

FROM MESSAGE TO MEANING

Using a Daily Message Board in the Preschool Classroom

When teachers and children read the daily message board together, they create a shared reading experience that leads to conversation and the exchange of ideas. The message board — whether a dry-erase board, easel pad, chalkboard, or something similar — provides children with information about the day ahead. Through simple line drawings, symbols, words, letters, numbers, and real objects, children “read” about special events, new materials, and other changes in the routine that will impact their plans, choices, and routines in the classroom.

Reading the message board daily with children supports their language and literacy development by encouraging purposeful conversation, reading, and writing. Deciphering messages nurtures children’s problem-solving skills and sense of social competence as they work together to construct knowledge. When children actively participate in deciphering information, they’re more likely to remember it — helping them feel more secure in

the classroom and better equipped to move from one part of the day to the next.

Message boards can be used to introduce classroom visitors, build letter identification and letter-sound recognition, and let children share their own messages with their classmates (e.g., “I got a new puppy”) as teachers support their attempts at writing. In addition, the message board also provides children with an opportunity for learning early math concepts, such as reading numerals on the board, figuring out how many of their classmates are in attendance, or counting down the days until school is out for the weekend.

This book describes the benefits of using a daily message board at greeting time, guides teachers through the process of creating child-relevant messages, and offers strategies for making the message board an engaging and interactive experience for all the children in your classroom.

FROM MESSAGE TO MEANING

Using a Daily Message Board in the Preschool Classroom

Suzanne Gainsley



USING SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

This book is part of a series published by HighScope that focuses on classroom materials and how to use them in an active learning environment. Through classroom dialogues, DVD clips, and photographs of actual message boards, *From Message to Meaning* will provide you with strategies for “writing” messages to read with children — using pictures, symbols, objects, and images — plus tips for follow-up activities and classroom-home connections.



HIGHSCOPE®



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in the Preschool Classroom**



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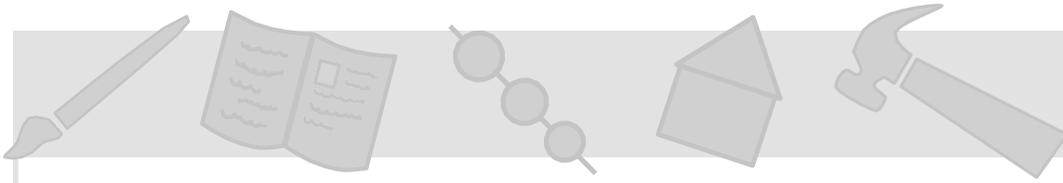
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— Sue Gainsley



1. The Message Board Alternative

In most preschool settings, greeting time is part of the daily classroom routine. This is the time of day (also often referred to as circle time) soon after arrival, when adults and children gather together, greet one another, and share information about the upcoming day. In many preschools, the primary focus of discussion at greeting time is the daily calendar, and teachers may use this segment of the day to “teach” children time concepts and letter and number identification — often through memorization and rote learning. At greeting time in HighScope classrooms, teachers and children gather together to read a daily message board. This process — a greeting time alternative that can work in any preschool classroom — supports children’s language and literacy development and early math skills in ways that are meaningful to children’s daily lives.

Reading a daily message board at greeting time (or circle time) is an interactive way to share information with preschool children about the upcoming day, while introducing them to the function of pictures, symbols, and words. This is a social time when children and adults collect as a community to discover what is going to happen in their classroom during their shared time together each day. Messages help children begin to acquire concepts about print while simultaneously developing their reading, writing, and communication skills. Reading messages ahead of time helps children socially and emotionally self-regulate and prepare for and act on information that may affect their plans and choices during the day.

By using simple drawings, symbols, letters, and words, teachers facilitate learning at different levels of development. Reading the message board also provides opportunities for learning mathematics concepts, such as when children read numerals on the board or figure out how many of their classmates are in attendance. In addition, through classroom discussions and problem-solving messages, children develop social skills, see themselves as problem solvers, and build a sense of community as they look to each other to resolve issues that arise in the classroom.



In HighScope classrooms, teachers and children gather together at greeting time and read a daily message board, sharing information about the day ahead. Reading the message board with children supports their language and literacy development and provides meaningful opportunities for exploring early math concepts.

The following is an example of greeting time in a HighScope classroom that uses a daily message board.

Ms. Camilia sits on the floor with a child on her lap. The rest of the children in her class sit with her in a circle. Ms. Camilia sings, "It's time to read the messages for today. Let's look at message one."

Ms. Camilia has prepared messages on a whiteboard which is turned toward the wall. Two children turn over the board to reveal the messages. Ms. Camilia points to the numeral "1" written on the message board. Next to the number, she has taped one plastic peg and a small pegboard. Directly under them, she has written the words Toy Area. Next to the words she has drawn lacing beads, which is the classroom symbol for the toy area.

"There's pegs in the toy area," says one child.

"Wow, you read that fast," says Ms. Camilia. "How did you figure that one out?"

The child points to the board and explains, "That says Toy Area and that's a peg."

Ms. Camilia points to each of the words as she repeats "Toy Area."

She continues, "Yesterday my small group used the pegs and wanted to keep them in the classroom to use again. If you want to use them at work time, they are in the" Before she can finish her sentence, children chime in, "Toy Area."

"Let's read the next message. It's message number three," says Ms. Camilia, pointing to the numeral 2.

"No, number two," say a few children.

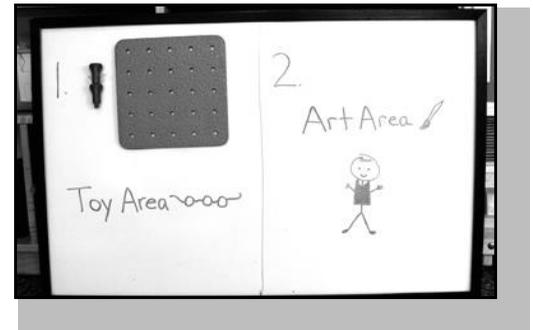
"Oh," says Ms. Camilia with a smile. "That is the number two. Two comes after one, doesn't it?"

On the board are the words Art Area and a drawing of a paintbrush. Below is a stick figure wearing something blue. Some children begin calling out comments like "art area" and "There's a paintbrush!"

Ms. Camilia points to the paintbrush and acknowledges, "Yes, there is a paintbrush." She then points to the words Art Area and comments, "I heard some of you reading the words Art Area. These words say Art Area and the paintbrush is the symbol for the art area."

"There's a person with something blue," says a child.

"He's wearing a smock," says another child.



In deciphering messages together and sharing their thoughts and ideas with one another, children learn to function as a cohesive social group.

“Yes, this is a smock,” says Ms. Camilia, pointing to the color blue on the figure. “I wonder, why is there a message about smocks?”

Many children respond. “You have to wear a smock when you paint,” says one child. “Or you’ll get paint on your clothes. Like me,” says another child. “It was yucky.” Ms. Camilia continues the conversation about smocks, reminding children where the smocks are hanging in the classroom.

This vignette illustrates the type of information teachers can present on the daily message board and how reading the message board is a process that involves both teacher and children. Consider all the learning that was taking place in these exchanges at the message board. Children were applying their knowledge of literacy and mathematics. Perhaps they were thinking about why pegs belonged in the toy area or incorporating the idea of wearing a smock into their plan to work in the art area. In deciphering the meaning of each message, they were also exercising their problem-solving skills. By sharing their thoughts with one another, the children were developing language skills and functioning as a cohesive social group.

Every classroom has typical activities and consistent expectations that children learn and anticipate each day. Sometimes there are special events, new toys, and changes in the routine that affect what children typically anticipate and do. When children know about these changes, they can respond to and act on that new information. Reading a daily message board with children at greeting time, like in the example above, is an interactive way to share this relevant information with them. The message board also gives children an opportunity to practice reading and writing drawings, symbols, and words with a teacher’s guidance.

A Typical Greeting Time

Now consider the following scene, an example of what often occurs during a typical greeting time in many preschools:

Ms. Lydia sits in the rocking chair as the children gather around at her feet, looking at the calendar on the bulletin board. “Who remembers the name of this month?” asks Ms. Lydia. Some children call out “Tuesday,” “Friday,” “September,” “October.” Ms. Lydia waits until she hears the correct month. “Yes, it’s October,” she responds.

Ms. Lydia then guides the children to the top row of the calendar and points to the days of the week as she and the children sing a familiar song that lists the days of the week in order.

“What day is it today?” asks Ms. Lydia. Children begin shouting out names of days until Ms. Lydia hears someone say the correct day.

“Yes,” she announces. “Marcus, you’re right. Today is Wednesday. Look at the calendar. Here is today.” She taps the blank square on the calendar waiting to be filled in with the correct date. Next Ms. Lydia holds

up an orange pumpkin with the number "23" written on it. "What's the date today?" she asks. A few children shout out "two, three." Ms. Lydia instructs the children to start with the number 1 and count with her as she points to the days leading up to 23. Some children's counting falls slightly behind that of others as they listen to hear the next number in sequence.

In contrast to the first vignette, the teacher in this classroom leads the children through a daily routine of memorization. The teacher asks a series of closed-ended questions (each having only one correct answer), which the children learn through daily repetition (drill and practice). Is drill and practice the optimal way for young children to learn? Is this information relevant to preschool children? Are typical greeting time activities developmentally appropriate for the preschool classroom?

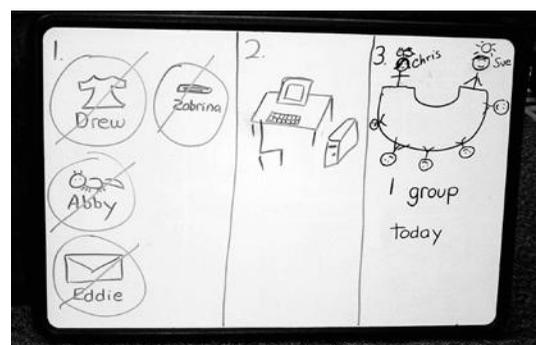
Typically, greeting time activities include posting the day's weather symbol on the classroom weather chart, adding the current day's date to the monthly calendar, and/or talking about the color of the week. Teachers often use this whole-group time to "teach" children concepts such as counting and letter identification, often by rote reciting.

Using a Message Board

In HighScope classrooms, however, teachers and children do not look at a daily calendar or routinely discuss the weather because these activities, presented as whole-group lessons, are often too abstract for preschoolers. Instead, the message board gives children information that is immediately relevant and of interest to them — the who, what, where, and when of the next few hours in their lives.

Think about a calendar and its purpose. Calendars help people keep track of time — the days of the week, the months of the year, and special holidays. Adults generally find calendars very handy indeed for keeping track of important dates and appointments in their personal and professional lives. However, unless a day has special meaning — as in the case of a loved one's birthday, for example — many adults won't be able to tell you the date without stopping to think about it or checking their calendars.

Teachers often feel that young children also need the calendar as a tool for keeping track of time. Thus, they are usually reluctant to give up calendar time in the classroom. Teachers who have calendar time each day often say they use the calendar to teach children time concepts such as the days of the week, months, and seasons. Some teachers say that calendar time also gives children opportunities to count and



The message board provides children with information that is meaningful and relevant to them, rather than concepts that are too abstract for preschoolers. Above, children learn who is absent, that the computer will be available at work time, and that there will be only one group at small-group time, led by teachers Chris and Sue.



Using the message board engages children at the beginning of the day, when they are eager and ready to learn.

learn numbers and patterns. While some children may be counting and memorizing the days of the week, this is no guarantee they understand the meaning of the numbers or words they are reciting. The principles of developmentally appropriate practice suggest there are better ways to teach preschool children these concepts. Meanwhile, many valuable learning opportunities are being lost at a time when children are eager and receptive as they begin the new school day.

Keeping Time Concrete

Preschool children begin to develop a sense of time relative to themselves and their immediate circumstances. They learn by exploring concrete and tangible materials (e.g., sand timer, egg timer), and they base their concepts about time on concrete, observable events such as daily routine cards of different sizes representing longer and shorter times (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002).

Three-year-old Jacob says to his teacher, “Remember yesterday when it was my birthday and we had cookies?” Jacob’s teacher nods and replies, “Yes, your birthday was a few weeks ago and you brought in delicious chocolate-chip cookies.” Many teachers may recall similar conversations with children who understand the concept of time in very broad terms: past events happened *yesterday*, and all future events will happen *tomorrow*. Similarly, a child might base his or her idea of a day by thinking about time in relation to breakfast, lunch, and dinner — all predictable activities in the day. Another child might say, “After two nightrightimes, I’ll see Papa.” And in the

summertime, many parents have heard this observation from children: “It can’t be bedtime. It’s not dark yet.”

Days, weeks, months, and years are concepts of time based on objective, measurable units. Adults talk about time using these terms because they understand these units and how they fit together to form bigger units. The calendar is an abstract representation of these segments of time. Each page represents a month, each square a day. When adults look at the calendar, they recognize how many individual days make up each week, how many weeks there are in a month, and so on.

Understanding time in this way requires a person to be able to hold more than one concept in mind at a time and separate an object into its individual parts. Preschool children, however, process one idea at a time. They look at objects as a whole rather than in terms of their individual parts. They are not developmentally ready to “see” each day on the calendar as belonging to a “week” or a week as part of the “month.” This is why, for example, it is difficult for young children to understand that Saturday is a day and that it is also part of the weekend (Tompkins, 1996, p. 224).

Some children do learn the calendar routine and learn the days of the week by memorizing a song using those names (e.g., the names of the days of the week are sung to a familiar tune). They can identify some of the numbers in the dates and understand enough about number sequence to figure out the correct date (i.e., the last number was three so the next number is four). But the names of the days and numbers take on real meaning for young children only when they are connected to what is important to them — their age, how many cookies they can have, the name of the day that the babysitter picks them up from school.

Likewise, adults refer to the numbers on a calendar if and when this information is useful to them, for example, if they are planning a vacation. But why do young children need to know that the date is October 23 or that the new year starts in five weeks? How is this information relevant to a three-and-a-half-year-old child who thinks that his or her birthday was *yesterday* when it actually occurred months ago?



Preschoolers learn about time in meaningful and observable pieces, such as by learning the segments and sequence of the daily routine and experiencing the time it takes for sand to pass through the timer to let them know it's their turn to play with a favorite toy.



The names of the days and numbers on the calendar take on meaning for children when they have relevance to children's lives and activities. For example, children learn about seasonal changes by experiencing them firsthand – as when it's time to play outside in the leaves.

A child wants to know if there is something new to play with in preschool *today* or if the class will be going to the pumpkin patch *tomorrow* — things he or she will discover at message board time.

In HighScope, programs children do learn about time, but in small, meaningful, observable pieces, not by studying a calendar. Children learn the names of the segments and the sequence of the daily routine, experience the time it takes for the sand to run out of the sand timer so they can have their turn on the swing, or count the number of rings on a paper chain to find out how many school days are left until it is time for a field trip. Teachers can provide children with many developmentally appropriate opportunities to experience time concepts by referring to the HighScope Key Developmental Indicators (KDIs) that describe preschoolers' emerging understanding of time (Epstein, 2007). When adults use support strategies such as relating lengths of time to familiar actions or events, they will foster children's learning of time concepts. For example, a teacher might say, "Your Daddy will be here when the big hand points straight down." These concrete indicators "simultaneously help children become familiar with conventional and unconventional ways to measure time as well as more abstract time indicators" (p. 165). Children will come to learn

the days of the week and truly understand them when those days become important to them. Teachers will avoid spending a lot of time and energy “teaching” something to preschoolers that children will more easily understand when they are older.

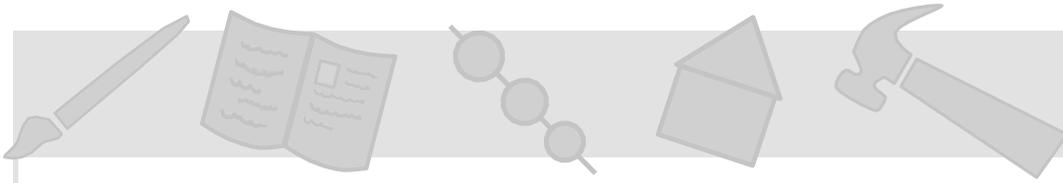
Making Math Meaningful

Teachers may now understand why children are not developmentally ready to understand the time concepts related to the calendar. Nevertheless, they may still want to hold on to calendar time in order to teach concepts such as counting, patterns, numeral recognition, and other mathematical knowledge and skills. For young children, however, early math learning, like other content areas, occurs with tangible objects in meaningful contexts. So, for example, in the HighScope Curriculum, children learn to count by counting objects or people (how many children fit in the boat), actions (the number of knee pats), or events (the number of passes of the timer until it’s their turn). Children learn about the seasons by experiencing how seasonal changes affect them and their immediate environment. For example, they notice that they have to start wearing a coat at outside time; they know that when the green leaves turn brown and crunchy, it’s fun to jump in them. Likewise, exploring patterns with pegs and pegboards is a more rewarding experience for children than passively looking at patterns on a calendar. The repeated sequence of the daily routine is more meaningful to them than the abstract march of numbered days on the wall.

HighScope teachers use the daily message board as a springboard for conversations about information children need to know to be successful in their classroom environment. When children participate at message board time, they are actively engaged in reading meaningful print that changes each day. The remaining chapters of this book will describe the benefits of using a daily message board at greeting time, guide teachers through the process of creating messages, and suggest strategies for making the message board an engaging and interactive experience for all the children in their classrooms.

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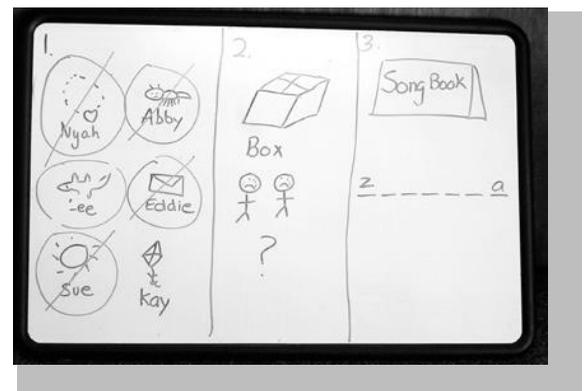
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2. Signs and Symbols

Young children are able to “read” many forms of writing without even realizing they are reading. They call attention to print in their environment and interpret signs, symbols, and pictures in storybooks before they are able to name individual letters or identify specific words. Children learn about the world around them by experiencing a print-rich environment in which print carries a purposeful message. Some parents may nod their heads knowingly because they have seen their young children point to and appear to read the signs for their favorite store or restaurant. For example, the mother of a child in our classroom described how, on pulling into a gas station, her child pointed to the letters on the station’s sign and said, “That says *gas*.”

Interpreting signs and symbols is a process that lies on the continuum of emergent reading; it is one of the beginning stages of understanding the alphabetic principle — realizing that printed text conveys meaning. Acquisition of the alphabetic principle also includes recognizing letters, connecting letters to letter sounds, and then learning that a word is a consistent set of letters and sounds (Hohmann, 2005).



Teachers create messages using symbols, pictures, letters, words, and numbers. As children gain experience reading the message board, they learn how these various representations convey meaning.

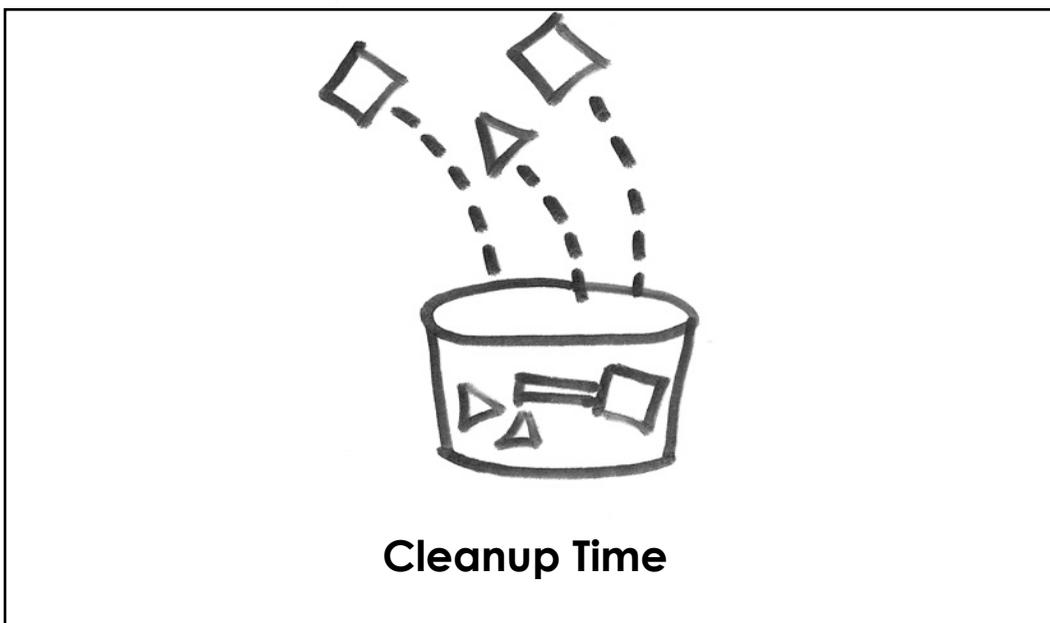
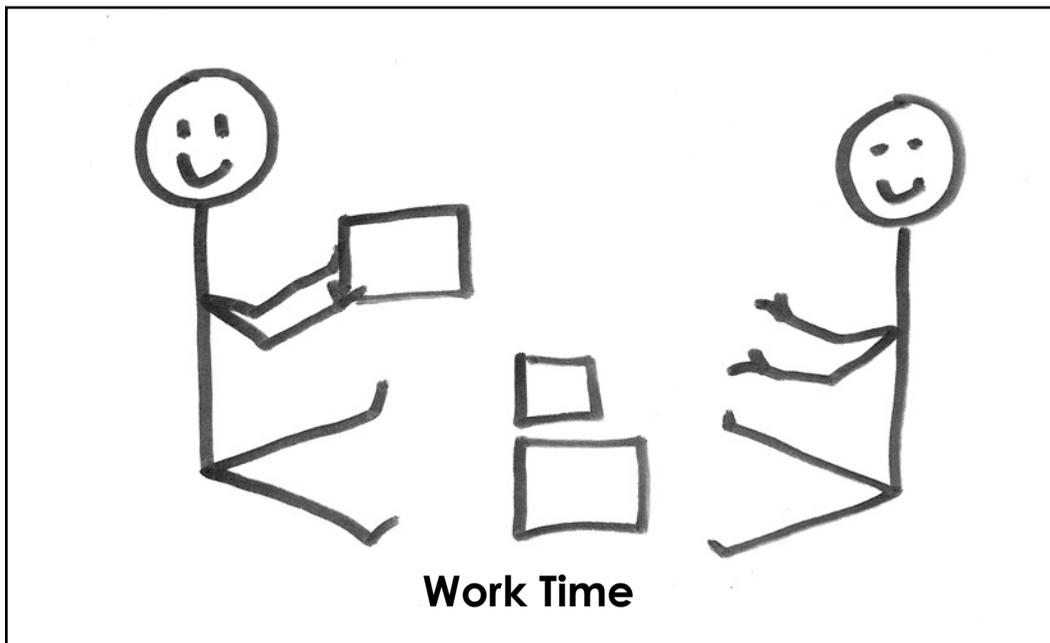


A shelf of toys labeled with picture representations of materials helps children to find and return these items.

As noted in the previous chapter, when teachers and children read the message board together, they are engaged in a shared reading experience that leads to conversation and an exchange of ideas. The message board provides reading and writing experiences that grow naturally out of the need to communicate information to one another about the classroom. Teachers create messages on the message board using pictures, symbols, letters, words, and numerals. Then, through the daily experience of reading the message board, children begin to understand how these symbols, pictures, and words convey meaning. Since children in the classroom are at different developmental levels, it is important that teachers create messages that appeal to children at *all* levels. This chapter will explain how teachers can use the message board to foster communication in their classrooms by creating messages that are relevant to children and appeal to children at different prereading stages.

Creating a Common Language

Teachers who use the HighScope Curriculum recognize that interpreting signs and symbols is an important developmental step in the process of learning to read, and they create classroom environments that include words and symbols for objects and ideas that are meaningful and useful to children. For example, teachers label contain-



ers and shelves with picture representations and the names of toys and other items so that children can locate these materials easily and return them to the same place. Classroom-area signs in the different interest areas of the room (e.g., art area, house area, block area) help children learn to recognize and refer to these areas at planning and recall time and throughout work time. Teachers also create charts that use words and symbols to identify the parts of the classroom's daily routine (e.g., work time, small-group time, outside time). Children refer to these charts to help them remem-

TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Make a daily routine book for each child in the classroom to take home. Draw one part of the routine per page. You might also include a brief description of what happens during that time. Encourage parents or guardians to read the book with their children and talk with them about the order of the daily routine and what happens during each part.

Home Connection: Encourage parents to make drawings of simple home routines with accompanying words. For example, a bedtime routine could be depicted with a sequence of simple drawings or photos of bedtime activities and words to describe them, such as brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, getting into bed, reading a story, turning on a night-light, and giving a hug.

ber and follow the sequence of daily activities and anticipate transitions.

Symbols work when they have a common meaning for different “readers.” Letters of the alphabet are a type of symbol that have standardized sounds, which vary by language, geographical region, or cultural group of the speaker. This same idea applies to the symbols used on the message board. When implementing the message board, teachers need to establish symbols that represent the people (children and adults), interest areas, materials, and parts of the daily routine in their classroom. Think of this process as creating a language specific to the classroom and its members.

Each classroom’s symbols or picture representations may be unique to that room, as long as they have shared meanings for everyone in the room. Teachers should remember to choose or create symbols that are easy to draw so they can be created the same way (given slight variations) each time. Through repeated experiences with these consistent representations, children will discover that each time a particular symbol appears on the message board, it has the same meaning.

“But I’m Not an Artist!”

When teachers first begin creating messages, they may feel a bit self-conscious about their drawings and artistic abilities. However, with experience, teachers usually find their artistic comfort zone. Remember that the purpose of the message board is to communicate ideas and create a sense of community, not to produce a work of art.

It is easier to identify an object if a drawing of it includes a distinguishing characteristic, such as its color, shape, or pattern (e.g., a rolling pin with little red handles,

a kidney bean-shaped table, a person with curly hair). When representing people, teachers should remember to portray emotion on the figures’ faces. This helps children recognize the tone of the message. Excitement about a birthday party can be easily captured, for example, with an up-turned mouth. Conversely, a down-turned mouth or a frown could express displeasure about being sprayed with water (left)!



A Matter of Interpretation

Trying different ways to present messages is a learning process for teachers. With experience, they figure out how much information is necessary to get the message across. For example, the HighScope Foundation is located in a large Victorian house, which is fondly referred to as the “Big House” by children in the HighScope Demonstration Preschool. When creating a message about the Big House, teachers found that it was not necessary to draw every arched window of the building in order for children to recognize it. The general size, shape, and one or two distinguishing characteristics, such as the arch over the door and the wide front steps, give children the overall impression.

Children do not always interpret messages the way a teacher has intended.

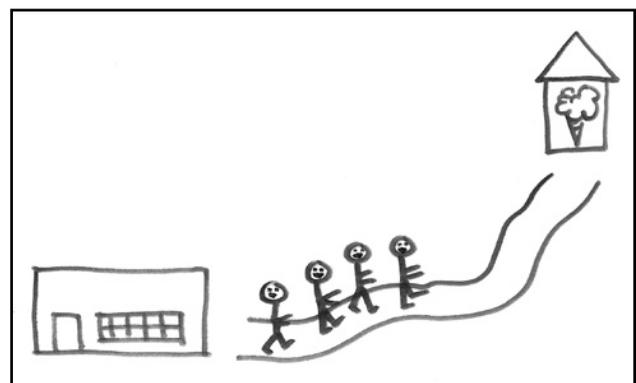
Teachers should learn to accept this fact and be sure to respond positively to all interpretations as they try to figure out *why* children might have interpreted messages in a particular way. For example, when the HighScope Demonstration Preschool class intended to take a walk down to the local ice cream parlor, the teacher drew what she thought was an obvious representation of the winding sidewalk they would follow. When it was time to read that message (right), one child responded with glee, exclaiming “Yeah, we’re going to the water park!” Sure enough, the winding sidewalk did resemble a curving water slide.

Teachers can ask children why they interpret a drawing or symbol a certain way by asking, for example, “*Why do you think it says that?*” After looking at the drawing from the child’s perspective, teachers may figure out the extent and type of detail children need to decipher the meaning intended.

When children make comments such as “*It doesn’t look like that,*” teachers can ask thought-provoking questions like “*What would make it look more like...?*” or “*How*



The “Big House” at HighScope’s Michigan headquarters is depicted on the message board with a few of the building’s distinctive characteristics.



Winding sidewalk or water slide? Sometimes a representation may not be interpreted by children as the teacher intends.

should I change it?" They can then use children's ideas to modify their messages. This allows children to develop their own message-writing skills as well as an awareness of how thoughts and ideas can be represented with pictures, symbols, and words.

As children become more experienced at reading messages, accustomed to their teacher's style of drawing, and familiar with the consistent symbols used in the classroom and on the message board, they will usually have fewer misinterpretations.

What and How to Draw on the Message Board

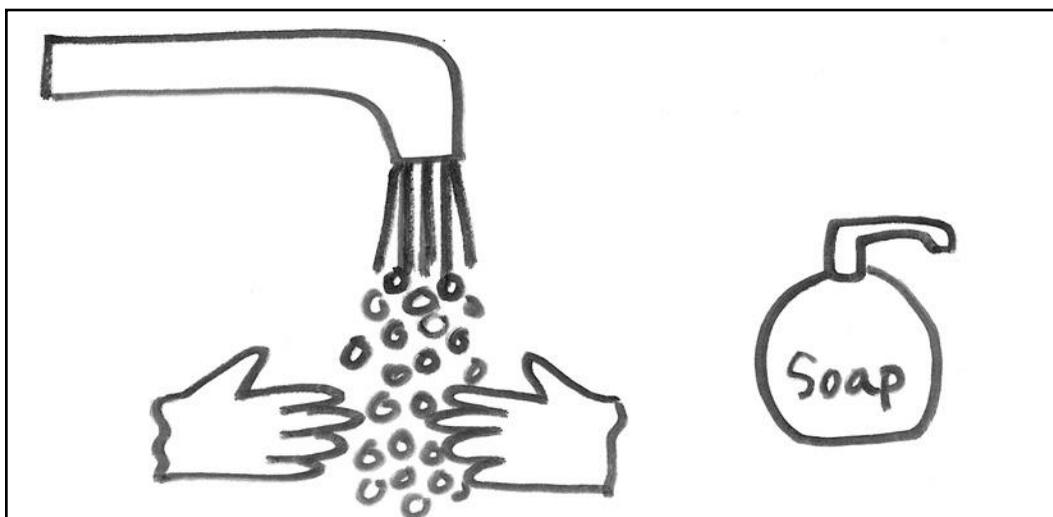
Prepare the message board ahead of time. A large whiteboard, a chalkboard, or a piece of chart paper can be used as a message board. Teachers should write messages on the board prior to greeting time. This will give them the opportunity to consider how children might interpret particular messages and time to revise them if necessary before reading them with children.

Keep the number of messages to a minimum. Message Board should be 5–10 minutes in length. At the beginning of the year, as children learn about reading messages and the purpose of message board, choose 1–2 important messages that need to be shared. As the year goes on, you can share 3–4 messages at the most. Too many messages can be overwhelming and cause children to become antsy and lose interest.

Make symbols large and dark. Write messages using markers with dark ink and large letters and symbols so that children sitting farther away from the board can still see them.

Keep messages simple and relevant to children. In general, start with basic, familiar messages each day. These are usually easy to read so children feel successful right from the beginning. Simple drawings are more practical than elaborate drawings, since they can be created more quickly and are more easily replicated for consistency each time they are used on the message board. For example, a teacher might draw a faucet and soap, or draw or trace hands, then add circles to represent soap bubbles, as a way to illustrate a message about washing hands (below).

Use objects and photos. Taping real objects to the message board is an easy and expedient alternative to drawing objects. Taping an actual toy to the message board



works especially well when introducing a toy that children may never have seen before. The taping option also works well when there are items that may be too complicated to represent on the message board.

Another alternative to drawing on the message board is to use photographs of particular objects, people, or places. One team of teachers used photos to prepare children for field trips. They took a picture of the field trip location and posted it on the message board the day of the outing so children could have a visual image of their destination.

Number each message. Teachers should number the messages and refer to each one by numeral. Separate each message with a line so children have a visual boundary for each one. This makes it easier for them to follow along as the messages are read.

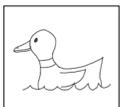
Support children at all levels of emergent reading. While some children will primarily attend to the representations and symbols on the message board, other children will be interested in messages that contain letters, numbers, or words. Creating messages that include real objects, pictures, symbols, and words will support children at different developmental levels. In general, teachers use fewer words on the message board at the beginning of the school year, typically starting out with the names of children and teachers, classroom interest areas, and the parts of the daily routine — words that are already displayed in the classroom.

Creating messages should be a relatively simple and instructive process rather than a complicated chore. By using different methods to communicate — drawings, letters and words, objects, and photos — you are helping children learn that there are many ways to represent objects and ideas. This concept is important not only for early literacy development but also for mathematics (where symbols are used to represent numbers and operations), the arts (visual images, musical notes, dance movements), and many other content areas.

Choosing Personal Symbols

In the HighScope Curriculum, children and adults each choose a personal symbol that corresponds to the initial letter and letter sound of their first names. For example, Suzanne might choose a sun, sailboat, or sock as her symbol, while Cindy might choose a circle, celery stick, or centipede as hers. This image is then paired with the child's or adult's written name in a system called *letter links* (DeBruin-Parecki & Hohmann, 2003). Letter-linked nametags are used as personal identifiers for both children and adults in the classroom. They are used to label children's storage spaces and belongings, and children's names are paired with their letter-linked images on group messages and charts, such as daily sign-in sheets. Children quickly learn to recognize

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Letter links are used in the classroom to identify children's belongings, personal spaces, and projects. When teachers want to represent children on the message board, they use their names and letter-linked pictures.

TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Choose letter-linked symbols for the children in your classroom. Allow them to pick one from a few choices.

Home Connection: Ask parents to label children's belongings (e.g., clothes, backpacks, shoes) with their name and letter-linked picture for easy identification at school. (Children can identify others' belongings and return them to the proper coat hook or cubby without having to ask the teacher to whom they belong.)

not only their own letter link, but also those of their classmates and teachers. When teachers want to refer to children on the message board, they write the children's names and their letter-linked symbols. Before children are able to recognize written words, they use letter links to help them identify one another.

Some preschool programs pair children's names with symbols that are not linked to the first letters of children's names. For example, Tonya's symbol may be the bunny. However, by using letter links, teachers build on children's attachment to their own names, introducing children to alphabet letter names and sounds through the letters and sounds in their names.

Symbols for Your Classroom or School

Teachers also need to create symbols for their classroom and/or school building to draw related messages on the message board. Take a look at your particular building or setting to determine its distinctive physical characteristics (e.g., a flag-pole or fountain in front of the building, a unique decoration above the entryway, a distinctive building material). Teachers at the HighScope Demonstration Preschool — located in a building with three large windows — represented their classroom by drawing a rectangle with large windows and





HighScope's Demonstration Preschool (above left) is represented on the message board by a rectangle with three large windows and a door, as on message number two (above right), where children use paper rings to count down the number of days left in the school year.

the door leading into their classroom. In another example, teachers with a classroom located within a large school chose to draw the door of their classroom with balloons on it to represent their classroom, the “balloon room.” Teachers helped children anticipate the weekend every Friday by drawing two school buildings, each crossed out with the “no” symbol. Children called these “no-school days.” At the end of the day, teachers and children would say good-bye to each other and say, “See you after two no-school days.” The teachers had fun drawing many “no-school days” on the message board the day before a long vacation. Children expressed amazement at the length of a message. Teachers also looked at this message as a way of providing a meaningful counting opportunity because it occurred naturally in the context of discovering useful information rather than in a situation, say, in which children were required to count objects simply for the sake of counting.

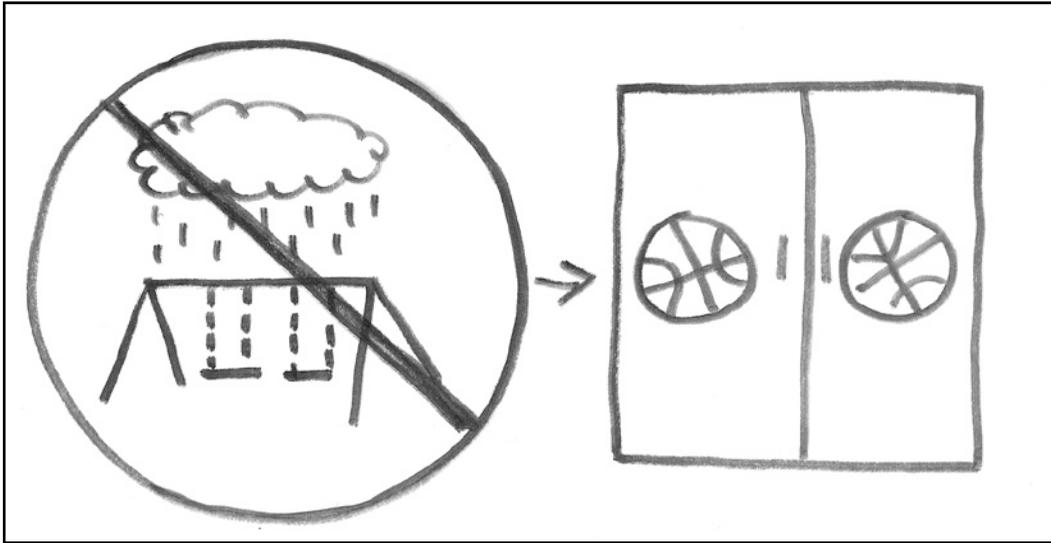
Sometimes children make transitions throughout the day to different rooms within a larger building, such as the gym, lunchroom, or other classroom. Teachers should create symbols for each of these places as well (e.g., a rainbow for the rainbow room or a door with a fork and spoon on it to represent the cafeteria). One teacher's symbol for the school's gymnasium was a drawing of a double door with basketballs

TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Think of other places in your school or center that are relevant to children and could be represented with a symbol (e.g., kitchen, music room, garden) and create symbols for or take photos of those places.

Home Connection: Draw your classroom symbol on index cards (lamine for durability) and give each family one to take home. To let their children know it's a school day, parents can post the symbol somewhere in the house that is visible to children, such as on the refrigerator or the child's bedroom door. Similarly, parents might want to make a symbol of their home on an index card to post when it's a home day, such as on a weekend or holiday.

on it. The following illustration is a message about using the gymnasium instead of the playground on a rainy day:



Classroom-Area Symbols

HighScope classrooms are divided into well-defined interest areas, such as the art area, block area, and book area. Teachers label each area with the word(s) for the area's name and a related symbol, usually an object associated with that area. Teachers and children refer to the areas of the classroom throughout the day (e.g., when planning or recalling, to tell someone where to find a particular toy). These area names and symbols are also used regularly on the message board, usually to alert children to new classroom materials in those areas. When teachers are deciding on area names and symbols, they should remember to choose simple names that make sense to children. For example, teachers may understand the meaning of the words "dramatic play," but children may not know what to expect from the "dramatic play area." If the area looks like a house, call it the "house area." HighScope teachers also choose symbols for the areas of their classrooms that children will easily recognize as belonging in that area. For example, children would usually look for a paintbrush, scissors, or crayons in the art area. So a teacher might choose to use a representation of one of these objects as their art area symbol.

Symbols for Parts of the Daily Routine

As mentioned earlier, young children benefit from predictable daily routines that facilitate transitions and allow them to anticipate and move smoothly from one activity to another. There are times, however, when the daily routine must be modified,

perhaps to accommodate a special guest, take a field trip, or have outside time before it rains, for example. In cases such as these, it is helpful for children to know in advance about the “mixed-up day” ahead. One way to inform children of the change in routine is to “announce” it on the message board. To do this, teachers must first create symbols or picture representations corresponding to each part of their daily routine in the same way they do for the different interest areas. Teachers should first think about events or objects that children might associate with the different parts of the daily routine. For example, in one classroom, children gather for large-group time on a blue, oval carpet. The classroom teachers therefore chose a blue oval as their large-group-time symbol. Other teachers may decide to depict large-group time as a circle of smiley faces, representing the children sitting in a circle.

And teachers who frequently use CD players at large-group time might decide that a simple drawing of a CD player is an appropriate symbol for large-group time in their classrooms.

In some established HighScope classrooms, teachers use a sequence of photos to represent the parts of the daily routine, for example, a photo of children sitting at the planning table, or a photo of children participating in a large-group time activity. In these cases, teachers transfer these photos, taping them to the message board, to create messages regarding specific parts of the daily routine, or they make copies of the photos specifically for use on the message board.

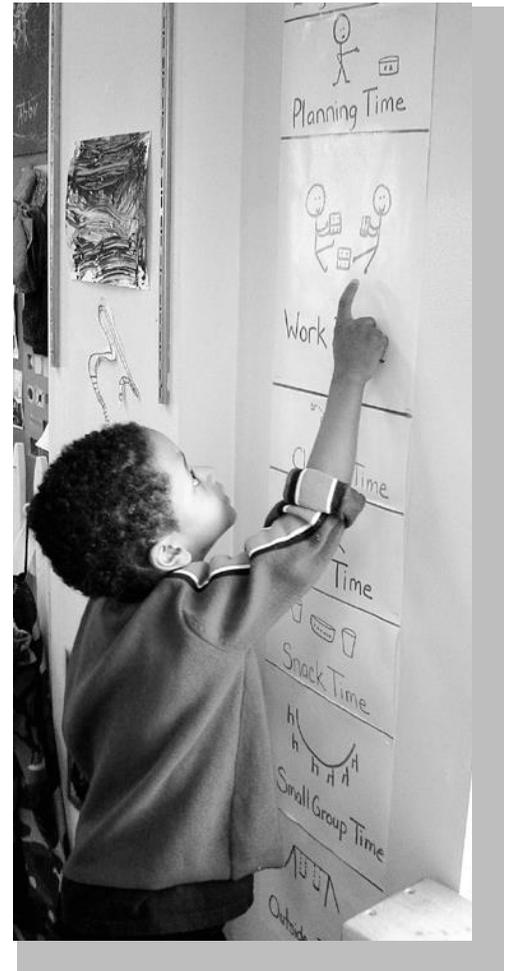
Children’s understanding of symbols and picture representations paves the way for their future reading skills. Providing a print-rich classroom environment, and establishing consistent symbols for the children in your classroom, the areas of the room, and the parts of the daily routine, are ways to take the first steps on the path to early literacy. Using these symbols on the message board to communicate information to children not only helps them learn that print carries meaning but also helps them function more confidently and independently in their classroom.



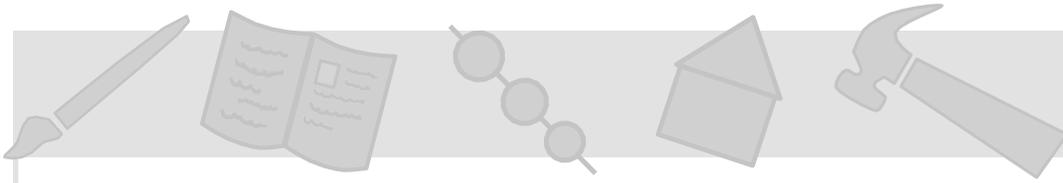
Children become familiar with the symbols used to represent classroom areas on the message board. Here, a child uses the signs to make a plan for work time.

References

- Brewer, J. A. (1998). Literacy development of young children in a multilingual setting. In R. Campbell (Ed.), *Facilitating preschool literacy* (pp. 119–130). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- DeBruin-Parecki, A., & Hohmann, M. (2003). *Letter links: Alphabet learning with children's names*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.
- Hohmann, M. *Growing Readers Early Literacy Curriculum teacher guide*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.



Teachers create symbols or picture representations for parts of the daily routine, which are then used on the message board to “announce” upcoming changes in the schedule. These symbols are also posted in the classroom and visible to children, who become familiar with their meaning. In this classroom, a daily routine chart provides a visual reminder of the events of the day.



3.

Types of Messages

For both children and adults, there is comfort in following the predictable routines of daily life. Knowing what to expect from day to day provides us with a sense of control and confidence and helps us self-regulate by knowing ahead of time what will happen. However, as most of us know, there are those occasions when routines or plans change. Some people accommodate change easily, determine how it will affect them, and follow through with a revised plan. Others have a more difficult time switching gears and prefer to have as much notice as possible about any deviations from their usual routine. Indeed, there are many instances in daily life in which knowing in advance of a forthcoming change makes for better planning and follow-through. For example, a person who drives each morning down the same highway may discover one day that there is a flashing road sign announcing the date of upcoming construction on that road. This advance notice gives the driver time to think about the impact of the road construction on his or her usual routine and to consider making alternative plans based on that information. Wouldn't it be nice if there were "flashing signs" to alert us to all those things "up ahead" that will impact our daily lives and the decisions we make?

Children also benefit from predictable daily routines and knowing what to expect. At school, there are typical activities each day and consistent expectations for children and adults. Children make choices based on their knowledge of the classroom, including its materials and daily routine. However, there are also special events, new toys, and changes in routine that impact children, their behaviors, and



Knowing about changes in the schedule ahead makes transitions easier for children throughout the day. Above, the group discusses the visitor who will be coming to the classroom to take photographs.

the choices they make. When teachers tell children in advance about daily changes to their classroom environment, children are able to base their choices and actions on that new information. This knowledge helps children feel secure in their classroom, to act more independently, and to move more easily from one part of the day to the next.

Just as a flashing construction sign alerts drivers to important information about the road, the daily message board gives children information about their day at school. Teachers who use the HighScope Curriculum write messages on the classroom's message board at the start of each school day to give children useful information about what's "ahead." At greeting time, children and teachers come together, share ideas, and collectively contribute to the process of figuring out the meaning of each message. While teachers could simply make classroom announcements each day at greeting time as children listen passively, many teachers have found through experience that when children are active participants in deciphering information, they are more likely to remember it. Children attend to and remember this information because it is connected to their own experiences and therefore meaningful to them.

When considering which messages to introduce on the message board each day, teachers should consider the relevance of the information to the children in the classroom. If many children will benefit from the information, teachers should consider

introducing it to the whole group on the message board. For example, if after several reminders to keep the rice table dry, children continue to pour water in the table, it would be useful for all children to learn that water causes the rice to become smelly and unusable. On the other hand, if a few children put water into the rice but stop after the teacher explains why the rice needs to stay dry, the teacher may decide that the problem may not be relevant to all the children in the classroom.

Changes in the Daily Routine

Since predictable routines help children navigate through their day, any change in routine can be a potential road block. Teachers can use the message board to inform children about changes in their daily routine, which will help children make smoother transitions throughout the day. For example, a team of teachers planned a morning field trip to be followed by snack time and then outside time. On the morning message board, a teacher drew a picture to represent the field trip, the daily routine symbol for snack time, and the daily routine symbol for outside time. Then she covered up the symbols for the other parts of the daily routine on the daily routine wall chart. At greeting time, the teachers and children talked about the new sequence of their day and the fact that they would miss planning time, work time, and recall time that morning. After the field trip, the teachers once again reminded children about the change in routine, making for an easier transition from the field trip van to snack time.

“Who’s Not Here?”

Knowing which teachers and classmates will be present each day helps children know who will be in the classroom and who will be available to play. When teachers know that certain children will be absent, they can let the other children know via the message board. One way to depict this type of message is to write the absent child’s name and his or her letter-linked symbol on the board and then draw the “no” symbol over it.

Sometimes children play with the same friend each day. When a child learns that a favorite classmate will be absent, he or she has the chance to shift gears and make alternative play plans, considering other children as play partners. For example, one morning at greeting time when the class learned that Kobe was sick, Nygel, who always plays with Kobe, turned to Henry and asked him to play. However, at plan-

TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Display the daily routine chart in your classroom so children are able to refer to it throughout the day. Make an extra set on large index cards or card stock for children to hold. Mix them up and see whether children can put them back in order.

Home Connection: Encourage parents to tell children about changes in their day and how these changes will affect their typical home routines. For example, parents can help their child understand the special sequence of events that occur on the day of a birthday party (e.g., play games, eat cake, open gifts). Help parents draw simple representations of these activities for children to see.



Message number two lets children know that their classmate Amelia will be absent today. Reading the message gives children the opportunity to ask questions and discuss feelings about their friend's absence and allows them to plan for play with other children.

ning time, Nygel said, rather automatically, "I'm going to play with Kobe." His teacher replied, "Remember, Kobe's name was on the message board. He's sick today." Nygel responded, "Oh yeah, I'm going to play with Henry."

Sometimes children will be upset about a friend's absence and may need adult support to help them work through their feelings and readjust their plans. Because this event (the absence) is represented in a concrete way on the message board, it may be easier for the child to bring the issue up to an adult in the classroom who can then help the child express his or her feelings.

Often children will ask for information about a friend's absence. Talking with children (if appropriate) about the reason for a classmate's absence helps inform them of their friend's well-being and anticipated return. Because children measure time in concrete and personal ways, talking about when a friend will come back to school (e.g.,

"Miranda will be back in two days. That means we have to do two work times without Miranda") is a more meaningful way to introduce time concepts such as "tomorrow" or "in two days" than pointing to numbered boxes on a calendar.

This type of communication also promotes a caring classroom atmosphere and provides a springboard for further discussion. For example, a teacher might say something like "Mary's mother called and said that Mary has a fever, so she'll have to stay home and rest." Responses from children to this news might include comments such as "I had a fever too" or "Sometimes you have to go to the doctor." Teachers might acknowledge these comments by responding "We missed you, Angel, when you were sick" or "Fever tells us our body is sick. Doctors help us get better." Children quickly learn to "read" this type of message. In one preschool, a child who was going on a trip said to his teacher, "Remember to put my name on the message board when I'm gone."

Some children may also find it very difficult to begin their day when a teacher is absent. When children are given information about the circumstances of the absence and the person who will substitute for the teacher while he or she is gone, they are

reassured that their teacher will return and that they will have another adult to care for them. When you know in advance that a teacher is going to be absent for more than a couple of days, it is often helpful to count down the days until that teacher's return. One way to do this is to draw the teacher's symbol on the message board as many times as the number of days he or she will be absent and to number each symbol. Then each day, erase one of the symbols, gradually approaching the date of the teacher's expected return.

This works well in situations that do not involve an extended leave of absence, so children will maintain interest and see progress toward their teacher's return. Another way to count down to a teacher's return is to make a paper chain with the number of links equal to the number of days a teacher will be absent. Teachers can ask children to help make the chain. Each day, have a different child remove one of the links. As with the use of drawings, words, actual objects, and photos, these visual devices become another way of representing information in a way that is concrete and meaningful to young children.

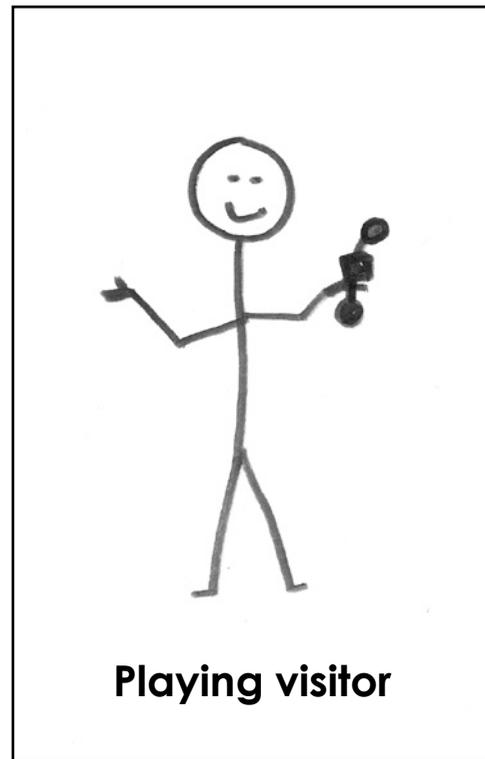
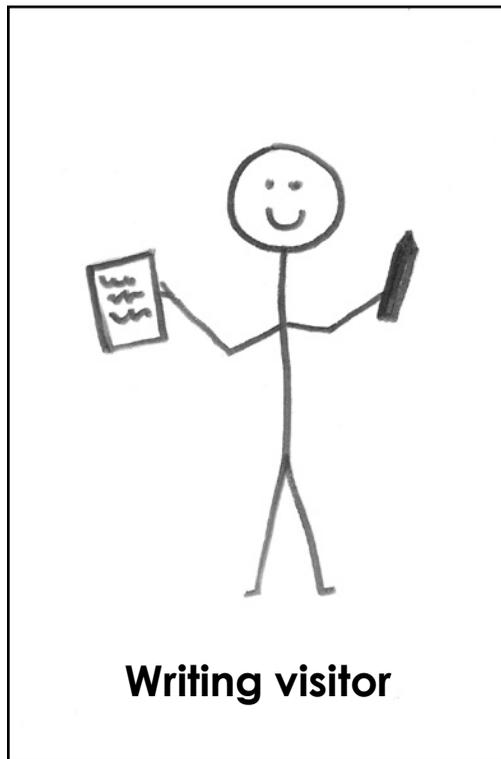


If a teacher is going to be absent for several days, it may be helpful for children to count down the days until the teacher's return. Using concrete, visual devices — such as a paper chain with links that represent the number of days the teacher will be absent — is a meaningful way to convey this information to children.

Classroom Visitors

It is very important and courteous to let children know when visitors will be coming into the classroom, who they are, and what their purpose is in visiting. Many children are timid around strangers, so an unidentified person in the classroom can make a child feel uncomfortable, making it difficult for him or her to get involved in play and activities. When you know that a visitor, such as a parent volunteer or a student observer, will be popping into the room, it is necessary to prepare children. Teachers can announce these visitors at greeting time with a message on the message board.

Of course, there may be times that guests arrive unexpectedly, giving you no opportunity to prepare the children in advance. However, if an unexpected visitor does



TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Create letter-linked symbols for or take photographs of people who are frequent visitors to your classroom.

Home Connection: Who will pick me up? Encourage parents to create symbols for or take pictures of themselves and other people in their children's lives, such as babysitters and grandparents. Use these representations to let children know who will pick them up from school or who will care for them while parents are away.

arrive, teachers can add the visitor's name to the message board and call children's attention to it.

Sometimes visitors to the classroom are there to play with children; sometimes they are there to observe or perform other tasks. A simple way for children to figure out whether visitors will join in daily activities or simply observe is to develop a representation for each type of visitor for use on the message board. For example, a figure with large eyes might represent someone who comes to "watch" or observe; a figure holding a piece of paper and a pencil could signal a visitor who will be observing and perhaps also taking notes. A person who will interact or play with the children might be represented by a figure holding a toy. These consistent representations will help children

know what to expect from each visitor.

Visitors who regularly visit the classroom and who are familiar to the children (e.g., the center director, regular support staff, a volunteer grandfather, the building custodian) should have their own letter-linked symbol or have their photo taken for posting on the message board.

New Materials

In a HighScope setting, all areas of the classroom are open at work time and all materials on the shelves are available for use each day. Since children know which toys are available to them, they can more easily plan work-time activities, develop more complex plans that combine materials, and extend their plans through several work-time periods. Messages that alert children to new classroom materials are useful to children in their planning process. These messages usually include a representation of the materials and the areas in the classroom where children will find them.

Often the materials themselves are introduced to children during a small-group time and then added to the classroom shelves the following day (though not all materials must be introduced at small-group time before being added to the classroom). Message board time gives children who used the materials during small-group time the opportunity to share information about the materials — for example, that you can use the new connecting blocks to make spaceships, or that you have to line up the holes in order to connect them — so that other children who have not yet engaged with the materials have some idea of how they can be used.

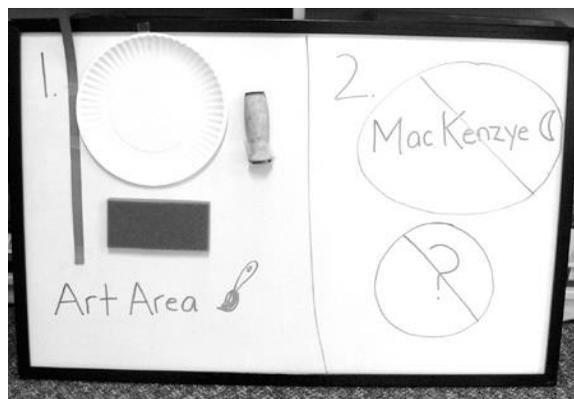
Teachers also use the message board to reintroduce materials with which children are already familiar, such as those that may have been removed from a classroom shelf in order to make room for other toys and are now available again. Teachers can ask children to share what they remember about playing with the materials and to suggest other ideas about how they might be used. For example, ideas for using feathers might include gluing them on paper or blowing them with a straw. When children share this kind of information with peers, other children who might not otherwise use certain materials are often inspired to give them a try.

Sometimes teachers notice that children are not playing with certain toys that are available in the classroom. When this is the case, teachers can try to rekindle children's interest in these materials with a message on the message board. A teacher might choose to draw the message by taping the material to the message board along

TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Label the shelves in your classroom so children will associate the symbols drawn on the message board with the symbols on the shelves.

Home Connection: Suggest to parents that they label their children's dresser drawers with pictures of the type of clothing in each drawer. Children can choose and put away their own clothes in the correct place by reading the label on the drawers, (e.g., underwear and socks, shirts).



Examples of materials children can expect to find in the art area for that day are taped to the message board.

with the area symbol where the toy is located, or tape up the toy along with a question mark rather than the area symbol for its usual location. In the latter case, the teacher might comment, “I know we have these toys in the room. I haven’t seen them out in a while. Where are they?” Based on children’s comments during this message, a teacher can discover whether children have simply overlooked the materials and are still interested in using them, or whether the items should be replaced with a new choice due to children’s lack of interest.

Classroom Dilemmas

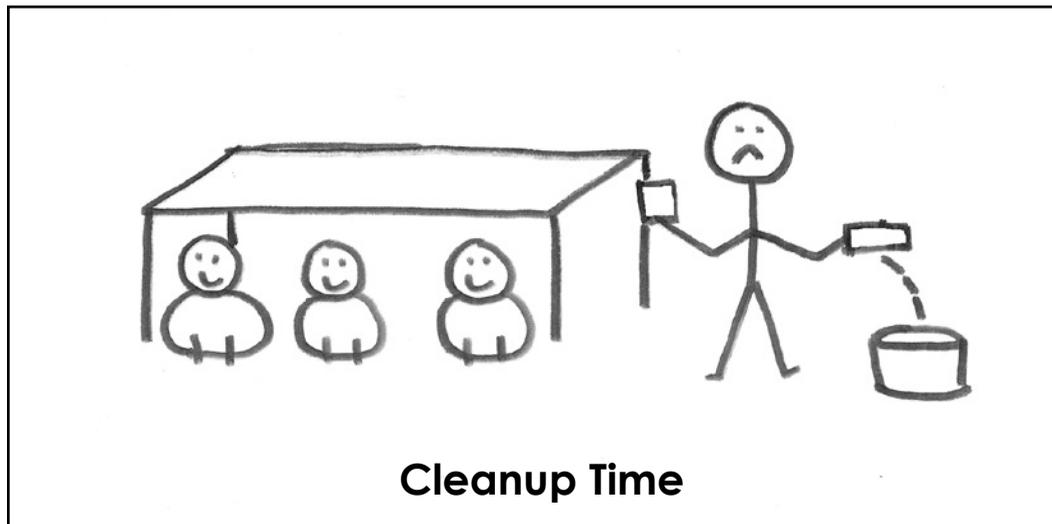
HighScope teachers also talk about classroom situations and dilemmas at greeting time (similar to the watery rice issue mentioned earlier in this chapter), using messages as a way to initiate a conversation with the children about specific classroom problems that need to be solved with all the children’s input.

A common symbol used on the message board to introduce classroom dilemmas is the question mark. Children learn that a question mark included in a message usually means that there is a “mystery” or question to figure out. For example, in one classroom the teachers discovered that the basket used to store dinosaur figures was empty. They brought this to the children’s attention by drawing the dinosaur basket on the message board with a question mark over it. After discussing the situation (the importance of finding the dinosaurs so that children could play with them at work time) and considering where to look, a child walked over to the house area, picked up a purse, and brought it over to the dinosaur basket, where she emptied its contents — the missing dinosaur figures. The teacher followed with the comment, “Oh, you remembered where they were. You solved the problem. Now we have dinosaurs for work time! At cleanup time today, let’s all remember to make sure the little toys like the dinosaurs go back in their baskets.”

Teachers need to decide whether a problem is one that can be handled on an individual basis with a particular child or group of children, or one that warrants discussion with the whole class. For example, if a few children need reminders about typing gently on the computer keyboard, teachers might consider whether this issue is significant enough to address with the whole class or if talking with individual children would be enough to resolve it. This is a judgement call, and teachers need to consider how often a problem occurs to determine whether it is truly a classroom-wide issue. While writing messages to facilitate



This message helps to initiate a discussion about a classroom dilemma – children cutting a doll’s hair.



In this message, teachers address the problem of children hiding under the table at cleanup time.

discussion is a creative way to solve classroom problems, teachers must be careful not to present every classroom issue this way. Message board time should be a positive experience and not always associated with problem solving. Teachers should also be sensitive about presenting messages in ways that do not single out specific individuals. In negative situations, children usually know which classmates were involved. Teachers need to guide these discussions to a general topic addressed to everyone. For example, as a teacher was addressing a problem involving children who were hiding under the table during cleanup time, a child shouted out the names of some of those children. The teacher replied, “Lots of kids like to hide at cleanup time. We need everyone to help get our room clean so we can have recall time. When kids hide, I feel sad because I have to clean up by myself. What should we do about this problem?”

Sometimes messages about classroom dilemmas are initiated by a teacher and at other times by children. Teachers in HighScope classrooms respect children’s ideas and concerns about the classroom and give them the opportunity to express them to the whole class. Sometimes children present issues and problems they encounter during the day. If there is no immediate need for a teacher to address the situation (e.g., a safety issue) with the whole class, a teacher may ask children if they would like to create messages for the next day’s message board. For example, one day during work time, a child showed her teacher a container of play dough

TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Introduce the “no” symbol on the message board.

Home Connection: Encourage parents to draw or write messages on sticky notes or paper to remind children about household responsibilities. Suggest, for example, they post a note by the light switch to remind their children to turn off the light, or post a note by the door as a reminder to children to remove muddy shoes.

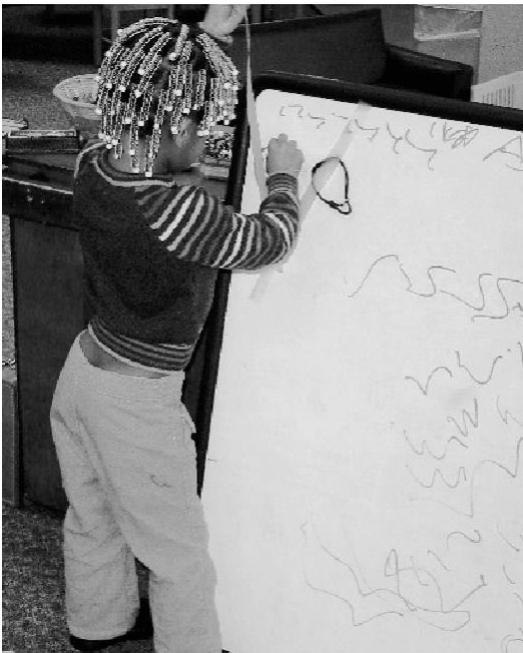
into which someone had poured water. The child and teacher talked about solutions to the problem, such as drying the play dough with paper towels, and the child decided the best way to solve the problem was to make new play dough. When her teacher asked her how to prevent someone from pouring water into the new play dough, the child decided to make a sign for the play dough container. She drew pink squiggles for the play dough, blue dots as water droplets, drew a circle around the whole picture and a slash through the circle (the “no” symbol). She taped the sign onto the play dough container. At greeting time the next day, she showed the class her sign on the play dough and explained what it meant.

Children’s Messages

As children have daily experiences with the message board, they discover that it is an instrumental means of classroom communication. Some of the most meaningful messages *to* children are generated *by* children. At first, children rely on teachers to provide the messages each day. Later children start requesting that teachers write specific messages for them. In these instances, teachers have opportunities to model writing for children and to ask children for suggestions about how to communicate messages (i.e., what the message should say and what symbols and words should be used to represent it). For example, a child may arrive at school one day with a dona-



Children often come to school with exciting news from home. Teachers can encourage children to create messages on individual dry-erase boards or paper and share this news at greeting time. This child (left) is drawing a message about baby fish that hatched in her fish tank at home. Later (above), she shares the message with the class.



Children enjoy creating their own messages (above and left) following the conventions of the classroom message board.

tion of art materials for the classroom and suggest the teacher write a message about the materials on the message board. Depending on the child, the teacher might respond in several ways; for example, he or she could describe the message by saying “I’m going to draw the art area symbol and the words *Art Area* so children will know where to find your materials,” or the teacher could ask, “What should I draw or write on the board? What part should I draw and what part will you draw?”

Eventually children begin to experiment with creating their own messages. Teachers should give all children in the classroom opportunities to write messages and encourage them to write in their own way on the message board. When teachers acknowledge children’s drawings, scribble writing, and letter approximations, children are encouraged to take risks and attempt writing; children also realize that

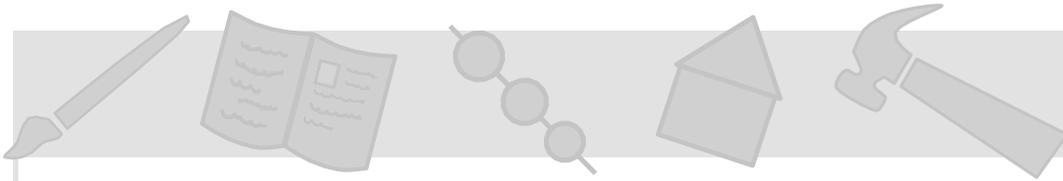
teachers value their messages. Sometimes children make comments about other children's messages, such as "It doesn't look like a cat. That's not the way you make an A." When this occurs, teachers can simply make comments such as "That's the way she draws a cat. Yours may look different. She is learning how to write." When children see developmental variations in drawing and writing valued and displayed in the classroom, they learn to be more accepting of these differences and confident that their own attempts will be accepted and acknowledged too.

Some teachers add small whiteboards to the writing area, book area, or art area, on which children can draw their own messages. Others provide clipboards and paper for children to use. Teachers may even ask children to write messages for them on the classroom message board. For example, a teacher might not have time to create a last-minute message about an absent child and will ask a child to do it.

Once children get inspired to write their own messages, teachers may find that they create more messages than can possibly be read at greeting time. Some typical child-generated messages might include "I got sick last night" or "This is my dog." The number that can be read at greeting time will depend on the level of children's interest and the extent of their attention span. If there are too many messages at greeting time, teachers can find other times of the day to share them with the class.

Teachers usually know ahead of time whether a child's message should be addressed with the whole class at greeting time. For example, in one classroom a child found a mitten on the playground at the end of outside time. He handed it to his teacher, who asked him how he was going to figure out whose mitten it was. The child decided to tape the mitten to a small message board and draw a question mark next to it. He showed his message to the class the next day, explaining that he had found the mitten near the fence; the mitten's owner claimed the mitten. This is the type of message that all the children needed to see at greeting time.

When children have information about the people, materials, and activities in their classroom, they can feel more secure and confident interacting in their environment. After a while, both teachers and children may discover that writing messages is a handy way to communicate not only at the beginning of the day but throughout the day. Since teachers have modeled different ways of creating messages, children have more examples of written communication to draw upon when they want to create their own messages. For example, at work time when a teacher asked a child to write her a reminder to refill the glue bottles, the child drew a picture of the glue bottle with the "no" symbol around it. She explained, "It says no glue, so you have to get more glue." Reading and writing messages is a process that conveys to children that using written messages as a form of communication is a useful feature of our daily lives.



4.

Reading the Message Board With Children

When teachers first introduce the message board to children, they typically guide children's reading and facilitate their understanding by interpreting pictures and symbols for them. Later, once they have become familiar with the symbols and ideas consistently represented on the message board, children begin to interpret messages themselves. Some children will learn to read messages quickly and easily, while others will need more teacher guidance. It is important for teachers to consider developmental differences among all of the children, not only when they create messages but also as they help children decode them. For example, some children will focus on pictures and symbols, while others may be ready for letters and words. Still others may need help keeping focused on the message board; these children will benefit from concrete representations, such as actual toys/objects taped to the board rather than drawings or symbols.

When teachers first introduce children to the message board at the beginning of the school year, they should start off with only one or two messages, using symbols that are already familiar to the children, such as letter-linked pictures. Children



Above, a message board listing children's names and letter-linked symbols lets members of the class know who is in each small group.

typically choose their letter-linked symbol before the beginning of the school year. Some teachers make home visits prior to the first day of school, giving children the opportunity to choose a personal symbol. The teacher then leaves a copy of the symbol so that children and parents have time to become familiar with it before school begins.

A helpful message at the start of the school year uses children's and teachers' names and letter-linked symbols to indicate who is in each small group (a group of 8–10 children and one teacher). Children find their name and/or symbol on the message board, are reminded of their teachers, and learn which other children will sit at their small-group table. (During the transition of new children to the classroom, it is important to introduce them to the group by using their symbol on the message board; it is also helpful during this time to scale back to one or two messages until new students become familiar with the symbols of the classroom.)

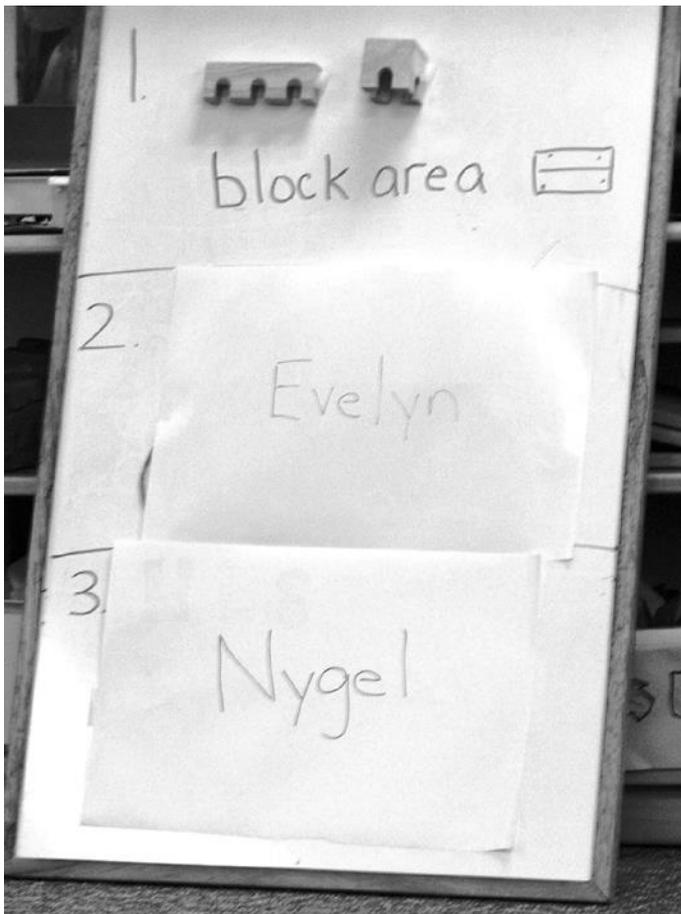
As teachers read the message board with children, they need to be aware of all children's engagement or lack of engagement. Children with confident language abilities may quickly engage, while others with no (ELL) or little language abilities will observe and may not speak up. Teachers need to give all children the opportunity to engage in the message board through guessing, interpreting, uncovering messages, reading, writing, and fixing the message board as discussed in chapter 5. All children should have a turn day by day to engage in message board according to their developmental levels of learning with the teacher's guidance and encouragement.

Strategies for Reading the Message Board

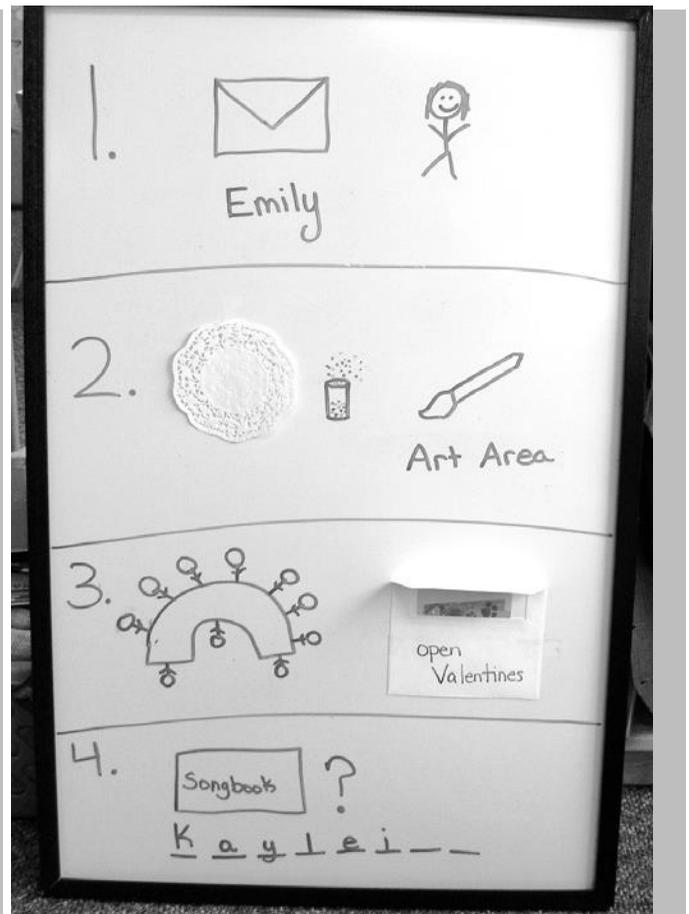
To ensure maximum interest and engagement from the class as a whole when reading messages, it is helpful to keep messages on the board hidden from view until everyone in the group is ready to begin reading together. Before greeting time, teachers can either turn the message board around or cover it with a piece of fabric or paper. Until children become familiar with the process of reading the message board, teachers should position themselves on the floor next to the board so they are able to point to each message and the various representations as they are being discussed. Some teachers may find it helpful to tape a piece of paper over each individual message when they are preparing the message board and to number each piece of paper as they would the messages on the board. Then teachers or children uncover messages one at a time, making it easier for children to know where to focus their attention.

The message board is written and read in order, like a page in a book (left to right, top to bottom), so children begin to acquire “concepts about print” — an essential component of early literacy — as they read it. Teachers can use the following strategies to support children's reading of the message board, recognizing that they may need to use different combinations of these strategies to meet the developmental needs of all children.

Identify each message by number. Point to the first message labeled “1” and say something like “Here's message number one. This is where we start.” When this happens daily, children learn that when they read the message board, they always begin with



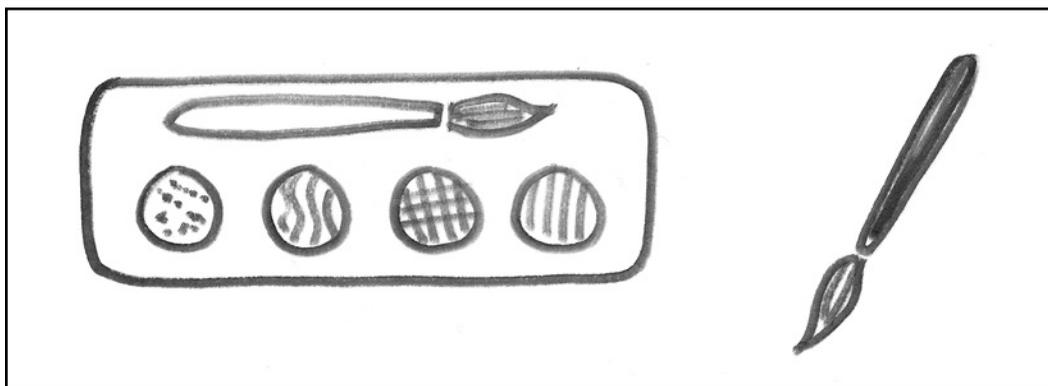
To help focus children's attention, teachers may cover messages until they are read. Children can take turns uncovering them.



Messages are numbered and read in sequence, a practice that supports children's later understanding of reading conventions.

message number one, which is located at the top of the message board or to the left side of the message board. This contributes to children's later understanding of the conventions of reading print materials (written in English). (Likewise, children learning other written conventions, such as Arabic, become familiar with the form or direction of that written language.)

Identify pictures, symbols, letters, and words. Point to and identify the individual elements of a message. For instance, a teacher might point to the drawing of scissors and say, "I see scissors. That is the symbol for the art area. Here are some words that say *Art Area*." After identifying the symbol and words designating the art area, the teacher can continue, "This message must tell us something about the art area. Let's figure out the rest of the message." Children might respond, "Something's in the art area." Generally, messages that contain area symbols indicate that a new material has been added to that part of the classroom. Children commonly identify those items before they read the area symbol, so it is helpful for teachers to start at



When new materials are added to an area of the classroom, messages typically include a representation of the new item along with the area symbol. This message alerts children to a new set of watercolors in the art area.

the beginning of the message and demonstrate how it can be read from beginning to end.

Ask “What do you see?” When children begin to more readily identify the representations on the message board, teachers can spend less time reading messages for children and begin to encourage children themselves to identify specific elements of the messages. Ask children, “What do you see in this message?” then acknowledge children’s responses by saying something like “Yes, that is the art area symbol. It looks like the sign hanging over the art area in our classroom. Here are some words written under the art area symbol. I wonder what those words say.” Point out that symbols and words used on the message board look the same and have the same meaning as those used throughout the classroom, so children begin to recognize that even when they see the same symbols or words in different contexts, the meaning remains consistent — another concept that contributes to later literacy.

Acknowledge all answers. As mentioned earlier, learning how to create effective messages takes practice for teachers, and the process involves a bit of creative risk taking. Children also take risks when they attempt to read messages and may sometimes misinterpret the teacher’s intended meaning. Acknowledge children’s efforts by restating what they say, for example, “Derek says this message is about the block area, Karen says it’s about a box. There are different ideas about this message.” Sometimes the reason for children’s misinterpretations are obvious to teachers. For example, a drawing of a rectangle (representing a large refrigerator box brought into the classroom) might resemble the block area symbol. In this instance a teacher might also say, “I see how this rectangle is the shape of a box and is also the shape of the block area symbol.” Acknowledging all attempts to read messages builds children’s confidence and sense of security in taking reading risks and knowing they will be respected for their efforts.

TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Add wordless picture books to the bookshelves in your classroom. As you look at the books with children, encourage them to describe what they see in the pictures as a way to help them understand the story. Support children's thinking by asking them to talk about characters or actions, and ask them open-ended questions, such as "What do you think is happening?" Or make comments about your observations, such as "That puppy looks playful. It's chasing its tail!"

Home Connection: Encourage parents to talk about the pictures in books as they read to their children. As children interpret the pictures, they learn how to connect the words and pictures of the story and make sense of what they hear and see. When children look at picture books, the process of making meaning is similar to the cognitive efforts to construct meaning from printed words (Paris & Paris, 2003)*.

*Paris, A. H., & Paris, S. G. (2003). Assessing narrative comprehension in young children. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 38(1), 36–76.

Wordless Picture Books

Clown by Quentin Blake

Rainy Day Dream by Michael Chesworth

The Midnight Circus and The Angel and the Soldier Boy by Peter Collington

Good Dog Carl and Carl Goes to Daycare by Alexandra Day

Pancakes for Breakfast and The Hunter and the Animals by Tommie de Paola

Rosie's Walk and Changes, Changes by Pat Hutchins

Frog, Where are You?, Frog Goes to Dinner, and Ah-Choo by Mercer Mayer

Moonlight and Sunshine by Jan Ormerod

Time Flies by Eric Rohmann

Dreams, Noah's Ark and Peter Spier's Rain by Peter Spier

Deep in the Forest by Brinton Turkle

Ask "How do you know?" There will be children in the classroom who are able to decipher messages without any help, and they may read a message aloud before others have a chance to figure it out. When this happens, teachers should support children's eagerness but also acknowledge that other children may still be reading the message. Teachers also can ask children to explain how they deciphered a particular message, which allows other children to learn from their peers. Children's observations and comments about the messages also give teachers information about children's thinking and development. When teachers notice which elements of messages individual children attend to, they can use the information to further support those children's interests and developmental needs with additional materials and activities. For example, one child might focus on the numerals labeling each message and consistently call attention to them. To support this child, a teacher could

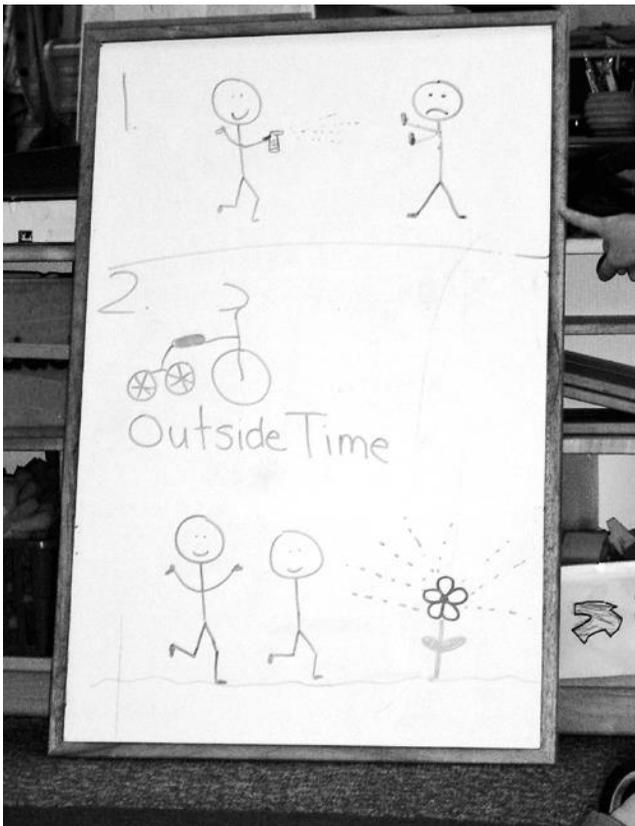
incorporate additional numerals on the message board, add more number books to the bookshelf, or use numeral cookie cutters at small-group time. Likewise, when children start noticing letters at storytime and during other activities, teachers can begin calling attention to letters and words written in messages, for example, by pointing to the words *Art Area* written next to the symbol for that area and saying “I see the art area symbol; I wonder what these words say.” Another comment might include, “Wow, both these words start with the letter A.” Along with taping objects or drawing representations of objects, teachers can write the names of those items. Even short phrases, such as *dinosaurs in the block area*, can be used to introduce children to the idea that spoken words are represented by combinations of letters and each separate unit of letters represents one word.

There may be those children who are typically not interested in the message board but may perk up for certain types of messages. For example, a child in one preschool classroom always seemed more interested in messages about opportunities to visit a different classroom. The teacher commented to the child that she noticed her excitement about visiting the other classroom and asked her if there was a particular reason for her interest. The child responded that she liked the “kitchen” in the other room. Upon further conversation, the teacher discovered that the other classroom’s house area had “better dishes and food.” This inspired the teacher to update her own house area with new materials.

A Message Board for Outdoors

If the purpose of the classroom message board is to inform children about their indoor environment, a message board posted on the playground or near the door leading to the outdoors is a way to help children understand their outside environment. In HighScope settings, teachers know that learning does not stop when children cross the threshold to the outdoors, and they provide a wide variety of materials for use outside as they continue to support children’s interests and development.

There may not be outside messages every day, but on occasion children need to be informed about differences in their outdoor environment. For example, teachers may want to point out that the tomatoes in the garden are beginning to turn red or remind children about swing safety. While teachers can certainly talk about these topics at greeting time, they can also think about repeating messages related to the outdoors on an outside message board. Since outside messages may not be posted daily, teachers will have to remind children to check the outside message board when necessary.



Message number two on the outdoor message board (left) informs children of available materials in the outside environment — a tricycle and a sprinkler in the shape of a daisy. One young boy (below) chooses to play in the daisy's spray!



A Message Board for Early Arrivals

In some preschool settings, children arrive at different times. In classrooms with staggered drop-offs, for example, those children who arrive early may need information about the upcoming day and changes in the classroom routine (e.g., a teacher's absence, new materials) prior to the regularly scheduled greeting time when everyone is present. Some teachers have found it helpful to display an additional message board near the classroom entrance so that children who are dropped off early can read the board with their parents upon arrival. For example, if there is a substitute teacher for the day due to the regular teacher's absence, children are alerted to this change by a message on the board before they enter the classroom and are greeted by an unfamiliar adult. Having a message board at the door that parents can read with children helps ease the transition into the classroom.

Other types of messages that might apply to early arrivers (e.g., in programs and child care centers that open at 7 a.m. and combine groups until more staff and children arrive) include those informing children about breakfast or room/area choices. Teachers can then decide whether those messages should be revisited at greeting time or whether to introduce new messages. Messages that require whole-class problem solving and discussion should always be introduced at greeting time. For example, in one classroom when teachers noticed that children were throwing their plastic cups into the trash can after snack time, the teacher created a message reminding children to place their cups in the dish tub rather than in the trash can.

The teachers then asked the children for ideas about how to keep the cups out of the trash can. The discussion went like this:

Shannon (teacher): *When Sue and I were putting the cups in the dishwasher, we noticed that we were missing some cups. We found the cups in the trash can. If the cups get thrown away, we won't have enough cups for snack time. How do you think we can remember to put the cups in the dish tub?*

Eli: *Make a sign.*

Shannon: *We could make a sign to remind kids to put the cups in the dish tub. What else could we do?*
(Silence)

Shannon: *What if you see someone put a cup in the trash?*

Madison: *Tell them to take it out.*

Shannon: *You could remind kids. What if you see a cup in the trash?*

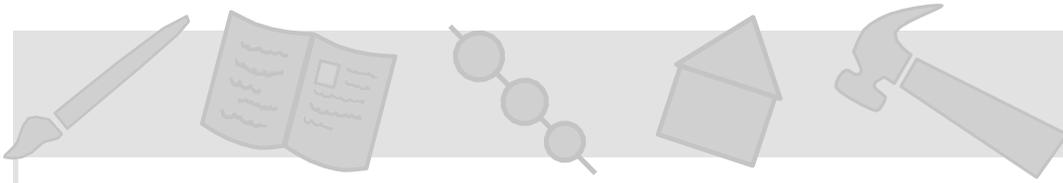
Evan: *Tell the teacher.*

Shannon: *You could tell a teacher. Do you think you could take out the cup yourself?*

- Evan:** *Yeab.*
- Shannon:** *So we have four ideas. We can make a sign to remind kids to put cups in the dish tub. We can remind kids to put cups in the tub. And if we see a cup in the trash, we can take it out or tell the teacher. These ideas will help us solve our disappearing cup problem. Would someone like to make a sign?*
- Eli and others:** *I will!*
- Shannon:** *You can make a plan to do that at work time.*

If the group arrives at a solution it would like to implement, this idea can be posted on the next day's message board to serve as a reminder. It will also provide encouraging evidence of the collective problem-solving ability of the class. For example, following the "disappearing cup" discussion, teachers displayed Eli's sign (a cup in a circle with a line across it to indicate the "no" symbol); Eli then taped the sign to the trash can.

This chapter took teachers through the process of reading messages with children, including ways to introduce children to the message board and guide them as they decipher and interpret messages. The final chapter will present strategies that teachers can use to support children's literacy and mathematics development with the message board.



5. Supporting Early Literacy and Math With the Message Board

When reading the message board, teachers encourage children’s active participation in decoding messages by acknowledging children’s comments, asking open-ended questions, and giving them opportunities to solve problems. Teachers also can use the message board as a way to actively introduce and support literacy concepts, such as letter and letter-sound recognition, rhyming and alliteration, and concepts about print. The message board also enhances children’s understanding of mathematics concepts, such as numeral identification, counting, and representing and interpreting data. This chapter will describe how teachers can draw children’s attention to these basic areas of early literacy and math development, create messages that facilitate children’s learning, and keep children actively engaged in reading the message board.

Strategies to Support Letter Identification and Letter-Sound Recognition

Children “read” long before they learn to read actual letters and words. They gradually acquire a knowledge of print from the books, toys, and environmental print (e.g., signs, labels, packaging) they encounter in the world around them. Often, children point out and identify letters they see often, particularly those that are meaning-



Environmental print is everywhere and provides a natural bridge to children's early literacy. From signs and labels to magazines and milk cartons, this everyday print supports children's "reading" long before they learn to read actual words and letters.

ful to them, such as the letters of their own or other people's names. Teachers can use the message board to capitalize on children's growing interest in letters and their emerging literacy skills. "As they explore print and begin discovering its importance, children start learning about individual letters and words" (Ranweiler, 2004).

Naming Letters in Familiar Words

One strategy teachers can use to support children who are just becoming aware of letters is to point out and/or name the beginning letters in familiar words that are written on the message board. For example, a teacher can point to the letter *t* in the word *toy* and say, "Here's the letter *t* for *toy*." Since *toy* is a word used often on the message board (e.g., each time a new material is introduced in the toy area), children have many opportunities to see and identify the letter *t*. Later, the teacher may add additional information about a specific letter, for example, saying "Tommy has a *t* at the beginning of his name also."

Teachers also can modify what they say about specific letters to encourage children to identify letters themselves. For example, rather than pointing to and naming the letter *t* in the word *toy*, teachers can point to the letter *t* and say, "Here's the word *toy*. Help me remember what this first letter is called."

After children have had many opportunities to see and identify letters on the message board, teachers can use a strategy that involves making “mistakes” in the messages for children to find and correct. For example, the teacher may combine the words *Block Area* with the symbol for the sand-and-water table and see whether children identify the incongruity. When teachers begin to create “mistakes,” they may first need to point out the errors themselves until children become more accustomed to anticipating and recognizing the types of mistakes their teacher may make. Teachers simply can acknowledge the mistake and explain the problem (e.g., “Oh, my goodness, look what I did. I wrote the words *Block Area* and drew the symbol for the sand-and-water table!”). After a few repetitions of this kind of mistake, children will become more attuned to recognizing others, and the teacher may simply have to pause with a quizzical look to prompt children to look for the error in the message.

Teachers also can keep children alert to the letters written on the message board by pointing to and then misidentifying letters. For example, a teacher might point to the *t* in the word *toy* and comment, “Oh, here’s the letter *s*. That’s the first letter in the word *toy*,” then wait for children’s reactions. If children do not catch the mistake, the teacher can simply pause and point out the mistake by acting startled or surprised and saying something like “Wait a minute. That’s not the letter *s*. That’s the letter *t*. *Toy* starts with the letter *t*.” Later, after children have had experience with misidentified letters but still miss an occasional mistake, the teacher might simply pause and say, “Hmmm, something seems strange about what I just said,” and then wait for the children to figure out the error.

Another strategy teachers can use to encourage letter identification and facilitate children’s understanding of letters in words involves building upon children’s interest in the letters in their own names and those of their peers. Teachers can modify the



When teachers make “mistakes” on the message board — such as combining the words *Art Area* with the rectangular symbol for the block area (above left) — children gradually come to recognize these kinds of mistakes on their own. This strategy supports children’s growing awareness of letters and emerging literacy skills. Eventually, they will pair the words *Art Area* with the “correct” symbol (above right) — a paintbrush.

typical messages about children who will be absent (represented by their name and symbol or letter-linked picture and circled with the “no” symbol) by writing only the first letter of the child’s name, rather than his or her whole name or symbol, on the message board, then asking children to figure out who is absent. Children then may call upon their knowledge of letters in order to figure out the name of the missing child. At first, teachers may have to help children find a strategy to use in order to figure out the missing child’s name, for example, by comparing the message to names on a group list. Teachers also might consider drawing the absent child’s letter-linked symbol to help developmentally younger children decipher the message. In order for this to work, children’s names must be routinely visible in the classroom environment (e.g., on small-group lists or coat hooks).

If two or more children’s names have the same first letter (e.g., Emily, Eddie, and Eugene), children may have to figure out who is missing through observation. Later, to extend this strategy, a teacher might make dashes following the first letter of the absent child’s name (e.g., E _____ for Emily) and ask children to help fill in the blanks with the correct letters — similar to the game Hangman — while the teacher writes them on the message board.

Additional strategies for practicing letter- and letter-sound correspondence are discussed later in this chapter. Children may offer their own ideas!

Identifying Letter Sounds

Teachers can also use the initial letters of children’s names and other familiar words to introduce children to letter sounds when reading the message board. Just as they first identify letters for the children in their classroom, teachers can identify the sounds of individual letters. For example, a teacher might point to the letter *V* in the name “Veronica” and say, “This name starts with a /v/ sound, /v/ for Veronica. Veronica is not going to be here today.” Or a teacher might point to the name “Demetrius” and say, “That’s a *D*, so this word starts with the /d/ sound. Whose name could it be?” Occasionally teachers might extend children’s thinking about letter sounds by asking them to think of other words that start with the same sound. Teachers can help facilitate this process by giving an example and emphasizing the initial sound “*d* for dog,” for example. The teacher might also make comments or ask questions like “I can think of an animal that starts with *d*. What could it be?” or “What are some other words that start with the letter *d*?”

Depending on children’s responses and level of interest (remember that reading the message board should only take a few minutes), a teacher might also write a few of the children’s responses next to the original word on the message board. If children come up with many words, teachers can suggest that those who are interested can continue compiling the list at work time. Teachers can also create opportunities

for children to catch letter-sound mistakes, similar to the way they challenge children by misidentifying letters. For example, the name “Veronica” might be written on the message board, yet the teacher says, “Meronica is not here today.” This strategy helps children begin to listen to the individual sounds that comprise words, supporting their development of phonemic awareness. If children do not catch a teacher’s mispronunciation, the teacher could say something like “Wait a minute. Did I say *Meronica*? That doesn’t sound right!” The teacher can point to the letter *V* and say, “Oh, I see the *V*. That makes the /v/ sound. It says *Veronica*.”

To support children who can identify both letters and letter sounds, teachers can create messages that require children to figure out messages in which the first letter of a familiar word is wrong. For example, a teacher might create a message to introduce new materials in the toy area; however, instead of writing the words *Toy Area*, the teacher writes *Boy Area*. The following conversation demonstrates how a teacher could use this strategy to support children at different levels:

- Teacher:** *Let’s look at message number 2.*
- Child 1:** *There are farm animals in the toy area.*
- Teacher:** *Yes, new farm animals in the toy area. How did you figure out that message?”*
- Child 1:** *There’s the toy area symbol.*
- Teacher:** *(pointing to the symbol) Yes, that’s the toy area symbol. But wait a minute! Something is wrong with this word (points to the word Boy).*
- Child 2:** *It has a B.*
- Teacher:** *Yes, it has a B (points to the letter B). That makes the /b/ sound. The first sound in this word is /b/.*
- Child 2:** *Boy area.*
- Teacher:** *Boy area? We don’t have a boy area. How do we make it say Toy Area?*
- Child 3:** *The B is wrong. Take away the B.*
- Teacher:** *What letter do we need for the word toy? (produces the sound /t/ a few times)*
- Many Children:** *T.*
- Teacher:** *(pointing to the toy area) Look at the toy area sign. The first letter in the word toy is the letter T. We need to erase the letter B and write the letter T.*

After this discussion, either the teacher or one of the children can correct the mistake on the board.



Messages that require children to decipher messages in which the first letter of a familiar word is wrong — Clock Area instead of Block Area, for example (above) — help children to attend to the individual sounds that comprise words, encouraging their developing phonemic awareness.

Identifying Rhyme and Alliteration

While learning letters and letter sounds is an important step in emerging literacy (i.e., the alphabetic principle), hearing the sounds in words (phonological awareness) is also a prerequisite for reading and writing. Identifying rhymes (word endings that sound the same) and alliteration (two or more words with the same initial sound) are important concepts that also can be supported through use of the message board. Children build phonological awareness as they listen to words that begin or end with the same sound. In the previous scenario, the teacher could have identified *toy* and *boy* as rhyming words. Each time a teacher changes the first letter of a word on the message board, the result is a rhyme. With experience, children will be able to identify rhyming words and create new rhymes.

Teachers can also call children's attention to alliterative words — words close together that start with the same sound — with creative messages. For instance, a teacher might write a message with the phrase “sand sable” rather than “sand table.”

Children who are attending to the sounds in words will hear the mistake and with practice will be able to determine that both words begin with the same sound. Teachers can help children recognize that the initial sounds are the same by emphasizing the beginning sounds as they say each word, noting that they are the same.

Supporting Concepts About Print

Along with using the message board to enhance letter learning and phonological awareness, the message board can also be used to help children become aware of the conventions of reading print. For example, children must learn that print is read in a particular direction, i.e., in English from left to right and top to bottom. Teachers can foster this understanding by occasionally varying the orientation of a rectangular message board. When it is turned so the longest side is vertical, messages are read from top to bottom. And when the message board is turned so the longest side is horizontal, messages are read from left to right.

Children also need to learn that letters must be written in a specific order to create words. One way that teachers can draw children's attention to this idea is by moving the first letter of a word to the end when they write it on the message board. Teachers can start by doing this with children's names (e.g., "Talia" becomes "aliaT"). Teachers should remember to include the letter-linked symbol with the child's name so developmentally younger children recognize that the word refers to the name of a classmate. Children ready to correct mistakes can use the letter-linked symbol to learn exactly whose name they must correct and then draw on their experience with letters and sounds — and the understanding that letters go in a specific order to make words — to identify the mistake. For example, a child might think "We're talking about Talia and her names starts with a *T*. The *T* belongs at the beginning of her name." Some children also will pick up on the visual cue that the largest letter (the initial capital letter) belongs at the beginning of a person's name.

TEACHER TIPS

Follow-up: Take children on a walk through your classroom, school, or neighborhood, encouraging them to identify letters or numerals they see in their environment. Play a version of "I Spy" in which you make a letter sound and ask the children to find the letter, saying, for example, "I spy the letter that makes the sound /t/," or "I spy the first letter in Jacob's name." Use this game at cleanup time to prompt children to find items to put away, (e.g., "I spy something that starts with a /p/") and also to support children's rhyme awareness (e.g., "I spy something under the table that rhymes with fish [dish]").

Home Connection: Encourage parents to cook with children at home. Cooking with children is an activity that can support both literacy and mathematics development. It involves reading directions, identifying ingredients, counting, and measuring. The directions on many food boxes, such as cake mixes and packaged dinners, include both words and pictures (e.g., a picture of three eggs or a partially filled measuring cup). Looking at cookbooks and creating shopping lists are other activities that may inspire young cooks in the kitchen.

As classroom teachers strive to provide literacy-rich activities for their preschool children, they should think of the message board as another means of incorporating purposeful reading, writing, and conversation into their daily routine. Teachers should, however, remember that the main purpose of the message board is to impart relevant information to children regarding their day.

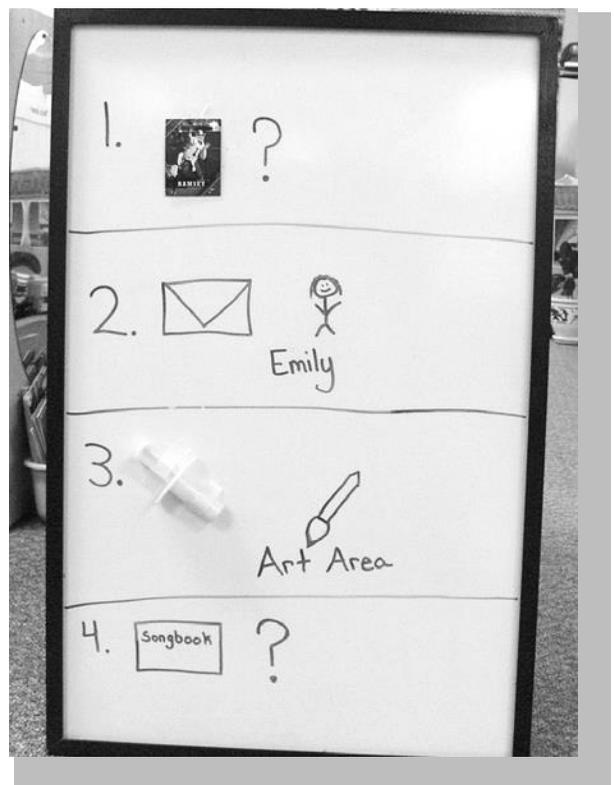
Supporting Mathematical Thinking

Along with supporting literacy, teachers can use strategies when creating and reading messages to enhance children's mathematical thinking. Messages can provide opportunities for children to identify numerals, count, and interpret simple numerical representations (e.g., graphs or charts).

Identifying Numerals

Preschool classroom environments are typically rich with materials that support letter learning (e.g., books, environmental print, letter blocks, ABC puzzles). Materials that encourage numeral recognition, however, are often less plentiful. Children learn about numbers and number symbols (numerals) in much the same way that they learn to name and use letters — through meaningful experiences. As mentioned earlier, numbering each message on the message board, and pointing to the numeral before reading each message, helps children know where to look on the board; it also exposes them to number words and symbols. Teachers also can introduce the idea that numerals can represent the order or sequence of objects or events. Teachers can make comments such as “Let’s take a look at message number one, the *first* message” (simultaneously pointing to the numeral 1) or “Message number two is the *second* message.”

Once children become familiar with the number order on the message board, teachers can again create “mistakes” for children to catch and correct. For example, a teacher might incorrectly number messages 1, 2, 4, or point to and misname a numeral (e.g., pointing to the

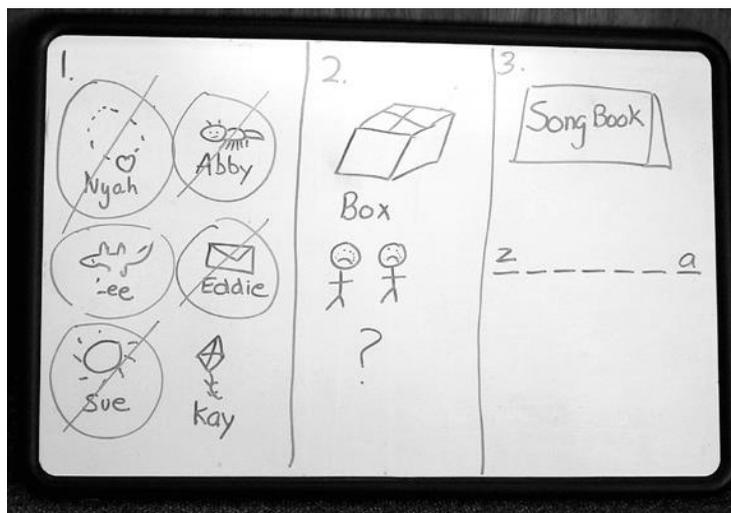


By numbering messages and pointing to the numeral before reading each message, teachers expose children to number words and symbols. Children are also introduced to the idea that numerals can represent the order or sequence of objects and events.

numeral 3 and saying “Now it’s time to look at message *five*”). As mentioned in the previous examples of literacy strategies, teachers may have to draw children’s attention to these mistakes until children become familiar with identifying them on their own.

Counting

Teachers usually find many opportunities for children to count; the key is to make these experiences meaningful. In other words, children need to have a reason for, or interest in, finding out “how many” of an object or item there are. The following are some examples of how teachers can use the message board to include meaningful counting opportunities.



Children learn about numbers and number symbols (numerals) through meaningful experiences, such as reading the morning message about absent classmates and counting how many children will be out for the day.

- ◆ Having a birthday seems to be an especially important occasion for preschoolers since they are becoming aware of age and the idea of growing older or bigger. A teacher in one preschool created birthday messages to announce those special days. In one birthday message, she wrote the birthday child’s name along with five balloons. She encouraged the children to count the balloons to discover the age of the birthday child. Teachers might also draw a number of candles on a cake or a number of cupcakes in a row to indicate the birthday child’s age.
- ◆ Asking “How many are absent?” is another way to occasionally incorporate counting into the common message about absent children. The following is an example of a conversation a class might have related to counting absent children.

Child: Lydia, Nigel, and Paulie are absent!
Teacher: Yes, I see ten children are absent.
Child: No, three children.
Teacher: Only three. How do you know?
Child: Count them. One, two three.
Teacher: (pointing to and counting absent children’s symbols) One, two, three. Three children.

- Teacher:** Look around the circle. Is anyone else missing?
Child: Kayleigh.
Teacher: Kayleigh is missing too. Now how many children are missing? We had three and we added one more.
Child: Four.
Teacher: I'll add Kayleigh's name to the message board and write the number 4.

Graphing and Representing Data

A rainy day or inclement weather usually brings with it the possibility that children will not have outside time. On the message board, teachers can create a basic two-column chart, one column labeled *outside*, the other column labeled *inside* (or one labeled with a picture representation of rain, the other with a picture of the sun), then ask children to predict whether they expect to have outside time or stay inside. Teachers can write children's names or symbols (or use tally marks) in the column that corresponds to children's responses, then count them with children to determine the total for each column. Teachers might also ask children to determine which column has more names or tallies.

The strategies outlined in this chapter should act as extensions to messages and not as literacy or mathematics exercises. As teachers create the daily messages, they must consider the number of messages they want to present, the type of discussion that might evolve from each, and the amount of time this might take. After these considerations, teachers can then determine how they will present the information.

References

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About the Author

Suzanne Gainsley is a HighScope-certified teacher who has been teaching at the HighScope Demonstration Preschool since 1998. She has also worked with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary school children in various settings as a teacher, parent, and volunteer. Gainsley is also the coauthor of two books in The Teacher's Idea Book Series, published by HighScope Press: *"I'm Older Than You. I'm Five!" Math in the Preschool Classroom*, and *50 Large-Group Activities for Active Learners*.



Appendix: Scenes From the HighScope Demonstration Preschool

The DVD included with this book contains video footage of actual message board times at the HighScope Demonstration Preschool over several years as our ideas about using the message board in the classroom developed and evolved. Taken together, these clips illustrate the many ways in which the message board can be used to support children's learning through an engaging and interactive greeting-time experience.

The following selections are included on the disc:

- 1 "Finding out who's here today" (6:00)
- 2 "Reading the message board with a late arriver" (1:33)
- 3 "Finding out about new materials in the book area and a change in the daily routine" (4:00)
- 4 "Using the message board to support math learning" (2:20)
- 5 "Solving a classroom problem" (4:54)
- 6 "Using the message board to support literacy" (1:14)
- 7 "Announcing classroom visitors and introducing new materials for the art area" (2:58)
- 8 "Discussing a new easel and a change in the daily routine" (3:00)