

Working with Other Staff Members

- _____ I show positive attitudes toward other staff members.
- _____ I give directions carefully.
- _____ I take directions from others.
- _____ I participate as a team member.
- _____ I coordinate my efforts with those of my coworkers.
- _____ I share my time, interest, and resources with other staff members.
- _____ I listen and hear staff feedback regarding my teaching.
- _____ I act on suggestions.
- _____ I communicate my perceptions of my teaching in an honest and clear manner.

Figure 5-5 (continued)

- Interpersonal communication
- Professionalism
- Dependency
- Cultural sensitivity
- Respect for individual differences in adults and children
- Preparing and maintaining appropriate learning environments
- Health and safety
- Personal qualities

Coevaluation. Evaluation by others associated with the teachers is a welcome addition to the evaluation process. Often a system includes more than a teacher's supervisor. Possible combinations are:

- Teacher (self-evaluation) and supervisor
- Teacher, supervisor, and parent
- Teacher, supervisor, and another team member (teacher, aide, student teacher)

A team evaluation is a more collaborative approach. More information is collected on the teacher's performance. A team approach may be more valid and balanced because a decision about teaching will be made by consensus and discussion rather than individual, perhaps arbitrary, methods. And the evaluation will have a wider perspective, evaluating a teacher's job performance from several viewpoints.

Coevaluation does have its disadvantages, however. It is a time-consuming process because more than one person is asked to evaluate a teacher. Feedback may be contradictory; what one evaluator sees as a strength, another may view as a shortcoming. The system can be complicated to implement. For instance, how do teachers work in a classroom and evaluate another team member at the same time? Can funds be found to bring in substitutes? Do fellow teachers have the time to

devote to evaluating each other? How and when does a parent evaluate a teacher? Clearly, a school must weigh these issues carefully as evaluation systems are devised.

A Systematic Process

Many evaluations are based on observable, specific information about a teacher's activities and responsibilities. This is known as a **performance-based assessment**. Figure 5-6 is an example of performance-based assessment in regard to a teacher's work with children. When paired with specific goals and expectations, this system is known as **competency-based assessment**.

Competency-based assessments outline exactly what teachers must do to demonstrate their competency, or skill, in their job responsibilities. Criteria are set as a teacher begins working (or a student starts a class or teacher education program). Areas are targeted that pinpoint what knowledge, skills, and behaviors the teacher must acquire.

The evaluation tools or format determine how valid the information gathered will be. Informal techniques may result in unreliable conclusions. A process that is formalized and systematic, related to goal-setting and professional development, has a greater chance of success. While it is important to select an appropriate method and assessment tool, keep in mind that it is the *process* through which the evaluation is conducted that matters most.

Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity

Throughout this text there are many examples that acknowledge the importance of culture in the early childhood setting. Often the differences we see between others and ourselves are obvious; sometimes they are not. Gonzalez-Mena (2001) writes about the ways our cultural framework

TEACHER GOAL	EXAMPLE
To help each child develop a positive self-concept	I greet each child with a smile and a personal comment.
To help each child develop socially, emotionally, cognitively, and physically	I have goals for each child in each developmental area, Fall and Spring.
To help provide many opportunities for each child to be successful	My parent conference sheets have examples; for instance, Charlie didn't want to come to group time, so I had him pick the story and help me read it—he comes every day now!
To encourage creativity, questioning, and problem-solving	This is my weak point. I tend to talk too much and tell them what to do.
To foster enjoyment for learning in each child	I do great group times and give everyone turns.
To facilitate children's development of a healthy identity and inclusive social skills	I participated in our center's self-study and am taking an anti-bias curriculum class.

Figure 5-6 Performance-based assessment ties the goals of the program to a teacher's work. This example asks the teacher to do a self-assessment; a director, parent, or peer could observe and make a second assessment.

influences our assumptions about other people's values and behavior. Cultural awareness has an effect on how a teacher relates to children, and this needs to be taken into consideration when assessing a teacher's performance. Insight about a teacher's social and cultural background is particularly useful if the evaluator is a member of the majority population and the teacher is not.

Caruso and Fawcett (1999) define five specific cultural factors that can affect communication, particularly where supervisors and staff members are concerned. They are:

1. *Time sense.* Being on time and doing tasks in a timely fashion are high priorities for many people raised in mainstream American culture. Each culture has its own concept of time, and the teacher who is always late for meetings may be reflecting the cultural context in which he or she was raised.
2. *Space.* How close you get to someone while talking is also a function of cultural context. In some cultures, invading another's personal space (their "comfort zone") is considered rude. If a teacher backs away, she may be considered cold and unfriendly. If the teacher is the one getting too close, he may be seen as forward and aggressive. These perceptions may be innocent reactions based on their cultural sensibilities and should be viewed in that light.
3. *Verbal and nonverbal communication.* Eye contact is seen in some cultures to be

disrespectful if prolonged; to others it may be a sign of interest and attentiveness. Other facial expressions, such as smiling (or not), gestures, and body language, communicate different things from culture to culture. Silence, too, is used in different cultures in a variety of ways with an assortment of meanings. Speaking loudly may be a cultural norm or it may communicate anger and accusations. Teachers and their supervisors need to learn each other's communication styles and be particularly aware of those that are culture-bound.

4. *Values.* Our values drive our behavior and responses. If a teacher comes from a background that emphasizes dependency in the early years and the school philosophy is one that encourages early independence, a cultural conflict can erupt and affect a teacher's evaluation adversely. Supervisors and teachers must understand each other's value system and what causes each of them to make certain decisions.
5. *Concepts of authority.* The way people deal with authority is also culture-specific. Early childhood professionals who supervise and evaluate staff members from cultures different than their own need to be aware of what cultural expectations surround the issue of authority. In some instances, authority figures are often male, and females are raised not to question authority. A correct answer may be more

culturally appropriate than expressing one's true feelings or ideas. The supervisor can avoid misunderstandings if he or she is aware that the teacher is used to an authoritarian style of leadership from supervisors and thus gear the conversation accordingly.

The evaluator has a rare opportunity to create bridges of understanding between and among many cultures. Jones (1993) notes that by seeing the connection "between their own cultural knowledge and their behavior as professionals in an early childhood setting," they can become "cultural brokers." Within their school community, they can create a two-way interchange about culturally relevant issues with children, parents, and other teachers.

Follow-Through

What happens after evaluation is critical to the overall success of an evaluation system. For instance, after gathering information for an evaluation session, a supervisor and teacher might discuss and evaluate concrete examples and live performance. Together they can establish goals for changing what may be ineffective or problematic.

Follow-through is the final part of the continuous *feedback loop* in a good evaluation system. Data are collected on teacher behavior and given to the teacher in person. Goals are set to improve teaching. A follow-up check is done periodically, to see how—and if—goals are being met. Teaching improves as recommendations are put into practice. Follow-through makes the *feedback loop* complete as information about improvement is communicated. Refer back to Figure 5-4 that illustrates this cycle.

Evaluation takes hard work, time, and dedication to a higher quality of teaching. It is also a shared responsibility. The supervisor must be explicit about a teacher's performance and be able to identify for the teacher what is effective and what is problematic. The teacher is responsible for participating in the evaluation.

Techniques for Productive Evaluation Sessions

Teachers must value the process itself. Evaluations emphasize how valuable the work of professional teachers is. The benefits of productive

evaluation sessions are clear. They range from improved self-esteem, higher levels of job effectiveness, and less absenteeism and turnover to assessment-related salary raises and other job benefits. Teachers need to analyze and take seriously the substance of the evaluation and understand its implications for their teaching. To further their professional growth, they must use this opportunity to improve the tools of their trade.

Certain techniques help make evaluation sessions productive for teachers:

1. Become involved from the beginning as the evaluation procedure is established. Know what is expected and how you will be evaluated.
2. Set a specific meeting time for your evaluation. Ask your supervisor for a time that works for you both.
3. Set some goals for yourself before meeting with your supervisor. If you know what you want to work on, you are more likely to get help achieving your goals.
4. Develop a plan for action. Be prepared to set a timeline for when and how you will work on your goals.
5. Establish a feedback loop. Make a follow-up date, and make copies of your goal sheet for both you and your supervisor.
6. Approach the meeting with a sense of trust, respect, and openness. Planning ahead promotes these attitudes.

What results from productive feedback sessions are better teaching and continued professional growth. Teacher evaluations help recognize strengths and build on them. They identify areas where growth is needed. They individualize the process itself. No two teachers are identical; each evaluation must be interpreted in terms of the behavior and stage of development of the individual person.¹ As teachers become more effective in their work with children, the quality of the entire program is improved.

THE BEGINNING TEACHER

Beginning teachers of young children cannot expect to successfully blend all of the many facets of a teacher—personal, team, and professional



¹ What teachers know about understanding and respecting diversity in children and families needs to be translated into working with colleagues.



The beginning teacher invests himself emotionally as well as physically.

identity—at once. Certainly, teaching young children carries with it the obligation to understand and accept the many roles and responsibilities associated with the title of “teacher.” However, beginning teachers must also be committed to the time and energy needed to *become* that total teacher.

Beginning teaching can be a great deal of fun as well as a unique learning experience. Textbook theories come alive as children naturally demonstrate child development concepts. New teachers expect to learn about individual child growth and development; many are surprised to discover that they also learn how children function in groups and with adults.

Planning and executing activities that fit the needs and abilities of the child are another part of the beginning teacher’s role. They provide an opportunity to test curriculum ideas, to see what happens when child meets materials. Working with an experienced teacher who models highly polished skills is an important part of the new teacher’s experience.

Identification with a number of professionals can help the beginning teacher find a teaching identity, and a team teaching situation can be especially supportive.

Yet we know that first-time teaching is not always fun. It is a time for intensive self-searching and self-revelations.¹ Many teachers’ own school experiences loom before them and undermine their confidence. Planning lessons takes long hours. There may still be doubts about being a teacher at all. It is uncomfortable to feel judged and criticized by others. This is a time of anxiety for most beginning teachers. But remember, even the poised, confident, and always-does-the-right-thing master teacher was once a beginner.



The Student Teacher

Many teacher training programs require a formal period of supervised work with young children either in the college’s child development center or in early childhood programs throughout the community. For students in such a program, practice teaching may be the first hands-on opportunity to work with children.

Beginnings for student teachers are just as important as they are for young children. A child’s first days of school are planned very carefully; likewise, there are some strategies for easing the



Good teachers know when to help children learn new skills.



¹ This may be the first time some students confront their attitudes toward classroom diversity and inclusion.



Through experience, teachers learn how to handle large groups of children. Learning to develop story time and reading skills is an ongoing process.

transition from student to student teacher. The following guidelines will help to make the first days of student teaching a satisfying and positive experience.

Before School Starts

- Contact the teacher and meet before school begins. Find out what time school begins, where the classroom is located, what the age group is, the size and makeup of the class, the daily schedule, and what hours you are expected to be on site. Ask if there are children with special needs and if there are cultural considerations of which you should be aware.¹ Find out what is expected of you the first few days. Be sure to meet the other administrative staff of the school.
- Visit the classroom to which you are assigned to become acquainted with its layout. Tour the yard as well. Find out where the janitor's room, kitchen, nurse's office, and storeroom are located.
- Share with the master teacher any special skills or talents you may have; let the teacher help you use these skills in new ways with young children. Let the teacher know about any other experiences with children: baby-sitting or camp counseling. Be sure to let the teacher know of any course requirements you must meet by this experience.
- Together, you, the master teacher, and your college instructor in student teaching will set goals and expectations for your student teaching experience. This will define more concretely what you would like to get out of the time you spend in the classroom, whether it is gaining experience with a group of children or learning to lead a group time by the end of the semester. By establishing common goals, the master teacher will be able to help guide a course so that these goals will be realized. An evaluation process related to those goals should be agreed on so that you will learn



¹ This may mark the beginning of a new teacher's pluralistic mindset.

whether you have met the expectations of the teacher, the school, and the program.

THE WHOLE TEACHER

At some point teachers emerge with their own point of view about teaching, based on self-knowledge of what calls them to teaching, why they teach the way they do, and what they know of the children they teach. This integration of knowledge and training, experience and life, is referred to by several names. Some say "real" teachers. Others refer to the "total" teacher. A common phrase is the "whole" teacher. Any one of these terms is an apt reflection of the relationship between how teachers view children and how they see themselves. There is a meshing of the emotional, physical, intellectual, and social aspects of each human being, adult or child.

Something happens when this blending occurs. During the first few years in the classroom, teachers consolidate their various official functions—merging their teacher training and experience with their personal style and nature. To discover and define the role of a teacher means to develop a personal teaching style. This is the sum of one's response to teaching, and it is unique to each teacher. When it happens, a beginning teacher becomes aware of "feeling" like a teacher. The strengths and convictions one has as a person blend with those one has as a teacher; they become inseparable. What teachers do and what teachers are become woven together. And in adding the personal teacher to the professional teacher, the sum becomes greater than two, allowing the whole teacher the freedom to grow in insight and understanding.

SUMMARY

Teachers of young children share with other teachers a variety of subject matter. The curriculum in the early childhood school is rich in math, science, language, social studies, geography, and the like. The format for these learning experiences is a "hands-on" approach. Teachers set out materials, equipment, and activities that invite children's interest and interaction.

In some area the early childhood teacher differs from others in the field of education. Team

teaching, teacher-child interactions, small-group emphasis, and adult relationships are more common in the early years than in other types of schools.

The teaching role is not restricted to working just with children. Teachers must learn to interact with numerous adults—primarily parents, other teachers, and administrators. Teaching roles will vary, depending on whether you teach alone or on a team. Team teaching is common in many early childhood programs and has many advantages. By keeping in mind ten essentials for successful teaching, all early childhood teachers can ensure themselves of optimal working conditions in their setting.

Early childhood teachers have multiple roles. They supervise and manage the classroom, interact with children and a number of adults, and set the emotional tone. Much of what they do occurs away from children. There are meetings to attend, reports to write, parent conferences to hold, and materials to purchase. These after-hours duties add to the depth of classroom experiences the teacher provides for the children.

Ethical situations arise frequently, calling on the teacher or administrator to make difficult choices about children and their lives. A professional code of ethics sets out standards of behavior based on core values and commitments all early childhood professionals share. It can support decisions individuals have to make in the best interests of children.

A systematic teacher evaluation process that is linked to professional growth opportunities is important. The process should include a self-evaluation by the teacher who, with a supervisor, sets appropriate professional goals. An evaluation by a supervisor and goal setting that relates to the program's philosophy and mission are also part of the process. Continuing growth within the professional field includes understanding the cultural context out of which teachers relate to the children, families, other staff members, and supervisors.

The student teacher gains valuable experience working directly with children under the supervision of a mature teacher.

As they grow and gain confidence, teachers pass through several stages of professional development and search for ways to be more effectively challenged. As they integrate teaching style and personality, they become whole teachers.

Key Terms

emotional framework
self-awareness
anti-bias

continuing education
feedback loop
performance-based
assessment

competency-based
assessment

Review Questions

1. What do you think are the five most important qualifications a teacher of young children should have? Why? Which do you possess? Which are most difficult for you?
2. How does a teacher "set the tone" for a classroom? How does being culturally competent fit in?
3. Give several reasons why team teaching is important in the early years.
4. List some of the common problems associated with student teaching. How can you avoid them?
5. Why is self-awareness important?
6. What does having a code of ethics mean to a teacher?
7. You will note many similarities if you review the Ten Essentials of Successful Teaching and the characteristics of a good school climate found in the teacher burnout section. Why do you think these are interrelated?
8. Who can be involved in evaluating teachers? Who would you prefer? Why?
9. How can teachers help to make their evaluation sessions productive?

Learning Activities

1. Draw a picture of the first classroom you remember. Place furniture in it, and note where your friends sat, where you sat, and where the teacher sat. Down one side of the paper write one-word descriptions of what you felt when you were in that classroom.
2. Survey a classroom where you teach or observe. How many different cultures are represented? How does the teacher respond to the cultural diversity?
3. Have you ever had a teacher who was "different"? Describe the person. What did you like most about that teacher? What did you like least? Would you hire that teacher? Why?
4. Write your own code of ethics.
5. Read the ethical situations posed in the section on professional development. Think about how you would solve them. Discuss your answers with a member of your class, a teacher, and a parent.
6. Observe a teacher working in a team situation and one who works alone in a classroom. What seem to be the advantages of each? Disadvantages? Which would you prefer for your first year of teaching? Why? Your third year? Your seventh year?
7. Do you disagree with any core values listed in the Ten Essentials of Successful Teaching section? What are they? How would you change them? Discuss your response with another teacher, another student, or your class instructor.

8. In small groups, discuss the popular images of teachers as reflected in current movies and literature. Is there consensus of the portrait of teachers today? Where do early childhood professionals fit into the picture? Are issues raised about teachers being addressed anywhere? Where? How? By whom? What would you conclude about your role as a member of the teaching profession?
9. What elements would you add to Figure 5-1 on the basis of your observation of early childhood programs and teachers?
10. Try to establish goals for your own growth as a professional in the following areas:

Area	Goal	Objectives/Implementation	Timeline
Programmatic			
Administrative			
Staff Relations			
Professional Growth			

Ask your supervisor or a colleague to help you make a realistic timeline for each goal.

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