Foundations and Principles in my Professional Context of Practice

The context of professional practice I selected was Early Childhood Education (ECE). I chose this practice because it’s the area that I studied and got an education in. This is also the professional practice I have always had a passion for and wanted to have as a career. Since I am working in this field as an ECE at a childcare, this would make it easier for me to connect and give real life practical knowledge with other professionals in the same setting and practice as me. It would help me relate better with other professionals in my context of practice. Another reason I chose this practice was because a lot the philosophies we believe in and use in the curriculum relate to the conceptions of curriculum, educational philosophies, and curriculum designs learned in this course.

When I started gaining access to a professional community page or blog for my specific practice it was challenging. I wanted to find either a website or a community page or blog strictly for ECE’s. The issue I had was trying to find a space that did not cost any money. A lot of the associations or websites for ECE’s you needed to pay a membership to gain access. This was not something I was prepared to do. I also found a lot of the blogs for ECE’s had no involvement of other professionals or it was outdated. I wanted to find a space where a lot of members were a part of so I could educate and engage with more people.

To overcome this issue I talked with a friend who is also in the same practice as me to get advice. She is a member of many community pages for ECE’s on Facebook. She gave me a list of pages to explore to see which one interested me. On these pages I can communicate and engage with other professionals in my context of practice. I joined a Facebook page called Early Childhood Educators of Ontario which is a space for educators to discuss the field of ECE, pose questions or share ideas with each other. I got accepted right away by another member. Since this community page is an active space where I can connect with ECE’s, I don’t think I will encounter any issues or problems later on inviting members in discussions.

When it comes time to engage with other educators in my field, I hope to make professional contributions to our practice. I hope to provide educators with new knowledge about curriculum, planning, instruction and assessment. In my practice, educators only know about curriculum through reading curriculum documents or books. They may not know about how curriculum comes together and what is used as the bases to design or structure the curriculum. I hope my new knowledge about the various conceptions of curriculum used to define and view a curriculum; the different educational philosophies that guide our decisions about curriculum; and the different curriculum designs used to help structure a curriculum, will help educators in my practice see that curriculum is much more complex then it seems. Even presenting them with information about how assessment, planning and instruction is done in different curriculum designs, and the outcome it has on the students and teachers may also give educators a chance to think and align this new knowledge with their own beliefs. In the end, I hope this information will help other educators analyze their own curriculum at their setting and see what they could do either to improve or enhance their role in planning, assessment and instruction with the children.

Community spaces can also contribute to my growth as a professional. I am new to the field of ECE so it would be great to connect with other professionals who have been in this field longer, to get advice or information from them to help me with my own development and
knowledge as an ECE. These spaces can also help in my ability to program plan and assess children’s learning. I can get interesting new ideas of learning opportunities or experiences that other educators have implemented with their children and get feedback about how it worked and the best way they implemented it. This could help me grow in my program planning and teaching ability. Community spaces can give me new ideas and strategies that other educators have used to assess children, as well as, find out the best methods to use in a childcare setting. This could help me better support them. Lastly, these spaces can also help me grow in my ability to provide the best learning environment for children. Many of these members may believe in different methods or models that are more important to use to educate children. This can give me ideas I can integrate in my own beliefs and current philosophy with children.

I feel these community spaces can also give me a chance to improve and use my leadership. Being a leader is hard for me sometimes where I do lack the confidence in my ability to be an effective leader. Part of that thinking came from having a lack of experience and limited role models to make me believe that I could be a leader. Most of the time I act more as a follower. Being a member of this community space would allow me to be in a group that is supportive of one another and won’t reject my ideas or opinions since we are all part of the same practice and have a willingness to learn from each other. This will make me more confident to take more leadership opportunities. In this space, I will get opportunities to lead the discussions and enlist dialogue from other members. I will have opportunities to take initiative in posting questions, sharing ideas or links that would further engage and extend other educator's thinking. But it would also give me an opportunity to make my own decisions on topics to discuss or take ownership of when a discussion occurs. Even if people are not engaged I would need to be confidence in using my leadership to try to find a better way to get members involved. This will all make me believe more in myself that I can be a leader with others.

After examining the Early Childhood Educators of Ontario Facebook page I see many modes of communication that the members use. I notice they communicate to other fellow educators through posting videos on important issues or topics related to the field of ECE. They communicate through pictures of real life photos of learning opportunities or activities that educators have done with children in their childcare settings or schools. The members on this page also communicate through discussion questions to get other educator's opinions on important topics. Other forms of communication include posting downloadable word or PDF files, inspiring quotes, websites (ie. AECEO), articles (ie. benefits of outdoor play), blogs, other Facebook pages (ie. Let the children play) and twitter pages that communicates other information that would be useful for ECE’s to apply to their knowledge in the field.

From examining this community space I have noticed a lot of its members are either Supervisors, Directors or Early Childhood Educators working in a child care, early years centre, kindergarten program or a before or after school program within the school board. Just by what is being posted or discussed, they seem to all practice child centred education with an emphasis on emergent, inquiry or play based learning. But I also see clues of outdoor education being practiced as well.

All this information within the community space supports the different conceptions of curriculum, curriculum designs and educational philosophies. When looking at the posts and discussions members had with each other, they seem to focus on the humanistic conception and the progressivism philosophy. These communities of educators seem to believe a lot in
providing satisfying experiences for the children in their classrooms. They hold an interest in student centeredness where they believe that learning opportunities should be used in developing a child to reach their fullest potential (Pratt, 1994 & Sowell, 2005). They place a huge emphasis on play and hands on learning. These educators also seem to believe in providing programs that interest the children and meet their needs of self discovery (Sowell, 2005). Examples of this is shown in a post about an ice age theme activity highlighting children’s interest of dinosaurs or a post about children’s interest in woodworking in a before and after school program. I saw in the pictures that these experiences engaged the children and incorporate many developmental areas. They truly believe in developing the whole child (Orstein & Hunkins, 2009 & Pratt, 1994). This is also seen in the educator's abilities to give children the chance to pursue their own choices, with the educators acting as guides, and steering the learning or inquiry (Sowell, 2005 & Orstein, 1991). This was shown in a post where an educator used the children’s interest of cars and guided them with a specific set up of materials such as toy cars, measuring tape and stacks of blocks. The educator let the children make their own choices on what to do in the activity. The children used the materials in different ways. They used the cars and measuring tape to see how far the cars would go. They used the measuring tape to see how tall each car was and used the materials to make different tracks and had a car race. This all supports the humanistic conception and progressivism philosophy.

The curriculum design these educators seem to use is learner centred to help guide planning, instruction and assessment and the inquiry model to help with this task. This is seen in pictures of various learning opportunities and blogs members have posted. For planning, some educators base it off an inquiry that a child had or a big question that the children wanted to explore. The educators would use these ideas or topics as the bases for planning the learning opportunities around that inquiry. (Canadian Education Association, 2014) An example of this was shown in a post about shadows. Children noticed their shadows through a window and had an inquiry about wanting to learn more about it and why this happened. The educator explored shadow making with the children. This shows that the idea came from the children not the educator. The educator was able to give the children a voice in the planning. (Canadian Education Association, 2013) This is important in a learner centred design.

When instruction happens it is usually done anywhere in the room, usually in peer groups. In all the pictures or blogs, children are doing an activity at a table or on the floor, with other children working cooperatively together. (Canadian Education Association, 2014) The educators believe in being near the children acting as a resource. I also noticed that children are probably given the freedom to work on projects or an activity as long as they want so there is not a set timeframe (McMillan, 2014).

Regarding assessment, I believe that they use informal assessment within their centres such as teacher observations and oral conversations to assess the children’s learning. Teacher observations and oral conversations are used a lot in a learner centred curriculum design. This way of assessing can help teachers see more of the interests, ideas and progress of the children in their learning. They can see this better just by observing and having conversations with them. (McMillan, 2014) Since some of the posts are about activities or things the educators did based on children’s interest, they would have had to observe or had conservations with the children to have learned this idea. Other assessment methods that these educators use is photo documentation, picture collages, learning stories or child centred portfolios that document children’s learning. I also noticed that children are probably being assessed differently from each
other. It looks like the children can make their own decisions on the learning activities they want to participate in. (Canadian Education Association, 2014) This gives children more freedom and independence to master their own knowledge and skills (McMillan, 2014). An example of this is shown in a post about loose parts where the children were given various materials at different interest centres. This gave them the creativity and inventiveness to use their thinking skills. The children probably were doing different things with the materials so the educator would have had to assess them in other ways to see what skills they were using or what they were learning.

Not only do these educators believe in using learner centre design as the bases for planning, assessment and instruction they also use problem centred/society centred design. I noticed this in other posts about outdoor education or bringing nature into the classroom. This is shown in an example of a pond inquiry. Instead of learning about this in the classroom the educator took the children outside to explore a real life pond. This would have allowed the children to witness for themselves the wildlife in and around the pond, and give them a chance to study the planet life at a pond. The educator probably also talked with the children about how to take care of a pond or problems that may happen when we don’t care for a pond. The learning that happened would have been endless. Based on other examples, these educators probably believe that planning and instruction should focus more on topics happening in a child’s environment. This can help children connect to the outside world better by taking instruction outside the context of the classroom to gain the knowledge they need (McMillan, 2014). These educator probably assess the children based on how prepared a child is for the world and environment around them. This is all important for a problem/society centred design. This idea also supports the social reconstruction conception because these educators seem to believe that a curriculum should be used to help teach children to have a better understanding of their society or environment that can help them develop a better one (Schiro, 2008). You can see that this community space does focus on the learner's needs and society needs based on what educators post.
References


