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ESSENTIALS

Caring for Infants and Toddlers

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*"What you teach from birth to three is what matters most to me"**

Bright Beginnings for Babies

by Pam Schiller

The first three years of life lay the foundation for lifelong learning. The child's brain is busy wiring the foundation for vision, emotional stability, language development, motor development, thinking skills, and much more. By age three, a child's brain is two and a half times more active than an adult's. It is more fertile than it will ever be again. The foundation for a lifetime of learning is in place, and parents and caregivers have played a critical role in establishing that foundation.

Quality Experiences and Caring Interactions

Brain development is contingent on a complex interplay between genes and the environment. While it is true that babies arrive with a genetic predisposition, it is also true that experiences within the environment will serve as the architect of the brain. What little ones experience in the environment will contribute to both the structure and capacity of the brain.

Human interactions also play a role in brain development. Positive interactions will enhance the wiring. Negative interactions or a lack of interaction will interfere with the wiring, and in some cases even destroy the wiring. Little ones need experiences that coincide with the windows of opportunity for wiring (see chart), and they need caring people to ensure that wiring opportunities are maximized.

Windows of Opportunities

During the early years there are numerous critical windows of opportunity for wiring (fertile times) that should not be missed if optimal brain development is to occur. These windows provide a rough timetable that indicates when the brain is especially geared to develop various senses and abilities. Knowing when the windows of opportunity for wiring occur and what can be offered in the way of experiences and interactions during those times offers caregivers and parents great insight into how they can help children grow into capable, caring, and good-natured beings.

It is important to understand that when the brain is wiring for a particular sense or ability, the child's experiences can either enhance or hinder that wiring. For example, during the first year of life the brain is set to wire for trust (the

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basis of emotional intelligence). If the baby's experiences are positive (caring and nurturing), the brain will wire for trust. If those experiences are negative (uncaring and neglectful), the brain will still wire, but it will wire for mistrust. Rewiring is possible in most cases, with the exception of vision, but it becomes more difficult with every passing day because the wiring strengthens as experiences are repeated.

Suggestions for Enhancing Wiring Opportunities

Following are descriptions of the windows of opportunity and some suggestions for enhancing the wiring opportunities.

Emotional Intelligence

During the first 14 months of life, the baby's brain is wiring for trust. Trust is the basis for emotional intelligence.

- Pick babies up when they cry. You can't spoil a baby. Hug them. Talk to them. Smile. Check their diapers. Make sure they aren't hungry. Brief periods of stress will not harm babies, but prolonged periods of distress should be avoided at all cost.
- Learn to recognize infant cues. They can communicate long before they say their first words. Tired babies rub their eyes. Hungry babies cry. Smiling babies are saying *let's talk some more or keep playing this game*. When babies have had enough, they turn away.
- Talk with babies, whether you are near or as far away as across a room. To an infant who is less than 7 to 8 months old, out of sight is out of mind.
- By the fourth month of life, an infant can read your emotions by noting your facial expressions. Smile at little ones while you are talking to them. They feel comforted by your happiness. Calm yourself before picking up a little one. They can read frustrations on your face and through your body movements.
- Keep babies joyful by playing games with them, singing to them, talking to them, and reading to them. Joyfulness builds strong emotional wiring.
- Cheer for baby's accomplishments.

Between 14 months and age 4, a child's brain is wiring for impulse control.

- Set limits and consistently uphold them.
- Provide simple explanations, even before you think baby can understand them.
- Reward appropriate behaviors with a smile, a pat on the back, a hug, or a high five.
- Ignore temper tantrums as much as possible.

Social Skills

Almost as soon as an infant is born, he strives to understand how he fits into the world. He looks, listens, and touches in an attempt to discover how people work or operate. Our actions and reactions and our words and responses provide information to the baby that he will use to lay a foundation for his development of the concept of *self*. For normal development, babies need to know right from the beginning that they can cause good things to happen, things that cause people around them to respond in positive ways. When baby cries, someone picks him up and comforts him. When he smiles, someone smiles back. He learns that social interactions are give and take.

- Play interaction games such as Peek-a-Boo or How Big is Baby?
- When baby coos, talk or coo back.
- Celebrate baby's accomplishments. Delight in his or her attempts to get your attention.
- Create a cuddle time each day for each baby. Babies learn to comfort themselves when they are comforted by you. Talk, sing, or read to them.

Motor Development

Movement is critical to learning, and the wiring that enables the refinement of movement ability begins at birth. Early movements and motor control is wired during the first two years of life as the baby moves from automatic reflexes to controlled movements and coordination that allow her to accomplish such movements as rolling over, holding a rattle, standing, and eventually walking. The more opportunities babies have for moving, the stronger their muscles

Window for:	Wiring Window	Greatest Enhancement Opportunity
Emotional Intelligence	Birth–48 months	4 years – 8 years
Social Skills (Attachment)	Birth–24 months	2 years – 8 years
Motor Development	Birth–24 months	2 years – 8 years
Vision	Birth–24 months	2 years – 6 years
Early Sounds	4–8 months	8 months – 10 years
Thinking Skills	Birth–48 months	4 years – 12 years
Vocabulary Development	Birth–24 months	2 years – 7 years

Songs and Chants for the Whole Day

Try some of these songs and chants with little ones during the day. They are a great way to keep language flowing for little ones. When you tire of these, make up your own.

Morning Greeting

Madison, Madison,*
Howdy-do.
Hello. Good-day.
How are you?

(*substitute baby's name)

Feeding Time

(Tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Chew, Chew, Chew Your Food

Chew, chew, chew your food
A little at a time.
Chew it slow, chew it fast,
Chew it to this rhyme.

or

Drink, drink, drink your milk
A little at a time.
Drink it slow, drink it fast,
Drink it to this rhyme.

become and the more accurate they become in guiding their movements.

- Limit the amount of time infants spend in confined areas such as baby seats, car seats, strollers, and small sleeping areas.
- Make sure little ones have a safe area for active exploration. The more they move, the better they are able to move with balance and accuracy.
- Encourage movement by placing objects just out of baby's reach or by encouraging older infants and toddlers to mimic your actions.
- Do movement activities with little ones. Exercise their arms and legs. Play movement games. Encourage older infants to dance.

Vision

The only window of opportunity that slams shut is the window for visual wiring. If babies don't have appropriate visual experiences during the first two years of life, their visual wiring will be impaired. Most children receive adequate stimulation for appropriate wiring in the normal course of events during the first two years. However, if a child is born with cataracts on his or her eyes, and the cataracts are not removed until after the second year, some areas of vision will never be wired.

- Limit the use of television. Many doctors and researchers advise no television viewing prior to the age of 2. A baby's brain needs to be wiring for the three-dimensional world. The television presents two-dimensional imagery.
- Place objects at the appropriate distance for baby's visual accessibility. Newborns can see from 9 to 14 inches away from their faces. By the end of the first month of life, an infant can see 2 to 3 feet away. By the third month of life, the baby can see across the room.
- Use and allow the baby to use three-dimensional objects whenever possible. Remember that pictures are interesting, but they are two-dimensional, and the baby's brain is attempting to wire for a three-dimensional world.
- Use colors that are appealing to baby. Three month olds recognize red, blue, and green. Five month olds begin to recognize white and yellow. Babies love bright colors, and bright color help keep babies alert.
- Change objects on mobiles periodically to vary visual stimulation.

Early Sounds

Infants form permanent maps in their brains that are based on the native language they hear. During the first year of life, infants distinguish the phonemes (smallest units of sound) of the languages they hear. Neurons in their brains are responsible for sorting out different sounds, and at no other time will these neurons be more active or the child more sensitive to sounds.

- Talk, talk, talk! Babies need to hear language as often as possible. Television is no substitute! An infant needs language that is interactive with another person. The more people little ones listen to, the better they wire the sounds of language. Describe your actions while you are doing them. Talk about routines and what's coming up next. Tell baby a story about something that happened to you on the way to work. Carry on both sides of a conversation by responding for Austin, who isn't talking yet.
- Sing, sing, sing! Singing offers a different perspective of language.
- Read, read, read! Reading offers a still different experience with language.
- Invite the children from older classrooms to come in and talk with, sing to, or read to the babies.

Vocabulary

By the time they are 18 months old, babies with chatty caretakers have vocabularies that are 185 words larger than their peers. By the time they are two, the difference has increased to 295 words. The larger a child's vocabulary, the more likely adults are to use more words when talking to that child, which

in turn creates the likelihood that the child's vocabulary will continue to grow.

- Label things for baby. When you hand Madison a cup say "*cup*." When you roll her a ball, say "*ball*." As babies gets older add adjectives — "*blue cup*" or "*striped ball*."
- Discuss facial expressions. Point out and name body parts.
- Don't use baby talk. Say "*water,*" not "*wa-wa*."
- Expand on words by building sentences around them. For example, if Evan says "*ball*," you say, "*Do you want the ball?*"
- Provide board books. Look through the books with little ones, and name the items on the pages.
- Say chants and rhymes to little ones. They will love the playful and rhythmic sound of the words.
- Talk, talk, talk! Sing, sing, sing! Read, read, read!

Thinking Skills

One of the most important cognitive revelations during the first year of life is the understanding of cause and effect. As little ones begin to understand that many actions (effects) are direct results of others (causes), they develop a foundation for problem solving and a more sophisticated ability to think. If we allow them to practice the steps of solving problems, they will develop neural networks that will provide a foundation for a life-long ability to find solutions to problems.

- Provide toys that reinforce cause-and-effect relationships, such as rattles, jack-in-the boxes, busy boxes, music boxes, and squeak toys.
- Encourage little ones to solve child-size problems. If Gabrielle's ball rolls under a piece of furniture, wait to see if she can discover a way to retrieve it. If a toy is just out of reach, see if baby can find a way to reach it.
- Let older infants and toddlers see you solve problems. Verbalize your thinking. "*Whoops! The tab came off your diaper. What can I do? I could get another diaper, but that would be wasteful. I know. I can use masking tape to hold your diaper in place.*"

The sophistication of modern technology has given us a key — a key to the future. We are daily shaping the lives of the little ones in our care. There is no job on earth more important than that of caregivers and parents. We hold in our hands tomorrow's doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, police officers, and a multitude of other future citizens, including mothers and fathers. We can give every baby a bright beginning. Let's do it! Every bright beginning has the potential to ultimately lead to another bright beginning.

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Web Pages:
www.iamyourchild.org • www.nccic.org
www.zerotothree.org • www.naeyc.org

More Songs and Chants for the Whole Day

Snack Time

Snack, snack, snack for me?
My, oh, my,
What can it be?

Wash-up Time

(Tune: "Mulberry Bush")

This is the Way We Wash Our Face

This is the way we wash our face,
Scrub our cheeks, scrub our ears.
This is the way we wash our face,
Until we're squeaky-clean.

Diaper Changing Time

I'm changing your diaper,
Sweetie Pie.
In just a minute you'll be dry.

Good-bye/ Bed Time
(Tune: "Muffin Man")

Now It's Time to Say Good-bye

Now it's time to say good-bye,
Say good-bye, say good-bye.
Now it's time to say goodbye
I'll see you in the morning.

(You can substitute good night for good-bye if using as a bedtime song.)

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Places for Babies: Infants and Toddlers in Groups

by Jim Greenman

Imagine a room with light streaming in the windows, shadows dancing on the floors and walls, and a richly textured world of different shapes and sizes of furniture to climb on, over, around, and in — with places to just sit, places to snuggle. It is a room where you can sometimes make wild messes as you discover the mysteries of sensuous substances that often end up on you. It is a room with different *places to be*, just like your house — places that look, feel, sound, and smell different. There are lilacs here and baskets of ivy hanging by the window. There is a door to the outside, that wonderful place with grass and sun and shade. Out there the messes can be even wilder and you are free to kick up your heels — sorry, you can't do that — let's say instead bounce and waddle with abandon, roll and swing, twist and shout.

It is NOT a room dominated by cribs, nor are you sandwiched between the glare of florescent lights and gleaming tile. It is NOT a tiny cell-like space where the day is divided into time on the crowded rug, the bounce chair, and the crib — nor is it a room filled with tables and chairs and a random assortment of toys, where activities are put out to keep the group busy.

In the room are large and small people interacting; the interactions are warm and relaxed and frequent. There are real conversations between adults and children. Adults listen to children and respond to their vocalizations.

Look closely and see — it is a room filled with individuals. There is Stephen, striding into the room like Louis the Sun King, expecting to be loved, his good nature surrounding him like a bumper. There is Alexander, always a worried man who likes to be held. And Alicia, who likes to sample everything, and JoAnna, who needs a morning nap.

Children are trying to "do it myself" — infants holding spoons and cups, toddlers pouring milk and wrestling with zippers.

Parents clearly belong in the room; one feels their presence through photographs and the information directed toward their eyes. The warmth with which they are welcomed and their familiarity with the life occurring within leaves little doubt that it is their place as well.

There is a sense of **SECURITY**: both the security that comes from knowing that this is a safe place for children, beyond the normal bumps and bruises that go with active learning, and the child's security that she is truly known, understood, and accepted for who she is.

There is a sense of **ENGAGEMENT**: when adults interact with children they give them their full human presence. When children are exploring the world and their emerging powers, they are intent.

There is a sense of **ACTIVE LEARNING**: children are genuinely INTO things, and ALL OVER things, as befits creatures that learn with all of their senses and through whole body action.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to find programs with these characteristics. Probably fewer than one in ten centers are truly *good places for babies*. Quality does not come easily or inexpensively.

Quality care for babies is not brandishing an infant curriculum or *infant stimulation*. It is not spic and span tile and formica, or attractive lofts, or a bump-free environment, or even low ratios and smiley, warm people. Quality is each and every child experiencing warm, personal care and developmentally appropriate opportunities for sensory, motor, and language learning. Quality is parents feeling in control.

How Does Quality Happen?

Without infant ratios of no worse than one adult to four children, toddler ratios of one adult to five children, it will not happen, or at least happen for all of the children all of the time. And quality depends on people who genuinely appreciate babies for who they are, for what they can do right now, not just what they will be able to do or are in the process of becoming. But good ratios and good people don't guarantee quality.

Quality happens because the environment — time and space — is designed and planned to support care and learning. The setting is furnished, equipped, and organized to maximize the caregiver's time. Quality is a result of considerable thought and planning: maximizing resources, adjusting to individual needs and changing circumstances.

The Importance of Built-In Learning

An essential quality of good infant and toddler programs is moving away from a traditional early childhood focus on activities and building learning into the environment. When learning is built in, it frees caregivers to BE WITH children and focus on the child: to take the time to slowly diaper a child, or to help a child through the agony of separation, or to appreciate the joy of newfound discoveries. These are the PRIME TIMES, the important times. It is upside down priorities to rush through these times to get back to *teaching* or managing children.

While teacher-directed activities may take place, there are always other opportunities for those toddling to a different drummer. Activities take place individually and with small groups within an environment rich with opportunities for vigorous motor and sensory exploration.

The Importance of an Organized Convenient Environment for Staff

Convenience and organization buy time for staff to spend precious minutes with a child. Poor storage and inadequate equipment result in lower quality.

What Kind of Place for Babies?

A Safe and Healthy Place

Good places for babies follow the National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs in **Caring for Our Children**, developed by the American Public Health Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics standards for group care.

But there are also two important understandings: (1) Learning involves the risk of acquiring the normal bumps and bruises of childhood, the natural result of learning to explore the world with a developing body. (2) *Sanitary* and *clean* are not the same thing and are usually confused. A good program has a vigilant concern for avoiding the spread of germs and disease, but not a preoccupation with cleanliness that gets in the way of sensory exploration and other active learning.

A Good Place to "Be"

A good place to be a baby and be with a baby for long days and weeks includes:

- sufficient room for adults (including a few parents) and children
- windows and doors to the outside
- home-like lighting that allows a variety of lighting conditions
- multiple *places to be* — that feel different when you are there
- *places to pause* that allow you to step back from the action
- soft places and more soft places — pillows, couches, futons
- enough tile surface for eating and the rest carpet
- a separate crib room or area that accommodates individual schedules
- plants and multi-textured decor
- an outdoors of shade and sun, grass and deck, hills and flats, things to climb on, and loose parts to collect

Excerpts From an Infant Toddler Focus Group

"This place is great," gurgled 9 month old Rebecca. "I get to sleep when I want, eat when I want, and every time I'm cranky Bobby Jo picks me up and holds me tight, sings to me, and I know that I am the most important person in the world to her."

"Yeah," agreed 14 month old Denise. "I can spend my day climbing around and getting into this and that and nobody jumps on me. I do love to lie on the couch and nurse my bottle. But, Rebecca, you are wrong, Bobby Jo loves me best."

Two year old James shoved a cookie in his mouth and mumbled, "I like knocking things down. I like to push things. In fact, I'd like to push down Joe. I also like to dump things out and to bite things (where did Joe go, anyhow?). I don't like always being told "no," I thought they gave me a new name for awhile — Nojames."

A Good Place to Learn

Nearly all the important learning in the first two years of life is sensory, motor, language, and self-knowledge: "I am important, competent, powerful, and connected to others." A good place to learn is filled with challenge and exploration:

- large motor learning: climbing, pushing, grabbing, and motor opportunities of all kinds
- sensory learning: a *world at their fingertips* to touch, taste, smell, see, and hear
- language: conversations, listening to children, reading
- expression and accomplishment: opportunities to express yourself in motion and mess (art), solve problems, and *do it yourself*
- loose parts to inspect, collect, dump, and sort

A Good Place to Work

A good place to work needs:

- water and toilets, where they are needed
- ample storage, close to the point of use
- ample information space, close to the point of use
- clear organization and signage
- cleaning supplies, right there

A Good Place for Parents to Be

Parents are welcome, greeted, and helped to understand how the room works. There is storage for their things.

A Final Note: Babies in the Real World

Babies deserve more than they usually get from group care. Too many programs are too hard, inflexible, over and understimulating, and tolerate too much child distress. But it is not really the people involved who are to blame. Many programs for babies are the equivalent of shanty towns, makeshift creations put together out of the wonderful stuff we can find and keep, the found and purchased spaces and materials barely adequate for the task, and all the energy and love and commitment that can be mustered. It is easy to accept what is and avoid criticism of programs doing the best they can. But at what cost to children? It is our job to assert what quality is and to push for the resources for all programs to achieve it.

Jim Greenman is vice president of Resources for Child Care Management and author of ***Caring Spaces, Learning Places: Children's Environments That Work*** *(Exchange Press [800] 221-2864).*

Quick Evaluation of an Infant or Toddler Learning/Caring Environment

If infants or toddlers could choose their own setting, they might ask:

How many places are there where I can:

climb up? _____	climb in? _____	climb over? _____	climb on? _____
go through? _____	go under? _____	go in and out? _____	
pull myself up? _____	reach? _____	kick? _____	jump? _____

How many semi-enclosed places are there?

How many different places to be are there for me, places that feel different because of light, texture, sound, smell, enclosure, and sight lines?

When you put me in an infant swing or bounce chair, am I only there for a short time and I get out when I want to get out?

How often do I get out of the room?

How often do I go for stroller or cart rides?

How often do I get to get out of the stroller/cart and walk/crawl around?

How often do I get to play with messy things — water, sand, dough, paint?

What is there to transport?

push/pull?

collect/dump?

throw?

Do I get to feed myself as soon as I can hold a spoon, bottle, or cup?

Do I have to wait to be changed or use the toilet?

When I talk my talk, will someone listen and respond?

When you talk to me, will you look at me and use words I am learning to understand?

Will someone read to me?

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Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers

Whenever I work with infant and toddler caregivers, I hear stories of how foolish they feel planning a *curriculum* for babies. Curriculum is a school word and obviously, our very youngest children don't need to be in school settings, but rather, home-like environments. How might this home-like context reshape our idea of curriculum? Certainly there are interesting activities we can offer babies, contributing to their brain development and learning, but I believe that building relationships is our primary curriculum with infants and toddlers. In that back and forth dance of reading cues with their caregivers, babies begin to get a sense of who they are, who they can trust, and what is valued and possible in their world. This is curriculum far more significant than the name of some song we write down in a box on a schedule.

Whether changing a diaper, offering food, or playing peek-a-boo, each ordinary exchange with a baby is helping answer fundamental questions for this stage of life:

- Is the world a safe place?
- Will my needs be met?
- Am I a successful communicator?
- How can I get my message across?
- Will you accept my uncensored feelings?

I think of these issues as our *curriculum themes* with infants and toddlers. And though they develop rapidly in their early years, my preference is to think of all children up to the age of three years old as babies. I say this not to demean or discount their capabilities, but rather to protect this precious time of life from too many adult agendas. Other big themes for these babies include autonomy, separation, and control.

- Can I meet my own needs?
- Do I have any power?
- If we part, will you still be there?

Tending to these themes, rather than more superficial topical ones, can lead to a healthy identity development as babies forge and maintain strong connections with their family and caregivers, and later, others.

Considering what this all means in everyday practice, here are some of the training strategies I often use in my work with infant and toddler caregivers.

Stories Shape Our Lives

While most of us don't have clear memories of the time we were babies, we often have stories or photos, which offer vivid impressions of what we were like as young ones. These impressions stem from the cultural, socio-economic, and emotional context of our families, as well as the historical times and influences into which we were born. If we don't have any stories, physical or emotional memorabilia from our early childhood, then that absence or void has helped shape our identity development as well.

For very young children in child care settings, we who spend our days with them must spot, tell, and preserve for them the stories that unfold as part of their development and evolution with us. This should be central to our understanding of curriculum for these young ones.

Strategy: Remembering stories about you as a baby

Spend time as a staff with each telling a story that has been told about them as a baby. Perhaps it is a story of their birth, how they got their name, or some particular quality, behavior, or pursuit that has become legendary. The vitality that usually accompanies this story telling is worth noting. It leads us to consider the role of stories in shaping our identity.

Strategy: Read good picture books aloud

To explore the developmental themes for babies I find picture books often more useful than textbooks. For example, *On the Day I Was Born* by Deborah Chocolate (Scholastic, 1995) has illustrations and language that immediately remind us of the themes of softness, a sense of belonging, and being the center of attention and delight of everyone's eye. How can we plan for these themes in our programs?

Another good example is *Welcoming Babies* by Margy Burns Knight (Tilbury House, 1994) which shows how different cultural traditions convey a sense of identity and affinity to young children. Discussing the elements in this book can enlighten our caregiving practices.

Goodnight Moon (Harper, 1947) has simple, clear pictures and text, naming familiar objects over and over again,

reminding us what children need in the way of consistency and routines to feel safe and trusting.

The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown (Harper, 1942) and *Mama, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara Joosse (Chronicle Books, 1991) emphasize the intense themes of trust and autonomy for toddlers: If I run away, will you come after me? If I have a big tantrum or am naughty, will you still love me? Our curriculum with infants and toddlers is to reassure them of this.

Strategy: Regularly tell stories of what the babies are doing

A primary component of our curriculum for babies is to make their lives visible with stories told to them, their families, and others in our program. These can be oral or written and supplemented with photographs. In the language of school, these stories might be called reports, portfolios, documentation, or developmental assessments. In the language of home, they are baby books. The important thing is the rich language of detail that we use, the way we show character development, and the child's perspective, rather than adherence to our adult goals or agenda. And, if they are to be stories told back to the babies as well as to adults, the language in some of our stories will need to be visual, simple, lyrical, and rhythmic.

Environments and Interactions Shape Our Stories

Everyday stories are in the making in our child care programs, and our environments and interactions are the primary influences on the authors. Here are some strategies to help staff keep this in mind.

Strategy: Know your preferences and aversions

Gather a collection of pictures of infants and toddlers in various activities (some likely to be provocative) from magazines, newspapers, and books. Help staff get insight into their own preferences and aversions by answering the following questions for each picture. Honesty is what is important in this activity. There are no right, wrong, or unacceptable answers. The challenge is to become self-aware and then thoughtful on behalf of a healthy identity development for a child like this.

- How does this picture make me feel? What is my uncensored response?
- What do I think this child needs?
- How do I know this?
- What would my response and specific behavior be with this child?

Strategy: Assess your environment

If we are to create environments which shape wonderful stories for children's lives, we need to be thinking beyond a good rating scale. Have staff draw a brief floor plan of their environment, indoors first, then outdoors. Ask them considerations like these to be filled in with code letters on their floor plan:

- Put an *I* in all the places where the babies' identity, family life, and culture are reflected and nourished.
- Put an *H* where parents feel at home. relaxed, and respected in the room.
- Put a *P* where children can feel powerful, independent, important, and competent.
- Put an *R* where relationships can be nourished with special time, sharing, and enjoyment between caregivers and babies.

Strategy: Explore the story potential of different materials

Gather collections of home-like materials for staff to explore. Examples might include fabric pieces of different textures and colors, brushes of all kinds, jewelry boxes, eye glass cases, coin purses, a variety of balls, mirrors of all sizes and shapes, gift ribbons of all textures and colors, and tubes of various sizes.

Ask staff to choose one of these collections to explore non-verbally, approaching it as if it is something they have never seen before and want to learn about. After a few minutes of sensory exploration, ask them to take pen and paper and make notes along the following lines:

- List at least five words (adjectives, adverbs) which describe the sensory aspects of the objects.
- List at least five things this object might do or be.
- List some phrases which describe how you might use this object to build a relationship with a baby.
- List at least five things that can be learned when a child uses this object.

Once these lists are made, ask each staff member (or team) to think of a particular baby they know well and imagine that child using these objects. Then, using the notes taken, string some of these words and phrases together to tell a story of how this particular child might use these objects.

By trying to take a child's point of view, this activity can lead to new ideas about the value of ordinary materials and interactions as curriculum for babies. For those hesitant about storytelling or

writing, it also offers a simple strategy to generate words about details to be shaped into stories.

When we train our minds to think about curriculum for babies as a relationship, not a school affair, a new set of possibilities opens up. Caregivers no longer feel foolish, but delighted with what they are learning from and with these little ones.

Margie Carter has a renewed interest in babies now that she is a grandmother of an infant and toddler. She has developed a staff training video, Time With Toddlers, which is described on her website at www.ecetrainers.com.

Order Margie's books on-line by visiting our web site: www.ChildCareExchange.com.

Contact Margie through her web site with Deb Curtis at www.ecetrainers.com.

Beginnings Workshop

can babies read and write?

by Deb Curtis

Deb Curtis currently works with toddlers at Milgard Child Development Center. She is co-author with Margie Carter of the book *Learning Together with Young Children* (Redleaf Press, 2007). She and Margie have been leading professional development institutes to help teachers study with the Thinking Lens.

Adult concerns about literacy development in early childhood fill the airwaves and have begun to trickle down and impact experiences for children under three. Infomercials promote the notion that "your baby can read," showing happy babies identifying words on flashcards and toddlers writing letters. My first reaction is dismay: Why on earth would someone spend the precious, short time of babyhood forcing attention on isolated literacy skills and drills? But then my curiosity is piqued; the children look joyful and excited to be playing these games. Rather than worrying about what the children are learning, I want to discover what they see and understand about these interactions and the lines and squiggles that we call reading and writing. What is the baby's point of view in these moments?

Recently, I was reviewing a toddler teacher's documentation story describing two-year-old Sofia reading a book to a stuffed animal. As I studied the photos, it was obvious that Sofia knew a lot about reading books. She had carefully placed the animal next to her, purposefully holding the book and turning the pages so the animal could see as she read. I was curious to notice in one of the photos that Sofia was explicitly pointing to the letters in the book. What did someone so young know about letters? When Sofia's mom arrived to pick her up I described my curiosity and asked her to tell me about Sofia's knowledge of books and letters. She excitedly told me the story of how she and Sofia's older brother do homework each night, focusing on reading, writing, and phonics and Sofia eagerly wants to join in. She told me, "Sofia knows letter sounds now, almost as much as her brother does and she loves to write them, too." At that point she got out her cell phone and proudly showed me multiple photos of Sofia with clipboard and pen, intensely focused on writing lines of letters.

Children care about what adults care about

In my own informal research about children's points of view about reading and writing, what jumps out at me is not the children's interest in pen, paper, and letters, but their palpable joy in connecting with people as they engage in these activities. The adults on television with the babies who can read are smiling, clapping in celebration, and showing total, positive attention to the children during each interaction with the flashcards. And it was apparent to me that Sofia's interest and skill in reading and writing came from her desire to be a part of the important 'real work' in her family as well as her mother's pride and attention. Children care about what the significant adults in their lives care about and will do what we think is important.

Make it meaningful

I've also discovered from my informal research that children pay closer attention to the lines and squiggles of literacy if they are connected to meaningful aspects of their lives. I playfully began to point to and say the letters of my one-year-olds' names on the

tags that identified their diaper bin as I was changing diapers. To my surprise and delight the children eagerly took up this game, pointing and repeating the sounds with me. I would read and point "H-A-N-N-A-H, Hannah," and then point to her photo next to her name and say, that's your name. Hannah would follow me saying, "hch-hch-hch." Most of the children loved this game, even requesting it by calling out a few sounds when we got to the diaper table. But what did they really understand about the letters? Did they see the connection between themselves and these sounds and squiggles? My best guess was that developmentally the work the children were doing at the time was learning to speak and make sounds, so this sound game was a perfect match for their interests and ability.

I experimented further by writing the children's names and saying the letters as I wrote when we were exploring markers. Again, the children would imitate me making lines with the markers as they repeated the letter sounds. But still, I wondered, did they do this because they wanted to further a relationship with me through this fun game, or were they connecting meaning to the marks and sounds and themselves?

After a few months of playing these games, I noticed 22-month-old Oona looking at a book that had the word LOOK on the cover. At one point she glanced at me and pointed to the two O's and exclaimed "Oona." Of course I was all over her with excitement and praise and eagerly told her dad the story when he picked her up. A week later she was painting at the easel, enjoying the movement of her arm and brush, inadvertently making swirling, circle shapes with the paint. She stopped; looked closely and pointed to the big O on her paper and said, "Oona."

I can't say that my focus on letter sounds and writing led to Oona's discoveries, but it has been an engaging process that I will continue studying. I also worry that what I've described here could be perceived as overemphasizing literacy skills at this young age. That's not my intent. What I've learned from observing my group of one year olds is that they are making meaning all of the time. So if I make reading and writing a meaningful part of our daily lives, they are just as interested in this as in everything else. I've come to see that what we do together is a part of identity development, not just literacy development. Each child's face can be connected to their name, the sound of it, the letters and how it is written, as well as to their family name, and their friends' names. Making it meaningful in this way is the most important element.

Adults have the power

Adults have all the power in children's lives. We are their window and access to safety, comfort, and engaging experiences. Children are smart enough to know this from the time they are babies. They have laser-like attention to what we care about and they want to imitate, please, and be a part of what we say and do. If you look at cultures around the world, children learn to do what adults value and believe children can accomplish because this is what they focus on and take time to teach children to do. But with this power comes responsibility. Young children can learn about literacy if that is what we care about and focus on with eager attention in a playful, loving relationship. But we should ask ourselves: What are we and they missing when we spend so much of our time focused on literacy skills? What about the scientific discoveries and magic in a puddle of water, the complex, creative work of pretend play, the deep, spiritual connections from time together in the natural world or the adventure and sense of accomplishment in toddling up a hill? Babies can read and write, but should they?

Beginnings Workshop

Children care about what the significant adults in their lives care about and will do what we think is important.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

Beginnings Workshop

Brain Research, Infant Learning, and Child Care Curriculum

by J. Ronald Lally

Dr. J. Ronald Lally is the director of the Center for Child and Family Studies at WestEd, an educational research and development laboratory with its home office in San Francisco. He is the director of the Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers and the creator of more than a dozen infant/toddler training videos. His most recent publication is as senior author of "Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Infants and Toddlers" in NAEYC's 1997 revision of ***Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs****.*

During the last ten years, brain research has taught us many valuable lessons about how infants learn and why early experience is so critical to their development. We now know that the brain is not fully formed at birth and that genes and experience interact to influence the brain's form and function. We know that engaging in rich language experiences with significant others influences vocabulary and quality of speech, and is correlated with later academic functioning. We have learned that participation in an environment filled with interesting sights, sounds, and people enriches a child's schemes of thought and action.

We have also learned that it is not only the intellectual and language functions of the brain that are significantly influenced by early experience. Early experience also significantly influences social and emotional brain functions. It has been shown that lack of early nurturance and prolonged stress can set emotional thermostats affecting brain functioning, and sometimes even increasing the secretion of cortisol, lowering levels of serotonin and elevating levels of noradrenaline. It has been hypothesized that lack of nurturance in infancy can lead to depression, loss of impulse control, and heightened aggression in later life.

In the wake of widespread distribution of these findings, facilitating the development of the brains of

infants and toddlers has caught the nation's fancy. The popular press has rightly so convinced the general public that experiences in infancy are critical to the shaping of brain functioning in later life.

For the first time in my memory, people outside of the early childhood education community are giving serious attention to issues of infant learning. Techniques for how to stimulate early language development, how to maximize early intellectual development, and how to keep children from developing into aggressive, antisocial adults are being considered by the President of the United States, captains of industry, Hollywood personalities, and media pundits.

The broad dissemination of the research findings that show that the brain is not fully developed at birth has led people to become quite open and excited about discovering ways to help make children smarter and more emotionally sound. It is not surprising, then, that recommendations about how to optimize development during this fertile period come from a wide range of people, some of whom know little about how infants best learn.

Of prime importance to the welfare of our next generation of infants and toddlers will be the soundness of new curricula recommendations that will be generated in the coming few years. In a rush to make sure that windows of opportunity don't close before children under three are given what people judge as the necessary experiences for appropriate brain growth, there have already been calls for various types of early stimulation. Many of these suggestions are quite sound, but others are amazingly shortsighted; and some are even detrimental to development.

Here are some predictions of what we have in store. Parents are going to be besieged by all sorts of educational products as the *guilt market* swings into gear interpreting the brain development findings to suit their marketing desires.

Because of worry by program managers, school administrators, and politicians that critical periods will be missed, caregivers will be expected to integrate into their daily practice any of a number of untested new curricula or educational materials emphasizing adult-directed lessons and activities that will be touted as fostering brain growth. Because they are easy to create, compartmentalized curricula will be developed. Infant learning will be separated into distinct development domains and specific lessons developed in each domain with the hope of ensuring various forms of infant mastery. Rote learning sessions, exposure to audio and video tapes in many languages and devoid of contextual or human framing, and hologram mobiles are only a few of the stimulants for our next generation of infants that have already been recommended.

The early childhood community needs to make sure that activities that are being endorsed as appropriate experiences for infants and toddlers are in fact appropriate. All new initiatives should be tested against what both brain research *and* child development research have told us about how infants best learn.

When picking and choosing how you will respond to the new information on brain growth, it would be wise to keep in mind the following ten factors of infant development:

1 **Relationships are primary to development.** The infant is dependent on close, caring, ongoing relationships as the source of positive, physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth. Infants develop best when they are assured of having a trusted caregiver or caregivers who can read their cues and respond to their needs. Infant/toddler care policies must be organized to ensure that these relationships exist and prosper. Policies that encourage and nurture secure relationships are the backbone of quality care and learning.

2 **Infants learn holistically.** Infants and toddlers experience life more holistically than children at any other age period. Social, emotional, intellectual, language, and physical learning are not separated by the infant. Adults are most helpful to the young child when they interact in ways that reflect an understanding that the child is learning from the whole experience, not just the part of the experience to which the adult gives attention.

3 **Infants are active, self-motivated learners.** Each infant is born curious and motivated to learn, and actively participates in learning each day. Caregivers need specific training in infant learning to understand how to read and respond to infant behavior and to delight in the types of learning in which infants are engaged. They also need training in how to construct environments and activities that keep motivation, experimentation, and curiosity alive as well as in how to facilitate the infant's natural learning process.

4 **Language skills and habits develop early.** The development of language is particularly crucial during the infant/toddler period. Good care provides many opportunities for infants to engage in meaningful, experience-based communication with their caregivers, and to have their communications acknowledged and encouraged.

5 **Environments are powerful.** Infants and toddlers are strongly influenced by the environments and routines they experience each day. This is particularly true for very young infants who cannot physically move themselves from a noxious to a more pleasant environment. The physical environment, group size, daily schedules, lesson plans, and caregiving routines must foster the establishment of small intimate groups in which relationships with trusted caregivers can develop and become the base for social, emotional, and intellectual learning in a safe and interesting environment.

6 **Infants are individuals with differing temperaments.** All children come into the world temperamentally different from one another. Because of these differences, caregivers need to individualize and adapt care to each child.

7 **Infancy has three stages.** Throughout all of infancy, infants are searching for a sense of security, are drawn to exploration of surroundings, and are carving out their own special identity. How they express these interests varies as they move through three distinct developmental stages. The **young infant** prospers from and seeks out secure contacts with trusted adults. The **mobile infant** who is starting to crawl uses this store of security as a base for this stage's overpowering interest in exploration. As children mature in late toddlerhood to **older infants**, they become fascinated with how they might control their exploration, with the *mine* of things, the *me* and *not me*, and with many forms of identity distinctions. Therefore, the type of care given should change when the child's stage changes. Treating the 18 month old infant the same as a six month old just doesn't work.

8 **Infants are developing their first sense of self through contact with others.** Much of the child's first two years of life are spent creating a first *sense of self* or building a first identity. An infant or toddler learns most of how he or she thinks and feels by imitating and incorporating the behaviors of those who care for her or him — how children first see themselves, how they think they should function, how they expect others to function in relation to them. Program managers must — in addition to carefully selecting and training caregivers so that they will be good models and value transmitters — ensure that links with family, home culture, and home language are a central part of program policy. If infant/toddler care does not reflect family values and culture, children will often incorporate a less than positive sense of who they are and where they come from.

9 **The learning context is as important as the learning content.** The brain thrives in the right learning context. Often adults become so focused on the lesson they are teaching that they forget the lesson that is being learned. One might think he or she is helping a child learn about the difference between a circle and a square when in fact what the child might be learning is that "I have no power because I can only play with these shapes the way this person wants me to." Learning theory and research show that infant learning is enabled by adults who provide a learning setting of nurturance, support, security, predictability, focus, encouragement, and expansion. It is this process, rather than specific lessons, that best helps infants learn.

10 **Adults exhibit strong emotions when charged with the care of infants.** Parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers often experience a heightened sense of emotionality when they care for infants and toddlers. They want to protect them and they want to do what is right for them. We don't provide care or stimulate learning in a vacuum. Developing strategies for dealing with conflicts that can emerge between parents and caregivers about the appropriate ways care should be provided, or the child's brain stimulated, must be part of any plans made to act on recent brain research findings.

As we take on this exciting challenge of developing appropriate ways of helping infants and toddlers develop their brains, let's make sure we don't throw the baby's genetically based interest, curiosity, and holistic approach to learning out in our rush to *bathe* the child in stimulating brain-enriching experiences. We must not let what we know about how infants and toddlers learn be lost in this new enthusiasm to fill infants up with knowledge. Our already developed rich research base on infant and toddler learning needs to remain the bedrock for any new approach to stimulate learning. It would be tragic to let current excitement for the early years be channeled into well-meaning but inappropriate interventions.

Bonding with Your Babies

by Alice S. Honig, PhD

An infant/toddler caregiver has a great many practical tasks to master. Scrupulous health care practices, diapering, preparing formula or baby food for each individual infant — such expertise forms the core of caregiver competence. But beyond such fundamental physical lore lies the emotional wisdom needed to bond with and relate to each unique little person.

Babies flourish with loving caregivers. So the first and foremost emotional neediness of a baby is for YOU to become intimately engaged with the baby. Sure you will hold and cuddle. Sure you will respond to infant distress. But the essence of quality infant caregiving lies in the **emotional** bond you forge with each infant.

Unlike adults, babies happily cope if they have more than one love partner in the duet of caring! Not only parents and grandparents but child care personnel can serve as intimate partners in babies' lives. Finding your way to create a love affair with each infant will take emotional skillfulness and a willingness to become a pleasuring and pleasured partner.

Research has shown that early bonding facilitates babies' development of **secure attachment**. Toddlers who are securely attached as babies later show more flexibility and resourcefulness, more confidence in play mastery, and more cooperativeness with caregivers in difficult tool-using situations (Matas, Arend, and Sroufe, 1978).

Practice Tuned-In, Tender Partnering

• **Babies thrive on body loving, with lots of holding, draping, and lap time.** Every baby needs an adult partner committed to a special bodily-intimate relationship.

• **Tune in to and respond promptly to baby signals of neediness or distress.** An upset baby is using a strong signal to tell adults: I NEED YOU TO HELP ME FEEL BETTER. Babies don't cry to bother adults. They cry when they feel bad. When you soothe what hurts them, whether a urine-irritated bottom, a hungry tummy, or a lonely feeling that needs a cuddle, they learn to trust you. Then the world feels like a good place to grow up, and it seems worth the effort to cooperate with caregivers and to learn what grown-ups want babies to learn.

• **Respect rhythms and tempos.** As adults, we need to understand and respect the rhythms and tempos of our babies so that we can have more tolerance for the normal ups and downs of their behaviors. Some new babies wake up several times a night for nursing and some seem to cry for longer periods each day (or evening!). The developmental dance of growth is not in a straight line, but a wave-like pattern. Some times are easy for babies; sometimes babies are frustrated by what they want to be able to do but still cannot accomplish. Then they may become more disorganized until they have worked through this period of developmental disequilibrium.

Understand Trying Behaviors

Be FOR your little ones. Your emotional bonding is a powerful force not only for promoting early secure

attachment of tiny infants in your care but also for sustaining trusting relationships during the *Terrible Two's*. Toddlers may show wild mood swings and seem not to need as much cuddling and body draping as younger babies. They often run-run away mischievously when called. But when frustrated or tired they will passionately demand to be held or will fling themselves into your lap.

If you have bonded well with each baby, then their deep confidence in your cherishing will tide them over. You can accept toddler mood swings and willfulness calmly and offer body loving when it is needed. You keep their self-esteem intact even as they go through crabby or absurdly see-sawing contradictions. Offer toddlers choices to avoid conflicts. ("Would you like juice OR milk?")

Toddlers will need you to remember that their rhythms and styles may not fit with group requirements. Toilet learning and neat eating take longer to achieve for some toddlers than others. But if you trust a toddler's signals, you will be comfortable about deciding when to encourage more mature learnings or when to accept a more leisurely pace for a toddler to practice, struggle with, and master new and difficult life skills. Keeping the trusting relationship intact provides babies with life energy and good will to master positive peer relations, relate cooperatively later to other teachers, and to strive for mastery in play.

Become a Skilled Play Planner

• Babies need safe play spaces to creep and crawl and cruise holding on to furniture.

• The most fascinating toys require a baby's **actions** in order to work or produce interesting results that will stretch baby's attention span and persistence. Make life interesting for babies.

• Learning games to play with YOU as partner especially entrance a baby.

Relish and Share Language Treasures

Aside from cuddling and gentle handling, your language interactions will eloquently reveal the quality of the relationship you have developed with each infant. A tuned-in talking partner jabbers with babies during daily routines.

• **Converse with your baby.** Respond to baby sounds. Make baby's early sounds and coos important. Show your genuine delight at early jargon babbling and at toddler attempts to create one and two word sentences. Embed turn-taking talk into every routine daily activity, especially diapering and meal times.

• **Hook your baby on picture books.** Read on the floor; read cuddled on a couch. Especially at the ends of days, when babies begin to wilt as the hours before pick-up time grow long, a loving snuggle with you and a familiar book can confirm for a baby your genuine sensitivity.

• **Read, label, and talk** about body parts, clothing, foods, and ongoing activities.

• **Sing and use chants** to explain to baby what is going on at the moment and what will come next during daily routines.

• **Talk about and model prosocial interactions** — sharing, kindness, empathy, and patience. Read to toddlers about nurturing creatures. Help your little ones feel that being friends and caring about each other is deeply important in the child care world.

Confirm Loveliness; Confirm Joy

• **Bring beauty and loveliness into babies' lives** — with pictures, mobiles, colorful scarves and wall hangings, soft classical music, fragrant flowering bulbs, and slow waltzing times with babes in arms. Include **aesthetics** in your infant/toddler curriculum.

• **Bring laughter into your own and your babies' lives.** Giggling and grinning come early and easily to babies. Enjoy this brand new world with the babies you serve. Get in touch with the deep core of your own long-ago joy as a tenderly cherished baby as you renew your awe at simple daily experiences that capture the delight of babies.

Learn a Wide Variety of Techniques

Perceptive cherishing will not alone boost the learning careers of your babies. Techniques for enhancing early learning will be easier to master if you have gotten to know and appreciate the personhood of each infant in your care.

• **Dance up and down the developmental ladders of learning.** Each developmental task may be more or

less difficult for a baby. Each learning domain may be harder or easier depending on a baby's skills, learning style, attention span, and persistence. So many tasks have to be mastered.

• **Hone your noticing skills.** Notice how hard or easy each different task is for your baby. If necessary, give a special boost to revive baby's interest. Arrange quiet spaces where the baby can keep on working and moving ahead with learning tasks.

• **Give barely noticeable help** sometimes so your toddler can succeed at the task.

• **Be available but not intrusive.** Don't interrupt your baby's own efforts to explore, learn, sample, and experiment. You may want a toddler to put rings on the ring stack toy in order of increasing width. Right now, she may just want to experiment with getting them all on regardless of size. Give babies freedom to adventure with toys their own ways. Lengthened attention span and task persistence, not perfect ring stacking, is your goal.

• **Use admiring glances and positive talk to lure your baby** into new tries and persistent work at a learning activity.

• **Help babies master certain prerequisite skills**, such as staying dry for hours and saying toileting words, **before you demand that they go on to the next stage**, toilet learning. At feeding times, babies can only learn to eat neatly when they have good wrist control plus firm fist control of the spoon.

Undertake Some Self-Searching

Sometimes freeing ourselves to bond well with babies means first freeing ourselves from old prohibitions and feelings of shame. Accepting the bodily needs of babies who drool, wet diapers, suck thumbs, and pat their genitals may require that we reexamine and rework old, anxious scripts from our past. We also need to reframe some of our attitudes toward misbehavior. What look like "naughty" actions of babies may really be learning experiences. Give babies safe ways to experiment.

• **Provide arms and a lap** (the perfect refueling station) generously if a discouraged baby needs a boost to self-esteem.

• **Find personal supports or pleasures to help you keep calm.** When adults are contented and proud of their nurturing work, then babies will thrive in that aura of contentment.

• **Take deep personal pleasure in your ability to read signals and to tune in responsively to babies' needs.** Your trustworthiness in cherishing builds confidence, secure attachment, a sense of self-control, self-esteem, and good will in babies. Intimate bonding with your babies reflects your courageous commitment to quality infant/toddler care!

Reference

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Karen Miller

Don't Interrupt a Busy Baby

Eleven-month-old Zachary cruises along a set of homemade 18" high wooden *cubes* that have the front sides open. The fourth cube has a circle cut out in the top and a round, plastic dishpan sits in this hole. As he reaches this fourth cube, Zachary's hands touch the rim of the dishpan, causing it to wobble.

He stops and looks at the dishpan. He hits it again and notices it move. He hits it harder and it wobbles more. He then looks through the front opening of the cube and hits the dishpan from the underneath. Again! Next time he hits it harder, and the dishpan pops out of the hole and falls on the floor. He stoops down, picks up the dishpan, and slams it back into the hole. He pops it out again and repeats the sequence, *six times*. Then he looks around and starts putting other objects and toys through the hole, seeing what fits through and what doesn't.

This exploration went on for over 20 minutes. While I observed, I was very grateful that the caregiver didn't come over to involve Zachary in some *learning activity*. What this child was learning was fascinating to him. He could develop his own ideas . . . much more valuable learning, probably, than anything an adult could devise for him.

This time, I'd like to discuss an issue of curriculum planning we haven't examined yet — creating a balance between child-initiated and adult-initiated learning activities. Each has a place in the daily flow of events in the infant and toddler program. Generally, the younger the child, the greater should be the emphasis on child-chosen activities.

Child-Initiated or Child-Chosen Activities

What it looks like:

The child is in the play environment and starts doing something spontaneously. It might be a body activity — using muscles in what looks to the adult like a random way, such as *scootching* around on his belly, crawling, rolling, pulling up on furniture, and *cruising*. Often it will be playing with an object that is available, turning it over, hitting it on the floor, shaking it, throwing it.

Value:

To understand why child-initiated activities are important, it helps to take a look at the main learning mode of infants — *mastery behavior.* The child practices emerging skills over and over in a sort of self-imposed drill. The child is *driven* to do this. An *emerging skill* is anything the child is almost ready to be able to do, or has just recently mastered, such as the gross motor activities listed above, a fine motor activity like visually directed reaching, or cognitive explorations such as object permanence or the relationships of size and space. You can trust the child to be working on exactly what she needs at the moment.

To make it work:

For child-initiated activities to be valuable a few things need to be in place:

- It must be a well-enriched environment, with many interesting options for the child to choose from, such as objects with interesting shapes and textures to examine, and interesting surfaces, angles, and spaces to climb on and explore.

- In infant care, the child must have *access* to this environment. In other words, the child must be allowed free movement on the clean floor and not be in a *baby trap* such as a swing, infant seat, sitting ring, or walker. These all inhibit the child's movement and force the child to be a passive observer, rather than an active learner.

- With toddlers, the environment needs to be organized so that the child knows where to find certain play objects. Toddlers are easily distracted; if there is too much of a

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mess, the child will be less likely to make and carry out plans. Instead, the child will just react to what is in front of him.

Adult-Initiated Activities

What it looks like:

The adult starts something the child hasn't thought of, such as an art or music activity. Sometimes these are planned activities that the adult sets up and then brings children over to. Other times these are little *pick up* games that the adult does spontaneously, such as lap games or spontaneous exchanges of peek-a-boo.

Value:

Adult-initiated activities, depending on what they are, can lend variety, head off boredom, redirect potentially troublesome behavior, provide information to the child, teach vocabulary, and generally create fun and valuable social interaction for the child.

To make it work:

The real skill is providing just the right kind of activity — one that is not too difficult or too easy, and most importantly, one that really interests the children. This requires that you know each child well and are aware of the emerging skills each is working on:

- Keep the activity simple so that you have minimal set-up and clean-up.
- Do it with one infant child at a time while you keep an eye on the other children. With toddlers, small groups of two or three children can be comfortable. Coordinate with other staff to supervise the other children.
- Present the activity *out there* and allow the child to be drawn over to it by his own interest. Allow refusals, if the child would rather be doing something else.
- Use the *flop and do* technique. Simply flop down on the floor and start doing something and see who is drawn over to you.
- Allow repeats. Children gain from the experience of doing things over and over again.
- Resist the temptation to do too much for the child, whether in planned activities or in a child's chosen activities. Well-meaning adults often want to *help* the child who seems to be struggling to get the puzzle piece in or place something in a child's hand she is reaching for but unable to grasp. We have to allow the child to struggle and the opportunity to try over and over again, figuring it out herself, using her own muscles. If you sense frustration is building, make sure there are other interesting objects or things to do nearby. The child can usually gauge her own tolerance for frustration and will go on to something different (matching her emerging skill) if the object at hand presents too much of a challenge.

How Do You Plan?

You start with the environment, both indoors and outdoors. It's hard to overemphasize how important this is. You plan what materials to make available in the environment for the child to discover and use *spontaneously*. The child might come up with totally different things to do with the materials than what you had anticipated. Trust that what the child chooses to do is *just right*, providing he is not hurting anything. Keep certain favorite objects available for children, knowing that they will play with them in different ways as their skills progress. But also bring out new things for children to explore on a regular basis — simple things like large pieces of fabric, big cardboard boxes, sturdy books, inflated plastic beach toys, and all kinds of containers, especially those with handles. That takes care of the *child-initiated* part. For the adult-initiated activities, have a repertoire of simple interactive games up your sleeve to offer as needed. Then plan a variety of activities to offer over, say, a two-week period of time. Favorite books and activities that extend from them, music and movement games, art activities, and sensory activities are all possibilities.

Now, back to our title. Observe what the child is doing before you offer an activity . . . and *respect* what the child is doing. While the child's occupation may look random, it may be a genuine exploration, as described in the first paragraph. Watch for signs of concentration on the child's face. If the child seems at loose ends or bored, then offer your planned activity. Caregivers sometimes feel like they are not doing their job, just letting children randomly play. As you can see, it takes a lot of thought and good planning to create rich play opportunities for children. Observe closely. Take notes. Be able to describe how the child is benefiting from the self-chosen activities as well as planned activities. Most of all, enjoy the wonder of it all — appreciating each child's uniqueness.

If you would like to join the informal e-mail network for this column, make a comment, or suggest future topics, just send a message to:
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How Infants and Toddlers Use Symbols

There is a piece of cognitive development that we usually don't pay too much attention to with infants and toddlers: the use of symbols. Here's how my desk dictionary (TIME: Webster's New Deal Dictionary, 1978) defines symbol:

1) Something that stands for something else; especially something concrete that represents or suggests another thing that cannot in itself be represented or visualized. 2) A letter, character, or sign used (as to represent a quantity, position, relationship, direction, or something to be done) instead of a word or group of words.

Our technological society is built around symbols. Reading and writing, mathematics, finance, and science all require that an individual is adept at using symbols.

In one sense, educators often make the mistake of trying to force children to use symbols too early, before they are ready for abstract concepts. We see this when well-meaning parents spend much time showing children flash cards of words, or teachers drill children on the alphabet. On the other hand, symbols are present in children's natural play almost from the beginning. If we understand how they use symbols, we can give them good opportunities to *grow the skill*.

Action Symbols

A newborn, of course, does not come into the world knowing how to use symbols. Very early on, however, this new human being is learning how to *read* symbols in the environment. An impending action can be represented by a symbol. A siren, for example, is a symbol that tells us we will soon see a speeding vehicle and we should get out of the way.

Very young infants quickly learn symbols for when something is about to happen. Here's one that is easy to recognize: you reach toward the child with your arms to pick him up, and the baby stiffens his neck and moves a little toward you, or even reaches his arms out to you, indicating that he has *read* the symbol of your posture. There are other symbols of daily routines you could probably think of: putting coats on = going outside; the smell of food = being fed and satiating hunger; telephone rings at home = interruption of interaction with the child.

What we can do:

- Always approach the child from the front and use the same gesture of putting your arms out when you are about to pick up the child. Also use the word symbols to go with this gesture. "Up . . . " or, "I'm going to pick you up now."
- Create other consistent symbols. Play certain, calming music or a particular lullaby when you put the child down to nap; tap on the bowl when you are about to feed the child; or always take the child to the same chair when you are about to give the child a bottle.
- With toddlers, play certain music at clean-up time, ring a small bell when it is snack time, bring out a particular puppet when it is time for a story.

What else can you think of? All of these symbols help the child *read* the environment and know what is going to happen next. That helps a child feel secure and in control.

Object Symbols

First of all, before we even talk about symbols, give the child lots of experience playing with safe objects of all kinds. The child must handle and mouth objects of all shapes and materials simply to *get the feel* of the physical world. In so doing, the child learns about the properties of shapes, materials, and textures. This helps the child to form a firm image in his mind. The

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phenomenon of *object hunger* dominates children's play from about the age of six months to 18 months. It is the famous *into everything* stage. The children are on an obsessive quest to touch and become acquainted with every object within sight . . . and not necessarily within immediate reach!

Another cognitive phenomenon that occurs at this time which has a close connection to the ability to see objects as symbols is *object permanence*. The child learns to create and maintain a mental image of an object that is out of sight as she searches for it. Objects, especially toys, can be symbols that represent something else. When a child has learned to keep the image of an object in her mind she will also be more able to look at a toy and see the larger, *real* thing that the toy object represents.

I first became aware of a toddler's ability to see toys as a symbol when I watched a 20 month old lie down on a 4" long dollhouse bed. It's true that a toddler doesn't really know how big his body is, but I don't think this toddler was that confused. What he was really doing is saying by his actions, "I know what this small piece of wood represents." Other examples are toy telephones, toy steering wheels, dolls, and various doll accessories. We often see children even under one year of age pick up such objects and show that they know what the thing it represents is used for.

This is the first seed of dramatic play, using objects as symbols. Later, the child will begin to take on a role and interact with others within that role. But for now, just using a toy object in an appropriate way indicates that the child understands what it symbolizes.

What we can do:

- Give young infants plenty of free time on the floor and many safe and interesting objects of all types to examine.
- Find toys that represent things in the child's world and make them available.
- Play along. If the child hands you the toy phone, for example, talk into it.

Picture Symbols

A picture is a symbol of a three-dimensional object. We know that one of the first steps in learning to read is *reading* the illustrations in a picture book. The child must see that the arrangement of lines and shapes on the page symbolizes something real. One prerequisite that people, even those who write and illustrate books for this age, sometimes forget, is that the child must be familiar with the object before the picture will be meaningful. If the child has never seen an elephant, the small shape on the page will not give the child an accurate image of the thing.

What we can do:

- Find pictures of things in the child's environment. Talk about them as you show them to the child. Compare them to the object that is present.
- Glue pictures of objects in the environment to individual cards. Hand the card to the child. See if the child can bring the card over to the object it represents.
- Create photo experience books. Take pictures when the children are engaged in something memorable, like playing with bubbles or going for a walk. Put these photos in a little book, or on a piece of posterboard. Then look at the photos together and talk about them. The children will learn to connect the images to real things and happenings.
- Make a visual discrimination poster. Glue pictures of many of the toys you have in the room on one piece of posterboard. (Out of date supplier catalogs are a good source for the pictures.) Then bring a toy over to the poster and ask the child, "Where is the picture of this toy? Can you find it?"

Books

Books, of course, are a whole system of picture symbols as well as word symbols that represent objects, actions, and experiences. When you choose books for your program be very conscious of the quality of the illustrations as well as their relevance to the child's life. When you read to very young children, what you are mostly doing is helping them with picture identification. You follow their lead and allow them to point to pictures and name them. They delight in finding an object you name on the page in front of them.

What we can do:

- Gather together some of the objects represented by pictures in the book. First, let the child see the pictures, then play with the real objects. After reading *Pots and Pans* by Patricia Hubbell (Harper Growing Tree), for instance, let the child use wooden spoons to beat on a real pot.
- Do some of the activities represented in a book. For instance, if there is cooking in the book, do some cooking with the children.

Language Development and Symbols

Words are symbols, of course. The more words a child acquires, the more adept he

becomes at using symbols. Words provide handles or anchors for thoughts. So everything you do to enhance language development encourages cognitive development. Talk to children. Read to them. Describe what they are seeing and doing. Listen to them and be patient in their attempts to speak. Let them know that their language has power.

Why Should We Be Thinking About the Ages and Stages of Symbol Use?

Many children spend their first three years in an impoverished environment, when it comes to learning to use symbols. The modern day culprit is, no news here, television. Television is really all symbols, you might rightly say. But they are the wrong type of symbol at the wrong time. They are too fast, and too abstract. Rather than showing a connection to real life, they are often simply mesmerizing as the child stares at moving patterns. Make sure that the children in your program do not lead a boring life, trapped in swings and such, or randomly playing without much quality adult interaction.

A simple awareness could go a long way to enhancing this aspect of your program. Delight when you see children interpreting some subtle symbol. Tell the parents about it. Invent new symbols, and build on what you already do.

Good Ideas

Adding to the ideas shared in our January column on motivating adults to learn, Joyce Kilbourn of Bright Horizons Family Solutions in Cary, North Carolina shares these things they do to encourage ongoing learning in staff:

- One person in each center is assigned the responsibility of reading professional publications and passing on articles to people who might be interested.
- Articles from popular magazines as well as professional journals are clipped or copied and put into a binder by topic, such as "sleep issues," "toilet learning," "play," "behavior," etc. These are then made available to parents or staff when issues come up.
- They provide rewards for people who write a response to an article.
- "Did you know's . . . " — one small statement or piece of research circulated to staff.

If you would like to join the informal e-mail network for this column, make a comment, or suggest future topics, just send a message to:
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supporting infant teachers in their care of fussy babies

by Cindy Jurie and Marsha Baker

The transition to child care can be challenging for both parents of young babies and the teachers who welcome the baby and family into their program.

Cindy Jurie completed her M.S. at Wheelock College, intending to become a teacher of four year olds, but since then has spent most of her time working in programs with infants, toddlers, their families, and caregivers. Cindy's experience includes work as a director of a Migrant Head Start Center, early childhood mental health consultant, CDA advisor, and positions supporting teachers in several grant-funded programs in diverse communities. She has taught vocational, community college, and graduate courses, including online coursework. She is presently a doctoral student at the Erikson Institute, preparing her dissertation proposal focusing on infant teachers and infant mental health in early child care settings.

Marsha Baker completed her degree in occupational therapy over 20 years ago, and has been working with young infants and families ever since. She attended Erikson Institute to receive a master's degree in early childhood development with a specialty in infant studies, and then returned to complete a certificate program in infant mental health. Marsha's experience includes extensive work with Early Intervention programs throughout the Chicago area and public school special education programs. She was an instructor at St. Xavier and Midwestern Universities. She presently works for Erikson Institute Fussy Baby Network providing direct service to families and consultation to home visiting programs, early childhood programs, and child care centers. Her special interests are feeding disorders and infant mental health.

Parents of infants may face a multitude of intense feelings that can include protectiveness for their young infant, grief at the impending separation, and concern for their child's safety. They often have conflicting worries that their children may have a bad experience in child care or that their babies may grow more attached to their teachers than to their own parents. Infant teachers struggle with how to best support parents in this highly emotional transition, knowing that parents frequently have strongly conflicting emotions about the decision to use out-of-home care. Infant teachers must keep the emotional needs of the family in mind as they begin to work with the young baby in their care. This emotionally-charged transition can become even more stressful when an infant is colicky, fussy, or otherwise hard-to-settle (see sidebar on page 29).

What does this mean for the infant teacher in a child care setting? Child care teachers cope with juggling multiple competing demands: managing relationships with parents, coping with individual infant temperaments, and meeting the group needs of the other infants in their care. Infant teachers often play a unique role in that they may be the first adults to listen and understand what the experience of having a fussy baby has been like for the parent as they encounter similar issues with the baby in their classroom. Infant caregivers can provide the non-judgmental empathy and support that a parent needs.

Research shows that parents of hard-to-settle babies may benefit from quality child care as it provides a respite for them (McKim, Cramer, Stuart, & O'Conner, 1999). Families also use child care providers for both emotional and informational support with regard to childrearing (Gilman & Collins, 2000). Caregivers provide more sensitive and supportive care when there is open communication with parents (Owen & Ware, 2000).

Erikson Institute's Fussy Baby Network

In 2005, a grant from the Prince Charitable Trusts enabled the Fussy Baby Network, Erikson Institute's first clinical program, to expand services to support infant teachers working with fussy babies in child care. As a part of this project, we have been listening to experienced infant teachers share their wisdom as to what may help when facing a fussy baby in child care. Here is what they told us:

Communication is essential — from both parent and infant teacher.

- Lack of communication from the parent is teachers' single biggest challenge — from routine information about how the baby's night before and morning have been to more specific information about caregiving practices such as how the parent puts the baby to sleep.

- The level of communication with parents of fussy babies improved as they shared the strategies they were trying at home and at the center. Honest, yet sensitive, communication is important as it helps parents to understand that the infant teacher is trying hard to meet their baby's needs in the context of a group setting.

The importance of listening in communication is essential.

- Parents of fussy babies tell us that they are given advice all the time, whereas few people seem interested in hearing how stressful this experience has been for them. This also parallels teachers' experiences of getting advice from others in their center.

- Listening is a powerful way of showing parents that care is being offered to their family.

- Listening also reinforces to the parent their importance to their baby as the 'expert' in this child's life.

- Listening to a parent can lay the foundation for mutual respect, which is important as both parent and teacher work together caring for a fussy baby.

Formal practices to support communication can be helpful.

- Teachers tell us that simple, formal practices, such as a daily journal of baby's day, can be extremely useful in facilitating communication with families.

One center reported that their requirement that parents change the child's diaper when they arrive at the center gave the infant teacher a few minutes to talk with the parent about how the baby's night had been, which proved beneficial.

- Knowing how well a child slept, how or whether they had eaten in the morning, if there had been anything different taking place recently (family members visiting, a sick sibling having impact on sleeping patterns), all can help the infant teacher provide more responsive care.

Teacher knowledge is important.

- This includes knowledge of the individual baby and her family, as well as an understanding of the cultural practices that may be at work in this situation.

- Enrollment forms that provide specific information on the baby's individual preferences prior to starting care, home visits to the family's home, and developmental screening are all mentioned as helpful.

Building a relationship makes a difference!

- The goodness of fit between a primary caregiver and an infant is a connection that helps support the hard-to-settle baby by reducing the number of staff that baby must adjust to.

- Teachers are emphatic that this good fit be looked at carefully and not just assumed and assigned.

- Primary caregivers also offer a consistent relationship to families that facilitate the development of trust, helping to reduce a parent's stress and concern over the transition to care outside of the home.

Understanding there is no one 'right answer.'

- As medical science has not yet discovered the magical 'pixie dust' to cure colic and crying in young babies, infant teachers share a variety of strategies they have tried to help them in responding to crying infants.

- Far and away the most commonly mentioned practice was that of swaddling the baby in a blanket (if permitted by licensing).

- Classical and soft jazz music were also commonly mentioned as well as sound relaxers as they seem to help provide a calmer atmosphere in the baby room.

- Taking advantage of fresh air and going outside may be helpful as is infant massage (although this should **not** be done when the baby is in the middle of a crying spell).

Maintaining a calm sense of oneself in the middle of the storm.

- Teachers tell us that despite the challenges of dealing with a fussy baby, their ability to be consistent in their practice and maintain a positive spirit aids them in their work.

- Seeing this experience in a professional sense of their own development helps them, as one teacher told us:

"It's a very challenging job, and you learn something new every single day. If you have one child, a fussy baby, you learn something from them,

What is colic?

Wessel's Rule of 3's defines colic as:

infant crying for more than 3 hours a day, more than 3 days a week, for more than 3 weeks.

That is a *lot* of crying! This crying is frequently at a higher pitch than typical crying. Many parents (and child care providers) report crying to be most common in the late afternoon/early evening. While as many as 20% of babies may show signs of colic in the first months of life, pediatricians often consider colic as a benign or self-limiting condition, one that babies will, on average, outgrow by four to six months of age. Colic has not been found to be linked to parenting behaviors, breast- or bottle-feeding, or cultural practices. It *may* be related to gastrointestinal issues, sensory thresholds, some form of developmental immaturity, or possible allergies — all reasons for making sure families have talked over their concerns about crying with their child's pediatrician.

and then it's easier for next year. And then you get another child and you learn something new. It's ongoing."

Strategies for supporting infant teachers in their work with fussy babies

Understanding is essential and this includes not just the director but also all members of the center team. It can be challenging to feel competent in the middle of what one teacher described as a 'screamfest' when others (and this includes other teachers, administrators, and parents) are making judgments about their actions. One veteran teacher said she was tired of hearing:

"What are you doing for him? Why is he still crying? Did you do anything with him at all?' And, that's the frustrating part because you've been trying. You've tried this and you've tried that. You've held him. You've sung to him. You've read stories. You've offered bottles. You've changed diapers. And so it's frustrating, but they're not there to see you going through those changes."

It can be very tempting for teachers to judge others, but part of our work in child care involves working as a part of a team. That means supporting one another when times are difficult!

Looking at program practices and staffing can also help.

- Do enrollment forms for infants provide enough information to help teachers in the support of a new baby in their care?
- Are infant teachers staffed in consistent ways to help provide a stable schedule for babies, while allowing families and teachers to establish routines and relationships?
- Is it possible for an infant teacher who is having a truly awful day with a crying baby to get coverage to give her a few essential minutes of peace and quiet to regroup and regain her coping skills?

Are relationships in place with families where additional support or resources may be used as referrals if indicated? Many families who are coping with a colicky baby have already talked with their pediatrician about this. Yet many pediatricians see colic as a 'benign condition' as it usually disappears by four months of age (see box above). If families are worried about developmental concerns or sensory issues, they may want to consider contacting early intervention (EI). You can find your state's EI contact information at: www.nectac.org/contact/ptccoord.asp. Is a system in place in the center to help parents find community resources such as early intervention?

When infant teachers reflect on their experience of having a fussy baby in their care, they will often note that part of this experience is developmental and that patience is essential. Many of the practices that support families and teachers with fussy babies are essential practices of quality early care. The experience of working through the issues that come with a fussy baby are not easy.

If center staff are able to establish a relationship and work as partners in care with the family, it strengthens the care for the baby and family, the infant teacher's professional practice, and the child care program itself. As one teacher told us:

"One day, I said (to the mother), 'Lately I'm having problems with him, what do you do at home?' so I can help him better. And she said, 'Oh, how funny! I was thinking to ask you the same thing.' Okay, so we have, I always say, the same problems. We have the same baby, so we need to talk. And my relationship with families is better, I think."

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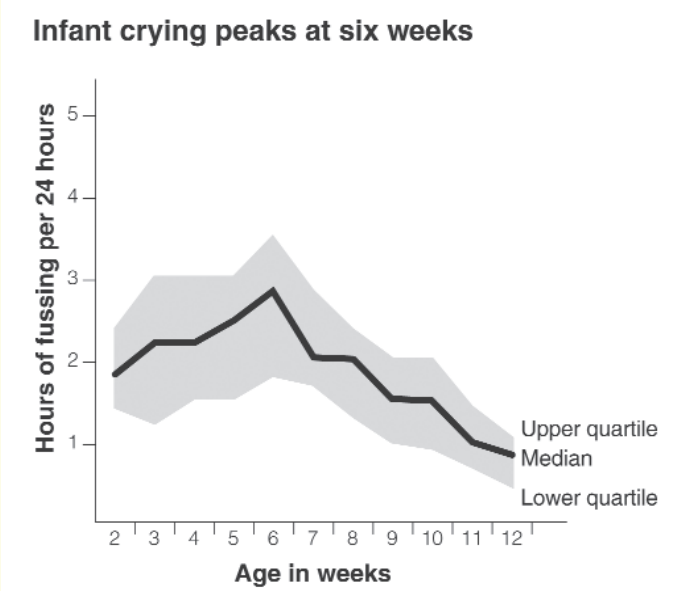
Partners in Care: Supporting Fussy Babies in Child Care — more information and resources to support infant teachers in their care of fussy babies may be downloaded at: http://www.erikson.edu/partnersincare

The Crying Curve and Infant Care



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The amount of time that babies cry was documented over 40 years ago by Dr. T. Berry Brazelton through cry diaries completed by families in his practice in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This 'crying curve' has been confirmed in many studies in cultures with different caregiving practices. The peak period for infant crying is 4-6 weeks of age — a time when many working families are facing the transition to non-maternal care. Knowledge of this curve may assist infant teachers in supporting families through this transition and helping parents to realize that if their baby is crying more at this time, it may very well be part of this developmental stage (Brazelton, 1990).

More Purposeful and Intentional Infant and Toddler Care

by Pam Schiller

Nine-month-old Audrey stirs from her nap. As Ms. Rose passes Audrey's crib while she is on her way to place Evan in his crib for his nap, she says to Audrey, "Hi, Audrey, I will be there to get you in just a minute." Ms. Rose gives Evan a hug and says, "Sleep well, Evan. We'll see you when you wake up." Evan starts to fuss. Ms. Rose pats him on his back and says again, "We'll see you when you wake up."

Pam Schiller, Ph.D., is a National Curriculum Specialist for The Wright Group/McGraw-Hill and an internationally recognized author and public speaker. Dr. Schiller has been a child care administrator for several years and has also taught in the public schools as a kindergarten teacher. She served as Head of the Early Childhood Department at the University of Houston where she also directed the Lab School. She is senior author of five early childhood curriculums, including *The DLM Early Childhood Express* for The Wright Group, ten children's books, and more than 30 teacher and parent resource books. Pam lives in Cypress, Texas.

Ms. Rose leaves Evan, who is still fussing just a little, walks over to Audrey, smiles at her and says, "You had a long nap. I think you are ready to play for awhile." As she lifts Audrey from her crib, she gives her a hug and begins singing softly.

You're not sleeping.
You're not sleeping.
You're awake.
You're awake.
Now it's time for playing.
Now it's time for playing.
Audrey's awake.
Audrey's awake.

Ms. Rose walks to the changing table and begins to change Audrey's diaper. "Let's get you a dry diaper. Did you have a good nap?" Audrey starts to babble, "ma-ma-ma-ma." Ms. Rose waits for a break and then interjects. "Listen to you talk! Are you telling me about your dreams?"

Audrey hears laughter across the room and turns her head in the direction of the interesting noise. Ms. Rose notices and says, "You hear Gabrielle laughing." After finishing Audrey's diaper change, Ms. Rose plays a couple of rounds of Pat-a-Cake with Audrey, then picks Audrey up and brings her to the play area.

Gabrielle and Madison are playing with a few toys on the floor. Ms. Rose sits Audrey down near her and says, "Hi, Gabrielle and Madison! Audrey wants to play by you." She hands Audrey a drum and small "drumstick" (small round stacking disk). Audrey watches the other children for a minute and then hits the drum with the "drumstick." Ms. Rose says, "Listen to the sounds you are making with the drum! Here is a larger 'drumstick' (larger stacking disk). Would you like to hit the drum with this?" Audrey stares at the new drumstick for a moment and then drops the smaller drumstick in order to take the new one. She immediately uses it to hit the drum. The noise is louder. Audrey shows her excitement by smiling and shaking from head to toe. Ms. Rose laughs and says to Audrey, "The bigger drumstick makes a louder noise."

Ms. Rose is using what she has learned from her training to guide her interactions with Evan, Audrey, Gabrielle, and Madison. Ms. Rose is becoming a more intentional caregiver. She knows that intentional care optimizes development for all children.

The intentional and purpose-focused caregiver

What are the characteristics of an intentional caregiver?

- An intentional caregiver focuses on what is developing with specific outcomes or goals in mind for children's development and learning. For infants and toddlers, she focuses on each of the developmental domains: cognitive, social-emotional, motor, and language.
- The intentional caregiver possesses a wide range of knowledge. She knows and follows the "windows of opportunity" from early brain development

research. She understands how to accommodate individual differences among little ones with different temperaments, personality styles, and learning styles.

- An intentional caregiver provides a balance of classroom experiences so that children and caregiver take turns leading activities.

Using neuroscience as a guide

When caregivers use the guidelines provided by the "Windows of Opportunity," they create a purposeful classroom. The information in these developmental timetables are based on scientific research. They are the same for all children no matter where they are born. They are the same for all children whether they are born on time, prematurely, or with developmental delays. The "windows" open at birth and "wire" with experience until puberty. All future wiring will be based on this foundation. The chart below shows the fertile time for wiring in each domain, as well as the optimum time for reinforcing the wiring with repetition and practice.

As you can see, infant and toddler caregivers play a crucial role in the lifelong learning of each child in their care. The initial wiring for all domains is forged between birth and age three. Infant and toddler caregivers write on the soul of every child they encounter.

- In the opening scenario for this article, Ms. Rose effectively used information from the "windows" and applied that information to her interactions with Audrey. Ms. Rose managed to include at least one activity to promote development in all five domains.

- Ms. Rose spoke to Audrey to let her know that she noticed that Audrey was awake. Ms. Rose told Audrey, "I'll be there in a minute." (trust/attachment)

- Ms. Rose smiled and hugged Audrey when she picked Audrey up from her crib. (trust/attachment)

- Ms. Rose sang a song to Audrey as she held Audrey and walked with her to the changing table. (early sounds)

- Ms. Rose talked with Audrey during diaper changing. (vocabulary)

- Ms. Rose responded when Audrey heard other children laughing. (cause and effect)

- Ms. Rose played a couple of rounds of Pat-a-Cake with Audrey. (motor)

- Ms. Rose talked about the different sounds that different drumsticks make. (cause and effect)

Intentional activities and experiences optimize children's learning! Doing just one activity each day, for each child, in each domain **is** infant and toddler curriculum.

Selecting toys and equipment with intentionality and purpose

An effective way to build a more intentional and purposeful infant and toddler environment is to use the "windows of opportunity" as a guide for selecting and using the toys and equipment in the classroom. It will enable you to engage children with specific outcomes in mind. Many items overlap domains because they have multiple uses. Make a list of items in your classroom and then sort them by domain. Take a look at each item under each domain and think about how you might use that item to provide experiences that correlate with the "windows of opportunity." A few examples are shown.

Using activities with intentionality

Looking at the activities and experiences you offer children with the same guide will also help you create a more purposeful environment. The following chart describes activities that promote early development in each developmental domain. The activities correlate with the "windows of opportunity."

Singing with intentionality and purpose

Children's songs are a wonderful tool for learning. They are far more effective, however, when you use them with a specific outcome in mind. For example, you might change the word "little" in

Windows of Opportunity

Window	Wiring Opportunity	Greatest Enhancement
Thinking Skills	0–48 months	4–puberty
Cause and Effect	0–16 months	
Problem-Solving	16–48 months	
Motor Development	0–24 months	2–5 years
Language	0–24 months	
Early Sounds	4–8 months	8 months–10 years
Vocabulary	0–24 months	2–5 years
Emotional Intelligence	0–48 months	4–puberty
Trust	0–14 months	
Impulse Control	16–48 months	
Social Development	0–48 months	4–puberty
Attachment	0–12 months	
Independence	12–36 months	

"Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" to *tiny, gigantic, silent,* or *blinking*. You can also change your voice and add hand motions to help emphasize the differences between each word. When you refocus a traditional song in this way, it offers a great vocabulary lesson. Or, when you suggest that children pretend to be the spider, using full body movement, to accompany "Itsy Bitsy Spider," you add the benefit of gross motor development to the song. Discussing what caused the spider to fall instead of just assuming children understand the cause-and-effect connection will enhance their cognitive development.

If you stop to define words such as *waterspout,* you also will be using the song as a tool for developing vocabulary.

The challenge

All caregivers and teachers of young children face the same challenge — finding strategies that will lead to a more purposeful learning experience for children. All are striving to become intentional teachers and caregivers.

Here are three suggestions for moving toward more purposeful care:

- Think of desired outcomes as you plan and move through daily routines. This will automatically lead you in a more purposeful and intentional direction.
- Strengthen your knowledge of the research that supports early development. You will become more effective in selecting outcomes that are beneficial.
- Remember that teaching is as much about following as it is about leading. Teachers who are keen observers of children learn as much from the children as the children learn from them.

Ann Epstein, author of *The Intentional Teacher* (2007), says that "the quality of learning rarely exceeds the quality of teaching." Every child has a right to a quality learning experience. Are you a quality caregiver? Do you provide purposeful care?

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Window	Wiring Opportunity	Toys/Equipment
Thinking Skills	0–48 months	
Cause and Effect	0–16 months	rattles; busy boxes; musical instruments
Problem-Solving	16–48 months	puzzles; blocks; stack-and-nest sensory toys; pop-and-lock beads
Motor Development	0–24 months	balls; climbers; giant sight-and-sound tubes; baby band; large push vehicles; pull toys; riding toys; scarves
Language	0–24 months	
Early Sounds	4–8 months	talk-to-me telephone; music CDs; books; baby band
Vocabulary	0–24 months	giant sight-and-sound tubes; me in the mirror; puppets; single word books; photo cards
Emotional Intelligence	0–48 months	
Trust	0–14 months	one-on-one interactions with caregiver with or without toys; CDs with one-on-one activities; see activities chart in this article; resource books that suggest one-on-one activities
Impulse Control	16–48 months	"This is all about setting boundaries — impulse control is learned through interactions with peers and caregivers."
Social Development	0–48 months	
Attachment	0–12 months	one-on-one interactions with or without toys
Independence	12–36 months	CDs with one-on-one activities; CDs with group activities; group games; mirrors; zipping and buttoning boards

Domain	Games/Activities/Experiences*
Cognitive	Keep your eye on the ball (6 months) Roll a ball across the floor, encouraging little ones to keep their eye on the ball. In the bag (12 months) Show one child two familiar items such as a rattle and a block. Place both items in a bag one at a time in front of the toddler. Ask the child to reach into the bag and find the one of the two objects, for example, the rattle. Real object match (toddlers) Trace the outline of objects , such as rattles, puzzle pieces and eating utensils onto a sheet of posterboard. Give toddlers the poster board and the real objects to match.
Motor	Pat-a-cake feet (3 months) Play pat-a-cake with baby's feet instead of hands. Tactile crawl (6 months) Place a few sheets of different textures of fabric in a pathway on the floor. Invite crawlers to crawl over the fabrics. Narrate their crawling experience. Walk the line (toddlers) Place a strip of masking tape on the floor. Help toddlers to walk the line of tape.
Language	Mirror talk (3 months) Place baby in your lap and face a mirror. Talk to the baby in the mirror. Talk walks (6 months) Walk baby around the room or outdoors. Talk about the things you see. I spy (toddlers) Give a description of something close by and see if the toddler can identify the thing you are describing.
Social-Emotional	Tummy to tummy (3 months) Lie down on your back and place baby on your tummy. Talk to baby. 'Round the house (12 months) Hold baby's hand palm up. Trace a circle on the palm as you say, "'Round the house, 'round the house, goes the little mousie." Walk index finger and middle finger up the baby's arm as you say, "Up the stairs, up the stairs, goes the little mousie." Tickle baby gently under the arm as you say, "in the little housie." Piggyback rides (toddlers) Take toddler on a piggyback ride.

*Activities taken from *The Complete Resource Book for Infants* and *The Complete Resource Book for Toddlers and Twos*, both published by Gryphon House.

Riding the Waves of Working With Infants and Toddlers

by Margie Carter

My colleague Deb Curtis has returned to working with infants and toddlers, and it is with great joy and fascination that I periodically visit her room and see what is unfolding among the children and the infant and toddler staff. Deb has taught early childhood college classes for over 20 years, and she co-authors books with me, and travels widely to speak and conduct workshops. But all of that now pales in the face of her joy in working with the babies and what she is discovering each day with them.

Most of the infant and toddler teachers I visit view their work quite differently than Deb. Typically they are focused on the chores and caregiving routines and appear fairly stressed about their work. Though they may be emotionally involved with the children, few find themselves intellectually engaged with what is unfolding in their daily activities. Deb and I regularly talk about how she can encourage her co-workers to be more focused on the joy of working with this age group, more observant and curious about what they are seeing.

Infant and toddler caregivers are involved with one of the most amazing and rapidly developing times of the human experience. It is a time when children are most acutely learning who they are, from adults and from their interactions and responses to them. Infant and toddler caregivers have a remarkable impact on this process. As Ron Lally describes it:

"In infant and toddler caregiving, more is happening than tender loving care and learning games — values and beliefs are being witnessed and incorporated. The way you act is perceived, interpreted, and incorporated into the actual definition of the self the child is forming."(Lally 1995)

How do we convey this message to our staff? What strategies will give them better insights into working with this age group and help them use their power wisely with these our youngest of children?

Relationships are the curriculum

For infants and toddlers, responsive interactions are what curriculum is about. Usually we don't think about responding to babies as a plan, but rather do it at a subconscious level. We act and react to a child's body movement, facial expression, and a certain cry or giggle. We change a wet diaper or feed a hungry belly, often without awareness of the complexity of what is involved in these brief, ordinary exchanges. But when we look closely at what is happening and its significance, the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

In the caregiving relationship, infants and toddlers are learning who they are and what they are capable of in each of these small moments with adults. The children are subconsciously searching for answers to questions such as:

- Is the world a safe place?
- Will my needs be met?
- Am I a successful communicator?
- Will you accept my raw, uncensored emotions?
- Do I have any power?
- If we part, will you still be there?
- Do you see what I already know and am further wanting to know?

Strategy:
Read children's books

Looking through picture books about infants and toddlers can remind caregivers of how to think about curriculum for this age group and how to interact in culturally sensitive ways. Here are books that tend to generate thoughtful discussion and new insights.

- Deborah Chocolate, *On the Day I Was Born* (Scholastic, 1995). Have the staff study the illustrations and make note of the language used in this book. Ask them to cull out what could be thought of as "curriculum themes" for babies — for instance, the themes of softness,

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a sense of belonging, and being known and delighted in by those around.

- Margy Burns Knight, *Welcoming Babies* (Tilbury House, 1994). As your staff reads about the different ways cultural traditions convey a sense of identity and affinity to young children, ask them to consider what they know about these traditions for the families of the children in their care. If little is known, how could you find out? Don't assume a questionnaire is the best approach, because that might not be culturally appropriate.

- Barbara Joosse, *Mama, Do You Love Me?* (Chronicle Books, 1991) and Margaret Wise Brown, *The Runaway Bunny* (Harper, 1942) are books alive with the intense emotions young ones are experiencing: If I runaway, have a big tantrum, do something you think is naughty, will you still love me? Have teachers make a list of how the parent in each of these books responds to these efforts to explore security and power and then consider paraphrases that might work for the children in their care.

Caregivers in our programs have the job of learning about the developmental needs and tasks of this age group while coming to know each child's individual ways of being and expressing her or himself. They need sharp observation skills and the ability to read and respond to the cues the children are continually expressing as a foundation for responsive caregiving. Equally important, caregivers must learn more about themselves so they are conscious of their reactions and can intentionally respond in a way that enhances the well-being and self-concept of each child.

Reading and responding to cues

With infants and toddlers, interactions in the caregiving process are primarily based on nonverbal cues. Adults send and receive hundreds of messages in our daily interactions through facial expressions and our tone of voice. This form of communication, although subtle and at a subconscious level, is extremely powerful. The way we move our bodies, tilt our heads, and touch and hold a child tells her or him about themselves and the world around them. Try offering these activities to enhance caregiver awareness of the cues they read and send.

Strategy:
Analyze pictures

Gather a collection of photographs of infants and toddlers in various activities from magazines, newspapers, and books. Have staff study them and practice reading cues and analyzing responses by looking at each photo with the following questions:

- How does this picture make me feel? Why? Where do those feelings in me come from? What is my instinctive reaction when I'm feeling this way?
- What do I think this child needs?
- How do I know this?
- What would my response and specific behavior be with this child?
- Are there any new considerations and revisions in how I would like to respond to a child doing something like this picture?

Now consider my response *from the child's point of view*:

- How successful are my messages to this adult?
- How interesting am I?
- Are my feelings understood and acceptable?
- Is it safe to be myself?
- What should I fear?

Changing instinctive responses to behaviors and emotions is usually not an easy task, even if new understandings come to light. It takes practice to reprogram ourselves. Suggest that your staff continue to explore their initial responses to infants and toddlers by observing them in stores, restaurants, or shopping malls and then considering the above questions. If you provide time in each meeting with caregivers to practice recognizing their own feelings and to then consider the experience from the child's point of view, you will be teaching them a methodology for developing responsive caregiving.

Everyday routines are the curriculum

The caregiving process is central to infant and toddler curriculum because it fosters a child's development and positive identity. The more caregivers increase their awareness of how everyday materials, activities, and routines constitute "a curriculum," the more intentional they will become in how they offer these experiences.

Deb tells me that her diaper changing table is a good example. The children love climbing up the stairs at this table because they are steeper and more challenging than any other equipment in her room. Deb has figured out a way to safely let children climb and stand on the stairs to watch a playmate getting a diaper change. This helps build relationships among the children as well as with Deb. They hear the conversation and expand their language exposure. They experience the physical challenge and their identity is strengthened by competentcy in the task of climbing, holding on, and watching. What Deb has discovered is that when you believe children deserve such experiences and you are willing to invest in the coaching process with them, you discover how much more capable they are than you otherwise imagined.

Strategy:
Analyze catalog materials

In a staff meeting gather several early childhood catalogs and look through the sections related to infants and toddlers.

Have staff quickly choose pictures of materials and equipment that are part of their daily work. For each one, ask them to identify the kind of learning they know occurs when this material or equipment is used thoughtfully by the caregivers and children. Consider self-concept and identity development, social/emotional learning, sensory/motor, language and literacy, numeracy, scientific thinking, etc.

Hearing Deb's enthusiasm for her work this year and her detailed stories of how the children are challenging her assumptions about them has sent me back to a story she wrote in *Reflecting Children's Lives* about a brief stint she had as a toddler teacher ten years ago. She called it "Riding the Waves Again" and describes how working with toddlers reminds her of growing up in Southern California. "It's like learning to swim in the ocean. You can only master an understanding of the nature of waves by spending quite a bit of time with your body immersed in the experience. You have to be able to anticipate what's going to happen and follow the lead of the waves, but at the same time, be totally observant and aware of what's happening with all the elements at each moment. You can never really be in control or change the waves. You just learn to understand how to respond to them . . . . I guess what I'm trying to describe is the part of teaching that isn't about planning or leading, but about learning to stay with the process."

If we want our staff to acquire this learning, we have to immerse them in a learning process that parallels what we want them to offer children.

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Secrets for Early Childhood Professionals

by Alice Sterling Honig, Ph.D.

Recent research findings that infant/toddler child care is of questionable quality in many centers in the United States challenges directors and care providers (Howes, Whitebook, and Phillips, 1992). These findings sound a clarion alarm. Infant mental health specialists have clearly documented the crucial importance of the first years of life for the future emotional well-being of children. So how do child care directors and staff respond to these worrisome findings?

Whether providers work in a center based facility or in family day care, they need to know first and foremost the fundamental secrets of quality infant/toddler care. The essence of quality care for infants and toddlers depends on the *intimacy* a caregiver develops in relationship with a baby. Professionals work toward *understanding and generously meeting* infant needs.

Each caregiver needs to be willing to develop an "I-THOU" relationship with a baby, rather than to treat the baby as a non-verbal object who is pleasant enough and can be easily given a bottle or a diaper change from time to time. Babies thrive on body loving, with lots of cuddling and lap time. But just holding is not enough. Every baby needs a tuned-in adult partner committed to genuine engagement with the unique little person that each baby is. Quality infant/toddler caregivers fine tune a special relationship with each baby.

Here are some important ideas for care providers:

Hold and Mold: Nourish Babies

Babies need nursing and warmth, safety and cleanliness. Beyond physical essentials, every baby needs someone to mold into, to drape upon, to lean against, to crawl into the lap of. Babies need to sink into somatic certainty on the caregiver's generously accepting body. Nourish your babies emotionally!

Be a Responsive, Reciprocal Partner

Every baby needs a "tuned in partner" to dance with emotionally. The quality caregiver interprets signals of distress — crying, compulsive self-rocking, or vacant eyes prompt-

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ly and accurately. Tender personal comforting promotes baby's positive attachment and primes cooperativeness and kindness with others.

Enhance Your Noticing Skills

Keen observational skills clue in the caregiver to infant needs. Some babies want to cuddle more; some want to explore more. Some want to dash away bravely and return for home-base security bouts of rest and reassurance.

Learn Ages and Stages: Prerequisites and Windows

Learn norms and milestones well, so that you can lure babies further in development, provide supports when early learning is more difficult, and recognize delays (Honig, 1993a). For example, some developmental timetable *windows* are wide (walking). Some are narrow (pincer prehension).

Prerequisites are important for the dialectical dance of early learning. No "dance" comes without a few backward steps! Toilet learning often means a few days dry, a few days with accidents. Toilet learning depends on many prior accomplishments like learning the words "pee" and "poop" and being able to sit still for some time rather than busily being on the move almost every waking moment, as so many toddlers are (Honig, 1993b).

Digest and Apply Developmental Theories

Eriksonian theory, Piagetian theory, and Mahlerian theory teach us that there is always a *balance* — a see-sawing between striving toward growth and optimal accomplishments, on the one hand, and the negative dark pole — of anger and frustration, of no-saying, of pushing away, of falling apart from efforts to push forward in development. A toddler who is wildly no-saying and defiant still needs you to be there as a *refueling station*, a place of refuge when her still-baby soul is on overload, and coping with growing up is too much for her.

Learn Jean Piaget's sensorimotor milestones in infancy:

- Object permanence
- New schemas
- Means-ends separation
- Spatial understandings and solutions for detour problems
- Causality learning and searching for causal
- Mechanisms to work toys
- Eye-hand coordinations
- Gestural and language imitations of the new and unfamiliar, the seen and unseen

Quality caregivers apply Piaget's principle that children learn at the cutting edge between what they already know and is easy for them *and* the new that a teacher will help them to struggle to learn. Hone your *matchmaking* skills at the boundary so that you adapt what new learning you are luring baby into, and what learning that baby has already begun to master (Honig, 1982). Offer activities, toys, and opportunities for learning that are appealing for each individual child. Encourage babies to stretch their persistence in trying.

Provide Language Treasures: Enhance Beauty in Children's Lives

Language playfulness, rhyming, chanting, singing, delighted responsiveness to infant vocalizations — all promote the emergence of early language (Honig and Brophy, 1996).

Babies respond to and enjoy beauty. Put on leisurely waltzes and whirl babes around in arms as you hum and sing with them. Give toddlers large nylon colorful squares and let them sway and twirl and dance to gentle music. Put up colorful pictures of beautiful scenes or animals on the lower walls of the child care room.

Read Picture Books

Talk about pictures in books as you snuggle babies close to your body. Choose books with single pictures of familiar and cherished subjects, such as puppies, babies, bath time, family outings, favorite foods, digging in sand, ball play, swinging, or settling down for a nap (Honig, 1989).

Promote Kindness and Friendliness

Toddlers will need a teacher boost to encourage rich sociodramatic play and positive peer interactions (Honig and Thompson, 1994). Try a wide variety of *positive* discipline techniques (see Honig, 1996). Emphasize words for sharing, caring, and taking turns. Toddlers will play out with their dolls the same nurturing interactions you are modeling with them. So be sure to provide a variety of props, such as dolls of different ethnicity and lots of baby blankets and toy bottles.

Discover Infants' Unique Temperamental Styles

Each baby has unique temperamental characteristics. Some are slow to warm up to strangers or new foods or changes in curricular offering. They adapt cautiously to change. Some enthusiastically rush toward novelty. Some are upbeat in mood while others are more quiet, with low-key moods. Some babies are irritable and sensitive, whether to nose wiping or too-quick handling or a hungry tummy, or too much pressure for toilet learning or neat eating. Some babies manage a higher tolerance for hunger pangs; some toddlers have more patience in waiting for a turn with a toy. Some toddlers fall apart into violent tantrums when disappointed or thwarted even mildly. Self-control must be supported by firm, loving caregiving (Honig and Lansburgh, 1991).

You can predict sleep and feeding and voiding patterns with some babies. Others are quite irregular, with no predictable schedule. Some infants and toddlers respond without fuss to routine care in diapering or wiping up. Others have intense reactions to caregiving interactions — sometimes negative, sometimes joyous. Every baby comes with a biologically based assortment of temperament traits. The perceptive caregiver notices each baby's temperament traits and how they cluster. Thus, caregivers can individualize care in tune with each infant or toddler's personality.

Conclusions

Wise directors will look for special persons to care for the youngest ones. A tryout time may be necessary when hiring caregivers. Does the trainee lure babies into activities just a wee bit difficult, puzzling, different, more complex? Does the new caregiver notice when tasks are difficult, and dance down developmental ladders, and *scaffold* tasks for babies so that a frustrating activity becomes easier or more comprehensible? Such "dancing" gives babies courage to try (Honig, 1992)!

Quality infant/toddler caregiving is a highly skilled profession. With powerful insights and knowledge, plus priceless personal gifts for intimacy and cherishing, caregivers enhance the daily lives of very young children. Keep faith in yourself and your intellectual spunk and sparkle for carrying out a noble job — high-quality infant/toddler caregiving.

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Worlds for Infants and Toddlers: New Ideas

By Jim Greenman

Our surroundings affect our behavior. As adults we whisper in libraries, we feel lost on the streets of strange cities, we relax in our own homes. Exactly like adults, children's feelings and behaviors are shaped by the physical situation in which they find themselves.

Even children who are too young to know about rules or possible dangers are affected by physical space: think about an infant's surprise at being laid down on a cold changing table, the way a two year old runs when faced with a ramp, the shyness of many four year olds entering a new classroom.

But for many years people have argued that while young children react to their environments, they are most strongly affected by the immediate qualities of their surroundings: cold air or bath water, wet diapers, rough edges, lost balance, or loud noises. This view of children's relationships to the physical world is meeting considerable challenge.

Infants: What Do They Know?

For a number of years, researchers argued that the vision of infants is hazy. Consequently, people believed that infants react to skin sensations more than to the world out there. Over the last 20 years, researchers like T. G. R. Bower and Robert Fantz have shown that even young infants make sense of their physical surroundings in clear and highly organized ways. Infants can recognize an object from the front, the side, or the bottom. Similarly, infants are distressed when they see a videotape of their mother in one location and hear her voice coming from a different location.

Until very recently, people believed that since young children are limited to personal or body sensations, they understand very little about the actual geography of objects, rooms, and larger spaces. This description turns out to be harsh. Research by Susan Rose and Holly Ruff at Einstein College of Medicine shows that as early as six to twelve months babies work at piecing together separate kinds of spatial information. Infants who mouth objects without seeing them can later recognize those same objects by sight.

Research from the laboratories of Herbert Pick at the University of Minnesota and Linda Acredolo at the University of California at Davis shows that infants do realize how large spaces are organized. They have been able to demonstrate that infants think in terms of landmarks, not just bodily cues. If a window is on an infant's left on a trip down a hall, the baby will look for it on his/her right side during the return trip.

Clearly, the physical environment is not at all a distant blur or a bundle of immediate sensations for infants. Beyond worrying about the temperature and texture of surfaces, we have to recognize that very young children are sensitive to the organization and appearance of their surroundings.

Toddlers: How Does Their World Shift?

If infants are already beginning to have a sense for the world's geography, then what, if anything, changes between the ages of one and three years? In this period, children go from sitting to crawling to walking to running. With the shift away from armchair life, children begin to cover increasing amounts of territory. They have to figure out not only how to get from here to there but how to get back. They may try to follow a ball as it rolls out of sight and bounces off different objects. They learn to use someone's voice to guide their way back to home base.

Once children lie, squat, walk, and run, they are faced with solving a whole new

set of spatial problems. Children who can be at all these levels live in a very complex spatial world. When such a child hunts for an object, she has to take into consideration not just where but from what point of view he/she last recalls seeing it.

During these years, children's social world is often reorganized. Many children are increasingly able to separate from their parents. Once they give up clinging to familiar knees, they wander and explore. A two year old can easily follow a peer behind a bush in a playground. From that vantage point the whole world looks different. At a moment like that, a child may have to cope with confusion, even fear. She will also have to call on all kinds of alternative cues for navigating: taller landmarks like roof lines and trees, or quite different clues such as noises and voices.

Work by Jerome Kagan and his colleagues shows that during their second and third years, children develop an initial set of standards. Two and three year olds realize that certain behaviors are right, whereas other behaviors are wrong in particular situations. In that way, children may cease to think about all physical spaces as being the same. Even though they could not put it into words, two year olds know the difference between what is expected in a nap room and what is expected on the playground. In other words, even though toddlers may not follow out their understandings, they have sense for the social messages carried by different spaces.

Environments Made for Infants and Toddlers

Despite this changing picture of young children's understanding of space, we lack good models for thinking about the design of infant and toddler environments. One mistake is to create bedroom-like settings which are limiting and lack challenge. The other mistake is to borrow familiar plans for preschool spaces and add cribs and changing tables. In this case, the scale is too large and the organization much too formal to make sense for younger children.

In place of borrowing, we need original designs meant specifically for infants and toddlers. These kinds of designs are based on observing babies in the wild. A keen sense of how babies or toddlers act at home, in parks, or in group care is probably the most important tool. The best training is to watch an infant or a two year old and to observe such things as:

- how they move through space,
- how they explore the surface and objects they meet,
- what captures their attention,
- the level of their gaze and reach, and
- what disturbs or frustrates their activity.

Once you have a feel for the way that an infant or toddler interacts with space, you have to take the basic qualities of good environments and ask: "How does this apply to infants?" or "What would this mean for toddlers?"

Health and Safety

Of course it is important that an environment be safe and healthy. This means that there must be careful control of temperatures and ventilation (especially at the low levels where children will be). There must be sanitation precautions that are thorough but easy for caregivers to follow out. The setting must be inspected for sharp edges, dark corners, uneven flooring. Materials must contain no toxic substances. Toys should be examined so that no baby can choke, suffocate, or be cut, even when playing with the toys in unorthodox ways.

At the same time, an environment which is overprotective is unhealthy in its own way. It stifles movement and exploration; it hurts children's ability to trust themselves and the physical world. Children are smart about their own safety when it comes to motor skills; they simply do not make the same errors over and over. They learn how to handle steps and how to protect themselves if they roll off a riser. The job is to learn not to patrol children or to limit the kinds of equipment but to set up the environment.

Crowding is often overlooked as a basic safety problem. There must be clear spaces for large motor activity, but spaces should be small enough to prevent children from bunching up. Until children are older, they lack much clear sense of other children's space needs; more than three or four children may lead to a fair amount of accidental bumping and knocking. Also, small numbers permit children to concentrate. If a child is alone on a ramp or a ladder, she can think about where she puts her feet. If there are large numbers of other children around, she is likely to be distracted.

If a child's fingers are pinched by a rocker, don't ban the rocker. Look for a new place to put it where it won't be in the flow of traffic. Think about padding and carpeting risers and lofts. Don't do away with drawers if a child's hand gets closed in one. Instead, realize that two year olds are fascinated by opening and closing; build alternative sources for that experience into the room.

In boring rooms, children end up exploring each other. That leads to poking, pushing, even biting. In restrictive rooms, adults are constantly pulling children away from items or areas that interest them. Being turned into a policeperson makes teachers tense, even angry. It wastes valuable teaching and caring time.

Variety

One of the biggest challenges of group care lies in avoiding the institutional qualities of the experience: everyone doing the same thing at the same time. This factory atmosphere has high costs: boredom, frustration, loss of individuality for both caregivers and children. In hospitals and old age homes, just as much as in child care, staff members have to work to avoid this kind of dulling routine.

The actual layout of physical spaces and facilities can be extremely important. If the spaces are individual and small enough, babies won't be moving in packs. Because of the size of the children, there should be something interesting every two feet. That way, within a small area two will be playing hide-and-seek behind a pillow, one will be collecting blocks, another will be in a lap looking at a book. In this type of space, babies and toddlers move at their own pace and tire at their own pace. Consequently, their active, quiet, and sleeping periods will become individual.

Personal or individual activity schedules can be accentuated by the kinds of furniture in the room. If the room contains large motor equipment as well as low mattresses and groups of pillows, one child can be very active while another infant takes a cat nap. The variety of possibilities also answers to the fact that in any single day individual children will feel energetic or quiet, sociable or crabby, needy or independent.

A second issue in providing individualized care comes from thinking about infants or toddlers as age groups: "Infants like …," "Infants can ...." Anyone with child care experience knows that no two infants are alike at nine months. Spaces must reflect the individual rates of development and the spectrum of interests or skills likely to show up in any group of children. Basically, this means there must be considerable variety. The same room must work for babies who sit or walk, who like books or ramps.

A final problem with group care comes from age segregation. Usually infants and toddlers are restricted to their own company and their own spaces. Many teachers and directors are concerned that older children will mow down babies. But infants and toddlers need the variety of walking to other rooms in a center, even playing in baby-proofed regions of other rooms. It is not positive for younger children (or their teachers) to be walled off from the three to five year olds.

Programs should consider ways of integrating babies into the larger community. Five year olds can help feed babies or they can come to play with individual toddlers in the late afternoons. Perhaps there can be a loft or a window which permits two year olds to observe older children in another room or to watch traffic through a hallway.

Flexibility

At no other time in their lives are children changing in quite so many ways at once. Yet it is rare that we think about what this rapid rate of development means for the way we design and furnish spaces. Infant and toddler spaces have to be set up flexibly so that the environment can keep in step with children's shifting needs but stay within what is probably a very modest budget.

Take the instance of providing seating and surfaces. These items can work for eating and for many other purposes as well. Some car seats come with special order trays that allow you to turn them into high chairs. These can be mounted on the wall. Infants may eat there, and, if teachers put interesting materials on the trays, the seats become a functional play space for quiet, individual activity.

In other centers, infant seats have been mounted on top of cabinets. The cabinets stop several feet above the floor, leaving a space for carpet and pillows below. In that way, eating, storage, and play space have been combined. Still other solutions are based on inventive combinations of purchased furniture, such as adding a top to the water table which turns it into a lunch surface or a safe space for tabletop block play.

Another form of flexibility comes from rethinking the usual, like a couch. For infants, a couch provides a perfect space for two caregivers to sit and hold babies. As children learn to crawl, the couch can be moved out from the wall to create an interesting path. When children want to practice walking, the same couch provides a soft walking rail. Once toddlers become fascinated by more complex kinds of spatial games like hide-and-seek, the couch can become the base for a slide or for tunnels made from blankets. This process of designing and redesigning an environment creates a caring and a working space which keeps pace with changes in children.

Scale and Perspective

It is easy to forget how small infants and toddlers are. Almost everything in their lives goes on under 30 inches. This requires that designers and teachers turn their normal expectations upside down. Beneath three feet is the active zone (where the curriculum happens), above three feet is the passive zone (storage, wall-mounted cradles, bulletin boards, etc.).

The body size of infants and toddlers has implications for laying out spaces and distances within a playroom. What is a small space for an adult may feel like a baseball diamond to an infant. A fiberboard drum, a cardboard box, a pillow leaning up to a couch are all rooms large enough for two babies. What is a short distance for an adult to cross may be too great a span for a young child. Items like

paper and crayons, toys, water tables should be located very close together. As children become self-assured walkers, these distances and spaces should change.

In planning environments for very young children, adults also have to think about adjusting their perspective. While older children and adults spend almost no time looking at the ceiling or the undersides of furniture, babies see quite a lot of this kind of scenery. The challenge is to find ways of making these spaces interesting and functional. As people plan infant and toddler rooms, they should consider mobiles above changing tables, ceiling displays in nap rooms, textures along baseboards.

Softness and Responsiveness

Infant and toddler rooms should spark the response: "What a neat place to be a little kid!" "What a neat place to be WITH a little kid!" There are two major ingredients in producing this kind of response: softness and responsiveness.

Softness is created by masking the sterile, efficient side of child care settings with the qualities of a living room: soft light, plants, nooks and corners, comfortable furniture, easily movable props like blankets and pillows. The point is not to create some House and Garden setting. The point is to design a place where babies will know how to find privacy and intimacy and where adults will find it easy to provide these same things.

Responsiveness is a slightly different quality. It is the way in which a room speaks back to a child who acts on it. A room has to be sensitive to the way that children of different ages are likely to act. Infants and toddlers provide a good contrast in this respect. For infants, a room has to be a fine space in which to sit, crawl, or walk short distances. It is full of pillows, low mattresses, barely raised platforms, and changes in textured surfaces.

The materials in an infant room should react to light touch and chance motions, because that is what babies produce spontaneously. In a playroom for babies you want mobiles that respond to air currents; mirrors that reflect simple changes in position; easily grasped items such as soft balls, foam blocks, or books with cardboard pages. An ideal item is a plastic swimming pool containing scarves, strips of cloth or paper. A baby can crawl directly into the pool and sit in the middle, where the smallest change of position creates interesting noises and visual changes.

But toddlers enjoy an environment which responds to quite different kinds of action. By the age of two, most children enjoy interacting with materials that demand more focus, work, and planning. Storage shelves that have compartments with some doors, shutters, and drawers would frustrate infants, but they can fascinate toddlers. Similarly, the furnishings in a toddler room can be more challenging. Possibilities include ladders to lofts, slides down from raised areas, light movable cubes which permit children to create their own novel spaces.

The toys in such a setting should also change. An infant may be interested by a mirror in a busy box, but a similar display would be boring for two to three year olds. Instead, they need a mirror with a set of colored plexiglass covers mounted nearby or a mirror covered with all different kinds of latches and catches.

Harmony and Order

An environment for young children has its own brand of attractiveness. It is beautiful if it works well for the children who spend their hours there. More often than not this means that the setting is harmonious and well ordered, rather than cute or pretty. A mural of Mickey Mouse may amuse adult visitors, but it is unlikely to mean much to small children. From a child's vantage point, it may just be visual noise, lots of complexity which doesn't help the child to understand the way the room works.

A child care center contains huge amounts of details and motion because of the sheer number of people in the same room. Walls and surfaces should provide a background against which the items that children use stand out. Plain wooden shelves show off toys and materials well. Against that kind of simple background, picture labels showing where items belong stand out. With a backdrop of neutral walls and fabrics, people stand out sharply. This makes it easier for infants and toddlers to find them, move towards them, and focus communications.

A Community of Adults and Children

As much as it is important to take a child's eye view, it is critical to consider the needs of adults working in infant and toddler rooms. An environment which is exclusively child centered will be tiring and stressful for teachers. Hidden nooks delight infants, but if a room contains any number of invisible hideouts, teachers will be distraught in no time.

Infant and toddler rooms must be highly organized. Items which are used together must occur in the same space. A diapering area must contain not just the changing table, but the sink with toweling and plastic bags mounted on the wall and storage for clean clothes. This kind of thoughtful centralization means that teachers spend their time with children, not on hunts for equipment. It also means that parent helpers, substitutes, or extra help at lunch time

can step in and be helpful immediately. This kind of organization also promotes safety. Adults are not constantly darting back and forth; they can focus their attention on what children are doing.

Materials and spaces should not promote a false sense of security. Changing tables with straps or rails are dangerous in their own way. Sooner or later a baby will escape, and there will be an accident. Better no such gimmicks, then it is clear that no child can be left alone.

Finally, rooms for young children must have easily restorable order. Infants have no rules against spilling. No two year old can resist seeing if popcorn will float in the water table or what happens if poker chips are mixed in with the play dough. If adults are going to last whole days (never mind years), child care settings have to contain built-in limits on the amount of dirt and chaos. Surfaces must be easily wiped off. Different types of messy materials can be rotated through an area of the room that is especially set up for handling drippy, dirty stuff. In that way, children can experience water, play dough, and paint without adults being run ragged with mopping and changing.

Activities involving small pieces such as tabletop blocks, Legos, or poker chips can be carried out in small, more contained spaces. Toddlers love dumping, sorting, and collecting. In order to answer to this fascination and preserve staff sanity, build a sorting pit which is separated from the rest of the room by pillows, shelves, or a carpeted bump.

Spaces can be designed so that the order is visible and clear even to young children. Items are less likely to get scattered wildly around the room if children have defined spaces for play: raised platforms, trays, mats, areas marked off with tape, changes in flooring, or circles of hosing. Even young children can become responsible for maintaining order if the clues are sharp and clear. If the play phones are stored on a shelf with a picture to label the space, toddlers have adequate clues for putting them back.

Storage such as bowling ball lockers provides spaces just large enough for individual items. Two year olds can easily grasp this kind of simple space-to-item matching. Teachers can be flexible in what they think of as worthwhile activities. For example, toddlers can be given empty buckets labeled with pictures of toy cars, Legos, or chips. They can be asked to hunt for all the stray bits scattered throughout the room. The basic idea is to create a setting in which learning and nurturance, not maintenance, consumes the most attention and interest.

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encouraging a new view of toddlers

by Margie Carter

Among the various age groups in our early childhood programs, toddlers seem the most challenging for teachers to work with. What words do you typically hear used to describe these newly mobile citizens of our world? Toddlers are often viewed as oppositional, clingy, whiny, prone to tantrums, untrustworthy, and exasperating. Imagine if your identity were being shaped by words like these? How would you begin to feel about yourself? How might you, in turn, start to behave? The reputation of 'the terrible twos' is ubiquitous across our country. I think this characterization inserts unnecessary negativity into the spirits of toddlers and their caregivers. My goal in working with toddler teachers is to shift the mindset from 'terrible' to 'terrific' twos.

With such platitudes I could be perceived as a Pollyanna and further annoyance to caregivers struggling with too many children in their group and too little support. The stress imbedded in their work is real, but I believe a different view of toddlers and the caregiving role can transform their daily experience. My working partner, Deb Curtis, has become my role model for this possibility. Leaving her college teaching to return to direct work with children, Deb has spent the last ten years showing me how teachers can bring joy back into the classroom. Three years ago she started working with toddlers, and her daily stories have both enriched and challenged my thinking. For instance, in the staff training video *Time with Toddlers* I made a dozen or so years ago, you'll see me with a group of toddlers advising their teachers how to work around the limited attention span of these terrific twos. Not so, says Deb. Toddlers have attention for everything around them, that's why they are usually on the move. Look at this! Oh, what is that?

We know from brain research that toddlers are learning more and at a faster rate than most adults. How strange that the typical characterization of toddlers is on what they can't do, how unreliable they are, and what they don't understand. In the past I've used these portrayals myself trying to advocate for toddlers, to encourage parents and caregivers to take a developmental perspective, while keeping these active ones safe from harm. I can now see the flaw in how I've presented this. When we focus on what they can't do, rather than their capabilities, we have a diminished view of toddlers, which limits what we offer them and taints the experience of our responses to their efforts. More helpful to toddlers, their parents, and caregivers is encouraging them to seek the child's perspective.

Meet up with their minds, not behaviors

Everywhere we work these days, Deb and I are sharing an insight that came to us in our re-reading of the reflections of Lilian Katz (1998) on what educators could learn from Reggio Emilia. She describes that in the United States teachers tend to focus on children's behaviors, whereas in Reggio, "Adults' and children's minds meet on matters of interest to both of them." I find this an incredible provocation for toddler teachers, and Deb has numerous stories of her efforts to translate this into practice. When toddlers are engaged in typical behaviors, i.e., climbing on tables, running away, grabbing a toy, screaming in objection to something asked of them, how could we meet up with their minds, rather than focus on their behaviors? A mindset of curiosity rather than compliance can begin to transform our responses. Seeking the child's point of view, wondering what

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is on his or her mind, offers us new possibilities. Perhaps we'll see a child wanting a connection with another child, rather than aggressive behavior; an eager explorer, rather than an impatient child; a person longing for some power, a sense of agency, rather than a defiant or mischievous two year old.

Strategy: Consider other possibilities

Gather a collection of photos or short scenarios and explore them with staff, using questions such as the following:

- What is your first reaction to this and why?
- Can you describe the details of what the child is doing?
- How do you imagine what's on the child's mind here? What is he or she trying to accomplish, understand, or communicate?
- What could you say and do to support this child's endeavors?

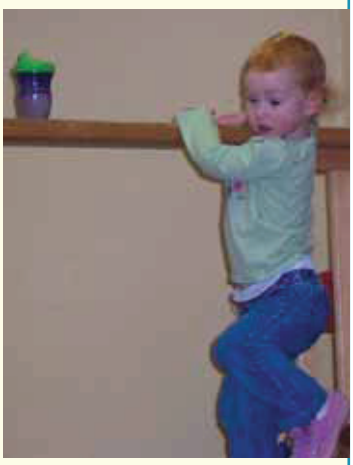
Strategy: Practice writing rave reviews

Ask caregivers to bring an observation of a child which is an example of behavior that tends to 'push their buttons' or 'drive them crazy.' Post chart paper divided into two columns, the first with a heading of 'terrible twos' and the second 'terrific twos.' Have the group generate a list of words and phrases for the first column, assuming one viewed this child negatively. Next, use the above questions to explore possibilities for meeting up with the child's mind, rather than behavior. From this discussion add words or phrases in the second column, 'terrific twos' to transform each of the 'terrible twos'

Practice Writing Rave Reviews

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARGIE CARTER

Left: Jacob found the basket of little dishes we have on the shelf and brought it to the table. When we next looked, he had spread out the dishes and had a spoon raised high as if it were a stick he was preparing to bring down on a drum.



Right: Despite our repeated reminders, Ella climbs around the outside of our loft, rather than on the inside platform.

Practice transforming your view of toddlers. Closely look over the photos and observation notes below; fill in additional words and phrases in the 'terrible twos' column of the chart below. Then discuss the questions in the box to explore other possibilities. Next, match each word or phrase with a new one in the column labeled 'terrific twos.' Finally, write a 'rave review' describing how you've come to see this child's actions as indicative of a complete child.

- What details do you notice in what each child is doing?
- How do you imagine what's on the child's mind?
- What is he or she trying to accomplish, understand, or communicate?
- What could you say and do to support this child's endeavors?

Add your words or phrases to transform how toddlers are characterized.

Terrible Twos	Terrific Twos
Have no idea of what is safe	Are passionate about finding out how things work

Rave Review for Jacob	Rave Review for Ella

ideas into a view of the child's competency underpinning this behavior. Finally, have staff write a one- or two-paragraph documentation story with the flavor of a 'rave review' about this behavior, including mention of how the caregiver was able to meet up with the child's mind to better understand and respond to this remarkable child.

I often prompt caregivers to reflectively describe changes in their understandings, asking them to use phrases like, I used to think _____, but now I see _____. When they are explicit about their process of seeing toddlers in new ways, they open a window for others to do the same.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

No Ordinary Moments: Using Observations With Toddlers to Invite Further Engagement

by Deb Curtis

Deb Curtis is a toddler teacher at the Burlington Little School, in Burlington, Washington. She also teaches workshops, seminars and conferences for adults in a variety of settings around the country. She is the co-author of several books with Margie Carter. This article is extracted from their forthcoming book, *Learning Together with Children* (Redleaf Press, in press).

The year I spent closely observing toddlers as a child care teacher was one of the most intellectually engaging and joyful years of my career. I kept a daily journal and took lots of photos of the unfolding activities that seemed significant to me and the children. I studied the photos and notes for my own learning and also loved sharing them with the children and their families.

Every observation was full of accounts of the children's remarkable focus and determination, curiosity and delight. Whether happy or sad, angry or tired, the children brought to every encounter an innate optimism and an eagerness for new experiences. My observations confirmed the current research that reports that the natural inquisitiveness and drive of these very young children ensures that during the first three years of life their brains will develop faster than at any other time. With an astounding 250,000 brain connections growing each minute, there are no ordinary moments during this time of life! The significance of this work was humbling and exciting. My hope was to find a way to take in each of these extraordinary moments with the children, to honor them and help them grow.

Seeking the children's perspectives

It took practice for me to slow down and look and listen attentively; suspending any agenda I might have for what the children should be doing. Instead, I tried to put myself in their shoes to understand the world from their point of view. Seeing the children's perspectives influenced my decisions and actions, and was critical for engaging with them in a deeper teaching and learning process.

Here is an entry from my observation journal illuminating the power of taking the children's point of view:

Today I brought in the clear plastic containers with lids, packed with colorful, sparkly bracelets that I found at the thrift store. I immediately knew from my previous observations that these would be a great learning material for the group. As I observed the children they were absorbed in using the materials just as I predicted. They loved exploring how the bracelets sparkled in the light from the glitter sealed inside. Of intense interest to them was fitting the plastic rings back into the cup and securing the lid. I'm always so intrigued by how serious toddlers are about this kind of work. Do they feel the satisfaction of conquering the challenge of a tricky puzzle, or soothed by the security of knowing that some things in the universe fit together just right?

Oscar immediately knew what the rings were for, and so he spent a very long time putting every bracelet he could get ahold of onto his arm. I was delighted that the other children seemed to understand the

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

importance of this work to him and let him have many of their bracelets so he could complete the task.

At one point I noticed Kiran deliberately throwing the bracelets onto the floor in front of him. My initial reaction was to jump in and stop this behavior. One of my ongoing goals is to help the children see how to care for our materials. Fortunately, before I jumped in, I stopped to watch for just a moment. What I realized is that Kiran was purposefully throwing the rings. He had discovered that if he threw them just the right way they would spin around and around like a top, until they slowly lost momentum and wobbled to a stop. I was thrilled to learn this new way to explore the bracelets and called the other children's attention to Kiran's idea. I'm so glad I stopped to see his perspective. I was astonished that he figured this out; he's only 14 months old! His discovery is now a part of the learning games we play with the bracelets, and the children are getting quite good at controlling this small aspect of the science of physics.

Capturing the details

Another observation skill I cultivated to enhance the teaching and learning process with my toddlers was to notice the many small things that occurred within the group. Children look closely at the details that we adults take for granted and don't pay attention to anymore. We are quick to assign a label or meaning to what we see. General information such as "they loved playing with the water" doesn't give us much to engage with to deepen the teaching and learning process. Capturing the specific details of what you hear and see, documenting with a clipboard and pen, a sketch, tape recorder, or camera can help you learn more about individual children, and see the complexity of the unfolding moments. You also get ideas about additional things to offer to extend their interest for further learning.

Here's another journal entry where I used the details of what I was observing to help the children connect with each others' ideas and actions:

I've been delighted to watch the changes in how my group of toddlers engages with the baby dolls and props in the room. For a long while they have been imitating the actions that come from their own experiences, earnestly trying to fit the bottles in the dolls' mouths and cover them with the blankets. As the children play with the babies I observe them closely to see what they do. I also love to make guesses about what they might be thinking as they play. I imitate their behavior and play along side them. As they play I describe the details I see unfolding around me.

"Kiran is feeding his baby a bottle."

"T'Kai is gently putting his baby to bed."

"Hannah is rocking her baby to sleep."

"My baby is crying. I'm going to give her a hug."

Children look closely at the details that we adults take for granted and don't pay attention to anymore.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

Using observations and photos with the children gave me a profound respect for their insights and abilities.

I notice that as I highlight their actions, the children seem to pay more attention to each other's play and often try what I have pointed out. I've been wondering if my comments may be helping their play skills grow. Today I watched their behavior with the baby dolls change. The difference I discerned is the children were playing together *with the babies. They watched and interacted with each other a lot more than usual. I am so curious about this new play. I know it is a stage in their development to start to play together, but it seems that broadcasting their actions has helped them make a leap in symbolic thought. Did watching each other pretend introduce them to the power of their imaginations?*

I particularly noticed this with Oona's play today. The other children eagerly followed her lead as she fed the babies, wrapped them in a beautiful cloth, and rocked them for a long period of time. She noticed their attention to her and I think it enabled her to see herself and her actions in a new way. A dreamy look came into her eyes and a satisfied grin came over her face, as she seemed, at that moment, to understand the power of her imagination. It was such a profound experience for me, witnessing her growing awareness of the magical world of make believe.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

Using observations with the children

As I continued to describe the details of my observations to the children, it was apparent that this had a positive influence on their play skills. I began to use my observations and photos with them more purposefully. My journal entries about our study of flubber demonstrate the power of using observation stories and photos with the children.

Flubber journal entry #1:
I invited the children to begin a study of flubber today which we will continue over an extended period of time. I have chosen flubber because it is a substance that moves and flows and responds to the children's actions. Today as they worked with the flubber, I narrated their actions and pointed out the things they were doing to the other children.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

"Oh look, when Kiran puts his finger in the flubber he pokes a hole."

"Oona is using the comb to make dots and lines all over the flubber."

"T'Kai is putting the lid on the cup."
I noticed as I described and pointed out these actions, the children seemed to copy what they saw and heard. They also stayed at the flubber table a little bit longer than usual.

Flubber journal entry #2:
Today I brought a homemade binder book full of photos I have taken of the flubber explorations we have been doing. I read the book to the children when they came to the flubber table to play. They were engrossed in the story of themselves and the flubber; and when I was done, a number of them looked through the book again. The children continued to explore the flubber, trying out the tools and actions that were in the book. I continued to refer them to the photos and describe their actions. They stayed at the flubber table even longer today.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEB CURTIS

Flubber journal entry #3:
I saw Wynsome sitting by herself looking at the flubber book and she was imitating the poking action that Kiran was doing in the photo. She was poking the photo with her finger just like he was. I wonder if when she sees these reflections, she notices things not readily available when she is immersed in her actual experience with flubber. When I reflect back children's work to them in these ways, does it help them develop a symbolic representation of it in their mind?

Flubber journal entry #4:
I worked with Oscar and Hannah with the flubber again today using my observations and photos to show them back their work. As they played, I continued to describe what I saw them doing and pointed out their actions. After I had taken a number of photos, I immediately downloaded them into the computer, and invited the children to look at a "show" about their work. Many other children

Capturing the specific details of what you hear and see, documenting with a clipboard and pen, a sketch, tape recorder, or camera can help you learn more about individual children, and see the complexity of the unfolding moments.

came over, fascinated to see themselves on the screen. They pointed excitedly, saying each other's names.

Oscar was very interested in seeing a photo of himself making an imprint in the flubber with the edge of a plastic container. As he looked at the photo he made a grunting sound and pointed, indicating that he had pressed hard to make the imprint. I suggested that he show us with the real flubber. This time as he pressed hard to make each imprint, he made the same grunting sound. Hannah showed us she caught on to Oscar's meaning right away. She demonstrated by pressing her hands together really hard and squinting her face as she made the same grunting sound. Both of them continued to make imprints in the flubber grunting as they worked.

I got to witness the miraculous process humans go through to develop language!

This thrilled me, as I believe that the work we have been doing to revisit our actions with descriptions and photos has encouraged the children to create a shared language for the hard pressure needed for imprinting. I saw this event as important for the development of their symbolic thinking and language, but I also saw a bigger significance. I got to witness the miraculous process humans go through to develop language!

These few entries are just a glimpse of the joy and deep engagement that the children and I had together. Using observations and photos with the children gave me a profound respect for their insights and abilities. Sharing these stories with the children's families helped us all slow down and appreciate this special time of life. What I discovered is that when I stopped, watched, and waited, I learned so much more about the children and myself. My actions communicated respect for the children and, in turn, furthered the possibilities for deeper meaning in the ordinary moments. I came to trust the children as partners in the teaching and learning process. I couldn't wait to get to work each morning, looking forward to what the day would hold for us.

Recipe for Flubber

Mix in a bowl
1 cup of Elmer's® glue
3/4 cup of water
Food color or water color

Mix in another bowl
1/2 cup of water
1-2 teaspoons of Borax®

Pour both bowls into one bowl and mix. Watch the magic!

Using Beginnings Workshop to Train Teachers

by Kay Albrecht

Do it yourself — create an observation journal: Curtis's vivid examples of what she learned from capturing the details in her observation journal are worth a try. Work with teachers to begin the process of creating and adding entries to an observation journal.

Sharing observations with children: Sharing the details of keen observation with children by describing what you see to the children seems like an easy way to implement an idea. Try it out and keep watching for insights and the "joy and deep engagement" reported by Curtis.

Talk it over: Help teachers pair up to review observation journals and dialogue. A colleague may see things differently and add insight to what the written journal reveals.