

The Master Plan

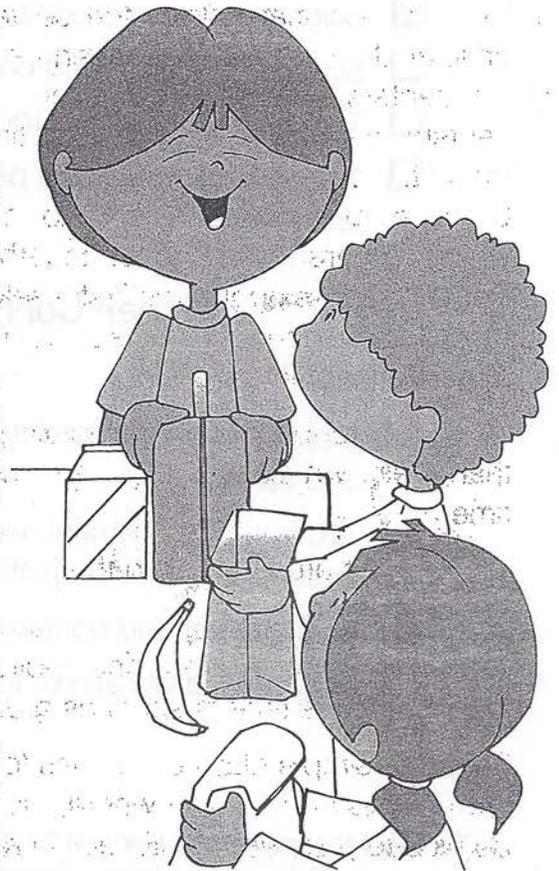
To make transitions smooth, visualize what the class should ultimately look like. Set a goal for a smoothly running classroom by the fifth week of school. Use the first four weeks to map out strategies to meet the goal.

In planning, remember the consensus values of honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance and giving. (*The Basic School*, Ernest Boyer, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1995). Weave those values into expectations for the classroom.

Fifth Week of School: The Goal

As children enter the classroom, they check their responsibilities for the day, put things they have brought from home in appropriate places and get involved in the first activity of the day. Bring them together to share their connections from the day before (how they connect what they have learned to their life away from school) and plan for the new day. After an information giving-gathering-getting session, children may choose from 9 to 12 centers in the room while individual and group conferences take place with children in reading, writing or math. A break for PE or recess allows planned and sequenced development of gross motor skills and group participation in games.

Snacks and lunch are social as well as nutritional. Children return for connections from the morning's activities to their out-of-class time, the information giving-gathering-getting session and learning centers. Formal closure evaluates what has been done that day, how connections might be made during the time away from school and what will happen the next day. Everyone leaves excited about the day they have had and the day to come.



To achieve "The Goal," begin at the beginning—Week 1.

Week 1: Structure Promotes Safety and Security

Children enter a strange room with all their belongings. They don't know where to go, what is in store for them, who will be there or how their basic needs will be met. It is important to establish safety and security early, and that is most often done through structure and close contact.

During the first week, structure the class. Children are asked to enter, take off coats and sit on the carpet to play with something that is put out for them. When everyone is seated, take attendance, read a story, and move quickly to centers.

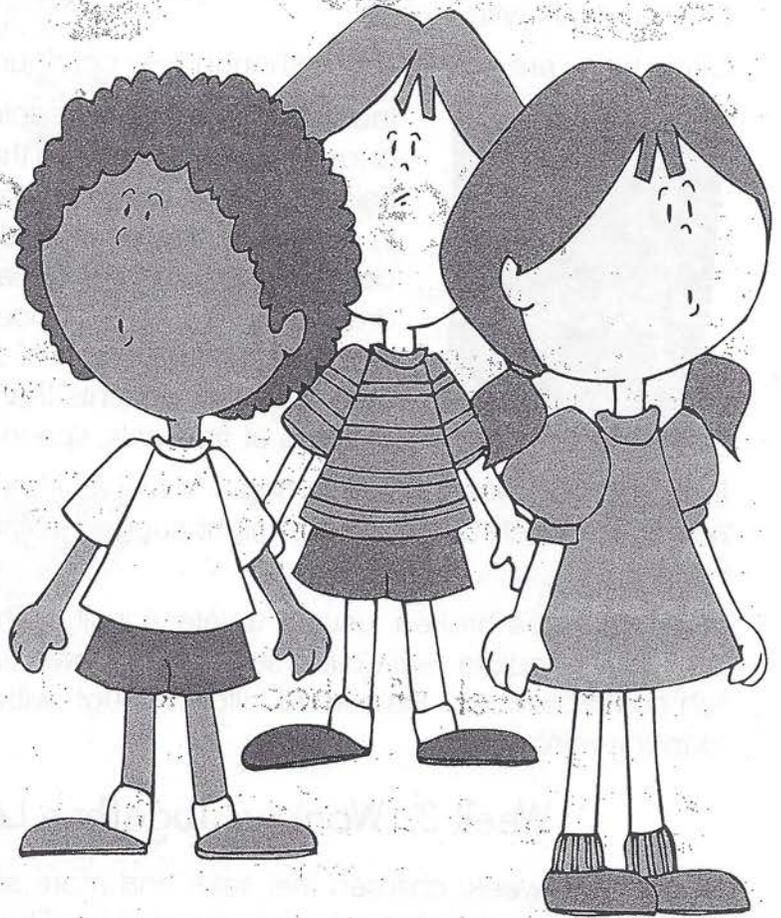
Each center has only one set of materials available on the first day. Every day add an additional set. Demonstrate materials at the centers or at circle time before children go to the centers. Rotate children through centers briefly, with only enough time for initial investigation of materials. Change groups each day to see which children work best together. Remember, the goal in the first week is for children to feel safe and secure, not to gain a lot of information.

Conduct group tours of the building and grounds daily to acclimate the children in places other than their own classroom. Play time outside is in a small space with only one classroom at a time.

Circle times are active with the teacher as leader. Tell or read and lead songs that are familiar to the children.

Observe, monitor, direct and redirect during the first week. Little teaching occurs when a teacher's class time is spent as group organizer.

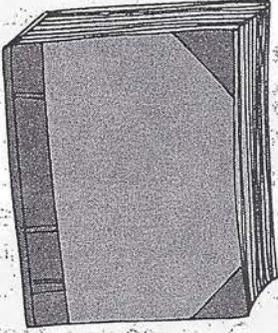
Establish simple classroom rules for safety and group functioning. Some examples are: walk in the classroom; watch where you are going; stay with your group; keep the teacher in sight; be nice to your friends. Establish rules, teach the rules to the children and remind them of the rules throughout the day using the exact words and reinforce the rules. Watch to see that the class is following the rules.



Week 2: A Sense of Belonging Fosters Responsibilities

In the second week, children should begin to feel safe and secure. Reduce the high structure of the first week by giving a little more freedom and responsibility to the children. When they come into the classroom, they may be told to get something to work with on the carpet or to go there and talk with friends.

Circle times are a bit longer, although they continue to be active.



Increase the length of center times. Most of the materials were introduced in the first week so that each center now has several sets of materials. Continue to assign groups to centers. The amount of time spent in centers is directly related to how long the children stay active at the center before becoming inactive. Watch for inactivity and redirect children within the center if possible. When several children get restless, it is time to rotate. Length of stay in each center ranges from 8 to 10 minutes. Remind students that they are responsible for the care and maintenance of materials, space and equipment.

In the second week students begin to feel as if they belong together. They look out for themselves and each other. Some might suggest a group name for the class and decorations to match.

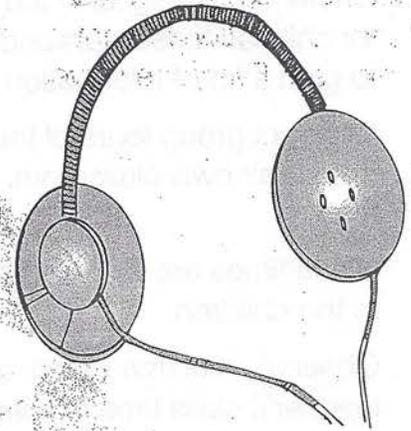
Rules might be broken, usually unintentionally. The children just forget them. Try to be kind, but use immediate redirection strategies. However, if simple redirection is not enough, establish consequences. Be sure to follow through with consequences immediately, not after three to four reminders.

Week 3: Working Together, Learning Problem Solving

By the third week, children feel safer and more secure, more a part of the group and somewhat responsible. The teacher's first two weeks have been spent in observation, monitoring and redirecting. This continues, but now social or academic problem resolution can begin. Continue to make children feel safe and secure, even if it is necessary to enter their work space and work or play activities. Always guide, allow exploration or right and wrong solutions and encourage safe risk taking. Do not correct, reprimand and sanction.

These observations are not only to encourage problem solving, but to see what each child can do and may be ready to learn. Recording these observations takes time. This is the week for you to record observations if you have not already started.

When children enter the classroom, they automatically put their things away and choose an activity to get involved in. Don't ask them to sit on the carpet or talk with friends, but ask them to go right to centers and get to "work" (play). Allow children to choose their work area and the length of time they want to play there. Circle times are well planned, but interject them into the schedule as needed or when appropriate. Intensive work is not interrupted.



Week 4: Conferencing, Instructioning and Evaluating



The ultimate goal is getting closer. Children enter the room and get to work. Move them when needed if they don't move themselves. There is time to conference with children in skill areas that need development. Those skill areas change with time. Young children may need help exploring the use of crayons, markers and pencils. Other children may need help counting objects (setting the table in housekeeping) while older children may need help adding two-digit numbers. Because they feel safe and secure, have a sense of belonging and have been guided in problem solving, they are deeply engrossed in the activities at the centers. The result is time for the teacher to work with individual children that have needs. Individual goals may be set, and tasks may be decided upon. As the child performs the tasks, the teacher and child can evaluate responsibilities.

Lunch break allows for out-of-the-class socialization and nutrition. The children return for connections from the morning's activities to the out-of-class time, an information giving-gathering session and learning centers. Formal closure looks at what has been done that day, how connections might be made during the time away from school and what will happen the next day. Everyone leaves excited about the day they have had and the day to come.

