

Early Childhood Education Observation:
Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Traditional Preschool Programs

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Introduction to Early Childhood 130

Mrs. Eastman

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Abstract

Childhood is a unique and vital stage in development. Children are only beginning to develop a social awareness and become aware of their own emotional and academic development. It is my job as a classroom teacher to provide an environment that encourages all three developmental areas. Over the past four weeks I have observed three very distinct preschool programs. Each was distinct in the areas that they focused upon in the developmental growth of a child. While the Montessori program focused more on the academic growth of the child, the Reggio Emilia program concentrated on the social and emotional developmental stages. The “traditional” preschool program, Manchester Church of the Brethren, combined elements from both of the programs and provided a balance between the two extremes. In the end however, the child was still at the center of all three programs and the sole focus of the philosophies and curriculum each school implemented.

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Early Childhood Education Observation:

Montessori and Reggio Emilia Preschools

Over a three hour period on March 28, 2007 I had the opportunity to observe two very distinct preschool programs. The first program was a Montessori program and the second was a program based on the philosophy of Reggio Emilia. Both programs were designed with the academic success of children in mind. However, both programs had two very different beliefs and ideas about how to achieve that goal.

The first program I observed was the Montessori program at Bunche Elementary. When I first walked into the classroom I noticed that all of the students were engaged in an activity, though not necessarily the same activity. One of the boys in the classroom was busy pounding nails into a clay board while a little girl nearby was counting by tens to a thousand. The classroom I observed was a mixed age classroom, as all Montessori classrooms ~~are~~^{are}, with children between the ages of three years old to kindergarten. Many of the three year olds were spending their time in the classroom "Practical Life Skills" where they could practice buttoning, zipping, pouring, dusting, and other activities related to their personal well-being. At the same time, many of the kindergarteners in the classroom were busy writing in their daily journals. However, when I walked into the Reggio Emilia classroom, all of the kindergarteners were engaged in one math activity together with their teacher. The children were using teddy bear ~~counters~~^{counters} to help them with various addition and subtraction problems. When they finished with that activity they moved onto to writing in their classroom ~~journals~~^{journals}. Each activity the students did, while done individually by the student, was done in unison with the rest of the class.

While children in both classrooms were engaged in various activities, the differences between self-directed activities and teacher-directed activities was obvious.

The walls of the Montessori classroom were very plain, a contrast from the bright colors of the Reggio Emilia preschool. Maria Montessori believed that children should not be over stimulated by bright colors or murals on the walls of the classroom. The classrooms, hallways, and offices of the school were quiet and talking was kept to a whisper so as to encourage learning and academic study. On the other hand, the Reggio Emilia school hallways were noisy and boisterous, reflecting the idea that children should be free to express themselves with sound, art, or movement. Both of these preschools, however different they may be from each other, were unlike anything I observed at the Manchester Church of the Brethren preschool. While the noise level at MCoB was not the quiet that Montessori requires it was also not as raucous as the Reggio Emilia school. Ms. Lisa kept the walls of the preschool bright and colorful, but not cluttered with collages or sculptures. I found that type of environment to be the most visually stimulating. While it still displays color and showcases students' work, it does not over stimulate the children to the point of lost concentration.

Maria Montessori believed that if classrooms contained mixed-age groups of children that children could learn from one another and help each other with older children becoming role models and collaborates for younger children. For example, I observed one of the four year olds trying to write a story in her journal but she didn't know how to spell a word. Instead of finding the classroom teacher for help the girl turned to one of the kindergarteners and asked one of them to help her spell the word.

The children in the classroom assisted each other with the tracing and coloring the words or letters of the day or helped each other figure out the math problem of the day.

The Reggio Emilia and Manchester Church of the Brethren programs however, were both grouped by age. I noticed though, a similar atmosphere of collaboration within those two programs as well. The classroom teachers had created an environment centered around learning and not on grades or competition. At the Reggio Emilia school students were regularly looking to their peers for help with their math problems and at the Brethren preschool children assisted each other with the tracing and coloring the words or letters of the day. All three classrooms had created an environment based on achieving one's personal best and not a contest of abilities. It is that kind of collaborating, not competing, atmosphere I would like to encourage in my own classroom someday.

Across the three preschool programs I observed children between the ages of three and six. Children at this stage of development are just beginning to develop socially, emotionally, and mentally. From my observational standpoint, I believe the Reggio Emilia program does a great job encouraging the social and emotional growth of children within their program. The children sought help from their classmates and expressed their feelings through creative outlets like painting or using clay. However, I did not see a lot of mental or academic stimulation within the classroom. The Montessori program though, encourages the social and academic growth of their children. Children within the Montessori program were working at their own academic pace and everything centered on them at their present stage of academic development. Children were seeking out classmates for help if they did not know an answer or if they did not know how to solve a problem similar to the Reggio Emilia classroom. However, there did not seem to

be a creative outlet for children in the Montessori program. What a child can and cannot do is closely monitored throughout the program while Reggio Emilia gives children all of the tools to do something and then allows the children decide what to do with those tools. The Manchester Church of the Brethren preschool though, seemed to encourage growth in both the emotional and academic areas of development. Children colored and painted as an outlet for their thoughts and feelings and also were stimulated academically through math and reading activities. Socially, all three programs encouraged children to grow and develop together without forcing children to compete against one another or making another child feel inferior.

Both of the Montessori and Reggio Emilia schools were very mixed racially. At the Montessori school 25% of the students were African American while the Reggio Emilia classroom I observed was 50% African American and 50% Caucasian. Neither of the schools dwelled on the subject of the children's racial or ethnic background. Rather, both programs simply encouraged the development of children. The Montessori school-wide curriculum this year is focusing on a study of Europe. All the different cultures of Europe are being discussed even though there may not be a student from the specific country being studied.

I felt this was a great way to incorporate a multicultural curriculum without focusing on one particular student's race or ethnicity. I did not observe evidence of a multicultural curriculum in the Reggio Emilia classroom; however, I did not observe a bias curriculum either. The children were all engaged in activities that focused on them as students and not as boys, girls, African Americans, or Caucasians. The Manchester Church of the Brethren preschool program was similar to that of the Reggio Emilia

classroom and, while there was no distinct or obvious multicultural curriculum, students were encouraged to learn and ask questions and the curriculum's appeal and focus was not on one particular group of children.

The most important thing I learned from observing three different programs is to value children for who they are. Childhood is a vulnerable, yet valuable, stage in a person's development. As a classroom teacher, I hope to take advantage of this stage and encourage children to grow socially, emotionally, and academically. I believe the environment of the classroom should be stimulating, but not cluttered. Students should be encouraged to use their creative energy in a positive and constructive way and their hard work should be displayed on the walls of the classroom proudly. Children should be encouraged to seek out answers to their questions, not only from their classroom teacher but from each other as well. I believe a culture based on collaboration will best provide for the academic needs of my students one day. As the classroom teacher, my job is to facilitate student learning in a positive, non-demeaning way that values all children for who they are regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnic background. My hope is to provide a curriculum rich in mental stimulation that encourages all children value who they are as a person. I believe all children, regardless of who they are or where they came from, should be valued for the person they are and encouraged to become the best they can possibly be.

I agree

well said

EDUC 130
ANALYTICAL WRITING RUBRIC

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| Name: <i>Lauren Houser</i> | Section: <i>11:00</i> | Date: <i>4-2-07</i> | Score: <i>30/30</i> | |
| | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Ideas & Content [Ex., Answers to four questions; Details and examples] | Clear, focused topic; Provides interesting and relevant details; Fresh ideas | Clear, focused topic; Shows promise; Sketchy development of expected content | No clear purpose or central theme; Reads like a collection of random thoughts | No content knowledge provided; Unclear or confusing |
| Organization [Ex., Introduction; Body of Information; Closure] | Strong introduction and conclusion obvious; Smooth transitions between ideas; Displays order as structure moves reader through text | Introduction and conclusion present; Some good transitions; Logical, yet ineffective structure | No internal structure; No clear transitions; Awkward pacing throughout; Details in random order | No order within text; Confusing pacing |
| Word Choice [Ex., Details related to grade level; Professional terms] | Specific and accurate terms; Strong imagery; Striking, yet natural phrasing; Powerful verbs; Incorporates professional jargon | Correct, yet terms not precise; Lacks punch, yet gets message across; Few energetic verbs; May sound verbose | Limited vocabulary; Vague and abstract words used; Incorrectly uses clichés and/or jargon | Inappropriate terms throughout; Predominately slang and informal language |
| Sentence Fluency [Ex., Complete sentences; without run-ons] | Easy flow; Easily read aloud; Varied sentence structure; Sounds natural; Complex sentence contains closely related ideas | Good control of simple sentence structure; Favors one pattern; Sentences go together | Difficult to follow; Choppy, rambling, or incomplete sentences; Not natural sounding; Monotonous | Awkward to read; Incomplete sentences difficult to read. |
| Conventions [Ex., Capitalization; grammar; punctuation; spelling; paragraphing] meaning | Grammar usage correct; Smooth punctuation; Correct spelling; Sound paragraphing | Spelling usually correct; Grammar problems not serious; Acceptable paragraphing; Internal punctuation errors | Frequent spelling errors; Incorrect paragraphing; Grammar/usage errors cloud the meaning; Many punctuation errors | Errors distract from content; Need to improve writing skills |
| Voice | Writer speaks to reader | Sincere, but not engaged | Distanced from topic | Confusing; Inconsistent |

Comments:

Comparison