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ECE 410 - Educational Foundations and Pedagogy for The Exceptional Child

May 13th, 2022

NAEYC Standards 2, 3, & 5's Reflection

The position statement “NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards” published by NAEYC in 2005 depicts the crucial standards the organization believes each early childhood program should hold itself to in regard to several aspects involved in the process of serving young children and their families. For the purposes of this paper, I will discuss the specific standards for Curriculum, Teaching and Health in the context of teaching children with special needs or special gifts.

Curriculum is an important part of any early childhood program, for it assists teachers to set developmentally appropriate learning goals for all children as well as finding effective ways to make such goals attainable. Nowadays, there are many options of standardized or prescribed curriculums that might be useful for elementary grades. However, when it comes down to teaching younger children that have special needs or special gifts, the better approach is to create a curriculum based on children's interests and needs. Also known as an “emergent curriculum”, such “curriculum emerges from the play of children and the play of teachers. It is coconstructed by the children and the adults and the environment itself” (Jones, 2012).

In my own experience, standardized curricula make it difficult for teachers to be flexible and teach accordingly to student's pace and needs. Recently, I was able to make the final (and

gradual) transition from a mass-produced curriculum to a child-led learning experience, and the results do not cease to amaze me. A particular gifted student that was not challenged enough by the standardized curriculum and used to display undesired behaviors out of boredom, has taken ownership of his learning experience because he is now interested in the content. This transition has allowed me to apply my knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices in connection with information about each student, in order to intentionally plan learning experiences that will foster each child's development across all areas.

Teaching strategies are inherent to the outcomes of children's learning experiences. According to NAEYC's position statement, "teaching staff who purposefully use multiple instructional approaches optimize children's opportunities for learning ... children bring to learning environments different backgrounds, interests, experiences, learning styles, needs, and capacities" (NAEYC Early Childhood, 2005). In my opinion, when teaching children with special needs or special gifts, it is even more essential that such strategies must be carefully planned and adapted accordingly to student's success in accomplishing certain tasks or lack thereof. In my experience as a teacher, I strive to use the strategy of differentiation whenever possible in order to set equitable learning grounds to the whole classroom. For instance, last year I had the opportunity to work with an ASD student who needed lots of visual supports in order to complete tasks and follow simple routines. Incredibly, other students also benefited from such visual supports, which became an integral part of my classroom. The ASD student showed progress in his learning outcomes as well as gained confidence when he was able to perform tasks independently and successfully.

Another important aspect of a high-quality early childhood program is Health. It is imperative to mention that health involves not only the absence of a disease, but also the overall

physical, mental, and oral well being of an individual. Head start programs brought such aspects into perspective, knowing that children need to be healthy in order to be able to learn and build social relationships with peers. There, “all children receive health screenings and nutritious meals, and programs connect families with medical, dental, and mental health services to ensure children are receiving the care and attention they need” (Head Start Programs, 2020). Special needs children in many cases need extra attention because of certain physical disabilities, such as Cerebral Palsy. In my current experience in a private daycare setting, all families have both the means and the knowledge to provide their kids with proper health care. On the same note, the daycare staff strives to provide nutritious meals and a clean and safe environment for children. Our curriculum also focuses on mental health, assisting children in identifying emotions, providing the necessary tools for self-regulation and the building of healthy relationships with peers and adults.

Curriculum, Health, and Teaching standards must be aligned with each other, as they are all essential pieces that compose the whole picture of a high-quality early childhood program. All children deserve the best and as a teacher I strive to provide such excellent services for the families and children in my care.

References

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