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## TEACHING YOUNGER CHILDREN

### POUČEVANJE MLAJŠIH OTROK

V prispevku avtorica poudarja, da učitelj ne posreduje le znanja, temveč otroke usmerja k razvoju lastnih strategij za pridobivanje znanja, zato je pomembno, da potrebe otrok razume. Po Bruceovi povzema poglede na izobraževanje mlajših otrok, ki izhajajo iz nekaterih vplivnih pedagoških smeri (Froebel, Montessori, Steiner). Izhodiščna točka poučevanja naj bi bila, *kaj otrok zmore*. Otroci so različni, zato bi moral učitelj organizirati delo v razredu glede na individualne razlike v razvoju, interesih in načinih učenja. Učitelj mora načrtovati obravnavo posameznih tem v skladu s specifičnimi izkušnjami, ki so jih otroci pridobili izven šole. Kot primer navaja izkušnje z vodo. Otroci, ki živijo ob morju, na primer vedo veliko o ribarjenju in ladjah, otroci, ki živijo ob Cerkniškem jezeru, vedo, da voda presiha in da jezero zamrzne, ljubljanski otroci pa poznajo reko, mostove in kopališča z bazeni.

Delo z mlajšimi otroki je zahtevno in kompleksno in zahteva od učiteljev znanje in razumevanje ter spretnosti, ki jih avtorica predstavi s povzetkom Rumboldovega poročila "Začeti kvalitetno". Da bi bili otroci deležni kvalitetnih izobraževalnih izkušenj, morajo učitelji načrtovati delo na osnovi značilnosti učenja otrok. Učenje morajo povezovati z igro. Razumeti morajo načine pridobivanja jezikovnih spretnosti in razlikovati med tem, kaj otrok pridobi z razvojem in kaj se nauči. Razumeti morajo vlogo staršev pri izobraževanju in poznati predšolske izkušnje otrok. Imeti morajo organizacijske spretnosti, sposobnost opazovanja in komunikacije s skupino in s posameznimi otroki. Omogočiti morajo enake možnosti vsem otrokom, zato je pomemben pristen odnos in spoštovanje otrok, visoka pričakovanja ter zavedanje, da imajo otroci različne potenciale.

Avtorica še posebej izpostavi organizacijo dela v razredu, ki je odvisna od metod dela in zajema širok spekter učnih možnosti, od organizacije prostora, preko dostopnosti učnih sredstev do odnosov in igro v razredu, ki ima pomembno vlogo pri učenju, saj otrok ob njej svobodno razvija pomembne dejavnosti, kot so vpeljevanje idej, odločanje, planiranje ter iskanje alternativnih rešitev. Prispevek zaključuje s poudarkom, da morajo učitelji pri zgodnjem opismenjevanju z zgodbami osmisliti potrebo po pisani besedi.

### WHAT DO YOUNG CHILDREN NEED?

All children deserve the best we can give them. Young children deserve the very best start in life. Everyone agrees with this principle and an acknowledgement of this principle is a good foundation from which to begin teaching younger children. Yet the principle on its own will not guarantee consistency in approach.

Teachers must have an understanding of the nature and needs of the young child.

The **Empiricist** view of the child regards the child as an empty vessel waiting to be filled by the teacher. Those who accept this view regard the role of the teacher as identifying which experiences, skills and concepts are missing from the child and transmitting these somehow to the child. This view of the child results in the teacher breaking down learning into easy steps. Children will also be taught how to fill a role in society.

The **Nativist** view of the child considers that humans are born with certain abilities and propensities that will develop in certain ways depending on the environmental conditions.

The Nativist approach to education implies that the teacher is not the source of all the child's knowledge. The child must be allowed to play, to imagine and to develop creatively. Teachers must be prepared to withdraw. Teachers must respect the child's blossoming development.

There can be problems if teachers only view the child from one of these positions. Aspects of both theories can be drawn from to understand what young children need.

The **Interactionist** view acknowledges the critical role of the adult. The adult in this view is not the giver of knowledge but the means by which children will develop their own strategies. Children are not alone in the environment but are supported by adults to maximise their use of the environment.

Bruce (1987, p.10) summarises the common principles of three of the major influences on the education of younger children, Froebel, Montessori and Steiner:

1. *Childhood is important in itself*, ie childhood is not just a preparation for adult life. However, the richer the childhood is, the better it will be as a preparation for adult life.
2. *The whole child is important*, ie their physical and mental health, their thinking and spiritual aspects.
3. *Learning is not compartmentalised*; everything in a child's life, especially home and school, connect and interlink.
4. *Intrinsic motivation is valued*, ie child initiated and self-directed activity.
5. *Self-discipline is emphasised*, and emerges from keeping intrinsic motivation intact.
6. *At particular stages of development children are particularly receptive to different learning* and each stage should be nurtured and developed, not accelerated.
7. *What children can do is the starting point for education*, therefore the teacher needs to observe and assess carefully, focusing on the child's strengths rather than their weaknesses.
8. *The child's inner knowledge and understanding emerges given favourable stimuli*; the role of the adult is to process, transform and share knowledge.
9. *People (children and adults) with whom the child interacts are of central importance*
10. *The child's education is an interaction between the child, the environment, other people and knowledge itself.*

## WHAT CAN YOUNG CHILDREN DO?

All children are different. The teacher of younger children must be able to recognise, plan and organise for and work with individual differences in development, in what children know and can do, in their individual rates and ways of learning and in their interests.

A range of environmental factors such as the time of day, the type of activity, the familiarity of the context and the people, moods and social relationships all affect children.

Outside school young children learn from real life experience. In meaningful contexts or in contexts from which others help them to make meaning. Young children have a curiosity about and some understanding of their own world, the people in it, what they do and how they act. They have started to develop basic skills and strategies for taking part in and enjoying that world. They have begun to develop attitudes to themselves and others.

A recognition by the teacher of the particular contexts affecting young children in his or her charge can help the teacher to plan for a range of starting points and learning.

As an example, consider the teacher is planning a topic about water. Firstly the teacher should identify what young children know about water in different parts of Slovenia.

## WATER

**What children might know?**Ljubljana

rain  
river  
bridges  
taps  
swimming pool

Cerknica

frozen water  
water disappears  
water for crops

Koper

sea  
Italy  
boats  
fishing

**What children might be able to do?**

talk about clothes for rain  
recognise how to cross water

recognise water as a resource for cooking  
swim

ice skate  
understand seasonal effect on water  
recognise water as food for plants

understand tourism  
acknowledge interdependence  
represent boats

**TEACHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN**

Working with young children is demanding, complex, sometimes frustrating and often rewarding.

The Rumbold Report *Starting with Quality*, published by the Department of Education and Science in England in 1990, investigated the provision of quality education for younger children. The report (DES; 1990, p.47) outlined the attributes which teachers of young children should possess in order to provide a high quality educational experience.

These attributes are divided into categories of knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudes, including the following which are crucial attributes for teachers of young children internationally.

**Knowledge and Understanding**

- *Understanding of the way young children learn*, demonstrated by planning from this basis
- *Understanding of the importance of play* and how it relates to learning
- *Understanding of the way children acquire language* and the distinction between what the child acquires and what they learn
- *Understanding of the role of parents* as educators
- *Knowledge and understanding of the needs of young children*
- *Knowledge of the pre-5 school experiences of children*

**Skills**

- *Observational skills*
- *Organisational skills*, to allow for different learning styles
- *Interactive and Communication skills*, to relate to young children as individuals and in a group
- *Skills in collaborative working* with peers, parents and children
- *Skills to provide equality of opportunity for all young children* in order to recognise, acknowledge and celebrate difference

**Attitudes**

- *Genuine liking and respect for children*
- *High expectations of children and self* which acknowledge that different children have different maximum potential
- *Appreciation of the role of other adults* including parents, other school staff and other professionals

## CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

The teacher who takes an interactionist approach to children's learning will wish to provide for a vast range of learning opportunities in the classroom.

- play
- practical activities
- social activities
- individual activities
- encouraging children's independence enabling children to choose
- giving children opportunities to develop their own interests

The ways in which teachers provide for and organise these opportunities will differ. The physical features of the classroom, the space and resources available and the school policy and ethos will have to be considered.

The teacher will probably employ a range of teaching modes during the day.

**Expository** The teacher giving information to the whole class of children

**Discursive** Oral work in groups

**Enquiry** Opportunities for the children to choose and experiment

**Activity** Children using their knowledge and skills

The methods the teacher wishes to use will also affect the classroom organisation.

The principles identified by Bruce are significant in terms of the contexts we create for learning and its organisation. The classroom is the place in which the learning planned by the teacher will be realised. The classroom should be planned, organised and equipped with the children in mind.

*"It is an environment that they can feel is their own, for which they can be responsible. Everything is real and accessible to them. We make certain that everything is as attractive and pleasing to the children as possible so that they experience delight in being there. Nothing is missing, broken or incomplete, so that children have the reassurance that everything is there for them, ready for their use."*

Hall (1994)

## PLAY IN THE CLASSROOM

Young children enjoy playing and enjoy talking about play. Play has an important role in learning. Play is interactive and social. Play is pressure free. Play is symbolic. Through play children can initiate ideas and situations, make decisions, plan, find alternatives, solve problems, explore and explain their ideas. These are all important features of the learning process which learners require to develop and apply. Children construct their knowledge and understanding of the world through these processes. If teachers utilise play within the curriculum the success of the curriculum can be greatly enhanced.

Approaches to play in the classroom differ. Some teachers provide a context for the play activities, believing that play is more meaningful to the child when connections are made. Other teachers prefer to offer decontextualised play activities, believing that children should be allowed to develop their own ideas and themes through play.

Play areas may be organised within the classroom or may be in a space children and teachers.

Play areas might include a selection of the following activities, with the teacher deciding on their appropriateness at different times:

- Imaginative play / role play, e.g. a house, shop or cafe corner
- Art and craft e.g. paint, junk, chalk or collage
- Construction, both small and large
- Investigation e.g. sand and water
- Table top activities e.g. jigsaws and board games
- Literacy area ensuring a range of reading genres and writing materials are available
- Maths area for e.g. shapes or time activities
- Music area including e.g. percussion instruments and a tape recorder
- Computer area with appropriate software

The teacher's role in the provision of play will be to:

- **plan** the curriculum. considering how activities will be structured
- **implement** the curriculum by considering the teacher's intervention which may involve participation, modeling, questioning. initiating, extending and observing
- **assess and record** the learning
- **evaluate** the provision in terms of its effectiveness

## EARLY LITERACY

In a literary society children know about literacy. Children have different experiences. knowledge, understandings and skills and as in all areas of the curriculum. teachers must discover what each individual in the class knows and plan the curriculum accordingly.

Frank Smith (1971) describes the Literacy Club of which all literate adults are members. Children wish to belong to this club and have access to the printed word. Children believe school provides the membership card to the Literacy Club. It is the teacher's role to be the adult who enables the child to gain membership of this club.

Storytelling is the important bridge between the oral experiences of children and literacy.

### Storytelling:

- introduces children to the magic of words
- helps children to understand concepts of narrative
- encourages children towards independent reading
- helps develop ideas of the relationships between the story and the printed word

Children need to have a purpose for writing. The teacher must consider the purposes for writing which young children know and must provide the resources and opportunities for children to develop their writing skills.

Teachers must help children to understand the differences between the written word and the spoken word. Children's writing should be published for audiences other than the teacher. Talk and experience must be seen as both preliminaries and accompaniments to writing.

Teachers must encourage and enable all children to consider themselves as active, enthusiastic readers and writers.

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