Dressing up lets children literally step into someone else's shoes. Provide a variety of traditional costumes from all over the world. Children are going to dress up anyway, so you might as well make it a learning experience.
8. **Serve a variety of foods from all over the world.** Cooking ethnic cuisine is one way to get kids excited about new cultures. During snack time, why not experiment with culturally diverse foods? Children love to cook, and this is a hands-on way for them to appreciate a new culture's cuisine.
9. **Explore different family structures.** During a "family" theme week, have the children draw pictures of their families and then share their drawings with the class. Students will see that families come in all sorts: single moms, single dads, same-sex couples, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and foster and adoptive parents.
10. **Experience different disabilities.** A wheelchair ride can help children understand disabilities. Blindfold children and have them attempt to conduct a simple activity. Bring in a child-sized wheelchair and have them experience first-hand what it is like to not have use of their legs. Teach basic signs to orient them to the deaf experience.
11. **Dolls and action figures should represent different races.** Decorate your room with diversity in mind. Letters of the alphabet should have a corresponding American Sign Language version. Dolls and action figures should represent a variety of races, ages and abilities.
12. **Books in your classroom should reflect a wide variety of experiences.** Keep a diverse library. Books should reflect a wide variety of experiences, featuring themes and people of different races, religions, countries, ages, abilities and family structures. Foreign-language or bilingual books are especially fun as children are learning to read.

Inclusive Classrooms

As an early childhood teacher you may have a child with special needs in your classroom. In 1992 the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) went into effect in the United States. It is a law that prohibits discrimination and guarantees equal opportunity for people with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that all children are provided care in the most natural least restrictive environment. The term Inclusion refers to the act of incorporating children with special needs in regular setting with children of the same chronological age. Often disabilities, special needs, or developmental delays are not evident at birth but become more noticeable as the child exhibits some type of delay. In some cases it is the early childhood teacher who may first notice that there may be a

developmental delay. Visual, hearing, speech, mental or physical disabilities and health or medical conditions are special needs that may be encountered in a child care center. Common medical conditions may include asthma, allergies, and juvenile diabetes. Teachers of children with special needs will have to make accommodations to ensure that each child has the opportunity to learn in the least restrictive environment. Good teachers meet the individual needs of all the children in their classroom. Every child has a special need, some are just officially diagnosed. The National Network for Child Care (Oessterreich, 1995) provides the following general suggestions for helping children with special needs:

- Modify toys and activities
- Work with the parents to set goals.
- Modify the environment by making minor changes.
- Model appropriate behavior by engaging in play with the child and inviting others to join in.
- Focus on the child's strengths as well as the child's needs.
- Seek help and information by talking with the child's parents.

Applying your Knowledge

How does this information affect your work with young children?

- Early childhood teachers are responsible for managing their classroom by supervising children, planning and implementing learning activities, and responding to the individual needs of each child.
- Understanding basic supervision and teaching strategies assists in implementing activities for the all of the children in your classroom.
- The use of intentional teaching methods helps teachers focus on learning the development abilities and the individual needs of the children. Early childhood classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. It is essential that teachers incorporate strategies to include all children's' different learning styles, cultures, and abilities.

Check Your Understanding

- ✓ Define Intentional Teaching.
- ✓ List 4 early childhood teaching strategies to assist in the learning of young children.
- ✓ Explain what it means to promote diversity in your classroom.
- ✓ Discuss considerations when working with a child diagnosed with a special need.

Resources

Resources

U.S. Department of Education – Creating a Learning Environment for Young Children

http://www2.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/teachingouryoungest/page_pg4.html

NAEYC – The Intentional Teacher <http://www.naeyc.org/store/files/store/TOC/165.pdf>

Scholastic – Teaching Diversity, A Place to Begin by Dora Pulido-Tobiassen and Janet Gonzalez-Mena

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/teaching-diversity-place-begin>

References

Diversity in Early Childhood Programs, Francis Wardle retrieved from

http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=548

How to Integrate Diversity into a Preschool Classroom, Parker Janney retrieved from

http://www.ehow.co.uk/how_7854817_integrate-diversity-preschool-classroom.html

Teaching Our Youngest. A Guide for Preschool Teachers and Child Care and Family Providers. Prepared by Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force. U. S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Module 4-Section C Worksheet

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| Define Intentional Teaching. | |
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| List 4 early childhood teaching strategies to assist in the learning of young children. | |
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| Explain what it means to promote diversity in your classroom. | |
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| Discuss considerations when working with a child diagnosed with a special need. | |
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