Planning for Play-Based Curriculum Based on Individualized Goals to Help Each Child Thrive in Preschool and Kindergarten

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I am an early childhood education consultant who works with programs across the country and the author of eight books published by Redleaf Press as well as several articles that have been published in the NAEYC journal, Young Children. I served as the Project Manager for NAEYC for resources related to the third edition of Developmentally Appropriate Practice. I am the creator of Child-Focused Coaching™, a new system to help teachers truly individualize and differentiate curriculum for young children.

My work focuses on:

– implementing learning through play and exploration
– incorporating early learning standards
– assessing children’s progress through observation and portfolios
– and coaching teachers to implement more individualized curriculum

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• Individualized Child-Focused Curriculum: A Differentiated Approach (to be published June 2016)

• Planning for Play, Observation, and Learning in Preschool and Kindergarten

• Developmentally Appropriate Play: Guiding Young Children to Higher Levels (with parent brochure, Why Children Play)

• Developmentally Appropriate Play Stories Volume 1 (an interactive video program)

• Make Early Learning Standards Come Alive 2nd edition: Connecting Your Practice and Curriculum to State Guidelines

• Focused Observations 2nd edition: How to Observe Young Children for Assessment and Curriculum Planning (coauthor, Marlyn James)

• Focused Portfolios: A Complete Assessment for the Young Child (coauthor, Bev Engel)

• Early Learning Standards and Staff Development: Best Practices in the Face of Change (coauthor, Marlyn James)

• Produced the CD-Rom accompanying Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, 3rd Edition, NAEYC and the DVDs, “The New Developmentally Appropriate Practice”, “DAP and Intentionality” and “DAP and Play”
Our basic premise...

“Every child deserves a chance to grow and learn in a play-based, experiential preschool and kindergarten. Play works.”

*Crisis in the Kindergarten:
Why Children Need to Play in School*
Miller and Almon 2009
www.allianceforchildhood.org
“Rather than detracting from academic learning, play appears to support the abilities that underlie such learning and thus promote school success.”

(p. 15) Developmentally Appropriate Practice, National Association for the Education of Young children (NAEYC), 2009
Let’s Start Emphasizing Playful Learning!!!

• “Playful learning is a whole-child approach to education that includes both free play and guided play...guided play offers a new twist. It refers to play in a structured environment around a general curricular goal that is designed to stimulate children’s natural curiosity, exploration, and play with learning-oriented materials. In guided play, learning remains child-directed. This is a key point. Children learn targeted information through exploration of a well-designed and structured environment...and through the support of adults who ask open-ended questions to gently guide the child’s exploration.”

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek & Roberta Michnick Golinkoff
http://preschoolmatters.org/2014/03/06/playful-learning-where-a-rich-curriculum-meets-a-playful-pedagogy/
A great resource:

A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Laura E. Berk, and Dorothy G. Singer
Oxford Press
www.oup.com/us

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In all grade levels...

Consider planning playful learning activities that address standards and that have many different levels of engagement, challenge, and success

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Four Steps to Effectively Planning for Engaging Learning
First, Let’s Consider the Stages in the Learning Cycle

From Reaching Potentials, Vol. 1, NAEYC
Planning with the Learning Cycle in Mind

Awareness
Introduce Learning Areas or Centers, Activities and/or Materials

Exploration
Provide Plenty of Time for Open Exploration with Teacher Support & Facilitation

Inquiry
Lead a Focused Investigation or Inquiry with a Teacher

Utilization
Provide Opportunities for Independent Focused Investigations or Inquiry Where Children Use and Apply Their Skills

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Differences in 3-, 4- & 5-year-olds in the learning cycle

**3-year-olds** need lots of time in open exploration with a teacher acting as model and guide.

**Prekindergartners** need lots of time in open exploration with a teacher acting as a guide and facilitator. Some focused investigations in small groups with teachers are successful.

**Kindergartners** also need lots of time in open exploration with a facilitator. They are more successful with regular focused investigations with a teacher. They can learn to engage productively in some independent focused investigations.
Set up the Environment for Open Exploration

Set up clear, delineated learning areas with specific materials that contribute to general goals:

- Expressing oneself
- Experimenting
- Problem solving
- Interacting with others
- Engaging in meaningful, productive activity

In open exploration, children are self-directed, making choices with your support.
Engage in General Focused Investigations or Inquiry with the Children

Using the same clear, delineated learning areas with specific materials encourage children to:

- Make a plan for their work with the materials (and implement and evaluate that plan)
- Consider different ways of working with the materials
- Represent what they are doing in drawing, writing, creating, describing, etc.

In general focused investigations and inquiry, children are self-directed and you are ready to facilitate their plans.
Play plans

- Have children name the learning center they are going to first
- Encourage them to plan for what they will do there
- Consider how they can represent that plan (draw, dictate, write themselves?)
- Plan for a way to report on the results of that plan (group discussion, photos, work samples?)
Add materials to the learning areas that will support children’s work toward specific goals (such as in literacy, math, or science).

- Set forth a challenge that leads children to work toward specific goals.
- Co-construct, interact, take the lead at times as you and the children engage together.

In specific investigations and inquiry, you and the children are working together toward goals you have identified.
Other possible challenges

• Block area
  – What can you build with all of the blocks?
  – What can you build with only the square blocks?
  – How can you turn the block area into a zoo? A city with a river running through it? A school?
  – What else?

• Manipulatives area
  – What can you and a partner build together without talking, constructing turn by turn?
  – How many different ways can you sort the items (such as a key, shell, button, or plastic bottle cap collection)?
  – What else?
- Identify activities that will enable children to use the skills and knowledge they have and to be successful and engaged.

- Design a way for children to check in with you when they complete the activity (Will they meet with you or write or draw something?)

In independent investigations and inquiry, the child is self-directed yet accountable for a check-in with you. You are ready and willing to assist as needed.
The best playful learning experiences at any age are *open-ended*!!!!

And, because of that open-endedness, children with differing abilities can be successfully engaged!
Consider Easy, Open-Ended Materials to Use Again and Again

Writing Materials
Drawing Materials
Books
Environmental Print
Pocket Charts
Paper Cut-outs
Pompoms

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Sorting Collections (bottle caps, keys, shells, etc.)

Counting Items and Numeral Cards, Number Lines, & Counting Charts

String & Other Non-standard Units of Measure

Items from Nature
Other Considerations for Active Learning

• Consider using the Project Approach (Preschool-Kindergarten)
  • http://www.projectapproach.org/

• Project-Based Learning (for Grades 1-5)

• Set up learning centers with activities that support various learning goals
  – Gayle M. Stuber, Beyond the Journal • Young Children on the Web • July 2007
We believe that the stifling of play has dire consequences—not only for children but for the future of our nation. No human being can achieve his full potential if his creativity is stunted in childhood. And no nation can thrive in the 21st century without a highly creative and innovative workforce. Nor will democracy survive without citizens who can form their own independent thoughts and act on them.

(Miller and Almon 2009)