Creation of a Childcare Center

Honors 499

By:
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Thesis Advisor:
Mrs. Donna Williams

Ball State University
Muncie, IN

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Expected Dates of Graduation:

Tammy Smith - December 2004
Peggy Walrath - July 2004
Abstract

Throughout our four years at Ball State, we have acquired great knowledge about children and developmentally appropriate education. After examining the present Childcare centers in Anderson, we realized there are only a few that meet the high standards of Ball State University. For our thesis project, we decided to create a childcare center that has the potential to be accredited by the National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mrs. Donna Williams for all of her encouragement and support throughout this project and our education at Ball State. She has been an incredible influence, and we have greatly enjoyed learning from her.

Also, we would like to thank the entire Early Childhood staff of Ball State University for so adequately preparing us to inspire the children of the future.
The Learning Shoe

NAEYC Accredited Childcare Center

123 Main St.
Anderson, IN 46016

(765) 644-1111
Emergency (after hours) (765) 644-1112

We accept children from ages 6 weeks to Kindergarten.
Philosophy

We believe teachers should facilitate children developing their social, emotional, and physical skills along with their cognitive skills by providing activities that promote active exploration and concrete learning in all areas. Children cannot fully develop in one domain without developing in all domains. We also believe that children develop in an orderly fashion and should be allowed to develop at their own pace. Teachers need to allow students to slow down from their hectic life styles, while encouraging them to do their best without challenging them too greatly. We believe that teachers must be accepting of all children while affirming them and their ethnicities and planning activities to meet their individual needs. Therefore, whenever possible, activities should be based on the interests of the child while continuing to prepare them for their future school and life experiences. It is important to us to motivate children to develop their decision-making skills and independence. Furthermore, parents are the child's first teacher, and children learn from their home and community as well as their school. All of these systems must work together to the benefit of the child. Teachers must take the initiative to involve parents, families and the community in the lives of their students.
Parent Involvement Policy

At the Learning Shoe, because of our open door policy, parents and guardians are welcome to stop in to visit the children at any time. We invite you to join with us in sharing your talent and skills. This includes, but is not limited to, musical and artistic interests, reading with or to the children, cooking, woodworking or sharing a foreign language. However, we do encourage independence in each child, so you may want to consider making your visits only on an occasional basis – a special treat for both you and your child! We encourage parents to participate in our many activities during the year; therefore, volunteer schedules will be available for anyone who wishes to join us. We also have established a program to allow parent and teacher conferences at least once every other month to discuss events in the center as well as brainstorm new ideas. There will be a suggestion box open everyday for those parents that have comments and wish to remain anonymous. This will keep our lines of communication open for the constructive development of our center and for meeting the needs of your child in the best ways possible.
Pick up/ Drop off Policy

- Children may be dropped as early as 7:00 a.m. While we do not have a time that is too late for drop off, in order for your child to develop a strong sense of community within the classroom, we suggest that children arrive no latter than 9:00 a.m.
- Children must be picked up no latter than 6:00 p.m. You are expected to call if you will be late, and you will be charged a $2.00 per minute late fee for every minute you are late past 6:05 p.m.
- We appreciate advanced notice if you will be picking up your child before your “regular” pick up time. We schedule our activities for times when the majority of children will be here, and do not want your child to miss opportunities to participate.
- Children are allowed to stay at The Learning Shoe for a maximum of fifty hours per week.
- We will keep a file containing photo identification of anyone who is allowed to pick up your child. We MUST have advanced notice, in writing, if someone not on file is going to pick up your child. (Forms are available in the director’s office. Please inform the person picking up your child that we MUST see his or her identification before your child will be released to him or her.)
- In case of emergency only, we will allow a phone call, by one of the legal guardians, to suffice as advanced notice. In this instance, you will call the center, give the name and address of the person picking up your child, and establish a code word. When the person comes to the center, he or she must present his or her identification and know the code word in order for you child to be released to him or her.
- At all times, we will keep the safety of your child as our highest priority.
Job Descriptions

Job Title: Director

Qualifications/Requirements:
- Early Childhood Degree or equivalent
- Classroom Experience
- Organization and Management Skills
- Must be available between 6:30am and 6:00pm Monday through Friday
- Clear drug screen
- Up-to-date immunization record

Responsibilities:
- Open and close center daily or delegate a full-time teacher to do so
- Will supervise classroom teachers
- Give permission for various activities and field trips
- Handle contracts
- Hiring/Staff Maintenance
- Keep track of all income and expenses
- Lead meetings with parents and teachers every other month
- Create stimulating & caring environment

Job Status:
- Full-time
- Salary of $30,000 per year

Job Title: Head Teacher

Qualifications/Requirements:
- Early Childhood Degree or equivalent
- Classroom experience
- Flexible
- Clear criminal history check
- Must be available to work required hours Monday through Friday
- Clear drug screen
- Up-to-date immunization record

Responsibilities:
- Will lead classroom activities
- Supervise Assistant Teacher
- Keep parental contacts within the classroom
- Create stimulating & caring environment
- Basic Custodial Maintenance
- Any other duties as assigned by Director

Job Status:
- Full-time
- Salary of $23,500 per year
**Job Title:** Teacher’s Assistant

**Qualifications/Requirements:**
- Clear criminal history check.
- High school graduate or equivalent (Can also be a Co-Op student)
- Flexible
- Must be available to work required hours
- Classroom experience preferred
- Clear drug test
- Up-to-date immunization record

**Responsibilities:**
- Support head teacher
- Clean floors, bathrooms, play areas and toys (Tasks will be rotated)
- Provide caring and stimulating environment
- Aid with the arrival or departure of children
- Any other duties as assigned by head teacher or director

**Job Status:**
- Part-time
- Salary of $9,782 per year
Staff Evaluation Form

Rate each staff member 1 through 5 for each category (1 = poor 5 = excellent)

1. Punctuality
   1  2  3  4  5

2. Communicates openly and regularly with parents
   1  2  3  4  5

3. Communicates regularly with Director
   1  2  3  4  5

4. Positive interactions with children
   1  2  3  4  5

5. Follows discipline policy
   1  2  3  4  5

6. Encourages creativity
   1  2  3  4  5

7. Knows emergency procedures
   1  2  3  4  5

8. Follows first aid guidelines with all injuries
   1  2  3  4  5

9. Keeps classroom tidy and sanitary
   1  2  3  4  5

10. Effective classroom organization
    1  2  3  4  5

11. Effective classroom management
<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Ensures a positive learning environment for all children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Applies knowledge of child development to classroom activities and arrangement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Professional attitude and interactions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Collaborates with other staff members</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
LEARNING SHOE
Estimated Income Statement
For First Year of Operation

Revenues:

Infants (8 at $150 wk for 50 wks/ year) .................... 60,000
Toddlers (10 at $110 wk for 50 wks/ year) ................. 55,000
2-Year-Olds (14 at $120 wk for 50 wks/ year) ............ 84,000
3, 4, & 5-Year-Olds (40 at $110 wk for 50 wks/ year) .... 220,000
Total Revenues ............................................ 419,000

Expenses:

P/T Salaries (10) ........................................... 97,825
F/T Salaries (5) ............................................. 117,500
Director Salary (1) ....................................... 30,000
Cost of vacant spots ...................................... 10,000
Food expense ............................................ 19,305
Building expense ...................................... 90,090
Programs expense ..................................... 12,870
Administration expense .............................. 30,030
Advertising Expenses ................................. 8,580
Total Expenses ............................................ 416,200

Net Income ................................................. 2,800
**Sample Daily Schedule**

Hours of Operation: 7:00a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00-7:30am</td>
<td>Child Arrival/Free Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:00am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*8:00-9:00am</td>
<td>Activity Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:15am</td>
<td>Group Story Time/Circle Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15-9:30am</td>
<td>Morning Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:00am</td>
<td>Gross Motor Activities/Outdoor Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00am-10:15am</td>
<td>Stretching/Circle Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15-11:00am</td>
<td>Activity Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-11:45am</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*11:45am-12:15pm</td>
<td>Dramatic Play/Reading/Coloring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15-12:30pm</td>
<td>Group Story Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-2:45pm</td>
<td>Nap Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2:45-3:15pm</td>
<td>Afternoon Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15-4:00pm</td>
<td>Gross Motor/Outdoor Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00-4:15pm</td>
<td>Stretching/Circle Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15-5:00pm</td>
<td>Activity Centers/Free Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00-6:00pm</td>
<td>Coloring/Writing/Reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Parent Arrival/Closing*

*Denotes time during which each child should try to use the restroom.*
### Menu Form - Day Care Center

**Name of Center:** The Learning Shoe

#### Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breakfast</strong> (Time)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit or Juice</td>
<td>Apple Juice</td>
<td>Orange Juice</td>
<td>Strawberry Slices</td>
<td>Grape Juice</td>
<td>Apple Slices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal or Toast</td>
<td>Cheerios</td>
<td>Waffles with Syrup</td>
<td>Toast</td>
<td>English Muffins</td>
<td>Cinnamon Rolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A.M. Snack</strong> (Time)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citrus Juice or Fruit</td>
<td>Fruit (water)</td>
<td>Raisins (water)</td>
<td>Orange Slices (water)</td>
<td>Grapefruit Juice</td>
<td>Apple-Raspberry Juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread or Equivalent</td>
<td>Granola Bar</td>
<td>Granam Crackers</td>
<td>Bagel</td>
<td>Pumpkin Bread</td>
<td>Biscuits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lunch</strong> (Time)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat, Poultry, Fish or Eggs, etc.</td>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>Salmon</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>Chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable</td>
<td>Peas</td>
<td>Squash</td>
<td>Green Beans</td>
<td>Pepper</td>
<td>Carrots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Vegetable or Salad</td>
<td>Egg Plant</td>
<td>Salad</td>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>Onion</td>
<td>Creamed Spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread and Margarine</td>
<td>Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td>Banana Bread</td>
<td>Mashed Potatoes</td>
<td>Texas Toast</td>
<td>Croissant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit or Plain Dessert</td>
<td>Plums</td>
<td>Tangerines</td>
<td>Fruit Cobbler</td>
<td>Watermelon Slices</td>
<td>Peach Yogurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P.M. Snack</strong> (Time)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread or Equivalent</td>
<td>Crackers and Sauce</td>
<td>Tortilla Chips</td>
<td>Soft Pretzel</td>
<td>Blueberry Muffins</td>
<td>Oatmeal Cookies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Other items such as egg, cheese or other protein foods may be served, but will be in addition to the other breakfast components.

**Those facilities open after 6:00 p.m. must attach additional menus for dinner and bedtime snack. Dinner must have all the lunch components. Bedtime snack must have all the A.M. snack components.*
Health Policies

Health promotion in children requires regular observation and accurate record keeping as systematic follow-up. Our responsibility is for the observation of health, handling of illness at the center, accident prevention, emergency procedures and keeping complete health records on a daily basis if necessary. Prior to admission, we require that a Health Care Summary be completed by your child's doctor. Incomplete Health Care Summary and/or immunization records would exclude your child from enrollment and/or attendance. Please help us to keep our records updated by informing us when your child has had an immunization. It is recommended the Health Care Summary be updated by your doctor when your child advances to the next program.

We strongly encourage parents to keep an unhealthy child at home. Parents must call us to report a sick day, in order for us to inform others and guard against further spread of illness.

In the event of an emergency or illness we must have instructions of how you may be reached while your child is in our care. It is the responsibility of the parents to let us know if your home or work address or telephone number changes so our records remain current. We will also require the names and telephone numbers of authorized persons who can assume responsibility if you cannot be reached. It is recommended that each child have a back-up care provider on file in case of emergency. You will be notified immediately should your child show signs of illness. We will provide care and supervision to your child in the event of illness until you arrive. An isolated area will be equipped with a crib or cot for this purpose. We ask that you not bring your child to the center if you note the following:

1. Auxiliary temperature over 100 degrees, oral 101 degrees.
2. If your child looks or acts differently; awake all night crying, unusually tired, pale, lack of appetite, irritable or restless.
3. Colds with a yellow/green nasal discharge and/or undiagnosed cough.
4. Vomiting (more than usual spitting up).
5. Diarrhea that is characterized by frequent watery or green colored bowel movements that are not related to medication or food reaction.
6. Any undiagnosed rash other than mild diaper rash or heat rash.
7. Breathing difficulties.

Remittance for the following communicable diseases shall be:

1. Fever - until child is without fever for 24 hours.
2. Throat Infection - 48 hours after the start of medication.
3. Chickenpox - All lesions are dry and crusted.
4. Impetigo - 24 hours after the start of medication. If there is not improvement in 48 hours, the child should be reassessed by a doctor.
5. Conjunctivitis (Pink eye) - 24 hours after the start of medication.
7. Pinworms - No restrictions following medical examination.
8. Hepatitis - Physician statement required for readmission.
** When dealing with the first signs of illness, it is better to err on the side of caution than to ignore the symptom that could lead to something serious, expose others to the disease, or prolong the illness.

The Learning Shoe will notify you of any infections or communicable diseases reported or diagnosed at the center. We are in continuing contact with the Health Department and follow their recommended procedures for notification that include a letter to all parents and a posted notice.

The Learning Shoe requires signed parental permission on all over-the-counter and prescription medications to be administered by Learning Shoe staff. They will be administered according to your instructions and logged.

We ask your cooperation in dealing with illness, please notify us as soon as possible if your child is diagnosed with a communicable disease so that we can take the appropriate action. We make every effort possible to prevent illness within the program, please remember the importance on keeping your child home when he or she is sick. You would not want another child to come to the program sick and infect your child so please show the same consideration for others.

The Learning Shoe will contact your child's health care source as recommended by you in the event of emergency medical care. We will follow any recommendations regarding hospitalization etc. Our staff is trained in First Aid and CPR. In the event of an emergency requiring immediate medical attention, we will call 911 and the parents to determine the proper course of action.
**Child Guidance Policy**

Our center supports the following statements to ensure your child’s safety and individual growth as well as to maintain an optimal learning environment.

1. Children are expected to behave appropriately. Inappropriate behaviors include:
   A. Aggression toward another child, staff member, or visitor.
   B. Not following classroom rules and acts of insubordination.
   C. Use of explicit and derogatory language.
   D. Disrespecting property that is not his or her own.
   E. Any other behavior that is not conducive for a learning environment in the classroom supervisor’s discretion.

2. We will use a system of positive reinforcement to encourage all of the children to do their best. The positive reinforcement system includes, but is not limited to:
   A. When we catch children doing something positive, we will write their names and what they did on a star. These stars will be placed on bulletin board called, “Shining Star Board” so that everyone can see their accomplishments.
   B. Children can also give each other “peer shining stars.” This teaches them to look for the good that others do.
   C. We will also have a “Great Work” board where we will post work chosen “best” by the child. This allows everyone to see the child’s improvements and accomplishments. The children will learn to value their work and the work of others.
   D. When a child discovers something new, we will have a “mini celebration” (three to four minutes) where we will announce the discovery or accomplishment. This allows the child to have a minute in the spotlight where everyone is congratulating him or her on a job well done.
   E. When a child does something extra special, we will send a super student note home. This allows you to celebrate victories with your child.
   F. Children who really go above and beyond while trying their best will get a super student note from the director. This reminds children they are valued by other adults within the school community.

3. Teachers will follow a procedure for discipline that will depend upon the severity of the misconduct.
   A. The child will be redirected to a more positive activity in order to prevent unnecessary misconduct.
   B. If redirection fails, the teacher and child will talk about how the child is feeling and why he or she feels they are acting in such a manner. When children understand why they are behaving in a certain manner, they will correct their behavior more effectively.
   C. If talking with the child fails, the child will be removed from the situation and will sit in a designated “quiet time place” where he or she will be able to think about his or her behavior. Children will remain in solace until one of the following occurs:
a. Time runs out. The rule is one minute per year the child has lived. If your child is four years old, he or she will be in the “quiet time place” for no longer than four minutes.

b. The child decides that he or she is ready to return to the activity and behave appropriately. To indicate this, the child will raise his or her hand and then wait for the teacher to come listen to the child explain what was done wrong and how the child is going to fix it.

D. If the child continues to misbehave, he or she will not be able to participate in the next activity. The child will sit in the quiet time area with a quiet toy or book. The child will be ready to join when he or she feels in control of his or her behavior and will not disrupt the other children.

E. If a child reaches the point of “D” or has been in the “quiet time place” more than three times for repeated behavior, the parent or guardian will be informed. If the misconduct is severe, the parent or guardian will be notified immediately.

4. Teachers will not discipline your child in these such manners as they are ineffective and harmful:
   A. No spanking, slapping, swatting, pulling of arm or any other physical punishment.
   B. No derogatory language, verbal abuse or threats of any kind will be made.
   C. Children will not be punished for lapses in toilet training.

5. We will have simple rules for your children to follow. The rules are:
   A. Be Kind
      Be kind to others with our words and actions.
   B. Be Careful
      Be careful when we play and work so no one is hurt. Be careful to always do our very best.
   C. Be Caring
      Be caring and compassionate of others’ feelings by listening to them and showing them respect.
Policy Board Members

Lawyer
Accountant
Physician (preferably Pediatrician)
School Board Member
Parent

Contact Information

The Learning Shoe 644-1111
Director at home 644-1112
Teacher #1 644-5555
Teacher #2 644-5556
Teacher #3 644-5559
Teacher #4 644-5558
Teacher #5 644-5554
The Learning Zone Floor Plans

- Storage
- Director's Office
- Conference Room
- Adult Bedroom
- Whole
- Library
- 3-5
- Gross Mgmt
- Toddlers
- Storage
Bibliography


Journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children

2002 Annual Conference early bird registration

See pp. 50-59

- Supportive relationships
- Everyone can sing!
- Bilingual education
High-quality early care and education reflects the careful coordination of many factors, including a clean and safe environment, a well-prepared and consistent staff, and a stimulating assortment of learning activities. When viewed from the children's perspective, however, the single most meaningful characteristic is probably the relationship that children have with their teachers.

Positive relationships between children and teachers make meaningful contributions to children's immediate and future learning (Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog 1997; Pianta 1999; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns 2001). The quality of these relationships develops from daily interactions, teacher sensitivity to children's developmental needs and individual personalities, and teacher ability to incorporate knowledge of children into planning early learning experiences.

Getting to know children requires keen observation of their likes, dislikes, feelings, family experiences, and peer relations. The structure and flow of early care and education programs offer many opportunities for teachers to gather helpful information. During a typical day, teachers guide children through transitions, arrange and supervise unstructured play, serve meals and snacks, lead group activities, and manage children's interactions.

Establishing supportive relationships with children combines knowledge of the multifaceted teacher role (Howes & Hamilton 1992), children's developmental and individual needs, and developmentally appropriate practices. Teacher ability to effectively weave together these elements of quality early care and education allows teachers and children to have fulfilling relationships.

This article focuses on how early childhood teachers establish and maintain supportive relationships with children. The topic is addressed within the different contexts for interaction during a typical program day because each interactive setting yields unique information about children. Teacher-child relationships are dynamic phenomena; getting to know children involves, at the very least, observation, assessment, information sharing with parents, and ongoing reflection. A teacher's ability to continuously gather information about children and to transfer these insights to routine interactions and weekly planning is critical to healthy relationships.

From a child's perspective, a positive relationship with a teacher makes a world of difference in the quality of early learning. When children experience the security of supportive teacher-child relationships, they know that their basic needs will be met; are confident about expressing their thoughts, feelings, and ideas; and have a foundation from which to explore and develop their own relationships with other children. Together, these experiences provide children with a source of confidence that allows them to engage in the important job of being a child.

A teacher's ability to continuously gather information about children and to transfer these insights to routine interactions and weekly planning is critical to healthy relationships.

Transitions

For children, parents, and teachers, each day in an early childhood program begins with a transition that is followed by many more. How teachers handle parent-child separations and reunions and transitions throughout the day has important implications for families.
and for teacher-child-parent relationships. Well-executed transitions incorporate teacher knowledge of individual and group needs and help young children develop self-control (Taylor 1999).

Routine transitions present a great opportunity to learn about children's stable personality characteristics and how these traits appear during times of change. For example, some children have a difficult time shifting gears and need a transition warning earlier than other children. On the flip side, some children are eager to move along and try a different activity. Teachers can ask these children to serve as transition leaders.

When teachers use their knowledge of young children to plan and manage transitions, teacher-child relationships remain intact and can better weather unpredictable stressors. Although these skills are second nature to some teachers, less apparent are the underlying confidence and security that teachers reveal for children when effectively moving the group through the day.

Parent-child separations and reunions present teachers with the chance to gather much-needed information about children (Jervis & Berlfein 1984). A child's day is greatly improved when parents share child-relevant information such as the previous evening's events, a child's sleep experiences, or a special accomplishment. Teachers who value relationships recognize the importance of keeping drop-off and pickup predictable for children and families and often establish information-sharing rituals with parents and children (for example, conversation, written summaries, checklists) to create a seamless experience for children moving from one setting to the next.

Children also benefit from thoughtful teachers who interpret child behavior for parents and provide teasers of information for family conversation on the ride home.

Children benefit from thoughtful teachers who interpret child behavior for parents and provide teasers of information for family conversation on the ride home.

Playtimes

"Play is the work of children." The child expert who said this had it right! Teacher-child relationships are greatly strengthened by teacher understanding of the excitement of early childhood and children's learning styles and preferences. During unstructured play teachers can assess children's skills in different developmental areas, observe interests for future planning, and collect anecdotal records of accomplishments for future planning and later sharing with parents (Cohen, Stern, & Balaban 1997). Teachers can convey their investment in children by commenting, questioning, and otherwise acknowledging children's activities (for instance, "You built that tower as tall as your nose!" or "I see you typing the letters in your name—let's try to find the letters in your last name" or "Tell me how you figured out that puzzle"). When children experience this type of teacher involvement, they feel safe within the context of teacher-child relationships.

The ongoing exchange between families and teachers of child-relevant information creates a strong foundation for maintaining positive teacher-child relationships.

Children also benefit from thoughtful teachers who interpret child behavior for parents (for example, "Samantha has been working so hard on her block building, I think she needs a minute or two to finish it before she puts on her coat to go home") and provide teasers of information for family conversation on the ride home ("Gabriel, remember to tell your dad about what you did today at recess that you've never done before"). The ongoing exchange between families and teachers of child-relevant information creates a strong foundation for maintaining positive teacher-child relationships.
their knowledge of children's current life experiences to arrange special pretend-play settings. When teachers attend to children’s pretend play, children feel valued, an important indicator of supportive relationships.

**Mealtimes**

The classroom mealtime environment is an important context for socializing young children's attitudes toward nutrition (American Dietetic Association 1999; Satter 2000; Gable & Lutz 2001) and allows teachers to learn about children's food likes and dislikes and to encourage children to talk about their lives. Teacher responsibility to children's early nutrition begins with providing a variety of nutritious foods to select from. Young children have the ability to decide what and how much to eat (Birch & Fisher 1995) and through exposure to nutritious food choices they begin to prefer healthy foods (Berman & Fromer 1997).

Honoring children's ability to determine what and how much to eat coincides with children's understanding of their bodies and reflects teacher investment in maintaining positive relationships. Teachers can also keep parents apprised of children's eating and mealtime habits to promote healthy eating at home. When teachers sensitively attend to young children's mealtime and nutrition needs, children feel confident that their basic needs will be met.

**Small- and large-group activities**

Convening children in small and large groups creates unique opportunities for teaching important concepts and facts, such as structure and function of calendars, the beat of music, and letter/sound combinations (Bredekamp & Copple 1997). During these activities, teachers can observe and assess children's unique learning styles to better plan and execute group experiences. While large-group activities require teachers to meet the varied learning styles of children, small-group activities give teachers more freedom to be creative. By reflecting on child-relevant information, teachers can exercise more choice in creating small groups and can vary their presentation and the persistence with which they encourage learning without increasing children's frustration. Teachers who value supportive relationships and understand developmentally appropriate practices are careful to limit the time spent on direct instruction.

Large- and small-group activities help foster children's love of talking, listening, reading, and writing—all foundations of early literacy (for activity ideas, see Gable 1999; National Research Council 1999; Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp 2000). Early childhood teachers must be especially mindful of variations in children's literacy knowledge and ways of learning. Communicating with parents about family literacy habits is crucial to understanding the skills and experiences that children bring to the classroom. Some children enter early childhood programs with a history of varied and rich literacy experiences (for example, regular trips to the library, family reading time, daily newspapers and monthly magazines, numerous books, posted lists), and others arrive with a limited history. Such information is crucial in creating and implementing activities that promote a wide range of children's early literacy needs.

Within the context of teacher-child relationships, teachers convey their commitment to literacy by modeling literate behavior and demonstrating the thrill of playing with letters, words, and sounds as if they were objects. Literacy-oriented teachers write notes, use mailboxes, wear nametags, keep calendars, make lists of supply needs and children's responsibilities, and share useful information with parents (such as program policies and weekly activity plans). They also honor the practice of choosing their words carefully when talking with children. Attention to the process of...
communication shows children that teachers value their relationships and respect the power of words.

Peer relations

The comfort of positive teacher-child relationships gives children the security of knowing that someone is there to help them navigate the social world (Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson 1994). Peer culture is critical for children’s healthy growth and development (Howes 1988); children need to interact with peers so they can learn how to join groups of children, form and maintain friendships, and share personal information with others.

To act as facilitative social coaches, teachers must observe and assess children’s social skills and playmate choices. For instance, when a child has a difficult time interacting with peers, teachers can coach her to join groups and invite other children to play. For children who act in ways that bother other children, skilled teachers help them adopt new behaviors (such as sharing, assisting, smiling, cooperating) to replace the bothersome ones (like grabbing, pushing, bossing).

When conflicts occur, sensitive teachers understand the importance of quickly assessing the situation before intervening; reacting too soon may interfere with children’s learning about conflict management. In other situations, teachers may need to get involved immediately to protect children physically and emotionally. This knowledge of individual children may prompt one-on-one interactions to help children learn strategies for self-protection or assertiveness.

When responding to children’s conflicts, teachers can work with children to achieve reconciliation through simple problem-solving and goal-setting exercises. Over time, children will appreciate the comfort of supportive teacher-child relationships for their positive self-esteem within the peer group.

By establishing and maintaining a sense of classroom community, teachers implicitly convey to children that they value relationships and healthy interdependency. Ultimately, teachers want to convey that everyone plays an important role in the day-to-day functioning of an early care and education program (Bredekamp & Copple 1997). To create this sense of community, teachers can seek children’s input into classroom plans (for example, “The class agrees to plan an afternoon sledding party for next month”) and rules for conduct (for instance, “Everyone needs to store their own belongings safely in their cubbies so that nothing gets lost”), and regularly rotate classroom responsibilities (such as watering plants, dusting toy shelves, and sweeping the entryway).

Additionally, teachers can recognize children’s unique strengths and, with parent permission, encourage them to share their talents (for example, a bilingual child can help the teachers and children learn to count from 1 to 10 or a child with a pet at home can help classmates learn about daily pet care). This is a wonderful strategy for nurturing good relationships with families. By fostering a caring community, teachers model the importance of acknowledging everyone’s contribution to a smooth-running classroom and provide individual children with the opportunity to experience the positive feelings that typically accompany helpful and cooperative behaviors. Moreover, teachers maintain secure relationships with young children by attending to their developmental and individual needs.

Teachers convey their commitment to literacy by modeling literate behavior and demonstrating the thrill of playing with letters, words, and sounds.

By fostering a caring community, teachers model the importance of acknowledging everyone’s contribution to a smooth-running classroom.

Conclusion

Plenty of research underscores the significance of supportive teacher-child relationships for young children’s learning and well-being (Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog 1997; Pianta 1999; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns 2001). Knowing how to establish and maintain caring, supportive relationships with children is a critical skill for early care and education teachers. Children need to experience teacher investment in the teacher-child relationship; a teacher who understands children’s needs, offers stimulating learning experiences, and encourages positive development creates high-quality early care and education.


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The walls in my classroom are resplendent with children's artwork—colorful murals based on favorite stories and unique paintings that only a four-year-old could create. Even the windows bear the bright colors of the children's painting. Photographs of the children and their families are on display. The photos serve as a visual record of events that occur throughout the school year.

Books adorn some of the shelves, while nursery rhymes and fingerplays are posted at a child's height for inspecting and reading. A ready supply of paper, markers, and crayons is available so the children can "write" their own stories or dictate a story to an adult.

The room is divided into learning centers, including blocks, art, math, science, reading, dramatic play, puzzles, and listening areas. Low shelves hold a variety of toys appropriate for learning, discovery, and fun. Everything is arranged so the children can help themselves and play and explore in the area they choose. An observer can easily see that the room is child centered.

The room feels warm and inviting. The children are friendly and curious about visitors to our room, usually assuming that a visitor must be someone's mom or dad. The energy from the children can almost be felt as they play happily and often noisily with each other. Adults acting as facilitators assist the children with new or unfamiliar activities one-on-one and in small groups.

Circle time activities at the beginning and end of the day include singing, stories, and dancing. Song charts with the words to favorite songs are available so the children see more examples of how print is used.

Observers may note the emphasis on early literacy. Children engage in much conversation (with adults and other children), they hear a number of stories, and they sing many songs. We try to build a solid foundation in early literacy to encourage competent and eager readers for the future. We also emphasize self-awareness and self-esteem. Adults treat the children with respect and kindness, and the children follow their example.

Although our classroom culture reflects the makeup of our rural county, which is 96% Caucasian, we take advantage of every opportunity to expand the children's knowledge of other cultures and ethnicities, as well as their own.

Our classroom is an enjoyable place to be. The children assume that I live there. It makes me smile when they sometimes ask me, "Teacher, where is your bed?" I am glad they feel so comfortable in our room, because I work hard to make it a safe, secure place for children to learn and grow.
What Do We Know About Learners and Learning? 
The Learner-Centered Framework: Bringing the Educational System into Balance

by Barbara L. McCombs

Abstract
This paper introduces "learner-centered" education from a research and theory base that integrates what we know about learners and learning both inside and outside formal school settings and describes the work of the author and colleagues in developing self-assessment and reflection tools for K-20 teachers and their students. Building on the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles (APA, 1993, 1997), data on more than 20,000 students and their teachers in kindergarten through graduate school were collected with the Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices (ALCP) surveys (McCombs, 1997, 1999; McCombs and Lauer, 1997; McCombs and Pierce, 1999; McCombs and Quiat, 1999). The surveys identify teacher beliefs and discrepancies between teacher and student perspectives on practices, and help teachers to reflect on and change practices as well as to identify personalized staff development needs. Data indicated that the best predictor of student motivation and achievement, at all age levels, was a common domain of practice that creates positive relationships between students and teachers and a positive climate for learning. Implications for moving from personal to systems change based on student perspectives will briefly be presented.

Introduction
Our educational system is out of balance. Current reform efforts are focusing primarily on technical issues (e.g., high academic standards, increased student achievement, alignment of curricula and assessment) that emphasize accountability (e.g., "high stakes" testing, teacher responsibility for student achievement) and punitive consequences for teachers, students, and administrators when student achievement standards are not met (e.g., replacing school staff, retaining students in grade). To bring the system into balance and bring some of the joy of learning back into the educational process, the focus must also be on personal issues and the needs of all people in the system, including students and the adults who serve them in the teaching and learning process. First, however, it is important to clarify why this balance is particularly vital at this time.

Imbalance in the Current System
Although focusing school reform efforts on high academic standards does have its merits, this approach puts content, curriculum, and assessment, not students, at the center, contributing to students' feelings of alienation. Even with clearer standards for what learners should know and be able to do, and the shift from what to teach to a focus on what content and skills must be learned by all learners, the needs of individual learners are often downplayed in the implementation of standards-based programs. Further, with the emphasis on knowledge and skill standards, our current educational paradigm defines the goal of learning as knowledge conservation rather than knowledge production (Carroll, 2000). This contributes to student complaints that school is boring and irrelevant.

From a learner-centered view based on research-validated principles of learning and change in complex human living systems, this focus must be transformed. Why? Because without a corresponding focus on individual learners and their learning needs, we are in danger of continuing to ignore students' and teachers' calls for
A Place Like This

After twelve years
I'm bored
I'm tired
The routine is getting old
It's child labor, without a doubt
Using us to make a living
That's a poor excuse
We could teach ourselves
A million times better
We'd even have an answer to:
"When will we need this in life?"
Or maybe . . .
We wouldn't even have to ask
After a while the
Filth builds
The anger mounts
And smiles fade
How could you teach
In a place like this?
Much less learn
In a place like this?
The walls close in
I begin to hate it here
I just want to get out
But where is there to go?
There is no way out
There is nowhere to go
There is nothing to be without this
The anger subsides
Hopelessness forms
And I just go to sleep.

—Jenna Holland
Grade 10
New Jersey

But is this focus the best? It may not be—particularly in light of new crises that have surfaced in our nation's schools. These crises are outside the academic standards, achievement, and accountability area, but they are clearly being magnified as a result of the focus on this area. They include not only rising youth alienation from learning and associated non-academic issues, but also the rising evidence

No One

Questioning What?
No one knows.
Anyone Care?
Someone's asking.
Asking ME?
Leave me alone!
I don't know!
I'M NO ONE.
No one's aware.
Why should they be?
Aware of anything,
That lurks inside of me.
I can't even understand.
What should I expect of you?
Comprehension is at hand.
Dissension right there too.
Blowing stale wind.
Choking out truth.
Hiding vision behind,
Society's curtain words.
Intended by the few
To misdirect the many
I need a LIGHT injection.
My soul is growing dark.
Show you know remorse.
You make it seem so hard,
It's all I know. Is it enough?
Can I use it for protection?
Will it even help?
Does anybody care?

—Justin J.
Grade 12
Mississippi

help when they report that they feel disconnected from each other, think school is irrelevant, or drop out mentally or physically from a punitive and coercive learning environment.

In spite of these negative consequences for students and teachers, current state and federal approaches to increasing student achievement and teacher quality continue to emphasize content knowledge, standards, assessment, and accountabil-
of teacher stress, feelings of being overwhelmed, despair, and departure from the profession.

The Need for Person-Centered Approaches

Schools no longer have the luxury of ignoring the personal needs of students. The rising wave of youth violence, both in the community and in school settings, has generated increased attention to issues facing today's school-age children. Associated rises in youth suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, school disciplinary problems, school dropout rates, and delinquent behaviors are of additional concern. School system and community responses run the gamut from fear-based attempts to expel or suspend all students who even appear to be troublemakers to more positive approaches that build the strengths and assets of even the most troubled youth. At the core of these youth issues, however, many experts as well as the youth themselves say that youth feel alienated, disconnected, and in a spiritual crisis, questioning who they are, their purpose in life, and the meaning of life (Brendtro, 1999; Wheatley, 1999). What is needed are educational models that reconnect youth and adults, models that are person-centered while also providing challenging learning experiences that prepare children and youth to be knowledgeable producers, knowledge users, and socially responsible citizens. We need models with a balanced focus on learners and learning.

Restoring a Needed Balance

Attention to the knowledge base about learners and learning is essential in focusing on the personal domain of educational systems. This domain focuses on the human processes and on personal and interpersonal relationships, beliefs, and perceptions that are affected or supported by the educational system as a whole. The foundation of research-validated principles is essential to designing person- and learner-centered programs and practices that attend holistically and systemically to the needs of all learners.

Youth alienation, with its relationship to problems such as school dropouts and suicide, is an issue of much current concern. Ryan and Deci (2000) maintain that alienation in any age population is caused by a lack of supports for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Unfortunately, there are too many examples in the current educational reform agenda of coercive and punitive consequences for students, teachers, and administrators when students fail to achieve educational standards as assessed on state and national tests. Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 76) argue: “Excessive control, nonoptimal challenges, and lack of connectedness . . . disrupt the inherent actualizing and organizational tendencies endowed by nature, and thus such factors result not only in the lack of initiative and responsibility but also in distress and psychopathology.”

Open School Movement founder Herb Kohl has thirty-six years of experience as a teacher working in dysfunctional, poverty-ridden urban school districts. In a recent interview (Scherer, 1998), Kohl emphasizes the importance of teachers projecting hope to students—convincing them of their worth and ability to achieve in a difficult world. This means respecting students and honoring their perspectives. Kohl also maintains

What Makes Me Want to Learn?

Another important thing that makes me want to learn is that the material is interesting. Some things, like the Civil War, are just plain boring. Teachers, however, can do a lot to make things like the Civil War fun! For instance, instead of taking notes on the battle between the Monitor and the Merrimac, students can draw images of the battle and write small narratives about specific crew members. This offers the same amount of information as taking notes (maybe more), but it makes it more fun and interesting. Another instance is French. If we only eat and conjugated verbs in class it would get pretty boring pretty fast, but instead we can do oral exercises and watch movies, or discuss pictures. In essence the thing that makes me want to learn is having a good, interesting teacher who does engaging, educational things with educational material, and the constant reminder of what a good, high-quality education can do for my future.

—William S.
Grade 7
Kentucky
that quality learning is learning that engages students. He describes learning communities as those that are curious and encourage invention, creativity, and imagination. He believes that the curriculum needs to be shaped by what adults know and by student interests and learning preferences. The educational environment has to be changed and communities rebuilt with a focus on caring. Kohl advocates "personalized learning," based on personal relationships between students and teachers and respect for the unique way each student perceives the world and learns.

This article presents a research-validated definition of "learner-centered" that integrates what we know about learners and learning, inside and outside formal school settings. I will describe the work of my colleagues and me in developing self-assessment and reflection tools for K-20 teachers and their students, highlighting the role of student perspectives in defining classroom practices and contexts that best support both high academic achievement and high motivation for learning. I will also discuss how self-assessment results are used to promote teacher change and the implications of these results for moving from personal to systems change based on student perspectives. I will conclude with a summary of what must be done in practice to achieve a balanced focus on technical and personal educational issues.

**What Knowledge Base Is Needed to Achieve a Balance between Learners’ Learning and Motivational Needs?**

What is the foundational knowledge base needed to define the learning experiences and conditions that create quality learning and meet social, emotional, and cognitive learning needs? Research supports the contention that a focus on personal and motivational outcomes balanced with a focus on high achievement and challenging standards is vital in today's schools. There is growing recognition that schooling must prepare children to behave in moral and ethical ways. For example, many educators are calling for caring, democratic schooling and instructional methods that build on each student's background, experience of reality, and perspective (e.g., Bartolome, 1994; McWhorter et al., 1996; Noddings, 1995; Ruddick, Day, and Wallace, 1997). These models balance attention to the personal domain; the content-focused technical domain; and the organizational domain, which focuses on management structures and process.

For such learner- and person-centered practices to become realities, however, teachers need to become more aware of their relationship with students as knowledge generators and active participants in their own learning. When power is shared by students and teachers, teaching methods become a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. As Schaps and Lewis (1999) report in reflections on the "perils" of building school community, it is essential that schoolwide change have a dual emphasis on (a) a sense of community and academic learning and (b) student and teacher input in shaping classroom lessons and decisions. Research-validated principles are needed to guide the implementation of such practices. The knowledge base underlying the principles of learners and learning can be a research-validated foundation for comprehensive school reform that focuses on meeting cognitive, social, and emotional human needs and fostering positive teacher-student relationships. These principles lead to understanding students as knowledge generators, active participants in their own learning, and co-creators of learning experiences and curricula.

**The Learner-Centered Principles as a Foundational Framework**

Education is one of many complex living systems that function to support particular human needs (cf. Wheatley, 1999). Such systems, unpredictable by their nature, can be understood in terms of principles that define human needs, cognitive and motivational processes, development, and individual differences. The research-validated Learner-Centered Psychological Principles (APA, 1993, 1997) provide a knowledge base for understanding learning and motivation as natural processes that occur when the conditions and context of learning support individual learner needs, capacities, experiences, and interests. This foundation is essential to designing programs and practices that attend holistically and systematically to the needs of all learners—including students, teachers, administrators, families, and community members.

**The Learner-Centered Psychological Principles**

In 1990, the American Psychological Association (APA) appointed a special Task Force on Psychology in Education, one of whose purposes was to integrate research and theory from psychology and education in order to surface time-
tested general principles that can provide a framework for school redesign and reform. The resulting document originally specified twelve fundamental principles about learners and learning that, taken together, provide an integrated perspective on factors influencing learning for all learners (APA, 1993). This document, revised in 1997 (APA, 1997), now includes fourteen principles, with attention to diversity and standards. [Note to readers: Those interested in research support for the principles are referred to the research and theory reviewed in developing the principles, described in McCombs and Whisler (1997). Further research support is also provided in Alexander and Murphy (1998) and Lambert and McCombs (1998)).

The fourteen learner-centered principles are categorized into four research-validated domains important to learning, as shown in Table 1: metacognitive and cognitive factors; affective and motivational factors; developmental and social factors; and individual difference factors. An understanding of these domains and the principles within them establishes a framework for designing learner-centered practices at all levels of schooling. It also defines what “learner-centered” means from a research-validated perspective.

**Defining “Learner-Centered”**

From an integrated look at the principles, the following definition emerges:

“Learner-centered” is the perspective that couples a focus on individual learners—their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs—with a focus on learning—the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners. This dual focus then informs and drives educational decision making. Learner-centered education is a reflection in practice of the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles—the programs, practices, policies, and people that support learning for all. [Summarized from the APA Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs (1997, November). Learner-centered psychological principles: Guidelines for school reform and redesign. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.]

This definition of “learner-centered” is based on an understanding of the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles as a representation of current knowledge on learners and learning. The principles apply to all learners, in and outside school, young and old. Learner-centered is also related to the beliefs, characteristics, dispositions, and practices of teachers—practices primarily created by the teacher. When teachers derive their practices from an understanding of the principles, they (a) include learners in decisions about how and what they learn and how that learning is assessed; (b) value each learner’s unique perspectives; (c) respect and accommodate individual differences in learners’ backgrounds, interests, abilities, and experiences; and (d) treat learners as co-creators and partners in the teaching and learning process.

Others who have used the term “learner-centered” (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1996; Sparks and Hirsh, 1997) refer to learning new beliefs and visions of practice that are responsive to and respectful of the diverse needs of students and teachers as learners. All learning, for students and teachers, must support diverse learners, provide time for reflection, and offer opportunities for teachers and students to co-create practices that enhance learning, motivation, and achievement. This view of “learner-centered” is a research-validated paradigm shift that transforms education—including how best to design programs to support the new vision (cf. Sparks and Hirsh, 1997).

“Learner-centeredness” is not solely a function of particular instructional practices or programs (McCombs, 2000; McCombs and Lauer, 1997; McCombs and Whisler, 1997). Rather, it is a complex interaction of qualities of the teacher in combination with characteristics of instructional practices, as perceived by individual learners. That is, “learner-centeredness” is in “the eye of the beholder”: it varies as a function of learner perceptions, which in turn are the result of learners’ prior experiences, self-beliefs, and attitudes about schools and learning as well as their current interests, values, and goals. The quality of “learner-centeredness” does not reside in programs or practices by themselves, no matter how well-designed the program may be.

When learner-centered is defined from a research perspective that includes the knowledge base on both learning and learners, it also clarifies what is needed to create positive learning contexts and communities. When this approach
The Learner-Centered Psychological Principles

COGNITIVE AND METACOGNITIVE FACTORS

Principle 1: Nature of the learning process
The learning of complex subject matter is most effective when it is an intentional process of constructing meaning from information and experience.

Principle 2: Goals of the learning process
The successful learner, over time and with support and instructional guidance, can create meaningful, coherent representations of knowledge.

Principle 3: Construction of knowledge
The successful learner can link new information with existing knowledge in meaningful ways.

Principle 4: Strategic thinking
The successful learner can create and use a repertoire of thinking and reasoning strategies to achieve complex learning goals.

Principle 5: Thinking about thinking
Higher-order strategies for selecting and monitoring mental operations facilitate creative and critical thinking.

Principle 6: Context of learning
Learning is influenced by environmental factors, including culture, technology, and instructional practices.

MOTIVATIONAL AND AFFECTIVE FACTORS

Principle 7: Motivational and emotional influences on learning
What and how much is learned is influenced by the learner's motivation. Motivation to learn, in turn, is influenced by the individual's emotional states, beliefs, interests and goals, and habits of thinking.

Principle 8: Intrinsic motivation to learn
The learner's creativity, higher-order thinking, and natural curiosity all contribute to motivation to learn.

Intrinsic motivation is stimulated by tasks of optimal novelty and difficulty, relevant to personal interests, and providing for personal choice and control.

Principle 9: Effects of motivation on effort
Acquisition of complex knowledge and skills requires extended learner effort and guided practice. Without learners' motivation to learn, the willingness to exert this effort is unlikely without coercion.

DEVELOPMENTAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

Principle 10: Developmental influence on learning
As individuals develop, they encounter different opportunities and experience different constraints for learning. Learning is most effective when differential development within and across physical, intellectual, emotional, and social domains is taken into account.

Principle 11: Social influences on learning
Learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES FACTORS

Principle 12: Individual differences in learning
Learners' different strategies, approaches, and capabilities for learning are a function of prior experience and heredity.

Principle 13: Learning and diversity
Learning is most effective when differences in learners' linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds are taken into account.

Principle 14: Standards and assessment
Setting appropriately high and challenging standards and assessing the learner and learning progress—including diagnostic, process, and outcome assessment—are integral parts of the learning process.

Table 1
Untitled
Imagine this, you are a student in high school. Your day is okay until you get to those teachers you are dried out and just like to lecture. You slouch in your seat and the next thing you know, you are being yelled at to wake up or take your head off the desk. This is the everyday story of most students around the United States. Most of the blame for students being bored or falling asleep in class could be placed on the student, but some of this blame could be shifted to the teachers. No student in the United States wants to go to the same dried out teacher, who sits and lectures to him or her all day long, or will teach and test without making school fun. All teachers prepare their students for college, but school should be fun and interesting everyday. A student should want to not only go to class to learn, but go because they like the teacher. No matter what the age of the teacher, they should be energetic and exciting to where the student wants to go to class. So any teacher can do some quick and easy steps that can help make their class interesting. First, a teacher can stop lecturing and testing everyday. Second, the teacher can add fun activities at least once a week to spruce up their class. Third, the teacher can get the students involved in some type of teaching and learning that the student will like. With these steps, any teacher can create an environment that a student will love to work in and learn in everyday.

—Bryan G.
Grade 11
Illinois

occurs at the classroom and school levels, it increases the likelihood of success for more students and their teachers. It can also increase clarity about the requisite dispositions and characteristics of those in service to learners and learning—particularly teachers. From this perspective, the learner-centered principles can become a foundational framework for determining how to assess the efficacy of existing programs and practices in enhancing the teaching and learning process. Learner perceptions of how well programs and practices meet individual cognitive, social, and emotional needs are part of the assessment of ongoing learning, change, and improvement.

The Role of Self-Assessment for Learning and Change
Throughout history, all major changes or paradigm shifts have required a transformation in thinking, seeing, or interpreting reality. In this current era of educational reform, many shifts in thinking are being proposed. We are asked to believe that "all students can learn" and to see education as a "shared responsibility" among all constituencies—students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. We are also asked to confront old models and beliefs about how we learn and how best to promote the learning process. In any time of significant change, people are forced to confront and revise old assumptions. For this process to be successful, however, people need to know why change is necessary, what it entails, and how to make the shift. This certainly is the case when educators are asked to consider a learner-centered perspective, to adopt a learner-centered approach.

Even those educators who are open to change may be uncertain what kind of changes will be most effective and how best to go about making the changes. It may seem unlikely that any change can be successful, given the complex and overwhelming set of problems and issues facing educational systems. Feelings of fear, frustration, hopelessness, and despair abound, as well as a sense that "we're already doing so much—how can we possibly do more?" In such an atmosphere, it is easy to hold on to old beliefs and assumptions, to stay within the comfort zone of old ways of thinking about and doing education, and to avoid the issue for as long as possible. Is there a way to break through this resignation and inertia? What might increase willingness to change and hopefulness about the possibilities?
We have taken these questions seriously in our work. We examined our own beliefs and thinking about learning, learners, and teaching, looked to the research literature to learn what needs to change and why; and challenged ourselves to discover a sound foundation of research-based principles that can guide the change process. In our efforts, we have learned to question even the most pervasive assumptions and ideas being proposed. For example, we have learned from research on learning that not only can all students learn, but all students do learn. Research from cognitive and developmental psychology clearly supports the view that learning is a natural and ongoing process, and that it occurs continuously for all learners, cradle to grave (Alexander and Murphy, 1998; McCombs, 1998). After examining the differences in educational systems based on the “can learn,” versus the “do learn,” philosophy, we have seen clear evidence of the superiority of those systems that assume all students do learn (McCombs and Whisler, 1997). The “do learn” environments respect and accommodate student diversity by assuming that learning and motivation will be natural and that students can be trusted to guide their own learning process—not selected and sorted into presumed categories of ability. Variable learning methods, content, and performance demonstrations are determined with student input, not selected for students in ways that may limit their potential.

To address motivation, learning, and achievement, as well as variables dealing with health and positive functioning, in addition to focusing on learning, our work with the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles has focused on providing tools for addressing the personal domain of educational systems. These tools were developed to foster a process of personal learning and change for teachers.

The Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices (ALCP)

The ALCP contains a set of short teacher and student self-assessment surveys for teachers and students in grades K-20 (McCombs, 1999). The Teacher (or Instructor) Survey measures two primary variables: “Teacher Beliefs” and “Assumptions and Teacher Perceptions of Classroom Practices.” Three factors that relate to learner-centered, versus nonlearner-centered, beliefs about learners, learning, and teaching are measured in the Teacher Beliefs section of the survey. Depending on the level of schooling, four to five factors that define domains of learner-centered classroom practice are measured in the “Teacher Practices” section of the survey. These domains are based on the principles and cover practices associated with metacognitive-cognitive, affective-motivational, developmental, personal-social, and other individual needs of learners (McCombs, 1997; McCombs and Whisler, 1997).

The student survey measures students’ perceptions of their teachers’ practices, assessing the same four or five domains of practice from the students’ perspective (McCombs, Lauer, and Pierce, 1998; McCombs, 1997; McCombs and Lauer, 1997). This survey provides teachers with feedback about how each of their students experiences classroom practices. (Note: There are other measures in the ALCP for administrators, mentor teachers, and parents, cf. McCombs and Whisler, 1997).

What do my teachers do that helps me to learn?

Every teacher here at my school motivates students to do their best by making class fun and interesting. Using a variety of teaching techniques, teachers here intrigue students to learn. Because each student learns differently, teachers use different methods to help us understand what is being covered in class.

Some students understand things by visualizing while others learn best by lectures. In history class, for instance, my teacher uses PowerPoint presentations, lectures, videos and various activities to help us understand.

My teachers are also always available when students need extra help.

—Stephanie Z
Grade 9
Hawaii
Results of Self-Assessing Personal Beliefs and Perceptions of Practice

Our research (McCombs, 1998; McCombs and Lauer, 1997; McCombs and Quiat, 1999; McCombs and Whisler, 1997) looked at the impact of teachers' beliefs on their perceptions of their classroom practices, as well as how teacher perceptions differ from student perceptions of these practices. In a large-scale study of teachers and students, we confirmed our hypothesis about the importance—for student motivation, learning, and achievement—of those beliefs and practices that are consistent with the research on learners and learning. We also found that teachers who are more learner-centered are more successful in engaging all students in an effective learning process and are themselves more effective learners and happier with their jobs. Furthermore, teachers report that the process of self-assessment and reflection—particularly about discrepancies between their own and their individual students' experiences of classroom practices—helps them identify areas in which they might change their practices to reach more students effectively. This is an important finding that relates to the "how" of transformation. Helping teachers and others engage in a process of self-assessment and reflection—particularly about the impact of their beliefs and practices on individual students and their learning and motivation—creates a respectful and non-judgmental impetus to change. The transformation is completed when this opportunity for self-assessment and reflection is combined with skill training in and dialogue about how to create learner-centered K-20 schools and classrooms.

We found in our research that teachers were not absolutely learner-centered or completely non-learner-centered. At the same time, however, specific beliefs or teaching practices could be classified as learner-centered (likely to enhance motivation, learning, and success) or non-learner-centered (likely to hinder motivation, learning, and success). Learner-centered teachers are defined as those with more beliefs and practices classified as learner-centered than as non-learner-centered. For example, believing that all students learn is quite different from believing that some students cannot learn; the former being learner-centered and the latter being non-learner-centered. Learner-centered teachers see each student as unique and capable of learning, have a perspective that focuses on the learner, understand basic principles defining learners and learning, and honor and accept the student's point of view (McCombs and Lauer, 1997; McCombs and Quiat, 1999). As a result, the student's natural inclinations to learn, master the environment, and grow in positive ways are enhanced.

The results of our research with the ALCP teacher and student surveys at both the secondary and postsecondary levels have confirmed that (a) student perceptions of their teachers' instructional practices are significantly related to their motivation, learning, and achievement; (b) teacher perceptions of instructional practices are not significantly related to student motivation and achievement; and (c) student perceptions of a positive learning environment and interpersonal relationship with the teacher are the most important factors in enhancing student motivation and achievement.

For K-3 students, three domains of classroom practice are best at predicting motivation and achievement: (1) establishing positive relationships and classroom climate; (2) adapting to individual differences; and (3) facilitating students' learning and thinking skills. For middle and high school students, there were four domains that included the three for K-3 students, but with the addition of (4) honoring student voice and providing individual choice and challenge. Results with undergraduate and graduate students and their instructors revealed five domains of practice important to motivation and achievement: (1) establishing positive interpersonal relationships; (2) facilitating the learning process; (3) adapting to student learning needs; (4) encouraging personal challenge and responsibility for learning; and (5) providing for social learning needs. Thus, at all levels of our educational system, teachers and instructors can improve instructional practices and move toward more learner-centered practices by attending to what students perceive and by creating positive climates and relationships—those critical connections so important to personal and system learning and change.

Moving from Personal Change to System Change

A focus on the learner has also emerged from those who see schools as "living systems"—systems that are in service to learners and serve the basic function of learning for the primary recipient (the learner) as well as for the other humans who support learning (teachers, administrators,
Fifth Grade at My School

Being in the fifth grade at the Horace Mann School gives me a good opportunity to learn. My teachers make it fun for us to learn. For example, my teachers put on a little skit to start off our unit on the American Revolution. Also, we play math games and those amuse all of the fifth graders a lot.

In my fifth grade, there is something called Enrichment. In January, my teachers picked about eight children from each class who they thought were gifted and talented and I was one of them. Then, twice a week, these children work in three different groups on a project. This year, we are making bridges out of toothpicks, and then we are going to see how much mass they can hold. In each group there is an architect, a transportation chief, a project director, a builder, and an accountant. I am the architect of my group.

There are some ups and downs regarding fifth grade. The ups are that we get to go on a lot of field trips. We are about to go to Environmental Camp. Also, we learn in fun ways. We do a lot of science experiments. We have a volunteer science teacher who teaches us a lot about science. For our last experiment we made parachutes out of plastic bags. We took these to the top of the fire escape and let them go. One bad thing about fifth grade is that we work side by side at our tables doing work sheets. Often, everybody talks and I can't concentrate on my work. Also, some of the work I do is busy work and is really boring. But I really do like fifth grade.

I took the MCAS test last year and did extremely well. Some fourth and fifth graders are worried about the MCAS, but I'm not, since I took it and did well on it last year. The thing I don't like about the MCAS is that I feel like I am wasting several days of the week taking an easy test.

I enjoy being in the fifth grade at my school. I like hanging out with my friends and being there for them when they need me. I like to learn and to figure out new things each day. I especially like to read and write. This is my last year at this school so I should make the best of it. I am going to miss this school, but I am looking forward to learning new and interesting things at the middle school.

-Katrina Faulstich
Grade 5
Massachusetts

Building on the living-systems concept, proponents of this “learner-centered” perspective contend that education must concern itself with how to provide the most supportive learning context for diverse students—a context created primarily when teachers value and understand individual student needs (e.g., Marshall, 1998; Sarason, 1995). From this perspective, curriculum and content are the important but not deciding factors in achieving desired motivation, learning, and achievement. Attention to individual learner needs and assessment of how well these needs are being met are as important and fundamental to learning.

Those working within a living systems framework also contend that systems change is the result of personal change and of critical connections (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers, 1998). That is, personal change in one’s perceptions, values, attitudes, and beliefs results from transformations...
In thinking. These transformations in thinking most often result from critical connections made in one's own understanding, knowledge, and ways of thinking, as well as from critical connections—personal relationships—with others of significance in the learning environment. For example, a teacher confronted with the awareness that prior instructional practices aren't working with a new group of students is most likely to change those practices to more learner-centered approaches if (a) he or she learns that this group of students has a higher level of prior knowledge about the topic being covered than prior groups of students (new information component) and (b) a valued colleague has worked with similar students successfully using new instructional practices that give the students more choice and control over the instructional process (personal relationship component).

As people in living systems such as education are given more opportunities to be creatively involved in how their work gets done, Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1998) contend that not only will they create conditions that facilitate rapid change (new relationships, new insights, greater levels of commitment), but they will also increase their capacity for learning and growth. When individuals are engaged in designing change, they create more and better connections and relationships that can help the system change from within. Although the availability of new and richer information helps people change personal constructions of meaning and understanding, increasing the number, variety, and strengths of interpersonal connections and relationships is what moves the system toward better functioning and health. Standards of functioning and plans for change should not be imposed or mandated from outside, but need to come from within—through ongoing dialogue and conversations in which people share perceptions, seek out a diversity of interpretations, and agree on what needs to be done. In this process of learning and change, research-validated principles can be guides to what will work well in the current situation or context, helping to create a system designed to take care of self, others, and the place (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers, 1998).

In most educational institutions and progressively within the K-12 system, teachers and disciplines are isolated from one another. It is difficult to find examples of cross-department collaborations in course design, multi-disciplinary learning opportunities, or organizational structures and physical facilities that allow interactions and dialogue among teachers or instructors. Content and people are isolated and fragmented. Change is often mandated from above or outside the system. Since critical connections are not being made, it is not surprising that change often meets resistance. The fears and insecurities that create resistance disappear when people participate in creating the system through which their work gets done.

In conclusion, by using research that integrates what we know about learners and learning as a framework and foundation for transformed practice at K-20 levels of our educational system, we can achieve a needed balance between meeting personal needs of learners and technical demands for high standards and accountability. Our research shows that learner- or person-centered systems can improve learning and motivation by meeting students' needs for belonging, control, and competence. Transforming our K-20 educational system with a consideration of the needs and perspectives of the people in the system is one of the most powerful ways to enhance learning, motivation, and achievement. Continuing to mandate and coerce higher achievement can at best produce only compliance among those too fearful, disheartened, or tired to contest these practices. We can do better than that, and we have research evidence and research-validated principles to point the way.

References
Predictors of Quality and Commitment in Family Child Care:
Provider Education, Personal Resources, and Support

Ruth Harding Weaver
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Human Development and Family Studies

This study examined the personal characteristics and resources in 65 licensed family child care providers' lives that influence developmentally enhancing caregiving and professional commitment to child care. Several self-report instruments were utilized to assess providers' personal characteristics and resources. The Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS: Harms & Clifford, 1989) was used to assess quality of care during morning observations at providers' homes, while the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ: Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979) was adapted to assess professional commitment to family child care. Factors in providers' lives that uniquely contributed to higher levels of quality care were higher levels of formal education and training, college coursework in ECE, higher levels of psychological well-being, and higher family incomes. Common factors in providers' lives that predicted higher levels of professional commitment to child care were helpful and supportive resources for child care and higher levels of psychological well-being.

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Predictors of Quality and Commitment in Family Child Care: Provider Education, Personal Resources, and Support

Across diverse settings of early care and education, positive developmental outcomes for children are associated with better quality of care. Current research demonstrates that good child care is linked with qualified providers working in planned environments that support children's health and safety while providing child-centered experiences that lead to learning through play (Burchinal, 1999; Cryer, 1999; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000; NICHD, 1998; Phillips & Howe, 1987; Whitebook, Howe, & Phillips, 1990). Family child care studies suggest that well-qualified providers, or nonparental caregivers who offer developmentally enhancing care, are more likely to be regulated and committed to child care as a profession (Kontos, Howes, Shinn & Galinsky, 1995; Pence & Goelman, 1987). In particular, the provider's professional commitment has been shown to promote stability in family child care programming and to foster consistent and personal relationships between children and providers (Bollin, 1993; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000). However, parents, practitioners and policymakers may be unaware of the key characteristics and resources that providers share in common that lay the foundation for quality caregiving and professional commitment to child care.

Although family child care studies have shed considerable light on the importance of education, wage, and structural components as factors that influence quality of care in these settings (Fischer & Eheart, 1991; Kontos et al., 1995; Kontos & Reissens, 1993), it is important to continue our review and exploration of the shared factors in family child care providers' lives that distinguish the best qualified and committed providers. Many parents choose family child care arrangements for their young children because they prefer smaller groups, a personal relationship with a consistent caregiver, and warm, individualized care in a home setting (Kontos et al., 1995; Adams, 1996). Research has shown that high quality care is more likely to be provided by providers who have an educational or professional background in early childhood education. Positive developmental outcomes are associated with higher quality of care environments (Fischer & Eheart, 1991; Galinsky et al., 1995). In response to these findings, licensed providers attend continuing education training, workshops, and conferences. However, little is known about the predictive impact of accumulating certain experiences versus early childhood education (ECE) coursework or more advanced training such as the CDA or program accreditation on quality of care in family child care.

Little is known about the influence of two personal provider resources on quality of care. Although studies have focused on the importance of compensation for family child care with less turnover and better retention (Kontos et al., 1995; Center for the Child Care Workforce, 1998) and lower turnover in family child care, studies have explored the predictive impact of accumulated experience on quality of care in family child care. One might anticipate that income and a solid financial foundation would influence quality of care and the provider's ability to offer good quality care. Similarly, it is possible that providers have about themselves as adults and families that influence the quality of their caregiving. In this study, I examine the relationship between provider's personal resources and quality of care by defining psychosocial characteristics of caregivers, but by the context in which quality of care is provided.

In their efforts to better understand factors that predict turnover in family child care, researchers have found mixed results. Although research on job commitment is associated with providers who consciously consider the provider's role as a family child care professional, they have found mixed results. Some studies have shown that providers perceive themselves as permanently committed to child care professionals, while others have found that providers view their work as temporary employment while they are in training (Eheart & Leavitt, 1986; Nelson, 1991). Investigators have noted that between training and job commitment in family child care (Kontos et al., 1995; Kontos & Reissens, 1993). At the same time, some studies have shown that providers perceive themselves as permanently committed to child care, while others have found that providers view their work as temporary employment while they are in training (Eheart & Leavitt, 1986; Nelson, 1991). Investigators have noted that turnover rates remain high and over one third of the country's child care workforce leaves the profession each year (Kontos et al., 1992; Kontos et al., 1995; Whitebook, 1999). Although competent caregivers may come about in a number of ways across the family child care marketplace, continued analysis of the individual and combined factors that strengthen family child care providers' quality of care and professional commitment to child care could lead to better child care investments, improvements in our early childhood career system, and better care for children.
allow standard business and safety guidelines, charge higher rates, and are involved with peer providers (Kontos et al., 1995). Professional providers have been characterized asregisers who offer marketable preschool programs, use their homes as an educational ting to implement their own educational philosophies, and perceive family child care as a ling (Nelson, 1990). Although little is known about the characteristics that providers are in common that nurture higher levels of professional commitment, these findings suggest that professional commitment may be predicted by the provider’s supportive connections tould care resources and by their beliefs about themselves as regulated and licensed child pe professionals. In this study, I examine predictors of professional commitment by drawing on Mowday, Steers and Porter’s organizational commitment research (1979) that aracterizes commitment to a profession as (a) belief in and acceptance of the profession’s als; (b) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the profession; and (c) a strong desire to maintainembership in the profession.

The purpose of this study is to enrich our understanding of the multiple factors in licensed providers’ lives that influence quality practice and predict higher levels of commitment to professional ides. Based on the research review, it was hypothesized that a family child care provider’s characteris tics of higher formal education, college level coursework or a degree in ECE, ing credentials that include a CDA, program accreditation or both; higher levels of vological well-being and higher levels of family income would predict a provider’sility to offer good care in the family child care setting. It was also anticipated that higher levels of psychological well-being and supportive resources for child care, along with higher levels of compensation for child care would predict higher levels of professional commitment to the profession.

Licensed family child care providers from a variety of urban and rural communities are registered with the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, Southern Regional Office. The sample size was chosen based on the study’s planned regression alyses. A power analysis determined that a minimum sample of 65 providers would be necessary to detect a moderate effect size (.20) with a power of .80 (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). After randomizing the complete list of 324 providers available in the sampling region, the last 24 providers were invited first by letter and then by follow-up phone call to participate in the study before a sample size of 65 was achieved. A small gratuity of $0.00 was offered to each provider who completed the study.

Within a week of receiving an introductory study letter, providers were systematically contacted by telephone beginning with the first randomized number on the list. The investigator inquired (a) if the provider was willing to participate in the study, (b) if the provider had been doing family child care for at least one year, and (c) if the provider had a house or adult partner. (Rather than excluding single providers, this sampling method wased on Kontos’ (1992) findings that regulated providers tended to be married or committedbooklet to complete and return to the investigator within a week. In addition, were given a self-addressed and postage-paid return envelope, reminded questionnaire needed to be filled out completely, and assured that the contents of each questionnaire would be considered anonymous and confidential. Follow-up reminders were sent to providers who failed to return their questionnaire booklet weeks. One hundred eighty-nine of the 247 providers that were originally invited or phone qualified for the study. Sixty-seven of these providers agreed to participate a participation rate of 35%). Two providers failed to return the follow-up question these complete observational and questionnaire data was available for 65 licensed

The majority of the participants were White (97%), female (98%), and married. Eleven percent of the participants were unmarried but committed to adult part providers aged in range from 27 to 59 years of age (M = 43, SD = 7.41). Over thr (78%) had a minimum of 5 years experience (M = 19.94; SD = 7.11, range = 1-Although 75% of these providers had biological, adopted, or step children under an age living in their household, only 35% counted their own children as part of child care group. On average, providers cared for 6 daycare children (SD = 1.53, 8), ranging in age from 2 weeks to 10 years of age. Twelve percent had a h education, 55% had some college, 8% had an A.A. degree, and 25% had a college. Almost 42% had taken some college-level child development courses and either an A.A. or B.A. in ECE. Twenty-three percent had one to three years of education training/workshops, 25% had 4-9 years of accumulating training, 14% had 10 or more years of accumulating training, and 29% had either a CDA, program accreditation, or postgraduate degree. Although the average median income in Wisconsin for a far $57,890 (Center on Wisconsin Strategy, 2000), 14% of these providers had gross annual ines less than $40,000, 28% had incomes between $40,000 and $59,999, and incomes over $60,000. The average provider grossed between $30,000 to $43,999 child care business compensation. After deducting 37% for business expenses additional 33% for taxes (Copeland, 1999; Modigliani et al., 1992), the average earned $12,600 to $14,700 annually. In summary, due to slightly higher family income levels of partner education, this sample may reflect providers with adult partners through educational, financial and supportive community resources are better able in the family child care marketplace. Therefore, the sample allows us to examine characteristics and resources of regulated providers who are better compensated capture a group of providers who have committed themselves to the family profession due to a number of less well studied personal resources.

Measures

Education and Training. Three measures were used to assess the provider’s education and training to include: (a) provider’s age, (b) provider’s partner education, and (c) provider’s income. The provider’s partner education was assessed by asking the following question: “What is the highest level of education completed by your partner or spouse?” The provider’s income was assessed by asking the following question: “What is your net yearly income?”

Professional Commitment. The professional commitment scale was found in a study by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). The scale consists of a 12-item true/false statement that assesses the following factors: (a) belief in and acceptance of the profession, (b) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the profession, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the profession. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The total score reflects the provider’s level of professional commitment.

Family Characteristics. The family characteristics scale was also found in a study by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). The scale consists of a 12-item true/false statement that assesses the following factors: (a) belief in and acceptance of the profession, (b) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the profession, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the profession. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The total score reflects the provider’s level of family commitment.

Provider Characteristics. The provider characteristics scale was also found in a study by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). The scale consists of a 12-item true/false statement that assesses the following factors: (a) belief in and acceptance of the profession, (b) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the profession, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the profession. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The total score reflects the provider’s level of professional commitment.
accumulating child care training and child care credentials such as the CDA or accreditation on quality of care, providers were rated 1 if they had less than 1 year of required training as a licensed provider; 2 if they had 1-3 years of accumulated training requirements; 3 if they had 4-9 years of accumulated training requirements; 4 if they had 10+ years of accumulated training requirements; and 5 if they had either a CDA certificate, city or national accreditation, or both.

Psychological Well-being. The provider's psychological well-being was assessed with two instruments: Ryff's (1989) Well-being Scale and the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Rydoff, 1977). The Well-being Scale (WBS-Short form) includes 42 items that assess six dimensions of positive psychological functioning (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance). Ryff and colleagues (1989; 2005) reported moderate to high correlations between the WBS and prior measures of positive functioning (e.g., life satisfaction, affect balance, self-esteem, internal control, and morale) and negative functioning (e.g., chance, powerful other, and depression subscales). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .27. The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CDS-D) (Rydoff, 1977) includes 20 items that assess depression. CES-D scores range from 0 to 60 with a score above 16 suggesting an individual at risk for clinical depression. This scale is widely used, demonstrates good discriminant validity (Rydoff, 1977), and has alpha coefficients reported as .85 for community samples and .90 for clinical samples. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Supportive Resources for Child Care. Using an adaptation of the Sources of Help Questionnaire (Wan, Jaccard, & Ramey, 1996), a composite score of the provider's supportive resources for child care was calculated by asking providers about the use of 15 types of child care support. Providers were asked to rate on a 5-point scale the helpfulness of 15 sources of social support from 1 (not at all helpful) to 5 (extremely helpful) that included husbands or partners, relatives, friends, parents in the family, child care group, church or temple, professional consultants, books, individual providers, day care system staff, child care organizations, respite services, family child care support group, the child and adult food program, and equipment loans. Providers were asked to rate their use of each type of helpfulness ratings from each of the potential 15 resources were summed into an overall score of supportive resources for child care that could range from 0-75.

Spouse/Partner Support for Child Care. Caregivers were asked to use a 5-point scale to rate their spouse's or partner's support of their role as a family child care provider. The family income was used as a covariate and as a contextual resource in the quality of care analyses. Providers were asked to give the best estimate of their household income (before taxes) last year.

Provider Business Compensation. Providers were asked to give the best estimate of the mean per hour in family child care earned by the individual child care provider when they worked in the family child care setting. This information was obtained through direct observation of the caregiving environment and data collection during the field study. Provider business compensation is the total amount earned by the provider for the family child care setting, not including any in-kind or other support from the organization.

Small adjustments were made to personalize the scale to family child care providers in the example, family child care was substituted for the word organization. The total score was tallied by calculating the mean across all 15 items on the scale.

Results

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviations, and range of scores for each of the study's outcome variables, quality of care and professional commitment to care. The average provider in this study reported moderately high levels of quality of care and professional commitment to care.
To offer adequate or high-quality care, 14% of the providers were rated as providing care that ranged from adequate to high-quality (FDQRS score > 3.25). No regulated provider was observed to offer inadequate or harmful care.

The quality of care observed in these licensed settings was just short of a 4 on a scale of 1 to 7, which is considered good quality. Forty-six percent of the providers were rated as providing care that ranged from adequate to high-quality (FDQRS score > 3.25), while 54% were rated as providing care that ranged from adequate to custodial (FDQRS score = 3.25).

Table 2. Zero Order Pearson Correlations Between Predictors, Quality of Care and Professional Commitment

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Providers who reported higher levels of psychological well-being also reported a higher level of commitment to family child care and better supportive network resources for child care. Conversely, providers with higher levels of depressive symptomatology reported lower levels of psychological well-being, commitment, and supportive resources for child care. Providers with higher levels of commitment to the profession reported higher levels of psychological well-being, less depression, more helpful supportive resources for child care, and greater support from their spouse or partner for their role as a family child care provider. Professional commitment was unrelated to formal education, college coursework in ECE, and training. Providers who acknowledged a more extensive and helpful package of supportive resources for child care reported higher levels of psychological well-being and commitment to family child care and less depression.

Zero-order correlations between predictors, quality of care and professional commitment are also presented in Table 2. All of the study’s predictors showed statistically significant relations with quality of care and professional commitment and these relations tended to be in the theoretically expected direction. Licensed providers’ psychological well-being, depression, formal education, and training/credentials were significantly related to quality of care in these regulated settings.

College coursework or a degree in ECE was significantly related to quality of care. Comparison of providers based on the absence or presence of college coursework or a degree in ECE indicated that providers with college coursework or a degree in ECE (n = 38) demonstrated a higher quality of care than those without college coursework in ECE (n = 27) (t = 4.85, p < .01). A comparison of the means on the FDCRS showed that college coursework or a degree in ECE raised the quality of care to good in licensed family child care settings (FDCRS mean = 5.30; scores above 5 indicate care of good quality) in comparison to licensed providers who do not have this educational advantage (FDCRS mean = 4.54; indicates care of higher custodial quality).

An ANOVA contrasted the difference in quality of care scores based on the regulated provider’s accumulating training records or advanced credentials in child care. As shown in Table 3, there was a significant difference in global quality of care based on the provider’s training background. Tukey post hoc comparisons indicated that licensed providers with CDA certificates, city or national accreditation, or both scored higher on quality of care (FDCRS mean = 5.89) in comparison to licensed providers who reported the accumulating yearly training requirements required of all licensed providers (FDCRS overall mean = 4.55). Specifically, licensed providers with CDA certificates, city or national accreditation, or both offered developmentally enhancing care of good quality, while licensed providers with lesser training offered care that was considered higher custodial in quality. Family income was related to quality of care at the trend level only. Licensed providers’ psychological well-being, depression, supportive resources for child care, family child care compensation, and partner or spouse support were significantly related to professional commitment in these analyses. Income was entered as a covariate in the quality of care analyses to control for socioeconomic status and to better isolate the unique effects of the predictors on quality of care. The results of these models are reported in Tables 4 and 5.

### Table 3.

ANOVA Results: Training Background and Differences in Quality of Care Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Background</th>
<th>Mean Score on FDCRS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 year of training</td>
<td>4.22 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years of accumulating training</td>
<td>4.85 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-9 years of accumulating training</td>
<td>4.56 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ years of accumulating training</td>
<td>4.58 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA, City or National Accreditation or both</td>
<td>5.9 ***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within training background, means with superscript * > * (p < .001, significant Tukey’s post hoc test).

### Table 4.

Summary of Standardized Regression Estimates for Individual Variables Associated with Quality of Care, Adjusting Only for Family Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Standardized Betas</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal education</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>7.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College coursework/degree in ECE</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>8.460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/credentials</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>12.291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological well-being</td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>7.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>4.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.
Summary of Standardized Regression Estimates for Individual Variables Associated with Professional Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Standardized Betas</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. of F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological well-being</td>
<td>.51***</td>
<td>22.456</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-.50***</td>
<td>21.352</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive resources for child care</td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>24.022</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/Partner support for child care role</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>5.025</td>
<td>.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care compensation</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>5.683</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Estimates for the prediction of quality care indicated that formal education, training, college coursework or a degree in ECE, psychological well-being, and depression each predicted quality of care in the licensed family child care settings at p < .05 or a higher level of significance. There was a trend that family income predicted quality of care (p = .068). Estimates for the prediction of professional commitment indicated that psychological well-being, depression, supportive resources for child care, partner or spouse support, and family child care compensation each predicted quality of care in these licensed settings at p < .05 or a higher level of significance.

Next, the collective effect of all predictor variables was examined in order to see which of the variables uniquely predicted quality of care and professional commitment when other variables were controlled. These results are presented in Tables 6 and 7. In the multivariate analysis of quality of care, 5 of the 6 variables entered were related to quality of care at p < .05 or a higher level of significance. Together, variables that include formal education, college coursework or a degree in ECE, training, psychological well-being and family income accounted for 48.9% of the variance in quality of care. Depression was not a significant unique predictor of quality care. Training was the strongest predictor (beta = .320), followed by family income (beta = .284), psychological well-being (beta = .297), formal education (beta = .235), and college coursework or a degree in ECE (beta = .218).

In the multivariate analysis of professional commitment, 3 of the 5 variables entered were related to professional commitment at p < .10 or a higher level of significance. Together, variables that include psychological well-being (beta = .30*), depression (beta = -.14), supportive resources for child care (beta = .34**), and spouse/partner support (beta = .18+) accounted for 49% of the variance in professional commitment.

Table 6.
Summary of Unique Effect of Multivariate Regression Estimates for Variables Predicting Quality of Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Standardized Betas</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>8.771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal education</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College coursework/degree in ECE</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/credentials</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological well-being</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01

R² = .49

Table 7.
Summary of Unique Effect of Multivariate Regression Estimates for Variables Predicting Professional Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Standardized Betas</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological well-being</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>9.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive resources for child care</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/Partner support</td>
<td>.18+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

This study reviews and expands on several provider characteristics and resources that predict good quality of care in family child care homes. In a society where we are seeing a profound shift in who cares for our youngest children, it is imperative to better understand how we can all work together to build a skilled and stable child care workforce that promotes positive development in children. The study's results replicate past associations between higher levels of education and training and quality of care but also present new evidence that providers who have a higher standard of practice are lifelong learners who seek out opportunities for advanced training and pursue child care credentials such as the CDA and program accreditation. Carter and Curtis (1994) suggest that specific knowledge in child development and early education may not only enable providers to develop realistic expectations for children in care but to create child care environments that foster social and intellectual development. The finding that providers who have a CDA or accredited program provide significantly better quality of care suggests that continuing education workshops and short term trainings may not be as effective in moving providers from custodial standards of practice to good or better standards of practice. In this sample of licensed providers, having a CDA, accreditation, or both credentials moved quality of care up approximately 1.5 points on the 7 point scale of the FDCRS (Harms & Clifford, 1989) from upper custodial to good quality practice.

This study sheds new light on the psychological well-being of providers, a characteristic that has been given little attention in the child care literature. Using Ryff's (1989) conceptualization that identifies the central characteristics of psychological well-being as self acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth, the providers in this study who offered higher quality of care saw themselves as autonomous adults who evaluated themselves according to their own personal standards and goals. These adults perceived that their lives and work had meaning, purpose and direction. They held positive attitudes about themselves and their past lives, and appreciated ideas that challenged their view of self and society. Well-qualified providers had more positive and trusting relations with others. They reported an ability to master their environments and restructure the setting they lived and worked in. Therefore, family child care providers who have a positive vision of themselves as valuable professionals who make important contributions to children's development, may be better able to achieve higher standards of practice. Higher levels of these habits of mind may enable caregivers to turn their homes into warm, stimulating and responsive learning environments and to build close relationships with children and parents in care. And higher levels of these psychological characteristics may empower family child care providers to speak up for themselves, demand respect and support for child care, value their own needs, and to follow through on regulatory guidelines, professional contracts, and higher standards of practice (Laurion, 1997).

One of the study's important findings was that providers' educational and training assets and early education may be equally important in influencing the provider's developmentally enhancing child care.

Another noteworthy provider resource that predicted good care was a level of family income. Consistent with parenting studies that have found positively related to quality of the child's home environment (Caldwell & these results suggest that better quality of care in family child care is a function of economic forces. Well-qualified providers require a solid financial base, daily needs, enrich their child care environments, and manage the true cost. Providers may depend on their overall family income to meet the financial needs that is necessary in meeting regulatory standards or as financial backup to low enrollment. At a minimum, a higher family income may be required child sized furnishings, toys and resources that are important to meeting high practice.

Replicating past research, perceived social support (Kontos & Riessen, 1990) to a number of diverse and helpful supports for child care contributed to professional commitment in these providers. Although having a supportive partner and higher levels of compensation served as individual predictors of commitment, supportive connections to diverse child care resources and psychological well-being were the strongest predictors of professional commitment of these providers. These results suggest that providers with higher levels of professional commitment must not only have an accessible array of helpful family and community resources but also internalize positive feelings about themselves, their work with others, and their accomplishments in life. It is possible that providers visions of themselves as effective and important forces in the lives of young children, with supportive resources for child care, balances up against the demands of the job, the need for state scholarship initiatives that encourage and college coursework in child development. Scarce resources should be channeled into programs in preference to less extensive training approaches.

Implications for Child Care Policy and Practice

Although generalization of this research is limited due to the self-selected geographical limitations of the sample, this study replicates and sheds further light on the characteristics and resources of well-qualified providers that may lead to higher levels of care and higher levels of professional commitment in our family child care systems. Further replication of these findings across more diverse child care settings that state and local child care monies should continue to be directed at initiatives that attract qualified caregivers, provide educational and training opportunities, support and financial incentives that make these small child care programs attractive. The results confirm the need for increased efforts and training initiatives that encourage and college coursework in child development. Scarce resources should be channeled into programs in preference to less extensive training approaches.
that well-qualified providers are appreciated by society for their contributions to children's development and encourage providers to perceive themselves as valued partners in children's care and education.

Policymakers, practitioners and consumers must recognize that effective and committed providers require the educational, supportive and financial resources that foster their growth and retention as family child care providers. Local and state initiatives can boost quality of care and commitment by offering financial incentives for educational attainment and retention, health and disability insurance, retirement benefits, and funds for renovation, maintenance, or improvement of the child care environment. Consumer education can emphasize how the characteristics of high-quality child care environments and the characteristics and resources of qualified family child care providers are intertwined and linked to stable and developmentally enhancing care. In sum, as we nurture the acquisition of these characteristics and resources in every child care provider, we can expect to increase our supply of well-qualified providers, raise quality of care and commitment across family child care settings, and anticipate many positive returns on our investments in early childhood care and education.

References


Childhood Education
Infancy Through Early Adolescence

Bullying
Planning Meaningful Curriculum
Education Challenges Facing the Maasai
Guidelines for Examining Books
Using Interpersonal Influence to Achieve Inclusion
Children's Heroes and Role Models

CURRENT
Journal of the Association for...
Six-year-old Sam is barely eating. When asked by his dad what is wrong, he bursts into tears. "The kids at school keep calling me a nerd, and they poke and push me," he sobs.

"There's a kid at school no one likes," 7-year-old Anika shares with her parents. "We all tease her a lot. She is a total dork. I would never invite her to my birthday party."

Bullying is a very old phenomenon; European researchers have studied its effects for decades (Olweus, 1991). Until recently, however, the issue has received less attention from researchers in the United States, perhaps because of the prevailing belief that bullying among children is inevitable. Considering that bullying often is a sign that aggressive or violent behavior is present elsewhere in children's lives — young children may be acting out at school what they have observed and learned in the home — and the fact that bullying among primary school-age children is now recognized as an antecedent to progressively more violent behavior in later grades (Saufler & Gagne, 2000), it behooves teachers to take notice.

Unfortunately, teachers have differing attitudes toward children who bully. Most teachers are aware that bullying begins early, yet many appear to believe the myth that children "picking on" or teasing one another is a "normal" part of childhood. They also may believe that these conflicts are best resolved by the children themselves. Consequently, some teachers do not intervene.

**Characteristics of Bullies and Their Victims**

Bullying refers to repeated, unprovoked, harmful actions by one child or children against another. The acts may be physical or psychological. Physical or direct bullying includes hitting, kicking, pushing, grabbing toys from other children, and engaging in very rough and intimidating play. Psychological bullying includes name calling, making faces, teasing, taunting, and making threats. Indirect, or less obvious and less visible, bullying includes exclusion and rejection of children from a group (Olweus, 1991).

Children who bully are impulsive, dominate others, and show little empathy. They display what Olweus (1991) defines as an "aggressive personality pattern combined with physical strength" (p. 425). Without intervention, the
frequency and severity of the bullying behaviors may increase. Even more disturbing, it appears that the patterns of bullying learned in the early years can set children on a course of violence later in life (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Baumeister, 2001).

Although a longstanding characterization of children who bully points to their low self-esteem, there is little empirical evidence to support this view. In fact, more recent research (Baumeister, 2001; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998) suggests that an inflated self-esteem increases the odds of aggressive behavior. When a bully's self-regard is seriously threatened by insults or criticisms, his or her response will be more aggressive than normal. Furthermore, bullies often report that they feel powerful and superior, and justified in their actions.

Research on family dynamics suggests that many children already have learned to bully others by preschool age. Many young children who bully lack empathy and problem-solving skills, and learn from their parents to hit back in response to problems (Loeber & Dishion, 1984; Vladimir & Brubach, 2000).

Children who are bullied, on the other hand, are often younger, weaker, and more passive than the bully. They appear anxious, insecure, cautious, sensitive and quiet, and often react by crying and withdrawing. They are often lonely and lack close friendships at school. Without adult intervention, these children are likely to be bullied repeatedly, putting them at-risk for continued social rejection, depression, and impaired self-esteem (Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1994). A smaller subset of these children, known as “provocative victims,” have learned to respond aggressively to perceived threats by retaliating not only against the aggressor, but also against others (Olweus, 1993).

**INCIDENCES OF BULLYING AMONG CHILDREN**

Evidence suggests that, in the United States, the incidence of bullying among children is increasing and becoming a nationwide problem. One out of five children admits to being a bully (Noll & Carter, 1997). In general, boys engage in more physical, direct means of bullying, whereas girls engage in the more psychological and indirect bullying, such as exclusion. Roland (1989) reported that girls may be involved in bullying as much as boys, but are less willing to acknowledge their involvement. In addition, because indirect bullying is often less apparent, girls’ bullying may be underestimated. Girls tend to bully less as they get older. The percentage of boys who bully, however, is similar at different age levels (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Twenty-five to 50 percent of children report being bullied. The great majority of boys are bullied by other boys, while 60 percent of girls report being bullied by boys. Eight percent of children report staying away from school one day per month because they fear being bullied. Children have a fear of being in the bathroom (Noll & Carter, 1997). A comprehensive plan to address the problems of bullying and teasing must involve school personnel, teachers, children, and families. Intervention must occur on three levels: school-wide, in specific classrooms, and with individuals.

**Schoolwide Intervention**

School personnel must recognize the pervasiveness of bullying and teasing and its detrimental effects on children’s development. Inservice training can be developed that outlines a clear policy statement against bullying and intervention strategies for addressing it. The school will then develop a comprehensive plan geared toward children’s prosocial behaviors and skills. The children may be involved in the development of such policies and strategies, providing their input on
what behavior is appropriate and identifying sanctions against bullies (Lickona, 2000; Olweus, 1997).

School personnel could enlist families' support and involvement by sharing details of the policy through parent-teacher conferences and newsletters. Families need to be aware of the specific sanctions that will be imposed on children who bully, and they need opportunities to offer feedback and suggestions. It is important to encourage parents to talk with their children about bullying. Children who are bullied often believe that their parents are unaware of the situation, and that their concerns are not being addressed or discussed. Children do want adults to intervene, however (Gropper & Froschl, 1999). If families are kept informed, they can work as a "team member" with school counselors and teachers to change the school environment.

Additional sources of school-wide support for children who are bullied and teased may be developed, including mentoring programs. Teachers can identify children who need support, and find them a mentor. Children may feel more at ease and less anxious when they have a "buddy," such as an older student, who can help intervene (Noll & Carter, 1997). Counselors at one elementary school selected, trained, and supervised high school students to teach the younger children how to deal with bullying and harassment. After implementation of this program, the teachers observed a decline in reports of harassment (Frieman & Frieman, 2000).

Bullying frequently occurs on the playground (Whitney, Rivers, Smith, & Sharp, 1994), yet many children believe that teachers do little to stop it. Consequently, "play-time...is more of a prison sentence than an opportunity to play and socialize" (Slee, 1995, p. 326). Therefore, school personnel may need to review playground design and space, children's access to these spaces, teacher supervision, and the role of the school in early intervention on the playground (Lambert, 1999). Yard monitors and lunch time supervisors can be trained to watch for signs of bullying. In addition, children can be asked to identify those places where bullying most frequently occurs.

Intervention in Specific Classrooms

Clearly, bullying and hurtful teasing affects children's ability to learn and enjoy play, as well as the teacher's ability to teach. Within the classroom, teachers can begin addressing the problem by creating times for children to talk about their concerns. Interestingly, one study showed that when children ages 5 to 7 years of age were asked about assisting someone who was being bullied, 37 percent replied that it was none of their business to help (Slee & Rigby, 1994).

Teachers can ask children to talk about what makes them feel unsafe or unwelcome in school. The teacher then can make a list of the children's responses, discuss them (e.g., "If bullies call me names or call me a name I don't like, I usually get angry and yell at them or fight back.") Teachers can also show children what to do to help themselves or other children, and remind them of the consequences of breaking the rules. Teachers can reduce children's anxiety by setting firm limits on unacceptable behavior (Froschl & Sprung, 1999).

If the bullying continues, teachers may need to make referrals to school counselors who will work with children, either individually or in groups, to talk about concerns, discuss solutions and options, and give suggestions on how to form friendships. Children without close friends are more likely to be victimized and may benefit from specific suggestions for building friendships (e.g., invite a friend to your house, work together on a school project, share a common interest, play a favorite game together).

Certain types of curricula, especially those that provide opportunities for cooperative learning experiences, may make bullying less likely to flourish. Children need to be engaged in worthwhile, authentic learning activities that encourage their interests and abilities (Katz, 1993). When they are intellectually motivated, they are less likely to bully. For example, project work (Katz & Chard, 2000) involves children's in-depth investigations into topics of their own choosing. As they explore events and objects around them in the classroom, in the school yard, in the neighborhood, and in the community, they learn to cooperate, collaborate, and share responsibilities. Project work can be complemented by noncompetitive games, role playing, and dramatization to raise awareness of bullying and increase empathy for those who experience it. Some teachers use children's literature to help create caring and peaceful classrooms (Morris, Taylor, & Wilson, 2000).
sis, teachers should provide encouragement that acknowledges specific attributes, rather than dispensing general praise, approval, or admiration (“I am so glad that you have done a great job; it is wonderful; yours is one of the best projects”) that may appear to be contrived. Expressions of specific encouragement (“You seem to be pleased and very interested in your project, and it appears you have worked on it for many days and used many resources to find answers to your questions”), as opposed to general praise, are descriptive, sincere, take place in private, focus on the process, and help children to develop an appreciation for their efforts and work. While developing children’s self-esteem is a worthwhile goal, false praise may instead promote narcissism and unrealistic self-regard. Teachers should avoid encouraging children to think highly of themselves when they have not earned it (Baumeister, 2001; Hitz & Driscoll, 1988).

Additional long-term strategies may include encouraging children to resolve their own problems and using peers to mediate between bullies and their targets. Furthermore, teachers can spend time helping children to form ties with peers who can offer protection, support, security, and safety, thus helping to reduce children’s exposure to bullying (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996).

**Summary**

Bullying and teasing are an unfortunate part of too many children’s lives, leading to trouble for both bullies and their victims. Children who are bullied come to believe that school is unsafe and that children are mean. They may develop low self-esteem and experience loneliness. Children who continue to bully will have difficulty developing and maintaining positive relationships. A comprehensive intervention plan that addresses the needs of the school, the classroom, teachers, children, and families can be developed and implemented to ensure that all children learn in a supportive and safe environment.

**References**


Two 4-year-old girls are arguing over a picture book. The teacher suggests that they go to the “peace table” to find a solution. A little while later, Erica has her arm around Melissa as they approach the teacher and announce their solution. They will share the book, with each of them holding one edge of the book while they read.

A teacher in a preschool classroom of 3- and 4-year-olds is frustrated by the number of children who use Tinker Toys, Legos, and bristle blocks to create some form of weapon and then run around the room imitating fictional crime fighters. The teacher raises her concern with the children in a class meeting. After some creative brainstorming, the children decide that toys from the table toy area should be “sit down toys”; the children will sit on the floor or at a table to build, instead of running around with their creations. This simple rule makes a noticeable difference. The children’s creations are more creative and less likely to be used as weapons.

These classroom anecdotes demonstrate that very young children can use a problem-solving process to resolve interpersonal conflicts. These accomplishments are particularly striking, given that early childhood teachers report an increase over the last five to 10 years in the number of children coming to school angry, aggressive, or lacking the social skills to get along with classmates (Adams, 1998).

Teachers of young children recognize the benefits of helping children learn social problem-solving strategies that can be generalized across situations and settings. As the children become more independent at solving problems peacefully, the teachers will need to spend less valuable time arbitrating disputes. The classroom climate improves as incidences of aggression and victimization decrease and positive social skills are promoted. A systematic approach to teaching a problem-solving process can yield such positive outcomes (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992; DeVries & Zan, 1994; Levin, 1992).

Social Problem-Solving Model
Early childhood settings can offer children opportunities to learn and practice fundamental problem-solving skills. Various writers recommend differing processes (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1998; Dinwiddie, 1994; Hewitt & Heidemann, 1998; Janke & Peterson, 1995; Kreidler, 1996; Levin, 1987; Murnane, 1992), but typically include the basic steps of: 1) defining the problem,
generating alternative solutions, 3) evaluating proposed solutions, 4) agreeing on a solution, and 5) following through to determine if the chosen solution is successful.

Many teachers have success with a problem-solving approach that presents five steps to problem solving, which includes the children asking themselves questions and seeking answers in order to arrive at a solution to the problem at hand (Committee for Children, 1991).

1. What Is the Problem? Identifying the problem incorporates a discussion of each child’s point of view—that is, the feelings and needs of both the victim and the aggressor (Dinwiddie, 1994). This process helps to define the problem or conflict as a shared one, with two competing and valid points of view. Children usually phrase the problem from their own point of view based on concrete actions, such as “Alex took my truck” or “Craig won’t give me the fire truck,” rather than “We both want the truck.” It is up to the teacher to show how both children have legitimate, albeit incompatible, points of view, and to clarify the feelings of each party in the dispute: “Craig, how did you feel when Alex grabbed the truck?” and “Alex, look at Craig’s face. How do you think he is feeling?”

The role of the teacher at this step is to help children tune in to each other’s needs and feelings, and then redefine the problem as a shared one. “So the problem is, Craig was using the truck and Alex wants the truck too. You both want to play with the truck.”

2. What Can I Do? In brainstorming sessions, participants think of many ideas in a short amount of time. It is useful to have children, even 4-year-olds, suggest whatever ideas come to mind, good or bad, so that they have a chance to evaluate the consequences of impulsive and aggressive behavior (see step 3). If a child suggests a less-than-ideal option, the teacher should include it on the list with a comment such as, “Yes, you are right. Sometimes children do grab toys. Let’s write that down.”

3. What Might Happen If . . . ? In this step, the class evaluates ideas by generating consequences for each solution. “What might happen if Craig decides to push Alex away? Is that safe? How would Alex feel?” At this point, any potential solutions that are unsafe or that hurt another child’s feelings are eliminated. For other ideas, the children need to answer the questions “Is it fair? Will it work?” Now is the time to respond to any of the children’s inappropriate suggestions from the brainstorming session. For younger children (4-year-olds), the teacher may need to show puppets acting out some of the solutions, so that the children can judge the

Techniques To Teach the Problem-Solving Steps to Young Children

Teachers can support development of problem-solving skills by directly teaching them to children, demonstrating and modeling their use in a variety of ways, and guiding children to use the problem-solving process in their ongoing interactions with peers. Methods to teach problem solving include the following:

Facilitating Regular Class Meetings. As a venue for modeling the problem-solving process, teachers conduct regular class meetings. In these meetings, small or large groups of children meet with the teacher to solve specific problems. The first goal of class meetings is to generate open discussion among the children. To do this, teachers must accept and validate each child’s contribution to the discussion. Children must believe that their opinions and feelings will be respected and approached. The second goal is to develop the children’s ability to solve problems using the social problem-solving process above. It is vital that children learn the steps and choose the solutions.
Class meetings should be regularly scheduled at a specific time each day, or several days a week. The teacher also can spontaneously call for a class meeting in response to a more immediate problem, such as a playground incident.

Successful class meetings require time, patience, and practice. Teachers need to establish a comfortable and secure atmosphere (Developmental Studies Center, 1996; DeVries & Zan, 1994). Early class meetings typically focus on getting to know one another, creating a sense of community and belonging, and building positive social and communication skills. Gradually, the teacher introduces the problem-solving process, using the techniques presented below.

Using Puppet Role-Plays. Puppets provide a captivating means of holding children's attention. The author has observed young children relating to and identifying with puppets, almost as if they were fellow classmates. Puppets can be used to role-play problems based on common classroom situations (such as name calling, lack of sharing, or difficulty taking turns), or in response to actual conflicts (such as two children arguing over who gets to use the watering can to water the plants). Playing out the scenario with puppets protects the identities and feelings of the children involved in the specific conflict. Puppet role-plays also allow the teacher to raise his or her concerns ("I've noticed that during clean-up time, some children continue to play and don't help others clean up. What can we do about this problem?").

William Kreidler (1984) suggests that the teacher identify some puppets as "problem puppets." The children name the puppets and may even create a "home" for them, using a small box. These puppets are the ones used during class meetings that focus on problem solving. The teacher operates the puppets, enacting the situation up to the point of conflict (i.e., the point where someone is going to hit, yell, cry, or call the teacher. At this "puppets freeze," at the point of conflict, and the teacher then involves the children in the problem-solving steps. Once the children choose one another's perspectives, the puppets role-play the situation.

Using Children's Literature to Teach Conflict Resolution. Children love to hear stories and often identify strongly with the characters. Books can introduce or extend conflict resolution skills, provide a nonthreatening way to talk about conflict, and show characters learning to solve problems nonviolently. William Kreidler (1994) makes the following suggestions for reading books about conflict:

- Read the book up to the point of conflict.
- Ask the children how they think the characters are feeling. "How is Koala Bear feeling now?"
- Have the children identify the conflict. "Children, what's the problem here?"
- Brainstorm ways that the characters could solve the conflict. Discuss which one the children think the characters in the story will use.
- Read the rest of the story. Discuss the characters' solution to their conflict. "Was that a good solution? Why? How do the characters feel now?"

Using Pictures and Posters As A Stimulus. Large photographs or posters can provide a stimulus to discussions of conflict scenarios. Teachers can create a story, based on the picture (as they would with puppets and books), leading up to a conflict. Then, they would talk the children through the steps to problem solving.

For example, using a large photograph depicting a crying young girl, the teacher might say, "This is Sarah. Look at her face. Let me tell you what happened to her. One day at preschool, Sarah asked two friends if she could play with them in the playhouse. Her friends said, 'No, we're busy.' How do you think that made Sarah feel? What is the problem? What do you think Sarah could do?" In one classroom presented with this scenario, the children brainstormed the following solutions for Sarah to try: ask the girls again if she could play with them, find someone else to play with, or ask the teacher for help.

Acting Out Make-Believe Role-Plays. Role-playing is a good technique for practicing solutions to conflicts and promoting children's ability to see a situation from another person's perspective. Usually, a teacher directed, small-group activity, the teacher describes the conflict situation, defines the roles, and has the children act out different ways to resolve the conflict together.

One teacher asked the children to set the situation: "If four partners are arguing, and then chose five children to role-play how they would
handle attempting to sit down for snack. Another teacher asked two children to simulate an argument over who could ride a tricycle: one child sat on the seat as another child held on to the handlebars, blocking her way. The rest of the children identified the problem, and the two girls acted out scenarios to complete the problem-solving process.

**Telling Stories.** Because many preschoolers like to create their own stories, teachers can encourage a problem-related story theme. The teacher may initiate this activity by saying, "Tell me a story about a little girl who wanted the toy someone else had and what she did to try and get the toy." For younger children, who may need more structure, the teacher can provide the beginning of a fairy tale-type story and then ask a child to finish. "Once upon a time there was a boy named Kevin (do not use the name of a child in the class) who did not get along with anyone at school because he couldn't share. One day, a little girl started to play with a blue car and Kevin grabbed the car so fast it scared her and made her cry." Children who enjoy make-believe and imaginary play can act out their problem-solving stories as a role-play.

**Getting Started in Your Classroom**
Introduce the problem-solving process gradually. Start by having children engage in the first two steps. Role-play a short problem with the puppets, then stop and ask the children, "What is the problem here?" Re-formulate their answers to establish a shared problem, such as, "They both want to play with the computer." Have the children identify how the puppets are likely feeling. Then have them brainstorm some possible solutions, which you write on a large piece of paper. Later in the day, remind the children of the problem, and read aloud their earlier answers. Now, do the next two steps with the children. Evaluate each possible solution, asking, "Is it safe?" "Is it fair?" "Will it work?" "How will they feel?" Ask the children to choose one idea that "passes the test," and use the puppets to act out the solution. Repeat this two-part process several times. Eventually, the children can complete the first four steps during a class meeting, then the puppets will role-play the chosen solution, and, finally, the children will decide if the selected idea worked (step 5).

Some teachers introduce a "peace table" or a "peace rug" as a site for conflict resolution. When a conflict erupts, the children involved go to the designated area to complete the problem-solving steps. Moving to an area away from the initial conflict may help to defuse the emotions and allow children to concentrate more on the process of solving the problem.

**Situations Where a Social Problem-Solving Process Can Be Used**
After the children have been exposed to the problem-solving process through the strategies described above, teachers can facilitate their use in real-life classroom situations. For instance, a child may be "getting into trouble" because she is running and bumping into other children.

**Negotiating Routine Conflicts Over Property, Territory, or Teasing.** Such conflicts occur frequently during children's play and interactions in the early childhood setting.

One Head Start classroom has been working on the five steps to problem-solving since October. "The teacher, Julie, has been paying particular attention to two 3-year-old girls, who she describes as "feisty" (because they are known to pull hair or pinch when frustrated by a conflict). One day in February, Julie brings in a set of new plastic dishes, a dishpan, a dish drying rack, a Handiwipe for washing dishes, and two dish towels. "At free-play time, both of these girls head straight for the dramatic play area and grab the Handiwipe. "Julie gets ready to intervene, then hears one of the little girls say, "We have a problem here. We both want to wash dishes. What can we do?" The girls, on their own, decide to cut the Handiwipe in half. They proceed to share the dishpan happily, and wash the dishes together.

**Negotiating Responses to Behavior Problems With Individual Girls.** In this case, the teacher typically initiates a conversation with a child.
hey draw, the teacher says, "I've noticed that you have trouble sitting next to your friends during story time. Sometimes you get too close to other children or you get on your knees and children can't see the book. What do you think we can do about this problem?" After giving some thought, the child decides that he should sit in a cube chair in the back row. (The other children typically sit on the floor in loosely defined rows facing the teacher.) He seems to know that the cube chair will help define his "space" and allow him to sit up high enough to see the book.

When the Teacher Is Willing To Share Power Over a Decision. Such decisions can relate to the schedule, a routine, or an activity that affects the class. In this case, either the teacher or a child may present the problem to the class.

During a class meeting, a preschool teacher introduces a problem by saying, "Children, I need your help with a problem. Every day, several children want to feed the gerbil. If too many children feed the gerbil, he can't eat all the food and so just plays with it. Lots of times, he knocks part of the food out of the cage and it makes a mess on the floor. How can we pick just one child to feed the gerbil every day?" The children decide to make "feed the gerbil" a job on the daily classroom chore chart.

**Conclusion**

As teachers teach and facilitate a social problem-solving process, both they and the children reap the benefits. Children gain independence as they learn to solve difficult problems and express feelings in acceptable ways. When faced with conflict, they are better able to have their needs met without resorting to aggression. They learn to negotiate fair solutions and assert themselves appropriately to avoid becoming victims of other children's aggression. Children with effective problem-solving skills gain self-esteem as they learn to interact with others in more positive ways.

Social problem-solving skills can be learned by all children. This process is not exclusive to highly verbal, high-achieving, or socially competent children. The learning process may take longer for children with developmental delays or for children already demonstrating social problems. When teaching these skills to children with language delays or auditory processing difficulties, teachers can pair short phrases with pictures, or use sign language. For example, Katlyn, whose ability to speak is virtually nonexistent, learned to make the sign for "stop" when she did not like what another child was doing. Children who exhibit aggressive behavior can discover acceptable ways to have their needs met without impinging on the rights of others. They learn what to do, rather than simply what not to do (e.g., the sign for "stop" is taught for behavioral infractions). Children who withdraw can become empowered to express their feelings and assert themselves appropriately, enhancing the chances that more powerful children will minimize their actions. Teachers who make the initial investment of time energy, and thought to planning to teach social problem solving to children will reap long-term benefits later, as they spend less time disciplining children and intervening in their conflicts. These teachers then have more time to do more meaningful and productive things in the classroom. Teachers also have the satisfaction of knowing that they have promoted coping skills that enhance children's abilities to live peacefully.

**Note:** Since 1994, the ECE-CARES Project has trained over 1,100 early childhood teachers and implemented CARES Strategies in classrooms serving over 10,000 children and their families. Data collected from a sample of these classrooms indicate that children demonstrate significant increases in positive social skills and significant decreases in problem behaviors.

**Children's Books Related to Problem Solving**


**References**


Equipping Office of 2002
Parent Communication
Surviving Tight Times
Naptime Rituals
Cribs, Cots, and Mats
Long Distance Teamwork
Bilingual Classroom Setup
For Profit Child Care:
Allergies
Beginnings Workshop:
Professionalism
To Spank or Not to Spank

Situation

The cartoon showed a maître d' greeting a family, the toddler pulling his mother's hair, and the preschooler tugging her hand. The caption read:

"Would you prefer the spanking or non-spanking section?"

When I first saw that cartoon, I despaired that we were destined for the spanking section with our ketchup-splattering, table-crawling, sugar packet-collecting brood of four. Through the years we did manage to civilize our kids and stay seated in the non-spanking section — but it didn't come naturally.

Solution

We all want to help our children. We really do. The question is how to do it? In the book, *Anger*, Mitch Messer, Roman Coronado-Bogdaniak, and Linda Dillon write, "We learn anger management in the same way we learn to wash dishes and make beds. There is not a whole lot of intellectual debate or rational discourse prior to the adoption of a mannerism that will last a lifetime. In other words, in the area of anger management, there hasn't been a brain cell working for four generations."

Replace *anger management* with the word *spanking* and the same statement fits. Little Bobby pulls his sister Susie's hair and Bobby's father, Jim, gives Bobby the same swat Jim's mother gave him and her mother gave her. Jim forgets that he still tugs on his sister Margo's now gray-streaked hair, just as he used to yank her braids years ago whenever their mom would leave the room. Perhaps it is time to get some new brain cells working.

Not Harmful — Doesn't Mean Desirable

Recent research by the Institute of Human Development at the University of California, Berkeley, made headlines saying that *mild spanking* would not hurt a child's social or emotional growth (Mason, *Seattle Times*). We could ask, "What is mild?"

But the question itself identifies what most adults fear: will an intended *mild* swat on the bottom turn into a stinging red welt, a bruised hip, or worse? What is too much? Instead of trying to define what is *mild* or how much is too much, why not ask a different question? What does spanking accomplish? We know what we want it to do: change behavior. But, does spanking accomplish this?

Interrupt or Change?

Do you ever feel like a rerun of your own movie? Yesterday, you yelled at Marty for calling his brother a doo-doo head, spanked him, and sent him to his room. Today, Marty is back in his room, same reason — different spanking. What do you think the odds are that Marty's name-calling and your spanking will flash across the family action screen again? Higher than you wish?

Why does misbehavior repeat? Spanking tends to be better at interrupting misbehavior than at changing it.

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Years ago, whenever we opened our front door, our dog, Squeaker, would race outside to chase the neighbor's cat. One spring the neighbors, and therefore their cat, moved. Months later Squeaker was still tearing outside in eager pursuit of the former resident cat, and he kept at it, even though he never saw that cat again. Sometimes we keep doing the same thing over and over even though circumstances have changed. Has your cat moved? Do you respond to children through habit or thoughtful response?

The Hand and the Bag

Picture a paper bag; inside repose all of the tools, tricks, and teachings we bring to the job of parenting. Some bags are lightweight, some rattle a bit when shaken, and a few bulge with possibilities. But no matter how little or how much the bags contain, the same thing happens when they are empty.

We reach inside; our hand zigzags back and forth as our fingers fail to detect anything; then with a final lunge we rip through the bottom. The hand that emerges is — the hand that spanks. Does your parenting tool bag leave you empty-handed? Spanking is, at best, a last resort and at worst, the ONLY tool in the bag.

Doesn't Teach

Lilly's job involved doing home visits at a nearby military base. Each week she would spend an hour or two in a family's home. As women nursed their newborns, Lilly stirred pots of bubbling stew, served up juice and crackers to toddlers, or helped fold diapers still warm from the dryer.

In mid-October Lilly shared an overstuffed sofa with a mom whose sixteen-month-old daughter played nearby. As they chatted, the child busied herself by pushing a chair across the floor to the television.
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vision console and scaling to the top of the set. When her mom saw what the child had done, she hurried across the room, yanked the would-be mountaineer off the television, and swatted her bottom. “No! No! Bad girl! You can’t climb up there.”

Well, she had climbed up there, thought Lilly, uncomfortable watching the toddler being spanked but not knowing what she could say or do without losing the mother’s trust.

On Lilly’s next visit, fallen leaves formed a colorful nest for the grinning jack-o-lantern stationed on the family’s front steps. Lilly joined the mom in the living room as before and within ten minutes the toddler was again standing on top of the television set. This time Lilly hurried to lift the child down, holding out a book she had brought with her. The toddler forgot her climbing expedition and settled into Lilly’s lap, pointing to the pictures as she helped turn the cardboard pages.

“Gee, I guess the spanking didn’t teach her to stop climbing, did it?” The mom sighed, nodding in agreement, “No, the spanking hasn’t stopped her.” No, because spanking doesn’t teach.

To Do or Not To Do

Why do we spank? It comes down to a simple equation: we either want children to do something or not do something. “Pick up your toys.” “Quit throwing the toys.”

Have you ever noticed that the toys still appear where you don’t want them or some new behavior variation appears? Does crayon-throwing end this afternoon but reappear at dinnertime as tossed noodles, at bedtime as a flying shoe, or at the park as an upended bucket of sand?

If we want the toys to get picked up (day after day), or the throwing to stop (and not restart) then perhaps we need to switch tools.

Past, Present, and Future

Does your past repeat itself? Do you do what your parents did without thinking about why or even if it works or doesn’t work? Is your present a series of reruns with both you and your child doing the same thing over and over again? Is your parenting tool bag torn and ragged, leaving you empty-handed?

If your answers are yes, then perhaps it is time to retrain some brain cells, take a seat in the non-spanking section, and keep your hands to yourself. The fastest way to a future that promises your child’s improved behavior could just be to change your own. Here is an E.P.A. (Encouragement, Prevention, Action) plan that can deliver the results you most want: changes and improvements that last.

E. P. A.
Tools That Work – Changes That Last

Problem: Block Throwing
State your objective:
Do say what you want done. “Keep the blocks on the floor while you play.”
Not what you don’t want: “Don’t throw blocks.” (Young children may only hear the last part, “throw blocks.”)

Encouragement:
Notice: “You are keeping the blocks on the floor. You made them into a circle.”
Appreciate: “You treated the blocks with care. Thank you for handling them gently.”

Prevention:
Set Limits: “We need to keep all of the blocks on the carpeted part of the floor.”
Model: “Let’s see how high we can build this tower.”

Action:
State what you will do: “If you throw the blocks, I will put them away.”
Then do it: When a block goes sailing, remove all blocks (without saying a word).
Building a Learning Community

Reading Poetry

Bibliotherapy

International E-Pal Partnerships

School Days in India

Addressing Classroom Problems
Wade runs "combat-style" beneath the windows of his school as he makes his getaway from his 1st-grade classroom. It is still early in the school year, but this is the third time Wade has tried to escape. Previously, his teacher has managed to catch him before he left the building. Today, however, his escape is easier, because Mrs. Archie is participating with the children in a game of "Squirrel and Trees" and Wade is behind her when he leaves the playground area. She sees him round the corner of the school, and speedily gives chase. When she reaches the front parking lot of their building, however, she cannot find him. Wade is gone!

Experienced and inexperienced teachers alike, in all grade levels, express concern about difficult classroom problems—those problems that don’t ever seem to go away, no matter what management techniques are used. Wade’s story and similar ones are echoed time and again in classrooms around the world as adults struggle to find a balance between correcting children’s behavior and instructing them about self-management strategies. Educators emphasize an understanding of appropriate guidance strategies, and teachers learn about acceptable center and school district policies. An abundance of books, videotapes, and other teacher resources are available to classroom practitioners to enhance their understanding of appropriate guidance strategies. Professional organizations such as the Association for Childhood Education International define standards of good practice. Textbooks for childhood educators define well-managed classrooms and appropriate management techniques (e.g., Marion, 2003; Morrison, 2001; Reynolds, 2003; Seefeldt & Barbour, 1998; Wolfgang, 2001).

Despite this preparation, educators daily face problems with guiding or disciplining children in their classrooms. Understanding the developmental needs of children and meeting their physical needs are two ingredients to happy classroom management. It is also important to look at the larger problems involved when children’s misbehaviors are chronic to the point that youngsters are labeled as “difficult.” Are these children receiving enough attention from the teacher? Are they developing social skills that will help them through interactions and negotiations with other children in the classroom?

Mrs. Archie’s guidance philosophy is founded on principles that she believes are effective for young children. Taking time at the end of the day to reflect on Wade’s disappearance, Mrs. Archie concluded that she had done what she could, as always, to develop a healthy classroom climate.

She strives to build a classroom community of learners and act with understanding in response to antisocial behavior in the classroom, and she knows that the vast majority of children will respond positively. Mrs. Archie’s classroom layout promotes orderly activity throughout the day and is well-stocked with enough materials and supplies to keep children engaged and actively engaged in their learning activities. Although the activities she provides are challenging, many simple experiences also are available to prevent children from being overwhelmed by classroom choices.

Furthermore, Mrs. Archie’s attitude is positive about children, like Wade, who come from families that use punitive discipline techniques at home. Her discussions with Wade’s mother prior to his escape had been instructive, and she thought that progress was being made with the family. Indeed, when Wade arrived at home the day he ran off, his mother returned him to school immediately.

So what is the teacher to do about children, like Wade, with chronic and intense behavioral difficulties? If serious behavior problems are not addressed before age 8, the child is likely to have long-lasting conduct problems throughout school, often leading to suspension or dropping out (Katz & McClellan, 1997; Walker et al., 1996). Since the window of opportunity to intervene with behavior problems is narrow, childhood educators must understand the nature of the
behavior problem and design an educative plan to teach the child alternative approaches.

The ABC’s of the Problem
The first step in analyzing the behavior problem is to determine the “pay-off” for the child. Challenging behaviors usually fall into one of the following categories: 1) behavior that gets the child attention, either positive or negative; 2) behavior that removes the child from something unpleasant, like work or a task; 3) behavior that results in the child getting something she or he wants, like candy or a toy; and 4) behavior that provides some type of sensory stimulation, such as spinning around until the child feels dizzy and euphoric.

To understand the pay-off for the child, it is important to examine the ABC’s of the behavior: the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences associated with the problem. The antecedent requires a record, which describes what was happening just prior to the incident. The actual behavior then can be described in observable, measurable terms: instead of saying that the misbehaving child had a tantrum, detail that he threw himself to the floor, screamed, and pounded his fists on the floor for four minutes. Finally, we examine the pay-off (consequences) for the behavior.

Did the behavior result in close physical contact as the child was carried into the adjoining room and the caregiver attempted to soothe him? Did the behavior result in his being given juice so that he could calm down? Did the behavior result in scolding by the teacher, providing the kind of intense individual attention that some youngsters crave because it is the only demonstration of love and caring they have experienced? When teachers and caregivers examine the ABC’s of the behavior, they are better able to understand the child’s motivation, establish preventive strategies, and teach alternative social skills the child can use to meet his or her needs.

Prevention Strategies
Mrs. Archie knows that she needs to learn specific strategies that will help her work with “difficult” behaviors, like those of Wade, because these problems certainly don’t seem to go away on their own. The following intervention methods are designed to preempt anti-social behaviors and are referred to as prevention strategies. It is always better to prevent the behavior as much as possible.

Accentuate the Positive. For the child who demonstrates inappropriate behavior to gain attention, the teacher should find every opportunity to give the child positive attention when he or she is behaving appropriately. Often, these opportunities to “catch the child being good” occur relatively early in the day. When children receive plenty of positive attention early in the day and the teacher continues to find opportunities for praise and attention as the day goes on, the child is not as likely to misbehave for attention as his need is already being met (Hanley, Piazza, & Fisher, 1997). This intervention is based on the principle of deprivation states. If the child is deprived of attention and is “hungry” for adult interaction, he will do anything to gain the attention of others, even negative attention.

Player’s Choice. When educators see a negative pattern of behavior, they can anticipate that the child is likely to refuse adult requests. This is often referred to as “oppositional behavior.” A teacher may remark, “It doesn’t matter what I ask her to do, she is going to refuse to do it.” One successful strategy for dealing with this type of oppositional behavior is to provide the child with choices (Knowlton, 1995). This approach not only gives the child power and control, but also affords the child valuable opportunities for decision making. Example of choices include, “Do you want to carry out the trash basket or erase the chalkboard?” “Do you want to sit in the red chair or the blue chair?” or “Do you want to pick up the yellow blocks or the green blocks?”

The teacher must be cautious about the number of choices provided, however. Many children have difficulty making up their minds if too many choices are presented—often, two choices are plenty. Also, adults need to monitor their own attitude as they present choices. If choices are presented using a drill sergeant tone of voice, the oppositional child is going to resist the suggestions.

On a Roll. When adults anticipate that a child is going to refuse a request, teachers can embed this request within a series of other simple requests. This intervention is based on the research-based principles of high-probability request sequences (Ardoin, Martens, & Wolfe, 1999). The first step in this procedure is to observe the child to determine which requests she consistently performs. Before asking the child to perform the non-preferred request, ask her to do several other things that she does consistently. For example, 8-year-old Morgan consistently resists cleaning up the dollhouse area. While she is playing with the dollhouse, her teacher could ask her to “Give the dolls a kiss,” “Show me the doll’s furniture,” and “Put the dolls in their bedrooms.” After she has complied with these three requests, she is much more likely to comply with the request to “Put the dolls away now” or “Give them to me.”

Grandma’s Rule. This strategy often is referred to as the Premack Principle (Premack, 1959). When asking a child to perform an action, specifying what he or she will receive after completing it more often ensures its completion. Examples here include: “When you have finished your math problems, then we will go outside,” “When you have eaten your peas, you can have some...
pudding,” and “After you have rested awhile, we will go to the library.”

**A Spoonful of Sugar Helps the Medicine Go Down.**
This principle involves pairing preferred and non-preferred activities. One particular task that is difficult for preschoolers, and many adults, is waiting. Most of us do not wait well. When asking a child to complete a non-preferred activity such as waiting in line, pairing a preferred activity with the waiting will make it more tolerable.

Businesses and amusement parks use the principle of pairing when they provide music or exhibits for customers as they wait in line. Similarly, with young children, teachers can provide enjoyable activities as children wait. Suggested activities that can be used during waiting periods include singing, looking at books, reading a story, or holding something special such as a banner, sign, or toy.

Another difficult activity for many young children is remaining seated. If the child is given a small object to hold during the time she must remain seated, she may be willing to continue sitting for a longer period. The principle of pairing preferred and non-preferred activities also gives the child increasing responsibility for her own behavior, instead of relying on teacher discipline.

**Just One More.** This particular intervention is most effective when a child behaves inappropriately in order to escape a low-preference task. The purpose of the intervention is to improve work habits and increase time on task. The first step is to identify how long a particular child will work at a specific task before exhibiting inappropriate behavior. Once the teacher has determined how long a child will work on a task, the teacher can give the child a delay cue to head off misbehavior. Examples of delay cues are “Just one more and then you’re finished,” “Just two minutes and then you’re finished,” or “Do this and then you’re finished.”

In this intervention, a teacher sets aside preconceived ideas about how long children should work on a task and instead focuses on improving the child’s ability to complete tasks in reference to his current abilities. As the children’s challenging behaviors decrease, the adult gradually can increase the time on task, and the amount of work completed, before giving them the delay cue and releasing them from the task.

**The More We Get Together.** Another way to improve task completion is by making the job a collaborative effort. If a child finds it difficult to complete non-preferred activities, then the instructor can complete part of the task with the student. For example, when organizing the bookshelf, the adult completes a portion of the task, such as picking up the big books as the student picks up the little books. She prefaces the activity by stating, “I’ll pick up the big books, and you pick up the little books.” As the child becomes more willing to complete her part of the task, the caregiver gradually increases the work expectations for the child while decreasing the amount of assistance.

**Communication Development**
In addition to preventing inappropriate behavior, another tactic is replacing the problem behavior by teaching the child alternative behaviors. The key to this process is “functional equivalence.” Teachers must determine the function or pay-off for the inappropriate behavior and then teach an alternative equivalent action that will serve the same purpose as the negative behavior. This often is referred to as the “fair pair” rule (White & Haring, 1976). Rather than punishing the behavior, teaching children a better way to behave assists in meeting their needs.

**Bids for Attention.** The first step in addressing attention-seeking negative behaviors is to reduce their occurrence by providing plenty of attention for the child’s appropriate behaviors. The next step is to teach the child appropriate ways to gain attention from others. Most children learn appropriate social skills incidentally from their family and teachers; some children, however, have learned negative ways to gain social attention. Some of the social skills that may need to be taught include calling others by name, tapping friends on the shoulder for attention, knowing how to join others in play, and raising one’s hand to gain the teacher’s attention. Numerous other social skills may require direct instruction. Any time a behavior is considered inappropriate, adults need to teach the child a better way to have his needs met.

When teaching social skills to children, break the skill into a maximum of three steps. Then model the steps and have the child demonstrate the skill. Provide positive and negative examples of the step and have the children label the demonstration as correct or incorrect. Use class discussion time to role-play and talk about when this particular social skill is appropriate. Throughout the day, set up situations that allow practice of the social skill and encourage the child to use the new skill. Finally, promote carry-over of the skill by communicating with the family about the social skills instruction in order for the child to practice the social skills outside of the classroom—on the playground, in the lunch room, and at home.

**Ask for Something Else.** If we know that the child has disruptive behaviors when presented with tasks that are disliked, then the teacher can present the child with an alternative task or materials, something she likes, before the problem behavior occurs. Then the child can be taught to ask for the alternative activity or object. When the child requests the alternative, provide it and preempt the negative behavior. In this way, children can learn to communicate their needs and prevent the
challenging behavior from occurring.

**Ask for Help.** Many children behave disruptively because they are frustrated with a task. Teachers usually can determine when the child is becoming frustrated by observing and reading nonverbal communication signals. Possible signs of frustration might be sighing, fidgeting, reddening of the face, or negative facial expressions. Noticing these signs helps the teacher know that it is time to intervene. Rather than offering help when the child needs it, the teacher says, "It looks like you need some help. When you need help, you need to tell me. Now you say, 'I need help,'" After the child has responded by saying, "I need help," the teacher provides assistance. This strategy is much more effective if the group already has role-played "asking for help."

**Ask for a Break.** This strategy is similar to the two listed above; in this case, educators teach the child to ask for a break during a difficult and frustrating task. Prior to presenting the task, the teacher can explain that she knows that the activity can be difficult, but that the child can have a break after spending some time working hard at it. Then, the child can be taught to request a break while other students are engaged in various tasks.

Although teachers would like to think that instruction and activities are always fun for children and that learning should be child-directed, certain important activities must be mastered if children are to become successful in school. Especially as children progress into the primary grades, teachers expect them to work independently on pencil-and-paper tasks. Teaching youngsters communication skills that will help them handle frustration and low-preference activities will improve their outcomes as learners in school and in life.

**Reviewing Options**

Mrs. Archie, in reviewing her options for working with Wade, is gaining confidence in her ability to work more carefully with the family and with Wade to ensure his successful re-entry to her classroom. Her resolve is to continue developing a "community of learners" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) by helping Wade become a functioning member of her group. She intends to teach him how to enter a play setting, negotiate for what he wants in the classroom, and learn how to make compromises, while nurturing him as she would any child. These are goals that she believes will help turn around Wade's negative behavior.

Mrs. Archie also knows that her administrator is a caring woman, and, if necessary, Wade could be placed in another classroom so that he could have a "fresh start" with his entry into school. Her hope is that this will be a last-resort strategy, because she understands how much Wade needs a caring adult who understands him and his needs. Her phone call to Wade's mother at the end of the day will be friendly and supportive, with many recommendations for how the school can assist the family.

**A Long-Term Plan**

Most children with chronic difficult behaviors did not learn them overnight. Many of these children experience serious ongoing problems in their families. As teachers, we cannot change home dynamics or family problems. Sometimes a parent conference or parent education groups can be helpful, as the family learns to support a difficult child at home. With others, we do well to teach the child socially appropriate behavior in the classroom. As a child learns socially appropriate behavior in school, she learns that the behavior is useful in other settings. Often, the school is the only place where the child has the opportunity to learn prosocial behaviors. Children's negative behaviors may have, in a sense, "worked" for them in numerous situations for a substantial period of time. When we work to teach the child a better way to get his or her needs met, we must recognize that this process takes time and effort. When we as educators invest this time and effort with children during childhood, we are providing them with the tools that can make the difference in their school careers and in their lives.

**References**


