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Managing Free Play in Early Childhood: Teachers Don't Need to End the Trend

Elizabeth D'Apolito
University of Akron Main Campus, emd45@zips.uakron.edu

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Managing Free Play in Early Childhood: Teachers Don't Need to End the Trend

Liz D'Apolito

The University of Akron

Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.

– Kay Redfield Jamison

www.heartmath.org

Wake up. Get dressed. Eat breakfast (if there is time). Get to school. Unpack, and put away belongings. Morning work. English Language Arts. Special. Lunch. Quick recess. Math. Read. Pack up belongings. Go home. Complete Homework. Eat dinner. Take a bath. Put on pajamas. Go to bed.

Start again.

Five days a week.

The above excerpt illustrates a typical daily routine for many young students. It should also be recognized for what is lacking….what adults once knew as p-l-a-y. The time when the school day was not rushed and imagination was welcomed. Maybe it is the new academic attitude to be better and smarter than the student beside you that is causing misplaced play. Maybe it is the pressure facing teachers to teach material specific to the new high-stakes tests that begin as early as kindergarten.

In 1983 The National Commission on Excellence in Education reported results of our education system as "A Nation at Risk" ("Are We There Yet?", 2002.). From these results,

solutions began to form as to how to improve the education system—one of these solutions was

the common core curriculum, which originally raised the standards for high school graduates

("Are We There Yet?"). In September of 1989, President Bush held a meeting of governors at

the first ever National Educators Summit in attempt to draft national learning goals for education

("Are We There Yet?"). The meeting established that educators would have until the year 2000

to raise the nation's academic results to meet that of the new learning goals. These goals focused

heavily on 4th, 8th, and 12th grades as students graduate from one level of schooling to the next

("Are We There Yet?". It was not until the second National Educators Summit in 1996 that it

was decided academic standards should be raised at the state and local levels, not just nationally

("Are We There Yet?"). This change was made public during President Clinton's State of the

Union address. He challenged the nation to raise standards and test all 4th and 8th graders by 1999

to demonstrate the knowledge the population will need for the 21st century economy ("Are We

There Yet?". In 1998, 38 states had adopted higher level standards; however, in 1999 the

attention at the third National Educators Summit shifted from standards to holding *schools*

accountable for the academic achievement of their students by making the school report card

public ("Are We There Yet?"). The next movement in education came with the No Child Left

Behind Act, which increased federal funding on education programs. In recent years, the

Foundation for Excellence in Education), created by former governor Jeb Bush in 2008, has been

progressively picking apart the education system to attempt to better prepare next generations for

life after school—continuing the education reform (Foundation for Excellence in Education,

2015). The education reform is something that the government feels necessary to better prepare

students of society for life after high school. While this may be true, it also appears that the

education reform is taking away from kids just being… kids.

The United States is increasing pressure on teachers and students by raising the standards of education, however, the United Nations considers play to be a biologically rooted 'human right' that is held as high as health and safety (Bekoff & Crain, 2011). Many studies have demonstrated that play is a natural way of learning proper social interactions as well as a constant lesson of speaking, listening, and pre-reading skill development. Bekoff and Crain (2011) noted that not only does play promote fairness and forgiveness—two important survival qualities of the professional world, but also the ability to improvise to handle the many unexpected events that people encounter throughout their daily lives. If not convinced, just think where medicine would be today if a student was not given the opportunity to freely explore a theory s/he built from a few science lessons. The latest cell phone would not have been created if a child was not given the opportunity at one point in time to take something apart, and put it back together without getting in trouble in the process. Play is the exploration of the future.

The purpose of play in schools has been an ongoing debate for decades. However, it is not an argument as to the value of play in school, but the structure and management of play. Although play is recognized as important, it can also be confused with a disruption of the sought out calm academic setting of a classroom. Some researchers believe that it is essential in the cognitive development of young children, while others believe that if children are awarded too much freedom, the learning environment can result in an uncontrollable classroom (Yang, 2000). Yang (2000) defined a free play situation as children determining what activities they will engage in by themselves. Not only will children determine what activities they will engage in, they will also determine where, how, and with whom they will play. Children will initiate and develop their activity, but they will also end or change an activity depending on the way the play develops and what their original intent for the play was (Yang, 2000). Yang, however, believes

that there is a danger in giving children too much choice in free play with no teacher direction

(2000).

Alternative research on play suggests that students who actively engage in play, and who

are provided freedom of choice by their teachers, are developing cognitively and learning

(Furman, 2000). Furman (2000) found that play actually gives children the opportunity to begin

to develop *symbolic representation*—using one thing to represent another. In other words, a

student's ability to give meaning to letters and words, known as language acquisition, can start to

form through what Yang thought of as "dangerous" free play. Furman (2000) documented

researcher Smilansky's theory of the four hierarchies of play—functional, constructive, dramatic,

and games with rules—as a way to build a bridge between play and prereading, language, and

writing. Ultimately the argument centers around how to construct free play opportunities, how

they should be managed, and their role in development.

There is no question that in recent years there has been a significant increase on the

testing of children at a younger age. This need to teach students more information at a younger

age is creating pressure for classroom teachers to reduce the free part of play for children at the

preschool and kindergarten levels in order to prepare them for testing. One argument is that

teachers are failing to recognize that free play is not the problem in the school setting; the

problem is the way that adults are reacting to it (Lobman, 2006). Lobman suggests that teachers

should be sensitive to what children are doing, creating, and playing with, but should not change

the subject or distract children away from their self-created goals (2006). When teachers

constantly redirect a situation in which the teacher's goal does not meet the student's goal, it

creates an unsafe environment for the child to be creative with their play and developing

thoughts (Lobman, 2006). Furman (2000) refers to a study that revealed that parents and teachers

think very little of play as a tool for development in children, and those who did believe that it had cognitive capabilities in the classroom concluded that it was still not important enough to be included in the curriculum. There is a need to protect the innocence of creativity in young students, and trust in their ability to learn through their instincts (Lobman, 2006). A teacher should be dedicated to their student's learning in the most effective and engaging way, while still meeting the standards depicted by the state and maintaining a behaviorally manageable classroom. This project is intended to confirm and discover the academic advantages to free play in the classroom. This will be done through a literature review, identifying research-based answers to why play will help the 21st century learner. This research will take a deeper look into early literacy skills, social/emotional development, and teachers' perceptions of play. Additionally, learning modules of free play lessons and classroom management strategies will be suggested and explained. The purpose of these modules is to give teachers a reference as to *how* to implement play in the classroom. These modules will give teachers a step-by-step lesson plan, which connects play to the new Common Core State Standards. The modules will also provide additional suggestions as to how successfully implement a classroom management plan that is friendly to play.

Review of Literature

The purpose of this review of literature is to unveil the academic advantages to play in the classroom. The research will go in depth of the benefits of play in children's early literacy skills and social/emotional development. Both of these developmental skills will help to develop a well-rounded member of society. The final section of the review of literature will provide a glimpse of teachers' perceptions of play in the classroom. It is important to understand the

teacher's view on this subject in order to further understand why play might not be a part of the everyday classroom in the 21st century.

Early Literacy Skills

Early literacy skills have a direct connection with play in the early childhood setting (Umek & Peklaj, 2008). As children grow and mature their levels of play become more complex and communication is required (Umek & Peklaj, 2008). According to Umek and Peklaj (2008) communication is the sharing of information about objects and events. There are four hierarchical forms of play: functional, constructive, dramatic, and 'games with rules', with symbolic play falling under the category of dramatic (Furman, 2000). Dramatic, or symbolic, play is especially enticing to literary development when directly placed in a 'literate' play setting (Furman, 2000). This would include the incorporation of both reading and writing materials as described in the Learning Module at the end of the review of literature.

Children learn through experience. According to psychologist Jean Piaget, language skills begin as physical interactions (Media & Thompson, 2015). This 'physical language' is where children begin to learn "how to imitate some of the sounds she hears her parents making and in what context those sounds should be made" (Media & Thompson, 2015). Without the opportunity to play and speak freely, children will lack the early practice of language acquisition—finding that specific letters and words are used to represent ideas (Furman, 2000). When communication, or language, is combined with symbolic play, "a comprehensive activity that combines children's thinking, language, understanding of concepts, social cognition, moral judgment, and emotional experience and expression," play lends itself to the testing of *transformations* (Umek & Peklaj, 2008). Transformations are words and phrases we use every day to name objects, imitate animals, and gestures to help define a situation.

Not only does symbolic play allow children to test expression and language, it is also the basis for telling stories, therefore the basis for learning how to read and write (Umek & Peklaj, 2008). When writing or even reading, children must be able to tell a story in a way that listeners can understand and mentally visualize (Umek & Peklaj, 2008). In writing, children must be able to form their own concepts and ideas. It is vital that imagination does not stop once students enter the primary grades, and an easy way to ensure this does not happen is to continue aspects of play after preschool.

Another aspect of play that coincides with reading and writing is the idea of taking something concrete, and turning it into an abstract idea. This is practice of metacognitive and metalinguistic abilities, which will transfer a student from saying, "this is a spaceship" to "let's pretend we're going to the moon!" The difference in these two sentences being that the first one would be that of a very young child needing to say specifically what s/he is playing with is a spaceship compared to the child with more experience playing, which implies that they are in a spaceship, and incorporating the location into the story. In writing or reading this would be referred to as the *setting* (Umek & Peklaj, 2008).

An easy statement to make would be that drama is a rehearsal of ideas. There are notable gains in cognitive development referring to prereading, language, and writing, however Ferman went on to demonstrate that "dramatic play was the 'best predictor of achievement in the standardized tests" after researching a study of second graders (2000). Their comprehension skills were tested using two methods: completing workbook pages after reading and acting out scenes after reading. According to Furman (2000), "drama was more effective than workbooks in developing the comprehension skills" (p. 174). He was able to conclude that recalling details, sequencing events, and generalizing the main idea scored higher after acting out a story than

completing workbook pages (Furman, 2000). It is also not to go without saying that all three of

the above elements of English Language Arts are part of the state adopted academic Common

Core Standards included in high stakes testing. Not only was drama a more effective way of

displaying comprehension, it was also the preferred activity when giving the second grade

students a choice.

The research demonstrates where language and literacy intersect beneficially with

dramatic play, and students would prefer this type of movement and activity rather than sitting at

their seats. Within the next section of the review of literature, a review of research on the

social/emotional development of children will be provided and a discussion of the benefit from

interacting with others through play. This interaction is an opportunity to freely experiment with

different human roles children might see in their everyday life, as well as the new words and

meanings children are still trying to figure out.

Social/Emotional Development

Coinciding with early literacy skills, social and emotional development is also related to

the opportunity of play. According to Ashiabi (2007) children's emotions are the ways in which

they react to situations. At the moment of a child's birth their emotions become relevant to

communication. Eric Erikson established eight psychosocial (individual needs versus needs of

society) stages of which humans encounter throughout their lifetime, the first one being between

infancy and about a year and a half years old (McLeod, 2013). With each psychosocial stage of a

human's life comes a crisis, and with each crisis that is overcome, a virtue of which oneself can

use to overcome similar crisis throughout life (McLeod, 2013). The first psychosocial crisis of a

child's life is when the infant begins to discover and experience a period of trust vs. mistrust to

develop the virtue of hope (McLeod, 2013). When a baby cries it is telling its mother something,

when a baby begins to babble, it is telling its mother something, and when a baby begins to laugh it is expressing emotion.

As children get older it is important, like practicing language acquisition, to practice displaying different emotions in order to see the different reactions emotions might carry (Ashiabi, 2007). "Play facilitates: problem-solving, perspective taking, emotional and social skills, and the development of theory of mind" (Ashiabi, 2007, p. 201-202). This goes hand-in-hand with social development, or how children get along with peers and form relationships (Ashiabi, 2007). Children need to begin to make connections between their own personal emotions and how others feel, this is known as emotional understanding (Ashiabi, 2007). The preschool years are where students begin to take on more responsibility. This age group of about 3-5 years old is making the transition from taking on a caregiver's emotions to beginning to regulate one's own emotions (Ashiabi, 2007). The preschool years, ages 3-5, are also the years when children explore Erikson's psychosocial stage crisis Intitiative vs. Guilt (McLeod, 2013). Success in this stage of development would lend itself to the virtue of purpose, or a sense belonging and meaning to the world (McLeod, 2013). In order to overcome this crisis, children need the opportunity to create games and plan activities (McLeod, 2013). Play is the perfect opportunity to begin to take initiative and practice self-regulating emotions. Through role play, children practice the learned trait of empathy and self-less behavior. By giving students baby dolls and allowing them to play house, they are required to take on a role of caregiver. Students need the opportunity to "practice new skills, refine old ones, and gain proficiency in social interactions" (Ashiabi, 2007, p. 201). At this point, it is ok to show a child how to change a diaper or remind them that it is important to feed their baby or hold it with care. This gives young children the mindset later in life to think of someone other than themselves. However, if

children begin to take initiative, and it is dismissed or frowned upon, they will begin to feel

bothersome to others and that their ideas are less important (McLeod, 2013). This feeling will

turn into a sense of guilt, the opposite of initiative, and due to overbearing criticism and control

(McLeod, 2013).

Erikson's psychosocial stages continue to emphasize the importance of social interaction,

teamwork, and play as children progress to school agers, ages 5-12. Students in this age group

have the challenge of overcoming the Industry vs. Inferiority battle (McLeod, 2013). It is to be

noted, though, that without a strong basis of success of initiative, this stage might find itself to be

a very difficult imposition on children. Children at this stage are looking for their peer's approval

as well as a sense of belonging (McLeod, 2013). Conflict resolution, compromise, and

cooperation are all aspects of social and emotional development that can be learned and practiced

for success in their psychosocial battle through the free time of play. "Children who are trained

in sociodramatic play showed improvements in the ability to work with other children on a task,

and improved their ability to take the perspectives of other children when those wants and

preferences differed from their own" (Ashiabi, 2007, p. 202). As long as children feel

encouraged to resolve peer issues, they will begin to feel confident in their ability to achieve

goals (McLeod, 2013). Rather than "tattling" on a peer, something that still finds its way to the

primary grades, students have the opportunity to explore the definition of compromise and begin

to become problem-solvers. It is important for students to have less structured time so that they

can practice working out their issues *before* the structured academic day begins.

Because diversity is an issue that is only going to get worse if it is not addressed, play is

also a good time to explore the differences between individuals. According to Ashiabi, without

intervention, there would be no diverse play: boys would only play with boys, white students

would only play with white students, and disabled students would never have the opportunity of

inclusion (2007). The intervention then shows students that there are differences among all

people, but gives the opportunity to explore these differences, and enhances their social

development.

The Teacher's Perception

With the direct correlations between early literacy skills, social and emotional

development, and play, an additional factor to consider the teacher's perception on play. The

obstacles that constantly come to surface are attitude, structure, and function of play in early

childhood (Ashiabi, 2007). Although, one obstacle that often gets forgotten is the emotional

labor of teachers.

The attitude is defined as the value teachers place on play in the classroom. Some

teachers expressed feelings of interference if they tried to become involved in the play, others

felt uncertain about whether or not they should be involved, and the last main group of teachers

expressed that their job is to teach and manage *only* academics (Ashiabi, 2007).

Structure is the second obstacle of play. The concerns with structure are the high stakes

curriculum, lack of time, space, and materials. Specifically, "expectations of teacher-directed

academic instruction has limited time for play" (Ashiabi, 2007, p. 202). Concluding that because

of the seriousness and stress that comes with meeting state standards and passing high stakes

tests, teachers feel that there is no time in the day to 'play'.

The third proclaimed obstacle of play is the function of it. Teachers may lack the training

in understanding the developmental benefits of play or how to incorporate play *into* the

curriculum rather than taking time out of the curriculum to incorporate play. Rather, the cycle of

obstacles comes full circle when "the function of play depends on the teacher's attitude towards it" (Ashiabi, 2007).

The last obstacle of play is the emotional labor involved in teaching. With the benefits of play stated, managing a large class of early elementary students during any play activity can come with frustrations and challenges. Emotional labor is "the forced emotion management in work" (Tsang, 2011, p 1312). Teachers are expected to act as professionals at all hours of the day. According to Tsang, there are five emotional rules of teaching: "(1) to love and to show enthusiasm for students; (2) to be enthusiastic and passionate about subject matter; (3) to avoid the display of extreme emotions like anger, joy and sadness; (4) to love their work; and (5) to have a sense of humor and laugh at their own mistakes and the peccadilloes of students" (2011, p. 1313). If a teacher does not act upon the five rules, the teacher is considered unprofessional (Tsang, 2011). Therefore the connection can be made that when deciding whether or not to incorporate play in the classroom, a level of consideration towards the control or lack of control a teacher can handle would be taken. If a teacher only has control over his or her emotions during structured academic time, it would not be surprising to find that the teacher may be reluctant to allow students to play because of the fear of losing emotional control—potentially resulting in a job-threatening outburst.

As it may seem like an easy implementation, play is something that takes analyzing and planning before it can be placed in the classroom. If a teacher does not feel comfortable allowing students the freedom of unstructured time, play may not be an option. However, the sections following describe two modules of play directly correlated with the new Common Core State Standards and multiple classroom management strategies for implementation. The learning modules can be used verbatim, or can be adapted and differentiated to meet the needs of individualized classrooms.

Learning Modules: Play

The purpose of these modules is to give a written explanation and idea of how play can be used in the classroom. Teachers can use the information by taking the written lesson plan, as well as any attached material(s) or documents and implement the activity step-by-step. Each lesson is directly aligned with the new Common Core State Standards, however because these modules are designed for K-3 students, the lesson plans and standards will need adapted for the individual grade level and class. The intention of the modules is to give teachers a starting point to use play in the classroom. The intended result of these lesson plans and modules is that teachers will begin expanding and adapting these plans to fit the needs of students.

The "Literate" Play setting

The "Literate" Play module is simply creating a real life situation that allows students to practice their literary skills in real life situations. Shopping lists, appointment sheets, and filling out forms are easy ways to allow students to role play while applying everyday written language. This module can be integrated into multiple subjects. Below is a lesson plan using a grocery shopping environment. Suggestions as to how to adapt the literate play module into doctor's offices, job interviews, restaurants, and a relaxed reading area are also described.

The Literate Play Setting

LESSON TITLE: Grocery Shopping!	SUBJECT AREA: English Language Arts
GRADE LEVEL: K-3	TIME ALLOCATION: TBD by participating teacher

STANDARDS (aligned with the Common Core Standards, adaptable by grade level):
-Reading: Foundational Skills -Writing: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K/1/2/3.2 Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K/1/2/3.5 With guidance and support from adults, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed. -Language

GROUPING OF STUDENTS:
Activity can be done **individually, in pairs, or small groups** depending on the amount of shopping materials. To hold students accountable for their actions, **each student should have their own shopping list and reflection worksheet**. **MATERIALS:** • Grocery store items (**must** match shopping lists)

Ex. Clean, recycled milk carton/cans/boxed snacks, plastic fruit • Shopping lists (enough for class/small group/partners) • Reflection worksheet • Grocery Store Suggestion box

PROCEDURE

1. PRE-ACTIVITY:
Hold a class discussion about the items in the shopping center. Talk about the importance of being able to read and write even at a grocery store. Not every item is on a shopper's list, therefore s/he must be able to read to know what to buy.

Transition:
Give directions. Each student (can be done as pairs or small groups as well) is given a shopping list. The student must find what is on his or her list, and check it off of the list. Later, students will have to write about their experience.

2. ACTIVITY
Allow students to begin shopping.

Transition:
Tell students "the store is closing in five minutes, please make your last purchases (find your last items)" and return to your seats (next meeting point).

3. POST ACTIVITY
Students journal about their shopping experience. Answer questions:
what did I buy?
How much did I spend?
What would I have liked to buy?

Closure:
Have students put their reflections in the store "suggestion box". The teacher may then check the students work to be sure they effectively completed the activity, and answered the questions in complete sentences.

ASSESSMENT
Students reflections can be used as a formative assessment to check that

Below is an example of a shopping list that can be adapted to any classroom. There are three blank lines where students can write in three extra items that they bought or would have liked to buy. Expand the box to add more items. Another way to adapt the document would be to add the reflection questions to the bottom, add pictures for early literacy students, or add higher level vocabulary items to the list for gifted literacy students.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 1em;">

Shopping list

Milk

Two apples

One box of crackers

Three cans of corn

Orange juice

_____

_____

_____

</div>

Doctor center.

- "Patients" must sign in, "Secretaries" must get patient information (Name, Address, parents, health background), Doctor and nurses take "notes" on patients.
- Students journal about their doctor experience and drop it in the doctor office's suggestion box

Interview for a job.

- Students take turns being the "boss" interviewing students for a potential job. This activity will practice communication/conversation skills.
- Students record answers of students, swap roles, and turn interview questions/answers into biographies.

Restaurant options.

- Waitress records customers' orders, customers read restaurant menus
- Students write a "restaurant review" based on their service and the imaginative quality of the food

Everyday reading center.

- Have school appropriate newspapers, comic strips, and magazines (National Geographic is a child-friendly read for multiple levels) readily available in the library of your classroom as other reading/nonfiction options.

Responsive Teaching/Improvisation

In order to be an effective, responsive teacher, the teacher must be willing to steer away from a teacher-directed classroom lesson. The idea behind responsive improvisational teaching is that the teacher feeds off of the students' thoughts to further develop them. "Teachers elaborate and enhance children's learning by adding to the activity at hand" (Lobman, 2006, p. 455). The teacher is *not* to redirect the students' activity. With responsive teaching, children are more likely to stay engaged for longer periods of time. When imaginative play is interrupted, children often become disengaged by the redirected activity (Lobman, 2006).

The breakdown of the theory of responsive/improvisational teaching is as follows:

Improvisation occurs when players work collectively to create an unscripted scene or story (Lobman, 2006). Improvisation begins with a plan, but moment-to moment activity is developed through implementation and collaboration. The rules of improvisation are that the participants must accept offers from one another, not negate the responses. Responses should always be "yes and…" There are three terms that are vital to the understanding and implementation of improvisation:

Offers- anything anyone says or does in a story or scene, the building blocks of the story. For example, one person picks a scene such as the moon, and the other person accepts that they are on the moon and builds upon this new idea.

Negating- when a player does not accept the offer. This immediately puts an end to the developing story because it does not allow the scene to develop.

"Yes and"- to elaborate on a student's idea

(Lobman, 2006, p. 457)

Responsive Teaching/Improvisation

LESSON TITLE: "Yes and…" Brainstorming	**SUBJECT AREA:** English Language Arts
GRADE LEVEL: K-3	**TIME ALLOCATION**: TBD by participating teacher
STANDARDS (aligned with the Common Core Standards, adaptable by grade level): **-Speaking & Listening** This activity is meant as a brainstorming exercise. While it involves teamwork, the students are also gaining information to being their writing. Therefore, this activity also lends itself to the Common Core **writing** standards per teacher's discretion.	

GROUPING OF STUDENTS:
Activity can be done **in pairs, or small groups** depending on the personality make-up of the class. Students MUST be able to work together to participate.
To hold students accountable for their actions, **each student should have their own brainstorming worksheet/scrap paper/ graphic organizer.**

MATERIALS:
- Story prompts
- Brainstorming worksheet/scrap paper/brainstorming graphic organizer

PROCEDURE

1. PRE-ACTIVITY:
Hold a class discussion about the rules of the activity. Each group will be given a prompt. The groups will have a few minutes to discuss their story, however there are no *wrong* answers. If a student does not say what s/he was supposed to say, group members must go with it, adding on to the mistake in the story. While groups are presenting, the rest of the class should be taking notes of ideas for their own writing.

Transition:
Divide students into pairs/groups, and pass out prompts and brainstorming worksheets. Give about five minutes for discussion prep.

2. ACTIVITY
Have the first group come up and present their impromptu story. The rest of the class should be taking brainstorming notes. (Continue until all groups have gone)

Transition:
All actors and actresses should return to their seats.

3. POST ACTIVITY
Students go through their brainstorming worksheets and pick out the top three best ideas to write about.

Closure:
Discuss the next day's activity: picking a topic to write about from the three ideas during brainstorming.

ASSESSMENT
Informal check that all students are participating as a team, and filling out their brainstorming worksheet.

Below is a series of prompts for How To writing. These may be edited, added to, or cut out to adapt to any classroom.

How to bake a cake.
How to ride a bike.
How to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.
How to line up for a restroom break.
How to get ready for school.

Learning Modules: Classroom Management Strategies for Free Play

Play has been found to be a wonderful transition for young students between life at home and life at school. Although it is true that people learn best in a state of disequilibrium, or discomfort, it is also true that young students need to be comfortable enough in their environment to think "outside the box" (Furman, 2000). Classroom management can set the tone for the entire class, and limit the abilities of the students as well. Caldarella, Page, and Gunter agree that "although curricula have changed significantly, behavior management approaches generally have not—creating a potential discrepancy between 'a curriculum that urges problem solving and critical thinking and a management system that requires compliance and narrow obedience'" (2012, p. 589). It is a teacher's job as the adult of the classroom to know the proper

forms of discipline that not only allow for learning and creativity, but also hold the individual

child accountable for his or her own actions. Without this guidance, young students especially of

the ages 3 through 6 will act impulsively, not paying attention to their own positive and negative

behaviors beginning a vicious cycle of repetitive unaware behavior (Yang, 2000). A teacher's

role as a classroom manager is to teach children to reflect upon their own actions as well as what

the appropriate activities or behaviors are for a classroom setting verses an outdoor or at-home

setting (Yang, 2000). The classroom management models focused on in this research are

High/Scope Curriculum, Verbal Plan and Evaluation Program (VPE), and Conscious Discipline.

High/Scope Curriculum

High Scope Curriculum focuses not only on children making their *own* choices in the classroom,

but also focuses heavily on evaluating the choices each individual made. There are three specific

steps to a High/Scope Curriculum as classroom management:

- Planning

- Doing

- Evaluating

This type of classroom management strategy helps children express their intentions about play

activities, work on their plans, and review their work in order to continue a path of positive

intentional choices and understand why some of their choices did not have positive outcomes.

Planning should take place near the beginning of the day. Depending on the child's age and

independent level, the students may write down their activity plan for the day/free time or simply

share to the teacher who can then record the information. The more experienced a student gets

with this type of management, the more accountable s/he will be regarding his/her choices.

The next step in a High/Scope Curriculum is **doing**. At this time the students are to actually perform the actions or activities that they had planned.

Finally, the **evaluation** step occurs. This will take practice and prompting before the students will become accustomed to the practice. The students will rejoin the class or their initial documented plan and evaluate its success or failures. The students will have to determine if they accomplished their original goal, and explain why or why not. This can be expanded in many forms, and can be the first step to the next day's plans by writing what would or could be done differently next time.

The goal of the High/Scope Curriculum is to eventually create a behaviorally self-regulated classroom of students who are able to deal with most problems as they arise. According to researcher Lev Vygotsky, "preschoolers are capable of learning to plan, to describe outcomes, and to report the results of their actions verbally. With guidance and support, or scaffolding, by an experienced adult (teacher), students will climb their Zone of Proximal Development to the point of being able to complete the task on their own (Yang, 2000).

Verbal Plan and Evaluation Program (VPE)

Similar to the High/Scope Curriculum, the Verbal Plan and Evaluation Program has three parts including planning, action, and evaluation. However, the VPE is a verbal or oral program. Rather than having to document every day's plan, the child must simply explain the plan to the teacher out loud.

- Verbal plan
- Action
- Verbal Evaluation

(Yang, 2000).

The **verbal plan** should be done before an activity or free time takes place, preferably in the morning (Yang, 2000). At this time the child chooses the activities he or she wants to perform, and verbalizes the plan to the teacher (Yang, 2000). Depending on the personality of the classroom and age of the students, the children may be able to verbalize their plans to a peer. This will save time, and give more responsibility to the students.

The **action** of the VPE is just that, the child performs the action or play according to their verbalized plan (Yang, 2000).

The **verbal evaluation** is where the students communicate to the teacher or original peer what he or she did during the play periods (Yang, 2000). Next, the child will talk about the results of their play or activity in relation to the original verbal plan. The student should answer questions as to why did the plan work, why did it not work, what changes would be made to their plan to better it, and would the child perform the plan again if given the opportunity.

The teacher's role in the classroom is not just to listen to the plans of her students, but rather to act as the stimulator, facilitator, observer, and supporter of the children with a nonjudgmental attitude (Yang, 2000). According to Yang (2000) the teacher should:

- Ask open-ended questions

- Direct problem statements

- Encourage students through the entire process.

DATE :

NAME :
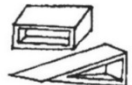
I will			
Book Area	Science and Math Area	Music Area	Art Area
Manipulatives Area	Block Area	Dramatic Play Area	

I did

Fig. 5. An example of VPE sheets.

(Yang, 2000, p. 9)

At the start of implementation, introduce the program by letting students explore the materials and explain what they are used for. During the beginning phases of implementing and testing VPE is to simply ask students "What would you like to do today?" (Yang, 2000). Some

students might be more responsive than others. The teacher can further encourage the quiet

students to respond by asking them to simply point to the area in which they would like to play

(Yang, 2000).

Materials for Implementation:

- name tags for children with photos

- sign boards with pictures of activities

- VPE sheets for presenting verbal plans and evaluations

- Information board showing all activity areas

Phase I: Verbal Plan

- Entering the classroom, the child goes to the VPE area, picks up his or her file folder, and adds a new sheet in the folder.
- For the verbal plan, the child with the folder checks the date on the calendar, and writes it down on the VPE sheet or asks the teacher to do it.
- The teacher asks the child what he or she wants to do today while browsing the information board and classroom with the child.
- The child verbalizes what he or she wants to play. At this moment, the child can make more than one plan.
- Either the teacher takes dictation or the child draws what he or she verbalized on the verbal plan section of the VPE sheet.
- The child places his or her folder in the file box and takes his or her name tag from the name board in the VPE area.

Phase II: Action

- The child goes to the activity area where he or she will play first, posts his or her name tag on the area sign board and plays in the area as he or she planned.
- Finishing the first planned activity, the child takes his or her name tag from the area sign board.
- The child goes to the second area where he or she planned to play, posts the name tag on the area board, and plays as he or she planned. This procedure will be done by children who plan more than one activity.

Phase III: Verbal Evaluation

- Completing all the activities he or she planned, the child returns to the VPE area.
- For the verbal evaluation, the child takes out his or her folder and tells the teacher what he or she did in relation to his or her verbal plan.
- Either the teacher takes dictation or the child draws what he or she verbalized on the verbal evaluation section of the VPE sheet.
- The child places his or her file folder in the file box.

Fig. 1. An example of Verbal Plan and Evaluation (VPE) processes.

(Yang, 2000, p. 5).

Conscious Discipline

Conscious Discipline as a whole is "a classroom management program which incorporates social and emotional learning" (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012). It teaches students to be aware of their emotions to better regulate and solve problems. The feedback given on this strategy shows that the implementation does minimize conflicts, as well as making the teacher consciously aware of his or her own emotional regulation. Although this classroom management strategy is time consuming, once it is learned by members of the class and school, more time can then be spent focusing on academics.

Conscious Discipline was created as a realistic tool to reverse traditional classroom management assumptions. Rather than trying to change the nature of a person, this classroom management strategy takes into consideration that people can only change their behaviors if they *want* to change (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012). It is not a character trait that can be forced upon another person.

Traditional Classroom Management assumptions: it is possible to make people change, the use of external rewards and punishments is foundational to behavior management, and conflict is bad and should be avoided (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012).

Conscious Discipline assumptions: it is impossible to make people change—people can only change themselves, relationships are foundational to behavioral management and give people the willingness to solve problems, and conflict is a necessary part of learning and an opportunity for teaching and building relationships (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012).

There are two important parts, or steps, to the process of Conscious Discipline. The only way to see success in this management strategy is for the teachers school-wide to practice managing and regulating their own emotions (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012).

The first step of Conscious Discipline is to train teachers in the seven basic powers for self-control and the seven basic skills for discipline, which work together to help train teachers to be **pro**active educators rather than reactive. The product of this training then would help form teachable moments out of conflict—mistakes made into lessons (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012).

The Seven Basic Powers for Self-Control: perception, unity, attention, free will, love, acceptance and intention (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012).

The Seven Basic Skills for Discipline: composure, encouragement, assertiveness, choices, positive intent, empathy, and consequences (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012).

The second step of Conscious Discipline is to establish a "school family" (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012). Students spend at least six hours a day, five days a week at school. It is important that this is a place where students feel safe, not intimidated or scared of this environment. It would be ideal to have Conscious Discipline be a school-wide implemented strategy. By having all staff members trained as Conscious Discipline followers, more positive relationships will be formed, and a family-like bond will follow (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012).

This is a very time consuming strategy that requires a lot of patience, training, and conscious efforts to change the way a teacher thinks and acts, but all results show improvement

over time and experience as well as high success rates as a classroom management strategy (Caldarella, Gunter, & Page, 2012).

Conclusion

After conducting this research, I have found the academic and social/emotional benefits to incorporating play in the classroom as well as the underlying insecurities of teachers when deciding to implement play in the classroom.

Play allows students to practice early literacy skills by testing expression and language—a major component to reading and writing. Play also has been correlated with the prediction of achievement on standardized tests by being a rehearsal of ideas (Ferman, 2000). Through acting out a scene rather than filling in a workbook page, children were able to go through the physical and visual steps of reading comprehension skills.

There was also a direct correlation found between social/emotional development and play. Social/emotional development is a component of life that may not be considered something taught in school, but research found just the opposite. By allowing students the freedom to interact with one another and express themselves, the psychosocial stages of development created by Erik Erikson directly align. Students need to be encouraged to go through these stages to develop confidence and a sense of belonging—two characteristics of a leader in society.

While being the face of the classroom, the teacher has a major say in what is allowed and not allowed to happen in the everyday routine. However, there is much more thought behind the yeses and no's a teacher gives her students. Classroom management plays a major role in the deciding factor of student choice. If a teacher feels that she cannot control the classroom coinciding with her emotions, she decide not to allow play in the classroom. However because

the pros outweigh the cons when considering play as an academic contributor to success,

learning modules and classroom management strategies were also researched and recorded for

the benefit of teachers' own social/emotional welfare.

Unfortunately, this research was limited by time and the restriction to a literature review.

This research would benefit from the outside opinion of the people behind the job—the teachers.

Suggestions to continue this research would be conducting surveys and interviews of teachers

expressing their own opinions and feelings towards play. Questions may be asked towards the

academic benefits, social/emotional benefits, and the attitude and emotional labor teachers feel

towards play in an education setting.

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