

Arkansas Children's Week
April 6-12, 2014

Connecting with Each Child



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Arkansas Children's Week 2014

Connecting with Each Child

Which of our children do we hope will achieve something important someday?

Which of our children do we hope will thrive in our care today?

The answer to both questions, of course, is **all of them**. Early childhood professionals wish the best for each child and family; we hope to see every child succeed. Yet, even with our best intentions, some children seem to struggle more than others. A few children seem to be such "easy keepers" – those cheerful children who settle in quickly and move through their day in a sure and steady way. A few others bring a bundle of challenges – anxious or angry, unsettled, often at odds with those around them or "out of synch" with the rhythm of the day. Many children can be found somewhere in the middle, a mix of sunshine and storminess.

If we are sincere in our desire to help every child succeed, we must go beyond labeling children as good or bad, easy or difficult. We must see each child as a unique combination of temperament, development, past experiences, and more. We must find the strengths and talents in every child, recognizing that there is more to being "good" at life than being still, quiet, and undemanding. And, we must recognize that we have the power to design environments, schedules, and routines that reflect what we know about each and every child – setting the stage for success.

Success for every child isn't just a happy accident. It is made possible by the efforts of a community of caring adults who come together to study, plan, observe, and apply knowledge and skills. All across Arkansas, early childhood and youth development professionals are rising to the challenge, elevating the quality of care and education to help each child learn and grow.

Welcome aboard for Arkansas Children's Week 2014!
Together, we'll explore ways of **connecting with each child**.
Our children are worth it!



Arkansas Children's Week
April 6 - 12, 2014

How will you celebrate?



Facets of Fabulous Me



Temperament

Parts of my personality that I was probably born with, including my natural activity level and the intensity of my emotions.

Past Experiences

My journey so far, including the places and people I've encountered. Pieces of this puzzle include health history, child care experiences, and events in my home.

Culture

Beliefs, behaviors, traditions, and more – learned from my family and community. It's another important aspect of who I am and who I will be!

Learning Preferences

Discovering my world by looking, listening, or moving and doing – Am I a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner?

Developmental Milestones

My behavior reflects my physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth so far. Every day, I discover new ways to communicate, interact, investigate, and use my body in many ways!

**Put it all together, and then you'll see
fascinating, fabulous, one-of-a-kind ME!**

A word about how to use this book...

In the pages that follow, we'll explore the many facets of personality and behavior.

- Temperament
- Experiences
- Culture
- Sensory Perceptions
- Learning Styles

It turns out, there's a lot to consider when we seek to explore our own behaviors and the behaviors of the children with whom we work.

The intent of this book is **not** to label or limit any child. (Or any adult, for that matter!) Although we will investigate many different facets of personality, each of us represents the unique sum of our parts, which is always much more complex and open to change than any label can convey.

It is also **not** the intent of this book to give educators and caregivers a whole, new laundry list of considerations to complicate their already busy days! Taken all at once, all of the factors listed above can feel overwhelming.

So, then, how *is* this book intended to be used?

Hopefully, it will expand your awareness of why children do the things they do, and perhaps why *you* do the things *you* do. When we understand the influences on a person's behavior, we also naturally become more understanding of that person.

Maybe it will awaken a curiosity in you to read, research, and find out more. We're never too old to learn something new! Network with other professionals to discuss, debate, and share what you know.

Perhaps most importantly of all, this book might inspire you to observe children carefully and reflect on what you notice. By being purposeful in the work we do as we set our schedules, arrange our spaces, and interact with children, we can truly connect with each child.

Thank you for taking the time to read this book and for the vitally important work you do every day.



*A teacher affects eternity;
he can never tell where his influence stops – Henry Adams*

Take a Look at Temperament

What makes you who you are?

Your personality reflects the sum of your life experiences. You've been learning since the day you were born, acquiring all of the knowledge and skills you need for school, work, and life. But did you know that your personality also reflects your own, natural way of approaching the world that was "wired" before you were even born? That's what temperament is all about!

Temperament is thought to be the result of the interaction of a number of prenatal factors, especially genetics and brain development. Every baby is born with a temperament of her own, with traits becoming more evident as she grows through infancy and enters the toddler years. These traits will influence who the child "is" throughout life, with behavior reflecting a combination of inborn traits and environmental factors.

For caregivers, recognizing each child's temperament provides important clues about the child's behaviors and needs. Understanding our own temperament is valuable, too, as we hone relationships with children, families, and co-workers. By realizing that many behavioral characteristics are inborn – rather than the result of bad parenting, failed teaching, or deliberate naughtiness on the part of the child – we recognize and respect that children are not identical, nor should they be responded to in identical ways. We gain the insight that allows us to provide individualized scaffolding and support that each child needs to learn and grow.



Research on temperament began in the late 1950's with a longitudinal study conducted by Alexander Thomas, Stella Chess, and associates. Their work identified nine temperament traits present in each of us.

- Activity Level
- Adaptability
- Approach/Withdrawal
- Distractibility
- Intensity of Reaction
- Mood
- Persistence
- Sensory Sensitivity
- Rhythmicity

There is a range of behaviors for each of the personality traits, with some people at one end of the range or the other, and many people somewhere in the middle. Let's take a closer look at how some of these traits may look at home and in the care and education environment as we consider ways that adults might meet each child's needs.

Activity Level

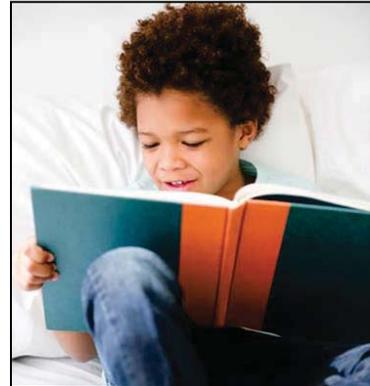


Meet Meg.

Meg is a “mile-a-minute” kind of toddler. She seems to be in constant motion, a blur of busy hands and feet. She learned to walk early, and seems to crave physical challenge – climbing, tumbling, running, and bouncing around to explore every inch of her classroom.

Meet Nathaniel.

When 7-year-old Nathaniel goes outside with his afterschool club, he’s often content to settle down under a tree or relax on a bench with a friend instead of joining in ball games or other active play. He’s last to gather his belongings and can usually be found tagging along behind the group at the end of the line. Teachers find themselves reminding him to catch up, keep up, and keep moving.



Nathaniel and Meg are on different ends of the spectrum when it comes to activity level, one facet of their temperament. Meg is highly active, while Nathaniel naturally moves at a slower pace.

What can adults do to meet their needs?

- Provide plenty of appropriate physical outlets for the very active child. Meg’s teachers will want to ensure that her toddler classroom includes large muscle toys, such as Sit-n-Spin toys, large push toys, and toys for rocking and/or riding. Include plenty of outside time in her day, and join in play with her in active ways – chasing, dancing, playing with balls.
- As highly active children move into the preschool years and beyond, teachers are challenged to find ways to include lots of physical activity in circle times, story times, and transitions - engaging body and mind simultaneously.
- Children with low activity levels, like Nathaniel, need time to prepare for transitions. It can be helpful to give a little extra time and support for clean-up tasks or to allow

additional time for him to finish the task at hand - such as a drawing or puzzle - before moving on.

- We know that regular, moderate exercise is important for the health and wellness of all children, so it is valuable for adults to seek physical activities that will especially appeal to the child with a low activity level. For example, if Nathaniel is fascinated by sea creatures, his teacher might use this interest as a “bridge” to entice him to join nautical-themed parachute, chase, and obstacle course games. Avoid races and competitions to see who is fastest, opting instead for cooperative games.
- Consider a schedule that allows children to move through their day individually or in small groups – at their own pace – rather than all at once.

Adaptability

Benn’s Story

Benn, age 3, has always been a “go with the flow” kind of kid. He loves surprises and readily shifts from one activity to the next. Even as a baby, easy-going Benn seemed to naturally adapt to changes in routines and caregivers.

Benn adores following his older brothers around, but sometimes finds himself in trouble when his spontaneous, eager-to-please personality makes him an easy target for their pranks and schemes. Just last week, he bumped his head after his brothers talked him into a ride down the staircase in a laundry basket.



Kylie’s Story



Kindergartener Kylie dreads days when her class has a substitute teacher or when the daily schedule changes for special events. Field trips and program days often result in crying and upset, or tummy aches and trips to the nurse’s office.

Even on typical days, Kylie’s teacher suspects that she sometimes acts out to feel in control of her world. She has trouble stopping one activity to move on to the next, and is sometimes reluctant to put away her crayons, line up from recess, or finish her lunch. On the other hand, Kylie participates enthusiastically in the daily circle time and can be counted on to complete every school assignment with care.

Kylie and Benn reflect differing levels of adaptability, one facet of temperament. Benn adapts to new situations quickly and easily, while Kylie is slow to adapt. Although very different from one another, both children have their share of strengths and struggles. Here are some tips for their teachers:

- Children who adapt quickly often settle in to new classrooms without a fuss, but that does not mean that they should be ignored. Make a special effort to connect with this child by talking with him about his interests and ideas and find ways to help him make new friends.
- As the easily adaptable child grows, he may be at risk of acting impulsively and following the lead of others without pausing to think things through. Use books, role play, and discussions to teach this child the benefit of slowing down to consider choices before acting.
- Children who are slow-to-adapt thrive on structure and need to know what to expect in their day. Set and stick to a predictable daily routine. Use pictorial schedules to sequence the day's events and help the child prepare for any changes. Respond calmly and patiently when schedule-related upsets occur. For example, keep this child close to provide comfort after an unexpected fire drill.
- Allow time for "switching gears" by giving a gentle time reminder (such as a 5-minute warning) before the end of each activity. Timers and clocks can be reassuring for the child who adapts slowly.
- Helper jobs can give the child who is slow-to-adapt a sense of predictability and control. This child might feed the class pet each morning, carry the clipboard to the playground, or help set the table for meals. Having a sense of purpose at these transition times can greatly ease anxiety.

Approach/Withdrawal

Meet Ruby.

4-year-old Ruby has never met a stranger. She'll walk right up and chat with anyone! Her bravery isn't limited to meeting new people; Ruby is always eager to try new foods and explore new places.

At preschool, she's the "hand's on" learner who can often be found at the top of the tall climber on the playground or in the housekeeping corner, decked from head to toe in dress-up clothes. Newcomers to her classroom – children and adults alike - are often greeted with a spontaneous hug or the gift of a crayon drawing.



Meet Jeremiah.



Jeremiah's mother describes the two-year-old as a cautious child and he can often be found clinging to her leg. He seems to prefer to hang back and watch other children play before joining in and is very slow to warm to new people and places.

It took quite awhile before Jeremiah would talk with his new teacher or let her hold him. He cried when he was dropped off each morning but would pull away when approached, leaving his teacher unsure of how to comfort him. These days, though, he seems to have finally settled in and enjoys cuddling in her lap to look at his favorite books or play fingerplay rhymes.

Ruby and Jeremiah's parents and teachers have noticed a temperament trait known as approach or withdrawal. Ruby is an outgoing, quick-to-approach child, while thoughtful Jeremiah takes time to warm to new people and places. Here are some ways that adults can reflect their understanding of temperament as they interact with the children:

- The child who is eager to approach often needs help to learn to read cues from peers and understand boundaries. She may learn to ask before giving hugs, for example, and classmates can learn to use words to tell her when her playful physical contact feels like "too much".
- Because this child may readily approach unknown adults, especially close supervision is needed in the early years. Later, talk about dangers to help the child learn to be appropriately cautious about potentially unsafe people and places.
- Rotate toys and materials to provide new challenges and learning opportunities for the outgoing child. Encourage her to think of new, creative ways to use materials. As she gets older, this child may be eager to participate in music, dance, sports, or other performance-based hobbies.
- When helping the slow-to-approach child adapt to new care environments and caregivers, families and caregivers should seek a balanced approach. It can be helpful to provide ample time for the child to visit to warm to the new space or person with a parent or familiar caregiver close by for support. When good-bye time comes, it should be straightforward and brief. It is not helpful to sneak out while the child is playing or to "boomerang" in and out in response to the child's upset.
- A comfort item, such as a favorite soft toy or a family photo in an unbreakable frame can provide reassurance to the child who is slow to warm to new caregiving environments.
- Allow opportunities for the child who is slow to approach to hang back and study the situation before joining. Do not force the child to try new foods or new experiences - such as fingerpainting or playing in a sprinkler - until he/she is ready. This child often learns by observing, and may prefer to watch instead of participating.

Distractibility



Meet Isabella.

This perceptive, quirky 8-year-old never misses a thing! She seems to notice every sight and sound in her world. In the classroom, she often finds the goings-on around her to be distracting as her attention is drawn to the sound of the pencil sharpener, the movement of classmates nearby, and the shadows on the desk and floor.

Her teacher often scolds her for interrupting, forgetting to finish her work, and wandering in the classroom. This rarely upsets Isabella, though - ever since she was very little, she has not been the type to sulk or stay upset. After just a moment, she is ready to forgive and forget and move on with her day.

Meet Erin.

Erin's pre-k teachers describe her as "in her own little world". She seeks out building blocks and fine motor materials at playtime. Erin can often be found working alone in deep concentration, poring over sets of materials as she creates complex patterns and designs.

Focused and mild-mannered during playtime, Erin can become inconsolably upset if she has to stop in the middle of an unfinished project. When the class goes outdoors, Erin sometimes becomes so involved with her imaginary games that she misses the teacher's calls to line up. Her father reports that they have meltdowns at home if she isn't able to finish a TV show or movie, or if he doesn't read the entire book she picks for a bedtime story.



Erin and Isabella are on opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to distractibility.

Erin can become so focused on her work that she blocks out the world around her, while Isabella notices almost everything. Each child's temperament can be an asset or a challenge, depending on the circumstances. What can adults do to help?

- Adults can be patient with the highly distractible child to allow her time to process all she sees and hears. We may have to be ready to switch gears on the fly to keep up with her train of thought! A simple walk to the playground can be a series of pauses as she reaches for each flower and acorn, hops over each crack in the sidewalk, and becomes engrossed in watching a passing truck or plane. It can help to have this child hold an adult's hand at the end of the line.

- The child who is highly distractible may appreciate charts or checklists to help stay on task. Routines and clean up tasks can be broken down into simple, easy-to-manage steps, with support from adults as she focuses on one part at a time.
- Get “up close and personal” when communicating with the highly distractible child. Move near and get down on her level, then establish eye contact and/or gentle physical contact to help her tune in to what you have to say.
- The child who is highly focused may miss cues at clean up times and transitions. Recognize that this child usually isn’t ignoring adults to disobey; she is simply so involved in her work that she doesn’t notice what is going on. Provide careful supervision to ensure that the child who is highly focused does not get left behind in the classroom or on the playground!
- Adult composure can help the highly focused child work through and recover from the inevitable upsets that can come when play is disrupted.

Intensity



Max’s Story

Shrieks of excitement and howls of despair – a day with 8-month-old Max can be a roller coaster ride of powerful emotion. The first word his parents use to describe this high energy baby is “LOUD”. Whatever he is feeling, the whole world knows it!

Aniyah’s Story

Aniyah’s calm demeanor stands at contrast to her excitable, dramatic third grade peers. It can be hard to tell what she is feeling because her moods seem so mild and muted. While her even-tempered nature makes her an easy child to work with, there are times when she seems to struggle to connect with peers – perhaps because she doesn’t seem to notice what they are feeling or respond to them in expected ways.



Aniyah and Max are opposites when it comes to intensity. Little Max expresses his emotions in a vocal, vigorous way, while subdued Aniyah barely shows her feelings at all. Here are some ways that adults can support children with these temperament traits:

- With the child who has very intense responses to the world, adults can notice and respond to signs of escalating intensity. Examples include rocking or distracting a baby who shows early signs of distress or using a friendly calm-down ritual with a child who is becoming overly excited.
- “It’s not fair!” “I hate this school!” “You aren’t my friend!” - The child with intense emotional reactions can be dramatic! Wise adults do not take such outbursts personally or respond with upset of their own, instead remaining calm to help this child learn to express strong feelings in appropriate ways.
- Because the child with a low intensity level doesn’t often express strong feelings with her body language, it is especially important to teach her to talk about how she is feeling. Teach words such as *disappointed*, *sad*, and *embarrassed*. Don’t assume that this child does not have feelings because her manner is so mild; she still needs your support.
- Help the child with low emotional intensity look for clues about feelings in books and movies and work with her on recognizing facial expressions and body language of peers. Recognizing feelings of others may not come easily to her, but is an essential skill for learning to relate to friends and family.

Persistence

Meet Adrian.



Adrian is a child who sticks with something new until he has figured it out and finished it. In the preschool classroom, his teachers know him as the “puzzle kid” – the more challenging the floor puzzle, the more he seems to love it! He also enjoys the block area, taking great delight in building towers as tall as he is.

Adrian has a bit of a challenging stubborn streak. Lately, he seems compelled to climb up the pole of the swing set, despite his teacher’s efforts to redirect his behavior. He’ll go play somewhere else briefly, but after a minute or two she’ll find him right back at the swing pole!

Meet Alexander.

Alexander - Adrian's brother – may look just like his twin, but their personalities are very different. Alex is a spontaneous, playful child who is always open to new ideas.

During playtimes, he often “bites off more than he can chew” when it comes to classroom tasks. He becomes frustrated with a half-finished puzzle, an emptied bin of lacing beads, and a dozen uncapped markers. His teachers find themselves constantly reminding him to go back and finish what he started!



As Alexander and Adrian prove, children from the same family – even twins- can be very different from one another when it comes to temperament. It is important to recognize each child's unique strengths. What can adults do for children with exceptionally high or low persistence?

- Longer blocks of play time are best for the child with high persistence. This child likes to finish what he starts, and can become frustrated when there isn't enough time.
- Consider ways to allow the highly persistent child to work on projects over time. Examples include setting a Lego structure on a safe shelf to finish at the next playtime, working on a collage project over the course of several days, and using a bookmark to keep a place in a book to finish reading later. If you promise this child that he can come back to something later, it will be important to him that you keep your word.
- Children with lower persistence tend to master fine motor skills – such as buttoning buttons and writing their names – more slowly. This may be because their natural response to a challenge is to move on to something else. Wise teachers seek highly appealing ways to help these children build skills.
- During play and clean up time, partner with the child with lower persistence to tackle tasks together. With just the right amount of support and encouragement, adults can find ways to help this child stretch his ability to “stick with it” as they work together on puzzles, simple board games, building block structures, and more.

Sensory Sensitivity



Chelsea's Story

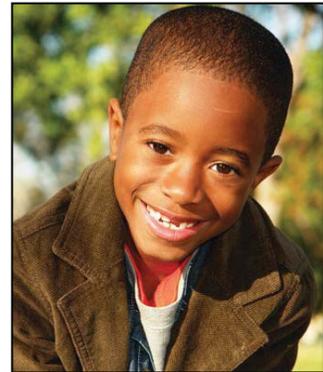
Chelsea's mother reports that her toddler was a fussy baby. Over time, her family came to learn that she is highly sensitive to sounds, textures, and touch.

She's often bothered by bunched up socks, snug sweaters, or tags in her clothing. She'll only sleep with her silky blanket, and she is picky about the temperature and texture of her foods. Loud, busy, bright environments seem to overwhelm her almost immediately. The transition to child care has been a bumpy one as Chelsea adjusts to all of the new sights and sounds of the busy toddler classroom.

David's Story

7-year-old David is an agreeable child who willingly eats almost anything, wears almost anything, and falls asleep almost anywhere. He doesn't seem bothered by loud, crowded shopping centers or long rides in the car. He's not one to complain.

In fact, David rarely even mentions when he is hurt or feeling ill. His parents tell about the time when they were surprised to see that his new shoes had rubbed blisters on his heels and the time when they didn't know he was sick until they kissed him goodnight and realized he was running a fever.



David and Chelsea's parents and caregivers have noticed their sensory sensitivity – one aspect of their temperament. Chelsea is extremely aware of – and sensitive to – input from her senses. David is the opposite – so unaware of sensory input that he barely seems to notice a stubbed toe or a sore throat. Here are some ways that adults can provide support.

- Once families and caregivers have identified a child's sensory sensitivities, they can seek tools to help the child feel more comfortable and in control. Examples include sunglasses for outdoor play on bright days, tag-free t-shirts, and a pair of headphones (or earplugs for older children) that the child can put on when classroom noise becomes overwhelming.
- Consider compromises for the child with extreme sensory sensitivities. A child who cannot stand to wear shoes all day might be more successful in slippers or slipper socks. Having at least one crunchy food on the lunch plate each day can help keep a

child with a strong aversion to soft, mushy textures from becoming uncomfortably hungry.

- Watch each child's responses to sensory input for clues about his/her needs. Hugs and tickles that are fun for most infants may be over-stimulating to a baby who is hypersensitive to touch. In the preschool room, some children avoid wet materials such as paint, play-dough and mud. Acknowledge the child's feelings and do not require her to engage in activities that seem uncomfortable.
- Toddlers who have a low sensory sensitivity may not cry when they fall or even when another child bites them. Close supervision can help ensure that there are not unexplained bumps and bruises later.
- Preschoolers with a low sensitivity to sensory input sometimes engage in aggressive, rough-and-tumble play. They may not be aware that they are hurting others. Provide guidance to help this child learn more suitable ways to interact with peers and provide outlets for physical play. Tumbling mats, a child-sized rower, or a balance board may be appropriate options for the very physical child.
- Older children with a low sensory sensitivity sometimes exhibit "daredevil" behavior because they have less fear of crashing or falling. Adults may need to help these children define boundaries for safety.
- Children with low sensory sensitivity sometimes seek greater-than-average stimulation. This child may prefer foods with very sour or spicy flavors, seek books and puzzles with high contrast images, and enjoy dancing to loud music with a strong beat.

Rhythmicity



Meet Ian.

In the weeks since he joined the group, Ian's family child care provider has come to call him "Mr. Predictable". He naturally seems to fall into a rhythm of eating at the same times, sleeping and waking at the same times, and even needing diaper changes at the same times each day.

Meet Nadia.

You never know what the day will bring with joyful 5-year-old Nadia. Early bird or night owl - some days she's wide awake at the crack of dawn, while other days bedtime is a battle.

Mealtimes are equally unpredictable. Starting school brought a new set of challenges: a series of forgotten lunchboxes, left-behind library books, and lost jackets.



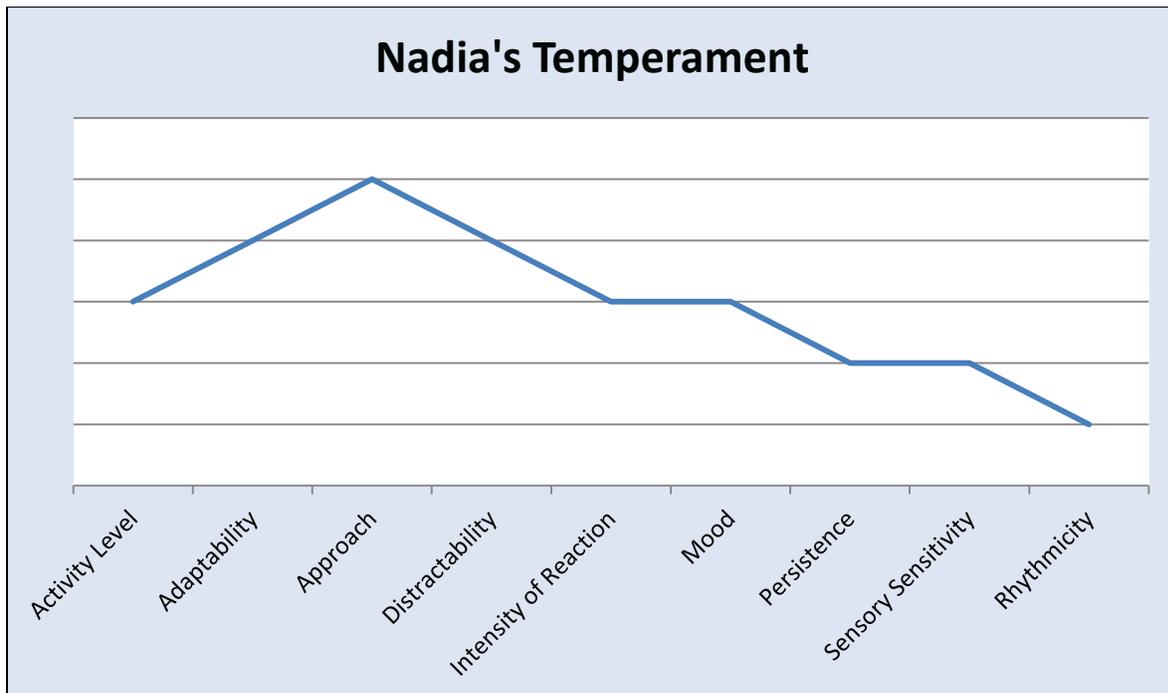
Ian and Nadia are demonstrating a temperament trait known as rhythmicity. You can set your clock by Ian's regularity, while Nadia's patterns of sleeping, waking, hunger, and playfulness are hard to predict. What do parents and caregivers need to know?

- The highly regular child is usually very easy to get along with. Ideally, infant caregivers honor each child's individual needs, and this child will thrive when he can keep to his natural schedule. Expect some short-term challenges as he gets older and has to adapt to different meal and rest schedules in new classrooms. Time changes can be tricky, too.
- Wise adults help the child low in rhythmicity become attuned to her own body's cues about hunger and tiredness. Don't push for a "cleaned plate" at mealtimes or try to force sleep during nap. Provide quiet alternatives – such as picture books and puzzles – for days when she isn't sleepy.
- The child with low rhythmicity sometimes struggles with organization. Establish playful but predictable routines and help her learn to use organizational tools as she gets older. Picture and word labels on storage containers can provide the cues she needs to keep "loose parts" - like small toys and art supplies – orderly and readily available for play.
- Children on both ends of this spectrum will benefit from learning self-help skills as they grow. For example, they can learn to fix a snack when they are hungry, set an alarm at bedtime, and find a quiet place to recharge when tired during the day.

The sum of the parts

Although the examples above focused on one strong facet of each child's temperament, each child's temperament is actually comprised of the combination of all nine traits. When the traits are viewed together, a portrait of the child emerges.

If we were to make a chart of Nadia's temperament traits based on the observations of her family members and teachers, it might look something like the chart below.



Nadia's lack of rhythmicity stands out, as does her highly approachable nature. Temperament traits on the high and low end of the spectrum are often the first things we notice about a person and have the greatest influence on behavior. Nadia's other traits fall somewhere near the middle of the spectrum and may be less noticeable, but they are still an important part of who she is. Her exact temperament is as uniquely her own as her fingerprint!

What would a chart of your personality chart look like? Adults sometimes find that their greatest challenges come when they work with a child who is almost exactly identical to themselves – or a very strong opposite!

Goodness of fit

The purpose of understanding temperament is not to judge children as good or bad, easy or difficult. Understanding temperament enables us to reflect what we know about each child in our planning and interactions. When we recognize temperament, we gain valuable insight into the child's behavior. When adult caregivers and children are well-matched, this is sometimes referred to as "goodness of fit".

Goodness of fit can be determined by the compatibility of the temperament of the adult and the child, but it can also reflect the caregiver's training and efforts. When the caring adult uses what she knows about the child's personality and abilities to guide expectations, structure, and support, the child is likely to have a positive experience.



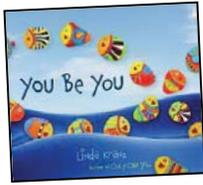
Our goal is to do the best job that we can to meet the needs of each child. The time they spend with us influences how they view themselves and their place in their world. Their experiences with us in the early years create the foundation for development throughout life.

Here are some important ways that we can work to optimize our interactions with each child.

- **Use what you know about temperament to help children grow.** For example, it isn't ideal to shelter a child who resists change from any variations in the daily schedule. To do so would only make her habits more inflexible. But, we can help her cope by recognizing her feelings and teaching her techniques to manage stress.
- **Respect that each child is a unique person.** Avoid comparing children to one another. Statements like "Why can't you be a good girl like your sister?" or "If all of the other kids can sit and wait, so can you." are never helpful.
- **Don't take a child's temperament personally.** It can be easy to assume that an inconsolable infant who is slow to warm doesn't like us or that an impulsive school-ager is being intentionally disruptive, but understanding temperament allows us to reframe these responses.
- **Help children see the strengths in their temperament even while helping them work through challenging behaviors.** Ruby is friendly. Isabella is observant. Adrian is determined, and Alexander is a leader. Everyone benefits from focusing on natural talents and children can grow to realize that their temperament isn't a curse – it is a special part of who they are!

Sources:

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Temperament Theory and Practice, Chess and Thomas, 1996



Read All About It

A dozen delightful picture books to help children understand individuality

Big Al by Andrew Clements and Yoshi, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1997
Talk points: not judging others by appearance; making friends

Cleversticks by Bernard Ashley, Dragonfly Books, 1995
Talk points: family cultures; individual strengths

Do Unto Otters: A Book About Manners by Laurie Keller, Square Fish, 2009
Talk points: meeting new people, making friends, understanding differences

Fraidyzoos by Thyra Heder, Harry N. Abrams, 2013
Talk points: understanding fears, patience, problem solving, working together

Leo the Late Bloomer by Robert Krauss, HarperCollins, 1994
Talk points: we all grow at our own pace and in our own way

One by Kathryn Otashi, KO Kids Books, 2008
Talk points: bullying, bravery, inclusion

Same, Same but Different by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw, Henry Holt & Co, 2011
Talk points: cultural diversity, pen pals

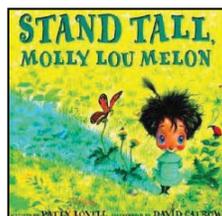
Skin Again by Bell Hooks and Chris Rascha, Jump at the Sun, 2004
Talk points: racial diversity, character, friendship

Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell and David Catrow, Putnam Juvenile, 2001
Talk points: seeing strengths in ourselves and others; teasing and bullying

Stellaluna by Janell Cannon, HMH Books for Young Readers, 1993
Talk points: We're all different yet we're all alike; respecting differences

The Day the Crayons Quit by Drew Daywalt, Philomel, 2013
Talk points: understanding differing points of view

You Be You by Linda Kratz, Taylor Trade Publishing, 2011
Talk points: individuality, acceptance



5 Ingredients for Connected Days



1. **Good morning, sunshine!**

A warm greeting starts the day in a meaningful way. Make every *hello* count by getting down on the child's eye level, making eye contact, and welcoming the child with a warm smile.

2. **If you're happy and you know it, sing along!**

Call-and-response songs and chants and participatory storybooks can be the perfect way to build a bond with your group. Here are a few fun favorites.

- ***Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*** by Bill Martin, Jr. and Eric Carle
- ***Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom*** by Bill Martin, Jr., John Archambault and Lois Ehlert
- ***Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes*** by James Dean and Eric Litwin
- ***The Pout-Pout Fish*** by Deborah Diesen and Daniel X. Hanna

3. **Be a shutterbug.**

The more photos, the better! Use family photos to build a bridge between home and school. During the day, take lots of photos of special classroom events and children at work and play. Post the pictures at child's eye level in the space you share together. Talking with children about the displayed photos is the perfect way to recall special times together and encourage children to tell you all about family, pets, and more.

4. **Get in the habit of habits.**

Familiar classroom routines help each child feel tuned in to their day. Create classroom traditions that are a fit for your group.

- Starting the day with a welcome song or a class chant or cheer.
- Counting down from "**BIG LOUD TEN**" to "whisper one" – starting with a shout and getting quieter and quieter as you go – as you gather the group.
- Racing to beat the clock at clean up time and celebrating together when you succeed.
- Creating silly "inside jokes" that reflect your children's sense of humor, just for fun.

Since young children thrive on repetition, they love to join in favorite, fun routines over and over again.

5. **High five!**

Playful, positive touch is something most children crave. Make a point of having warm contact with every child throughout the day. Possibilities include sharing hugs or pats on the back, snuggling together to share a favorite book, and connecting with one another through games like *London Bridge* or *Ring Around the Rosie*.

Picture This!

Fun ways to include children’s photos in the learning environment

Making use of children’s photos in the learning environment is a perfect way to help children feel connected to the group and to their child care space.

Photo displays are a great start, don’t stop there – today’s technology makes it possible to feature children’s photos on learning materials throughout the room! Here are some ideas to get you started.

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Pop-Stick Puzzles

ages 2 and up

Paint the back of a photo with glue and attach to wide, wooden craft sticks. When the glue has dried, cut the sticks apart with a hobby knife.

Individual puzzles can be stored in pencil boxes or repurposed snack food canisters.

Photo source: Toys in the Dryer blog

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Block People

all ages

Use contact paper or craft glue to secure children’s photos to wooden blocks or cylindrical lengths of PVC pipe or cardboard packing tubes.

Children can incorporate themselves and their classmates into block center play.

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Book Look

all ages

Use large, cropped photos of children's hands, faces, and even feet to make a homemade guessing book.

*Whose smile is that? Whose fingers are those?
Who has Batman sneakers?*

Photo source: Things to Share and Remember
Family Childcare Blog

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Kids in the Game

ages 3 and up, including school-agers

Cut out and laminate small photos of the children. Use a metal binder clip to create "feet" that allow each photo to stand up.

Kids can use these personalized playing pieces for almost any board game, from Candyland to Monopoly!

● ● ●





Match Me

all ages

Use children's faces and names for a homemade memory matching game.

Game pieces can be made from cardstock, small blocks, or metal lids from frozen juice canisters.

What a fun way to learn the names of friends!

Doodle Mats

ages 2 ½ and up, including school-agers

Copy or print a large photo of each child. Laminate the photos or cover with clear contact paper.

Pair with dry erase markers so that kids can add glasses, moustaches, and other doodled details.

Or, pair with play-dough for even more fun.



Connecting with our Littlest Learners

Even in infancy, each child has a personality of her own. Although some preferences shift with baby's changing moods and milestones, certain inclinations are there to stay! In time, adults can come to learn the unique characteristics of each baby.



Do you know me?

Twinkle, Twinkle or *Wheels on the Bus*? Do I love a lullaby, or something more playful?

Tickly touches or more steady massage?
What sort of touch do I like best?

What best soothes me when I am upset?
Shooshing? Rocking? Patting my back?

Do I pop up from nap ready for action, or am I a little slower to wake and warm up?

Lifted high to see the world, or seated solidly on the ground? Where do I most like to be?

Fuzzy toy, wooden rattle, or bouncing ball – which is most likely to catch my eye and bring a smile to my face?

Do I like to be right in the middle of the action, or do I prefer my personal space?

3 Rs of Responsive Care

Recognize

Observe baby for clues about her interests, mood, and state of being.
What do you notice?

Respect

Let her know that you understand how she is feeling.
Even little babies know when their voices are heard!

Reflect

Reflect what you know about baby in your schedule and activities. Instead of urging him to change his ways, make individual adaptations when you can do so safely.

How well do you know the children in your care?

Use the questions below to check how well you know each of the toddlers, preschoolers, or schoolage children in your group. Make a copy of the quiz for each child, or jot your answers down on a separate piece of paper. If you are not sure of an answer, leave the question blank.

1. Which toys/games does this child pick first for playtime?
2. Are there any special friends that he/she seeks out to play with? If so, who?
3. What does this child sometimes fear or worry about?
4. This child knows a lot about...
5. How does this child respond when frustrated or angry?
6. What is something that this child is proud of?
7. This child likes to pretend...
8. What does this child especially like to do outside?
9. Something that seems to make this child uncomfortable is...
10. Can you list at least three examples of this child's current favorites – such as favorite color, favorite food, favorite animal, and favorite book?

How many questions were you able to answer?

8-10 answers:

You know this child well!

Your investment in a relationship with this child shows!

6-7 answers:

You're in the process of establishing a connection with this child.

Keep up the good work!

5 or fewer answers:

Challenge yourself to get to know this child better. Observe, have conversations, and join in play with this child. The more you learn, the more your relationship with this child will grow.

Precious Packages

Exploring Home-School Connections

Imagine the children arriving at your classroom door, each carrying a large package. You welcome the children as they enter the room and settle here and there – on the rug, at the table, near the cubbies – to begin unpacking their boxes with care. What is in the packages? No two are the same, but each is dear to the child who brought it.

The children's boxes of treasures are a metaphor for the "personal belongings" that each child brings to school each day.

- ❖ A collection of past experiences
- ❖ A family and community culture
- ❖ A role within the family unit



Each of these helps make up the framework of the child's identity; they affect how she moves through her day and interacts with other children and adults. These factors, along with temperament and development, shape how she views herself and others in her world. Although it may not be as visible as a parcel in her hands, this collection of past and present experiences does, indeed, enter the classroom with the child each morning and will have a tremendous influence on her day.

Consider each of the following children.

How might each child's circumstances be reflected in classroom behaviors?

A toddler is by far the youngest in a loving family with several significantly older siblings. This is his first time in child care.

A preschool student is part of a large farming family where independence is a strong part of the home culture. She's used to running around the house and yard as she pleases and grabbing a snack from the fruit bowl if she is hungry.

A kindergartener did not go to preschool. Although his parents are gentle and affectionate with him, he has been taught that it would be brash and disrespectful to look an adult in the eye when they correct his behavior.

A seven-year-old girl's mother works until 11 pm most nights. Because this is the only chance she gets to see her mother most days, the girl's grandmother is in the habit of letting her stay up to welcome her home. With bedtimes after midnight, mornings come early!

A third grade boy in the afterschool group spent the summer outside with his older brother and a group of cousins around his age. Machismo, good-natured roughhousing and daring deeds were a part of most days' play.

Talking About Differences

Simple ways to connect with diverse families

Be available.

Try to talk to parents as often as possible. Remember that body language can reveal whether you are anxious or in a hurry. If you are calm and relaxed, a family will feel that they can be open with you.

Be informative.

Families appreciate knowing what goes on during the day. Keep a few notes and don't focus only on problems.

Be receptive.

Help parents feel comfortable talking to you by setting aside your judgments. Strive to listen beyond their words to identify unspoken messages.

Work together.

If a parent has concerns, try to get to the root of the problem. Are issues based on cultural differences, or could it be something else?

Don't assume.

Some parents will never raise an issue or disagree with a person they consider to be an authority. It is our responsibility to open up possibilities for parents to talk to us about their opinions and reasons for how they choose to care for their child.

Adapted from A Place to Begin: Working with Parents on Issues of Diversity, by Dora Pulido-Tobiassen and Janet Gonzalez-Mena

Bossy. Baby. Spoiled. Shy.

Is there any value in labeling children in these ways? Children show what they know. Their behavior can be seen as a reflection of what they learned so far in life. Instead of judging and labeling, the wise adult seeks to understand the perspective of child and family.

Here are just a few of the many ways that family perspectives may differ:

- Attitudes about holding and carrying infants
- Focus on adult assistance or self-reliance
- Sleeping arrangements – together, or alone?
- Roles of men and women within the home
- Response to crying and upset from a child
- Value placed on competition or cooperation

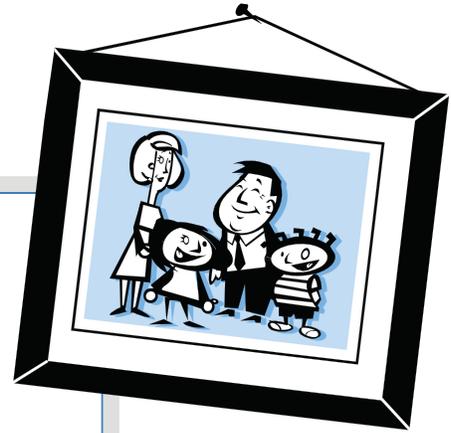
In addition, there are many circumstantial influences on the treatment of the child within the family. For example, a single parent who is struggling with stress-related anxiety and depression may respond inconsistently to the child – sometime clinging to her, sometimes lashing out at her, and sometimes ignoring her needs. This emotional rollercoaster ride at home is certain to be reflected in the child's behavior at school.

Or, consider the child who has just recovered from a long, severe illness. Justifiably, adults have been focused on providing him with comfort and relief and normal day-to-day expectations may have fallen by the wayside. The transition back to more typical relationships with parents and peers may naturally take some time.

Once we understand where a child is coming from and get to know families well, we can work together to make the transition from home to school – and back again – a smooth, supportive, and respectful one.



Family Connections Checklist



- ✓ **We connect with families in many ways.** We use a variety of communication tools – such as blogs, a Facebook page, bulletin boards, notes and newsletters – to keep parents informed about news and events.
- ✓ **We plan family involvement activities at various times of day throughout the year.** Families are invited to join us for activities in the morning, afternoon, and evening – and maybe even on a weekend. By not scheduling all of our activities at the same time of day, we support parents' busy work and school schedules.
- ✓ **We often share positive, personalized information with each family.** Telling families about their child's day is important. Every day, we find ways to communicate about children's play and the successes of their day.
- ✓ **We take a team approach, even (especially!) at times of trouble.** We help families understand that social and behavioral challenges can be a normal part of childhood; adults can work together to help the child learn and grow!

Saying Hello, Saying Good-bye

Songs and games for beginning and ending the day

Songs, chants, and games can be a special way to start or end the day. Children relish the familiar routine as these songs welcome them as part of the group.

Good Morning to You

This song, sung to the tune of "Happy Birthday" is simple enough for very small children. Older children will enjoy walking around to shake hands as they sing.

Good morning to you,
Good morning to you,
Good morning dear (child's name),
Good morning to you!

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Stars

Twinkle, twinkle, little stars,
Welcome to this class of ours.
First we'll put our things away,
Then we'll smile and start our day.
Twinkle, twinkle, little stars,
Welcome to this class of ours!

Hello, Hello

Wave to each child in turn as you join in a circle to sing to the tune of Frere Jacques:

Hello (child's name), hello (child's name),
How are you? How are you?

We're so glad to see you,
We're so glad to see you,

Welcome to school!
Welcome to school!



Farm Song

Add animal actions or signs to this song for even more fun.

Oh, the duck says quack,
And the cow says moo,
And the old red rooster says cock-a-doodle-doo!
The sheep says baa,
And the cat says mew,
But I say "Good morning!"
When I see you!



Good Morning, Friends

To the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know It"

Good morning (*first and last name*),
How are you?
Good morning (*first and last name*),
How are you?

It is time to start our day.
And we're glad you came to play,
Good morning (*first and last name*),
How are you?

I Have a Friend at My Preschool

To the tune of "BINGO." If you wish, you can change the movements for variety. Substitute stomping, clapping, waving, and other movements for jumping.

I have a friend at my preschool,
And (child's name) is his/her name-o!
Jump, jump, (child's name),
Jump, jump, (child's name),
Jump, jump, (child's name),
We're glad you're here today-o!

Circle Greeting Game

For pre-k and elementary groups.

Children are invited, but not forced to participate.

Children form a circle. Two children face one another. One child shake's the other's hand or gives a high five, saying, "Good morning, (child's name)." The greeting is passed around the circle as each child turns to the next.

We're All Here

Children stand in a circle, with one child in the middle. The group joins hands to walk in a circle around this child while singing to him to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell".

Afterwards, this child picks a friend to join him in the middle, and the song is sung again.

Continue until 4-5 children are in the middle. Reform the large group, if desired, to repeat as needed to ensure that every child who wants a turn in the middle has one.

(Child's name) is here!
(Child's name) is here!
It's a wonderful day today,
and (child's name) is here!

Optional: End the song with everyone dancing around together "in the middle" as you sing:

We're all here today!
We're all here today!
It's a wonderful day – Hooray!
'Cause we're all here today!

Afterschool Starter – a special chant for school-age kids

Hey there, neighbor, what do you say? (*handshakes or high fives*)
It's going to be a really great day!

Clap your hands and boogie on down, (*clap and twist*)

Give a little bump and turn around. (*bump hips, then twirl!*)

Hey there, neighbor, what do you say? (*handshakes or high fives*)
It's going to be a really great day!

See You Later, Alligator

Challenge your group to come up with movements for each line of this fun good-bye rhyme.

See you later, alligator,
After awhile, crocodile,
Bye-bye, butterfly,
Give a hug, ladybug
See you soon, raccoon,
Take care, polar bear,
Out the door, dinosaur!



Goodbye, Goodbye

March as you sing to the tune of "Heigh Ho" from Snow White

Goodbye, goodbye,
It's off to home we go!
We've worked and played,
As friends all day!
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!

So Many Ways to be Smart



Celebrate the strengths of every child!

Did you know?

The theory of Multiple Intelligences was developed by Dr. Howard Gardner, Professor of Education at Harvard University.

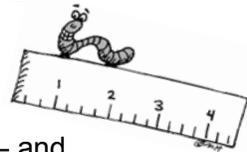
He challenged the idea that IQ tests and traditional academic measures (such as math and reading assessments) were the only way of determining intelligence.

He proposed that there are eight identifiable intelligences that should be considered:

- **Word Smart** – linguistic intelligence
- **Number Smart** – logical/mathematical intelligence
- **Picture Smart** – spatial intelligence
- **Body Smart** – kinesthetic intelligence
- **Music Smart** – musical intelligence
- **Self Smart** – intrapersonal intelligence
- **People Smart** – interpersonal intelligence
- **Nature Smart** – naturalistic intelligence

More than One Measuring Stick

Understanding & Supporting Multiple Intelligences



“Sharelle is the smartest kid in our class – and maybe the smartest kid out of all of the preschool classes!” says Ms. Kelly. “She can count to 100 and she already knows how to read!”

While Sharelle is clearly an exceptionally bright child, is it possible that many of her preschool classmates are also “smart kids”? Their teacher, Ms. Kelly, might consider:

- Evan, who races across the playground, bending smoothly without stopping to scoop a ball from the grass. He launches the ball across the playground with power and accuracy.
- Maribel, who draws detailed portraits of herself and her friends. Her crayoned people don’t just have eyes, nose, and mouth – she adds eyebrows, earrings, and even dimples!
- Xavier, who can remember songs after hearing them only once. He marches around the room singing in a loud, clear voice.
- Brittany, a charismatic leader in the classroom. Brittany seems to naturally understand what other children are feeling, and they seek out her attention and help.

We’re accustomed to thinking of intelligence in terms of ABCs and 123s, but that’s just part of the picture. Children can be gifted in many ways. In addition to clever Sharelle, Ms. Kelly’s class also includes athletic Evan and creative, artistic Maribel. Their talents, if nurtured and supported, will blossom. Perhaps someday Evan will be a professional ball player or use his agility as a firefighter or mechanic. Maribel may have a future as an artist, architect, engineer, or designer.

An important challenge for education professionals is to notice and support children’s unique interests and talents. When we respond to each child in this positive, individualized way, we help him/her feel recognized and respected. In turn, the child will likely respond with enthusiasm about coming to school and confidence in his/her ability to succeed – opening the door for growth and learning in all domains!

Supporting all of our children

Consider the advantages of acknowledging more than one way for preschoolers to be “smart”. We all do well when our special skills are recognized and supported, and children are no different. When we reflect each child’s interests and abilities in our activities and interactions, every child feels significant and capable of success. In addition to helping all of our children learn in a natural way, this method of teaching gives exceptionally talented children an ideal setting in which to develop their gifts as they grow.



The child with linguistic interests and aptitude

This child has a knack for words – first spoken and later written. Children who are skillful at debate, storytelling, and the use of verbal humor are strong linguistically. In the adult world, linguistic skills are especially valuable for teachers, journalists, and lawyers.

Elements of the classroom:

storybooks and poetry books; magazines; books on CD; writing tools such as crayons and chalk; flannel board stories; cookbooks, menus, and other props for pretend play; early literacy toys/tools such as magnetic letters and ABC stamps; small figures for pretend play

Favorite learning centers:

library, art/writing center, dramatic play

Learning throughout the day:

- Play word games - such as rhyming games – together.
- Pick out a book for her to read/tell to you. Or, write down stories she makes up.
- Share fingerplays together.
- Point out environmental print on signs, packages, etc.
- Write with purpose during play. Make a grocery list in the dramatic play center or signs for her building block structures.

- Try out new languages together. Teach her to count to 10 in Japanese or learn colors in Spanish.
- Challenge her to remember and recall information. *Who? What? When? Where? What next?*

The child with mathematical/logical interests and aptitude

This child may seem drawn to numbers and is especially skilled at using logic to figure things out. The child with mathematical strengths is often quick to recognize patterns and first among peers to grasp concepts related to time, quantity, and parts of the whole. In later life, mathematical and logical strengths are especially useful for engineers, programmers, and physicists.

Elements of the classroom:

wooden unit blocks; measuring tools such as tape measures and balance scales; cash register and play money; art and/or woodworking tools; sets to sort, count and pattern; dominoes; board games; graphs; simple experiments with magnets, inclined planes, pulleys; problem solving toys such as ball tracks and gears

Favorite learning centers:

blocks, math, science, sand and water table, fine/motor table toys.

Learning throughout the day:

- Ask lots of “why” and “how” questions to encourage him to figure things out.
- Share counting rhymes – such as *5 Little Monkeys* – together.
- Introduce ways to use numbers in real life, such as setting the table for snack or keeping score of a ball game.
- Point out patterns.
- Make lists.
- Talk about math concepts as you play together: sizes, shapes, quantity, time concepts, etc.



The child with visual/spatial interests and aptitudes

This child is especially skilled at interpreting what she sees. She may seek out maps, puzzles, and picture books. Often, the child with visual/spatial strengths excels at visual arts such as drawing, painting, and sculpture. A child with aptitude in this area may grow up to be a talented architect, photographer, artist, or designer.

Elements of the classroom:

art materials for drawing, painting, collage, and sculpture; jigsaw puzzles; light table; posters and photo displays; picture books; maps; pictorial sequencing cards; pattern blocks; lacing beads; mirrored trays for play; interlocking building toys; all sorts of building blocks; color paddles and discovery bottles; I Spy books and toys

Favorite learning centers:

art, blocks, fine motor, dramatic play, sand and water



Learning throughout the day:

- Enjoy picture books together. Encourage her to look closely and talk about what she sees.
- Invite her to tell about her artwork.
- Engage in imaginative play together.
- Share matching games and work together to build “up and out” with manipulatives.
- Talk about photo displays and displayed artwork.
- Encourage open-ended exploration with materials.

The child with physical/kinesthetic interests and aptitude

This child stands out when it comes to coordination and movement. This child is often drawn to balls, climbing equipment, riding toys and/or other gross motor equipment, and may demonstrate exceptional skill and agility. In adult life, this aptitude is especially beneficial for dancers, athletes, builders, and physical therapists.

Elements of the classroom:

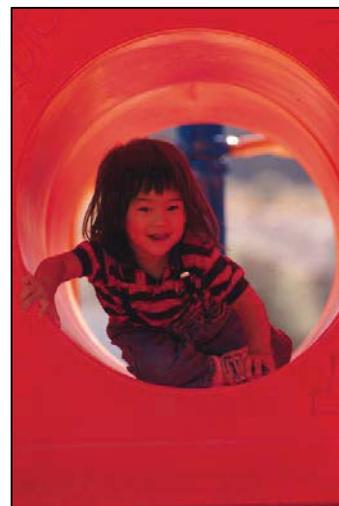
balance boards; hopscotch rug; textured/tactile toys; cardboard bricks and other oversized blocks; woodworking tools; large trucks, doll strollers, or other wheeled toys; playdough or clay; large chalkboard; tossing games; movement CDs

Favorite learning centers:

music and movement, blocks, dramatic play, woodworking

Learning throughout the day:

- Incorporate big body movements – such as stomping and hopping - into transition times and learning activities.
- Provide ample outlets for movement throughout the day. Don't expect her to sit still.
- During indoor play, share large movement activities. Play a clapping game, teach her the Chicken Dance, or act out *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*.
- Join her in active play outdoors – chase one another, throw a ball, or hula hoop together.
- Invite her to help with physical tasks such as sweeping, stacking or putting out chairs, and putting sheets on cots.



The child with musical interests and aptitude

This child takes notice of music in ways that other children often do not. He may demonstrate a flair for recognizing tones, replicating rhythms, or remembering melodies. As he grows, playing an instrument or singing with a choir may be a natural and rewarding choice. Later in life, musical skills are especially useful for composers, singers, musicians, and music teachers.

Elements of the classroom:

many styles of recorded music; keyboard with headphones; rhythm instruments; bells; stringed instrument(s) such as ukulele; puppet theater; tape recorder; rain sticks and other sound toys; real or pretend microphone; discovery bottles/sound matching games; books on tape with songs; dance props such as ribbons, tutus, and tap shoes

Favorite learning centers:

music, science, dramatic play

**Learning throughout the day:**

- Incorporate songs into transitions.
- Share story books with musical or rhythmic verses, such as *Over in the Meadow*.
- Be an appreciative audience for his performances.
- Dance together.
- Provide challenge as you play with musical instruments together. Can he duplicate a rhythm stick pattern or learn a simple tune on the xylophone?

The child with intrapersonal interests and aptitude

This child has a strong sense of self and may seem especially aware of his own feelings in ways that other children are not. The child with exceptional intrapersonal skills is often the “deep thinker” of the preschool classroom. In later life, this child’s talents could lead to success as a writer, theoretical scientist, or entrepreneur.

Elements of the classroom:

journals; storybooks about children his own age; alone spaces – quieter play areas especially for just one person; easel and paint; frame puzzles and other work-alone toys; computer games or listening centers with headphones; books, games, and toys related to faces, feelings, and senses; mirrors.

Favorite learning centers:

library, science, art, fine motor

Learning throughout the day:

- Respect and support his need for independence.
- Allow daydreaming. Thinking time can be valuable.
- Don’t force participation in whole group activities.
- Provide a safe, easy-to-supervise space for retreat from the busy classroom. Examples include a loft or a cozy corner with pillows.
- Talk with him about his feelings and ideas. He appreciates a good listener when he is ready to talk.

The child with interpersonal interests and aptitude

This social child seems to have an innate ability to interact with others. In the me-centric preschool years, the child with interpersonal talents may stand out for her ability to understand others. Later, interpersonal skills are an asset for counselors, politicians, coaches, and administrators.

Elements of the classroom:

board and card games to play with friends; puppets; walkie talkies; dollhouse and other play buildings with figures; baby dolls and accessories; dress up clothes and prop boxes for role play; homemade books and games featuring photos of classmates; blank greeting cards and other writing materials for sharing; sets of materials that are large enough for 3 or more children to use together.

Favorite learning centers:

dramatic play, table games, blocks

Learning throughout the day:

- Include cooperative games - such as parachute play – on a regular basis. Group projects such as murals can be a fit, too.
- Give her a leadership role in the classroom. She might teach a friend how to play a game or poll classmates about preferences.
- Offer as many opportunities as possible for her to communicate – with peers, with teachers, and with other adults.
- Facilitate informal, small group discussions at the meal table and during play.
- Outdoors, invite her to join in group games such as hide and seek and freeze tag.



The child with naturalistic interests and aptitude

This child is attuned to the natural world and enjoys exploring outdoors. She may be drawn to collecting and classifying activities and may have accumulated greater-than-average knowledge related to plants, animals, weather, fossils, or other aspects of nature. A child with great interests of this sort may grow up to become a biologist, meteorologist, farmer, or conservationist.

Elements of the classroom:

non-toxic houseplants; class pets; window flowerboxes and/or bird feeders; collections of natural objects such as crystals, seashells, and leaves; sorting trays; non-plastic play materials made of wood, silk, and other natural materials; sand and water; natural clay; natural materials for collage; drawing materials for sketching; nature magazines; field guides; binoculars.

Favorite learning centers:

science, art, sand and water



Learning throughout the day:

- Include lots of time outdoors, and not just on pretty days. Dress for the weather and go outside as much as possible.
- Outdoors, pause from play to look at nature with her. Search for insects in the taller grass, watch the clouds pass by, or collect leaves and acorns.
- Give her roles caring for classroom pets and plants.
- Work alongside her to count, sort, and classify collections of natural materials.
- Ask, “What do you notice about...” to encourage her to talk about her nature observations.

A final note about children’s interests and aptitudes

When we increase our awareness of children’s individual skills and learning preferences, we gain the insight we need to create supportive classrooms. We have three goals:

1. Create a learning environment that is especially suited to each child by reflecting what we know about the children in our choices of materials, activities, and schedule. In other words, a child who is drawn to the visual arts can look forward to daily access to a well-stocked art shelf, while a child who is especially social can count on her adults to provide lots of opportunities for interactions with peers as she develops leadership skills.
2. Help children become aware of and value their individual strengths in a healthy way. This occurs when adults talk with children to help them notice and reflect with statements such as:
 - “You use your whole body when you play. Does it feel good to move?”
 - “Look how hard you worked on this block tower! You’ve done a careful job of stacking the blocks just so.”
 - “You really seem to enjoy singing and I enjoy listening to you. Hearing your happy songs makes me smile.”
 - “It was kind of you to help Braden pick up the spilled crayons. You noticed that he needed help, didn’t you?”
3. Help families understand the concept of “more than one measuring stick” by sharing regular, informal feedback about the child’s positive experiences in the classroom.

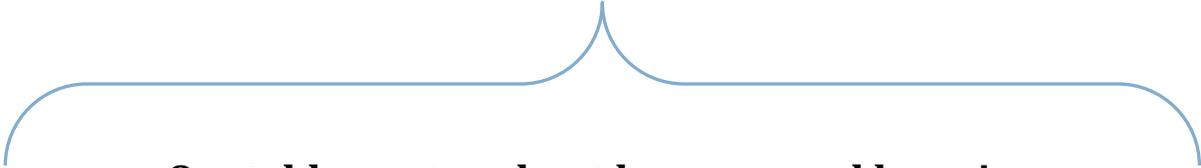
It is important, however, to realize that information about children’s interests can be misused or even abused. A few words of caution -

Because young children are in a period of rapid development and reach cognitive and physical milestones at an individualized pace, we do not presume that challenges or competencies seen in the early childhood classroom are a sure indicator of aptitude. For example:

- A child who can read fluently at age four has developed this skill earlier than many of his peers, but we know that many early readers level out in later years. We can validate to parents that their bright child is doing something special without misleading them to believe that this is a definitive indicator of exceptional intelligence. Otherwise, the child may be pushed and pressured in ways he cannot handle.
- Likewise, a child who seems clumsy and awkward in the preschool years may develop coordination as she grows. Real harm could be done if we tell a very young child that “sports just aren’t her thing”; she may come to believe such statements and later limit herself based on assumptions she has long since outgrown. We would do better to encourage her to seek out activities she enjoys in the early childhood years, without worrying if she is “good enough” at them.

Recognizing children’s aptitudes in the classroom should be empowering, not limiting. We don’t want to fall into the habit of assuming that children will only learn and play in certain ways. Cognitive skills such as sorting, counting, and patterning are important for every child. So, too, are social skills and communication skills. We can be respectful of each child as we scaffold learning in individualized ways. Often, the child’s interests can be used as an effective bridge to learning. For example, math and numeracy learning could be promoted throughout the room with books, puzzles, computer programs, manipulatives, play money, and more.

Because children’s interests change over time, we send the message that it is always OK to try something new. Let the child be the guide of what she likes or dislikes; avoid statements such as “You aren’t much of a block builder.” Continue to invite a child to join activities, rather than assuming that you know she will not want to participate. Sooner or later, you might both be surprised as a new interest emerges!



Quotable quotes about learners and learning

**...If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree,
it will lead its whole life believing that it is stupid. – Albert Einstein**

**If a child cannot learn the way we teach,
maybe we should teach the way they learn – Ignacio Estrada**

**Every child is gifted. They just unwrap their packages at different times.
– Unknown**

**Put the relationship first and then figure out how to fit everything else
around that. – Joyce Fetteroll**

**The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will
be their motivations and the richer their experiences – Loris Malaguzzi**



A RECIPE FOR LEARNING

In a large bowl combine...

One cup of **CURIOSITY** I am a child, I am naturally curious.

A dash (or three) of **RELEVANCE**
I learn best when what I am learning is meaningful to my own experiences of the world.

A good dose of **VARIETY** I like to learn in lots of different ways.

A pint of **INTEREST** I am most motivated to learn when I am interested in what I am doing and learning.

A smidgen of **PURPOSE** I like you to know that I am helpful.

A litre of **PROBLEM SOLVING**
To really get me thinking.

A heaped teaspoon of **ACTIVE DOING**
As it is through active interaction with objects, people and places that I acquire knowledge.

And a large pinch of **PLAYFUL FUN!**

Stir together with **FRIENDS** to learn alongside.
Sharing with others helps to reinforce my own learning.

Add an **INTERESTED ADULT**
to guide and pose challenges that push my thinking further.

And bake together with **TIME** to explore, experience, grow and mature.

Pathways to Learning

For each of us to learn, we must first gather and process information through our senses. Even when all of our senses are engaged, most of us have a method of processing and learning that we rely on most of all. Some people learn primarily through visual input, while others learn mostly through auditory or kinesthetic input. There are also people who naturally process through more than one style of perceptual learning.

As we grow, we learn to make the most of our strongest learning style while compensating for those that are less sensitive. For example, a college student might record a lecture because she knows that note taking is not a strength. Younger children usually do not have this degree of self-awareness or life experience. Knowing each child's learning style is one of the best ways that adults can ensure effective communication with children ages 10 and under.

It should be noted that there is currently much debate surrounding some once-popular theories of perceptual learning styles. Although some techniques once thought to be especially beneficial for teaching each style of learner have proven inconsistent, there still appears to be practical merit to the observation of young children to determine learning preferences. Teachers report that using intentional practices to create a mixed-modality classroom intended to meet the needs of all learners is truly helpful in increasing child engagement while decreasing unwanted behaviors. Because of this anecdotal evidence, perceptual learning styles are included in this book.



Visual learners

The visual learner especially processes information that she sees with her eyes. In the middle elementary years and beyond, she is often a strong reader who works well with written texts, charts, and diagrams. But in the early, pre-reading years, it is not uncommon for adults to describe this child as one who “never listens”. In fact, she may not be ignoring directions from adults – she might actually not hear or understand them!

Here are some ways to help the young visual learner find success.

- **Organize the play space.**
This learner does well when shelves are not overloaded with materials and when work areas are defined with trays, rugs, or other in other ways. Picture labels on containers and shelves are helpful, too.
- **Use visual cues to help her find her place in space.**
It is especially easy for the very young visual learner to seem lost or overwhelmed at transition times. She may miss the adult's verbal instructions and this especially busy time in the classroom can be confusing. Visual cues can help! Try dimmed (but not dark or flashing) lights to signal time for a change and use tape marks on the floor to show spaces to gather as a group.

- **Show and tell.**
Recognize that she may not pick up information through words alone. Demonstrate what you need for her to do or find other ways to pair your words with non-verbal communication. For example, gently putting a book into her hands and pointing toward the shelf could be a great way to get her started at clean up time. This child often appreciates picture schedules.
- **Keep your cool.**
Adults sometimes grow frustrated when they feel a child is not listening or following directions. This child may pick up on your irritated tone or notice your exasperated body language without having any idea why you are upset with her. She can easily come to feel that you don't like her. Having patience and maintaining composure will go a long way towards preserving your relationship with the visual learner. Remember: the visual learning style that presents a challenge in the preschool years will actually be an asset to her later in life!

Auditory Learners

The auditory learner obtains information through the sense of hearing. Naturally, they are often identified as “good listeners” in the preschool classroom, but may struggle with written instructions later in life.



Here are some ways to help the young auditory learner find success.

- **Clear the static.**
It is important to this child that he can hear you well. He may feel irritated when noise from other children or classroom electronics interferes with his ability to hear. Move close if you see signs of frustration.
- **Expect a play-by-play.**
Typically, auditory learners are also talkers! This child often narrates his work and play with talk and sound effects. It's valuable to recognize that this is part of how he learns.
- **Play to his strengths.**
Incorporate learning concepts into songs, stories, and discussions, rather than relying only on visual tools such as posters or pictures.



Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic learners are far and away the most physically active of all learners. They process the world around them through touching, tinkering, and doing. Since they often have high energy levels and a strong need to move, they may stand out in the classroom for their inability to sit still, wait in line, or pay attention to stories and discussions.

Here are some ways to help the young kinesthetic learner find success.

- **Provide outlets for activity.**

Asking this child to sit still and be quiet will frustrate both of you! Instead, incorporate movement activities throughout the day. (In addition to meeting the special needs of the kinesthetic learner, it is a healthy habit for every child!)

Keep whole group gatherings brief or provide an alternative activity. A “fidget toy” - such as a stress ball or Rubik’s cube - can give her something to do with her hands as she listens.

- **Hands on – minds on: she’s learning best when she is moving.**

For example, this child may do especially well if she is allowed to draw or work with playdough at a table as she listens to a story. You may notice that she can recall many details of the story, even though it appeared that she was playing and not listening.

- **As with the visual learner, your composure is crucial!**

Keeping the kinesthetic learner busy and engaged can be exhausting. A regular break schedule with a few minutes away – for you or for the child – can be important when working with children with very high energy levels.



When it comes to meeting children’s perceptual learning needs, adults are urged to consider a balanced approach that considers all three learning styles. By being good observers of children who move purposefully through the day in a way that is stimulating to the eye, ear, and body, they will be able to effectively connect and communicate with each child.

Sensory-Aware Care

Planning child care environments with the senses in mind

To connect with each child, we must be attuned to children’s sensory needs.

Smell

Things we smell:

- Help form a lasting impression of a place and influence our feelings about being there.
- Can impact our ability to concentrate and learn.
- May be forever linked to our memory of a person, place, or event.
- Can be irritating to children or adults with allergies or sensitivities. Commercial air fresheners and scented sanitizing sprays should be used with care.

Pleasant scents in the classroom can include natural materials, such as pine boughs and potted herb plants, scented sachets of lavender or eucalyptus, art materials, and cooking smells.

Unpleasant classroom smells often include sour milk, trash, bathroom odors, unclean pet cages, and harsh cleaning products. Care should be taken to eliminate these odors.



Hearing

Things we hear:

- Can sooth, stimulate, or overwhelm. Our focus and pace may shift without us even realizing it!
- Can create “noise pollution” when too many noises are present at once.
- Are influenced by the acoustics of the classroom space.

Classroom sounds often include music played on CD players or other devices. Lullabies and some classical music can help create a relaxed atmosphere, while upbeat music can set a fun, active tone. Music should be turned on and off with purpose, rather than left on as background noise all day long.

If environmental noise feels overwhelming, consider using headphones at computers and listening centers and decreasing the number of battery-operated toys in the classroom. Musical instruments with softer, lower tones, such as maracas, rasps, and bongo drums, are well suited for small, busy classrooms. Consider saving louder, sharper-toned instruments - such as cymbals, triangles, and tambourines - for special times or outdoor musical experiences.

Sight

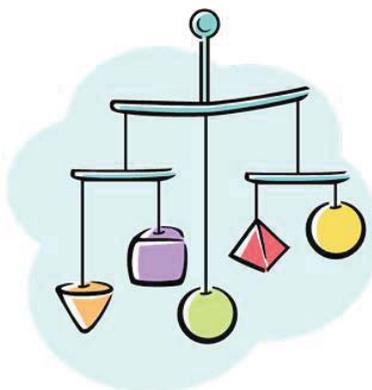
Things we see:

- Have an immediate impact on our feelings about a place and space.
- Can contribute to a sense of order, or a sense of chaos.
- Are influenced by lighting and background.

Seek a balanced display. Walls should not be bare, but there should be some open spaces for the eye to rest.

Displaying children's individualized artwork helps foster a sense of belonging for children. Hanging work at child's eye level permits easy viewing by young artists. Frames – real ones, or those made of construction paper and/or clear page protectors – can give value to children's artwork while also creating a tidier, visually pleasing display.

Babies spend a lot of time on the floor looking up! Don't forget to hang mobiles and other interesting materials from the ceiling in their spaces to provide visual stimulation.



Light

Natural light provides varying intensity, from bright, sunny patches in front of windows to shadowy corners. Shades or blinds can be used to soften bright light and reduce uncomfortable glare.

Fluorescent lighting washes out colors and flattens perceptions. Adults and children who spend long periods of time in windowless, brightly lit rooms often complain of fatigue, headaches, and irritability. Incandescent lighting (light bulbs used in standard lamps) can help provide a sense of warmth and coziness.

Color and pattern

Light colors may make a room feel larger, while dark colors can make a room feel smaller. Warm colors (red, yellow, orange) are often stimulating, while cool colors (green, blue) are more soothing.

Children's environments are often crowded with colorful things – children's clothing, toys, and artwork. Consider neutral colored walls, floor tiles, and rugs to create visually soothing background for the busy classroom! When many patterned materials – such as decorative rugs and/or curtains and furnishings with stripes, polka dots, or other prints – are placed in one area, the effect can be overwhelming. Items such as these should be used in moderation, if at all.

Store-bought classroom decorations, such as cartoony posters and bulletin board sets, create visual clutter and can set an artificial, trivial tone. Consider reducing the use of these items. Almost anything on a poster from the educational supply store can be replaced with a more natural display, if desired. For example, a teacher might swap a simple graph with children's photos for a bright, circus-themed birthday chart.



Arrangement

Ideally, rugs and furnishings help break up the classroom area to define focus areas, without creating supervision problems. Pathways between areas may be linear or meandering, but should always be clear and uncluttered.

Touch

Textures and materials

A wide range of textures encourages depth of focus and play and offers children many different experiences. Woods, metals, materials from nature, fabrics, and even furs - such as lambskin - can be used to create a complex and engaging environment, while art and sensory materials offer stimulating opportunities for tactile exploration. Soft furnishings provide calm, cozy places to relax. In addition, many young children prefer to work and play on the floor. Thick rugs create comfortable places for such play.

Recommended Reading

Caring Spaces, Learning Places by Jim Greenman

The Complete Learning Spaces Book for Infants and Toddlers by Rebecca Isbell and Christy Isbell

Designs for Living and Learning by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter

Family Child Care Homes: Creative Spaces for Children to Learn by Linda J. Armstrong



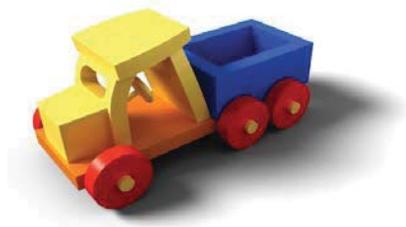
Look Closely at Learning Centers

Have you ever considered the significance of the play spaces you offer to children? When you look closely, you might notice that there's more to learning centers than first meets the eye.

Block center: a roomy area with shelves of blocks.
Bins of props for block building - such as cars and animals – add to the fun.

Look closely –

- Logical reasoning skills and coordination skills grow as children stack and balance blocks. It's a trial and error process.
- It's one of the busiest areas of the classroom. Here, children learn important life lessons about cooperation and social navigation. How do you ask to join play? How do you collaborate to construct together? How do you speak up when someone else tries to knock your tower down?
- This is one of the best areas in the classroom for learning math skills as children naturally compare sizes and shapes and play with patterns and symmetry.



Dramatic Play/Housekeeping center:
It's a place for playing pretend. Props usually include – but are not limited to – play furniture, dolls, dishes, and dress up clothes.

Look closely –

- Children process feelings and ideas through pretend play. You'll see their interests, worries, and experiences reflected in their play here.
- Perhaps the most social of all of the learning centers, the dramatic play center is an incredibly valuable place for learning to interact with others.
- Vygotsky described the child at play by saying, "It is as though he were a head taller than himself". Nowhere is this more evident than in the dramatic play center, where children experiment with sophisticated language and complex roles.

Fine Motor/Manipulatives center: a table and/or rug where children work with materials such as puzzles, lacing beads, and small building toys.

Look closely –

- Play here is often focused and intense. Children are learning to concentrate on a task.
- Materials of varying levels of complexity challenge children to use their hands and fingers in many ways. They're building the dexterity and strength that they will need to be strong writers later on.
- Here, children explore the interrelationship among parts. At any given time, you might find children here sorting, patterning, constructing, and counting. That's serious brain work!



Art center: a place in the room where children use art materials in their own, creative ways at a table and/or easel. This center often contains drawing materials, collage and sculpture materials, paints, and art tools.

Look closely –

- Children are exploring colors, textures, lines, and designs. This is an area where children feel very much in control and empowered to make choices.
- Creative expression blossoms as children begin to use art materials as an extension of their storytelling.
- Capping markers, washing paintbrushes, and placing work gently on the drying rack – practice makes perfect as children learn to take care of materials. Art materials aren't toys; through work here, children learn about responsibility in a whole new way.



Science center: a corner of the classroom for learning about nature and conducting simple experiments. Materials found here commonly include collections of items from nature, magnifying glass, magnets, discovery bottles, a class pet, and more.

Look closely –

- This area is all about inquiry and investigation. It's a special place for children who like to observe, classify, and figure things out.
- In the plastic world of childhood, this is a place where children can explore textures and materials that are more natural: smooth stones, soft feathers, and more.
- This is often one of the quietest places in the classroom. A child in need of some personal space can find solace here. Whispering to the class pet or becoming engrossed in watching the light stream through a sparkling discovery bottle can be comforting on even the gloomiest of days.



Sand and water center: a tub or bin of materials to scoop and pour, along with toys or tools for exploration. Usually, this area contains sand and/or water, but other substances – such as dried corn or rice – can be found here, too.

Look closely –

- Scooping and pouring can be soothing or stimulating for the senses. Children seek out this kind of play to fill a sensory need and are often more intensely engaged in play here than anywhere else in the classroom.
- This is a place for math and problem solving learning as children fill and measure. You'll see their "inner scientist" emerge as they repeat their actions over and over – *"If I do it again, will the same thing happen?"*
- Open-ended play here lends itself to discoveries about gravity, matter, buoyancy and more. Their play here builds a solid foundation for science learning in years to come.



Library center: a soft, quiet corner of the room with a shelf of children's books and a cozy place for reading, such as a small couch, floor pillows, or a beanbag chair. Often, puppets and soft toys can be found here.

Look closely –

- The softness here provides a retreat where children can rest, relax, or recharge. It's often a place that children can go when they need some time alone.
- This space teaches children that books are a treasured part of the classroom. This is an area of the classroom where you'll notice children and adults enjoying special moments together. Children learn to love reading as they snuggle close to share a favorite book with a trusted grown-up!
- This is a place for imagination – for poring over pictures and interpreting details. Communication skills blossom here as children tell stories to adults, classroom friends, or just to themselves!

A first impression of a preschool classroom may be that it is busy, messy, and chaotic. When we look closely, we notice a wealth of purposeful activity as children engage in many different activities.

There's no better way to learn!



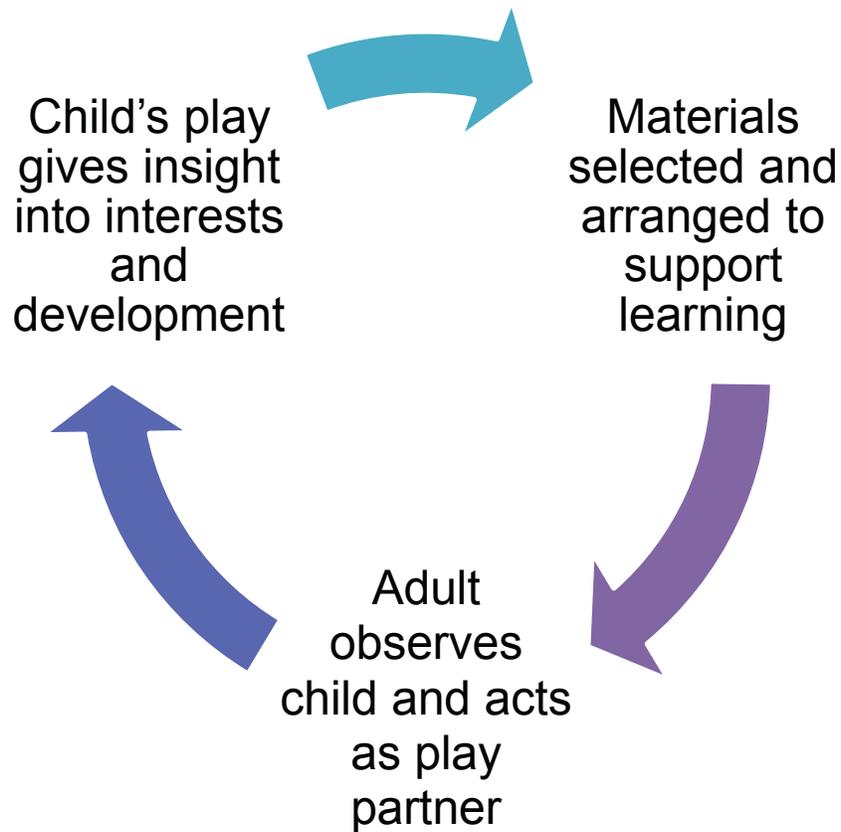
Find out more about learning centers and learning through play.

Center signs, material labels, parent handouts and staff training resources from Environments: <http://www.environments.com/environments-resources-r/>

Planning a Developmentally Appropriate Program for Children, from ASU Childhood Services: http://ittc-web.astate.edu/chs/docs/planning_developmentally_appropriate_program.pdf

Collection of articles about play and children's learning from NAEYC: <http://www.naeyc.org/lay>

Reflecting children's interests and abilities in learning centers



- *Do these materials appeal to the child?
Do they invite the child in to play?*
- *Do these materials challenge the child?
What skills is the child in the process of developing?
Is there anything I can add or change to scaffold learning?*
- *What do I notice about the child's ideas and interests?
Can I find materials that will support and extend exploration
and investigation?*

10 Skills Every Child Needs to Thrive in Kindergarten – and Beyond!

Will our little ones be ready for school?

Are we giving our preschoolers the best start possible, and are we doing enough to support our school-agers as they move through the elementary years and beyond?

Gather devoted educators and parents, and questions such as these are bound to come up. Sometimes, the focus is on academics. Other times, talk turns to social skills. Here's one look at a more universal list – a wide range of competencies that can help our children succeed as learners and in life.

1. Understanding of their world

Young children are making sense of **thousands** of real world concepts that adults take for granted, such as wet and dry, shadow and bright, and heavy and light. These concepts are best learned through meaningful, concrete experiences.

During early childhood, children naturally seek opportunities to explore, compare, and classify, and will often repeat the same actions/activity over and over as they process their observations and seek understanding. Children who experience and understand the world around them are later able to more readily demonstrate reading comprehension, use scientific thinking skills, and understand math concepts related to size and quantity.

Adults set the stage for learning about the world by creating an interactive, experience-rich environment indoors and out. Sand and water are important ingredients, as are open-ended art materials and collections of natural objects. Children are given time and encouragement to look closely and explore. As adults work and play alongside children, they introduce vocabulary related to children's authentic experiences:

Mirrors and puddles *reflect*.

Pencils make *fine lines*, while markers make a broader stroke.

Cardboard brick blocks are *hollow*; wooden blocks are heavier.



The world is mud-lucious and puddle wonderful. – e.e. cummings

2. Reasoning and Problem Solving

During the early childhood years, children begin to develop important logical thinking skills, including:

- Comparing, sorting, and classifying
- Sequencing
- Applying real knowledge to solve a physical problem
- Using observations to form a hypothesis

The early childhood environment is filled with intriguing “loose parts” for children to sort and organize. By providing repeated opportunities to work with these materials, we help them grow as organized thinkers. These skills are linked closely to persistence of task and are a crucial step in developing the cognitive skills needed for success with higher level math and science.

Children are often encouraged to tell about their work and explain their reasoning. Simple science explorations encourage children to practice process skills: observing, measuring, classifying, inference, predicting, experimenting, and communicating conclusions. Rather than solving problems for children, adults respect the child’s need to think things through and figure things out.



Too often we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve – Roger Lewin

3. Creative Thinking

Imagination is especially important during the early years. Children process new ideas and information through pretend play and learn to express themselves creatively in many ways, including:

- Art – Drawing, painting, sculpting
- Music – Playing a simple instrument or making up a new song.
- Dance
- Storytelling
- Drama

Later, creative thinking skills will be an asset to children as they develop as writers, artists, and musicians. To help children’s creative thinking skills grow, our days are filled with opportunities to sing, dance, pretend, tell stories and create artwork. Adults recognize that

creative learning isn't "one size fits all" and reflect this knowledge by offering many different kinds of materials, as well as opportunities to explore the arts individually, in small groups, and as part of a larger group. Children are encouraged to work in their own, imaginative way.



Art is literacy of the heart. – Elliot Eisner

4. Communication Skills

Expressive language skills blossom as children learn to share information in many ways, such as:

- Asking and answering questions
- Expressing an opinion
- Explaining an idea
- Recalling information from books or past experiences
- Carrying on a back-and-forth conversation

Children with strong communication skills usually adjust well to the later school environment and are often strong students and leaders within the school community.

The naturally noisy, busy early learning environment offers many opportunities for children to practice communicating – with one another and with adults. Puppets, toy telephones, dress up clothes, and toy animals encourage communication during play. Adults facilitate conversations throughout the day - during meals, group discussions, special activities, and outdoor play.



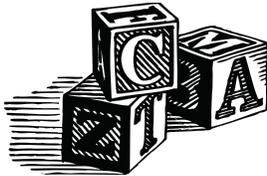
**We worry about what a child will become tomorrow,
yet we forget that he is someone today. – Stacia Tauscher**

5. Purposeful Literacy

During the preschool years, children develop an awareness of the value of reading and writing for gaining and sharing knowledge. Foundation skills for later literacy include:

- Understanding that written words are an important means of communication.
- Recognizing letters and words in the environment and as part of meaningful daily activities.
- Taking part in a wide range of print-related activities such as making lists and contributing to charts.
- Beginning to read and write independently

When young children view reading and writing as relevant and useful, they naturally develop a strong interest in learning these skills as they are developmentally ready. Rather than making literacy learning a difficult chore, skillful early childhood educators find ways to help children gain knowledge in engaging ways. Favorite books and stories are shared with joy, and the room is rich both in print and in materials for learning to print – crayons, chalk, colored pencils and more.



**Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.
-Emily Buchwald**

6. Purposeful Math/Numeracy

Meaningful math is about much more than just being able to recite numbers from memory! Children build important math skills as they:

- Practice one-to-one correspondence, group objects and compare quantities.
- Add and subtract while playing with materials.
- Learn to recognize, replicate, and create patterns.
- Connect time concepts to classroom activities and events.
- Measure with purpose.
- Explore geometric shapes and solids in many ways.

Genuine understanding of concrete basic math concepts during the early years ensures that the child will later be able to easily make sense of more complex concepts such as multiplication and division.

Early childhood educators recognize that each child develops the foundation skills of math learning at his/her own pace – true understanding cannot be hurried or forced! Thus, the environment is filled with appealing materials to explore, including options especially suited to challenge each learner. Real tools – such as tape measures, balance scales, and sorting

trays especially appeal to young learners. Adults recognize “teachable moments” to scaffold learning throughout the day by joining children in play, incorporating math into daily routines, and planning cooking projects and other special activities.



Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.
- William Butler Yeats

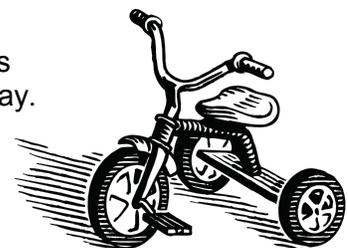
7. Body Control

In the few, short years that they have been alive, our preschoolers have learned to use their bodies in many ways. Growth continues in the early childhood classroom and on the playground as children learn to:

- Move from a high level of activity to a low level.
- Quiet the body to focus on discussions, stories, and tasks and demonstrate impulse control.
- Show persistence with physical tasks such as stacking chairs and picking up toys.
- Attempt, and eventually master, self-help skills.
- Use both large and small motor skills to move in many, increasingly complex ways.

Children with well-developed muscle skills are ready and able to grow as writers, artists, musicians, and athletes without physical frustration. As with most other developmental milestones, children develop large and small muscle skills fall into place varying rates. The early childhood environment is rich in materials that invite children to use their hands in many ways as they work and play. Materials vary in complexity to meet children’s individual needs.

Outdoors, children have room to run and spaces that invite active exploration through climbing, crawling, digging and more. Adults recognize that building large muscle skills is crucial and reflect this knowledge by making gross motor play an integral part of every day.



Play is our brain’s favorite way of learning.
- Dianne Ackerman

8. Social Navigation

Crucial social skills are developed as adults help children learn to:

- Negotiate turn taking and sharing with toys/materials.
- Manage and express strong feelings appropriately.
- Work cooperatively with others.
- Learn appropriate boundaries as leaders and followers.
- Understand the feelings and needs of others.
- Resolve conflicts in a constructive manner.

Outcomes in school and later life are dependent on the individual knowing how to interact successfully with others! Rather than expecting children to simply know how to “share” or “be nice,” early childhood educators recognize that early years are learning years for social skills! They can often be found down at child’s level, patiently helping children talk through conflicts and learn to express ideas and strong feelings in appropriate ways. Perhaps due to temperament or past experiences, some children seem to master these skills easily, while others benefit from consistent coaching.

Blocks of playtime in the thoughtfully arranged environment are especially valuable opportunities for social skills building. As children play together in self-selected small groups, there are natural occasions for learning about leadership, negotiation, and fair play.



**The whole purpose of education
is to turn mirrors into windows.
– Sydney J. Harris**

9. Affiliation with School Community

Preschool – often the first school experience for children and families – is a time when the child’s relationship with the classroom can be established through positive messages:

- I belong here.
- I have a relationship with the children and adults here.
- There are rules and structures in place to keep us safe.
- I have important responsibilities in my classroom.

Children who are connected to their school and their classroom view themselves as valued, competent members of the school community and are eager to attend each day. Early childhood educators strive to create an environment where every child feels welcomed, noticed, and important. There are many ways to foster a sense of belonging, including

warm greetings, welcome songs, invitations to join circle games, and helper jobs within the classroom. Boundaries aren't arbitrary – adults take time to explain the reasons behind the rules while respecting children's feelings.



**The language of friendship is not words but meanings.
– Henry David Thoreau**

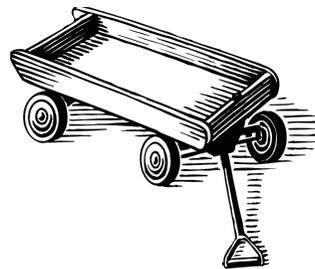
10. Attunement with Adult Leaders

Children, like all people, seek understanding and acceptance. The wise teacher connects with each child in many ways, including:

- Eye contact
- Warm, appropriate physical contact
- Sincere interest in the child's work, play, stories, and ideas
- Individualized, positive attention
- Empathy towards the child's experiences and emotions.

Children who often experience attunement with adult leaders actually gain academic skills more readily and are more willing to accept classroom structures and boundaries. Research proves this to be true for all ages – from the early learning years to all the way up to college! Every child needs to know that there are adults he can trust, who love and believe in him and see the good in him. Early childhood educators recognize that there is nothing more important than establishing a meaningful relationship with each and every child.

**No significant learning occurs
without significant relationship. – James Comer**



Adapted from *Reflecting on Readiness: 2013 ECERS Refresher Workshop*, ASU Childhood Services.

We're All in This Together

As different as we all are in terms of temperament, culture, and development, there are many universal human needs that we all share.

We all seek a sense of safety.

For infants and young children, a familiar, trusted caregiver is crucial to their sense of safety. Clear, consistent, and appropriate boundaries help children feel safe in the toddler years and beyond. For all ages, the addition of rugs and soft furnishings to the child care environment helps create a feeling of homelike security. When a child does not feel safe, her behavior may reflect an attempt to gain comfort or escape something she fears.



Consider:

How do you respond when you feel frightened and unsure about a situation?

How have you seen children respond to similar feelings?

What people/things in your life help you feel safe and secure?

What do you do to help each child in your care feel safe, too?



We all seek love.

Children need to feel closeness and emotional warmth. Nurturing touch is vital in infancy and remains important throughout childhood. It is important for children to understand that love is not dependent on accomplishments or behavior. If the only time an adult interacts with a child is to correct behavior, the child may quickly grow to feel unloved – and unlovable. In fact, a loving relationship is essential to helping young children with challenging behaviors grow.

Consider:

How do you respond when you feel rejected and unloved?

Have you ever seen children respond to similar feelings?

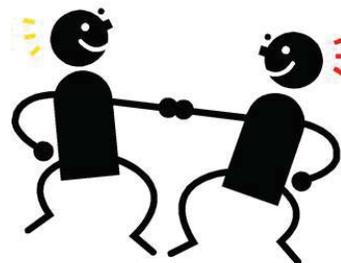
Think of a time in your life when you felt especially nurtured, supported, or accepted. What influence did this have on your behavior?

What do you do to ensure that each child in your care feels unconditionally loved?

We all seek belonging.

Even people who prefer to work and play alone most of the time need to feel a sense of inclusion. Very young children sometimes seek belonging in inappropriate ways. For example, a child who does not know how to engage in play with peers may take a toy and run away, hoping other children will give chase. The wise adult can notice behaviors such as these and help the child learn other, more suitable ways to engage with classmates.

A sense of belonging is crucial during the schoolage years – a time when feeling left out is especially hurtful and little matters as much to the child/youth as “fitting in.” At this age, youth will go to great lengths to impress others or avoid embarrassment. It is critical for adults working with youth of this age to be attuned to the group’s social climate.



Consider:

How do you respond when you feel lonely and left out?

How have you seen children respond to similar feelings?

How do you feel when you are welcomed and included by others?

What do you do to ensure that each child in your care feels a sense of belonging?

We all seek significance.



Even tiny babies want to be noticed and heard. In the toddler and preschool years, this need can take the form of power seeking. Children may engage in tantrums or simply refuse to comply with directives. It is important to realize that these behaviors are often rooted in a child’s very real need to have some control over her life. We can help most children grow out of power-seeking behaviors by offering acceptable choices, helping her develop self-help skills, and offering her tasks that will allow her feel important.

Consider:

How do you respond when you feel powerless and not in control?

How have you seen children respond to similar feelings?

Think of a time in your life when you felt competent and capable. What influence did this have on your behavior?

What do you do to ensure help each child in your care feel noticed and powerful in appropriate ways?

Reframing Fairness

There's an old parable that goes something like this...

Once upon a time, three townspeople sought out the town doctor.

***The first had a hangnail.
The second had a pounding headache.
The third had a badly broken arm.***

When they arrived at the doctor's office he looked them over in turn before giving them each a tablet of strong aspirin with these words:

***"Funds are short and time is shorter.
But you'll each receive the exact same care.
After all, fair is fair."***

-Source unknown.

What do you think about the doctor's care?

In trying to treat each of the patients fairly, he really only managed to meet one of their needs.

Educators and caregivers often wonder if it is fair to treat children in their care differently from one another. But in truth, our children all come to us with different needs – just like the doctor's patients. This one may need a little more time, that one may need a little more help, and a third may be ready to go a little farther and a little faster.

Could it be that individualization is actually the fairest choice of all?



Recommended Reading

Grow your professional resource library with picks from this mix of old favorites and new finds.

Children's Development and Needs

How Children Learn, John Holt, Da Capo Press, 1995

The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn, and Flourish, T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley L. Greenspan, Da Capo Press, 2001

The Whole-Brain Child, Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, Bantam, 2012

Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom ages 4 - 14, Chip Wood, Northeast Foundation for Children, 2007

Strengths-based Care and Curriculum

Infants, Toddlers and Caregivers, Janet Gonzalez-Mena and Diane Widmeyer Eyer, McGraw-Hill, 2011

Learning Together with Young Children, Deb Curtis and Margie Carter, Redleaf Press, 2007

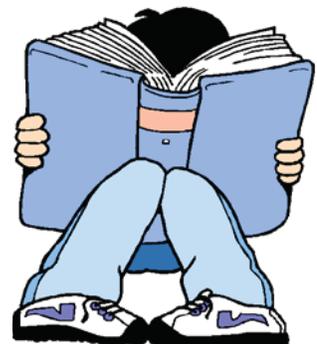
The Intentional Teacher, Ann S. Epstein, NAEYC, 2007

Building Relationships with Every Child

I Love You Rituals, Dr. Becky Bailey, William Morrow, 2000

Powerful Interactions: How to Connect with Children to Extend Learning, Amy Laura Dombro, Judy Jablon, and Charlotte Stetson, NAEYC, 2011

The Morning Meeting Book, Roxann Kreite, Northeast Foundation for Children, 2002 (*for school-agers*)



Supporting Children with Special Needs

Challenging Exceptionally Bright Children in Early Childhood Classrooms, Ann Gadzikowski, Redleaf Press, 2013

How to Handle Hard-to-Handle Preschoolers: a Guide for Early Childhood Educators, Maryln Appelbaum, Skyhorse Publishing, 2013

Starting with Their Strengths: Using the Project Approach in Early Childhood Special Education, Deborah C. Lickey and Denise J. Powers, Teachers College Press, 2011

The Behavior Code: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Teaching the Most Challenging Students, Jessica Minahan and Nancy Rappaport, Harvard Education Press, 2012 (mostly for school-agers)

The Inclusive Learning Center Book, Christy Isbell and Rebecca Isbell, Gryphon House, 2005

Connecting with Families

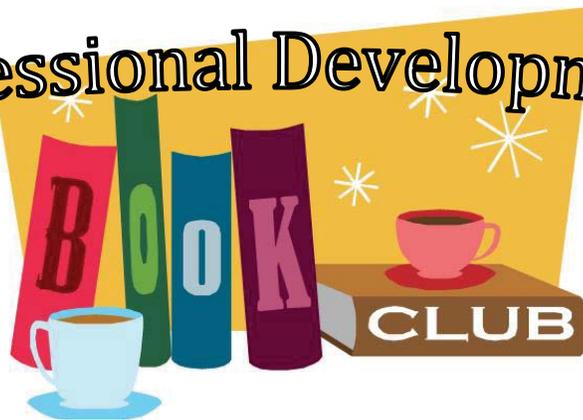
50 Strategies for Communicating and Working with Diverse Families, Janet Gonzalez-Mena, Pearson, 2013

From Parents to Partners: Building a Family-Centered Early Childhood Program, Janice Keyser, Redleaf Press, 2006

Roots and Wings: Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Practices, Stacey York, Redleaf Press 2003



Professional Development



Round up a handful of professional friends and copies of your favorite articles from this book. As you read, highlight or underline passages that stand out to you and make notes about your thoughts. Afterwards, come together to share your thoughts using the discussion questions below or topics of your own. This is a time to reflect, consider new perspectives, and connect with one another as we strive to connect with each child!

Book Club Meeting #1

Take a Look at Temperament, page 8

- Did any of the children in this article remind you of a child you know? If so, did you gain any fresh insight about working with this child?
- What do you think are some of the strongest aspects of your own temperament?
- Was there ever a time when you recall an adult from your childhood or teenage years—such as a teacher, coach, or camp counselor – who seemed to especially be a match for your temperament? What did this adult say or do to make you feel this way?
- What do you think is meant by the term “goodness of fit”? What are some specific ways that we work to ensure goodness of fit for the children in our care?
- Consider the connection between continuity of care and goodness of fit. How might these two concepts be related?

Book Club Meeting #2

Precious Packages, page 29

- Are you an only child, or do you have siblings? Consider birth order and the difference in ages between children in your home. How do you think these influenced your behavior as a child?
- Think of the first times you ever spent the night at a friend’s house as a child. Do you remember being confused or surprised by any differences between life at your friend’s home and life at your own home?

- Were you especially curious about any of the five children described at the bottom of page 29? What might adults do to support this child?
- For children, what are the benefits of a home-school connection? What are the benefits for parents and guardians?
- What are some of the things that your program currently does to promote family involvement? Which of these seem most valuable? What else you would like to try?
- Do you feel like you are more connected with the families of some children than others? If so, why might this be? What more could you do to build relationships with families with whom you do not feel well connected?



Book Club Meeting #3

More than One Measuring Stick, page 36

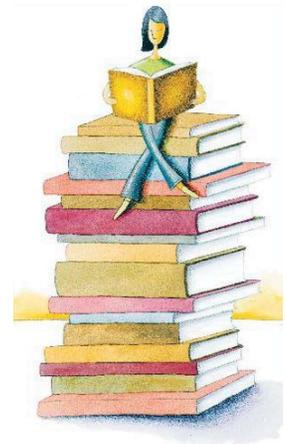
- Dr. Howard Gardner proposes that there are eight different kinds of intelligence. (See sidebar on page 36). Have you ever met a child who seemed especially “smart” in one of these areas? How did you know?
- Which of the eight intelligences do you feel best describes your own talents? Why? Which people, places, or things especially helped you develop these talents when you were a child?
- What might be the advantages of helping each child recognize and build individual strengths? What are some positive, supportive opportunities that you have in your day to connect with and challenge individual children?
- Do you feel that intelligence and aptitude are ever misunderstood by parents and/or educators in the early years? If so, how?
- Think about the toys and learning materials in the space you share with children. Which of the intelligences do you feel are especially well supported by your materials?

Are there any of the intelligences that are not supported as well as they could be? If so, brainstorm as a group to think of things that could be added to your environment or schedule to help. (For example, homemade maracas and drums to support musical intelligence.)

Book Club Meeting #4

10 Skills Every Child Needs to Thrive..., page 58

- What are the first skills that come to mind when we think about kindergarten readiness?
- Did this article offer any new insights or broaden your perspective about readiness skills?
- What are some ingredients in your classroom or schedule that support each of the skills? Is there anything you would like to add?
- The article tells us that children who experience attunement with adult leaders gain academic skills more readily. Why might this be?
- What does attunement between an adult and a child look and feel like?
- Do you have a special “success story” related to an individual child and one of the ten skills? If so, please share!



Additional challenges for your group:

- The opening article in this book notes, “There is more to being ‘good’ in life than being still, quiet, and undemanding.” What does this quote mean to you? In pairs or small groups, take a behavior that could be seen as a challenge and “flip it” think of all of the ways that it could be a strength for a child or adult. Here are a few to get you started:
 - Talkative
 - Bossy
 - Physically active
 - Curious
 - Persistent
- Randomly draw 3 names from each class roster. Classroom staff members complete the quiz on page 28 for these children. Discuss – which answers came easily, and which were more challenging? Make go-forward goals for connecting with children.
- Read the article, **Look Closely at Learning Centers** on page 53. Have each person pick a learning center to focus on in the week to come. Become especially careful observers of children at play in these areas. Come together again to share stories of your observations. How did children interact with one another and use materials? What might be changed or added to strengthen this learning center?
- There are a number of quotes about connecting with children throughout the book. (Hint: pages 7, 45, 54, and 58-64.) Which of the quotes was most meaningful for you, and why? Consider making posters with favorite quotes to hang in the break room or hallway. Or, make your own recipe for connecting with children, inspired by the one on page 46.
- Keep on going, book club! Pick a title from pages 68-69 to read and discuss together.