

by Laura J. Colker and Derry Koralek

The
TEACHING
YOUNG CHILDREN
STAFF DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

MAY 2008

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Using this guide

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

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

A few notes

- All page numbers refer to *Teaching Young Children*, May 2008.
- No permission is needed to make copies of NAEYC-copyrighted articles in *Teaching Young Children* as long as they bear a credit line and are distributed at no cost.
- Depending on the setting in which you meet, you can ask participants to do activities in pairs or small groups or as classroom teams.
- Ask volunteers to type and disseminate ideas generated in the sessions.
- Teachers can share their ideas, read articles, and find other useful resources at tyc.naeyc.org.

This feature explains why cooperative games are appropriate for preschoolers. It includes instructions for playing two games: Plastic bottle bowling and Over and under.

Note: You will need to gather the items used in playing the cooperative games on p. 4 and any other cooperative games of your choosing. See tyc.naeyc.org/NEXT to find instructions for a few additional cooperative games. You can use these as a resource for yourself and provide copies for participants. If possible, schedule this session in a large open room or outdoors.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Cooperative games help young children build social skills and self-confidence.
- ➔ Cooperative games teach children to work together to reach a common goal.
- ➔ Cooperative games can be fun for all players, not just those who have highly developed physical skills.

Let's Talk

1. What do you remember about playing games as a child? What kinds of games did you enjoy? What games were you good at? Which games did you avoid playing?
2. Do you play games as an adult? What kinds of games do you enjoy now? What games do you avoid?
3. Would you be more or less likely to enjoy playing a game if it were cooperative rather than competitive?

For Further Thinking and Playing

1. **Consider the research.** Read the following research abstract to participants:

Researchers at the University of Nevada, Reno, examined the effects of competitive and cooperative games on aggressive and cooperative behaviors of seventy 4- to 5-year-old preschoolers. They measured children's behaviors while playing games and in subsequent free play times. The research results showed that while children were playing cooperative games, their use of cooperative behavior increased and use of aggressive behaviors decreased. On the other hand, after children played competitive games, their behavior was more aggressive and less cooperative.

To read the full article "Cooperative Games: A Way to Modify Aggressive and Cooperative Behaviors in Young Children," by A.K. Bay-Hinitz, R.F. Peterson, and H.R. Quilitch (*Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, Fall 1994), go to <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/picrender.fcgi?artid=1297825&blobtype=pdf>.

Lead a discussion prompting participants with questions such as these:

- Have you seen similar behavioral responses when children in your class play competitive and cooperative games?
- Why do you think preschoolers are more likely to be aggressive after playing competitive games? Why are they more likely to be cooperative after playing cooperative games?

2. **Let's play a game.** Lead participants in playing one or more of the games on p. 4 or from the handout at tyc.naeyc.org/NEXT. After the game, encourage participants to discuss their reactions to the game and relate their feelings to those that preschoolers are likely to have when playing cooperative games. Be sure to acknowledge that it is perfectly all right for adults to enjoy competition. Many preschoolers, on the other hand, have not yet developed the skills needed to cope with losing a game. Explain that cooperative games do not lead to winners versus losers, so all of the players can feel good about their participation. Have participants work as a group to list the skills they used to play the cooperative game and to list the skills preschoolers could build if they played the same game.

(continued on page 8)

This article is rich in techniques for supporting children’s emergent writing. The photographs show children writing as they play and learn together. The Message in a Backpack suggests ways families can support children’s writing at home.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Children learn about writing even before they learn to read.
- ➔ When teachers provide writing materials in every center, children are eager to incorporate writing in their play.
- ➔ Teachers can support young writers through modeling the uses and importance of writing, encouraging children’s writing efforts, displaying children’s writing, and explaining the writing attempts to families the same way they do children’s artwork.

Let’s Talk

1. What do you remember about your early writing efforts? Learning the mechanics? Expressing your thoughts? Was it exciting, difficult, or a combination of the two? What effect do you think these experiences have had on the way you support children as writers and authors?
2. How do you address both reading and writing in your classroom?
3. The authors of this article say, “No two people write the same way.” Are they referring to penmanship, content, or both? How could this statement influence your approach to teaching about writing?

For Further Thinking

1. **Incorporate writing into all learning centers.** Ask participants to work in pairs to develop a plan for including writing materials and activities in a learning center other than the writing center. After discussing typical play themes in the chosen learning center, each pair should list materials they would provide so children could incorporate writing in their play. Have each pair share their ideas with the group.
2. **Create or enhance the writing center.** Ask participants to describe their classroom writing center. Where is it located? What items will children find? Next, building on the ideas in this article, have participants draw a design for their ideal writing center. Post the designs on the wall, then have the group gather at each design so teachers can introduce their writing centers to each other. What features were common to the designs? Which were unique? Which ideas can be implemented—as is or with slight adaptations?
3. **Establish a publishing area.** Ask the group to react to the idea of setting up a classroom publishing center where children can write and bind individual or group books. Discuss:
 - How could this center support children’s writing?
 - Where would you locate it?
 - What materials would you provide?
 - How would children use the center?
 - How would children “write” the texts?
 - How would they illustrate their books?
 - How would the books be bound?
 - Where would published books be housed?

In the Classroom

1. **Implement and document.** Have participants assess the writing materials available throughout their classrooms—in all centers, including the writing center—then make changes they think are needed to enhance children’s opportunities to incorporate writing in their play. Ask participants to keep track of the changes and how they affect children’s development of writing skills. Suggest that participants take photos showing children at play in the centers before and after the changes.
2. **Involve families.** Have teachers copy and distribute to families the Message in a Backpack and plan ways for families to report on their use of the suggestions. Parents could write their ideas on a running list on a classroom bulletin board, send in photos of children writing, describe what they did with their children via e-mail, and so on.
3. **Follow up.** At the next session, invite participants to describe the writing materials they added to the learning centers, what else they did to encourage children to include writing in their play, and how children responded. Ask them to share their photographs documenting children’s responses to the changes.

This photo essay presents images of preschoolers building with hollow and wooden unit blocks. The text poses questions about the skills children can develop through block play. Possible answers appear on pp. 16–17.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Block play supports learning in all developmental domains and content areas.
- ➔ Teachers can extend children’s block play and learning by providing props and suggesting dramatic play scenarios.
- ➔ Teachers’ comments and questions can help children enhance their block creations and play.

Let’s Talk

1. Unit blocks have been around for almost 100 years. Did you play with them as a child? What memories do you have? What did you build?
2. What does your classroom block area look like? How is it arranged to promote play and learning? How do you protect children’s constructions so they can come back to them the next day? What props, books, and writing materials are in the block area? Is there anything you might change—to increase the space available for constructions or to make block play more interesting and rewarding?


For Further Thinking

1. **List the skills.** Tape four sheets of chart paper around the room; provide a marker with each. Label each sheet with a developmental domain: (1) Social and Emotional, (2) Language and Literacy, (3) Physical, and (4) Cognitive. Ask participants to think for a moment about the block play they have observed in their classrooms. Ask a volunteer to share an observation and discuss what kinds of skills the children were learning. For example, if a participant describes a child searching for a block of a certain size, point out how this is related to the cognitive skill of understanding size and shape and record this skill on the chart paper with the heading Cognitive. Next, have teachers walk around the room, listing examples of skills children can develop during block play on the appropriate chart papers. When each chart includes at least five or six examples, reconvene the group. Ask for four volunteers, each of whom will lead the group in discussing the skills listed under one domain and adding other examples as appropriate.
2. **What would you do–A?** Make sure all participants have a copy of the article. Draw their attention to a photo of your choice. Ask participants to think about what props they could add to extend the children’s learning. Have the group share their ideas of props to add and discuss how these props could influence what children do and learn. Next, refer to the skills charts posted on the walls. Which skills could the children in the photo be learning before and after adding the suggested props?
3. **What would you do–B?** Refer to another photo and ask participants to think of a dramatic play scenario to suggest to the children in the photo to make their play more elaborate. Write each suggested scenario on chart paper and discuss how this play might impact the children’s block building. Again, look at the lists of skills recorded on the chart paper. Which skills could the children in the photo be learning before and during the suggested scenarios?
4. **What would you do–C?** Using a third photo from the article, ask participants to write two questions they might ask the children in the photo that would extend their play or take it in a new direction. As the teachers share their questions, record them on chart paper and discuss how these questions might lead children to try new ideas.

In the Classroom

1. **Implement and document.** Ask teachers to try some of the new ideas for props, scenarios, and questions. Have them photograph the children’s block play before and after implementing the idea. To show families what children are learning, teachers might make a bulletin board display or documentation panel titled “Block Building Leads to Skill Building.” For each photo, teachers can write a statement about what children are doing and learning.
2. **Follow up.** At the next session, have teachers bring the photos they took of children playing and learning in the block area. Have the group put together a photo essay using everyone’s photographs.

Planning and reflection are thought processes that go hand in hand. During planning, children think through an activity or project, weighing what they will need to do to make the effort a success. During reflection, they review what happened and consider how this information will affect their plan.

 **Note:** Before beginning these activities, make copies of the Planning Form found at tyc.naeyc.org/NEXT.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ The daily schedule can include times for planning and reflection.
- ➔ Effective planning enables children to reach their goals.
- ➔ Teachers can help children connect their reflections to their next plan.
- ➔ Planning and reflection are skills children will use now and in the future.

Let's Talk

1. What role do planning and reflection play in your work life? How about your personal life?
2. How are the steps outlined in the article similar to those you use? What's the same and what's different?
3. How would you explain the importance of planning and reflection to families? How could you support parents who want to help their children build their abilities to plan and reflect?

For Further Thinking

1. **Practice planning.** Ask participants to work in pairs, with one acting as a preschooler and the other as a teacher. Distribute a copy of the Planning Form to each participant and explain how teachers can use it to help children plan using the steps described on p. 18. Have the “preschoolers” choose an activity or project. Then have the “teachers” pose the questions on the planning form and record the responses. Next, ask the pairs to take turns describing the experience to the full group. The “teachers” can share with the group the open-ended questions they used as prompts to help their partners elaborate on their plans. Ask a volunteer to record these questions on chart paper. To close, review the list of techniques for helping children make plans on p. 18. Are there other strategies the group can think of to add to this list? If so, make sure that participants add them to the techniques included in the article.
2. **Reflect on reflection.** Ask individuals, pairs, or small groups to come up with three or four reasons why it is important to help children reflect on what they did to carry out their plans. As participants share their reasons with the group, focus on how reflection supports preschoolers in the present and how it can support them in kindergarten and the primary grades. Ask participants to examine the photo on p. 18 or p. 19 and think of what they could say to help the child or children reflect on their activity. Review, discuss, and expand on the list of techniques for helping children reflect on p. 19. Close by reminding participants that reflection can be spontaneous as well as a scheduled daily event.
3. **Combine both processes.** Ask the paired participants to discuss how teachers can help children use their reflections to make new plans. Ask, “How does reflection ‘raise the bar’ so that children can create plans that help them reach new goals?”
4. **Get more information.** Encourage teachers to read “How Planning and Reflection Develop Young Children’s Thinking Skills,” by Ann S. Epstein (*Young Children*, September 2003), at tyc.naeyc.org/articles.

In the Classroom

1. **Implement and document.** Ask participants to adapt their daily schedule to provide time for planning and reflection. Have them document what happens in writing and with photos. The documentation should show individual children’s planning approaches and preferences; use of the suggested planning and reflection strategies on pp. 18–19 and from the group brainstorming; times when children changed their plans; spontaneous reflection opportunities; and communication between teachers and families.
2. **Follow up.** At the next session, invite teachers to share what happened as they implemented daily planning and reflecting times with the children. What worked well? What challenges arose for teachers and children? How did teachers overcome these challenges?

Walter Gilliam's research on the expulsion rate of children attending state-funded pre-K programs in 40 states points to an alarmingly high incidence of expulsion. Preschoolers are expelled at three times the rate of children in K–12 programs. Moreover, boys and African Americans are expelled at disproportionately high rates. This article presents Gilliam's seven recommendations for policy makers and suggests steps teachers can take to make sure that all children stay enrolled in preschool.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ When teachers have access to a classroom behavioral consultant, children are more likely to get the help they need.
- ➔ Teachers need to care for their own mental health, so they can serve children well.
- ➔ Teachers, families, and specialists should work together to plan ways to assess the causes of a child's disruptive behavior and plan ways to help the child learn acceptable behaviors.

Let's Talk

1. How does your program respond when a child's behavior is disruptive?
2. What kinds of support does your program offer children who use challenging behavior?
3. What kinds of support does your program offer to families when their child uses challenging behavior?
4. What kinds of support does your program offer teachers when children in their classrooms use challenging behavior?

For Further Thinking

1. **How teachers can play a part.** As a group, discuss Gilliam's seven policy recommendations on p. 21. Although many of these recommendations are for policy makers and administrators, what can teachers do to support their implementation? Lead the group in brainstorming ways to work with administrators and other policy makers in addressing these recommendations.
2. **What teachers can do.** Excluding the first one, assign each of the steps teachers can take (on p. 21) to two or more participants. Have the pairs or small groups discuss their assigned step and think of specific things they can do to implement it. Next, have the pairs or small groups share their ideas and record them on chart paper. Throughout the discussions emphasize that teachers are part of a team along with families, colleagues, supervisors, and specialists. They can work with others to assess and address children's needs.
3. **Plan for support.** Lead participants in discussing what teachers can do if they feel overly stressed and depressed. Where can they get help and support? Make sure that everyone knows that seeking help is a sign of good sense. Remind them of the author's words: "Seeking and accepting support is not an admission of failure—it is an acknowledgment of the importance of [your] work."

In the Classroom

1. **Read and practice.** Download, copy, and distribute the Guidance Matters column by Dan Gartrell from the January 2006 issue of *Young Children* (<http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200601/GuidanceBTJ.pdf>). This column reviews Walter Gilliam's 2005 study and suggests techniques teachers can use with children they find challenging. Ask teachers to read the column and try out some of the suggested techniques. Invite teachers to keep track of what they do and how children respond by writing in a journal.
2. **Follow up.** At the next session, invite participants to discuss the techniques they tried and how children behaved as a result. Emphasize that these suggestions—when included as part of a developmentally appropriate program—support children and can go a long way toward preventing preschool expulsions.

This one-page feature reminds teachers of the many things children can learn when they offer water play as a regular activity. The authors' tips for getting started address health and safety, props, questions and comments to support learning, and ways to encourage new kinds of exploration.

Notes:

1. The following suggestions are targeted for use with teachers who rarely or never offer children water play.
2. The action plan handout used in **For Further Thinking 1. Plan to remove the lid** (below) can be found at tyc.naeyc.org/NEXT.
3. You will need to make copies of applicable math and science early learning standards to use in **For Further Thinking 2. Connecting to standards** (below). You can find state learning standards for preschool children online at <http://nieer.org/standards/statelist.php>.

Key points to reinforce during staff development sessions:

- ➔ Water play can encourage young children's learning in all domains.
- ➔ Water play is a particularly effective way to encourage children's explorations of math and science concepts and vocabulary.
- ➔ Planning ahead and being prepared to handle spills and mishaps is key to the success of water play.
- ➔ Water play can take place in tubs, trays, or wading pools instead of or in addition to a water table.

Let's Talk

1. **Where is your water table located?** How often is it available for children's use? What materials and props do you provide? What changes could you make to enhance water play in your classroom?
2. **Have participants picture a busy, well-stocked water table in their classroom.** Ask questions such as, Which children are playing at the water table? What props are they using? What are they talking about? Is there a teacher nearby? What is the teacher doing or saying?

For Further Thinking

1. **Plan to remove the lid.** Distribute copies of the handout "Taking the Lid off the Water Table Action Plan." Ask participants to complete the plan using the article on p. 24 as a guide. Have participants exchange their plans with a partner and review and give each other feedback.
2. **Connecting to standards.** Distribute copies of applicable math and science preschool learning standards. Provide highlighters in two different colors, for example blue and yellow. Ask participants to highlight the math standards that could be addressed through water play in one color and then do the same for science standards in the other color. Brainstorm what children might do during water play and list participants' ideas in a column on the left side of a piece of chart paper. Then go back and try to match the learning standards with each activity. For example, if children filled a quart-size bottle with water using a half-cup measuring cup, what standards might the activity address?

In the Classroom


1. **Implement and document.** Ask participants to implement their action plans and record what happens through observation notes, anecdotal records, and photographs. Suggest using the photographs to create a display that shows how water play addresses specific standards.
2. **Follow up.** At the next session, invite participants to display and elaborate on their documentation. Discuss what happened when they involved the children and families in introducing (or reviving) water play in their classroom.

(continued from p. 2)

In the Classroom

1. **Implement and document.** Ask participants to introduce some cooperative games to the children in their classrooms. Have them keep track of the games they played and how children responded during and after the game. Do they see similar results to those identified by the researchers from the University of Nevada, Reno?
2. **Follow up.** Ask participants to learn about other cooperative games preschoolers enjoy and to revamp competitive games to make them cooperative. At the next session, participants can discuss their experiences introducing cooperative games to preschoolers and share at least one new cooperative game with the group.

New Resources for *NEXT*



Starting with this issue, participant materials that go with the activities in *NEXT* are located on the *Teaching Young Children* Web site. Go to tyc.naeyc.org/NEXT to download handouts to use in staff development sessions. While you're there, please take our online survey to provide feedback about *Teaching Young Children* and *NEXT*.

Look for
this icon: 
indicating online
content and
resources.

*NEXT: The Teaching Young Children Staff
Development Guide* Vol 1, No 3 May 2008

Teaching Young Children/Preschool is published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 1313 L Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005-4101.

Through its publications program, NAEYC provides a forum for discussion of major ideas in our field. We hope to provoke thought and promote professional growth. The views expressed or implied are not necessarily those of the Association. Acceptance of advertising does not represent NAEYC's endorsement of any product or service, nor is NAEYC responsible for representations made by advertisers.

Copyright © 2008 by NAEYC.
All rights reserved.

Become a Member of the World's Largest Organization of Early Childhood Educators

The **National Association for the Education of Young Children** supports preschool teachers on the job—today and in the future. More than half of NAEYC's members are educators who work with preschool children. We value them and all they do for children and families.

Your professional association wants to help. Find out more about joining NAEYC at

www.naeyc.org/membership

naeyc[®]

