

HDFS 428: PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM I

Fall Semester, 2008

INSTRUCTOR:

Dr. Eva L. Essa

Office: SFB 105

Office Hours: by appointment

Phone: 784-7005

email: essa@unr.nevada.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This class, together with HDFS 429, explores theoretical and practical aspects of planning and implementing a curriculum for young children, including activities that promote creative, physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. In particular, we will explore issues related to planning an emergent, integrated curriculum, including documentation, reflective teaching, and collaboration. Philosophical underpinnings of emergent curriculum are emphasized.

TEXTBOOKS:

Fraser, S., & Gestwicki, C. (2000). *Authentic childhood: Exploring Reggio Emilia in the classroom*. Albany, NY: Delmar.

Hendrick, J. (Ed.) (2004). *Next steps toward teaching the Reggio Way* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Pelo, A. (2007). *Language of art: Reggio-inspired studio practices in early childhood settings*. St. Paul, MN: Releaf Press.

A COMMENT ABOUT THIS CLASS:

This class, together with its companion HDFS 429, is part of the requirements for the degree in Early Childhood Education. We will consider this class to be a partnership between the students and the instructor as we attempt to apply the principles of emergent curriculum to how this class is taught. The class will focus on an innovative approach to early childhood education, specifically the emergent curriculum approach which has gained world-wide notoriety through the Italian schools of Reggio Emilia. It will be a learning experience for all of us!

WHAT DO WE HOPE TO LEARN FROM THIS CLASS?

Overall, I hope all of us will gain insight into how to view early childhood curriculum in a way that respects and values children and helps them achieve competence. I expect that we will be creating a new image of children and how to work with them. More specifically, we will...

1. ...examine curriculum philosophy and development on a continuum, from highly teacher-directed to a more collaborative view where children and teachers work together in providing direction for the curriculum.
2. ...learn about the Reggio Emilia approach and the fundamental principles that drive curriculum in those programs.
3. ...explore the "image of the child" and clarify values about how children are viewed in our society.
4. ...experience the importance of the environment, viewing the environment as the "third teacher" of a program for young children.
5. ...learn the role of investigations and projects in early childhood education and differentiate these from the more traditional units or themes.
6. ...learn strategies for effective communication with children.
7. ...reconsider the role of the teacher, to view her/him as a reflective collaborator and partner in the learning process and as a researcher in discovering how and what children are learning.
8. ...gain a deeper understanding of parents as partners.
9. ...gain skills in methods of documenting the learning that goes on in the classroom.
10. ...view early childhood curriculum as integrated rather than as segmented.
11. ...explore a variety of media and how they can be used to express learning.
12. ...explore ways in which all aspects of development - creative, cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical - are fostered in the early childhood curriculum.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED TO DO FOR THIS CLASS?

I would like to assume that you will as receive an "A" in this class, so you will all start out with an A. To keep that A, you will need to do the following and demonstrate that you are fully engaged in the tasks of this class:

1. Be a full participant in this class. That means reading assignments, thinking about and *reflecting* on them, and being ready to discuss concepts in class. It also means being a thoughtful participant in class activities and discussion about involvement in the Child and Family Research Center or an early childhood classroom in the Washoe County School District, as discussed more fully below.
2. Email Dr. Essa two discussion questions based on the readings for the week by the Monday before each class period. These questions should reflect your understanding of the readings. Grading of the questions will be based on the complexity of the question, as it reflects your understanding of the material. (Note: some examples of such thoughtful questions will be provided separately.)
3. Be involved in one classroom of the Child and Family Research Center (CFRC) or the Washoe County School District (WCSD) for two hours a week. Your time there will be focused on "getting a feel for the class," which will involve both observation **and** participation. Experiences in the CFRC or WCSD will revolve around the types of activities we are considering in this class. More details are provided below.

One additional comment about the practicum component: The CFRC or WCSD class in which you spend time this semester will be the same one in which you will spend **more** time next semester, in HDFS 429. The focus of your time in the spring will be much more on participation and involvement in the curriculum.

4. Each week, set and discuss with the Head Teacher an objective for your own progress as a teacher. "Weekly Reflection" forms are provided for this purpose and should be brought to class for our weekly meetings with the Head Teachers.
5. Hand in assignments, as described later. There are 10 assignments, which primarily represent an integration of your time spent in the CFRC or WCSD and class readings and discussions.
6. Become familiar with Daily Journals. By October 1, hand in a critique of one daily journal along with a copy of the daily journal itself (use one either from the class in which you work or of one of the examples provided in class). Through October and November, hand in six daily journals. These should come from experiences in which you have participated and be approved by the Head Teacher.

GRADING AND GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

I would like each of you to earn an A in this class, and will assume that this is the grade you start out with and, we hope, end with. Points will be given to the various components of the class, as indicated below:

Ten assignments @ 15 points each	150
Daily journal critique	20
Six daily journals @ 15 points each	90
Weekly Reflections 12 @ 5 points each	60
Class discussion/participation - this assumes attendance (please let Dr. Essa know if you cannot be in class)	100
Two weekly questions based on readings 13 @ 10 points each	130
Participation in CFRC or WCSD	100
TOTAL	650

If you plan to keep track, an A is 93% and above, a B is 83 to 92%, a C is 73 to 82%, and a D is 63 to 72%. Anything below 63%....well, let's not even mention that!

PORTFOLIOS:

All students pursuing a Teacher Education Program must complete a portfolio before they begin the student teaching experience in their last semester at UNR. Those of you in the Early Childhood Education program will begin (or continue) working on the portfolio this semester. The Portfolio is not part of the grade for this class; however, 25 points will be deducted from the final grade if you do not hand in the portfolio preparation assignment (this is purely an incentive so that you don't get into the "I'll do it later" mode!). Plan to hand in the following: (1) a box, folder, or other container with the materials that you have collected for potential inclusion in the final Portfolios; (2) a draft of the "introduction" part of the reflective essay. Note that Portfolios can be done in electronic format as well as in a tangible, hard-copy format.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Each week in class, we will discuss the topic of that week, supported by the readings, especially your reactions to these, and your experiences with and observations of children in relation to the topic. In addition, the last half hour of class each week will be spent in small group meetings with the head teachers discussing what is happening in the classrooms you have become part of. On several dates, we will spend some time exploring various media. All of these activities will be aimed at helping us gain a better understanding of emergent curriculum, especially the Reggio Emilia approach.

DATE	ACTIVITY	ASSIGNMENTS
8/28	Introduction; review class information How do children learn? This is a question of theory, philosophy, even politics	
9/4	What is Reggio Emilia? History, background, influence	Fraser 1; Hendricks 1, 2, 3 2 questions due 9/2 (by email please)
9/11	"Image of the child" Discussion of Daily Journals (bring a photo from your classroom)	Fraser 2; Hendrick 4; Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 9/8
9/18	The role of the teacher: Teacher as collaborator and researcher Media Exploration 1: <i>Paper</i>	Fraser 3; Hendrick 7, 8; Pelo pp. 1-20; Assignment #1 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 9/15
9/25	Relationships with families and the community (focus on Fraser, Chapter 4,)	Fraser 4 (focus on pages 64-78, 89-98); Hendrick, 9, 10 Assignment #2 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 9/22
10/2	Relationships with children (focus on Fraser, Chapter 4, pages 78-89) Media Exploration 2: <i>Pens</i>	Hendrick 12, 13; Pelo p. 85-103 Assignment #3 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 9/29 Critique of a Daily Journal due
10/9	The environment as "the third teacher"	Fraser 5; Hendrick 17; Pelo pp. 35-56; Assignment #4 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 10/6

DATE	ACTIVITY	ASSIGNMENTS
10/16	Documentation Media Exploration 3: <i>Paint</i>	Fraser 6; Pelo pp. 35-56 Assignment #5 Weekly Reflection due
10/23	Documentation, cont.	Hendrick 19; begin handing in Daily Journals as you do them 2 questions due by 10/20
10/30	Negotiating the curriculum	Fraser 7; Hendrick 16 Assignment #6 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 10/27
11/6	The investigating classroom Media Exploration 4: <i>Clay</i>	Fraser 8; Hendrick 14; Pelo pp. 57-84; Assignment #7 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 11/3
11/13	Projects in the curriculum; meeting standards through projects	Hendrick 15; Assignment #8 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 11/10 All Daily Journals handed in by today or earlier (preferably!)
11/20	Aesthetics in the program Media Exploration 5: <i>Wire</i>	Fraser 9; Hendrick 19; Pelo, pp. 85-103 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 11/17
11/27	Thanksgiving Day: No class	
12/4	The Hundred Languages of Children	Fraser 10; Pelo, pp. 107-137 Assignment #9 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 12/1 ECE: Portfolio materials
12/11 12:00- 2:00	From there to here: Summing up Reviewing, wrapping up, and looking toward the Spring semester NOTE <u>time change</u> according to finals schedule	Fraser, Afterword; Hendrick 4, 20, 21 Assignment #10 Weekly Reflection due 2 questions due by 12/8

BEING WITH CHILDREN AS PART OF THIS CLASS

Child and Family Research Center (CFRC)

The two hours per week spent in the CFRC will serve as a laboratory where what is learned and discussed in class can be observed, experienced, and/or carried out. Students can spend the time in a preschool or Kindergarten class:

1. The Kindergarten class, 11th St. Center (upstairs)
Jenna Hayes, Head Teacher (until 9/30) 784-4533, hayesj2@unr.nevada.edu
Shari Roberts, Head Teacher (from 10/1 on), 784-4533, SAP4774@aol.com
2. Mixed-age group of 3- to 5-year-olds, 11th St. Center (downstairs)
Minoo Rahmanifar, Head Teacher, 784-4533, minoor@unr.edu
3. The 3-year-olds' class, SFB, Room 117
Diana Clarke, Head Teacher, 784-8258, Dclarke364@aol.com
4. The 4-year-olds' room, SFB, Room 116
Heike Hepp, Head Teacher, 784-8257, hhepp@unr.edu
5. There are several CFRC infant and toddler classrooms in which students can be placed. If this age group interests you, please discuss with Dr. Essa.

There are some times that are better than others for you to be in CFRC classes; if you have absolutely no other time, we can make an exception or two:

1. Kindergarten: 8:30 to noon, T, F; 1:15 to 3; 1:15 to 5:30, M, W, TH
2. Mixed-age: 9 to 11:30 a.m., T, Th, F; 3:30 to 5:30, T, Th, F
3. 4-year-olds: 9 to 11:30 a.m., T, Th, F; 3:30 to 5:30, T, Th
4. 3-year-olds: 9 to 11:30 a.m., T, Th, F; 3:30 to 5:30, M, W, F

Choose one class in which you will spend your time. We will aim to have no more than two students in any given classroom so we don't overwhelm the teachers or the children. Find a consistent schedule when you will be there each week; however, you may, on occasion, want to come at a different time to get a broader sense of how the class operates.

Begin your two hours per week in the CFRC the week of 9/1. If you are not able to fulfill your practicum hours because of illness or another urgent reason, please let the head teacher know as soon as possible. Missed hours will have to be made up within 2 weeks. You do not need to make up for days that fall on official holidays (e.g., 9/1 is Labor Day) or when the Center is closed (Professional Development Days). Punch in a time card when you arrive and leave to verify your hours.

BEING WITH CHILDREN AS PART OF THIS CLASS

Washoe County School District (WCSD)

The two hours per week spent in a WCSD class will serve as a laboratory where what is learned and discussed in class can be observed, experienced, and/or carried out. Students can spend the time in one of three preschool classes or one COW Bus (Classroom On Wheels) class. These classes are all staffed by a teacher and an aide, and are bilingual classrooms.

1. Mindy Kinsey, Teacher, mkinsey@washoe.k12.nv.us
Libby Booth Elementary School, 1450 Stewart St., 333-5140
9-11:30 a.m. and 12:30 to 3 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays
Year-round schedule; off-track 10/31-11/28; 12/22-1/2; 3/23-4-17
2. Corinne Thomson, Teacher, cthompson@washoe.k12.nv.us
Sparks High School Community Learning Center, 820 15th St, Sparks
(behind the school building, in a Modular unit), 333-3526
Traditional schedule: Mondays through Thursdays, 9-2 (same holidays as UNR)
3. Kara Turek, Teacher, kturek@washoe.k12.nv.us
Veterans Elementary School, 1200 Locust Street, Reno, 333-5090
Mondays through Thursdays, 9-2
Year-round schedule; off-track 10/31-11/28; 12/22-1/2; 3/23-4-17
3. Gloria Rodarte, COW Bus Teacher, grodarte@washoe.k23.nv.us, 691-0047
Mornings: Echo Loder Elementary School, 600 Apple St.
Traditional schedule: Mondays through Thursdays, 9-11:30
Afternoons: Kate Smith Elementary School, 1925 F Street, Sparks
Traditional schedule: Mondays through Thursdays, 12:30-3

Begin your time in the WCSD classroom the week of 9/1. If you are not able to be there because of illness or another urgent reason, please let the head teacher know as soon as possible. Missed hours will have to be made up within 2 weeks. You do not need to make up for days that fall on official holidays (e.g., 9/1 is Labor Day). Please arrange to make up the hours you will miss during weeks that are off-track. When you choose a WCSD classroom that is year-round and has an off-track schedule, keep in mind that during the Spring 2008 semester you will need to make up 6 hours per week that will be missed during off-track weeks. Please keep a log of the dates and times that you spent in the classroom.

YOUR ROLE AS A STUDENT IN THE CFRC or WCS

1. Be on time
2. Be there during assigned days and times
3. If ill, call head teacher and email instructor first thing in the morning
4. Make up any missed hours within two weeks
5. Sign in and out on time cards in the CFRC; make sign-in arrangements with the WCS teacher
6. Check with head teacher before purchasing materials or asking for materials to be purchased; funding is available to purchase some materials this year. If you wish to purchase materials for an activity, please discuss with Dr. Essa
7. Share your enthusiasm about teaching with the head teacher
8. Interact with the children
9. Dress according to the dress code, spelled out in the CFRC student/staff handbook; check with WCSD teacher about their dress codes
10. Contact course instructor if questions or issues arise

ROLE OF HEAD TEACHERS

1. Model of best practice
2. Mentor (willingness to answer questions, be open to ideas)
3. Allow students to try leading activities
4. Share an enthusiasm with students about teaching
5. Contact course instructor if questions or issues arise
6. Provide monthly feedback on student performance

ASSIGNMENTS

For each of the following assignments, write approximately two typed, double-spaced pages, indicating what you observed and your reflections about what you observed. Your thoughtful, reflective reaction is what is required in these assignments. In all assignments, cross-reference to information from the readings.

Assignment #1 (due 9/18) - *Image of the Child*

Videotape a young child for 5 minutes. In the context of what we've discussed and read about the "image of children," reflect on what you see in the child as you review the video. Try to see the child as strong and competent rather than as weak and needy. What does the child do to confirm such an impression?

Assignment #2 (due 9/25) - *Teacher as Collaborator*

Videotape and observe the head teacher in the classroom. Look for examples of the teacher as collaborator or partner, either with a child or with a small group of children. How does the teacher engage children in conversation, facilitate their exploration of materials, or guide experiences of discovery or problem-solving? Note what you see and hear and analyze her role as a collaborator with the children. How did she act as a collaborator? Are there other ways she could have expanded that role? What facilitated or hindered her taking on the role of collaborator?

Assignment #3 (due 10/2) - *Relationships with Families*

Observe the classroom and nearby environment to look for ways in which the teacher communicates with families. What signs do you see that families are made welcome and are considered a part of the program? Note these down. Formulate 2 or 3 questions that you can ask of the head teacher to gather more information about this topic. Ask the head teacher whether she would prefer to discuss your questions via email or in person. Be sure to provide the head teacher enough time for this task.

Assignment #4 (due 10/16) - *Conversations with Children*

Authentic conversation with children is not superficial, but is respectful of the child's ideas, abilities, and thought processes. Engage a child in conversation. If possible, work in teams of 2, videotaping each other in conversation. Later analyze what was said. What was the child's message? How did you respond? Could you have responded differently? Did you hear the child's message or might you have missed her/his meaning? Be critical and indicate what you learned from this experience. *Repeat this activity as often as possible over the remainder of the semester (see #10).* Such conversations are not a "one-shot" activity but ones that require much practice. Hand in your paper and a videotape or CD (preferably) of your conversation.

Assignment #5 (due 10/23) - *Environment as the Third Teacher*

Design and use of space should encourage encounters, communication, & relationships and have underlying order and beauty in design and organization. Videotape one area of the classroom for about 10 minutes. Analyze how the children use the space and whether they recognize its identity, purpose, and potential. Do they engage the space in confident and interested ways or do they seem to ignore or avoid the space? Analyze what you see from your brief observation.

Assignment #6 (due 10/30) - *Documentation*

Documentation is communication. The thinking of the children can be documented in different ways: through transcription of their words, photographs of their activities, and representation through media. Observe an activity in which one or more children are engaged. Document what the child or children are doing by using two forms of communication. Explain and discuss in a paper what you observed and documented. Please submit both pieces of documentation that you discuss along with your paper.

Assignment #7 (due 11/6) - *Philosophy of Teaching Young Children*

Your readings, assignments, and interactions with children through this semester should have provided you with the opportunity to reflect on your approach to teaching young children. Write a brief paper on your philosophy of teaching young children. Consider this as the start of the reflective essay for the ECE Portfolio.

Assignment #8 (due 11/13) - *The Investigating Classroom*

Carefully examine the classroom and look for one element that is designed to promote investigation by children. What did you observe about how this has provoked children to explore and investigate? Has it carried over into other investigations? How do the children use it? Given information in Chapter 8 of *Authentic Childhood* about theories that explain children's learning processes, discuss what you have observed within the context of these theories.

Assignment #9 (due 12/4) - *Aesthetics in the Program*

Carefully examine the classroom for signs that art by the children is an expression of their ideas. How are materials presented to promote engagement? How are children's products displayed or made part of documentation? Observe a child engage in the art center and describe what you observe. How does the child's activity fit with the principles described in Chapter 9?

Assignment #10 (due 12/11) - *Conversations with Children, Revisited*

Provide a cumulative report of your continuing analysis of how you engage children in conversations. What have you learned through the semester to help you better engage children in conversation? Reflect on your growing skills, providing specific examples; include an early and more recent example on CD or videotape with the paper.

VIDEOTAPING

Som of the assignments ask you to videotape what you observed. The CFRC has two camcorders; one is kept in the Sarah Fleischmann Building and the other is at the 11th Street site. These are for use by students as well as by staff. You will need to sign out camcorders and return them to their designated storage place. WCSO's ECE program also has a camcorder available. You will need to arrange ahead of time with your teacher when you want to video record so she can make arrangements for the camcorder to be there on the days you need it. This may take some spontaneity out of the activities, but try to be as prepared ahead as you can.

Videotaping provides a unique opportunity to observe, analyze, and document events. Reflect on how the use of videotapes helps you in your self-analysis and growth as a teacher. One of the ways in which you should develop and grow as a teacher this semester is in your ability to converse with children. This means having meaningful conversations rather than perfunctory or superficial ones that interest neither you nor the children. Having such conversations is not easy, and requires practice and skill. Continual attempts at engaging children in conversations and analysis of your attempts are part of what you will be working on this semester. The videotape equipment will help you in this goal.

Also, in order to videotape for some of the assignments, especially ones in which you are a participant rather than an observer, you will need to work collaboratively with others in the class. Collaboration is a cornerstone of what we are learning in class this semester, and working as a team rather than alone is much more rewarding and productive. So, you are encouraged to view your classmates as partners and collaborators as much and as often as possible. It is not only for purposes of videotaping that such partnerships are valuable; you will find that having someone with whom you can discuss various aspects of your work with children within the classroom becomes richer when more than one person's views and insights are taken into consideration. This, by the way, is one reason why many activities we will do during our class time will be done as collaborative group work.

WEEKLY REFLECTIONS

Each week, this form should be filled out before you leave the classroom and given to the head teacher. It provides information for the Head Teacher to support your work and for Dr. Essa as she reviews your progress.

Overall Goal: *During the time you spend with children, you should observe, experience, and/or carry out what you are learning from the readings and from class discussions.*

1. When I am with the children this week, my objective is:

2. If you met your objective this week, how did you meet it? If you did not meet it, why not? Be specific. [Note: not meeting your objective is a good opportunity for learning]

3. Record an incident that was out of the ordinary or made an impression on you (think about children's explorations, conversations, comments, teacher behaviors, routines, etc.). Be specific and cite children's words if you can.

4. Chose at least one question/topic from this past week's experiences that would be most relevant to discuss during the weekly meeting with your head teacher.

5. Head Teacher's initials: _____ Notes from the teacher:
Weekly Reflection Form was: ___ on time ___ complete ___ incomplete