

Psychological Exploration into Emotional-Based Education and Childcare, Observational Study at the Bowdoin College Children's Center

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The pedagogy of the Bowdoin College Children's Center is a carefully curated nature-based curriculum, centered around emotional development. The project aimed to explore the neurological support for their practices, specifically answering why a child's emotions must be the center of care and how this atypical classroom approach allows children to thrive. Educational theories have previously supported the validity of this style of care; however, the purpose of this research was to understand the application of these concepts in a sustainable group care setting. With a combination of over 200 hours of classroom observations and an extensive search within the scientific literature, I created evidence-based guides for prospective parents and educators to explain the Center's methods and outcomes for the minds of the children.

Humans have an incredibly long childhood compared to other animals, requiring direct and attentive care to survive. As new parenting methods continue to emerge, there seems to be a rush for children to grow up faster – to start walking and talking earlier, excel in academics, make friends, and control their emotions as soon as possible. However, this immaturity serves an invaluable purpose, as this extra time of dependence allows for brains to develop the ability for consciousness and other higher-level thinking processes.

Naturally, parents should develop a connection with their child that encourages this kind of neurological progression. In group care settings, these attachments must be thoughtfully curated to maintain a sense of security for the child, creating a safe base to return to during independent exploration. The BCCC applies these theories in every aspect of their practice, such as continuity of care, easing transitions, and referring to families frequently throughout the day.

Children must feel secure to fully express emotions within their close relationships. Parents and teachers often use methods of distraction or redirection to avoid emotional explosions, but this release is necessary for healthy brains and the ability to learn. Letting the children cry when they have tears, labeling these emotions during care, and eventually having a conversation about self-regulation are all components of development.

With this emotional freedom comes the impressive capacity to play. The BCCC promotes child-direct play, a pedagogical approach that pairs well with the children's innate curiosity about the world around them. Educational research has proven that this intrinsic motivation to learn is central to academic prosperity in the future, precisely because the children decide what to discover. Instruction and the typical model of preschool encourage passivity – an immense block on their creativity and independence. The unnecessary structure of lesson plans ignores the spontaneous fascinations children develop and ignores their questions. Instead, the BCCC focuses on what the children find interesting and establishes ways to continue this engagement to validate the children's internal motivation.

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