

## Methods of Teaching Young Children

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## Outline

- Groupings for Learning Activities
- Direct Instruction
- Mini Lessons
- Playful Learning
- Learning Centres

## Groupings for Learning Activities

- **Large Group:** Entire class
  - Useful for...
    - Introducing key concepts or skills
    - Storytelling/Reading stories
    - Circle Time/Greeting Time
  - Shortcomings
    - More time spent in large-group activities at age 4 leads to lower thinking skills at age 7
    - Why?
      - In large groups, children...
        - Are passive
        - Do not get feedback on their learning
        - Do not practice their language skills
        - Are often distracted
        - Are learning what is best for the group, not what is best for their own unique abilities and interests

## Groupings for Learning Activities

- Recommendations for Large Group Instruction
  - Only use 2 or 3 times each day
  - Use for as little of time as possible
  - Only 10 to 20 minutes at a time

## Groupings for Learning Activities

- **Small Groups:** Four to seven children
  - Useful for...
    - Teaching specific skills (e.g., writing)
    - Engage in instructional conversations (e.g., religious studies)
    - Ask questions and pose challenges (e.g., maths)
    - Conduct guided explorations (e.g., science)
    - Guided reading activities
  - Recommendations for Small Group instruction
    - Gather small groups during learning centre time
    - Teach in small groups while other children are working on assignments independently or in pairs
    - Use the class assistant or other volunteers to implement a learning activity with a small group

## Groupings for Learning Activities

- **Pairs:** Two children
  - Useful for...
    - Children modeling for each other
    - Children guiding and giving feedback to each other
    - Practicing social skills
  - Recommendations for Pairing Children
    - Teach the children how to *guide* each other, not do the work for the other

## Groupings for Learning Activities

- **Individually:** Each child by themselves
  - Useful for...
    - Practicing skills (e.g., writing)
  - Recommendations for individual learning activities
    - Allow children to talk quietly while working because speech is used to guide behavior

## Direct Instruction

- **Direct Instruction:** Teacher communicates new information to pupils
  - Useful for teaching...
    - Facts
    - Vocabulary
    - Rules
    - Names of Objects
  - Shortcomings
    - Generally not effective for teaching most skills to young children, who need hands-on activities
  - Recommendations for use:
    - **ALWAYS** include a learning activity where children put what they have learned from direct instruction into practice
    - Do not use direct instruction for more than 10 minutes at a time
    - Try to incorporate storytelling as much as possible

## Mini Lessons

- **Mini-Lesson:** Short lesson with a narrow focus of a specific skill or concept
  - 5 to 15 minute lesson
  - “Children don’t get better *during* the lesson – its *after* the lesson when they practice the skill that they improve their abilities” (Smekens Education Solutions)
- Useful for teaching...
  - A particular skill
  - A tip or strategy that children will use often
  - Classroom rules or procedures

## Mini Lessons

- **Typical Steps**
  - **Introduction:** Announce the skill
    - Connect the skill to students’ interests or previous learning if possible
  - **Instruction:** Through explanation and demonstration
    - Demonstrate the skill, oftentimes using *think aloud*
  - **Practice:** Guide the children in practicing the skill together
  - **Conclusion:** Summarize the skill
- After a mini-lesson, children should be given repeated opportunities to practice the skill



## Playful Learning

- There are many different definitions of play, but most have these essential ingredients:
  - FUN and Enjoyable
  - Children are actively involved
- “Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills” (UNICEF, 2018, p. 7)

## Playful Learning

- Useful for...
  - Developing social and character skills
  - Developing language
  - Developing creativity
  - Improving physical development
  - Improving children’s understanding
  - Motivating children to practice skills
  - Learning how to solve problems

## Continuum of Play

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### Free Choice Play

- **Free choice play:** Children are free to play in any manner they choose
  - **Enriched play:** Teachers look for opportunities to teach academic content and nurture holistic development as children are playing
- **Structured play:** Teachers plan a playful activity for children to participate in

### Structured Play

## Example of Enriched Play

- **Mathematize:** A conversation about mathematical concepts that children use in their everyday and/or play experiences
  - Children use maths concepts – and all academic concepts – in their everyday experiences
  - Teachers should *mathematize* children's playful activities and everyday activities by identifying how math can be incorporated into the child's activity and then leading a mathematical discussion
  - Asking questions is more effective than instruction!

## Enriched Play

- Children learn more effectively if teachers capitalize on children's experiences with academic concepts during playful explorations
  - As children are engaged in play – and all other activities – look for opportunities to discuss:
    - Letters and words (reading)
    - Vocabulary words
    - Quantities, patterns, measurement, and shapes (maths)
    - Science concepts
    - Observation, comparison, prediction, and reflection (scientific inquiry)
    - Social Studies and Religious Studies concepts

## Learning Centre

- **Learning Centre:** Specific area of the classroom organized around a topic, theme, or activity in which children engage in self-directed activities to learn, practice, or develop their abilities
  - **Specific area:** The learning centre is in a clearly defined part of the classroom
  - **Organized:** Learning centres take considerable preparation by the teacher, primarily in terms of gathering learning materials
  - **Topic, theme, or activity**
    - *Topic:* Subject like Mathematics Centre
    - *Theme:* Specific experience such as Tailor Shop
    - *Activity:* Example is Block Play
  - **SELF-DIRECTED ACTIVITIES:** The teacher only introduces the learning centre and provides occasional guidance. Children then engage in activities with the materials using their own understanding and ideas
    - The teacher should NOT have to direct children after the initial introduction
  - **Learn, practice, or develop their abilities:** Children may learn (e.g., something new) but more frequently practice (e.g., practice counting) and/or engage in activities that develop holistic skills (e.g., physical and social development)

## Example Learning Centres

### Academic

- Literacy Centre
- Writing Centre
- Maths Centre
- Science Centre
- Engineering Centre

### Holistic Development

- Dramatic Play
- Blocks
- Water Play
- Sand Play
- Cultural Play

## Learning Centres

- Useful for...
  - Developing social and character skills
  - Developing language
  - Developing creativity
  - Improving physical development
  - Improving children's understanding
  - Motivating children to practice skills
  - Learning how to solve problems

## Learning Centres

- Recommendations
  - *"Children play best with what they know best."*
    - Use materials that children are familiar with
  - Introduce materials slowly to not overwhelm children
  - Lead mini-lessons on learning activities that children can do in the learning centres, then leave the materials in the centre for future use
  - Children need in-depth time to get engaged and learn during learning centres (45 to 90 minutes)
  - Typically, children are free to choose their learning centre
  - The teacher and class assistant should interact with children throughout learning centre time

## Developing Learning Centres

- There are 2 key parts to developing a learning centre
  1. Plan the Learning Centre
    - Determine the theme
    - Gather relevant materials and organize them attractively in the Learning Centre
  2. Introduce the Learning Centre
    - Attract children's interest
    - Activate prior knowledge

## Materials for Learning Centres: Loose Parts

- “Loose Parts”: Open-ended materials that can be used and manipulated in many ways
  - Rocks
  - Seeds, Leaves, Sticks, Flowers and other Plant materials
  - Boxes
  - Bottle Caps
  - Beads
  - Buttons
  - Straws
  - Match boxes
  - Fabric pieces
  - Small plastic containers
  - Cutlery
  - Cotton
  - Etc.

## Materials for Learning Centres: Loose Parts

- **Literacy:** Make letters
- **Maths:** Count, compare quantities, add/subtract, make shapes, make patterns, measure
- **Science:** Make careful observations of natural materials
- **Engineering:** Design structures
- **Art:** Design pictures
- Also develops:
  - Fine motor skills
  - Creativity/Imagination
  - Social skills
  - Oral language

## Introducing Learning Centre

- There are 4 steps to Introducing a Learning Centre
1. Present the topic
    - Arouse children's interest in the topic
      - Tell a story
      - Sing a song
      - Present a short skit
    - **Ask questions** that activate children's background knowledge
  2. Explain the materials in the Centre and what can be done with them
    - **Use question-and-answer** to get children to identify and explain the materials
  3. Suggest activities that children can participate in at the centre
  4. Announce any rules for the learning centre

## Learning Centre

- As children are participating in self-directed activities in the learning centre:
  - Be available to answer questions
  - Observe children's activities to guide them to more in-depth understanding
  - Model activities in the learning centre
  - Ask children to describe what they are doing (nurtures oral language)
  - Ask questions to deepen children's understanding of important concepts or vocabulary words
  - Observe children's activities to evaluate whether the materials are effective