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SKILLS FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS



Second
Edition

Published by Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.
A Bell & Howell Company
Columbus, Ohio 43216

Text Designer: Cynthia Brunk
Cover Designer: Tony Faiola
Production Coordinator: Molly Kyle

Photo Credits: cover, Elizabeth Crews; p. 14, Ben Chandler; pp. 16, 28, 31, 55, 76, 88, 148, 160, 182, 188, 204, 244, 266, Janice Beaty; pp. 40, 66, 93, 108, 125, 144, 165, 174, 192, 216, 258, Janet Gagnon; p. 204, © C. Quinlan.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 83-62013
International Standard Book Number: 0-675-20086-5
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10—90 89 88 87 86 85 84
Printed in the United States of America

In memory of a special teacher and friend
Kathryn L. Jenkins

PREFACE

This introductory text presents and discusses basic classroom skills for pre-school teachers. It is designed for use by college students preparing to be teachers in nursery schools, day care centers, Head Start, prekindergarten, and kindergarten programs. It is also useful for inservice teachers and aides who are updating their skills or preparing for the national Child Development Associate (CDA) assessment.

The skills for working with three- to five-year-old children in a classroom setting are presented in fourteen chapters. There are eight accompanying sound filmstrips that illustrate the text and present a variety of ideas for applying the information.

Each chapter is a self-contained learning module with objectives, text, learning activities, question sheets, lists of supplementary texts and film resources, and an evaluation sheet. Students may progress through each chapter at their own pace. To gain the greatest value from this program, the student should be in a position to apply directly, in an early childhood classroom, the ideas in the text and films. Many college programs place their students in a nursery school setting for several mornings a week so they may accomplish the prescribed learning activities with young children.

College programs that use this text as background material for a practicum experience often expect students to complete three to four of the chapters in one semester. To determine which chapters a student should work on, some programs perform an initial assessment as the student works in an early childhood classroom; the instructor uses the Teacher Skills Checklist as an observation tool.

The student is also asked to complete a self-evaluation with the Checklist, as described in Initial Assessment. The observer and the student then meet to compare Checklist results and decide on which of the fourteen areas the student needs to concentrate.

The other checklists—the Activity Area Checklist, Child Involvement Checklist, Language Assessment Checklist, Large Motor Checklist, Small Motor Checklist, and Self-Concept Checklist—are useful inservice observation tools.

The fourteen chapters of the text are arranged in the same order as the skills in the Teacher Skills Checklist. Each chapter provides theoretical background on the particular skill, as well as ideas for practical application in working with young children and their families.

Acknowledgements

I am especially indebted to Bonny Helm, CDA Field Trainer at Elmira College, Elmira, New York, for reading the manuscript and helping with changes. Thanks also to Ruth Raimon-Wilson, Head Start Regional Training Officer at Cornell University, who worked with me on the development of the initial assessment instrument; to Ellen Wohl, director of the Chemung County (New York) Child Development Program; to Sandy Shepard and Marilyn Owen, teachers in that program; to Faith Gray, director of Steppingstone Nursery School; to teachers and trainers in colleges and early childhood programs around the country who offered suggestions for the improvement of this revised edition; and especially to the many parents who allowed their children to be featured in the photographs and filmstrips.

J.B.

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Introduction

THE SELF-TAUGHT MODULAR APPROACH

The book introduces a new approach to training teachers and aides in early childhood classroom skills: the self-taught modular training program. It is based on the premise that students learn more effectively when they become deeply involved in their own instruction. The self-taught modular approach allows the student to help determine his or her own needs, to participate in selecting a trainer, to assist in setting up a training prescription, to work at his or her own pace in an early childhood setting, and finally, to help determine when the objectives have been accomplished and the training finished.

Children in the preschool classroom also strive to become independent and self-directed in their learning. Thus it is appropriate that their teachers and aides develop classroom skills to assist the children toward this end through the teachers' own self-taught training.

The self-taught approach is also based on the premise that training in classroom skills, to be effective, should be individualized. The program contains fourteen modular chapters that can be prescribed separately, or in any combination or sequence, to meet the individual's training needs.

Each chapter in the program is self-contained and can be used independently to upgrade particular skills during inservice training. For college students in preservice training, all the chapters can be used to provide them with the basic skills necessary for successful preschool teaching.

The skills derive from the revised version of the six general areas, designated in 1973 and revised in 1983 by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, and the Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program, as basic competencies for persons with primary classroom responsibility for groups of young children three to five years of age:

1. To establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment.
2. To advance physical and intellectual competence.
3. To support social and emotional development and provide positive guidance and discipline.
4. To establish positive and productive relationships with families.
5. To insure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs.
6. To maintain a commitment to professionalism.

True learning occurs when students have opportunities to make practical applications of theoretical ideas. Therefore, the classroom skills acquired through this self-taught approach should be performed in actual preschool settings. If the student already serves as a teacher, aide, or volunteer in a Head Start classroom, day care center, nursery school, parent cooperative, or prekindergarten program, he or she may use the classroom as the location for completing the prescribed chapters. If enrolled in a college early childhood program, the student will need to volunteer at least three mornings a week in a nearby preschool classroom.

Students will also need a trainer to assist with their progression through the training program. The trainer will help with each student's initial assessment, review answers to question sheets, observe the student in the early childhood classroom, and meet regularly with the student to provide support and assistance as the learning activities are completed.

The trainer, in other words, serves as a support person who responds to the student's work and activities. The primary responsibility for progress through the self-taught modular training program belongs to the student. Activities each student will be involved in include:

1. Initial assessment of present skills in an early childhood classroom based on observations by the trainer, using the Teacher Skills Checklist.
2. Self-assessment of present skills by the student, using the Teacher Skills Checklist.
3. Assessment conference with trainer to discuss and compare results of the two checklists.
4. Training prescription of chapters based on the results of the assessment conference.
5. Step-by-step, self-directed progression through each of the assigned chapters.
6. Observation of the student by the trainer in the preschool classroom.
7. Regular meetings with the trainer to discuss assigned learning activities.

The intent of the self-taught modular training program is to assist the student in acquiring classroom skills through a wide variety of learning techniques. Viewing a Mediapak, reading from the text, writing answers to questions, responding orally to a trainer's questions, performing focused observations of individual children, making file cards of classroom activities, creating special games and activities to meet children's needs, demonstrating evidence of competence through classroom performance—all of these learning activities are a part of each chapter.

The second edition of *Skills for Preschool Teachers* is a comprehensive multimedia program for training primary caregivers in early childhood programs. For those already employed in programs, it will help them assess their areas of need and strengthen their skills. For those preparing to work in such programs, it will help them develop entry-level skills in a classroom setting. And for anyone who qualifies, it will prepare him or her to stand for the final assessment for the Child Development Associate credential.

Initial
Assessment

Those who have chosen to work with young children know only too well the truth of the maxim that the beginning is the most important part of the work. They are dedicated to providing a happy and successful beginning for the child's first group learning experience away from home, with the hope that such a beginning will have a lasting effect on the child's future development.

So it is with beginners of any kind. If you have been one, you have undoubtedly realized how important it is for your future success to know at the outset where you stand, what will be expected of you, how you will be judged, and what support or encouragement you can expect.

Students in the self-taught modular training program will begin with an initial assessment to help them determine what classroom skills they presently possess and what skills they need to strengthen.

The initial assessment is a threefold process involving both student and trainer. It consists of (1) a classroom observation of you by your trainer, using the Teacher Skills Checklist; (2) a self-evaluation using the same checklist; and (3) a conference between you and the trainer, to compare checklist results and arrange your personalized training prescription.

In a self-taught program, the student is always the initiator of any activity. Therefore, it is up to you, as the student, to begin the process.

SELECTING THE TRAINER

First, you will need to arrange for a trainer to make the initial assessment. If you are a college student, your early childhood instructor or supervising teacher may automatically become your trainer. In other instances, someone in the early childhood program where you will be volunteering may serve as the trainer.

If you are employed in an early childhood program, it is possible for a master teacher, educational coordinator, or director to be your trainer. Or, your program may wish to contract for the services of an outside field trainer through a local college or Head Start regional or state training office.

It is important that the trainer be someone you have confidence in . . . someone who has had experience in an early childhood classroom . . . someone who can evaluate your classroom skills objectively . . . someone who will help and support you throughout your training program.

ASSESSMENT BY THE TRAINER

Again, it is up to you to arrange for initial assessment by the trainer. The assessment should take place as soon as you are comfortably involved with the children and their activities. If you are a volunteer, you may want to wait for a week or so until you feel perfectly at ease in the classroom. Then your trainer can be invited to make the observation, checking off items on the Teacher Skills Checklist which he or she sees you performing. After each item, the trainer will make a brief notation of the evidence for your performance. For example, after "x Promotes common safety practices within each activity area," the trainer might note: "Exposed pipes covered with insulation."

Some observers wish to stay most of the day. Others prefer to observe for only an hour at a time on more than one day. I have found three one-hour observations on three days to be ideal.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Next, you should go through the Teacher Skills Checklist yourself, checking off the items you see in the room or those you are performing. Be honest. Check only those items you have actually performed. A self-assessment is often a difficult one. If you are not sure about some of the items, put down a question mark instead of a checkmark. Your responses on the checklist are just as important as the trainer's in determining your training prescription.

ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE

When both you and the trainer have finished the Teacher Skills Checklist, arrange a meeting to discuss the results. At this time you should go over your checklists together, discussing items that were checked as well as those that were not. A blank on the trainer's checklist may result from the trainer's not having had an opportunity to see you perform that particular skill. You will need to point this out. A blank on your checklist that corresponds to a checkmark by the trainer may be an area of confusion for you, which should be noted.

Items that are blank on both checklists need to be noted also. These items may serve as a focal point for your training prescription. The chapters from sections that have the most unexplained blanks on both checklists will need to be included in the training prescription.

TRAINING PRESCRIPTION

The training prescription put together by you and your trainer is an outline of the training program you will follow, based on the checklist results. The prescription should both note your areas of strength and point out your areas of need.

The learning activities you will be working on are listed at the end of each chapter. Follow them in order.

Teacher skills checklist 4

Name _____ Observer _____

Directions:

Check items which are performed regularly.

Put question mark on items you do not understand.

Leave all other items blank.

1. Safe

Evidence

- _____ Promotes common safety practices within each activity area.
- _____ Encourages children to follow common safety practices.
- _____ Stops or redirects unsafe child behavior.

2. Healthy

- _____ Encourages children to follow common health & nutrition practices.
- _____ Provides & uses materials to insure children's health & cleanliness.
- _____ Recognizes unusual behavior or symptoms of children who may be ill & provides for them.

3. Learning environment

- _____ Determines what activity areas can & should be included in the classroom on the basis of program goals, space available, & number of children.
- _____ Separates activity areas & places them in appropriate spaces.
- _____ Arranges equipment & materials so that children can make choices easily & independently.

4. Physical

- _____ Assesses physical needs of individual children & makes appropriate plans to promote their development.
- _____ Provides equipment & activities to promote large & small motor skills in & out of the classroom.
- _____ Provides opportunities for children to move their bodies in a variety of ways.

5. Cognitive

- _____ Helps children use all of their senses to explore their world.
- _____ Helps children develop such concepts as shape, color, size, classification, seriation, number.
- _____ Interacts with children in ways which encourage them to think & solve problems.

	Evidence
6. Communication	
_____	Interacts with children in ways to encourage them to communicate their thoughts & feelings verbally.
_____	Provides materials & activities to promote language development.
_____	Uses books & stories with children to motivate listening & speaking.
7. Creative	
_____	Arranges a variety of art materials for children to explore on their own.
_____	Accepts children's creative products without placing a value judgment on them.
_____	Gives children the opportunity to have fun with music.
8. Self	
_____	Accepts every child as a worthy human being & lets him or her know with nonverbal cues.
_____	Helps children to accept & appreciate themselves & each other.
_____	Provides many activities & opportunities for individual children to experience success.
9. Social	
_____	Provides opportunities for children to work & play cooperatively.
_____	Helps, but doesn't pressure, the shy child to interact with others.
_____	Provides experiences which help children respect the rights & understand the feelings of others.
10. Guidance & discipline	
_____	Uses a variety of positive guidance methods to help children control their negative behavior.
_____	Helps children establish limits for their behavior.
_____	Helps children handle negative feelings through acceptable outlets.
11. Family	
_____	Involves parents in planning & participating in children's programs.
_____	Communicates frequently with parents.
_____	Treats information about children & families confidentially.
12. Program management	
_____	Uses a team approach to plan a flexible classroom schedule.
_____	Uses transitions & small group activities to accomplish the goals of the program.