University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Children’s Center

Position on Teaching

UHMCC is an eclectic group of professionals who approach education from a wide variety of pedagogical stances and perspectives. This allows us the freedom to be creative, explore the art of teaching, and be passionate about our work with and for children without limiting us to one approach. Each teacher is able to follow personal and professional interests in a way that compliments rather than competes with his or her colleagues. It also gives us many opportunities to learn from each other. We frequently have collaborative discussions in which no single individual is the dominant or primary voice. While we may be challenged by administration to explain what we are doing or why we are doing it, as long as there is clear intention that is consistent with our overall mission, core curriculum and core practices, teaching teams are encouraged to try something new.

Just as our program has a core curricular thread running through it, our teaching practices have a common thread. Basically, our activities, themes and units should be collaborative, intentional and personally relevant to the child. We follow seven teaching standards established by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, presently seated at the UH Manoa College of Education Department of Educational Psychology. Briefly, the seven standards are:

- Joint Productive Activity – Teacher and a small group of children collaborating on a tangible or intangible product.
- Language and Literacy Development – Activities designed and opportunities created to expand expressive language and enhance literacy development.
- Contextualization – Leveraging the child’s prior knowledge and experiences to reach a deeper understanding of ideas and concepts, and to apply skills and knowledge from a personally relevant perspective.
- Complex thinking – Challenging the child to increase knowledge and use higher cognitive strategies to solve problems and make new connections.
- Instructional Conversation – Learning through discussion in which the adult holds 50% or less of the conversation, but maintains a clear academic goal and guides the discussion through questioning, rephrasing and modeling.
- Modeling – Promoting learning through observation by including but not limiting to demonstrations and exemplars.
- Child-directed activity – Empowering children work with new concepts and ideas in their own way and in their own time to encourage decision-making and self-regulated learning.

While every standard is rarely present to a high degree in a single activity, the activities planned throughout the day and over the course of a unit should demonstrate a high level of effective implementation of each standard. As long as a particular pedagogy does not preclude or interfere with the effective implementation of any of these standards, we are free to try it out in whole or in part. It could be easy to write off the independent learning and frequent chatting between peers as simply play because a teacher may not clearly lead and everyone seems to be doing something different. It works because the plan maintains a high level of intention, collaboration, and personal relevance with the child, thereby meeting the needs of both the child and the teacher.

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What It Looks Like By Age

Age 2 to 3
Children at this age level often respond non-verbally. The teaching standards are therefore taken to where the child is, verbal or non-verbal, and seek to engage and encourage expression. Children are so young at this level that they may have few prior experiences related to a topic or skill. Experiences, concepts and skills may therefore be introduced then reintroduced in slightly different ways or from a variety of perspectives and contexts to build prior knowledge. The relationship between home and school is very important to ensure contextualize and personal relevance. Modeling is also very important as visual learning is a natural approach for this age, but each teaching standard is used.

Age 3 to 4
Here we begin to encourage peer interaction and support as we implement the teaching standards. The child takes on more responsibility within each activity, and assistance by the teacher is planned to begin to develop independent learning. The curricular continuum used by the entire program helps define areas of prior knowledge so that this knowledge base can be built on in a personally relevant manner. Language development and complex thinking move to higher levels.

Age 4 to 5
Work at this level is planned to develop collaboration skills, and peer assistance is encouraged. As the child take on more responsibility for independent learning, child-directed activity are planned to ensure the environment affords independent investigation and discovery. Complex thinking includes introduction to strategy and goals setting as children work through activities with more intention. Pre-reading and pre-writing is also highlighted as part of language and literacy development.

Mixed Age
The strength of our core curriculum and freedom to fill out the curriculum and define pedagogical approach is most evident in a mixed age class and at the times when different classes combine. We worked hard to define skill progression across age bands. This allows the mixed age group to take on both learner and teacher roles. Higher functioning children in one area assist peers while they receive assistance from peers who are higher functioning in other areas. In every case the teaching standards remain consistent and provide focus for the teacher.

Suggested Reading
• Teacheing Transformed: Achieving Excellence, Fairness, Inclusion, and Harmony by Roland Tharp, Peggy Estrada, Stephanie Dalton, and Lois Yamauchi
• Comprehension & Collaboration by Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels
• Rousing Minds to Life by Roland Tharp and Ron Gallimore
• Developmentally Appropriate Practice by Carol Copple and Sue Bredekamp
• Growing Minds by Carol Copple
• Education for a Civil Society by Dan Gartrell