Rethinking Calendar Time: Making Group Activities Meaningful and Engaging for Children (and Teachers)

KY Exceptional Children's Conference
November 21, 2017
Elizabeth McLaren
Morehead State University
Talk to your neighbor...

- What kinds of activities do you tend to do each day at whole group time?
- What kind of activities do the children seem most engaged in during whole group?
- What are they least engaged in?
NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice (0-8 years)

- **Large groups (whole group, class meeting, or circle time).** One function of whole-group time is **sharing experiences** – singing together, welcoming a new classmate, contributing ideas for naming the class hamster, and the like. Further, large-group time gives children opportunities to **practice skills** such as talking to a group, listening to their classmates, responding appropriately with questions or comments, working cooperatively, and using and processing new information.”

Copple & Bredekamp, 2009
NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice (0-8 years)

“To a greater extent than is the case in preschool, kindergarten and primary teachers are able to make effective use of large-group time to introduce a concept or skill and then have children take it further, apply the new knowledge, or practice a new skill individually and in small groups.”

Copple & Bredekamp, 2009
NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice (0-8 years)

“As for the recommended duration of large-group meetings...The most important principle is to be alert to the children’s cues and not keep going after they start to lose interest. If the children are getting restless, they usually are not benefiting from the large-group activity at hand.”

Copple & Bredekamp, 2009
DAP Core Considerations

1. Consider what is age appropriate based on typical child development
2. Consider what is individually appropriate based on individual development, prior knowledge, personality, etc.
3. Consider what is appropriate in child’s social and cultural context
DAP Core Considerations

1. Consider what is **age appropriate** based on typical child development
2. Consider what is **individually appropriate** based on individual development, prior knowledge, personality, etc.
3. Consider what is appropriate in child’s **social and cultural context**

Reflect on what you know about your students at these three levels.

Do you use this information to adjust your planning and teaching during group times?
ECERS-3: Item 35 (Whole-group activities for play and learning)

**Inadequate**
1.3: Activities used require only passive, rather than active involvement (Ex: children mainly have to sit, listen, and look)

**Good**
5.3: Staff use group times to introduce children to **meaningful ideas** in which children are **interested** (Ex: review theme of the week; explain how to use new material; tell children what will happen on field trip)

**Excellent**
7.1: All children in the group are actively **engaged** in group activities
7.2: Group activities are usually carried out in **smaller groups**, rather than in one large group
ECERS-3: Item 19 (Music and movement)

**Minimal**
3.3: Staff engaged in singing with children during the observation, either formally or informally

**Good**
5.3: Some movement/dance activity observed
5.4: Staff positively encourage children to participate (Ex: dance; clap, or sing along)

**Excellent**
7.2: Staff point out rhyming words in songs, identify sound repetition such as consonants or vowels, or do finger plays where children use gestures or actions to act out meaning of words
CLASS: Concept Development (Student Interest)

- **Low**: The students do not appear interested and/or involved in the lesson or activities.
- **Middle**: Students may be engaged and/or interested for periods of time, but at other times their interest wanes and they are not involved in the activity or lesson.
- **High**: Students are consistently interested and involved in activities and lessons.
CLASS: Concept Development (Integration)

Low
Concepts and activities are presented independent of one another, and students are not asked to apply previous learning.

Middle
The teacher sometimes links concepts and activities to one another and to previous learning.

High
The teacher consistently links concepts and activities to one another and to previous learning.
KY Framework for Teaching: 3C: Engaging Students in Learning

Ineffective
- The learning tasks...require only rote responses
- The pace of the lesson is too slow or too rushed
- Few students are intellectually engaged or interested

Accomplished
- The learning tasks...designed to challenge student thinking, the result being that most students display active intellectual engagement with important and challenging content and are supported in that engagement...
- The pacing of the lesson is appropriate, providing students the time needed to be intellectually engaged
YIKES…
CALENDAR TIME!
Are you surprised?

“The three activities with the highest frequency of challenging behavior were roll call, discussion, and calendar routines.”
Reflect for a minute

- How do you use a calendar?
- What do you mark on it?
- When do you refer to it?
Do the same for children!
“...look for meaningful ways to introduce preschool-age children to concepts such as before and after and later and next. You can use a calendar to keep track of important events. Mark the days when you will have a visitor, school will be closed, or a site visit is planned. This approach helps children to learn the purpose of calendars and how calendars can be useful to them personally.”

https://www2.teachingstrategies.com/blog/44-before-after-later-and-next-using-a-calendar-in-a-preschool-classroom
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A child-friendly weekly plan

- Concepts of before/after, later/next, today/yesterday, week/month, past/future
- Calendar items are meaningful to children

https://www2.teachingstrategies.com/blog/44-before-after-later-and-next-using-a-calendar-in-a-preschool-classroom
“Each day, we'd fill in one square during our last large group time. It was a way to reflect on the day. We'd add a photo or a child's drawing to the calendar as we discussed the events of the day. It really helped the children to have a ready answer to the question, "What did you do at school today?"

https://www2.teachingstrategies.com/blog/44-before-after-later-and-next-using-a-calendar-in-a-preschool-classroom
The teacher uses this calendar to prepare children for small group activities and special events.

Children refer to the calendar as they anxiously count down to the costume parade!
The teacher uses this calendar to tell children about new materials and lessons.
Mary Kathleen Barnes
Teaching Children Mathematics
Vol. 12, No. 6 (FEBRUARY 2006), pp. 290-295
“The posting events did not occur at a prescribed time, but rather occurred randomly as the children shared their ideas and questions….For example, on Monday we planted narcissus bulbs, and the children were curious about ‘how long’ it would take until they bloomed. In order to provide a reference point in time for the students, I said we could note the planting date on our calendar. “
Children apply temporal concepts to meaningful classroom experiences

Provides reference point to count (e.g., how many days until my birthday?)

Use terms such as tomorrow, yesterday, next week, two days ago, etc. in meaningful context.

Helps children anticipate events in the future and reflect on past events.
Family involvement

- Ask families to send in important dates for their family (e.g., sibling’s birthday, grandparent coming to visit)

- Incorporate these dates into the class calendar to encourage individual children to find special meaning in upcoming dates
Good Intentions Gone Awry

Sallie J. Beneke, Michaelene M. Ostrosky, and Lillian G. Katz

Why do the children struggle to answer Ms. Kelsey correctly, when they have participated in this routine for months? What is the long-term impact on children when they engage regularly in an activity they do not fully understand? Here is a fresh look at calendar time in light of what we know about child development and best practices.

Young children’s development of a sense of time

Adults use calendars to mark and synchronize time, such as scheduling appointments, remembering birthdays, and anticipating upcoming special events (spring break, a basketball tournament). However, if we look at the development of children’s understanding of time (sometimes referred to as temporal understanding), there is

Sallie J. Beneke is the author and coauthor of several books on the project approach. She is a doctoral student at the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois and provides professional development for school districts and early care centers.

Micki Ostrosky, PhD, is on faculty in the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She collaborates with other faculty in the Center on Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning and is involved with The Autism Program in Illinois. Micki is involved in research on social interaction interventions, nonsocial language interventions, social-emotional competencies, challenging behaviors, and transitions, ostrosky@illinois.edu.

Lillian G. Katz, PhD, is director of the Clearinghouse on Early Childhood and Parenting and professor emerita at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Lillian served as vice president and president of NAECY in the 1990s. She has lectured in more than 60 countries and served as visiting professor in a half dozen countries.

Will these calendar methods still work to teach these concepts? Yes! Just more meaningful and less rote!

- Numeracy
- Vocabulary
- Sequencing
- Patterns
- Time intervals (day, week, month)
Take a minute to think about how you might like to use calendars in your own classroom or professional work.
Other ways to teach passage of time
Director, Cerise Bouchard
Fayette County
If pictures and words are too abstract, use an object schedule!

https://www.pinterest.com/pin/349240146075323852/
Individual Schedules
Days of the school year

- Have a “helper job” each day for a child to write or draw something interesting that happened in school. Connect these writings/drawings in a paper chain and build it over many weeks or months. Children can see the chain grown longer (concrete object) as each day passes.

- Can group by fives, tens, etc. for older students to emphasize math concepts.
Who has a birthday this week?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4skztnA4tc

Let's practice
Take a minute to think about how you might like to teach *passage of time* in your own classroom or professional work.
Introduce New Materials or Concepts
Create links between materials/concepts you introduce at large group and exploration during small group and free choice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday (math)</th>
<th>Tuesday (science)</th>
<th>Wednesday (music)</th>
<th>Thursday (social studies)</th>
<th>Friday (literacy)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math Monday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Science Tuesday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wacky Wednesdays</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Our School” Thursday</strong></td>
<td><strong>Flashlight Friday</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>Introduce a math or design problem at circle and children solve in pairs or as a group with manipulatives during free choice (e.g., find out how many acorns will take to balance one walnut on the scale)</td>
<td>Introduce an experiment at whole group and children explore in small groups</td>
<td>Sing a silly song with lots of movement or act out silly scenarios during large group. Have props and music available during free choice</td>
<td>Focus activities on decorating the classroom, partnering with students in other classrooms (e.g., reading buddies), or plan an upcoming event (e.g., write invitations for families to attend a party)</td>
<td>Turn the lights off! The teacher (or children) read a book with a flashlight at whole group. Have flashlights available in the cozy center for use later.</td>
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“Color of Apple Graph - The kids had to bring in an apple that we used to make applesauce. Before we made the applesauce, we graphed what color their apples were. We had red, yellow, green, red/green and red/yellow. I had pictures of the different colors on the end of the floor graph and the kids had to place their apple on the graph.”

How could you extend this concept or these materials to other parts of the day?
The importance of brushing teeth
https://watdonthongep.wordpress.com/tag/science-experiment/

“For health we have been talking a lot about what to do to have healthy teeth. For a class experiment we put 3 white eggs into 3 cups of liquid for 24 hours. One cup had grape Fanta, the next coffee and the last was Coca Cola. After the 24 hours we removed the eggs from the cup. I displayed for the students how with a toothbrush and toothpaste we were able to change the color dyed egg back to white. The eggs are very similar to our teeth in that if we do drink sugar or eat sugar we can clean it away when brushing.”

How could you extend this concept or these materials to other parts of the day?
KWL Chart
Classroom in Ashland Independent school district
Data analysis with shoes at whole group
Moving from concrete to abstract for data analysis.
Create a pattern to the week to “force” yourself to plan for variety of content throughout the week

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**Math Monday**
Introduce a math or design problem at circle and children solve in pairs or as a group with manipulatives during free choice (e.g. find out how many acorns will take to balance one walnut on the scale)

**Science Tuesday**
Introduce an experiment at whole group and children explore in small groups

**Wacky Wednesdays**
Sing a silly song with lots of movement or act out silly scenarios during large group. Have props and music available during free choice

**“Our School” Thursday**
Focus activities on decorating the classroom, partnering with students in other classrooms (e.g., reading buddies), or plan an upcoming event (e.g., write invitations for families to attend a party)

**Flashlight Friday**
Turn the lights off! The teacher (or children) read a book with a flashlight at whole group. Have flashlights available in the cozy center for use later.
Take a minute to think about how you might like to **introduce new materials or concepts** in your own classroom or professional work.
Daily Message
Daily message board

- Do you use a daily message with students?
- What kind of information do you share?
- Do you use text, pictures, or a combination?
- What are children doing and learning during the message time?
Pictures, objects, and text to tell about new materials in centers.

Symbols to say that water table will be closed.
Message Board
http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?ContentId=381

Number and cover messages. Have children reveal them one at a time to allow for conversation about each message.
Grouping children for small group using pictures and text.

Message Board
http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?ContentId=381
Use concrete objects and text to alert children of new choices in centers.
Changes to the Schedule

Gainsley (from Message to Meaning)

Change to the daily schedule.
Messages that promote problem solving and clarify expectations
Authentic writing opportunity to share personal message with peers.

Gainsley (from Message to Meaning)
How is this different than traditional calendar time?

- **Makes “time” a more concrete concept** (today, yesterday, tomorrow) than the traditional “calendar” time.

- **Doesn’t rely on rote memorization** of days of week, months in year, or counting days.

- The daily message **allows the day to be differentiated from other days in a meaningful way** for children (activities available, changes in routine, changes in personnel, birthdays, etc.)
Basics of Daily Message: What is it?

- Daily interactive process that introduces the writing and reading process to children
- Can include day of week, month, and date – but is not required!
- Makes use of text and pictures to support children’s ability to “read” the message
- Use the same format each day – consistency will help children use familiar pattern to “read” the message
- Decide if the message will be created by the teacher or with student input
Basics of Daily Message: Ideas for Messages

- Messages should be meaningful to children
- Changes to materials or schedule
- Attendance (supports sense of community and caring)
- Upcoming weekend/holiday (promote understanding of days of week and passage of time)
- Classroom dilemmas (promote problem solving and remind of expectations)
- Children’s personal messages
Consider differentiating for student development and interest

- Part of the class can leave toward the end of large group time (e.g., go to small group or free choice)
- Continue with more advanced content at end of group session
  - Example: use a simple, picture-based daily message for entire group and use word-based or child-created message for more advanced students in smaller group
- For entire group focus on using illustrations to make meaning of text. For advanced students focus on decoding to read words.
Differentiation to meet all needs

- Think about the developmental continuum represented by the children in your classroom and how this changes throughout the year.

- Consider languages used by children.

- Incorporate communication board symbols used with children throughout day.

- Concrete objects → symbols → words
  (see next slide)
## Continuum of Symbolic Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbolic Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Object Stage</td>
<td>Use actual objects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photograph Stage</td>
<td>Use real photographs (i.e., photo, magazines, catalogs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Symbolic</td>
<td>Use colored line drawings (hand drawn or commercially produced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line Drawing Stage</td>
<td>Use black and white line drawings (hand drawn or commercially produced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Stage</td>
<td>Use written form of words and/or numbers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Take a minute to think about how you might like to use a daily message in your own classroom or professional work.
Movement
One day some children decided to go fishing so they got in their boat.

They rowed steadily upstream against the current.

Beautiful butterflies fluttered around their heads.

They saw a large green turtle floating downstream.

They threw in their fishing lines and hey presto they caught a fish.

And then in their boat they floated quietly back downstream.
Lying on their backs, watching the clouds drift by.

© Joanna Gardner 2005
Yoga for Kids

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbXPvDAt2k
Getting the “wiggles” out and “calming down”
Resource: Go Noodle

https://app.gonoodle.com/channels/youtube/move-your-legs-and-arms
**Active Letter Game**

Anna’s four-year-old students are working hard on learning their letters. She has made up a game they all love to play, especially when they need to burn off excess energy. Anna has each letter of the alphabet cut out of brightly colored foam sheets. She takes a handful of letters and strews them on the grass on the playground. The children line up on the sidewalk. When she calls out a letter name, the children find that letter, and then tell Anna what sound it makes.
Take a minute to think about how you might like to use **movement** in your own classroom or professional work.
Telling Stories
Borrowing from the Waldorf Tradition
Consider props for teachers and children to use

- Makes the story more concrete and easier to recall

- Visual “prompt” for children

- Children’s props keep them actively engaged

https://www.entangledharmony.com/storytelling-a-skill-you-will-want-your-child-to-have/
Let’s retell one of these perennial favorites. Be sure to use fun voices!
Take a minute to think about how you might like to use **storytelling** in your own classroom or professional work.
Class Meetings
Class Meetings

“On occasion circle times flow into class meetings, but the two have a different focus. The class meeting is expressly designed for the active involvement of each child. Its purpose is to encourage thought and sharing by children and teachers about their experiences, needs, concerns, and triumphs.”

“They provide opportunities for the teacher and children together to set guidelines for the class; discuss and make decisions about events, issues, and procedures; appreciate individual members of the group; and build an inclusive, noncompetitive group spirit.”
“In a Head Start classroom children were having problems when playing on a new climber that had been set up to promote physical activity. During a class meeting, the teacher used the following social problem-solving steps with the children.

The guidelines, which the children came up with and the teacher helped to word and write down, were as follows:

- Give kids room when climbing up the ladder.
- Use only careful touches on the top.
- We go down the slide except on Fridays.

This [third] solution also provided a functional use of the class calendar and allowed for upper-body exercise. (Children often come up with solutions adults would never think of. If these solutions have a chance, make them work – for the benefit of the group.)}
How might this look?

- At the beginning of the year, hold class meetings to decide on classroom guidelines/rules.
- Use class meetings to determine a new theme/project.
- Use meetings when social issues arise (e.g., some children not helping during clean up time).
- Ideas for your classroom?
Take a minute to think about how you might like to use class meetings in your own classroom or professional work.
"The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas."

— Dr. Linus Pauling

• Child-Centered Calendar
• Movement
• Daily Message
• Telling Stories
• Introduce New Materials
• Class Meetings

• GOOD LUCK!

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