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Inquiry in Early Childhood Teacher Education: Reflections on Practice

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Abstract

As teacher educators we work to make inquiry methodology explicit to help teacher candidates construct the link between theory and practice. Bringing inquiry learning into the early childhood curriculum method courses raises the potential for inquiry teaching practice for teacher candidates and models a constructivist practice in a higher education setting. Of the numerous curriculum studies available, few focus on methods of inquiry to guide adult learners' to construct inquiry-teaching practices that they can transfer to their work with children. To improve the quality of our teaching in our Early Childhood Teacher Education program we researched and developed several tools to facilitate the transfer from teacher candidates own learning experiences to their teaching practice. We relied on the literature regarding the Reggio Emilia approach of inquiry learning and teaching based on documentation, as well as Creativity theory to help us develop a method to relate concepts with materials in a cycle of inquiry. Through our *Cycle of Inquiry* and the introduction of *Concept Materials* we promote representation which is a critical aspect of constructing knowledge about what it means to teach. We find that this differs from merely modeling hands-on activities in that it promotes higher level reasoning and creativity throughout the early childhood curriculum, as teacher candidates learn to reflect on and question the *big ideas*—thinking and learning—they observe in play to develop practice that extends learning along a conceptual continuum of inquiry. This data accumulated over the course of two years at East Tennessee State University and the University of Michigan-Dearborn

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