

How Inquiry Can Be Used to Connect Curriculum Content Areas in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

We are living in an age where an answer to any question is available with a click of a mouse or a simple “Alexa!” But are these answers always correct? What is a child learning about the inquiry process with such quick solutions? Children used to be taught to research questions because, as Margret Mead said, “Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.” Unfortunately, the advance of technology has caused a step backward in practicing inquiry education. This is a detriment to children who will continue to move on into formal education without knowing the art of finding information on their own.

This project will focus on an inquiry based approach and how it can be used to integrate curriculum content areas. The hope, however, is that this is just the starting point to anchor all curriculum content areas to each other, allowing children to connect in a way that feels right to them while learning to answer questions in a factual way.

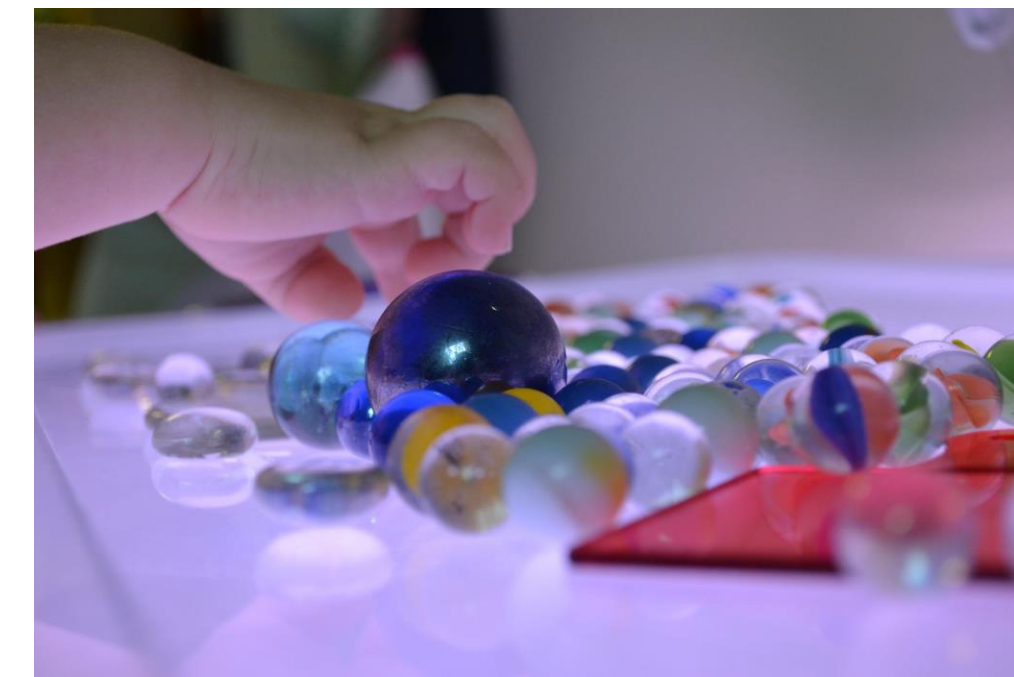


Methods

- Observations
- Surveys of early childhood educators
- Focus group
- Analysis of developmental theories

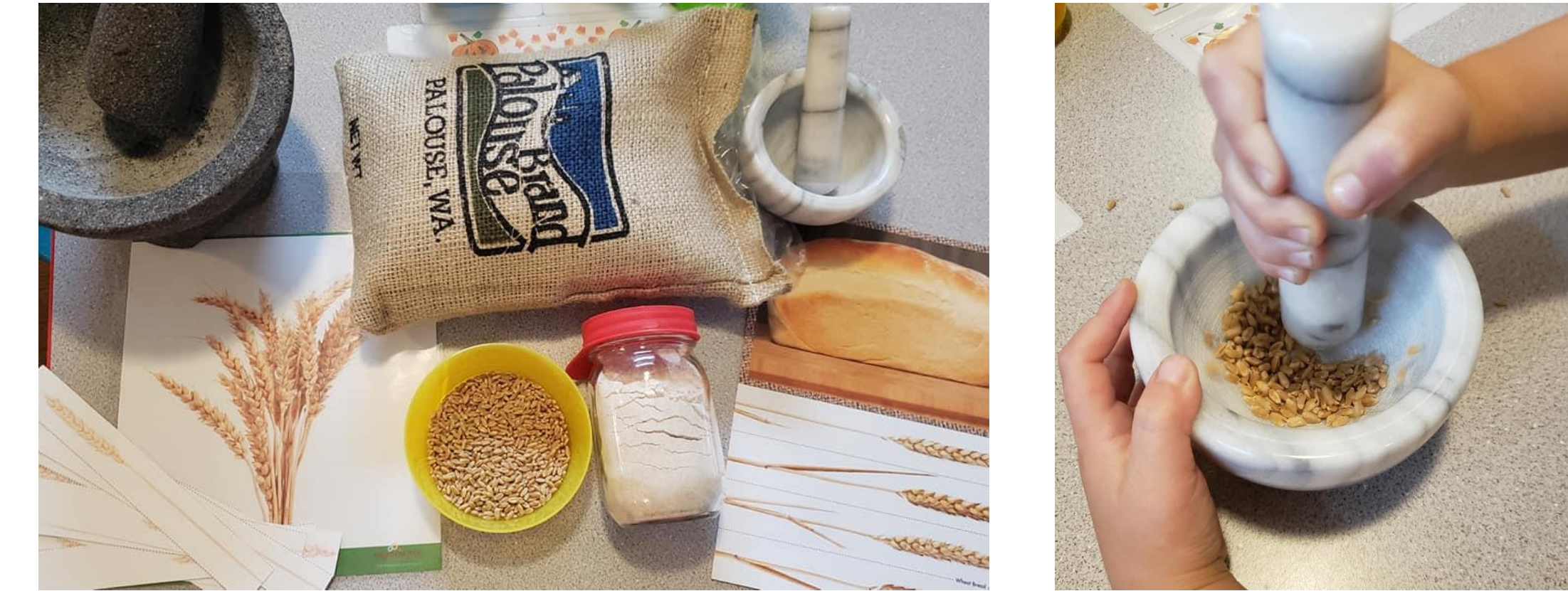
Objectives

The objective of this project is to assess if early childhood educators can integrate curriculum content areas through the incorporation of inquiry skills and to give educators strategies that can be used in the classroom.



Results

- “Young children don’t separate content into different areas; they naturally see and integrate learning in a holistic way as they play.” (McClure, G. 2017 p1)
- By staggering curriculum content areas throughout the day and not making connections, teachers are actually preventing children from fully understanding what is being taught.
- Instead, it is imperative that teachers take time to plan a way to connect curriculum content areas.
- Example: when learning about insects during science; read books about insects for literacy, mix insects in resin with wooden blocks then graph or count what is built, learn where different insects live for social studies and create insect inspired art.



- Take that idea a step further by documenting the children’s learning, focusing on questions that are being asked.
- Once a list of questions has been compiled, start the research together. Following the children’s interests may result in a long term investigation or study that could be truly meaningful. (This style of learning is often called “Project Based Learning.”)
- Children will likely not remember everything they learn while in early childhood education, but they will remember how they went about learning and how a teacher’s encouragement made them feel.



Conclusion

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

— W.B. Yeats

To teach inquiry, we must first admit that we do not have the answer to every question. We must long to learn alongside the children that we are guiding. When a child asks a “big picture” question, instead of immediately giving the answer, offer them the chance to find the answer with you. This can be done by making observations, reading books, or researching the answer in a way that is valuable to the child. That is not to say that technology shouldn’t be used, it is instead to suggest that we use it as a tool not a solution. Children will go on to spend 13-20 plus years in formal education settings, why not teach children to find joy in those settings? I would challenge teachers to be the educator that helps children to love learning!



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