



by Laura J. Colker and Derry Koralek

The
TEACHING
YOUNG CHILDREN
STAFF DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

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Introduction

NAEYC's magazine *Teaching Young Children (TYC)* is designed especially for preschool classroom staff. Each issue highlights current thinking on best practices in early childhood education, innovations in the field, research and its implications, and practical ideas for and from preschool teachers. Teachers can read and use it on their own, and supervisors, staff development specialists, and teacher educators can use it as a tool for supporting further learning.

NEXT: The Teaching Young Children Staff Development Guide suggests ways to build on the content of selected *Teaching Young Children* articles and encourage teachers to adapt and apply appropriate ideas in their own classrooms. Center directors can use it to plan staff meetings or training sessions, staff development specialists can use it to design workshops, and teacher educators might incorporate some of the ideas in their classes.

Articles in *Teaching Young Children* reinforce the accreditation criteria for NAEYC Early Childhood Program **Standard 1: Relationships** and **Standard 3: Teaching**.

The **Relationships** standard promotes positive relationships among all children and adults through teachers' work in the following areas:

- building positive relationships among teachers and families
- building positive relationships between teachers and children
- helping children make friends
- creating a predictable, consistent, and harmonious classroom
- addressing challenging behaviors
- promoting self-regulation

The **Teaching** standard states what teachers should do in these areas:

- designing enriched learning environments
- creating caring communities for learning
- supervising children
- using time, grouping, and routines to achieve learning goals
- responding to children's interests and needs
- making learning meaningful for all children
- using instruction to deepen children's understanding and build their skills and knowledge

(Go to www.naeyc.org/academy/standards. Click on the red links for more information on each standard.)

Also, several principles of effective teaching in the preschool years underlie the *TYC* offerings. Effective teachers

- **observe** children regularly to keep up-to-date on each child's individual skills, knowledge, and characteristics.
- know and use information about each child's **family, home language, and culture** to inform their practice.
- are **intentional**; they have a purpose for everything they do, from selection and arrangement of materials to documenting progress.
- plan and implement strategies that address the needs of both **individual children and the whole group**.
- use applicable **early learning standards** along with **developmentally appropriate practice**.
- **partner with families** regularly to support children's health, development, and learning.
- **reflect** on the effectiveness of their practices and make changes accordingly.

Using this guide

NEXT provides ideas for leading staff development sessions focused on some of the articles in *TYC*. For these articles you will find

- a brief summary of the main ideas;
- an indication of which NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards are most closely related to the content (check the tab at the top of each page);
- key points to reinforce;
- discussion prompts in **Let's Talk**;
- workshop activities in **For Further Thinking**; and
- ways to apply content in **In the Classroom**.

A few notes

- All page numbers refer to *Teaching Young Children*, November 2007.
- No permission is needed to make copies of NAEYC-copyrighted articles in *Teaching Young Children* as long as they bear a credit line and are distributed at no cost.
- Depending on the setting in which you are using this guide, you can ask participants to form small groups, find a partner, or work as classroom teams to complete the activities.
- Teachers can share their ideas, read articles, and find other useful resources at tyc.naeyc.org.

For many preschoolers, life in a busy, noisy classroom can be stressful. Teachers can identify ways to reduce or eliminate stressors by using a 15-item checklist to assess how well they arrange their space to support individuals within the group, prevent and reduce stress throughout the day, and include families so children feel connected to their loved ones. A photograph shows two smiling girls sitting together while writing in their notebooks.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Many problem behaviors can be prevented by offering a program that decreases stress and helps children feel at ease and ready to learn.
- ➔ Simple changes in the classroom environment and teaching practices can make huge differences in how children feel and behave.
- ➔ Every child is a unique individual with his or her own capacity for coping with stress.

Let's Talk

1. Think of a time when you felt confused, overwhelmed, or frustrated. Where were you? What were you doing? What was the environment like (for example, too noisy, crowded, or bright)? What might have been the cause of your stress? Was there anything you could have changed to reduce the stressors?
2. How does the design of your space—indoors and outdoors—support individual children and reflect their families, cultures, and home languages?
3. Which daily teaching practices support individual children?
4. How do you include families so children feel connected to their loved ones?
5. How might children behave in a stressful environment? How might they behave if the environment is designed to increase their comfort and success?

For Further Thinking

1. **Review the checklist.** Ask teachers to complete the checklist on pages 6–7 for their classrooms. Explain that there may be suggestions and examples on the checklist that they already use, some that they might want to try, and some that would not work in their situations. Next, have the teachers discuss their results with another participant and share additional examples of things they do to reduce children's stress.
2. **Plan for an individual child.** Have teachers think of a child in their classroom whose behaviors indicate he or she may be feeling stressed. This might be a child who acts out, a child who withdraws, or a child whose behavior falls somewhere in between. Ask teachers to review the items on the checklist with this child in mind. Discuss whether the suggestions could help the child feel safe, relaxed, and competent.

In the Classroom

1. **Make some changes.** Ask participants to select several items from the checklist that they do not do now and would like to try. Encourage them to make the changes in their classroom and outdoors and then watch to see how children's behaviors change.
2. **Follow-up.** At the next session, invite participants to discuss the changes they made and the results. Ask how the changes affected the child on whom they focused in the previous session.

When teachers take time to talk with preschoolers, the children expand their use of language and learn other new things. Conversations can build relationships, provide insight into children's thoughts and feelings, and create trust. The 10 tips are easy to implement in a typical classroom. A large photograph shows a teacher listening intently to a preschooler.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ During even the briefest of conversations, teachers can learn a lot about a child while building a supportive relationship.
- ➔ Each child in the classroom needs to engage in a one-on-one conversation with one teacher every day.
- ➔ Talking with children is a great way to learn about their unique characteristics and experiences and to encourage development of thinking skills such as making predictions, problem solving, and comparing and contrasting.

Let's Talk

1. What do you remember about your childhood conversations with adults—teachers, family members, neighbors? Did you enjoy or avoid these conversations? Or did it depend on the conversation partner? How could this influence the ways you engage preschoolers in conversations?
2. Think about a typical day in your classroom. What do you talk about during conversations with the children? How do you introduce new vocabulary? How do you keep the conversation going?
3. How can you get reluctant talkers to engage in conversations?
4. Why is it important to find time to talk with every child every day?
5. Examine the large photograph on page 8. What might this teacher and child be talking about?

For Further Thinking

1. **Talk to Lucy.** Invite two volunteers (role-playing as Lucy and her teacher) to act out the conversation on page 9. Lead the group in brainstorming the kinds of questions and comments the teacher could use to encourage Lucy to use higher level thinking skills. For example, what could the teacher say that would help Lucy make a prediction, develop a hypothesis, experiment, compare and contrast, solve a problem? Record the questions and comments on chart paper. Ask a volunteer to type and disseminate the brainstormed list of questions and comments.
2. **Discuss the 10 tips.** Assign one or more of the 10 tips on page 9 for having good conversations to pairs or small groups of participants. Have them discuss the assigned tip(s) and share examples of times when they applied this tip while talking with a child. When the discussions have been completed, have the teachers trade assignments so they will eventually have an opportunity to discuss all of the tips.
3. **Go from 10 to 20 tips.** As a group, brainstorm additional tips for talking with children. Write them on a piece of chart paper. When you can't think of any more, have the group narrow the list to 10. Ask a volunteer to collect the final selections to type and disseminate.

In the Classroom

1. **Take the challenge.** Ask teachers to have a conversation with each child in their classrooms every day. They can use the 10 tips and the brainstormed list of tips to support higher level thinking. Explain that improving or developing a skill such as talking with children takes time and many opportunities to practice.
2. **Remember the 20 tips.** Have teachers make posters listing the 10 tips from the article and the 10 from their brainstorming session. They can hang them in the classroom to remind themselves of ways to engage children in conversations. They might also use these tips to create a **Message in a Backpack** (page 13) to encourage families to talk with children at home.
3. **Listen and reflect.** Encourage participants to tape record, listen to, then reflect on their conversations with children. This activity will help teachers refine their ability to extend children's ideas, to ask open-ended questions that encourage children to think, and to motivate children to want to talk further.
4. **Follow-up.** Ask participants to share a conversation recording at the next session. Discuss how participants used their reflections to enhance their conversation skills.

This lead article, adapted from an article in *Young Children* (March 2005), encourages teachers to invite several children to work together to do indoor and outdoor tasks that make a real contribution and let children feel useful and valued. Big Jobs build cooperation, teamwork, and goodwill. The photographs show preschoolers working together to do Big Jobs.

Message in a Backpack, a handout for teachers to share with families, explains the reasoning behind Big Jobs and suggests ways families can try out this idea at home.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Big Jobs allow children to analyze and solve problems, experiment, think creatively, and otherwise build skills they will use at school, at home, and in the community.
- ➔ Some Big Jobs are planned in advance; many arise spontaneously.
- ➔ Adults must ensure children's safe use of tools and equipment at all times.
- ➔ Families can encourage children to do Big Jobs at home.

Let's Talk

1. Did you do Big Jobs when you were a child? What jobs do you remember? How did you feel when you worked with others to do a difficult job?
2. What are some Big Jobs you do with others at work, at home, and in the community? With whom do you work? What do you do? How do you feel as and after your team completes a challenging task?
3. What Big Jobs are the children in the article's photographs doing? What concepts and skills might the children be learning while doing these Big Jobs?

For Further Thinking

1. **Consider the Big Jobs children do.** Ask teachers to list the Big Jobs the children in their programs do on the left side of a piece of paper. If the children do not do Big Jobs, teachers can list Big Jobs the children could do.
2. **Review the benefits.** Discuss in general terms what children can learn from doing Big Jobs. Then ask participants to review their lists and for each Big Job, note in the right column how children will benefit from doing it. For example, for the Big Job "washing the classroom chairs," children could use their large muscles to carry the chairs outdoors, cooperate with peers to get the job done, experience what happens when soap is added to water, predict how long the suds will last or how long it will take for the chairs to dry, and so on.
3. **Share.** Have the teachers present and discuss their lists. Point out that because each classroom and each group of children is unique, it's not expected (nor desired) that the same Big Jobs take place in every classroom. Ask a volunteer to collect the lists to type and disseminate.
4. **Make a plan.** Review and discuss the tips on page 12 for encouraging children to do Big Jobs. Using the tips as a guide, have teachers make a plan for introducing or expanding Big Jobs. The plan should include introducing Big Jobs (if this is a new idea in their classroom), providing and storing tools, inviting children to participate, encouraging children who are reluctant to volunteer, using Big Jobs to build knowledge and encourage thinking skills, and so on.
5. **Get more information.** Encourage teachers to read the full-length version of "Big Jobs" at tyc.naeyc.org. (If needed, you can make copies for them.)

In the Classroom

1. **Implement and document.** Ask teachers to implement their Big Job plans in their classrooms. Remind teachers to document what children do and say in observation notes, anecdotal records, photographs, and video and audio tape recordings. Remind them to also record what they do and say to promote learning.
2. **Involve families.** Encourage teachers to copy and distribute the **Message in a Backpack** to families, then talk with families about what happened when their children did Big Jobs at home. Teachers can ask parents to send in photos of children doing Big Jobs at home, then use them to make a book to place in the library area.
3. **Follow-up.** The next time the group meets, invite teachers to share what happened as they implemented their plans for introducing or expanding Big Jobs in their classrooms.

This photo essay presents images of preschoolers engaged in pretend (dramatic) play. While pretend play looks like fun, it is also an effective learning tool. The text poses questions about the socioemotional, physical, cognitive, and language and literacy skills children can build through the play scenarios shown in the photographs. Possible answers appear on pages 16–17.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Effective teachers set the stage for meaningful play by offering props and materials that encourage children to engage in play that requires use of cognitive, socioemotional, physical, and language skills.
- ➔ When teachers observe children’s play, they will come to understand what children are doing and learning and what additional resources will allow children to take their play to higher levels.
- ➔ It is appropriate for teachers to enter children’s play by assuming a role, asking open-ended questions, and making comments that influence the direction of the play.

Let’s Talk

1. What kinds of pretend play take place in your classroom? How do pretend play scenarios change over time?
2. How do children’s interests influence their play?
3. What new skills have you seen children using during pretend play? How does pretend play support language development and encourage creativity, problem solving, experimentation, and other thinking skills?
4. What do you do to support and extend children’s pretend play?

For Further Thinking

1. **List the skills.** Make several color copies of pages 14–17. Cut out the photos and place them in a basket, and have each person pick two photos to examine. Next, ask the teachers to list examples of the socioemotional, physical, cognitive, and language and literacy skills the children in the photos might be learning. (The photos do not necessarily depict learning in all domains.)
Also have teachers discuss at what point it would make sense for them to enter the action to extend children’s learning. Have participants share their thoughts about what they might say or do. If any participants examined the same photos, they can discuss their interpretations together.
2. **Address standards through play.** Pass out copies of applicable learning standards for preschool children (for example, Head Start child outcomes, state early learning standards, Department of Defense educational standards, and so on). Now, have participants use as a guide the section “Documenting learning related to standards” (page 17) while matching the skills (found earlier in the photos) with the applicable learning standards. Have participants share their findings.

In the Classroom

1. **Document.** Ask participants to make their own photo essays of children learning through pretend play. They can take and print digital photographs and make labels explaining what skills the children are gaining and how their play addresses specific learning standards. In addition, they can include their own actions—what they did and said to support learning in all domains through pretend play. They can place the photos and explanations together on a bulletin board or large piece of cardboard hung on a wall where families can stop, look, read, and discuss.
2. **Follow-up.** At the next session, invite participants to describe their photo essays and their experiences discussing the photos, skills, and learning standards with families.

A preschool teacher plans a hands-on approach to teach children about the abstract concept of texture. This content is presented in the form of a Textured Hands activity plan, showing how children can select soft- or rough-textured objects and glue them onto cardboard outlines of a pair of hands. The activity plan includes examples of how to individualize the activity for an English-language learner and for a child with specific needs, and ways to involve families. Photos show a pair of completed hands. A blank copy of the activity plan is available at tyc.naeyc.org.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Developing a detailed activity plan supports intentionality as teachers think through what adaptations are needed to allow all children to participate.
- ➔ Hands-on learning activities allow preschool children to create, explore, and make discoveries while teachers use open-ended questions and other teaching strategies to scaffold children’s learning. (To scaffold learning, teachers offer less and less support as children acquire the knowledge and skills needed to do a task or use a skill on their own.)

Let’s Talk

1. How do you learn best? Do you think children learn in these same ways?
2. What do you think of when you hear the term *hands-on*? How do preschool children benefit from doing hands-on activities?
3. What concepts could a teacher introduce using a hands-on experience?

For Further Thinking

1. **Discuss the activity.** Ask teachers who have tried the activity to report on the experience, emphasizing what went well and what they might have improved. How did they adapt the activity to make it appropriate for the children in their classroom? What did they do and say to support children as they learned how to
 - compare, sort, and categorize
 - use small muscles
 - follow directions
 - take turns and share materials
 - think and answer questions
 - work with others(If no one has tried the activity, skip this step.)
2. **Adapt the plan.** Provide copies of the blank activity plan from tyc.naeyc.org. Have teachers review the activity plan on pages 18–19 and determine what they would need to change or add to make it work for the children in their classroom. Teachers who have already tried the activity can serve as mentors to the rest of the group.
3. **Identify current interests.** Ask teachers to discuss current classroom events. What are the children exploring? Are they engaged in a theme or project? What are the children’s topics of interest?
4. **Plan a new activity.** Have teachers focus on a current classroom interest and plan a hands-on activity that will support children’s explorations and learning. They can use the blank activity plan or one that provides the same information. Ask them to indicate the learning standards to be addressed through the activity and to prepare some open-ended questions to engage children in higher order thinking, such as making predictions, reasoning, and exploring cause and effect.
5. **Review and give feedback.** Have participants trade their completed plans, read them, and make verbal or written suggestions for enhancing the activity. Ask a volunteer to collect the plans to type and disseminate.

In the Classroom

1. **Try a hands-on activity.** Ask teachers to try the Textured Hands activity with children. If they have already done this, they can try one of the variations on page 19 or a hands-on activity related to children’s current interests. Remind teachers to reread and answer the questions on page 19. In addition, ask them to list some open-ended questions they could ask to scaffold children’s thinking.
2. **Document.** Ask participants to take photographs and write anecdotal notes about the children doing the activity to share with the children’s families.
3. **Follow-up.** At the next session, have teachers share their documentation while discussing what they did and how it supported children’s learning during and after the hands-on activity.

Recent research involving three- to five-year-old children enrolled in Head Start underscores the importance of including dance and creative movement in the preschool curriculum. After participating in an eight-week dance and creative movement program, children had improved social skills and fewer behavior problems than children in a second group who did not take part in the program. The article includes ideas teachers can use to incorporate dance and movement activities in their classrooms. Photographs show children engaged in such activities.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Social skills such as self-regulation (the ability to monitor and control one's emotions and actions) are closely linked to school readiness and academic success.
- ➔ These research findings provide important information for families. Teachers can explain to parents that dance and movement help children build skills that prepare them to succeed in school.
- ➔ In addition to supporting development of social skills, creative dance and music activities can foster other kinds of learning, such as problem solving, sequencing, cause and effect thinking, and experimentation.

Let's Talk

1. What was your reaction to the research findings? Which ones surprised you and why?
2. Why is self-regulation important? How do young children build this important skill? What can teachers do to support self-regulation?
3. What kinds of creative movement and dance activities do you offer the children in your classroom? How do the children respond?
4. How will these research findings change your classroom practices?
5. Why do you think the arts are often the first to go when there is a budget cut? What can educators do to address this issue?

For Further Thinking

1. **Learn from the children.** Have participants work in pairs to examine and discuss the photographs in this article. Ask: What are the children doing? How do you think they feel? Are there times you have seen children in your classroom with similar expressions? What were those children doing and feeling?
2. **Offer more opportunities for dance and creative movement.** Review the suggestions on page 21 for including dance and creative movement in the classroom. Discuss with teachers which ones they already do and which ones they could try.

As a group, brainstorm additional ways teachers might include dance and creative movement in the curriculum. Record the suggestions on chart paper and post on the wall. On this master list, have participants place a ✓ next to items they already do, a + next to items they intend to do in the near future, and a Ø next to items they don't think they will be doing any time soon. Have participants discuss their choices (as intentional teachers), explaining why they marked things as they did. Remind participants that dance and creative movement can support learning in all areas, including language, literacy, and mathematics. Encourage them to implement the ideas they put a + next to.
3. **Get more information.** Encourage teachers to read the full-length version of the original research study (<http://classweb.gmu.edu/awinsler/LoboWinsler2006.pdf>). (If teachers have limited computer access, you can make copies for them.)

In the Classroom

1. **Share with families.** Have teachers write a letter to send home to families as a **Message in a Backpack**. They should describe their classroom dance and movement activities, explain how they support learning, and include ideas families can use to encourage creative movement and dance at home. The handout could introduce the importance of the arts in the preschool curriculum. Teachers could follow up with a classroom meeting for families on the same topic.

(continued on next page)

News from the Field: Preschoolers Dance Their Way to Social Competence and Success

by Laura J. Colker (pages 20–21)

- (continued)
- 2. Document.** Ask teachers to choose two focus children and then make sure these children frequently take part in dance and creative movement activities over a two-week period. Have teachers keep track of changes in the children's behavior. They can conduct observations, take photographs, make anecdotal records, and otherwise document how the children get along with others, focus their attention, monitor their emotions, and so on. At the end of the two weeks, teachers can review their documentation to see how and in what ways the children's behavior did or did not change. Teachers might share this information with the children's families. (If teachers find this activity particularly useful, they may wish to read about teacher research in **Voices of Practitioners**, <http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/vp>.)
 - 3. Follow-up:** At the next session, begin with teachers' reports of the children's experiences during creative dance and movement activities. Have teachers share their documentation of the two focus children. What did the children learn? What skills did they use? How did they change? How did the children's families respond?

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