

TATS eUpdate  
Curriculum and Instruction**Worksheets vs. Real Life: Using Real Life Connections to Enhance Learning**

September 2008

A joint position statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) published in 2003 states that two of the indicators of an effective curriculum are:

- Valued content is learned through investigation and focused, intentional teaching
- Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences

These indicators support the idea that young children should be actively engaged in exploration and learning, and they learn best by interacting and investigating their environment. At the prekindergarten level, seatwork with worksheets does not foster learning as well as active engagement in the learning process. Active learning provides children with meaningful opportunities to learn. By using their senses and manipulating their environment, children can learn basic concepts more effectively than using the abstract objects in worksheets.

**Best Practice:**

*Scenario.* Three early childhood teachers are planning a lesson related to fruit. The fruit of the day is grapes. Each teacher reads stories about grapes, and asks the children questions about their experiences with grapes in the home and at school. Given that early childhood classrooms focus on language development and expansion as part of the curriculum, the teachers would like to further the children's vocabulary skills. However, their lessons differ somewhat in the way that they expand the children's knowledge about grapes. The differences are listed as follows:

- Teacher 1 – This teacher uses worksheets to emphasize the features of grapes. She provides each child with a worksheet with a bunch of grapes to be colored. She provides the children with red, purple, green and brown crayons. She helps the children color the stem brown, the leaves green and the grapes either green, red or purple.
- Teacher 2 – This teacher provides the children with plastic grapes. She has grapes that are variety of colors. Each child is able to hold the grapes. They are even placed in the dramatic play area for further use.

- Teacher 3 – This teacher has fresh grapes, of various types and colors, in the classroom. Each child is welcomed to try the grapes. As a group, they explore the different sizes and colors, and talk about individual experiences with grapes.



As part of the instructional objective, each teacher develops a vocabulary list generated from the children’s comments about grapes. The lists generated are below:

Teacher 1: Worksheets	Teacher 2: Plastic Grapes	Teacher 3: Real Grapes
Green Red Brown Leaves Stem Bunch Colorful Flat Shiny Different colors	Green Red Brown Leaves Smooth Shiny Heavy ( <i>weight</i> ) Light ( <i>weight</i> ) Plastic Can't be put in the mouth Can't be eaten Dark Light (colors) Bunch Different colors	Green Red Brown Leaves Stem Bunch Smooth Cold Warm Seeds Seedless Juicy Small Large Hard Soft Roll Some taste sweet Some taste sour

Not only did Teacher 3 generate a longer list, but the list of words was more accurate. Have you ever seen a flat or plastic grape? Engaging young children in active learning and making it fun expands their knowledge base.

**Reflection:**

1. How could you adapt worksheets into hands-on, active learning for children?  
*If children are excited, curious, resourceful, and confident about their ability to figure things out and eager to exchange opinions with other adults and children, they are bound to go on learning, particularly when they are out of the classroom and throughout the rest of their lives.*  
- Constance Kamii



**References and Resources:**

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National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)  
A national organization of early childhood educators and others dedicated to improving the quality of programs for children from birth through third grade, including those with disabilities. <http://www.naeyc.org/>

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Sandall, S. & Schwartz, I. S. (2008). *Building blocks for teaching preschoolers with special needs*. Second Edition. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Company

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**Technical Assistance & Training System (TATS)**

Statewide project providing technical assistance and training to programs in Florida serving prekindergarten children with disabilities. Web site provides information and resources on curriculum and instruction, evaluation and assessment, family involvement, inclusion, program effectiveness/quality, and transition, as well as, linking early childhood partners. [www.tats.ucf.edu](http://www.tats.ucf.edu)



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