

Smile Maker

By: Tracey Smith-President

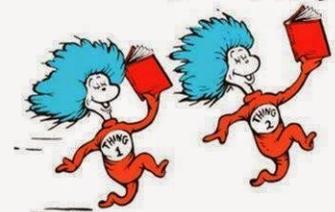
I've been thinking a lot about community lately and maybe it's because I recently completed a class called Community Building (SWRK 660) or perhaps it's because I have been traveling the road of breast cancer and have found myself enormously supported and cared for by various communities. I was not interested in taking this community building class at all and enrolled only because I was pushed to do so. I was also not interested in getting breast cancer but life happens. This leads me to talking about community because I now know how important community is to all people, families and children.

Whether you are a teacher in a cooperative preschool, community preschool or childcare center, you are part of a very important community. Although families are ultimately responsible for the care of their children, I believe that a supportive community is the best environment for nurturing a child. It takes a village, right? One definition of community is a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests and goals. A common goal that is shared among all parents is that they all want the best for their children and we as teachers feel the same. Hence preschool becomes a community. Communities can be complicated at times but they are almost always supportive, if you are involved in the right one. I have found that one of the best ways a community can be helpful to one another is to ask what is needed. We need to ask and we need to listen in order to work towards the goal. Using your professional knowledge and experience puts you in a position to support families within your school community. I've found this to be one of the most rewarding experiences while working in a co-op. I feel that we are all on the same team. You can be proud of the community that you are in because you are one of a child's first advocates towards creating a childhood in which children gain experiences and important life skills which lead to a positive love of learning.

On another note, I would love to thank you for being such a supportive community to me while dealing with my health challenges. Your well wishes and care touched me beyond words.



The MORE
that you read,
the MORE things
you will know.
The MORE that you
LEARN,
the MORE places you'll go.



HOW TO PICK A PRESCHOOL IN LESS THAN AN HOUR

DAVID L. PIRP UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKLEY PROFESSOR

As soon as I walked into a prekindergarten class in Union City, N.J., I was sucked in by the hum of activity. Art plastered the walls, plants were hanging from the ceiling, and in every nook there was something to seize a child's imagination. Some kids were doing cutouts of paper clothing and others were at an easel, painting. A bunch of children were solving puzzles on a computer, while another group was building a pink cardboard chair, which they called "A Chair for My Mother." In the reading nook a girl was learning about how, when the wasp larva hatches, it eats the spider. Three classmates were playing dress-up, trying on old felt hats and checking themselves out in the mirror.

The teacher was everywhere — praising kids, offering suggestions when they were stumped and, sometimes, peacemaking. Two boys were peering at insects through a microscope when they started fighting over who got to look next. Ms. Rojas deftly diverted them. "How many parts does an insect body have?" she asked. The boys knew: "Three parts — the antenna, abdomen and legs."

"How about an insect salad — would you want to eat it?" she inquired. "Ugh," the boys chorused. "Why not — are they bad for you?" she asked. The boys thought about it. "Maybe if you chopped them up they'd be O.K.," one volunteered.

At that moment I wished that I were 4 years old and could join the festivities.

But most pre-K classrooms look entirely different. After surveying preschools nationwide, Robert Pianta, dean of the University of Virginia Curry School of Education, concluded that "superficial task demands, including giving directions and assigning routine tasks, predominate over children's involvement in appropriate conceptual or class-based activities."

A preschool in Chicago that I visited a few years earlier boasted that it was certified by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the pre-K equivalent of the Good Housekeeping seal. But it didn't merit that encomium. A big room that might once have been a storeroom had been split into mini-classrooms, each about 15 feet square, separated by chest-high partitions. Noise reverberated throughout the building.

"Stay within the lines," a teacher commanded a 3-year-old boy. "You're not tracing the triangle." After he started coloring, she returned, exasperated. "You weren't paying attention during circle time. Only color the triangles, not the circle or the heart." The teacher turned to me. "I like the kids when they stay within the lines and color beautiful," she said. In another class, children were told to paint the bottom section of a pyramid. The directions were the same: Stay within the lines. It turned out that the kids were painting the food pyramid, but they didn't know that's what they were doing.

What I saw made me wish that I could round up a passel of children and make a run for safety. Deborah Stipek, a professor of education at Stanford, makes the point more bluntly: "What I see in a lot of preschools is much worse than coloring between the lines. It's teachers yelling at kids all day."

Though I've spent many hours crouching in these classrooms, I'm no expert. What I witnessed should be obvious to any mom or dad. That's why, even if you are an anxiety-ridden parent, you can rapidly determine whether you want to send your child to a particular preschool.

When you walk in the door of a prekindergarten, check out the walls — they should be festooned with children's projects, and not, as is too often the case, plastered with posters that are calculated to please adults and mounted too high for 4-year-olds to see. Look around. There should be lots of different things for children to do.

If the kids say hello, and quickly return to what they have been doing, that's a good sign, for it suggests that they're developing social skills. But if they mob you, you have your answer: This isn't the place for your child. You might consider yourself to be a fascinating person, but you shouldn't be more interesting than whatever activity these 3- and 4-year-olds are engaged in.

Is the class pin-drop silent? I've talked with well-to-do parents who equate obedience with quality, but unless you want your child in boot camp, that's unhealthy. (Of course, running wild isn't a good thing either; that stored-up energy belongs on the playground.) Kids should be quiet, if a bit squirmy, during circle time, when they are gathered around their teacher. But mostly they should be engaged with one another, because that's when most learning occurs. Their teacher should be talking with them, not at them.

And if the classroom looks like a healthy mix of kids from different backgrounds, that's all to the good. Children learn a lot from their classmates, and kids with different experiences have much to contribute to one another.

That's it, more or less. If you have a chance to talk briefly with the teacher, ask her how she decides to spend time with one group or another. Inquire about how she handles children who haven't fully learned how, as the argot goes, to use their words, take turns or share. While the answer matters, you mostly want to make sure she has really thought about those things. Winging it doesn't make for good teaching.

I imagine many readers believe that I've committed heresy. To them, Montessori or HighScope, Reggio Emilia or Waldorf, or some other school of pre-K pedagogy embodies the Holy Grail. But there's no reason to believe that one of these is better than the others.

The key is how well a particular model of teaching is being carried out. A class can be a joy when the teacher truly understands how properly to use, say, the HighScope approach, which has the children decide what they want to do that day, then tackle the chosen project and later review what they've learned. But these techniques are devilishly hard to pull off. When done badly the result is a mighty mess. That's why the school district in the first example allows the best teachers to design a curriculum that, while borrowing from well-vetted approaches, makes the most sense for their kids.

For parents, the bottom line is simple: Watch closely what's happening in the classroom, pick a preschool that you wish you had gone to, and your child will do just fine.



The Big Round Sun

The big round sun in a
springtime sky

(form circle with arms)

Winked at a cloud that
was passing by.

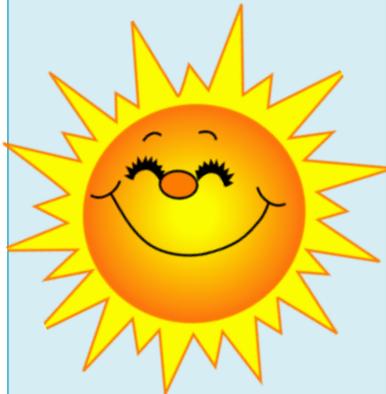
(wink eye)

The little cloud
laughed as it scattered
rain,

(flutter fingers down-
ward)

Then out came the big
round sun again.

(form circle with arms)



Weather Watch

March

Wind Watching: Make simple windsocks by stapling crepe paper strips around the edges of plastic lids. Punch two holes on opposite sides of the lids and attach pieces of string for hangers. Hang the windsocks outside and let the children watch them swing and sway when the wind blows.

April

Rain Painting: On a rainy day, give the children a paper plate with drops of food coloring on the plate. Then walk outside and hold the plate in the rain for about a minute. Take the plate inside and talk about the designs created by the rain.

May

Greenhouses: Clear plastic salad containers make great greenhouses for sprouting seeds. Let the children fill the bottoms of the containers with potting soil, add seeds and a thin layer of soil, then water the seeds. Replace the lids and set the greenhouses in a sunny spot.

Wave Jars

Fill a baby-food jar halfway with water and add two or three drops of food coloring. Fill the jar to the top with vegetable oil. Screw the lid on tightly and secure with hot glue if necessary. The children will enjoy tipping the wave jar back and forth to create waves.

Healthy Teeth

Show the children an eggshell. Explain that it is made of calcium, just like our teeth. Set out a glass of cola, and a glass of juice. Place part of an eggshell in each glass. Leave another part out. Predict with the children what might happen. After two days, examine the eggshells. The shells in juice and cola are stained and more brittle than the shell left out. Discuss the importance of dental hygiene and eating healthy foods.

Cover a table with a sheet or blanket. Place big, fluffy pillows inside the tent. Let the children use the space for a camp-out reading hideaway.

Camp Out with Books

What Kindergarten Teachers *Want* and What You *Can and Should Do!*

Ellen Parlapiono Scholastic.com

If your child's preschool years are coming to an end, your thoughts are probably turning toward kindergarten. But is your child ready to move on to the "big" school? What skills do kindergarten teachers expect their new students to have? To help answer those questions (and ease your mind), we've asked highly regarded kindergarten teachers from around the country to share their insights on helping your child gain the right mix of kindergarten-readiness skills.

The skill sets they are looking for might surprise you. Because of the national focus on improving education and meeting standards, you might think that it's most important for children to enter kindergarten knowing their ABCs, numbers, shapes, and colors so they can keep up with the curriculum. While teachers would love children to come in with some letter and number recognition, they don't want you to drill your kids on academic skills. There are equally — if not more — important readiness skills that set the stage for your child's learning. Raising an eager learner is the goal, and it can be achieved easily through play and day-to-day activities.

What follows are the top readiness skills that **kindergarten teachers** look for:

1. Enthusiasm toward learning

Kindergarten teachers WANT: Is the child eager to explore and discover? Does the child ask questions? Are they motivated and persistent with regard to completing a task? Children who are enthusiastic toward learning have higher chances of success in school.

Preschool teachers CAN: Provide activities that allow the children to explore, investigate, ask questions and persist at answering their own questions with your guidance (rather than telling them how things work).

2. Solid oral-language skills

Kindergarten teachers WANT: Can the child talk about where they've been, what they've done (such as discuss a recent family trip to the zoo)? Children need a wide variety of words and language skills. The more words they know and can use in daily conversation, the more able they will be to guess at new words they learn in kindergarten.

Preschool teachers CAN: Introduce new words and descriptions for new words. (We have a lot of cars, trucks and bus toys here. What are they used for? Have you ever been on a bus? These are modes of transportation or ways to get from one place to another").

3. The ability to listen

Kindergarten teachers WANT: One of the teachers interviewed aptly states that listening is a key part of school behavior. Children need to be able to concentrate on not only what the teacher is saying, but also to attend to what their peers are saying.

Preschool teachers CAN: Read, read, read! Ask questions about stories "What do you think the puppy will do next?" "Why do you suppose that happened?" Sing songs and read rhymes! These help the children break down sounds and patterns in sounds.

4. The desire to be independent.

Kindergarten teachers WANT: The basic self help skills are necessary if kindergarteners are to adjust quickly to school. When skills children can do for themselves is done for them (such as hanging up their coat or backpack; washing hands; putting on their jacket; fastening simple buttons or snaps, etc.) are done for them (because it is quicker for the teacher or parent), the child is dependent on the teacher to do these things for them.

Preschool teachers CAN: Yes, it takes more time, but it builds independence: Encourage the children to put on their own jackets, including trying to zip and button on their own; clean up their own spills; pour their own drinks.

5. The ability to play well with others

Kindergarten teachers WANT: Children need guidance on how to use social skills such as taking turns, sharing, problem solving arguments, etc. These skills come from practice and guidance. They will need to work through these interactions in kindergarten as well. If they have not been given the opportunity to work through issues, they will not be able to express their feelings in words in kindergarten. Teachers would like their entering kindergarteners to be able to identify the feelings of another by observing their facial expressions or by being able to identify that the other person is crying because they are sad.

Preschool teachers CAN: Rather than telling two children who will get a turn next or how to take turns, guide children through problem solving skills when there is an issue with sharing or taking turns. This helps them to develop the skill of expressing their wants while listening to the other child's wants and needs. Encourage this by asking the children how to solve the problem, "How can we use these so everyone will have their own turn?" "What can we do about this problem?"

6. Strong fine motor skills

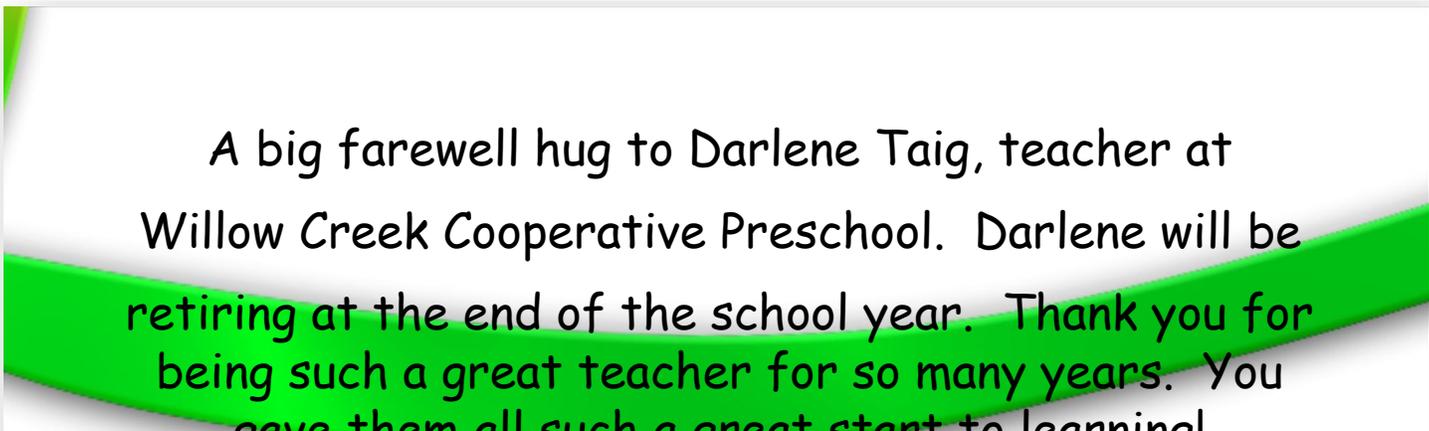
Kindergarten teachers WANT: Teachers stated that the children's hands should be strong enough to perform the fine motor tasks expected in kindergarten. In kindergarten they will be mastering cutting, gluing, holding a pencil, coloring and more. Reread those two sentences. Did you hear it? Children **WILL BE** mastering these skills. They are not expected **TO HAVE** mastered them before kindergarten.

Preschool teachers CAN: Provide different writing items (fat and skinny markers and crayons; pencils; chalk) to use. Allow them to use them freely to get the feel of them. More importantly, provide many fine motor activities such as lacing, stringing beads, playdough, etc. for fine motor development. The focus here is that their fine motor control needs to be strong. That's what we, as preschool teachers, need to focus more on and the statement explains why.

7. Basic letter and number recognition

Kindergarten teachers WANT: Kindergarten teachers do want incoming students to be able to recognize most letters by sight, to count to 10, identify numbers 1 to 5 and know some shapes and colors. However, they believe it is their responsibility to teach the children letter sounds and how to write. We, as preschool teachers, have the responsibility to help them recognize these items and practice but, not insist that they master each one.

Preschool teachers CAN: Provide sorting activities (sorting blocks, beads, cars, etc.); magnetic numbers and letters on a board. One teacher in the article suggests that we "teach by immersion" such as "Look! That sign spells "Happy. Let's spell it h-a-p-p-y".



A big farewell hug to Darlene Taig, teacher at Willow Creek Cooperative Preschool. Darlene will be retiring at the end of the school year. Thank you for being such a great teacher for so many years. You gave them all such a great start to learning!

We will miss you at TA!!

This newsletter has two articles that can be shared with preschool parents. They can be shared with new parents coming to your Open Houses, and with current parents as they get ready to send their children to kindergarten. Please print and share.



The Smile Maker is your newsletter. If you have anything you would like to submit for our next issue please email it to the editor: reenehult@yahoo.com.



The Greater Detroit Cooperative Preschool Teacher's Association does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, nation or ethnic origin.





GDCPTA

Greater Detroit Cooperative Preschool Teacher's Association

TA Learning Fair

Schoolcraft College

Thursday March 2, 2017

8:30-2:30

SHARE FAIR - Presented by our own GDCPTA members.

Fostering Emotional Intelligence.

A look into the Waldorf philosophy.

5 HOURS OF TRAINING.

Conference Calendar

March 2, 2017

TA Spring Workshop

Schoolcraft College

March 4, 2017

Appelbaum Training Institute

Plymouth, MI

April 20-22, 2017

MIAEYC

Grand Rapids

**Don't Forget to Get the Word out
about GDCPTA!**

**Our wonderful workshops can be
counted towards the 16 clock
hours of annual training required
by licensing.**

preschoolteachersassociation.weebly.com

TA Workshops 2017-18

Learning Fair: 8-23-17

Fall Workshop: 11-3-17

Spring Workshop: 3-1-2018

Schoolcraft College