



Fostering Critical Reflection in an Authentic Learning Environment

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Presentation Objectives

- ➔ *explore the value of authentic learning environments as a model for teaching best practices to teacher candidates*
- ➔ *gain ideas about how to create a model classroom with a limited budget.*
- ➔ *learn how our university students reacted to the creation of a model ECE and ECE/SPED classroom and how it enhanced their success and understanding of best practices*

The Collaborative Vision

- ⇒ We know the value of authentic learning environments for children, but adult learners can also benefit from being in a space that is specifically prepared for them in their educational journey.



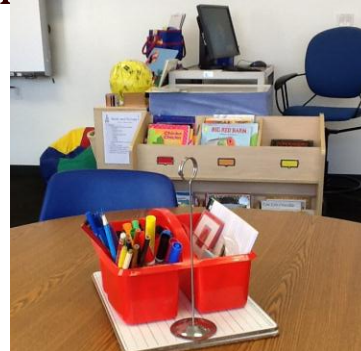
Our Story



- ➔ The creation of a model, authentic learning environment
 - Process
 - Needed resources
 - Elements that are perceived to be required for the successful development and creation of a model classroom
 - Dedicated Space
 - Imagination
 - Community Support
 - Commitment

“A high quality authentic environment is one that offers both cognitive authenticity and physical authenticity”

(Herrington & Herrington, 2006. p.3).



Connection of the environment to enhanced learning experiences

- ➔ Simulating authentic assessment by observing other students playing in centers
- ➔ Assessing the classroom using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) to see what additional materials are needed (the faculty intentionally remove some items for this experience)



Teaching Ideas Continued



- ➔ Using math manipulatives to practice assessing children's mathematical abilities and asking appropriate questions to enhance learning.
- ➔ Modeling creative activities by allowing students to explore the art center freely

More Learning Applications

- ➔ Having students create adaptive materials based on objectives in sample IFSPs and IEPs that could be infused in various centers
- ➔ Providing students with child profiles (including developmental objectives), assigning them a center, and having them plan for embedded learning experience



Meaningful Applications



- ➔ Exploring classroom materials and then identifying what national and state standards are being practiced during different types of purposeful play
- ➔ Using the classroom as a practicum experience with children during a specifically designed summer program



Students' Perceptions of their Learning Experiences



A word cloud on a dark blue background featuring the following words: 'interactive' (orange), 'organized' (red), 'special' (yellow), 'perfect' (orange), 'welcoming' (yellow, largest), 'realistic' (yellow), 'engaging' (blue), 'inviting' (red), and 'intriguing' (blue).

interactive
organized
special
perfect
welcoming
realistic
engaging
inviting
intriguing



Preliminary Research Findings

- ➔ Analysis of qualitative data found that the depth of students' critical reflection skills increased significantly
- ➔ Provide evidence that even more important than the mere physical attributes is the quality of cognitive experiences that are facilitated to promote problem-solving and deeper understandings based on multiple perspectives
- ➔ Provide support for the need to further explore the use of authentic learning environments in relationship to how we prepare individuals to effectively develop as teachers in early childhood teacher preparation programs emphasizing critical thinking and reflection



Interested in Learning More?

➔ Please feel free to contact:

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