



For Children
Ages 0–6

Saudi National Curriculum Framework

برنامج التحول
الوطني 2020



وزارة التعليم
Ministry of Education

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Saudi National Curriculum Framework

For Children Ages 0-6

**Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
2018**

Ministry of Education

Tatweer Company for Educational Services

National Association for the Education of Young Children

برنامج التحول
الوطني 2020



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Foreword

A Letter from the Minister of Education

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has shown a special interest in the development of the educational system and working towards the improvement of its quality through a series of ambitious programs. Such interest was reflected in the Saudi Vision 2030, which has clearly articulated a deep interest in early childhood as being a key phase, and that the child has the right to have access to a quality education wherever that child may be. The Vision has also stressed the importance of developing the national curriculum, training teachers, and that the outcomes of our education system are in line with the market needs.

Based on these articulations, the Vision is a strategic starting point to create a strong, comprehensive system of early childhood education that reflects best global practice.

For more than thirty years now, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has been working in collaboration with local Saudi universities, early childhood consultancy firms including Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and international consultants such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to develop and promote the quality of the early childhood educational process.

In order to achieve the Vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2030 related to early childhood, and on which the strategic orientations of the MoE are based, the Ministry has launched, under the umbrella of the National Transformational Program, an initiative called “The development of Nurseries and Kindergarten Programs, and the expansion of their services across the Kingdom.” The initiative includes many projects such as the development of the national curriculum, the Saudi Early Learning Standards, the quality assurance system, and policies and regulations.

It really gives us great pleasure to introduce this document as the Saudi Early Learning Curriculum Framework for Children Ages 0-6, which was developed by competent and specialized national cadres in cooperation with Tatweer Co. For Educational Services (T4Edu) and NAEYC.

We do hope that all stakeholders in early childhood education take advantage of this framework to create and develop other cognitive frameworks for the content of the services rendered to the child.

H.E. Ahmad Bin Mohammad Al Eisa, PhD
Minister of Education, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

A Letter from the Vice Minister of Education

The Saudi Vision 2030 has stressed the importance of investing in education and training and providing our children with the knowledge and skills necessary for future jobs. The Vision has also affirmed that every Saudi child can have access to quality education in a variety of options, and that a greater focus is to be placed on early education. Such interest in early childhood education has been manifested in one of the initiatives proposed by the National Transformation Program, and it is called, “The development of Nurseries and Kindergarten Programs, and the expansion of their services across the Kingdom.” It aims to achieve quality services in the field of early childhood, including the curriculum, standards, quality assurance, and policies and regulation development.

As a result of this initiative, The Saudi Early Learning Curriculum Framework for Children Ages 0-6 has been developed in cooperation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

The importance of developing the national curriculum for early childhood is due to the uniqueness of the stage that distinguishes it from the other stages of education. Studies and research have shown how critical such a stage is in the formation of the comprehensive personality of the child, which positively affects his future academic and practical life. This framework aims to guide the practices of teachers, families, and caregivers to be appropriate for the child’s developmental characteristics and needs during this stage, which in turn support basic growth areas to open learning channels for the child and enable him to experience discovery, understanding, experimentation, and conclusion, and thus build new knowledge to support the educational system in the later stages.

This early learning curriculum framework describes principles, theories, and research findings that support and promote the learning of young children from birth to age six, and it addresses what we already know from researchers regarding the development and learning of children. It is also grounded in learning theory and widely-accepted professional discourse on practice, and is guided by the philosophical, social, and religious basis for teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia.

The curriculum framework is considered to be a guide for the coming stage, in which comprehensive content is to be created to support the child’s different areas of physical, social-emotional, language, and cognitive development. It will also help the institutions and stakeholders in early childhood education from other sectors in developing the cognitive frameworks for the content of the services rendered to the child.

The document was developed by a selected number of preschool leaders at the MoE and specialists in early childhood education (leaders, teachers, trainers, etc.), as well as specialized faculty members in cooperation with Tatweer Co. For Educational Services, our strategic partner for educational development, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and a team of curriculum specialists from School Readiness Consulting. Their great efforts have laid the foundation for the development of the Saudi Early Learning Curriculum Framework, which is considered to be a leading work not only on the Kingdom’s level, but also on the Arab and Islamic Worlds’ levels.

We offer special thanks to everyone who helped and contributed to making this work a fabulous success! We also hope that this work is reflected into the practices of those who are working in the educational field, and that it may become a starting point for the next stages.

H.E. Haya Bint Abdulaziz Al-Awad, PhD

Vice Minister of Education

Head of the Nurseries and Kindergartens Development Program Initiative

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Introduction



The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has shown a special interest in the development of preschool and kindergarten programs since 1985. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with local Saudi universities and international organizations including Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), showed its support to the early learning sector through the development of a national curriculum.

As a result, many training centers for preschool and kindergarten teachers were established to build teacher capacity to implement curriculum, provide high-quality early learning experiences, and implement similar early learning practices across all areas of the Kingdom. This had a significant impact on young children's education at the regional level. In addition, the early learning sector gained national backing through its recognition as an official sub-system within Saudi Arabia's education system in 2010, allowing its official consideration and adoption into national strategic planning efforts.

Looking Ahead

This project has been initiated in accordance with the resolution of the Council of Ministers stating that all preschool and nursery affairs come under the Ministry of Education (Resolution No. 152, February 8, 2016). The resolution mandates the transformation of all elements of early childhood education programs and systems to ensure that early learning opportunities for all children, ages birth to six years, are aligned with recent research, early learning theory, and the national goals of Saudi Vision 2030. With that in mind, the key features of the updated curriculum are its promotion of authentic, self-directed learning and its basis in widely-accepted theories that elevate play and interaction as the components of learning.

As we carry out this project, we should rely primarily on Almighty Allah, and also on the capabilities of Saudi experts to develop a curriculum framework supported by theory and research and founded on the many strengths of the Kingdom. This approach will allow us to achieve our ultimate goal of a harmonious and robust educational system capable of meeting the needs of all children according to their age and developmental needs.

With this heightened national focus on early learning, and an emphasis on building the capacity of teachers and program leaders, the Saudi Vision 2030 has clearly articulated a deep interest in early childhood. Thus it has driven consistent progress in related policy, and has become a significant point of strength to support ongoing investment in early learning at all levels.

“We will invest particularly in developing early childhood education, refining our national curriculum and training our teachers and education leaders. We will also redouble efforts to ensure that the outcomes of our education system are in line with market needs.” (Vision 2030, p. 36.)

The National Curriculum Framework

In general, national curriculum frameworks seek to support and facilitate high-quality education across national education systems to guarantee, as much as possible, that children have a consistent learning experience throughout their schooling. An early learning curriculum framework describes the “why” of the curriculum by establishing the foundational philosophical and related practical components of the curriculum and offering a rationale rooted in relevant theory and current research.

The Saudi Early Learning Curriculum Framework is designed for a variety of stakeholders in early childhood education with different levels of familiarity with early childhood policies and practices. It describes principles, theories, and research findings that support and promote the learning of young children from birth to age six and promotes consistency in the educational philosophy and pedagogical approaches in early learning programs across the Kingdom. It addresses both what we know (research) and what we believe (national and global values) about children’s learning and development. This framework is grounded in learning theory and widely-accepted professional discourse on developmentally appropriate practice, and is guided by the philosophical, social, and religious basis for teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. The Curriculum Framework is not designed to offer practical implementation guidance to teachers or program leaders, but rather to propose a philosophical focus for early learning curriculum that is based on current research, relevant theory, and widely accepted developmentally appropriate practice.

Methodology and Contents

The document was developed in cooperation with Tatweer Co. For Educational Services, our strategic partner for educational development, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and a team of curriculum specialists from School Readiness Consulting, and co-authored by a Saudi advisory team consisting of a group of early learning specialists and representatives of the Ministry of Education (e.g., leaders, researchers, trainers, teachers), plus members of the faculty of two prominent Saudi universities. The

team attended a series of workshops and participated in an international study tour to immerse themselves in the theory, guiding principles, and best practices related to curriculum development. Content was developed and integrated into an organizing framework which included the following components:

Chapter 1. A Vision For Children’s Learning

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the rest of the Framework by providing the cultural foundation on which the National Curriculum will be developed. It traces the evolution of early education in the Kingdom and provides an overview of the national impetus for the development of the curriculum as part of a larger national, social, and economic strategy to be accomplished by 2030. Finally, it provides an in-depth discussion of the theory and practice informing each of the three pillars: Islamic education, national identity, and the international mindset.

Chapter 2. Essential Learning Theory

Chapter 2 addresses differing theories of early childhood that inform approaches to children’s learning and development. These include: 1) Cognitive Development Theory, focused on describing processes of change in children’s learning and development over time; 2) Sociocultural Theory, emphasizing the numerous roles that families, teachers, and peers play in children’s learning; 3) Social Learning Theory, focused on the role of experience, observation, and modeling in children’s learning and behavior.

Chapter 3. Teacher Practice

Chapter 3 provides an overview and discussion of critical teaching practices and dispositions that ensure effective curriculum implementation and support children’s learning and development. This includes a description of the characteristics of: 1) The Informed Teacher; 2) The Intentional Teacher; and 3) The Responsive Teacher, and exemplifies how these dispositions manifest in effective practice.

Chapter 4. Pedagogical Principles

Chapter 4 reflects contemporary theories and research evidence concerning children’s learning and early childhood pedagogy. Principles discussed include: 1) Secure, respectful, and reciprocal relationships; 2) Strong partnerships with families and communities; 3) Teachers as self-evaluators, reflective practitioners, and lifelong learners.

Chapter 5. The Saudi Early Learning Standards

Chapter 5 provides a brief overview of the Saudi Early Learning Standards (SELS) 3-6, the recently developed SELS 0-3, and how each connects to the Curriculum Framework.



Chapter 1.

A Vision for Children's Learning



It is well established in developmental research and theory that the early years are a critical period for learning and development. It is during the first months and years of life that children develop the skills and knowledge they need for lifelong learning and well-being.

Therefore, access to high-quality early learning and care for all children is critical to ensure a quality life for the child from the very beginning. Experiences in early childhood have a formative impact on children's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development, along with their aptitudes and readiness to learn. Central to this process, young children's brains are establishing vital neural connections at an unmatched rate, which provides the foundation for all future learning (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2017). It is also during the early years that children begin to develop a strong foundational knowledge of Islam that will support the development of self-awareness and instill an understanding of their national heritage and identity.

The individual's personal and social lives are deeply rooted in Islam. Therefore, supporting religious competencies provides children with the basis for living in peace and security. In addition, the promotion of religious competencies builds a child's **national identity** as it is related to their sense of belonging, the conservation of identity, national allegiance, and the stability of society. An education grounded in national identity supports the child's acquisition of knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes that lead to values for shared life, rule following, freedom, and respect for the values of others. Another important role of early learning is to prepare children with knowledge and skills for the 21st century, as they remain rooted firmly in Islamic and national values, and construct the deep **conceptual knowledge** needed to face the challenges of globalization in a changing world. To grow as global citizens, the children of Saudi Arabia will need to develop a set of skills and knowledge based on three pillars of learning: 1) **Islamic education**; 2) national identity; and 3) the **international mindset**. These goals must be translated into concrete practices that are embedded in the early learning curriculum.

I. Islamic Education

“Religious competence is extremely important for young Saudi Arabian children to fully develop in and understand their world.”
(Saudi Early Learning Standards: Children 3 to 6 Years Old, 2015, p. 143)

Islamic education establishes faith in God (Almighty Allah) in the hearts of children and acknowledges man’s place in the world and in society. In addition, it addresses children’s development of values and dispositions such as love, cooperation, tolerance, humility, and equality. It builds an understanding of the connections between an individual’s well-being and the well-being, strength, and cohesion of society as a whole. In that sense, Islamic education is the basis for how the child grows socially and morally and becomes a balanced and responsible individual (Dagestani, 2005). Islam has provided a holistic educational approach that cares for and protects the child. Islamic principles acknowledge and recognize each child’s rights, including the rights to life, sustenance, love of all types and forms, fair treatment, protection from injustice, and education. The learning and protection afforded to each child by his membership in the Islamic community meets the child’s needs for security, social acceptance and appreciation, a sense of success and freedom, and authentic experiences, and has set these rights as the foundations for education (Sharif, 2007).

Islamic education is driven by the child’s natural curiosity about religion, which begins at an early age as he observes the religious practices and values of those around him. The young child is motivated by curiosity to ask questions about the mystery of the existence of his surroundings and how religion relates to the unexplained aspects of the world (Dagestani, 2005). This interest in turn can lead to curiosity about the natural world, the characteristics and well-being of others, and understanding of the self in relation to others. These realizations form the foundation of important social-emotional skills children need to establish meaningful relationships with others and manage their own behavior as well as the skills and knowledge they will need to support their learning in all areas including: cognitive, social-emotional, and physical domains.

Focus On Practice–Islamic Education

The teacher . . .

Plans activities that are both related to Islamic values and connected to more universal concepts, and integrates these in **developmentally appropriate** learning experiences, without allocating long periods devoted specifically to Islamic education.

Acts as a role model of Islamic values in the way she interacts with children, co-teachers, families, and the community, and shows appreciation for the attempts of children to practice behaviors that reflect the values and ethics of Islam (Al-Qaimi, 1995).

Respects the individuality of each child and works to develop each child’s positive self-concept by planning activities based on the child’s developmental strengths, interests, and abilities.

Considers the child's age and abilities in presenting Islamic concepts and activities and introduces new ideas that are simple, concrete, easy to understand, and built on previous learning.

Offers Islamic experiences that are interesting, play-based, age appropriate, and culturally informed, such as Islamic chants, artwork, storytelling, and discussions.

Encourages children to reflect on the universe and its creator (e.g. stars, planets, earth, etc.) and helps children to develop religious **competency** through questioning and dialogue (Dagestani, 2005).

Includes materials related to religious practice into learning centers (e.g. block corner accessories include models/structures related to religion, literacy corner includes books and stories related to religious concepts, the dramatic play corner includes a prayer mat, etc.).

Involves parents and program staff in planning events that celebrate religious occasions and uses these as opportunities to talk about religion with children (Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Hajj, Eid al-Adha).

II. National Identity

The development of national identity has a multi-level psychological structure: the cognitive/knowledge level, the beliefs level, and the emotional level. The cognitive/knowledge level includes recognizing the existence of a national group (i.e., awareness that a group of people are classified together, for example, the Saudi people). There is also knowledge related to the natural characteristics of the geographic region, as well as national emblems, customs, cultural heritage, important historical events and figures representing the homeland, and knowledge of one's own membership in that national group. The beliefs level refers to the common characteristics of the nation's people and the ideals, norms, and values that are shared across the national community, as well as the shared characteristics of all citizens. On the emotional level, national identity involves internal feelings of belonging to the national community, a sense of connectedness to the people who form the national group, and other emotions such as national pride and a sense of attachment to the country. The acquisition of this complex system of knowledge, beliefs, and emotions occurs over many years and extends from early childhood through adolescence (Barrett, 2000).

Young children take an interest in their **individual identities**, including their name, gender, family, and physical characteristics such as skin color, hair, and eyes. Self-concept refers to children's understanding of themselves as individuals and recognition of what makes them unique and distinct from others. Children's earliest sense of self is linked to concrete characteristics, and the way that others respond to these characteristics leads to the development of self-esteem. Developing a sense of personal identity and healthy self-esteem is important for their success in school and personal life (Copple & Bredekamp, 2014).

As children grow, they begin to develop social or group identities. Just as self-concept refers to what makes the child unique, social or group identity refers to the understanding of what makes her community unique. As children begin to take greater notice of other people, roles and responsibilities, and how people live and work together, they develop a sense of belonging

associated with certain people and places (Saudi Early Learning Standards for Children 3 to 6 Years Old, 2015). **Social identity** includes elements such as race, **culture**, gender, religion, socio-economic status, and geographical identity (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2012).

The national education is a collection of knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes that contribute to the child's values for shared life, following rules, fairness, and behaving appropriately while respecting other communities' values. The importance of building the national identity is closely related to sustaining allegiance and community stability, along with its impact on nurturing the child to be an effective citizen in his community. Children acquire the values and skills of citizenship through experiences and interactions with others, and this requires a methodology where adults and children share rights and duties in the early learning environment (Caliphah, 2011).

Focus On Practice–National Identity

The teacher . . .

Integrates age-appropriate learning experiences and discussions related to national identity within the daily routines of the classroom, without forcing rote memorization of facts or ideas (Copple & Bredekamp, 2014).

Encourages children to acquire basic skills and concepts related to geography through simple spatial activities such as drawing a map of the classroom or neighborhood, or reading the map of the outdoor playground (Copple & Bredekamp, 2014).

Provides concrete materials and supplies (i.e., books, pictures, paintings, costumes, etc.) that reflect important places, practices, and daily life experiences.

Supports foundational understanding of the passage of time and sequence of events through activities such as reviewing the daily schedule, reviewing the days of the week, and arranging the parts of a story into chronological order (Epstein, 2014). Thus, she prepares children for an awareness of historical sequence, an essential factor in national identity development.

Nurtures the child's respect for nature by providing opportunities for play and discovery with natural materials. Children need opportunities to observe nature, care for plants and animals, and take responsibility for the care and maintenance of the classroom environment (Epstein, 2014).

Encourages children to participate in decision-making in the classroom and kindergarten community by developing rules, examining results, expressing views in a secure democratic environment, defending their own rights, and respecting the rights of others (Caliphah, 2011). Provides opportunities for choices and follow-through with persistence and effort focused towards their goal.

Encourages families from various regions of the Kingdom and beyond to share their traditions, holidays and celebrations, chants, and folk stories with the children in the kindergarten classroom.

Plans with children and families to celebrate national and religious events and to participate in civic services, such as volunteering to clean a mosque or visiting a nursing home.

III. The International Mindset

For the first time in history, mankind is witnessing the world coming together as a unified entity. Despite existing geographical and ideological boundaries, the world is experiencing a shift toward a global economy, diversity, and international connectedness, where all people share in a collective destiny. This phenomenon is called “internationalism,” and our response to it has become the basis for survival (Berdan & Berdan, 2013).

As people across national boundaries become increasingly interdependent, children need to be exposed to an international education that is linked to their own essential cultural values and at the same time facilitates vital connections to the broader world. Starting in early childhood, children need to develop an open, global perspective of learning that respects diversity and enables them to communicate effectively across cultures. Children learn best in a positive environment that promotes tolerance, justice, and peace, mitigates bias and violence, and builds the skills to cope with the challenges and harness the opportunities associated with globalization (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2015).

Early learning programs that are focused on supporting children’s ability to think globally must be well-designed to support analytical skills, critical thinking, and mental flexibility. This will motivate and activate the child’s thinking capacities and encourage creativity, innovation, problem solving, and the ability to take on diverse perspectives (Berdan & Berdan, 2013). Integrating the identified skills needed for success in the 21st century includes: creativity, communication, collaboration and critical-thinking skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). In the context of the Saudi early learning curriculum, the goals of the international mindset include: maintaining national, community, and personal identity, promoting respect for diversity, recognizing the equal value of all people, building a society that thinks globally, and the values of social cohesion, economic opportunity, and sustainable development (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2015).

Focus On Practice–The International Mindset

The teacher . . .

Models open-mindedness to various cultures and respect for **cultural diversity** and considers this modeling to be one of the most powerful tools to help the child acquire an international mindset.

Focuses on the strengths and assets of others when addressing issues of cultural diversity with children.

Encourages open dialogue and shows respect for children’s views and decisions during the daily program (Epstein, 2014). Supports children’s ideas, unique solutions, and creative thinking.

Plans to promote skills that are essential for the development of an international mindset, including critical and analytical thinking and diverse perspective taking, throughout the day.

Familiarizes herself with elements of the cultures represented in the classroom and beyond (i.e., clothing, food, housing, transportation, etc.) and introduces these to children through picture books, stories, field trips, displays, and materials in the classroom.

Engages families in activities that support diverse perspective taking, connectedness to others in the learning community, and the development of an international mindset.

Acts as a leader of other teachers, program leaders, and families around issues of cultural awareness and tolerance in the learning community by conducting discussions on these topics and interrupting patterns of intolerance.

Recognizes differences among children and discusses these in accurate and positive ways, demonstrating an appreciation for cultural diversity and promoting national, regional, and family pride for all children, especially by celebrating religious and national occasions (Eid Days, Saudi National Day, etc.).

Participates with external bodies such as the General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage, Media and Culture, and the Center for National Dialogue to build her own competencies around the international mindset, openness to other cultures, and building positive cross-cultural relationships.

IV. Conclusion

Through the development of knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes, the child progressively forms a set of skills enabling him to thrive within society, with beliefs and values for shared life that include respect for the differing values and characteristics of others, along with deep roots and pride in his own cultural and religious beliefs. As children grow, they develop knowledge of their historical and cultural heritage, starting with simple and concrete ideas and building toward more sophisticated knowledge and understandings. The three pillars of early learning are vital to the stability of society and have important implications for the present and future success of the Saudi people.

Here we have discussed developmentally appropriate strategies to support the development of children's competencies around Islamic education, national identity, and the international mindset. The success of these strategies, however, is linked to the capacities of specialized and well-trained teachers, who are in touch with the educational, scientific, and technological demands of a rapidly changing world. Therefore, significant effort is needed to support professional development systems that build international mindsets and associated skills in emerging early childhood teachers. Teacher preparation programs (universities) must incorporate coursework related to the theoretical framework and research basis of the Saudi National Curriculum and have a high regard for the emerging skill sets that teachers need to prepare young children for the 21st century. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop systems that enhance the international mindset and build related expertise in the existing early childhood workforce.

Essential Learning Theory



To ensure the highest quality and relevance of the Saudi early learning curriculum, it must be based on a strong foundation of broadly accepted knowledge of child development and learning. For this reason, the Curriculum Framework places significant emphasis on relevant **learning theories** that will drive all further conceptualization and development of the national curriculum (Al-Nashif, 2014).

Established learning theory should inform the way that curriculum is designed and enacted in the early learning environment. This includes instructional strategies, ways of preparing the learning environment, planned interactions between teachers and children, and tools to observe and assess children's learning.

This chapter will focus on the relevant early learning theory that provides the fundamental knowledge of young children's development and learning, upon which the Saudi early learning curriculum is established. To approach teaching and learning from a **whole-child perspective**, it is useful to explore and integrate an array of critical early learning theories that inform the way children's behavior is viewed and the way we understand the building of knowledge. This chapter will discuss **constructivism** with a focus on Cognitive Development Theory, Sociocultural Theory for its implications in play-based, **concept-driven** learning, as well as the way that teachers plan for **scaffolded** learning and the curricular implications of Social Learning Theory to further understand the links between behavior, teaching, and learning in the social context of the early childhood classroom.

I. Cognitive Development Theory

Cognitive Development deals with the nature and acquisition of knowledge itself. A widely recognized theory of cognitive development was proposed by the Swiss theorist Jean Piaget, who suggested that knowledge is built gradually, or "constructively," and through increasingly sophisticated cognitive processes as the child progresses in age and capabilities. He posited that the most authentic learning occurs when the child is exposed to new experiences and is



able to connect these new experiences to his previous experiences (Abu Ghazal, 2016). The work and findings of Jean Piaget will hereafter be referred to as “Cognitive Development Theory.” Cognitive Development Theory emphasizes the importance of the child’s internal processing of his interactions with his surroundings (i.e., the environment, the materials, and people), suggesting that the more opportunity that children have to interact freely with their surroundings, the more they can learn (Al-Qutami, 2013).

Cognitive Development Theory is founded on the widely-accepted belief that learning is an active process. Hence, the child is not a passive receiver of knowledge, but instead, she actively works to construct, connect, and apply experiences, to challenge previous knowledge, and to connect with new knowledge in an ongoing process. Moreover, Cognitive Development Theory posits that human beings follow the cognitive process of classifying knowledge into **schemata** (Abu Ghazal, 2016). A schema is the result of a resolution of a period of **disequilibrium** as the child makes sense of a new experience or concept according to his prior knowledge, or is required to challenge his prior knowledge because new information is introduced. The development of a new schema requires a two-part process: **assimilation** and **accommodation** (Abu Ghazal, 2016). Assimilation is defined as the process through which the child matches the incoming stimuli with the patterns that already exists in his/her mind. Accommodation is the process through which the child adapts his/her existing schemata according to the new incoming stimuli (Thomas, 2005).

Additionally, Cognitive Development Theory suggests that the modes by which children build knowledge change with age and their developmental stage. Piaget identifies four major stages of cognitive development:

The Sensorimotor Period (birth to two years of age)

In this stage, children are constructing knowledge primarily through the use of their senses and the movement of their bodies.

The Preoperational Period (two to seven years of age)

In this stage, thought can begin to take precedence over the senses, and children are beginning to use symbolic representation in their play. Children at this stage are able to think and solve problems through the manipulation of objects and interactions with real materials and concrete experiences.

The Concrete Operations Period (seven to eleven years of age)

In this stage, the child can begin to solve problems logically as they apply to concrete objects or events and can begin to take on others’ perspectives.

The Formal Operations Period (eleven years of age through adulthood)

In this stage, the child develops the capacity for abstract and hypothetical thought, **metacognition**, and critical perspective taking.

Cognitive Development Theory acknowledges that moving from one stage to another happens gradually, and that all children go through the stages in the same order during the cognitive development process, but the abilities of children can differ considerably within one stage

(Thomas, 2005). One important limitation of this theory is that it describes development in terms of rigid developmental periods, rather than a flexible continuum, in which children may advance and regress at times due to a variety of internal and external factors. However, the cognitive stages that Piaget presents offer a useful framework to plan developmentally appropriate learning environments and experiences for young children and understand the role of maturation in children's readiness to learn (Al-Qutami, 2013).

Focus On Practice—Cognitive Development Theory

The teacher . . .

Provides opportunities for natural interactions between the child and the environment and between the child and others (adults and peers). Also, she should provide a rich learning environment for the children, including a variety of familiar and unfamiliar materials.

Creates learning experiences based on circumstances in children's daily lives. For instance, if a marker is dry, she could use this as a basis for a scientific investigation and problem solving, inviting children to explore possible solutions.

Accurately aligns learning objectives to practical tasks for children and understands the complexity of different tasks, including how they address multiple areas of learning and development at one time.

Provides a rich learning environment that provokes children's curiosity and provides many opportunities to explore and manipulate materials and objects.

Works to enrich the children's vocabulary, recognizing that language is a critical tool that children use to construct knowledge and make meaning.

Provides opportunities for children to practice engaging in **the inquiry cycle** (i.e., asking/ wondering, investigation, discussion, reflection, and action).

Organizes materials into learning centers to allow children to pursue specific topics of individual and shared interest.

II. Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural Theory was proposed by Russian theorist Lev Vygotsky in the early 1900s. Unlike other theorists that concentrated on the role of maturation in children's learning, Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social interaction and the role of more experienced others in enhancing the development of the child (Thomas, 2005). Central to Sociocultural Theory is the idea that each child has a **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**, which is the space between what the child knows and can do without help and what is outside of the child's developmental reach at any given time. This presents the important role of **scaffolding**, which is the assistance that the teacher or more experienced peer can provide as a way of bridging a child's knowledge and expanding his capability in manageable increments (Abu Ghazal, 2016).

Sociocultural Theory differentiates between **spontaneous concepts** and **scientific concepts**, explaining that children initially understand concepts based on their existing knowledge until they are taught the actual scientific explanations and are able to replace spontaneous concepts with scientific concepts (Thomas, 2005). To that end, Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the use of language as a tool for transforming knowledge. The child uses the language that he/she gains through interactions with others as a tool for thinking through and classifying knowledge and making meaning of an array of complex phenomena.

Sociocultural Theory confers the importance of play in children's development for the rich opportunities that it provides for children to exchange language and use symbols, as children create a shared understanding for symbols that they use during play. For instance, during play a child may hold a stick and pretend that he is riding a horse, and thereby, the stick becomes a shared symbol for a horse (Abu Ghazal, 2016). Research on early literacy associates the child's experience with shared symbols with their growing **concepts about print**, or the recognition that letters are unique symbols that carry shared meaning, and therefore, opportunities for symbolic play with others facilitate early literacy development (Neuman & Dickinson, 2011). Moreover, play supports enhanced imagination and affords children opportunities to envision themselves in a variety of adult roles, enabling them to explore a broad range of potential aptitudes (Thomas, 2005).

Focus On Practice—Sociocultural Theory

The teacher . . .

Arranges the classroom environment in a way that encourages social interaction between children through the use of language for a variety of purposes.

Uses precise and extended language when speaking with children to enrich their language and understanding of a variety of concepts.

Provides open-ended materials and props that allow children to use their imaginations and encourages their creative thinking.

Relies on careful observation to understand children's developmental levels in terms of the ZPD and offers assistance to children when needed. She is diligent to regularly trade materials that her students have already mastered for more challenging materials.

Builds secure relationships with children that encourage inquiry and open discussion of a variety of topics. Provides a safe environment where children are able to try new things and explore new possibilities.

Works in partnership with families to better understand children's developmental levels and learning needs.

Acts intentionally to group children heterogeneously by ability at opportune times to encourage learning from one another.

Understands the significant role of culture in children's prior experiences and learning processes, and honors cultural differences between children.

Encourages children to take on different roles within the group. Some of these roles may include:

- An observer, noticing the ideas and perspectives of others
- An encourager, inspiring and supporting others to persist
- A leader, establishing group norms, play schemes, and symbols
- A negotiator, accommodating the play scheme to include more friends, or to make up for the loss of an important object
- A facilitator, preparing the space and materials needed for play

III. Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory was proposed by Albert Bandura in the 1970s and elevated the importance of children's observations and learning from role models. Bandura posits that observation is a primary tool for learning, replicating and altering human behavior. Children can learn much about accepted and unaccepted behaviors through observing what others do in a variety of circumstances and how adults interpret and respond to these behaviors.

The process of learning through observation is influenced by four critical factors: the role model, the child's disposition and prior learning, the circumstances, and the frequency of reinforcement (Abu Ghazal, 2016). The effectiveness of a role model is subject to a variety of factors, including the role model's level of acceptance of the protégée, his efficiency in communicating knowledge, and similarities in age and characteristics (Al-Nashif, 2014). Also, children who are more or less disposed to challenging norms, and children who have more or less experience interpreting and applying adult feedback, might respond differently to the role model. The child's perceived safety in the environment, relationship with the adult involved, and other external factors might affect the child's response as well. The frequency and persistence of observation significantly affects the likelihood of adopting new behaviors as well. The more frequently the child observes a behavior, the more likely that the child would adopt this behavior (Abu Ghazal, 2016).

Learning a behavior from a role model involves paying attention, coding for memory, retaining in memory, carrying out the behavior, and responding to motivation (Bandura, 1977). Observed consequences of behaviors play a significant role in helping the child identify socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors (Thomas, 2005). For example, when a child notices the teacher giving positive feedback to his friend for helping to clean up the snack table, he might try to elicit similar feedback from the teacher by mimicking his friend's behavior. On the other hand, when a child observes his friend having to delay play time because she neglected to clean up her prior play space, the child may act to avoid a delay.

It is important to note that in many cases, observed behaviors are not carried out immediately, but retained in the child's memory and recalled later in a similar situation. For example, a child might notice aggressive behavior at home or on television and may carry out the same behavior weeks later when another child takes a toy from him in the classroom.

This indicates the importance of the commitment of parents and teachers to exhibit desirable behaviors with children and act as positive role models, not only for behavior, but also for language, ways of thinking, productive play, and more. This is a critical consideration even before children are capable of exhibiting these behaviors.

Focus On Practice–Social Learning Theory

The teacher . . .

Understands that she is a prominent role model and is therefore aware of the full range of her behavior in the presence of children, including her language, manner of speaking, bias in her treatment of individuals or groups, and attitudes toward the natural world.

Emphasizes social norms and rituals that demonstrate respect and good manners and reinforces these frequently.

Allows children to participate in setting rules and expectations and embeds opportunities for children to assess themselves and their work.

Treats book characters as role models, using stories to affirm good behaviors that she wants her children to adopt, and makes sure to inspect the content of books and other materials in the classroom.

Creates opportunities for children to develop critical thinking skills as they relate to social behaviors.

Reinforces positive and **pro-social** behaviors in the classroom and takes a clear stand against unacceptable behaviors.

Understands and applies the principles of Social Learning Theory to better understand the diverse cultures represented in the classroom and the implications of culture on children's behavior and learning.

IV. Conclusion

These three major theories provide a foundational understanding of children's learning and development and justify the building of the Saudi early learning curriculum on the principles of play-based, concept-driven learning in a language-rich classroom environment with an emphasis on social interaction. While theories place differing levels of emphasis on the internal processes (assimilation, accommodation) and external components (role models, circumstances), all theories presented here are grounded in the importance of the child's interactions with adults and peers in an appropriate learning environment. All point to the importance of the teacher's role as the facilitator of vital interactions and the architect of a rich and dynamic learning space.



Chapter 3.

Teacher Practice



Early childhood teachers have the important and intricate responsibility to manage numerous factors, including national standards, curriculum and assessment approaches, and an ever-evolving body of current research and evidence-based practice.

They must manage all of these factors while keeping the interests, motivations, and cultural values of individual children and families at the forefront of their planning and decision-making. The research is clear that children's development and learning occurs within the context of relationships, and the quality of these relationships significantly impacts outcomes later in life, including motivation to learn and overall school achievement (National Scientific Council, 2004).

Skilled teachers plan and act purposefully to build on what children know and support optimal growth and development in a meaningful way. Ever aware of the knowledge and skills children need to be successful in school, and the cognitive and social requirements of global citizenship, teachers guide children by addressing content knowledge in an integrated way, while facilitating the development of core competencies such as collaboration, problem-solving, and analytical skills. In addition to building foundational knowledge and fostering advanced cognitive skills, teachers prioritize and nurture a sincere respect and appreciation for human differences, contributing to the strength of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the strength of its membership in the global economy.

The daily practice of teaching young children occurs within a complex and dynamic ecosystem. A clear understanding of the characteristics of high-quality early learning programs, and the three pillars of early learning (i.e, Islamic education, national identity, and the international mindset), drive the priorities for all facets of teacher practice, including curriculum, assessment, teaching strategies, and partnerships with families and the community. This chapter will address three key teacher dispositions that drive effective practice, including: 1) The Informed Teacher, 2) The Intentional Teacher, and 3) The Responsive Teacher.

I. The Informed Teacher

Effective early childhood teachers draw from research to define and enact practices that promote high-quality early childhood education. Informed by an evidence-based awareness of the characteristics of children's growth and development, the teacher is prepared to design a multi-faceted learning environment that affords each child access to developmentally and culturally meaningful learning experiences. For instance, informed teachers understand typical growth in each of the developmental domains (physical, social and emotional, language, and cognitive), value growth and development in all domains, and understand the full range of capabilities that young children may have at any given age. Informed teachers understand that development across domains is inter-related, and therefore, prioritize approaches to teaching and learning that span multiple domains in an integrated way. With this deep expertise about typical patterns of development, the informed teacher also works to understand the specific developmental patterns of individual children using a range of evidence, including observation, work samples, and ongoing discussion with families and other professionals.

Informed teachers know that children's experiences at home have a significant impact on development and learning. Therefore, they prioritize building relationships with families and finding meaningful ways to partner that are personalized for optimal accessibility and productivity. It is through partnerships with families, and an understanding of the community context, that teachers come to a deeper understanding of each child and an operating awareness of the values, cultural norms, and experiences that form the whole family's context for learning, communication, and thought. As the teacher embraces and celebrates the strengths and assets of each family, she sets the tone for harmonious cross-cultural relationships across the entire learning community.

We glean from constructivist philosophy that learning is an interactive process whereby children construct knowledge through meaningful learning experiences. Informed teachers are aware of children's need to be active participants in their learning. Young children are naturally curious and have an innate desire to learn. Therefore, the informed teacher recognizes that children learn best through hands-on experiences with concrete materials and through interactions with other children and adults. According to constructivist theorists, children use past experiences and their unique cultural lenses to inform this ongoing learning process. As children engage with the environment, materials, peers, and adults, they continue to test and refine their conceptual knowledge. We know from research and best practice that when concepts are embedded in meaningful experiences and connected to prior learning, children are able to make vital connections and develop cognitive processes that facilitate all future learning (National Scientific Council, 2004, p. 199). For that reason, while the acquisition of content knowledge is necessary, it is more important for children to have rich opportunities to experience and explore concepts. The informed teacher enlists this knowledge to drive teaching and learning and to advise the larger community about best practices for early learning.

Focus On Practice—The Informed Teacher

The informed teacher. . .

Stays abreast of current research on child development.

Embeds learning opportunities throughout each day that support children's development across all developmental domains and includes opportunities for children to talk and interact freely with one another.

Records observations of developmentally significant child behaviors and uses this information systematically to drive individualized planning and discussions with families.

Considers the ZPD in setting goals for children so that they continue to feel engaged and challenged and have opportunities to experience success.

Commits to having broad cultural knowledge and to understanding the unique cultural values and norms of each family enrolled in the classroom, ensuring continuity between home and school.

Provides opportunities for multisensory experiences and makes available a variety of open-ended and natural materials to engage children in a range of experiential approaches, including movement, listening, questions, props and accessories, chanting, etc.

Respects the process of learning over whether children arrive at a particular understanding or achieve a finished product.

Chooses concepts and materials that build on the observed and expressed interests of children in the classroom. Builds on children's interests and supports continuing processes and investigation.

Makes meaningful connections between learning activities and standards, ensuring that activities are aligned to developmentally significant and appropriate expectations of children.

II. The Intentional Teacher

The intentional teacher uses her knowledge of the patterns of children's growth, development, and modes of learning to purposefully arrange and prepare the learning environment. A well-organized learning environment engages children by providing various ways and tools that invite children to discover, inquire, and experiment. It also promotes positive, productive, and safe interactions among the learning community. The intentional teacher, with a robust understanding of the importance of interactions in the early learning environment, makes careful plans for how she will present and guide learning opportunities, initiate and respond to meaningful dialogue with children, and use language to enrich children's investigations.

When designing the physical environment of the classroom, the intentional teacher considers all of the various learning settings in which children learn, including large and small-group settings, learning centers, and spaces used for daily routines and care (i.e., diapering, hand washing, etc.). In large-group meetings, teachers must identify adequate and conducive spaces for maintaining every child's interest and plan to accommodate multiple learning modalities.

The teacher must also prepare spaces where small-group activities can occur. These more intimate areas allow for individualized and differentiated learning opportunities for small groups of children. In addition, the intentional teacher includes purposeful designs and constantly updates learning centers where children spend extended periods of time pursuing learning interests both independently and in peer groups. The materials within the learning centers relate to the curricular focus on an ongoing basis and promote integrated learning across the developmental domains.

The intentional teacher plans for effective interactions with children by pre-planning how she will initiate and respond to interactions with children in ways that respect children's modes of learning and emotional needs. Children learn best when they are deeply engaged, both when they shape the activity and when teachers thoughtfully plan and guide the activity. In child-guided activities, children have the opportunity to pursue their interests through activities that they determine. In teacher-directed activities, teachers introduce materials and experiences that children are not likely to encounter on their own, explore systems of knowledge with which children are unfamiliar, and respond to children's requests for assistance or observe that children are ready to do more but are unsure what steps to take (Epstein, 2009). Intentional teaching requires a balance between guiding learning and following children's interests.

The intentional teacher purposefully chooses moments to engage in and observe children's play. Used at the right times, these processes afford her critical opportunities to understand children's interests and capabilities, which drive her planning for curricular content and instructional approach. As she plans to introduce new concepts and content, the intentional teacher is careful to fit the learning experience to the learning objective. She also manages the balance between child-driven and adult-driven learning experiences, following the children's lead in certain learning areas and taking the lead in others as appropriate (Epstein, 2007). As part of ongoing instruction, the intentional teacher plans how she will use questioning as a central teaching tool. She plans for moments where she will "think aloud" to model metacognition for children, encouraging them to reflect, predict, and question (Copple, 2012). She will pose provocations as she observes children's thinking, communicating, and collaborating on projects, thereby supporting their development of ideas.

Focus On Practice—The Intentional Teacher

The intentional teacher . . .

Creates well-defined learning centers that contain a variety of tools and materials to support children's imagination, as well as their inquiry, and gives children opportunities to extend their thinking about the current topic of learning.

Infuses the environment with carefully-placed, non-verbal messaging that guides children's movements through the environment (e.g., children's footprints arranged in a line by the door that goes out to the outdoor play space).

Adjusts the space, materials, and location of each learning center based on practical considerations (i.e., number of children participating at one time, need for proximity to running water, etc.) and alignment to the topic at hand.

Plans opportunities for children to experience being part of a community during large group meetings (i.e., participate in rhymes and chants together, discuss community strengths and concerns together, welcome a new peer into the community, and learn from a guest from the community).

Facilitates small-group activities that provide children with individualized time with a teacher and one another (i.e., to build on skills introduced earlier and allow time for children to ask questions of the teacher as well as one another).

Displays children's work in areas that are accessible to children and families to promote reflection and conversation.

III. The Responsive Teacher

Responsive teachers strike a balance between planning for intentional moments of teaching and learning and remaining flexible enough to meet the varied emotional and learning needs of children. Learning in early childhood classrooms is child-centered, meaning that teachers use the combination of strengths, knowledge, experience, and interests that children bring as a basis for planning and instruction. Through planning, teachers maximize learning opportunities for young children and help children reach learning objectives over time. Responsiveness goes hand-in-hand with intentionality and teacher knowledge, as the more informed and prepared teachers are, the more available they are to listen for and respond effectively to children's emotional and learning needs.

The responsive teacher recognizes the importance of being aware and sensitive to children's emotional needs. When children form positive attachments with their teachers, they are more emotionally secure and better prepared to explore and learn. The responsive teacher builds this secure attachment by valuing the full range of children's emotions and making time to support children in expressing, processing, and regulating their emotions. With regard to teacher-child attachment, researchers underscore the value of an adult's skill to accurately read children's signals and "to respond contingently on the basis of these signals (e.g., to follow the child's lead), to convey acceptance and emotional warmth, to offer assistance as necessary, to model regulated behavior and to enact appropriate structures, and limits, for the child's behavior" (Pianta, 1999, p.67).

The responsive teacher is also sensitive to children's learning needs. Essential to quality learning and development is the teacher's ability to incorporate children's interests and ideas into the learning process and scaffold children's learning along the way. Responsive teachers plan with children in mind. As teachers introduce concepts in coherent and integrated ways, they incorporate children's interests and ideas into learning experiences. During instruction, the responsive teacher also notices opportunities to tap into children's interests and ideas as they unfold. These exchanges engage and motivate children. Teachers who are sensitive to children's learning needs also recognize when children need more support and guidance to fully grasp concepts, and adjust their approach. As teachers interact with children, they provide opportunities for them to develop communication skills essential for sharing their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. For instance, they may adjust the pacing, ask questions to better understand children's thinking, or introduce another experience to support children's understanding. These adjustments occur within a lesson and inform future interactions across the various learning settings.

The responsive teacher understands the nuances of culture and how culture impacts children's learning and growth. Being culturally responsive goes beyond understanding the cultural backgrounds of children and families in the learning community and ensures that the materials in the classroom reflect their backgrounds. A culturally responsive approach holds cultures in high esteem and prioritizes a strengths-based approach to understand each family's cultural background and forms the basis for the home-school partnership.

Focus On Practice–The Responsive Teacher

The responsive teacher . . .

Notifies children's emotions and checks in, verbally or nonverbally, to assess and address children's emotional needs.

Observes children to learn about their interests and ideas and then includes them in lessons or adds materials to the classroom.

Encourages communication between peers and adults, providing opportunities for interactions to occur and be extended.

Asks families about their preferred language and modes of communication and builds these in as much as possible.

Learns about the traditions that families value, including routines at home, and the roles family members play in terms of discipline, caregiving, and holidays.

Encourages families to spend time in the classroom and share ideas about how to make the curriculum culturally relevant and meaningful for children.

IV. Conclusion

The success of the early learning curriculum rests on the ability of teachers to deliver it skillfully, recognizing the close relationship between thought and language, and ensuring that there are many opportunities for children to talk, listen, collaborate, and reflect on their learning and the contribution of others. As this chapter describes, the teacher's responsibility is vast and requires a high level of education and professional poise. It requires a dynamic and thoughtful approach to teaching and learning, along with great attention to detail, to meet the description of an informed, intentional, and responsive teacher. That said, high-quality curriculum and instruction hinges on the teacher's knowledge of the characteristics and learning needs of children, her ability to apply this knowledge in purposeful ways, and her sensitivity to children's emotional and learning needs.

Chapter 4.

Pedagogical Principles



Pedagogy relates to the method and practice of teaching. Widely held beliefs and knowledge about young children and how they learn is what drives our pedagogical approach and informs the conceptualization of early learning programs, development of curriculum, modes of partnership with families, and interactions with children.

Knowledge of the various factors that impact child development influences what strategies the teacher employs, the way she understands and meets the children's individual needs, and the way she arranges and equips the learning environment. This section will address three foundational components of an effective pedagogical approach, including: 1) The importance of establishing secure, reciprocal relationships across the learning community; 2) The formation of strong family and community partnerships, and; 3) the role of teachers as self-evaluators, reflective practitioners, and lifelong learners.

I. Positive Relationships in the Early Learning Community

Attachment theory, posited by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in 1991, expresses that children without secure attachments to adults spend an inordinate amount of developmental energy seeking stability and security. By contrast, children with strong attachments to adults approach new experiences and learning with confidence and a sense of security ("Introduction to Attachment Theory," 2015). When young children enter preschool, they often form close attachments to their teachers. These attachments are formed through positive interactions and a sense of belonging and connection to the learning community. The research is clear that children who have positive and caring relationships with their teachers tend to be more engaged in learning and more successful in school overall (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Caring and secure relationships begin with trust. The early childhood teacher has an important responsibility to establish a caring community of learners, founded on trust, that includes all teachers, caregivers, families, and children. In the context of security and trust, children are encouraged to take risks, receive individualized guidance, and develop social-emotional competence (Copple & Bredekamp, 2013). Likewise, in trusting relationships, families are assured that their unique cultural, linguistic, and family backgrounds are well understood and respected by teachers and the larger learning community. Where there is trust, teachers can be assured that their partnerships with families yield shared goals for



young children and that families regard teachers as professionals and co-collaborators in children's learning and development.

Consistency plays an important role in establishing trust. Children thrive in a learning environment where they can trust in predictable members, activities, and routines. Children typically find security and assurance in knowing what will happen, when it will happen, and what will be expected of them. Consistent routines and predictable expectations play an important part in alleviating anxiety as young children enter the school setting for the first time (Epstein, 2014). Another essential factor is the teacher's ability to consistently provide emotional support to young children (i.e., setting a positive and nurturing tone, avoiding irritability and harshness, and guiding children in positive ways), which has strong correlations to both social and academic outcomes for young children (Curby & Brock, 2013). Likewise, to build strong relationships with families, teachers must be intentional about establishing communication structures that are regular and accessible to families (Epstein, 2014).

A culture of **reciprocity** is another component of positive and trusting relationships. Reciprocal relationships between families and teachers are built on the teacher's belief that families are their children's first and ongoing teachers and an invaluable source of key developmental information about children. Through open dialogue with families, teachers can learn much about each child's individual learning arc, their home environments, their communities, and cultural contexts for learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2013). Teachers have an array of experience and expertise to share with families as well. Teachers often have a nuanced perspective of child development norms and expected behaviors, along with parts of the picture of each child's development that families may not have an opportunity to see. For instance, teachers can share particulars about children's social development in the context of a large group, different ways that children express their knowledge, and what ideas and materials interest them most. All of this information can factor into parents' decision-making in important ways.

While forming reciprocal relationships with families can require special effort from teachers, it is an effort that pays off substantially for children. Both teachers and parents are better able to plan and set goals for children's learning when they have the most complete understanding of the child's development. Most importantly, young children feel secure and are better prepared to approach learning with confidence when they sense that the important adults in their lives trust one another and are working together to support them (Copple & Bredekamp, 2013).

There can also be a degree of reciprocity in the relationship between teachers and children. While the teacher creates a structure that allows for all children to be safe and to learn, the children can have a significant role in making decisions and building community within that structure. When children make decisions and have control of their experiences, they are not only more engaged in the learning, but also positioned to gain confidence and build their capacity to become self-directed learners (Isbell & Yoshizawa, 2016).

Respect is another foundational element of a healthy early learning community and must flow bi-directionally in every relationship within the learning community. Mutual respect between teachers and families is critical in the formation of reciprocal relationships. A key factor in respectful relationships is the recognition that every family, regardless of culture or status, brings a vast body of knowledge and competence that is of value to the rest of the community,

and can broaden the teacher's understanding of children and learning overall. Respect for individual and cultural difference relies on the assumption that teachers and parents have a shared fundamental goal, which is the growth of the child toward her full learning potential, and that there may be many valid ways to achieve this goal. A foundation of respect allows teachers and parents to discuss differences in culture, experiences, and expectations without alienation and to make decisions that are aligned with shared values and goals.

Many adults expect that young children show respect for the rules and instructions of adults, respect for the space, safety, and belongings of their peers, and respect for the space and materials in the learning environment. These are learned behaviors in an environment that supports their development from beginning efforts to the accomplishment of these skills. While these values certainly are a vital aspect of a civil and productive learning environment, respect for children is equally important, and plays a significant part in children's development of positive and pro-social behavior and their overall success. In an early learning environment founded upon mutual respect, teachers show respect for children in the following ways:

Respecting children's identities: Young children have a growing sense of identity. They begin by distinguishing themselves from others by describing themselves and their actions in very concrete ways (e.g., "I have brown hair," or "I treat my friends nicely."). Children learn to evaluate these characteristics of self largely based on how they perceive adults' evaluations of these characteristics, and thus they begin to develop self-esteem (Copple & Bredekamp, 2013). To respect children's identity development, adults can allow children to develop and express aspects of their identities in their own ways and in their own time.

Respecting children's culture and experiences: All children will enter the early learning community with a different set of knowledge and experiences. Children may come from different regions, have different family structures and norms, and have had different opportunities based on family income and social class. In response, the teacher should incorporate elements of each child's culture in the daily life of the classroom (i.e., using words, toys, materials, and routines that are familiar), thereby affording every child access to culturally familiar learning experiences.

Respecting children's abilities: Teachers must acknowledge that while children follow similar patterns of growth and development, all children develop at their own rates. Children come with a variety of abilities and strengths, and some children need special adaptations to instruction or the environment to be successful. However, respecting children's abilities requires the acknowledgement of each child's rights to: 1) realistic, yet high, expectations; 2) inclusion in the learning community with adequate support for socialization, and; 3) practices that allow them to achieve their highest potential (Brilliant, 2017).

Focus On Practice—Positive Relationships in the Learning Community

The teacher . . .

Establishes consistency in the classroom by posting and discussing the daily schedule with children, ensuring that they interact with teachers and peers daily and helping to set classroom expectations.

Establishes culturally informed relationships with families and children, accommodating a variety of communication styles and working to bridge linguistic differences.

Respects the privacy of all children and families and has high standards of confidentiality for record-keeping and communication.

II. Family and Community Partnerships

The hallmark of any successful partnership is a coordinated effort toward a common goal. For a partnership to work well, all stakeholders must understand the vision and goals, their respective roles in achieving these goals, and the mutual benefit of partnering. In the context of early learning, this is true of the partnership between teachers and families. As teachers invite families into collaborative relationships, families can have an important role in shaping the curriculum to the degree that teachers value and enact the information and ideas that families have to offer. Together, parent and teacher can set rigorous and achievable goals to challenge children and build their confidence and sense of themselves as capable and independent learners, both at home and at school. Most importantly, children feel most secure when they sense that the important adults in their lives trust each other and are working together to support them.

Families approach early learning with differing levels of availability and expectations as to the purpose and method of early learning and their role as parents. For these and other reasons, forming partnerships with families can be a challenge at first, and therefore requires an individualized approach. Often, when schedules and other circumstances make it difficult for families and teachers to engage in traditional ways, teachers must plan with individual families how and when to communicate. Creating reciprocal relationships with parents requires a personalized approach that the teacher and parent develop together.

Early learning programs are a fundamental part of a community. The availability of high-quality options for early childhood education and care has extensive benefits, not only for children and families, but also for the local workforce and economy. Additionally, early learning programs benefit the community as a whole by producing better-educated and better-prepared citizens. Community partnerships in early learning are founded on the shared belief that children can benefit from the rich learning opportunities that communities have to offer, and that the entire community can benefit from an investment of time and resources into the programs and systems that care for and educate young children.

Early learning programs can also play an important role in linking families to the array of resources available in the community. Connecting families to the resources and support they need and sharing colloquial knowledge are parts of the teacher's work to build strong family partnerships. In order to do this however, the early childhood teacher must be well connected and aware of the community in which she works. The early learning program that builds bridges with community partners takes on the important responsibility of educating and orienting the larger community toward the needs and interests of children and families.

Focus On Practice—Family and Community Partnerships

The teacher . . .

Acknowledges parents' goals and priorities for children and responds sensitively to their concerns and choices.

Makes an effort to interact with families in both formal and informal ways on a regular basis (e.g., sharing anecdotes at drop-off and pick-up times, sending updates via e-mail or text, scheduling parent-teacher conferences, etc.).

Encourages involvement in classroom or school events and establishes procedures and practices that set the tone for open and positive dialogue with families.

Supports families in locating vital resources in the community for their basic needs and connects them to opportunities to extend children's learning.

Educates other stakeholders of the important role of early learning as a foundational component of a thriving community.

III. Educators as Lifelong Learners

Essential Competencies for Early Childhood Teachers

Competencies are described as the demonstrable knowledge and skills that enable teachers to be effective. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) identifies six core competency areas for all early childhood professionals:

- › Promoting Child Development and Learning
- › Building Family and Community Relationships
- › Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families
- › Using Developmentally Effective Approaches
- › Using Content Knowledge to Build Meaningful Curriculum
- › Professionalism

Promoting Child Development and Learning

Promoting child development and learning refers to the teacher's knowledge of the characteristics of children, how they learn, and the types of experiences and interactions that support them. Teachers of young children should have a deep understanding of typical developmental patterns and timelines and the range of abilities and learning aptitudes that children possess. The most effective teachers also call on their understanding of the complex and dynamic influences that impact each child's development in a unique way. These include both internal characteristics (i.e., genetics, physical and mental health, disposition, personality) and external influences (i.e., family and peer relationships, community context,

prior experiences, etc.). A nuanced awareness of how these factors influence children drives sound, culturally and pedagogically informed decision-making, and enables the teacher to create a healthy, supportive, and challenging learning environment for each child. This includes appropriate approaches and modifications for children with a variety of special needs, planning on an individual basis, and taking observational data and parent input into account.

Building Family and Community Relationships

The importance of building strong family and community relationships in the early learning environment is discussed at length above and is a cornerstone of successful programs. A teacher should demonstrate her commitment to this dimension of her work by seeking ways to effectively connect with every family and engage them in reciprocal partnerships on behalf of children.

Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Assessment, in this context, refers to the gathering, documenting, and analyzing of developmental information about children. Early childhood educators have a tendency to rely on intuition and informal observations of children rather than the collection and systematic use of assessment data to guide decision-making (Sandall, Schwartz & LaCroix, 2004). Different types of assessments can have a variety of purposes; however, here we are referring to the types of assessments that a teacher uses to inform her planning of individualized learning experiences for each child. This can be done in a variety of formal and informal ways, and at multiple points in time. However, an effective teacher should take a systematic approach to observing (i.e., both planning for and responding to opportunities to notice children's capabilities), documenting (i.e., methodically recording and storing records), and analyzing (i.e., reviewing and comparing observations for evidence of growth, determining readiness, and identifying next steps). The observation data and the teacher's analysis constitute an important contribution to her ongoing dialogue with families on behalf of children (NAEYC, 2011).

Using Developmentally Effective Approaches

This competency area relates to a teacher's ability to apply what is known about children to facilitate learning experiences that are responsive to children's ages, prior knowledge, and cultural frames. Successful early childhood teachers know that effective practices are rooted in positive relationships and responsive interactions within the learning community, and that they require a balanced approach to shared decision-making between teachers and children. Opportunities to stay abreast of ongoing research and to engage in professional communities are essential to sustained best practice.

Using Content Knowledge to Build Meaningful Curriculum

Building rich and meaningful learning experiences for children requires the teacher to have a deep understanding of the content, including the principles and theories behind the concepts that children are exploring. Substantial content knowledge enables teachers to add information to children's play and problem solving, and to extend their knowledge by suggesting alternative approaches and posing thoughtful guiding questions. For instance, when children are building with blocks, a teacher's advanced understanding of the concepts of gravity, balance, and spatial relations enables her to add information and pose questions

that lead to more nuanced understandings for children. The teacher recognizes that many experiences need language to accompany meaningful activities, which helps children to expand their vocabulary and problem-solving and to express their thoughts.

Professionalism

The sixth competency area, professionalism, relates to the teacher's capacity to view and present herself as an expert, and consistently demonstrate commitment to best practices. Professionalism, or the process of advancing oneself along a professional continuum, is addressed at length in the next section. Teacher competencies in all of the aforementioned areas are cumulative and become increasingly more sophisticated with professional growth, continuing education, and experience. A novice teacher may exhibit beginning evidence of the described competencies, whereas an experienced teacher would demonstrate enhanced depth and agility in applying these and may be well suited to coach and encourage others. Of utmost importance is each teacher's connection to opportunities for continued education and professional discourse with peers, allowing her to sharpen and refine her practice and build confidence and competency in her craft.

Ongoing Learning and Critical Reflection

The early childhood teacher has a complex and demanding role that requires significant education and a commitment to ongoing learning. Rapid advancements in brain development and other related research continue to shape and refine our collective understanding of best practice, underscoring the importance of continuing education for early childhood teachers.

Similarly, teachers should commit to the discipline of self-assessment and reflection on a regular basis. Awareness of one's own personal beliefs and values related to children and early learning is an important starting point to improving practice overall. Teachers should consider their conceptions of children and families through a critical lens, comparing these notions to their observations within the early learning community and to their knowledge of early learning theory and current research.

A professional and self-aware teacher also continuously reflects on her views and attitudes as they relate to children and families. This includes an examination of what overgeneralizations or unfair assumptions she may be making about children and families and how this impacts children's learning. For instance, if a teacher assumes that girls are less interested in or capable of activities that require physical strength or endurance, she might inadvertently afford girls fewer opportunities for gross motor development. Similarly, if she assumes that a mother with lower socioeconomic status is unwilling to engage in partnership because the mother fails to appear for meetings, she might not consider other means of outreach, and thereby limit the potential learning benefit to the child of a robust family partnership. **Bias** in the early learning environment is often unintended by the well-meaning teacher, however, it can have a tremendous and lasting impact on the learning and overall experiences of children. A teacher's self-awareness enables her to create a healthy and equitable learning environment, in which she holds high expectations for all children, and provide each child customized and targeted support to succeed. This will become increasingly important as early learning

settings become more diverse through further integration of children with special needs and changing demographics in parts of the Kingdom.

Critical reflection is a key part of effective teaching and learning. In order to grow and refine their practices, teachers need explicit opportunities for self-assessment and reflection, alone and with peers, which engage them in questions of philosophy, ethics, and practice. The use of instructional coaches or mentors is an opportune way to convene and challenge teachers in professional learning communities to participate in self-evaluation and peer-evaluation.

IV. Conclusion

Early learning pedagogy is the foundation upon which programs and practices are built. The fundamentals of secure, reciprocal, and respectful relationships, family and community partnerships, and teachers as learners and reflective practitioners are grounded both in widely-accepted best practice and in the guiding principles of the Saudi Early Learning Standards (SELS). These foundational components will have significant implications for program quality assessment, teacher preparation, and the development of early childhood systems that support continuous quality improvement.



The Saudi Early Learning Standards



A comprehensive set of early learning standards—the Saudi Early Learning Standards (SELS)—has been developed to provide additional guidance for the development of the Saudi national early learning curriculum.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), based in the United States in Washington, DC, had a leading role in collecting resources and facilitating the drafting process to support the development of the SELS, employing the expertise of multiple leading early learning experts. Additionally, the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia and Tatweer Company for Educational Services assembled a team of national early learning leaders and key stakeholders to work collaboratively with international experts, provide additional expertise, and ensure the applicability of the standards in the context of Saudi early learning programs. After a comprehensive developmental and review process, the SELS were developed and presented in February 2015.

I. The Purpose of the SELS

The SELS were developed to drive shared, evidence-based expectations for young children's learning and the role of early learning programs. This is particularly important during this era of rapid globalization and global competition, in which there is mounting societal pressure for children to achieve mastery of the discrete skills related to literacy, mathematics, and science. The SELS present a view of early learning, not as an early start to primary and secondary school education, but as a unique stage in human development and an unmatched opportunity for young children to develop essential concepts and competencies that will provide a critical framework for all future learning.

Standards are a valuable part of any high-quality early learning program or system, as they present a broad description of what children should know and be able to do at different developmental stages. They provide a shared understanding about the characteristics of young children and the purposes and goals of early learning. They establish shared language, grounded in evidence and relevant theory, to support ongoing professional discourse. Early learning standards deliver guidance for programmatic planning and offer insight as to what child behaviors are developmentally significant. Finally, they help early childhood teachers

align learning experiences with the skills and knowledge that children will need upon entering primary school and offer primary school teachers and leaders critical insight about the developmental characteristics of transitioning children.

II. The Guiding Principles

The SELS were founded on ten guiding principles upon which the development team agreed at the start of the process. In the SELS, the guiding principles are described as follows:

Children

All children can learn. Beginning before birth, and continuing through the early years, children learn and develop. This is true of all children regardless of their language, culture, setting, or developmental status. Among the many things educators and caregivers can do to support this learning and development, the creation of early learning standards helps to instruct adults in maintaining appropriate developmental expectations for young children as they grow.

Children are unique and develop at different rates. Though children typically develop along a predictable continuum, children learn in different ways and at different rates. Additionally, children will differ in how they demonstrate learning across the domains. Teachers and caregivers should utilize the Standards to inform their observations of children, but they should remain mindful that children may vary in how and when they develop in different areas.

How Children Learn

Children are active learners who learn best through meaningful play experiences. As children play, they develop physically, socially, and emotionally, solve problems, create, and much more. Meaningful play is integral to the healthy development of young children in all domains and must be supported by teachers and caregivers.

Children are naturally curious and should be provided opportunities to explore their environment. By engaging with their environment, children make sense of their world. This type of learning is instinctual, and children will make meaningful connections to the world around them when they are provided with rich environments and the freedom and encouragement to explore.

Children's development in one domain is strongly connected to development in other domains. Children's learning is strongly interconnected across domains. The learning that takes place in one area affects and is affected by the learning that takes place in others. Equal attention must thus be paid to children's whole development, rather than placing more or less importance on any one domain.

Family And Community

Children develop within a culture. Children's culture, language, traditions, and values greatly impact their learning. Understanding the culture in which a child's earliest experiences take

place is a huge asset to teachers and caregivers in supporting the child's ongoing learning and development. It is thus essential to respect each child and his or her culture and to foster a positive connection between the home and the school.

Children learn best when families are active partners in learning. Families are the primary caregivers and educators for young children and should be supported by schools with the tools and guidance needed to ensure healthy development. Families should likewise seek to actively engage with schools to support and extend learning within the home.

Children's Rights

All children deserve a high-quality education and teachers that are specialized and well trained. It is essential that teachers have the training and knowledge to deliver a high-quality education to young children and to support children in reaching appropriate developmental goals. Understanding the Standards is an essential first step to setting appropriate expectations for young children.

Children have the right to feel safe and loved. Early relationships are extremely important in young children's learning and development. Children learn best when they are able to foster strong positive relationships with adults in an environment in which they feel safe, cared for, and protected.

An Education Centered in Islam

In order to fully reach one's natural potential, children must be nurtured in Islamic principles and values. Before they can make sense of their world and gain understanding of their own mind and abilities, children must come to understand the centrality of Allah, the Creator of all things. Love of Allah and a devotion to the Islamic values of honesty, productivity, self-reliance, cooperation, kindness, and respect for others is critical to the total development of young children in Saudi Arabia. (Saudi Early Learning Standards for Children 3 to 6 Years Old, 2015, pp. 7-9)

III. The Contents

The SELS identifies seven areas which form the framework for more specific strands and indicators of learning and development. The SELS document defines these learning areas as follows:

Approaches to Learning

This addresses the skills and dispositions that foster children's learning. This includes fostering their natural interest and curiosity, their desire to take initiative in seeking information, and the development of their attention and persistence in learning and in undertaking exploratory tasks. This standard also focuses on positive learning behaviors such as cooperation, risk taking, and creativity.

Language and Early Literacy Development

This focuses on the development of both classical and colloquial Arabic language. This standard includes listening and speaking skills, such as understanding the communicative function of speech; writing and nonverbal language; receptive and expressive language development; and enjoyment of books, storytelling, and conversation. It also addresses the use and understanding of language and literacy conventions such as grammar, sentence structure, print concepts, and phonological and phonemic awareness.

Patriotism and Social Studies

This addresses the concepts and values associated with establishing a sense of nationalism in young Saudi Arabian citizens. This includes essential content knowledge of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, such as history, geography, economy, basic knowledge of important leaders, and cultural traditions. It also includes developing a sense of self within the context of the nation's cultural and religious values, and knowing one's rights and responsibilities toward society and the country.

Social-Emotional Development

This includes the skills required for adapting to and thriving in society, such as creating relationships with adults and peers, the ability to work and play in a group, thinking and acting independently, solving conflicts, managing responsibilities, and understanding and complying with social rules. It also includes the ability to identify and express feelings and emotions appropriately, exhibit self-esteem, and show respect toward others.

Cognition and General Knowledge

This addresses the internal mental processes and functions that develop thinking and the ability to use information. Presented within the context of the academic knowledge areas of mathematics, science, creative arts, and technology, these skills include: question asking, experimentation, problem solving, and creativity and imagination. This standard also includes content-specific indicators within each of these academic topics.

Islamic Education

This is essential for developing the religious feelings, knowledge, and skills that will allow children to fully participate in the Islamic faith and lifestyle. This standard encompasses all aspects of the religion required by Allah, as described in the Qur'an. This includes, where appropriate, performance of religious commitments such as prayer and fasting, memorization and recitation of Qur'anic verses, conducting prayers, and developing love for the Prophet and knowledge of his life, morals, and actions. It also includes establishing Islamic behaviors, such as being courteous and respectful to others, which are considered the manifestation of the principles, values, and customs of Islam.

Health and Physical Development

This addresses development of coordination, mobility, and fine and gross motor control and manipulation, as well as the development of the five senses and ability to recognize spatial relationships. It also focuses on building knowledge and positive attitudes about healthy practices, such as daily personal hygiene, nutrition guidelines, healthy physical activity, and behaviors that contribute to personal safety. (Saudi Early Learning Standards for Children 3 to 6 Years Old, 2015, p. 12)

IV. Limitations and Other Considerations

It is important to note that the SELS is not intended to act as an assessment tool, nor as an exhaustive list of the characteristics of children at each developmental stage. Human development is widely regarded as a fluid, dynamic, and highly individualized process, and therefore cannot be fully described in the context of age-aligned standards. It would not be useful nor appropriate to think of the standards as a list of required behaviors for all children, or to assume that the achievement of the capabilities described in the SELS is an endpoint for learning. Instead the SELS can be used as a guide for planning learning activities and a means to align instructional practices to widely-accepted developmental goals.

The Standards and associated tools, guidance, and materials are intended for use in all early learning settings and for all children. This includes planning for children with special needs in inclusive settings. Teachers should take special care to ensure that all children in the learning community have access to the full array of learning experiences, opportunities to experience both success and challenges, and the opportunity to develop to the fullest extent of their abilities. Teachers and program leaders are encouraged to convene the expertise needed to fully support all of the diverse learning abilities and needs of children in early learning programs.



سالم

Conclusion



With the vision of developing an overarching approach to early learning across the Kingdom, the Saudi Early Learning Curriculum Project was launched in 2017. Under the leadership of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and supported by teams of specialists from School Readiness Consulting (SRC) and the Tatweer Company for Educational Services, the Curriculum Project includes a Curriculum Framework and an Operational Guide that, taken together, provide the resources and guidance needed to deliver comprehensive and consistent high-quality early learning experiences to all young children in the Kingdom.

The Curriculum Framework outlines the philosophical and educational foundations as well as the individual, societal, and economic priorities for early education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In addition, the elements of the Framework have been aligned with expectations for children's development included in the Saudi Early Learning Standards (SELS). Finally, this Framework provides a basic structure on which roles and responsibilities for implementation, quality assurance, and linkages to the K-12 system can be built, and to that end, is designed to inform the work of policy makers, teachers, families, public and private providers, and other industry partners.

In summary, this Curriculum Framework identifies the essential knowledge, skills, and approaches to learning that all children need to be successful learners. It provides teachers with the foundational information they need to plan and deliver effective learning experiences that reflect understanding of children's development, the role of the teacher and the child in the learning process, and what it takes to engage families and community partners.

The successful implementation of these strategies is highly contingent on the competencies and dispositions of the teacher and may represent a significant shift in thinking and practice for many Saudi early childhood teachers. To translate the elements of the framework into developmentally appropriate approaches and practices will require specialized training that is

centered on early childhood development and builds teachers' individual capacities to create effective, high-quality programs. To reach this goal, a systemic approach to integrating this approach into training and professional development for both novice and experienced early childhood teachers must be developed and broadly implemented across the Kingdom. The most pivotal driver of growth in these areas will be an early learning system that is focused on the preservation of national identity and Islamic values, the recognition of the importance of supporting children to live in an open and globally-minded society, and the development of the skills and knowledge children will need to fully access expanded economic and social opportunity for all Saudi people.

Glossary of Terms

Islamic Education

The process of building and guiding each individual to develop a character that reflects the goals and values of Islam.

Conceptual Knowledge

Relating to or concerned with concepts. Conceptual Knowledge refers to the knowledge of, or understanding of, concepts, principles, theories, models, classifications, etc. We learn conceptual knowledge through reading, viewing, listening, experiencing, or thoughtful, reflective mental activity.

Competency

The ability to do something successfully or efficiently.

Individual Identity

An understanding of self as an individual and the recognition of what makes one unique and distinct from others.

Social Identity

An understanding of the shared characteristics of the community to which one belongs, including culture, race, gender, religion, etc.

Culture

The sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguish one group of people from other groups. Culture is transmitted, through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next and is the context for all learning and thought.

National Identity

A sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language and one's belonging to a nation.

International Mindset

A stance of respect for diversity, recognizing the equal value of all people, and being open to learn from other cultures, leading to opportunities for cross-cultural competence and social cohesion.

Cultural Diversity

The representation of people from a variety of different cultural groups.

Developmentally Appropriate/ Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

An approach to teaching grounded in research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education. Its framework is designed to promote young children's optimal learning and development.

Learning Theories

Conceptual frameworks describing how knowledge is absorbed, processed, and retained during learning.

Whole-Child Perspective/Whole-Child Approach

Policies, practices, and relationships that ensure each child is safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, and that learning activities are designed to facilitate growth in all areas of development.

Constructivism

Philosophy of learning in which the child is not a passive receiver of knowledge, but instead actively works to reorganize, connect, and apply experiences, to challenge previous knowledge, and to construct new knowledge in an ongoing process.

Concept-Driven

An approach to teaching and learning that prioritizes the child's development of broad conceptual knowledge over discrete knowledge and skills.

Scaffolded/Scaffolding

In education, scaffolding refers to instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward stronger or higher levels of understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process.

Schema (Schemata, pl)

Describes a pattern of thought or behavior that organizes categories of information; a structured framework or plan.

Disequilibrium

Refers to an inability to fit new information into a schema or existing thoughts. When one comes across information or experiences that do not fit into their current knowledge base, this is where disequilibrium begins.

Assimilation

Describes the act of taking something in and absorbing it fully. The process of taking in and fully understanding information or ideas.

Accommodation

The process of accommodation involves altering one's existing schemata, or ideas, as a result of new information or new experiences. New schemata may also be developed during this process.

Metacognition

The ability to think about your thoughts with the aim of improving learning; thinking about thinking.

The Inquiry Cycle

The purpose is to engage students in active learning, ideally based on their own questions or curiosities. Learning activities are organized in a cyclic way, in which the investigation of one question leads to the creation of new ideas and other questions.

Pro-social

Relating to or describing behavior that is positive, helpful, and intended to promote social acceptance and friendship. Pro-social behavior in the classroom can have a significant impact on a student's motivation for learning and contributions to the classroom and larger community.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she cannot do. The educator Vygotsky believed that when a student

is in the ZPD for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance will give the student enough of a "boost" to achieve the task.

Spontaneous Concepts

A concept acquired without effort through participation in everyday experiences and interactions with others.

Scientific Concepts

Concepts that develop in the process of acquiring knowledge through formal instruction.

Concepts About Print

Knowledge of print including an understanding that print carries meaning.

Pedagogy

The discipline that deals with the theory and practice of teaching. Pedagogy informs teaching strategies, teacher actions, and teacher judgments and decisions by taking into consideration theories of learning, understandings of students and their needs, and the backgrounds and interests of individual students. Pedagogy includes how the teacher interacts with students and the social and intellectual environment the teacher seeks to establish and follows specific rules.

Reciprocity

Responding to a positive action with another positive action; rewarding kind actions. Reciprocal relationships between educators and families require mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility, and negotiation of conflicts toward achievement of shared goals.

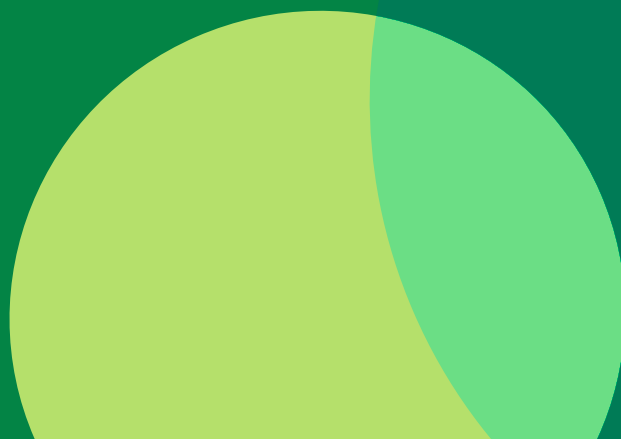
Bias

Having an opinion or view that is often wrong, without considering evidence; one-sided, lacking a neutral viewpoint, or not having an open mind. Bias can come in many forms and is related to prejudice and intuition.

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