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Part I

Daily Dilemmas

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- 2.** Starting the Day Off Right
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- 5.** Free Choice: Making Learning Fun
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- 8.** Art: Mess without Stress
- 9.** Safe Fun Outdoors or in the Gym
- 10.** Peaceful Naptimes
- 11.** Computer Center Concerns

1. The Daily Schedule: An Active and Purposeful Program

The key to a successful daily schedule is alternating long, active periods with short, quiet periods and alternating short, teacher-led activities with long, child-initiated activities. Young children are naturally active and learn best by exploring and discovering for themselves. Imposing long periods of quiet, sedentary activities on children will result in rebellious behaviors and will reduce vital learning opportunities.

The following samples will give you ideas for developing a workable schedule for your classroom. Make changes to fit your particular program's goals, equipment, meal schedule, space constraints, and the needs of your particular children.

Many half-day programs run less than four hours. Depending on whether you eliminate one or both meals, make adjustments to the following schedule. Keep about the same length of time for free choice and the outdoor/gym part of the schedule. Shorten other parts of the schedule if necessary.

Half-Day Toddler Program

8:30–8:45	Limited Free Choice (table toys, puzzles, playdough, and so on)	10:40–11:40	Outdoor/Gym (includes creative movement/dance)
8:45–8:50	Circle Time	11:40–11:45	Book Browse
8:50–9:00	Hand Washing and Toileting	11:45–11:50	Music
9:00–9:20	Breakfast	11:50–12:00	Hand Washing and Toileting
9:20–10:25	Free Choice (includes teacher-prepared art and individual attention)	12:00–12:20	Lunch
10:25–10:35	Cleanup	12:20–12:25	Toothbrushing
10:35–10:40	Story	12:25–12:30	Closing Circle and Dismissal

Full-Day Toddler Program

7:00–8:35	Free Choice (with some teacher-prepared activities and individual attention)	11:50–12:00	Hand Washing and Toileting
8:35–8:45	Cleanup	12:00–12:20	Lunch
8:45–8:50	Circle Time	12:20–12:25	Toothbrushing
8:50–9:00	Hand Washing and Toileting	12:25–12:30	Story
9:00–9:20	Breakfast	12:30–2:30	Naptime
9:20–10:25	Outdoor/Gym (includes creative movement/dance)	2:30–2:50	Snack
10:25–10:35	Story	2:50–4:00	Free Choice (includes teacher-prepared activities and individual attention)
10:35–11:40	Free Choice (includes teacher-prepared art and individual attention)	4:00–4:05	Creative Drama or Story
11:40–11:45	Music	4:05–5:30	Outdoor/Gym (includes creative movement/dance)
11:45–11:50	Book Browse	5:30–5:35	Music/Rhythm
		5:35–6:00	Art and Limited Free Choice

Half-Day Preschool Program

8:30–8:45	Limited Free Choice (table toys, puzzles, playdough, and so on)	10:35–10:45	Story Time
8:45–9:00	Circle Time	10:45–11:00	Small Group
9:00–9:05	Hand Washing and Toileting	11:00–11:45	Outdoor/Gym (includes creative movement/dance)
9:05–9:25	Breakfast	11:45–11:50	Silent Reading
9:25–10:25	Free Choice (includes individual attention, teacher-prepared art, and hands-on math activities). Breakfast is available to eat when individual children wish.	11:50–11:55	Hand Washing and Toileting
		11:55–12:15	Lunch
10:25–10:35	Cleanup	12:15–12:20	Toothbrushing
		12:20–12:30	Music and Dismissal

Full-Day Preschool Program

7:00–8:35	Free Choice (includes individual attention, teacher-prepared art, and hands-on math activities)	11:50–12:00	Music/Movement/Rhythm
8:35–8:45	Cleanup	12:00–12:05	Hand Washing and Toileting
8:45–9:00	Circle Time	12:05–12:25	Lunch
9:00–9:05	Hand Washing and Toileting	12:25–12:30	Toothbrushing
9:05–9:25	Breakfast	12:30–12:40	Silent Reading
9:25–10:15	Outdoor/Gym (includes creative movement/dance)	12:40–2:10	Naptime
10:15–10:25	Story	2:10–3:30	Free Choice (includes teacher-prepared activities and individual attention). Snack is available to eat when individual children wish.
10:25–10:40	Small Group	3:30–3:40	Story
10:40–11:40	Free Choice (includes teacher-prepared activities and individual attention)	3:40–5:00	Outdoor/Gym (includes creative movement/dance)
11:40–11:50	Cleanup	5:00–5:15	Creative Drama
		5:15–6:00	Art and Limited Free Choice

Resources

Web Sites

Classroom Schedule Samples.
users.stargate.net/~cokids. Click on Teacher Pages, then on Classroom Schedule Samples.

Videos

NAEYC
 1509 16th Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20036-1426
www.naeyc.org
Daily Dilemmas: Coping with Challenges, 28 min.

2. Starting the Day Off Right

The tone of the day for you and the children is often set in the first few minutes of the day. Children arrive at the center in many different moods and with very different early morning experiences. By respecting those differences and accommodating them whenever possible, the children will have a much better chance for a successful day.

Preventing Problems

- Greet each child and parent individually as they enter. Look them in the eye and use their names.
- If you and the child feel comfortable, make physical contact with her by hugging or by touching the child on the arm or shoulder. This lets the child know that her presence is acknowledged and important.
- Children who have intense emotional needs, in particular, should be given attention and care as soon as they arrive. They usually come with their “tanks on empty” and you must fill those tanks with positive attention or they may seek the attention they need through inappropriate behavior.
- Arrange for children (and adults) to wash their hands soon after arriving. Invite parents who bring their children to school to help guide their child’s hand washing. This will help stop the spread of germs from home and greatly control disease in your program. Make it a fun, interactive experience and a positive ritual.
- If children enter in a large group all at once, have them choose one of a variety of activities. If breakfast or a circle time comes early in the schedule, you may want to keep the children’s choices limited to activities that can be cleaned up quickly. Use this time to greet each child individually, as described above.
- Set free choice time early in your schedule. Note that children get anxious and restless waiting for the period of time they like the best. Being surrounded by enticing materials, activities, and friends, and not being able to interact with them is difficult for young children. They may refuse to comply, act silly, or misbehave. Scheduling free choice early in the day for at least forty-five minutes will prevent behavior problems from occurring.

● Time your first meal or snack to make it work for your own group of children. Experiment with the timing so that as many children as possible are getting the food when they are hungry, but not when they are too hungry. If they are eating the food quickly and voraciously, are irritable, or do not listen well before the meal, then you are scheduling the meal too late. If many children pick at their food and are sleepy during the meal, then the meal is coming too soon. Kitchen staff can usually be more flexible with breakfast. If necessary, make it yourself with the children. Hungry or overfed children will be difficult children.

Dealing with Existing Problems

Children Who Have a Hard Time Separating from Their Parents

- Encourage parents to spend five or ten relaxed minutes when dropping off and picking up their children. Invite parents to chat with staff and play with their children during this time. This helps ease the transition for the children. However, encourage parents to leave quickly and smoothly once they have given their child a good-bye kiss. Both rushing in and out and lingering too long can add to the anxiety of separation.
- If the child is still anxious when the parent needs to leave, hold the child’s hand or put your arm around her shoulders and say: “I’m glad you’re here. Now it’s time for parents to go to work and children to go to school. You’ll see Mom again when she comes to pick you up. Let’s go see what there is to do today.” Lead the child away as you both wave good-bye.
- As a way to ease the transition, let the child bring in something comforting from home, such as a favorite stuffed animal. Or give the child something to hold that symbolizes the parent. This may be a picture of her parent(s) or an item from Mom’s purse or Dad’s pocket. Something like an extra house key works well because the child knows the parent must return to get it, which may be the cause of the separation fear.

Children Who Are Very Fussy at the Start of the Day

You may have children in your class who are highly active, lethargic, very grouchy, or defiant in the morning, but who improve as the day progresses. Parents may know the cause, or the problem may be due to one or more of the following reasons:

Allergies. A child who is sensitive to particular fabrics may be grouchy in the morning because of sleeping on synthetic bedding. If this type of allergy runs in the child's family, she is probably affected also. Using only cotton and other natural fibers for bedding and clothing should relieve the symptoms. Food allergies can also cause behavior problems. Many children are allergic to typical breakfast foods, such as milk, eggs, and wheat. Suggest to parents that they eliminate one category of food at a time to determine if the removal of this food improves the way their child feels. This is best done with the guidance of an understanding doctor. (See "Active and Distracted" on pp. 135–137 for more information.)

Lack of Food. Some children may arrive at school having had little or no dinner the previous night and little or no breakfast that morning. Securing food is your first priority, if the parents cannot. Teaching young children means meeting all their basic needs. Children who are hungry will learn little. In one public school, a kindergarten teacher was able to give a midmorning snack to the children from funds for children with special needs. Because the children made the snack themselves, it became a learning experience.

Lack of Sleep. Ask the child which TV show she watched the previous night to determine the time the child went to bed. Discuss with parents the importance of an early, consistent bedtime. Provide parents with easy to read, brief information about bedtime routines and strategies. Such information, and other parenting help, is available from the Web sites listed at the end of this chapter (p. 11). Make a cot available for any tired child to take a short nap at any time during the class.

Chaos: Too Much Going On at Once

Parents want to talk to you, several children are demanding your attention, the director needs you, your assistant has a question, and two children are chasing each other through the room. This probably sounds familiar, because all teachers have had mornings like this.

- Remember that children must always come first. Adults can wait. Greet and talk with parents each day, but if you are concerned about the children's behavior or well-being, ask an assistant to help the children or excuse yourself from the adult conversation.

- Keep a clipboard or note pad on a bulletin board posted near the door for parents, visitors, or other staff to write messages to you.

- To reduce attention-getting behaviors, greet children warmly and individually when they enter, as described earlier in this chapter. Make sure the children can get settled into the first routine of the day without much help. If the children cannot read their names, tape a picture of them in their cubbies. Have children help each other in the morning. "Ask three before you ask me" is a great classroom rule. The "three" refers to three other children. This will also foster independence and communication between children.

- Assign each adult, including yourself, some tasks to do each morning before the children arrive. Keep the written task-list posted. To provide variety and the opportunity to learn new skills, swap the set of tasks once a month. Make the task cards reusable by laminating them or covering with clear, self-stick plastic. The lists, prepared ahead of time, might look like this:

Adult # 1

- Mix paints and set up easel.
- Take out trikes and wagons.
- Set out the following gross-motor equipment:

Equipment: large ball, frisbee, bat and ball
 Located: classroom closet near front door
 Place it: bench next to porch

Equipment: plastic climber
 Located: storage shed behind building
 Place it: grassy area in center of field

Adult # 2

- Take chairs down from tables.
- Wipe off tables.
- Set out the following activities on tables:

Activity: Cherry Picker board game
 Located: red storage shelf
 Place it: round table

Activity: five puzzles
 Located: puzzle rack on wood shelves
 Place it: rectangular table by window

Resources

Chvojicek, R., N. Larson., and M. Henthorne. 2001. *Transition magician for families: Helping parents and children with everyday routines*. St. Paul: Redleaf Press.

Larson, N., M. Henthorne, and B. Plum. 1997. *Transition magician: Strategies for guiding young children in early childhood programs*. St. Paul: Redleaf Press.

Larson, N., M. Henthorne, and R. Chvojicek. 2001. *Transition magician 2: More strategies for guiding young children in early childhood programs*. St. Paul: Redleaf Press.

Web Sites

Easing Separation Anxiety (National Network for Child Care) www.nncc.org. Click on Search, then enter “separation anxiety” in the search box.

Specific bedtime issues:

Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood Parents’ Page: Making the Transition to Bedtime
pbskids.org/rogers/parents

iVillage Family Topics: Sleep
www.ivillage.com/topics/family. Scroll down and click on Sleep.

General parenting:

Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood Parent Pages
pbskids.org/rogers/parents

What You Need to Know About . . . Parenting and Family
home.about.com/parenting

iVillage Family Topics
www.ivillage.com/topics/family

Parenthood.com
www.parenthoodweb.com

Parent News
www.parentnews.com

National Parent Information Network
www.npin.org

3. Circle Time: Meeting Individual Needs in a Group

Circle time, also called group time, refers to any time that a group of children are sitting together for an activity involving everyone. Typically this might include reading a story, sharing events from the weekend, playing rhythm instruments, or singing songs.

Preventing Problems

- Keep your circle time short! Most groups of toddlers have a maximum attention span of five to ten minutes. For most groups of preschoolers the maximum is ten to fifteen minutes. Start the year with the circle time lasting a few minutes and gradually increase the time throughout the year.
- Several short circle times with part of the group is better than a long one with the whole group. These can take place during the course of the day or simultaneously, if enough staff is available. Short circle times with small groups allow you to give more individual attention, increase children’s chances for participation, and have fewer distractions for children.
- As a guideline to help children sit appropriately, give each one a rug-sample square. They can usually be purchased cheaply from carpet stores. As an alternative, you can laminate pieces of paper with children’s names or a picture on them. Gluing a Velcro fastener

(the loop side) to the back can help make them stay in place on a carpeted surface. This provides individual spaces so children will not conflict with each other. Some groups of children, particularly older preschoolers, attend better when sitting on chairs placed around the circle.

- Hold circle activities away from toy shelves and other attractive places in the room. Make the circle big enough to seat all the children comfortably.
- Establish one or two simple circle time rules and remind children of them at the start of the circle. They might be the following:
 - “Keep your hands next to your own body.”
 - “Talk only when no one else is talking.”
- Avoid using circle time for teaching specific skills. Circle time is most successful when you use it for singing together, playing movement games (such as “Hokey Pokey”), listening to stories, participating in active group games that involve handling things or moving, watching films, planning activities for the day, making classroom rules, or assigning “jobs” for the day.
- Plan circle activities that are not too difficult nor too easy to follow, and are highly interesting to your particular group. Prepare well. Know your material well enough that you can stray from your plans, answer unexpected questions, and easily get back on track.

- Start off your circle time with an active but not boisterous game that requires the children to focus and attend, but not sit still and quiet. You might use the game “Follow the Rhythm.” With everyone sitting around the circle, tap out a simple rhythm and then invite the children to repeat it. Make the rhythm a little harder each time you tap. Give some children a chance to lead the game. After playing for a minute or two, begin your circle activity. This type of activity will draw children to the circle who have not yet made the transition.
- If your planned activity does not hold the children’s interest, have alternative activities to use or move on to the next activity.
- Place another adult (teacher, assistant, or volunteer) behind the children in the circle. There she or he can see the whole group and move quickly to an area where children are having a hard time. Sometimes just sitting behind them or gently touching their backs will settle them.
- If possible, involve all adults in the group activity. An assistant or volunteer who is doing other things within sight or sound of the circle will be distracting. Adults who participate can act as role models for the children.
- Occasionally provide an alternative to sitting in a circle. For example, have the children sit in two rows across from each other, facing each other. Do a variety of activities during which one partner interacts with the other verbally and physically.

Dealing with Existing Problems

Hitting, Arguing, or Talking with Each Other

Boredom during circle time is the most common cause of hitting, arguing, or talking with others. Follow the suggestions in “Preventing Problems” to make the circle time short and stimulating.

- Keep the children who “set each other off” away from each other in the circle. If necessary, assign seats.
 - Focus your attention and encouragement on the children who are behaving well. Say things like the following, “Thank you, Sam, for looking right at me. It lets me know you’re listening well.”
 - Give minimal attention to misbehavior.
- Remind the children of the circle time rules you have established.
 - Begin your activity without waiting for everyone to join or be entirely quiet. Start with a louder voice to get the children’s attention and quickly tone down your voice when the talking or moving has stopped.
 - At the start of your activity, remind the children that they will have an opportunity to talk right after you have finished.
 - During group games, give children opportunities to be the “teacher” and decide what the group should do. For example, a child can decide which body part everyone should shake during “Hokey Pokey.”
 - Use a nonverbal cue to get the children’s attention, such as placing your thumb and index finger in the shape of an *L* and putting it by your ear (American Sign Language for *listen*). Use this cue to remind children that this is a time to listen. Quickly go back to your activity.
 - Whenever possible, give children opportunities to talk and move in appropriate ways. Involve them actively during the circle. For example, invite the children to take turns holding the book being read. For well-known stories, leave off the ends of some sentences for the children to finish. Ask questions occasionally to give children opportunities to talk.

Can’t Sit Still

- For a variety of reasons, some children cannot sit still for more than a few seconds. For these children, provide an alternative quiet activity, such as doing puzzles or drawing at a nearby table, where they will not distract the circle. This is not a punishment or a reward, but a recognition of the different needs of the children. If they were able to exercise control, they would. If other children want to do this additional activity also, explain that the children are choosing another activity because sitting quietly is difficult for them at this time, although they will get better at it. Tell the children who can sit still that they are able to sit and listen well and that you appreciate their participation in circle.
- For some active children, sitting on an adult’s lap during circle will provide the soothing stimulation to keep them calm.

- Let the children who cannot sit still start the circle with the others, but when they are close to reaching their limit, give them a choice of alternative quiet activities or listening a little longer. Note that the time they are able to stay in the circle should gradually increase if you are also working on the root cause of the problem. (See “Helping Children with Challenging Behaviors,” pp. 123–126, for more information.)

- If a child is still disruptive to the group, even after given the opportunity to do another activity, another adult (who is not leading the circle) should calmly guide him to a place where the child can be involved in a solitary activity but cannot be seen or heard. The adult should keep an eye on the child but give as little attention as possible, as the goal of disruptive behavior is usually to get attention. Tell the child that he can return to the activity or the circle when he is ready to work quietly. Give the child lots of encouragement when he does return and is quiet for a few seconds. Say something like the following: “I can tell that you’re really listening because you’re quiet. That’s very polite because now everyone can hear.”

Interruptions Directed to the Teacher

- Ignore the first interruption (unless the child needs to use the bathroom or has some other emergency). If the child interrupts again, he will likely keep interrupting until you will have to respond. Act on the second interruption. (Usually it will be a request like “Tie my shoe” or “Can I get a drink of water?” Or the child may ask a question about the activity.) Tell the child that you are very interested in what he has to say but that he must wait until the end of circle time. If the child interrupts again, signal by nodding your head to another adult to help the child with his needs. Go back to the activity quickly.

- Keep a mental note of the nature of the distraction. At a later time, talk with the child about what he may be able to do differently the next time so as not to interrupt.

- Some interruptions are great learning opportunities. They should be allowed, and you should follow through on them. For example, if a child complains that another child hit him, use the conflict resolution strategies discussed on p. 123. All the children will be interested and will learn from the experience.

Bored Children during “Show and Tell”

- Limit the number of children who share during “Show and Tell” by assigning some to share only on Monday, others on Tuesday, and so on. Consider doing “Show and Tell” in small groups, as this will keep the time appropriately short.

- Involve all the children in this activity by making sure the child who is talking speaks to the other children, not just to you. Encourage the other children to ask questions of the child who is sharing. Place yourself behind the child to facilitate this.

- Have children share family experiences, a picture they made, or what they did earlier in the day at school. Sharing themselves rather than things, helps children who have no item to share; develops the children’s ability to review; and makes for more personal, meaningful sharing.

For additional ideas on getting children to circle and to the next activity after circle, read “Transitions: Structuring Unplanned Time” on pp. 123–124.

Resources

Briggs, P., T. Pilot, and J. Bagby. 2000. *Early childhood activities for creative educators*. Clifton Park, N.Y.: Delmar Learning.

Charner, K., ed. 1996. *The giant encyclopedia of circle time and group activities for children 3 to 6: Over 600 favorite circle time activities created by teachers for teachers*. Beltsville, Md.: Gryphon House.

Kriete, R. 1999. *The morning meeting book*. Greenfield, Mass.: Northeast Foundation for Children.

Spangler, C. B. 1997. The sharing circle: A child-centered curriculum. *Young Children* 52 (5): 74–78.

Web Sites

Circle Time Activities—Ideas submitted by teachers users.stargate.net/~cokids. Click on Teacher Pages, then on Circle Time Activities.

Circle Time Group Activities.

daycare.about.com. Enter “circle time” in the search box.

Circle Time. Numerous resources. Education World.

www.education-world.com/early_childhood. Click on Circle Time on the sidebar.

Videos

Educational Productions
900 SW Gemini Drive
Beaverton, OR 97008
www.edpro.com

Super Groups. Series includes three videos:

Come Join In, 30 min.

Give Yourself a Hand, 34 min.

Once Upon a Time, 33 min.

4. Successful Small Group Learning

If you are not already doing so, schedule a time during the day for fifteen to twenty minutes of small group learning. Plan to have at least three small groups of children in three areas of the room (or at three tables) working on activities at the same time. If you have enough staff, plan on each group doing a different activity with an adult. Rotate the groups to a different activity each day, so by the third day, every child will have done all three activities. For the remaining two days of the week, repeat the more popular activities, introduce new activities, or do a combination of both. For the activities, include art or craft projects, dictating or writing stories, simple science activities, lotto games, simple board games, manipulating objects to learn counting and math, memory games, role-playing, solving social conflicts, and cooking projects. By doing this, you individualize more than you can in a large group. You can provide direct information, answer questions, encourage problem solving, and give more feedback to individual children. Also, you can provide more challenging activities than children can do on their own during free choice. Finally, with these small groups you are able to observe children better. You can more readily determine how they think, act, and feel and what their strengths and weaknesses are. You can “scaffold” their learning as described on p. 1 and you can then plan and adjust future activities accordingly.

Preventing Problems

- To get children to their places easily, name each group. Place a picture of that name on the table or the area where the children are to go. For example, the six children who are in the Tiger group will go to the table with the picture of the tiger placed in the center. Similarly, the children in the Bear group and those in the Elephant group will go to their tables. Give each child a picture tag that corresponds to her group. Attach this tag to the child's clothing. Within a few weeks, each child should know her group.
- Prepare all your materials and written instructions for the other adults ahead of time. Discuss the activities with the adults beforehand so your expectations

are clear. Tell them why the children are doing the activity and what you want the children to gain from it.

- Develop activities that allow the children to handle real objects and that do not consist of children using only pencil and paper or adults demonstrating something or lecturing.
- Divide children into mixed groups. Include within each group some slow learners and some quick learners, some compliant children as well as difficult children. This allows children to learn from each other and to help each other.
- Individualize when you see the need. If a child is having difficulty, ask her to do only part of the activity, give extra help in accomplishing it, or offer a different way of doing it.
- Individualize according to abilities, but stretch them and challenge them a bit. For example, if your activity is making playdough, invite the child with poor small-motor coordination to pour liquids from the measuring cup into a large bowl. Encourage the child with good small-motor coordination to pour and measure a tablespoon of oil. Invite the child with reading skills to read the recipe for the group. Encourage the child with poor counting skills to count along with another child the number of tablespoons of salt needed. Plan for this before the activity.
- Make sure activities are meaningful to children and have an emotional connection for them. For example, teach the math concept of *half* in the context of sharing cookies during a snack.
- The focus of the activities should be on understanding, as much as on learning skills or information. See “Approach to Teaching” in the introduction for ways to do this.

Dealing with Existing Problems

Not Enough Staff

- Small group time requires a capable adult for each group. If only two are available, you can have two groups with the third involved in an activity they can do well on their own, with some occasional checking. In any case, include no more than six children in a small group.
- As an alternative to this or if you are the only adult, extend your free choice time and involve five or six

children in a small group activity while the others are in free choice. When the first group is done, choose a different group of children to do the same activity, until all the children have participated. Unless you are doing a long project that will take several days to complete, select a different small group activity each day. The drawbacks to this system are that pulling children away from free choice activities is difficult, the continuity of their play is broken, and you cannot be actively involved in free choice while working with small groups.

- To minimize the drawbacks, allow children to save whatever they have constructed during free choice time by making themselves a “Do Not Touch” sign or placing their project in a special “saving” place. They can then pick up where they left off and not worry about others ruining their work. Also make free choice long enough so that children have time to play after they are done with small group, and you can have time to be with children during free choice.

Bored or Resistant Children

If your children clearly indicate that they would rather be doing something else, try some of these ideas:

- Plan activities that involve the children actively in movement or in handling real objects. Provide many chances for each child to talk and to do.
- Use more activities that are creative, that allow children to express themselves, and that do not require one correct answer. Using sets of three wood scraps and glue to build various sculptures is more satisfying than circling the picture of three balloons on a ditto sheet. Yet the same information—the concept of *three*—can be taught in both activities.
- Shorten each small group activity so that children have to sit for only a few minutes.
- Schedule very physical activities—such as outdoor play, gym play, or movement games—before and after your small group time.
- Lead a short stretching game (such as “Shake Your Sillies Out” or “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes”) just before small group time and/or between each small group activity.

Resources

Charner, K., ed. 1998. *The giant encyclopedia of science activities*. Beltsville, Md.: Gryphon House.

- Charner, K., and C. Barnes, eds. 2000. *The giant encyclopedia of arts and crafts activities*. Beltsville, Md.: Gryphon House.
- Davalos, S. R. 1999. *Making sense of art: Sensory-based art activities for young children*, 3–5. Shawnee Mission, Kans.: Autism Asperger Publishing.
- Kohl, M. F. 1993. *ScienceArts: Discovering science through art experiences*. Bellingham, Wash.: Bright Ring Publishing.
- . 1994. *Preschool art: It's the process not the product*. Beltsville, Md.: Gryphon House.
- . 2000. *The big messy (but easy to clean up) art book*. Beltsville, Md.: Gryphon House.
- Moomaw, S., and B. Hieronymus. 1995. *More than counting: Whole math activities for preschool and kindergarten*. St. Paul: Redleaf Press.
- . 1999. *More than painting: Exploring the wonders of art in preschool and kindergarten*. St. Paul: Redleaf Press.
- . 1999. *Much more than painting: Exploring the wonders of art in preschool and kindergarten*. St. Paul: Redleaf Press.
- Timpl, R. 1997. *100 small group activities 3*. Ypsilanti, Mich.: High/Scope Press.

Web Sites

Activity ideas in art, math, science, and more
atozteachertstuff.com. Click on Lesson Plans, then on Preschool under Grade Level.

Lesson plans for various areas
www.lessonplanspage.com

Activity ideas listed alphabetically
www.theideabox.com. Click on Activities on the side bar.

Early Childhood Education on Line (ECEOL-L) Web Site
www.ume.maine.edu/ECEOL-L. Click on Curriculum and Environments.

Art Activities

Incredible Art Department
www.princetonol.com/groups/iad. Click on Lessons, then on Early Childhood.

About Daycare
daycare.about.com. Enter “art activities” in the search box.

The Chalkboard
patricia_f.tripod.com. Click on Assorted Art Activities on the side bar.

Early Childhood.com
www.earlychildhood.com. Click on Arts and Crafts on the side bar.

Kinder Art
www.kinderart.com
LessonPlansPage.com
www.lessonplanspage.com/ArtK1.htm

Math Activities

Early Childhood Educators' and Family Web Corner
users.stargate.net/~cokids. Click on Teacher Pages, then on Curriculum, then scroll down to Math section.

LessonPlansPage.com
www.lessonplanspage.com/MathK1.htm

Science

LessonPlansPage.com

www.lessonplanspage.com/ScienceK1.htm

Early Childhood Educators' and Family Web Corner
users.stargate.net/~cokids. Click on Teacher Pages, then
on Curriculum, then scroll down to Math section.

LessonPlansPage.com

www.lessonplanspage.com/ScienceK1.htm

Videos

High/Scope

Dept. 10

600 N. River Street

Ypsilanti, MI 48198

www.highscope.org

Small Group Time Video Series:

Counting with Bears, 17 min.

Plan-Do-Review with Found Materials, 25 min.

Working with Staplers, 12 min.

Representing with Sticks and Balls, 14 min.

Exploring with Paint and Corks, 12 min.

5. Free Choice: Making Learning Fun

This part of the schedule is sometimes called work time, free play, choice time, and other names. Since young children learn best within complex play—that is set up, guided, and mediated by skilled teachers—free choice time provides great opportunities for learning. Free choice is the time children love the most. They get to decide what they want to do, how to do it, and for how long. The value of free choice depends on the quality of materials and equipment you have. It also depends on your ability to help children do what they choose at a higher level than they could do by themselves, to solve problems effectively, and to learn new skills. This all can happen when you listen and observe carefully and respond with suggestions, new materials, and questions.

Preventing Problems

- Schedule the first free choice time early in the day and for at least forty-five minutes.
- Rotate equipment. Keep some in storage and then bring out this equipment after several months. When you do this, put some other equipment away to reduce the boredom caused when children use the same toys every day.
- Change the dramatic play area fairly often. Have the children help you set up a post office for about three weeks, then a restaurant for several weeks, then a campground, and so on. Other ideas can come from common activities, the workplaces of the children's families, and popular places in the community. Have

the children come up with other ideas. If space is available, have a permanent "house" area but change the materials and supplies on a regular basis.

- Set out a variety of activities to choose from, such as art materials, paint and easels, board games, puzzles, water play, and clay.
- Involve yourself with your children's play and move around the room. Don't control the play or tell them what to do. Ask questions. Add supplies and equipment to expand and deepen their play.
- Use free choice time to interact with some children one to one. Offer special time with the teacher as one of the choices.
- Establish a system where children place name cards at the area they choose to use. This will help them plan and think ahead. You can limit the number of children in each area by having a set number of hooks to place their name cards on.
- Set up long-term projects for children to pursue playfully and help guide them when necessary. Project ideas can come from children's interests. Invite them to help decide the subject of the projects. They might include designing and building a school bus, creating a large "sculpture" of a dinosaur, creating a model of the school or the neighborhood, or developing an elaborate hospital area. To help them learn through play, ask questions about what they need and how they can obtain or make it; read information about the subject of their projects; and help them use tools and skills to measure, count, write, diagram, graph, and negotiate. (See "The Project Approach" in "Selecting and Using a Curriculum," on p. 41, for further information.)

Dealing with Existing Problems

The Child Who Spends Most of His Time in One Area

This is not necessarily a problem. A child who is less than three years old or who is a slow learner needs to spend time using materials over and over. This is particularly true early in the year when equipment and games are new to the child. You should be concerned later in the year, with children older than three, and if persistent. It is an important educational goal that children experience a wide variety of activities.

- Add some variety to the child's play. Introduce new materials or suggest different ways to play with the same materials. Bring materials from another area of the room to that area. For example, bring paper and pens into the block area and suggest that the child draw a picture of her block structure.
- Entice the child into other areas by providing challenging and fun art projects, cooking projects, water or sand play, or woodworking or a new dramatic play center.
- If a child uses an area too often, close it to all children for one or two days per week. This will give the child a chance to try new areas.
- If enticements do not work and closing the area brings shrieks of protest, consider that the child is getting something from playing in that area that is vitally important to him emotionally or physically. Back down. Be patient. Let the child continue using that area for another few weeks before trying again to promote a change.

The Child Who Spends Very Little Time in Any One Area

Free choice can be overstimulating to some children. They are so excited by all the activities and choices that they can't settle down. So, you see them move quickly from area to area.

- Cut down on the number of choices offered if this does not adversely affect your program too much. Gradually add more choices, one at a time. Start the year off with a limited number of choices and then add more as the year progresses.
- For the child who is overstimulated, create a small, quiet area that is blocked off from most of the room, although make sure that you can easily see into the area. Typically this is a library corner. But if you have

enough room, create another private place, containing a small table with one or two chairs. Encourage the child to play with building toys or other games in this area, perhaps with one friend. Stay with the child for a short time to help him focus on the activity. Ask questions, talk about what the child is doing, or do the activity yourself at the same time.

- Use a refrigerator box to make a private space for one child. Encourage the child to use this space when she feels overstimulated.
- Make freestanding cardboard dividers (one-and-a-half feet high) that can be placed on the sides and in front of the child while he works at the table on a project. This will cut down on the visual distractions around him.
- Another reason a child may not stay in any area of the room very long is that the activities there are not challenging. Provide different levels of complexity for different activities and within an activity. For example, make available a wide variety of art supplies and collage materials so that a child can create a simple or very detailed project according to his interest and ability. Provide math games that can be played at a variety of different levels.
- Before free choice time, ask the child to tell you what he will do and in which areas he will play. Encourage the child to stick to his plans. This will help the child who flits from one area to another to become organized. As most preschool children are developing self-organizing skills, doing this with all your children is a good idea.

Too Noisy, Too Boisterous

If fights break out and the noise level rises to an intolerable level, try some of the following ideas.

- Establish a classroom rule that only quiet voices can be used inside the classroom. Demonstrate what a quiet voice sounds like. Remind the children of the rule just before free choice. Let them know that they will be able to use loud voices when they are outside.
- Provide more activities with more challenges to keep the children's interest high.
- Put number limits on the noisiest areas, at least temporarily.
- Encourage children who are playing appropriately by saying something like the following: "Thank you for

using a quiet voice. It helps make the room a pleasant place for everyone to work.”

- Provide enough supplies to prevent arguments over toys. Purchase duplicates of popular toys, especially for toddlers.
- Provide supplies and activities that are fun and of high interest to the children—not too easy and not too difficult.
- If a particular child is responsible for the high noise level, remind her of the “quiet voice rule.” Tell her that if the incident happens again, she will have to choose a quiet activity to do by herself. Follow through on the consequence if necessary. If this happens, tell her she can return to play anywhere when she feels ready. Every five to ten minutes, tell her she is playing well: “When you play well we can all hear each other, no one gets a headache, and everyone stays safe. Thank you.”
- If there are two children who tend to “get each other going” when they play together, guide them into separate activities at the start of free choice. During play, catch them just before things start escalating and provide more structure and direction to their play. Tell them that they will not be able to play together if voices get too loud or the activity gets too wild. Follow through, if necessary. When they are playing well together, let them know: “You can play quietly and safely. Thank you for taking care of yourselves.”

Too Messy

- Children may misuse the blocks, table games, the dramatic play area, or other areas, so materials are left in a mess or are damaged. If this happens, remind children of rules like the following:
 - ▮ “Take blocks from the shelf as you need them to build.”
 - ▮ “Put items back in their place when you are finished using them.”
 - ▮ “Pick up anything from the floor that belongs on a table or shelf.”
 - ▮ “Use all materials so that they don’t break or hurt anyone.”
- Remind the children of these rules before they use the area and make sure each item has a specific place that is clearly labeled for the children. Lead children back to an area they have left messy and have them straighten it up before moving on to another activity.

- Observe the children’s play carefully. If it starts to get out of control, which will lead to misuse of materials, help them by suggesting a different direction for the play, adding new materials, taking a role in the play, or redirecting them to different activities.
- Briefly demonstrate and discuss the various ways different materials can be used appropriately. Ask the children for ideas and help them determine if their ideas make safe and constructive use of the materials. (This is especially important to do when a new dramatic play area is set up.)

Resources

- Berk, L. 1994. Research in Review. Vygotsky’s theory: The importance of make-believe play. *Young Children* 50 (1): 30–39.
- Casey, M. B., and M. Lippman. 1991. Learning to plan through play. *Young Children* 46 (4): 52–58.
- Christie, J., and F. Wardle. 1992. How much time is needed for play? *Young Children* 47 (3): 28–32.
- Crosser, S. 1994. Making the most of water play. *Young Children* 49 (5): 28–32.
- Ford, S. 1993. The facilitator’s role in children’s play. *Young Children* 48 (6): 66–69.
- Greenberg, P. 1992. Creating creative play opportunities. *Young Children* 47 (5): 51.
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- Ward, C. 1996. Adult intervention: Appropriate strategies for enriching the quality of children’s play. *Young Children* 51 (3): 20–25.

Web Sites

- Back to Basics: Play in Early Childhood by Jill Englebright Fox www.earlychildhood.com/Articles/index.cfm. Click on Child Development, then scroll down to and click on article title.
- Dramatic Play: A Daily Requirement for Children by Linda G. Miller, Ed.D. www.earlychildhood.com/Articles/index.cfm. Click on Child Development, then scroll down to and click on article title.
- Free-Choice Time for Children Teaches Life Skills by Evelyn Peterson www.earlychildhood.com/Articles/index.cfm. Click on Child Development, then scroll down to and click on article title.
- The Hummingbird Syndrome: Children Who Flit About during Play Time by Sandra Crosser www.earlychildhood.com/Articles/index.cfm. Click on Child Development, then scroll down and click on the article title.
- Play as Curriculum by Francis Wardle, Ph.D. www.gymboreeplayuk.com. Click on Articles on Play and Music on the side bar, then on the article title.