What is a Discourse Community?

James Gee stated that “discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (Gee 483). In other words, a discourse community is formed by a group of people coming together because of a certain subject, situation, or location. Early childhood education as a discourse community has a certain set of expectations regarding its members' knowledge of development-related topics. In order to be accepted into the early childhood discourse community, each potential member must understand the conventions, language, and common knowledge that the group expects. Gaining membership to a discourse community also involves being able to understand the types of texts common to the field, types of knowledge that is expected, and how an individual comes to be considered literate within the community.

Types of Texts

Another important aspect of a discourse community is that each member has the ability to understand how to interpret the types of texts that are commonly produced within the field. Each discourse community has a unique set of texts that are most applicable and useful to the group. In the education discourse community, the texts most commonly produced serve an instructional purpose. Two types of texts commonly found within the early childhood discourse community are lesson plans and standards charts.

Lesson Plans: Text in the detailed lesson plan is generally arranged in the form of a chart that is easy to read. The text must be both clear and organized. The text of a lesson plan is created to address the main area of study covered by the particular lesson. The lesson plan must contain a variety of information including a description of the activity, a list of the materials that will be used, specific skills the activity will require, and guidance limits that will be in place. It is important that every member of the discourse community could interpret the lesson and implement it in any classroom.

Standards Charts: Standards identify what criteria must be met by each student by the end of the academic year. They serve as a guideline for all educators and are divided up by what knowledge is expected by each separate grade level. State and national standards are usually presented in graphical form. By using a chart to demonstrate standards, educators are able to quickly reference both state and national standards when going through the process of curriculum alignment. Curriculum alignment is the process of matching curriculum to the content standards assessed in various testing programs to ensure that teachers will cover the necessary material. When concentrating on curriculum alignment, it is important that the standards are easy to read and process quickly. For this reason, both state and national standards appear organized first by content area and secondly in a numerical system.

Link to the South Dakota Standards for early childhood education
Forms of Communication

Two way communication is very important within the educational discourse community. It is vital that teachers are in constant communication with their fellow educators, administration, and of course, families of their students. Technology has become an especially important tool that educators use to connect with each other and student's families. Technology makes it much easier to keep in contact because so many people have constant access to computers, smart phones, and the internet. But, teachers are also cautioned to use multiple methods to deliver messages to ensure that all students will have equal access regardless of their socioeconomic status or experience. The most common methods of communication in early childhood education are:

Monthly or weekly newsletters
Phone conversations
Email
Bullitan boards
Online discussion forums
conferences
Seminars
Long term studies

Types of Knowledge Necessary

The early childhood education as a discourse community has expectations for its member's knowledge concerning common terminology and theories. These terminologies, theories, and common knowledge combine to differentiate the members of this discourse community from other people around them. Early childhood discourse community has accepted a widely used set of mnemonic devices and acronyms to represent the list of terms regarding agencies, organizations, and program names associated with early childhood education. Every professional involved in early education must be confident and in speaking, reading, and writing these acronyms in order to be fluent within the discourse. The early childhood discourse community also expects that its members have a broad knowledge concerning a variety of theorists related to the development of the whole child. All members must also be aware of the various stages of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development of children.

Here is a link to some examples of common terminology

http://www.del.wa.gov/resources/glossary.aspx
Works Cited
