ECE: FIELD EXPERIENCE 1



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ECE: Field Experience 1

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1: INTRODUCTION

1.1: Welcome

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1.1: Welcome

Welcome to Field Experience 1

Field experiences are intentional placement sites where students work in partnership with a cooperating teacher to build their teaching skills.

This Open Educational Resource (OER) is designed to support real-world learning while you are in your placement site. It is useful for students at all experience levels. Your prior experience, whether limited or extensive, is valuable and will support your growth in this course.

Throughout this text, key terms and concepts will be defined to support your understanding of course content and expectations.

Field Experience 1 is a structured learning opportunity that takes place directly in an early childhood classroom. In your placement, you will work closely with a Cooperating Teacher (CT), who serves as a direct support and mentor throughout your experience. These experiences are designed to help you develop new skills and extend your learning beyond your comfort zone.

In Field Experience 1, you will complete 60 hours in your assigned placement classroom. These hours will include relationship-building, observations, and the implementation of learning activities. Throughout your time in the classroom, you will engage in ongoing conversations with your CT, receive and reflect on feedback, and practice your teaching skills in a supportive and safe environment.

We welcome you to your first field experience and look forward to supporting your growth as an early childhood professional.

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2: FOUNDATIONS OF WMELS AND THE TEACHING CYCLE

2.1: Purpose and design of WMELS
2.2: The 9 Guiding Principles
2.3: The Teaching Cycle
2.4: The 5 Developmental Domains

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2.1: Purpose and design of WMELS

The *Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS)* is a framework to help early childhood educators and caregivers understand how young children grow and learn from birth until they enter first grade. It gives a big-picture view of the process in which children typically develop and learn during their early years based on their current level of development.

The main purpose of WMELS is to cultivate young children's abilities to learn and grow in healthy, appropriate ways in all areas of development through their relationships and learning environments. It supports early childhood educators and caregivers in providing experiences that help children develop physically, socially, emotionally, and academically, while also encouraging curiosity, problem-solving, and positive learning habits.

Pause to Reflect

1. How does the purpose of WMELS influence the way educators design learning environments and experiences for young children?
2. Why is it important for WMELS to focus on all areas of development, and what could happen if one area (such as social-emotional or language development) is overlooked?

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2.2: The 9 Guiding Principles

In the *Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards* guide (2017), the nine Guiding Principles outlined on page 10 provide a framework for understanding how educators and caregivers support the development of the whole child. Each principle offers a unique perspective, helping adults recognize and value the complex and interconnected factors that influence a child's growth.

As stated in the guide:

> *"The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Steering Committee has established nine Guiding Principles to inform the development and application of the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards in Wisconsin. These guiding principles reflect the knowledge base in scientific research, our values, and our commitment to young children and families"* (Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards, 2017).

These principles ground the work of early childhood professionals by encouraging intentional reflection on both the child and the environment in which they are growing. They emphasize that development is not isolated to the classroom but is shaped by a wide range of internal and external factors, including family, culture, community, health, and lived experiences. By keeping these influences in mind, educators can take a more holistic approach to teaching and caregiving.

At the heart of all nine principles is the understanding that relationships are the foundation of child growth and development. Meaningful, responsive relationships create a sense of trust and security, which are essential for children to explore, learn, and develop new skills. Without strong relationships, opportunities to support a child's development in key areas may be limited.

Ultimately, the Guiding Principles serve as a powerful reminder that every aspect of a child's life contributes to their overall development. They challenge educators to view each child as a whole person and to thoughtfully consider how their practices support each child's unique needs, strengths, and experiences.

Pause to Reflect

1. Which guiding principles stand out to you the most, and why do you think it is important when working with young children?
2. How do relationships impact a child's development? How can you support strong relationships in your future or current work?
3. Which guiding principles challenge you the most or highlight an area for your growth? What steps can you take to strengthen your understanding or practice in that area?

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2.3: The Teaching Cycle

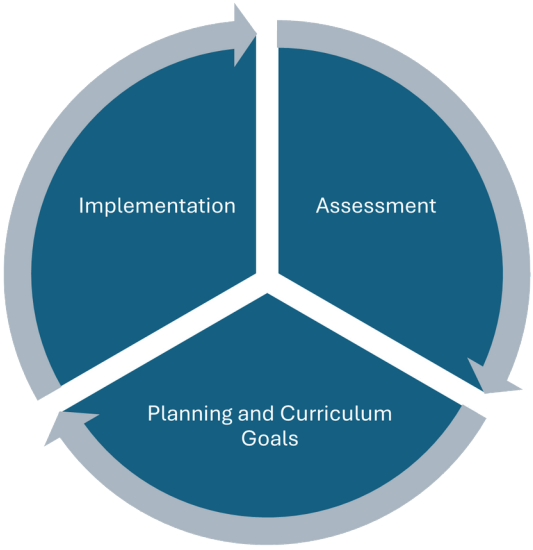


Figure 2.3.1: The Teaching Cycle

Each part of the teaching cycle is an influential part of our classroom. You can start at any point in the teaching cycle, but it is a continuous process. At times, the parts of the teaching cycles overlap, and that is normal during implementation. In all of the cycles, observations, taking notes, and writing down your thoughts can help teachers be more intentional with supporting children's current developmental needs.

Assessment

Assessment is gathering information to better understand the children you are working with. This may include their interests and their current level of abilities.

We collect information by observing the children in an authentic setting.

- Interacting with learning materials in the classroom and interacting with other individuals. We capture this information in the form of documentation, like writing observations, taking notes, or short videos.
- Observation and interactions with children. Teachers gain a deeper understanding of children's current abilities and levels of development. The form of 'data collection' can be anecdotal records, running records, timelines, notes, and video observations.

Planning and Curriculum Goals

Planning small and large activities for a specific child or a small group of children. When we implement activities, we observe how the children react to the activities. We can use the observations to adjust the activities to meet the needs of the children based on their current ability level.

Implementation

When ready, the teacher implements small or large activities in the classroom setting.

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2.4: The 5 Developmental Domains

Domains & Sub-Domains

Within the *Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards* (WMELS), there are five developmental domains. Each is an important part of child development.

These five domains include:

- Health and Physical Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language Development and Communication
- Approaches to Learning
- Cognition and General Knowledge.

Each of the five developmental domains has three sub-domains that provide more detail within each domain in supporting child development.



Figure 2.4.1: Table of contents for WMELS showing domain and sub-domain structure.

Performance Standards

When you turn to any of the developmental domain sections, you will find a similar layout. The first paragraph of each domain has an overview of the corresponding domain. The **rationale** provides the purpose of the domain.

Within each of the sub-domains, you will find a number of **performance standards**. The performance standards are specific criteria that guide the intentional activities teachers can provide in the classroom setting to help children develop skills. Teachers connect performance standards with specific activities they provide in the classroom to support children's development. They are the connective piece between activity and skills.

The program standards provide an outline of how the program is expected to support child development at all ages.

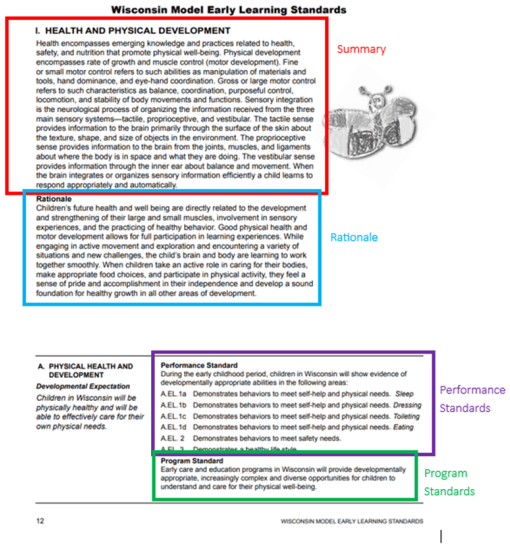


Figure 2.4.2: Example of WMELS domain and sub-domain pages.

Developmental Continuum

The developmental continuum is located after the introduction pages to each developmental domain. It is used to help guide the progressive performance of a child based on current ability and skill level.

Individuals use the continuum during observations to intentionally plan activities to support the children in their classroom, based on development. As a child's skillset increases, they move downward or to the darker areas of the continuum for that specific performance standard.

The continuum provides the skill, sample strategies that could be observed in the classroom, and samples of adult strategies to help a child practice specific skills.

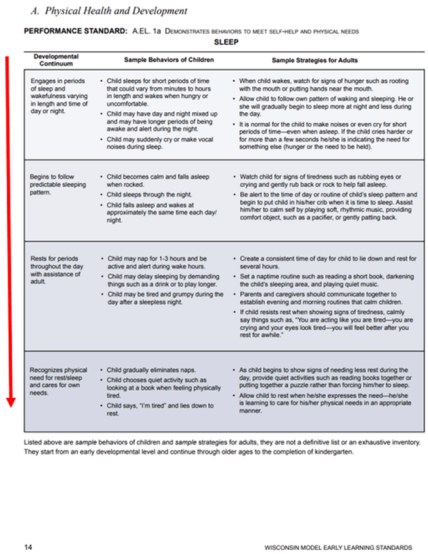


Figure 2.4.3: Example of WMELS performance standard page showing the developmental continuum.

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3: DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE, PLAY AND ASSESSMENT

3.1: Developmentally Appropriate Practices
3.2: Implementing the Teaching Cycle Steps
3.3: Child Web Assessments

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3.1: Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Children are born observers and are active participants in their own learning and understanding of the world around them from the very beginning of their existence. This means they are not just recipients of teachers' knowledge. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) challenges early childhood professionals to be intentional in their interactions and environments to create optimal experiences to maximize children's growth and development. Under this umbrella of DAP, knowledge is based upon discovery, and discovery occurs through active learning and abundant opportunities for exploration. Through a "hands-on" approach and using play as a vehicle, children will develop the skills necessary for growth and development and maximize their learning.

Teachers play a pivotal role in children's active construction of knowledge. They intentionally provide the environments, interactions, and experiences that support children in actively building concepts, skills, and overall development. The role of the teacher who works with young children in early childhood is to support children's active construction of knowledge. In a sense, early childhood teachers serve as research supports as the children sense, discover, and construct meaning about the world around them.

Early childhood teachers are responsible for:

- Offering children well-stocked play spaces where they can construct concepts and ideas, preferably in the company of peers
- Designing daily routines that invite children to be active participants and to use emerging skills and concepts
- Supporting children's learning through interactions and conversations that prompt using language and ideas in new ways

Pause to Reflect

Which concepts are being developed by which types of play? By incorporating each of these types of play, are you developing the "whole child"? Why or why not?

As with most things, the way that children play will go through developmental stages. As teachers plan, they keep in mind the stages of play relevant to the children they are planning for. Originally described by Parten (1932), this list explains how children's play changes by age as they grow and develop social skills.

- **Unoccupied Play (Birth-3 Months)**: At this stage, a baby is making many movements with their arms, legs, hands, feet, etc. They are learning about and discovering how their bodies move.
- **Solitary Play (Birth-2 Years)**: This is the stage when a child plays alone. They are not interested in playing with others quite yet.
- **Spectator/Onlooker Behavior (2 Years)**: During this stage, a child begins to watch other children playing but does not play with them.
- **Parallel Play (2+Years)**: When a child plays alongside or near others but does not play with them.
- **Associate Play (3-4 Years)**: When a child starts to interact with others during play, but there is not a large amount of interaction at this stage.
- **Cooperative Play (4+ years)**: When a child plays together with others and has an interest in both the activity and the other children involved in playing.

Pause to Reflect

Why might these stages be important to consider? How would you use this information in your planning?

Just like the "whole child" is often broken down into developmental domains for studying, so too is learning. Many aspects of learning occur simultaneously; it is integrated and connected. To define learning, we often break it into categories. Because the connection between play and learning is so important, the way it is broken down exists in many forms, including assessments, planning resources, and the frameworks and foundations discussed in this book.

Below is a compilation of such skills, compiled by Eyrich (2016), tying development into learning.

What Children Learn Through Play

How play is tied to learning:

Physical

- Nutrition
- Safety
- Motor (Movement) Skills
  - Active physical play
  - Perceptual-motor (senses, effort, direction)
  - Gross (large) motor (running, throwing, ...)
  - Fine (small) motor (hands, fingers, feet, toes)

Cognitive

- Cognitive approaches to learning and self-regulation
  - Maintain attention
  - Self-comfort
  - Curiosity and initiative
  - Self-control of feelings and behavior
  - Engagement and persistence
- Skills of inquiry: Observe, investigate, document, communicate
- Knowledge of the natural/physical world: Understanding properties and events
- Cause and effect: Understanding the relationship between cause/effect
- Classification
  - Learning the attributes of objects by exploring
  - Compare, match, sort, categorize
  - Finding similarities and differences
  - Symbol
- Number
  - Understanding quantity (amount, degree)
  - Assigning a numerical symbol to a quantity
  - Counting
- Measurement
  - Awareness of difference in properties
  - (size, length, weight, capacity, volume)
  - Seriation (order 3 or more by comparison)
  - (small/medium/large, loud/louder/loudest)
  - Time (sequence of events, rhythm, yesterday/ tomorrow)
- Patterning: Recognize, reproduce, repeating sequences
- Spatial relationships: Experience an object's position in relation to others

Language

- Symbol/symbolic reasoning: Sounds and letters are put together to represent things
- Receptive language: Listening, understanding, responding
- Expressive language: Speaking, communicating, and conversation
- Graphic (written) language/literacy
- Interest in print & books, phonology, pre-reading, and reading
- Symbol, letter, print knowledge, pre-writing, writing

Social

- Skills learning with adults
  - Can stay at school without a parent
  - Can respond/enjoy adults other than parents

    - Adults will help in times of need
    - Adults will not always solve problems
- Skills learned with peers
    - Different approaches work for different peers
    - Cooperation and turn-taking
    - Lead and follow
    - Sustain relationships and help peers
    - Share materials, equipment, people, and ideas
    - Asserting rights and self-defense
    - Negotiating skills and solving conflicts
    - Anticipate and avoid problems
    - Realistic expectations and valuing differences
- Skills learning in a group
    - Respect
    - Responsibility
    - Compassion
    - Tolerance
    - Group identity
    - Follow and adapt to routines and expectations
    - How to enter and exit situations
    - Deal with the delay of gratification (patience)
- Skills learned as an individual
    - Self-help and self-care
    - Make choices and initiate own activities
    - Cope with rejection, hurt feelings, disappointment
    - Take responsibility

Emotional

- Ability to deal with feelings
    - Notice, label, and accept feelings
    - Express feelings in appropriate ways
    - Deal with the feelings of others
    - Resolve inner fears, conflicts
- Ability to exercise judgment
    - Notice, label, and make choices
    - Think through consequences
    - Evaluate the effectiveness of choices
    - Learn to take another viewpoint
- Enjoying oneself and one's power
    - Acquire a sense of self
    - Develop self-confidence and self-esteem
    - Build trust in self and others
    - Reveal their own personality
    - Learn to take risks & learn from mistakes
    - Become competent in several areas

Creative

- Flexibility (shifting from 1 idea to another)
- Fluency (producing many ideas)
- Sensitivity (awareness (moods, textures, senses)
- Imagination/Originality
- Risk-Taking/Elaboration (pushing boundaries)
- Self as a resource (awareness, confidence in ability)
- Experience (to build mastery to build upon)
- Visual and Performing Arts

The Value of Play

Key Points from this Section

- Although play is a common topic, people think of many different things when they hear the word play, and describing it is complex.
- Play supports children's development in all domains.
- There are several types of play.
- Some children struggle with playing by themselves and/or with others.

Terminology

1. **Intrinsic**: within a person
2. **Extrinsic:** outside of a person
3. **Receptive language:** understanding what is being said
4. **Expressive language:** talking and communicating in a way that others understand the intended meaning

What is Play?

Play is common in childhood, especially for young children, yet it is difficult to describe (Mardel, 2019; Piaget, 1962; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Nevertheless, the presence of play for young children and as part of early childhood education (ECE) has persisted over time (Piaget, 1973; Smilansky & Shefatay, 1990; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Play is also considered an aspect of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020). Before you read further, take a moment to write down your description of play. In a few sentences or bullet points, how would you describe play?

One reason play is difficult to describe is that it is creative and fluid. As they are playing, children try things out and develop ideas. It is not planned. The children act, talk, and do. Play is also personal—the player engages based on their own knowledge, understanding, and experiences. Play is a series or set of behaviors and actions (Piaget, 1962). It involves all domains of development: social/emotional, cognitive, and physical. Play is also **extrinsic**—outside of and external to a person, observable, and **intrinsic**—within and inside a person and not observable. This means there are aspects that are external and can be seen, and some that are internal and difficult to see (Parton, 1932; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Vygostky, 1978).

Children make choices about what to play with, how to use the materials (toys), and whether or not there will be others involved. They make these decisions based on who and what is in the environment. For example, when he arrives and enters the classroom, four-year-old Joey plays with puzzles every day. When he gets to the program on Wednesday, he goes directly to the puzzle shelf and pulls down a puzzle. He glances over at three peers who are building a boat with blocks. Joey looks back and forth at the puzzle and the block building several times. Hesitantly, he sets the puzzle back on the shelf and goes over to the block area and says, "I am going to build a very big ship," and starts to build next to his peers' boat. In this example, Joey is originally interested in working on a puzzle, but the boat-building also captured his attention. He pauses before he starts the puzzle and seems to think about what he wants to do. The behavior, playing with puzzles or blocks, is observable and extrinsic. The decision-making is intrinsic, an internal cognitive and social/emotional process of making a decision about what he will do. A careful observer who has a relationship with Joey and knows him well could comment on Joey's motivation (Erikson, 1963), interests (Dewey, 1913, and thinking (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). These comments are only a hypothesis, and Joey's actions may change at any moment. This is the creative and fluid part of play—young children's actions change due to shifts in interests, developmental levels, and various other reasons that are unseen. Play is complex, and when you think about these things, you can see how it is difficult to describe.

Description of Play

Although play is complex, there are key components that can be used to describe it. Three words that have been used to describe play are: choice, wonder, and delight (Mardell, 2019). Play, even for infants and toddlers, includes choices such as deciding what to play, how to play it, and for how long they want to play. It also includes imagination and making up things that may be different from reality (Luckenbill, Subramaniam, & Thompson, 2019).

Joey makes his own decision about what to play. Wonder relates to curiosity—Joey is curious about what his peers are doing. The story of Joey's play continues: Joey starts building his big ship, and while doing so, talks with his peers. They discuss how they are using blocks to build their ships, and begin to discuss trips. Joey says, "If we are going on a long trip, we will need food!" He runs to the dramatic play area and brings back plastic food. Two more children join the play, and the ships are redesigned and enlarged so that the children can get on the ship, take a trip, and eat food. One person says, "Let's go to dinosaur land!" The other children agree, and the journey begins. The children are focused, talking, and laughing at different ideas. The second part of the story shows delight. In this example, the laughter is an obvious sign of delight. However, enjoyment and joy can be experienced in many ways, and it is not always with laughter. The example also shows that the children are using their imaginations and making up ideas.

Reflection

Review your description of play and consider the three components of choice, wonder, and delight.

How does your description include (or not) these components?

Think of a time you saw children playing. How did you see choice, wonder, and delight?

Play and Children's Development

Play, with the opportunities for choice, wonder, and delight (Mardell, 2019), can be thought of as an experience rather than an activity. Experience and activity are not the same. Experiences involve personal connections and are defined as "something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through" (Meriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2005, p. 440). The various definitions of activity include action and "being active" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2005, p. 13). Although play is active, it is also personal and involves children bringing their own knowledge of the world to build upon it either alone or with others during play experiences (Parten, 1932; Piaget, 1962; Smilanky & Sheftaya, 1990; Smith, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997, Vygotsky, 1978). A well-designed environment can be used by a skillful teacher for play experiences as a priority for supporting children's learning.

Play, as an experience, can result in benefits for children as it creates conditions conducive to growth and development (Dewey, 1938/1997; NAEYC, 2020; Piaget, 1973). Despite the benefits, academic instruction (such as learning the names of letters and numbers) is valued over play in some early learning programs (Almon & Miller, 2011). This is creating a reduction in opportunities for children to play. Because it is important for children's development, the American Academy of Pediatrics published a report to guide doctors with information needed to talk with families about play, including writing a prescription for it (Yogman, et al., 2018).

Katz (2010) wrote about "standards of experience" and described how, instead of emphasizing performance standards (such as identifying letters and numbers), teachers and other early learning professionals can think about types of experiences offered for children. Rather than academic activities, children can engage in play, which allows them to pursue what is of interest to them and to do so at their own developmental level. In the video below, Carlsson-Paige (2013) explains play, children's learning, her concerns regarding academic activities versus play experiences.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

View this YouTube Video online

Watch the video on YouTube to view the transcript - www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZzFM1MHz_M

As you saw in the video, play experiences create opportunities for children to engage in all areas of development and it promotes creative thought and expression (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Carlson, 2011; Dewey, 1913, 1916/1944, 1938/1997; Isbell & Yoshizawa,

2016; Parten, 1932; Piaget, 1962, 1973; Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990; Smith, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Yogman et al., 2018). Additionally, play is valuable because it can result in practice that builds various skills (Sutton-Smith, 1997). The domains of development are cognitive, physical, social, and emotional. These areas overlap and intersect with one another, and this can be seen during play. For the purposes of understanding how play supports each developmental domain, the domains will be described separately, but keep in mind that all developmental domains are used when children are playing.

Play is intellectual; it requires thinking. When playing, children represent their thinking symbolically and through the use of physical and mental tools (Dewey, 1916/1944; Piaget, 1962, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). During play, children not only represent their ideas, but they also construct knowledge of the physical and social world (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Play requires self-regulation, which builds executive function (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Yogman et al., 2018). As described by Yogman et al. (2018), play helps children develop 21st-century skills such as creative thinking and problem solving, and these skills use executive functioning.

Equally important to cognition is physical and social/emotional development. Physical development includes fine and gross motor skills as well as movement. When children use materials and toys in play, they use fine and gross motor skills, and in some forms of play, engage in movement and physical activity. Physical development begins before birth as babies move their bodies in the womb and continues throughout childhood (Carlson, 2011). Infants engage in sensorimotor activity, such as waving a rattle and watching it. This type of play is physical and interrelated to cognition and future development (Dewey, 1913; Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Sensorimotor play continues in toddlers with increased mobility as children learn to walk and are continually in motion (Carlson, 2011). There is interest and motivation to move oneself and objects (Dewey, 1913), and at times it can take a lot of effort and/or is sustained for a length of time. This can be observed when watching a one-year-old move objects around the room, such as pushing a chair or box, and the primary interest in this play is to move. Preschoolers gain coordination and increasing competence with physical activity (Carlson, 2011). As fine and gross motor skills are refined, it is demonstrated in the way they play with toys that connect, sensory materials such as play dough and clay, and writing/drawing materials. They also use large motor skills such as running, jumping, and climbing. As children get older, they have the motor ability to build with materials such as Legos and can play games like hopscotch.

Social/emotional development is also important for children. Children play with adults and with each other; they engage in social interaction. There is an **intrinsic,** emotional aspect to play. The previous description of play as involving choice, wonder, and delight (Mardell, 2019) provides a summary of the emotional aspects of play. Each word—choice, wonder, and delight—involves emotions. Children choose based on interests and motivation (Dewey, 1913). Wonder involves curiosity and is usually related to positive emotional interest. Delight is a word to describe pleasure and joy. Imagine three children playing outside where there are rocks that are large enough to stay in place but small enough for a child to move. One child turns a rock over. The children find bugs and worms that were underneath the rock, and one exclaimed, “Wow, look at that! Another said, “He is moving, look, he is crawling really fast!” The third said, “Where is he going?” A debate starts about whether or not the bug is scared, hungry, or looking for a new home. In this example, the children decided to play with the rock and move it, were excited about what they found under it, and wondered about what the creatures were doing. Take a minute to think about your emotions when you can make choices, what you wonder about, and how you feel when you hear the word delight.

Play involves all of the developmental domains. There is a developmental aspect to play. The play of very young children—infants—is quite different from the play of older children. These differences are a result of development and life experiences. Developmental progression is a basis for some theories and authors, such as Piaget (1962, 1973) and Parten (1932). Play is complex, and there are many ways in which to examine children’s play; the benefits of it, and it can be helpful to use the domains as a framework for understanding play and development. Reading about the types of play brings further clarification of play and its role in children’s development and early learning.

Reflection

After reading this section and watching the Carlsson-Paige video, what are your thoughts about how children benefit from play?

Types of Play

As established at the beginning of this section, play is complex. For the purposes of studying and understanding play, it is often divided into types of play (Luckenbill et al., 2019; Smith, 2010). Similar to describing play, the categories are complex, and they overlap (Smith, 2010). Nevertheless, categorizing play into differing types aids in understanding it. This section is categorized

into six types: sensorimotor, physical, exploratory, constructive, dramatic, and outdoor/nature play. Risky play, which could be classified as its own type of play, is included with nature play because outdoor experiences create good opportunities for risk-taking.

Sensorimotor play begins early in life (Luckenbill et al., 2019; Piaget, 1962, 1973; Smith, 2010). In sensorimotor play, children engage with physical movement and input from the senses. The play actions can include materials, the child's own body, other people, and sensory action and exploration. Actions may be repetitive. They can also build and expand from the repetitions (Piaget, 1962). Sensorimotor play is common in Infants and toddlers.

Infants and toddlers often engage in exploratory play, although older children will explore new materials (Smith, 2010). Exploratory play is exploration. When engaged in exploratory play, children are learning about the materials. Think about when you get a new item, such as a new stove, car, type of yarn, sewing machine, or power tool. You take time to get to know the new features and, if appropriate, how it feels to use the new item. You explore the new item. Similarly, in exploratory play, that is what children do to get to know the materials. Exploratory play may be referred to as practice play (Piaget, 1962) or functional play (Smilansky and Sheftaya, 1990). In this section, the term exploratory is used because it is descriptive of what children do when engaged in this type of play.

When children have an understanding of materials, they can use them in a purposeful manner. If they are not familiar with the materials, they explore and learn about the materials' work rather than intentionally create. Constructive play can be described as using open-ended materials to create things (Luckenbill, et al., 2019; Smith, 2010). Think about children playing with blocks. They use the blocks with purpose to build roads, ships, airplanes, castles, beds, etc. Through exploratory play, they learned they can stack the blocks, and this knowledge leads to purposeful use of the materials to create. Another example is with sticks. Exploration may include waving and breaking sticks. Some sticks are not as easy to wave or break. Such sticks might be used to build or stir.

Constructive play can lead to and be used with dramatic play. Dramatic play is known by other names, such as pretend and fantasy play. In the video from the Play and Children's Learning section above, Carlsson-Paige (2013) described a dramatic play (she used the word fantasy) episode in which her son became a firefighter. In dramatic play, children take on roles and act out scenarios. Imitation, such as with the child acting as a firefighter, can be a part of dramatic play (Piaget, 1962; Erikson, 1963). Children may build a fire station with blocks and other materials, perhaps sticks as hoses, and once built, it emerges into dramatic play because they become firefighters.

When dramatic play involves others, it is socio-dramatic play (Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990). Socio-dramatic play most often begins when children are three. Toddlers usually engage in dramatic play alone. Older children, even beyond preschool years, engage in socio-dramatic play, although it is not inappropriate for them to play alone, in any type of play.

Link to Learning

The following video and transcript show both dramatic and socio-dramatic play.

Pretend Play with Big Boxes Video - illinoisearlylearning.org/videos/videos-parenting/boxespretend/

Children engage in dramatic play in differing ways. Parten (1932) identified six ways children participate in socio-dramatic play, which can be called engagement strategies. The six engagement strategies are on a continuum ranging from not involved to active participation. The engagement strategies are as follows: unoccupied, solitary, onlooker, parallel, associative, cooperative (Parten, 1932). Unoccupied play is not playing or doing anything in particular; solitary is playing alone; onlooker is watching others play, usually showing interest but not getting involved; parallel is playing next to another but not together; associative is playing next to, at times talking and/or looking at the other person, but not playing the same thing; and cooperative is children playing together, doing the same thing, and creating one storyline (Parten, 1932).

Unoccupied and solitary can be classified under dramatic play; onlooker, parallel, associative, and cooperative fit into socio-dramatic play. Furthermore, Parten's (1932) study revealed that the engagement strategies can be considered as progressive stages because the findings indicated that older preschoolers used cooperative play, but younger children did not. My observations as a preschool teacher for over 20 years, as an on-site trainer for early childhood programs, and as a college instructor have been consistent with Parten's (1932) findings that the stages show a developmental continuum. Children will engage in "earlier" stages, but until ready, not use later stages such as cooperative play. It may be helpful to add that I found socio-dramatic play to be fascinating, informative, and complex to observe as well as useful in the teaching and learning process.

An example of constructive play used in conjunction with dramatic/socio-dramatic play may illustrate the complexity and value of play as part of the teaching and learning process. It is possible that a child may be involved in a socio-dramatic play situation but primarily engaging in constructive play, such as building a boat or an airplane for others to use in the cooperative play storyline. Nevertheless, the social involvement is significant because the child is participating with others and must construct in accordance with the play topic. If the play topic is taking a trip and traveling on an airplane, it would not be appropriate to construct a boat. If the builder has built boats and has no experience with airplanes but is interested in playing with the others, an airplane must be constructed. A boat will not work for air travel. The builder must now expand thinking and self-regulate to stay on task to build an airplane. The builder may or may not have information about airplanes. Lack of information adds another layer of complexity and opportunity for learning.

This example illustrates that there are implicit (not stated) rules in socio-dramatic play (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). It also brings to light Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978). The ZPD is a range in which one can function alone and with assistance. A child can function at a higher level with assistance from others. In this case, if the builder has minimal information about airplanes and has never been on one, the peers can provide the needed information for constructing the plane that includes the inside accommodations for travelers.

Additionally, according to Vygotsky's theory (1978), preschool children function at their highest level when engaged in socio-dramatic play. Socio-dramatic play requires self-regulation and executive functioning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). It is also important to note that children's interests can provide motivation for trying new things (Dewey, 1913).

Children also engage in physical play. Physical play is active and robust, in which children are engaged in gross motor movement (Smith, 2010; Pellegrini, 2011). Children of all ages engage in physical play, but it looks different in infants and usually involves such actions as kicking legs and waving arms (Pellegrini, 2011). Physical play has also been referred to as big body play (Carlson, 2011). Although adults can be uncomfortable with this type of play, it is beneficial for children's physical development (Carlson, 2011).

Rough and tumble play is a form of physical play that is done with others (Carlson, 2011; Smith, 2010). Rough and tumble play is different from fighting. In rough and tumble play, the goal is to play together rather than to harm or work against one another (Carlson, 2011). It occurs at all ages. It may be hard to imagine infants in rough and tumble play, but the examples given by Luckenbill et al. (2019) provide a good illustration: "infants crawling over other infants" and "pulling opposite each other on a length of fabric" (p. 9).

Physical play often occurs outdoors. Outdoor and nature play has been gaining attention in recent years, and it has been shown that children's outdoor experiences, especially with nature, have been decreasing, which may be contributing to developmental issues (Louv, 2005). In this section, outdoor and nature play are considered one category. Nature is present outdoors, including places such as sidewalks, manufactured playgrounds, or concrete surfaces such as parking lots, which seem to be devoid of natural elements. Weather, worms, insects, leaves, trees, weeds, etc., are part of nature, and these are just a few examples of things that can be found in most any outdoor environment that children visit on a regular basis.

One way to think about outdoor/nature play is through thinking about outdoor spaces in early childhood programs as outdoor learning environments (OLE) (Cooper, 2015; Falk, 2018; Nature Explore Program, 2019). The OLE affords opportunities that are different from what is found indoors. It is not surprising that children's play is different outdoors (Engelen et al., 2018). Nature provides loose parts (Nicholson, 1971) such as sticks, rocks, and logs that can be moved around and used in many different ways. Children tend to be active in the OLE because there is more space for running and other large motor activities, such as playing on manufactured playground equipment or using natural elements. A log or tree, if permitted, can promote physical play, including climbing. Additionally, early childhood teachers allow more physical activity outdoors (Storli & Sandseter, 2015). The OLE also affords opportunities for risky play. Risky play is when children take on risks. This often causes adults concerns over safety, even though children have the capability to negotiate risks (Keeler, 2020). Children may see a risky situation and do one of the following: engage, change it so it is less risky, or choose not to engage (Lavrysen et al., 2017). A child may see a large rock and choose to try to climb it, get a block to stand on to assist with climbing, or do nothing with the rock. Engaging with risk, with or without changing it, is beneficial for children's physical, social/emotional, and cognitive development (Bento & Costa, 2018; Keeler, 2020; Lavrysen et al., 2017; McClain & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2016).

The six categories of play provide a framework for understanding play. All types of play are a part of DAP (NAEYC, 2020). Each play type has been described separately but is not exclusive. The play types can be combined and often overlap when children are playing.

Reflection

What type of play do you think you are most comfortable with? Least comfortable with? Why?

Play in the Early Childhood Classroom

Thus far in this section, play and its value for children have been described. Developmentally appropriate classrooms contain physical spaces with daily schedules that incorporate blocks of time for play (NAEYC, 2020). This includes time for indoor and outdoor play.

Indoors, children need time to get involved and fully engage in play, a minimum of 45 minutes. In a well-run classroom, children can engage in free play for up to one and half hours. This gives children time to choose what they want to do and fully engage in play. It also allows for the opportunity for children to create through constructive play and use the creation in dramatic play. Imagine how disappointing it would be to create an elaborate castle but not have time to dress up and play in it! Additionally, children need the materials and space to create the castle. Lack of open-ended materials and not enough space can result in missed opportunities for creative play, which also means they are not benefiting from such experiences.

As previously mentioned, the OLE provides opportunities for differing types of play, especially vigorous physical activity (Engelen et al., 2018) and risky play (Keeler, 2020; Storli & Sandseter, 2015. Outside time is typically not considered recess and a "break" because young children are learning all the time. Instead of recess, play, and engagement in the OLE can be considered additional opportunities and enhancements of indoor learning (Mustapa et al., 2015).

The weather is often given as a reason for not playing outdoors. Not going outside when it is raining or snowing can contribute to missed opportunities, similar to what happened with the castle example above. Although at first it can appear as a daunting task to get children to put on outdoor gear such as raincoats, hats, mittens, and boots, it becomes part of the routine as well as presents opportunities for practicing fine motor and self-help skills. The rain that is often present here in the Pacific Northwest is a wonderful resource for play! Water makes mud, which can be used in making pies and soups, and especially for children who enjoy sensory and pretend play.

Allowing children to use the environment, especially outdoors, is also a challenge for teachers. This can relate to weather, such as playing in puddles, as well as using items from the environment. Loose parts such as sticks, rocks, and wood chips can be added to soups and pies (perhaps made with water and mud) and can be used in other ways. Children use items in the environment for dramatic play. One teacher described the children using wood chips as food for playing restaurant, specifically Happy Meals at the McDonald's drive-through. The outdoor playhouse was the building; children served the wood chips to other children (and teachers) as they walked or rode bikes to the drive-through (M. Naw, personal communication, January 15, 2021). Another teacher described how the children would organize themselves to re-enact the story of the Three Billy Goats Gruff using a log as a bridge for the troll (T. Sy, personal communication, December 28, 2020). Both teachers said the children played these storylines many times, and each time the play included more than one child and was done outdoors, but not indoors. Additionally, stationary items such as large rocks and logs can be used for physical and risky play.

The early childhood classroom, indoors and out, should be an environment that is rich with opportunities for play. As you read this section, you can think about how environmental design creates opportunities for the different types of play.

Issues & Challenges with Play

Although children all over the world play (Carlsson-Paige, 2013), some face challenges in doing so. Take a moment to think about what play involves, especially constructive and dramatic/socio-dramatic play. To construct, children need to know about the materials and how to put them together, have the physical development to work with the materials, use creative thinking, and stay on task. To engage in dramatic play, they need to have a topic to play (cooking, airplane, boat, family, etc.), use creative thinking, and, if socio-dramatic, they need to be able to follow the storyline, self-regulate, and sometimes the skills needed to enter a group. An additional type of play that has been gaining attention is risky play, which involves understanding one's own skills and the emotional willingness to try something challenging (Keeler, 2020). This list of skills and abilities is a general list, and it is lengthy! You can imagine what it takes to engage in play, and that some children face challenges.

Some of the common challenges and issues children face with play can be grouped into three categories: materials, language,

and other. These categories were created as a way of explaining the challenges. The descriptions in each category are not comprehensive. The purpose is to give the reader a general idea of the reasons children may struggle with play, especially in an early childhood classroom.

Often, children use materials and toys when they play. As you have read about in this section, during exploratory play, children explore and gain an understanding of materials, and in constructive play, the materials are used purposefully. As infants and toddlers, they look at, move around, and try to work with the materials. One issue that can arise is when infants and toddlers do not take the initiative and explore with materials.

Sometimes older children have difficulty using materials. This may be because they have limited experience with the materials, or they need time to engage in exploratory play. It also could be that a child needs support to learn to use the materials purposefully. Most children gain a sense of using materials through exploratory play, but some do not. An example is a four-year-old who would touch pieces together, but never connect or build. He did this with Duplos and any other type of toy that connected together. His "play" with the materials lasted about two minutes, and then he'd throw the toys. This frustrated his peers. Often, this child would engage in inappropriate behaviors to gain attention. The situation was resolved when the teachers took time to play with him and show him how to work the materials. Once he knew what to do with the materials, he could purposefully engage. He needed the support of the teachers to gain an understanding of the skill for using the materials.

Language, the second category listed above, may not be as easy to see as the challenges with materials. When children play with peers, in constructive or socio-dramatic play, they communicate and most often do so through words. Children need to be able to talk to and understand what their peers are saying. **Expressive language** is talking so that a person knows what is said and saying it in a manner that makes sense. **Receptive language** is understanding what is being said. Both expressive and receptive language are a part of play with others, especially socio-dramatic play.

Children usually start to engage in cooperative play (Parten, 1932) at about three years and have the speech and language to communicate effectively. Some children do not have this level of speech and language. If a child struggles with saying words, doing so in a way that others can understand, and/or following what is being said, it makes it difficult and frustrating for the child. Children can be very accepting of one another, but the child who is struggling knows that peers are not understanding what is being said or feels confused by what is going on. This area is one of the more challenging areas for teachers because it can be difficult to intervene. When adults enter, children's play often changes. There is a fine line between interrupting and changing the play versus supporting it, and a child who may be struggling. It is not within the scope of this section to address interventions; the point is to bring awareness that children can struggle with play and that teachers' support is needed.

In addition to materials and language, there is the "other" category. This category is broad and includes physical challenges, such as sitting in a wheelchair with limited access to the play area, not being able to see or hear, or other motor challenges that get in the way of playing. A child may not fit into an area or may have coordination difficulties and knock over what is being built. Some interventions for physical challenges can be addressed with environmental design. You may start to see the significance of intentionally designed environments and the complexities teachers face in doing so.

The other category also includes not playing for various reasons, such as wandering, flitting about rather than sustaining play, staying in the onlooker stage (Parten, 1932) rather than eventually joining, and being rejected from play. This is a list of common challenges, and it is not comprehensive. With each of these reasons, teacher support targeted to help the child gain the needed skills is beneficial. Once again, it is beyond the scope of this section to fully address challenges in play and how to foster and support children; this section will give the reader an idea of play in an early childhood classroom.

Rejection is worth a special mention because it happens and it can be overlooked in a busy early childhood classroom, especially at a full-day program in which children are there for eight or more hours. In kindergarten through third-grade classrooms where children go outside for recess and often play with peers, it can easily go unnoticed. Play, especially cooperative play (Parten, 1932), takes a lot of work. It can be quite difficult when there are more players, which means more roles and more ideas. It also means more personalities and more negotiation. A well-known author, Vivian Gussin Paley, regarding children's play, pondered inclusion and specifically wrote "...the rejected children know who they are, whether or not they tell us" (p. 15). From years of experience, I have to agree. I have a vivid memory, from 17 years ago, of a mother reporting that her child was upset about a peer moving to a new school. Her child rarely interacted with the one who moved, so she asked why he was so concerned. His reply, "Because he is the mean kid, just like me. We both have no friends to play with." I think this underscores the importance of teacher observation, assessment, and support during children's play.

Rejection and the other challenges children face in play are a concern. Not only is it sad to hear about rejection, but the result is also—as with any other reason a child does not play—that a child is not fully participating in the classroom. Play is a part of the curriculum (NAEYC, 2020), and all children need classrooms that allow for full participation and engagement.

Reflection

Think about a time you observed or heard about that indicated a child was struggling with play. What do you think was happening—what were the challenges the child was facing?

Final Thoughts

Play is a key aspect of the early years. There are differing types of play, some of which are very complex, such as cooperative play. Many children progress through differing stages and types of play, from exploratory to constructive, but some need support because they face challenges. Children's play may be entertaining and amusing, but an understanding of it allows teachers to see the value and role of play in the early childhood classroom.

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3.2: Implementing the Teaching Cycle Steps

An effective early learning educator's goal is to provide young children with a safe, nurturing, culturally responsive learning environment that supports individual learning needs. To create and maintain this learning environment, a teacher must understand and have the skills to conduct observations, document those observations, and use assessments as part of their everyday teaching practices, as well as assessments as part of their everyday teaching practices. This section will review the importance and skills necessary for using observation, documentation, and assessment in the teaching cycle for early childhood educators to successfully plan individualized and group curriculum.

Key Points

- Observations allow teachers and families to collaborate to meet children's needs in curriculum, interactions, and environmental setup.
- Young children should not be "tested". Authentic assessment allows teachers to observe skills, knowledge, and behaviors in a natural manner.
- There are many formats and methods to complete observation documentation and to assess and track development over time.
- It is important to understand developmental milestones, but also to take culture and other variables into account when assessing children.
- Observations can assist teachers in creating learning activities based on children's interests and needs while also assisting them to gain proficiency in areas of challenge.

Terminology

1. **Authentic Assessment** is the evaluation of a child's knowledge, skills, and behaviors in a natural, culturally responsive learning environment free from the pressure of testing (preferably conducted in the child's home language).
2. **Formative Assessment** is the ongoing assessment of children's educational development
3. **Observation** is the ability to watch someone or something from a non-biased, factual, and free from personal opinion perspective for a period of time to gain purposeful information about that someone or something.
4. **Observation Cycle** is a process of observing, planning, and evaluating the child's progress in a continuous cycle.
5. **Summative Assessment** is the assessment of a child's achievements over a range of subjects over time by combining appraisal of formative assessments.
6. **Executive Functions** are cognitive abilities that assist children in managing impulses and self-regulating, filtering out distractions, problem-solving, following sequences, remembering, and applying rules for different situations, and more.
7. **Documents** are any written items that provide information or evidence.
8. **Objectives** are the ability to write factually and without bias.
9. **Scaffolding** is the assistance of a teacher in helping a child gain or become more proficient in a skill, knowledge, or ability.
10. **Portfolios** are a collection or body of work that shows a person's ability. A type of authentic assessment.
11. **Subjective** in the case of observation documentation, is writing observations that have personal feelings, inferences, or nonfactual information.
12. **Time Sample** is also known as a frequency count. A documentation tool that should show how frequently a behavior occurs over a period of time.
13. **Event Sample** is a type of documentation that helps a teacher understand the relationship between a behavior and the event under which the behavior occurs.
14. **Checklists** are document tools that record a child's skills and abilities.
15. **Rating Scale** indicates the degree to which a concept is presented or the frequency with which a skill is illustrated.
16. **ABC Chart** is an observational tool that allows teachers to record information about behaviors that occur in the classroom.
17. **ZPD** is the Zone of Proximal Development. This is a period in which a child is ready to learn with the assistance of scaffolding from a more knowledgeable person.

18. **Active Agent** refers to the child acting as their own agent of learning and constructing their own knowledge without the influence of adults.
19. **Passive Agent** refers to the child's learning being heavily influenced or supported by the caregiver or environment.

Observation

Observation is defined as the ability to watch someone or something from a non-biased, factual, and free from personal opinion for a period of time to gain purposeful information about that someone or something. Observations can be both formal and informal. Initially, one may think of observation as the act of watching someone or something. Nevertheless, a valid observation includes an additional actionable step of an analysis of what was observed and involves the practice of reflective thinking.

Not only is observing children a skill necessary for all teachers, but historically, teachers have also believed that good observations conducted during the day can give them important information about a child's development, strengths, or challenges and can inform curriculum and activity plans in the classroom. Learning how to be a skilled observer who objectively documents child learning interactions honors the uniqueness that each child brings to the learning environment.

The Role of Observations in ECE

Observations can be conducted continually throughout the day over an extended period of time. Teachers who are experienced observers can screen for many things in the classroom, including the safety of the learning environment, the health of the child, the developmental milestones or skills of each child, behaviors that occur both inside and outside of the classroom, and each child's learning experience. For example, teachers can use the simplicity of a morning greeting and a casual conversation with a child playing with building blocks as a way to do a daily health screen to ensure that a child is well enough to interact throughout the day.

Through intentional observations, teachers can also take formal and informal observations that can assist with and ensure accountability for the effectiveness of interactions and inform curriculum. In addition, observations of children can be prepared to share information with co-teachers and the child's family. The effects of intentional observations also include impacting effective learning, improving child guidance skills, and supporting child-to-child and adult-to-child social development. In addition, observations assist teachers in providing effective learning, improving teacher-child guidance skills, and supporting child-to-child and adult-to-child development in many domains.

According to Piaget, "children require long uninterrupted periods of play and exploration so that they can discover things for themselves. If we truly believe that children are capable of socializing, problem-solving, and creating complex systems with rules, then we can successfully use random observations to capture a child's development as it unfolds naturally." (Peterson & Elam 2020) Observations during this free play time can yield important information that teachers can use to support the child to meet their potential.

It is important to remember that useful observation requires using the human senses by being able to watch, listen, and understand children in their learning environment from their perspective. Observations show an educator the fantastic milestones children meet as they grow in their abilities, such as, but not limited to, their ability to use their **executive functions**, seek autonomy, self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, and more. Through observation, teachers can understand the child's unique needs and understand and honor each child's culture.

Pause to Reflect

Take a moment to think about your favorite restaurant. What are some of the observations you can make about the restaurant environment that make it your favorite? Could some of those same qualities (such as warm and inviting) apply to early learning classroom environments?

How Much Should Teachers Observe?

Although there is no industry "standard" about how often or how much teachers need to observe children, the average early childhood teacher spends about 45 minutes each day on documentation (www.Himama.com). There is no set amount of number

of observations that teachers usually do. That will depend on the number of children enrolled in the childcare, the environment, and the program philosophy and curriculum. The goal of observation should be to ensure that accurate documentation of each child is taken, which prevents gaps in the records of that child. In other words, don't wait too long or allow too much time to lapse between observations and the documentation of observations. Accurate progress should paint an accurate, flowing story of each child's development.

Some ways that can help with this are a continuous process of observing and documenting, carrying a pack of sticky notes with you in your pocket or apron, and setting up a specific place in the classroom where you can leave the notes for later documentation and interpretation. It is also a good tip to have plenty of paper and writing tools all around the classroom so that there are always materials handy for you to jot down notes.

Learning to Observe

The first step in learning to carefully observe children is to learn how to separate your feelings and reactions from what you are seeing to objectively state what is actually happening. It is important to remain **objective** because everyone has biases and preconceived notions about what they *think* they might be observing. It is also important to remember to include enough information that records or paints a picture of the child or scenario and doesn't lack detail that may cause a reader to surmise or insert their own information. Just stick to the facts and think about the reader: they should be able to visually picture themselves in the classroom at that moment and "see" what you observed.

Thorough observations consist of three parts:

1. Observing: gathering information about what you see and hear through careful watching and listening.
2. Recording: documenting what you have observed.
3. Interpreting: reflecting on what you have observed and written.

Often, the three parts are referred to as **the observation cycle**. Each of the steps, combined with reflection on behalf of the teacher, informs the curriculum that a teacher plans for the classroom and shares with families. This is explained more thoroughly later in this section.

For now, let us explore each of the steps more in-depth by focusing first on the observer themselves and then each of the parts that comprise the observation cycle.

The Observer Themselves

The most important part of the observation is the teacher's ability to be and remain present, intentional, and an active observer. Being fully present in the moment of observation allows the teacher to see the uniqueness of each child and their development. For example, the teacher can observe mannerisms, social and emotional abilities, executive functioning, personal preferences, and dislikes. The teacher can also observe talents, specific interests, or areas of challenge in addition to seeing the overall developmental level of different domains. Being present as an active observer means having the ability to block out any distractions that may be present. To do this, a teacher may have to initiate the help of other teachers to ensure proper supervision in the classroom, and they should try to clear their mind of any other invasive thinking to properly focus on what they are experiencing with the children.

Next, it is important for observers to be knowledgeable about early childhood theory and child development. This knowledge will help the observer set measurable, attainable, relevant, and culturally responsive goals for the child. The observation outcome should be shared with the child's family, which will also help teachers to inform practice. In understanding the theories of development, teachers can implement the knowledge of the developmental sequence in their observations and assessments. This allows teachers to connect domains of development and communicate those strengths and any areas of concern to families. Teachers should be authentically curious during observations and become learning and growth detectives: "the documenter is a researcher first, collecting as much information as possible to paint a picture of progress and outcomes" (Sietz, 2008).

Observations can occur from the first greeting of the day until the last goodbye. Observations should be planned and unplanned, while always being careful to ensure proper supervision in the classroom. It is essential to get holistic snapshots of the whole child throughout various times of the day. Additionally, observations should happen in both teacher-directed situations as well as child-directed situations. It is also important to observe during structured and unstructured learning periods both indoors and outdoors. Teachers can also observe relationships: those between children and staff, children and their families, and children

engaged in play with other children.

When planning for observations, the teacher or caregiver should be prepared to conduct informal and formal observations both at planned and unplanned times. In this way, the observer can experience authentic representations of the child's skills, knowledge, and behaviors. When conducting observations at varying times and using different tools (such as running records, brief notes, anecdotal notes, video/photography, and creation of portfolio pages) in natural and comfortable surroundings, the observer can better view an authentic representation of the child's knowledge, skills, and behaviors in an authentic manner.

It is essential to use tools that provide useful rating scales and documentation methods to observe a child's development level and milestones. There are many methods that can be used to **document** (or record) your observations. In the next section, we will explore some of the more common types of records used in early learning environments as well as the language to use when documenting observations.

Language

It is important to remember when writing any records of any kind to avoid “red flag” words or words that are **subjective** rather than **objective**. Subjective (or red flag) words are words that might have a strong emotional meaning to you but are not objectively written to describe the situation. An example of a subjective observation statement is “George and Joshua, two little stinkers in the class, were playing in the block area when George knocked over Joshua's amazing tower that he had built”. The same scenario written more objectively is “George, four years old, and Joshua, three years old, were in the block area, and George kicked over the tower Joshua had built that was five blocks high”. This type of descriptive language allows the reader to identify who the children were in the scenario, what they were doing, and gives some indication about the skills of the child building the tower. It is specific and non-biased.

Table 3.2.1 illustrates some examples of objective vs. subjective statements.

Pause to Reflect

Can you identify the “red flag” words in these two sentences?

- “Sally seemed happy while she was playing because she had a beaming smile on her pretty face.”
- “Antonia has on such a beautiful dress this morning that I noticed as she came into the classroom, however she is sad because she was frowning”.

Table 3.2.1: Subjective vs. Objective. CC BY 1.0

Subjective Observations	Objective Observations
Often influenced by personal past events, experiences, or opinions. Can be biased based on our own cultural experiences	Based on what is observed using our senses. Recording what is seen, heard, tasted, touched, or smelled.
Based on our opinions, assumptions, personal beliefs, feelings, rumors, or guesses	Based on facts that are gathered. If it is not seen, don’t document it. Only write details and provide vivid descriptions
Results are inconsistent and vary from child to child	Results are likely to be valid and reliable from child to child
Avoid words like: always, never, can’t, happy, smart, helpful, pretty, angry, shy, likes, hates, loves, sad	Include phrases like “seems to be; “appears to”

Types of Documentation

There are many reasons why teachers should document observations, and many uses for the documentation that is collected in early learning classrooms. Through documentation, teachers can not only show developmental growth, but they can also provide accountability to families, communities, and administrators, extend the learning for children, and become more confident in their own teaching. Just as there are many reasons why teachers document, there are many ways to record observations.

The most common way to record developmental milestones is through anecdotal notes. **Anecdotal notes** are short notes taken by teachers, capturing observations. They can be taken on a formal document or a shortened form (such as post-it notes or index

cards). These types of observations can be written after an event and often focus on specific developmental domains.

Another popular method of documenting development is using running records. A **running record** is a documentation method that sequentially details the child's behavior while the observation is taking place and is written in the present tense. Running records often require periods of time where the teacher is primarily focused on the activity at hand, and are not always an effective way to observe and document while managing groups of children.

Another method is the use of samples of children's work, sometimes called a **portfolio**. Child work is a collection of the work samples of the child. These can be writing samples, paintings or other art projects, examples of fine motor work, such as cutting samples, and can also include photos of the child at play, such as a child building in the block center, or engaged in a science activity. Many teachers believe that portfolios are the best type of authentic assessment, displaying exactly what a child can do and is reflective of their development at a particular point in time. These can be shared with families and are a good way to document growth over time.

Types of documentation that support teachers in making decisions about a specific child or environment might include time or event sampling, also known as structured observations. Deciding which type of sampling a teacher should do is dependent on what the teacher wants to learn about the child or the classroom. For example, if a teacher wants to find out how often a particular behavior occurs, such as biting or hitting, they might choose a **time sample**. However, if a teacher wants to understand the relationship between the biting behavior of a child and the context of the behavior, an **event sample** is a better documentation choice.

Checklists and **rating scales** are helpful when recording a child's skills and knowledge. A checklist is usually written in a sequential order and offers the teacher the opportunity to check when a behavior or skill is first observed. Many programs create their own checklists based on the curriculum they are following in the classroom. Rating scales can be written in the same way, but often offer a continuum for rating a particular skill or behavior.

Another observation tool that has become popular with early education teachers to assist with a better understanding of behavior is an **ABC Chart**. ABC charts include a column titled "A" for antecedent: the event that occurs before the "B" behavior happens. "C" is the consequence, or event that immediately follows the behavior. This type of documentation gives the teacher information about the relationships that may exist between environments, curriculum, or children's peers that influence a behavior.

Lately, digital documentation has become very popular in early learning environments. Using a video or audio recording of a child can be valuable to interpreting observations and is especially useful when documenting language, interactions between children and/or children and staff, as well as motor development. In addition, there are some electronic documentation programs that are used in early learning environments, such as the tools offered by Teaching Strategies [teachingstrategies.com] and apps such as HiMama [www.himama.com], Seesaw [web.seesaw.me], ClassDojo [www.classdojo.com], and Google Classroom [classroom.google.com] to name a few.

Pause to Reflect

What are your thoughts about using electronic documentation in an early learning classroom?

Interpreting the Observation

The last part of the observation cycle is making interpretations of what you have observed and documented. This is when the skills of incorporating what teachers know about child development, developmentally appropriate practice, and the individuality of each child and family will intersect, along with the reflective practice of teaching.

Part of what teachers consider when interpreting the information is taking into consideration the many factors that influence how a child acts, including the state of development, health of the child, culture, and individual experiences that make each child unique. This is one of the reasons it is so important to use a variety of documentation for each child, as well as varying the times, days, and environments when gathering information. It is also helpful if a variety of individuals can not only provide documentation but also interpretation. What one teacher may observe, another teacher may not—we all notice different things and have different perspectives.

To illustrate this point, look at Figure 3.2.1 below. Some teachers might interpret the behavior one way, while another teacher may have an entirely different perspective or interpretation of the behaviors observed. Behavior is very complex, and over time,

teachers begin to develop skills in interpreting what they see and making adjustments to the environment, the curriculum, or interactions.

After a teacher observes, documents, and interprets the observation, the final piece is to bring the information back to the parents and work with them to make sure that the child is supported at home and the connection between home and childcare is strengthened. Having meetings with families to discuss concerns and to plan together for the child can help the child become successful in the classroom.

When Do Teachers Interpret Observations?

All teachers benefit from spending time reflecting on the observations and documentation that they have made in a classroom. However, many teachers question when they could possibly find time for this practice. One recommendation is to begin to find time that already exists within the day. This might include naptime, before families arrive for the day, after families depart, during staff meetings if allowed by administrators, or during curriculum planning time. Reflection ties the entire process together, and teachers need “a time to slow down, to see what can be learned and carefully look at and listen to ourselves, and those with whom we work” (Parlakian, 2001).

Ethics and Biases of Observations

To remain objective in documenting observations, teachers should always be aware of personal bias. This is done by self-reflecting on a person's implicit and explicit perspectives rooted in one's upbringing. Not being aware of bias, especially implicit bias, teachers can reflect their prejudice through their documentation. According to the NAEYC Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement:

> All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity. They can do this best when they are effectively supported by the early learning settings in which they work. When they and their wider communities embrace diversity and full inclusion as strengths, uphold fundamental fairness and justice principles, and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities.
>
> To effectively practice advancing equity in observation and documentation, an educator must "consider how your own biases (implicit and explicit) may be contributing to your interactions and the messages you are sending children.
>
> To remain objective in documenting observations, educators must be aware of personal bias and strive to eliminate these in the observation and in the analysis of observations. (NAEYC, 2020)

Teachers need to practice responsible documentation that adheres to ethical practices. In doing so, teachers should keep in mind:

- Maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of both the child and family in the documentation is critical.
- Inform the family of the observations and documentation process and receive permission for any picture- or video-based documentation.
- Never force or punish a child into participating in an observation process.
- Do not interfere with the child's natural learning.
- Never lie to a child about what the observer is doing or use rewards like food to get them to comply.
- Never share documentation in any other manner than it does not follow ethical guidelines.

Pause to Reflect

Do you think that there are any ethical implications when using electronic documentation in an early learning classroom?

In the field of early childhood education, assessment of learning is a multipart process that is used to make decisions about the care and education of children. In other words, **assessment** is the evaluation of a child's ability conducted in a natural, culturally relevant learning environment, combined with the process of determining how the teaching process works in the classroom for both the children and the teacher. The ultimate goal of assessment is to better understand the children you are teaching and provide them with the programming that will meet their individual needs.

The Assessment Cycle

There are four parts to the assessment cycle, a cycle that is often used when building and evaluating curriculum, as well as communicating the information a teacher has learned about a child to the family. Simply put into four “steps”, the cycle looks like a continuous loop:

The teacher observes children and collects information. The teacher documents what they observe. The teacher interprets the information they have documented. The teacher communicates information. Then repeat.

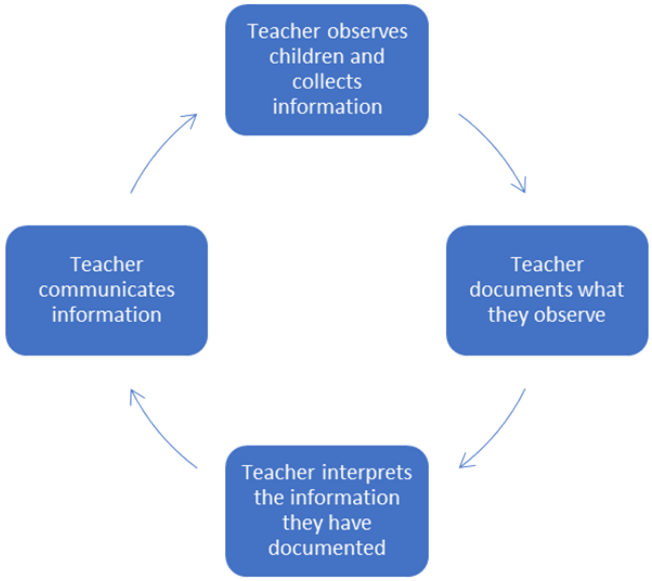


Figure 3.2.1: The Assessment Cycle

What Does Assessment Look Like in Early Childhood?

Assessments can be done both as a formative and a summative approach. The **formative assessment** approach follows the teaching cycle's critical steps, including planning, implementing teaching, assessing student work, informing teaching, and administering through adaptation. Formative assessments can take the form of an informal or formal assessment, and in the field of early learning, are often called **authentic assessments** and are often carried out while teaching.

Formal assessments maintain a standard of high validity and reliability in their tools. These assessments, in general, follow a predetermined standardized format and are typically administered to all children. Formal assessments are based on research-based development, not taking into consideration biases. Formal assessments follow a national rating scale or a desired developmental profile. Often, this type of assessment is called a **standardized assessment**. On the contrary, **informal assessment** can be done with a holistic approach. The educator can develop the assessment to address the individual needs of the children and the learning environment.

Summative assessment is usually gathered at the end of the year or by developmental people to review the overall development process, and is usually taken in the form of some type of test.

In following unbiased and ethically sound observation and documentation practices, the assessment will reflect a central focus on child development. In assessing a child's growth and development, use various assessment tools to support developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive practices. Assessments should be observed and documented during children's daily activities, without disrupting the child's natural learning environment unnecessarily.

According to Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation (which is a joint position statement of NAEYC and NAECS/SDE), it is important that teachers and early learning environments:

> “Make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, use developmentally appropriate assessment methods, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development,

> inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions".

Assessments should be designed to fairly evaluate children regardless of age, cultural background, home language, economic status, or ability. NAEYC describes assessments as being "Derived from real-world classroom or family contexts that are consistent with children's culture, language, and experiences." (NAEYC, 2020) Additionally, assessments should adhere to professional criteria that are both valid and reliable and captured in a realistic setting.

The assessment process is a vital part of the teaching and learning cycle that informs teaching practices and helps teachers plan an effective curriculum. Through proper observation and documentation, teachers can assess children's abilities to plan for supported teacher work and independent work in the classroom. Additionally, teachers can also capture a child's interest as part of their learning environment and foster better family partnerships.

Keep in mind that the learning process may look and sound different for each child, and so it is important that teachers are responsive to the individual needs of children. **Authentic assessment** designed in observation-based documentation is an important part of knowing the interests of each child and their current stage of development. When making decisions about curriculum and activities to provide in early learning classrooms, teachers can feel confident that they are providing intentional experiences that support and respect each child's growth, development, and culture.

Any assessment or information that teachers gather about children is information that should be protected. Assessments are confidential and should be stored in ways that protect the privacy of the children and families. Sometimes, other professionals working with children (such as speech therapists, physicians, or other medical professionals) might have an interest in assessments conducted by teachers. Generally speaking, sharing of any assessments conducted with children requires written permission from the family.

Pause to Reflect

What types of child assessment have you conducted in the past?

Do you support standardized assessment of young children? Why or why not?

How Observation and Assessment Tie to Curriculum

Effective teachers understand that observations and assessments are also important to help inform teaching practices and guide the learning activities for the children. Observations and assessments are a looking glass into not only the child's physical abilities but also their interests, strengths, and learning gaps.

Through observation of several children, a teacher is able to determine if the content planned for the children was absorbed, if a child is struggling developmentally in any areas, if the teaching strategies are effectively supporting students' learning, and can provide information that can be shared with families about the child's growth and development.

Having well-planned (and spontaneous) intentional activities throughout the day that are rooted in developmentally appropriate practice gives teachers solid information about how to scaffold and develop learning and curriculum for their classroom.

To illustrate how a teacher might use observations to impact curriculum choices for an individual child, consider this scenario:

> Sitting at a moon-shaped table during work time, Jackson, a three-year-old boy, balances a small red dinosaur on the handle of a kitchen spatula. "I, 2, 3, blast off!" he counts as he smacks his hand down onto the blade of the spatula and laughs as the dinosaur flies toward a white mixing bowl on the other side of the table. "Yah! Pool party!" he cheers, pumping his fist in the air as the red dinosaur joins others, landing in the bowl of water with a splash. (Delgado, 2020)

This scenario, observed in a natural environment as children are engaged in play, provides the teacher with a wealth of information about the child's learning, development, and interests. This observation and authentic assessment provide a snapshot of what is happening in the classroom at the time and can provide the teacher with information about Jackson's language and physical development as well as his interests that could inform future activity plans for Jackson himself and the classroom in

general.

Thinking about what was observed in the scenario above, let us assume that Jackson's teacher wrote an **anecdotal record** to add to his **portfolio** and share with his family. A sample of the anecdotal record could be:

> 2/2/20: Jackson, while playing at the table with spatulas and dinosaurs, said "I, 2, 3, blast off" while smacking his right hand on the blade of the spatula, laughing while it flew towards a white mixing bowl at the end of the table. He added, "Yah! Pool party!" (physical domain, language).

Next, the teacher used this observation to plan how to scaffold his learning. In Table 3.2.2, we see an example of a learning plan tied to the observation:

Table 3.2.2 *Jackson's Plan. CC BY 1.0*

Step	Plan
Identify children's interests:	Jackson has been using a spatula as a springboard to propel dinosaurs into his pool.
Identify curriculum or assessment content area:	Experimenting
Part of the Daily Routine:	Small-group time
Description of planned learning experience:	Children will experiment with the use of tongue depressor catapults and small pompoms.
Consider children's developmental levels:	While observing Jackson at play, I noticed he initially repeated the same actions, even when his dinosaurs were not landing in the bowl of water. He was using trial and error rather than drawing correlations between the placement of the spatula and the "landing zone."
Scaffolding strategy:	Begin by supporting Jackson's current level of development: • Imitate his actions • Have him describe his actions: "Tell me how you are using your catapult." • Use parallel talk to describe how his actions are impacting the trajectory of the pompom: "When you placed the catapult directly in front of the landing zone, it landed where you wanted." Gently extend Jackson's learning to the next developmental level: • Introduce new ideas; for example, "What might happen if we move the catapult to the left?" • Model a change in trajectory using your own materials.

It is important to remember when planning for children using observations that learning is a continuum of growth that occurs over time and at differing rates across the domains of development (Copple & Bradekamp, 2009). Keep in mind that a child may be observed to fall into one domain area earlier in their stage of development, and that same child may come into later stages of development in another domain.

Once a teacher has reviewed all of the information gathered from observations, the planning of the curriculum can begin. The most effective curriculum in early learning classrooms will include the following:

- It will motivate the child to explore the environment
- Inspire children to investigate various centers and activities
- Encourage children to explore with new materials
- Allow children to engage in conversations and prompt them to ask questions
- Prompt children to interact with peers

- Permit children to problem-solve
- Celebrate diversity and embrace uniqueness
- Accommodate each child's individual needs

The process of curriculum planning should always have thoughtful reflection at the center of the planning.

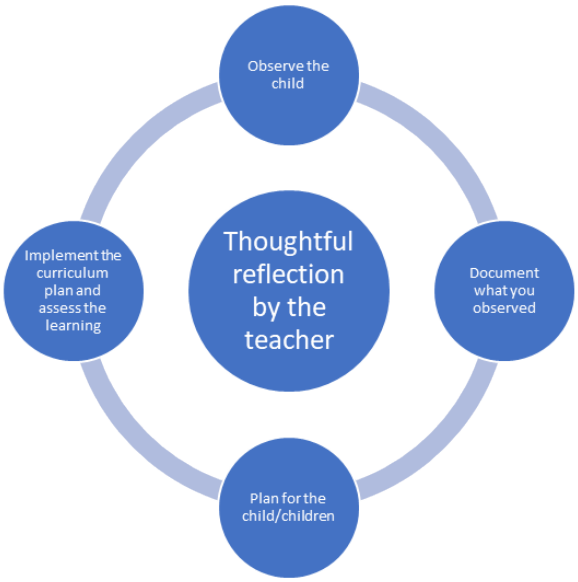


Figure 3.2.2: Curriculum Planning Process. CC BY 1.0

To summarize briefly how assessment and curriculum are connected: curriculum involves learning concepts through strategies the teacher plans, and assessment determines whether the skills or knowledge have been learned. In the scenario with Jackson, the plan the teacher wrote after observing his play becomes the curriculum. Assessment will occur through another observation after the plan is executed, and the teacher can determine if the goal of experimenting with tongue depressors deepens and strengthens Jackson's learning.

Through careful observation, documentation, interpretation, and reflection, teachers can plan and implement an effective curriculum that allows each child to thrive as they master major developmental milestones.

Final Thoughts

Teachers who are skilled in child observation become very thoughtful and purposeful in their techniques. As teachers use a combination of various tools such as running records, anecdotal notes, video recording, checklists, frequency counts, and work samples or portfolios, they are learning unique factors about children in order to better help support the child. Teachers are also able to use this information to examine the ecological system of the classroom and develop a curriculum. This could range from knowing how to individually engage children as they are developing, how effective the teaching strategies support learning, and if the expectations and goals are at the appropriate level of development.

Lastly, thoughtful observation and assessment of children can provide teachers with the confidence to provide intentional teaching and learning experiences that support the unique needs of each child.

Samples

The examples provided below are student samples submitted to college faculty. The names have been changed, and student permission was granted to share in this text.

Student Example of Anecdotal Records

Child: Maci, Age 2; 7

Date: 10/18/2019

Note taken: Jameson/arrival/friend

Maci (2; 7): When Jameson arrived and entered through the front door, Maci exclaimed, “Jameo! I miss you!” and ran across the room to greet him. She reached out and held his hand. (Social)

Note taken: Maci/chickens/memory

Anecdotal Record: Maci (2; 7): Maci stated, “Want to go see chickens again,” referring to the last time she was at the house and went to see the chickens in their coop. (Cognitive/memory)

Student Example of a Running Record

Center: Time: 10:50 am

Date: Child/Age: Greyson/4 years, 4 months

Observer: Katie Teacher: Angela

Assistant: Ryleigh

Comments:

10:50 am Greyson has red playdough and is sitting at the table in a chair. He stands up to push on the playdough. He picks up the playdough and says, “Hey, Katie, look at it!” He made a hole in the playdough with his pointer finger. He says, “I am done with this one.” He puts his playdough back into the container, puts the lid on, and climbs up the shelf to put the container away.

10:55 am Angela asks Greyson to get down and asks Greyson if he wants another playdough. Greyson says “yes,” and Angela hands Greyson an orange playdough. Angela brings out the tools for playdough. Greyson says, “Hey Koa, would you like to make a flower?” Greyson rolls the playdough into a ball and hits the table about 10 times. Then he says, “Angela, look!” Angela says, “Ohhh, did you get some red in your orange playdough?” Greyson says, “Yes!”

11:00 am Greyson gets up and looks for another color of playdough and asks Angela for help opening the purple playdough. He takes the playdough out and uses the roller pin to flatten the playdough. When it is flat, Greyson looks into the playdough tools and finds a flower. He makes a flower shape in his playdough. He pulls the flower out of the playdough, looks at it, and immediately puts it back into the same spot where he pulled it out of the playdough and pushes it with his hands. He looks into the bin of playdough tools again and pulls out a dolphin. He pushes the dolphin shape into the playdough. He begins to pull the playdough dolphin out, but it doesn’t come out, so he squeezes the playdough and sets it on the table. He picks up the roller pin and flattens out the playdough. He pulls out a gingerbread guy from the tools and pushes it into the playdough. Then he picks up the playdough and forms it into a ball again.

11:05 am (Missing Rolling pin)

> Greyson stands up and says, “Hey, where is it?!” He looks on the ground under the table and says again, “Hey, where did it go?” Angela says, “Here, do you want this one?” Greyson says, “No! I want the one I had!” Angela finds the rolling pin that he had with another child, she trades the other child for the one in her hand, for the one Greyson was using, and hands the roller pin back to Greyson. Greyson says, “he took it from me!” Angela tells Greyson that it probably just rolled over to the other child. Greyson stands up from the table and walks to where the other playdough tools go and says, “Where are the other playdough toys?” Angela finds the toys he wants and hands Greyson the bag of toys. Greyson dumps out the bag of toys.

11:10 am He finds a ghost shape and pushes into the flat playdough. He picks up the ghost and says, “ohhhhh ohhhhh” and looks me in the eyes and says, “it’s a ghost!” With a smile on his face. He continues to make 3 more playdough shapes. He makes his playdough flat and finds a long (approximately 5 inches long) and skinny (like a straw) green flower, and he tries to stand it up in the playdough. Greyson says, “no no no” (approximately 10-15 times) when the green toy is falling. Then he picks up the green toy and says, “la la la” approximately 10-15 times in a weird, growly raspy voice. Then he picks up a letter “B” and hits it about 6 times into the playdough in front of him. He says, “Hey, look Miss Katie” and then he pushes on the B marks on the playdough.

11:15 am Observation ends

Conclusion: Greyson enjoyed playing with playdough. He liked to try out the different colors and seemed to have a good memory of what toys were normally offered. He liked to make the playdough shapes and then roll them into a ball and flatten them out again. He did this without struggling, so it appears that his fine motor skills are appropriate for his age. He did seem to get upset when he couldn't find the roller pin, but he did not lose his self-control and was able to continue his play when he had the roller pin returned to him. Greyson also likes to show his work to his teachers.

Preschool Skills

PHYSICAL:

FINE MOTOR:

- Uses fingers and hands
- Can use scissors
- Strings beads on a shoelace

GROSS MOTOR:

- Uses balance skills
- Traveling skills (running, skipping)
- Bounces a ball
- Throws a ball overhand

COGNITIVE:

- Follows directions (1-3 steps)
- Builds/creates and tells what it is
- Problem solves
- Can categorize by a physical feature (color, size)

Student Example of a Checklist

Checklist

Skills	Almost Always	Often	Sometime	Almost Never
1. Can follow rules			X	
2. Share with others			X	
3. Manage bathroom needs	X			
4. Separate from parents easily	X			
5. Can put coat/jacket on/off	X			
6. Makes activity choices without teacher help	X			
7. Wash hands	X			
8. Use words/signs to state basic needs	X			
9. Asks for help when needed	X			
10. Help set up the table	X			
11. Bounce a ball	X			
12. Runs without falling or tripping	X			
13. Climbs up and down without tripping	X			
14. Jumps with one or two feet	X			

Skills	Almost Always	Often	Sometime	Almost Never
15. Rides a tricycle	X			

Student Example of a (partial) Literary Rating Scale

Child's Name: _____

Interest in Books

- No interest, avoids.
- Only if the adult initiates
- Brings books for adults to read
- Looks at books as a self-initiated activity

Listening to Books

- Wiggly, no attention
- Intermediate attention
- Listens in a one-on-one situation
- Listens as a part of a group, tuning out distractions

Involvement with Books Being Read

- Little to no response
- Emotional response, laugh, frown
- Comments, asks questions
- Joins in during reading

Student Example of a Time/Event Sampling Record

Time/Event Sampling

Time:	Manipulatives	Blocks	Dramatic Play	Art	Science	Library/ writing	Puzzles
9:30	2	2	2	0	1	3	1
9:35	5	2	0	0	0	0	2
9:40	3	2	2	0	0	2	0
9:45	4	2	2	0	0	2	0
9:50	3	3	2	0	0	2	0

The children enjoyed playing at the manipulative center and the block area. This sample shows that the art center was not used at all during the 20-minute observation sample. I believe that the manipulative center was the most populated because the children got to choose from the whole shelf of toy bins to find the one they wanted to use. Because they had more to choose from, the kids stayed there longer and were more engaged in their activity. The block room was another area that was consistently full. The teachers in this class chose to only allow two children in that room at a time because the children would fight over the toys in that area.

Attribution

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Tervalon, M., Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). *Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education*. Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 9, 117-125.

Websites you may want to explore further

Department of Children, Youth and Families: www.dcyf.wa.gov

Teaching Strategies: https://teachingstrategies.com/solutions/assess/gold/

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3.3: Child Web Assessments

A child web can be used on each child as an individual. It helps teachers gain a deeper understanding of the child outside of the classroom, not limited to what they are able to observe when the child is in their care. It encourages educators to consider how the child's home life, culture, relationships, and other experiences influence their development and behavior.

A child web:

- Gathering comprehensive information about a child's background, interests, strengths, and needs
- Recognizing influential factors that impact a child's growth and development
- Building stronger connections between school and family
- Individualizing teaching strategies based on the child's unique context

If information is missing, teachers are encouraged to ask families thoughtful questions such as:

- What are your child's favorite activities or interests at home?
- Are there any family routines or experiences that are important for us to know?
- What goals or hopes do you have for your child this year?

If families are not available at drop-off or pick-up, teachers can gather insights from others who know the child well, such as:

- Other caregivers or family members
- Previous teachers or childcare providers
- Support staff (e.g., aides, specialists)

Elements of a Child Web

Children who are in our care come from various households, cultures, and upbringings. As teachers, we sometimes overlook what makes a child unique and special. Slowing down our day to make intentional time with a child allows us to connect, build relationships, and get to know the whole child. From that information, we are able to adjust our classroom setting to support the child's unique self.

In some child care programs, families will complete an intake form upon enrollment. Information shared by the families can give teachers additional insights into the family's beliefs, cultural expectations, and current child-rearing practices. Generally, one form per family is completed upon initial enrollment. The family intake forms do not always provide additional information on each individual child. High-quality practice promotes the family intake forms to be completed once per year, specific to each child. This allows the family to provide updates on changes within their family systems, beliefs, and cultural practices.

Completing a child web per individual child allows the teacher an opportunity to better understand how the child thinks, acts, and interprets their environment. It is an anti-bias approach to learning about the whole child. A teacher will never know all of the questions presented, but the idea is to learn about each child as an individual to have a better understanding of the strengths they bring to the classroom.

> There are many variations of a child web. The following are the most common elements of a child web. It is encouraged to find a child web that best supports your goals of learning more about each individual child.

Setting Where the Child Spends Time

A classroom teacher will know, on average, how much time a child spends in their classroom on a weekly basis. Where does the child spend the additional time?

Questions to reflect on as you learn more about the child:

- Does the child visit family throughout the week?
  - How many days? How many hours?
- Is your program offered full-time or part-time?
- Do the child or family members participate in extracurricular activities?
  - If so, where?
  - What sport?
- Does the family take trips?
- Does the child help with chores: grocery shopping, laundry, etc.
- Does the child sleep at night?
  - Where? At their home? In their own bed? In their own room?
- When the child is at home, what types of activities do they do? Games? Play with parents? Watch TV?

Example 3.3.1

If a child does not have family that lives close, how could the teacher adjust Grandparents' Day festivities to ensure the child and family feel included?

Example 3.3.1

If a family participates in several sporting events and plays sports themselves, how can you incorporate sporting activities into your classroom and curriculum?

The environment where a child spends their time will also give the teacher additional insights into different influences that impact the child's development. What skills is the child learning at home, and how do these compare to what is being taught or influenced at school? Bridging the gap between the two will help the teacher and family keep the child at the center.

Strengths and Abilities of the Child

Have you taken the time to pause and listen to how a child speaks to you? How about listening to conversations in the classroom, how children talk to and interact with one another? What activities do certain children eagerly jump into? Are there other activities where children pause and show hesitancy to participate?

If you are able to answer these questions about any child in your classroom, great observing! Watching how a child interacts with their peers and environment helps you understand their interests. Listening to classroom conversations also provides insight into what captures their attention and engagement.

A child will gravitate towards activities they feel confident in their abilities to participate in. Teachers should note where a child spends most of their time and what their current skill set is with the materials provided. A teacher may also notice when a child's skills are more developed than the materials provided. A child may start to mis-use materials, which tells the teacher they have outgrown those items.

When we observe children in an authentic environment, we are also able to see what they are not participating in. This can give teachers a clue to where a child may need additional support.

All children bring strengths to the classroom. As teachers, through observations, we are able to see those strengths and bring them out for others to see.

Individual Characteristics of a Child

Each child brings a beautiful element to your daily classroom. When a child first starts in your classroom, how do you learn about their personal characteristics? In many programs, as a child grows to the next classroom level, the previous teacher will share some information about the child. At times, this information can be biased as each child-teacher relationship will differ. Listening to what the previous teacher's experience has been is part of the equation of learning about a child's individual characteristics, but as this new relationship develops, the new teacher will need to take some time to make intentional time to observe and connect.

- **Personality:** When a child starts in a new environment, how eager is the child to play with peers? How comfortable does the child seem to start to play with new materials?
- **Interests:** When the child is in the classroom, where does the child spend most of their time? Is this with others or independently?
- **Temperament:** Refers to a child's natural way of responding to and interacting with the world. It is the set of inborn traits that influence how children experience emotions, react to situations, and engage with others. Temperament is present from birth and remains relatively stable throughout life, although experiences and relationships can influence how it is expressed.

Understanding temperament helps early childhood educators and families recognize that children's behaviors reflect their unique temperament and developmental needs.

Throughout the day, a child's temperament may change with environmental influences. Consider some of the following characteristics of temperament:

- **Activity Level:** How physically active or energetic a child tends to be.
- **Approach or Withdrawal:** How a child responds to new people, situations, or experiences.
- **Adaptability:** How easily a child adjusts to changes in routines or expectations.
- **Intensity of Reaction:** The strength of a child's emotional responses.
- **Mood:** Whether a child generally displays positive or negative emotions.
- **Persistence and Attention Span:** How long a child stays engaged in an activity, especially when challenges arise.
- **Sensitivity:** How aware a child is of sounds, textures, light, or other sensory experiences.
- **Regularity:** Predictability of biological functions such as sleep, hunger, and toileting.

Notice and respect how children's temperaments are similar and different. Rather than trying to change a child's reaction to an environment, adjust the environment to better support the child's needs. Create a safe, secure classroom to promote positive relationships.

Learning Styles

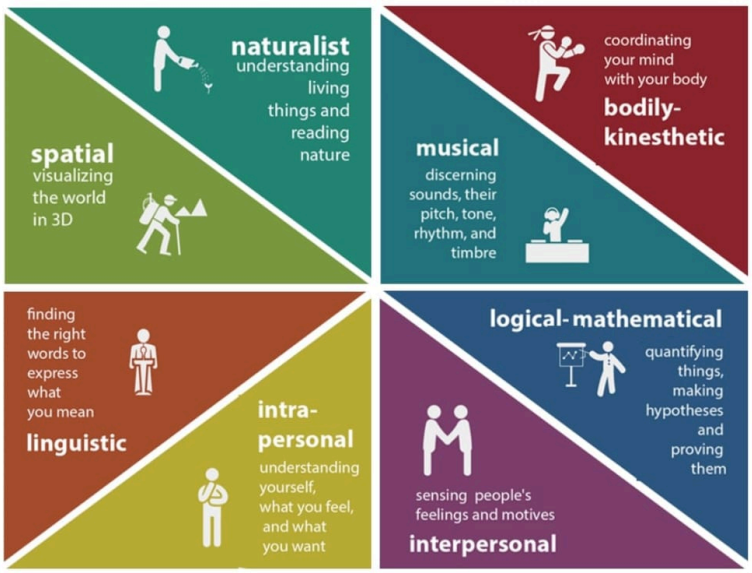


Figure 3.3.1: Learning Styles: Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that individuals demonstrate strengths in different areas of intelligence. Gardner identified eight intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Gardner's Theory Of Multiple Intelligences

Through observation, early childhood educators often notice that children show preferences for certain types of activities and ways of engaging with their environment. For example, some children may enjoy movement and hands-on experiences, while others may be drawn to music, nature exploration, storytelling, or social interactions.

Recognizing these individual strengths can help teachers plan meaningful learning experiences that engage all children. By offering a variety of materials, activities, and teaching strategies, educators create inclusive environments that support diverse learners and encourage children to build on their unique abilities.

Examples of classroom experiences that support multiple intelligences include:

- Storytelling, discussions, and dramatic play
- Building, sorting, and problem-solving activities
- Art, drawing, and visual representations
- Music, singing, and rhythm experiences
- Movement, dance, and outdoor play
- Cooperative learning and group projects
- Opportunities for self-reflection and independent exploration
- Nature studies and environmental investigations

Providing a balance of learning experiences helps ensure that every child has opportunities to participate, demonstrate competence, and develop new skills across multiple areas of growth and development.

Missing Information in a Child Web

If information is missing from the child web, or is unknown to the student teacher. A student teacher can create questions to ask the family during drop-off or pick-up. Examples of these questions could include:

- What are your child's favorite activities or interests at home?
- Are there any family routines or experiences that are important for us to know?
- What goals or hopes do you have for your child this year?

If families are not available at drop-off or pick-up, teachers can gather insights from others who know the child well, such as:

- Other caregivers or family members
- Previous teachers or childcare providers
- Support staff (e.g., aides, specialists)

Pause to Reflect

Think about a child you have observed. What activities seem to capture their attention and interest most often? How might you incorporate those strengths into future learning experiences while also encouraging growth in other areas?

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4: APPLYING THE TEACHING CYCLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

4.1: Program Application of the Teaching Cycle
4.2: Implementing WMELS at the Field Site

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4.1: Program Application of the Teaching Cycle

Early childhood programs use child development theories to inform their practice. High-quality programs know that grounding program practices in sound theory leads to better outcomes for children. When programs use real, hands-on experiences to teach children about their world, it is due to the influence of the cognitive developmental model. Likewise, when programs include family involvement or community connections, we can thank the influence of the ecological systems theory. The next section will take a look at some programmatic approaches, which are combinations of theory and practice that create specific curriculum choices.

High Scope

High Scope is a program model that is child-centered and provides children with hands-on experiences. Its roots are unique – it originated from a research-based preschool program in Michigan in the 1960s called the Perry Preschool Project. The goal of the Perry Preschool Project was to enroll low-income children in high-quality preschool experiences to see if it would improve their life outcomes. The researcher David Weikart followed the children's progress for decades to measure the results. Weikart chose to include low-income children because, in comparison to middle-income children, children in low-income households are at greater risk for lowered academic achievement, have lower rates of high school graduation, higher rates of crime, and a higher likelihood of poverty later in life. The goal of the Perry Preschool project was to counter the effects of poverty early in life. This was one of the first and most published pieces of scientific research to investigate how economic investments in early childhood education could have long-term benefits to the child, the family, and society. The idea was that if you give a child a strong start early on, it will pay off when they become adolescents and adults. What the researchers hoped for came true. Children who participated in the Perry Preschool Project had greater academic achievement, higher high school graduation rates, lower rates of crime, and higher adult earnings than their low-income peers who were not in the preschool project. This study showed that access to high-quality preschool programs in the first few years of life can have long-term benefits for the child. This research highlighted the importance of the early years of a child's life in influencing the course of their future.

So, what was the magic formula of the Perry Preschool Project? There were several components, but two main pieces stand out. The classroom system of plan-do-review and family involvement. **Plan-Do-Review** is a system that helps children organize their play activities. Children gather in a circle, and the teacher asks them which activity center they plan to play in during the morning free play time. The choices range from blocks and art to dramatic play or puzzles. Children make their choice to the group, such as "I plan to play with Jakeem in the blocks area. We are going to build a really big bridge!" After the children make their plans, they go and do the activity of their choice. It is okay if kids switch activities or change their plans during this time. After free play, the children return to the circle and report back on how their plans went. Did Jakeem and his friend build a successful bridge? What went well? Did anything unexpected happen? The teacher will ask these types of probing questions to get the children to think about their activities. This method supports cognitive development because it involves planning. Children are able to explore their world and engage in hands-on activities. The plan-do-review helps to support their memory development and helps them to develop concentration, attention, and focus, all skills that are related to the academics they will engage in when they enter elementary school.

The second main component of the Perry Preschool Project was family involvement. Families were visited in their homes by teachers to create connections between what was happening in the classroom and at home. When a child learns a concept in class, it should not stay in class. Having families participate in learning at home can help create layers of learning for the child. It also provides an opportunity for parent support and education. This approach aligns with the ecological model in that the family and community are integrated into a child's early childhood education setting, supporting development using the multiple contexts involved in a child's life.

The High Scope model follows the findings from the Perry Preschool Project. It has taken those evidence-based strategies and created a program model to serve children in early learning settings. It is the embodiment of the philosophy that family income need not be the sole determining factor in children's academic and life outcomes.

A similar program to the Perry Preschool Project is Head Start. Head Start is a preschool program that also has its roots in researching ways to improve the lives of children in poverty. Head Start research has found similar results to the Perry Preschool, and with comparable methods. Head Start has become a long-term, nationwide program that still exists today. Indeed, many Head Start programs even follow the High Scope method. These programs demonstrate the need and effectiveness of high-quality preschool programs.

Developmental Interaction

The Developmental Interaction approach was founded by Lucy Sprague Mitchell, an education reformer who developed innovative ideas for educating children and helped to professionalize teaching for women. Mitchell also founded the Bank Street College of Education in New York. The developmental interaction approach, sometimes called the Bank Street approach, focuses on developing the child in all areas – physical, intellectual, social, and emotional. Teachers in the Developmental Interaction approach see learning as a holistic process and consider developmental domains (physical, intellectual, social, and emotional) as inherently interconnected. It emphasizes meeting children where they are and providing opportunities for making choices. It is play-based, so children have lots of free time to explore on their own terms. It also emphasizes the child's role in society – another nod to the ecological model of child development.

Montessori

The Montessori approach to education was developed by Maria Montessori, an Italian physician and educator who was interested in reforming the way children learn in group settings. The Montessori method has distinct key features that make it stand out from other approaches. One such feature is mixed-age groups in a single class. Children in Montessori classrooms can range from 2.5 to 5 years old. This means that there is a great deal of peer learning happening. Older children can model behavior for younger children, which can help facilitate learning better than direct instruction from a teacher.

Another feature of the Montessori classroom is the concept of constructivism. Montessori classrooms rely on a carefully structured classroom with materials that children can use to discover new concepts on their own, using real-life materials. Items are often made from natural materials to give the child a realistic concept of the weight of an object based on its size. In order to deeply engage with materials, children are given a large block of free play time – usually about 2.5 to 3 hours. During this time, teachers will help children on an individual or small group level with materials. The materials have an emphasis on child development. Some may involve fine motor skills, like threading beads on a string, and some may promote problem solving, a part of cognitive development, such as ordering pegs into holes by size and shape. Many activities are related to practical life: washing dishes, placing flowers in a vase, and cleaning up after oneself. Materials for practical life are always child-sized so that the child can feel that she can master the activity without unnecessary impediments. There is a strong emphasis on completion. Children will not be interrupted by a teacher when they are in the middle of a task, as this is thought to disrupt learning. Independence is also emphasized. Children are encouraged to learn how to use buttons and zippers in order to dress themselves at an early age. Teachers without a Montessori background are often surprised to see the abilities of a two-and-a-half-year-old getting a jacket on and zipping it alone.

Mealtimes in Montessori centers can often differ from those of traditional classrooms. When a meal is served, children will be invited to the table and asked to join when they are ready. There is no large-scale, formal transition from playtime to lunchtime. If a child is still working on an activity, then he may complete it in as much time as he wishes. Typically, children gather around the table more or less at the same time, but it happens organically. Children are drawn to the smell of food and a chance to visit with playmates at the table. Children serve themselves and pour their own milk using child-sized utensils and milk pitchers. At the end of the meal, children clear their own dishes and place them on a cart after removing unfinished food.

With such a free environment, how do teachers encourage classroom harmony in a Montessori classroom? Teachers use guidance strategies that are similar to other approaches, but children often learn from observing older peers. If a 3-year-old is approaching the art easel for the first time, she may watch a 5-year-old first. She may observe her peer carefully dipping the brush into the cup, keeping paint on the paper, and wiping up any spills with a cloth. Sometimes, this way of learning how to use and respect classroom materials can resonate more with a young child than when a teacher outlines strict rules for how to properly use paint.

Waldorf

Waldorf schools originated in Germany and were developed by Rudolf Steiner in the 1920s. Waldorf programs have a strong emphasis on everyday practical activities, and centers are designed to resemble a home in order to facilitate this. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, and building are all activities that children engage in in a Waldorf program. There is a strong emphasis on oral storytelling, creative arts, and music. Historically, Waldorf programs included mystical and religious elements, but most modern programs typically do not. Children are encouraged to engage in free play using toys and activities made of natural materials. Like in Montessori programs, the belief is that children are more connected to toys and tools that are made of wood rather than plastic, as it is more aesthetically pleasing and facilitates a connection to nature. In that spirit, Waldorf classrooms include organic materials such as acorns, shells, and wool that are used for counting games, art, and storytelling. Academic subjects

are integrated with one another – math is taught through storytelling, combining mathematical problem solving with language development. This helps promote cognitive development in a holistic way. Teachers facilitate early math activities using small wool dolls and other natural, tangible materials. However, formal learning of letters and numbers is not pushed upon young children in Waldorf schools. It is the belief that children will come around to letter and number identification when they are ready, and that is usually not until the age of 6 or 7 years, which is when it is formally introduced in Waldorf schools. Interestingly, this coincides with most modern European educational systems as well. Preschools in the United States, on the other hand, typically begin letter and number identification well before age 5 (although this is beginning to change). This variation is a valuable lesson in cultural differences in developmentally appropriate practice.

Another key feature of the Waldorf program is the daily rhythm. While many preschools follow a daily schedule with specific hour or minute intervals, Waldorf programs follow a rhythm instead. What matters here is the order of the day, not how long each activity takes. So daily activities always follow the same sequence, but may not be at the same time every day. In the morning, for example, the teacher may invite the children to help bake bread or make soup for lunch. Children gather around, kneading dough or chopping vegetables (children are encouraged to learn knife safety at an early age), and as they finish, they may disperse into other activities like sewing, building with blocks, or dancing with scarves. Another teacher might gather a group of students to invite them to hear a story that she is telling, using puppets and props to act out the plot. Children may naturally come and go from the story based on what they are interested in playing with at that time. When the lunch is ready, the teacher will invite children to the table with a song and, oftentimes, by lighting a candle (children are also taught safety around the candle). There is no set time, but meals are typically served at about the same time each day. Children rely on the order of events to help them predict their environment. A difference of 15 or 20 minutes makes no difference to them, however. This focus on rhythm is also reflected in the practice of honoring the changing of seasons. Waldorf programs also include rituals that celebrate the rhythms of nature. This gives the children a connection to the larger system of which they are a part.

Reggio Emilia

The Reggio Emilia approach takes its name from the Italian city where it originated. A constructivist approach, the Reggio method provides encouragement that children should explore their world using hands-on methods that are child-directed. The approach was developed by Loris Malaguzzi following WWII. It was his belief that children should be able to freely express themselves. In that vein, Reggio programs encourage arts and music. One core belief in the Reggio approach is the **Hundred Languages of Children**, or the ability of children to express their thoughts and feelings through arts such as painting, sculpting, and drawing. Indeed, Reggio programs are known for their emphasis on beautiful artwork. Children's art is displayed on the wall at the child's eye level, often with a description of the work written by the teacher in the child's own words. This honors the child's creative spirit and helps promote healthy emotional development. Another feature of the original Reggio school in Italy is the connection to the community. The children there learn directly from members of the community, and the community members feel responsible for taking part in children's education. American programs emulate this goal with strong parental involvement. US programs are referred to as "Reggio-inspired" because the true Reggio schools in Italy have a connection to the community that is unique to that location. The Reggio approach believes that children learn from adults, peers, and the environment. The environment is thought to be the "third teacher" and is set up so that children can explore independently as their interests guide them. Spaces are set up with natural light, living plants, and materials that encourage creativity.

Forest Schools

Forest schools originated in Sweden and other European countries, and their popularity has spread to the United States in recent years. The concept of forest schools is that children spend their whole day outdoors, in all weather. All activities take place outside – stories, art, construction, and even meals. Children are dressed in appropriate clothing for all weather so that they are comfortable and safe while outside. Many of the same activities that take place in indoor preschools also happen in forest preschools. Children create art, often using natural materials, but also use paint, clay, and crayons. Science activities are well-suited to a forest environment, as children can collect leaves and rocks to sort and categorize, or examine bugs using a microscope. An outdoor environment lends itself well to construction projects, which may include building a tower with blocks or building a giant fort out of sticks, branches, and rope. Forest schools often have a covered shelter or area where materials are kept in bins, and teachers can take out the materials at the start of each day so that children have access to all the things they need for free play. Teachers do circle time, read books, and sing songs, the same as in a typical preschool. Mealtimes take place at outdoor tables, and children wash their hands using an outdoor hand-washing station. Usually, children do not sleep outdoors, so forest schools are typically either half-day programs or include only children who are old enough not to need naptime. Children in forest schools have a strong connection to nature, and it is believed to provide many health and developmental benefits.

On a related note, in July 2021, Washington State became the first state to permanently license outdoor, nature-based childcare

for preschool and school-age children under a new Senate Bill 5151. This comes after a four-year outdoor preschool pilot program and gives DCYF the ability to set the precedent as the first state in the nation to develop licensing requirements for outdoor education.

Pause to Reflect

How can a child's individual culture be reflected in program approaches?

Final Thoughts

Theories give us insight into how children develop. There are seven major theories on child development, and each one is useful in understanding children's needs at a given age. It is important that teachers have a deep knowledge of children in order to create learning experiences that support development. High-quality early childhood programs must be informed by theory. There are a variety of approaches and philosophies in early childhood program models, and each has its own unique benefits. One thing that all program models have in common is the connection to theory that supports children's optimal development.

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4.2: Implementing WMELS at the Field Site

Each program has to make a decision on how they choose to align its program with supporting the whole child. Some programs have chosen to adapt the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) into their program.

Programs that have adopted WMELS ensure they include specific learning activities that they implement in their classrooms, aligning with all of the developmental domains.

Here are some examples of lesson plans that are intentionally aligned with WMELS. In each of the examples, the lesson plans have designated space for the teachers to share the specific activities that align with each developmental domain of WMELS. Thinking about the next part of the teaching cycles allows for quick reference of where and when certain activities will take place as teachers support children with their goals.

Sample A

Child-Initiated Activities

Developmental Domain	Activities
Block Area	
Literacy Area	
Dramatic Area	
Art/Music Area	
Manipulative Area	
Gross Motor Area	

Teacher-Initiated Activities

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

Group or Individual Goals

Goals

In Sample A, the lesson plan is segregated between child-initiated and teacher-initiated in the planning process. The classroom teacher would include what learning materials they would provide for children to engage with independently for each of the learning centers included in the lesson plan. The teacher-initiated activities would also include materials that would be provided for children, but with the support and guidance from the classroom teacher(s). All details for each of the learning materials provided should be included in the lesson plan write-up.

A section for goals is included at the bottom of the lesson plan that would be forward-facing to other classroom teachers and families. Notes in this area would be provided to show the intentionality of activities planned for the week and the connection to how children are growing in their development. Goals for this lesson plan can be focused on group goals or individual goals for specific children. To maintain confidentiality, it is highly encouraged to use signs or symbols instead of children's first and last names if a teacher chooses to share this information with families or post publicly in a classroom.

Sample B

Concept/Big Idea:

Week of:

Experiences/Materials Needed

Category	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Indoor Experiences					
Outdoor Experiences (Indoor gross motor when inclement weather)					
Learning Center Materials Needed					

Activities by Developmental Domain

Domain	Activity
Health and Physical Development	
Social and Emotional Development	
Language and Communication Development	
Approaches to Learning	
Cognition and General Knowledge	

Group or Individual Goals

Goals

In Sample B, the lesson plan is segregated between indoor/outdoor activities and specific developmental domains. The teacher would plan the indoor and outdoor learning activities for the entire week and include materials needed for all of the activities. The teacher would then organize the activities based on the developmental domain most supported in the activities planned in the corresponding developmental domain.

Similar to Sample A, there is space at the bottom of the lesson plan to include goals for the entire group of children or individual goals. To maintain confidentiality, it is highly encouraged to use signs or symbols instead of children's first and last names if a teacher chooses to share this information with families or post publicly in a classroom.

Follow-Up Questions

- Is WMELS implemented in your field experience placement? If not, what type of curriculum alignment have they implemented?
- Align what your program currently uses to WMELS
- What is similar? What is different?

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5: DESIGNING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

5.1: Relevant, Meaningful, and Challenging Learning Experiences

5.2: Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Learning Experiences

5.3: Age and Individually Appropriate Learning Experiences

5.4: Learning Experiences Reflecting the Teaching Cycle

5.5: Learning Experiences Incorporating the WMELS Framework

5.6: Learning Experiences with Effective Transitions

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5.1: Relevant, Meaningful, and Challenging Learning Experiences

Key Points

- Young children's development can be conceptualized in four main areas: physical, intellectual, emotional, and social.
- Understanding how children develop is important to ensure healthy developmental progression.
- While there are many commonalities, there are also individual and cultural differences in development such that development is not identical for each child.
- High-quality classroom settings and practices should support individual and cultural developmental needs.

Terminology

1. **Atypical development:** When a child does not develop in the way that is congruent with averages for a given age, causing a disturbance to everyday activities.
2. **Child development:** The pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through adolescence.
3. **Culturally relevant pedagogy**: The practice of including ideas and artifacts that refer to a child's individual culture.
4. **Developmentally appropriate practice:** Methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning.
5. **Developmental domains:** Specific areas in which growth occurs – Physical, Cognitive, Emotional, and Social.
6. **Differentiation**: The thoughtful practice of tailoring activities to meet children's individual needs.
7. **Early childhood period:** Ages birth through age eight.
8. **Executive function:** A collection of processes that encompass attention, working memory, and inhibition.
9. **Fine motor skills:** Movement related to small muscle groups in the body.
10. **Gross motor skills:** Movement related to the large muscle groups in the body.
11. **Joint attention:** The action of a child and a caregiver focusing on the same object or concept at the same time.
12. **Metacognition:** Self-reflection; the ability to think about one's own thoughts.
13. **Open-ended questions:** Questions that do not have a yes or no answer.
14. **Separation anxiety:** A fear of being separated from their primary caregiver.
15. **Temperament:** An infant's regular way of reacting to their environment.
16. **Toxic stress:** Physical or emotional abuse, neglect, witnessing of physical or emotional abuse of another person, or extreme poverty.
17. **Typical development**: When a child develops in the way that is congruent with averages for a given age.

Creating Developmentally Appropriate Learning Experiences

Early childhood teachers create learning experiences for children every day. These experiences are intentionally planned to support children's development, interests, and learning goals. However, even well-planned activities do not always unfold as expected. When this happens, effective teachers observe children's responses and adjust to better meet their needs and interests.

To plan and implement meaningful learning experiences, teachers must first understand child development. Knowledge of developmental milestones and individual differences will help early childhood teachers create experiences that are both engaging and appropriately challenging.

Observation plays a critical role in this process. By observing children in their everyday environments, teachers gain insight into each child's current skills, abilities, interests, cultural upbringing, and developmental needs. This information helps teachers identify what children can do independently and where they may benefit from additional support.

Using observation and assessment data, teachers can design learning experiences that build on children's strengths, encourage new skill development, and connect to their interests. Developmentally appropriate learning experiences provide opportunities for children to explore, create, problem-solve, and learn through meaningful interactions with people, materials, and their

environment.

When learning experiences are planned with children's developmental levels and interests in mind, children are more likely to be actively engaged, successful, and motivated to learn.

Child Development

Have you ever watched a toddler exploring their world and wondered – What are they thinking? How are they learning? What will they do next? How can I help them grow? The science of how children learn, grow, and relate to others is called developmental science, or child development. **Child development** is defined as the pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through adolescence.

Humans have probably thought about how children learn, grow, and relate to others since mothers started having babies, but formal scientific inquiry about child development has only been around for about 100 years, making it a fairly new science. Knowledge gained from child development science is helpful in building strong interactions with children to help them grow to their full potential. In this section, we will focus on conception through about age 8 years. This unique age span has been determined by developmental scientists as the **early childhood period**, or the period of life in which the most rapid development takes place.

Role of Environment on Development

The way that children are cared for impacts how they develop. An environment filled with loving, responsive caregivers works wonders on a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Conversely, an environment filled with **toxic stress** will slow down the healthy development of children and those adults caring for them. Signs of toxic stress include physical or emotional abuse, neglect, or witnessing of physical or emotional abuse of another person. Toxic stress, sometimes referred to as childhood trauma, can be detrimental to the early childhood stage of development. It can also impact social, emotional, and cognitive development, lower academic achievement, and lead to long-term health-related issues such as cardiovascular problems. It is important to create an environment for the child that includes safe, sensitive, and supportive care.

Pause to Reflect

What things can a caregiver do to help a young child feel safe and secure?

Physical Development

Physical development includes all things related to the body. Sometimes this domain is called biological development because it also encompasses processes that occur inside the body at the biological level.

Brain Development

Brain development is an important part of physical development. As a reminder, infant brains begin to develop while still in utero. Because of this, it is important to support fetal brain development through proper nutrition and care of the mother. Once born, infant brains develop rapidly. Brain connections, called synapses, develop rapidly during the first few months to the first 3 years of life, making this period critical for healthy brain development. During infancy, babies require responsive interactions with trusted caregivers that include verbal, expressive, face-to-face engagement. Additionally, and above all, they require a safe and secure home environment for healthy brain development.

Motor Skills

Children's bodies are designed to wiggle and move. Motor skills refer to a child's ability to move and coordinate motion using their body. Motor skills are generally organized into two categories: gross motor skills and fine motor skills. **Gross motor skills** are related to the large muscle groups in the body: walking, running, climbing, balancing, and jumping are examples of gross motor skills. **Fine motor skills** are related to small muscle groups in the body. Grasping a spoon, holding a pencil, stringing

beads, and stacking blocks are examples of fine motor skills.

In order for gross motor skills to develop successfully, infants and children must be given opportunities to move their bodies freely, safely, and without restriction, starting from birth. This is why most pediatric physical therapists recommend against the use of so-called “baby containers” – chairs, bouncy seats, swings, and jumpers that place an infant in an upright position before their body is ready to do so on its own. These devices can hinder development. Instead, babies should play on a blanket or mat and have a few minutes of “tummy time” each day starting at birth. This helps to strengthen neck and shoulder muscles that will later be used in crawling. As children begin to crawl and walk, soft climbers can help to develop gross motor skills.

Once solid on their feet, children need opportunities to practice running, jumping, balancing, and climbing. This is why daily outdoor play is vital. Playgrounds can be great places for children to experiment with gross motor skills. Outdoor play in natural areas is also important. Consider the difference between climbing stairs or monkey bars on a playground vs climbing the branches of a strong, low tree. Both offer opportunities for using arms and legs, but tree climbing allows children to use muscle groups in new positions and learn to balance in an irregular position. If no safe climbing trees are available, learning to walk or run on uneven ground in a field or meadow can also be beneficial. It is important for children to move their bodies in many different ways.

Playing outdoors on playgrounds and in nature provides children with opportunities to take risks. When children climb, they not only build muscle and coordination but also learn to overcome fears. This can lead to greater self-confidence that carries over into other areas as well. This is one way in which outdoor activity supports not only physical but also emotional development.

Fine motor skills begin to develop in infancy when the child first learns to grasp a toy such as a rattle or a cloth. Later, they learn to throw a ball, hold a crayon, and use scissors. Children can be given opportunities to use their hands in a variety of ways using age-appropriate materials. Young children love to practice fine motor skills using real-life items, such as buckling the clasp of a highchair strap or zipping a zipper. This has the added benefit of fostering independence, which supports emotional development. Children can coordinate their finger movements while learning to zip a zipper, and they can also feel proud when they can zip their own jacket to go outside. Opportunities for fine motor development are everywhere and can be as simple as picking up a leaf and ripping it into tiny pieces. Teachers can foster fine motor skills by making sure to create challenging activities based on each child’s developmental level.

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development includes all things related to thinking and learning. In the early childhood stage, the focus is on problem-solving, memory, and language acquisition.

Executive Function

One key area of cognitive development is called **executive function**. Executive function is the collection of processes that encompasses attention, working memory, and inhibition, and it develops between the ages of about 3 and 6 years. Attention is the ability of a child to focus on something, like carefully concentrating on a picture in a book. Working memory refers to the ability of a child to maintain several pieces of information in the mind for a short period of time. This could be recalling some items present in the picture in the book, like a tree, a bird, and a house. Inhibition is the ability to block out distractions, such as other background designs in the book or even the sounds of other children playing in the classroom. Development of executive function is key to building social relationships, acquiring and maintaining learning, and eventual academic success. For example, if a child is going to learn how to add using blocks, she might have to first pay attention to the blocks in front of her, remember that she had three blocks on one side and one block on the other side, and inhibit the distraction of other toys on the table. All of these components come together with executive function. It is important to remember that because executive function is developing between the ages of about 3 and 5 years, young children do not have the ability to pay attention to things for long periods of time. Nor do they have the ability to remember multiple pieces of information or block out distractions. This is important when planning activities for young children. Setting the expectation that young children should sit at a table and focus on one activity will result in frustration for both children and teachers, as children will communicate their lack of executive function with a lot of wiggles and movement! This is healthy, and teachers should keep this in mind when planning activities that require concentration.

Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) need extra support to develop executive function, as concentration and inhibition are particularly difficult. Children who are in chaotic environments or those who have experienced toxic stress and trauma may struggle with the development of healthy executive function. Strategies that have been successful in promoting executive function are games and activities that practice concentration and task-switching. Such games need to be fun, not tied

to punishment or reward. Deep breathing and meditation have also been shown to aid in the development of executive function for children who are struggling.

Problem Solving

When children encounter a challenge, they learn to practice problem-solving. Problem solving involves assessing the problem, devising a plan, carrying out the plan, and reflecting on the outcome. Children may do this without actively knowing that they are carrying out these four steps. For instance, if a child is building a block tower on a soft carpet, it might be unstable and fall down. The child might think of a solution: get a tray or a large book to set on the carpet to create a flat surface. The child then gets the tray, builds the block tower, and checks to see if it is wobbly or stable. Problem solved! Children solve many such problems each day during play. It is helpful for teachers to facilitate problem-solving by asking **open-ended questions** or questions that do not have a yes or no answer. This type of question helps the child see the main features and problems in the situation, encourages thinking about solutions, and suggests solutions, all without giving the answer. An exchange might look like the following:

> Teacher: “It looks like your block tower is falling down a lot. I wonder why?”
>
> Child: “Because the carpet is bumpy and soft.”
>
> Teacher: “How can you make a more stable base for your tower?”
>
> Child: “I could put a tray underneath it!”
>
> Teacher: “Want to try that and see what happens?”

This exchange of open-ended questions helps the child learn to problem-solve on their own. The use of the phrase “see what happens” encourages the child to engage in the fourth step of problem solving, assessing the outcome. After all, a problem-solving strategy may not succeed, and the child might have to try something else. This is all part of the process of learning.

Self-reflection

Self-reflection is the ability to think about one’s own thoughts. This is sometimes referred to as **metacognition**, which develops between middle childhood and adolescence. However, during early childhood, there are signs of self-reflection, or thinking back on one’s thoughts. Self-reflection is helpful in problem-solving and emotional development. If a child has solved a problem such as mixing the colors just right for a painting, the teacher might ask, “Why did you decide to do it this way?” or “Tell me about why you chose to mix those colors?” This helps children to think through their process and helps them remember the strategy for next time. Self-reflection in early childhood is best facilitated by teachers using probing questions such as the examples above, but older children can engage in self-reflection through journaling or planned exchanges with peers.

Language

Language development is a very broad and rich area of development that encompasses much more than the scope of this section. Nevertheless, this section will highlight the key points of language development in early childhood.

Children learn to understand language in infancy through responsive interactions with adults. Adults should speak with and listen to infants starting at birth, making eye contact and using a gentle tone. When infants begin to babble, adults can take turns talking and letting the baby babble. This sets up the format for later turn-taking in conversation. Throughout childhood, children will usually understand more words than they can speak. As children begin to understand language, they can answer simple questions with a yes or no response by shaking their heads or using simple sign language. It has become a common practice to teach hearing infants a few common signs to facilitate communication earlier than when they begin speaking. Infants with hearing impairments can be taught sign language as soon as challenges are detected.

Books should be read, and stories told to children starting in infancy, as this helps develop new vocabulary and creates a connection to literature that will later be important for learning. It also helps strengthen the relationship between the child and the adult. **Joint attention** is the action of a child and a caregiver focusing on the same object or concept at the same time. This shared experience helps to form new vocabulary. Children learn new words much more quickly and efficiently with joint attention

than they ever could by viewing a video. In fact, there is evidence that suggests that television can actually hinder language development rather than help. Here is an example of joint attention in action.

> **Setting:** Teacher Tanisha and 18-month-old Sofia are looking out the window. Teacher Tanisha sees some autumn leaves falling from the tree.
>
> Teacher Tanisha: “Look, Sofia, leaves are falling from the tree.”
>
> [Sofia looks at the leaves]
>
> [Teacher Tanisha and Sofia look at each other and make eye contact]
>
> Sofia: Smiles and says “leaves!”
>
> This action has three steps: the adult and the child focus on the same object, the adult and the child make eye contact, adult names the object. In this way, children add many new words to their vocabulary; the words are presented in a real-life context, and they strengthen social relationships with their caregivers.

Once children begin to speak, language use should be encouraged through open-ended questions and topics that interest the child. Songs, rhymes, and books are all effective and fun ways to encourage language, but everyday conversation is also helpful. Children like to be involved in the real-life daily activities of adults, so engaging a child while doing tasks around the classroom is a good way to support language. Mealtimes are another opportunity for language development, as eye contact is easy while sitting at a table.

When learning to speak, children will inevitably make errors with grammar and syntax. The best way to support language development is to model the correct grammar and word order rather than correcting the child. This avoids the embarrassment that might come with being called out for making a mistake, and language modeling is simply a better way for the brain to remember how to use grammar. An exchange might look something like this:

> Child: “After breakfast, I goed outside.”
>
> Teacher: “After breakfast, you went outside? How fun! What did you do outside?”
>
> Child: “I played with Weihua out there.”

By using language modeling, the teacher provides an example of when and how to use the word in a certain situation, thus helping the child remember it for next time.

Social Development

Social development includes all things related to interacting with others. Parents, family, teachers, and peers all have special relationships with children, and those relationships are also related to one another. Teachers form relationships with parents, which benefits the child, and adults can facilitate communication between children. At the center of this is the child, who is driven to form relationships with adults and children alike.

Relationships with Caregivers

Infants begin to form relationships with caregivers at birth. Forming a strong relationship with a primary caregiver gives a baby a feeling of safety and security. The primary caregiver is typically the mother, but can also be the father, relative, or other main person in the infant’s life. Eventually, infants form relationships with secondary caregivers like relatives and teachers. Healthy relationships are characterized by things like reciprocal interactions, sensitivity to emotions, a warm, calm voice, and lots of positive language. These are good ways to interact with children of all ages, but are particularly important with infants and toddlers. Children may form preferences for particular caregivers and be upset when one is not available. Similarly, children

between about 9 and 18 months of age may go through **separation anxiety**, or a fear of being separated from their primary caregiver. This is normal, and children's emotions should be respected during this time. They do not understand that their mother will return later, which can be upsetting. Teachers can provide support by recognizing the child's emotions and providing physical comfort (if the child wants it). Using phrases like "I see you are sad that mommy has left," "You are feeling upset right now" are helpful in supporting the child through the tough time.

Relationships with Peers

As children grow and mature, they begin to show interest in other children. At first, it may be just a 10-month-old watching other children playing on a playground. This may not seem like much, but observing older children at play lays the groundwork for later social interactions. Later, children will play with toys alongside one another, but not yet interact. Adults may be eager for children to form friendships with others, but this time of play is important for children to experience before they move into play involving rules and negotiation.

A great deal of peer relationship building is in the context of play. Play is, after all, the work of childhood, and this is what children spend most of their waking time doing. During play, children learn the rules of games, how to read a peer's emotions, and how to engage in social problem-solving. If a group of 5-year-old children is playing a game of hide and seek, younger children who are new to the game will quickly learn the rules from the others. If two children are playing with crayons and one takes the crayon from the other, the ensuing frustration will be evident. In this way, children learn to read the emotions of their peers.

Perhaps the most interesting development is social problem-solving. When children encounter a conflict, it can disrupt their play, and if there is one thing we know to be true about children, it is that they do not care for their play to be interrupted. This motivates both children to solve the conflict as quickly as possible in order to continue playing. Take an example of two children playing in the kitchen, in the dramatic play area. Both children want to cook, but there are only enough materials for one to stir the soup. A conflict arises, and in order to navigate this, the children decide that one will stir the soup and the other will chop the vegetables. This is an example of sophisticated negotiations and problem-solving. Both children need to regulate their emotions, come up with alternative activities, and decide who will do which activity. If they give up at any time during the process, then the game is over. This type of problem-solving behavior in the context of play is highly complex and takes a lot of practice. Teachers can facilitate this by stepping in to help regulate emotions, brainstorm alternative activities, or help decide who will do which activity, but only if it seems that the children need help.

Emotional Development

Emotional development includes the development of emotions, emotion regulation, and a sense of self. Emotional development is closely related to social development. They are so closely related, in fact, that some frameworks of child development refer to them as socio-emotional development or social-emotional development. In this section, we will discuss some main areas of development that lean more toward the emotional side of things.

The Development of Emotions

When babies are born, they experience basic emotions such as contentment, interest, and distress. After a few months, they begin to experience fear, anger, happiness, and surprise. Later, when a sense of self develops, more emotions come along, such as guilt, pride, and embarrassment. It is important for caregivers to allow children to express emotions freely and teach them to express them in socially appropriate ways. One good way to do this is through modeling. Teachers can express mild frustration and model strategies to overcome it. For example, a teacher may demonstrate frustration with difficulty opening a jar, and then take some deep breaths before asking another teacher for help. This is an effective way to teach children how to manage emotions. Another way is to read books that depict children overcoming difficult emotions so that children have a benchmark that they can relate to. Yet another approach is to encourage the expression of emotions through dance and art. Children may also act out emotions through pretend play. Providing children with space and time to work through feelings in a pretend setting can be very helpful for the development of emotions.

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation refers to a child's ability to control or modify their own emotions. It is closely tied to brain development. The underpinnings for emotion regulation begin in infancy with the infant's primary caregiver. When a baby cries for attention and is soothed by the caregiver, it sends signals to the brain that help it to calm down. With this repeated action of crying and receiving

comfort from a caregiver, the baby's brain slowly learns the process of how to regulate emotions. This process takes a very long time, and more sophisticated emotion regulation occurs alongside executive function. This means that between the ages of 3 and 5 years, children are able to shake off frustrations in a socially acceptable way.

Children with ADHD can have persistent difficulty with emotion regulation, making it hard to succeed in school environments designed for typically developing children. These children need special support and understanding in order to work toward developing emotional coping strategies.

Pause to Reflect

What are some activities that you could create to support child development? On which developmental domains will your activities focus?

Typical and Atypical Development

Most children develop in a similar way. Even when cultural backgrounds, geographic locations, and personal characteristics vary, child development is generalizable. That does not mean, however, that all children are the same. Some children develop more quickly in cognitive areas, but more slowly in social areas. Some children develop more quickly in general than others, some more slowly. Children are living, breathing beings, and some variation is normal. When a child develops in the way that we expect, we refer to this as **typical development**. There is room for a good deal of variance in typical development. For instance, babies can speak their first words anywhere from 9 to 13 months, and children can write their own names anywhere from 3 to 5 years. This variance is healthy and normal.

Some variance is unusual, and that is referred to as **atypical development**. Atypical development can slow down growth in other areas of a child's life. If a child cannot speak any words by 15 or 16 months, it is considered atypical development. The ways and speed at which children grow are measured by tools called developmental assessments. The caring adults in a child's life benefit from knowing how the child is developing, where they are struggling, and what to expect next. Despite the name, developmental assessments are not complicated standardized tests that a child must complete. Instead, they are carried out by the teacher through observing the child at play or by playing small games and activities with the child. The teacher records the child's developmental milestones on the assessment and later shares it with the parents. If development is not on track, teachers should speak with parents and connect them with specialists who can help. Specialists will administer another type of assessment that is specially designed to diagnose developmental disabilities. Atypically developing children benefit from early intervention programs that can help them get back on track.

Individual Needs

Considering an individual child's needs means knowing what is appropriate for a given child. The way this is determined is through developmental assessments. Curriculum should be tailored to each child's different developmental needs. Perhaps there is an art activity in the classroom in which children cut paper with scissors and glue it onto a larger sheet. If some children do not have strong scissor skills, they may rip paper instead and use glue sticks to glue it down. In this way, children's individual developmental needs are met. They are still able to practice fine motor skills with art, but the activity is not designed to limit children by ability level. This type of planning is one of the hallmarks of early childhood educators – the thoughtful practice of tailoring activities to meet children's individual needs. This practice is also referred to as **differentiation,** where the teacher understands and implements the idea that "one size does not fit all".

Cultural Context

To consider culture in developmentally appropriate practice is to keep in mind the context in which the child is raised. Each family's set of rules, way of communicating, neighborhood, history, status, and environment is unique. While there are some universals, what is considered developmentally appropriate for one culture may not be for another culture. For instance, the ways adults talk with children can vary widely depending on the culture. Some cultures rely heavily on verbal communication, while others rely more on non-verbal communication. Cultures can also vary in their norms around children's freedom to move freely around a space. Some cultures allow children to move freely, while others expect that children ask permission from an adult. Differences in these norms may mistakenly be seen as behavior issues by teachers.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is the practice of including ideas and artifacts that refer to a child's individual culture. This concept also extends to assessments. When measuring development using assessments, it is important to consider the cultural relevance of the assessment. Does the assessment allow for children who speak multiple languages or those who are not familiar with classroom materials? Imagine, for instance, that your assessment uses American football as an example. What happens when you have a child in your class who has just moved from India? Will her assessment be meaningful if she doesn't understand the rules of American football? Teachers can be mindful of such differences when assessing children. The best way to stay informed about cultural practices is to develop reciprocal communication and strong relationships with families.

NAEYC Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

NAEYC has outlined guidelines that help ECE teachers engage in developmentally appropriate practice. These guidelines are summarized below, but for a deeper look, please refer to the Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The guidelines are as follows:

1. Creating a caring community of learners
2. Engaging in reciprocal partnerships with families and fostering community connections
3. Observing, documenting, and assessing children's development and learning
4. Teaching to enhance each child's development and learning
5. Planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals
6. Demonstrating professionalism as an early childhood educator

These guidelines go beyond child development and extend to the larger context of teaching and learning in early childhood settings. Each of the six guidelines plays a role in creating a developmentally appropriate learning experience for children.

Creating a caring community of learners refers to how teachers create respectful interactions, positive relationships, and a supportive environment that focuses on the strengths that each child and family brings.

Engaging in reciprocal partnerships with families and fostering community connections refers to how teachers establish two-way communication with families that respects varying communication styles, creates multiple types of opportunities for family participation, and uses families as a source of information for each child. It is also important to consider the community to which the program belongs and develop practices that honor and respect the community.

Observing, documenting, and assessing children's development and learning are how teachers measure how children are progressing in their development. This refers to watching and systematically observing children at play, keeping track of these observations using some type of system or tool, and later using that information to draw conclusions about how a child is meeting developmental goals.

Teaching to enhance each child's development and learning means that teachers use child development principles to foster learning. One main way to achieve this is through play-based learning. It also means that teachers use direct instruction in effective ways that meet children's needs and create learning experiences that are varied in format and complexity.

Planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals refers to taking time to reflect and consider children's individual developmental goals and creating learning experiences around those goals. These goals come from the observations and assessments that have been previously carried out. Curriculum should also include all developmental domains (physical, cognitive, emotional, and social) and learning content areas (art, music, math, science, and language/literacy).

Demonstrating professionalism as an early childhood educator is achieved in many ways. One way to demonstrate professionalism is to follow the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators from NAEYC.

Pause to Reflect

Imagine you are the teacher in a classroom of two- and three-year-olds. What developmentally appropriate considerations would you take when designing an art activity?

Final Thoughts

Understanding child development is a vital skill for all early childhood teachers. Knowing the key features of the developmental domains, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional, is a good start. Making sure that both typically developing and atypically developing children's needs are met is a requirement of good early childhood education. Implementing developmentally appropriate practice is critical to quality teaching. As with all things, understanding child development and its connection to developmentally appropriate practice takes time. It means seeking new knowledge and staying connected to the children in your care.

Attribution

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Websites You May Want to Explore Further

Developmental milestones resource: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EL_0015.pdf

Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/dap/contents

Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (NAEYC): https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/professional-standards-competencies

Talking with parents about child development: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/tipstalkingparents.pdf

Developmental screening: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html

Center for Disease Control Milestones Checklist: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/checklists/Checklists-with-Tips_Reader_508.pdf

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5.2: Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Appropriate Learning Experiences

Curriculum in Multicultural Classrooms

The term culturally responsive practices has been used to refer to the implementation of effective teaching practices in diverse early education settings. Culturally responsive practices are teaching to the individual needs of children who are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. This term implies the integration of assessment and curriculum practices: program staff must learn about the individual abilities and preferences of each of the children enrolled in their program, and then find ways to plan and implement a curriculum that is based upon each individual child's needs and interests. For example, teachers can use home visits to learn about the child, to observe ways that families interact with their child, and to begin a dialogue with families about their goals for the child.

Classroom Materials

In her 1995 book, The Right Stuff for Children Birth to 8, Martha Bronson offers detailed suggestions for selecting play materials that are safe, appropriate, and supportive of play and development. It is relevant to note here that classroom materials can potentially depict people in stereotypical ways or only contain simplified or inaccurate images of culturally diverse people. Therefore, the challenge is to provide classroom materials that reflect all children, families, and adults in the program, and to eliminate stereotypical or inaccurate materials from daily use. For example, books and dramatic play materials should reflect diversity of gender roles, racial and cultural backgrounds, special needs and abilities, and a range of occupations and ages. Books and environmental print should also represent the different languages of children in the classroom.

The challenge for programs is to establish systems and procedures that take the cultural and linguistic contexts of the children into account. Once in place, these classroom materials should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that the classrooms reflect all enrolled children without stereotyping. Programs are encouraged to seek information from families and knowledgeable members of the community for their input in equipping classrooms to reflect cultures and languages in respectful ways.

Finally, encouraging children's language and cognitive growth does not preclude the responsibility to support each child's sense of well-being, the formation of his or her identity, and feelings of security. A consensus within the research is that effective environments for children support all domains of development, and that environments associated with learning outcomes should also provide strong support for social–emotional development (Hart & Risley 1995, 1999; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin 1998).

With this in mind, the developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate environment mirrors the ideas, values, attitudes, and cultures of the children it serves (Gestwicki 1995). The following are some specific strategies suggested by Derman Sparks (1989):

Suggested Strategies

1. Use images in abundance that represent all children, families, and staff in your program.
2. Use images of children and adults from the major ethnic groups in your community, but also include ethnic groups from around the world.
3. Use images that accurately reflect people's current daily lives in the U.S. during work and recreational activities.
4. Allow outside observers to come into your classroom and offer feedback on what cultures and abilities they see represented in the classroom.
5. Review your library center to ensure it includes a wide range of languages, ethnic groups, families, and abilities.
6. Include stories and songs from other cultures.
7. Exhibit artwork—prints, sculpture, and textiles—by artists of various backgrounds

Vignette: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Song - "A Hmong New Year Song"

Setting: A preschool classroom where children come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Context: During the morning meeting, Ms. Rivera is exploring music from the cultures represented in the classroom. One of the children, Mai, recently shared that her family celebrates Hmong New Year and enjoys singing traditional Hmong songs during family gatherings and community celebrations.

Activity: Ms. Rivera gathers the children in a circle and says, "Today we're going to learn about a song that is special to Mai's family and many Hmong families. Music is one way people celebrate their culture and share traditions with others."

She displays photographs of Hmong families wearing traditional clothing at a New Year celebration. The children notice the colorful clothing and decorations.

"Mai told me that music is an important part of Hmong New Year celebrations," Ms. Rivera explains. "People use songs, dancing, and other traditions to celebrate with family and friends."

Ms. Rivera plays a recording of a simple traditional Hmong song and invites the children to listen carefully. After listening, she asks, "What did you notice about the music?"

The children respond:

- "It sounds different."
- "I heard instruments."
- "It makes me want to dance."

Mai smiles and shares, "My grandma listens to music like that at home."

Ms. Rivera thanks Mai for sharing and explains that listening to music from different cultures helps us learn about one another.

She then teaches the children a simple Hmong greeting: **"Nyob zoo" (hello).**

The children enthusiastically practice saying the phrase together.

To extend the experience, Ms. Rivera provides colorful scarves inspired by the vibrant colors often seen during Hmong cultural celebrations. The children move to the music, waving the scarves as they explore rhythm and movement.

As they dance, Ms. Rivera encourages children to think about celebrations in their own families.

"Do you have special songs or music at home?" she asks.

Children share their experiences:

- "We sing songs at church."
- "My family plays music at birthday parties."
- "My grandma sings to me."

Ms. Rivera acknowledges each child's contribution and emphasizes that music is an important part of many families' traditions.

Reflection: After the activity, Ms. Rivera invites families to share music that is meaningful to their culture or family traditions. She creates a classroom "Music Around the World" collection that includes songs, greetings, and musical traditions from the families represented in the classroom.

The children continue to learn simple greetings and songs from various cultures throughout the year, helping them build respect for diversity and appreciation for differences.

Outcome: This music experience introduces children to Hmong culture in a respectful and authentic way while promoting inclusion and cultural awareness. By incorporating a song connected to a child's family experiences and inviting all children to share their own traditions, Ms. Rivera creates a classroom community where every child feels valued and represented. The children develop an understanding that music can connect people across cultures and help preserve family traditions for future generations.

Adapted from OpenAI. (2026). *ChatGPT* [Large language model].

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5.3: Age and Individually Appropriate Learning Experiences

Age and Individual Appropriate Learning Experiences

1. **Age-Appropriateness:** Teachers will use what is known about child development and learning. Remember, not all children develop at the specific age outlined in developmental milestone charts. These guidelines are used as a general gauge to understand what typical development looks like for these ages.
2. **Individual-Appropriateness:** Teachers will use what is known about each child as an individual. Completing observations in authentic environments will allow the teacher to better understand where each child is developmentally. Teachers may also use additional information such as a child web to gain a deeper understanding of the whole child, including other influences on the child's development. Based on this information, the teacher will adjust learning activities to best support the child as an individual.

Early Learning Standards

Early Learning Standards can help teachers provide learning experiences that are age- and individual-appropriate. By knowing what children should know and be able to do at certain ages, yet understanding that all children develop at various rates, teachers can plan developmentally appropriate experiences. In Wisconsin, see the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards and the Guiding Principles.

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Reflect 5 Domains of Learning.

1. Health and Physical Development
2. Social and Emotional Development
3. Language Development and Communication
4. Approaches to Learning
5. Cognition and General Knowledge

Observing the children in our care and looking at the developmental continuum and sample behaviors in the WMELS book will help teachers to be sure they are planning learning experiences and activities that are age-appropriate, individual-appropriate, and social- and cultural-appropriate. When planning your interdisciplinary unit, be sure to plan activities to provide learning in all domains.

Classroom Examples

Example 5.3.1

Learning Experience: Exploring Colors Through Finger Painting

Age Group: 3-year-olds

Observation: Ms. Johnson notices that several children enjoy mixing materials at the sensory table and often talk about the colors they see during outdoor play.

Learning Experience: Ms. Johnson plans a finger-painting activity using primary-colored paint. Children are encouraged to explore the paint with their hands, mix colors, and talk about what they discover. She asks open-ended questions such as:

- "What happens when the red and yellow paint mix together?"
- "How does the paint feel on your fingers?"
- "Can you find a color that reminds you of something outside?"

Children are free to create their own artwork while exploring colors and textures at their own pace.

Why This Is Developmentally and Individually Appropriate:

- Matches the developmental abilities of preschool-aged children.
- Builds on children's observed interests.
- Encourages hands-on exploration and sensory learning.
- Allows for individual creativity and different skill levels.
- Focuses on the learning process rather than a specific product.

Example 5.3.1

Learning Experience: Completing a Color Worksheet

Age Group: 3-year-olds

Observation: Children have shown interest in colors and painting.

Learning Experience: The teacher distributes worksheets with written color names and requires children to match color words to pictures independently. Children are expected to sit quietly for 20 minutes and complete the worksheet correctly.

Why This Is Not Developmentally or Individually Appropriate:

- Relies on reading skills that most 3-year-olds have not yet developed.
- Does not build on children's preferred hands-on learning style.
- Requires long periods of seatwork that exceed many preschoolers' attention spans.
- Limits exploration, creativity, and active engagement.
- Focuses on a correct answer rather than the learning process.

How It Could Be Improved: The teacher could replace the worksheet with a hands-on color-mixing activity, a color scavenger hunt, or an art experience that allows children to actively explore colors through play.

Pause to Reflect

Review both examples.

Which learning experience would be more engaging for the children?

How does knowledge of child development help a teacher determine whether an activity is age-appropriate and responsive to children's individual needs?

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[1] National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009) Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8. Retrieved from https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/PSDAP.pdf

[2] Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is in the public domain

Examples adapted from Open AI: ChaptGPT, 2026

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5.4: Learning Experiences Reflecting the Teaching Cycle

Plan Your Lessons Using the Teaching Cycle

The teaching cycle involves observation and assessment. Although teachers can start at any point in the teaching cycle, in Field Experience 1, we start at the assessment portion of the teaching cycle. Teachers want to know the skill levels and interests of the children to plan their curriculum. Teachers observe and document interests and skill levels. Teachers then review their observation data to intentionally plan learning experiences that meet the developmental needs and interests of the children. Once they have planned and developed the learning experiences, they implement the activities with the children, where the teacher will assess the children's interactions and engagement of the implemented activity, and the cycle starts over. This is a continuous process with each learning activity implemented in the classroom with all children.

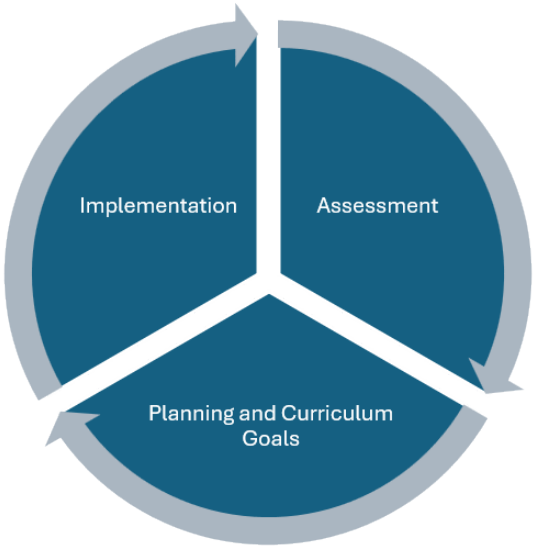


Figure 5.4.1: The Teaching Cycle

Assessment

Before starting an observation, a teacher will choose which developmental domain will be the focus of their observation. This is an essential step in the observation process because many observations can be connected to several different developmental domains.

Use the strategies in the previous chapters to observe effectively in the classroom setting. Choose an observation method that works best for you. Many teachers find it helpful to have a designated notebook or notebook to take notes throughout the day.

Once a teacher has completed observations of a child or children, they will use the program's assessment tool. Programs have a decision on what assessment tool they will use program-wide. An assessment tool will allow the teacher to compare and contrast how the child or children are developing based on typical development. Remember, WMELS is not an assessment tool; instead, it is a guide to be used in partnership with the program's assessment tool.

Development is linear, which is why using WMELs as a guide to what skills come next in development is helpful. Once a teacher understands where a child's current skills are in a specific developmental domain, they are ready to create a goal and activity to increase the child's skill set in any specific area.

Scenario: On the playground, teacher Ms. Sandy decides to take an observation of one of her students, Tamika. Ms. Sandy will observe the Healthy and Physical Development Domain.

This is what she writes:

"Tamika is picking the dandelions, but is unable to grasp the stem. She tries picking three dandelions and only gets the top yellow flower. After the three attempts, Tamika states, "Ugh! I just can't get the bottom. I want the whole flower."

SMART Goals

Creating goals for a child will include five elements: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely. These five elements will help guide a teacher to create a SMART goal.

Specific: A goal needs to be specific to a skill the child needs to work on.

Measurable: How often will you offer intentional interactions with the child to practice the skills they are working on?

Achievable: Based on the teacher's knowledge of the child. The goal must be achievable for the child to make progress on within a month. Review the history of the child if available. Have they made progress towards past goals within a month? Do additional notes include more detail on how progress towards previous goals was made with the child? Review WMEL's developmental continuum. Has the child achieved skills in the continuum prior to what you want to work on with the child? Review developmental milestones for typical development of a child of the same age. Using all of this information will help the teacher create a goal that is achievable for the child.

Relevant: Children will show interest in skills they are developmentally prepared to work on next. During observations, has the child shown interest in working on a new skill?

Timely: All goals must have an endpoint, a point where the teacher evaluates how the child has progressed or has not progressed towards their goal. In a classroom setting, many children will have many mini goals they are working towards, but the main goal should not last more than two months. If a child does not make progress towards their main goal within two months, this tells the teacher the child is not developmentally ready for the goal, and the goal is too difficult for the child. During the evaluation process, the teacher will create a new goal that is more achievable for the child. This also allows adequate time for the teacher to create goals in other developmental domains for the remainder of the year. If a child does not make progress towards their goals, the goal can be revisited at a later time or when they are more developed.

Teachers use the SMART goal template to create goals for children that are clear and specific. Teachers will use additional information, like a child web, to gain additional insight about the whole child. Teachers may also have conversations with the family to learn about what the child is learning at home, skills the family is working towards, and questions the teacher or parent has about the child's current level of development.

Scenario: Based on the Health and Physical Development observation, Ms. Sandy noticed that Tamika was showing interest in flowers. Tamika's fine motor skills were not developed enough to grasp the stem of the flower, but only the flower head when she pulled her fingers up.

SMART Goal: Tamika will be offered three fine motor activities two times a week for two weeks.

Health and Physical Development: B.EL. 2 Exhibits eye-hand coordination, strength, control, and object manipulation

Reflect and Plan

As teachers reflect on children's play, they discover possibilities for designing curriculum to sustain, extend, and help children's play become more complex and, consequently, support the children's continuing learning.[13]

Teachers ask themselves questions about what the information they have documented in observations of children says about the children's development, interests, and needs. The answers to these questions lead to individualizing care and learning. There are many questions that teachers may ask themselves. For example:

- What developmental skill or activity does the child appear to be working on?
- What strategies does the child use to play with different toys?
- Does the child engage with objects or people differently than a month ago? What has changed? What has not changed?
- Do my actions/the actions of other adults who interact with the child affect the outcomes of the child's experience? How so?
- How does the information relate to goals for the child? The family's goals? The program's school readiness goals?
- What other information do I need?
- What questions do I have for the child's family?

It is during the reflective process that interpreting the meaning of children's behaviors and interactions becomes important. These interpretations and insights give rise to each child's story. Each child's story informs responsive practice.

Teachers use what they know about each child to

- Adapt the environment
- Modify the daily schedule and/or routines
- Make decisions about how to guide the children's learning based on what the child knows and can do, as well as what the child is ready to try.[14]

That process of reflection then informs possible next steps in the curriculum. Possible steps might include adding materials to interest areas, books to read with large or small groups, activities to do in small groups, or a topic to investigate over time with the children. With clear ideas or objectives in mind, teachers plan a curriculum that includes strategies to enhance the learning of all children in a group, as well as strategies to support the learning of individual children. Here is how reflection, discussion, and planning worked in the snail exploration:

While the children were exploring snails, teachers met each week to reflect and plan for the next steps in the children's explorations. They decided to schedule time for small groups of children to explore the snails in a more focused way, hoping to extend the children's learning and add complexity. The teachers planned a series of walks that would allow all the children to find snails in natural habitats.**[15]**

Implementation

Based on the observations and creation of a SMART goal, a teacher will create an intentional learning activity to implement to support the child's development. Learning experiences can be implemented in large groups, small groups, or one-on-one. When you are ready to implement an activity, here are a few things to remember.

- Talk with the co-teacher to plan when the implementation of the activity would best fit into the daily schedule.
- Prepare the materials ahead of time
- Practice the activity without children
- Be aware of how much time you may need for the activity
- Have a backup plan just in case the activity does not work
- Be willing to adjust the activity if the child is not responding as expected
- Do not push through the activity if it is not going well. It is about the process (experience), not the product (end result)

Take notes after the activity. Reflect on what went well and areas you would adjust if you choose to implement this activity again in the future.

> **Scenario:** Ms. Sandy is planning three fine motor activities around flowers for her classroom to help Tamika build her fine motor skills.
>
> 1. Sensory bin flower building. Materials Needed: Clothes pins, small and large child tweezers, felt flowers, feathers, cotton balls, paper flowers.

2. Outdoor scissors flower cutting. Materials Needed: Special outdoor scissors. Flowers (dandelions) for the child to cut and make a small bouquet.
3. Hide & seek flower book (with tabs to open on each page). I can Grow a Flower, by DK

Implement

Once a plan is written, teachers implement it. While implementing a plan, teachers observe, reflect, and document. The curriculum-planning cycle begins again (or continues) as teachers watch to discover how children respond to the planned curriculum and how children show evidence of their development during the planned learning encounters. Teachers often approach this step with a sense of wonder, for they may be surprised and amazed by the children's responses.

To hold the responses in memory, teachers may record notes, take a photo, or label, date, and keep a work sample, all of which they can later review to assess the impact of the curriculum plans. The evidence collected will help teachers to come up with ideas for supporting and assessing the children's learning. Teachers might ponder the following questions:

- Are children responding as predicted, or were there surprises?
- What do the children's responses tell us? How might we name the children's interest(s) or intention(s)? What concepts and ideas are the children forming within their play?
- How might children who are English learners and children who speak English collaborate in small groups to learn from one another?

Putting it all Together

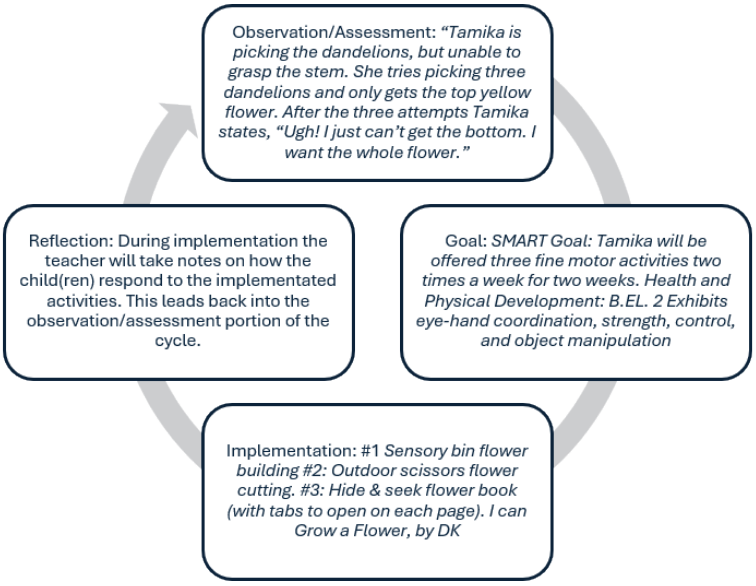


Figure 5.4.2: Observation/Assessment, Goal, Implementation, and Reflection Cycle.

Pause to Reflect

What happens when implementation goes differently than expected? What would have happened if the children had discovered and become fascinated with dandelions on their hunt for snails (and subsequently lost interest in the snails)? Does the curriculum have to go as planned? Why or why not?

References

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[3] California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1 by the California Department of Education is used with permission (pg. 19-20)

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5.5: Learning Experiences Incorporating the WMELS Framework

Identify Learning Experiences that Incorporate the WMELS Framework

The lessons in your plan should follow the WMELS Teaching Cycle (see Figure 5.5.1). Use the assessment data you collect on students in your field experience site or your workplace to plan your unit activities. Then implement the activities and assess the implementation of the activities and the unit.

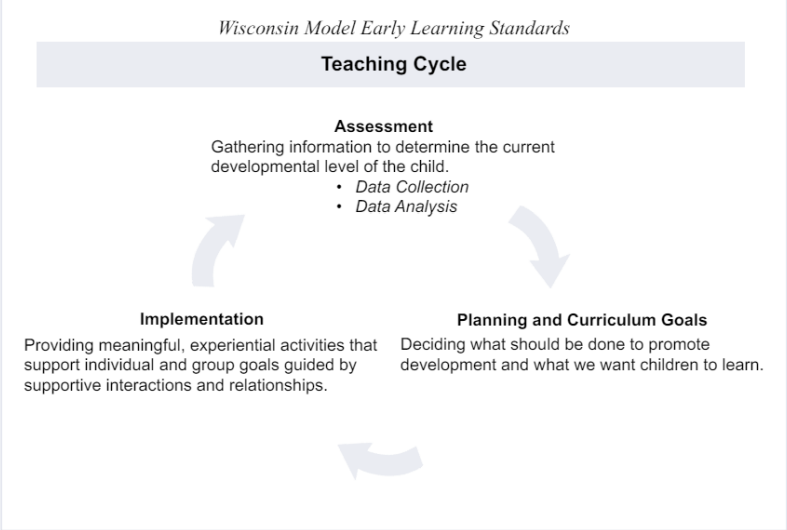


Figure 5.5.1: Teaching Cycle (Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards)

A teacher will generally have more than one child in their classroom. Taking observations, creating goals, and then implementing intentional activities for each child's needs can be overwhelming. Classrooms do not always have access to additional support staff. This can make it more challenging to find the time to create intentional activities to support each child's goals.

In practice, classrooms are often busy environments, and educators may sometimes feel pressured to create separate activities for individual learners. However, differentiation does not always require developing entirely new learning experiences. Often, meaningful support can be provided through intentional adjustments or adaptations to an existing lesson plan.

Learning Experience Plans

A complete learning experience plan consists of three key components: Introduction, Activity, and Closing the Loop. Each component serves as a valuable opportunity to engage learners through purposeful mini-lessons and activities. When designed intentionally, these elements can support a diverse range of learning needs, interests, and developmental levels while maintaining a cohesive learning experience for all children.

Many early childhood education programs use themes or units of study to guide learning experiences for children. Examples of themes may include *Fall*, *Garden Treasures*, *Bodies of Water*, *Winter Holidays*, and many others. These themes are often developed based on children's interests, observations, and experiences. By building on children's natural curiosity, educators can plan meaningful activities that deepen understanding while supporting the development of new skills and knowledge.

Using a theme or unit allows educators to intentionally connect learning opportunities throughout the classroom. Learning centers, materials, books, and activities can all be enhanced to reflect the focus of the theme, creating a rich and engaging learning environment. This integrated approach helps children make meaningful connections across different areas of learning.

Why is this important? Every activity planned within the classroom supports the development of one or more skills. As discussed in the concept of supporting the whole child, each developmental domain contributes to a child's overall growth and learning. Providing opportunities for children to practice a variety of skills throughout the day helps strengthen their abilities and expand their understanding of the world around them.

Educators also consider the diverse ways children learn. Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that children may prefer different approaches for processing and demonstrating knowledge. When educators design comprehensive learning experience plans and incorporate a variety of activities within themes or units, children are more likely to encounter learning opportunities that align with their strengths and preferences. Offering variety within the classroom promotes engagement, supports individual learning needs, and increases opportunities for success.

Example: Flower Power Learning Plan

Let's take a look at a sample of some activities a teacher may plan in their classroom.

Unit: Flower Power

Preface: A teacher has taken several observations in their classroom. There has been a lot of discussion about the flowers the children have found on nature walks while outside. The teacher is planning a month-long flower unit to help the children in their classroom learn more about flowers.

NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of activities planned in the classroom. Activities will slowly be implemented into the classroom, no more than two per day over a two-week period. The Flower Unit will last one month.

WMELS Domain Key:

1. HPD-Health & Physical Development
2. SED: Social Emotional Development
3. LDC: Language Development & Communication
4. ATL: Approaches to Learning:
5. CGK: Cognition & General Knowledge

Block Center Learning Center

Activities include:

- **Flower Puzzles:** The teacher cuts apart large flower images and tapes them on blocks.
- **Building Flowers:** The teacher will tape different parts of a flower on a variety of blocks. As children build with the blocks, they create their own unique flower.

WMELS Domains include:

- **HPD:** Children strengthen fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and visual-motor integration as they grasp, turn, and align blocks**.**
- **SED:** Children practice cooperation, sharing materials, taking turns, and experience confidence and satisfaction when completing the puzzle
- **LDC:** Children use descriptive vocabulary such as flower, stem, petals, leaf, and discuss puzzle strategies with peers and teachers.
- **ATL:** Children demonstrate persistence, attention, curiosity, problem-solving, and flexible thinking while determining how the pieces fit together.
- **CGK:** Children develop spatial awareness, matching, part-to-whole relationships, and gain knowledge about flowers and plant structures.

Dramatic Play Learning Center

Activities include:

- **Flower Shop:** The teacher will provide items often found in a flower shop. There will first be a demonstration of the roles in the flower shop. A teacher may also include a greenhouse in addition to the flower shop to show the progression of how flowers are cared for prior to cutting for bouquets.
- **Cooking with Flowers:** Children can use pretend flowers to create snacks and teas. The children can then set the table to 'enjoy' the creations they have made.

WMELS Domains include:

- **HPD:** Children develop fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination as they arrange flowers, handle play food and utensils, pour, stir, wrap bouquets, write orders, and set the table.
- **SED:** Children practice cooperation, sharing, turn-taking, empathy, and self-regulation while working together in various roles such as florist, customer, cook, host, or guest. Dramatic play also encourages confidence, independence, and positive peer interactions.
- **LDC:** Children engage in meaningful conversations, use flower- and food-related vocabulary, ask and answer questions, negotiate roles, take orders, and communicate their ideas and experiences with peers.
- **ATL:** Children demonstrate creativity, imagination, initiative, persistence, and problem-solving as they create bouquets, prepare pretend foods and drinks, organize the flower shop, and participate in open-ended dramatic play scenarios.
- **CGK:** Children build knowledge of community roles and businesses, explore counting and sorting, practice sequencing and planning, and develop an understanding of everyday experiences related to shopping, cooking, serving food, and caring for plants and flowers.

Art Learning Center

Activities include:

- **Creating your own flower:** The teacher will provide a variety of materials for children to create their own flower. Visuals of existing flowers in the community will be provided.

WMELS Domains include:

- **HPD:** Children strengthen fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and control of small muscles as they cut, glue, draw, paint, and manipulate a variety of art materials.
- **SED:** Children express their individuality, creativity, and emotions through their artwork. They build confidence and self-esteem as they make choices and share their creations with others.
- **LDC:** Children discuss the flowers they observe, describe their artwork, share ideas with peers and teachers, and expand their vocabulary related to flowers, colors, shapes, and art materials.
- **ATL:** Children demonstrate creativity, curiosity, initiative, and persistence as they explore materials, make artistic decisions, and develop unique representations of flowers.
- **CGK:** Children observe and compare characteristics of real flowers, recognize patterns, colors, shapes, and parts of flowers, and use their knowledge to create original artistic representations

Science Learning Center

Activities include:

- **Planting Flowers:** The teacher will provide soil, seeds, and a container for planting.
- **Flower Examination:** Children will use a magnifying glass to explore different parts of the flower. Images of a labeled flower will be provided with the correct titles of each of the parts.

WMELS Domains include:

- **HPD:** Children strengthen fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination as they scoop soil, plant seeds, pour water, handle gardening tools, and use magnifying glasses during investigations
- **SED:** Children build responsibility and confidence as they care for living plants, make observations, share discoveries with peers, and work cooperatively during planting and exploration activities**.**
- **LDC:** Children expand their vocabulary by learning and discussing terms such as seed, soil, roots, stem, petals, leaves, and flower. They practice communication skills as they describe observations, ask questions, and share ideas about plant growth.

- **ATL:** Children demonstrate curiosity, persistence, attention, and inquiry as they investigate flowers, observe similarities and differences, predict what will happen to planted seeds, and monitor changes over time.
- **CGK:** Children develop science process skills through observing, comparing, classifying, and investigating plant structures and life cycles. They gain knowledge about the parts of a flower and the conditions plants need to grow and thrive.

Sensory Learning Center

Activities include:

- **Flower Counting:** The teacher will provide a variety of textures, shapes, and colors of flowers along with tweezers. The children are encouraged to match the colors, build a flower, or move the parts of the flower from one side to the other.
- **Seed Sorting:** The teacher will provide a variety of seeds in an ice cube tray. The children will dump out the seeds and see if they can match them with each other, then with the appropriate flower.

WMELS Domains include:

- **HPD:** Children strengthen fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, finger strength, and grasping abilities as they use tweezers to pick up, sort, and transfer flower parts and seeds
- **SED:** Children build confidence and independence as they complete sorting and matching tasks. They also practice cooperation, sharing materials, and working alongside peers during sensory exploration.
- **LDC:** Children expand their vocabulary by discussing colors, textures, shapes, flower parts, and seed characteristics. They communicate observations, explain sorting strategies, and engage in conversations with peers and teachers.
- **ATL:** Children demonstrate curiosity, persistence, attention to detail, and problem-solving as they investigate similarities and differences among flowers and seeds. They use trial and error while sorting, matching, and creating flower designs
- **CGK:** Children develop classification, matching, counting, and comparison skills. They explore attributes such as color, size, shape, and texture while learning about flowers, seeds, and their relationships. These experiences support early math and science concepts

Literacy Learning Center

Activities include:

- **Flower Books:** A variety of flower books with various numbers of words, thickness of pages, length, and images.
- **Vocabulary Board:** A board with new and known vocabulary words. The teacher may include images or other enhancements to help children see the connections between words.

WMELS Domains include:

- **HPD:** Children develop fine motor skills and book-handling abilities as they turn pages, point to pictures and words, and interact with books of various sizes and formats. They also practice visual tracking and coordination when using the vocabulary board to locate and identify words and images
- **SED:** Children build confidence as readers and communicators while exploring books and sharing observations with peers and teachers. The vocabulary board encourages participation in conversations and fosters a sense of accomplishment as children learn and use new words.
- **LDC:** Children expand their vocabulary through exposure to flower-related words in books and on the vocabulary board. They practice listening, speaking, questioning, describing, retelling stories, and connecting printed words with pictures and real-world objects
- **ATL:** Children demonstrate curiosity, engagement, attention, and persistence as they explore books and reference the vocabulary board. They use both resources to make connections, ask questions, and deepen their understanding of flowers and nature.
- **CGK:** Children gain knowledge about flowers, plants, and the natural world through both informational and storybooks. The vocabulary board supports concept development, print awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and understanding of flower parts and plant life

Music and Movement Learning Center

Activities include:

- **5 Little Flowers Flannel Board**
- **Flower Hop:** The teacher will provide large flowers for the children to jump on during a song or rhyme

WMELS Domains include:

- **HPD:** Children develop gross motor skills, coordination, balance, body awareness, and spatial awareness as they jump, hop, move, and follow movement directions during songs and rhymes. They also strengthen fine motor skills when manipulating pieces on the flannel board
- **SED:** Children build self-confidence as they participate in group activities and demonstrate movement skills. They practice turn-taking, following group expectations, cooperating with peers, and enjoying shared musical experiences.
- **LDC:** Children strengthen listening and comprehension skills by following directions and participating in songs and rhymes. They expand their vocabulary related to flowers, numbers, positional words, and movement while engaging in discussions and musical interactions
- **ATL:** Children demonstrate curiosity, engagement, persistence, and creativity as they participate in musical activities, remember song sequences, and connect movements with words and actions. They actively explore learning through play and movement
- **CGK:** Children develop early math skills through counting, one-to-one correspondence, sequencing, and number recognition during the “5 Little Flowers” activity. They also strengthen memory, pattern recognition, and understanding of flower concepts while connecting movement to learning.

Outdoor Learning Center

Activities include:

- **Digging Up the Garden:** In preparation for planting, the garden will be worked up using small handheld tools.
- **Flower Hide and Seek:** The teacher will hide pieces of laminated flower parts around the outdoor playground. Children will go to find the parts and work together to create a team flower.

WMELS Domains include:

- **HPD:** Children develop gross motor skills, strength, coordination, and balance as they dig, carry tools, move throughout the outdoor environment, and search for flower pieces. Fine motor skills are strengthened through handling tools and assembling flower parts.
- **SED:** Children practice cooperation, teamwork, turn-taking, and problem-solving as they work together to prepare the garden and assemble a team flower. These experiences foster confidence, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment.
- **LDC:** Children engage in conversations with peers and teachers while discussing gardening tasks, giving directions, identifying flower parts, and collaborating to complete the flower puzzle. They expand vocabulary related to gardening, plants, and positional concepts
- **ATL:** Children demonstrate curiosity, persistence, initiative, and engagement as they explore the outdoor environment, search for hidden flower parts, and participate in preparing the garden for planting. They use problem-solving skills and work toward shared goals
- **CGK:** Children develop an understanding of gardening, plant growth, and the parts of a flower through hands-on experiences. They practice observation, classification, spatial awareness, and part-to-whole relationships while locating and assembling flower pieces

Example created with support from ChatGPT, 2026

Pause and Reflect

How do the planned Flower Unit activities support the diverse learning styles, interests, and developmental needs of young children?

Why is it important for early childhood teachers to introduce only one or two new activities each day? How does this support children's learning and engagement?

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5.6: Learning Experiences with Effective Transitions

Effective Transitions

Transitions take place between activities. They help keep children engaged while they are moving from one activity to another. Giving simple verbal instructions to children does not always capture their attention to keep them engaged, which can lead to undesired behaviors.

There are different types of transitions a teacher will use throughout the day.

- Gaining attention and/or interest
- Keeping children engaged during wait time
- Giving directions on what comes next or how to complete a task
- Dismissal

Types of Transitions for Your Learning Experience Plans

Gaining Attention and/or Interest

You will want to plan a transition for your introduction to your activities that will gain the children's attention and invite them to participate in an upcoming activity. Some ideas for this include songs or finger plays related to the activity, surprise boxes or bags, puppets, drawing their attention to previous learning, and helping them make a connection to the new learning that will occur in the activity.

An effective transition gains their attention and focus. It is interesting and helps the children to be excited about the upcoming activity.

This is an example of what an effective transition is **NOT.** Telling the children "Ok, we are going to read a story", or "We are going to do this activity," or "Who wants to..."

Table 5.6.1: Ways to Get Attention

Effective Way to Gain Attention	NOT an Effective Way to
Start singing a song about the unit or theme	Telling the children to com
Show pictures/images of the unit or theme you are focused on: Give two concepts about each of the images	Giving children more infor
Ask open-ended questions	Asking 'yes/no' questions,
Point to the images and ask the child questions about the images	Telling children all about tl

Dismissal Transition

Dismissal transitions take place after a large or small group activity or a one-on-one activity. The dismissal takes place after the

child(ren) participates in the activity. A dismissal transition is 'closing the loop' to the activity.

You can use this as a time to assess the level of understanding the child(ren) has had from participating in the activity.

Dismissal transitions are most effective when they connect to the theme, unit, and activity the child was working on.

Table 5.6.2: Ways to Dismiss

Effective Dismissal Transitions	NOT Effectiv
Asking a thoughtful question that relates to the activity	"Okay, thank y
Asking a question about their favorite part of the activity. Writing down each child's answer to post in the classroom	"Okay, we are

Transitions

It is important to focus on creating and managing smooth transitions between activities in the classroom. Reasons to address transitions between activities in early childhood classrooms include:

- Transitions take up a great deal of time in preschool classrooms.
- During transitions, children often spend a lot of time waiting (e.g., waiting until everyone has finished their snack, waiting for everyone to clean up before beginning large group time). All of this time waiting with nothing to do can lead to unrealistic expectations and challenging behaviors.
- Some children (and adults) have stressful and frustrating experiences during transitions between activities (e.g., children arguing over who took out what toys and who should put them away; children not knowing where to put certain toys when they are done with them; children not knowing what to do, or not knowing expectations for the transition).
- Many preschool teachers and other caregivers consider children's ability to independently make transitions between activities as one of the essential skills needed in group contexts such as preschool and kindergarten.[1]

Supporting Successful Transitions

There are numerous strategies that can be used to ensure well-organized transitions between activities. These include strategies you use before the transition, during the transition, and following the transition.

Before the Transition

- Plan your daily schedule to include the minimal number of transitions that occur over the course of the day. Minimize the number of transitions in which all children have to do the same thing at the same time (e.g., Do all children have to go to the restroom at the same time? Can some children come over to the rug and sing a song or read a book, while other children finish an activity?).
- Plan for what adults will do during transition times (e.g., which adult is responsible for greeting the children? Who will begin looking at books on the carpet with children?).
- Teach children the expectations for the transition routine. Teaching children how to clean up and how to line up will reduce the length of transition times. By reducing transition times, more time is available for children to spend in other learning activities. As children become familiar with the expectations, problem behaviors are less likely to occur.
- Provide verbal and nonverbal cues before transitions (e.g., "Five minutes 'til snack. It's almost time for clean-up," show pictures of the next activity, beat a drum). Once a transition cue has been established, the cue should be used consistently to signal the transition.

During the Transition

- Engage children in transition activities (sing songs, play word or guessing games, recite rhymes, organize finger plays). Transition activities provide children with an activity to complete while other children are still transitioning. These activities also encourage children to finish their previous task, so that they can play the game or sing the song. During these activities, skills related to the transition can also be taught (e.g., setting the table for snack or lunch, sorting toys during clean-up time).
- Allow children adequate time to finish projects or activities so they do not become frustrated by activities ending too soon. Give them a warning that it is about time to change activities.
- Plan something to engage those children who finish an activity quickly, so they are not waiting without anything to do (e.g., if some children finish cleaning up and getting to the large group quickly, they might look at books while waiting for other children to finish cleaning up).
- Individualize support to accommodate individual children's needs.
  - Photos to help anticipate what activity is next.
  - Directions given in a child's home language or sign language.
  - An individual warns a child that it will soon be time to clean up and begin a new activity.

Support May Need to be Individualized

- For example, one child may need an adult to provide a five-minute, three-minute, and one-minute warning before clean up, while the rest of the class might need only a three-minute warning.

After Transitions

- Provide positive attention and feedback to children following transitions.
  - When children pick up toys without much prompting, share with them how this shows how well they take care of the classroom materials.
  - When children are working together to accomplish the task more quickly, let them know how much you appreciate their teamwork (e.g., "Nicholas and Jorge did a great job cleaning together and moving to the carpet").

You can also work to promote independence during transitions by

- Allowing children to move individually from one area to another when they complete an activity (e.g., as children finish snack, they are encouraged to go to the carpet and choose a book; as children finish putting away their coats and backpacks, they are encouraged to get a puzzle).
- Teaching children to help others (e.g., have children move as partners from one activity to another, or ask one child to help another child gather his/her backpack).
- Helping children self-monitor during transitions (e.g., children can be asked to think about how quietly or quickly they moved from one activity to another).

The following vignette offers an opportunity to watch and listen for the learning that occurs during a transition routine and to reflect on the planning that had to occur in order for this experience to play out as it did.

Vignette

Ms. Cone had used the children's name tags in transition activities for quite some time, at first pointing out and naming the first letter in each name as she called children to go wash hands or to get their jackets before going outside. Somewhat later, she held up each of the nametags and pointed to the first letter as she asked the child to name it. Today, she is using the first sounds in names to send a few children at a time from the circle time area to wash hands for lunch: "If your name starts with /k/, you may go wash your hands. Yes, Connie and Carolina, you may go to the sink. Both of your names start with the /k/ sound." Cindy sees Connie and Carolina stand up, and she stands up too. Ms. Cone explains that Cindy begins with the /s/, not /k/ sound, and that she'll get a turn soon. Cindy says, "I'm a C too!" Ms. Cone says, "Oh, you are right. Your name begins with the letter c, like Connie and Carolina, but it starts with a different sound. We hear /k/ at the beginning of Connie and Carolina—/k/ Connie, /k/ Carolina. We hear /s/ at the beginning of your name—/s/—Cindy. I'm going to say that sound next: 'If your name starts with /s/, you may go wash your hands.'" Sabrina stood up, joined hands with Cindy, and they walked to the sink together.[2]

Built into this large-group gathering is a dismissal ritual that takes full advantage of young children's interest in their names and the names of their friends. As part of this dismissal ritual, the teacher invites children to use their emerging skills in distinguishing the distinct sounds of language, described in the language and literacy foundations as phonological awareness. She embeds this learning in the context of a game, one that inspires children to listen carefully to the sounds spoken in instructions for inviting small groups of children to wash their hands. The transition from the large group to the sink area goes much more smoothly as a result, and in the process, children get to use an important emerging skill.

References

[1] Guide to Presenting Managing the Classroom: Classroom Transitions by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is in the public domain

[2] The Integrated Nature of Learning by the California Department of Education is used with permission

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6: CAREGIVING ROUTINES AND INDIVIDUALIZE SUPPORT

6.1: Caregiving Routines Following Established Guidelines
6.2: Caregiving Routines for Individual Needs

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6.1: Caregiving Routines Following Established Guidelines

A typical day in an early learning classroom has a rhythm of ebb and flow to it that is part art and part science. Days should have routine and structure, but also have periods of time that are flexible and allow children to make choices: all sandwiched together with smooth transition times to keep the day running smoothly. A **schedule** for the classroom is the big idea of what is happening daily in the classroom environment, while a **routine** is the pattern and predictability of the day within the schedule (Ostrosky, 2007).

Scheduling

Things to consider when planning the schedule include:

- How many opportunities during the day should children engage in free-choice activities?
- When will outdoor time occur, and what do you need to consider when planning for outdoor time?
- What type of large group activities should be included for the age group you are teaching?
- When should teachers include small-group activities?
- How will transitions be managed in the environment?
- What will the routines be during the schedule?
- How is my schedule communicated to staff, children, and families?

Children need many opportunities throughout the day to engage in play and follow their interests. The most effective way to meet this need is to include free-choice time in your schedule. According to research studies, children are more involved in activities that allow them independence and the opportunity to make choices. In free-choice time, children can also be engaged in social interactions with their peers (Vitiello, 2012). A substantial part of the day should be set aside for free-choice time and can be included in both indoor and outdoor environments.

Both large and small group activities should be considered when planning your schedule. Large group activities are generally initiated by a teacher and could include instructional pieces (such as learning how to tell time, talking about the weather, counting days of the month or week), but are also opportunities to read books to the entire group, sing songs with movement, encourage children to share about themselves, and build classroom community. The amount of time spent in large group activities is very dependent on the age of the children in the environment. Small group activities can allow a teacher and child to focus on a personal goal and give children the personal attention of the teacher at that time.

Transitioning

Transitions occur during the day when children move from one area to another. For some age groups, transitions can be the most difficult part of the scheduled day. As a teacher, it is a good idea to have a plan in place to minimize the number of transitions and the stress that transitions have on both children and staff alike. Having a routine, song, or chant that signals a transition can help to keep children focused during these inevitable times during the day.

Routines

Routines are a very important part of the daily schedule. Routines can help to manage people and create a sense of comfort for children, families, and staff. Planning is a very important part of designing routines and should take into consideration the developmental needs of the children in the environment. The best routines will have clear beginnings and endings. For example, for a mealtime routine, children should know a script of expectations. It might sound like this: “I wash my hands, sit at the table, sign a rhyme with my friends, eat my food, clean up, and brush my teeth”. Having this routine that is followed consistently helps children build confidence and independence and minimizes frustrations for the teacher.

Some of the most important times of the day to have routines include arrival to the classroom as well as departure from the classroom, diapering and/or toileting times, mealtimes and snacks, cleanup, rest, or nap times. You might also consider using the same transition routines daily so that children get auditory signals about what comes next.

Communicating your schedule and routines should be clear to all staff working in the classroom, as well as the children and

families in your classroom or program. A schedule is also something that (in Washington State) is required to be posted for licensed childcare facilities. Some teachers find that posting both a printed schedule and a visual schedule is helpful for some children and can also encourage pre-literacy skills in young children.

Pause to Reflect

What are some transition ideas you have for preschoolers? Kindergarteners? School-age children?

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6.2: Caregiving Routines for Individual Needs

Through our discussion of child webs, you learned that every child develops within a unique network of relationships, experiences, environments, and influences. As you observe children in the classroom, you begin to recognize that no two children respond to routines, interactions, learning materials, or experiences in exactly the same way.

These differences are a normal part of development and highlight the importance of understanding each child's individual needs. As an early childhood educator, you will adjust your interactions, expectations, and teaching strategies based on what you learn about each child. Building positive relationships and responding to individual strengths, interests, and developmental levels helps create an inclusive environment where every child can learn, grow, and feel valued.

Let's review how different classroom activities and routines support different age groups.

Morning Routines

For Infants/Toddlers

Separation may take more time. Infants and toddlers are very connected to their parents and caregivers. The transition from parent/guardian to caregiver will take extra time; do not rush a parent or caregiver to leave their child. Take time and ask questions about the child's night, sleeping, and eating over the past 12-24 hours. Ask how you can make the transition easier for both the parent/caregiver and child. Caregivers should take the time to learn about the infant/toddlers evening, night, and morning.

Parents will be eager to share extra information about their child with you.

Throughout the day, teachers will keep the parents up to date on how their child is doing.

For Preschool Age Children

Generally, a preschool-age child's morning routine takes less time than that of an infant or toddler, but not always. Child-to-adult and adult-to-adult relationships are essential as the child makes the transition to their next environment.

Similar to infants and toddlers, the teacher should inquire about the child's last 12-24 hours. Questions can be around sleeping habits, eating, bathrooming, and other elements of a child's daily routines.

Learning about the child's time outside of the program will help the teacher prepare for a more successful day with the child.

Meals

For Infants/Toddlers

Infant and toddler mealtimes will vary based on the needs of the child. Observe the child's temperament and emotional response throughout the day. The infant and toddler will let the teacher know when they are getting hungry and ready for their next meal.

When feeding an infant or toddler, continue to observe how the child is eating or feeding. Each child has a preference for how they prefer to be fed. Asking questions of the parents during drop-off time will clue the teacher into the child's preferences.

Mealtimes are a wonderful opportunity to increase your connection with the infant or toddlers. For infants, feeding the child close to your body in a comfortable position will make their meal more enjoyable.

Talk with the parent to learn about the child's preferred position during feeding time. Ask if the child prefers to be burped after a few minutes of feeding, or once they have finished. To understand how much the child will need for a meal, talk with the parent/caregiver to learn more. In many programs, an infant will have a meal chart completed by the parent each morning during drop-off time.

Toddler meals vary depending on the age and development of the child. Some toddlers are ready to sit at the table and begin to feed themselves, while younger, less developed toddlers will have a highchair or booster. All toddlers start solid foods at different times. Talk with the parents to learn about when the child is ready to start solid foods. The teacher should not make the decision on when a toddler is ready to start solid foods; this is a parent decision. Toddlers start to have preferences in their food flavors and types. We are aware that it takes at least 9 introductions to new foods before a toddler will decide if they enjoy that specific food or not.

Some programs encourage 'try it bites'. Refrain from calling these bites 'no thank you bites'; 'no thank you' means they do not want to try it.

For Preschool Age Children

Preschool-age children's meals are generally scheduled at specific times throughout the day. In a full-day child care program, preschoolers will be offered breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack. Meals will include all required components of the CACFP meal plan.

Preschool-age children generally have preferred foods they enjoy. Some programs encourage 'try it bites'. Refrain from calling these bites 'no thank you bites'; 'no thank you' means they do not want to try it.

Mealtimes are a wonderful time to ask questions to children, learning about their likes and dislikes of food, and share rich conversations about the variety of foods offered at a program.

Diapering/Bathroom

For Infants/Toddlers

Infant diaper changing is required every two hours. Checking an infant's diaper on a regular basis (every 2 hours) is essential to an infant's health. Even if the child is dry, checking and maintaining healthy practices will help support a healthy classroom. Use proper diapering procedures for all changes. Leaving a wet or soiled diaper on a child for a longer period of time can create health risks.

Teachers should take part in caring conversations with the infant and toddler during their bathroom time. Some teachers find it helpful to have images of animals, colors, or shapes above or near their changing area. During the diapering procedure, talk with the child. Use the child's name and prepare them for what will be happening in the procedure next.

At the toddler age, some toddlers are starting to prepare for potty training. Talk with the family before you start introducing the toilet to the child. The family must be ready for this next step before you encourage the use of the toilet. Always use appropriate encouragement techniques with the child. Never force a child to try to use the toilet or place them on the toilet against their will.

Teachers find it helpful to have potty training books included in their library shelves. This makes for great daily conversation about the bathroom and toilet that are age-appropriate in preparation for the toilet training process.

For Preschool Age Children

At the preschool age level, many children are almost or fully potty trained. Some preschool-age children may still use a pull-up or diaper during rest time. Have conversations with the family about the child's current schedule.

If a child is not fully potty trained, you will want to include 'potty breaks' in your daily schedule every couple of hours. At this age, children do not always know when they need to use the restroom until it is too late.

If a child has an accident, do not use punitive language with the child. Remember, the child is still learning.

If your bathroom breaks take place after mealtime or during free play, only take a few children at a time in the restroom. This will allow you to support the child through the entire bathrooming process with healthy bathroom practices.

Using visual reminders to prompt children to the next step is a great way to connect with the child personally. This will also help the daily routine go smoothly.

Rest Time

For Infants/Toddlers

Infants and toddlers need a lot of rest; their bodies and brains are growing at such a rapid rate that rest is needed! Each infant and toddler's schedule will be different based on their needs. Listen to the infant's cues throughout the day to notice when they are hungry or tired. If you are feeding an infant and they start to fall asleep, you do not need to continue feeding the child. Following their sleeping routine and preparing them for their rest. Talk with the families about how the infant prefers to sleep. Some families use a swaddle, others use a sleep sack, and some hold their infants close and bounce them to sleep. Each individual infant will have their own routine. As you develop a closer relationship with the child, you will become familiar with their preferences.

Older toddlers will start to have a sleeping routine. At the toddler age, they will generally take one longer nap throughout the day. Note, this is not all toddlers. Pay close attention to the cues the toddler shows you. If a toddler becomes sleepy between breakfast and lunchtime, be willing to adjust your schedule to accommodate the needs of the child. Do not force the child to stay awake until the 'scheduled' rest time.

During the toddler age, children also transition from cribs to small toddler cots. Talk with the family about their preference for sleeping locations for their child.

For Preschool Age Children

At the preschool age, preschoolers generally take a rest after lunch. As preschool-age children grow, their rest time will be shorter, or some do not nap at all.

If a preschooler no longer naps, the teacher will have alternative activities for the child to do during the time when the other children are resting.

Some quiet activities include puzzles, coloring, writing, and other tabletop activities.

In some programs, children who no longer rest during the day have a separate classroom where they can continue their learning. This all depends on the program setup and staffing.

High-quality practice for rest time is to have a routine that the children can become familiar with. If rest time takes place after lunch, think about making the transition from eating to quiet activities or resting their bodies. It takes time to make this transition, be understanding of the activities you have scheduled right before lunchtime, and reflect on how long it takes to settle the body down after running, playing, and being outside.

Departure

For Infants/Toddlers

After spending a wonderful day with the infants and toddlers, it is pick-up time! Take time talking with the parents and caregivers about their child's day. Many programs use daily sheets for infants and toddlers so the family can see how their child's day went. The daily sheet will include feeding times, nap times, and all diaper changes that happened throughout the day, all with times and the initials of who helped the child with those daily events.

Check in with the family on upcoming events and other notices, and allow space for the parent/caregivers to ask questions about their child's day.

For Preschool Age Children

After spending a beautiful day with your preschoolers, it is pick-up time! Take time talking with the parents and caregivers about their child's day.

Not all preschool programs have daily sheets for preschool-age children, but some feel it is a great way to give the families an

overview of their child's day.

If you do not use daily sheets, have some type of communication with the family about their child's day.

> Parents are children's first teachers. They play an essential role in the child's growth and development. Create time and space for the families to share more information about their child and, as the teacher, share how the child's day went each and every day.

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7: LICENSING REGULATIONS AND QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

7.1: Standards of Wisconsin Licensing Regulations
7.2: Licensing Regulations in the Practicum Setting
7.3: Wisconsin Licensing Regulations

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7.1: Standards of Wisconsin Licensing Regulations

Licensing

> *"The child care licensing program is a component of the services provided by Department of Children and Families (DCF). The program is accountable for statewide licensure of Wisconsin's child care facilities, including family child care, group child care, and day camps. The purpose of the program is to promote health, safety, and welfare of children in licensed child care. The Department ensures that licensing requirements are met through ongoing inspections of child care facilities."* Wisconsin Department of Children and Families [dcf.wisconsin.gov]

The state of Wisconsin is broken down into five different regional regulation offices: Northeastern, Northern, Southeastern, Southern, and Western. The regional offices house licensors who have direct contact with the licensed child care programs in their region. Your regional office can be found at: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Licensing Contacts [dcf.wisconsin.gov]

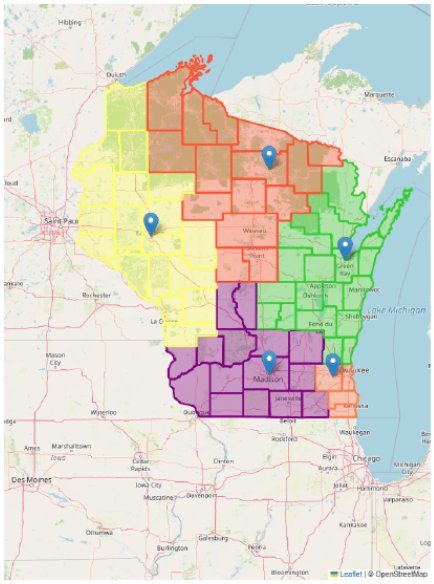


Figure 7.1.1: Map of Wisconsin Regulation Regions (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Licencing Contacts [dcf.wisconsin.gov])

State-Licensing Categories

Licensing regulations were created to set a base safety standard for regulated child care programs. DCF is the governing body of the licensing regulations and holds child care programs accountable for implementation. There are three different types of licensing regulations child care programs follow, depending upon the care they provide.

There are three different categories of state-licensed child care in Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Licensing [dcf.wisconsin.gov]).

- **Licensed Family Child Care Centers**: May provide care for between 4 and 12 children. This care is usually in the provider's home. (Effective August 1, 2026).
- **Licensed Group Child Care Centers:** May provide care for 13 or more children. These centers are usually located somewhere other than a residence and may be small or large in size. (Effective August 1, 2026).
- **Licensed Day Camps:** Seasonal programs that provide experiences for 4 or more children 3 years of age and older. These programs usually operate in an outdoor setting.

Regional licensors will make frequent visits to licensed programs to ensure the programs are following all licensing rules and regulations.

From a provider's perspective, the licensing manual can feel overwhelming at first. However, the more you use and refer to it, the more comfortable and fluent you will become. This helps you maintain a high standard of care and reduces the chances of being out of compliance during a licensing visit.

The goal is not to be perfect, but to consistently meet as many regulatory requirements as possible.

The licensing manual is organized into several categories, each with a specific rule number. This numbering system helps create clear and consistent communication between providers and licensors.

You will also notice commentary included with some regulations. This commentary is meant to clarify the intent of the rule, so be sure to use it to deepen your understanding.

During your licensing visit, if a program receives a violation, the program will either need to create a statement of compliance or create a plan of correction. Depending on the severity of the violation, the program may receive a fine or be required to close until they get their program back into compliance.

Correction plans may include continuing education for staff members, a description of how the regulation will be followed in the future (this could include adjustments made to the program handbooks), or termination of staff members. All this will vary based on the severity of the violation and the history of the program.

All licensing visits and summaries can be found on the Wisconsin Child Care Finder [childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov]. In addition to the website, programs are required to post their most recent license visit summaries on their websites.

If questions arise, providers are encouraged to contact their local licensing representative for clarification and support.

Pause to Reflect

Explore the most frequently cited rule violation: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Regulation Providers Most Cited [dcf.wisconsin.gov]

- What topic is most surprising to you?
- Choose one violation. Why do you think this regulation is cited frequently?
- How can you, as an early childhood professional, ensure that your classroom is following the regulations?

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7.2: Licensing Regulations in the Practicum Setting

One of the characteristics of a **high-quality** early childhood program is the practice of continuously monitoring children's development, along with the environmental setting and teacher interactions. By evaluating the overall performance in these key areas, teachers, administrators, and families can reflect, make necessary changes, and improvements to support all students and families. There are numerous tools on the market that evaluate program quality. For the purpose of this text, we will focus on just a few tools that are highly recognized to monitor quality practices in preschool programs.

The Environment Rating Scales (ERS)

The **Environment Rating Scale** is a standardized assessment tool that can help caregivers, teachers, and administrators improve the quality of their program. The **ERS** measures process quality.

Process quality consists of the various interactions that go on in a classroom between staff and children, staff, parents, and other adults, among the children themselves, and the interactions children have with the many materials and activities in the environment, as well as those features, such as space, schedule and materials that support these interactions. Process quality is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than structural indicators such as staff-to-child ratio, group size, cost of care, and even type of care, for example, child care center or family child care home. [11]

There are 4 Environment Rating Scales:

1. The Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scale **(ITERS**) for programs serving young learners aged 6 weeks to 30 months
2. The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (**ECERS**) for preschool programs serving children aged 3-5 years
3. The School-Age Child Environmental Rating Scale (**SACER**S) for afterschool programs serving children aged 5-12 years
4. The Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale (**FCCERS**) for family childcare programs serving children aged 6 weeks to 12 years.

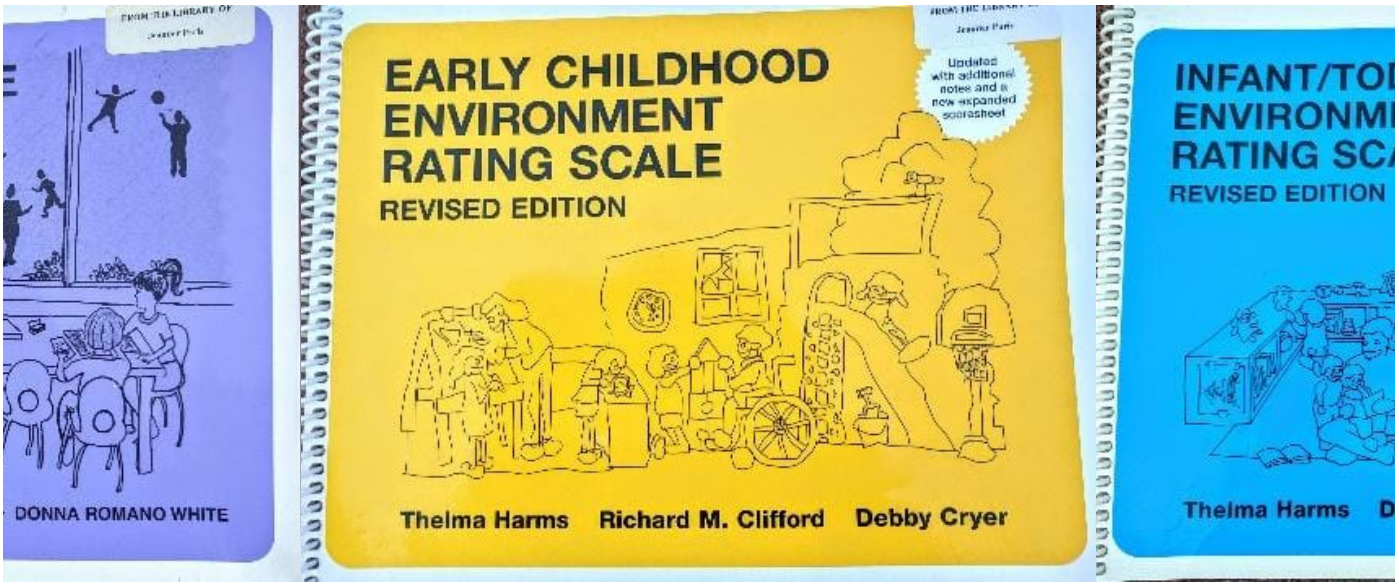


Figure 7.2.1: Rating Scale Texts [12]

Why Use Environment Rating Scales

The scales are used in a variety of ways, including for self-assessment by center staff, preparation for accreditation, and voluntary improvement efforts by licensing or other agencies. For example, in the United States:

- Several states, including California, Massachusetts, Montana, Mississippi, Kansas, Oregon, Kentucky, New Mexico, Georgia, Florida, Wisconsin, and Nebraska, have also initiated quality evaluation and improvement programs using our scales. Each state is tailoring its use of the scales to its individual needs and resources.
- The state of Arkansas has trained personnel who do assessments and provide training and technical assistance so that childcare centers and homes can increase their quality of care. Another innovative feature of the Arkansas program is that parents who select childcare facilities with an average of 4.5 or higher on our scales are eligible for two times the state childcare tax exemption. Thus, both parents and providers are being rewarded for quality improvements that benefit the children.
- The state of Colorado uses the scales in a variety of program improvement and evaluation projects. For example, Denver has a quality improvement program that uses on-site consultation and training based on scale scores. Many of the centers participating in this program serve poor and minority children and their families. The state of Colorado is currently considering a tiered reimbursement system using the scales.
- North Carolina also currently uses scale scores as part of their 5-star rated license system. Centers and family childcare homes are awarded either one or two stars based on compliance with licensing standards. Programs may voluntarily apply for an additional three stars based on a set of quality measures, including the licensing compliance record, teacher and director education, and the levels of process quality as measured by the appropriate environmental scale. Only the lowest level of licensing is mandatory. However, an additional fee is paid to the provider of subsidized care for each additional star earned voluntarily.
- The Oklahoma 3-star tiered license incorporates an evaluation with the scales in the second tier as a basis for quality improvement and provides technical assistance based on scores for meeting accreditation standards. Tiered reimbursement is a part of this system.
- Tennessee is now initiating a rated license system, based on North Carolina's experience. In their system, however, program evaluation is not voluntary, but is required yearly to create a "Report Card" that must be posted with the license so childcare consumers have access to reliable information on the quality of childcare they are using for their children. Tiered reimbursement will also be tied to scores on the scale.
- All the US military services have been using the scales routinely in their center and family childcare homes for program improvement and monitoring. The military child development system was recognized by Executive Order in 1998 for its high quality.
- Our environmental rating scales are widely used by programs as they prepare for accreditation. This is due to the fact that our scales use a format with detailed levels of quality that provides a blueprint for gradual change. The content of our scales is completely supportive of the various credentialing and accreditation programs.

The ERS Tool

As suggested by ERS, in order to provide high-quality care and education experiences to all children and their families, a childcare program must provide for the three basic needs all children have:

- Protection of their health and safety
- Building positive relationships
- Opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience

Let’s take a closer look at how to use the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-3) for preschool programs serving children aged 3-5 years.

The Scale consists of 35 items organized into 6 subscales: [13]

- Space and Furnishings
- Personal Care Routines
- Language and Literacy
- Learning Activities
- Interaction
- Program Structure

Within each subscale, there are indicators that are arranged in a hierarchical order, with basic needs at low levels and the more educational and interactional aspects at higher levels. The requirements for each indicator must be met before the next indicator is measured. If a requirement is not met, scoring then comes to a stop.

Scoring:

- 1 = inadequate
- 3 = minimal
- 5 = good
- 7 = excellent

Empirical Research

Empirical studies using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R) tool have generally found positive associations between the quality of early childhood programs and child development.

The ECERS-R (1998) is the revised edition of the original ECERS (1980). It is currently being used in several major studies, including the Early Head Start Study (Mathematica Corporation) and Welfare, Children and Families: A Three-City Study (Columbia University, University of Chicago, and Harvard University). The original ECERS was used in the Head Start FACES study, in which over 400 classrooms were included nationwide. The preliminary results in all these studies show that the ECERS and the ECERS-R are performing very well.

Additionally, it should be noted that the ECERS and ITERS were used as the comprehensive quality measures in the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989) and the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study (1995), the major studies of their time. The FDCRS was used in the Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, & Shinn, 1994). In all of these studies, a relationship was found between higher scores on the ECERS and more positive child development outcomes in areas that are considered important for later school success. The effects of higher quality early childhood experiences have now been shown to last at least through the second grade of elementary school (Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustici, & Zelazo, 1999). Research is continuing to evaluate longer-lasting effects. [14]

ERS Strengths

The instrument has good test-retest reliability, high inter-rater reliability (Clifford et al., 2010), and many studies have demonstrated its predictive validity (Burchinal et al., 2008; Montes et al., 2005; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Furthermore, the results show that ECERS-R is a significant predictor of child development in two domains: physical health and well-being and social competence.

ERS Limitation

While the ECERS-R is a useful tool to measure the quality of early childhood programs across various settings, there are some limitations. Because the Environmental Rating Scales were developed in the United States, the relevance to non-American cultural settings has been questioned (Dickinson,2006; Mathers, Singler,& Karemaker, 2012). Some have criticized that the ITERS-R scale places too much emphasis on the structural aspects of childcare (Sanders & Howes, 2013; Vermeer et al., 2008, while others are concerned that the Rating Scales fail to measure the interactions between the teacher and children and families, which is considered to be key quality factors in childcare (Bisceglia, Perlman, Schaack,& Jenkins, 2009; Helmerhorst et al., 2014).

Although the Environment Rating Scales are highly regarded, there has also been some considerable criticism. For example, a closer look at the items in the ECERS-R reveals that some items may be less relevant than others in our study's setting—poor, rural villages in Indonesia. Item 27 outlines the provision of TV, video, or computers for classroom activities. Item 3 describes the provision of soft furnishings such as carpeted spaces and cushions for children's relaxation and comfort. While all of these provisions would be great to have, they are often unfeasible in rural, resource-constrained environments. In over 3 weeks of field observation, we rarely saw soft furnishings—sitting on the floor for children and adults alike is the norm in rural Indonesia, even when soft furnishings are available. We did encounter one center with a computer lab during piloting of the ECERS-R, but this was a state-of- the-art center where not one but three international donors had channeled funding. [15]

ECERS FAQ Find:

- When was the first ECERS tool published?
- Who typically uses the ECERS tool?
- Who administers the assessment tool?

- How can teachers prepare for an assessment?
- When was the last time the ECERS tool was updated?
- How many measures are there in the ECERS?

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

Research shows that all children benefit from high-quality instruction and classroom interactions, regardless of language status, race/ethnicity, or special needs (August & Shanahan, 2006; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). When teachers provide individualized support and guidance to the children in their classrooms, they contribute to each child's social and emotional development, which has been linked to their overall physical development and academic achievement. The CLASS tool showcases various strategies that teachers can implement to promote quality interactions. It is important to note that CLASS does not favor any curriculum model over another.

The CLASS tool differs from other measurement tools that may address the content of the physical environment, available materials, or a specific curriculum. Although the physical environment, materials, and curriculum are important, the CLASS tool focuses more on the context of how teachers directly interact, engage, and communicate with the children in their classroom environment. CLASS measures cooperative and creative learning experiences and focuses on the teacher's role in allowing children to be active participants in their own learning. More specifically, CLASS promotes social justice and equity and has "indicators" to assess how a teacher develops a sense of community and empathy for others. Not only must the teacher consider the tangible environmental elements, but they must also consciously incorporate quality interactions. Teachers must ask questions and engage in thoughtful conversations that emphasize back-and-forth dialogue rather than one-and-done responses. Teachers must extend the children's vocabulary and create opportunities where children can use their expressive language skills. Lastly, teachers must provide positive feedback to children throughout the day and allow children to make choices.

Why Use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)?

As advocates and educators, we know that engaging interactions and well-designed environments form the foundation for optimal learning to occur. High-quality preschool programs should strive to incorporate the following:

- Well-managed and well-organized classrooms with clearly defined spaces
- Support systems to enhance children's social and emotional development
- A variety of instructional materials that stimulate children's thinking and curiosity
- Opportunities for authentic interactions and meaningful conversations
- A balance of teacher-directed activities and child-directed activities
- Enhanced language and literacy are implemented throughout the day
- Opportunities for movement and classroom spaces that support kinesthetic learning

Research findings from over 3,000 classrooms found that children who were in classrooms that received higher CLASS ratings showed greater gains in social skills, language, early literacy, and math development. Furthermore, after a decade of research, crucial conclusions were made that suggest using the CLASS tool can not only improve the effectiveness of an individual classroom, but it can also improve the program as well. Let's look at some reasons as to why you might want to use the CLASS tool:

1. Effective teacher–child interactions are an active and crucial ingredient for children's social and academic development.
2. Children in ECE settings are not consistently exposed to effective teacher–child interactions.
3. Initial evidence suggests thresholds for effective teacher–child interactions, as measured by CLASS, in promoting children's learning and development.
4. Quality improvement efforts that focus explicitly on teacher–child interactions maximize impacts for children.
5. Carefully designed and implemented professional development support can improve the quality of teacher–child interactions

The CLASS Tool

The CLASS Tool is divided into 3 Domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Each Domain has several Dimensions (see the chart below), and each Dimension has several Indicators that provide detailed descriptors of how a teacher should interact (Note: the indicators for each dimension are not listed in the chart below.)

Table 7.2.1: CLASS Tool Domains

Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support
1. Positive Climate 2. Negative Climate 3. Teacher Sensitivity 4. Regard for Student Perspective	1. Behavior Management 2. Productivity 3. Instructional Learning Formats	1. Concept Development 2. Quality of Feedback 3. Language Modeling 4. Literacy (optional)

Scoring

Scoring is based on a 7-point scale, with the "low range" being a score of 1 to 2, the "middle range" a score of 3 to 5, and the "high range" a score of 6 to 7. The higher the range in each dimension, the better.

CLASS Strengths

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool is a systematic observation tool that can be used to measure the interactions between teachers and their children in typical classroom settings. The CLASS tool has also been used to assess classroom quality across diverse populations, including dual language learners (DLLs), children from migrant families, tribal populations, in addition to children with special needs and children with diverse cultural backgrounds (Downer et al., 2011). The CLASS tool is deemed both reliable and valid, and it provides preschool programs and individual classroom teachers with an opportunity to regularly monitor and evaluate themselves.

Formal assessments can be made by certified CLASS evaluators, and the results are shared with the teacher and program with the intent of finding strategies on how to improve interactions. The tool can also be used informally. Teachers can review each domain, dimension, and indicator, and then reflect on their own practices to find ways they can incorporate more intentional interactions.

CLASS Limitations

Even though every CLASS observer is formally certified, there will be small, systematic differences in their scoring. Some observers may tend to give slightly higher scores, while others may tend to be slightly more critical. Although slight differences fall within the threshold for "reliability," inaccurate results have been noted. One other limitation is that there is little emphasis on structural quality. More specifically, CLASS does not assess the physical environment or materials, and it is not designed to review program safety.

Additional Methods, Tools, and Techniques to Ensure High-Quality Practices

Program Accreditation

Both the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (link: https://www.naeyc.org/) and the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA) [16] (link: https://www.naeyc.org/accreditation) are nationally recognized agencies that set a standard of excellence for overall program quality. Programs that pursue accreditation must meet key criteria expectations in areas such as "the learning environment, teacher and child interactions, staff qualifications, professional development, and family engagement" (Center for America, 2017, p. 6). Both NAEYC and NECPA offer training, technical assistance, and consulting services to support early care and education programs that not only want to meet but also exceed standard industry practices. Accreditation is a voluntary endeavor that requires programs to undergo a self-study as they prepare for the validation process. Programs that achieve accreditation status must be re-assessed every three years to demonstrate a continued commitment to high-quality practices.

The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and school-age care programs. [17] The main purpose of the QRIS is to improve and standardize the quality of care in all facilities in the state and to make childcare more accessible and affordable for families. In Wisconsin, the QRIS used is YoungStar. Quality rating systems can:

- Assess program quality comparably across provider types (publicly and privately funded, centers, and family childcare homes) throughout the state
- Align program standards with early learning and practitioner standards
- Support continuous quality improvement for participating programs and their staff
- Provide families with information about program quality to assist them in making informed choices. [18]

The Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS)

In the late 80's, Arnett released the Caregiver Interaction Scale (1989) to assess a global rating of caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness in both early care and education settings and family childcare environments. The tool focuses on caregiver/teacher emotional interactions and measures several items, including sensitivity, harshness, detachment, and permissiveness. Items are rated on a 4-point scale. The scale has limitations as it captures only one aspect of process quality, and thus, it is suggested that additional assessments be used to measure more structural dimensions.

NAEYC Position Statement on the Importance of Environmental Assessments

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education take the position that policy-makers, the early childhood profession, and other stakeholders in young children's lives have a shared responsibility to:

- Construct comprehensive systems of curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation guided by sound early childhood practices, effective early learning standards and program standards, and a set of core principles and values: belief in civic and democratic values; commitment to ethical behavior on behalf of children; use of important goals as guides to action; coordinated systems; support for children as individuals and members of families, cultures, and communities; partnerships with families; respect for evidence; and shared accountability.
- Implement a curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.
- Make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by Professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.
- Regularly engage in program evaluation guided by program goals and using varied, appropriate, conceptually and technically sound evidence to determine the extent to which programs meet the expected standards of quality and to examine intended as well as unintended results.
- Provide the support, Professional development, and other resources to allow staff in early childhood programs to implement high-quality curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation practices and to connect those practices with well-defined early learning standards and program standards. [19]

Indoor Learning Environments

The indoor learning environment teachers establish should reflect the teachers' thoughts about children and how they will learn and play in the environment, as well as reflect the values of the program and the community. In addition, children should see *themselves* reflected in the environment. Do they see pictures of their families, books with children that look like them, places to feel safe, and places they can explore and be loud? The more a child has ownership of the environment, the more they will value and respect the space. It should be their class/space as much as it is the teacher's. This section will discuss components of the

indoor learning environment.

Jim Greenman (2005) has written that there are nine aspects of a good early childhood learning environment. They are places:

- To live where children feel welcomed, competent, and relaxed with a sense of familiarity and order,
- Of beauty that engages all of the senses
- That promote strong, diverse families
- With spaces for gathering and ways to see from place to place in the program
- With spaces for working independently and with others
- For exploration and discovery indoors and out, with room to move
- That develops responsibility, compassion, and community by giving children access to resources and encouraging them to work together
- To connect to the natural world, the larger community, and the world beyond, and
- For staff to learn and work with space, internet access, professional journals, and books.

This first section will discuss components of the indoor learning environment.

Activity Zones

An activity zone, sometimes also referred to as learning centers or interest areas, is an area within a learning environment with a targeted activity purpose. Typical activity zones might include art, blocks, dramatic play, math (manipulative, table toys), sensory, science, language arts (literacy), and library (quiet corner, books). Activity areas should be open to children during free choice time during the day or whenever a teacher designates time for specific small group activities. Sometimes children will explore an activity zone on their own or in small groups. Sometimes children will need the scaffolding of a teacher or peers to extend their learning. These areas should be equipped with items that support children's natural tendency to play and learn in an experiential manner and should always take into consideration developmental appropriateness for the children in the classroom.

When children are engaged in free choice play throughout the day in activity areas, these are opportunities for teachers to conduct observations and assessments of children in authentic ways. This also provides teachers with the opportunity to plan curriculum and meaningful activities for the daily schedule.

Some of the more common activity zones found in early learning environments include:

Art

Encouraging children's creative thinking is essential throughout the early years. Art is also a tool for thinking and inquiry, allowing children to make their theories and ideas visible, take new perspectives, represent, and explore emotions, and to study the properties of the physical world. Art is open-ended, child-directed, and process-oriented. Art is not a craft, product-oriented, with a correct way of making something, or step-by-step directions. Materials may include different kinds of paint, paint brushes, easels, collage materials, scissors, clay and playdough, colored paper, magazines, popsicle sticks, cotton balls, and a large selection of loose parts. The area is best supported with plenty of light, close to hand-washing sinks, and easy-to-clean floors. Art zones can help children develop coordination and fine motor skills, which are needed for emergent writing.

Blocks

Blocks are wonderful open-ended learning materials with no closely defined boundaries, no right or wrong way to represent children's ideas. Many skills and concepts are developed and enhanced through block play. Children think critically, explore, manipulate, experiment, represent, problem-solve, and make decisions in the block area. The block area is best in an area of the room where the noise level is increased and away from traffic, so structures are not disturbed. This area can include wooden, cardboard, or foam blocks as well as small figures and architectural items that will promote creative building. This is where children can learn about sizes and shapes, spatial relationships, and math concepts, as well as learn how to make decisions and solve problems.

Dramatic Play

In this area, children's thoughts become visible through play. Children may operate at more advanced cognitive levels than they

do in non-pretend situations, including staying on task for extended lengths of time. Is not just an activity, but an expression of thinking. This area provides opportunities for children to pretend and use their imagination, role-play, and act out real and imaginary experiences in a playful context. Although “housekeeping” is a common theme for the dramatic play area, other themes can be explored in this area, such as grocery stores, doctor offices, restaurants, veterinary clinics, and more. Through this type of play, children will practice social skills, learn to solve problems, and work cooperatively.

Language Arts (Literacy)

Literacy skills are critical in laying the foundation for current and future success in oral and written language. Literacy skills often play a crucial role in learning content in other areas. The space should be well-lit and clearly defined. Comfortable seating and tables with plenty of paper and writing utensils. Puppets and props are also ideal for this area. Many teachers choose to create unique writing centers in literacy areas where children can explore print materials as well as create their own.

Library (Quiet Corner, Books)

Library areas support children in a lifelong habit that promotes literacy and a love for the written word. The space should be a comfortable area where children are encouraged to read books. Create an enticing area that is well-stocked with a variety of books that support diversity, culture, and life. Literacy and the library can be next to each other, but should be separate areas. It is best not to have distractions when children want to read alone. Through the literacy and library activity zones in the classroom, children will begin to recognize the connection between spoken language and the written word.

Math (Manipulative, Table Toys)

This space can also be referred to as manipulatives or table toys. The ideal location has accessible materials, shelves near tables, in a medium-traffic area. As the adult, step back and let the child direct. While observing play in this area, assess the level of items used, self-control, perseverance, pride, creativity, classification, number concepts, emergent reading, fine/gross motor, eye-hand coordination, visual discrimination, and refined sense of touch. You will want to rotate toys often and keep the area organized.

Music and Movement

Help children synthesize experiences, transition into new activities, calm down, share culture, build self-esteem, and build a sense of community. There are also academic benefits to music and movement, like boosting memory, improving spatial perception, and cognitive development. For setting up the music and movement area, the location should be away from quiet areas, and it is best to alleviate the clutter so children have space to move. Include a variety of authentic instruments, and this is the perfect time to introduce a variety of music to children.

Sensory

When children are engaged in sensory-related activities, they are,

- Developing **questions** throughout the sensory experience.
- **Investigating** - by grabbing, smelling, rubbing, staring, licking, and so on
- They are collecting **data** through their senses.
- Learning to **communicate** their findings.
- Participating in a valid exercise in scientific **inquiry.**

It is important to remember that sensory activities should include more than a sand and water table. After all, there are 5 senses that should be supported. This is where life can get messy (but not always), relax, and have fun!

When it comes to the sensory environment, there are a few critical elements to think about. Make sure sensory tables are by a sink: for best hygiene practices, children should wash before and after interacting with materials in the sensory table. Depending on what is included in the sensory area, an easy-to-clean floor is best. However, if the floor is not easy to clean, having access to a tarp that can be placed on the floor will also work. Watch for allergies and other hazards. These can include scent jars or items in sensory that trigger allergies, items that are small and pose a choking risk, or even whisper tubes used improperly, which can hurt ears.

Water tables are great areas to learn scientific concepts, such as “will it sink, or will it float?” as well as mathematical concepts through the use of measuring cups, funnels, tubes, or shovels. The water in the water tables should be cleaned out daily or more often if needed.

Science

Children are scientists who are naturally curious and biologically primed to learn about the world around them. They use information they gain through their everyday experiences to develop theories about how the world works. The science area should support “what if” statements, be enticing and inviting, and have adequate workspace. The area is best in a quiet area of the class that is uninterrupted, so children can work and concentrate. This is a good place to include natural elements such as leaves, sticks, rocks, pinecones, magnets, kaleidoscopes, oil and water bottles, seashells, magnifying glasses, flashlights, and color wheels to pique children’s interests.

Room Arrangement

The design and layout of the indoor environment can have an impact on children’s learning and behavior and on the teacher’s ability to do their job effectively. Good indoor environments support children’s interactions with good organization around space, materials, and people. When a classroom is set up properly, children have the freedom to move around safely, engage in activity zones, and learn to manage their peer relationships. These environments should also help both children and adults feel invited and welcomed.

Each space within a classroom should be defined, and **boundaries** made clear. In addition, the children need to be visible to the teacher at all times. Thoughtful room arrangement helps to keep order in the space, reduces the possibility of crowding in any given area, and can support children in their decision-making. This can be achieved by using existing walls or furniture, like toy shelves. Even an area rug or a cloth draped from the ceiling can give the illusion of separation. Figure 7.2.6 illustrates two examples of room arrangement. The first image shows a classroom with less defined space for activity zones, while the second image shows how a classroom can look when a teacher uses furniture to define a space.

Designating spaces where children can have quiet play, such as puzzles or books, can be made cozy with carpet or pillows that absorb sound. More active areas can be arranged that allow for more movement and give children the behavioral cues that louder, more active play can take place in that area. Furnishings can also be used to guide movement patterns throughout the room.

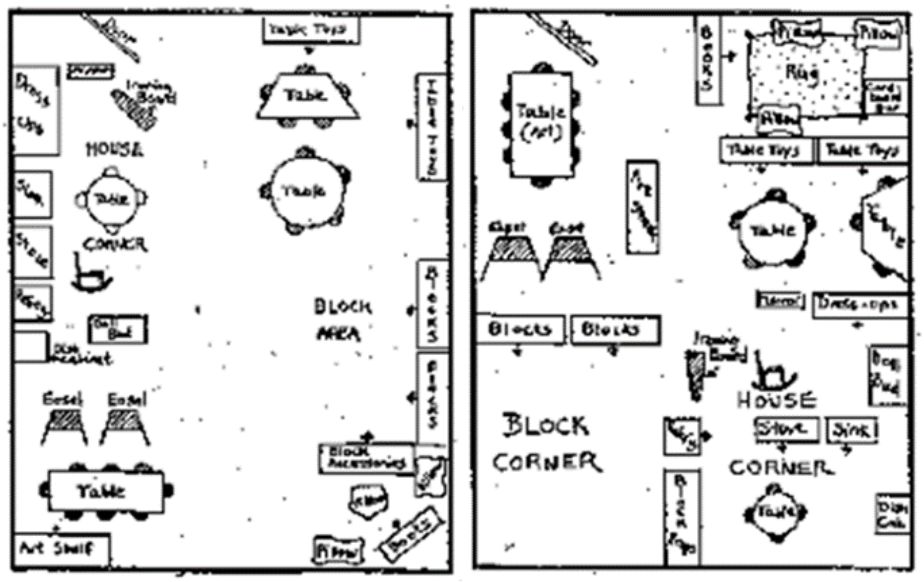


Figure 7.2.6 Drawing of undefined and defined space Photo by S.Leek is licensed under CC by 1.0

Impact of Color and Plastic in a Classroom

Small changes to an environment can make a big impact. For example, think about the use of color in a classroom and the use of

plastic. Oftentimes, when people think of a classroom space for children, they think of bright, bold colors. However, these are not the ideal colors for an early learning space. Color impacts the brain and can trigger a chemical response. For example, shades of red may trigger excitement, resulting in behavior perceived as hyperactive or even angry. Shades of yellow trigger hunger. Many fast-food restaurants select these colors for logos or building colors to make one believe they are hungry and excited to eat. Using yellow heavily in a toddler room can leave a teacher with fussy, emotional children because their brains are telling them they are hungry. Shades of blue can be a depressant. This is not an ideal classroom color, especially if any of the children have experienced trauma. Ideally, colors should be within the green, brown, and grey color families. These colors ground children and help them feel grounded in the world.

Plastic, often heavily used in early learning environments, can also have an adverse effect on behavior. It can be substituted with wicker baskets and other more natural containers to hold toys and materials. Every person absorbs and expels energy. Depending on the space, this exchange is done without a person knowing. We often have things in our space that we are naturally drawn to that help with the absorption of energy. These items are made of natural materials like glass, wood, cotton, and rock, to name a few. However, if we fill children's classrooms with material that will not absorb their natural energy, such as plastic, the result can be a room that feels electrified. The effort adults may spend to focus on children and get them engaged can be futile. Simple changes like using baskets to hold toys, adding rugs, a plant, or wooden frames and adding other natural elements will not only have a positive impact on behavior. It will be far more aesthetically pleasing as well. If you work in a program that tends to use a lot of plastic, look for ways you can balance that with some of the items listed in this section. If that is not possible, providing more frequent or longer periods of outside time will also be beneficial.

Selection and Placement of Materials

Part of the physical environment takes into consideration the selection and placement of materials. Having already discussed the overuse of plastics in classrooms, it is important to note that materials that are selected for classroom environments need to be developmentally appropriate as well as culturally relevant for the age of children using the classroom.

Teachers also need to keep in mind how the materials will be organized and accessed by the children. Keep in mind these tips when choosing appropriate materials for early learning classrooms:

- Organizing the materials should take into consideration the independent abilities of the children in the classroom.
- Keep appropriate materials in appropriate places (art materials in the art center, books in the library), but allow for the crossing of materials during play from one center into another.
- Provide enough materials for all children to be engaged in the activity.
- Place heavy items on lower shelves.
- Rotate materials to promote children's interests.
- Make sure to have personal storage areas (such as cubbies) for both children and teachers.

It is a basic practice in early learning that when a material is broken, missing pieces, or is otherwise worn out, it is a good idea to eliminate those materials from the environment. In addition, all materials need to be clean and sanitized following licensing guidelines.

Labeling shelves with print and pictures where materials are to be placed will help children to become more self-sufficient and build print awareness. Some teachers will use color coding of materials to keep them organized.

Pause to Reflect

Looking at the image above, how could you remove the plastics and reorganize the materials into more natural-based storage materials?

Environmental Aesthetics

When creating an early learning space that will foster learning, inspire creativity, and support social relationships, a professional will need to consider environmental characteristics such as lighting, color, crowding, noise levels, clutter, and more. When designing a space—any space- creating an attractive and pleasing environment includes thinking about the **aesthetics** of the space.

Creating supportive early learning environments is an art and a science and can seem overwhelming at times. Setting goals to make physical changes to the environment is helpful, but these can be costly. Setting small goals will bring positive change to the space over time.

Alleviating clutter is one goal that will make a huge impact on the environment, the teacher, and children who share the space. Clutter can distract from even the most attractive spaces. Clutter usually happens slowly and stems from:

- Undefined space for where items belong
- Taking time to put things in their place
- Lack of sufficient organization

A poorly organized space with too much clutter will prevent a classroom from functioning effectively. The best way to assess the level of clutter is to take pictures of the space while standing, sitting in a child's chair, and sitting on the floor. If you do not want to show a parent or coworker the photo because of materials not put away properly or a stack of papers needing your attention, then you have a clutter issue to address.

Two other environmental characteristics that should not be overlooked are the impact of crowding and noise. Both have a significant influence on stress levels and learning opportunities. Sometimes less in a space is best. Fewer items keep children from being overwhelmed by the many choices, and there is a clear purpose for what is available to them. However, when limiting items in an activity area, it is best to swap out the items often so children have access to new educational experiences. If items remain the same and children are not engaged in what is offered, behavior issues will soon arise. Noise is also often a distraction and can be improved by adding rugs, hanging tapestries, or noise-absorbing enhancements to the walls, and by the placement of the activity centers.

Lighting is something to consider when creating an early learning space. Ideally, lots of natural light is preferred. When additional light is needed, lamps, string lights, or similar are advised. The large fluorescent lighting, often found in early childhood spaces, interacts with the brain and can cause problems like headaches and irritability.

Children are more likely to feel they can be themselves when their classroom environment feels home-like. Soft furnishings, nontoxic plants, natural or soft lighting, decorative touches such as area rugs, family photos of children and staff, and neutral paint colors help to create a space that everyone in the environment can enjoy.

Pause to Reflect

What would you include in the various activity areas to spark interest and curiosity?

How can clutter be addressed in a space?

Outdoor Learning Environments

Children can have rich experiences in a thoughtful outdoor setting. No matter if the child is attending a large center or a family home setting, the outdoor environment should be responsive to each child’s interests and needs. The natural environment is unique in its ability to respond to the depth with which children engage. The outdoor environment should offer exploration as well as meet the physical needs of children. Often, teachers think of a child’s physical development and how to get them moving outdoors; however, children can also learn a great deal from a robust outdoor environment. Concepts learned outdoors include physics, biology, botany, and geology. Nevertheless, these are just the starting points for the enormous learning potential of the outdoor environment. As the adult in the space, be observant, engage, and play along with children, relax, and educate families on the benefits. One of the biggest stressors in a teacher’s day is outdoor play, and not from the environment itself, but from parents not wanting children to be dirty, wet, or sick. As I always explained to parents, the nice thing about children is that they are washable. If clothing was an issue, I offered changes of clothes that children could change into before going outside. Lastly, viruses and bacterial germs are what make us sick, not rain. If rain made us sick, no one would ever bathe. Additionally, the more children play outdoors, the healthier they are; the germs that make us sick are not as concentrated as they are when we are indoors. In other words, get children outside!

Outdoor Activity Zones

Just like indoor environments have activity zones, outdoor environments have zones with distinct purposes for outdoor play.

Transition Zone: The transition zone is the area where children enter and exit the outdoor space. This allows children to see what is available to them in the space and begin to make choices about where they would like to play. This should also be an area where children can safely wait for the teacher or gather as a group.

Active Play Zone: This is a space that allows children to run, jump, skip, throw balls, and ride or pull wheeled toys and tricycles. This might also include big grassy areas if possible, and equipment for sliding and swinging. Many places allow for climbing structures, tunnels, and ramps.

Natural Elements Zone: This area includes plants, dirt, rocks, trees, grass, and water. You could also provide mud, dirt, and sand for digging. Some centers might also include garden areas, and this is the ideal place to put up a bird feeder for observation.

Creative Zone: This area is a place for children to create messy art that you may not want to do in the indoor environment, or a place for children to gather to complete puzzles or use tabletop activities like puzzles, games, or books.

Social/Dramatic Zone: This area gives children the opportunity to practice social and dramatic play and can include props. This area outdoors might also include stages or playhouses.

Materials for Outdoor Environments

Everything that is included in an indoor environment can also be included in an outdoor environment. Books can be brought out and space provided for sitting and reading in the fresh air, materials to enhance and support large motor movement, and elements that encourage learning, like magnifying glasses, pulleys, ramps, and materials that are for balance, push, pull, and ride.

Additional items to include in an outdoor learning environment are materials for:

- **Art:** Art outside can be messy and spacious, like marble painting in a small pool with golf balls, or finger painting on the windows. Water spray bottles can create art projects.
- **Gardening:** A tool for planting, maintaining, and caring for the garden area. Children are often more likely to try or eat healthy food they have grown.
- **Woodworking:** While woodworking can be scary for some teachers, the value of including woodworking in a space is too valuable not to consider.
- Music with unconventional items, such as hanging pots and pans on a lower fence, can give toddlers some music time—just at the right height.
- Bubbles are perfect for outdoors!

The Role of Licensing in Environments

The role of licensing is to ensure health and safety measures are in place and are followed. This does not mean we do not allow children much-needed outdoor time, or that when we do provide outdoor time, we limit their activity. This is the time for children to expel all their pent-up energy, breathe deeply, and engage their large muscles. The Washington Administrative Code (WAC) does have requirements for outdoor spaces. WAC 110-300-0145 outlines 12 outdoor licensing rules, including

- Fencing requirements
- Amount of space
- What the space should include
- And other safety rules.

The 12 leading causes of outdoor learning environment injuries are: inadequate fall zone, improper protective surfacing, protrusion and entanglement hazards, entrapment openings, trip hazards, insufficient equipment spacing, lack of supervision, age-appropriate activities, lack of maintenance, Pinch, crush, shearing and sharp edge hazards, platforms with no guardrails, and dangerously designed equipment.

It is important to do safety sweeps of your outdoor space frequently. Inspecting outdoor play areas for debris, standing water,

snow or ice, natural objects that may have become unsafe in changing weather, and other human factors such as tripping hazards or litter should be cleaned up properly.

Accessibility

It is imperative to provide chances for children of all ages to find an outlet for their need to move about in a meaningful context. What does it mean to be accessible? Making sure that entry openings are 11-24" and the turn radius is 60". Children have a reach range of 20-36" for a child 2-5 years old and 18-40" for a child 6-12 years old. If children have mobility aid devices, having a firm, resilient surface supports their ability to move freely around the environment, and any outdoor paths, walkways, and stairs should be clearly marked and free of obstruction. Also, consider that for every 2-4 elevated components of an outdoor space, there would be at least one at ground level entry, and the ground level entry should provide at least one type of activity.

The size of large gross motor equipment should be developmentally appropriate for all children, and there should be sure to have enough equipment so that children can use it without long waiting times. Storage should take into consideration the amount of time it takes to clean up outdoors and be labeled clearly.

Loose Parts

While large climbing structures and equipment have developmental purposes, they are also not as engaging to children over time. There is not much for a child to do with a slide for 30 minutes. However, using **loose parts** can increase movement, interest in outdoor play, and educational opportunities. Some loose parts include balls, hula-hoops, magnifying glasses, bikes (helmets), books, blocks, dramatic play materials, and art materials. It might also include recyclables such as boxes, egg cartons, PVC pipes, milk cartons, or crates that children can use for construction. While this list of loose parts could be pages long, the benefit of including a variety and quantity of loose parts in an outdoor learning environment is never-ending. Some of those benefits include independence, self-regulation, and allowing children to explore their world and make decisions.

Pause to Reflect

Do you feel the WAC prohibits play in any way?

What are some challenges to ensuring accessibility for all?

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7.3: Wisconsin Licensing Regulations

Adhere to WI Licensing Regulation in the Practicum Setting

During your student teaching experience, you will be placed in a licensed child care program. Throughout your placement, you are expected to follow all licensing regulations to help ensure children's health and safety.

This does not mean you need to memorize the entire licensing manual. Instead, you should become familiar with it and use it as a resource to guide your practice.

Students often find it helpful to ask questions before and during their field placement hours. Consider asking the following:

- Look up your placement using Child Care Finder to review their recent licensing history and compliance within the past year.
- Complete all required paperwork before your first day. Bring copies with you and share them with the program director to keep on file.
- When working in the classroom, confirm the teacher-to-child ratio and how it is maintained throughout the day.
- Remind your cooperating teacher that, as a student, you cannot be left alone with children at any point during your placement.

If you have questions about how the program is following licensing regulations, request time with the program director or cooperating teacher. If questions continue to arise, reach out to your instructor immediately.

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8: ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

8.1: NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct
8.2: College Code of Conduct
8.3: Practicum Placement Guidelines
8.4: Life and Workforce Skills

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8.1: NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct

Running an Ethical Program is Complex

Learning Objectives

- Describe the ethical responsibilities that guide programs for early care and education and the professionals who work in them.
- Use the NAEYC code of ethical conduct to guide decision-making.
- Recognize how culture, bias, and belief systems impact and influence ethical dilemmas.

What are ethics?

From a practical standpoint, it can be difficult to connect to the concept because they are ideals and principles we aspire to and work towards. Ethics can be easy to read about and then set aside as something you don't really need or might come back to someday. However, ethics are something you use every day in decision making, relationships, and interactions with children, families, colleagues, and your community.

As early care and education professionals, we are frequently faced with any of the following ethical scenarios:

1. Responding to a parent when they ask to keep their 3-year-old from napping because they are not sleeping at night.
2. Unpacking a child's lunch that included a sandwich made out of chocolate chips, marshmallow crème, and sprinkles—every day. Yes, every day!
3. Overhearing a team member complaining about another team member.
4. Being asked by a supervisor to "just do this today because licensing is coming by."

How do you navigate these challenges? Sometimes not too well. But there is a tool to use. The National Association for the Education of Young Children's Code of Ethical Conduct will help you to be much better prepared to recognize and respond to ethical dilemmas when they occur! The NAEYC created the Code of Ethical Conduct to guide professionals in navigating ethical situations and dilemmas. Let's first dive into some definitions and foundational concepts.

Commonly Used Words

Ethics, ethical responsibilities, and ethical leadership are big topics that we will introduce in this module.

Ethics are moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conduct of an activity.

Ethical responsibility is the ability to recognize, interpret, and act upon multiple principles and values according to the standards within a given field and/or context.

Ethical leadership is defined as "leadership demonstrating and promoting 'normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relations'."

Is there a connection between values, morality, and ethics? Generally, the words are used interchangeably. There is, however, a difference:

- **Values** are the qualities we believe intrinsically to be desirable and that we prize for ourselves
- **Morality** is usually more theoretical; it is a philosophical concept that is about our beliefs about right and wrong
- **Ethics** are the practical application of morality in daily life. The term ethics refers to a conscious deliberation regarding moral choices.

The difference is that of theory and practice. If a person has a moral character, he or she will generally deal with other people in an ethical manner.

Example 8.1.1

I'm considering stealing a cookie. I value honesty, and morally, I believe stealing is wrong. My personal ethics then guide me to decide not to steal the cookie. If I did steal the cookie, I would be acting outside of my values. Easy—right? Only if you are planning on stealing a cookie. Our personal values, ethics, and morality are developed based on our experiences as we grow. If each professional applied their personal code of ethics to their work with children and families, it would be very difficult to navigate.

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct

A code of ethics is adopted by a profession to assist the members in distinguishing right from wrong within the context of early childhood education and independent of personal values and belief systems. While it may seem that right and wrong are very concrete and easy concepts, in the work with children and families, it is not always an easy choice to make. For leaders, the decisions can be even harder and often lead to a choice that makes someone unhappy. Remember, the Code of Ethical Conduct is based on our profession, not our personal values.

The ***National Association for the Education of Young Children*** (NAEYC) has created and shared the *Ethical Code of Conduct* and the *Ethical Code of Conduct for Administrators* to guide the decision-making of ECE professionals. But what is our code of ethics? And why is it important to our profession? Great questions!

The ***Code of Ethical Conduct*** is sectioned by category of responsibility. Ethical responsibilities to children, families, colleagues, and the community. As you work through this module, you will notice that each section is divided into Ideals and Principles to offer guidance in our work with children and families. Take a look at the Ethical Code of Conduct and familiarize yourself with how it is organized and what the profession has determined is important to know and understand.

Deeper dives can be found on the NAEYC website. There are many resources available, and you are encouraged to see the resources at the end of the modules for further study.

NAEYC recognizes that those who work with young children face many daily decisions that have moral and ethical implications. The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct offers guidelines for responsible behavior and sets forth a common basis for resolving the principal ethical dilemmas encountered in early childhood care and education. The Statement of Commitment is not part of the Code, but is a personal acknowledgement of an individual's willingness to embrace the distinctive values and moral obligations of the field of early childhood care and education.

Many of the decisions you make on a daily basis are fairly easy or follow a specific program policy. Some decisions are tougher and can involve values and belief systems or cultural differences, which can lead to an ethical dilemma. Ethical dilemmas occur when it is not clear what the best solution is, and choosing one solution violates the other.

Example 8.1.2

A parent may ask you to keep their 4-year-old awake during nap time because they are not going to bed until late in the evening. We have an ethical responsibility to support the development of children (allow them to sleep when they need to), and we also have an ethical responsibility to honor families as a child's first teachers and to listen and respect their input into how their children are raised. Tough decision! This is where the Code of Ethical Conduct can help you.

The Code of Ethical Conduct reads:

- P-1.1—Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle has precedence over all others in this Code.
- P-2.4—We shall ensure that the family is involved in significant decisions affecting their child.
- P-2.2—We shall inform families of program philosophy, policies, curriculum, assessment system, cultural practices, and personnel qualifications, and explain why we teach as we do, which should be in accordance with our ethical responsibilities to children.

In this example, the Code of Ethical Conduct would offer guidance as to how to communicate with the family about what is developmentally appropriate for the child and what your program policies are. You could empathize with the family and share your understanding about how difficult it can be when children don't sleep. You could share that your program policies state that children are offered rest time, and if they fall asleep, they are not to be woken up. You could discuss different options (if any) and select a choice that honors the family and adheres to the ethical code of conduct. One solution could be a family member picking up the child during nap time and returning them in the afternoon after nap is over.

Ethical situations are a challenge in every early care and education setting. This is why it is critical that professionals understand the different terms, how they connect, and how the Code of Ethical Conduct can support professionals in navigating ethical situations.

The Code of Ethical Conduct is not just about situations with children and families. It is also used to support leaders in understanding their ethical responsibilities. As a leader, you have the opportunity to influence other people's behaviors and share your knowledge and experiences. This means that you must be careful and consider your actions through the lens of ethics.

Ethical Leadership

> What do you think is important for a leader to be? What values do you hold for yourself and others in leadership positions?

Leaders, by their very nature, wield power over others in some capacity. Even in a Collective Leadership Model, you are often able to make decisions, allocate resources, and behave in ways that greatly impact other people. This power can be tempting to use in ways that may not be ethical, e.g., to favor one person's needs over another's or to demand compliance with a questionable policy.

Three key questions for ethical leadership include:

1. What is the relationship and balance of power between me as a leader and those I have influence over? Do I have too much power as a leader? Do others feel they have input in decisions I make that impact them?
2. Do I sometimes feel tempted to ignore a rule or offer an exception?
3. Am I trustworthy? Do I follow through on what I say, and am I there to support my team members?

Key Takeaway

Trust is a critical responsibility for a leader. When you and your team members trust each other, there are fewer ethical situations. Why? Because you demonstrate behavior that is respectful, collaborative, and transparent. Your fellow team members reflect that behavior back in their interactions with you and others. Communication is open, honest, and authentic.

Communication is one of the areas where ethics and leadership can get caught up in culture, values, and beliefs. In some cultures, it is a cultural norm to:

- To be untruthful, be vague, or less than forthcoming with all of the truth to spare someone shame or embarrassment, or be very direct and open.
- To appeal to another person's emotions to get what you want or to be factual and analytical with your request.
- To keep secrets or to share everything with others.

In the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct supplement for Early Childhood Program Administrators, there are a couple of key principles that can offer guidance in these situations:

- P-3.1—We shall provide staff members with safe and supportive working conditions that respect human dignity, honor confidences, and permit them to carry out their responsibilities through performance evaluation, written grievance procedures, constructive feedback, and opportunities for continuing professional development and advancement.
- P-3.2—We shall develop and maintain comprehensive written personnel policies that define program standards. These policies shall be given to new staff members and shall be easily accessible and available for review by all staff members.

In each case, leaders must carefully weigh the policies of the program with the individual skills and competencies of each team member. Educating other professionals about the Code of Ethical Conduct is a great place to start!

> Think of different people you have worked with who demonstrate one or more of these cultural values and beliefs listed. How might you approach each situation differently as a result of learning about the Code of Ethical Conduct?

Ethics and Confidentiality

Why is it important to maintain confidentiality when working with children and families? What type of information is important to keep confidential?

Confidentiality is critically important when working with children and families. Confidentiality is defined as keeping information secure and separate, only available to those who need to have it. There are several principles in the Code of Ethical Conduct that speak directly to confidentiality.

The following principles from the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct relate directly to confidentiality.

P-1.4–We shall use two-way communications to involve all those with relevant knowledge (including families and staff) in decisions concerning a child, as appropriate, ensuring confidentiality of sensitive information.

P-2.12–We shall develop written policies for the protection of confidentiality and the disclosure of children's records. These policy documents shall be made available to all program personnel and families. Disclosure of children's records beyond family members, program personnel, and consultants having an obligation of confidentiality shall require familial consent (except in cases of abuse or neglect).

P-2.13 We shall maintain confidentiality and shall respect the family's right to privacy, refraining from disclosure of confidential information and intrusion into family life. However, when we have reason to believe that a child's welfare is at risk, it is permissible to share confidential information with agencies, as well as with individuals who have legal responsibility for intervening in the child's interest.

P-2.14–In cases where family members are in conflict with one another, we shall work openly, sharing our observations of the child, to help all parties involved make informed decisions. We shall refrain from becoming an advocate for one party.

P-3A.2–When we have concerns about the professional behavior of a co-worker, we shall first let that person know of our concern in a way that shows respect for personal dignity and for the diversity to be found among staff members, and then attempt to resolve the matter collegially and in a confidential manner.

As you can see, confidentiality encompasses your work with children, families, and coworkers. Most organizations have confidentiality policies that include written and verbal confidentiality. Those policies may include:

- Keeping children's files in a secure location.
- Keeping staff files in a secure location.
- Not posting sensitive information (such as medical info) in public view.
- Not providing children's last names on written labels.
- Directing staff to not have conversations about children or families within hearing of other staff, children or families.
- Directing staff to not have conversations about children or families with others who are not engaged with the family or child.

It is critically important to know what your organization's policies are regarding confidentiality!

> Maintaining confidentiality can be challenging sometimes. It can be incredibly difficult for educators to avoid talking with their friends or partners about sensitive situations at work. We care about the children and our close relationships with them. Think about a time you had to maintain confidentiality for sensitive information. What actions did you take? How did these actions align with the Code Of Ethical Conduct?

Ethics and Culture

Culture reflects the agreed-upon set of morals and beliefs that indicate how people within a specific group interact. As you interact with different groups, you bring your personal set of values and beliefs to these relationships. The more individuals engage, the more opportunities for values and ethics to come into conflict. Therefore, as a profession, it is critical that professionals adhere to the Code of Ethical Conduct.

But that is not always easy! Personal biases, beliefs, and experiences influence our judgment and how we interact. Portions of the Code of Ethical Conduct can be open to interpretation by individuals, making it challenging to know what is the "right" thing to do.

Questions you must ask yourself...

- Are you willing to ask questions to better understand cultural differences?
- Are you willing to educate yourself on the cultures of the families you serve?
- Are you willing to confront your personal biases and work towards resolving them?
- Are you willing to speak out when a policy or procedure seems unfair?

Understanding that an acceptable behavior in one culture may not be acceptable in another can go a long way toward untangling complex ethical challenges. It is up to you as a leader to commit to ethical behavior that is reflective and respectful.

How do culture and values impact ethical dilemmas? Great question! Let's dive deeper into a few examples.

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct Says

I-2.5—To respect the dignity and preferences of each family and to make an effort to learn about its structure, culture, language, customs, and beliefs to ensure a culturally consistent environment for all children and families.

Example 8.1.3

Let's say the cultural norms of one family were that children did not make eye contact with adults unless spoken to directly. Another family's culture promotes making eye contact and initiating conversation with adults. How would you honor the first family's culture while at the same time supporting the second family's culture? At first glance, it may seem easy–simply allow each child to behave in a manner that suits them. Unfortunately, if you are teaching in a classroom that supports American culture, the first child may feel they are wrong for not making eye contact. They may not get the same level of attention and developmental support as the second child. Why? Because American culture tends to pay less attention to those who don't speak out. It is subtle and often overlooked, but it is there. Is it ethical to provide the student who seems the most "engaged" with a higher level of engagement? Is it ethical to push away your doubts or uncomfortable feelings about teaching the student who seems "quiet?" Tough questions that must be answered if you are going to be an ethical leader.

> What are the cultural norms that influence your communication with others? How do you feel about the examples? Do they resonate with you? Why or why not?

Ethical leadership can look different from leader to leader and organization to organization. That is why it is so important to keep ethics as a constant guide and learning tool!

The following ethical leadership commitment statements can assist you in navigating this complex concept:

- I will advocate for truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.
- I will support freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and respect.
- I will strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.
- I will promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to contribute to the well-being of families, colleagues and communities.
- I will promote communication messages of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and

characteristics of those I work with and serve.
- I will condemn communication that degrades individuals through distortion, intimidation, and coercion, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.
- I will commit to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.
- I will advocate for sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.
- I will accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for my communication and expect the same of others.
- I will be trustworthy and offer and expect respect from those I work with and serve.

When we make a commitment to ethical leadership, we are acknowledging the complexity and "messiness" that comes with honoring diverse views, respecting each person, and doing the "right" thing. We know that we will make mistakes and learn about ourselves and others in the process.

Ethical Responsibilities to Families

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct (May 2011) **"families are of primary importance in children's development. Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child's well-being, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation, and collaboration (the three C's) between the home and early childhood program in ways that enhance the child's development."** [111]

The code consists of ideals and principles that we must adhere to as ethical professionals. The ideals (refer to the Code of Ethical Conduct) provide us with how we need to support, welcome, listen to, develop relationships with, respect, share knowledge with and help families as we work together in partnership with them to support their role as parents. The principles provide us with specific responsibilities to families in our role as early childhood professionals. These principles include what individuals must do as well as the programs that serve those families.

Pause to Reflect

After reviewing the Ethical Responsibilities to Families in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, what stands out to you and why? What seems to make the most sense and why? What might be easy for you to uphold? What may be challenging? How can you use the code to shape your interactions with families?

Citations

NAEYC. (2011). *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment*. https://www.naeyc.org/resources/posi...thical-conduct

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8.2: College Code of Conduct

As a student at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, you are expected to consistently represent the College at the highest standards. Many of you will be completing hours in the community. As a reminder, please review the most recent NWTC Student Code of Conduct.

Pause to Reflect

How do you currently support the college's code of student conduct?

Where is one area that you have interest in continuing to grow in support of the college's code of conduct?

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8.3: Practicum Placement Guidelines

In addition to adhering to the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, program requirements, and the College's Student Code of Conduct, students must comply with all policies, procedures, and expectations established by their practicum placement site.

Each early childhood program has its own set of guidelines designed to support the safety, confidentiality, and well-being of children, families, staff, and visitors. Students are expected to review the placement site's handbook, policies, and procedures at the beginning of their practicum experience and seek clarification if they have questions about any expectations.

Some students may complete their practicum hours within their current place of employment, while others will complete their hours at a different early childhood program. Regardless of the setting, students are responsible for following all placement-site policies and maintaining professional behavior throughout their field experience.

Failure to comply with placement-site guidelines may result in removal from the practicum site and could affect successful completion of the field experience course.

> Examples of placement-site guidelines may include:
>
> - Confidentiality and privacy requirements
> - Health and safety procedures
> - Attendance and scheduling expectations
> - Appropriate use of technology and social media
> - Dress code requirements
> - Sign-in and sign-out procedures
> - Emergency and evacuation protocols
> - Communication expectations and professionalism

Before beginning your field placement, schedule a meeting with the program director, cooperating teacher, or designated site supervisor. This introductory meeting provides an opportunity to become familiar with the program, review site-specific policies and procedures, and discuss expectations for your practicum experience.

Use this time to ask questions, clarify responsibilities, review schedules, and learn about any requirements unique to the placement site. Establishing clear communication from the start helps build a positive professional relationship and supports a successful field experience.

Taking the initiative to learn about the program and its expectations demonstrates professionalism and preparedness, setting the stage for a meaningful and rewarding practicum experience.

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8.4: Life and Workforce Skills

Students in the Early Childhood Education program are expected to demonstrate college-specific life and workforce skills that prepare them for success in both academic and professional settings. These skills include responsibility, professionalism, communication, and ethical behavior. As future early childhood professionals, students are not only learning content knowledge but also developing the habits and attitudes necessary to work effectively with children, families, and colleagues.

Acquiring Skills

These standards are built into the Early Childhood program through intentional learning activities, interactions with their cooperating teachers, and at program sites.

Faculty create intentional learning opportunities for students to learn and practice these skills in preparation for the workforce.

Students practice professionalism by arriving prepared, meeting deadlines, and following program expectations such as licensing regulations and confidentiality guidelines. They learn the importance of clear and respectful communication when interacting with instructors, peers, and early childhood professionals. These experiences help students build confidence in speaking, listening, and collaborating skills that are essential in early learning environments.

Additionally, students demonstrate workforce readiness by applying problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability in a variety of learning situations. Whether analyzing classroom scenarios, reflecting on observations, or responding to unexpected challenges, students are encouraged to think thoughtfully and act in ways that prioritize children's health, safety, and well-being. They also learn to accept feedback and use it for continuous improvement, which is an important part of professional growth.

By consistently demonstrating these life and workforce skills, students build a strong foundation for transitioning into the early childhood field. These competencies not only support their success in the program but also prepare them to contribute positively to early learning environments and uphold the standards expected of early childhood educators.

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9: PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

9.1: Positive Interpersonal Skills

9.2: Guidelines for Respectful Interactions

9.3: Positive Relationship Development

9.4: Collaborating Effectively

9.5: Maintaining Composure

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9.1: Positive Interpersonal Skills

Intrapersonal skills are defined as “the ability to communicate and interact with other people in an effective and friendly way” (Webster-Merriam Dictionary, 2026).

Intrapersonal Skills with your Cooperating Teacher

In your field experience site, some cooperating teachers have had years of experience overseeing a field experience student. In some circumstances, this may be the first time a cooperating teacher has taken on the responsibility of overseeing a student teacher in their classroom. What is the difference?

An experienced cooperating teacher will likely have built time into their schedule to ensure that a student teacher’s questions have been answered. The cooperating teacher may directly ask the student teacher what they have learned in class each week, or if they need time to plan and schedule certain activities.

A new cooperating teacher does not yet have the experience to know or understand the number of activities a student will need to implement in a semester. An effective way to communicate with your cooperating teacher is to observe, write down questions you may have, and ask questions when the cooperating teacher has time. If the daily schedule does not offer time for one-on-one questions, a student should ask the cooperating teacher what time works best for them.

Whether your cooperating teacher is experienced with a student teacher or not, communicating with them on a daily basis will allow the cooperating teacher to best support you throughout the semester.

Example 9.1.1

Setting: Preschool classroom during the morning routine.

Mr. Zach is serving as a cooperating teacher for the first time and is excited to mentor his student teacher, Amiko. During the morning meeting, Amiko is unsure of what her responsibilities are. Wanting to build relationships with the children, she sits on the carpet among them. As soon as she sits down, several children gather around her and compete for a spot on her lap. The children become distracted from the meeting and focus their attention on Amiko instead of the lesson.

Mr. Zach notices the disruption and begins to feel frustrated. He believes that Amiko could be more helpful by cleaning and sanitizing the tables so they are ready for breakfast after the meeting. However, because he is new to supervising a student teacher, he feels uncertain about how to address the situation. He worries that Amiko may feel criticized or embarrassed if he tells her she is not helping effectively.

Using intrapersonal skills, Mr. Zach takes a moment to reflect on his own emotions before reacting. He recognizes that his frustration stems from unclear expectations rather than intentional behavior on Amiko’s part. He reminds himself that Amiko is still learning and has not been given clear guidance about her role during the morning meeting.

After the meeting, Mr. Zach calmly speaks with Amiko in private. He explains that he appreciates her desire to build relationships with the children and acknowledges that they are drawn to her because she has formed positive connections with them. He then shares his expectation that during the morning meeting, one adult will facilitate the lesson while the other prepares the tables for breakfast. Amiko expresses relief, explaining that she had been unsure of what she should be doing during that time and was afraid of interfering with the lesson.

Together, they develop a plan for future mornings. Mr. Zach will clearly communicate expectations ahead of time, and Amiko will take responsibility for preparing the environment during the morning meeting. Both individuals leave the conversation feeling respected and better prepared to work together.

Adopted from ChatGPT, 2026

In this scenario, Mr. Zach demonstrates an awareness of Amiko’s experience level and recognizes that her uncertainty is likely

the result of unclear expectations rather than a lack of initiative. Not every cooperating teacher will have the same level of self-awareness or mentoring experience. As a student teacher, remember that you are entering an established classroom community with routines, expectations, and roles that may not be immediately clear. If your cooperating teacher does not provide specific guidance, it is appropriate to take initiative by seeking clarification. Asking thoughtful questions not only helps you better understand your role but also demonstrates professionalism and a willingness to learn. Consider asking:

- “Is there another task in the classroom you would like me to work on during morning meeting?”
- “What does the morning generally look like when there are two teachers in the classroom?”
- “How can I help keep the children engaged during morning meeting?”

By asking questions and seeking feedback, student teachers can develop their own intrapersonal skills, including self-awareness, reflection, and confidence. Rather than waiting for direction, proactive communication helps establish a positive working relationship and ensures that both the cooperating teacher and student teacher are working toward the same goals for the children and the classroom.

Intrapersonal Skills with Children and Families

As a student teacher, you will work with children on a regular basis. Your schedule may vary depending on your placement, location, program hours, and other responsibilities. In some placements, you may interact with the same group of children each time you attend. In others, you may work with different groups of children throughout the day or week.

During the first few weeks of your field experience, your primary focus should be building relationships and getting to know the children. This often means spending time at children's eye level, engaging in conversations, participating in pretend play, joining classroom activities, and assisting with daily routines and small tasks.

Developing meaningful relationships with children takes time and intentional effort. As you begin your placement, create a list of the children in the classroom and work with your cooperating teacher to learn about each child's interests, strengths, preferences, and individual needs. Many classrooms have established routines and strategies that support individual children. By communicating regularly with your cooperating teacher and maintaining consistency in expectations and routines, you can help children feel safe, secure, and confident as they learn and develop new skills.

Intrapersonal skills play an essential role in these interactions. As you build relationships with children, take time to reflect on your own reactions, assumptions, and emotions. Ask yourself what you are learning about each child and how your interactions can support their growth. Self-awareness and reflection help educators respond thoughtfully to children's needs and create positive learning environments where every child feels valued and understood.

Example 9.1.2

Scenario: Intrapersonal Skills with Children and Families

Amira is completing her student teaching placement in a preschool classroom. During morning arrival, one of the children, Leo, enters the classroom visibly upset. He clings to his father and begins crying when it is time for his father to leave. Wanting to help, Amira immediately approaches Leo and tells him, "You're okay. There's no reason to cry. Dad will be back later."

Instead of calming down, Leo becomes more upset and hides behind his father. Leo's father appears uncomfortable and quickly leaves after a brief goodbye. Throughout the morning, Amira feels frustrated that her attempt to help did not work. She begins to wonder whether she is good at comforting children.

Later, Amira reflects on the interaction. She realizes that her own discomfort with seeing children upset caused her to focus on stopping the crying rather than understanding Leo's feelings. She recognizes that Leo may have needed his emotions acknowledged before he was ready to move on.

The next time Leo struggles with separation, Amira takes a different approach. She calmly says, "You seem sad that Dad is leaving. It's hard to say goodbye sometimes." She then offers Leo a choice between joining a classroom activity or helping her prepare materials for the morning. Leo gradually settles into the classroom routine.

At pickup, Amira briefly shares with Leo's father how Leo's morning improved after participating in a classroom task. His father appreciates the update and provides additional information about recent changes at home that may be contributing to Leo's difficult transitions.

Through reflection and self-awareness, Amira learns that managing her own emotions and assumptions helps her respond more effectively to both children and families.

Adopted from ChatGPT, 2026

Connecting the Scenario to Practice

In this scenario, Amira recognizes that her initial response was influenced by her own discomfort rather than Leo's needs. Intrapersonal skills require educators to reflect on how their emotions, beliefs, and experiences affect their interactions with children and families. Not every interaction will go as planned, and mistakes can become valuable learning opportunities when educators take time to reflect on their actions.

If you are unsure of how to support a child through a daily routine, it is okay to ask for support from your cooperating teacher. Students are with the children for a short amount of time compared to their full-time teacher. Oftentimes, a student's cooperating teacher will have strategies to work on during placement hours. After completing hours for each day or week, it can be helpful to seek feedback from the cooperating teacher on strategies to work on for the upcoming day or week.

Regular reflection helps educators develop greater self-awareness, empathy, and confidence when building relationships with children and families. These skills contribute to supportive classroom environments where children and families feel valued, respected, and understood.

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9.2: Guidelines for Respectful Interactions

Running an Ethical Program is Complex

Learning Objectives

- Describe the ethical responsibilities that guide programs for early care and education and the professionals who work in them.
- Use the NAEYC code of ethical conduct to guide decision-making.
- Recognize how culture, bias, and belief systems impact and influence ethical dilemmas.

What are ethics?

From a practical standpoint, it can be difficult to connect to the concept because they are ideals and principles we aspire to and work towards. Ethics can be easy to read about and then set aside as something you don't really need or might come back to someday. However, ethics are something you use every day in decision making, relationships, and interactions with children, families, colleagues, and your community.

As early care and education professionals, we are frequently faced with any of the following ethical scenarios:

1. Responding to a parent when they ask to keep their 3-year-old from napping because they are not sleeping at night.
2. Unpacking a child's lunch that included a sandwich made out of chocolate chips, marshmallow crème, and sprinkles—every day. Yes, every day!
3. Overhearing a team member complaining about another team member.
4. Being asked by a supervisor to "just do this today because licensing is coming by."

How do you navigate these challenges? Sometimes not too well. But there is a tool to use. The National Association for the Education of Young Children's Code of Ethical Conduct will help you to be much better prepared to recognize and respond to ethical dilemmas when they occur! The NAEYC created the Code of Ethical Conduct to guide professionals in navigating ethical situations and dilemmas. Let's first dive into some definitions and foundational concepts.

Commonly Used Words

Ethics, ethical responsibilities, and ethical leadership are big topics that we will introduce in this module.

Ethics are moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conduct of an activity.

Ethical responsibility is the ability to recognize, interpret, and act upon multiple principles and values according to the standards within a given field and/or context.

Ethical leadership is defined as "leadership demonstrating and promoting 'normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relations'."

Is there a connection between values, morality, and ethics? Generally, the words are used interchangeably. There is, however, a difference:

- **Values** are the qualities we believe intrinsically to be desirable and that we prize for ourselves
- **Morality** is usually more theoretical; it is a philosophical concept that is about our beliefs about right and wrong
- **Ethics** are the practical application of morality in daily life. The term ethics refers to a conscious deliberation regarding moral choices.

The difference is that of theory and practice. If a person has a moral character, he or she will generally deal with other people in an ethical manner.

Example 9.2.1

I'm considering stealing a cookie. I value honesty, and morally, I believe stealing is wrong. My personal ethics then guide me to decide not to steal the cookie. If I did steal the cookie, I would be acting outside of my values. Easy—right? Only if you are planning on stealing a cookie. Our personal values, ethics, and morality are developed based on our experiences as we grow. If each professional applied their personal code of ethics to their work with children and families, it would be very difficult to navigate.

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct

A code of ethics is adopted by a profession to assist the members in distinguishing right from wrong within the context of early childhood education and independent of personal values and belief systems. While it may seem that right and wrong are very concrete and easy concepts, in the work with children and families, it is not always an easy choice to make. For leaders, the decisions can be even harder and often lead to a choice that makes someone unhappy. Remember, the Code of Ethical Conduct is based on our profession, not our personal values.

The **National Association for the Education of Young Children** (NAEYC) has created and shared the *Ethical Code of Conduct* and the *Ethical Code of Conduct for Administrators* to guide the decision-making of ECE professionals. But what is our code of ethics? And why is it important to our profession? Great questions!

The ***Code of Ethical Conduct*** is sectioned by category of responsibility. Ethical responsibilities to children, families, colleagues, and the community. As you work through this module, you will notice that each section is divided into Ideals and Principles to offer guidance in our work with children and families. Take a look at the Ethical Code of Conduct and familiarize yourself with how it is organized and what the profession has determined is important to know and understand.

Deeper dives can be found on the NAEYC website. There are many resources available, and you are encouraged to see the resources at the end of the modules for further study.

NAEYC recognizes that those who work with young children face many daily decisions that have moral and ethical implications. The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct offers guidelines for responsible behavior and sets forth a common basis for resolving the principal ethical dilemmas encountered in early childhood care and education. The Statement of Commitment is not part of the Code, but is a personal acknowledgement of an individual's willingness to embrace the distinctive values and moral obligations of the field of early childhood care and education.

Many of the decisions you make on a daily basis are fairly easy or follow a specific program policy. Some decisions are tougher and can involve values and belief systems or cultural differences, which can lead to an ethical dilemma. Ethical dilemmas occur when it is not clear what the best solution is, and choosing one solution violates the other.

Example 9.2.2

A parent may ask you to keep their 4-year-old awake during nap time because they are not going to bed until late in the evening. We have an ethical responsibility to support the development of children (allow them to sleep when they need to), and we also have an ethical responsibility to honor families as a child's first teachers and to listen to and respect their input into how their children are raised. Tough decision! This is where the Code of Ethical Conduct can help you.

The Code of Ethical Conduct reads:

- P-1.1—Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle has precedence over all others in this Code.
- P-2.4—We shall ensure that the family is involved in significant decisions affecting their child.
- P-2.2—We shall inform families of program philosophy, policies, curriculum, assessment system, cultural practices, and personnel qualifications, and explain why we teach as we do, which should be in accordance with our ethical responsibilities to children.

In this example, the Code of Ethical Conduct would offer guidance as to how to communicate with the family about what is developmentally appropriate for the child and what your program policies are. You could empathize with the family and share your understanding about how difficult it can be when children don't sleep. You could share that your program policies state that children are offered rest time, and if they fall asleep, they are not to be woken up. You could discuss different options (if any) and select a choice that honors the family and adheres to the ethical code of conduct. One solution could be a family member picking up the child during nap time and returning them in the afternoon after nap is over.

Ethical situations are a challenge in every early care and education setting. This is why it is critical that professionals understand the different terms, how they connect, and how the Code of Ethical Conduct can support professionals in navigating ethical situations.

The Code of Ethical Conduct is not just about situations with children and families. It is also used to support leaders in understanding their ethical responsibilities. As a leader, you have the opportunity to influence other people's behaviors and share your knowledge and experiences. This means that you must be careful and consider your actions through the lens of ethics.

Ethical Leadership

Pause to Reflect

What do you think is important for a leader to be? What values do you hold for yourself and others in leadership positions?

Leaders, by their very nature, wield power over others in some capacity. Even in a Collective Leadership Model, you are often able to make decisions, allocate resources, and behave in ways that greatly impact other people. This power can be tempting to use in ways that may not be ethical, e.g., to favor one person's needs over another's or to demand compliance with a questionable policy.

Three key questions for ethical leadership include:

1. What is the relationship and balance of power between me as a leader and those I have influence over? Do I have too much power as a leader? Do others feel they have input in decisions I make that impact them?
2. Do I sometimes feel tempted to ignore a rule or offer an exception?
3. Am I trustworthy? Do I follow through on what I say, and am I there to support my team members?

Key Takeaway

Trust is a critical responsibility for a leader. When you and your team members trust each other, there are fewer ethical situations. Why? Because you demonstrate behavior that is respectful, collaborative, and transparent. Your fellow team members reflect that behavior back in their interactions with you and others. Communication is open, honest, and authentic.

Communication is one of the areas where ethics and leadership can get caught up in culture, values, and beliefs. In some cultures, it is a cultural norm to:

- To be untruthful, be vague, or less than forthcoming with all of the truth to spare someone shame or embarrassment, or be very direct and open.
- To appeal to another person's emotions to get what you want or to be factual and analytical with your request.
- To keep secrets or to share everything with others.

In the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct supplement for Early Childhood Program Administrators, there are a couple of key principles that can offer guidance in these situations:

- **P-3.1**—We shall provide staff members with safe and supportive working conditions that respect human dignity, honor confidences, and permit them to carry out their responsibilities through performance evaluation, written grievance procedures, constructive feedback, and opportunities for continuing professional development and advancement.
- **P-3.2**—We shall develop and maintain comprehensive written personnel policies that define program standards. These policies shall be given to new staff members and shall be easily accessible and available for review by all staff members.

In each case, leaders must carefully weigh the policies of the program with the individual skills and competencies of each team member. Educating other professionals about the Code of Ethical Conduct is a great place to start!

Pause to Reflect

Think of different people you have worked with who demonstrate one or more of these cultural values and beliefs listed. How might you approach each situation differently as a result of learning about the Code of Ethical Conduct?

Ethics and Confidentiality

Why is it important to maintain confidentiality when working with children and families? What type of information is important to keep confidential?

Confidentiality is critically important when working with children and families. Confidentiality is defined as keeping information secure and separate, only available to those who need to have it. There are several principles in the Code of Ethical Conduct that speak directly to confidentiality.

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct

The following principles from the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct relate directly to confidentiality.

- **P-1.4–**We shall use two-way communications to involve all those with relevant knowledge (including families and staff) in decisions concerning a child, as appropriate, ensuring confidentiality of sensitive information.
- **P-2.12–**We shall develop written policies for the protection of confidentiality and the disclosure of children's records. These policy documents shall be made available to all program personnel and families. Disclosure of children's records beyond family members, program personnel, and consultants having an obligation of confidentiality shall require familial consent (except in cases of abuse or neglect).
- **P-2.13** We shall maintain confidentiality and shall respect the family's right to privacy, refraining from disclosure of confidential information and intrusion into family life. However, when we have reason to believe that a child's welfare is at risk, it is permissible to share confidential information with agencies, as well as with individuals who have legal responsibility for intervening in the child's interest.
- **P-2.14–**In cases where family members are in conflict with one another, we shall work openly, sharing our observations of the child, to help all parties involved make informed decisions. We shall refrain from becoming an advocate for one party.
- **P-3A.2–**When we have concerns about the professional behavior of a co-worker, we shall first let that person know of our concern in a way that shows respect for personal dignity and for the diversity to be found among staff members, and then attempt to resolve the matter collegially and in a confidential manner.

As you can see, confidentiality encompasses your work with children, families, and coworkers. Most organizations have confidentiality policies that include written and verbal confidentiality. Those policies may include:

- Keeping children's files in a secure location.
- Keeping staff files in a secure location.
- Not posting sensitive information (such as medical info) in public view.
- Not providing children's last names on written labels.
- Directing staff not to have conversations about children or families within hearing of other staff, children, or families.
- Directing staff not to have conversations about children or families with others who are not engaged with the family or child.

It is critically important to know what your organization's policies are regarding confidentiality!

Maintaining confidentiality can be challenging sometimes. It can be incredibly difficult for educators to avoid talking with their friends or partners about sensitive situations at work. We care about the children and our close relationships with them. Think about a time you had to maintain confidentiality for sensitive information. What actions did you take? How did these actions align with the Code of Ethical Conduct?

Ethics and Culture

Culture reflects the agreed-upon set of morals and beliefs that indicate how people within a specific group interact. As you interact with different groups, you bring your personal set of values and beliefs to these relationships. The more individuals engage, the more opportunities for values and ethics to come into conflict. Therefore, as a profession, it is critical that professionals adhere to the Code of Ethical Conduct.

But that is not always easy! Personal biases, beliefs, and experiences influence our judgment and how we interact. Portions of the Code of Ethical Conduct can be open to interpretation by individuals, making it challenging to know what the "right" thing to do is.

Questions you must ask yourself...

- Are you willing to ask questions to better understand cultural differences?
- Are you willing to educate yourself on the cultures of the families you serve?
- Are you willing to confront your personal biases and work towards resolving them?
- Are you willing to speak out when a policy or procedure seems unfair?

Understanding that an acceptable behavior in one culture may not be acceptable in another can go a long way toward untangling complex ethical challenges. It is up to you as a leader to commit to ethical behavior that is reflective and respectful.

How do culture and values impact ethical dilemmas? Great question! Let's dive deeper into a few examples.

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct Says

I-2.5—To respect the dignity and preferences of each family and to make an effort to learn about its structure, culture, language, customs, and beliefs to ensure a culturally consistent environment for all children and families.

Example 9.2.3

Let's say the cultural norms of one family were that children did not make eye contact with adults unless spoken to directly. Another family's culture promotes making eye contact and initiating conversation with adults. How would you honor the first family's culture while at the same time supporting the second family's culture? At first glance, it may seem easy–simply allow each child to behave in a manner that suits them. Unfortunately, if you are teaching in a classroom that supports American culture, the first child may feel they are wrong for not making eye contact. They may not get the same level of attention and developmental support as the second child. Why? Because American culture tends to pay less attention to those who don't speak out. It is subtle and often overlooked, but it is there. Is it ethical to provide the student who seems the most "engaged" with a higher level of engagement? Is it ethical to push away your doubts or uncomfortable feelings about teaching the student who seems "quiet?" Tough questions that must be answered if you are going to be an ethical leader.

Pause to Reflect

What are the cultural norms that influence your communication with others? How do you feel about the examples? Do they resonate with you? Why or why not?

Ethical leadership can look different from leader to leader and organization to organization. That is why it is so important to keep ethics as a constant guide and learning tool!

The following ethical leadership commitment statements can assist you in navigating this complex concept:

- I will advocate for truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.
- I will support freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and respect.
- I will strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.
- I will promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to contribute to the well-being of families, colleagues and communities.

- I will promote communication messages of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of those I work with and serve.
- I will condemn communication that degrades individuals through distortion, intimidation, and coercion, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.
- I will commit to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.
- I will advocate for sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.
- I will accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for my communication and expect the same of others.
- I will be trustworthy and offer and expect respect from those I work with and serve.

When we make a commitment to ethical leadership, we are acknowledging the complexity and "messiness" that comes with honoring diverse views, respecting each person, and doing the "right" thing. We know that we will make mistakes and learn about ourselves and others in the process.

Ethical Responsibilities to Families

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct (May 2011) **"families are of primary importance in children's development. Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child's well-being, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation, and collaboration (the three C's) between the home and early childhood program in ways that enhance the child's development."** [111]

The code consists of ideals and principles that we must adhere to as ethical professionals. The ideals (refer to the Code of Ethical Conduct) provide us with how we need to support, welcome, listen to, develop relationships with, respect, share knowledge with, and help families as we work together in partnership with them to support their role as parents. The principles provide us with specific responsibilities to families in our role as early childhood professionals. These principles include what individuals must do as well as the programs that serve those families.

Pause to Reflect

After reviewing Ethical Responsibilities to Families in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, what stands out to you and why? What seems to make the most sense and why? What might be easy for you to uphold? What may be challenging? How can you use the code to shape your interactions with families?

The Role of Relationships

This section will support you in exploring and reflecting on the connection between relationships, social development, emotional development, and behavior. Did you know that relationships with others may influence behavior either positively or negatively?

Reflect for a moment on this photo of the young boy playing Jenga. As he moves and/or removes the blocks, the structure becomes unbalanced and even unpredictable. A child's behavior and the relationships in his or her life can mirror this game of Jenga. Social and emotional development is also important to the foundation as they help to inform how the child manages feelings and emotions and how he/she can socialize and cooperate with others within a relationship.

According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect practically every aspect of their development. Simply put, relationships are the "active ingredients" of the environment's influence on healthy human development. They incorporate the qualities that best promote competence and well-being – individualized responsiveness, mutual action-and-interaction, and an emotional connection to another human being, such as a parent, peer, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, teacher, coach, or any other person who has an important impact on the child's early development. Relationships engage children in the human community in ways that help them define who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people (NSCDC, 2004).

When children have secure and stable relationships with caring adults, they are more able to develop warm and positive relationships with others. These children are more excited about learning, more positive about coming to school, more self-confident, and have stronger skills in getting along with others. (NSCDC, 2004). When relationships are secure and stable, the

child's social skills to support interactions are strengthened, along with the ability to express and manage feelings and emotions.

It is also important to understand that the relationships children have with other children also inform and influence their behavior. Young children learn from each other how to share, how to participate in shared interactions such as taking turns, the reciprocal acts of giving and receiving, how to respect and accept the needs and wants of others, and how to manage their own impulses.

Simply being around other children, however, is not enough to build the skills for positive behaviors. The development of friendships is critical, as children learn and play more competently in the bond created with friends rather than when they are dealing with the social challenges of interacting with casual acquaintances or unfamiliar peers. Positive relationships and positive behaviors all add to healthy brain development and depend upon the relationships with individuals in the child's close community, as well as in the family. (Harvard, 2006).

It is within that context of family that we must remember that everything we think, say, and do is processed through our own individual lens and our unique cultural backgrounds. For teachers, it is essential to see and understand their own culture to see and understand how the cultures of children and their families influence children's behavior. Only then can you give every child a fair chance to succeed (Kaiser, Raminsky, 2020).

According to Kaiser and Raminsky, your culture and the children's cultures are not the only cultures at work in your classroom. Every school and early childhood education program has a culture, too. The cultures of most American schools are based on White European American values. As the makeup of the US population becomes more diverse, there is more cultural dissonance, which impacts children's behavior.

White European American culture has an individual orientation that teaches children to function independently, stand out, talk about themselves, and view property as personal. In contrast, many other cultures value interdependence, fitting in, helping others, being helped, being modest, and sharing property. In fact, some languages have no words for *I, me,* or *mine*.

Children who find themselves in an unfamiliar environment—such as a classroom that reflects a culture different from their home culture—are likely to feel confused, isolated, alienated, conflicted, and less competent because what they have learned so far in their home culture simply does not apply. They may not understand the rules, or they may be unable to communicate their needs in the school's language. (Kaiser, Rasminsky)

It is because the way you respond to children's behavior and conflict is bound to your own culture; it is common to get the wrong idea about a child's words or behaviors. When you observe a child's behavior that appears to be noncompliant, ask yourself if that behavior could be culturally influenced. Honest and open conversations with the family will help you understand and respect their cultural beliefs and practices regarding education and child development.

> "Affirm the Child, Not the Behavior"
>
> Dan Gartrell, 2020

In terms of relationships, when you, as the teacher, are responsive to the children's culture, you are better able to form genuine and caring relationships with the children and their families. You can scaffold on this to build on what the child already knows and can do and identify their next steps for learning. This information will help you choose and implement appropriate activities and strategies that honor children's cultures as well as life experiences and teach children what they need to know and do to be successful in the world today. (Kaiser, Rasminsky).

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) outlines the fundamental importance of positive relationships in an article by Drs. Gail Joseph and Phillip Strain. When adults invest time and effort in teaching proactively prior to behavior "events," children are more successful in achieving improved behavior change, even in situations that might lead to escalating challenging behavior. The key is communicating non-contingent affection and unquestioned valuing of children. The bottom line is that success is dependent on building a positive relationship first. Adults need to invest the time and attention in children as a prerequisite to the optimum use of sound behavior change strategies (CSEFEL).

The first step is to invest the time in relationship building, and the second is to understand that as your relationships with the child become stronger, so does your potential influence on their behavior. Children will "cue in" on the presence of you as a meaningful and caring adult and will attend differentially and selectively to what you say and do, continuing to seek out ways to ensure even more positive attention from the adult (Lally, Mangione, & Honig).

Review these strategies as you work to build relationships with children (adapted from work by Drs. Joseph and Strain (CSEFEL):

- Offer children a choice as much as possible vs. asking for compliance. Instead of saying “it’s time to clean up”, ask the child if she would like to put the blocks in the basket or the cars on the shelf.
- Take time to reflect to determine if you might ignore some forms of challenging behavior (for example, a child’s loud voice), which is simply a decision about where and when to intervene. Note that this is different from “planned ignoring” for behavior designed to elicit attention.
- Be aware of your own behaviors and expectations. Set appropriate goals for behavior and determine a way (possibly a counter or visual reminder) to make and track multiple and ongoing relationship deposits.

There will be times that you should and will need to give feedback to children that is in the form of correction and reminders. This will not hinder your relationship building. The important takeaway is that your positive interactions need to happen in greater numbers and frequency. As you learn to do this, you can begin to keep a tally of how many times you remind a child about an unwanted behavior. The goal is for you to find at least twice the number of positive things to comment on and tally those also (CSEFEL).

When children do not receive positive feedback, they are less likely to enter the positive cycle of motivation and learning. The conclusion here is that when children have positive interactions with teachers and other adults, they have fewer instances of challenging behavior. When children feel safe and understood, they can use those positive interactions to help build positive relationships. This will build motivation and stimulate within the brain a cycle of repetition focused on motivation and learning.

Citations

NAEYC. (2011). *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment*. https://www.naeyc.org/resources/posi...thical-conduct

Adaptation Credit

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9.3: Positive Relationship Development

Relationships with Cooperating Teachers

Students will work side-by-side with their cooperating teacher throughout their field experience placement. Developing a positive professional relationship takes time, effort, and communication. As with any new relationship, it will take time to learn about the cooperating teacher, including their teaching philosophy, classroom management style, expectations, and preferred methods of communication.

Building a strong relationship with the cooperating teacher begins with active listening, observation, and a willingness to learn. Pay close attention to classroom routines, ask questions when expectations are unclear, and remain open to feedback. A student's cooperating teacher is both a mentor and a collaborator who can provide guidance as you develop teaching skills.

Establishing trust is a foundational part of a relationship. Arriving on time, following through on responsibilities, maintaining professionalism, and communicating openly demonstrate reliability and respect. At the same time, student teachers should feel comfortable seeking clarification, sharing ideas, and discussing challenges they may encounter in the classroom.

As the field experience progresses, both the student teacher and cooperating teacher will learn from one another. A strong professional relationship creates a supportive environment where feedback can be exchanged, new skills can be practiced, and confidence can grow. Ultimately, this partnership benefits not only the adults involved but also the children they serve.

Relationships with Children

A student's work with children will take place daily. A student is entering a classroom where many relationships already exist, finding space where to start a relationship with any child can be difficult, but it is the foundation to creating and maintaining a trusting environment.

Children learn best when they feel safe, respected, and valued by the adults in their environment. Students should start their relationships with children by spending time at the children's level, observing, and slowly starting to engage in meaningful play. A student can listen to a child's ideas, ask open-ended questions, and show genuine interest in their learning experiences.

Building and maintaining relationships with children takes understanding and consistency. In the classroom, some children will be eager to interact with a new adult right away, and some children may need more time. Be aware of how children are reacting to the new adult in the classroom. If a child is eager to interact and play right away, spend time with that child. Slowly invite other children into the play as they become more comfortable.

Each day will bring new surprises and interactions with children in the classroom setting. Teaching strategies that worked previously may not work the next time a student is at their field placement site. Be willing to adjust and adapt as needed to best meet the needs of each child.

Relationships with Families

Families are children's first teachers and play an essential role in their growth and development. As a student teacher, developing positive relationships with families helps create a partnership that supports children's learning both at home and at school.

Student teachers may have opportunities to greet families during arrival and departure times, participate in family events, or communicate with families under the guidance of their cooperating teacher. These interactions should always be professional, respectful, and welcoming. Families bring knowledge about their children, including their interests, routines, cultural backgrounds, and experiences.

Student teachers will have a different role in the classroom because they are often not in the classroom regularly, or during drop-off and pick-up time. This can make it more challenging to build and maintain relationships with families. Communication with the cooperating teacher will help a student gain additional understanding of the family and of the child.

In this course, each student will create a welcome letter to the families in the classroom or program. This is a wonderful opportunity to introduce yourself and share with families the skills you hope to gain from this experience.

Building trust with families takes time and requires active listening and open-mindedness. Student teachers should recognize and respect the diverse backgrounds, values, and perspectives represented within the classroom community. When families feel respected and included, they are more likely to engage in their child's education and collaborate with educators to support their child's success.

Relationships with Co-Workers

Early childhood education is a collaborative profession. In addition to working with a cooperating teacher, student teachers may interact with assistant teachers, support staff, therapists, administrators, food service staff, custodians, and other professionals within the program.

Developing positive relationships with co-workers requires professionalism, respect, and teamwork. Every member of the educational team contributes to creating a safe and supportive environment for children. When working together, understand that each role in the field of early education plays a role in how the child develops. Each individual who works with children is an influence on their development. Relationships between colleagues model to children how a team works together.

Observing how experienced professionals work together can provide positive learning opportunities. By building positive relationships with co-workers, student teachers gain insight into the collaborative nature of early childhood education and learn the importance of working together to meet children's needs.

Relationships with Classmates

Classmates are a source of support throughout your field experience and educational journey. Although classmates may be placed at different sites or work with different age groups, they often encounter similar successes, challenges, and learning opportunities. Each week we will meet to learn new teaching strategies, reflect on how the week at the field placement went, and discuss scenarios students have experienced.

Being present during class allows students to create opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and professional growth. Sharing experiences, discussing classroom situations, and exchanging ideas can provide new perspectives and help deepen your understanding of early childhood education. Classmates can also offer encouragement and support during challenging experiences.

Professional relationships with classmates should be built on mutual respect, active listening, and a willingness to learn from one another. As future colleagues in the field, the connections formed during coursework and field experiences can become components of a professional network that extends beyond graduation. By supporting one another throughout the learning process, students develop collaborative skills that will benefit them throughout their careers.

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9.4: Collaborating Effectively

Supporting children through the early years of development is not the responsibility of one individual; rather, it requires a collaborative effort from everyone involved in a child's life. Families, teachers, support staff, community members, and other professionals each contribute unique ideas, perspectives, experiences, and skills that support children's growth and learning.

When early childhood professionals collaborate effectively with others, they create a wider variety of experiences and opportunities for children. Collaboration allows educators to share knowledge, solve problems together, and develop new strategies to support each child's individual needs.

Working collaboratively with others may look different depending on personalities, environmental factors, past experiences, and individual characteristics. Each person brings their own knowledge and expertise to the team. By listening to one another, valuing diverse perspectives, and working toward common goals, educators can expand their understanding and provide children with more meaningful learning opportunities.

Ways to Collaborate with Others in the Early Childhood Education Field

- Invite guest speakers into your classroom on a regular basis to share their expertise and experiences. Here are a few examples:
  - **Gardener**: Gardening can be overwhelming. Invite a local Master Gardener into your program to help you get started on a small classroom garden. Start small with flowers or mini-pumpkins, and expand as you feel comfortable.
  - **Police Officer, Firefighter, other community helpers**: Many community helpers will make time to come into the early childhood classroom to read a story or showcase their equipment. Contact your local community helpers to see what their schedule looks like and if they would be willing to stop at your program for a visit.
  - **Librarian**: Many local libraries have reading programs for children. The librarian will come in and read a few stories with each age group of children, have a small activity, and invite the teachers to check out their local library. Library cards are free, and books can be ordered online for pickup at your local library. For more information, stop at your local library to learn more.
  - **Teachers from other classrooms:** A great way to connect in your program is to connect with the teachers in different classrooms. Invite teachers to read a story or participate in a classroom activity once or twice a month. If staffing is challenging, try to choose a time when most of the program is together, like outdoor time. This is a wonderful way for children to make connections with other teachers and for teachers to share their knowledge and experience with all children.
- Participate in professional development and continuing education opportunities that align with your interests and goals.
- Join local, state, or national early childhood education organizations to connect with other professionals.
- Network with colleagues and other professionals to exchange ideas, share resources, and strengthen your skills.
- Collaborate with families by maintaining open communication and seeking their input about their child's development and learning.
- Volunteer in your community: There are several non-profits and services in each community. The best way to learn about these services is to get involved. Many organizations do not ask for many hours each month. When a teacher learns more about each organization, they are more likely to share this information with others.

Pause to Reflect

Think about a time when you worked with others to accomplish a goal.

- What made the collaboration successful?
- What did you learn from that experience?

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9.5: Maintaining Composure

Working in early childhood education can be rewarding, but it can also be challenging. Educators may encounter unexpected situations, such as children experiencing strong emotions, schedule changes, family concerns, staffing shortages, or classroom conflicts. During these moments, it is important to remain calm, professional, and focused on finding solutions.

Maintaining composure under pressure helps create a safe and supportive environment for children. Young children often look to trusted adults for guidance and reassurance. When educators respond calmly and thoughtfully, children learn positive ways to manage their own emotions and behaviors.

Remaining composed does not mean ignoring stress or challenges. Instead, it means using effective strategies to manage difficult situations while maintaining professionalism. Taking a deep breath, asking for assistance when needed, focusing on problem-solving, and reflecting on the situation afterward can help educators respond effectively.

Overall Approach to Maintaining Composure

- Ask questions to learn more about the situation before you react.
- Use deep breath or calming techniques to become regulated
- If you need a break, ask for one
- Focus on the solution, rather than the problem
- Keep a positive and professional attitude
- Be flexible; change should be expected

Preparing for Stressful Situations

- Engage in **personal wellness behaviors** to establish a foundation of your emotional self-regulation, in support of maintaining your composure in the classroom. This can be a daily or weekly practice built into your weekly routine. Find a way to positively release stress through a hobby you enjoy.
- Develop your awareness of the **specific instances** (also known as triggers) in which you are most likely to lose composure so that you can identify strategies to use during these moments. Be aware of specific characteristics of children or adults that 'push your buttons' or make you feel uncomfortable. What skills can you build and practice to handle these situations more effectively?
- Remember that this is an **ongoing practice**. We get better at maintaining composure through reflection when we take time to check in with how we're doing, re-ground in taking care of ourselves, and learn lessons from what's working or not yet working in how we're responding to stressful situations. Reflect on your day in the classroom. What went well? Where do you see room for improvement? Each day brings new opportunities. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present."

Research-Supported Strategies for Wellness

Adults who feel safe and cared for are better able to create spaces where children feel safe and cared for.

As an ongoing commitment to your well-being, consider research-supported strategies such as:

- Adequate sleep, exercise, and nutrition
- Play (enjoyable activities that promote a flow state)
- Mindfulness
- Positive relationships
- Setting appropriate boundaries and managing commitments

While the responsibility for creating the adult climate rests with all of us, **school leaders** should take the lead in modeling positive wellness behaviors and structuring an environment that promotes well-being for all staff.

Link to Learning

See the Whole Child Approach to Adult Well-Being for information about creating the adult climate.

Maintaining Composure with Children

As much as students learn from what we say, they learn from what we do.

How to maintain composure in the moment:

- Learn your **triggers** so that you can be aware of them more quickly in the moment.
- Take a moment to compose yourself before speaking, if needed, so that you can **maintain a calm, neutral tone**.
- Connect with students' humanity through **empathy**; acknowledge their feelings and remind yourself that their upset does not need to become your upset. See the Empathy Implementation Guide for more support.
- Model using the student **breathing strategies**: rainbow, pretzel, squeezing lemons, flower & candle.
- Model **appropriate self-talk**, including naming your feelings (even if they are negative) and coaching yourself through calming down.

Cycle of a Trigger

We can work to interrupt the cycle of a trigger.

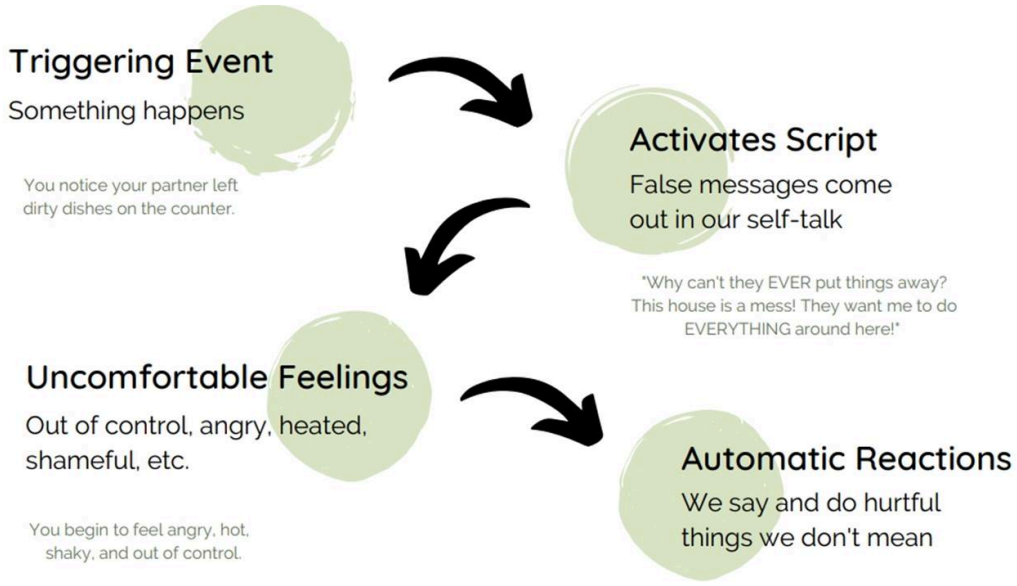


Figure 9.5.1: Triggering events lead to activating scripts with uncomfortable feelings and automatic reactions.

About Triggers

For children who have experienced trauma, being in the presence of a visibly angry adult may cause reactive behaviors and breach trust.

Why Do We Get Triggered?

- Triggers are events that call up **automatic responses**. Without reflection, we might not recognize patterns in our triggering events.
- Triggers are often related to **events in our childhood**. They are commonly rooted in shame, fear, and lack of control.
- Triggers can be **exacerbated** by hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and physical discomfort.

Prevention and Reframing

- Some triggers can be **prevented:** eat healthy food, drink enough water, and get enough rest.
- Other triggers need **reframing**: a key message you can repeat to yourself when a triggering event happens so that you don't launch right into your scripts. For example: "My partner has other lovely qualities besides putting dirty dishes into the dishwasher."
- Some triggers may benefit from the intervention of **professional counseling**.

Pause to Reflect

What events typically trigger your strong emotions? What prevention or reframing could you do around these triggers?

Modeling Helpful Self-Talk

Model **appropriate self-talk**, including naming your feelings (even if they are negative) and coaching yourself through calming down.

Examples

- “I feel really frustrated right now. I am going to stop and take three deep breaths.”
- “Oops, I made a mistake. I will think of a way to fix it. Hmm, let’s try this...”
- “I feel a lot of stress in my shoulders. Let me do a couple of shoulder rolls with deep breaths to see if that helps.”

Non-Examples

- "I’m so stupid! I can’t believe I did that!”
- “I’m really mad at you! Why did you do that?!”
- “You kids are driving me crazy!”
- “When you yell, it makes me mad too! Calm down right now!”

Pause to Reflect

What key phrases can you use to model helpful self-talk?

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10: FOUNDATIONS OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION PRACTICES

10.1: Identifying Human Differences
10.2: Supporting Inclusion
10.3: Examining the Learning Environment

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10.1: Identifying Human Differences

Diversity

Diversity is “a variation among individuals, as well as within and across groups of individuals, in terms of their backgrounds and lived experiences. These experiences are related to social identities, including race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, social and economic status, religion, ability status, and country of origin” (NAEYC, 2019, 17).

The key to this definition of **diversity** is that it moves us away from simply thinking that **diversity** means being different from someone and appreciating those differences. This definition specifically highlights the experiences that people have based on those differences. Social identities are differences and categories that were and are socially constructed. This means that these categories were and are created and then agreed upon by society and have serious consequences for people’s lives (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Below are the beginning definitions of the social identity groups listed in the definition.

- **Race** is a social-political construct that categorizes and ranks groups of human beings on the basis of skin color and other physical features (NAEYC, 2019).
- **Ethnicity** refers to “people bound by a common language, culture and spiritual traditions, and/or ancestry” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p.45)
- **Sex** is the biological or genetic markers that distinguish male and female bodies and refers to one’s genitals and body structure, and is assigned at birth (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).
- **Gender** is the assigned sex given at birth that has prescribed roles, behaviors, and expectations; gender identity is the development of oneself as a male or female in relation to others; and gender expression is the gender that a person presents to the world (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017)
- **Sexual Orientation** is who a person is sexually attracted to (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020).
- **Social and Economic Status** refers to the financial and social conditions of a person, which determine their access to the institutions and resources of society (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020)
- **Religion** is the faith and worship of a particular system of beliefs.
- **Ability Status** includes the ability that children have to do something and acknowledge disabilities, including a physical, cognitive, emotional, or neurodivergent challenge that impacts a person's abilities in some areas of daily living and learning (NAEYC, 2019, & Derman-Spark & Edwards, 2020).

These categories are binary. They are categories that we all belong to and are presented as either/or to divide and differentiate people. For example, our sex assignment at birth is either male or female, and the gender roles attached to our sex are framed around masculine or feminine characteristics. Our sexual orientation is either gay or straight. We are either able-bodied or have a disability. Our race is either black or white. However, the 2020 census did collect race data from five groups: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

To address the binary nature of these categories that differentiate people, NAEYC’s Advancing Equity diversity definition noted that “the terms **diverse** and **diversity** are sometimes used as euphemisms for non- White and NAEYC specifically rejects this usage, which implies that Whiteness is the norm against which **diversity** is defined” (NAEYC, 2019, p.17). This specific clarification is a response to the binary nature of and the social construction of social identity groups and the meaning attached to them by society.

Advancing Equity Recommendations for Everyone

When we review the first recommendation from NAEYC’s Advancing Equity statement, we are asked to examine the impact and the influence of diversity on who we are as teachers and what and how we teach. We need to have awareness and understanding of our own culture, personal beliefs, values, and biases. And in order to do that, we have to reflect on our own lived experiences based on our social identities (NAEYC, 2019). As teachers of young children, we are teaching from a specific set of cultural values and beliefs. We have learned those beliefs and values through the cycle of socialization. Through this process, we have also learned about biases. We have also experienced privilege and oppression based on our social identity groups. To truly understand the impact of diversity on our teaching practices, we have to do some intrapersonal work and examine our own personal and

social identity development.

Pause to Reflect

How would you describe your social identities as listed in the diversity definition? What are other identities that categorize and differentiate people that are not listed? Do you think our social identities influence how we interact and engage with other people whose identities are different than ours?

Culture, Social Identities & the Cycle of Socialization

Culture is something we all have and is something that we learn. **Culture** is the experiences, language, values, and beliefs that people share at a given time and place. Our cultural ways of being can be as simple and visible as what we have learned to like to eat, what we don't like to eat, the words we use, the language we speak, how we dress, and what music we like to listen to. Culture is also complex and invisible. It is the deeply held beliefs and values we have that influence the daily decisions we make. These beliefs can be about eye contact, what we should look like, touching, relationships with our elders, the way we raise our children, and what role families should play in our lives. There is a lot under the surface that we have learned and that we don't see or are aware of, and those cultural ways of being become automatic.

Ultimately, culture shapes and frames how we understand, view, and interact with the world around us, and what we learn depends on what cultural and social groups we belong to. We are born into or assigned them at birth, such as race, sex, class, or religion. And they can be cultural and social groups we join or become part of later in life. For example, it is possible to learn a new culture by moving to a new country or area, by a change in our economic status, or by becoming disabled. We all belong to many cultural and social groups. When we have similar cultural ways of being with others, we usually get along better with or feel more comfortable with.

Pause to Reflect

Think about the people who are important people in your life. What do you have in common with them? How does this commonality make you feel when you engage with people who have similar cultural ways of being as you? What about those who are different from you? How do you feel when you engage with those who may not speak the same language as you or eat the same foods as you?

We are socialized into those cultural ways of knowing and being based on the various cultural and social identity groups we are a part of. We have been systematically socialized into those identities (Harro, 2018).

Socialization is the process by which we internalize the cultural norms and ideologies of society that we have learned through the institutions we interact with, i.e., education, church, peers, family, laws, media, business, etc. Harro (2018) notes that based on each of our social identities, we learn how to:

- Think about ourselves and others
- How to interact with others
- Understand what is expected of us based on a specific set of social identities we were born into
- Know what the consequences are if we deviate from what is expected of us

What is important to understand is that these social identities that we are either assigned to, born into, or become a part of later in life predispose us to unequal binary roles. We are socialized into those roles subtly as well as overtly by our family and institutions (teachers, schools, media, church, work). These roles are prescribed through systematic training that tells us the "appropriate and acceptable ways to be" that identity (Harro, 2018).

In the U.S., the "appropriate and acceptable ways to be" have come from the dominant social groups. We are either part of the dominant groups or the marginalized groups. In the U.S., these dominant social groups are men, white people, able-bodied people, middle- to upper-class people, heterosexuals, and middle-aged people. Subordinate or marginalized groups are women, people of color, specifically historically racially oppressed groups; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people; people with disabilities; seniors and youth; and people living in poverty. Understanding the socialization process and the groups we belong to will help us better understand what we have learned to value and believe, but also what we have learned about the groups we do

not belong to.

An example of how this socialization process works can be demonstrated by thinking about sex, gender identity, and expression. When someone is pregnant, we usually ask them what the sex of the baby is. Will it be a boy or a girl? Depending on what they tell us, we start thinking of names that we would consider boy or girl names. We may also start to think about what kind of toys and clothes to get, depending on the sex. When the baby is born, we then begin to engage with the baby and consciously or unconsciously have expectations for them to act and look a certain way. For example, we may remind little girls not to talk loudly, or be too physical in their play, and tell them how pretty they look in their new dress. We may tell boys to stop crying and to be strong physically and emotionally. For some children, the sex assignment matches how they identify and want to express themselves as that gender. For some children, the sex and gender roles that are expected of them are not what they identify with and how they want to express themselves. However, through the cycle of socialization, these roles are enforced by either the child's family, school, church, or possibly their friends.

Pause to Reflect

What social identity groups do you belong to? How did you learn to be that identity or part of that group? What role did your family, friends, and community organizations play in this process of learning about who you were and are now? What role did your teachers play? What messages may we be sending to children about their social identity groups based on how we were socialized?

What is important to remember here is that we were born into or assigned these identities at birth and really have no control over that process, and what we learned as children. The cultural norms, values, and ways of being were already established. These rules, roles, and assumptions were created by the dominant groups, and marginalized or subordinate groups were essentially exploited, disenfranchised, and discriminated against (Harro, 2018). Through this cycle, society has normalized the dominant group's cultural values, beliefs, and ways of being at the expense of the subordinate groups. This leads to implicit biases that we have learned about other social identity groups. It also leads to systemic bias towards the dominant groups who have unearned privileges and discrimination and oppression of marginalized groups.

Bias

Advancing Equity (2019) defines **bias** as the attitudes that favor one group over another. Explicit **biases** are conscious, openly aware beliefs and stereotypes that influence one's understanding, actions, and decisions; implicit **bias** affects one's understanding, actions, and decisions but in an unconscious, not aware of manner (NAEYC, 2019). We all have biases. They are learned from our cultural ways of being and through the process of socialization.

An example of explicit bias in the classroom may happen when we openly expect children from a specific racial group to be good at sports or be quiet and shy. An example of implicit bias in a classroom would be where all but one or two books have illustrations with only white children and families in them. An example of systemic bias in the classroom may be where the lead teachers and supervisors are white, but the assistants and support staff are people of color or English language learners. Most of the biases we have are not necessarily conscious of, and we have learned to normalize the attitudes and actions of the dominant groups through our socialization process.

The first Advancing Equity (2019) recommendation suggests that we have to recognize that we all hold some type of bias based on our personal background, experiences, and socialization. We need to "identify where our varied social identities have provided strengths and understandings based on your experiences of both injustices and privilege" (NAEYC, 2019, 6). Knowing which values, beliefs, and cultural norms we hold that influence our teaching will help us begin to reflect on the impact we have on children and families that do not have the same values and beliefs.

Pause to Reflect

Consider how your values and beliefs influence your teaching decisions. Are those values and beliefs held by the children and families you work with? For example, do you always have the same expectations around sleeping, feeding, and potty training children as your family? What biases do you think you may have about others who do not have the same values and beliefs you have? What biases may you have learned about other social identity groups?

Oppression and Privilege

When we reflect on which groups we belong to and learn more about ourselves and others, we will realize that the privileges and oppressions we experience are based on the social identity groups we belong to. **Privilege** is the unearned advantages that result from being a member of a dominant social identity group. This type of privilege is deeply embedded, and it is often invisible to those who experience it without ongoing deep self-reflection about diversity and equity. An example of this privilege can be the language we use in our programs. If your program is an English-speaking program, then if you speak English, it will be easier for you to communicate. Because of your ability to speak English, you have access to resources and services that others who do not speak it do not. If you do not speak English and there are no other languages spoken in the program, then you may struggle with communicating with others.

Oppression is the systematic and prolonged mistreatment of a group of people that results from systemic bias based on their social identity groups. For example, ableism is a systemic form of oppression deeply embedded in society that devalues disabilities through structures that are based on implicit assumptions about standards of physical, intellectual, and emotional normalcy (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020). If we are an able-bodied person, we might not think about making sure our classroom is set up for a child who uses a wheelchair or a family member who uses a scooter. It may be harder to find tables for children that allow a wheelchair to slide under. When we have not experienced the challenges of a person with a physical disability, the changes needed to adjust our classroom do not come to us as quickly. Usually, they come to us when we have to make those changes because we have a child or family member who uses a wheelchair or scooter.

This is not to say that those of us who have privilege have never experienced challenges, and those of us who have been oppressed have not experienced advantages. However, when we become more aware of the biases we have learned, the privileges and systemic oppressions we have experienced, then we may be able to understand the experiences of others. We can empathize as well as resist and revise our teaching practices based on our understanding of how we have experienced privileges and/or oppressions.

Our early education system is a product of the dominant group's values and norms in the U.S. When we take the responsibility to become more aware and conscious of whose norms and values we have learned, internalized, and are teaching from, we can assess and evaluate our work with children. In order to be unbiased, we have to know our biases and actively fight against them. In order to be culturally responsive, we have to know what cultural values and beliefs we have that are different than others. Therefore, diversity is not just appreciating and acknowledging differences; it is actively reflecting on our own experiences and identities and how it influences how we are teaching.

Pause to Reflect

If biases, privilege, and oppression are part of our education system, then how can we ensure that all children have access to quality learning experiences?

Equity

When biases and systemic oppression go unexamined or unchecked, it leads to harmful and discriminatory experiences for children from marginalized social identity groups. **Equity goes beyond "fairness"** and provides us with a framework to understand the impact of our biases and oppression on children and families and how we can address them.

NAEYC's Advancing Equity (2019) statement defines equity as "the state that would be achieved if individuals fared the same way in society regardless of race, gender, class, language, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic" (NAEYC, 2019, p.17). If we have been socialized into unequal roles based on our social identity groups, then we are not truly equal. Attempting to treat everyone the same is essentially not fair. We cannot have equality and fairness until we have equity, where children have similar access to resources to support their learning, growth, and development.

The image below provides us with a visual of the difference between equality and equity. Giving everyone the same thing when they are starting from different places would not be equitable.

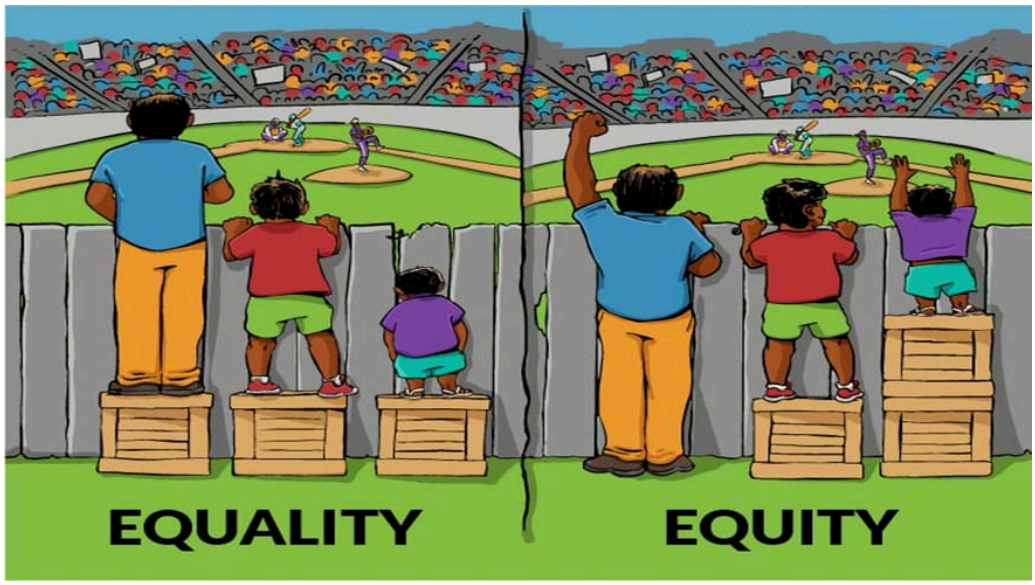


Image 10.1.1 *Interaction Institute for Social Change* | *Artist: Angus Maguire*

Pause to Reflect

The picture above represents the difference between equality and equity. What does this picture tell you about how we may be using the boxes/crates like in our classrooms and programs?

What supports (boxes/crates) are we providing for children in our classrooms?

Advancing Equity Recommendations for Everyone

Inequities, unfair advantages (privilege), and disadvantages (discrimination and oppression), are built into our systems; they are structural. Advancing Equity's fourth recommendation tasks us to acknowledge and seek to understand these structural inequities and their impact over time (NAEYC, 2019). As teachers, we have to be sure that we do not place blame or fault on a child or a family's character or abilities. Every single child has the potential to learn, thrive, and be successful in life. Because of historical and current systemic structural inequities based on social identity groups, children from marginalized groups have been and are disproportionately impacted.

Demographics

The U.S. has always had diverse social and cultural groups. This wonderful and rich growth in diversity continues today. According to the Children's Defense Fund's "The State of America's Children®" 2020 report, 73.4 million children lived in the U.S. in 2018. 50 percent were children of color: 14 percent were Black; 26 percent were Hispanic; 5 percent were Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander; and <1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native.

Pause to Reflect

Who are the children in your classroom?

What social identity groups do they belong to?

However, the statistics below provide a glimpse into what structural inequity looks like for children in our country.

- 16 % of America's children were poor in 2018–a total of 11.9 million children–and children of color were disproportionately poor (Children's Defense Fund, 2020).

- Poverty is one of the biggest threats to children's healthy development. There are 11,752,892 children in the U.S. between the ages of 3 and 5.9% of them in deep poverty, where families of these children have incomes below 50 percent of the federal poverty line, or less than $10,289 for a family of one parent and two children (National Center for Children in Poverty, n.d.)
- $88,200 was the median income for white families with children compared with $40,100 for Black and $46,400 for Hispanic families in 2017 (Children's Defense Fund, 2020).
- Children from families with higher socioeconomic status (economic status, education, occupation) were likely to enroll in higher education institutions than those from lower SES families (Long, 2007).

To help us better understand equity, we will specifically examine race and what racism looks like in early childhood education. NAEYC's Advancing Equity (2019) defines race as a social-political construct that categorizes and ranks groups of human beings on the basis of skin color and other physical features. As we learned earlier from the definition of diversity and from the cycle of socialization, race is a social identity that confers privilege to one group and discriminates against another. Racism is defined as a belief that some races are superior or inferior to others, and it operates at a systemic level through deeply embedded structural and institutional policies that have favored Whiteness at the expense of other groups (NAEYC, 2019).

Throughout the history of public and early childhood education, children have been discriminated against because of their race. Children of slaves were not allowed to attend schools, and indigenous children were removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools. Not all children start with the same resources or supports because of historical and current bias and oppression in our institutions. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) children and families are part of our classrooms and programs. Earlier, we reflected on bias, privilege, and oppression. Looking at data about preschool expulsion and suspension rates, we can see how our implicit biases about a child's race are contributing to systemic oppression:

- Gilliam (2005), in his initial Yale study, found that expulsion and suspension rates are higher in preschool programs than in K-12 schools.
- The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2016 a, b.) confirmed that these rates were disproportionately high for Black children, where Black children make up 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of preschool children are suspended more than once.
- Gilliam (2016) and Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2019) found that race and implicit bias seem to be contributing factors to the higher expulsion and suspension rates for black and brown children, specifically boys.

Furthermore, here in Washington State, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families found that children of color are underrepresented in the percentage of children entering kindergarten with the skills they need to be successful. Children and youth of color enter and remain in the child welfare system at greater rates. Youth of color are also disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system (DCYF, n.d.). Teachers are a part of creating this data. We have to consistently consider children's diverse identities and how our own biases may be contributing to these systemic issues.

Achievement and Opportunity

All children can achieve. All children have the capacity to learn and develop to their fullest potential when they have the opportunities to do so. But due to biases that exist in individual teachers, in our programming and educational system, not all children are set up for success. Milner (2012) identified this as an opportunity gap. It is important for us to understand this distinction. Structural inequities adversely impact BIPOC children; however, it is not something inherent in them or related to their ability and capacity to learn. Again, all children will achieve if the opportunity to do so exists. As teachers, we have to create those opportunities.

The fourth Advancing Equity recommendation reminds us that we do this work by looking deeper at our own expectations, practices, and curricula, especially when outcomes vary significantly by social identities (NAEYC, 2019). Authentic observations and assessments can assist teachers in identifying aspects of their work that could be adjusted to create more equitable learning experiences and family support. Teachers need to see each child as a capable learner and develop a culturally responsive curriculum and individualized learning experiences to create opportunities for growth and development. We have a responsibility to set the stage so that all children have opportunities to learn, grow, and develop to their fullest potential.

We have learned and inherited our biases about race, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, gender expression and identity, ability and disability, language, national origin, indigenous heritage, religion, and other identities. Ongoing critical reflection on our biases and our social and cultural context, and how we may be contributing to systemic inequities, is necessary for achieving better outcomes for all children, especially for those who are from historically and systemically marginalized and oppressed groups.

Pause to Reflect

How are children and their families in your classroom impacted by bias and systematic oppression?

What are some things you are doing to ensure that all children feel they belong in your classroom?

What changes can you make in your classroom and curriculum to create equitable learning opportunities?

Inclusion

The study of **inclusion** involves how we can intentionally create equitable learning opportunities in our teaching, curriculum, and programs with a commitment to continuous learning. Inclusive teaching strategies engage each child to feel like they belong and help them to participate in the learning experiences with the rest of the group.

NAEYC Advancing Equity defines inclusion as "the embodiment of the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and their family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of their families, communities, and society" (NAEYC, 2019, p. 18). To be inclusive means to include everyone, and full inclusion seeks to promote justice by ensuring equitable participation of all children. To be inclusive, we also need to know who we may be unconsciously excluding.

When early childhood educators take the time to truly get to know children and their abilities, they can design learning environments that are welcoming to all children. It is important to consider aspects that include the children's culture, linguistic background, and developmental ability when setting up an inclusive classroom. Effective and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies for inclusion involve building nurturing relationships, authentic observations, scaffolding learning experiences, adjusting support, and collaboration.

Advancing Equity Recommendation for Everyone

There are several recommendations that can support our ability and capacity to work towards inclusion, where all children feel like they belong. The second NAEYC Advancing Equity recommendation for everyone tells us that we need to recognize the power and benefit of diversity and inclusivity, and recommendation three asks us to take responsibility for biased actions, even if unintended, and actively work to repair harm (NAEYC, 2019, p. 6). In our classrooms, children are learning about the world around them. Developmental theories and brain research tell us that the first 8 years of a child's life is one of exponential growth. Children are curious and engaged in what we share during circle time. They are active and excited when they participate in our planned or spontaneous table activities. During this time of active cognitive learning, children are also learning about themselves and others as well. Children in our classrooms are not only working towards meeting developmental milestones, but they are also being socialized by their families, teachers, and the communities they live in. They are beginning to learn about the cultural norms of their family as well as the social norms that we have in our classrooms and those of society. We are an intimate and integral part of a child's social and cultural growth and development. Whether we know it or not, we may be contributing to the deep inequities that exist for children and their families because of their social identities. It is imperative and necessary for us to consider ways that we can be more inclusive in our work.

Acknowledge, Discuss, and Plan

Creating welcoming and inclusive classrooms requires educators to put forth an ongoing effort. When we become more comfortable with social diversity, we will become more comfortable talking to children about differences that children will notice. If we don't acknowledge a child's observation in a positive way, then it gives them the impression that the difference is a problem or something negative.

Think about taking the following steps when a child sees something that is different in another child or their family.

1. Don't ignore it. Our initial acknowledgement can be a simple, positive, affirming statement. For example, a child may ask why their friend has two dads and no mom. A simple positive acknowledgment of this observation is to affirm that the child does have two dads and that there are so many different kinds of families.
2. Continue the discussion. We should continue the discussion depending on our comfort level by using open-ended questions

and examples to share about affirming the differences and normalizing them to the child. If we are uncomfortable continuing any discussions, then we can revisit them at another time when we feel more prepared.
3. Plan for integration. This leads us to the third step, where we can plan for a purposeful introduction or integration into our lesson planning and materials we have in our classroom.

Reflective practices that involve consideration of children's abilities, languages, cultures, and temperaments will guide teachers to adjust their teaching approaches to create inclusive learning environments. This type of reflective approach focuses on the uniqueness of each child and their individual needs and social diversity. The following are brief descriptions of inclusive practices and approaches you can apply to your teaching.

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is required to help us assess our thinking, judgments, and actions in the classroom. Self-reflection is a strategy that teachers should use to stop, step back, pause, and think about their work and assess to make changes or affirm what is working well. Sometimes self-reflection happens in the moment in the classroom after a planned activity, or it may happen at a time when you are not in the classroom. Critical self-reflection is a process where we stop and consider why we did what we did, how we did, and specifically ask if there were any biases in our decision-making.

Culturally and socially, many of the developmental theories we have relied on were researched by white men with children and families who spoke the same language, lived in similar homes, and had similar traditional family structures, who were part of the dominant (white) culture at that time. Having the ability to reflect on information that is current and culturally responsive will help us engage with diversity, equity, and inclusion in our work with children. Learning more about growth mindset, trauma-informed care (ACES), and language development are places you can start to develop an understanding of current developmental needs and supports.

Anti-Bias Approach

Ultimately, the goal of anti-bias education is to be conscious of and actively fight against biases we have about others and that exist in the institutions we work and live in. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2020) explain the anti-bias approach as an approach in early childhood education that explicitly works to end all forms of bias and discrimination towards children by those who care, teach, and guide them.

Derman-Sparks & Edwards (2020) outline four goals of anti-bias education that will nurture the development of the whole child so they can:

- Demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities
- Express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring human connections across diverse backgrounds
- Increasingly recognize and have language to describe unfairness (injustice) and understand that unfairness hurts
- nd have the will and the skills to act, with others or against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions

For us to meet these goals of identity, diversity, justice, and activism, we need to learn about the social, cultural, and economic context of the child, their family, and ourselves. We all have biases that we learned through the cycle of socialization. We also have our own social, cultural, and economic context that influences how we work and teach. Becoming more conscious of our biases through critical reflective work will help us determine how we learned to know what we know and do what we do.

To better assess our awareness and knowledge, below are some activities that can be done.

1. **Classrooms**. Look around your classroom and reflect on the materials you use to teach children. What social identities are represented in your books and dramatic play area? What kind of pictures are up in your classroom? Who is visible and who do we not see?
2. **Books for Children**: Assess your books for bias by using the Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books written (Derman-Sparks, n.d.).
3. **Self-Assessments**: Consider completing a self-assessment about your own social identity groups you belong to. How were you socialized into those identities? What did you learn about groups that you belonged to, and what did you learn about groups you did not belong to? Reflect on where you may have experienced privilege and/or discrimination (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020).

4. **Books for Teachers**: Read more! Start with NAEYC's Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement (NAEYC, 2019). Specifically look over the recommendations for early childhood educators. Derman-Sparks & Edwards, *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves (2020)* provides a thorough introduction to anti-bias education in early childhood education.
5. **Self-Education:** Take classes on Anti-Bias Education, Diversity & Equity, and Inclusion to continue to learn and build your knowledge and awareness. Another thing to consider is finding ways to expand your knowledge of diverse experiences and perspectives without generalizing or stereotyping others who are different from you (NAEYC, 2019). TED Talks are an excellent way to hear powerful and empowering authentic stories about systemic oppressions and bias. There are some suggestions on the website to review, following the references at the end of this section.
6. **Intent vs Impact**: Remember, good intent does not always lead to positive impact. When you commit a biased act, be ready and willing to be accountable and to take that opportunity to learn rather than being defensive (NAEYC, 2019).
7. **Book Clubs:** Think about starting a book club focusing on diversity and equity with your co-workers or with your friends and families. Or even with the children!

This is a journey and requires continuous learning for all of us. Take time to regularly reflect and revisit the aspects listed above, so you can create an equitable and inclusive early learning setting for children to thrive in. Invite your co-teachers to examine and discuss aspects with you. This type of collaborative work supports raising awareness of issues and developing an anti-bias approach.

Anti-Racist

If the stories we are learning from and teaching with are from the dominant white culture perspective, then we have to move beyond the anti-bias approach and also be anti-racist. Children are constantly internalizing the messages conveyed in their environments. As we previously discussed, BIPOC children are being disproportionately impacted by our education systems. A recent study found that children as young as 5 rated images of black boys less favorably than images of white boys and girls, with images of black girls falling in the middle (Perszyk et al, 2019). As teachers, we are also socializing children into the dominant cultural norms and values. It is critical that we reflect on what we are teaching children that may not be visible to us.

Furthermore, Dr. Shulman (2020), President of the American Psychological Association, stated that we are living in a racism pandemic. This racism "pandemic" leads to a number of psychological, physical issues, and historical trauma (Shulman, 2020). The impact of racism emphasizes the urgent need for each early childhood educator to engage in anti-racist work. This work will require us to examine our own racial biases, which we may have based on our own socialization process. Anti-racist work will look different for each person and teachers in each of our classrooms and our teaching approaches. We all can actively fight against racism. Some educators might say that they do not see color; we want to avoid this color-blind approach. When we see color, we truly see children and welcome the diversity that each child brings.

We will have to actively engage in learning more about what it means to be an anti-racist as well. Dr. Kendi (2019) points out that the opposite of being a racist is not just not being racist, but being an anti-racist, where we are actively fighting for racial equity. It means examining our own beliefs about what racial equity is. Through evaluation and reflection, we can dig deeper into our own socialization process and check for beliefs and ideas of others based on our and their race.

Working with Families

As we learn more about ourselves, we will begin to realize that the social and cultural systems that our families lived and worked in influenced us as children and now as adults. This same process is something we are part of for the children and families we are working with. As teachers, we have an opportunity to disrupt the socialization process that perpetuates the discrimination and marginalization of social identity groups.

It is important that we move away from the binary classification of social identities. We have learned to value and espouse the *either/or* way of thinking about others, but why can't we be an *and/both*? When we begin to shift our thinking to an *and/both* perspective, we allow for more space to integrate the diverse needs and support our children and families need. We can use a child's home language in the classroom and use English to support their language development. Why can't we boys and girls wear dresses in our classroom and be able to rough and tumble and be assertive in our play?

Home Environments

Children may be living and thriving in a single-parent household, a multi-generational household where other family members are an integral part of the home, or they may be homeless and living in transitional housing. These are just a few ways that diversity in family structure can look for the children in our classrooms.

Connecting with Families

Learning more about our families does not mean that we have to integrate or engage with all that they may do for their child. But we can begin to consider ways to support the child based on what they are learning from their family and what we are teaching them. Think about the ways you connect with families.

- How do we get to know our families, and how they raise their children at home? What are some ways to incorporate the cultural ways of being of the families into your program?
- How do we reflect on or consider a child's home environment's impact on the child's way of being in our classrooms?
- What networks of support does the family have outside of the home? How can we create a supportive network within the early learning program?
- How are we creating a sense of emotional and physical safety for the family? For example, if a family is undocumented, then the way they engage with the school will depend on the level of safety they feel with the teachers and the school. This will be something that impacts the child.
- How are we integrating the funds of knowledge that children and families already have into our classroom?

Ultimately, to create responsive, equitable learning opportunities, we must fully understand the lived experiences of the family and the child outside of our classroom. When we reflect on how a child is influenced and impacted by the environments that their families have to navigate to function and survive, we can create equitable opportunities for the child and the family because we have a better understanding of the barriers that the family is experiencing.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

When we integrate culturally responsive teaching into practice, we are moving to another level of critical reflection. We not only see how our social identities influence our decision-making, but we also acknowledge and find ways to teach using the cultural context of the children in our classroom. Culture is increasingly understood as inseparable from development (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, it is important to ensure cultural continuity, where the child's home culture is reflected in the classroom and is not invisible. Many marginalized social identity groups are invisible in our classrooms and teaching materials.

Zaretta Hammond (2018) writes about the pliability of young children's brains. Her focus was mostly on older children, but it is a reminder again that we set the stage for how children see and feel about themselves and where they fit into the classroom environment. There are three strategies we can use right now with children, and some of us are doing them already.

1. Culturally responsive teaching in practice can be as simple as making learning fun with **interactive games** that focus on social and verbal interactions, instead of just sitting and listening (Hammond, 2018). Children learn by doing, so adding a game to the learning makes it more engaging. Teachers can facilitate group activities in which children work together to create a story or mural. We could create a guessing game using felt boards when teaching about body parts. Give children felt pieces that represent different parts of the body and have them guess which parts they use to smell something they cook at home.
2. Another strategy is to make it a **social experience** (Hammond, 2018). Think about how we lead circle time. Do we allow children to share and talk during our reading of a story or teaching of a specific lesson? Do we make time for children to talk with each other about what they are learning? Consider asking children to share their favorite smell, family activity, food they eat together at home, or a song that they listen to at home.
3. A third strategy is to add **stories** (Hammond, 2018). Can we invite families to share or make up stories with their children about smells? Have elders come and tell stories in the classroom during circle. Instead of reading books, listen to stories families have recorded. This also helps us see how using play could be a culturally responsive strategy.

Ultimately, culturally responsive teaching occurs when we integrate teaching strategies that are centered on the children and their families' culture. This does not mean we have to know about all the cultures of our families and how they live outside of the classroom. As the fifth NAEYC Advancing Equity (2019) recommendation mentions, we just need to be willing to be open to learning and commit to learning based on our experiences with children and their families. When we are open to learning

more about children and families, we will build connections and partnerships that will support children's development. These connections demonstrate that we welcome all families and strive to incorporate children's cultures into the learning experiences.

Final Thoughts

This section discusses aspects related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in early learning settings. The details within these topics include societal issues, identities, bias, and cultural identity development. The information presented includes influences that can impact our teaching and program practices, along with ways to engage in anti-bias work. Diversity is more than just being different from someone. It requires a commitment to learn about our own diversity and how it influences our teaching. Equity is more than trying to treat everyone fairly. We have a responsibility to understand that not everyone has had the same opportunities, so we have a responsibility to ensure that all children have access. Inclusion is not just about making everyone feel welcome. It requires us to take an active role in engaging and integrating children's and their families' diversity into our programs intentionally.

We hope that this section will motivate and inspire early childhood educators to learn more about the children and families in their programs and strive to work with them in a culturally responsive way. Every interaction we engage in with children can influence their memories, cultural and social development, and ideas about how they fit into this world. We have the responsibility to ensure that every single child feels welcomed as a valuable part of the learning community. In order to ensure that children meet their fullest potential, it is vital that we continue to study, reflect, and act to address diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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10.2: Supporting Inclusion

Suggestions for Your Program and Classrooms

1. Respect the Uniqueness of Each Family System

Characteristics of the family system are often heavily influenced by a family's cultural values and beliefs. For example, researchers have found that, in some cultures, the family unit includes extended family members or clans composed of several households of relatives with a commitment to a family-based support network, while other families tend to focus on the immediate family and utilize external support networks. Knowledge and understanding of the variety of family structures and systems increase the professional's ability to respond to the family's needs. In turn, respect for the diverse systems of family organization enhances a professional's effectiveness.

2. Develop a Personalized Relationship with Families

Families are more likely to develop effective working relationships with professionals they trust. Yet, this relationship may be forged in different ways. Some families may prefer a more formal relationship with early education professionals, while others may prefer a more informal, friendly relationship. In some cultures, the father may be considered the head of the household and, therefore, may be responsible for making decisions for the rest of the family. In other cultures, the oldest female member of the household may hold the position of authority. Researchers in the early education field suggest that these issues need to be considered on a family-by-family basis, because intra-group differences are as great as inter-group differences. Awareness of these differences increases the likelihood of building effective relationships.

3. Communicate in Culturally Appropriate Ways

Cross-cultural differences in communication may also affect professional
-family relationships. For example, researchers note that if professionals assume a dominant role in conversations, the submissive role in which the family is placed may be a source of tension and may result in family members withholding information. Communication of this type may be particularly offensive to some families from traditional Hispanic, Native American, and Asian backgrounds. As discussed in the literature, knowledge of issues related to the use of translators and interpreters is important for early education professionals because communicating with linguistically diverse families often requires individuals fluent in the family's primary language to explain or clarify information related to programs and services.

It is also critical to maintain open, ongoing communication with families from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This communication may take the form of home-program notebooks, oral exchanges, or other modes of communication based on each family's preferences.

4. Recruit Staff Who View Diversity as an Asset

Efforts should be made to hire bicultural and bilingual staff to increase an organization's ability to create trust between families and professionals. However, researchers note that what is even more essential is to hire staff who embrace diversity as an asset and demonstrate a willingness to learn about the experiences and traditions of individuals whose backgrounds are different from their own. By recruiting such individuals, early childhood programs will substantially enhance their ability to work with families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

5. Create Alliances with Cultural Guides

It is important to encourage the participation of community leaders as "cultural guides" to facilitate communication and understanding between professionals and families. The literature describes several roles these individuals can play:

- Provide professionals with insights concerning community beliefs, values, and communication style.

- Offer families information about programs and services in a culturally sensitive and responsive manner.
- Act as facilitators to bring families and professionals closer together to reach desired outcomes.

Examples of cultural guides include community leaders, members of the clergy, and business leaders who are from the family's cultural group or who speak the family's primary language.

6. Evaluate Process and Outcomes

The final strategy addresses the need for ongoing evaluation of early childhood programs that serve diverse families. Evaluation can take several forms, such as asking families to complete surveys or sharing information through face-to-face or phone interviews. Early education professionals may also participate in program improvement activities by conducting a needs assessment to identify areas for training and then self-evaluating their knowledge and skills in those areas. With collaboration from bicultural/bilingual staff and cultural guides, information can be collected in ways that match families' preferences. In turn, early education professionals can use this information to improve their programs and their interactions with families. [63]

What About Holidays?

Talking and thinking about holidays in early childhood programs today is a "hot topic." Diversity among children, families, and staff who make up our programs is ever-increasing. Many of us believe that holidays should be celebrated, while many others think celebrations do not belong in the classroom. These opposing views have created a divide and uncertainty on whether to celebrate. As an industry (and even program by program), we need to discuss the decision and ramifications on whether to celebrate or not to celebrate. [64]

The Southern Poverty Law Center notes on its Teaching Tolerance website that there are some things programs should avoid doing when it comes to celebrating:

- Having a December-only emphasis on the holidays. While there are some important holidays for many families that fall in December, there are holidays that are really important to some families that do not occur in December.
- Making some holidays exotic and others just part of regular life, and using the "tourist approach" (of including many holidays, but only in stereotyped or superficial ways). These can happen unintentionally when trying to expose children to new holidays that you don't have as much information about or experience with or when you only recognize the culture on the specific holiday, rather than through the school year. [65]

And the National Association for the Education of Young Children reminds us to remember that

- Some holidays go against the values of families.
- The way holidays are celebrated is not always healthy and inclusive.
- Some holidays present a very lopsided perspective on history that can unintentionally lead to misinformation and stereotypes being passed on.
- Families may celebrate holidays the teacher and other children are not familiar with and may not fully understand or they may celebrate holidays in very different ways. [66]

Programs that choose to celebrate holidays should take care to make sure that what is celebrated represents all of the children and families their program serves. This requires meaningful conversations between staff and families. This should be done through respectful dialogue and requires staff to keep an open mind about things beyond their personal experiences and beliefs, and to try new things and new ways of celebrating. [67]

Pause to Reflect

One holiday that has evoked concerns about bias and equity is Thanksgiving. What are concerns that people have about Thanksgiving? How might a program navigate those concerns? How does this play a part in ensuring there is equity in what is celebrated and how it is celebrated?

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10.3: Examining the Learning Environment

Social justice and bias (implicit and explicit) have recently become key terms in the field of early care and education, but have been researched for many years. Dissecting biases can often lead straight to imbalances in social justice, which include inequity in education, access to resources, including food and healthcare, and in areas early educators see as vital to development, such as play.

The Disappearance of Play

In early education, we have been taught that play is a child's work. Children learn about the world through play, practice social norms including role-playing, learn how to negotiate, use their imagination, and release stress, develop fine and gross motor skills, and redirect energy. Yet as we look at early education centers that are located in lower socioeconomic communities, play can be little to none. Oftentimes, it can be used as a reward and given, or a punishment and taken away. Schools that serve impoverished communities may mistakenly eliminate play and replace it with more formal, structured instructional time, believing this will help children learn. This ignores the facts that children are fully engaged when playing, developing self -regulation through movement and choice, social-emotional skills by negotiating and building ideas together, and practicing what works in language. (K. Esquivel, 2019)

"Free play should not be seen as a 'reward' for young children's hard work - play is the work of a young child. Early childhood educators must use play as a tool for cognitive and social-emotional growth." Young children need play in order to develop full, healthy lives. It gives them a unique way to engage with language and build literacy skills. It builds their knowledge as they solve problems, interact with concepts, and test their hypotheses. "Children build resilience, confidence, physical abilities, and relational skills as they engage in play with meaning."

Play is increasingly being pushed out of children's daily lives, in spite of the advocacy for play from researchers, psychologists, and early childhood educators. "The issue of missing play in schools is essential for educators to address as children continue to grow in stressful situations, requiring the unique supports that development through play offers. Children who experience a play-based early education are empowered as confident people with tools for healthy development in every area of their lives. Play is a tool that educators must use to honor children's needs as they learn and grow." [82]

Inequitable Access to Play as Curriculum

As we discuss the types of curricula used in more affluent schools, we will see the vast difference in how play is welcomed, nurtured, appreciated, and viewed as a necessity. We also know children from more affluent communities tend to have fewer behavior-related challenges, more impulse control, and greater use of language, which shows a direct correlation to the increased play that is received and valued.

As the next generation of early care and education educators, there is a need to be cognizant of the social justice issue rooted in play, while also acknowledging the biases that may be linked to children playing. Some of these biases are:

- Play is a waste of time
- "Those" children are already too wild and get wilder when they play
- Children are to be seen and not heard
- "Those" children are already behind and need to be learning, not playing

Understanding why a family or school pushes back on children's play is an important first step towards change, delivering information, and moving towards changing imbalances. Diverse cultures place differing values on play. Not all families will understand or agree with the importance of play for young children in early childhood education programs.

A disparity in materials purchased can also be noted and rooted in the feelings of certain groups being less deserving and/or not taking care of nice materials. As professionals, we know fancy materials are not needed; the upkeep of an inviting, clean environment and quality interactions using materials that are in good repair and rotated frequently to maintain engagement. Additionally, providing the 'basics' is needed, such as:

- Various building materials

- Various art materials, including writing
- Various books that are culturally relevant to those in the class
- Outdoor space with ways to practice fine and gross motor skills

Appropriate classroom materials, including how to design high-quality environments, can be found in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) for preschoolers or Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-R) for infants and toddlers. Additionally, there are separate tools used for family child care centers, Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (FCCERS-R), and for programs that serve out-of-school programs, School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS).

Differences in Food and Mealtimes

Meal practices vary based not only on family culture, but differences can be seen based on the location of the early education center. Schools located in more affluent areas have a tendency to get more fresh foods and homemade meals by default, vs the opposite in other communities that receive packaged or processed foods.

Many programs are understanding the value in children having access to fresh foods, including fruits and vegetables, and are adjusting their practices and budgets accordingly. Families are also understanding the negative effects on children's growth and development, along with the immediate effects on their child's behavior due to various dyes found in many foods (K. Esquivel, 2019).

In addition to the food served, mealtime practices also vary. Meal times are most beneficial when they are enjoyable, not rushed, and filled with back-and-forth conversations that allow children to socialize and practice social norms. Having family-style meals (where the food is on the table and children serve themselves) allows children to practice their fine and gross motor skills and leads to children trying a variety of foods they may not typically be exposed to. Educators must consider the possibility of pushback because of family traditions, food scarcity, socializing at the table only being for adults, and eating all things given is a must.

As you work with families who exhibit mealtime traits that do not align with best practice, strategies may be helpful. One strategy is starting a conversation with the family, while encouraging the child to take a more active role in their meals is a useful tool. There is a fine line between respecting the family culture and their wishes and perpetuating social injustices that can be linked to socioeconomic differences (K. Esquivel, 2019).

It is also important to note that the use of food as a play material is a topic that families and early child educators may have strong feelings about. For some, especially those who have experienced food insecurity (not knowing where their next meal was coming from), it may be considered wasteful to use food for play instead of nourishing people. Programs may choose to implement a policy to respect the views and the values behind them.

Biased Response to Children's Behavior

Developing a culturally responsive understanding of child development is imperative to ensure child behaviors are not categorized as negative when they are actually rooted in race, ethnicity, and/or gender. Educators must acknowledge that goals and beliefs about children's development vary across different cultural contexts (the cultural context of the many adults in the child's life: parents/caregivers, extended family, practitioners, teachers).

The behavior of children of color, particularly Black, Latino, and Native American boys, is often mislabeled as challenging and negative. Boys from these groups are singled out more often for displaying the same behaviors and are withheld from more opportunities than their white peers. They are suspended at much higher rates, even from preschool, and are more harshly labeled as being aggressive, loud, and disrespectful.

Boys of color are seen as much older than their actual age, thereby having expectations placed on them well beyond their ability. Research has shown that implicit bias, the unconscious beliefs each of us possesses about specific groups, plays a large role in the negative connotation given to typical child behaviors. [83]

In his experimental study, Dr. Gilliam asked early educators to watch a video of children in a classroom and press a button each time they saw a "behavior that may become a potential challenge". The video included four children- a black boy and girl, and a white boy and girl engaged in a small group activity. In reality, the video had no challenging behaviors in it. Using an eye

tracking device, the research team measured where teachers were looking on the screen. Findings revealed that teachers spent significantly more time looking at the Black boy in the video than at any other child.

This research may shed some light on the stubborn disparities we see in expulsion and suspension practices. If early educators are scrutinizing black boys more, looking at them more, expecting more challenging behavior from them, we may expect they may find it, or in some cases think they've found it, even if objectively it is not there.

When the federal government published its own data on preschool suspensions for the first time, the results were remarkably similar. Though black boys made up 18% of preschool enrollment, they made up 48% of preschoolers who had been suspended. New Federal data released just this year, again, show that the numbers haven't moved. While black children make up 19% of enrollment, they make up 47% of suspensions. This year's data also reveal that black girls make up 20% of the female preschool population, but 54% of all preschool girls are suspended.

Of course, when we see such pervasive and long-lasting disparities, many of us consider the possibility of bias in the system. Dr. Gilliam's research is important because it provides us with data that explicitly finds implicit bias in the educators and directors who work in our early childhood programs. While it is exceedingly disturbing that bias, which is pervasive across all systems, is also present in our early childhood programs, it is not surprising.

All of us have biases- no matter what our profession, no matter where we live, or where we're from. We are all exposed to a society that is full of implicit biases—biases of all kinds. In fact, research shows that while explicit bias has decreased in our country over time, implicit bias has remained stable. And it is instilled in us at very early ages. [84]

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11: UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR AND POSITIVE GUIDANCE STRATEGIES

11.1: Challenging Behaviors
11.2: Positive Guidance Strategies

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11.1: Challenging Behaviors

This section provides insight into child behavior within a developmentally appropriate context. Later, we will address intentional and positive guidance to teach children appropriate and expected behaviors. The content is presented in a positive or strengths-based approach to support children as they grow, develop, and learn. This approach centers on our lens, looking for and identifying a child's strengths as a starting point for our work.

The foundation begins with building a shared definition of what guidance is, as well as what it is not. Throughout the section, you will examine the basis of behaviors both seen and unseen. It is also important to delve into some background and information about neurodiversity and trauma, and how this relates to and impacts behavior. The section will also address how emotions, psychological state, and social relationships influence child behavior. The final focus area is communication with families, along with mutual perspectives in guidance and the role of reflective practice.

Key Points

- Defining behavior: What behavior is and is not.
- Exploring the role of relationships: How relationships and behavior(s) connect.
- Identifying the social and emotional connections to behavior.
  - Social-Emotional Foundations of Early Learning
  - Classroom Climate
  - Guiding Social Behaviors
- Trauma and behavior: the role of neurodiversity in behaviors and the relationship between trauma and behavior.
- Discuss communication with families by sharing and reflecting on mutual perspectives: What, when, and how to communicate with families about behavior.

Terminology

1. **Affect:** What we can observe as a visual demonstration of the child's own feelings and empathy for others.
2. **Approaches:** Approaches are different ways to look at teaching and learning. An approach is based on theory, knowledge of brain development, and best practices for a specific area.
3. **Behavior:** Behaviors are the way in which a child acts, especially toward others. Behavior can be positive, supporting learning, positive relationships and interactions with others, or be challenging and interfere with the same.
4. **Challenging Behavior:** Challenging behavior is inappropriate behavior that children use and rely on to get their needs met. These behaviors interfere with learning, development, and success at play. Challenging behaviors may include aggressive and disruptive behavior or timid and withdrawn behavior.
5. **Communication**: Communication is a core skill in a child's development. It is the ability to understand and to be understood, and is essential to relationships, learning, play, and social interaction. Communication can be verbal or non-verbal, and can also be a form of communication.
6. **Compliance:** The child's ability or willingness to conform to the direction of others and follow rules.
7. **Cultural Dissonance:** Cultural dissonance is defined as a sense of disagreement, tension, confusion, or conflict experienced within a cultural environment. The underlying causes of cultural dissonance are often not expected and not understood because of different types of cultural aspects.
8. **Emotional Development:** Emotional development refers to the child's development of and identification of emotions and feelings, and includes the child's experience, expression, and management of their emotions.
9. **Goal:** A goal is the end (or final product) you are working toward. It is the "umbrella" statement, on objective terms, of what you want to see. For example, a goal for this section is: Introduce students to child guidance and **behavior** in the early years.
10. **Guidance**: Child guidance means teaching and helping children learn social skills that will support them in getting along with other people. We use positive techniques to teach so that each child can feel secure and comfortable while learning.
11. **Interaction:** The way in which the child initiates social responses to parents, other adults, and peers.
12. **Neurodiversity**: Neurodiversity is a viewpoint that brain differences are typical and that we all think and learn in our own unique ways. Neurodiversity **approaches** learning from a positive stance, as opposed to a deficit approach, reducing the stigma of difference in thinking and learning.

13. **Outcome:** The specific steps to a goal, stated in measurable, objective terms.
14. **Perspective**: a specific attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view.
15. **Planned Ignoring**: Deliberate and intentional inattention to an identified attention-seeking or other strategic behavior. Planned ignoring is used in a selective response to behaviors that function to get attention**.**
16. **Reflective Practice**: the ability to reflect on one's actions to engage in a process of continuous learning. According to one definition, it involves "paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively and reflexively.
17. **Relationships**: Relationships are the construct in which children and teachers talk, share experiences, and participate in activities that support the child to be engaged in learning. Relationships support a child to think, understand, communicate, express their emotions, and develop social skills.
18. **Self-regulation:** Self-regulation is a child's ability to understand and manage their behavior. This process supports a child in handling their reactions to feelings and helps to regulate their emotions.
19. **Strengths-Based Approach:** Interactions that begin with helpful and encouraging mindsets, that support adults to see children and families in a more optimistic manner, and allow us a strong foundation to build our positive relationship. Using a strengths-based approach begins with a focus on a child's (and family's) strengths.
20. **Trauma**: Trauma in ECE refers to traumatic experiences. These experiences can be from intentional violence, a natural disaster, an accident, or war. Childhood trauma disrupts a child's sense of safety, potentially causing negative behavioral, emotional, nervous system, and developmental impacts for the child.
21. **Unwanted (undesired) behavior**: behavior(s) that challenge us as adults, therefore are "unwanted". These behaviors are typically seen as negative.
22. **Venn Diagram:** A Venn Diagram uses 2 or more overlapping circles or shapes to illustrate the logical relationships between sets of items or information. The larger "outside" circles show the unique elements, and the overlap of the circles in the center is used to list the shared features.

Behavior Defined

According to the dictionary published *by* Merriam-Webster, behavior is a noun and is used to describe the way in which someone conducts oneself or behaves, the manner of conducting oneself, as in anything that a child does involving action and response to stimulation, the response of an individual or group to its environment, and finally, the way in which something functions or operates.

It is important to note that behavior includes not only the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, but especially how one acts or interacts with others. Likewise, behavior is the way a person acts in response to a particular situation. Behavior has two purposes:

1. To get something or
2. To avoid something.

Children learn all behavior. They learn from watching others, and we learn from the reactions we get in response to behavior. As behavior is learned, it can also be unlearned. When we stop and ask the question "why is this behavior occurring?" we can identify the opportunity to teach new, more appropriate behaviors as a replacement.

All behavior is communication. This communication happens every moment of every day. This important function is a signal that a child may not have the words or skills to tell you what they need, so they communicate with behavior. It can also be that a child does not even know what they need! When we understand and acknowledge this communication that is the basis of unwanted behavior or "misbehavior", we can work to change that communication into a form that is socially acceptable, safe, and healthy.

Behavior is observable. It is what we see and what we can hear, such as a child throwing a block, standing up, speaking, whispering, yelling, or arguing with a classmate. On the reverse side, behavior is how a feeling is expressed, not what the child is feeling. An example of expressing a feeling is that a child may show anger by rolling her eyes, making a face, yelling, crossing his arms, and turning away from the adult. These are observable actions and are more descriptive than just stating that the child looks anxious.

Behavior is measurable. This means that the early care and education professional can define and describe the behavior in objective, concrete, fact-based terms. The adult can easily identify the behavior when it occurs, including when the behavior begins, ends, and how often it occurs. An example of this is taken from circle time, and the child who is "interrupting all the time". This behavior is not measurable because it is not specific. However, stating that "Holly yells, 'teacher!' 4 times during circle time"

is specific, and we can measure and track the data each day at circle time. Using this operational definition of objective data, anyone observing in the classroom would be able to identify specifically which behavior the teacher is working to change.

Behavior does not occur in isolation. The process of behavior has three parts:

1. The action or event that comes first (the trigger)
2. The resulting behavior(s)
3. The consequences of our reaction to the behavior.

Behaviors are visible. This visibility is in terms of desired and undesired behaviors. Think for a moment in terms of behavior being like a tree and its root system. Above the ground, we see and observe the behavior. What we do not see is the part of the tree and its root system that is below the ground. It is the same with behavior. We see the actions and manifestations of the behavior. We do not see the underlying characteristics of feelings, thinking, and attitude(s).

Behavior falls under the domain of social and emotional development. Children are born with the want and need to connect with those around them. When parents and teachers, along with other caregivers, create positive relationships with children beginning at birth through the early years, they value their diverse cultures and languages, and children feel safe and secure. This creates a base for strong social and emotional development. This also affects how children experience the world, express themselves, manage their emotions, and establish positive relationships with others.

Behaviors are an outcome (or result) that can be observed. Above the ground, the behaviors we see children say and do might include indicators adapted from Mona Delahooke's work:

- Saying nice things to others or nothing at all
- Working quietly while others finish their work
- Keeping hands and feet to oneself
- Raising a hand and waiting quietly
- Respecting others
- Being agreeable
- Calling other students bad names
- Taking other students' belongings without asking
- Asking the person to borrow their belonging before using them
- Follow directions the first time
- Arguing or refusing to comply with adult requests or directions
- Disturbing others while they are working
- Punching or kicking others
- Blurting out answers
- Bullying others
- Arguing

A child's behavior may not be communicating what it seems outwardly. Every behavior has a motivation or purpose. While we cannot assume that we know the motivation for the behavior, we can observe the results of the motivations. Those observations must be objective, factual, and descriptive to assist in the identification of the motivation. Any of these motivations can be the reason for behavior:

- I feel angry.
- I feel frustrated.
- I feel scared.
- I feel happy.
- I feel loved.
- I feel proud.
- I feel lonely.
- I feel worried.
- I feel embarrassed.
- I feel sad.
- I feel sick.
- I am tired.
- I am hungry.
- I do not feel safe.

- I do not belong.
- I am not respected.
- I am not understood.
- I am not accepted.
- I do not matter.
- I do not feel loved.
- I cannot do things by myself.

Think about an image of a tree. The roots are underground, therefore not observed. Here are some behaviors that are typically "under the surface" and are not seen:

- Social skills
- Basic needs
- Physical safety
- Need to belong
- Security
- Hunger
- Thoughts
- Executive functioning
- Environmental stressors
- Attention
- Sleep
- Attachment
- Need for connection
- Need for attention

Here are some needs that are an underlying cause of behavior in children:

- Sensory needs
- Emotions
- Self-esteem
- Developmental level
- Fear
- Anger
- Power
- Sadness

The theory behind the tree and root model of childhood behavior is that there are many things that influence the way that children act and react, including the skills, knowledge, experience, social role or values, self-image, traits, and motives. Under the surface in the root system, however, are the unseen forces that can shape their behaviors.

As adults, we need to take the time to understand behavior and the motivations or causes of behavior. True behavior "problems" or challenges are those that are continuous and that get in the child's way of social relationships, communication, and learning. These misunderstood behaviors can potentially cause harm to the child, the family, other children, and other adults.

Pause to Reflect

Behaviors are communication and are both seen and unseen. Think in terms of the tree presented above. The leaves and branches are seen, just like in behavior, where we can observe changes and growth. The photo shows that the roots are below ground, hidden, and not easy to see or observe. The roots, even though not observable, are a vital part of the whole tree.

- The same can be said for behavior; we only see part.
- Some aspects of behavior are easily seen or observed (above ground), while the "invisible" characteristics seen in the photo as underground, are equally important to determining motivation and change.

The Role of Relationships

Now that we have a shared understanding of how behavior is defined, this section will support you in exploring and reflecting on the connection between relationships, social development, emotional development, and behavior. Did you know that relationships with others may influence behavior either positively or negatively?

Reflect for a moment on this photo of the young boy playing Jenga. As he moves and/or removes the blocks, the structure becomes unbalanced and even unpredictable. A child's behavior and the relationships in his or her life can mirror this game of Jenga. Social and emotional development is also important to the foundation as they help to inform how the child manages feelings and emotions and how he/she can socialize and cooperate with others within a relationship.

According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect practically every aspect of their development. Simply put, relationships are the "active ingredients" of the environment's influence on healthy human development. They incorporate the qualities that best promote competence and well-being – individualized responsiveness, mutual action-and-interaction, and an emotional connection to another human being such as a parent, peer, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, teacher, coach, or any other person who has an important impact on the child's early development. Relationships engage children in the human community in ways that help them define who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people (NSCDC, 2004).

When children have secure and stable relationships with caring adults, they are more able to develop warm and positive relationships with others. These children are more excited about learning, more positive about coming to school, more self-confident, and have stronger skills in getting along with others. (NSCDC, 2004). When relationships are secure and stable, the child's social skills to support interactions are strengthened, along with the ability to express and manage feelings and emotions.

It is also important to understand that the relationships children have with other children also inform and influence their behavior. Young children learn from each other how to share, how to participate in shared interactions such as taking turns, the reciprocal acts of giving and receiving, how to respect and accept the needs and wants of others, and how to manage their own impulses.

Simply being around other children, however, is not enough to build the skills for positive behaviors. The development of friendships is critical, as children learn and play more competently in the bond created with friends rather than when they are dealing with the social challenges of interacting with casual acquaintances or unfamiliar peers. Positive relationships and positive behaviors all add to healthy brain development and depend upon the relationships with individuals in the child's close community, as well as in the family. (Harvard, 2006).

It is within that context of family that we must remember that everything we think, say, and do is processed through our own individual lens and our unique cultural backgrounds. For teachers, it is essential to see and understand their own culture to see and understand how the cultures of children and their families influence children's behavior. Only then can you give every child a fair chance to succeed (Kaiser, Raminsky, 2020).

According to Kaiser and Raminsky, your culture and the children's cultures are not the only cultures at work in your classroom. Every school and early childhood education program has a culture, too. The cultures of most American schools are based on White European American values. As the makeup of the US population becomes more diverse, there is more cultural dissonance, which impacts children's behavior.

White European American culture has an individual orientation that teaches children to function independently, stand out, talk about themselves, and view property as personal. In contrast, many other cultures value interdependence, fitting in, helping others, being helped, being modest, and sharing property. In fact, some languages have no words for *I, me,* or *mine*.

Children who find themselves in an unfamiliar environment—such as a classroom that reflects a culture different from their home culture—are likely to feel confused, isolated, alienated, conflicted, and less competent because what they have learned so far in their home culture simply does not apply. They may not understand the rules, or they may be unable to communicate their needs in the school's language. (Kaiser, Rasminsky)

It is because the way you respond to children's behavior and conflict is bound to your own culture; it is common to get the wrong idea about a child's words or behaviors. When you observe a child's behavior that appears to be noncompliant, ask yourself if that behavior could be culturally influenced. Honest and open conversations with the family will help you understand and respect their cultural beliefs and practices regarding education and child development.

In terms of relationships, when you, as the teacher, are responsive to the children's culture, you are better able to form genuine

and caring relationships with the children and their families. You can scaffold on this to build on what the child already knows and can do and identify their next steps for learning. This information will help you choose and implement appropriate activities and strategies that honor children's cultures as well as life experiences and teach children what they need to know and do to be successful in the world today. (Kaiser, Rasminsky).

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) outlines the fundamental importance of positive relationships in an article by Drs. Gail Joseph and Phillip Strain. When adults invest time and effort in teaching proactively prior to behavior "events," children are more successful in achieving improved behavior change, even in situations that might lead to escalating challenging behavior. The key is communicating non-contingent affection and unquestioned valuing of children. The bottom line is that success is dependent on building a positive relationship first. Adults need to invest the time and attention in children as a prerequisite to the optimum use of sound behavior change strategies (CSEFEL).

The first step is to invest the time in relationship building, and the second is to understand that as your relationships with the child become stronger, so does your potential influence on their behavior. Children will "cue in" on the presence of you as a meaningful and caring adult and will attend differentially and selectively to what you say and do, continuing to seek out ways to ensure even more positive attention from the adult (Lally, Mangione, & Honig).

Review these strategies as you work to build relationships with children (adapted from work by Drs. Joseph and Strain (CSEFEL):

- Offer children a choice as much as possible vs. asking for compliance. Instead of saying "it's time to clean up", ask the child if she would like to put the blocks in the basket or the cars on the shelf.
- Take time to reflect to determine if you might ignore some forms of challenging behavior (for example, a child's loud voice), which is simply a decision about where and when to intervene. Note that this is different from "planned ignoring" for behavior designed to elicit attention.
- Be aware of your own behaviors and expectations. Set appropriate goals for behavior and determine a way (possibly a counter or visual reminder) to make and track multiple and ongoing relationship deposits.

There will be times that you should and will need to give feedback to children that is in the form of correction and reminders. This will not hinder your relationship building. The important takeaway is that your positive interactions need to happen in greater numbers and frequency. As you learn to do this, you can begin to keep a tally of how many times you remind a child about an unwanted behavior. The goal is for you to find at least twice the number of positive things to comment on and tally those also (CSEFEL).

When children do not receive positive feedback, they are less likely to enter the positive cycle of motivation and learning. The conclusion here is that when children have positive interactions with teachers and other adults, they have fewer instances of challenging behavior. When children feel safe and understood, they can use those positive interactions to help build positive relationships. This will build motivation and stimulate within the brain a cycle of repetition focused on motivation and learning.

Social and Emotional Connections to Behavior

As children grow and learn to be in the world, they learn the skills needed to take turns, help their friends, play together, and cooperate with others. Generally, around the same time, children are learning about their own feelings and emotions.

Children are born with the need and desire to connect with those around them (social development). When teachers and providers establish positive relationships with children from birth through the early years and value their diverse cultures and languages, children feel safe and secure, laying the foundation for healthy social and emotional development.

This process affects how children experience the world, express themselves, manage their emotions, and establish positive relationships with others (emotional development). Emotional awareness is the ability to recognize and identify our own feelings and actions, along with the feelings and actions of other people, and understand how our own feelings and actions affect ourselves and others. Review this example of how a Venn Diagram can be used to show some of the discrete social development milestones and emotional development milestones, as well as the intersection (overlap) between the two:

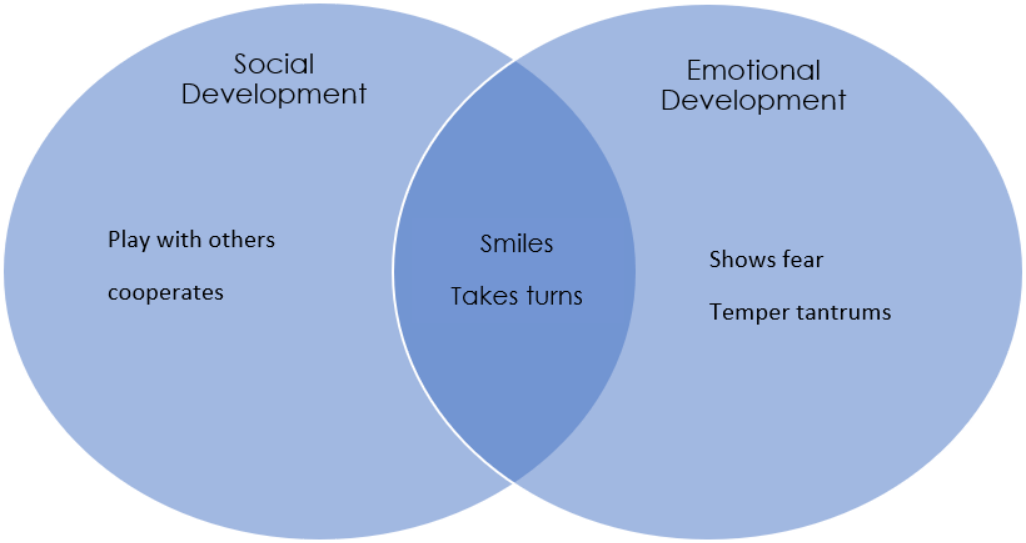


Figure 11.1.1: Venn Diagram

Here are some examples of social and emotional developmental milestones as they relate to behavior:

Table 11.1.1: Social and emotional developmental milestones by age.

Age	Examples of social and emotional developmental milestones
Birth to 2 Months	May briefly calm himself (may bring hands to mouth and suck on hand). Tries to make eye contact with the caregiver. Begins to smile at people.
4 Months	May smile spontaneously, especially at people. Likes interacting with people and might cry when the interaction stops. Copies some movements and facial expressions, like smiling or frowning.
6 Months	Reacts positively to familiar faces and begins to be wary of strangers. Likes to play with others, especially parents and other caregivers. Responds to own name.
9 Months	May show early signs of separation anxiety and may cry more often when separated from the caregiver and be clingy with familiar adults. May become attached to specific toys or other comfort items. Understands “no.” Copies the sounds and gestures of others.

Table 11.1.2: Social and emotional milestones

Age	Examples of social and emotional milestones
12 Months	May show fear in new situations. Repeats sounds or actions to get attention. May show signs of independence and resist a caregiver’s attempt to help. Begins to follow simple directions.
18 Months	May need help coping with temper tantrums. May begin to explore alone, but with a parent close by. Engages in simple pretend or modeling behavior, such as feeding a doll or talking on the phone. Demonstrates joint attention; for example, the child points to an airplane in the sky and looks at the caregiver to make sure the caregiver sees it too.
2 Years	Copies others, especially adults and older children. Shows more and more independence and may show defiant behavior. Mainly plays alongside other children (parallel play) but is beginning to include other children in play. Follows simple instructions.
3 Years	May start to understand the idea of “mine” and “his” or “hers.” May feel uneasy or anxious with major changes in routine. May begin to learn how to take turns in games and follow directions with 2-3 steps. Name a friend and show concern for a friend who is sad or upset.
4 Years	Cooperates with other children and may prefer to play with other children rather than by herself. Often cannot tell what is real and what is make-believe. Enjoys new things and activities.

Age	Examples of social and emotional milestones
5 Years	May want to please caregivers and peers. Is aware of gender. May start recognizing what is real and what is make-believe.
6-7 Years	Measure his performance against others. Continue to develop her social skills by playing with other children in a variety of situations. Be able to communicate with others without adult help. Start to feel sensitive about how other children feel about him.

Social and emotional development involves several interrelated areas of development, including social interaction, emotional awareness, and self-regulation. Below are examples of important aspects of social and emotional development for young children.

Social interaction focuses on the relationships we share with others, including relationships with adults and peers. As children develop socially, they learn to take turns, help their friends, play together, and cooperate with others. **Emotional awareness** includes the ability to recognize and understand our own feelings and actions and those of other people, and how our own feelings and actions affect ourselves and others. **Self-regulation** is the ability to express thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in socially appropriate ways. Learning to calm down when angry or excited and persisting at difficult tasks are examples of self-regulation.

Children who are socially and emotionally healthy tend to demonstrate, and continue to develop, several important behaviors and skills (adapted from McClellan & Katz 2001 and Bilmes 2012). According to these three authors, children

- Are usually in a positive mood
- Listen and follow directions
- Have close relationships with caregivers and peers
- Recognize, label, and manage their own emotions
- Understand others' emotions and show empathy
- Express wishes and preferences clearly
- Gain access to ongoing play and group activities
- Ability to play, negotiate, and compromise with others

Social and emotional development are both related to behavior and include the areas of social interaction, emotional awareness, and self-regulation. Social interaction spotlights the relationships children share with others and includes relationships with adults and other children. As children develop socially, they learn the skills needed to take turns, help their classmates, play together, and cooperate with others.

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11.2: Positive Guidance Strategies

Connecting to Behavior in the Classroom and Real Life Supports

With behavior at the core of this section, we will use this section to look at teaching social and emotional skills intentionally to support positive behaviors. When we teach intentionally, we have a plan and a purpose, and our outcome (result) will be observable. We are approaching this from a teaching perspective, as that matches our strengths-based focus and moves away from a negative or punishing approach.

Review and reflect on these intentional teaching strategies. This work is adapted from NAEYC (The Intentional Teacher):

1. **Coaching on the spot:** This practice will help you to describe behaviors and actions as they are happening in the classroom and help children recognize what they are doing in real time. This helps the children to understand the effect of their actions on others and helps them to select a different and appropriate replacement action (Riley et al. 2008). For example, when Taylor grabs a toy from Nicole, you would kneel at the child's level and calmly interject that "Nicole is using that right now. Next time, if you want to use this toy, please ask if you can have a turn when she's finished." You can then provide positive feedback to Taylor when you observe her desirable behavior.
2. **Effective praise:** Effective praise is meaningful feedback to the child that is related to what the child is doing in the moment. Giving effective praise is a powerful strategy for fostering children's social and emotional development (Kostelnik et al. 2015). An example of making praise effective would include you describing exactly and specifically what you see. This must be in objective terms and without generalizing, evaluating, or comparing. An example of this is related to a child painting at the easel. In giving effective praise, you would share that "I see a very colorful rainbow. You used red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Just like in our rainbow song at circle time." This example provides detailed and positive comments.

Effective praise can also be used with the first coaching example as desirable behavior is observed. You could say, "Taylor, you used your magic word. Please, may I have a turn when you're finished to ask Nicole for the toy? Great job working together!

3. **Modeling appropriate behavior.** We know that all children learn by observing other people. They learn from their observations and find ideas about behaviors and use these new ideas to manage their actions (Bandura 1977).

When we implement non-invasive strategies in the classroom, we are promoting socially and emotionally healthy behaviors.

Points to Remember:

- A gentle touch to a child's hand can be used to redirect attention or behavior.
- Acknowledge "in the moment" when you observe acts of kindness between children, or a group effort for working together to finish a job.
- Model appropriate warm and respectful behavior throughout the day with children and with your colleagues. Add modeling at specific times when a child needs a gentle reminder of the desired behavior or action.
- Move closer to a child and provide a non-verbal cue to redirect unwanted behavior.
- Use nonverbal gestures and cues (such as a nod of your head, a thumbs-up, or a gentle touch to the shoulder) to send a reminder message and acknowledge that you are there and aware.
- Use simple language like "walking feet," "hands to self," or "inside voice" to give reminders of expectations.

When children see teachers and other adults model these strategies that are non-threatening and do not invade their space, the child's response is typically a smile; they, in turn, use their gentle hands, they say please and thank you, give hugs and high fives, and use appropriate words to label their feelings.

As adults, we are not only role models for the children, but we also use the children's appropriate behaviors to model social and emotional skills for them. You might choose to use puppets during circle time to demonstrate children's appropriate behaviors to help them use those skills in a meaningful way. You might also use a strategy called "social stories" to teach important social and emotional skills. Social stories are a tool created to help children learn routines, expectations, and appropriate behaviors and are presented in a story format. These stories help children learn in another way while at the same time reinforcing the behaviors that we as adults want to see.

Pause to Reflect

Create your reflection in a Venn Diagram. Define social development in your own words, and then provide some indicators or examples of social development. Now, define emotional development and again think of emotional development examples or indicators. List your social examples in one circle of your diagram, and emotional examples in the other. List the indicators that are shared between the two areas in the oval where the two circles overlap:



Classroom Climate

Children who feel emotionally supported, valued, and safe in their classrooms are more likely to take academic risks and to deeply engage in learning tasks. These children also tend to have more positive interactions with their teachers and their peers. Better relationships between students and teachers predict higher achievement, social competency, and stronger social and emotional skills. Teachers who are warmer and more responsive to their students' needs tend to see fewer instances of problem behavior. As a result, the classroom becomes a less stressful environment for both children AND adults. (Vanderbilt University).

Classroom climate refers to the general mood, attitudes, principles, and tone that you and your children feel when in your classroom. A positive classroom climate feels safe, respectful, welcoming, and supportive of student learning. Positive classroom climate is built from a strengths-based approach and reflects a goal of teaching and guiding. Punishment is never a strategy used in a classroom exhibiting a positive classroom climate. The opposite of a positive climate is a negative classroom climate. This classroom will feel hostile, chaotic, and out of control.

You can recognize a positive classroom because you will see responsive teachers who use behavior and attention challenges to teach children appropriate behavioral expectations, while meeting the social and emotional needs of individual children.

Here are some strategies that you can use to build a positive climate (adapted from Vanderbilt College/PRI):

- Eliminate all use of threats, shaming, and sarcasm
- Maintain an approachable affect and tone when interacting with children
- Offer praise that is specific and meaningful (not simply "good job")
- Use behavior-approving language
- A classroom practice that supports a positive climate is using language that reinforces a particular behavior and describes to the child what he/she is doing. This approach shows that you want the behavior to continue or that you approve of it. Use of this strategy can be in verbal comments, facial expressions, or physical contact with children.

A classroom practice that supports a positive climate is using language that reinforces a particular behavior and describes to the child what he/she is doing. This approach shows that you want the behavior to continue or that you approve of it. Use of this strategy can be in verbal comments, facial expressions, or physical contact with children.

Verbal examples include:

- "I see that you are sitting so straight and tall on your mat."
- "Give yourself a pat on the back!"

- "I see that you are working so carefully on your drawing."
- "You are really taking your time to think about this problem."

Non-verbal examples include:

- Offering a smile, a wink, a head nod, or a thumbs-up in response to behavior observed in one or more children.

When learning in positive classroom climates, children over time have demonstrated significantly greater social competence and fewer unwanted behaviors, including more positive peer interactions, teachers who had a more positive emotional tone, and teachers who spent more time positively reinforcing behavior (rather than correcting undesirable behaviors).

In emotionally supportive classrooms, children have frequent opportunities to develop positive self-regulation**.** In these classrooms, teachers model appropriate choices, reinforce children for making those choices, and guide children in developing strategies for themselves. Use of this positive approach builds self-esteem in children while also reducing stress for children and teachers. Remember: the goal is to teach, not to punish.

Teaching and Supporting Social Behaviors

Children are born wanting social interaction. They watch how family and others connect with them. They watch and listen closely to facial expressions and tone of voice. Through these interactions and observations, babies develop the foundation for appropriate behavior based on what they see.

Social rules help to guide us in our interactions with others. Many children have a hard time recognizing these rules. It takes time and practice to learn.

Thomas McIntyre wrote these suggestions in his article "Teaching Social Skills to Kids Who Don't Yet Have Them":

1. Teach "belly breathing" as a calming technique. Take a deep breath in and count slowly, blowing air out. The first photo in this section shows a child blowing bubbles, a strategy that is also highly effective here, as a child must take a deep breath to blow bubbles. You might also use the strategy of "smell the flower and blow out the candle" for a visual image and use a silk flower and an unlit birthday candle for props.
2. Include a calm corner (not the book area/library) in your classroom. Include soft toys, pillows, emotion posters, and materials.
3. Teach social skills (making friends and getting along with others) and incorporate social stories regularly in your ongoing curriculum. Social stories help teach children routines, expectations, and behavioral standards in an alternative way. Search online for "social stories" for more information.
4. Teach children how to identify their emotions and label feelings with them. Use photos and prompts, and keep materials about emotions available in the classroom.
5. Ensure you integrate plenty of movement activities throughout the day.
6. Include many opportunities for sensory play, including sand and water.
7. Model the social behaviors you want to see from the children.

The Relationship Between Trauma and Behavior

Many of our children have experienced trauma, and we may or may not be aware. For them, keeping themselves safe becomes the primary motivator of behavior. Children may appear manipulative or controlling when they may be attempting to just keep themselves safe. Safety is the most important goal of a child experiencing trauma (NCTSN.org).

Like the tree and root system, we only see the small portion above the surface. Look below the surface of the behavior, and you will see the feelings and emotions driving the behavior. The unwanted or "misbehavior" we experience is often a child's attempt to solve another problem of which we are unaware.

Even minor stressors can act as triggers that fill children with emotion and can result in misbehavior. When teachers and caregivers do not understand why a child is acting out, they are more likely to focus on "managing" the behavior rather than meeting the child's needs. This is not an effective response to misbehavior and is very much like a doctor treating the symptoms of a disease without considering the cure. (NCTSN.org).

To understand unwanted or “misbehavior”, it is important to understand the body’s stress response. The NCTSN shares that our bodies have a built-in alarm system that signals danger. Children who have experienced repeated trauma often have overactive alarms. They are powerfully attentive to danger and may label non-threatening things as dangerous. False alarms can happen when children hear, see, smell, or feel something that reminds them of frightening things from the past. These reminders are called triggers.

Some Common Triggers of Behavior include:

- Changes in the schedule, routine, or environment that are unexpected
- The sense a child feels of helplessness or fear
- Experiencing a situation that causes a child to feel threatened or attacked
- Overstimulation from the environment (can be many things, including too many children/people in the room, noise, light, or activity).

What Does a Triggered Child Look Like?

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network shares that behaviors resulting from a stress response typically fall into one of three categories: fight, flight, or freeze. Flight looks like a behavior in which children move away from a person/situation they feel is a threat. Fight looks like a behavior in which children move toward a person/situation they feel is a threat. Freeze looks like a behavior in which children use their minds to move away from a person/situation they feel is a threat (holding still while “checking out”).

Additionally,

- When the child is calm, talk about how to recognize triggers and what can be done to increase awareness of emotions to prevent being triggered, or what can be done to calm down and manage (or regulate) emotions.
- As difficult as it can be, try to remember that these behaviors are not a personal attack and likely have little to do with you.

Children who have experienced trauma may appear nervous or jumpy. They may avoid physical contact. They may have difficulty sleeping/have nightmares. Children who have experienced trauma may be confused about what is dangerous and who to go to for protection, especially if the trauma was caused by a caregiver. They may have mood swings, for example, shifting quickly between being quiet and withdrawn and being aggressive. Additionally, they may demand lots of attention, have trouble paying attention to teachers at school and to parents at home, lose their appetite, and go back to “younger” behaviors such as baby talk or wanting adults to feed or dress them. They may also re-enact the scary things they have experienced during play, withdraw from friends or activities they have enjoyed previously, and/or get into fights at school or fight with siblings at home.

What Can You Do?

- You, the adult, must stay calm, regardless of the behaviors demonstrated. An upset adult interacting with a triggered child can worsen the behavior.
- Remember the tree and root system…try to identify the need below the surface that is influencing the child’s behavior. Shift your focus to meeting the child’s needs rather than correcting the behavior.
- You might try the strategy of “belly breathing” or blowing bubbles to help the child breathe and calm.
- Wait until the child is no longer triggered to talk about what happened. While triggered, a child is not able to use the rational part of the brain, making reasoning ineffective.

We tend to think of trauma as the result of a single frightening and upsetting event; we rarely consider unwanted behavior to be the result of trauma. Many children experience trauma through ongoing exposure, throughout their early development, to abuse, neglect, homelessness, domestic violence, or violence in their communities. And research has shown that chronic trauma can cause serious problems with learning and behavior (Miller).

Trauma is particularly challenging for educators to address because kids often do not express the distress they are feeling in a way that is easily recognizable — and they may hide their pain with behavior that is aggressive or off-putting. As Nancy Rappaport,

MD, a child and adolescent psychiatrist who focuses on mental health issues in schools, shares, “They are masters at making sure you do *not* see them bleed.”

As educators, we need to learn the symptoms of trauma in children to understand these confusing behaviors. Identification of symptoms of trauma can also help avoid misdiagnosis, as these symptoms can mimic other learning challenges, including ADHD and other behavior disorders (Rappaport).

Some of the barriers to learning that are experienced by children impacted by trauma include trouble forming relationships with teachers and other adults, poor self-regulation skills, negative thinking, hypervigilance, and challenges with executive function (NCTSN.org).

Children who have been neglected or abused often have problems forming relationships with teachers, a necessary first step in a successful classroom experience. They have learned to be wary of adults, even those who appear to be reliable, since they have been ignored or betrayed by those they have depended on. Often, these children do not have the experience that would support them in asking for help. There has been little or no adult modeling for recognizing and meeting their needs.

Many children who have experienced trauma have not been able to develop secure attachments to the adults in their lives. Children who have never developed that early attachment for trust and who have not learned that they are lovable and that people will take care of them need extra support to build those special relationships with their teachers and other staff (ChildMind.org).

The Child Mind Institute also shares that one of the challenges in giving that support is that when kids act out, our programs and schools often use disciplinary systems that involve withdrawing attention and support, rather than addressing their problems. We need to do the opposite and show extra patience for kids who provoke and push away adults who try to help them. Instead of punishing, this is our opportunity to teach a child what to do! We need to work with them on changing their behavior. When a child is acting up in class, we as teachers need to recognize the powerful feelings they are expressing, even though they are expressed inappropriately.

Rather than jumping to reprimands, a behavior plan, deducting points, or withdrawing privileges or suspending the child, it is critical to acknowledge the child’s emotion and try to identify it. This is also where modeling plays a big role. By saying, “I can see that you are really angry that Anja took the marker you wanted!” If that statement is not correctly connected to the feelings the child is experiencing, that child s/he is highly likely to correct you.

Materials and strategies for labeling feelings and emotions should be an ongoing part of the curriculum and be present in a “quiet corner” and in accessible parts of the classroom environment. Acknowledging and naming an emotion helps children be more able to express themselves in a more appropriate way. Communicating that you understand the child is the essential first step to helping a child learn to express himself in ways that do not separate them and/or push away people who can help him.

It is critical that we remember and respect that children who have experienced trauma (or are experiencing ongoing trauma) often have trouble managing strong emotions. As babies and toddlers, children learn to calm and soothe themselves by being calmed and soothed by the adults in their lives. If they haven’t had that experience, because of neglect, the lack of a secure attachment system contributes to their chronic dysregulation (emotional dysregulation is when a child is unable to control or regulate their emotional responses to challenging input) (ChildMind.org).

In the classroom, teachers need to support and coach children in ways to calm themselves and manage their emotions. This allows the adults to act as models and to be partners in helping children to learn skills for managing their behavior. Remember that co-regulation (warm and responsive interactions that a child needs to understand, express, and modulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) comes before self-regulation. We need to help them learn how to get the control they need to change the output when they are upset. This also includes providing coaching and practice at de-escalating when they feel overwhelmed. (ChildMind.org).

Another challenge to children with trauma is that they develop the belief that they are bad, and what has happened to them is their fault. This leads to the expectation that people are not going to like them or treat them well. They may think, “I’m a bad kid. Why would I do well in school? Bad kids don’t do well in school.”

Children with trauma may also tend to develop the idea that everyone is out to get them. They might hear directions and requests as exaggerated, angry, and unfair. This leads the child to act out with quick responses and in an irritable manner. A mistake that might seem trivial to us becomes exaggerated if their experience has been that minor mistakes result in adult anger or punishment. For these children, it is important to build on small steps towards success in the classroom and to help them see that in the classroom, making a mistake is a necessary part of learning.

One of the classic symptoms of trauma is hypervigilance, which means being overly alert to danger. In the case of trauma, physiological hyper-arousal means that children are jumpy, and they have an exaggerated startle response. They can have some big, out-of-control-seeming behaviors because their fight or flight response has gone off. Be mindful that this can look like hyperactivity and lead to a misdiagnosis of ADHD. Being chronically agitated can also lead to difficulty sleeping and chronic irritability. (Miller).

For positive behaviors to grow and thrive in the classroom, it is important that teachers learn strategies to support children in calming themselves when something in the classroom triggers an emotional outburst. When a child is escalating, the key is to match their affect, but in a controlled way. The goal is to connect to their big feeling. If you can connect with what they are trying to tell you, they may be able to regain their calm. It can work even if you just make a guess — you do not have to be right; they can correct you. (Garey, 2013).

Pause to Reflect

Highlight the topics presented in this section where information overlapped.

List strategies that you will implement in your curriculum to support positive behavior and social and emotional skills growth.

Record the changes you can make to your environment to support social and emotional skill development related to behavior.

Communication with Families. Sharing and Reflecting Mutual Perspectives

At this point in the section, we have built a shared definition of behavior, taken a deeper look at behavior and motivation, and established an understanding that all behavior is a form of communication. We have also reviewed how relationships (especially positive relationships) relate to behavior and are needed to support positively guiding the behavior of children. This foundation was built to support a mutual understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma. This critical piece of information is necessary to understand the whole child and not simply react to the behavior(s) that are seen. We are closing with information about how to have conversations with families about behaviors (challenging and/or unwanted). This communication requires an ability for you to be objective, positive, and culturally aware in the information you share and the method by which you communicate.

Successful work in the field of Early Learning depends on your ability to build positive, trusting, and respectful relationships with families. No child comes to us alone or isolated; they come to us within the context of a family. When we build and maintain trusting relationships with those families, we will be able to engage in more opportunities for open communication and dialogue about children.

We know from experience that having a conversation about a child's challenging behavior can be stressful for them and for us. Did you know that you can reduce your stress and gain more positive results when you "invest" in relationships with families? You will need to be objective and stick to facts, while at the same time maintaining a focus on solutions. It is important that we understand that in child development, there are cultural differences relating to beliefs about developmental milestones. When communicating with families, it is important to be conscious of your own beliefs related to culture and your personal biases as you make choices about what and how to communicate with families.

You might even feel intimidated in having conversations with families about a child's behavior. A key strategy in having difficult conversations is to begin with the positive. We start with strengths, including describing what the child can do and what he/she does well. Include positives about behavior and times when you have noticed positive behaviors or interactions. We must always avoid the impulse to blame the family for the child's challenging behavior. This is an important interaction to have with the family and cannot be avoided out of our fear of potential (real or imagined) conflict. When we look at these extremes of blame and avoidance, we should realize that neither approach is helpful for the child, and both only add to your own stress. This added stress could even possibly increase the intensity of the behavioral situation of concern.

When the time comes to talk with a child's family about challenging behavior, Dr. Webster-Stratton (2012) shares some strategies to help create a productive interaction. Remember above where "invest" in relationships was mentioned? Dr. Webster-Stratton talks about this process of relationship building as a metaphor for a "piggy bank". She believes that we need to make deposits regularly into this piggy bank to have the ability to make withdrawals that support our difficult conversations. Try these three

things in your relationship work with families:

- Make sure you have plenty of investments in the “relationship bank” with the family,
- Stick to data from your observations
- Offer possible solutions and support.

Dr. Webster-Stratton also discusses how to fill your relationship bank. Each of us (both children and adults) has an emotional “piggy bank”. It is built on positive relationships. Just like your real-life piggy bank, you must have money in the bank to successfully make withdrawals without a negative outcome.

We know from research (Incredible Years, 2012) that children need 5 positives, such as:

- I see you using walking feet!
- High-5! You’ve got this!
- You are working SO hard!

Those 5 positives are needed for “balance”, and to move forward in your positive relationship, for every negative, such as:

- No! or Stop!
- Use of a child’s name to call them out
- Please do not do that!

Pause to Reflect

Stop and think about that for a minute to let that ratio sink in; you need to say to a child 5 positives for every negative:

1. Five (5) positives
2. Provide balance for 1 negative
3. Resulting in a more positive relationship and allowing the child opportunities for success.

Stop and practice this “formula” related to a specific behavior you have observed or can imagine.

Time to do some math! Think about that child whose name you say 350 times a day. Imagine that child’s name and multiply that by 350 x 5. Did you calculate that answer to be 1750 positives? The child will need over 1700 positive comments just to break even emotionally! This deposit strategy is not only for the child, but also the same for families. That very first time you approach a family to discuss a child’s challenging or “unwanted” behavior, you are withdrawing a significant amount from the emotional piggy bank. Do you have “enough” positive interactions and a strong relationship already in place to avoid a negative balance? With sufficient balance in the piggy bank, you are ready to have challenging conversations and, as Dr. Webster-Stratton (2012) found, families will still have emotional “money-in-the-bank” to work with you on developing possible solutions.

The next point bulleted above was to stick to the facts. This is called being objective. We need to put aside the emotional aspect of challenging behaviors when you are communicating with the family. Taking this emotion-free, positive approach, you could share with a family, “Today, Michael had a very difficult time sharing”. This is a much more useful statement that opens the possibility for a conversation about problem-solving. The opposite can be said for using statements such as “Michael was hitting ALL day”. This statement is not helpful and is not helpful (it is also most likely not accurate). The positive approach will lead to a strategy to support Brandon in learning a new skill, which he is. This also provides scaffolding to ask about behavior in the home: “Tell me about how Michael shares at home with his siblings. What methods have you tried that I might try here at school?” Remember that emotional piggy bank that was shared earlier? Our goal here is to build a positive relationship and partnership with the family. We want to work together to make positive connections between home and school. When we approach challenging behaviors in a fact-based manner, it will help to remove emotion and blame from the conversation and will be much more likely to help open doors rather than create walls (Webster-Stratton, 2012).

The last bullet is about problem-solving. For every conversation, we as ECE professionals need to be ready to share some solutions. At the same time, it is of benefit to the partnership to engage in give and take by asking for and offering an ongoing partnership with the family. Always get ideas and input from the family. You will have an opportunity to share other strategies with the family after they communicate what they are currently doing at home to support their child. This partner-based communication will work to build a bridge between home and school that will support of the child’s learning. You will also need to talk about going forward and how you will continue to communicate about the child’s skill-building. This should include any information you will be

collecting from your ongoing classroom observations. Remember the importance of sharing successes in all written and verbal conversations with the family to keep adding to the family's and child's emotional piggy bank.

Here are some guiding thoughts for your conversation with the family:

1. Begin with strengths: "Let's talk about what Sarah is doing really well!" This will begin your conversation on a positive note and will focus on what the child can do so that you can build from there.
2. Share your concern using facts: "I am concerned about Sarah and how she's doing with her frustration. Are you seeing similar challenges at home?" Remember that you are working to build that positive relationship with the family, and you should always bring up concerns with collaboration in mind.
3. Together, define a clear and measurable goal. "I really want to work with you to help Sarah develop her social skills to support positive behavior".
4. Create a plan together. "What do you think we should include in the plan for Sarah, so that each of us has strategies to follow that develop new skills for success?". Always focus on skill development, not on behavior. Use the image below as a checklist for your plan.



Figure 11.2.1: Checklist

5. Finally, discuss next steps for moving forward. "The more we all work together, the more successful Sarah will be". Remember that consistency between home and school will support the child to be more successful and faster.

Final Thoughts

This section looked at child behavior. The information was shared with the intent of building the foundation for positive and intentional guidance within a developmentally appropriate framework. The information was presented in a strengths-based approach to support your work to build on what a child knows and can do to build skills.

In defining behavior, we looked from two different perspectives: behavior that is seen and observed, and behavior that is "below the surface" and unseen. It is important to know every child with whom you work to be able to discover the "below the surface" experiences, skills, and motivations that influence behavior. Along with the development and teaching of social and emotional skills, we must remember that all behavior is communication. Stop and ask yourself what a child is telling you through behavior next time you are challenged. The other question we must ask is about the well-being of the whole child and the possible presence of trauma in their life.

At the core of our work around behavior is relationship building with the child's family. Strong, respectful relationships that are founded in partnership will support your work with the children and model social skills for life.

As young children develop socially and emotionally, they learn self-control. At this time, challenging behavior is common and can be expected. It is important to identify the meaning behind challenging behaviors and work together with families to set age-appropriate expectations for the child.

"Every child deserves a champion- an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be."

Rita F. Pierson; Keystone Creations

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