

Flying by the Seat of Our Pants:

14 Students + 2 Instructors = Meaningful Lessons Learned
Our Trip to the 2006 NAEYC National Conference

Presented by

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Early Childhood Education Club (ECEC) Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, NC

- Mission: The ECEC exists to foster the professional development of its members through participation in local, state and national professional development activities.
- The ECEC was founded by Carol Gestwicki, former CPCC instructor and author.



Flying by the Seat of Our Pants

- To fly an airplane by feel and instinct rather than with the help of instruments. *Many pilots in World War I had to fly by the seat of their pants* (Many pilots in World War I flew with few or no instruments, by touch or feeling).
- To do a job instinctively rather than by concrete information. *The architect was flying by the seat of his pants when he designed that house* (The architect designed the house without reference to formal rules).



The Value of Problem Solving

- “The single best way to grow a better brain is through challenging problem solving . . . It’s critical to expose students to a variety of approaches to solving problems. When students feel more capable of solving a problem, their thoughts change their body’s chemistry . . . It makes sense to encourage students to do any problem-solving activity; the more real-life, the better.” (Jensen, 1998)



Problem Solving in Early Childhood Education

- Early childhood educators recognize the importance of the problem solving process in relation to child development.
- Do we value this process in all relationships?
- The more we practice problem solving in meaningful, real-life contexts, the more effective we will be in modeling problem solving in our work with young children.



Attributes of Problem Solvers

- Autonomous
- Curious
- Spontaneous
- Determined
- Reflective
- Risk-taking
- Open to new ideas, experiences
- Flexible
- Good sense of humor
- Adventurous
- Playful
- Intrinsically motivated
- Non-conforming
- Love a challenge
- True to their convictions
- Sensitive
- Perceptive
- Love novelty
- High energy level
- Tolerant



The Problem Solving Approach to Guiding Students' Behavior

Philosophy/Assumptions

- Students are competent; they are capable of solving their own problems when encouraged and trusted to do so.
- Problem solving is a natural part of life.
- Students learn to solve problems when they have many opportunities to solve problems, particularly in real-life contexts.
- Students should share power with instructors.
- Problem solving increases self-confidence and leadership skills.
- Problem solving is critical to the functioning of a group.
- Problem solving is related to creativity.

The Problem Solving Approach

Major Procedures

- Active Listening
- Negotiating
- Setting Limits
- Modifying the Environment
- Affirmations

Guidelines

- Appropriate behavior ensures that everyone is safe
- Appropriate behavior ensures that no property is damaged, destroyed
- Appropriate behavior ensures that everyone takes responsibility for his/her actions
- Appropriate behavior ensures that all people are treated with respect

Challenges

- Inexperienced club advisors
- Inexperienced executive committee members, lack of leadership training
- No model
- Few members
- Limited funds available
- Limited amount of time to make it happen (6 weeks)
- Diverse group of students



How Did We Do It?

- We believed it was possible.
- We were creative.
- We got organized.
 - Did research (how much money was needed, potential sources of funding)
 - Set guidelines for participation



How Did We Do It?

- We formed partnerships.
 - Student Government Association
 - College administrators
 - Early Childhood Education Department
 - NAEYC
 - Businesses throughout the community



What Did We Learn?

What works for children works for adult learners, too.

- Students are capable of solving their own problems when they are trusted and encouraged to do so.
- Some problems can't be resolved; sometimes the best you can do is maintain a dialog.
- Developmentally appropriate practice applies equally in adult learning situations.



What Did We Learn?

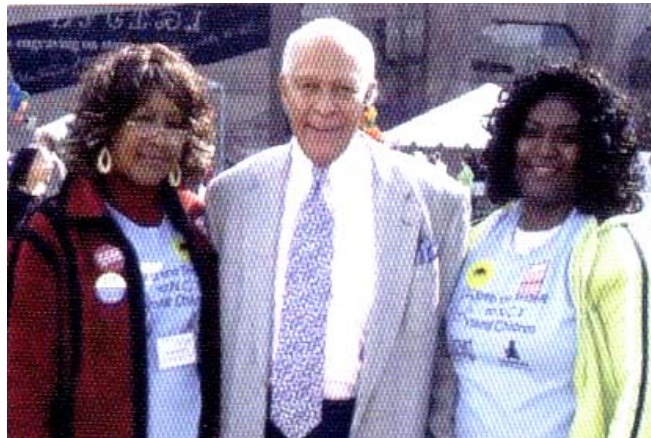
- Adults, too, learn by trial and error.
- It's the process that counts.
- We learn experientially.
- It helps to have a sense of humor.



Affirmations

Leadership develops in members and advisors

- Club advisors and members present at NCaeyc 2007 Annual Study Conference
- Members participate in Camp Cheerio Leadership Conference
- Members travel to Raleigh to lobby state officials/advocate for children and families
- Member receives scholarship, serves in SGA, participates in Student Leadership Academy, is recruited for full-time administrative position at CPCC



Affirmations

- Member is promoted to director of center
- Club advisors named "CPCC Outstanding Club Advisors, 2006-2007"
- Club advisor named "CPCC Outstanding Co-op Coordinator, 2006-2007"
- Club advisor named "CPCC Outstanding Instructor, 2006-2007"
- Thanks and compliments



Thanks and Compliments

- **S:** Thanks to all for the experience and to Christine for relating problems to the problem solving approach we use with young children.
- **B:** Thanks to S for personal support, to A for bouncing back after encountering problems, to G for her leadership skills, for keeping me on my toes, for partnering with me on work at the conference and for her sense of humor.
- **C:** Thanks to J, who always had a smile on her face, to G, who “opened herself to me as a person and professional . . . I felt connected to her.”
- **S:** Thanks to the advisors for taking care of everything and to G for letting us get to know her.
- **C:** Thanks to J and G who “encouraged me to join the club and go to the conference. I got to know two beautiful women and we are from the same country (Columbia). We had not connected prior to the conference.” C complimented everyone for achieving a common goal. He stated that he is ready to go to Chicago!
- **S:** Thanks to B for encouraging me to join the club. She would like to go to the conference next year.

Thanks and Compliments

- **J:** Thanks on behalf of G (who is working a part-time job and could not be here). Thanks to Carol Gestwicki; she enjoyed meeting her. Thanks to all for their fundraising efforts. Some worked harder than others, but all continued to work together.
- **C:** Thanks to all members and to the advisors. Everyone worked together.
- **G:** Thanks to B for her teamwork. Thanks to Christine and Susan for being safe drivers. Thanks to J for her laughter and smile. G also shared that while ordering/eating Chinese food, she had an allergic reaction to bell peppers. K took care of her throughout the night. Thanks for all the items at the exhibit hall. The van was fun and alive – lots of laughing, but respectful.
- **A:** Thanks to S, who “gave up her bed for me when I thought I did not have one.” Thanks to K for walking with me on Saturday when I missed the bus.
- **E:** Thanks to the advisors and to K for all of her input and knowledge of club details. Thanks to C and J for their sense of humor.
- **C:** Thanks to all members; she got to know them, felt connected to them. Thanks to K for becoming a new friend. Thanks to Susan; she had not had her in class before.
- **K:** Thanks to the advisors – a great help throughout the process and good mentors. Thanks to S, A and G for the opportunity to get to know them. Thanks to E and C for being good friends, supportive.

Where do we go from here?

- Chicago here we come!
- ECEC will sponsor the participation of 10 members in the NAEYC 2007 Annual Conference, November 7-11.

What will we do differently?

- Form a better trip agenda
- Develop leadership skills
- Have a group meeting every day (to reflect, make plans)
- Have team leaders (members who will take responsibility for specific projects)
- Delegate responsibility
- Be firm with deadlines/eligibility criteria and/or have back-up plan
- Do room assignments earlier
- Complete intent forms earlier
- Have a small number of major fundraising projects as opposed to many small ones
- Everyone should take complete responsibility.