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Early Childhood Education

The true test of civilization is, not the census, nor the size of the cities, nor the crops, but the kind of [person] that the country turns out” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1870). This is an awesome responsibility for parents and educators. To nurture a mind is to mold the future.

This issue of the JOURNAL looks at education’s endeavors to set young children on a course for success. It considers a number of issues relating to early child development, such as: the current move toward universal preschool, the need to ensure safe learning environments, and wholistic development in formal and informal preschool settings.

Even a cursory review of educational literature reveals the importance of focusing on early child development. Too many youngsters are not performing well on high-stakes tests. Politicians and educators struggle with how to produce well-educated citizens from an increasingly diverse population. Dire warnings are issued about at-risk 3-year-olds falling behind academically, never to catch up. Many view universal preschool as a potential solution to these problems.

Meanwhile, kindergarten teachers demand more classroom time to advance students to expected levels of proficiency. Preschool dropout rates top dropout rates at all other grade levels. And child development specialists warn that a toxic society is taking its toll on children’s brains.

Perhaps now more vulnerable than ever, children need advocates. Overworked parents, inadequate or unconnected caregivers, lack of discipline, irregular routines, sensory overload, pressure to learn before developmentally ready—these influences and more can rob children of foundational strengths they need to thrive.

This issue provides information and perspective to help educators and parents as they prepare children for formal academics—when the time is right. Many of our readers are involved in preschool/kindergarten programs—directly or indirectly. Whatever your role, we have tried to provide current, relevant information to help guide early childcare and education. Some of the articles included here may be shared with parents trying to determine the best educational setting for their children.

Philosophically, this issue was prepared with the assumption that the mother is the best caregiver (the father, of course, also plays an important role), and that children should not be rushed into academics prematurely. Despite reports in the popular press, science does not conclusively support the idea that formal preschool is best for optimal child development. However, the authors are aware that societal pressures and family circumstances often lead parents to choose the next best options.

How should Adventist educators respond to growing demand for Christian preschools? When the mother is unable or unwilling to act as primary caretaker, other types of care must be considered. In this issue, we have tried to provide information to aid in these situations, as well as to promote the importance of maintaining respect and support for more ideal nurture of children. Because of this dual aim, the reader may sense a divided focus.

Ultimately, the most important thing to keep in mind is the welfare of the younger members of the family of God. The church, through its educational system, as well as family and children’s ministries, has a moral responsibility to support and help parents, especially those who cannot or do not want to provide care themselves. This means a number of things, potentially, such as offering parenting classes, information about child development, preschools, kindergartens, etc. Also, in locations that mandate preschool enrollment by a certain age, the church may want to consider offering a religious alternative to secular care.

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In California where I live, television, radio, and newspapers all promote the “First Five” initiative, which seeks to convince the public that preschool is vital for every child’s optimal development. Other educational systems have a similar focus. The message conveyed is that without preschool, children:

• are less likely to graduate from high school, much less go on to college;
• will likely trail behind and be victimized because they were deprived of early formalized learning; and
• will overwhelm the school system as it struggles to bring deficient children up to levels other children attained in preschool.

These are legitimate concerns, but many believe this emphasis represents a skewed frame of reference. Current lifestyles do create the need for universal preschools; however, societal trends do not always align with what is best for children. Parents and educators would do well to consider this topic from a broad perspective before concluding that preschool is the best option for children.

Recent research conducted under the guidance of Walter S. Gilliam, a psychologist and associate research scientist at Yale University Child Study Center, indicates that three times as many children are expelled from preschool as from grades K-12. Why so many expulsions? Gilliam’s study, titled Pre-kindergartners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Pre-kindergarten Systems, reports behavior as the main cause. “Behavioral problems can seriously derail a young child’s first educational experiences. Preschoolers are just learning to socialize and follow directions, and many young children resort to disruptive behaviors, including kicking and biting,” Gilliam says. “These 3- and 4-year-olds are barely out of diapers... They are being viewed as educational failures well before kindergarten,” Gilliam continued.

These research findings suggest a barrage of related...
This article considers the rationale for formal preschool instruction as well as other ways to prepare children for K-12 schooling. Four questions seem pertinent:

- Why is there so much emphasis on universal preschool?
- What are the concerns about early childhood learning?
- What does current research suggest about the best caregivers for preschoolers?
- Does learning for preschoolers happen best in a formal setting?

**Rationale for Universal Preschool**

Societal trends seem to necessitate preschool programs. Preschool can be an attractive option when both parents work outside the home or when a single parent must work and cannot afford a babysitter.

Preschool benefits immigrant families, also. These parents often work long hours to establish the family in a new setting. This leaves little if any quality time to prepare children for school. Preschool helps children from these families to acculturate and to master a new language.

Children from chaotic and impoverished homes often begin kindergarten and first grade at a disadvantage. Trying to nurture and educate children well prepared for school as well as those who are unready stresses school systems already under pressure to meet mandated standards for academic achievement.

Consequently, preschool seems the logical way to "level the playing
field” to ensure that all children are ready for first grade. Attack and eliminate the problem during the earliest and most impressionable years seems to be the motto of those who seek to require universal preschool. This position assumes that emphasis on intellectual development offers a magic cure. However, another view deserves consideration.

Another Perspective

Research suggests that during the first five years of life, there are critical periods for psychological, physiological, sociological, emotional, and spiritual development. Enriched environments during these years are especially important. But can formal preschool programs offer optimal nurture and care for the whole child—body, mind, and spirit?

The idea that more is better—more years in school, more and earlier academics, more homework—may not prove to be true in the long run. In fact, research on the brain suggests that this unbalanced emphasis may even be counterproductive.

As reported in Carla Hannaford’s Smart Moves, experiments in various schools have documented that less can be better. When these schools de-emphasized academic seatwork and included more physical education in the curriculum—as much as one-third of the school day—academic scores went up, rather than down. School morale soared, as did students’ desire to learn.

The brain wants to be in charge of its own learning, according to Case Western Reserve University’s James Zull in The Art of Changing the Brain. Putting too much emphasis on extrinsic motivation and force-feeding facts does not match the brain’s preferred way of functioning. The human brain is constantly learning on its own. To guide that learning, the educator should honor ways the brain prefers to learn. For preschool children, the best learning opportunities are created in play-full environments.

What is needed, as we consider the roles of preschool and kindergarten, is a balanced perspective. Unfortunately, educators tend to value intellectual prowess over physical and spiritual development. When budget cuts are necessary, physical education and aesthetic programming are usually the first to go.

Ellen White’s definition of true education—the harmonious development of physical, mental, and spiritual powers in preparation for service to humankind—points to a quite dif-
different philosophy. Her counsel commending this integral balance is validated repeatedly by current neuroscience research. The September 2005 issue of Educational Leadership cites much of this research in an issue entirely devoted to the whole child.

Mind, body, and spirit function together. To try to separate them is illogical and impossible. To achieve a balanced education, we must find ways to integrate children’s intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual development.

As we consider the educational needs of preschoolers, we should evaluate our assumptions, practices, and innovations. For education to be truly brain-body-spirit and learner-friendly, it must focus on the whole child. Any initiative that values mental, physical, or spiritual function over the full integration of all three is incomplete and harmful.

Who Should Care for Children?

A number of researchers have investigated the best environment for young children. Relevant factors they cite include: attachment, self-realization, and neurological issues (stages of development, the role of emotion, neural development, etc.). Current media promotions for preschool, however, rarely even mention these important issues.

Trust. During the first six or seven years of life, patterns form in a child’s brain that largely determine what kind of person he or she will become. This early imprinting is optimized in loving environments that bond caregiver and child. Georgetown University’s Karl Pribram and Claremont Graduate School’s Paul Zak describe research on beneficial oxytocin levels produced in both mother and child when they are synchronized in spirit. The body systems (immune, respiration, digestion, and cardiac) all function better when a trusting relationship exists between children and parents—especially the mother. This sets the stage for optimal learning.

Emotion. Emotion is based on neurochemistry. The caretaker’s opinion of a child affects his or her performance and self-concept. If the caretaker perceives a child as a behavior problem or a troublemaker, the child detects this and reacts negatively. Preschool teachers, who interact with many children each day and have different children in class every year, will have difficulty forming long-term bonding relationships with multiple children.

Neuroscience helps explain why sustained levels of negative emotion compromise brain function and efficiency and how positive emotions help children thrive. Whether preschools provide the optimal environment for emotional and academic development is a question parents and educators must consider.

Heart/Brain Connections. The more we learn about heart-brain connections, the more we realize how much the heart is involved in learning! Earl Bakken, inventor of the first wearable heart pacemaker and author of more than 100 scientific articles on heart-brain connections, explains that more connectors extend from the heart to the brain than from the brain to the heart. According to Bakken, the heart has a profound effect on the brain and cognition.

Research reveals that the heart contains neuron-like structures similar to those in the brain, though in greatly reduced numbers. Thus, the heart can store memories. In fact, the heart can be described as “having a mind of its own.” As a sensory organ, it is a major player in cognition. Recent research on heart-brain connections may provide new insight regarding biblical statements about the heart. Perhaps “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7, KJV) is more literal than previously thought.

The child is uniquely linked to the brain and heart of the mother. Ellen White suggests that when the mother experiences an intimate relationship with God, she is empowered to nurture her child. The father, too, has a vital role in nurturing the growing child.

If circumstances prevent sustained interaction between parent and child, the heart/brain can adapt; but the best situation for young children is loving nurture in their own home, especially when parents are attuned to the heart and mind of God and to that of the child. If some other case is a must, parents should ensure that there is a trusting relationship between the child, parents, and teacher, in a family-like situation or in a developmentally sound Christian preschool.

Attack and eliminate the problem during the earliest and most impressionable years seems to be the motto of those who seek to require universal preschool.

Developing Mind. Psychiatrist Daniel Siegel, in his book, The Developing Mind, says, “Interpersonal experiences directly influence how we mentally construct reality. This shaping process occurs throughout life, but is most crucial during the early years of childhood. Patterns of relationships and emotional communication directly affect the development of the brain. . . . Studies of human subjects reveal that different patterns of child-parent attachment are associated with differing physiological responses, ways of seeing the world, and interpersonal relationship patterns.

The communication of emotion may be the primary means by which these attachment experiences shape the developing mind. Research suggests that emotion serves as a central organizing process within the brain. In this way,
an individual’s abilities to organize emotions—a product, in part, of earlier attachment relationships—directly shapes the ability of the mind to integrate experience and to adapt to future stressors.”

As a proponent of child nurture by parents, Ellen White wrote 100 years ago: “The little ones should be educated in childlike simplicity. They should be trained to be content with the small, helpful duties and the pleasures and experiences natural to their years. . . . Children should not be forced into a precocious maturity, but as long as possible should retain the freshness and grace of their early years. The more quiet and simple the life of the child—the more free from artificial excitement and the more in harmony with nature—the more favorable it is to physical and mental vigor and to spiritual strength.”

**Quality of Parental Nurture**

Is simply being at home with a parent enough to ensure a well-adjusted and academically successful child? Not necessarily. The quality of time is also important. Appropriate at-home nurture requires discipline, a regular routine, varied educational experiences with real-life applications, academics appropriate to the child’s interests and age, abundant physical activity in fresh air and sunshine, proper nutrition and water intake, adequate rest, social relationships with other adults and children, a balanced lifestyle, and consistent modeling of trust in God on the part of the caregiver. All this takes time and commitment. In today’s world, many parents have to work and cannot invest this kind of time and attention in their children. When the ideal is not attainable, parents must find caregivers who will provide these advantages.

In *Reclaiming Our Children*, Peter R. Breggin warns: “A meaningful parent-child relationship—where parents give unconditional love and genuine attention to the child—is the single most important factor in providing a child with a secure, emotionally stable life. Conversely, the loss or absence of beneficial relationships with significant adults is the single most important source of suffering in a child’s life.”

### Concerns About Hothousing Children

Current research highlights significant concerns regarding the quality of learning in formal preschool settings. A major concern is preschool and kindergarten programs that are developmentally inappropriate for the children they serve.

About 20 years ago, experts began to express alarm about the pressure for children to learn formal academics at younger and younger ages. Irving Sigel of the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey, coined the term *hothousing* to describe these efforts—attempts to teach children to read or do math before being enrolled in grade school.

More recently, research on brain function has intensified this concern. Though the brain is highly adaptive, pressuring children to perform academically before they are developmentally ready can lead to neuroses and other complications later in life.

the Mind: How to Nurture Your Child's Intelligence, Creativity, and Healthy Emotions From Birth Through Adolescence, University of California Berkeley's Marian Diamond and Janet Hopson cite numerous authorities' concerns over hothousing children. David Elkind, a professor of child studies at Tufts University, in his books The Hurried Child and Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk, warns parents and educators about the dangers he sees in teaching academic subjects to young children. Over the short term, he says, young children stressed by educational pressure tend to show fatigue, decreased appetite, lowered effectiveness at tasks, and psychosomatic ailments.

Over the long term, says Elkind, these children may show less interest in learning, less ability to work independently to judge their own progress, and the tendency to worry and compare their intelligence with other children's. Although some parents fervently believe that their children's potential is wasted by letting them play until they reach school age, Elkind insists that exposing them to anything other than self-directed activities can be harmful and dangerous.15

Jane Healy relates school readiness to brain development: "Since myelin formation enables more efficient brain use, making demands on undeveloped areas may be a real mistake. We have very little information on ways to speed the growth of myelin; although it is age-related, the schedule varies widely among individuals, and it is unclear how much—or if—the process can be accelerated. It seems evident that our efforts to stimulate learning must be tempered by patience until the child's mental transmission systems are equal to the task or we risk frustration, inferior skill development, and an abiding distaste and incompetence for the activity. We may even be programming in bad habits and negative motivation at a neurophysiological level."16

In 1890, when educational environments were far more primitive than today, Ellen White offered similar advice: "Many children have been ruined for life by urging the intellect and neglecting to strengthen the physical powers. . . . Their minds were taxed with lessons when they should not have been called out, but kept

Research suggests that during the first five years of life, there are critical periods for psychological, physiological, sociological, emotional, and spiritual development.

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back until the physical constitution was strong enough to endure mental effort. Small children should be as free as lambs to run out-of-doors. They should be allowed the most favorable opportunity to lay the foundation for a sound constitution. 17

Religious Education in Early Childhood

No responsibility assumed by human beings is more important than the care and nurture of children—they are our future. In the busyness of daily life, it is easy for parents to lose sight of children’s seminal needs—for routine, structure and discipline; for synchrony in spirit with parents and caregivers; for nurturing strengths and strengthening weaknesses; for adequate sleep, nutrition, and physical activity; and most importantly, for a consistent example of God-likeness. No more sacred privilege is afforded to parents and teachers than to restore the image of God in children and to introduce them to God’s plan for their lives.

Six years ago, I began a research study to compare brain science research with Ellen G. White’s educational counsels. Again and again, I was amazed at how closely they aligned. Even though neuroscience favors a naturalistic perspective, many researchers have concluded that emotion, love, and a positive spirit are critical to mental and physical health.

Similarly, a major emphasis in Ellen White’s writings is the harmonious development of physical, mental, and spiritual powers in preparation for service to humanity—and throughout eternity. Science’s reiteration of Ellen White’s emphasis is another reminder that parents and educators must address the needs of the whole child.

Spiritual nurture is as vital as physical and mental development. Failure to provide this nurture not only represents unfaithfulness to God, it is a form of child abuse. By offering developmentally appropriate religious training, the Christian preschool can enhance human potential and prepare children for the kingdom of heaven. If they offer a wholistic program that combines physical, emotional, mental and spiritual training, they can rightfully market themselves as offering care that is superior to that of secular preschools.

When children are young and impressionable, lessons in spirituality are vitally important. During these years, the brain is patterned in indelible ways that determine the child’s character. Through neglect of balanced training and nurture, we skew children’s development in ways that will require much effort and pain to overcome. One of the most valuable gifts that we as loving parents and educators can give to children is spiritual nurture. Children crave the love of their parents and teachers. Wise caregivers will seek God’s guidance through prayer and study in order to provide developmentally appropriate and theologically sound training for the children in their care.
Summary

Societal trends have created the need for non-parental care for young children. This has led to recommendations for universal preschool attendance. The goal of such programs is to prevent academic deficiencies—system-wide as well as in specific groups of children—and to provide care and nurture for children whose parents are unable to provide full-time care. Enriched environments during preschool years do seem to help students from deprived backgrounds to succeed in primary school and can stimulate creativity in gifted children.

However, many preschool programs are developmentally inappropriate and even harmful. They warehouse children and force-feed them academics before their brains are ready. Preschools with large enrollments and a few ill-trained and badly paid teachers cannot individualize their offerings to meet the needs of each child, and some do not recognize the need to do so.

Such preschools are not the best choice for child nurture during the earliest years. Young children need loving nurture from consistent, God-fearing caregivers with whom the child has developed a long-term bond. Along with emotional nurture, children need opportunities for creative expression, abundant physical activity, and stress-free environments. Preschools that place undue emphasis on academic development can cause more harm than good. They are unlikely to address children’s wholistic developmental needs.

Parents are often “taken in” by the hype about the need for universal preschool. Churches and schools can make a significant contribution to the present and the future of their communities if they seek ways to help parents understand and fulfill their responsibility to provide a nurturing climate for their children. When children cannot be cared for at home, Adventist schools can offer developmentally appropriate and loving Christian preschool care.

The idea that more is better—more years in school, more academics, more homework—may not prove to be true in the long run.

Addressing the problem of low academic achievement and school dropouts is important, but it requires more than mandates for formalized preschool education. It would be better achieved by helping families understand the way children develop and how to provide quality care. Education at its best nurtures the uniqueness of each individual. Though well intended, bureaucracy does not excel in individualization. Adventist educators do well to keep in mind the sacredness of individual human potential, especially during children’s most impressionable years.

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15. Ibid., p. 167.
16. Jane M. Healy, Endangered Minds (New York: Simon & Schuster— Touchstone, 1990), pp. 75, 76. Myelin is a white fatty substance that coats the axon of the neuron and speeds information transfer. Not all neurons require myelination for efficient function, but many do. Lack of myelination can be a serious problem.

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Small children should be left as free as lambs, to run out of doors, to be free and happy, and should be allowed the most favorable opportunities to lay the foundation for sound constitutions.”¹ For more than 100 years, this statement has been the authoritative counsel for Seventh-day Adventist parents and educators. Early childhood education and group care (ECEC) have not been part of the conventional Adventist paradigm. Many times, the question has been asked: “Are we working in opposition to biblical and Spirit of Prophecy counsel when we promote the operation of ECEC programs?”

Although I am an early childhood educator and coordinator for the early childhood education and care division of a union conference, I still concur with the traditional Adventist belief that young children, prior to entrance into formal schooling, should be in the home, taught and cared for by loving parents.

Empirical Backing for Adventist Traditions

As with other traditional Adventist teachings, empirical research consistently authenticates the wisdom of our heritage. Both past and current research reveal that children who stay at home between birth and 8 years of age, cared for and taught by a loving and attentive mother and father, are more successful and balanced in all areas of life than those children who do not have the same early environment.²

According to David Elkind, professor of child development at Tufts University, “children who receive academic instruction too early—gener-
ally before age six or seven—are often put at risk... taught the wrong things at the wrong time...,” permanently damaging children’s belief in their abilities, reducing their “natural eagerness to learn,” and blocking their “natural gifts and talents.”

Edward Zigler, co-founder of Head Start and current Sterling Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Yale University, concurs: “There is a large body of evidence indicating that there is little if anything to be gained by exposing middle-class children to early education.”

Rebecca Marcon, a developmental psychologist and a professor of psychology at the University of North Florida, has concluded from research that “[c]hildren’s... long-term progress may be slowed by... [introducing] formalized learning experiences too early for most children’s developmental status. Pushing children too soon may actually backfire when children move into the later elementary school grades and are required to think more independently and take on greater responsibility for their own learning process.”

Recent research on the effects of time spent in childcare demonstrates that smaller care settings are much more beneficial for the young child than larger, institutionalized settings—regardless of the adult/child ratio. According to empirical research, home-based and faith-based centers do indeed provide higher-quality care and nurture, which in turn enhances children’s social, emotional, and academic success.

In other words, no research supports the assumption that enrolling middle-class and upper-class children in preschool will increase their academic, emotional, and social skills. In fact, it may produce negative outcomes.

**Society Versus Family**

Unfortunately, for the vast majority of children, the ideal scenario of care by one or both parents in the home is not a reality. Over the past century, diverse sociological and political factors have had a huge impact on families and child-raising. These include increased mobility and immigration, nuclear families, high divorce rates, teenage pregnancy and single parenthood, societal disdain for “women’s work,” better-educated mothers with demanding careers, anti-family legislation and taxation, wars and natural disasters, the high cost of living, the change from an industrial to a service economy, promiscuity, the increasing gap between rich and poor, and over-indulgence in pleasure-seeking behaviors.

These trends have led to the disintegration of the traditional family structure and made it more difficult for people to care for their children at home. Although childcare advocates see these trends as creating a demand for universal early childhood education, Public Agenda found that “parents of young children believe that having a full-time parental presence at home is what’s best for very young children and it is what most
would prefer for their own family.” Without question, the intact home where family members can provide love, training, and protection during the earliest years remains the ideal educational environment.

**The Early Childhood Education Frenzy**

Although a child’s formative years are the responsibility of the parents and extended family, the reality of societal trends has placed a heavy burden upon schools and social structures. Politicians, corporations, teacher unions, and professional organizations have seized upon the results of three studies purporting to show profound and long-term benefits from quality early childhood education. However, the results of these studies cannot be generalized to all American families, as the demographics of the participants were not representative of the larger population.8

In addition, the environments were not representative, as they included home visits, individualized education activities, and teacher/child ratios of 1:5. All three studies concentrated on severely disadvantaged minority children, some at risk for retarded mental performance. Furthermore, the studies have not been replicated with a broader cross-section of young children.9

As a result of these over-publicized studies, the changing social structure of families, working parents, parental concern about their children’s perceived academic deficiencies, language barriers, behavioral disturbances, test scores, and socialization skills, “experts” have convinced many parents that they need to enroll their young children in out-of-home care for early educational opportunities.10

**Benefits of Early Learning Environments**

Both public and private entities have responded by recommending reliable, high-quality, safe, and instructive care for young children. The term “developmentally appropriate practice” (DAP) has become a cliche signifying the necessity to provide both education and care.

A developmentally appropriate preschool environment can provide
long-term benefits if the program is not overly academic. Developmental appropriateness has two dimensions: age and individualization. Experts in child development have produced a framework that teachers can use to shape the learning environment and plan appropriate experiences. These programs seek to promote physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development that is appropriate for the age of the child.

Individual appropriateness focuses on enhancing children’s abilities while also challenging their interests, understanding, and critical-thinking skills. Factors to be considered include the child’s individual pattern and timing of growth, personality, learning style, coping skills, and family background.

The benefits of DAP have been verified repeatedly by developmental psychologists and educational researchers. Many of these were enumerated by Marcon in her 2002 quasi-experimental follow-up study:11

- A positive classroom climate that is conducive to children’s healthy emotional development;
- Lower levels of exhibited stress and greater motivation to learn;
- Increased comprehension and verbal skills, greater creativity, and higher levels of cognitive functioning;
- Higher achievement scores throughout their primary grade years; and
- Smoother transitions from primary to later elementary grades with academic gains holding constant.

The preschool teacher’s role is critical—he or she must plan, observe, and guide learning through direct instruction, environmental support, appropriate materials, and thoughtful questioning strategies. “Without a nurturing, playful, responsive environment, an academic focus may diminish children’s engagement and motivation. But a ‘child-centered’ environment that lacks intellectual challenges also falls short of what curious young learners deserve.”12 Young children’s academic aptitude can be significantly shaped if the teacher focuses and individualizes the environment and activities in the areas of organization, coordination, cooperation, and independence.

Adventist Early Childhood Education

How do the studies cited above relate to Adventist preschools? It will be helpful to review the goals of Adventist education at this point. Ellen White wrote that “the purpose of education is to qualify [children] for usefulness in this life and for the future life in the kingdom of God.”13 Elaborating on this, the North American Division (NAD) Office of Education published this philosophy statement in their Journey to Excellence document:

“Adventist education seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all human beings; to build character akin to that of the Creator; to nurture thinkers rather than mere reflectors of others’ thoughts; to promote loving service rather than selfish ambition; to ensure maximum development of each individual’s potential; and to embrace all that is true, good, and beautiful.”14

The Pacific Union Conference Education Code provides more detail: “The primary aim of Seventh-day Adventist education is to provide opportunity for students to accept Christ as their Savior, to allow the Holy Spirit to transform their lives, and to fulfill the commission of preaching the gospel to all the world. Seventh-day Adventist education has a two-fold mission. The school’s primary role is to educate and to spiritually strengthen Seventh-day Adventist youth. In addition, the school is to serve as a mission outreach to the community.”15

Responsibility

In order to help meet the needs of society and to fulfill the gospel commission, Seventh-day Adventists have a responsibility to offer appropriate instruction and to lead children to Christ. We have been counseled that “as soon as the child is capable of forming an idea and reasoning, his education should begin.”16 Long ago, the Adventist Church recognized the need to support families in training young children to become “useful, respected, and beloved members of society here, and give them a moral fitness for the society of the pure and holy hereafter.”17 Hence, Adventists instituted programs such as Sabbath school, church schools, Vacation Bible School, Adventurers, and Pathfinders.

In 1904, Mrs. White expressed deep concern for young children who were not being properly disciplined and trained within their home environments. Such children, she believed, were not provided with the proper foundation for the future.18

On January 14 of that year, Mrs. White met with the church school board at Elmshaven, Sanitarium, California. She acknowledged that “children surrounded by these unfortunate conditions are indeed to be pitied. If not afforded an opportunity for proper training outside the home, they are debarred from many privileges that, by right, every child should enjoy. . . . God desires us to deal with these problems sensibly.”19 “[H]ere is a work that must be done for the families. . . . They will learn in school that which they frequently do not learn out of school, except by association.”20

When board members questioned her previous statement about the need for children to be as “free as
“God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things.”

In these comments, Mrs. White was referring to the care and educational needs of children between the ages of 7 and 10 years. However, the philosophy applies to younger children as well: The church must be ever vigilant to assist in the upbringing and training of its youngest members. In the 21st century, lifestyle choices and ever-increasing economic demands have placed families in peril. Using biblical principles, mature members must provide guidance and counsel for the less mature as they “hand one another along.”

Mrs. White encouraged the church to “carry a burden for the lambs of the flock. Let the children be educated and trained to do service for God, for they are the Lord’s heritage.”

Recent research on the effects of time spent in childcare demonstrates that smaller care settings are much more beneficial for the young child than larger, institutionalized settings—regardless of the adult/child ratio.

Seventh-day Adventist church and/or school should operate a childcare program. However, it does mean that congregations should assist their struggling members, being willing to teach and care for them, and seeking to serve them.

Mrs. White encouraged the church to “carry a burden for the lambs of the flock. Let the children be educated and trained to do service for God, for they are the Lord’s heritage.”

Matthew 19:14 and Luke 18:16 (KJV) both record Jesus saying “suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not.” This implies that every child deserves to learn about Him. Thus, He placed a longing within the hearts of certain individuals (myself included) to pick up the seemingly impossible task of caring for and guiding young children to Himself.
“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. . . . He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”26 This is where Christ-centered early childhood education and care must begin. To lovingly care for another person’s child provides a sacred opportunity to build strong bonds of trust and confidence between teacher and parent. Through this medium, the gospel of Jesus Christ is taught and lived in the hope that the children’s parents will heed the call of Christ. Through the faithfulness of Adventist teachers and administrators with impressionable children, the gospel of Jesus Christ is being taught and lived in an effort to “train up [the children] in the way [they] should go” (Proverbs 6:22).

This is the mission of Adventist early childhood education and care centers.

Church Administration Responds

For many years, ECEC professionals within the Seventh-day Adventist Church have faithfully looked after the “little lambs of the flock”—and those of anyone else willing to entrust their children to our care and training. Recently, church administrators have also demonstrated a more active interest in assuming responsibility for training the young.

In June 2005, the North American Division (NAD) union presidents and division officers voted to ask the NAD Office of Education to take responsibility for the development and supervision of all early childhood education and care programs.27

For those of us within the ECEC field, this is the beginning of an exciting time in Adventist history! The Lord is working to preserve the family unit, and we have the privilege of being His instruments through our ECEC centers. We hope to both share with and learn from what other church organizations have done in this area.

We have a lot of organizational work ahead of us, but what a blessing it is to participate in the great commission of Matthew 28:19, 20: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (KJV).  

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SO YOU WANT TO START A

CHILD CARE CENTER!

WHY? The answer to this one-word question will influence everything you do. Why are you thinking of starting a center? Will it be an outreach to the community? Will it provide a Seventh-day Adventist environment for the children of the congregation? Are you looking for a feeder program for the church school? Or are you hoping to establish a money-maker to support the school or another ministry of the church?

If you are looking for a money raiser, try something else. Doing early childhood education right will cost money, not make it. Unless the church or school (hereafter referred to as the “parent organization”) has a clear idea of the commitment it must make in time and resources, there will be misunderstandings that will produce hurt and angry feelings, monetary loss, and a failure to establish a credible and permanent center.

Each of the other reasons cited above are valid ones; but the parent organization must be very clear about the purpose of the childcare center. Whatever reason a group chooses for starting a center, it has a moral imperative to make that location the very best possible environment for children. A Christian school or church can do no less and maintain its integrity.

Until fairly recently, churches operated preschools as an outreach ministry. Wives of professionals volunteered their time for half days as staff. Most churches that now operate centers do so full-time, and the volunteer worker is rare.

Historically, Adventists have opposed out-of-home care for young children. Admittedly, a Christian home with competent, devoted parents is the best place for young children, but where are people to turn when they cannot provide full-time care? If they entrust their children to you, this is an enormous and sacred responsibility.

What Steps Should You Take?

Commit to Operating a Quality Center

1. A quality center regards the safety of children, both physical and emotional, as its paramount responsibility. Administrators’ familiarity with accepted health and safety practices will help ensure wise decisions about the fa-
Whatever reason a group chooses for starting a center, it has a moral imperative to make that location the very best possible environment for children.
juries and illnesses to parents.
• Each child should have an emergency card with contact information and signed consent for treatment.

2. A quality center employs professionally trained staff who love children and promote their optimal physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development.

3. A quality center uses a developmentally appropriate curriculum. It resists the current political push for formal academics. Young children need to use their senses to explore and manipulate their environment. Because preschoolers learn best by doing, not by hearing or seeing, the curriculum should provide hands-on experiences that employ these methods. More abstract activities, such as workbooks and symbol recognition, should be reserved until children’s eyes and brain are ready to learn in that manner, usually around Grade 1. Finally, 2- to 4-year-olds learn best by working with the familiar; therefore, the curriculum should vary by locality, with adaptations to fit geography and culture.

The parent organization must be willing to follow the advice of people who are knowledgeable about quality childcare programs. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has a document outlining standards for early childhood programs and curriculum and guidelines for appropriate curriculum. The American Public Health Association, in cooperation with the American Academy of Pediatrics, has an excellent and comprehensive book about safety, health, and nutrition.

Decide Who the Center Will Hire.

Will the center have an all-Adventist staff? Many centers hire non-Adventist Christians or even non-Christians. To avoid conflicts with the values and beliefs of the parent organization, it is highly recommended that all staff be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The center should employ only people with appropriate academic training in early childhood education. Even
A quality center employs professionally trained staff who love children and promote their optimal physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development.

Write a Mission Statement.

A helpful first step is to write a mission statement, as this will give direction to everything that follows. A core reason for operating a Seventh-day Adventist Child Development Center (CDC) is to provide a safe place for children to live and grow. It should, as closely as possible, model itself after a high-quality Seventh-day Adventist Christian home.

Contact the Local Licensing Agency.

In many locations, centers must meet specific licensure requirements. Talking to the appropriate agency can save much time. For example, I know of one organization that wanted to start a center, but did not have the required square footage for a playground. Finding this out before they began to renovate their building saved them time and money. Another organization built a center and had already chosen paint and carpeting before contacting the licensing agency, only to discover that the facility could not be licensed without extensive remodeling. The building now houses a junior high school, and plans for a childcare center have been abandoned.

Contact Your Local Conference.

Some conferences have financial and legal protocols that must be followed in establishing a center. Talk to them before trying to open a center. Keeping the conference informed of your plans will make the process go more smoothly.

Form a Feasibility Committee.

This group should look at space, finances, potential personnel, needs of the community, and church members’ attitudes about establishing a center. The committee should develop a survey instrument and poll the parents of potential enrollees. The questionnaire in the book, When Churches Mind the Children, can be used as a guideline.

Survey the Neighborhood.

The community may not need another childcare center; there may be a greater need for after-school or infant care. Contact centers within a five-mile radius to see if they are operating at capacity or have many openings. This will help you decide what type of center to operate.

Investigate Funding Options.

Who will actually operate the center? The best plan is for the director to report directly to a church or school board (or a subcommittee of one of these groups), rather than to a pastor or principal. Sometimes the interests of the center will conflict with other programs of the parent organization, so the center should have a group of people willing to champion its needs.

Some churches operate centers with local control and support. Schools often operate centers as an extension of their program. A few conferences in the United States assume responsibility for childcare centers, giving guidance as well as administrative and financial support. Some centers, especially outside of the United States, are partially funded by governments.

Some centers are stand-alone programs, but most are connected with a parent organization; a few are operated by a constituency of churches. Some churches rent space to private, for-profit programs.

Renting space to a privately operated group has pros and cons. The advantage is a steady income with minimum effort by the landlord. The
disadvantage is the likelihood of philosophical conflict and legal risk. If a congregation or its officers become involved with the operation of a center to which the church rents space, it automatically becomes liable for the actions of the center. Another possible disadvantage: The center will be identified as Adventist because of its location when, in fact, it may be diametrically opposed to the practice and philosophy of the parent organization. Renting to a church member does not ensure that he or she will not subcontract or sell the business to someone who may be unaware of or hostile to the values and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When renting to an organization or individual, consult with a lawyer first to ascertain your level of risk.

**Plan for the Use of Space.**

Will the center will have its own rooms or share the space? It is possible for a Sabbath school and a childcare center to coexist, but this arrangement often causes difficulties. Providing separate locked storage areas for each program solves the problem of unauthorized or unintentional use of supplies. Since the room configuration will be different for the two programs, the childcare administrators and Sabbath school leaders must work out in advance who sets up the room for each program and when this is to be done, as well as who chooses the room decorations. As petty as it seems, centers have closed because of squabbles over bulletin boards.

Different local agencies may have varying requirements for the physical space of a center. At a minimum, each room must be on the ground floor, have two exits, running water, and toilets. Bathrooms must have child-sized sinks with stools or steps provided for each. The number of children that can be accommodated depends on the unencumbered square footage of the room.

**Create Budgets.**

Both a start-up budget and an operation budget are necessary. The operation budget should reflect the likelihood that the center will start with a few children and then grow. It should indicate where money will come from until the center’s finances have stabilized.

Investigate the types and amounts of subsidies. Most parent organizations provide in-kind subsidies, such as space and utilities. Some provide custodial service. Telephone, room, and equipment repair are usually the responsibility of the center. Building maintenance is usually handled by the parent organization.

A financial subsidy also will be needed, with a larger amount of money allocated for the first two years. Most centers take about this long to reach their enrollment capacity. It may take longer, depending on location. By querying existing centers and governmental regulating agencies, you will be able to obtain an accurate estimate of what is normal for your area. I visited a new center that had been open for six days and had a waiting list. A local church had just closed its center, and its director and children all moved to the Adventist center. The same director later established a beautiful childcare center in another town that took two years to reach its licensed capacity.

Be as realistic as possible in estimating costs and income. This will prevent unpleasant surprises later on. When estimating the cost of equipment for the center, take into account the cost of institutional-grade furniture and toys. Avoid the temptation to furnish a center with donated, outgrown home equipment and items from garage sales. Poorly constructed, aging equipment can become a hazard and will need to be replaced.

Buy tables (not desks) with adjustable legs to accommodate the different-sized children. Check with the conference to see if they can get you a discount on equipment, or try to acquire good-quality equipment from a center that is closing.

**Write a Proposal.**

The proposal should contain as much information as you can obtain on possible enrollment, costs, income, space to be used, type of program, hours of operation, ages of children to be served, personnel to be hired, and the impact on the parent organization.

**Choose a Name.**

The name should indicate the focus of the program. The name of the parent organization can be included—for instance, ___________ Children’s Center, or ___________ Child Development Center. These names imply that the program focuses on children and their nurture. The term *Day Care Center* has acquired negative connotations and should be avoided. It implies custodial rather than nurturing care. If a less-obvious title is used, such as “Children’s Discovery Center,” be sure the name does not already belong to a center or a chain of centers.

**Present Your Proposal to the Parent Organization.**

To succeed, the proposed center needs not only approval, but also commitment by the members of the parent organization’s constituency. This is a good time to update the local conference on your plans and progress. Once you have obtained constituency support, it is time to

**Create an Implementation Committee.**

This committee can act as the board of the center. Whether or not it answers to the board of the parent organization, the tasks are complex enough that it is prudent to choose a group of people with the sole responsibility of getting the center up and going. This
The best plan is for the director to report directly to a church or school board (or a subcommittee of one of these groups), rather than to a pastor or principal.

Hire a Director.

The director should come on board two months before the center’s projected opening date. It is his or her responsibility to create forms and lists of needed equipment and supplies, set up the room(s), and hire staff. However, the director will need help in marketing the center.

The committee needs to decide whether all staff must be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (This will, of course, depend upon the rules of the country in which the center is located.) To have an all-Adventist staff has distinct advantages: (1) there is harmony of purpose and philosophy; (2) depending on the organizational structure, there is a cleaner legal situation; and (3) financially, the staff can be linked with the fiscal procedures of the parent organization.

The biggest problem is finding qualified church members to work at the center. It may be necessary to identify people with potential and train them. In the United States, this is not difficult or expensive. Most community colleges offer the training at a minimal cost.

The committee and director should select a developmentally appropriate curriculum for the center. See other articles in this issue for resources and recommendations.

Obtain the Backing of the School Board or Local Congregation.

If the group with financial responsibility for a center is not solidly behind the endeavor, it will fail. The only exception is when a foundation or an individual bankrolls the program. Be sure to determine the stability of their commitment, as well. People pass away, move on, or change their minds. This can be devastating to a center.

Investigate Local Requirements.

In most places, local governmental agencies set the standards of the centers in its territory. In California, for example, all centers must be licensed and must comply with minimum health and safety standards. The state also regulates the qualifications of directors and staff.

Determine Whether Help Is Available From the Conference.

Some conferences, including Southeastern California Conference (SECC), provide oversight of their child-development centers (CDCs). Identifying its program as “Preschool through 12,” the SECC education board has approved a manual codifying the operation of these centers. The center staff are conference employees; their wage scale is based on experience, education, and certification. Staff members thus earn retirement credit and are entitled to health and tuition benefits. Directors have a separate pay scale and receive an administrative budget based on the size of their center. Personnel from the SECC office of education sit on the boards of the centers, and assist in recruiting and hiring employees. The conference sponsors occasional workshops and seminars for childcare employees and subsidizes the centers whose remuneration is commensurate with the training and experience of the teachers.

When the conference began supervising centers in 1986, childcare teachers with comparable qualifications were receiving 49 percent of the pay of elementary teachers. Currently, the conference pays center staff 85 percent of the elementary teacher pay scale. The goal is to pay CDC teachers with equivalent experience and certification the same as elementary and academy teachers.

Become Conversant With Legal Issues.

Like other institutions in society, childcare centers are vulnerable to legal action by disgruntled clients. Angry parents can cause considerable grief and inconvenience. Even a frivolous lawsuit can cost the center a great deal of money in legal fees.

A center can protect itself against litigation in several ways:

1. Be scrupulous about following laws and regulations. This one safeguard will prevent most lawsuits.

2. Keep good documentation. This includes (a) records of immunizations, (b) daily sign-in and sign-out sheets that show who brought and picked up each child, and at what time, (c) a list of persons authorized to pick up each child (including copies of custody and restraining orders limiting who can pick up a child); (d) up-to-date lists of work, home, and cell phone numbers for parents and guardians; (e) incident reports on any injury sustained while a child is at the center (minor incidents can be reported verbally to the parent, but keep a written report of all injuries in the child’s file).

3. If there is any chance a staff member could be accused of mistreating a child, contact the police. In many cases, a police report of an incident will absolve the center of responsibility and prevent a lawsuit.

4. Notify the local authorities if you suspect a child in your care has been sexually or physically abused.

5. Invite a lawyer to serve on the board or keep one on re-
Your conference can offer helpful advice and assistance regarding legal issues if you keep them informed from the start of planning.

**Obtain Insurance.**

Every child-care center needs insurance that covers property, liability, injuries, and accidents. The local school or church may be able to include the center in its coverage. Contact the conference for advice. In the United States, most child-care centers obtain some or all of their insurance from Adventist Risk Management, which has operational requirements to minimize hazards and risk.

**Time Frame**

Does starting a center sound like a complicated and lengthy process? It is. It can take from two months to a year.

**More Questions?**

What you have just read may raise more questions. This article is not the definitive document on centers, but only an introduction to the subject. It is only fair, in closing, to answer one of the most frequently asked questions:

*Why can’t a childcare center make money? You say that isn’t possible, but I know of centers that do make money.*

I said that quality centers won’t make money. If you pay teachers minimum wage, have a high ratio of children to adults, and scrimp on equipment and supplies, you may make money; but you will be able to hire only marginally qualified teachers, and you will have high staff turnover, neither of which is good for children.

Remember, a center is open for 11 or more hours a day. Most localities limit the number of children per adult. The highest ratio permitted throughout most of the U.S. is 12 children to 1 adult for 2- to 5-year-olds and 4 to 1 for infants. National accreditation standards do not allow more than 10:1 for older preschool children and 3:1 for infants.

I don’t know of any church school in session up to seven hours a day with as many as 25-30 students in a classroom that is not subsidized. How, then, could a center with smaller ratios that is open longer hours with more staff members be expected to be self-sufficient?

*Putting together a center sounds like a lot of work. It is.*

*It sounds as if you are trying to discourage us from trying.*

I’m not. I am just trying to provide a realistic view of what is involved so that your organization will go into the process with its eyes open and not be disillusioned. It is possible to establish and operate a quality Christian center that is uniquely Adventist—provided the parent organization is willing to give ongoing resources and support to make it happen. The many good centers already in existence prove that it is possible.

A well-run, quality Adventist center can provide a safe, nurturing place for young children and help supplement parental efforts to maintain a full-time loving, caring environment in which their most precious possessions, their children, can grow and thrive emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

**Marilyn Beach** is a semi-retired Early Childhood Specialist who has spent the majority of her career teaching both young children and teachers of young children. She has a Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education from Claremont Graduate University and has taught in public and church schools at every level from preschool to graduate school. She served as Associate Superintendent of Education in the Southwestern California Conference for 16 years. A passionate advocate for children, Dr. Beach continues to teach on a part-time basis at La Sierra University in Riverside, California, and to serve as a consultant for child-development centers in California.

**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

4. States and countries differ as to which agency has this responsibility. In many places in the U.S., it is the county Health and Human Services or the state department of education. In others, it is the department of social services. Because of the wide variation, make your initial contact with the local social services agency or county department of education, or ask a local center for advice.
6. Two reliable sources for equipment and supplies are Constructive Playthings and Lakeshore Learning Materials. Both have comprehensive catalogues, and at least one of them has two lists of equipment needed to start a center: a basic list, and items to add as a center grows: Constructive Playthings, 13201 Arrington Road, Grandview, MO 64030 (http://www.cptoy.com); and Lake Shore Learning Materials, 2695 E. Dominguez Street, Carson, CA 90895 (http://www.lakeshorelearning.com).
8. Personnel in Adventist Risk Management suggest that anyone interested in operating a childcare center should check the following Web-sites: http://www.daycarestarterkit.com; http://www.PCITcourses.com (Free Info Kit, “Learn How to Run a Child Day Care”). You can also contact your conference office or Gary Hile, ARM Risk Control Director (ghile@adventistrisk.org or 301-680-6852). In addition to the state approval process, U.S. applicants will need to fulfill the requirement in the North American Division Working Policy – P50: (GC WP 860) relating to (1) Property; (2) General Liability; (3) Student Accident; (4) Employers Practices Liability; and (5) Sexual Misconduct and Molestation.
Imagination plays a vital role in learning. As they grow, children gradually come to learn the difference between reality and fantasy. Throughout this dynamic process, play is a key element, as it promotes cognitive development. Both parents and educators sometimes have difficulty understanding how children develop in this regard.

This article approaches the topic of imagination and play from a neuro-psychological perspective. It includes insights from several authors who have done extensive research on the subject.

Marian Diamond and Janet Hopson say that imagination and play encourage preschoolers to develop “inventiveness and the lifelong creativity into which it can blossom. Parents sometimes inadvertently damage their children’s development by misunderstanding and discouraging two perfectly normal phenomena: a child’s imaginary friendships and her private (although often audible) conversations with herself.”

Yale University’s Jerome Singer suggests that preschoolers with imaginary playmates are “more independent, cooperative with teachers and peers, generally happier, and less aggressive than their peers, and have a richer vocabulary.” It’s not unusual for children to chatter in “private speech” to an imaginary character or friend.

Jane Healy lauds the role of imagination in reading development. She talks about “the importance of words without pictures” in helping children involve themselves in abstract thinking. Referring to research done by Wells and his associates, Healy states, “the most powerful predictor of [children’s] school achievement was the amount of time spent listening to interesting stories,” a form of play for the mind.

Healy describes “[t]he development of language and symbolic play” as the beginning of abstract thought. Until about age 6 or 7, children’s “work” is to develop the basis for abstract thought, to master their physical environment, and learn to use language. Thus, children’s play and work are synonymous!

“Patterns are the key to intelligence,” Healy is convinced. Autistic children cannot play as other children do. They seem unable to “make

BY LINDA BRYANT CAVINESS
meaningful connections out of experience, so that the world seems to be a terrifying jumble of sights, sounds, and feelings.\(^7\)

“For children with these difficulties,” Healy further explains, “we are not sure how much can be done to change things at these fundamental neural levels, but while the brain is still developing rapidly before age four or five, it is wise to focus on helping the child make physical and mental connections through lots of self-organizing play activities rather than emphasizing specific bits of information.”\(^8\)

Healy says neurological research shows that formal school can be inappropriate and harmful for preschool children if it robs them of time to play freely: “Because of immaturity in parietal lobe areas that connect sight, sound, touch, and body awareness, it is still difficult to combine processes from more than one modality, such as in looking at a letter form and saying a sound to go with it, or hearing a numeral and writing it.”\(^9\)

Diamond cites research\(^10\) supporting the idea of allowing children to be free to play up until kindergarten age. However, she also cautions that “there is a balance to be achieved between too much unguided play, leaving a child unprepared to learn academic skills, and too much book-learning too early, leaving them potentially less creative and less comfortable in school. And we think it is up to parents to find the right balance for their children.”\(^11\) When children attend preschool, teachers also must make these determinations.

Even after children enter school, play is still an important part of learning. Vivian Gussin Paley, author of *Wally’s Stories*, documents experiences with her kindergartners that made her aware of the importance of play as children process new information. Paley explains how lessons she thought she had taught superbly actually registered in distorted ways in her students’ thinking.\(^12\) By allowing them to act out their perceptions, she was able to understand how they processed the new concepts she presented in the classroom. These dramatizations became a useful tool for her and a vehicle for helping her students learn to reflect on their own thought processes.

Paley comments: “A wide variety of thinking emerges [during conversations, stories, and playacting], as morality, science, and society share the stage with fantasy. If magical thinking seems most conspicuous, it is because it is the common footpath from which new trails are explored. I have learned not to resist this magic

Marian Diamond and Janet Hopson say that imagination and play encourage preschoolers to develop “inventiveness and the lifelong creativity into which it can blossom.”
Wally’s Stories follows a group of five-year-olds through their kindergarten year. The scene is the classroom, and the teacher is the stage manager. The children are scriptwriters and actors who know what kindergartners want to say.”

Listening to her students’ conversations as they engaged in playacting enabled Paley to understand and reflect on their imagined reality. This allowed her to adjust her instruction to accommodate their cognitive processing.

Carla Hannaford agrees with Paley about the value of make-believe and play: “The value of make-believe cannot be stressed enough. The child can take its world, and through play and familiarity organize it into more and more complex mental and emotional patterns. The time from ages two to five is a crucial stage for children’s cognitive development as they learn to process information and expand it into creativity. Interactive communication and play, when children are learning from each other’s imagination, accelerates the process.”

Paley warns, however, that without monitoring and guidance, distorted thinking can occur. Children’s playtime offers a valuable opportunity for the teacher to get into the heads of his or her students—not to intrude and control, but to connect with their realities and to discover what they know. The teacher can gently modify children’s misperceptions through questions and comments, and model and define new knowledge so that it aligns with children’s reasoning and understanding. By using these processes, Paley was able to help her students modify their misperceptions. For example, she posed key questions and used their responses to guide them into rethinking their positions and ideas.

Chief of the Laboratory of Brain Evolution and Behavior at the National Institute of Mental Health in Washington, D.C., Paul MacLean “ties the process of imaginative development to the development of play.” Using McLean’s research, Hannaford concludes that play becomes the essence of creativity and high-level reasoning. She stresses the value of intrinsic motivation in the play environment and cautions that even on the playground, extrinsic motivation (teacher direction) often threatens to take over. “The marvelous changes unfold naturally [in playtime], and happily do not require adult supervision and meddling. Unfortunately, however, these days there seems to be less time and opportunity for children to simply play. Even playgroups seem to be organized and structured. There appears to be an assumption that children need to be entertained and their play orchestrated. I see it a lot in organized sports for children. Adults are in charge and competition is the goal. Rarely do you just see children initiate ‘pick up’ games that were routine when I was a child.”

In playtime and in other aspects of learning, the concept of time, though abstract, helps to promote creativity. As children playact, they have interesting ways of using time and space to construct knowledge. For example, they may say something like “Pretend it’s raining. What will happen to our [pretend] house when the rain comes? We’d better hurry and make a shelter!”

Through the use of imagination and creativity, children’s brains construct meaning and acquire skills that are vitally important for them to make sense of future experiences. Trying to force this development can have devastating effects. An example from nature may help to illustrate the importance of timing.

Yesterday, while reading in our family room, I glanced through the ceiling-to-floor windows that offer a panoramic view of Glendale and Burbank, California, beyond our patio. Hanging from the eaves of the house is a drooping potted fern, a reminder of our horticultural neglect while traveling last month. A family of birds has made this planter its home. During the past week or so, the baby birds, except for one, have taken flight. Occasionally the fledgling flaps its wings, hinting that flight is soon to come. However, it continues to clutch the edge of the fern pot. The mother bird returns with a morsel of food for energy and encouragement. But still, the tiny bird clings to security.

Finally, after occasional gentle encouragements and beckoning, the mother leaves the baby to decide for

Jane Healy lauds the role of imagination in reading development.
Children’s playtime offers a valuable opportunity for the teacher to get into the heads of his or her students—not to intrude and control, but to connect with their realities and to discover what they know.

Itself what to do and when to do it.
And then the tiny bird tests its wings. Successfully, it alights on a downhill limb.
I may have read more into this nature lesson than actually was there, but perhaps this was a lesson on the importance of intrinsic motivation. I like to think so. The baby bird took flight when the timing was right and all systems were “go.”

Hannaford describes play as an opportunity for learning to take place in a wholistic way—involving all learning systems. She explains: “Play at the simplest physical level as well as the furthest reaches of the intellect, depends on a balance of all the elements of our humanity [mental, physical, emotional/social]... When the emotions are brought into dynamic equilibrium with reason, insight, action and even survival, learning becomes a rational, creative process. If any part of the brain processing is left out of the learning process, integration of patterning and appropriate action are limited. When dynamic equilibrium is lost, learning and creativity suffer.”

Educators often lament the drop in creativity they observe between kindergarten and third grade. Is this inevitable? Or does the emphasis on early skills development and extrinsic motivation conspire to diminish creativity at a time when children are passing through critical periods of neural patterning and networking? Are educators unknowingly truncating human potential during prime-time development?

Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation belong in the classroom. To function well in society, children need the skills that develop under extrinsic motivation. They also need the creativity that blooms when intrinsic motivation is nurtured. To neglect either during the most critical patterning times in brain development is a serious matter.

It is our privilege as teachers to nurture the “child of the pure unclouded brow and dreaming eyes of wonder,” as Lewis Carroll put it in Through the Looking-Glass. But, even more precious is the awesome responsibility of partnering with God to unleash human potential and creative expression. We must ask for divine guidance as we seek to meet this important challenge.

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SKILLS FOR SCHOOL READINESS AND LIFE

Quiz

Yes No

❑ 1. Children are ready for school when they know the letters of the alphabet and can sound out words.
❑ 2. Children entering kindergarten must know how to count to 20.
❑ 3. Children who are curious and creative will have lots of problems in school.
❑ 4. Children cannot be responsible for their own clothes, work, and lunch money in kindergarten.
❑ 5. Knowing how to make friends is less important in school success than knowing how to write your name.
❑ 6. Children cannot develop compassion until they reach high school.

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may need to re-think your ideas about school readiness.

Too often early care and education teachers feel pushed to focus on academics. They may decide to drill letters and numbers. They may make flash cards and worksheets. They may order videos and computer programs that promise school readiness.

Let’s take a step back and consider the skills children really need to succeed in school. Will 5-year-old Timmy succeed if he can count to 20 by rote on the first day of kindergarten? Or will he stand a better chance of success if he comes with a sense of self-confidence and trust? If he feels curious and creative? If he gets along well with others? If he has self-control and can finish what he starts? If he loves learning?

The truth is that if Timmy has the attitudes and behaviors that foster learning, he will likely learn what he needs to learn in every grade level. More than that, he will likely learn how to succeed in life.

The attitudes and behaviors children most need for school readiness are independence, compassion, trust, creativity, self-control, and perseverance. Our role as teachers is to create an environment where children can develop these traits.

Independence

Children begin learning independence as toddlers. They insist on doing things themselves one minute and wail in frustration the next. They say “no” and “mine” and resist taking a nap even when they can barely hold their eyes open.

Ideally by kindergarten, children are able to take some responsibility for their own success and failure. They discover that their actions have consequences and that they can influence those consequences by their actions. They learn to internalize motivation and don’t have to rely on rewards and praise to feel success. They want to practice self-reliance and show that they don’t want or need the constant protection and supervision of adults.

Encourage independence in the following ways:

• Give toddlers reasonable choices. “Do you want to read this book or that one?”
• Allow 18-month-old Jennie to use a spoon at mealtime but stand ready to help if she gets frustrated.
• Provide 3- and 4-year-olds with peanut butter, crackers, and plastic knives and let them prepare their own snack.
• Set up learning centers and let children choose activities within them. In the math center, for example, they might sort items by size, fit geometric shapes into a puzzle, or string beads in a pattern.

Compassion

Infants and toddlers regard themselves as the center of the universe. They are unable to understand the needs of others and can express only their own.

Ideally by kindergarten, children begin to empathize—
to put themselves in another’s place. Children begin to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of other people—and to share their sorrow or pride.

Encourage the development of compassion in the following ways:

• Talk about feelings. Give a name to pain, fear, anger, and joy, for example.
• Identify and encourage kindnesses, such as when Abby tries to console Abbot when he scrapes his knee.
• Make pet care more than routine by talking about feeling hungry, thirsty, or dirty.
• Encourage cooperative rather than competitive activities. Instead of challenging children to a foot race, plan an obstacle course that requires children to help each other squeeze through a cardboard box, for example.

**Trust**

When infants and toddlers have consistent, loving care, they develop basic trust. They feel they are important members of the family or group and learn they can rely on adults for help in unfamiliar situations. Coupled with a desire for independence, trust enables children to feel the protection and support of adults as they explore, discover, and interpret the environment.

Ideally by kindergarten, children can understand the give-and-take of social situations. They are comfortable with the rules or “ways of doing” that keep them safe. They rely on our consistency to know what is expected of them and are eager to do things the right way.

Encourage the development of trust in the following ways:

• When a baby cries, respond as soon as possible.
• Follow daily routines for eating, play, and naps.
• Establish simple rules and enforce them consistently.
• Treat children fairly, with respect and consideration.
• Provide supervision to prevent biting, bullying, cruel teasing, and other violent behavior.

**Creativity**

Babies are born curious. They reach for objects and explore them with their mouths and hands. As toddlers, they get into everything and climb into interesting spaces. Ideally by kindergarten, children are eager to work on and solve their own problems—in art and construction projects, computations, and social interactions. They approach ideas and tasks with initiative, playfulness, and inventive thinking. They ask lots of questions.

Encourage creativity in the following ways:

• Provide clay, paints, blocks, and other unstructured materials. Allow children time to explore the material without the need to make an object or paint a picture.
• Focus on the process, not the product. Avoid asking “What is it?” Rather say things like “Looks like you really enjoyed doing that” or “You worked hard on that.”
• Ask open-ended questions. Instead of “Did you like the story?” ask “What did you like best about the story?”
• Notice and appreciate children’s ideas. “Yes, Juan. We could take apart that old clock and see if we could make it work.”
• Avoid rote learning and modeled projects that minimize individuality.

**Self-Control**

Toddlers have little self-control. Ricky, for example, sees a truck and wants it. However, he does not have the intellectual or social skills to consider that Heddy is already playing with it and that he needs to wait for his turn.

Ideally by kindergarten, children understand and accept the need for rules—for their own sake and the sake of others in community. They are learning the art of compromise and negotiation and can often see an event from someone else’s point of view. Kindergarten children are usually able to identify their own property and respect the belongings of their peers. They are also able to take responsibility for simple tasks, having the self-control to stay focused, and follow through on a commitment.

Encourage self-control in the following ways:

• Model self-restraint. “I feel like eating a big bowl of...
ice cream right now, but I know I would feel too stuffed to move.”

• Offer children choices.
• Consistently enforce simple rules.
• Offer to help children identify and deal with their frustrations. “Your face looks really angry, Jacob. Shall we take some deep breaths before we talk about the problem?”
• Be clear about appropriate and inappropriate ways to express anger. “You can stamp your feet, Hannah, but I can’t let you use your feet to kick Hank.”

Perseverance and Resilience

Toddlers learn to walk only after lots of trials and tumbles. Determination to succeed helps them ignore bumps and falls, and find success. When preschoolers dig canals in the sand, they learn cause and effect—what works and doesn’t work.

Ideally by kindergarten, children have experience with problem-solving, brainstorming, and evaluating decisions. They can often use these skills to evaluate what went wrong with a project—and find the courage and determination to try again.

Encourage perseverance and resilience in the following ways:
• Encourage children to finish projects they begin—work a puzzle, build a structure, paint a picture, or play a game before quitting.
• Let children extend their projects over time—a block construction or multi-piece puzzle, for example, could take several days.
• Provide storage space for unfinished art projects.
• Avoid the temptation to do something for, rather than with, a child.
• Teach negotiation skills. “Cole and Bryan, how can you both play with the trike without fighting?”

Independence, compassion, trust, creativity, self-control, and perseverance—these attitudes are the real signs of school readiness. These are also the attitudes children need to grow into successful, competent adults. With these qualities, they will find satisfying jobs, form loving families, and be respected in society.

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Parents and other family members lay the foundation for reading and writing long before children enter school. To help preschoolers begin to develop these skills at home, parents need to provide two things:

- Experiences with language—having conversations, playing games with language and sounds;
- Experiences with print—reading to children, giving children tools for reading and writing.

Learning to read and write should be pleasurable; it does not require tedious drills or forced memorization. When learning is fun, children develop good attitudes toward schooling as they master valuable skills. Below are 12 things parents can do to make learning enjoyable and meaningful. These ideas build on children’s natural desire to communicate and can easily be included in family routines.

1. **Have daily conversations with children.**

   Listening and speaking are the foundation of reading and writing. When parents converse with children, they should listen patiently, even if it means waiting for children to form their thoughts and words. Adult patience creates a climate in which children feel free to talk.

   Children like to talk about themselves, their interests, and their feelings. If parents talk about the things children care about, children will be eager and natural speakers. There are many things parents can do with their children to encourage conversation, for example:

   - Looking at pictures in the family photo album and talking about the people and celebrations;
   - Joining children’s pretend play, letting the child be the leader;
   - Providing materials and sharing the child’s favorite activities, such as drawing, building with blocks, racing toy cars, or baking cookies;
   - Attending sporting events, going for walks, digging in the yard, making a snow fort, or collecting bugs.

**BY ANN S. EPSTEIN**
When learning is fun, children develop good attitudes toward schooling as they master valuable skills.

12 Things You Can Do to Help Your Preschooler Become a Reader

1. Have daily conversations with your child.
2. Keep lots of printed materials and writing materials in the home.
3. Set up a reading and writing space for your child.
4. Let your child see you read and write.
5. Read with your child every day.
6. Point out reading and writing in everyday activities.
7. Make a message board.
8. Encourage your child to “read.”
9. Display your child’s writing.
10. Make a bank or file of words your child likes to write.
11. Go to the library with your child.
12. Use television and technology wisely.

To convey the importance of reading and writing, parents can set up a special space for these activities. It may be a quiet place or somewhere close to the center of action, whatever is most inviting for the child and will keep his or her attention. This space should include materials that belong to the child alone and do not have to be shared with adults or other children in the household. This will encourage the child to think of the area as his or her own play or work space. Parents can offer the child a choice of spending quiet time in this special area instead of taking a nap. Or, they can set aside another regular time each day when the child can choose to go to this area.

4. Let children observe parents reading and writing.

Young children imitate their parents, so modeling reading and writing at home is very important. When parents pick up a newspaper or book instead of turning on the television, they send a powerful message about the pleasure as well as the usefulness of reading. At the dinner table, parents can briefly describe something interesting they have read, or mention some reading and writing they did at work that day. Children should see their parents writing, whether they are paying bills or writing an e-mail message to a friend. If a child wants to know something, a parent might say, “Let’s look that up in the dictionary [or in the encyclopedia or on the Internet].” This shows children that written sources provide information and that answering questions can be an adventure.

5. Read with children every day.

Parents should set aside a regular time each day to read with their children. This might be at bedtime, after school, early in the morning—whatever works in the family schedule. They should read in a comfortable place, without a lot of distractions, where they can snuggle or sit side by side with their child. Children should be able to see and touch the book while parents read to them. Reading with children will be most beneficial if parents follow these simple techniques:

• Be familiar with the book. If the book is new, parents should try to read it themselves beforehand.
• Read slowly but naturally. Pronouncing the words carefully helps to build children’s vocabulary.
• Read with interest. An expressive voice shows interest and engages the child.
• Use different voices. This helps children differentiate the characters and their qualities.
• Use a finger to follow the words. This shows the connection between spoken and written words. Children will learn to associate sounds with specific letters and letter combinations.
• Stop reading to talk about the book. Children want to talk about the pictures, story, and characters. If a book is familiar, they might predict what will happen next or imagine
different events and endings.

- Extend the reading. Reading is enriched when children represent the events or characters through drawing and play-acting. Other ideas include visiting places and doing things that appear in the book or making up stories and games that build on the book’s ideas.

There should be a variety of books to choose from and the child should make the choice, even if it is often the same book. Repetition helps children understand the forms of written language and begin to recognize familiar words and letters. Here are some guidelines to help parents choose storybooks for their young child’s library:

- **Illustrations.** Are the drawings, paintings, or photographs visually pleasing? Do the people represent a variety of races, ages, and abilities?

- **Storyline.** Is it written in the language the child speaks? Will the activities and messages make sense to the child? Will it encourage discussion?

- **Child interest.** Will the child be curious about the characters and what happens to them? Will the child look at the book alone, even when an adult is not available for reading?

- **Adult interest.** Is it a book the parent wants to read and talk about with the child? Is the parent prepared to answer whatever questions the child may have about the book?

6. **Call children’s attention to reading and writing in everyday activities.**

Children are curious about the daily activities adults view as commonplace. Their natural interest provides many opportunities for parents to call attention to reading and writing. These opportunities include making grocery lists and finding matching coupons; pointing out letters and words on signs and buildings while riding in the car or taking a walk; looking up addresses and phone numbers before going places or making calls; reading maps; reading team names and scores aloud at sporting events; looking at the weather report in the newspaper; reading menus at restaurants or making up menus at home; writing and illustrating children’s favorite recipes; labeling pictures in the family photo album; writing thank-you notes; reading the television guide and making a list of the shows the family will watch; writing and mailing fan letters to children’s favorite performers and athletes.

7. **Make a message board.**

A message board lets children know the family’s plans for the day. This can be especially important on weekends, when routines may vary. The message board can be a dry-erase board, a chalkboard, or just a pad of paper. The board should be hung at the child’s eye level for easy visibility and so the child can add his or her own messages. Each day, the parent and child can draw a few simple pictures and label them with easy words. For example, a picture of a swing on one line and a grocery cart with the word **store** on the next line would indicate they were going to the playground and then the supermarket. Parents should encourage children to predict what will happen based on the picture and word messages. At the same time they are learning to read, children are learning about sequences, an important concept in math.

8. **Encourage children to “read.”**

Young children “read” in many ways. Before they read actual words, children pretend to read. They follow the pictures in a familiar book, tell the story from memory, or make up their own narrative. With lots of exposure to books, they come to understand basic print concepts, such as turning pages from front to back, reading from top to bottom, and following lines from left to right. Parents can promote children’s early reading in several ways. They can encourage young children to read to them, to other family members, even to dolls and stuffed animals. As children begin
to write, parents can ask them to read their words. If a child asks the parent to take dictation, either the parent or child can read back the words. It is important for parents to write down the child's exact words. This establishes the direct connection between spoken and written language.


Parents should display all the different forms of children's writing, including scribble letters and words based on word sounds (for example, hig for big). They can also take photos of and display temporary writing (for example, made with sticks in the mud or sand on a tray). Writing should be mounted at the child's eye level so it can be easily seen. It can be attached with tape, pins, clips, or any other household fasteners. Display surfaces include the refrigerator, a wall, a bulletin board, a bookcase, the side of a dresser, the front of a kitchen cabinet; sticky notes can be stuck to the computer, papers hung from a mobile, and so on. If other family members comment on the writing, children will have a sense of its importance and of their accomplishment.

10. Make a word bank or word file.

A word bank is an illustrated dictionary or file of words a child uses in talking, reading, and writing. It organizes the words that are important to the child. A word bank can be created with an old recipe box and index cards, or with a looseleaf notebook. Each word is put on a separate card or page, written in large and clear letters. Next to the word, the parent or child draws a picture or pastes a photo or magazine picture that illustrates it. The cards or pages are then placed in alphabetical order. A word bank should be kept in a place where the child can easily reach it and look up words on his or her own. Whenever the child asks for help writing or spelling a word, the parent can refer the child to the existing list or help the child add a new entry to the word bank.

Reading and writing supplies do not need to be expensive.

11. Take children to the library.

Libraries offer books and other reading materials, usually at no cost. Parents should find out where the nearest public library is located or if it sends a bookmobile to their neighborhood. Their child's preschool or daycare center may also have a lending library. Library visits should occur frequently, preferably on a regular schedule. A child should have his or her own library card and a tote bag to carry and store books.

Children can check out books, magazines, cassette tapes, and CDs with stories, information, poems, and songs. They should pick the items that interest them. Parents can point out something they think is interesting, but in the end, the child should make the choice. Children should also be the judge of whether a book is too easy or too hard. Reading or re-reading easy books can build a child's confidence. On the other hand, if a difficult book is interesting enough, the child may be up to the challenge of reading it. If a book is boring or too difficult, a child will simply set it aside and pick up something of greater interest.

Many libraries also have regular story hours and other events for young children. Sometimes they have exhibits; for example, an art show by a local artist. Looking at the exhibit together and talking about it is another good way for parents to help develop their child's language skills.

12. Use television and technology wisely.

Young children learn best by doing, not by watching. Television and computers can play a part in early learning but should not replace active exploration and social interaction. Viewing should be limited to one or two programs a day. Parents should look for shows that help develop the intellectual and social skills children need when they enter school, and they should watch and talk about these programs with their child. If the family has a computer, parents should buy software designed for young children. Drawing and writing programs that allow children to create and read their own pictures, words, and stories are more interesting and promote a wider range of skills than programs limited to memorization and practice.

Finally, parents should remember that they are not alone in helping their child along the path to literacy. They can talk to their child's teacher, the librarian, and other parents. They can share the books and activities their family enjoys and get others' ideas on how to support children's learning at home. With a parent's encouragement, a child will enter school ready to learn how to read and write. With a parent's example, a child will become an adult who reads for information and pleasure.

To learn more about how parents can help young children become readers and writers, and prepare them for school, see the following materials published by High/Scope Press:

- **Helping Your Preschool Child Become a Reader** (Ann Epstein, $4.95)
- **You and Your Child Parent Newsletter Series**—12 newsletters on topics important to parents
- **All About High/Scope**—10 fact sheets for parents, policymakers, and practitioners
- **The Essential Parent Workshop Resource** (Michelle Graves, 2000, $25.95).

Dr. Ann S. Epstein is Director of the Early Childhood Division of High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, Michigan. This article is reprinted with permission from High/Scope Resource, **Summer 2002, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 4-6. © 2002 High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. To order resource materials or for more information, contact High/Scope by e-mail at: info@highscope.org or visit their Website: http://www.highscope.org.**
Guidance Techniques That Work

What’s the most challenging aspect of caring for children? Many caregivers and teachers say “discipline.”

Actually, the word discipline is off target. Guidance is a more accurate term. As caregivers and teachers, we guide children’s behavior. We teach them acceptable behavior and guide them to develop self-control. The goal is that children learn to make good decisions about how to act in specific situations.

Here are some tried-and-true guidance techniques that help children achieve that goal.

Focus on “Do’s” Instead of “Don’ts.”

Listen to how you speak to children. If you hear the words don’t, stop, or quit before your directions to children, try to rephrase your words to tell children what to do instead of what not to do. Telling children what not to do doesn’t give them any information on the correct way to behave. Translating your “don’ts” into “do’s” gives children clear guidance on what you expect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’ts</th>
<th>Do’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stop running in the hall.</td>
<td>Walk in the hall, please. You can run when we go outdoors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t squeeze the kitten.</td>
<td>Pat the kitten gently with your hand flat and loose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit whining.</td>
<td>Tell me about the problem with words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t climb on that counter.</td>
<td>In our classroom, feet stay on the floor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Build Confidence.**

Help children feel that they are capable, worthwhile, and able to do things. Feeling dignity and confidence enables children to try new things and approach new experiences with confidence. Ridicule, sarcasm, and belittling comments destroy confidence. Guide children with constructive, clear, and supportive words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Destructive comment</th>
<th>Constructive guidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Jenny spills paint.</td>
<td>Can’t you do anything right?</td>
<td>It’s hard to walk without spilling. Next time, put a paper towel under the can to catch the spills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Harry has trouble pedaling his tricycle.</td>
<td>If you’d just listen to me.</td>
<td>On the playground, we have gravel, grass, and the path. Decide which is best for riding your bike.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Four-year-old Jose has wet his pants.</td>
<td>You are such a baby. Shame on you.</td>
<td>Accidents sometimes happen. Get your dry clothes and go to the bathroom to change. I’ll make sure you have time to finish your painting when you get done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May’s block tower topples.</td>
<td>I told you it wouldn’t work.</td>
<td>Constructing tall towers is really hard. What do you think you could do to make your building sturdier?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Change the Environment to Promote Behavior Changes.**

Wise caregivers look for the causes of misbehavior. Are there squabbles over too few toys? Are children climbing because materials are out of reach? Are children whiny and cranky because meals and naptimes are too late? Consider changes in the environment that can make you less irritated and the children less frustrated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Old environment</th>
<th>New environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Toddler Hannah spills her milk—every day.</td>
<td>Hannah uses a tall, narrow plastic cup.</td>
<td>Hannah uses a heavy, broad-bottomed cup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carlos and Sam fight over blocks.</td>
<td>There are 10 cardboard stacking blocks.</td>
<td>There are 40 blocks in a variety of shapes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Milton can’t find his shoes.</td>
<td>There is one jumbled shelf unit for children’s items.</td>
<td>Each child has a labeled hook and cubby for storing personal items.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Offer Choices—and Be Ready to Accept the Decision.
Caregivers know that offering choices helps children develop independence. But conflicts can arise when you are unwilling or unable to accept the choice a child makes. In general, it’s best to offer two options. If there is no choice, state your expectations simply and concretely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Invites conflict</th>
<th>Builds independence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• At lunchtime</td>
<td>What do you want to drink? (Too many options, many of which may not be acceptable.)</td>
<td>Would you like milk or water with your sandwich? (Either choice is acceptable.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Going outside</td>
<td>It’s cold today. Do you want your coat? (Child could say “No.”)</td>
<td>Let’s get our coats and go for a walk. (No choice.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Billy is wandering aimlessly in the classroom.</td>
<td>What do you want to do? (Child could say “Go home,” or “Go outside.”)</td>
<td>Billy, you look like you need something to do. Would you rather paint at the easel or feed the fish?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work With Children, Not Against Them.
Make sure your expectations are appropriate to the ages and developmental levels of the children in your care. When 3-year-old Alyssa flushes the toilet five times in a row, ask yourself: Is this misbehavior, or is this normal behavior? She may be trying to satisfy her curiosity.

Remember that infants and toddlers learn through their senses—from things that they can hear, taste, touch, smell, and see. Preschoolers follow their curiosity, need hands-on activities, and use their imagination for learning and discovery. You can minimize conflicts with children by anticipating their behaviors and preparing the environment to be safe and ready for exploration. Keep your expectations clear and reasonable—and share them with the children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Anticipate</th>
<th>Prepare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Infants and toddlers</td>
<td>Infants and toddlers explore with their fingers and mouths.</td>
<td>Baby-proof the environment and put dangerous, fragile, and breakable objects out of reach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preschoolers</td>
<td>Preschoolers want to know how things work.</td>
<td>Offer concrete, hand-on activities with real objects that teach children about their world, like magnifying glasses, keys, and magnets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School-agers</td>
<td>School-age children can think abstractly and are learning about symbols.</td>
<td>Plan opportunities for pretend play, board games, and word games.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use Mistakes as Teaching Tools.

Treat mistakes, errors, and accidents as steps to learning—everyone makes them as they try new things. Share some of your mistakes—“Oops, I mixed too much water into the paint. Next time, I better measure more carefully.” In doing so, you help children know that adults too have accidents and can still learn. Build a learning environment that discourages failure and promotes success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Encourages failure</th>
<th>Promotes success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• After a water table activity, the floor is slippery and children’s clothes are wet.</td>
<td>Fuss about the mess and children’s carelessness—without offering solutions.</td>
<td>Anticipate the mess by covering the floor under the table with newspaper, having towels nearby, and providing smocks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Yetta has a hard time completing a puzzle or another project.</td>
<td>Make Yetta sit in one place to “finish what you have started.”</td>
<td>Accommodate Yetta’s needs by letting her finish the puzzle on the floor or stand to paint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The toddler room floor is covered with toys, making Ben and Laurie reluctant to practice walking.</td>
<td>Leave the disorder until naptime “since it will just get messy again” and the children can crawl to what they want.</td>
<td>Arrange furniture and materials so that there is always a clear path for new walkers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Give Children Limits—and Security.

Everyone needs to have boundaries defined. You, for example, rely on speed-limit signs, price tags, and recipes to guide some of your activities. Children need to know limits and, within those limits, need the freedom to practice making appropriate decisions. They need adults to help draw the line between not enough and too much decision-making freedom.

Children also must know behavior limits will be enforced consistently—what’s OK today will be OK tomorrow. Look at your own behavior for mixed messages. Did you have children finger paint with pudding yesterday and then get frustrated at lunch today when children smeared the pudding on the table?

Set behavioral limits to reflect the safety of children, the safety and well-being of others, and the protection of community property. Rules that are few, enforceable, and essential give children the freedom and responsibility to make good behavioral choices. Evaluate limits—or rules—regularly. Ask: Is the rule still necessary, or have the children outgrown it? Is the rule for my convenience alone? Does the rule restrict experimentation or keep a child from trying new things? Can the rule be enforced? Make sure you understand the reason for the rule—the children will surely ask for it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Invites conflict</th>
<th>Offers security and reassurance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• On the playground, you monitor 5-year-olds climbing the old oak tree.</td>
<td>No climbing above that branch.</td>
<td>I know you want to go higher. I’ll be here if you feel like you’re getting into trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In the classroom, you use a timer to remind children to give up a place at a favorite activity.</td>
<td>Because I say so.</td>
<td>We have this rule so that every child has a chance to play with the train. Would you like to read the train book while you wait?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At naptime, you help children settle on their mats.</td>
<td>Go to sleep. Close your eyes right now and quit wiggling.</td>
<td>Sometimes it’s hard to sleep. Would you like to choose a book to look at during rest time?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use Logical Consequences.

Respond to inappropriate behavior with logical consequences—the natural result of a particular behavior. A logical consequence for an adult, for example, may be a stomach ache after eating spicy food. For a child, a logical consequence may be feeling cold after going outside without a sweater.

This kind of learning goes on all the time. In some cases, we can set up a logical consequence if one doesn’t occur naturally. If a 3-year-old spills milk, for example, one logical consequence is to have the child help with cleanup. The consequence is not punishment and it always relates to the original behavior. It’s not logical, therefore, to deny time in the art center to a child who spills milk—the two things don’t relate to each other.

The consequence must also be reasonable. If a child’s behavior poses danger—picking up broken glass or running into the street, for example—stop it immediately. Avoid extremes. If 9-year-old Josh breaks a baseball bat by swinging it against a brick wall, don’t say “You can never play baseball here again.” Show children that you trust them to change and learn. “Here’s a glove for you to practice catching. You can try batting later this afternoon.”

For a logical consequence to be effective, you must respond immediately. Make it clear that it’s the behavior—not the child—that is objectionable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Illogical punishment</th>
<th>Logical consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Benny runs on the playground and knocks Jena over.</td>
<td>Make Benny sit in the sandbox for the rest of outdoor time. (Not related.)</td>
<td>Have Benny help Jena up and walk with her to clean her hands and knees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Toddler Mike scribbles on a wall with crayon.</td>
<td>Remove crayons from the classroom for six weeks.</td>
<td>Help Mike scrub off the wall with a soapy rag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Laura misuses a book and tears several pages.</td>
<td>Take the book away from Laura and tell her she has ruined it. (Not related.)</td>
<td>Show Laura how to use tape to repair the book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Set an Example.

Children learn by watching you. They observe your interactions with children and other adults and are likely to model their behavior on yours. For example, if you consistently talk to children rudely in a loud voice, you’re teaching them that this is the way to treat others. If you tell the director that you are out of glue and then produce a hidden bottle from the closet, you’ll have a difficult time convincing children that it’s not right to lie.

Instead, show concern for others, work out conflicts, and respect the dignity of others—both adults and children. In this way, you model behaviors children need to learn for their social and emotional success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Negative role model</th>
<th>Positive role model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• At lunchtime</td>
<td>You watch the children eat their lunch while you have a snack of soda and chips.</td>
<td>You sit with the children and model sound nutritious and social mealtime habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• On the playground</td>
<td>You scream across the yard to tell Hank his dad is ready to go home.</td>
<td>You wave to Hank’s dad, walk across the yard to tell Hank it’s time to leave for the day, and help Hank say goodbye to his friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In the art center</td>
<td>Mirabelle spatters paint on the floor and wall. You tell her that it doesn’t matter because the custodian is paid to clean up.</td>
<td>You let Mirabelle get the sponge and help her wipe down the wall and floor. When she’s finished, you congratulate her for helping make the classroom a pleasant place to work and play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tips for Handling Common Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The child</th>
<th>It may mean the child</th>
<th>So don’t</th>
<th>Instead try to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becomes angry.</td>
<td>• Does not feel successful with an important task.</td>
<td>• Become angry.</td>
<td>• Remember anger is normal and sometimes appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Has been told stop, no, and don’t too many times.</td>
<td>• Allow an out-of-control tantrum.</td>
<td>• Evaluate and modify the environment to minimize frustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is being forced to do something.</td>
<td>• Let the child express anger in ways that don’t hurt anyone.</td>
<td>• Help the child express anger in ways that don’t hurt anyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feels frustrated by too many demands from adults.</td>
<td>• Feel frustrated but hasn’t learned more appropriate coping skills.</td>
<td>• Provide an outlet for strong emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t share.</td>
<td>• Is too young (under 3 years) to understand sharing.</td>
<td>• Snatch an object from the child.</td>
<td>• Help the child feel more secure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Needs experience and guidance in owning and sharing.</td>
<td>• Scold the child.</td>
<td>• Teach problem-solving skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bites other children.</td>
<td>• Is teething.</td>
<td>• Bite the child back.</td>
<td>• Provide toddlers with alternative and soothing objects to bite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is using the mouth for learning.</td>
<td>• Encourage biting back.</td>
<td>• Supervise closely to prevent biting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicates through biting rather than words.</td>
<td>• Make the child bite soap.</td>
<td>• Help children develop other communication skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Doesn’t understand that biting hurts.</td>
<td>• Force the child to say, “I’m sorry.”</td>
<td>• Evaluate and modify schedule, environment, or materials to reduce children’s stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feels frustrated but hasn’t learned more appropriate coping skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Comfort victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is jealous.</td>
<td>• Feels replaced by a new person in the family.</td>
<td>• Shame the child.</td>
<td>• Teach children that biting hurts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Has been unfairly compared with others.</td>
<td>• Ignore the child.</td>
<td>• Share information with parents, stressing how typical biting is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Has been treated unfairly.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide warmth, love, and understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses foul language.</td>
<td>• Doesn’t know any better.</td>
<td>• Show shock or embarrassment.</td>
<td>• Discuss the child’s feeling one-on-one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is imitating someone.</td>
<td>• Get excited.</td>
<td>• Help children feel competent and successful with tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is trying something new.</td>
<td>• Over-react.</td>
<td>• Make available books that deal with jealousy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is trying to get your attention.</td>
<td>• Wash out the child’s mouth with soap.</td>
<td>• Evaluate and modify materials to be stimulating but not overwhelming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is letting off steam.</td>
<td>• Put hot pepper on the child’s tongue.</td>
<td>• Ignore the incident.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*References for this information:*
### Tips for Handling Common Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>It may mean the child</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Hurts you or other children. | • Is too young to understand the pain.  
• Is inexperienced in social relationships.  
• Is angry.  
• Is frustrated. | • Get angry.  
• Hurt the child.  
• Force the child to say, “I’m sorry.”  
• Say you don’t like the child.  
• Ignore the child. | • Attend the hurt person first and involve the child who did the hurt in the comforting.  
• Quietly separate the children.  
• Divert the children’s attention.  
• Take away hurting objects—calmly and firmly.  
• Offer different ways to express feelings. |
| Destroys materials. | • Is curious about how things work.  
• Does not understand the correct way to use the materials.  
• Has had an accident.  
• Feels excited or angry.  
• Finds the materials too difficult or frustrating. | • Scold, yell, or shout.  
• Tell the child “You’re bad.”  
• Hurt the child. | • Teach and model the proper ways to handle materials.  
• Examine fragile items with the child.  
• Remove broken materials from the area.  
• Teach the difference between valued and throw-away items.  
• Involve the child in repair work. |
| Refuses to eat. | • Is showing a normal decrease in appetite.  
• Is not hungry.  
• Does not feel well.  
• Dislikes a particular food, flavor, or texture.  
• Is imitating someone.  
• Is trying to be independent.  
• Is trying to get attention. | • Make a scene.  
• Reward or bribe the child.  
• Threaten the child.  
• Scold the child.  
• Force the child to eat.  
• Withhold other foods or drink. | • Remain calm and casual.  
• Make food interesting and attractive.  
• Introduce new foods a little at a time.  
• Help children learn to serve and feed themselves.  
• Serve small portions.  
• Involve children in food preparation. |
| Demands attention. | • Is tired, hungry, or not feeling well.  
• Feels left out, insecure, or unloved.  
• Really likes you and is jealous of the attention you give other children.  
• Hasn’t yet learned to play creatively and independently. | • Ignore or isolate the child.  
• Shame the child.  
• Scold or punish the child. | • Attend to the child’s physical needs.  
• Show interest in the child’s ideas and discoveries.  
• Offer interesting activities for the child to do with other children.  
• Recognize the child’s efforts and successes. |

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* Adapted from “Tips for Handling Common Situations With Children,” Texas Child Care, Winter 1983.

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The child-centered kindergarten is not new; it has its roots in the 19th century. At that time, the kindergarten was envisioned as a "garden for children" (the literal meaning of the German word "kindergarten"), a place where children could be nurtured and allowed to grow at their own pace. While that image has changed somewhat over the years, the "roots" of sensitivity to children remain. Children’s developmental needs have not changed, and so the importance of educating the whole child—recognizing his or her physical,
social/emotional, and intellectual growth and development—remains. A change in the kindergarten curriculum, however, was brought about by: (1) societal pressure, (2) misunderstandings about how children learn, (3) aggressive marketing of commercial materials largely inappropriate for kindergarten-age children, (4) a shortage of teachers specifically prepared to work with young children, and (5) the reassignment of trained teachers in areas of declining enrollment.

Since its beginning more than 100 years ago as a professional organization, the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) has emphasized the importance of the kindergarten years in a child’s development. The official position of ACEI concerning kindergarten states: The Association for Childhood Education International recognizes the importance of kindergarten education and supports high-quality kindergarten programs that provide developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate experiences for children (Moyer, Egertson, & Isenberg, 1987).

Purpose of Kindergarten
Many of the earliest kindergartens in the United States served the purpose of easing the acculturation of newly arrived immigrant children. Later, the purpose became easing the child’s transition from home to the more formal aspects of the elementary school. For some children, the transition purpose continues to be important. The vast majority of children today, however, have experience at preschool and/or childcare settings before they attend kindergarten.

Nevertheless, many people in and out of education continue to perceive the kindergarten as the initial group experience for children (National Center on Education Statistics, 1984, p. 43). Unfortunately, many parents and elementary educators do not view experiences in child care or other prekindergarten programs as “real learning.” Spodek (1999) reported that many of the programs have shifted their emphasis from spurring kindergartners’ development to highlighting specific learning goals. While programs vary in quality (as they do in elementary and secondary schools), children of any age are learning in every waking moment. Education provided for children at any level simply serves to organize their learning into more well-defined paths, governed by the philosophical orientation of program planners and the quality of the program. Although broad variations in children’s abilities are evident, all children can learn. Noddings (1992) reminds teachers not to expect all children to bring similar strengths and abilities to the classroom. These variations in abili-
ties, coupled with children’s varying ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic levels, add interest, joy, and challenge to the kindergarten program.

The work of such developmental theorists as Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky serves as a foundation for kindergarten practices. The theoretical background is expressed through the integrated curriculum, which also best accommodates the variations in children’s understanding of the world around them. Early childhood professionals at all levels are concerned about the methods and content in the majority of kindergarten programs. Despite societal changes, kindergarten remains a place where children need a quality program in order to achieve their full potential.

Program Goals

The need for flexibility in planning programs that serve children and their families is well-documented. Parents need options so that the services they select for their children can meet family needs, as well as the needs of each child. Some parents, however, have misconceptions about the goals of the kindergarten program and, as a result, they focus on such cursory academic skills as counting and reciting the alphabet (Simmons & Brewer, 1985). Many people feel comfortable emphasizing such learning because it is easily measured. Elkind (1996) warns, however, that pushing children into academic areas too soon has a negative effect on learning and refers to this practice as the “miseducation” of young children.

According to Katz (1985), early childhood educators need to consider children’s dispositions, which she defines as “characteristic ways of responding to categories of experience across types of situations. Examples include curiosity, humor, creativity, affability, and quarrelsomeness. . . . Dispositions are not likely to be acquired through workbook exercises, lessons, or direct instruction” (p. 1).

Some parents, concerned over the demanding nature of the kindergarten curriculum, delay their children’s kindergarten entrance. This practice has tended to institutionalize the more demanding and narrowly academic curriculum (Walsh, 1989). While 6-year-olds may be more capable of accomplishing the curricular goals, such programs try to “fit” children to the curriculum, rather than adjusting the curriculum to respond to the nature of the learner. Thus, younger children are more likely to fail.

The activity/experience-centered environment, which is essential if young children are to reach their maximum potential, provides for a far richer and more stimulating environment than one dominated by pencil-and-paper, teacher-directed tasks. A well-designed kindergarten program capitalizes on the interest some children may show in learning academic skills. At the same time, it does not have that same expectation for all children; nor does it use up precious time to inculcate skills and knowledge for which children have no immediate use or real understanding. Learning to learn should be the emphasis in the early years (Bloom, 1981).

Program Content

Kindergarten programs must be related to the needs and capacities of the children enrolled in them. In spite of major sociological and technological changes, developmental rates have not accelerated, nor are children more intelligent than they used to be (Elkind, 1986). Only the variety and intensity of early experiences have changed. Most kindergarten children are only 5 years old, and they have the basic needs of this age group, whether or not they have attended preschool or know how to read (Webster, 1984). Young children still need supportive environments, rich in direct experiences that are meaningful to them (Nebraska State Department of Education, 1984).

A high-quality kindergarten program provides a strong foundation upon which children can build the skills, knowledge, and attitudes toward schooling necessary for lifelong learning.

Program Implementation

An effective, individually and culturally developmentally appropriate kindergarten program:

- Recognizes and accepts individual differences in children’s growth patterns and rates by setting realistic curriculum goals that are appropriate to their developmental levels.
- Educates the whole child—with attention to his or her physical, social/emotional, and intellectual developmental needs and interests.
- Responds to the needs of children as developing, thinking individuals by focusing on the process of learning rather than on disparate skills, content, and products.
- Provides multiple opportunities for learning with concrete, manipulative materials that: (1) are relevant to children’s experiential background; and (2) keep them actively engaged in learning and discovering through use of all the senses, leading to more input upon which thought is constructed.
- Provides a variety of activities and materials by incorporating: (1) learning activities that encourage active participation through “hands-on” activity, communication, and dialogue; (2) large blocks of time to pursue interests; (3) time to ask questions and receive answers that develop concepts and ideas for use at varying levels of difficulty and complexity; and (4) time to reflect upon and abstract information when encountering viewpoints that are different from one’s peers.
- Views play as fundamental to children’s learning, growth, and development, enabling them to develop and clarify concepts, roles, and ideas by testing and evaluating them through the use of open-ended materials and role-enactment. Play further enables children to develop fine and gross motor skills, to learn to share with others, to learn to see others’
points of view, and to be in control of their thoughts and feelings.

• Provides many opportunities for the use of multicultural and nonsexist experiences, materials, and equipment that enhance children’s acceptance of self and others; these experiences enable children to accept differences and similarities among people, including those who are challenged in some way.

• Embraces the teaching of all content areas, especially when they are presented as integrated experiences that develop and extend concepts, strengthen skills, and provide a solid foundation for learning in language, literacy, math, science, social studies, health, art, and music and movement.

• Allows children to make choices and decisions within the limits of the materials provided, resulting in increased independence, attention, joy in learning, and the feelings of success necessary for growth and development.

• Utilizes appropriate assessment procedures, such as observation techniques and portfolios, to measure learning for all kindergarten children.

Play Is Essential

The pressure for academic achievement, coupled with the mistaken idea that today’s children have outgrown the need to play, have led to increased emphasis on “basic skills” in kindergarten. The principal source of development in the early years is play (Vygotsky, 1976); in fact, Catron and Allen (1999) state that the optimal development of young children is made possible through play. When viewed as a learning process, play becomes a vehicle for intellectual growth, and it continues to be the most vital avenue of learning for kindergartners. In contrast, research indicates that academic gains from non-play approaches are not lasting (Schweinhart & Weikert, 1996). Play involves not only use of materials and equipment, but also words and ideas that promote literacy and develop thinking skills. Consequently, in addition to the three R’s, play also promotes problem-solving, critical thinking, concept formation, and creativity skills. Social and emotional development also are enhanced through play. Play fosters wholistic learning (Isenberg & Jalongo, 1997), “Children integrate everything they know in all domains when they play” (Almy, 2000, p. 10). The classic words of Lawrence Frank (1964) remain as meaningful as ever today:

“A conception of play that recognizes the significance of autonomous, self-directed learning and active exploration and manipulation of the actual world gives a promising approach to the wholesome development of children. . . . It is a way to translate into the education of children our long-cherished, enduring goal values, a belief in the worth of the individual personalities, and a genuine respect for the dignity and integrity of the child” (p. 73).

Suransky (1983) warns that “eroding the play life of early childhood has severe implications for the chil-
Appropriate Physical Environment

Kindergarten children are active, curious learners who need adequate space, a variety of materials, and large blocks of time in which to try out their ideas. Attention to the arrangement of physical facilities is an integral part of their educational experience. How teachers arrange kindergarten classrooms affects children’s interests, level of interaction and involvement, initiative development, skill development, and overall attitude toward schooling and learning. A classroom arrangement that supports learning gives attention to the organization and use of space, the arrangement of materials, and the role of both adults and children in the learning environment.

How space is organized and used influences how comfortable children feel and how they work, contributing to a challenging and satisfactory learning environment. Because children’s activity patterns change as they gain new skills and mature, and because spatial organization influences other behaviors, the physical facilities must be flexible enough to change to accommodate the children.

Similarly, the arrangement of learning materials determines their level and use. How well materials are arranged also affects the ideas and connections children can make with the materials.

Although children and teachers occupy the same physical space, their perceptions and use of that space are not the same. Kindergarten teachers must arrange the space from the kindergartner’s point of view and perspective. In order to build a sense of community, kindergarten classrooms should reflect the children, individually and as a group, as well as the teacher.

The following environmental principles address spatial organization, use of materials, and the role of adults in the kindergarten:

- Rooms should be arranged to accommodate individual, small group, and large group activities.
- Interest areas should be clearly defined; differ in size, shape, and location; and attend to traffic patterns while permitting continuity of activity and reducing distractibility. All spaces should be clearly visible to the teacher.
- Rooms should be arranged to facilitate the activity and movements of children at work by attending to available paths for their use and minimizing the amount of interference.
- Learning materials should be arranged and displayed so that they are inviting to children and suggest multiple possibilities for use; they should be clearly visible and accessible, enabling children to return and replace materials as easily as they can get them. Clear, well-organized materials facilitate children’s ability to use and explore them.
- Materials should be changed and combined to increase levels of complexity, thus helping children become more self-directed and increasing their level of involvement.
- Children perceive space they can see, reach, and touch. Teachers can support, stimulate, and maintain children’s involvement in learning by providing a variety of raw materials for exploration, tools for manipulation, containers for storage and displays, adequate work spaces, inviting displays at eye level, and appropriate sources of information within the children’s reach.

Textbooks and Materials

Considerable discussion in the educational and popular media has focused on the quality of textbooks used in schools. The concerns of early childhood educators, however, appear to have been overlooked in this discussion. Many kindergarten teachers are expected to use commercial texts that present information and activities that are developmentally inappropriate. These materials also may be culturally inappropriate. Many “how to” books for teachers are simply collections of reproducible worksheets that result in a pencil/paper curriculum. Such practices do not reflect what we know about how young children learn. Today’s kindergarten programs must reflect developmentally appropriate practices that promote active learning, and should match goals and content to the child’s level of understanding (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2000).

The introduction of technology into kindergarten classrooms, while promising (and becoming more common), still requires the teacher to determine appropriate uses of that technology. “Used appropriately, technology can enhance children’s cognitive and social abilities” (National Association for the Education for Young Children, 1996, p. 12). Elkind (1996) cautions: “The danger is that the young child’s proficiency with the computer may tempt us to
ignore what we know about cognitive development. . . . If we rate a child’s intellectual competence by his or her performance on a computer, then we will have lost what we have been working so hard to attain—a broad appreciation of developmentally appropriate practice” (p. 23).

Teachers for Kindergartens

Aside from parents, teachers frequently are the most significant adults in young children’s lives. Therefore, quality kindergarten programs must be staffed by caring teachers who have faith in every child’s potential to achieve and succeed.

Assigning primary and upper elementary teachers to the kindergarten is a questionable practice—indeed, it is cause for great concern. Many of these teachers have limited understanding of appropriate programs for 5-year-olds, and so they operate under the false assumption that young children learn in the same way that older children do (Association for Childhood Education International et al., 1986). Consequently, they use a “watered-down” primary curriculum, replete with workbooks, textbooks, and one-dimensional tasks that can be readily evaluated.

ACEI advocates developmentally appropriate kindergartens staffed with early childhood teachers who:

- Are knowledgeable in child development, committed to children, and able to plan a curriculum that will promote the full development of each child—enabling teachers to have a profound influence on children’s lives.
- Listen thoughtfully to children, extend children’s language about ideas and feelings, ask questions that encourage insights and highlight contradictions, and promote and value creative, divergent responses from all children.
- Regularly assess children’s interests, needs, and skill levels—enabling them to plan continuous, flexible, and realistic activities for each child.
- Design learning environments that provide for successful daily experiences by matching activities to each child’s developmental level, and by using positive interactions, encouragement, and praise for children’s efforts.
- Promote a positive self-image by helping children succeed in a variety of activities and experiences, and by providing techniques to help children establish their own limits. Children’s
self-esteem affects what they do, say, and think.

- Utilize a variety of instructional approaches, including individual, small group, large group, role-enactment activities, and activity centers—all suited to kindergartners’ wide range of ability, interests, and needs.

- Provide varied experiences about which kindergarten children can communicate by: (1) encouraging them to use their own experiences as a basis for developing language activities through individual and small group interactions with peers and adults; (2) arranging for periodic change of materials, equipment, and activities in the environment; and (3) providing experiences for children to use their senses as they interact with people and materials.

Such teachers provide effective interaction with children, as well as encouragement, support, and guidance.

Program Support

Parental involvement is essential if they are to understand the purpose of kindergarten education, assist in achieving kindergarten goals and reinforce those lessons in the home setting. Parents who are unable to participate directly in the classroom can contribute in myriad other ways (Barbour & Barbour, 2000; Isenberg & Jalongo, 1997). Parents can show their support for their children’s learning by volunteering in the classroom, exchanging information with teachers, acting as chaperones on field trips, helping with homework, reading to children, discussing the school day with the kindergarten child, informing teachers about home situations that may affect the child’s behavior at school, and paying attention to materials sent home. Parents must advocate for child-centered kindergarten programs for their children, in part by informing administrators and school boards of their eagerness to support these programs. Teachers, administrators, and parents must work together as advocates for child-centered kindergarten programs.

Central administrators, supervi-
child a chance to succeed and to play” (p. 564).


**An earlier version of this paper was published in Childhood Education 63:4 (April 1987), pp. 235-242.**


__________.”Young Children and Technology: A Cautionary Note,” Young Children 51 (1996), pp. 22, 23.


**Guest Editorial**

Continued from page 3

Such situations offer an evangelistic opportunity and a means for channeling children into the church’s elementary schools.

One journal issue is wholly inadequate to cover the topic of early childhood development. Limited space does not allow us to cover a number of relevant topics. However, the JOURNAL welcomes reader responses to the articles and invites the submission of additional manuscripts.

Readers wishing to read more about this topic can refer to sources listed at the end of many of the articles or search the CIRCLE Website for additional resources: http://circle.adventist.org/—Linda Bryant Caviness.

The coordinator for this special issue on early childhood education, Linda Bryant Caviness, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Education at La Sierra University in Riverside, California. Her areas of specialization are Language and Literacy and Educational Neuroscience. The editors express their appreciation for her dedication, enthusiasm, assistance, and attention to detail in soliciting articles and producing the issue.
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