

F.L.A.M.E.
(Firetrucks Leaving and Meeting Emergencies)

A Simulated Learning Experience Designed for 4 and 5 year-Olds
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Rationale

Since there remains a distinct shortage of planned and organized materials in Social Studies for early childhood, the simulation game F.L.A.M.E. was created. The simulation gives children a chance to learn about a fire department and, more importantly, to make critical decisions about human beings through role playing and information sharing. The rationale for using this technique is based on the idea that Social Studies in Early Childhood Education should deal with the child and the child's own environment.

In implementing F.L.A.M.E., teachers act as guides. It is their responsibility to prepare the students for effective participation in the simulation and to insure that it functions smoothly. It is very important that teachers be explicit about the students' experiences with the game. They must also aid the students in examining their views of the real world.

Educators have shown that an open concept in the classroom stimulates growth and an environment in which the child can actively participate will provide understanding and a basis for formal thought processes. Hilda Taba¹ believes "In order to learn to think, the student must do the thinking instead of absorbing the products of thought processes performed either by the book or by the teacher."

¹Hilda Taba, The Taba Curriculum Development Project in Social Studies, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Menlo Park, California, 1969.

What makes up thinking and in what kind of situations do students "learn to think"? Hilda Taba identifies three cognitive tasks involved in the thinking process: (1) Concept formation, (2) Interpretation of data, and (3) Application. F.L.A.M.E. is a simulated learning situation which develops all three of the cognitive tasks defined by Taba.

The first of Taba's tasks is concept formation. This involves organizing information into a system of classes or groups. F.L.A.M.E. develops this area by having the students make maps of the fire truck. In map making students work with concrete facts. They are required to verbally label and identify items according to a common property. For example, there is one symbol which represents each ladder in the game. This symbol differs from the one used to represent the axe or the hose.

The second cognitive task described by Taba is interpretation of data. This involves the students in relating various kinds of information given on their maps and determining cause and effect relationships. For example, while playing F.L.A.M.E. each student must look for cause and effect relationships between the parts of the fire truck and their uses. An understanding of these relationships is essential in rescuing a person from a burning building.

The third cognitive task is application. This involves the students in applying what they know, facts and generalizations, to problem solving. In the game this task is developed in the role playing portion where the students are given a role card which loosely defines the types of persons they will role play (name and reason for being involved in the problem situation). The students playing a role work in groups of five to discuss the problem concerning the fire. They must use previously acquired knowledge of the map and the generalizations they have formed in the previous steps of the game to reach a decision upon which all members of the group can agree. Then representatives of the group participate in the role playing situation.