NEEDS, APPROACH, BENEFITS, COMPETITION (NABC)

Designing a Preschool Classroom

Needs

Recognizing that the preschool experience encompasses critical phases of a child’s emotional, socio-cultural, cognitive, and physical development, we propose a redesign of the typical preschool classroom to include options for flexible usage of space coupled with a balanced implementation of varied educational philosophies. Preschool classrooms are often purposefully designed and thus static in their orientation, allowing for little flexibility for differentiated usage of space. In addition, many preschool classrooms are very contrived in appearance, rather than designed as a natural extension of the child’s home experience. We find that this is unfortunate, given that the preschool experience is, in many cases, the child’s first experience away from the home. Finally, the disconnect between classroom space and the outdoor space within most preschools leaves much to be desired. At a time in a child’s life where we strive to show connections between the “disciplines”, the freedom to explore nature and ask questions capitalizes on the child’s inquisitive nature and provides a fantastic entry point for discussions and explorations.

Approach

To address the learning needs of young children, it is important to pay attention to what their development needs are, how these needs can be addressed, which of the approaches results in an effective learning, and how best an approach can be evaluated. In addition, the practicality, feasibility, and financial viability of all approaches need to be assessed.

We are going to approach the redesign of a preschool classroom by studying the literature that covers decades of research on children’s learning; observing kids in a pre-school classroom to identify their behavior patterns, likes and dislikes, specific cultural practices, languages, and activities, both intended and free-form; observing the classroom in terms of physical attributes such as shape and size, environment, and availability and use of objects including furniture, toys, and books; and interviewing the teachers and staff to obtain more information about the children’s development needs and priorities. We may also interview the parents of children attending preschool to get an idea of their views and preferences for their children’s learning needs.

Some of the initial solutions to pre-school age kids’ learning needs are listed below:
- Monthly themes based on natural habitats; for example, forest and ocean, which would develop curiosity and knowledge and promote inquiry-based learning later in life.
- Video projections on a screen with which kids can play thus promoting visual learning.
- Collaborative story-telling that stimulates critical social, cognitive, and linguistic skills as they jointly construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct theories of everyday events.
- Interactive exhibits on the concepts of science to familiarize them with some real-world problems.
- Soft blocks that kids can use to make familiar objects and furniture, which is intended to bring out creativity.

Benefits

Initially, we have identified the following as a few of the potential benefits to this type of spatial redesign:
- Permits Integrated curricula (math, language, sciences, arts, geography, botany, zoology)
- Permits the development of multiple intelligences (Same content displayed with different media)
- Permits open ended and directed teaching styles
- Permits individual and collective learning
- Permits virtual and in person learning and teaching
Competition/Alternatives

Many other preschool spaces offer some sort of flexibility, but the type that we are going to propose will let teachers experiment with more types of technology and new, light-weight, durable furniture in order to convey the topics that the preschool class is learning about. Our design will integrate topics through projectors and new furniture that can be easily changed to move fluidly from topic to topic. This will be especially useful to play-based preschools that follow the interests of the children – and with shift in new “studies” should be a shift in the learning space. The competition provides for shelving, carpeting and other pieces of furniture that are movable and changeable, however, they do not recreate the space (and with as much ease) as our proposal of a super flexible design. Additionally, in many preschools, these pieces of small, movable furniture are either bolted down or hard to change (e.g. play set can only be changed once every year), making it difficult to really tailor the classroom design to the children’s interests.