

Ideas Into Practice

Segment 3: Selecting Classroom Materials and Planning the Schedule

Option A: Refurbishing a Learning Center

Step 1: Conduct a quick study of how often centers in your classroom are used:

- List the names of all centers on a pad of paper.
- Each time a child visits a center during free play time, make a mark under its name on your pad.
- After several days, study your list. Which centers have the fewest number of visits by children?
- Discuss with colleagues why these centers are underused.

Step 2: As a team, select one of these low-use centers, photograph it, and refurbish it, relying on ideas from this segment:

- Are there enough choices of materials and activities in the center to keep children engaged? If not, add several more.
- Are there graded challenges—that is, activities that range from simple to more challenging, so children of all levels of ability can participate? If not, add a few less complex or more difficult materials to achieve this balance.
- Does the center include materials that are fascinating to children and that relate to their interests and their culture? If not, add materials to enhance the interest level of the center (e.g., multicultural books or dolls, novel objects, newly created or purchased materials).
- Does the center include open-ended, self-expressive materials? If not, add some of these (e.g., a sketch pad and markers to a science center or several puppets to the book area).
- Does the overall appearance of the center and its position in the classroom attract children? Is it partitioned with dividers to protect the center's activities from distractions in the rest of the classroom? Make adjustments to these features if needed.

Step3: A few days after redesigning the center, study its use again, following the same method as before. Do children more often go into the center now that you've refurbished it?

Step 4: Take a photograph of the center. Write a brief report on how the center was changed and what effect these modifications had on children's behavior.

Option B: Implementing Child Planning and Evaluation Sessions

With your colleagues, implement child planning and evaluation sessions at the beginning and end of the day (or end of the morning, if you prefer).

Step 1: During an opening group time early in the morning, devote a few minutes to asking children to discuss what they plan to do during the day. A few of the following questions might be asked to guide them:

- What is one thing you would like to do today?
- Who is someone you might play with today?
- Which center will you go to to start your day?
- What is something you think you will do when we go outdoors today?
- What is something you might create today?

You might write down children's plans as they share them on a large experience chart.

Step 2: At the end of the day (or the morning), in a whole group meeting, ask children to reflect on their day. A few of the following questions might be asked to guide them:

- What is something you did today that you really enjoyed?
- Did anything happen today that made you very happy or excited?
- Did anything happen today that made you sad or frustrated?
- What is something you did today that you're very proud of?
- Who did you play with today?
- Did you create anything today that you'd like to share with everyone?
- Did you do all the things today that you planned? (Here the caregiver can share the written plans from the morning session for review.) What things did you not get to do?

Step 3: Try these planning and evaluation sessions for a few days. Take a photo of one or two of your written planning charts, if you made any. Write a brief report describing how the system worked:

- What were the strengths and weaknesses of this process?
- What do children get out of the planning step?
- What do they get out of the evaluation step?

Option C: Creating a Photo Board Schedule for Children

Create a photo board schedule of the classroom day that can be posted and reviewed with children at group time.

Step 1: Begin by making sure that there is a set, predictable routine in your classroom that reflects the key ideas from this segment (e.g., a quiet-active-quiet pattern, child-directed free choice for at least half the day, adequate outdoor time). Use a camera to photograph all key events in your classroom that happen at each point in the schedule. You could photograph children singing in opening group time, for example. You could photograph children eating snacks and playing on the playground during those parts of

the day. Be certain to photograph transition periods—a clean up period at the end of free play, for example.

Step 2: Once photos have been taken, print them out and place them on a large sheet of poster board in chronological order (e.g., a photo of arrival at school first, a photo of morning group next). Each photo should be labeled in large print (e.g., “Lunch Time,” “Play Time,” “Outdoor Time”).

Step 3: Once the board is created, post it in the classroom and review it with children periodically during opening group time. Throughout the day, review this schedule with individual children who are confused about what to do at clean up time or who are wondering when their parents will be back to pick them up (“Let’s look at our schedule. We’re having afternoon snack, see? What happens after snack? Right! Your father comes to pick you up!”)

Step 4: Write a brief report on how the photo schedule worked:

- Did children look at it during the day to see what would happen next in the classroom?
- Did you engage in meaningful conversations with children using the board?
- Did the board help children (or you) follow the schedule better?