

A Whole Child Approach: Bridging the Digital Divide with Ignite by Hatch™

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Classrooms across the country vary dependent upon the school, curriculum, and overall makeup of the student body. Historically, traditional classroom settings were comprised of rows of desks that did not allow for much student collaboration. These classrooms were led by teachers who disseminated knowledge to students; the curriculum largely addressed subject-matter content and students worked independently. As our societal norms have shifted and developed, our classrooms have needed to change as well. The whole child movement in curriculum theory addresses these needs to the core. Indeed, there is a breadth of research detailing the benefits that derive from addressing social emotional components of learning in conjunction with academic content.

As a society, we now understand the importance of communication, collaboration, and problem-solving in juxtaposition to subject-matter content. In the 21st century classroom, more focus has been dedicated to a whole child approach to instruction in which learning competencies like communication skills, problem-solving, and collaboration are developed in addition to mathematics, science, and reading. In a whole child approach to instruction, developmental and social needs are infused into the curriculum in an attempt to provide a well-balanced curriculum that prepares children for life outside of the classroom. Instead of sitting in rows, students are oftentimes found at tables or in learning circles engaging in projects or discussions. In this whole child approach to instruction, the teacher is viewed as the facilitator, helping to foster learning discovery in a student-centered fashion.

Along with addressing social emotional learning in the classroom, 21st century educators are also tasked with teaching children how to thrive in an increasingly digital world. The field of educational technology continues to grow at a rapid rate; assistive technologies for supporting diverse learners are created daily. While most applications, digital learning games, and web-based educational opportunities address subject-matter content in a direct manner, it is important to note that these instances do not afford opportunities for whole-child instruction.

If we are to continue preparing our children for success in a collaborative world, we cannot overlook the importance of the whole child in these digital spaces. It is well-documented that a whole-child approach to instruction best supports student success in the 21st century (Slade & Griffith, 2013). As such, it is imperative that educators utilize educational technologies that support such instruction in their classrooms. Given the implications for best practices at the classroom level, the issue of how to fuse digital learning with the arts and social emotional learning activities presents itself.

Thankfully, new digital literacy tools affording school systems the opportunity to structure learning with a whole-child approach are available. Ameliorating the issues of whole child instruction in digital spaces while measuring kindergarten readiness, Ignite by Hatch is a digital learning solution that affords school systems the ability to generate rapid growth across the domains in an engaging, research-based manner. Ignite by Hatch is the only adaptive, digital learning solution on the market for preschool, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten students that accelerates whole child development across seven domains of learning with an emphasis on social emotional, mathematics, and literacy instruction. In as little as 30 minutes of independent play per week, children make meaningful progress towards their school readiness goals providing teachers with real-time, objective, and actionable data to inform classroom instruction. The product developers at Hatch understand the importance of learning in offline spaces as well, so at-home, hands-on extension activities are provided to best support learning growth.

Tenets of whole child instruction call for learning to be healthy, safe, engaging, supportive, and challenging (Scharberg, 2013). Ignite by Hatch addresses all these components through digital learning experiences and extension activities. The social emotional learning opportunities Ignite provides children situates it as the prime learning solution on the market that helps children develop these competencies in a digital format. Learning experiences

in Ignite help children learn about proper nutrition, appropriate emotional responses, and how to communicate with their peers amongst many other social emotional learning components. Because the characters in Ignite are engaging, children truly have fun – Ignite is the epitome of learning through play in a digital space. Furthermore, children can make personal connections in Ignite through the creation of their own avatar, a character for which they can select outfits and accessories as rewards for the completion of skills. While the learning experiences in Ignite are engaging and fun, they fully align with curricular domains and skill levels. Students are presented curricular material and when they are unable to successfully complete these skills independently, guided practice opportunities provide students additional and varied instruction.

Ignite by Hatch meets children where they are while supporting their developmental and personal growth. Ignite's alignment with the seven learning domains situates it as the only learning software that is in alignment with whole-child, cross-curricular goals. Ignite extends teachers' abilities to collect assessment data, enabling them to support children's growth with an individualized approach. Furthermore, because Ignite by Hatch affords teachers with a detailed, progress monitoring report system, it provides them more time throughout the day to develop lessons, create assessments, and identify necessary remediation for children in their classrooms. Teachers can access a class progress report for each domain to get whole-group data, and detailed individual student reports allow for deeper dives into student strengths and areas for growth. Administrators and teachers alike can measure growth over the entire year through entry and exit check-ups; these reports ensure a detailed picture into student growth and kindergarten readiness levels.

The kindergarten classroom includes children with a wide range of skills. Some children enter kindergarten with very minimal levels of educational exposure, while others have attended up to five years of preschool. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic closed many early learning programs,

sending record amounts of children home. This global pandemic continues to force closures of childcare centers and other educational programs designed to support a child's readiness for school. As a result, many children are entering kindergarten without the basic skills necessary to be successful learners. Bringing children to grade-level success on an accelerated timeline can be a daunting task for the classroom teacher. Thankfully, research has shown that children who play Ignite with fidelity for as little as three months are able to demonstrate one grade-level of growth, and in six months, two grade-levels of growth.

Because Hatch Early Learning understands the importance of whole child instruction, they offer an additional layer of support in offline environments, as well. Ignite provides family log ins to drive engagement outside of the classroom, with individualized hands-on learning activities facilitated by parents. These activities are also divided by both domain and skill level, allowing families to track their child's growth, as well. In this manner, Ignite powerfully extends the teacher's impact and accelerates learning year-round.

While learning gaps have consistently characterized the field of early childhood instruction, the global pandemic may have widened these gaps to levels teachers have never witnessed in the children entering their programs. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, learning gaps have grown exponentially in the early childhood population, and early childhood teachers were forced to find alternate methods for serving the children in their care (Dias, et al., 2020). Quarantining in isolation oftentimes meant children were unable to experience the social interactions with peers required for learning how to participate in a classroom environment, in cooperative learning groups, or even in simple peer-to-peer situations. Furthermore, many early childhood educators posit that a great number of the children entering their classrooms and programs are not equipped with the skills necessary to learn. While differentiating instruction has consistently maintained a challenge for educators, it is a concern more prevalent in our post-pandemic classrooms because of varied pandemic learning-from-home

environments (Hunt Institute, 2021). Kindergarten teachers voice that a high number of their students are entering school systems ill-prepared for curricular guidelines and objectives – this issue is prevalent across all states (Goldberg, 2021).

Now, more than ever, teachers need increased assistance through new technologies to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all learners. More importantly, preschool teachers need alternate, highly engaging methods for preparing children to enter kindergarten classrooms (Stites, Sonneschein, & Galczyk, 2021). While there may not have been strong early childhood resources for teachers to use in the classroom effectively in the past (Flexer, as cited by Tate, 2021), Ignite by Hatch offers a robust pedagogical tool for teachers, equipped with an extensive reporting system to inform their practice. Not only does Ignite by Hatch allow for accelerated growth in students who play with fidelity, but it helps to correct the trajectory on which these children are when they begin kindergarten ill-equipped for the tasks at hand.

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