

## Developing Your Preschool Program, for Project WILD Facilitators



- Appropriate Topics: Keep it simple. Exposure to nature and ideas is brand new for many children, so it will all be exciting!
- Gathering or Free Choice (learning stations, call over to rug/meeting area to show and tell)
- Sensory Table (can be part of learning stations) – sand box with dinosaurs buried in the sand, water container filled with various rubber amphibians, container with lots of dried leaves to crunch, large magnifier to place objects underneath, feely box, etc.
- Songs and Finger Plays – kids love songs! They might not all sing along, but they enjoy listening.
- Story Time – choose books that do not have a lot of text, i.e. picture books. Give them time to look at each picture, point other things out in the pictures. If there is a lot of text, but you love the basics of the story and the illustrations, just omit some of the longer details that aren't necessary to the story.
- Dramatic Play – Kids love to pretend. They do not see it as strange or foreign like we might as adults. You can pretend to be an acorn swinging on the tree and fall to the ground, who will find you? Use puppets to take little "acorns" to hiding places, or have them grow into trees.
- Large Motor Games – active games, such as Animal Charades, Sleepy Bear, etc.
- Small Group Games – goes back to learning stations with puzzles, sorting games, etc.
- Art – Crafts are always fun, but can be complicated for children to do on their own. You end up with something nice to hang on the refrigerator, everyone including adults usually know what it is. However, art is sometimes considered more creative and less confining for preschool age children. They can discover as they create. Paint with feathers, create with play dough, create paintings by blowing through a straw, etc.
- Outdoor Exploration and Trail Activities –Senses, senses, senses!

## **Inquiry-Based Learning--What Does it Mean?**



Focusing on children making discoveries independently or as members of a group. Encouraged to ask questions, experiment, use trial and error, discuss, and evaluate. ***Inquiry is the point of the activity, not a way of getting children to the right answer.***

Like constructivism, ask open-ended questions whenever possible. Instead of asking, "What color is that?" or "How many dinosaurs are there?" Might come easily to us, but may inhibit a child's ability to reflect and reveal their own thoughts and perspectives. Instead ask things like "What would happen if..." or "If you were a frog where would you like to live?" You can find out how children think and not just what they already know.

### **Why is it Important?**

Young children learn best through finding their own answers. Preschoolers need to learn how to learn, rather than just learn facts. When children discover that they can find answers to what puzzles them, they are learning the basics of scientific principles.

### **Benefits**

Children will find the answer they are ready to understand. Focus remains on the process of learning rather than the facts. Children who learn early to think creatively and problem solve are more likely to continue this type of thinking as they get older. They can ask their own questions and find their own answers.

### **What don't we use it more?**

*Fear of losing control:* this kind of learning can get loud and may appear chaotic to someone unfamiliar with it. Once instructors get used to the activity level of children involved in inquiry, they recognize it as the sound of minds at work!

*Concern that children won't learn:* Children will be less likely to have facts to parrot back than they would in a skills-driven program. Recognition of what children should be learning at this age, which includes attitude, passion, and confidence, helps instructors to let go of the desire for children to know facts.

*Concern that they will learn misinformation:* When children find their own answers and construct with own knowledge, sometimes they come up with less than the whole answer. We may need to encourage them to revise their theories through more open-ended questions.

## **Learning Stations-What Does it Mean?**

Children are given time and opportunity to explore them at their own pace. Always good to have set-up for exploration at the beginning of the program or while you wait for others to arrive. Things such as puzzles, play dough, blocks, animal memory, or other activities that pertain to your topic.



### **Why are they important?**

Learning stations promote choice and freedom of movement. They convey a sense of trust in the children by allowing them to choose what is important to them. As a result, the program is more responsive to the needs of individual children, rather than herding them around and treating them as a group.

### **Benefits**

Learning Stations create a welcoming environment. When children arrive they may be feeling apprehensive. Having familiar activities set up for them to choose from helps to ease them into a new space and routine. And, it shows you have anticipated their needs. Setting up an appropriate environment for young children is half the battle. The right environment encourages learning and play and discourages inappropriate behavior. It doesn't hurt your credibility with parents either.

### **Why don't we use it more?**

Again, the control issue...or lack there of. "There isn't enough time for "play." Then make programs longer. Children will have a more positive experience if you leave time for unstructured activities. They will learn something! It takes a lot of time and effort But it's worth it!

Possible Issues: Conflicts between children. Provide enough toys/ puppets/ supplies to minimize conflicts

*Keep these philosophies in mind as you design your programs. We're not saying any one of these is superior and the end all method to use, but they may help guide you as you try to accommodate the way preschoolers think of the world around them.*