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# TYC

## TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN



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**naeyc**® National Association for the  
Education of Young Children

**Empowering  
Educators &  
Programs**

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## Message from Rhian

Dear colleagues,

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the undeniable necessity of early childhood education. But the recent attention just confirms what we (as a field) already know. Excellent early education and care programs are essential for children, families, and communities—day-to-day and long term.

Vice President Harris recently stated, “We are in a moment that should cause us to have great optimism about what is possible” as we “invest in our child care workers, in our child care centers, and invest in our children.” We echo this optimism and underscore the need for significant and sustained funding. Hand-in-hand with these are questions about quality: What does high-quality early childhood education entail? How can it be recognized, documented, supported, and maintained over time?

NAEYC’s Early Learning Program Accreditation has answers to these questions. Reflecting the work of outstanding educators and programs and grounded in research, NAEYC Accreditation ensures quality. Its standards and processes empower educators and programs through a shared understanding of and dedication to developmentally appropriate practices.

The benefits abound: Actively engaging in accreditation means that staff are involved in a sustainable and ongoing process of self-reflection and continuous improvement. It is linked to increased staff morale and retention, and an overall productive and upbeat work environment—all key ingredients for positively impacting the lives of young children, families, and our field. Across the nation and internationally on military bases, more than 10,000 programs are engaged in NAEYC’s process of accreditation. This equates to more than one million children learning and growing in high-quality programs. To learn more, visit [NAEYC.org/accreditation](https://naeyc.org/accreditation).

Whether you are new to accreditation or have been at an accredited program for years, we hope you find inspiration and guidance in the many ways the teachers and programs bring the standards to life in this special issue of *Teaching Young Children*.

Onward!

**Rhian Evans Allvin**  
Chief Executive Officer

## NAEYC Calendar Highlights

Highlights	Get Involved	Learn More
<b>NEW BOOK</b> <i>Advancing Equity &amp; Embracing Diversity in Early Childhood Education: Elevating Voices and Actions</i>	Voices of early childhood educators sound the call to advance the profession toward more equitable educational experiences, systems, and practices for all children.	Visit <a href="https://naeyc.org/books/advancing-equity">NAEYC.org/books/advancing-equity</a> and get your copy today. (This is a premium and standard member benefit.)
<b>NEW BOOK</b> <i>Learning Stories &amp; Teacher Inquiry Groups: Reimagining Teaching &amp; Assessment in Early Childhood Education</i>	Learn how to integrate the Learning Stories approach and teacher inquiry groups to promote authentic assessment and inform instruction.	Visit <a href="https://naeyc.org/books/learning-stories">NAEYC.org/books/learning-stories</a> and get your copy today.
<b>NEW EVENT</b> <b>2021 NAEYC Annual Conference</b>	Don’t miss this amazing <b>virtual</b> event for the high-quality content you’ve come to rely on from NAEYC.	Registration opens this August at <a href="https://naeyc.org/conference">NAEYC.org/conference</a> .



## Message from the TYC Editorial Team

Back by popular demand, we bring you a special edition of *Teaching Young Children* that is devoted to high-quality practices in early learning programs. Packed with research-informed recommendations and classroom-based examples, this digital-only issue offers a compilation of content from the TYC archives that aligns with NAEYC's Early Learning Program Accreditation. You'll find one article for each of the 10 standards, and each one captures an aspect of developmentally appropriate practice in action for you to reflect on and apply in your own setting.

You'll read about everything from "Teaching and Learning With Hip-Hop Culture" to "Two Homes, One Classroom: Inclusive Practices That Work." There are also articles about "Understanding the Importance of Timing, Length, and Sequence of Activities" and preparing assessment information for a family conference. In addition, this special issue features an interview with an exemplary NAEYC-accredited early learning program. Finally, you'll find two Message in a Backpack™ features, which contain ready-to-share tips for families about guiding young children's behavior and ways to have fun with math, science, and the outdoors.

### Reflection Questions for this Issue

1. Looking through the standards overview below, what is one standard that is a strength for you and your program? What specific conditions or practices have helped make this an area of success?
2. What is one standard that presents a challenge for you and your program? After reading the corresponding article in this issue, what is a new or different practice that you can try out to attain growth in this area?
3. Across the 10 articles, what classroom example or recommended practice are you most excited to try in your setting?

We encourage you to share your voice with us! Submit an article ([NAEYC.org/writeTYC](https://naeyc.org/writeTYC)), nominate yourself or a colleague to be a feature teacher ([NAEYC.org/tyc/nominations](https://naeyc.org/tyc/nominations)), or provide feedback to us about TYC ([tyc@naeyc.org](mailto:tyc@naeyc.org)).



## Help Your Program Thrive with NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation!

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# NAEYC Accreditation Standards Overview

<b>Standard 1</b> <b>Relationships</b>	The program promotes positive relationships between all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member.
<b>Standard 2</b> <b>Curriculum</b>	The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and that promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.
<b>Standard 3</b> <b>Teaching</b>	The program uses a variety of developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development in the context of the program's curriculum goals.
<b>Standard 4</b> <b>Assessment of Child Progress</b>	The program uses a variety of formal and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development. These assessments occur in the context of reciprocal communications between teachers and families, and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children are developing. The program uses assessment results to inform decisions about the children in their care, to improve teaching practices, and to drive program improvement.
<b>Standard 5</b> <b>Health</b>	The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness.
<b>Standard 6</b> <b>Staff Competencies, Preparation, &amp; Support</b>	The program employs and supports a teaching and administrative staff that have the qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests.
<b>Standard 7</b> <b>Families</b>	The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.
<b>Standard 8</b> <b>Community Relationships</b>	The program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children's communities to support the achievement of program goals.
<b>Standard 9</b> <b>Physical Environment</b>	The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development.
<b>Standard 10</b> <b>Leadership &amp; Management</b>	The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences.

For further details on the standards, visit [NAEYC.org/accreditation/early-learning/interested](https://naeyc.org/accreditation/early-learning/interested).

# Feature Program

## Culver Family Learning Center

is one of 12 NAEYC-accredited early learning sites owned and operated by the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp. (EVSC) in Indiana. It is the largest of the sites and serves as a hub for early learning in this public school district. Services at Culver are funded using Title I, On My Way Pre-K (Indiana's state pre-K program), and special education funds (both state and federal). The program serves a diverse population of nearly 700 children, including children with disabilities, English-language learners (including a Spanish/English bilingual classroom), and children whose families are experiencing challenges. The program has operated for more than 10 years. Davida Johnson is the on-site director.



### Why did your program decide to become NAEYC accredited?

Culver Family Learning Center is committed to providing the highest quality early learning possible. NAEYC accreditation represents the highest level of excellence for early learning nationally. Accreditation provides a shared perspective of the quality Culver strives for. Accreditation also provides a common set of expectations for staff, children, and families. The Indiana Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning recognizes NAEYC accreditation and provides additional funding to programs that have achieved it.

### How has the accreditation process or being NAEYC accredited helped your program?

In Indiana, NAEYC accreditation affords us the opportunity to access additional funding to assist in meeting high-quality standards. It gives Culver a set of shared standards for accountability on which to build continuous improvement. While working on accreditation portfolios, teachers had the opportunity to hold each other accountable and to learn from each other. Each teacher had different interpretations of the standards; hence, they helped one another gain new perspectives. Culver has been accredited for 10 years. When talking with parents, we discuss the program's accreditation. It guides parents on what to look for in high-quality early learning programs. It deepens families' and teachers' understanding of how children learn.

### What is a NAEYC program standard that your program has been especially focused on recently?

**Standard 4: Assessment of Child Progress; 4A: Creating an assessment plan.** In addition to screening upon enrollment and with an ongoing assessment, Culver works with special education professionals, school psychologists with specialized training in early childhood, and social and emotional learning coaches—who are collectively called the Child Success Team (CST)—to implement a tiered intervention approach (Response to Intervention model,

or RTI). Through this approach, children who may need additional supports receive interventions, and educators use formative assessments to monitor children's progress over time. The process has been shown to help children and educators focus on specific goals and the sustained and individualized supports that will help children reach those goals.

### **How does your program connect with families and the community?**

Connecting with families is critical for a number of reasons. Building a relationship with each family empowers them and builds trust. Teachers connect with children and families through home visits, family conferences, and multiple streams of communication, including social media, newsletters, personal notes, and phone calls. Culver conducts family engagement opportunities such as Expressive Arts Night, Family Movie Night, and Friendship Dances. Culver also conducts family nights in Spanish so our Spanish-speaking families receive information in their home language. Culver has a community council that has helped support ongoing initiatives like our library, clothes closet, and monthly food drives. One of Culver's largest community events is Family Fun Day in which community partners collectively work with teachers to give families a day of resources, fun, and food in a festival setting.

### **How does your program care for and support the well-being and professional preparedness of its teachers and staff?**

Lead teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree, and associate teachers are required to have a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™. EVSC participates in the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood Scholarship Program to assist staff in furthering their formal education. Each year teachers are responsible for acquiring a minimum

of 20 professional development hours. A professional development plan is put in place for each staff member to guide their professional development choices. Staff participate in professional learning communities (PLCs), where they look at data and collaborate with one another to work on personal and child goals. Examples of professional development opportunities are Feature Fridays, which are short, informal presentations on specific issues; the summer professional development catalog, which offers weekly PD on a variety of topics; and weekly coaching. Additionally, staff are offered opportunities to attend state and national conferences and study tours of Reggio-inspired programs. In 2019, two teachers who attended a study tour in Reggio Emilia presented at the Indiana AEYC conference. Opportunities like these broaden teachers' perspectives and help develop their leadership skills.

### **What are the characteristics of an effective leader of an early learning program?**

An effective leader needs to possess integrity, gratitude, empathy, self-reflection, and self-evaluation. Leaders must develop a positive climate and culture, encourage lifelong learning, and be willing to capitalize on the strengths of each individual. A leader must also support others to take the lead when appropriate. Leaders must work to develop partnerships with community groups and other school district departments. It is also essential that a leader demonstrates a preparedness to step in and help wherever needed.

As a leader, it is important for staff to see me (Davida) do the work. I love getting the opportunity to work with and alongside them. I get the opportunity to truly learn from and work with the best; many of my weaknesses are strengths of theirs. I try fervently to live by my motto, "love, light, and respect," and to always take the high road. I generally wear a Michelle Obama quote around my neck that another staff member gave me; it says, "When they go low, we go high!"

### **What is the program's overall mission or mission statement?**

We believe all children are competent, capable, and full of potentialities; they have the right to be related to with respect and learn in a safe, enjoyable, and meaningful environment; they deserve a strong foundation of social, cultural, and emotional development; they learn best when adults and children build knowledge collaboratively and create purposeful experiences and explorations by working together.

### **What is a future goal for your program?**

Culver wants to be a beacon of hope and a staple in the community; a place of refuge for families to come to for a quality education and resources for their child and themselves. Culver's short-term goal is to have families and the communities help drive, influence, and determine decisions for the education of children through the creation of a family-community council. It is the goal of Culver to continue to meet the needs for the community it serves.

### **How has your program supported children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Culver Family Learning Center was forced to close our space in March 2020. Through partnerships with the community, Culver was able to support families with food, clothes, special holiday offerings, and literacy activities. Teachers delivered resources to families' doorsteps. Teachers also built relationships with children and families by personally calling them, participating in virtual meetings, and holding class on secure websites. Proudly, Culver Family Learning Center was able to reopen our doors in August 2020 and has remained open for in-person learning the entire school year. As the pandemic continues, Culver has continued to provide resources as needed.





# Instead of Discipline, Use Guidance

Dan Gartrell

We all know that we shouldn't punish young children when they exhibit challenging behaviors. The children in our preschool classrooms are just beginning to learn the complex skills of getting along with others. These are skills that we humans work on our entire lives.

Children are going to have disagreements—sometimes dramatic ones—as they interact with others. They really don't “know better” because they haven't learned the “better” yet. After all, a 4-year-old has only 48 months of on-the-ground experience! It's our job to teach children positive lessons from their mistakes—and to make sure we don't hold their mistakes against them.

Conventional discipline too easily slides into punishment. For example, if we embarrass children by singling them out as part of our discipline strategy, this is punishment. Punishment makes young children feel stressed, hurt, rejected, and angry; these feelings make it harder for children to learn emotional and social skills.

When we punish children, we are actually making life more difficult for

- › the child, who feels rejected and unworthy and becomes more challenged in learning social skills
- › other children, who worry for themselves and the punished child
- › adults, who are not being the leaders they want to be



## Using Guidance

*Guidance* is about building an encouraging setting for every person in the group. It means helping young children understand they can learn from their mistakes, and it starts with showing them how. To give this help successfully, we need to build relationships with every child—especially with the children we find difficult to connect with and understand. We build these relationships from day one, outside of conflict situations. It is only when children know and trust us in day-to-day interactions that they will listen to us when conflicts happen (after we have helped everyone calm down).

So what do you do when conflicts arise and you want to use guidance? This article gives two illustrations of guidance at work. The first one might surprise you.

### Illustration 1: Jeremiah Comes Through

This example comes from former preschool teacher Beth Wallace.

When I first started working with Jeremiah, he had a lot of angry outbursts. The center used time-out at that point (the dreaded “green chair”), and Jeremiah spent considerable time there. While I was at the center, we moved away from using time-outs and introduced a system called peer problem solving. By the time Jeremiah graduated to kindergarten, we had been using the system for three years, and he was one of the experts.

One day, I overheard a fracas in the block corner. I stood up to see what was going on, ready to intervene. Jordan, just 26 months old and only talking a little bit, had a truck. Franklin, 50 months old, decided it was his turn to use the truck. I took a step forward, ready to go to their aid, but paused when I saw Jeremiah (then 60 months old) approach them.

“What’s going on, guys?” Jeremiah asked (my standard opening line). He then facilitated a five-minute discussion between the two children. He made sure both got a chance to speak, interpreting for the little one. “Jordan, what do you think of that idea?” he asked. Jordan shook his head and clutched the truck tighter. “I don’t think Jordan’s ready to give up the truck yet,” Jeremiah told Franklin.

After helping his classmates negotiate an agreement, Jeremiah’s competence was without question, and his pride was evident.

On this day, Beth knew that three years of building relationships and teaching children how to resolve their conflicts through mediation was paying off.

## Illustration 2: Playdough Politics

In preschool, three common sources of conflicts are property, territory, and privilege. The following illustration is a combination of dozens of property-related conflicts I have worked with teachers to address. I put a magnifying glass to this one so you can see up close what guidance is and isn’t, and how it teaches young children to learn from mistaken behavior.

Jason, age 42 months, is the only one at the playdough table. He gets a grin on his face and pulls the whole chunk of dough in front of him. He starts working the dough and mutters, “Makin’ a dinosaur nest and eggs.”

Daeisha, age 52 months, sits at the table and sees Jason has all the dough. She says, “Hey, give me some!” Jason hands Daeisha a tiny bit and circles his arms around the big mound. Daeisha responds by grabbing a large handful of dough out from under Jason’s arm. Jason screams. When he tries to grab the dough back, Daeisha pushes him and starts kneading the playdough. Teacher Kris sees Jason on the floor, yowling, and Daeisha using playdough as if nothing has happened.

Pause for a few minutes to think about how you would address this situation. Then read on to consider two possible intervention choices.

**Conventional discipline:** Kris walks over to Daeisha, stands above her, and says loudly, “You’ve taken something from another person again, Daeisha. You need to sit on the time-out chair so you will remember how to share.” Kris takes Daeisha to the chair.

Daeisha is *not* thinking, “I am glad the teacher has temporarily prevented me from playing. Now I will be a better child and use friendly words instead of forcing my will on others.” Instead, Daeisha is embarrassed, hurt, and angry. She feels rejected by Kris and unwelcome in the group. Daeisha is thinking how to get back at Jason.



**Guidance:** Kris moves between the two children, kneels down, and takes the following five firm, friendly actions. Kris

1. **Describes** the scene. “I see Jason on the floor very upset. I see Daeisha using a big bunch of playdough. We need to solve this problem.”
2. **Calms** who needs calming. “Jason, we need to help you cool down so we can make this better. Let’s get you back on the chair.” Taking the playdough, Kris looks at Daeisha and says to both children, “I will hold the playdough. Take some deep breaths or just close your eyes to get calm.”
3. **Leads** each child to describe the conflict, often starting with the younger child.

Kris: Jason, what do you think happened?

Jason: I was making a dinosaur nest and Daeisha took my playdough!

Kris: Anything else?

Jason: I gave her some, but she still took mine.

Kris: Daeisha, what do you think happened?

Daeisha: He had all the playdough and just shared a little. So I took some so I could play too.

Jason: Daeisha had some. *(He points to the little glob he gave her.)*

Kris: Let’s let Daeisha finish.

Daeisha: I needed more to play, so I took it.

Kris: Let’s see, is this right? Jason, you were making a big nest with the playdough. Daeisha came and didn’t have any. Jason gave Daeisha some. Daeisha, you didn’t have enough, so you took more so you could play too?

*Both children nod, which assures Kris that they both feel like they have been heard and are ready to move forward.*

4. **Solves** the problem with the children—not for them.

Kris: So how can we fix this so you can both play?

Daeisha: He can share more.

Jason: But not too much.

*Kris sets the playdough in front of Jason. Jason gives Daeisha a bit more. Daeisha and Kris both look at Jason. He grimaces but hands over enough to satisfy the other two.*



Kris: Thank you, Jason. Can you still make a dinosaur nest or maybe just an eagle nest?

Jason: A littler dinosaur nest.

Kris: Daeisha, Jason was on the floor, and he was upset. He has given you more playdough. Seems like you need to do something here to make things better. *(Instead of forcing Daeisha to apologize, Kris guides the child to think about what would make Jason feel better.)*

Daeisha: Thank you, Jason. Sorry. Can I make you some eggs?

Jason: Yeah, a whole bunch.

5. **Follows up** with one or both children by having a *guidance talk*. Sitting next to Daeisha, Kris thanks her for helping to solve the problem and talks with her about what to do next time so no one is hurt. They agree that if a classmate won’t share, Daeisha will ask a teacher for help.

Although guidance may seem time consuming, a scene like this can play out in just five minutes. If you truly do not have time to engage in all five steps at that moment, do steps 1 and 2 right away and tell the children when you will get together to finish the mediation. Don’t forget! If the problem is no longer a big deal to both children when you get together, skip to step 5 for a guidance talk. Help each child learn how to get along better next time.



## Seeing the Value of Guidance

Why is guidance well worth the time it takes? Here are four reasons.

First, the teacher does not make one child seem like a perpetrator and the other seem like a victim. Adults can actually start bully-victim patterns if they consistently comfort the “helpless” victim and punish the “guilty” perpetrator. Kris handled this situation so both children felt they were worthy individuals who belonged in the class and were capable of solving their problems and of learning from their mistakes.

Second, Kris worked *with* Daeisha. Children who have the boldness to take things from others most often also have the individual strength to become leaders who can work cooperatively with others (like Jeremiah), if we support them in developing their emotional and social skills. This change requires belief in the child and firm, friendly, and consistent guidance (with an emphasis on the friendly).

Third, every use of guidance provides powerful lessons in language arts and social studies. Children who learn to put strong emotions into non-hurtful words gain vocabulary and communication skills that serve them well for their entire lives. Children who learn the social studies lessons of overcoming differences and solving problems together are gaining democratic life skills.

Finally, every time members of an encouraging classroom see guidance at work, children and adults together learn the vital lesson that everyone is a worthy individual, belongs in the group, and can participate in solving problems. For all of us, this is important learning for making our democracy “more perfect.”

## Closing Thoughts

Guidance should not be thought of as a weak alternative to traditional discipline—it’s being a good coach who doesn’t give up on any member of the team. Your efforts at guidance don’t have to be perfect, but if you persist and reflect, you will get good results. Like Beth and Kris, we learn even as we teach. Do these things, and you will feel positively about yourself as a teacher—and that will help with the inner calm you need to guide children toward healthy emotional and social skills.

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**Dan Gartrell**, EdD, is an emeritus professor of early childhood education and a former Head Start teacher. The ideas here come from *Guidance with Every Child: Teaching Young Children to Manage Conflict* and *A Guidance Guide for Early Childhood Leaders*. To learn more, visit [dangartrell.net](http://dangartrell.net).





## MESSAGE IN A BACKPACK™

Send home with children as a resource for families! Also available online at [NAEYC.org/tyc](https://naeyc.org/tyc).

# Guiding Your Child's Behavior

Keri Giordano

Your preschooler is learning positive behaviors just like she's learning new words and skills. Challenging behaviors often happen when children feel they don't have another way to express their feelings or another way to get what they need. It's important to stay calm, patient, and consistent as you help your child understand your expectations.

**Your child is very upset and having a temper tantrum.**

## Try This:

- › Think about what might be connected to the tantrum. Is he hungry or tired, or does he need to go to the bathroom? Address those needs first.
- › Encourage your child to take deep breaths; you can do them together.
- › Speak quietly and bend down to your child's level.
- › Develop logical consequences related to the undesired behavior, promise them, and follow through on using them. ("If you can't wait for your turn on the swing, we'll go over to the slides.")

**When your child is calm and relaxed, it is a good time to put some things in place to encourage positive behavior.**

## Try This:

- › Talk about family rules and expectations. Your child can help come up with rules and the consequences for not following them.
- › Reinforce positive behaviors ("You're using your words to explain what you want!").
- › Help children with behaviors they're struggling to learn, such as waiting for their turn. Practice them together.
- › Be supportive by modeling positive behaviors.

**Keri Giordano** is an assistant professor at Kean University, New Jersey. She has been in the field of early childhood for 26 years and specializes in working with children with challenging behaviors and their teachers and families.

Photographs: Courtesy of Paul Gargiulo

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# Teaching and Learning with Hip-Hop Culture

Anthony Broughton

In my preschool classroom, I heard children singing and humming popular hip-hop songs during pretend play. To honor their interests, support their learning, and connect with their culture, I decided to incorporate aspects of hip-hop culture into the curriculum. When teachers learn about and connect with children's cultures, they show they value the whole child. Culture opens a door to many possibilities.



## What Is Hip-Hop Culture?

Hip-hop culture is an artistic, musical, physical, and visual mode of communication that people use to express their experiences, beliefs, and emotions. Rap music (spoken or chanted rhyming lyrics performed in time to a beat) is one of the four key stylistic elements of hip-hop culture, in addition to deejaying/scratching, break dancing, and graffiti writing (word art).

Instead of the commercialized rap commonly heard on the radio, instructional/educational rap—or inspirational rap—is more appropriate for young children and offers multiple opportunities for teaching and learning. Through music and language, movement, and the visual arts, rap and other elements of hip-hop culture can support preschoolers' learning and development in all domains.



## Forms of Expression

Children share their experiences, ideas, and feelings in diverse ways. Hip-hop culture offers children many opportunities for self-expression while having fun and honing their communication skills.

- › **Rapping/emceeing:** Creating and speaking raps, chants, or class poetry to a musical beat to share ideas and emotions. After reading aloud a book about being loving, such as *One Love*, by Cedella Marley, invite the children's reactions, then compose and perform a brief rap together.
- › **Deejaying:** Playing music for an audience by using audio equipment (CD player, MP3 player, turntable). Instead of the usual circle and song time, try throwing a mini dance party, with a deejay hosting. Taking the role of class deejay, a child can select an educational hip-hop CD and operate the CD player for the class.
- › **Breaking:** Dancing using creative, expressive, and complex movements. Children can take turns performing their favorite break dance moves for their classmates, including crisscrossing their legs or moving their arms across their midlines to the beat of a hip-hop tune. (Crossing the midline, a child spontaneously moves a hand or foot to the other side of the body—movement that connects the brain with the body—bilateral integration.)
- › **Word art:** Creating visual representations of ideas, beliefs, and emotions using words, symbols, and colors. Children can use blank index cards, dry-erase boards, or pieces of paper to draw their names. Using paint on bulletin board paper, children can create a graffiti mural about their neighborhood, their family, or a topic the class has been studying. After talking with children individually about their contributions, the teacher can help them label their art, then display the mural on a wall.
- › **Beatboxing:** Creating beats and rhythm using the mouth as an instrument.
- › **Incorporating social justice themes:** Raising social awareness by composing and reciting rhythmic verse about an important social topic, like keeping the planet clean. Children and teachers can create brief lyrics based on children's thoughts and experiences, and the class can perform them together.

## Benefits of Hip-Hop in the Classroom

Elements of hip-hop culture can support children's learning and development in all domains: social and emotional, language and literacy, cognitive, and physical.



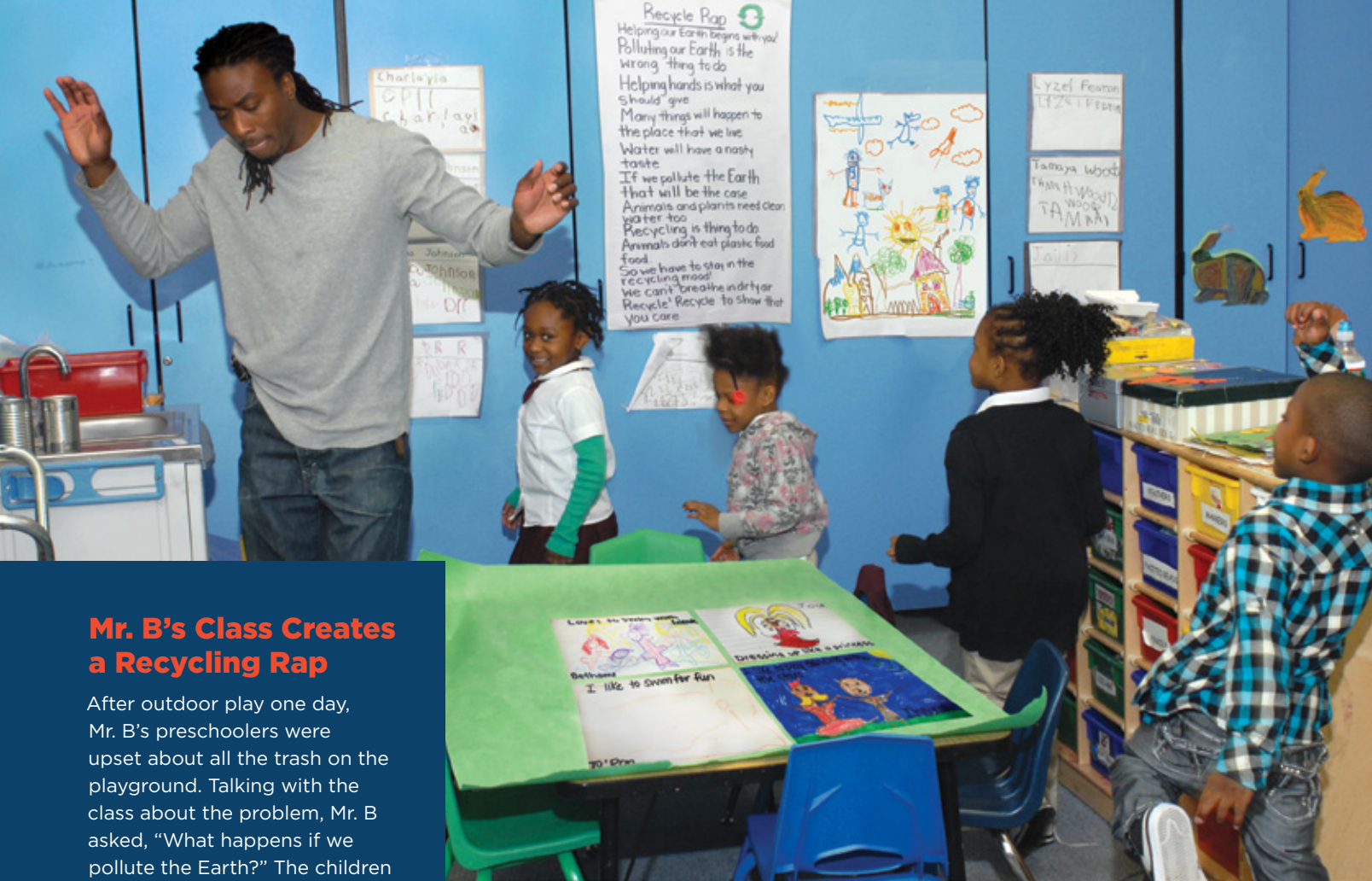
**When teachers learn about and connect with children's culture, they show they value the whole child. Culture opens a door to many possibilities.**

### Social and Emotional: Express Yourself!

Hip-hop encourages children to share their thoughts and feelings in creative ways. It supports children's experimentation while building their self-esteem. To make hip-hop part of the curriculum:

- › Introduce children to different hip-hop experiences or elements, such as rap, break dancing, and word art. Ask them how the music, beat, art, or dance makes them feel.
- › Talk together about a particular classroom activity, such as the emergence of a butterfly from its chrysalis or a chick from its egg. Support children in sharing their ideas and feelings by offering social and emotional vocabulary (*excited, exhausted, surprising*) for them to use in a rap, a break dance, or word art to describe their response to the activity.
- › Provide children with opportunities to discuss emotions. After listening to a rap, ask them how they think the author/rapper felt, or invite them to listen again and then create word art based on the rap.





## Mr. B's Class Creates a Recycling Rap

After outdoor play one day, Mr. B's preschoolers were upset about all the trash on the playground. Talking with the class about the problem, Mr. B asked, "What happens if we pollute the Earth?" The children responded with thoughts like, "The water will be nasty" and "We will breathe dirty air." Mr. B helped the children craft a rap about recycling.



## Language and Literacy Development: Just Say It!

Many preschoolers enjoy experimenting with and exploring early literacy components—letters, words, sounds in words. Music is an effective way to engage children and supports both phonemic awareness and language development. Use hip-hop elements to foster language and literacy development:

- › Record children rapping. Combine the "tracks" to create a classroom rap album. Create accompanying lyric booklets for children and families, so they can follow along or perform them at home.
- › Create raps for each letter of the alphabet. "C is for cat / She sleeps on the hat." Encourage children to explore the rhymes and rhythms in raps: "Sat, bat, hat, cat, I like to dance on my mat."
- › Find or create a simple poem—or use a poem the children are already familiar with—and read it aloud. Pronounce words slowly and clearly to allow the children to feel the words and sounds. Invite children to recite the poem to the rhythm of different beats.

### RECYCLE RAP

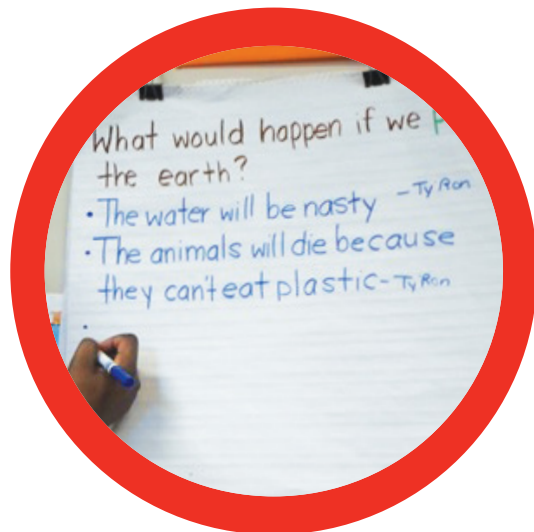


Helping our planet begins with you!  
Polluting our Earth is the wrong thing to do!  
Helping hands is what you should give!  
Many things will happen to the place that we live!  
Animals don't eat plastic for food!  
So we have to stay in the recycling mood!  
We can't breathe dirty air!  
Recycle! Recycle to show that you care!

## Cognitive Development: Think About It!

Preschoolers are naturally curious about the world around them. The following approaches can help you learn more about the children in your program, using hip-hop to support you in differentiating instruction.

- › Have children create and recite simple rhymes or raps about topics they are studying. Ask open-ended questions about the poems or raps.
- › Encourage children to ask each other questions about their raps, word art, or break dance moves. They will gain new perspectives about their classmates and friends.
- › Provide opportunities for children to compare and contrast their hip-hop projects. Children learn how their ideas are similar and different while also appreciating their own work and the work of others.



## Physical Development: Move with It!

Children and teachers build a sense of community by learning from and supporting each other's creative movements. Children move for fun—but they also express themselves through their bodies.

- › Provide instrumental hip-hop music or classroom-created rap music so children can act as class deejay by choosing music for the class to dance to.
- › Have children create dance moves alone, with partners, and as a whole class.
- › Create a class music video of the children performing their rap and dance moves. The video can serve as documentation of children's physical development.

## Try Hip-Hop in Your Classroom

Hip-hop has been inspirational for the children in my classroom. With hip-hop activities, they are more engaged and creative because hip-hop is familiar, meaningful, and relevant to them. My hope is that other teachers will use these concepts and approaches to foster fuller participation and engaged learning through an exploration of hip-hop.

## Classroom Playlist

Artist: Anthony Broughton

Songs: "Clean up as a Team," "Good-Day," "Months of the Year," "Patterns," "The B-Glide," "Counting to 100"

[misterbinspires.com](http://misterbinspires.com)

CD: *In the B-Hive With MISTER B*

Artist: Kobie Wilkerson

Song: "Getting Ready" (single)

[lkobiedawiz.com/category/music](http://lkobiedawiz.com/category/music)

Artist: Eddie Peeples

Song: "EP Shuffle"

CD: *Sing a Song*

Artist: Aaron Nigel Smith

Song: "One Love"

[families.NAEYC.org/song/one-love](http://families.NAEYC.org/song/one-love)

For more information on using hip-hop and rap with preschoolers, see "[Rap and Young Children: Encouraging Emergent Literacy](#)" in *Young Children*, July 2014.

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**Anthony Broughton**, PhD, is a professor at Claflin University, in Orangeburg, South Carolina. He is an educational consultant and children's music artist. For more information, visit [misterbinspires.com](http://misterbinspires.com).





# Timing Is Everything

## Understanding the Importance of Timing, Length, and Sequence of Activities

Monica Lesperance

Every classroom has its own daily schedule and routines: morning circle, centers time, snack, outdoor play, and so on. You probably have a schedule clearly posted for visitors and one in picture format for children to see. Most days you follow it closely—or at least you try to! But have you ever considered how the daily schedule impacts the behavior of the children in your classroom?

### Classroom Environments: Space and Time Both Matter

Classroom environments influence the way children behave. From the acoustics (how a room's shape or size impacts being able to hear sounds clearly) and lighting to the furniture layout and organization, the *physical environment* affects how children behave and learn. The timing, length, and sequence of activities—sometimes referred to as the *temporal environment*—also influence children's behavior and learning.

You change the classroom setup throughout the year, tweaking it to create a more comfortable and functional space for you and the children. Adjusting the schedule can be more challenging, though, since there are factors you can't control. Arrival and departure times, shared outdoor space, and your program's curricular expectations all need to be considered.

The ideal amount of time to allocate to different activities depends on the ages and developmental range of the children in the classroom, as well as the learning goals. For example, we might expect a typical fifth-grade student to sit at a desk and stay engaged in a writing activity for up to 30 minutes. But asking a preschooler to do the same is not developmentally appropriate and would certainly lead to some challenging behaviors! Expectations for younger children are different, and the classroom schedule and routines should reflect that.

In a preschool setting, there are likely children at various levels of development, including some with delays or disabilities. Having a schedule that considers the development and needs of all children is key in creating an inclusive environment where all children can thrive.





## How Do You Know if Your Schedule Is Working?

Sometimes it's obvious that the timing of specific activities leads to challenging behaviors. For example, if your schedule calls for a late lunch and many of the children become easily frustrated during activities right before they eat, you might add a snack break into the schedule. Other times, it's not so clear that the schedule is the issue.

If you notice more challenging behaviors at certain times of the day or during certain activities, it might be time to modify the schedule. Here are some things to consider.

### Length of Structured Activities

Children's attention spans vary depending on their ages, interests, and development (and also depending on more day-to-day factors, like whether they got enough sleep the

night before). A long circle time or extended read aloud may cause some children to become disruptive. When children have exhausted their focus on one activity, they often begin to fidget, make disruptive noises, or get up and walk away! Their behavior tells you that they've had enough.

When one child behaves this way, consider an individual accommodation, such as providing an alternative, quiet activity for that child. But when several children are having trouble paying attention or remaining engaged—and a simple reminder or redirection doesn't help—consider altering your schedule:

- › Shorten the activity by a few minutes.
- › Incorporate more movement or sensory breaks into activities.
- › Add breaks for calming and focusing, such as everyone standing up to stretch and taking three deep breaths.

### Transitions Between Activities

Ah, transitions. For many children (and teachers!) these are the most challenging times of day. Long transitions or too many transitions can lead to disruptive behaviors. Even within an activity, too many transitions can be difficult for some children—particularly those with developmental delays or disabilities. If you notice that a child's challenging behavior occurs mostly during transitions, try modifying or providing extra support during those times:

- › **Allow the child to transition first.** If you know it takes Shaun longer than others to put on his coat, give him extra time to get started before the rest of the group lines up.
- › **Add structure to transitions.** If Maya has trouble keeping her hands and body safe when waiting for the class to line up, give her a job, such as holding the teacher's coat or holding the door for her classmates, so she has less idle time.

## Sensory Breaks

A sensory break is a short pause from an activity that includes brief movement or another physical activity to help children refocus. Examples include deep breathing and stretching, jumping jacks, hopping on one foot, dancing, finger games, and squeezing stress balls.





- › **Cut down on transitions.** Do you have to walk the whole group to the bathroom for a break? Or can you send a few children at a time with a classroom assistant? Find places in your schedule where you can streamline activities so there are fewer transitions during the day.

## Sequence of Events

The time of day when activities take place can also impact children's behavior. Different classroom activities require different levels of attention and energy. Asking a child to do a high-attention task just before lunch or at the end of the day could result in resistance, disengagement, or disruptive behaviors. Build in extra support for children by thinking strategically about their day:

- › **Alternate between teacher- and child-directed activities.** Sustaining attention during circle or story time takes a lot of effort for preschool children! They have to keep their bodies still, focus on the speaker, and process what they see and hear. A schedule that includes back-to-back circle, story time, and teacher-directed group activities can be too much for many preschoolers to manage. Alternating free- or guided-play activities with teacher-directed, large-group activities gives children a chance to recharge.
- › **Build in quiet time to transition children from high-energy activities.** It takes a while for young children to calm their bodies after running outside or playing an active game. Try a relaxation activity, like a few simple child yoga poses. Or ask children to sit with their legs crossed and shrug their shoulders up and down. This helps them prepare to shift their focus to a new activity.

- › **Plan for children with specific needs.** Make sure there are ways for children with physical or medical conditions that affect their energy levels to participate in high-energy activities. You might schedule activities at times when those children have the most energy.
- › **Allow children to take breaks.** When frustration levels start to rise, give children the option of taking a break. Sometimes getting a drink of water or taking a short walk down the hallway is enough to help a young child get back on track. Some children also benefit from spending a few minutes drawing a picture to express their feelings.
- › **Consider implementing an individual schedule for children who need more time, fewer transitions, or a different order of activities.** You might have a child who entered your program midyear or a child with disabilities who is not ready to sit for a full story time, even with accommodations like sitting on a special seat cushion or holding a fidget (squishy ball or weighted stuffed animal). This child may need a more individualized schedule that includes a sensory break after five minutes of focusing, so they are able to sustain attention for longer periods of time.

## Conclusion

Once you start looking at the schedule through the lens of children's behavior, you'll see places where small changes can have a big impact on children's engagement.

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**Monica Lesperance** is the deputy director of the DC Special Education Cooperative in Washington, DC, where she developed the INCLUDE DC teacher training program.



# 4 Quick Reminders as You Plan for Family Conferences

NAEYC Professional Learning Team

Whether you're a seasoned teacher or this will be your first year, these reminders will help you plan the many steps of family conferences—from preconference scheduling to follow-up.

1

**Prepare for the conference to ensure positive interactions with the family, resulting in stronger relationships and more shared information.**

- Offer a flexible schedule.
- Allow enough time.
- Let the family know what to expect.
- Create a welcoming environment.
- Organize your information.
- Select a few samples of the child's work (such as a drawing, a story, or a photo of a block tower) to share and discuss.
- Know the names of the people who are coming.

2

**Begin the conference in a way that establishes a sense of trust and comfort for the family.**

- Smile and greet family members by name.
- Thank them for coming.
- Offer a beverage or snack, if feasible.
- Ask how the family and child are doing.



### Exchange information about the child to show that you are interested in the family's point of view, know their child, and want to learn more.

- Prioritize the information to share (most important first) to avoid overwhelming the family and to allow time for two-way conversations.
- Individualize the conference, especially by attending to the family's culture and language. Focus on the child's
  - › **Strengths**
    - “What is a strength you see at home?”
    - “A strength I have observed at school is \_\_\_\_.”
    - Share a work sample or observation from the classroom.
  - › **Progress**
    - “What is an area where you’ve seen progress at home?”
    - “Here is an area where I’ve seen progress at school: \_\_\_\_.”
    - Share a work sample or observation from the classroom.
  - › **Goals**
    - “What is a goal you have for [child’s name]?”
    - “A goal I have for [child’s name] at school is \_\_\_\_\_. This is how I plan to help *them* reach it: \_\_\_\_\_.”



### Planning Form for Family Conferences: Role-Play

Use the form below to prepare for conferences. Study a few examples of each child's work, and think about learning goals and topics you may want to role-play with a colleague beforehand.

**Child's name:**

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**My role-play partner:**

**How I will begin the conference:**

**A strength the child has, and evidence that highlights it:**

**An area of progress, and evidence that highlights it:**

**A goal or next step for the child, and how I plan to help the child reach it:**

### Close the conference in a way that ensures the partnership is strengthened, the family feels hopeful, and the lines of communication are open.

- Thank family members for coming.
- Encourage them to contact you whenever they want to share questions, concerns, or information.



# Preparing to Meet with Aiden's Family

## Strengths, Progress, and Goals

by Marlen Murray, Dionne Gibson, and Daniela Arbizzi

During a family conference, it's important to provide a detailed—but not overwhelming—picture of a child's progress. The following example (shared and discussed at a family conference) shows the strengths, progress, and goals of Aiden, who is 3.5 years old. It begins with a summary of Aiden's current abilities and then provides several specific observations ranging from fine motor skills to social and emotional development to learning about science. His teachers made sure to include time for the family to read the report in advance and ask questions during the conference.

**Summary:** Aiden is a creative learner who thrives when given opportunities to learn through play. He's a valued member of our group and enthusiastically participates during morning meeting, reflection, and small group work. Aiden actively engages in dialogue with children and teachers and expresses his ideas with confidence. His ability to create, collaborate on, and follow through with plans and ideas makes him a valued play partner with other children.

Aiden is an effective communicator, acquiring new vocabulary and using it to communicate new understandings. His interest in literacy motivates him to explore new ways of storytelling and concepts of print. He uses his prior knowledge to further his explorations of math and science concepts, such as patterning, sorting, gardening, and cooking.



## Strengths: Communication and Collaboration

At one of our morning meetings, we read a new version of *Creepy Carrots!*, by Aaron Reynolds. Aiden asked the question, “What does it mean to glow?” He also made a connection between this book and another book by the same author that we had previously read in class.



During group time, the children created a recipe using carrots and peas they harvested from our outdoor classroom. Everyone was invited to try the vegetables. Aiden didn't like the big snap peas, but he liked that they were fresh from the garden. He also enjoyed the soup that we made from the vegetables we had grown.

In the art center, Aiden uses different tools to make marks, scribbles, characters, and letters. He also engages with a classmate as they write together, using a shared piece of paper.

When an announcement came over the intercom, Aiden listened carefully to the directions. He followed the teachers' lead and evacuated the building to the safe gathering area outside, and he listened for the safety roll call accounting for all people in our classroom. He always listens to safety instructions and asks questions about being safe.



## Strength: Fine Motor Skills

At lunchtime, Aiden serves himself milk using a small pitcher. He is also able to use child-sized tongs and cups.

Aiden likes working with clay and practices techniques such as rolling, coiling, and pressing the clay to make different shapes.



Aiden discovered that he could string together loose parts on a piece of wire to make a necklace.





## Progress: Patterns

Aiden is able to identify AB and ABC patterns. He is also able to recognize and repeat the patterns he notices. Over the next eight weeks, we will be introducing Aiden to more complex patterns and providing some pattern games.

## Progress: Coordination and Large Motor Skills

Aiden participates in a swimming class. He is practicing techniques for breathing, floating, diving, and swimming by using his whole body to move through the water.



Aiden and his classmate compared the pieces of tape and then cut the tape to the length they predicted would be long enough. Together, they continued designing a dress with a long “tail,” as Aiden called it.

While working on measuring the tape, there were several moments in which Aiden needed support from us to keep from becoming frustrated and to persist in problem solving. Over the next four weeks, we will add similar challenges to Aiden’s play and help him engage in solving problems in creative, joyful ways.

Aiden used yarn and a cardboard tube to create a “Rapunzel.” Again, he needed some support to persist in problem solving—but he remained engaged and creative!

After finishing Rapunzel, he also cut some blue foam sheets and asked for a marker to add lines to his blue circle. He shared that he was making “The Heart of Tafiiti from *Moana*.” He asked for string to create the necklace from the movie, adding details that he remembered.



## Goal: Persistence in Solving Problems

Aiden cooperated with another classmate to make a dress. They used tape, but they realized their pieces were not long enough. We asked them to measure how long the piece of tape should be to go from one end of the dress to the other.

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**Marlen Murray** works as a classroom teacher at the Cerritos College Child Development Center, in Norwalk, California.

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**Dionne Gibson** is the program director of the child development department and full-time professor of early childhood education at Cerritos College in Norwalk, California.

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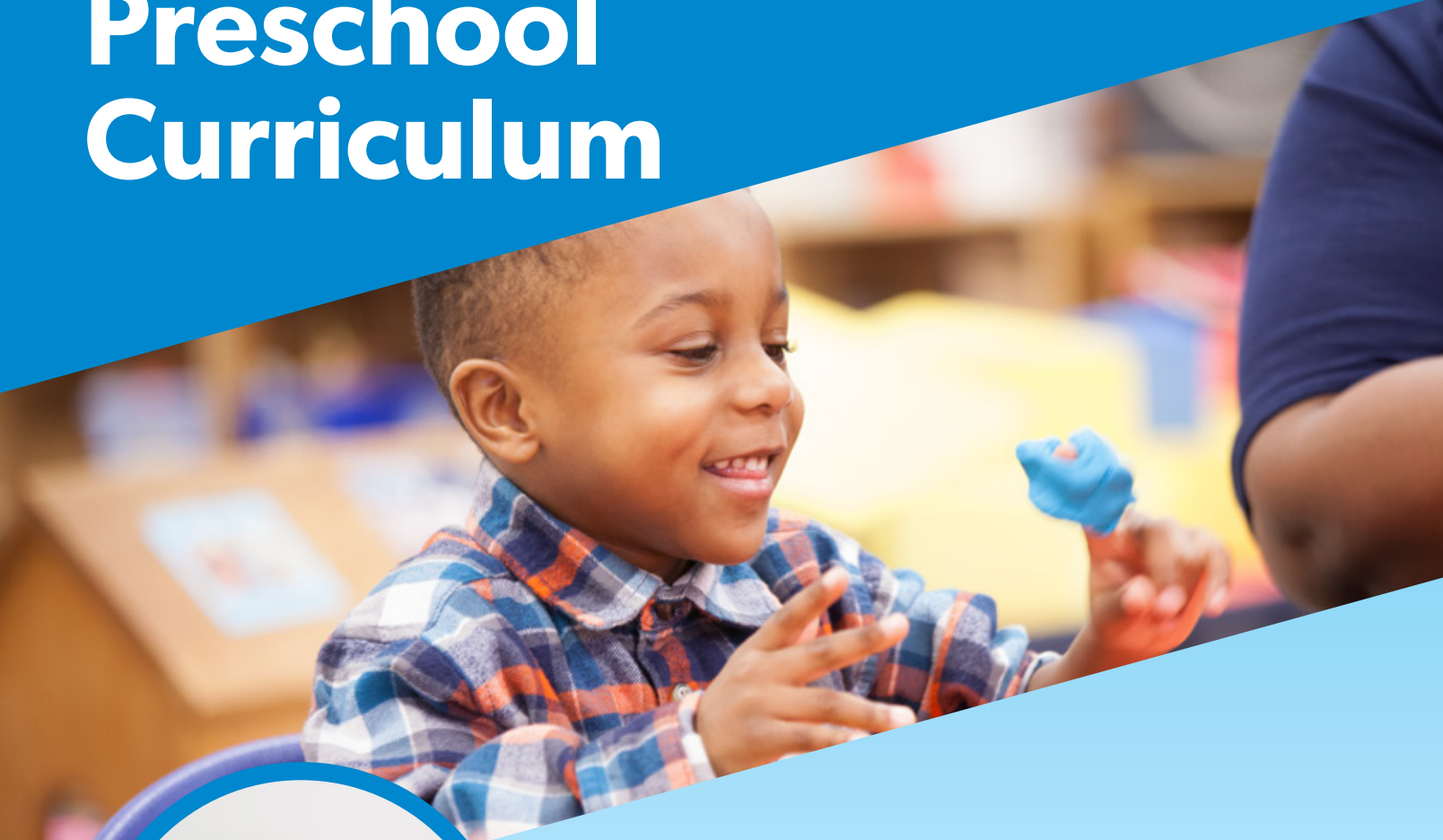
**Daniela Arbizzi** is the child development program specialist at the Fullerton School District, Child Development Services, and part-time faculty at Fullerton College, in Fullerton, California.

Photographs: Courtesy of the authors

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# Healthy Habits

Lillie F. Badesso, Elizabeth Mirth, and Jennefer Gehringer

Healthy habits are important life skills. They include selecting nutritious foods, practicing good hygiene, engaging in regular physical activity, focusing on positive feelings, and getting plenty of sleep. As an educator, you can help young children start developing these healthy habits in fun and engaging ways.

## Nutritious Foods

It's never too early to have conversations about good nutrition. Engage in discussions about the benefits of different foods to help children be more conscious of their diets and make informed decisions about what they choose to eat.

**Weekly snack study:** Once a week, invite the children to choose a snack to learn about, then make a list of questions to answer together. How is applesauce made? What do cucumbers need in order to grow? Who invented tortillas?


To help the children answer their questions, you could ask your local librarian for relevant books and videos and then extend the exploration by inviting a farmer, grocer, or chef to visit the classroom.

## Good Hygiene

Hygiene helps us keep our bodies clean and healthy, which positively impacts our social and emotional health. The following activity gives children the opportunity to practice effective hygiene routines through a fun, active game.

**Hygiene charades:** In small groups, children act out proper hygiene habits. One child chooses a hygiene card (a card with a picture of a personal care practice) and, without using any verbal clues, acts out what is printed on the card (tooth brushing, hand washing). The rest of the group tries to guess what hygiene practice the child is acting out.





## Regular Physical Activity

Keeping young children active is a vital part of an early childhood classroom. This lesson not only teaches children how to maintain their physical activity but also stimulates creative thinking.

**Exercise dice:** Create two dice: one with numbers (or dots for children to practice counting) and one with pictures of physical activities. If you roll ● (2) and a jumping jack picture, for example, then the children do two jumping jacks. This engaging lesson helps children learn different types of exercises they can do on their own to stay active—it's also great for rainy days when you are stuck inside the classroom!

## Positive Feelings

As a preschool teacher, you know that one of your main goals is to help children become aware of their emotions and to be mindful of how to appropriately express them. Making a feelings flip-book gives children an opportunity to identify and reflect on scenarios that spark their emotions.

**Feelings flip-book:** Give each child a piece of paper (or, if more appropriate for your specific group of children, prepare the flip-books in advance so the children begin at the drawing step). Fold the paper long ways. On the top-facing half, cut three slits into the paper, making four flaps. On the top of each flap, write a feeling (happy, sad, frustrated). Under the flap, draw a picture that expresses that feeling.

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Photographs: © Getty Images

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## Plenty of Sleep

For young children—and their teachers!—it's hard to overestimate the benefits of sleep. Preschoolers, though, often have trouble understanding the body's need for sleep. Why not keep playing? Teaching young children the importance of sleep can help prevent nap time struggles. In this lesson, children can practice positive nap time routines to reinforce healthy habits. (You can also share this activity with families to support bedtime routines at home.)

**Nap time routine puppet show:** In small groups, children create a puppet show that depicts an effective nap time routine. A variety of craft materials (pom-poms, pipe cleaners, googly eyes) can be used to create puppets and props. Encourage groups to discuss routines that help them calm down, like listening to a story or soft music, dimming the lights, or cuddling a teddy bear. If desired, children can present their puppet show to the rest of the class!

## Conclusion

Healthy habits are essential from childhood through adulthood, and as educators we have many opportunities to inspire children to make informed choices. Instilling healthy habits at an early age sets up young children for leading active and balanced lives.

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**Lillie F. Badesso** is a Kutztown University graduate and fourth-grade teacher for the Parkland School District in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

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**Elizabeth Mirth** is a Kutztown University graduate and a fourth-grade teacher for the Parkland School District in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

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**Jennefer Gehringer, EdD**, is an elementary education professor at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania in Kutztown, Pennsylvania.



# 9X

## Becoming Your Best Building Professional Competencies

Meghann Hickey

My career in early childhood education has been an unexpected adventure, giving me an expanded view of life outside the classroom. I have worked as a preschool teacher and most recently as a relationship implementation specialist for NAEYC's Early Learning Programs. It has been my pleasure to help teachers have a voice in education policy and support high-quality programs for children.

While the primary focus of your job as a teacher is educating and caring for young children, there's growing momentum for teachers to take charge of their profession. I've gathered the following be-your-best ideas for busy teachers regarding competencies, professionalism, and support from my time as a teacher, an advocate, and a trainer (and continuous learner!) working with programs from coast to coast.

### 1 Be Knowledgeable

While many teachers don't focus on their program's general employment policies—sick leave and vacation, coverage and break times, and health care benefits—these things directly impact how you practice in the field. For example, knowing that NAEYC calls for staff to have planning time built into the schedule, as opposed to the common expectation that teachers will do this work in their personal time, can help you advocate for work-life balance. Make sure you understand policy implications and participate in staff meetings in which policies are reviewed. If you don't know when the program policy reviews occur, ask for a schedule and to be included.





## 2 Be Self-Aware

In a typical office job, you can step away for a coffee break if you feel stressed, but the pressures of coverage and teacher-to-child ratios can quickly make a teacher feel overwhelmed. Take time for your mental health and ask for breaks away from the classroom when needed. You'll be a better teacher for the children when you're at your best.

## 3 Be Vocal

Working at an advocacy organization in Washington, DC, I saw that classroom teachers had the greatest impact when they addressed issues like teacher salaries or class size from their unique perspectives and experiences. I became much more passionate about speaking for the field when I found that leaders listened to the real-life challenges I had faced in my classroom. I also saw how many opportunities to influence policy we miss by not speaking up. You know (and research demonstrates) how crucial your role with children is, so find ways to advocate for the importance of early childhood education and increase support at local, state, and federal levels. It can be as simple as posting on social media about your work or having the children in your classroom draw and write messages to mail to your representatives!

## 4 Be Ethical

Part of what defines a profession is having a set of ethical guidelines for practice. Doing what is right for children starts with agreed-upon guidelines for interactions in your classroom, with your fellow educators, and with the families you serve. When I was working in an infant classroom, we focused on partnering with families to understand their specific preferences for their child's feeding, napping, emotional support, and more. I used NAEYC's code of ethics to guide me as I developed relationships with families. It reminded me that it's important "to acknowledge families' childrearing values and their right to make decisions for their children," especially when I felt tension between meeting the needs of an individual child and supporting all the children in my care.

## 5 Be Educated

While a degree alone does not make a high-quality teacher, it's important to have knowledge of child development. For example, through studying child psychology I've learned that toddlers act out, such as by biting, because of some sort of emotional trigger. Biting is a way to communicate distress, so instead of punishing the child, it's important to figure out the action or situation that causes the biting—strategies I've learned through child development coursework. Even if college seems out of reach, start by taking a course or even attending a single lecture at a local college. You'll support the children better in their learning by being a lifelong learner yourself.

## 6 Be Passionate

An easy way to start your own higher education or professional development path is to find what motivates you to teach. For me, it was American Sign Language (ASL), which became a core part of my teaching practice. In college I minored in communication disorders, which is how I learned ASL. From there, I used it with infants and toddlers. Whether or not the children had diagnosed needs, ASL helped the children communicate better, which decreased their frustration when communicating needs to adults and interacting with peers. Find classes you enjoy—children's literature, STEM, or even puppetry—that you can put directly into practice to make your learning useful and fun!



## Core Competencies for the Profession

The *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* was released in March 2020 in conjunction with the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*. The *Unifying Framework* designates these professional standards and competencies as the core expectations for what early childhood educators should know and do to effectively promote young children's learning and development. Based on the NAEYC 2009 position statement, standards and competencies were revised by a workgroup that included practitioners, subject matter experts, higher education faculty, and researchers. They incorporated feedback from two rounds of public

comment from surveys, focus groups, conference sessions, letters from organizations and individuals, and many other avenues. Thousands of individuals in the early childhood field from across the United States engaged in this process! The resulting *Professional Standards and Competencies* is intended to guide the early childhood profession's professional preparation programs, professional development systems, licensing expectations for practitioners, and professional early childhood education accrediting bodies.

To access the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, visit [NAEYC.org/resources/position-statements](https://naeyc.org/resources/position-statements).

## 7 Be Mentored

Aside from deepening your knowledge, gaining experience is a large part of becoming a successful teacher. I was blessed throughout my career to have mentors to guide me and inspire me to be my best. My first mentor in the field—who continues to support my career today—challenged me to leave my comfort in the classroom and use my voice to become a full-time policy advocate. Invest in yourself by learning from experienced members of the profession so you can continue to develop our field.

## 8 Be Accountable

Take charge of your professional development. Your program's leaders should be providing you access to curriculum materials and professional development opportunities. If they aren't, take it upon yourself to find learning opportunities that inspire you. I am passionate about child-driven lesson planning, so I sought out articles, books, online sessions, and conferences—anything I could get my hands on—so I could learn more and share with my colleagues. Many conferences offer great scholarships to make attending affordable!

## 9 Be Equitable

I'm extremely grateful that I learned early in my career the importance of connecting with families to understand their preferences and beliefs before making judgments about how a child was behaving. This framed my understanding of cultural differences and gave me a strong foundation for educating children equitably. For example, my colleagues and I had a few children in class who struggled to settle at nap time. This was frustrating for us—as most programs do, we used nap time for planning and meetings. The children would not settle, wanted individual attention from their primary teachers, and quite often were exhausted (and fussy!) by the end of the day because they did not have a nap. Before frustrations could escalate, we took the time to discuss this challenge with the families. They explained that following their cultural practices, the children never slept alone—which explained why the children wouldn't settle when staff moved away from them. We learned to recognize their cultural practices and planned for an extra staff member at nap time to stay near those children so the teachers could still use that time and the children would have that period to rest.

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**Meghann Hickey** is a former relationship implementation specialist in NAEYC's Division of Early Learning Systems. She also worked for the Early Care and Education Consortium in Washington, DC, and as an infant through prekindergarten teacher in Massachusetts.



# Two Homes, One Classroom

## Inclusive Practices that Work

Katia González



It's not uncommon to have children in your program who spend time with parents in two different homes. What's the best way to show your understanding and sensitivity to the needs of these children and families? Individualizing communication is an effective way to recognize and welcome diverse family structures.

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### Understanding Family Structure and Individual Needs

The one-size-fits-all approach to communicating with families is not enough. After all, households can take many forms (separated or divorced parents, blended families, two moms,

two dads, partners, stepparents, and foster families). First, find out about each household. Some schools and programs have emergency contact and family information forms as part of the registration process, but it's helpful to confirm directly with the adults caring for the child. For each household, ask questions like "Who are the adults in the household?," "What is their relationship to the child?," and "What does the child call each adult?"

Once those basics are established, set up a time to discuss the preferences and needs of both homes—individually or together, depending on family dynamics. Talk about the best way to communicate with each household and who the primary contacts are. This demonstrates respect for the families' individual needs and appreciation for the contributions each person brings to the child's life. It is good to remember that contact information can change and may need to be updated throughout the year.

# Teacher-Family Partnership Action Plan

Create a Teacher-Family Partnership Action Plan, a written document that outlines strengths, concerns, goals, resources, and specific actions that will take place to make sure both households receive information necessary to support their child. It is very helpful to have this in place at the beginning of the school year or as soon as possible thereafter. The action plan helps you consider the input and concerns of all adults responsible for the child’s care. It is a way to make sure all adult family members provide input and effectively receive both individual family communications about their child and general classroom communications intended for all families.

The sample form below is a tool to help you develop an action plan with families and to ensure ongoing collaboration and communication about the child. Adapt it to prepare for teacher-family interactions. Use the form to note, reflect on, and thoughtfully capture and respond to the particular needs of the child and both households. Identify, as needed, new and ongoing goals and resources you and the family members can use to support the child and family. Consider the language and literacy needs of the family and respectfully include that information in the plan.

To ensure that all households receive general classroom messages, choose a few different methods for sharing information. Phone messages, emails, newsletters, and family-school notebooks are excellent ways to stay in touch, as long as they’re easy for both homes to access.

## Sample Teacher-Family Partnership Action Plan

<b>Child’s Name</b> Greg Smith	<b>Date</b> November 14
<b>Overall Topics Discussed</b> Examples include interests of the child, changes in the family, academic and behavioral strengths and concerns, school-home communication and needs.	<b>Main Concerns/Focus Area</b> Example: Greg’s parents are divorced. They worry that they are not receiving the same amount of information from the school about Greg.
<b>Goal(s) Related to Concerns</b> Send at least one email in addition to one class newsletter to both homes once a month to make sure both parents feel they are receiving all the information they want about their child.	<b>Resources to Support Goals/Concerns</b> Examples include access to technology, confirming there are no language or literacy barriers, and offering translations or phone calls if family member(s) cannot speak English or read.

### Notes/Specific Next Steps to Reach Goals

Have a follow-up conversation with both parents before December 14 to make sure they received emails and newsletters and that this plan is working for them. The plan will be adjusted as needed.

### Contact Log

Date	Person Contacted	Notes
11/14	Both parents	Met with both parents to discuss communication concerns and develop action plan.
11/21	Both parents	Sent email to both parents to let them know their child is now able to spell his name.
11/23	Both parents	Mailed newsletters to both parents as part of class newsletter distribution.
11/30	Parent A	Called father to make sure that he had received email and newsletter. He said he received communications and shared how happy he was.
11/30	Parent B	Called to make sure that he had received email and newsletter. Father didn’t answer, so I left message.





### Ashley's Dictation:

*Una puerta es de mi mamá  
y la otra es de mi papá.  
Es el corazón de mi mamá  
y de mi papá.  
Una mitad es de mi mamá  
y la otra de mi papá.  
Es de noche. Me gusta ver  
las estrellas.  
Estoy contenta porque  
estoy con mi mamá y  
también con mi papá.  
A veces como y duermo  
en la casa de mi papá.  
Quiero mucho a mi mamá  
y a mi papá.*

One door leads to my  
mom's house and the  
other to my dad's.  
The heart belongs to both  
my mom and dad.  
One half of the heart is my  
dad's, and the other half  
is my mom's.  
It is night time. I like  
gazing at the stars.  
I'm happy because I am  
with my mom and I am  
also with my dad.  
Sometimes I eat and sleep  
at my dad's house.  
I love mom and dad  
very much.



### A Heart with Two Doors

Acrylic painting on canvas and  
dictation by Ashley, 4 years old.



Be flexible so you can include all parties  
during family conferences.

## Family Conferences

Understanding and addressing the needs of families  
before holding family conferences can make a big  
difference to everyone involved. Focus on discussing the  
child, don't take sides, and keep these tips in mind:

- › Present a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.
- › Greet everyone with a smile, which  
sends a positive message.
- › Make eye contact with the person speaking.
- › Arrange seating so that everyone can be  
comfortable and interact easily.

- › Be sensitive to, respectful of, and understanding about differences in household routines.
- › Make the child's classroom work and art available to all households.
- › Give everyone opportunities to ask questions and express their opinions. Don't forget that digital technology and the telephone offer ways for family members who cannot attend a meeting in person to participate remotely.
- › Be flexible so you can include all parties when scheduling conferences—consider making online sign-up sheets available in addition to classroom sign-up sheets, offer individual meetings, and be sure to follow up by phone or in person with families who may not understand the sign-up process or have computer access.
- › Revisit the Teacher-Family Partnership Action Plan if it is already in place, or create one.



Frank shares his school portfolio with his father.

## Family Involvement and Classroom Events

Family members from both homes are welcome to get involved in the classroom. They can join parent advisory committees, become classroom visiting experts, volunteer in classrooms, and attend school parties and events. Make necessary accommodations for them to volunteer for or participate in special events, if needed. You can also ask households to write about family activities the child engaged in at home or in the community and share it with you. These actions strengthen your inclusive environment.

## Classroom Resources and Activities

Make certain that your classroom resources and activities communicate that all families are welcome and valued. Reading aloud books whose characters are part of nontraditional families is a powerful way to encourage children to learn about—and value—the differences that make people unique and the similarities that unite them. Activities that spotlight the experiences of a child from two homes, like art activities that invite children to draw their whole family, can help that child feel proud and special.

## Conclusion

The ideas in this article offer teachers opportunities to develop a welcoming, caring classroom community that invites everyone to be a part of the school experience. If you are new to navigating teacher-family partnerships or find yourself a little overwhelmed, reach out to your director, principal, school counselor, or another teacher and ask for advice. It's also helpful to check in with other staff who have worked with some of the same families in the past. Respecting the roles of family members from each home, learning about family dynamics that may impact effective school-home relationships, and being willing to individualize practices can work wonders!

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**Katia González, EdD**, is a professor and chair of the education department at Wagner College in Staten Island, New York.





# Preschool in the Park

## Place-Based Learning in Unexpected Spaces

**Rachel J. Franz**

It's midweek at a park on Beacon Hill, in Seattle's south end. It's rainy, and only a few brave walkers are out, wearing raincoats and bending their heads low against the wind. But if you peek through a small patch of trees in the corner of the park, there, with no buildings or walls, is a preschool.



Tiny Trees Preschool is just one of many all-outdoor preschools in Washington State. Each morning, children from ages 3 to 5 come to a tiny corner of a public park—rain or shine. It's a space populated with log circles, stumps, and storage for materials for outdoor play, learning, and exploration. Some of these materials include traditional arts tools like scissors, paint, and paper. We also include outdoor tools like binoculars, wheelbarrows, and hammers to add to the possibilities for exploration. Schools like Tiny Trees that offer place-based education rely on the surrounding landscape to teach life skills, such as staying warm and contributing to the community. They are intertwined with outdoor activities that address preschool content standards, like counting, alphabet recognition, and spatial awareness.

## What Is Place-Based Education?

Place-based education uses local cultures, heritage, landscapes, opportunities, and experiences to create a curriculum in which literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, and arts learning occur in the context of place. That is, learning focuses on local themes, natural resources, and content; it is relevant to children's daily lives and experiences. (Learn more at [promiseofplace.org](http://promiseofplace.org).)

Educators can use aspects of a program's site—urban, suburban, or rural—to inspire the curriculum and to launch learning projects that follow the children's interests. At Tiny Trees, we engage in place-based education mainly by focusing on outdoor experiences; this could include studying fish at a park where salmon spawn in a nearby stream or experimenting with angles and inclines at a local skate park.

## Learning Is Everywhere

As my colleagues and I have learned at Tiny Trees, moving beyond the walls of a classroom can be tricky. Obstacles include weather, access to outdoor space, safety worries about strangers or wildlife, and the teacher's comfort level with nature and the outdoors. Educators can find opportunities for teaching everywhere and in almost any weather, but it does take intention, effort, and persistence. In this article, you will find activity ideas and learning opportunities for math, science, and literacy, and some tips for getting started!

### Place-Based Math

Children learn best when they experience new concepts in familiar contexts. For example, children are more motivated to recognize numerals (or number symbols) when they relate



to their daily lives and experiences—such as identifying the numbers on a neighbor's apartment door or examining prices on items in the grocery store.

In the nine different parks that serve as Tiny Trees' homes, numerals are everywhere: they're used as trail markers, they're embedded in the sidewalk and on signs, and they're even tagged in street art! Educators point out numerals as they walk, play, and explore with children. One activity to try:

**Giant dice:** A set of giant dice is useful when helping children learn to associate numbers with quantities. A fun game to play in the park is to roll the dice and find the same number of objects nearby, such as six stepping stones in a path or four birds on a telephone wire. As children further develop their concept of numeracy, they can look for numerals in the environment, such as on signs or license plates.

### Science on the Sidewalk

While outdoor preschools are fortunate to have access to green space, many early education facilities have limited outdoor space. Especially in urban environments, teachers have to be creative: cracks in sidewalks with grass shoots and puddles that shrink in the sun offer rich learning opportunities. Even schools that have concrete lots for outdoor spaces can promote science learning. Here are some ideas:



**Ecology:** One feature in our urban park is storm drains. For children, storm drains hold a lot of mystery. One day, the children in our program noticed that things had been dropped into the storm drain. We discussed the impact this has on our watershed, and the children—adamant that they would help keep the water clean by catching lost objects—decided to create fishing rods out of sticks and string. It was a fantastic cooperative play opportunity for the group: they came together to practice problem solving, turn taking, and sharing space, as well as to learn about environmental stewardship.

**Physics:** Another surprising outdoor learning activity was a visit to a skate park, which is fairly empty during school hours. It provided amazing opportunities for using spatial vocabulary (*up, down, around, sideways, diagonal*) and for talking about speed (“Wow! That ball moved even faster down this side!”), inclines and angles (“Which side is the steepest?”), and other physics-related topics. Children explored the skate park with their bodies and with balls, acorns, and other items that roll and move in different ways.

## Literacy Is All Around

Promoting early reading and writing skills is great fun outdoors. Our world is full of signs; they are perfect for scaffolding emergent reading skills, like letter recognition. Some activities to try:

**Street sign scavenger hunt:** Looking at signs as the class walks through the neighborhood helps children appreciate that written words and symbols have many important purposes—to keep us safe, to help us work together, and to spread essential information. Try prompting children’s thinking with questions like, “Oh! What signs do we see? I wonder what the clues are to tell us what this sign says?”

**Can you write in the rain?** Outdoor preschools show that learning outside is possible even in sloppy weather. Think outside the box: writing doesn’t need to rely on pencils and paper. Instead, children can write with water or sticks in mud, gravel, and snow. We have even used water to write on the sidewalk! Children can also form letters using twine, twigs, and objects found in nature.

## Getting Preschoolers Outdoors: Where to Start

Need some help getting started with place-based education? Here are some ideas.

- › **Identify the parks and outdoor spaces that the children’s families frequently visit.** Plan trips to those spaces, if possible. Explore the school’s neighborhood together and help the children create a neighborhood map.
- › **Think beyond the playground.** While parks are often attractive to families because many have playgrounds, they have much more to offer in the natural spaces beyond the playground. At Tiny Trees, teachers are discouraged from taking children to the playground. Instead, we use natural areas and neighborhood resources to engage in math, science, and literacy explorations.
- › **Find the cracks (and numbers, letters, and slopes) in the sidewalk.** Practice noticing these details in your personal life, and then work on introducing them to children. Use phrases like,
  - “Oh! I see that there are numbers on this sign! I see the number three. I wonder what it refers to” and “What other numbers can we find on our walk, and what do they tell us?”
  - “I see some footprints across the concrete. I wonder who made them. Can we think about where they might be going?”
  - “I spy with my little eye . . . a triangle on the basketball court. Can you find other shapes on the court?”

## Conclusion

Children deserve to have the kinds of childhoods that many of us look back on fondly—full of connections to their neighborhoods and outdoor experiences that get them excited about learning, no matter where they live. Educators can feel empowered to get children outdoors and into the world around them. Children, in turn, can find learning opportunities wherever they go—even in their neighborhood park!

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**Rachel J. Franz**, MEd, is the family and education manager at Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. A former all-outdoor preschool director and teacher, Rachel also offers teacher training in nature-based early education through Twig & Thread Consulting. She is a founding member of NAEYC’s Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC).

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## Building Reciprocal Relationships with Communities

Ludmila Battista

Being an early childhood administrator can be challenging but also professionally and personally rewarding because it provides the opportunity to develop lasting and meaningful relationships with families and the community.

Building relationships with the community has multiple benefits: Your organization or school builds name recognition and a positive reputation; you are informed of local events and community resources; and your organization's credibility is enhanced. Some possibilities for collaboration follow.

- › **Develop partnerships with community organizations and agencies.** Offer referrals to community organizations such as social services, parks and recreation departments, local police and fire departments, and senior groups so you become known as a valuable information distribution center. Become familiar with social services offerings in your community (subsidized wellness clinics, financial aid, food pantries, and homeless shelters) so you can confidentially and quickly offer referrals. You can coordinate events, publicize information, and invite representatives of community organizations and agencies to be guest speakers at parent workshops.
- › **Become the center of community activities.** By offering your space (either for free or a fee) to community organizations such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, book clubs, family groups, or 4-H, you can increase your recognition in the community and also raise some needed funds!
- › **Hold Parents' Nights Out.** Offering child care services in the evenings provides extra funds for your organization and enhances your reputation within the community. Welcoming the children of families who do not attend your school can also spread the word to potential clients.

- › **Offer workshops and seminars.** Engage families of children who attend your program and those who do not by hosting a wide range of family education workshops. These could include building literacy in young children, child developmental milestones, and effectively guiding behavior. Also consider addressing other interest areas; for example, host a public speaking seminar, or host a welcome orientation for new residents to the community that highlights community resources, events, and activities.
- › **Encourage staff and administrators to join community organizations.** Joining the local chamber of commerce, serving on community child care task forces, or engaging with local women's and family's groups will build your organization's recognition and credibility and foster positive community relations.

The key to creating reciprocal relationships is to build a mutual respect and appreciation for the common goal of providing the best experiences and resources for children. Early childhood organizations need parents and families to support the school and contribute in meaningful ways to the planning and implementation of programs and events. Family members also provide insight into the family's diverse background—cultural, linguistic, structural, and economic. Families need the early learning organization to provide nurturing, developmentally appropriate experiences for their children, and to support the family's challenges and goals. The relationship is interdependent: each can enrich the other.

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**Ludmila Battista** is an adjunct faculty member at Purdue University Global.

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# Going Beyond the Playground

## Math, Science, and Outdoor Fun

Rachel J. Franz

Going outside for a walk or to a local park to play are great ways to help your children learn! In addition to spending time at the playground, take time to explore: do you see trees to count, neighbors to greet, or street signs to read?

Here are some ideas for playful learning that will help you make the most of your family's time outdoors.

### Street Sign Scavenger Hunt

While walking through the neighborhood, invite your child to look at and identify signs, like Stop and No Parking. Talk about them. This helps children understand that written words and symbols have many important purposes: to keep us safe, to help us work together, and to spread essential information. Try prompting your child's thinking with questions like, "What signs do you see? I wonder what clues help us figure out what the signs say." Work together to identify the colors, letters, and numbers on different signs!

### Science on the Hill

Hills are such fun for rolling, running, and exploring. Did you know that hills are also great for learning science concepts and vocabulary? Try this in the park with your child: collect different nature items (pinecones, pebbles, sticks) and test

whether they roll down a hill. Use words like *faster*, *slower*, *speed*, *weight*, *mass*, and *slope* as you experiment. Children also love to roll their bodies down hills!

### Help Your Child Be a Noticer

Practice noticing numbers, letters, and other details as you explore outdoors. Encourage your child by saying and doing things like these:

- › "I see numbers on this sign! I see the number three. I wonder what it means" and "What other numbers can we find on our walk, and what do they tell us?"
- › "I see some footprints going across the ground. I wonder who made them. Where are they going?" Create a story together about the footprints!
- › "I spy with my little eye . . . a cloud shaped like the letter O! What do you see?"

### Identify the Parks and Other Outdoor Spaces in Your Neighborhood

Sometimes the most magical places are just around the corner. Websites like [findyourpark.com/your-parks](https://findyourpark.com/your-parks) can help you identify nearby parks. Even the tiniest spaces can hold magic for you and your family!

**Rachel J. Franz, MEd**, is the director of education and founding lead teacher at Tiny Trees Preschool.



# Play in the Grass!

## Practical Considerations for Quality Outdoor Play

Brandy Smith and Heather Olsen

When you think about outdoor space for children to play in, does a traditional picture usually come to mind? Do you imagine brightly colored equipment in a fenced-in area where children can engage in physical play?

Big body play outdoors is great—but as a teacher, you know something important is missing from traditional playgrounds. Outdoor spaces have wonderful potential for enhancing children's social, emotional, and intellectual development. This article provides simple tips to enrich outdoor environments so you can ensure all children have time to play in the grass.

### 1 Positive Teacher Attitude

Let's be honest—creating an engaging, safe, and nurturing outdoor environment can be hard work. It's difficult enough preparing the indoor space!

To inspire excitement, consider your colleagues' and your own interests. Is there a teacher who loves to garden? A vegetable patch could become a part of the outdoor space. Is another teacher an enthusiastic cook? Invite him to design an outdoor kitchen where children can bake mud pies. Is there a teacher who excels at organizing fun physical activities? A low balance beam and an obstacle course could be her domain.



## 2 Family Connections

As you add elements to your outdoor space, be sure to ask families what they would like to see their children doing outdoors. Families may want to help build raised garden beds or donate natural loose parts—such as sea shells from their beach vacation—for children to explore.

In addition, sometimes culturally sensitive issues arise around outside playtime; invite families to share their concerns, interests, and suggestions so that your outdoor space and time meet everyone's needs.



## 3 Natural Elements

This might sound ridiculous, but ensure there are natural elements in your outdoor space. Many programs have fenced-in space that fences out all the natural elements. Children may be outside, but they are not in nature. How can children play in the grass if it's all on the other side of the fence?

You may not be able to plant grass, but you could bring in sticks, pinecones, pebbles and rocks, acorns, and other easy-to-gather natural materials. If your space is very limited, try to arrange a weekly walk to a local park so children can directly explore nature and observe changes over time.

## 4 Welcoming Spaces for All Children

Many questions arise when accommodating children with different abilities. Ask yourself:

- › Is the outside space welcoming and inviting to children of all abilities?
- › If a child uses a mobility device, can they easily play with peers without being excluded?
- › If a child has sensory aversions, are there considerations for space, materials, and special environments that are inviting to them?
- › If a child has an allergy, is the staff trained and ready for immediate action with emergency medication?

## 5 Free Play

Allow for extended periods of free play in the outdoor space—just like you do indoors. All children—and especially the most active ones—need long stretches of time to run, play, and explore in open space.

Some preschool programs take away outdoor playtime as a consequence of challenging behavior, but we strongly discourage that. Denying children the opportunity to play outside will not improve their behavior, health, or well-being.

## 6 Toys and Materials in Good Repair

At times, the outdoor space is forgotten when it comes to offering toys and materials children use to engage in deep play experiences. Consider how you might create centers such as dramatic play, natural art, scientific discovery, and poetry writing in the outdoors. When there are a variety of materials to match children's interests, the chance of less-desirable behaviors is reduced and the opportunities for playful learning are increased.

## 7 Overcoming Deterrents

Several things might deter you from taking children outside every day, including inclement weather, lack of outdoor space, and questions about how to foster learning outside. We hope you will reconsider those deterrents and take children of all ages outdoors!

If you're concerned about the weather, try these tips that NAEYC members shared on the HELLO forum:

- › Have spare sets of clothing available for children who may not have coats, boots, or other items for wet or cold weather. You can also partner with community clothing banks to help families get the things they need to stay dry and warm.
- › Don't be afraid of the cold! Despite common misunderstandings, cold weather does not cause illness. Rather, children spending even more time indoors during colder months can lead to the spread of many germs and the flu. Bundle up and head outside to explore and play!
- › Get children moving! Being physically active outdoors will keep children warm while they also have fun and learn. Some ideas for outdoor activities in winter weather include using large blocks to build structures in the snow and painting with spray bottles filled with colored water.

If space is a challenge, try a walk around the neighborhood. From comparing different trees' leaves to reading street signs to visiting the local barber or pizza maker, there's a lot to learn in the community!

If you're worried about how much learning occurs outdoors—or if academic pressure makes you feel like you cannot take children outside—start with a child-directed exploration, like inviting children to collect or photograph natural items that interest them (pebbles, leaves, beetles). Then follow up with read alouds about the items they selected. The article “Math Learning—and a Touch of Science—in the Outdoor World,” in the April/May 2017 issue of *Teaching Young Children* (NAEYC.org/math-learning-outdoors) has some great suggestions for incorporating the curriculum outdoors.

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**Brandy Smith, EdD**, is an early childhood consultant and was previously an early childhood instructor at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

## 8 Quiet Spaces

For some children, outdoor time might be when they want to relax or engage in quiet activities with a small group of friends. Consider ways your outdoor space might allow for some nooks and crannies where children can read, draw, investigate, or play with one or two classmates.

## 9 Shade, Shade, and More Shade

A critical element of outdoor space is ample shade. Although we tend to fear wet and cold, sun exposure should be a concern. Unfortunately, shade structures are expensive, and natural shade takes many years to achieve. Shade considerations need to be planned and budgeted over a long period of time. Consider reaching out to the American Academy of Dermatology or to a local dermatologist to inquire about partnering to purchase a shade structure.

**“Outdoor spaces have wonderful potential for enhancing children’s social, emotional, and intellectual development.”**

## 10 Storage

Outdoor materials are much easier to access when you have secure, weatherproof storage outside. Toting materials and crates back and forth from indoors can be a challenge—and might result in lost learning opportunities if magnifying glasses, clipboards, paint brushes, or other materials are forgotten. See if your budget will allow for secure and organized outside storage.

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**Heather Olsen, EdD**, is professor in the College of Education and National Program for Playground Safety at the University of Northern Iowa. For more information, visit [playgroundsafety.org](http://playgroundsafety.org).





# DAP with Apps and Other Tech Tools

## Making Choices that Make Sense for Preschool

**Jennifer Garrette Lisy, Kathleen A. Paciga, and Mary Quest**

Griffin and Holly, 4-year-olds in a multiage preschool classroom, approach their teacher, Melissa, to ask if they can use the classroom tablet. Melissa asks, “What would you like to use the tablet for?” and they respond, “You said it would be cleanup time in five minutes. If we take a picture of the town we built with the Magna-Tiles, then tomorrow we can look at the picture and make it again.”

Griffin and Holly understand that the camera application on the class tablet can be a useful tool for helping them achieve their goal: preserving their play beyond the designated play time. By giving children access to technology for a purpose such as this, Melissa demonstrates her understanding

of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) and how technology can be used to facilitate play and to encourage creative thinking, collaboration, and communication.

As a preschool teacher, you have many teaching tools at your disposal. Tablets, apps, and other digital technology can help children learn—as long as you are intentional in their use, carefully plan the content, and monitor how children interact with them.

While digital technology should be limited, research suggests that it can add value to children’s investigations and learning, especially when it’s used in ways that increase access to high-quality content and encourage peer interaction. Developing relationships, fostering curiosity, and providing opportunities for unstructured play and hands-on experiments are at the core of preschool education; technology can support many of these endeavors. Read on for ideas for using apps and other digital technology in your classroom!

## How Can Technology be Used in the Classroom?



### Videos

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what might a video be worth? When children are learning about animals they have never seen, videos can give them a better understanding of what that animal looks, sounds, and acts like: they can hear a lion's roar, see a horse's gallop, and watch a giraffe eat from a tall tree. Videos should be brief and should connect to the current topic, providing ample opportunities to dramatize, illustrate, and discuss key vocabulary. Educational media developers who understand developmentally appropriate practice are our first sources for video clips in our classrooms: PBS Kids, Fred Rogers Productions, and Sesame Workshop have historically been great resources, but nonfiction content such as live-streamed video from zoos, aquariums, and wildlife sanctuaries or even videos that children capture themselves are also incredibly useful additions to preschool curriculum.



### E-Books

Using e-books shows children that digital technology is not only for playing games or watching movies. E-books give preschoolers opportunities to experience stories in new and different ways. They can help children learn the alphabet, develop their phonological awareness, support their vocabulary learning, expand their knowledge, and encourage print awareness. High-quality e-books may have a function that highlights the text as it's read, as well as other features such as "Read to Me" or "Read It Myself" to support children as their reading abilities develop. (However, some e-books have too many clickable features that are not related to the content of the book. These can become distractions that inhibit learning.) E-books could be a choice during center time, a lap reading experience for one child or a small group of children, or a whole-class shared reading experience (especially if you have a Smartboard to display the e-book). Be available to talk about e-books with children to increase their learning and further develop their language around books.



### Reflection

Self-awareness and empathy are two social and emotional skills that are developing in preschool. One way to help children better recognize their own and others' emotions is to video record an interaction between children at the discovery center (let them know in advance you will be video recording them). View the recording with the children and prompt them for reflection: "Sometimes we can remember things that people say. Can you tell me more about. . .? Can you tell me about what you were feeling in the video?"





## Foundational Academic Skills

Counting, ABC recognition, and handwriting apps abound. Outside of the long-standing history of apps developed in collaboration with children's television programming, there are several developers who are making a splash in this area: Originator, L'Escapadou, and Duck Duck Moose are just a few. By being selective, you can choose apps that align with your educational goals to support the children's learning. As you test apps, think about how the children will interact with them. Is there a story? Will children understand it? Limit children's time using apps and monitor what they are doing, focusing on skills being used and storylines in the games to drive learning tasks: "What is that character trying to do? Why does she have to do that? What happens when. . .?"



## Creativity

There are many apps that give children opportunities for practicing skills in open-ended ways, just as a blank canvas would allow for composing, for example, a menu or a shopping list with a combination of drawings and emergent spellings. Collage, puppet theater, music, and even coding apps are excellent tools for prompting children to actively develop their ideas and also enhance communication, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. After some open-ended exploration of the app features, you could ask, for instance, "How might we use this tool to retell the story of *The Little Red Hen*?" When it comes to encouraging creativity, *Felt Board* by Software Smoothie is among the simplest interfaces we've encountered for creating stories. We have also seen some fabulous creations as a result of *app smashing* (using multiple apps to complete tasks) by using simple creations and photos to build more complex constructions, with the help of apps such as *Green Screen*, *ChatterPix*, *Scratch Jr.*, and *Book Creator*.



## Home-School Connections

Many technology tools can be used to connect home and school settings: email, text messages, weekly newsletters, and child assessment portfolio systems are just a few examples. Parents and caregivers want to know what is happening in the classroom, and technology is a powerful way to keep them engaged and informed. For example, you can share children's play, ask for materials for class activities, and send suggestions for making connections (such as "Today we used a microscope to look at insects in some dirt we dug up outside. Ask your child to tell you about it!").

If you use any social media platforms or group shared sites, be sure they fit with your setting's privacy guidelines and that parents and caregivers have given their approval for their child's work or image to be included.



## Video Chats

Video chats support social and emotional connections and language development. To incorporate them into the classroom, you could invite experts (robotics developer, zookeeper, farmer, author) to talk to the children about what their jobs involve, ask guest readers (such as family members) to read a story to the class, or connect with a group of children in another part of the country or world. These chats provide opportunities for deeper understanding of the world and other cultures.



## Becoming Authors

Once children have experienced e-books and engaged in some creative projects with digital tools, consider facilitating a project in which the class writes its own e-book. We've often created e-books after field trips, for example. We take photos of the activities, and later children dictate text to go along with the images. Some children even become narrators and have their voices recorded by the e-book app! Families love receiving these e-books and often use them to extend discussions at home.

## Conclusion

Technology tools are among the many tools teachers can intentionally choose from to support children's learning. You can offer children new and interesting ways to explore stories and content, document their explorations and learning, and be creative in a collaborative classroom environment. For additional suggestions on resources, we recommend the lists published by these librarians: Notable Digital Children's Media ([ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/notalists/ncdm](http://ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/notalists/ncdm)), the Excellence in Early Learning Digital Media Award ([www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/EELDM](http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/EELDM)), and the Best Digital Tools for Teaching and Learning ([ala.org/aasl/awards/best](http://ala.org/aasl/awards/best)).

**Jennifer Garrette Lisz** is a visiting assistant professor at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio.

**Kathleen A. Paciga** is an associate professor of education at Columbia College Chicago.

**Mary Quest** is on faculty at Erikson Institute in Chicago, Illinois.

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# Food in the Sensory Table

**Q** I work in a diverse, school district-based program. About 10 years ago, our early learning community adopted a policy prohibiting food in the sensory table because of food scarcity and because some foods, like rice, are sacred in some cultures. Now, some of the teachers in our program want to repeal the policy because of the cost and ease of using food. They also say it's difficult to replicate the sensory experience. What do you think?

**KIM, MINNESOTA**

**A** We do not have a policy prohibiting food in the sensory table; however, I personally do not use it in my classroom. Food insecurity is such a big issue for our children and families here that it feels insensitive to use food in that way. I focus primarily on sand and water, but I also use paper from the shredder, collections of loose parts, nature items, shaving cream, water beads, etc.

**PATRICE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

After moving in the direction of everyday, all-weather outdoor play, I began to feel that the sensory table was taking up valuable real estate in our room. I put a plastic one outside, where students could play with mud, dirt, leaves, mulch—whatever they found in the back yard. It was really messy, and it was really sensory. In fact, the whole yard was sensory, and the table became more of a site for building “habitats” and other child-determined projects.

**KAREN, PENNSYLVANIA**

This is a great discussion. It would be helpful if we were mindful of language to avoid “othering” people. It's not “others” who may be food insecure—it's people in our communities and our child care settings. Rice, beans, and other kinds of food aren't important in the cultures of “other” people—they're important in the cultures of people in our communities and our child care settings. These aren't issues because they're important to people other than ourselves. They're issues for all of us.

**AREN, MASSACHUSETTS**

We've had this discussion for years and ultimately decided to allow rice and lentils as the only food materials for sensory play. We provided each classroom with one bulk bag of rice, and it lasted over a year (pre-pandemic). We felt that there weren't other safe, cost-effective materials that could replicate the critical sensory opportunities provided by these items. I think as long as there is critical self-reflection about the reasoning, community concern, and any other aspects involved, that the decision on whether or not to use food cannot be a one-size-fits-all.

**KIRA, WISCONSIN**

NAEYC's HELLO online forum is a great place to have conversations and create connections with peers around important early learning issues. Excerpts from HELLO have been edited for style and length.

Do you have questions or suggestions to share with your peers? Are you simply interested in reading different takes from early childhood educators around the country? Tap into the vibrant discussions on HELLO at [hello.NAEYC.org/welcomehello](https://hello.NAEYC.org/welcomehello).



# TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN

For the Preschool Professional

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*Teaching Young Children* wants you to be part of our next chapter! Each TYC issue will now have a theme featuring at least three related articles. Our continued goal is to provide our audience with meaningful insights into current thinking on promising practices in early childhood education, innovations in the field, research and its implications, and interesting ideas for and from preschool teachers. That's why we're excited to introduce the themes and submission deadlines.

For more information, visit [NAEYC.org/writeTYC](https://naeyc.org/writeTYC).

Issue Date	Topic	Article Due Date
Spring 2022	A Focus on Math	September 15, 2021
Summer 2022	Summer Learning for Preschool Educators	N/A
Fall 2022	Assessment: An Essential Part of Preschool Teaching	February 15, 2022
Winter 2023	The Arts in Preschool: Playful and Engaging Integration	May 14, 2022

