Teachable Moments

The development of social and emotional skills is crucial to the success and confidence of young learners. Children's social and emotional skills are essential for school readiness and are central building blocks for cognitive development and gaining knowledge.

Therefore, in conjunction with WePlaySmart™ experiences and the Beyond the Table activities, we wanted to provide you with Teachable Moments. Teachable Moments are intentional strategies that enable educators to integrate techniques and cues into their daily interactions. These techniques are essential for scaffolding children's development of social and emotional skills. As you review the WePlaySmart Progress Monitoring Tool (and as you observe the children in your class on a day-to-day basis), you should reference Teachable Moments to find support, training, 'things to say' and other intentional strategies that will increase the children's experiences and successes with all of the social and emotional skills provided through WePlaySmart.

As early childhood educators, you already know that every day in your classroom provides endless teachable moments. For example, suppose that Jacob is playing at the water table and you notice he has arranged the rubber ducks in order from largest to smallest. Taking a minute or two to ask Jacob open-ended questions about his work creates a teachable moment during which you also enable him to talk about seriating, among other math skills.

Teachable scenarios can extend beyond cognitive development to address social and emotional development. For example, Jacob is at the water table and his classmate Lucy wants to join him, but will not ask him whether she can help with the ducks. The teacher observes Lucy's hesitation and quietly asks Jacob whether she can watch him work. Jacob agrees and makes room. The teacher looks up and signals to Lucy to come closer. She says to Lucy, "Would you like to help too?" Lucy nods. "Can you ask Jacob the same way that I did? He is really good at working here and he can help you." Lucy shrugs and quietly asks Jacob whether she can play too. He readily agrees and as Lucy steps to the table, the teacher backs away saying, "You two have fun! I cannot wait to see what you do next. If you need me, I'll be at the next center."

Although there are a number of ways this interaction could have gone, the teacher noticed Lucy's hesitation and due to other interactions the teacher has observed, the teachable moment became one of modeling and guidance.

Within this document, you will find the social and emotional skills from WePlaySmart and the Beyond the Table activities integrated within the Teachable Moments content.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT:

Teachable Moments provide a brief description of the social/emotional skill that needs attention in early childhood settings.

Tipping Points provide you with an example of what it might look or sound like when a child (children) is struggling with the skill in question.

Teacher Trainings provide you with more information about why the social/emotional skill in question is important to the overall development of young children.

Intentional Strategies are the techniques, cues, modeling tips and hints that are the bulk of Teachable Moments. These are the strategies to integrate into your daily life as an educator to increase the success of social and emotional development of your young learners.

Social Competence

Teachable Moments for **[children who struggle to maintain positive group participation behaviors,](#)** who may be unable to take turns, respect others' space and projects, and who are commonly not polite, friendly and/or respectful. (A.SCS.1)

Tipping Points: Some children find it difficult to make and maintain friendly relationships because it is difficult for them to understand and follow social rules (during games, learning center activities on the playground, and so on) and therefore may not exhibit **positive pro-social behaviors** in different group settings. For example, children who easily anger and lose their temper when things do not go their way likely also have a hard time getting along with others.

Teacher Training: Most children, like adults, do not like behavior that is bossy, self-centered, or disruptive. It is simply not fun to play with someone who does not share or follow the rules. Social competence is a broader term used to describe a child's social effectiveness--a child's ability to establish and maintain high-quality and mutually-satisfying relationships while avoiding negative treatment from others. In order for children to experience success in the classroom and throughout life, they must be able to cooperatively work with others, appropriately respond to others, respectfully acknowledge others and maintain polite and friendly demeanors. Children who have a wide repertoire of social skills and who are socially aware and perceptive are likely to be socially competent and are therefore more apt to maintain positive group participation (Zimmerman, 1989, 1990, 1994; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990).

Intentional Strategies

- Include a variety of **topics that cater to children's differentiating interests**. Many teachers invest energy in the pre-planning and set up of classrooms and lesson plans, but sometimes overlook children's interests. For example, say you are planning to read a book about acorns because the children experimented with acorns at the sensory table. Suppose, however, the children are clearly uninterested in the story that you are reading. Rather than forcing yourself and the children to sit through the remainder of the story, as it is, turn the story into one about dinosaurs eating acorns (or another applicable interest and topic). Doing so may enable children who struggle with positive group time to refocus, hunker down, engage with others, and enjoy the experience.

- In order to provide **developmentally-appropriate** experiences for children, it is important to consider three dimensions. These include age-appropriateness, individual appropriateness and appropriateness of cultural and social contexts. Here are definitions of the three dimensions:

- **Age-appropriateness**: Children who are the same chronological age may still vary in developmental age because of individual growth rates, patterns of development or other individual differences. For example, a range of two years in the developmental ages within a group of five-year-olds is common. At this age, boys are often up to six months less mature than girls.

  o **Individual appropriateness**: Experiences should match the child's developing and emerging abilities, while at the same time provide some challenge for continued growth and expansion of interests.

  o **Cultural and social context appropriateness**: It is important that adults working with children have some knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which the children live. This ensures that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families [Bredekamp, Sue & Copple, Carol (Eds.). (1997). See also: *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (revised edition)*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)].

- **Guide children to work together to invent rules.** When they have the chance to do so, they will feel more empowered to follow them. Work with your class to stick to three main categories: taking care of themselves; taking care of friends; and taking care of the classroom (and school).

  o **Limit the number of rules to 3-5**. An excessive number of rules may overwhelm young children. Finally, write the rules in positive terms and state what the children should do, rather than what they must do. For example, "We are kind to each other" may be more effective and meaningful than, "Don't be mean to your classmates".

  o Ensure that **children know why rules are important**. For example, rules keep us safe while we are having fun. Additionally, when children take care of themselves, their friends, and their classroom, they foster important social and emotional skills including compassion and empathy.

- **Revisit the classroom rules** often, both as a reminder and so that you can readjust them in order to make them more effective for you and the children.

- Invite children to **work in groups on activities** such as making snacks, creating murals, and building. Group work invites discussion and collaboration and enables children to observe how their classmates problem-solve. As the children work, provide guidance such as, "You are all working so nicely together! I like the way you are sharing and taking turns."

Teachable Moments for children who do not exhibit positive social behaviors and communication such as, abilities to share, cooperate, or compromise with other children (and adults). (A.SCS.2)

Tipping Point: Children who do not exhibit *positive social behaviors* (sometimes known as pro-social behaviors) may respond negatively to suggestions of others (for example, "No. I think playing with puzzles sounds like a dumb idea."). Conversely, children who exhibit positive social behaviors consider the perspective of other children (and therefore recognize others' emotions and feelings).

Teacher Training: Children may face rejection by peers as a result of difficulties focusing their attention and controlling their behavior. Such children may show high rates of noncompliance, interference with others, or aggression (teasing or fighting). Pro-social skills (friendly, cooperative, helpful behaviors) and self-control skills (anger management, negotiation and problem-solving skills) are key facets of social competence. As children learn to maintain positive social behaviors, they learn to participate in the give-and-take of group activities, as well as appropriate ways to express feelings, words and actions. Social development involves learning to form and value relationships with others and you can promote these important social behaviors in young children by helping them establish and maintain friendships (Zimmerman, 1989, 1990, 1994; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). See Intentional Strategies for more information.

Intentional Strategies

- Children enjoy **opportunities to talk about events, moments, daily goals and plans.** Provide your class with open-ended questions as they enter your classroom each day (either one-on-one, in small groups, or in a large group setting). **Morning questions might include**:
  "Who do you plan to play with today?"
  "What types of things do you plan to do today?"
  "What great things are you hoping will happen today?"
  Later in the day, try statements such as:
  "What was the best part of your day today?"
  "Tell me a funny story about something you did today."
  "Talk about something that surprised you today."
  "Talk about something that upset you today."
  These types of questions help children learn to express themselves as they build vocabulary.

- Your classroom should be a place that feels safe enough for children to **converse about mistakes** they have made as this can help to ensure children do not become frustrated or overwhelmed by mistakes, but rather learn from them.

This will help children to learn tenacity and to gain a sense of accomplishment. Ask children to identify the mistakes of characters in books, then to share personal experiences too. For example, talk about how it feels to make a mistake, and identify what you learned when you made that mistake (in addition to what you might do differently next time). You might say, "I was trying to do a lot of things at the same time and I was not paying attention to any of the things I was doing! Because I was so busy, the bread I was baking burned, the water in the sink overflowed AND I forgot to let the dog outside! All of these mistakes reminded me to pay attention to what I am doing!"

- Talk with children about ways to deal with frustration such as:
  o Taking a break and then returning to the situation
  o Taking a deep breath or counting slowly to 10
  o Help children learn to **HIGH FIVE** as an approach to problem solving (see the age-appropriate language suggestions below). The following steps should be facilitated by you (or another adult) so that children become more skilled in resolving conflicts:
    - **1- Tell.** Provide the children involved in the conflict a chance to tell what happened from their perspective. Use age-appropriate language such as, "I need each of you to take turns talking about what happened before you got into the argument."
    - **2- Think.** Ask the children to decide on alternative ways to solve the conflict. Using age-appropriate language such as, "What can we do to fix the problem?"
    - **3- Try.** Invite the children to try the solution/solutions they selected. This is likely where the most facilitation will take place as younger children may provide one-sided solutions!
    - **4- Try again.** If the first solution does not work, ask children to think of another solution and to try it out (continue to facilitate).
    - **5- High Five!** Encourage the children to high five (or acknowledge their accomplishment in other ways that are comfortable).

- Your presence is needed in order to **facilitate problem solving and resolutions**. Ask open-ended questions that lead the children to understand the importance of appropriate solutions. For example, "Jorga & Davis, I appreciate that you are working in the Solution Station (see below) and that you

are taking turns talking about what happened. Now I need you to decide on a way to fix the problem. Davis, I do not think the solution of taking the truck away is one that solves the problem. What if you and Jorga take turns with the truck, just as you took turns talking? That will enable both of you to have fun with the truck. What do you think Jorga and Davis? What other ideas can we try?"

- Learning to solve conflicts and problems amongst friends is a complex skill and will take a lot of time and diligent effort on your part as you support children through the continual process. In addition to the process of High Five; **create a Solution Station** in your classroom.

  o This space should be a peaceful and, if possible, quiet place and that can be utilized as children work their way through the High Five process. A Solution Station can be as simple as a designated space in the classroom (or elsewhere in the school). If appropriate, include chairs, a mirror, books about emotions, the Help Basket (as mentioned within the *Emotional Control* Intentional Strategies), puppets, tissues, pencils and paper (or other art materials) and 'magic make-up spray' (a spray bottle that is empty, but that has magical healing powers when teachers use it to spray friends in conflict).

- Once children have finished working together, either through the High Five process, or in the Solution Station**, provide special recognition and verbal encouragement**. As children mature and improve their negotiation skills, withdraw your facilitation and encourage the children to work through High Five on their own. This is an important step in the development process.

Teachable Moments for children who do not have accurate opinions about their capabilities (and/or limitations). These children do not believe that they can achieve age-appropriate goals or tasks (this skill can also be underdeveloped in the sense that a child's opinion of certain skills does not match the actual ability). (A.SCS.3)

Tipping Points: Children who do not exhibit *self-efficacy* tend to lack confidence in their capabilities and do not maintain accurate opinions about their skills. Such children often do not participate in activities or tasks because they fear doing so will end in a negative outcome. For example, Evan told his friends that he was going to build a tall tower with "over 20 blocks". When Evan realized that several classmates were going to watch him as he worked, he suspended the project altogether saying, "I don't know how to count to 20 and I can't build a tower that tall because I am not that smart."

Teacher Training: When children have self-efficacy, they see themselves as capable beings and are confident that they can

achieve goals (learning risks, activities, and so on). All children need to encompass an "I can do it" attitude and you can reinforce and build upon this by providing consistent recognition and praise. It is crucial however that you do so in a genuine manner. Erik Erikson (child-development theorist) put it this way: "Children cannot be fooled by empty praise and condescending encouragement. They may have to accept artificial bolstering of their self-esteem in lieu of something better, but what I call their accruing ego identity gains real strength only from wholehearted and consistent recognition of real accomplishment, that is, achievement that has meaning in their culture."

Intentional Strategies

- **Share personal skills and talents** with your young learners and encourage them to do the same.

- As you praise children, challenge yourself to **name, as specifically as possible, what you are praising**. Strive to say things such as, "You clapped your hands to the beat so well! You must have been listening really well!" and, "I like the way you are counting! You counted all the way to 14!" Rather than saying things like, "You were wonderful" or "You did great." (Maddux, 2002).

- Feeling good about oneself matters, but the best way to ensure self-efficacy is to **provide children with opportunities to learn their strengths.** Recognize and acknowledge children's strengths and successes, keeping in mind that the successes young children experience are different from those that older children and adults experience. Additionally, it is your responsibility to **cultivate the belief that children can overcome challenges**. This is more likely to happen when the children in your classroom feel safe and secure in the environments you have created. Consistency, routine, encouragement, kindness, and respect all foster a child's belief that he can overcome challenges.

- **Be honest and realistic.** When a child fails or has a setback, do not pretend that it did not happen. It is far better to acknowledge struggles with words like, "That must have been really hard. I can see why you are frustrated." Identify specific strengths you noticed despite the struggles. For example, "You hop on both feet really well. Maybe you should cross the finish line by hopping both feet rather than one. After today's race we can spend more time practicing hops on one foot." Helping children to pay attention to their strengths and skills enables them to figure out how to use those skills more fully. Acknowledging the reality of struggles conveys that you genuinely understand what the child has experienced and helps her see herself as someone who can cope with a challenge (Reivich, K. & Shatté, A. 2003).

- **Attribute children's successes to internal factors.** For example, when a child finishes a prolonged or challenging project, compliment him by saying, "You were able to do that because you are smart and you stuck with it and did not give up even when things were difficult!" This type of acknowledgement enables children to experience a sense of mastery that reinforces self-efficacy.

- Invite and encourage **children to observe others who are working hard to achieve a goal** or obstacle. Doing so will contribute to the belief that they too can successfully negotiate similar tasks. For example, a child sees her friend climb to the top of the jungle gym after several attempts. The child watching might think to herself, "If she can do it, I can, too!" The more similar the child feels to the person she is observing, the stronger the effect the other person's successes or failures will be on the child's beliefs about her own ability to succeed (Kamins, M. L., & Dweck, C. S. 1999).

References

Bodrova, E., & D.L. Leong. (2007). *Tools of the Mind: The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Bronson, M.B. (2000). *Self-Regulation in Early Childhood: Nature and Nurture*. New York: Guilford.

Diamond, A., Barnett, W.S., Thomas, J., & Munro, S. (2007). Preschool program improves cognitive control, *Science, 318,* 1387-1388.

Gillham, J. E., Reivich, K. J., Freres, D. R., Chaplin, T. M., Shatte, A. J., Samuels, B., et al. (2007). Schoolbased prevention of depressive symptoms: A randomized controlled study of the effectiveness and specificity of the Penn Resiliency Program. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 75*, 9–19.

Kamins, M. L. & Dweck, C. S. (1999). Person versus process praise and criticism: Implications for contingent self-worth and coping. *Developmental Psychology*, *35*, 835–847.

Lewinsohn, P. M., Hops, H., Roberts, R., & Seeley, J. (1993). Adolescent psychopathology: I. Prevalence and incidence of depression and other DSM-III-R disorders in high school students. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *102*, 110–120.

Maddux, J. (2002). Self-efficacy: The power of believing you can. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 277–287). New York: Oxford University Press.

Pintrich, P.R. & De Groot E. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *82*, 33-50.

Reivich, K. & Shatté, A. (2003). *The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*. New York: Broadway Books.

Zimmerman, B. J. & Bandura, A. (1994). Impact of self-regulatory influences on writing course attainment. *American Educational Research Journal*, *31*, 845-862.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1994). Dimensions of academic self-regulation: A conceptual framework for education. In D. H. Schunk & B. J. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Self-Regulation of Learning and Performance: Issues and Educational Applications* (pp. 3-21). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Exclusively by

hatch®

The Early Learning Experts

we play smart ™ by hatch