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PSY 215 Child Psychology- Honors Contract

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Child Care Center Observations

On March 22, 2013, I observed children age three to five in the Child Care Center at Cayuga Community College from 10:40 am to 12:00 pm. The topic of the day was dinosaurs. This topic inspired the physical, cognitive, and social/emotional activities that the children participated in throughout the day. The children seemed to really respond to the topic. They were eager to learn about dinosaurs and base their whole day around these extinct creatures.

Physical Activities

The first dinosaur related physical activity planned for the children was an art project. For this art project, the children used papier-mâché to create dinosaur eggs. To begin the art project, the children had to put on smocks so that they did not get their clothes dirty. Putting on smocks consisted of three steps: 1) picking an old button shirt out of a box, 2) putting the shirt on backwards, and 3) buttoning the shirt for someone else, since they could not reach their backs to button their own. After everyone had a smock on, the children gathered around a table and waited for their teacher to hand them a balloon, the object they would be papier-mâchéing to create the dinosaur egg. The children worked in groups of two. Once each pair had a balloon, the children began the papier-mâchéing process. To papier-mâché, the children scooped a goopy mixture of flour and water that had been prepared for them onto the balloons using their hands. Then they ripped up strips of newspaper and stuck them onto the goop-covered balloons. Some children did not like the texture of the flour and water mixture, so they were less active in the papier-mâchéing process. Those children held back and preferred to place the newspaper strips down. They were also the first to the sink for clean-up.

After the children finished cleaning up the mess created by the art project, that is, washed their hands and took off their smocks and put them away, they were escorted to the gym for more physical activity. Once the children got to the gym, they began running around to burn off some energy. The children raced each other and pretended to be dinosaurs. They roared as they chased each other around the gym. After the children had been running for quite a bit, the teachers got out balls and gave them to the children. The children pretended that the balls were dinosaur eggs. The girls pretended that they were mama dinosaurs, protecting the eggs in a nest. The boys pretended that they were dinosaurs who stole eggs to eat. They tried to get the balls away from the girls. That is how the majority of time at the gym was spent. Once it neared 12:00, the children had to leave the gym and return to the classroom for lunch.

Cognitive Activities

The class began with the children forming a half circle around the teacher in front of a calendar. One child volunteered to use the pointer to point to what the teacher asked. The children were asked what month and year it was; then the volunteer pointed to them on the calendar. Next, the children counted all the numbers on the calendar as the volunteer pointed to them, until they reached the current date, the 22nd. After that, the children worked on sequencing. They had to order the days of the week from yesterday to today to tomorrow. The children correctly put the words Thursday, Friday, and Saturday in the proper sequential order. Then the children had to look outside to determine the weather of the day. On that day, it was snowy.

After the calendar exercise, the children stayed in the half circle for story time. The book that the teacher was reading to them was about dinosaurs. The children learned that dinosaurs are extinct and that they lay eggs like birds and reptiles do today. After the children finished the story, they joined the other class for a science lesson. The children used their imagination to pretend that they were scientists. They pretended to be paleontologists, since they were studying dinosaurs. Then they were asked to recall science words that they learned in previous classes. The teacher asked the children what a dinosaur that only ate meat was called. The children responded with “carnivore.” They also recalled what a dinosaur that only ate plants was called and what a dinosaur that ate both meat and plants was called. The children responded with “herbivore” and “omnivore,” respectively.

The children participated in many cognitive activities throughout the day that intertwined with the physical activities they were doing. When the children were doing the art project, they used their cognitive abilities to decide how much of the flour and water mixture they needed to put on the balloon to make the newspaper strips stay. They also decided how many strips of newspaper they needed to completely cover the balloons. When the children were playing in the gym, they used cognition to set up the rules for their game play. Imagination and pretend play were also used by the children throughout the day. The children were interested in learning about the dinosaurs, and they asked several questions about them to gain knowledge to aid their dinosaur imitation.

Social/Emotional Activities

The children in the Child Care Center had a lot of social interaction. They interacted with the kids in their class, as well as kids in other classes. They also interacted with a hand full of adults that led them in instruction. The children did activities either as a class or as small groups; they hardly ever worked alone. The children had downtime between the art project and going to the gym, while they waited for the teachers and the kids who got really messy to cleanup. The children used the downtime to socialize with one another. The teachers referred to the children as a collective group of friends. When another class was going to join them in an activity the teacher would say Mrs. Soandso’s friends are coming to join our class. Dominance was established in the social pyramid with a line leader. The line leader is only a day long position, but it was a social position all the children wanted.

As far as emotional activities go, the children learned morals and expressed their feelings about certain activities. They also made emotional attachments. Before the children made the dinosaur eggs, they discussed the proper way to treat the eggs. The children knew the moral way to treat the eggs. They said that they had to be careful with them and could not throw them or try to damage them in any way. The children voiced their feelings on the papier-mâché project. The children who felt uncomfortable getting messy or feeling the texture of the flour and water mixture said so; then accommodations were made to put them at ease. The girls seemed to have formed an emotional bond with their teachers. They wanted to hold the teacher’s hands while they walked through the halls and they stayed within a very close proximal distance to their teachers at all times. The boys, on the other hand, were more independent and seemed emotionally unattached. They strayed farther from their teachers than the girls did.

In the short hour and twenty minutes that I spent observing the children at the Child Care Center, they participated in many activities that aided in their physical, cognitive, and social/emotional development. I was surprised with how much they were able to cram into such a small window of time. I was also surprised by the fact that these areas of development were so interconnected. All of the activities the children participated in had a physical component, a cognitive component, and a social/emotional component. This observation has definitely inspired me to want to put any children that I may have in the future into a day care or preschool program. It has also inspired me to apply what I observed into my tutoring and any other teaching that I’ll be doing later on. People have different learning styles, and it is important to include different types of learning and development into one activity to reach people of all different developmental strengths.