

Good Things for Children and Teachers to Be Doing - Part 2

As I wrote in last week's column, classrooms consist of many things but the most important components of any classroom are the children and the teachers. In last week's column I focused on the the "good things" children should be doing in the classroom. In this week's column, I look at the "good things" teachers should be doing.

1. Demonstrate respect for children

Positive teacher-child relationships are built on the respect teachers have for children. Teachers must continually think about how they demonstrate respect for the individuality and humanity of all the children in their care; they should respect the developmental journeys of the children and respect the children's various family and cultural backgrounds.

2. Serve as models for children

Teachers serve as important models for children in terms of demonstrating respect for other people, exhibiting curiosity about the world around them, cooperating with other staff members (and children), and using appropriate language to express ideas and feelings, and to communicate with other people.

3. Respond to children's interests

Quality educational curriculum should emerge from the interests of the children. To this end, teachers spend time observing and interacting with children, making note of the interests that are being expressed in their play and activities, and then planning the environment and curriculum activities to foster and build on those interests.

4. Scaffold children's activities

Young children often want to accomplish tasks in their environment that they don't quite yet have the ability to carry out. Teachers understand the importance of supporting children in their efforts to carry out their goals and intentions and provide "just enough" support for the children to accomplish their goals. Teachers also understand the importance of allowing the child to act independently when they are able to do so and teachers know just when to remove the support. Teachers are watching for the opportunity to move children from acting with support to independent behavior.

5. Observe and document children's activity and behavior

Good teachers understand that their work doesn't end with the planning and implementation of curricula activities. It is important to observe children's activity in order to understand the interests, needs, and capabilities of the individual children and in order to respond to those individual needs. Documenting children's efforts through anecdotal notes, running records, and photographs are just a few ways that teachers can reflect on children's learning and development and are also powerful tools for communicating with parents about the daily experiences of their children.

6. Continue to develop as professionals

Good teachers understand the importance of their own growth and development as professionals who will be influencing the lives of children. They seek out ways in which they can obtain more knowledge about child development, curriculum ideas, and approaches to relating to and teaching children. Good teachers can look to more experienced colleagues for mentoring, value the constructive evaluations provided by supervisors, build professional development plans in which they outline their teaching goals for the year, and seek out and take advantage of any in-service workshops that might be available.

The ideas touched upon in last week's and this week's column do not represent an exhaustive list of the good things that children and teachers should be doing in the classroom. They can be, however, a beginning point for the important discussion of what we would like to see happening in our classrooms; what we would like to see the most important components of those classrooms - the children and teachers - doing on a regular and daily basis.

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