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### **Personal Philosophy**

My personal philosophy about education is like education and child development itself—multifaceted and complex. Early childhood is a critical time where important connections must be made, lessons must be learned, and connections in the brain created. I believe that children need to be treated as individuals and teachers need to work to be intentional teachers. Teachers are guides, providing children with educational opportunities in a safe, open environment, but also enforce guidelines and rules.

Quality early childhood education is fundamentally important to a child's development into a healthy, intelligent, well-adjusted adult. During age 0 to 5 a child learns lessons, creates connections, and experiences brain development that is very difficult or impossible to develop later in life. It is vital for young children to be in an environment and with individuals who are conducive to healthy brain development. *“At birth, the brain is a thicket of branching extensions that connect neurons and allow them to talk to one another. Early in life, experience works on this tangle like a bonsai master, pruning away connections that don't play a part in working neuron circuits and reinforcing those that do.”* (Stassen Berger, 90) Child development and learning are multifaceted; education cannot just be about academics, or moral development, or physical development. It needs to encompass a complex combination of all the attributes of a

successful adult. The goal of education is not just to produce students who are intelligent but also empathetic, critical thinkers, problem solvers, leaders, and have a sense of integrity and morality. Early childhood is a critical time to develop all of these attributes.

If we are to achieve these goals as a part of early childhood education it is important to approach teaching with developmentally appropriate practice as the core of our teaching philosophy. *“Developmentally appropriate practice is grounded in the research on child development and learning in the knowledge base regarding educational effectiveness... This knowledge is the starting place for teachers in the many decisions they make-the long term ones as well as the minute by minute ones...”* (Copple and Bredekamp, 33) DAP serves as the base for the most effective teaching methods we use such as scaffolding, effective and appropriate curriculum, both/and thinking, and intentional teaching as a whole.

Intentional teaching is vital to quality education. Teachers must always work to be *“caring and committed, enthusiastic and engaged, curious and creative, respectful and responsive, passionate and patient, purposeful and playful, focused and flexible, aware and accountable, informed and effective, listening and learning”*. (Bredekamp) Early childhood development is about teaching more than academics, and if teachers try to practice these attributes, they can contribute a child’s learning in many different ways. Reflected in the importance of intentional teaching is the importance of having teachers who are educated and committed to ongoing learning about new developments in education and child development. Both/And Teaching is essential to help teachers “widen the lens” and consider more factors in a situation. Using Both/And thinking teachers may be able to see that there are more answers to a question than they originally thought.

Children must not be thought of as blank slates to be written on, or innocents who will only become corrupted, but as individuals. We are continually learning about child development and how children learn best, and it is important to pay attention to those developments. While children at the same age often share the same traits or development benchmarks, children are individuals just as adults are individuals and they have individual needs, talents and interests. Teachers should appeal to how an individual child learns and what their talents and interests are. Children learn best through play. Play is universal in children and it teaches them lessons that cannot always be taught from a lesson plan or a textbook.

If we are to consider children to be individuals, then adapting to individual differences is a necessary part of high quality instruction. When teachers understand the individual differences their students have, they are able to adjust the way they teach each individual child, and implement scaffolding techniques. Teachers must learn to modify the amount of assistance they provide a child as the child learns a particular skill. They must have a good understanding of the child's zone of proximal development, and be able to adjust their own behavior based on the child's current skill level. The ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) is an essential part of implementing scaffolding effectively. On one end of the ZPD is where the child's current ability is; on the other side is where the child could be. The role of the adult guide is to help the child through their development from one end of the spectrum to the other. Scaffolding learning is an essential part of being an effective and intentional teacher.

The physical classroom plays an important role in a child's learning. Developmentally appropriate physical environments should create a sense of order, promote social interaction, enable children to practice making choices, and support active learning. *"Children benefit in many ways when teachers design developmentally appropriate classrooms... They have lower*

*levels of stress and fewer discipline problems. They interact with other children in a more positive way... [they] help children be more independent and self controlled.”* (Marion, 87) The classroom must be a place where, first and foremost, a child feels safe. They must feel safe from both physical and emotional dangers. The child should be able to trust that the room, and everyone in it, is safe. The physical classroom should also include items that can help enrich learning including toys, coloring materials, books, etc. When a physical environment meets all of these qualifications, teachers are able to use it as a means of indirect guidance in the classroom, supporting the developmental needs of the students.

Guidance and discipline are an essential part of education for young children. Children need structure and they need to learn that the world they live in has rules and consequences. They need to know what behavior is socially acceptable, and what behavior is socially unacceptable. They also need to develop patience, a spirit of sharing, nonviolence, respect, and many other lessons that are also taught by discipline. Of course discipline must always be appropriate for the child and the situation. Extreme or abusive discipline will always do more harm than good.

Teachers spend the majority of time directing their time and effort to what goes on with their students inside the classroom, but part of being an effective teacher is understanding where students come from outside the classroom and making connections with the people who are important in the child's life. It is important to remember that no child comes into the classroom unattached, meaning each individual child comes from a unique family structure, culture, ethnicity, etc. They come into the classroom with important connections to family members and their culture. Teachers must work to create positive, reciprocal relationships with important family members of the children in their classroom. Parents and other caregivers should feel

welcome in the classroom, feel comfortable with the teacher, and feel like they can bring up questions or issues when they arise.

The role of a teacher in children's learning is one of a guide. Teachers can work tirelessly to develop lesson plans and perfect curriculum, but you can never *force* someone to learn.

Teachers need to make learning fun and interesting in order to encourage the child to become engaged in the learning process. They also need to be a guide in other ways. Being a responsive caregiver is also about responding to children's emotional needs. Children need to feel safe and cared for in order to learn. Children are able to learn if a teacher is able to create an environment where children feel safe and open to learning, and where learning is fun and interesting.

Teaching is both an art and a science. Without the science of development and the theoretical bases of past philosophers teachers are unable to come into the classroom with a comprehensive understanding of where their students are and where they can go. However teachers also need to see teaching as an art. They need to bring creativity, enthusiasm and compassion into the classroom to engage students and create attached relationships. The best teachers practice all of these ideas and work tirelessly to improve each day.

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