

Creating a "Yes" Environment



By Teresa Gonsoski

Topics: Environment as the Third Teacher, The Power of the Environment

Date: April 07, 2015

Think back to when you were a child. How often were you told "no"? It probably felt frustrating and discouraging. Think of the children in your classroom now. How often are they told "no"? Are they—and you—able to enjoy your day together if you have to say "no" all the time?

When a classroom environment is set up so that teachers have to constantly say "no" to the children, it is stressful for everyone. The teacher stops being a facilitator of the children's play and learning, and instead becomes a police officer, monitoring what the children can and cannot do. To reduce this stress, a classroom must provide an environment where the children are able to feel successful through opportunities to explore without the limitations of adult expectations.

There are four important parts to a "yes" environment: respect for the child, process instead of product, opportunities for risk-taking, and the teacher's role in the classroom. Being thoughtful and intentional about implementing these qualities in the classroom allows for less stress and more success, for both the children and their teachers.

Respect for the child

It's important to know where your children are in their development. You can then set up the classroom accordingly, providing areas or activities at which they can be successful without the assistance of an adult. Doing this shows that you have respect for what the children are able to do. Of course, giving them a few challenges isn't a problem—but it becomes a problem when the children feel like they have to ask the adult to do it for them.

If you put a child onto a tricycle, he isn't going to learn how to get onto it himself. The next time, if you aren't there, he'll be frustrated about doing it on his own. Children will eventually learn to use materials and equipment once they reach the developmental stage which allows them to navigate those things. If they become dependent on us to do it for them, they won't feel successful doing an activity that is beyond their skill level.

Process instead of product

In creating an environment of success, it is crucial to offer open-ended activities and not expect a particular end result. Children need opportunities to explore materials in their own way, at their own pace. They need to be allowed to make messes and make mistakes.

When a young child begins to paint off the paper and onto the easel or tray, it's hard to resist saying, "Don't paint on the easel," or, "Paper is for painting." When you focus on the process, though, you see that the child is learning about how the paint and the brush work and where they make marks. Ask yourself: does it matter if the easel gets messy?



Opportunities for risk-taking

Children need opportunities to climb and run, to get messy and get wet. Fortunately, they're still small, and if they fall down, they're close to the ground. Falling probably scares them more than it does injury to their bodies. While you can do your best to prevent hazards, you can't ensure that children will never get hurt. You can be there to help if they do get hurt, but you shouldn't hover.

If a toddler wants to climb up the ramp onto the climbing structure, and you're not sure how she'll manage, be nearby in case she needs help. Don't place her onto the ramp or pull her down if she seems stuck. Don't tell her, "No, that isn't safe." Doing so sends the message that you will always be there to move her onto and off of the ramp and that she isn't capable of climbing the structure. If she never falls, she never learns how to hold on tightly, how to balance her body, or how to catch herself if she slips.



The teacher's role

The most important role of teacher in a "yes" classroom is as facilitator. In this role, teachers give guidance and partner with children in their learning processes. This takes the emphasis off the teacher's agenda and puts in on what children are doing and how the teacher can assist them.

If you're feeling that the children are "out of control," reflect on what is happening in that moment. Often, a teacher's expectations of what should be happening don't match where the children are developmentally and temperamentally. Rather than expect children to sit still for a story at circle time, you might have to change your own thinking in order to meet the children's needs in that moment. If some children want to run, give them the option to run before the story—or excuse them from the circle altogether, which gives them an opportunity to run while the remaining children hear the story. What if no children want to sit still for a story? Perhaps it isn't the right time, and you can try again later.

Teachers set up the classroom, create the schedule of the day, and plan the curriculum. We also have to be flexible because the classroom is for the children. The focus should be on what the children want to do. If we

try to control too many elements, it becomes easy to feel "out of control" and stressed out. In those moments, it might be best to take a breath, maybe laugh a little, and understand that it's time to try something different.

Creating a "yes" environment in the classroom doesn't mean that teachers allow the children to do whatever they want. It means that we have patience for the children and meet their needs in a developmentally appropriate way. In doing this, we get back to what children actually want to do with their bodies. It may also mean that we push the limits of our comfort zones to get there. If it means less stress for every person in the classroom, the journey is worth it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Teresa Gonsoski

Teresa Gonsoski has been teaching in the field of early childhood education for thirteen years and has worked with all age groups, from infants to preschoolers. She has a Master of Arts in Human Development from Pacific Oaks College. Teresa currently teaches in the two-year-old program at the Children's Center of the Stanford Community, a parent cooperative. She also organizes weekend campouts for families with preschool-age children and volunteers as a leader for backpacking trips.





Jean Rosenberg <jean@chelseadayschool.org>

October Newsletter

1 message

Jean Rosenberg <jean@chelseadayschool.org>

Sat, Oct 8, 2022 at 2:16 PM

To: All Families 2021-2022 <allfamilies@chelseadayschool.org>, All Staff <staff@chelseadayschool.org>

Good Day!

My sincere apologies for not adhering to the **communication plan** which goes like this:

- **Friday:** Recaps from each class sharing life in your child's classroom during the past week. How? Why? What? What's next? These recaps will give everyone insight into the development of curricular themes, and the growth of the children as a group. See your class site on the website.
- **First Tuesday of the month:** Newsletter sent out from the office with important dates, things of note in the community and things on my mind. It will also be uploaded onto the website.

I have said it already and will do so again: I am so happy to have all components in our community physically together in the building. The hustle and bustle of kids, parents, caregivers, grandparents, staff interacting in the morning is a joy. I love greeting you all at the door each morning and getting the weather report from your kids!

The first and most joyous news is that **Theresa**, teacher in Classroom 2, **gave birth to Imogen** yesterday! She had officially started her maternity leave as of Thursday. Just in the nick of time! Imogen arrived the next day to happy parents Theresa and Tom! Our community grows! Watch for Imogen's picture on the baby wall!

We are so grateful and happy to welcome **Anna Mallat back on staff in Classroom 2** for the duration of Theresa's maternity and family leave. Anna worked with us for several years before Covid hit. She was a beloved part of our community then and remains so now!

Several Groups have been set up for events going forward:

- **Class Parents:** Attached is the roster of Class Parents for the school year.
- **Winter Fair:** Our Winter Fair will be held on **Saturday, December 10th**. This is a wonderful community builder, welcome to prospective families and alumni gathering! Stay tuned for specifics. A robust Brainstorm was held yesterday under the guidance of Jillian Cohen. Stay tuned for developments and ways to play!
- **Community Outreach:** It is getting to be time to organize a few drives that we take part in each year: **Room to Grow** and **City Harvest Can Drive**. This committee is being formed from volunteers on the Parent Participant Form. Anyone is welcome to join! Stay tuned for details!

Dates To Note:

- **Monday, October 10th:** Indigenous People's Day. School closed
- (FYI: Thursday, October 13th, 6:30pm: Open House for prospective families.)
- **Wednesday, October 19th: 7:00pm: Class Night:** You are invited to meet with your child's teachers in their classrooms. It is an evening to share what happens during your child's day, developmental milestones, and is a platform for upcoming Parent/Teacher Conferences in November when you will talk about your child specifically.

Halloween is on the weekend this year. Our policy about the holiday is that we ask that your child **not wear a costume** to school. Although dressing up is the work of preschoolers, each classroom will have a special treat of the season, this year on the 29th, such as carving a pumpkin, cooking a special treat, making masks, etc. Costumes are best managed if you trick-or-treat after school in your neighborhood.

Thanks for understanding!

Each year, I know that you deal with the **mountain of candy** in your home if you trick or treat! We collect the **over-flow candy** and send it to Operation Gratitude which distributes it to First responders, if this helps! A large bucket will be in the reception area for collection. It is packaged and sent out at the end of the week. Your dentist will be happy!!

Chats with Jean: Friday, October 14th, 9:30am to 10:30 in the Big Room

Monday, October 24th, 9:30am to 10:30am in the Big Room

Please join me and other parents to Chat about living with one or more preschoolers. The agenda depends on who is in the group and what's on your mind. This is one of the highlights of my work at the school!

Please RSVP to Rebecca. If it rains (and the Big Room becomes an indoor space,) we will ZOOM.)

Parents applying out:

The season of applying to your child's next step is in full swing. A few reminders:

- Information about events at schools you may be applying to are posted in the Big Room and on the site dedicated to you on the web. Please check on a regular basis.
- All Confidential School Reports go out from the office. I am the contact person. All reports will go out in December. Please follow the school's individual instructions about reports.
- Classroom teachers are not permitted to write individual references. They are pivotal in writing the School Report.
- Please keep me posted if you add or delete a school from your list. An email is fine.
- I am available to meet about your process. I know it's daunting and best if I know your thoughts so I can support you!

I think that's plenty for now!

One last thought: We are beyond phase-in and all classes are becoming their own community. This important time of fewer children, less time is essential to the smooth operation of a child-centered classroom. The children continue to learn that the environment is another teacher available to them in the way that they need.

I am posting an article on the web that speaks to creating a "Yes" Environment. Good food for thought! Enjoy!

Have a lovely, long weekend. Again, welcome home!

Warmly,

Jean

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