What is the center’s philosophy?

What does it mean for children’s learning?

Andy Stremmel, Ph.D. & Kay Cutler, Ph.D.
(some excerpts taken from a philosophy talk)

The Fishback Center for Early Childhood Education is a center that is inspired by three main frameworks or mindsets: Inquiry-Based Learning, Social Constructivism, and Reggio-inspired practices.

All three of these frameworks are interrelated and work very well together. Inquiry-Based Learning is a way to approach curriculum building. It takes into account children’s questions, both verbal and nonverbal, and brings them to the center of the curriculum. Inquiry-Based Learning means that teachers form either whole-group or small-group learning around questions or problems posed as provocations for children. These provocations then become the focus of investigations that may occur in a day, in a week, or something more ongoing. It integrates learning into meaningful experiences and draws upon many different disciplines of study at one time rather than separating the disciplines.

Social Constructivism means that children are innate seekers of meaning-making. They are naturally

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Director’s News

Welcome to the New School Year! The fall has been really moving quickly!

Kay Cutler, Ph.D.

The building seems so very empty when the center is not in session. This fall has been moving really fast! I would like to extend a special welcome to new families whose children are enrolled for the first time this fall. Welcome to the Fishback Center!

For families who are returning, Welcome back!!

Center’s Declaration of Intent

Each year the Center’s Teaching Team creates a Center Declaration of Intent to guide the teaching team’s focus and direction as we work this year.

The 2013-2014 Declaration of Intent is:

We declare this to be a year to engage in outreach with the community by creating an environment that fosters positive collaboration and builds connections through community dialogue - both in the center and in the Brookings community.

The purpose of the Declaration of Intent is to help us frame the work that we do and to help guide us in one direction throughout the year. We come back to the declaration periodically as a teaching team to see how we are doing and what we are doing to make the initial intent come alive. As we go through this year together, please help add to our work together, give feedback or suggestions on building positive collaboration and connections with everyone who is part of the center and within the Brookings community.
curious and want explore their world to make sense of it. Children explore in relationships. They build their knowledge together with others. This framework on learning puts teachers in the role of creating an environment for discovery. It gives teachers the opportunity to be co-learners or partners in learning rather than the role of fact distributer and dispenser of knowledge.

“Children are innate seekers of meaning-making. They are naturally curious and want to explore their world to make sense of it.”

Reggio Inspired Practices is a mindset or a way of thinking. It isn’t a set curriculum or way of teaching/learning. It isn’t a model that can be picked up and copied from one place to another. When we study Reggio Inspired practices, we find that it embraces all the best research and theory in child development like progressive education and the works of John Dewey. In fact, when talking about their way of teaching, some Italians have said that Americans are coming to Italy to rediscover their own theories and ideologies about how to work with children.

Being inspired by the teachers in Reggio Emilia, Italy means that we really have to work on thinking about and creating our own approach to teaching and learning based on the values and beliefs in the context of the cultural community of Brookings and the larger community of South Dakota. We can’t copy exactly what is being done in Reggio Emilia, Italy because it doesn’t fit with who we are and what we value. Yet, we can study what they do and consider what it means for us, here in Brookings, SD.

There are a number of very important ideas that have been part of this mindset. The Image of the Child means that we see children as competent and capable, from birth, in terms of being able to learn and contribute to their own development and relationships that they form. Children are so innately curious and everything around them is exciting. When we view children as competent (meaning having the skills to figure things out or make meaning), capable, intelligent, and able to do things, then we focus on what they can do rather than what they can’t do. We look at their questions, the things that intrigue them, and what they are passionate about and see the world in a whole new light. The idea of the Image of the Child keeps us honest as teachers. We often ask, “Is this meaningful for the children? Where is their curiosity? What are they focused on?” This helps teachers to focus on meaningful things rather than for teachers to teach to the child who is not there.

The second very important idea is the idea of Listening with More than Just Ears. The pedagogy of listening means that we see listening as an active verb, a way of honoring and respecting children’s ideas and questions. If we listen carefully by watching – using our eyes and our ears, then there are four active places taking in information. The Italians say, “We were given two eyes, two ears, and only one mouth”. Therefore, teachers should spend more time listening than talking.

Often we try to capture what we are seeing and hearing in order to bring it back to the children as a memory, to discover what we have learned, and as a way to think about what to do next. This idea is called Making Learning Visible. We try to capture interactions through images and dialogue to also bring back to parents and teachers to think together about what is going on in their interactions. During the months of October and November, we are using the Teaching Team – Friday morning meetings to study documentation – images and dialogue, with each other. If you are curious, about what is going on – parents and family members are always welcome to attend. We meet in Pugsley Room 117 (the classroom next to the center) from 8:15 am to 9:15 am.

In addition, at time points during the semester, small groups and individual classroom teaching teams may have curriculum meetings with family members to talk about what is occurring in small groups. The process of thinking together is so very valuable. Multiple sets of eyes and perspectives adds a richness to our understanding of what potentially is happening and what the children may be thinking/learning.
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The PAC would like to ask your permission to contact you this year. At the Family Communication Center table located at the front entrance, there are contact lists on the table, please add your name and contact information if you are ok with the PAC contacting you periodically throughout this year.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS
OCT. 29TH – SDSU STUDENT ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN
PLACE – FISHBACK CENTER FOR ECE
TIME – 6:00 – 7:00 PM
The SDSU Student Association for the Education of Young Children will be hosting a Fall Festival this evening. Come join the fun!

NOV. 6TH & 7TH – LIFETOUCH PICTURE RETAKES FOR SDSU PRESCHOOL
PLACE – GATHERING SPACE
TIME – WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY, DURING THE DAY
If you would like your child’s picture re-taken, please let your mentor teacher know your request and pictures will be retaken on Wednesday and Thursday.

NOV. 11TH – VETERAN’S DAY HOLIDAY – NO SCHOOL

PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL NEWS:
In keeping with the Center’s declaration (see page 1) that this is the year of outreach, the Parent Advisory Council has been thinking outwardly about the status of education in the larger Brookings community.

In particular, we are excited and curious about plans to build a new elementary school in Brookings, and at our first meeting of the year, we were glad to hear from Kay Cutler that the SDSU Early Childhood Education program is working with the Brookings School District as partners in the design for the students and teachers who would be served by this new facility.

Beginning last spring, Sue Brokmeier (SDSU kindergarten teacher), Andy Stremmel (department head), and Kay Cutler (Center director) have been involved in conversations about the new K-3 school to include a laboratory-experience for teacher candidates. No decisions have been made. This fall Dr. Stremmel and Dean Thorngren visited Maplewood Richmond Heights School District in St. Louis, along with two administrators and a school board member from the Brookings School District. The Maplewood Richmond Heights School serves as a partner primary elementary setting for faculty and teacher candidates at Webster University and are also using Reggio-inspired practices/inquiry based-learning.

What might this mean for Brookings and for SDSU? It seems that only time will tell, having an open communication system and ongoing dialogue can only benefit everyone involved. Incorporation inquiry-based learning at other levels of learning may look differently and ongoing discussions about what might facilitate future inquiry-based learning experiences in the new school environment have been part of the design process.

It is an exciting time of growth and change for our children. We know how important the early years of school are, and as parents at the Fishback Center, we support the inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning that our children experience every day. Might our faculty and our teacher candidates be partnered with K-3 mentor teachers in the community who also support this approach? It seems like a “win-win” situation to us!

The real first step is the special bond issue vote to be held on Tuesday, Nov. 12. Assuming that passes, we hope that the school district will continue to work with SDSU to promote quality education for our children. We look forward to ongoing dialogue, and as a Parent Advisory Council, we will actively seek opportunities to involve families at the Fishback Center in this conversation.
Looking Ahead to National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Conference

Nov. 20-23rd, 2013 – Washington DC

The Fishback Center’s Teaching Team engages in teacher research each year. For the last two years, we have been studying small group learning as a collaborative project with a teaching team at Kent State University’s Child Development Center. The research has been accepted and scheduled to be presented this year. De Gilkerson and Kay Cutler, along with Carol Bersani, from Kent State University, Kent, OH will be presenting the work.

Team Member Corner – Who is Laura Gloege?

Laura Gloege holds three roles at the Fishback Center. She is the SDSU Preschool Coordinator, the Mentor Teacher for the 4 & 5 Morning Lab, and is the Coordinator for the Out-of-School Time Program for the SDSU Kindergarten. As the Preschool Coordinator, she is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the preschool.

She oversees enrollment, tuition, and facilitates communication between the community and the center regarding community events. She keeps the communication flow open between labs and supports the kitchen work by supervising the two work-study people, Sam Bloementhal and Val Lux.

As the 4 & 5 Morning Mentor Teacher, she supervises the curriculum planning, guidance, and activities that occur in the 4 & 5 Morning Lab. She guides the teacher candidates and assistant teachers by providing feedback on their interactions. She oversees the development of the children’s portfolios and provides teacher candidates feedback on their portfolio development. She also evaluates them on teaching, documentation/reflection, newsletter writing, planning, and teacher research engagement. As the Coordinator for the OST Program, she oversees the enrollment, tuition, and licensing requirements.

Laura’s family includes her husband, Chad, who works at Daktronics, and her two sons, Donovan and Trevor. Donovan is 3 years old and is in the 3 & 4 Morning Lab. Trevor is 5 months and is growing and changing every day. Laura enjoys spending time with family and friends, traveling, and collecting children’s books. She has thousands that she shares with the preschool.

Did You Know?: The Fishback Center as a Parent Lending Library?

The Fishback Center for Early Childhood Education has a Parent Lending Library with books available for parents and family members to check out. The Parent Section is located on the dark brown wooded shelf that in the Gathering Space.

The books have an orange code on their spines. The book check out process is completed in the Resource Area of the Center and your child’s Mentor Teacher may help you check out the book(s).

Some of the new additions to the library this year include:


