



WEE Learn Curriculum

Theoretical Framework

Program Philosophy

WEE Learn Curriculum is framed by theory and philosophy of life. Led by faith and grounded in evidence-based practices, programs using the WEE Learn philosophy and curriculum work to support children and families. Children's individual differences and learning styles are considered as children learn through play and interactions with supportive early childhood teachers to maximize each child's learning potential. This thoughtful and well-planned curriculum has a multiple theoretical basis. By blending what is known from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Piaget's theory of development, Erikson's stages of development and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, early childhood teachers prepare individually and age-appropriate experiences for young children.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory addresses children's development within the context of relationships among complex layers of environment, each having an effect on the development of a child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The interaction between the child's natural biology, immediate family and community environment, as well as societal structures and processes affects and directs development. Changes within the system result in changes to the child's development. In the study of human development, it is necessary to not only consider individuals in their immediate environment, but the interactions within the larger environmental systems as well (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In relation to curriculum then, structures and processes of quality must be accounted for, such as those used for the Florida Performance Standards for Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-

Old Children: physical health, approaches to learning, social and emotional, language and communication, cognitive development and general knowledge and motor.

Children are affected by families, child care, and the neighborhoods in which they reside (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Relationships among these influence the individual development of each child. For example, relationships between children and parents, children and early childhood professionals, and parents and early childhood professionals all shape the development of a child. The WEE Learn curriculum accounts for the importance of these different types of relationships in children's lives, including those not directly experienced by children (e.g., the community or world events). Entire units in the curriculum support the conceptual framework of the ecological systems theory including: *Starting off to school, My family is special, My community has helpers, and I can care for my world*. Ecological systems concepts are further emphasized in activities teaching children how every relationship with another is vital such as, *Talking about brothers and sisters, Getting ready for company, Reading about friends, and Setting up a shoe shop*.

Theoretical application to the WEE Learn Curriculum philosophy. A large portion of research on child development identifies factors that influence children's readiness for school, beginning with the child and extending outward to encompass the family, early care and education programs, and the community (Zaslow, Calkins, & Hall, 2000). This ecological perspective provides a useful framework for understanding how child care and early learning systems can support and improve quality initiatives that promote healthy child development and school readiness. In particular, the ecological perspective frames the issue of the WEE Learn curriculum philosophy by providing clear linkages between the provision of quality child care, the professional resources available to early childhood teachers, and optimal development of young children. There are varied opportunities in the WEE Learn curriculum that are grounded in an ecological systems perspective. The benefits include introducing children to the larger web of relationships that comprise the world around them (i.e., close and distant relationships), exposing children to the

differences found in their worlds, and attaching a deeper value of responsibility not only to oneself but to others (i.e., family, schools, work, community).

Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development

Children learn through play. Children’s interactions with the environment create learning (Mooney, 2000). Through play and exploration children construct knowledge by giving meaning to the people, places and things in their environment. The role of the teacher then, is to nurture inquiry and support children’s natural instincts to make sense of the world around them (Mooney, 2000). Piaget’s theory of child development supports the importance of individual and age-appropriate activities. Children’s thought processes vary depending on a child’s age and stage of development. WEE Learn Curriculum is designed for specific ages with increasing skill and knowledge emphasis that supports the natural progression of children’s development.

Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development		
Age	Stage	Behaviors
Birth – 18 months	Sensorimotor	Learn through Senses Learn through reflexes Manipulate materials
18 months – 6 years	Preoperational	Form ideas based on their perceptions Can only focus on one variable at a time Overgeneralize based on limited experience
6 – 12 years	Concrete Operational	Form ideas based on reasoning Limit thinking to objects and familiar events
12 years and older	Formal Operational	Think conceptually Think hypothetically

Adapted from Mooney, C.G. (2000). "Theories of Childhood: An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget, & Vygotsky."

Theoretical application to the WEE Learn Curriculum philosophy. Piagetian theory lends itself to early childhood curricula and quality care and education experiences by providing a framework for children’s developmental thought and language processes and capabilities (Thomas, 1979). With the understanding that language and cognitive thought processes are integral to children’s abilities to learn, WEE Learn Curriculum clearly addresses the sequence of children’s development through increasingly intensive and complex objectives and activities. One example of this gradual transition can be found in teacher expectations about listening. Although three-year-old children and four-year-old children all learn about their worlds through

watching and listening, expectations about how each age group can best gain from their visual and auditory experiences varies.

For example, the curriculum guides teachers to expect that three-year-old children find it easier with understanding in one-on-one situations than in groups. On the contrary, teachers of four-year-olds are guided to understand that they acquire the skill to listen not only when they are spoken to one-on-one by adults and peers, but also to listen when they are spoken to as part of a group (important for learning and acquiring information in school settings).

Erikson’s Stages of Development

Nurturing children’s development requires sensitivity to their emotional development and opportunity for them to achieve personal success (Mooney, 2000). Similar to Piaget’s concept of age defined cognitive developmental stages, Erikson proposed psychosocial stages of development encompassing the entire life span. This theoretical perspective is particularly important for young children whose experiences shape their world view and formulate their sense of self-worth. Early childhood teachers must plan activities that provide positive experiences for each stage of development. WEE Learn teachers understand these critical concepts and incorporate several activities into their daily routines that support children’s feelings and understandings about hope, willpower, and purpose.

Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development		
Age	Stage	Strength Developed
Birth – 1 year	Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope
2 – 3 years	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Willpower
4 – 5 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose
6 – 12 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence
Adolescence	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity
Young Adulthood	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love
Middle Age	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care
Old Age	Ego Integration vs. Despair	Wisdom

Adapted from Mooney, C.G. (2000). “Theories of Childhood: An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget, & Vygotsky.”

Theoretical application to the WEE Learn Curriculum philosophy. Erikson’s theoretical work has implications for early childhood classroom practices because it

frames the process for children's development of social, emotional, and mental health (Mooney, 2000). The curriculum is firmly grounded in faith, which uniquely sets this curriculum apart given that such concepts of hope, love, and purpose are integral components of the experiences children are offered and cannot be separated from everyday routines. These routines are embraced and defined by a moral foundation which not only supports, but also consistently encourages the social, emotional, and mental health development of all children.

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Just as adults process information and learn differently, so too do young children. In the WEE Learn Curriculum framework, the suggested use of individually appropriate activities and adaptation of activities for children's individual developmental capabilities is reflective of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. From this perspective, early childhood professionals can gain an understanding of adapting classroom activities and approaches based on how children in their care learn.

Gardner's conviction is based on the concept that every individual has at least some form of intelligences, that these are relatively independent of one another, and that they can be fashioned and combined in a multiplicity of adaptive ways by individuals and cultures (Gardner, 1983). Gardner expands the concept of intelligence to include such areas as music, spatial relations, and interpersonal knowledge in addition to mathematical and linguistic ability.

He suggests that the intelligences are used concurrently and typically complement each other as individuals develop skills or solve problems. For example, a dancer can excel in her art only if she has (1) a strong musical intelligence to understand the rhythm and variations of the music, (2) interpersonal intelligence to understand how she can inspire or emotionally move the audience through her movements, as well as (3) bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to provide her with the agility and coordination to complete the movements successfully.

Gardner's Eight Intelligences	
Logical-Mathematical Intelligence	consists of the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively and think logically. This intelligence is most often associated with scientific and mathematical thinking.
Linguistic Intelligence	involves having a mastery of language. This intelligence includes the ability to effectively manipulate language to express oneself rhetorically or poetically. It also allows one to use language as a means to remember information.
Spatial Intelligence	gives one the ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems. This intelligence is not limited to visual domains--Gardner notes that spatial intelligence is also formed in blind children.
Musical Intelligence	encompasses the capability to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms. (Auditory functions are required for a person to develop this intelligence in relation to pitch and tone, but it is not needed for the knowledge of rhythm.)
Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence	is the ability to use one's mental abilities to coordinate one's own bodily movements. This intelligence challenges the popular belief that mental and physical activity are unrelated.
Personal Intelligences	includes interpersonal feelings and intentions of others--and --
Intrapersonal intelligence	the ability to understand one's own feelings and motivations. These two intelligences are separate from each other. Nevertheless, because of their close association in most cultures, they are often linked together.
Naturalist intelligence	designates the human ability to discriminate among living things (plants, animals) as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world (clouds, rock configurations).

Adapted from Brualdi, A. (1999). Multiple intelligence: Gardner's theory. Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation, 5.

Theoretical application to the WEE Learn Curriculum philosophy.

Accepting Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences has several implications for teachers in terms of classroom instruction. The theory states that all eight intelligences are needed to productively function in society. Teachers, therefore, should think of all intelligences as equally important (Brualdi, 1999). This importance is evident in several units and activities found in the WEE Learn curriculum that account for the different ways in which children learn best.

Children have opportunities to access books, both by being read to and for individual play purposes, children can explore the outdoors and nature, there are numerous musical activities, and children can play with a variety of materials including bubbles, puzzles, crayons and paint, tissue paper, and blocks. Children are not only directed in activities by their teachers, but also supported to explore individually.

The WEE Learn curriculum takes into account that each child will have his own unique set of intellectual strengths and weaknesses (commonly referred to as a learning style). Teachers are guided to show children how to use their more developed intelligences to assist in the understanding of a topic or experience which normally employs their weaker intelligences.

References

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