

THE ABC'S OF QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS



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Empower Children Education
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The ABC's of Quality Early Childhood Education: Strategies for Teachers©

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The intent of this book is to provide information on quality early childhood education and related strategies, methods and techniques that can be used by teachers to encourage learning success for children from three to six years in an early childhood setting. The author assumes no responsibility for the implementation of the strategies, methods and techniques for young children by teachers and other educators, any immediate and future results that transpire from the use of the book.

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FOREWORD

Quality early childhood education for children up to the ages of six to eight years is important for their social wellbeing and academic achievement. It is the “X Factor” of education in the early years. When teachers promote, plan and implement quality early childhood education, the learning success of young children is assured.

This book is intended to boost the inspiration and empowerment of teachers for this significant responsibility. It is also to ensure continuous improvement in the quality of early childhood education and status for teachers in early childhood as professionals in the broader education industry. The term “teacher” refers to tertiary qualified teachers working in the early childhood education and childcare industry.

The book is based on what I’ve observed, researched, reviewed, assessed and learnt over many years about quality early childhood education including relevant learning environments, innovative teaching strategies, successful learning experiences for young children, and the characteristics and attributes of teachers working in the early childhood area. It is also based on my own experience in early childhood as an advisory and classroom teacher, caregiver and parent, consultant, curriculum officer, lecturer, parent and community educator, program evaluator, researcher, staff supervisor, superintendent and trainer and assessor.

It uses practical research in terms of theories, strategies, methods and techniques the best teachers use to empower young children and to assist them to achieve learning in readiness for transition into school and learning success in the first years of schooling.

The book is part of the Empower Children Education (ECE) which comprises a number of related resources. The book is a key introduction for *Life Skills for Pre-Schoolers: Curriculum Guide for Teachers*©.

It can be read and used by teachers to give them a sense of their highly important role in the early childhood area of the education and childcare industry and to encourage them to develop strong smart young children who become strong smart adolescents and adults.

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Isabelle Adams

Isabelle is a qualified teacher whose involvement in the early childhood education industry spans four decades. She is also an accredited trainer and facilitator of adult learning and a professional speaker.

Isabelle worked in early childhood education as a pre-school, transition and pre-primary teacher, pre-school officer, pre-primary advisory teacher, curriculum officer, researcher, program evaluator, superintendent, and lecturer. She now works as an independent consultant and trainer. She has extensive knowledge and experience of culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse children, families and contexts.

Isabelle co-authored the original best-selling curriculum resource for educators in early childhood entitled *A Self-Concept Curriculum for Young Children*. She has written research reports and academic papers on early childhood education for publications produced by state, national and international organizations and held membership on state and national committees as an early childhood educationalist.

Isabelle is a strong advocate of the rights of all young children to be treated as unique individuals who deserve to have foundational life skills including a positive self-concept, a sense of self-worth and identity and high self-esteem; who are entitled to be valued, respected and loved unconditionally by their families and other people who are significant to them; and who deserve to have relevant and practical learning that makes sense to them and prepares them for transition into and learning success in the first years of formal schooling.

SAMPLE ONLY

Chapter 1

Early Childhood Education in the 21st Century

In the 21st century early childhood education is of paramount importance and needs a strong focus for a number of key reasons. These include the situation of the changing nature of childhood; the recognition of the importance of early childhood; an acknowledgement of the value of early childhood intervention; and the recognition and acknowledgement of the role of educators in the implementation of early childhood intervention.

Changing Nature of Childhood

Currently the world is a constantly changing and often an uncertain and unstable place. Nations are grappling with the impact of global concerns such as economic and social crises, climate change, natural disasters and the impact of technologies on day-to-day living. In many countries, this ever changing and uncertain and unstable world includes the diminishing of many blue collar jobs, an increasingly information based economy, and a rapid pace of social change which is not always positive.

At a societal level, there are social and health indicators such as high rates of divorce and separation, numbers of children living in households where no one is in the paid workforce, increasing rates of juvenile crime, substance abuse and suicide, rising rates of mental illness, and increasing levels of childhood obesity. These indicators give much cause for concern because they are all related to social disadvantage which is demonstrated by occurrences of low income, poor nutrition, low birth weight, poor early health, exposure to family violence and inconsistent, punitive or neglectful parenting, and exposure to neighbourhood crime and violence.

In many instances, this social disadvantage is influenced by the new and increased demands on families, including the need for parents, especially mothers, to work while raising their children. These demands place pressures on children who are often the victims. Our uncertain world will continue to change and this situation is placing more pressures on children.

This new era is changing the nature of childhood for many children. It is now considered by society in general and governments in particular that it is more important than ever to focus on children's experience growing up. This is to enable them to develop the skills to participate and compete in an information-based economy, and the competence to be the future parents, workers and citizens who are fundamental to the ongoing health and welfare of a nation.

More than ever before, children are seen as “the hope of the future”. A related view is that children deserve to be valued as children in their own right and are members of our society who are entitled to the best childhood that can be offered to them.

The view is supported by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* which advocates that all children have the right to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives and to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives and maximizes their ability.

World leaders are espousing a priority for early childhood development and advocating that investing in early childhood development can eventually have a significant effect on a country's economy and is one of the best returns on investment that a country can make to accelerate long-term economic growth and productivity.

Recognition of Importance of Early Childhood

There is renewed recognition that early childhood is a vital period in children's learning and development. This is supported by research evidence that indicates investment in early childhood development can bring about improvements in the life of a child and provide tangible social and economic benefits to society. This evidence, verified by longitudinal studies following children's development from birth to young adulthood, points to the importance of the early years as a period in which foundations for children's later development and well-being are laid down.

Other research studies show that educational outcomes in adolescent can be traced back to academic skills at school entry. This in turn, can be traced to capabilities seen in young children during their pre-school years and the experiences in and out of the home that foster their development. Children's cognitive skills before they enter formal schooling show strong associations with achievement in elementary and high schools and during adulthood.

It is evident that early intervention can make substantial contributions to the overall development and academic skills of young children. Early childhood is claimed to provide a blueprint for adolescent and adult well-being that cannot be altered. Getting a good start in life is considered to be a strategy for increasing the odds of greater competence in later childhood, adolescence and the adult years.

Early experiences are viewed to affect the likelihood that children will progress positively and ‘on track’ through childhood and adolescence to become good parents, productive workers and fully participating citizens. Adult health status is seen to be heavily influenced by many of the same factors that are linked to these outcomes of effective early childhood experiences.

This premise is supported by scientific research on how the brain of a young child is developed, including the “wiring and sculpting of the brain’s billions of neurons, which influences or builds the basic capabilities of the brain” and the effects of early experience on this development.

According to an Early Years Study Report done in Canada (*The Mustard Report, 1999*), “the development of the brain in the early years of life.....sets the base of competence and coping skills for the later stages of life”. The report contends that early brain development is interactive, rapid and dramatic.

It states that early nutrition and nurturing support optimal brain development and influence later learning and behaviour. In contrast, abusive or neglectful care, growing up in a dangerous or toxic environment and related conditions are viewed to manifest risks for healthy brain development. The report claims that if opportunities to promote children’s learning and development at this age are lost, later interventions to deal with issues may be more expensive and less effective.

The research on brain development is revealing some of the underlying processes that occur every early in life and the influences on cognitive development and intelligence later in life. These studies help to explain why early childhood experience tends to send children down particular ‘pathways’ and to highlight that some abilities are acquired more easily during sensitive periods or ‘windows of opportunity’ early in a child’s life, and can form the foundation for a child’s capacity as an adult.

This demonstrates that neurological development occurs very early in life from the neural connections that are ‘sculpted’ during critical phases of development. Learning results in and tends to build on the strengthening of some of these connections and the loss of others.

In the early childhood years between birth and the age of six to eight years, rapid brain growth is occurring in young children, and an enormous amount of learning is taking place. This means that young children develop life skills including core concepts, attitudes, values and beliefs about people and things in their world that will influence how they feel, think, behave and survive as older children, youth and adults.

Value of Early Childhood Intervention

The value of early childhood intervention is now acknowledged as crucial to a young child’s healthy development and well-being. The evidence from intervention studies strongly supports the value of effective early childhood intervention to which links are indicated for a range of diverse outcomes in later childhood, adolescence and early adulthood including success at school.

Positive progress and success in school are seen to be major contributions to constructive life pathways for adolescents and adults. For example, children who do poorly at school are unlikely to complete high school. As adults they are significantly more likely to display a host of behaviours that are destructive to themselves and others including substance abuse, unemployment, low income, welfare dependence, delinquency and crime.

It is acknowledged that successful outcomes in early childhood are more likely to impact on successful outcomes in primary school and the completion of high school. This can influence young people's success in finding work, avoiding a reliance on welfare, staying out of jail, lower rates of substance abuse, and lower rates of teenage pregnancy. These effects relate to the prevention of social disadvantage throughout adolescent and adulthood.

Long term studies indicate that the effects of early childhood operate in at least three ways e.g. latent, pathways and cumulative effects. Latent effects are those outcomes that emerge much later in life and are influenced by events that have occurred in the early years.

Pathways effects relate to a particular path that is laid down by experiences in the early years and becomes self-reinforcing through 'vicious' or 'virtuous' cycles. The pathways effect means that very small differences early on, such as readiness to learn at school entry, magnify over time unless something breaks the cycle.

Cumulative effects relate to a range of factors including early childhood experiences which combine over time to build capacity and resilience, or the reverse, vulnerability. The cumulative effect is important because a wide range of protective or risk factors for child outcomes tend to cluster.

These effects are clearly influenced by the experiences that a young child has in the early years. They indicate that "good" early childhood experiences relate to the combination of positive health, care and education experiences that children before age six years, in stimulating and nurturing environments at home, and in the neighbourhood e.g. pre-school and early childhood settings. It is suggested that the earlier children have these experiences, the better the result.

These experiences are deemed to result in better outcomes throughout a child's life and to be the most powerful predictors of success in school education for young children in terms of better school grades, better self-esteem, fewer social problems, and fewer health problems and less likely to be teen parents, use drugs or be involved in crime.

Implementation of Early Childhood Intervention

The implementation of early childhood intervention in terms of the child's development and education depends on the role of the educator which is considered to be of vital importance.

It is recognized and acknowledged that educators include teachers, childcare professionals, parents and caregivers of young children who have significant influence on the lives and learning of children in the early years.

Educators ensure that early intervention in an informal or more formal education setting is “good” in terms of being positive, nurturing, stimulating, appropriate and relevant for children and can build a foundation that will result in present and future outcomes and benefits for the child throughout their life.

The relationship that a child has with his/her educators in the early years is one that has enormous impact on their individual lives as children, youth and adults. This places significant responsibility on all educators of young children.

In the rapidly growing early children education and child care industry, educators who work with young children and/or supervise other staff, parents and home caregivers have extra responsibility. They are required to understand that the child’s development remains vulnerable to risks and open to protective influences throughout the early years of life, within the context of the timing of early experiences. They are required to know that in early childhood, the course of development can be altered by effective interventions that change the balance between risk and protection.

They are required to ensure more adaptive outcomes that have long lasting benefits for the young child right throughout their formal schooling and beyond. They are required to undertake their role in the implementation of early childhood intervention with high commitment and effectiveness to ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes deemed important for young children.

Outcomes of Early Childhood Intervention

Although learning outcomes of early childhood intervention programs may differ between countries and jurisdictions, there are generally five key outcomes.

1. Children have a strong sense of identity

This outcome relates to children’s learning about themselves and constructing their own identity within the context of their families and communities, including early childhood settings and schools. It includes their relationships with themselves, other people, places and things in their world and the actions and responses of others.

2. Children have a deep sense of wellbeing

This outcome relates to children’s strong sense of wellbeing which incorporates both physical and psychological aspects including good physical health, feelings of happiness, satisfaction and successful social functioning that provide children with confidence and optimism to maximize their learning potential.

3. Children are confident and involved learners.

This outcome relates to children's confidence to experiment and explore and to try out new ideas, developing their competence and becoming active and involved participants in learning and effective learners who are able to transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another and to locate and use resources for learning.

4. Children are effective communicators.

This outcome relates to children's communication as social beings with others, and the value of communication for successful learning using a range of modes such as verbal, non-verbal, print, symbols, signs, and electronic media; and the value of print literacy including contemporary texts in English and other languages.

5. Children are connected with and contribute to their world

This outcome relates to children's relationships and participation in a range of community contexts including early childhood settings and schools and involves living and learning with others in families and local community settings.

Quality Early Childhood Education

The achievement of the five learning outcomes for children in an early childhood setting is highly dependent and closely interconnected to the provision of quality early childhood education programs.

Key aspects considered most important for quality early childhood education are:

1. Professional and Competent Teachers
2. Child Development Philosophy
3. Children as Active Learners
4. Appropriate Learning Environment
5. Relevant Curriculum for Early Learning
6. Proper Assessment of Children's Learning

Quality early childhood education is effective when it promotes and assists the attainment of the following beneficial outcomes for children:

- a) Positive self-awareness and identity;
- b) Adequate levels of self-value and self-esteem;
- c) Successful relationships with significant others;
- d) Satisfactory adjustment to a bicultural and/or multicultural society;
- e) Successful learning in diverse educational settings;
- f) Recognition that learning can be useful, enjoyable and positive;
- g) Recognition that they are the central focus of early childhood education programs;
- h) Life knowledge and skills that are valued and provide a foundation for continuous and further learning experiences and successful transition to formal schooling in the early years.

Key aspects for quality early childhood education are briefly described and/or implied in National Acts or legislative requirements which outline and describe regulations to which adherence to compliance is expected by organisations that operate defined early childhood programs.

Using the *Education and Care Services National Regulations* in Australia as an example, regulations can incorporate sections such as:

- Requirements for educator accreditation and qualifications.
- Standards relating to operational requirements;
- Approvals and certificates relating to provider approvals, service approvals, supervisor certificates;
- Assessment and ratings relating to quality improvement plans, prescribed rating levels, assessment, review of ratings, highest rating, offences;
- Operational requirements relating to educational program and practice, children's health and safety, physical environment, staffing arrangements, relationships with children, collaborative partnerships with families and communities, leadership and service management;
- Review, enforcement and compliance relating to internal review and enforcement and compliance;
- Administration relating to Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, information, records and privacy—national and regulatory authorities, fees and delegations; jurisdiction-specific and transitional and saving; and
- Provisions relating to general transitional and saving provisions and specific provisions.

The purpose of *The ABC's of Quality Early Childhood Education: Strategies for Teachers* is not to reiterate or replace regulations that are in National Acts or legislative requirements. It is intended to provide a description of practical philosophies and strategies that teachers can implement to ensure key aspects for quality early childhood education are provided for the attainment of beneficial development and learning outcomes for children in the early years.

LIFE SKILLS FOR
PRE-SCHOOLERS
EMPOWER CHILDREN
EDUCATION PROGRAM

A quality early childhood education is important for the social wellbeing and academic achievement in young children. The components are interrelated and include the early childhood teacher who is of vital importance, a child development philosophy, the participation of young children as active learners, an appropriate learning environment, a relevant curriculum focus, and proper assessment of young children's learning. Those who have the knowledge and understanding of and can implement a quality early childhood education have a significant advantage in the early education industry and can make a real difference for the education of young children.

The ABC's of Quality Early Childhood Education: Strategies for Teachers will:

- Clarify what constitutes quality early childhood education for young children.
- Identify the roles, characteristics and attributes of strong smart early childhood teachers.
- Ensure that all early childhood teachers take action for personal development.
- Build confidence in early childhood teachers to increase their professional status.
- Instill a sense of commitment in early childhood teachers to educate young children for social well-being and school readiness and success.
- Eliminate irrelevant beliefs and attitudes of how young children develop and learn.
- Provide direction for early childhood teachers to make a real difference for young children.
- Encourage early childhood teachers to become outstanding teachers of young children and strong advocates for early childhood education.

The author Isabelle Adams, is an experienced early childhood teacher and professional who has successfully implemented quality early childhood education strategies in the classroom and recommended them for teachers and early educators.

