

Possibilities

Early Childhood Inclusion

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Project PREPARE's New Grant Year

Project PREPARE has received continuation funding for the 2011-12 grant year from the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Division of Early Childhood Care & Development. The primary goal of Project PREPARE is to improve the quality of care for children in licensed child care settings by enhancing the professional development opportunities needed for centers throughout Mississippi to successfully include children with special needs and children at risk. Project PREPARE staff members provide intensive on-site coaching and mentoring to early childhood teachers and directors. In addition to that support, a bi-monthly listserv, *Postings*, is sent electronically, and the *Possibilities* newsletter is mailed twice a year. Professional development opportunities include a series of two PREPARE Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for early childhood educators working with infants and toddlers and two series for early childhood educators working with preschoolers. Each series consist of two three-hour training sessions that provide opportunities for small groups of administrators and providers to reflect on best practices through video-based training and hands-on activities. Each participant is provided two hours of classroom follow-up. In addition, there is an introductory session on Universal Design for Early Learning. That session focuses on how to use early learning guidelines to foster effective inclusion for high-risk children and children with developmental disabilities. Participants receive child care facility

staff development hours approved by the Child Care Facilities Licensure Division of the Mississippi State Department of Health for their participation in the PLCs. Project PREPARE also provides intensive on-site coaching and mentoring for a minimum of three hours per classroom upon request.

The new Project PREPARE grant year began on November 1, 2011, and will end on September 30, 2012. Anyone interested in receiving technical assistance services should contact Ann Henson, Project PREPARE coordinator, at 601.331.7369.

Project PREPARE staff members are excited and are looking forward to another year of helping Mississippi child care centers serve all children.



Photo: Project PREPARE staff members
(Back Row) Dr. Jane Siders, Nicole Briceno
(Front Row) Alicia Westbrook, Ann Henson, Kristie Bowlin

Inside this issue

| | |
|--|---|
| Project PREPARE's New Grant Year | 1 |
| Universal Design for Learning (UDL) | 2 |
| Website Spotlight | 3 |
| Professional Learning Community (PLC) Information..... | 3 |
| Request Form for Local PLC Information..... | 4 |



Project PREPARE is funded by the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Office for Children and Youth (GR# 525Q7421A).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Early Childhood Education

Project PREPARE staff members will focus on UDL principles through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), technical assistance visits, the *Postings* listserv and newsletters. All children should have access to a wide range of learning activities and the proper supports for full participation. Young children, both with and without disabilities, have different learning styles and strengths. In a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) environment, teachers seek to design a program to meet the diverse needs of all children.

There are three core UDL principles: (1) Multiple Means of Representation, (2) Multiple Means of Action and Expression and (3) Multiple Means of Engagement.

Multiple Means of Representation

Multiple Means of Representation, i.e., information provided in a variety of formats, ensures that the unique learning styles of each child are addressed. Once teachers have decided on specific goals and objectives from the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines, thought should be given to the use of multiple learning strategies and techniques that introduce and reinforce the selected goals and objectives.

Points for Teachers to Consider

- Children take in information through their senses, by seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and moving. Sensory preferences and strengths vary with each child. Some children, especially those with disabilities, need extra support to gain and process information through one or more of the senses. For example, a child with ADHD may need the freedom to move during learning activities, a child with autism may learn better visually, while a child with vision impairments will gain information better through auditory and tactile means of representation. Some children may need extra support provided through technology. For example, some children learn better when information is provided on a computer, through ear phones or a listening device, or through the use of adapted equipment as simple as an adapted pencil or crayon holder. Teachers should ask themselves the question: "How can I make sure that each child has the opportunity to learn given their individual learning strengths, needs and preferences?"
- Activities and materials should be presented and adapted in ways that all children are able to access information and participate in learning activities regardless of their individual learning styles or capabilities. For example, during circle time the teacher should present information using a variety of sensory modalities including use of visual materials, songs and rhymes, textured materials, action and exploratory props such as puppets or flannel boards, etc.
- Access to learning environments should extend beyond pre-academics/learning centers to include all daily activities and routines.

Multiple Means of Action and Expression

This second principle focuses on opportunities that children are given to show teachers what they have learned. It is not always as easy as asking a question and getting a verbal answer. Teachers too often require verbal responses from young children. Think about a child with a language impairment. When asked the question from a story book, "Who threw the red ball," the child may be non-responsive. The child may not be able to formulate and express a verbal reply, but could respond using non-verbal means such as eye-gazing or pointing.

Points for Teachers to Consider

- Children should be given multiple ways to indicate their understanding of learning material. For example, when working on patterns, one child demonstrates his understanding by lining up car counters--red, green, red, green, red, green. A child with poor fine motor control may verbalize the pattern saying put the red one on first, then the green one and then the red one, etc. as the teacher strings beads.
- An augmentative communication device or sign language can allow non-verbal children to communicate what they know.
- Computers with touch screens allow children to respond to learning activities in non-verbal ways.
- Allowing children to demonstrate knowledge through action is appropriate for children who cannot sit still.



Multiple Means of Engagement

Engagement is so crucial in any learning environment. If children are not engaged, they are not learning. Teachers should not only be in tune with the interests of each child but with the supports a child may need to fully engage with the animate and inanimate environment. For example, a child with ADHD or autism may not be able to engage in a small, closed-off learning center. A child with a walker may need additional space to navigate. A child with poor fine motor control may need larger blocks or adapted materials. A child with auditory sensitivity may need a quiet space to play. A child with cognitive challenges may need the teacher to join the play in order to "coach" engagement.



PLC Information

Project PREPARE will be offering Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in all 10 Mississippi Planning and Development Districts. A Professional Learning Community is a group of educators who come together to share and learn from one another. This opportunity will focus on developing a deeper understanding of child development and how to increase overall learning for all children. Through a mixture of teaching, conversations and hands-on activities, teachers will walk away with more knowledge and new ideas to incorporate into their classrooms.

There will be a preschool series that includes two three-hour sessions: "I Think I Can: Self-Esteem as the Foundation for Self-Regulation and Learning Through Explorations, Movements and the Arts" and "Fairytale and Fantasies: The Expansion of Language, Numeracy, Literacy and Science." An infant and toddler series will also be offered that includes two three-hour sessions: "Lullabies and Nursery Rhymes: Building Relationships as the Foundation for Growth and Development" and "I Can Do It Myself: The Expression and Expansion of Motivation and Learning."

Participants can come to both sessions in each series described above or choose to come to one of the two. In addition, a general session for early childhood teachers and directors will include one three-hour session: "Include Me, Engage Me, Inspire Me: Universal Design for Early Learning." Participants will also receive two hours of one-on-one technical assistance by PREPARE staff in their classroom for each PLC session they attend. Please read the back page of this newsletter and complete the application instructions if you are interested in an upcoming PLC in your area. Project PREPARE staff will contact those who are interested and provide them with information about dates, times and location specifics.

The PLC city locations chosen for this grant year are Booneville, Coffeeville, Columbus, Greenville, Hattiesburg, Horn Lake, Jackson, McComb, Meridian and Tupelo.



Points for Teachers to Consider

- Affect refers to the outward expression of feelings or emotions. Teachers who use high affect are very animated in their facial expressions and tone of voice. Low or flat affect is the opposite and refers to the lack of facial expressions and monotone speech. A reflective teacher will find the right amount of affect to engage children in learning. High affect usually is engaging for young children. However, in some cases a child may be frightened or overstimulated by very high affect.
- When appropriate, children should be given choices. This helps to foster autonomy and independence. Children should be given opportunities throughout the day to choose what centers they want to play in and what activities they wish to engage in. A variety of materials should be available so that children can choose materials that they are interested in and better able to engage with. For example, the block center should contain a variety of sizes and textures of blocks.
- The level of challenge should match the child's abilities. Activities and materials that are too challenging for a child may be frustrating. Likewise, if the activities and materials are too easy and lack challenge, the child will become bored and unengaged. It is important for there to be a variety of materials to meet the needs of many different learners.

Website Spotlight



The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) is at the forefront of the Universal Design for Learning approach. Their website, www.cast.org, has a wealth of information for anyone wanting to learn more about the

UDL approach to learning for all ages. Individuals can access learning tools and free resources that will enable them to have better understanding of UDL principles.

Project PREPARE Website
www.usm.edu/ids/prepare

Request Form for Local PLC Information

Interested in a Professional Learning Community event in your area? Let us know!

Child Care Center Name _____

Director's Name _____

Address: City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Child Care Center Phone Number _____

Fax Number _____

Send this form by mail or fax:

The University of Southern Mississippi
Institute for Disability Studies
Attention: Ann Henson or Kristie Bowlin
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Project PREPARE

For more information, contact Ann Henson at 601.331.7369.




Possibilities is a free newsletter published by the Institute for Disability Studies at The University of Southern Mississippi.

To subscribe or to submit materials (pictures, articles, etc.) for consideration, contact Kristie Bowlin at 662.397.1902 or kristie.bowlin@usm.edu.

Alternate formats available upon request.

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