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Most important job each day is to be present for children and take time to have genuine conversations with them. Talking with children helps them to feel recognized, respected, and appreciated by you. This in turn helps them to feel good about themselves—and safe to explore, experiment, question, and test new limits—all prerequisites for learning.

**Charlotte Stetson, Early childhood consultant**

**Contribution to TYC:** Coauthor of “Tips for Talking with Children”

**Early childhood education focus:** Creating videos, written material, and training approaches that focus on teacher-child interactions, curriculum, observation, and portfolios.

**Message to readers:** The words we say to young children can stimulate thinking, inspire curiosity and creativity, build meaningful relationships, and motivate engaging conversations. Young children can be wonderful conversationalists when the adults around them watch closely, listen with open minds, and show genuine interest in the children’s actions, ideas, and creations. I hope this article is a springboard to some wonderful conversations.

**Nancy P. Jones, Director of The Children’s Farm**

**Contribution to TYC:** Author of the full-length version of “Big Jobs”.

**Early childhood education focus:** Directing a small nonprofit nursery school, leading parent-child workshops, and connecting children’s social and emotional growth with other kinds of learning.

**Message to readers:** I wrote my article to share our observations and experiences with other teachers. I hope they can look at their curriculum and activities and find ways to incorporate those that would encourage the social and emotional growth of the children in their classrooms.
Read, Question, Explore, & Learn

Preschoolers are natural scientists—curious and full of wonder and questions about their world. They are hands-on investigators who learn as they turn over rocks to examine the bugs living underneath or plant seeds that they water and watch grow into pumpkins or tomatoes. This book answers some of children’s questions and, with your guidance, inspires them to keep asking, exploring, and learning.


This book asks eight intriguing questions, including, “Why do snails carry houses on their backs?” and “Why do sheep have curly wool?” The first answer to each question is always slapstick (snails like to go camping, sheep like to wear curlers in their hair). Children love to join in with the No! on the next page, and they are eager to discover the real answers that follow (shells protect snails from predators and sun; curly wool traps air to keep sheep warm).

This book is fun and factual and it teaches children to wonder about the natural mysteries around them. It ends with a surprise that reinforces children’s wonder and desire to explore. This book is a sure hit for read-aloud time. Then, to promote scientific explorations, you can:

- **Keep a running list** of children’s questions about the natural world and possible answers. Help the children find out the facts using hands-on exploration, observation, books, other print and Internet resources, and by interviewing local experts. What new discoveries do children make?

- **Offer interesting items** children can explore and wonder about.
  
  > Bring in dryer lint from home. Where does it come from? Where would it go if it didn’t collect in the dryer?
  
  > Share a bird’s nest. How do birds build their nests? What makes them strong?

  > Examine some orange peels. How long will it take them to dry? How much do the peels weight today? How much will they weigh tomorrow or next week? Why does the weight change?

- **Notice the things that interest children.** Listen to their conversations, observe their discoveries, and write down their questions. Then provide the resources they need to explore their interests and share them with others.

More new books for preschoolers

**Alligator Boy,** by Cynthia Rylant. Illus. by Diane Goode. 2007. Harcourt. This boy insists on being an alligator and stays in character everywhere—even at school, where being an alligator helps him confront a bully.

**The Incredible Book Eating Boy,** by Oliver Jeffers. 2007. Philomel. Henry discovers that the more books he eats, the smarter he gets, until one day he realizes he’s had too much.

**Wolf! Wolf!** by John Rocco. 2007. Hyperion. Wolf is too old to chase animals, so he plants a small garden. When the garden fills with weeds, he wonders how to get his next meal.

What Do I Do? I Teach!

NORY RODRIGUEZ

Preschool Teacher, Association to Benefit Children, Echo Park, in New York,

I became a teacher because I wanted to be part of influencing the amazing, growing little minds that eventually will run our world.

One thing about teaching that surprised me is how each day can be different.

I’m still teaching because I love it.

Three words that describe my teaching style are fun, creative, and persistent.

The best part of the classroom day is choice time because children can socialize and problem solve, and we get to see their individual personalities.

I would tell a new teacher the most important thing you can do is be patient and flexible.

My favorite children’s book is The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear, by Don and Audrey Wood.

My favorite children’s song is “I’m Not Perfect,” by Laurie Berkner.

I’m really proud of the literacy center in our classroom, because it provides the children a variety of authors, concepts, and books they can relate to.

I invite the children’s families to participate in our classroom by sharing their cultures through activities, such as cooking, art, and folk stories and songs. We also welcome parents to volunteer on trips and in the classroom throughout the year.

At the end of every day I feel tired, of course, and content at the same time to know that the children walked out of the classroom with new knowledge.

Changing the Way We View Children’s Growth

“Learn the Signs. Act Early.” is a campaign of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to educate teachers and families about when a child should reach milestones in how he or she plays, learns, speaks, and acts. A delay in any of these areas can be a sign of a developmental problem, even autism. The earlier delays are recognized, the better we can help all children reach their full potential.

The CDC offers free Child Care Provider Resource Kits in English and Spanish. Each kit includes a CD-ROM with fact sheets to print out covering developmental milestones from three months to five years, various types of developmental disabilities, and developmental screening. The CD-ROM also includes milestones checklists to print out and share with families as well as tips for talking with them about child development.

Order your kit at www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/actearly or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.
Ten Ways to Use Egg Cartons

When you ask families for supplies, you are sure to get a mountain of egg cartons. How can you use them to support learning? Here are 10 quick ideas. Have fun!

1. **Art area storage.** Close the lid, turn the carton over, and punch a hole in the top of each cup. Use it to hold scissors, paintbrushes, markers, or chalk.

2. **Counting game.** Number the cups from 1 to 12. Children can fill each cup with the appropriate number of beads, marbles, or plastic counters.

3. **Individual painters’ palettes.** Remove the tops, then cut Styrofoam or plastic cartons in half to make two sections of six cups. Fill with up to six tempera colors of the painter’s choice. When painting is over, clean-up’s a snap.

4. **Sorting containers.** Provide lots of objects to sort by color, shape, size, or texture. Children can put like objects in each cup. Offer tweezers to build small muscles and coordination. Make sure objects cannot be swallowed.

5. **Collections.** Take a nature walk, then use cartons to store rocks, acorns, seeds, baby pinecones, and other small found items.

6. **Blocks and props.** Close and tape shut many cartons. Voilà! You have a set of giant blocks. Children can glue cartons together to build castles, doll beds, bridges, trains, tables, and more.

7. **Planters.** Plant seeds in each cup of a paper egg carton. Have children take turns watering and watching for growth. When the seeds sprout, separate and plant the seedling-filled cups in a garden. The paper will disintegrate and the plants will flourish.

8. **Lost and found center.** Provide cartons without lids to collect stray pieces from games. If something is missing from a game, children can look for it in the lost and found carton.

9. **Measuring tool.** Cut a carton in half lengthwise to make two rows of 6 cups. Have children tape rows end to end to make a long row of 12 cups. Use it to measure areas in the classroom and outdoors. Keep cutting and taping. How long can you make your egg carton measuring tool?

10. **Boats:** Cut Styrofoam cartons into rows of three cups. Children can glue paper scraps to straws to make sails. Use clay or playdough to insert a sail in the middle cup and place the carton boat in the water table. Encourage thinking: “What makes the boat stay afloat?” “What could you do to make the boat sink?” “How could you make a boat with two sails?” “What would happen if the boat didn’t have a sail?”
Being in a group setting is stressful for many preschoolers. Some have not yet developed the social skills they need to get along with others. The activity level and noise in a classroom may be overwhelming. For many children it is hard to say good-bye and spend the day apart from the people they love and trust the most. Daily routines can be confusing, leaving children tired and cranky.

Stress interferes with learning. It can lead children to act out in ways that may hurt themselves, other people, or things.

Imagine how it feels to be a young child in your classroom. Is it noisy? Confusing? Overwhelming? Or is it a place where children can feel safe, relaxed, and competent?

This checklist will help you identify steps you can take—if you haven’t already—to decrease stress and increase children’s comfort and success.

Arrange your space to support individuals within the group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUGGESTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>WE DO THIS</th>
<th>WE CAN TRY IT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Set up a one-child-at-a-time activity area.</strong></td>
<td>Include a single chair and a table or desk with a basket of soothing items—squeezable balls, small stuffed animals, table blocks and props, finger puppets, crayons and paper.</td>
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<td><strong>Provide a self-service snack area.</strong></td>
<td>Put out the food and drinks on a table so children can eat and drink as needed rather than waiting for a set snack time.</td>
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<td><strong>Include duplicates of popular items.</strong></td>
<td>Avoid frustration and disagreements between children by making sure children have the toys and materials they need to carry out their plans.</td>
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<td><strong>Offer relaxing music and head-phones.</strong></td>
<td>Suggest children listen to favorite songs when they need a break from the busy-ness of the classroom.</td>
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<td><strong>Create small, cozy places.</strong></td>
<td>Set-up two beanbag chairs in a corner, a wading pool filled with pillows, a small tent, or a blanket-covered table where one or two children can play or relax together.</td>
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### Prevent and reduce stress throughout the day

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<tr>
<td>Offer plenty of opportunities for children to move.</td>
<td>Give children time each day for physical activities like climbing, running, jumping, skipping, riding tricycles, and pulling wagons.</td>
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<td>Provide ways to do activities alone as well as in a group.</td>
<td>Spread a blanket under a tree with a basket of books and small toys for children who don’t want to join in a group game. Use baby baths or dishwashing tubs for individual water or sand play with the same kinds of props found in the group sand and water play tables.</td>
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<td>Limit the time children have to wait.</td>
<td>Plan so children don’t have to stand in line to wash their hands or use the bathroom. Sing songs, do fingerplays, retell stories, or play games when a short wait is unavoidable.</td>
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<td>Reduce the glare and buzz from overhead lights.</td>
<td>Turn off a few overhead lights. If it seems too dark, turn on a lamp or two.</td>
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<td>Help children make and keep friends.</td>
<td>Pair children to do a job; organize cooperative games; offer a new prop to help a child enter a pretend play scene or join a group of block builders. Talk with a child about who and what he played with yesterday—turn it into a story that can continue today.</td>
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<td>Spend one-on-one time with children.</td>
<td>Read a book to a child, talk briefly during transitions, rub a child’s back at nap time. In short, focus complete attention on one child—even if just for a few moments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have some fun.</td>
<td>Read a humorous book, act it out with puppets, and invite children to laugh and be silly.</td>
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### Include families so children feel connected to their loved ones

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<td>Communicate with families daily.</td>
<td>Ask parents to share news (in person or by note or e-mail) about what interests, excites, or upsets a child at home.</td>
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<td>Reflect families and their home languages and cultures in the classroom.</td>
<td>Put family photos on the wall and in scrapbooks; play families’ favorite tunes for the class; invite parents to share or help prepare home recipes; talk with children about what their moms and dads (brothers, sisters, grandparents, and so on) are doing.</td>
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<td>Encourage families to visit during the day.</td>
<td>Greet parents warmly; invite parents to eat lunch with their children. When family members volunteer, ask them to read a book to a small group, help a child find her lost shoe, or go on a class trip.</td>
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Tips for Talking with Children

By Judy Jablon and Charlotte Stetson

Conversations with children help me understand how they think, feel, and process information. As we talk together, I get to know each child. They get to know me. This creates strong, trusting connections between us that help me promote learning.

—Carol Agahan, Preschool Teacher, Louisiana
See how much happens in this short conversation:

Lucy: I helped Mommy make muffins. We had ‘gredients.

Teacher: What ingredients did you use?

Lucy: I poured the flour and stirred the egg. Know what? The flour got on me and the floor.

Teacher: Then what happened?

Lucy: We put blueberries in the bowl, 100 cups!

Teacher: That’s a lot of blueberries.

Lucy: I put them in all by myself.

In less than a minute, this teacher learns that four-year-old Lucy feels confident and proud about helping her mother bake, is working on number concepts and measurement, and is eager to talk and share stories. In response, Lucy’s teacher plans a cooking activity, adds a new counting game to the math area, and writes a note to herself to read Blueberries for Sal, by Robert McCloskey, with Lucy.

Through this brief chat, Lucy is learning new words and how to form sentences. She is learning how to listen. These are skills Lucy—and all children—will build on as they learn to read and write.

Here are ten tips for having good conversations with young children

1. **Make sure both people get a turn.** A conversation doesn’t have to be long, but it does have to involve taking turns talking and listening. Aim to switch speakers at least five times.

2. **Use facial expressions and comments.** They show you are listening and interested in the child’s ideas and comments. Nod your head, smile, or laugh. Add “Mm-hmm,” “Really?” or “Tell me more about that.”

3. **Pause after you say something.** This gives children time to think and focus on their ideas.

4. **Describe what you see children doing.** Young children often talk as they draw, paint, and build. Say, “I notice you are using a lot of orange paint. What made you decide to use that color?” “What does your painting remind you of?”

5. **Ask children to tell you their stories.** When Liana shows you her new shoes, you could say, “I see you have new red shoes. Tell me about your trip to the store to buy them.”

6. **Talk about books.** After reading time, ask children “What did you like about that story? What didn’t you like?” “Who does that character remind you of? Why?” “There was one part that made us all laugh. What else did you think was funny in the story?”

7. **Invite children to teach you how to do something.** Children may simply demonstrate, but as they do, you can carry on the conversation. “Tell me how you draw houses. I see you are making some straight lines. Oh, and squares for the windows.”

8. **Ask open-ended questions.** Children can then come up with a variety of answers. For example, ask, “What are some things you notice about the guinea pig?” Avoid questions with one-word answers: “What color is that?” “How many peas do you have on your plate?” Questions like these stop the conversation.

9. **Encourage self-expression.** Some children express their opinions freely; others need to be asked their views. “What do you think about this artwork?” “Why do/don’t you like today’s snack?”

10. **Connect the conversation to the child.** You can refer to a child’s home life, previous events, or other things you’ve talked about. On Monday morning, say to Marc, “You were excited about going to your grandpa’s birthday party this weekend. Tell me all about it.”

Try this . . . Challenge yourself to have a conversation with each child in your classroom at least once a day.

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I really value conversations with children because they’re fascinating, honest, and real.”

—Louis Mark Romei, Preschool Teacher, New Jersey
Preschool children can work together to do real, important work.

Preschoolers love to help out, but many times we don't give them the chance. Why? Because we think it's easier—and faster—to do everyday jobs ourselves. A child might take 15 minutes to complete a task an adult can finish in one. But those 15 minutes will promote lots of learning.

Think about this: children learn by doing. If you do everything for them, you take away learning opportunities. So give children the chance to help. They will feel useful, learn to work together, and feel pride when they do a “Big Job.”

What are Big Jobs?
Big Jobs are important, real jobs. Not busy work. They give children the chance to make a true contribution. Any useful, helpful task that requires more than one person can be a Big Job.

Children may work by themselves or with a teacher to move the indoor climber to a new spot, carry their chairs outdoors and wash them, or change the display on the family bulletin board. The best Big Jobs require energy, lots of discussion, and thinking caps on!

**Big Jobs help children learn**

Children need to be needed. When children work together on a Big Job, they feel useful and happy because they’re doing something valuable. They gain confidence when they complete a project. When the job is done, whether it’s baking bread or tidying the art area, they can see the results: a delicious, crusty loaf of bread or an organized shelf of supplies on which they can easily find scissors, glue, and markers.

Learning to cooperate and work with others is hard work. Focusing on a Big Job helps children to help each other figure things out, share ideas, and make compromises. It’s also a way to build friendship and trust—children learn that they and their classmates are capable people who can be counted on.

**Big Jobs in action**

At the Children’s Farm School near St. Paul, Minnesota, Big Jobs are part of the everyday preschool routine. As the school is located on a small former dairy farm, much of the children’s time is spent outside. The teachers at the school find that children build cooperation, teamwork, and goodwill while doing challenging work.

Children who worked together to drag a hay bale to the pony shared toys more peacefully in the sandbox. Hesitant children who were asked to help shovel snow tackled new puzzles with greater confidence. And children who had been aggressive became friendlier after energetic teamwork.

Your program is probably not on a farm, but there are still many Big Jobs that you and the children in your class can do. Here are some examples:

- Dig up weeds in the garden
- Change the water in the aquarium
- Rake leaves into a pile
- Set up a pet store for creative play
- Sweep the blacktop for trike riding
- Make a welcome sign for Family Night
- Fill and empty the water or sand table
- Move the small picnic table into the shade
- Add a new bag of sand to the sandbox

...children who had been aggressive became friendlier after energetic teamwork.
How can your class do Big Jobs?
Here are some tips.

• **Stop and think** before doing a job yourself. Could the children help you or do the job themselves?

• **Make an announcement** when a job needs to be done. Invite the children to do the same. Keep a running list of the jobs.

• **Build jobs into the daily schedule** as choices, or bring them up as activity ideas during group time.

• **Ask for volunteers**; never force children to do jobs.

• **Allow enough time** for children to finish their jobs.

• **Provide enough child-size tools, materials, and safety gear.**

• **Comment on children’s efforts:** “You worked hard making a new batch of playdough. Now we have a good supply for the art area.”

### Safety

Big Jobs require real and sturdy tools—brooms, sponges, rakes, mini-vacuum cleaners, and hammers, to name a few. Using real equipment is safer than using play versions made for children. Items children use, however, should be child size or adapted to fit small hands.

Supervise children at all times as they use and put away tools. Discuss safety concerns during group time. Involve the children in creating a few simple guidelines for safe use and storage of tools and equipment, such as “Wear goggles when hammering” and “Hang garden tools in the shed under their pictures.”

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**Conclusion**

Every day there are many Big Jobs children can do, both inside and outdoors. Doing these jobs gives children stronger friendships, stories to tell about their day, and more information about how the world works. Let children help with meaningful work and you will hear them say with pride, “We did it!”

Teachers, Big Jobs are a good way to link what you do in the classroom to children’s home lives. You can sign then make copies of the **Message in a Backpack** on the next page to share with families.
Big Jobs at Home

Preschoolers love to help out, but many times we don’t let them. Why? Because we think it’s easier—and faster—to do everyday jobs ourselves. Your child might take 15 minutes to finish a job you can do in one. But in 15 minutes your child can learn a lot! Have you heard your child talking about the Big Jobs we do in school? You can do Big Jobs with your child at home too. Big Jobs carry big rewards—for your child and your entire family.

What are Big Jobs?
They are jobs your child does with you (or others) that help the whole family. They may be indoor or outdoor jobs. Setting the table, planting flowers, and tidying up when visitors are coming are all Big Jobs.

How are Big Jobs different from chores?
You assign chores. Children volunteer to do Big Jobs because they want to help out. Also, Big Jobs are done together with other family members. Teamwork is an important part of doing Big Jobs.

What do children learn from doing Big Jobs?
They learn to:
• work with other people
• solve problems
• compromise
• contribute to their family

What are some Big Jobs preschoolers can do?
Cooking and baking—washing and peeling vegetables, stirring muffin batter, tearing lettuce leaves to make salad
Gardening—digging holes, planting seeds, raking leaves, weeding, watering plants indoors and outdoors
Doing laundry—carrying the laundry basket, sorting, folding, delivering clean clothes to each family member’s room
Caring for pets—feeding, brushing, walking, cleaning the cage or aquarium
Cleaning—rinsing dishes, dusting, emptying

Tips for Doing Big Jobs with Your Child
• Keep your child safe. Show your child how to safely use equipment like a rake or a vegetable peeler. Stay close by when it is his turn.
• Try to find child-size tools. They make jobs easier and safer.
• Have fun. Remember, your child chose to help out. Keep it enjoyable and she will want to do Big Jobs all the time.
• Talk while you work together. Chat about what you are doing and whatever else your child wants to discuss.
• Show your appreciation for the work family members have done. Say, “Thanks for setting the table, everyone. We are ready for dinner now and the table looks beautiful.”

A message from your child’s teacher
Pretend Play Leads to Real-Life Learning

Social and emotional
What do children learn by dressing up and role-playing as firefighters, doctors, or construction workers?
What social skills does it take to work together during dramatic play (for example, as firefighters)?
How could pretending to examine a patient help a child overcome her fear of doctors?

Cognitive
What might a child learn about math and science while bagging pretend groceries?
What can a grocery store scenario teach children about money?
What problem-solving skills might these children be working on?
What other thinking skills do children use during pretend play?
Language and literacy
What vocabulary could the children’s teacher introduce?
How can pretend play encourage language development?
How did the teacher incorporate early writing skills into dramatic play?

Physical
What examples of small motor development are pictured here?
How does pretend play strengthen hand-eye coordination?

Extending the learning
What could a teacher say or do to build on children’s learning during pretend play?
How might a teacher document progress related to learning standards?
Possible answers

Social and emotional

Learning through role playing: By imitating a firefighter using a hose, a doctor checking a patient’s ear, or a construction worker building a skyscraper, children learn about community roles and services and feel proud and satisfied. While acting as mothers and fathers children can be caring, loving, and responsible. Grocery store staff, construction workers, restaurant staff, and farm workers feel useful, needed, and accomplished.

Coping with fears: Pretend play allows children to explore their fears in a safe setting. A child can begin to conquer her fear of doctors by donning a lab coat and stethoscope and becoming the person who scares her. She replaces her fear with a sense of control.

Working together: Firefighters need to negotiate: Who will drive the fire truck? Who will rescue the baby? Whether fighting fires, serving and cleaning up after a meal, or feeding the cows, children must plan, compromise, cooperate, share, and communicate.

Cognitive

Math and science: As he fills a bag with groceries, the child learns that objects take up space and that the bag will hold only as many items as will fit the space inside it. Shoppers give the clerk money and the clerk gives them change. This exercise acquaints children with bills and coins, and they begin to understand the purpose of money. They also explore concepts related to adding and subtracting.

Problem-solving skills: The girls with the cows might decide how much grass to feed them. The child on the phone might be figuring out how to order a pizza. The boy washing dishes might find a way to separate the clean utensils from the dirty ones.

Thinking skills: When they pretend, children create pictures in their minds of past experiences and use their imaginations to think of new scenarios. These thoughts and images let children think about situations and objects that are not right in front of them and things that have not yet happened.

Language and literacy

Vocabulary: Lots of rich vocabulary words are associated with the play pictured here: stethoscope, suds, hard hat, grocery scanner, cash register, cud, menu, sign-in sheet, and clipboard, for example.

Language development: When using a phone a child must speak aloud, anticipate what an imaginary speaker on the other end of the line would say, and reply accordingly. Pretend play encourages conversations about topics such as:

- How long is the wait at the doctor’s office? At the restaurant?
- Why did you call?
- What does the baby want to do when she finishes her bottle?

Early writing skills: The clipboard and pen on the desk invite the boy to sign in at the doctor’s, dentist’s, or vet’s office. Likewise, the sign in the restaurant lets diners know they need to wait to be seated. By helping children post the sign and by sitting in the restaurant, the teacher encourages reading and writing in a natural setting.

Physical

Small motor development: Washing dishes, putting on fancy shoes, using a medical tool to examine another child’s ear, dialing a phone, hammering, writing, and putting containers in a bag—all are ways children can build small motor skills during pretend play.

Hand-eye coordination: When using props, children have to coordinate their eye and hand movements. Grocery clerks have to place items in bags, construction workers use
hammers, and dressers have to get shoes on the correct feet.

**Extending the learning**

Build on children’s learning during play. A teacher could

- Pick up another phone and talk with the child on the phone.
- Place a rubber pig on the table with the cows and say, “This pig doesn’t like grass. What can you feed him?”
- Ask the girls dressing up, “Where are you going?”

A teacher could also pose some “What if?” questions:

- What would you do if you ran out of water or if the fire truck broke down?
- How can you make sure the building won’t topple over?
- What will you do while waiting for your turn?

**Document learning related to standards:** After formally observing children and taking photos similar to the ones shown here, a teacher could match this evidence of learning to state or program standards. A series of photographs and notes could show individual children cooperating, writing, using fine motor skills, solving problems, talking, and thinking creatively.
Young children learn by using their senses. They see, hear, touch, move, examine, smell, and sometimes even taste things. Direct contact with materials helps children understand them.

Think about teaching a concept such as texture. You can tell children, “Cotton balls are soft.” But only when children have the chance to pick up a cotton ball, shake it, mush it, and rub it against their cheeks will they begin to understand what soft is. After touching the cotton balls, they can think of other soft things they’ve touched, like feathers and cat fur. One touch is worth a thousand words.

Would this be a good activity for the children in your class? If so, you can adapt this sample activity plan for the children you teach.
Textured Hands Activity Plan

Why do this activity? To give children firsthand experiences with different textures.

What can children learn? To understand the concept of texture, to use texture descriptions like soft and rough correctly.

Vocabulary words: Texture, rough, soft

Materials:
- Small items with soft textures—cotton balls, yarn, feathers, and pieces of velvet, silk, ribbon, and corduroy
- Small items with rough textures—bits of clay and playdough rolled in sand, emery boards, pieces of netting and sandpaper, kitchen scrubbers
- Glue sticks
- Large pieces of construction paper
- Scissors
- Containers for small items

Prepare for the activity
1. Draw a set of two large construction-paper hands for each small group. Label one Soft and one Rough.
2. Gather items with soft and rough textures. Put a mixture of items in several containers and place on the table.
3. List the vocabulary words to introduce to the children (see above) on construction-paper.

Lead small groups of 4 to 6 children
1. Have children sit at the table.
2. Pass around the containers. Invite children to look at and feel the items.
3. Talk about the children’s observations. Ask a few questions:
   > What words would you use to tell someone what these things feel like?
   > What other things look and feel like these?
4. Show children the large labeled hands. Point out the labels and discuss the meanings of soft and rough.
5. Have children cut out the hands.
6. Ask each child to choose two items from the containers—one soft and one rough—to go with each labeled hand. As children pick an object, they can tell the group why they made their choice.
7. Have pairs of children take turns gluing their objects on the hands one at a time. Ask questions while the children work.
   > How do the objects on each hand feel?
   > Which ones are softer or rougher than others?
8. List the creators of each set of Textured Hands on a sentence strip. Post the strips and Textured Hands on the bulletin board (for future conversations).
9. Take photos to document the children’s experiences throughout the activity.
10. Repeat the activity with other small groups.

Respond to individuals
1. With Samanda’s group, introduce the words soft and rough in Portuguese (macio and aspero) and label the hands in both Portuguese and English. Encourage Samanda to speak Portuguese while describing how the objects feel: (“A bolinha de algodão é muito fofa.” [The cotton ball is very fluffy.])
2. Have Cassie sit next to me to help her stay focused.

Follow up after the activity
1. Display the finished Textured Hands, accompanying sentence strips, and documentation photos on the wall.
2. Discuss during the day and at group time what is the same and what is different between the groups’ sets of Textured Hands.
3. Provide construction paper, scissors, glue, and soft and rough items in the discovery center. Post step-by-step instruction cards so children can trace and cut out one set of hands and then glue on soft and rough items.

Involve families
Send home photos and instructions so families can do this activity at home. Include a list of items they might have at home (for example, cotton balls, tissues, bubble wrap, emery boards, pot scrubbers). Invite families to send in photos and notes for the class newsletter.

Hands down, this activity makes learning come alive. The children learn about textures and they learn how to
- Compare, sort, and categorize items based on one or two features
- Follow directions
- Think and answer questions
- Use small muscles
- Take turns
- Share materials
- Work with others
Preschoolers Dance Their Way to Social Competence and Success

Exciting recent research provides evidence that dance and creative movement can help preschoolers develop social skills, make friends, and negotiate conflicts (Lobo & Winsler 2006). A randomly selected group of three- to five-year-old children enrolled in Head Start took part in an eight-week dance and creative movement program. Twice a week 10 children at a time attended 35-minute classes. Each class included a greeting, warm-up and stretching, high-energy exercises like jumping and skipping, reading a brief story or poem, making up a dance based on the story, and a cool-down time with soothing, relaxing music. For part of each class, the children followed the instructor’s movements, but most of the time they made up their own. During some activities, the children used musical instruments or props such as scarves and wings.

At the end of the eight weeks, children who took part in the dance and movement program had better social skills and less behavior problems than children in a second group who did not take part in the classes. The family characteristics of children in both groups were similar.

Read the research yourself! http://classweb.gmu.edu/awinsler/LoboWinsler2006.pdf
What does this research mean to you?
Most important, dance and creative movement activities should be part of your program. They support the development of self-regulation and increased control of the body, of powerful emotions, and of focus and attention (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). Self-regulation is linked to school readiness and academic success (McClelland et al. 2007). Dance and movement activities can increase positive behavior while also helping children develop the thinking and social skills they need for school. Here are some suggestions to help children dance, hop, and wiggle their way to school readiness and success.

Set up a dance and movement center in your classroom, outdoors, or in a resource room.

- Provide enough space for children to move about freely, without fear of bumping into objects or each other.
- Stock the center with scarves, costumes, and related props. Include music CDs or tapes and a CD or tape player. Make sure to include some soothing and relaxing music to help children cool down before they go on to other activities.
- Post photos or illustrations of dancers doing everything from ballet to flamenco to tap to hip hop.
- Include a few books about dance (for example, Color Dance, by Ann Jonas, or Barn Dance, by Pat Hutchins). Children can explore books on their own or with you.
- Offer dance and movement as a regular choice time activity that children can do themselves or with you (or a dance/music teacher).

Plan activities that introduce dance and movement

- Divide the class into smaller groups for dance and movement activities.
- Demonstrate dance movements, perhaps after reading a story. Then step back to let children invent their own ways to move their bodies.
- Play different kinds of music—jazz, ragtime, classical, opera, salsa—along with your favorites. Encourage children to listen to each type of music and then move their bodies in response.
- Assure children that there are no right or wrong ways to express themselves when they are inventing their own movement or dance routines.
- Play relaxing and soothing music as children warm up and stretch and during a cool-down period.
- Invite families to come in and teach children traditional or popular dances from their cultures. Some dancing has specific steps that are fun to learn together.

REFERENCES
Keeping the Joy in Learning

With today’s emphasis on early academics and learning standards, I feel we’ve forgotten that learning is supposed to be fun. I miss hearing children laughing and being silly as they playfully explore and discover. How can we keep the joy in learning and address standards?
— Stressed in Skokie

Dear Stressed,
I feel the same pressure you do. Teachers know that children learn best through play and when they are having fun; however, families—or even one’s supervisor—may not understand that. Without support from the director and families, teachers have a very hard time creating a playful learning environment. Here are some of the things I do to show parents that the children learn through play. You may already do them in your classroom, but may need to make them more visible.

- In the library area I wear a multicolored storytelling hat that inspires different character voices.
- In the art area I put on a children’s smock (very tight) along with my beret to demonstrate techniques and encourage children to use a variety of materials to express their creativity.
- In the music and movement area I often grab my microphone—a painted toilet tissue roll with a three-inch Styrofoam ball glued on top. As the next American Idol, I belt out preschool songs and nursery rhymes with the children.
- In the cooking area I don my chef’s hat and use an accent (sounding like a combination of Julia Child and Emeril) while reading recipes and measuring ingredients with the children to create delicious snacks.
- In the science area I slip into my lab coat, ruffle my hair, and become a mad scientist, supporting and guiding children as they observe and explore, discover, and experiment in the world around them.

By using my voice and creating a few teacher characters, I keep children giggling and laughing throughout the day and keep the joy in learning—and teaching.

Michael Lopez Breaux, Early Childhood Special Education Teacher, Monte Vista Early Education Center, Los Angeles, California

Dear Stressed,
Picture a 40-something-year-old riding a tricycle and making race car sounds while speeding around the bike paths with several (unlicensed) four-year-old drivers, encouraging them to turn left, turn right, stop, go, speed up, slow down—challenging, yes, but a lot of fun for the children.
I also scatter around a few hats and select clothing items (purchased from garage sales) indoors and out to transform myself into a variety of teachers:

- In the library area I wear a multicolored storytelling hat that inspires different character voices.
- In the art area I put on a children’s smock (very tight) along with my beret to demonstrate techniques and encourage children to use a variety of materials to express their creativity.
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Masami Mizukami, Early Childhood Teacher, Small Stages Nurturing Center, Houston, Texas
Next in The Teachers’ Lounge . . .

My co-teacher and I have worked together for five years. We make a good team and can count on each other to get things done. Lately, though, I’ve been feeling that we’re not giving the children our all. We could exchange some responsibilities, but I think we may need to do more than that to keep on our toes. How do teaching teams who have worked together for a long time avoid getting into a rut?
—Pondering in Poughkeepsie

Submit your responses to Pondering in Poughkeepsie to tyc@naeyc.org or write to Teaching Young Children, NAEYC Editorial, 1313 L Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005.

If your response is published, you will receive a $100 gift certificate to Gryphon House.

Do you have a question you’d like to raise in The Teachers’ Lounge? Write us and we may choose it for discussion in a future issue of Teaching Young Children.

If we publish your question, you too will receive a $100 gift certificate from Gryphon House.

Tools for Teachers

Books

Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House.
Here are more than 100 activities that address literacy while engaging children in movement games. The author describes the benefits of active literacy learning and the connections between music, literacy, and movement.

St. Paul, MN: Redleaf.
This guide to the basics of story dictation tells when and how to do it and how to use it to assess children’s learning. When teachers listen to children’s stories and write them down, they foster language, literacy, and thinking skills along with social and emotional development. The author covers documenting children’s learning, acting out stories, and sharing stories with families.

On the Web

Growing Ideas Tipsheets
www.ccids.umaine.edu/ec/growingideas

These useful tipsheets address many topics, including daily transitions, social skills, inclusion, and early literacy. The printable tipsheets follow a clear question-and-answer format.

WordWorld
http://pbskids.org/wordworld

This is the companion Web site to the PBS series WordWorld, a computer-animated show aimed at preschoolers. Each episode provides opportunities for wordplay, helping children make the connections between letters, sounds, words, and meaning that are necessary for reading. The Web site features interactive games for children along with information for parents and teachers.
Why... Cubbies?

Here’s my cubby. See, this is my name, a picture of me, and a picture of my family. This is my classroom. I belong here.

I hang my jacket on this hook. When we go outside, I can reach it and put it on. I feel proud when I do things by myself.

There is plenty of room to store the special things I bring from home, like my stuffed penguin and my blanket. At nap time, they help me fall asleep. I like having them nearby; they remind me of my family.

This is where my teacher leaves notes to my family. Sometimes my family leaves a note for the teacher here too. My teachers and my parents care about me so they like to stay in touch.

My classmates know that these are my things. They don’t go into my cubby, and I don’t go into theirs. I like having my own special place.

This is the painting I did today. I put it here so I will remember to take it home to show to my family. I can show them what I did today.

In the next issue of TYC
Classroom pets
Digital photography
Gardening