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Reflection:

Conceptualizing the Image of the Young Child

In analyzing the ‘ma’ or space between that separates us from children, my group hoped to achieve several goals. These goals included exploring what makes us similar and different to/from children/ our students. This introspective analysis would allow us to understand students/children and adults on a deeper level. Completing our project and watching others present allowed me to gain a new level of patience, empathy, and respect for children. As a result, my perception of how students learn, my role as a teacher, and how to plan my curriculum, evolved.

First of all, children are mini us! The main space between children and us is the time it takes for children to gain experiences in order to evolve into adults and the gradual shift away from taking time to play. It takes time and patience to develop self-control over our emotions. It takes time to control impulses, appropriately communicate needs and feelings orally, understanding and the acceptance of sharing or compromise, and distinguishing acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Some adults wish children would gain these attributes so they become more mature/wise to try to fill this gap between. As Kostelnik, Rupiper, Soderman and Phipps Whiren (2014) explain, the end goal is for them to become successful members of their communities. However, through this progressive shift, our values and feelings toward “play” and taking the time to play becomes less of a priority as we age. Instead, work, wisdom, and maturity become the goal.

As a result, we tried to portray the image of children as explorers and emphasize the importance and benefits of play for adults and children. Our three types of cards in our game included movement, language, pretend play, construction, games, and object play (Kostelnik et al., 2014). **PRETEND PLAY: Explorers need to play!** Play helps us remember to take turns while we play, negotiate, problem solve, cope with disappointment, listen to each other, and empathize. It’s practice for the real world and a reminder of the skills we need to use to live harmoniously. As Feeney and Moravcik (2005) wrote, children like language and repetitive or rhyming words and it can help them develop their literature. For this reason we included rhyming or descriptive riddles. **RIDDLES Explorers need laughter** for happiness and health. Riddles have been proven to develop intellectual critical thinking and problem solving skills. They improve reading skills, memory skills, reading comprehension as it can expand vocabulary, and can give the opportunity to teach others’ riddles. **ORANGE (Find and share) An explorer is somebody who** makes difficult and unique voyages that include personal challenges (as seen in the classroom and everyday life). These challenges help the student learn more about themselves as they interact with people and objects in the world around them.

We tried to represent teachers as facilitators/guide of explorers in the game. My role as a teacher is to prepare the environment by providing material and multisensory-activities creating the opportunities for children to get to explore and understand the world around them by touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, hearing (Kostelnik et al., 2014). Similarly to us, the “Mr. Blobert” group viewed children as explorers. Tying to our readings, the idea of “exploring” was inspired by the Reggio Emelia approach- a fundamental component is to allow topics to stem from children’s interest. According to Gilman (2007), it is through the teacher’s observation, guidance, and facilitation that the child expands their skills and knowledge. As a facilitator/ teacher, I will provide multiple types of play and opportunities for my students to explore materials on their own or in groups. For this reason, we had animal footprint moulds and tracks to peak the students’/players’ curiosity. I will adapt the materials as needed for students with physical or mental disabilities. However, to adhere to an inclusive classroom philosophy, tasks will be the same for all students. I will simply give struggling students the tools and guidance needed to complete these tasks.

There were multiple interpretations and representations of the image of the child and the space between. The various perspectives from the other groups taught me new ways of viewing the child and helped me enrich my teaching philosophy. The first group taught me that children are unique and diverse learners due to their background information. This group discussed race, gender, disability, culture, divorced parents as factors that help define our students’ nackgrounds. Knowledge of their backgrounds will help us make informed, sensitive, empathetic decisions and create effective learning environments (Kostelnik et al., 2014).

Another group represented the child as having rights. As an educator it is my job to teach my students explicitly of their rights. For example, according to UNICEF (2010), every child has the right to play and rest. For my students, I will review their rights and freedoms at the beginning of the year so that they are aware of their right and they know that they have power.

Another group captured the child as “ambitious dreamers”. It is my job as a teacher to help encourage my students’ to work hard and to follow their dreams. While doing so, it is important to avoid reinforcing gender roles. For example, a little girl, whom the group interviewed, stated that she wanted to be a police officer. When thinking about my practice in the future, I can create a career month as a topic in my Kindergarten class. According to O'Keefe and Shibley Hyde (1983), the little girl, expressing that she wanted to do a male dominated career, is atypical since most children choose stereotypical occupations for themselves even before they have a concept of gender stability. I can read books about students breaking gender roles or stereotypes.

Other groups represented the child as “an open book” with so much love, empathy, passion, and positivity. Children are naturally good and want to be good. It is my job to use their openness to help create an inclusive and safe environment where everyone cane share their ideas, opinions, and stories. Three groups represented their image of the child as creative individuals who are musical, clever, engaged, free-spirited, sense makers, whom use their five senses.

Another taught me that the child is a builder of the future society. It is important to help guide these individuals to becoming the next doctor, teacher, and business owners. This made me wonder, what morals, philosophies, skills, attitudes do I want to pass on for future generations?

One group created an interactive book that was split up to target the six developmental domains: social, emotional, physical, language, cognitive, aesthetic. Their image of the child project let students use their hands and body to manipulate, build, create, bead, sculpt, stick, order and experiment using various materials to either tell a story. Students could create their own characters and play with physical facial expressions to explain how they are feeling. As a teacher, I will create explorer stations for children to investigate various materials. At these stations, they will practice ordering, assembling, creating, and experimenting with shapes, colors, sounds, and patterns.

Another group had the similar idea of representing the five domains but used a Russian doll with multiple layers to express the six domains. Similarly to our interactive game, we wanted to give students/children an opportunity to explore without a facilitator. For ours, it was the paw models, the story, and hoof tracks.

However, our image of the child project focused more on portraying the role of the teacher as a nurturing guide and facilitator. Our game was meant to teach children to problem solve by working together, build relationships, and was a means of play, as it was a requirement for multiplayers to work together to complete the game (end puzzle piece). The facilitator in the game is the person reading the cards. They represent us as teachers; explaining the game, giving them guidance as they accomplish tasks, encouraging them along the way. These dynamic interactions are meant to develop a relationship of reciprocal trust between facilitator (teacher) and explorer (child). My image of the child and space between, as well as others’ interpretations, has helped me advance my perspective on children. I will take what I learned and apply it in my classroom and to my teaching.

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