



February 29, 2008  
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Dear Everyone,

Our classroom has been filled with lists lately, a couple of days last week it was getting a little tricky for the teachers to help kids keep track of which list goes with what activity, but we all managed somehow. Having all the lists around is really a reflection of how far the group has come in terms of settling into school routines and developing autonomy and independence.

For those of you unfamiliar or less familiar with the process of a sign-up list, a quick introduction: One of the regular routines in our classroom is using a sign-up list as a means of helping children realize the chance to take a turn for a popular activity. From the beginning of the year, teachers are on the look out for opportunities to introduce this method of taking turns. As we introduce new activities into the classroom, there is often a lot of interest in a particular project, or game, or toy. The reality of this situation—of many children wanting to do something that only few children can do at a time—provides a natural segue for teachers to say, “What should we do about this? There isn’t enough room for you to paint at the easel right now, why don’t we get a piece of paper and put your name on it and that will help us remember that you want a turn.”

Inviting children to make lists becomes a concrete way for them to be reassured about the process of taking turns. When we assist children in making a list, teachers will verbally talk children through the process. We let them know that by putting their letters on the list, they will get a turn to try or do what they want when their name is next. We can help children adjust their expectations based upon the length of the list—if it is short, then we can let them know they won’t have long to wait; if it’s long, then we can prepare them for the possibility that their turn might not happen until the next school day.

Making lists also happens to be a great literacy opportunity and we encourage and honor all attempts. Sometimes a list can be the teacher writing down names for the children, but most often we really want to challenge children to do this for themselves and there will be a lot of individual variation in what children will do.

We try and scaffold the process for children by asking them a lot of questions, seeing what they can do (or might be willing to try), and then help them identify what the steps would be. What is the first letter in your name? Do you know how to make that? Should we go and get the nametag from your cubby to look at? On a meta level, lists serve as a concrete example of the purposes of literacy and social necessity--a fair means of remembering and keeping track.

You may have perhaps heard of a new twist to our sign up lists. A couple of weeks ago, we introduced the idea of turning stories into plays that we can act out at the end of the day. We started with an old favorite--The Berenstain Bears' *The Spooky Old Tree*--a tried and true stand-by because it has a short and clear story line, full of action and adventure, and even some props. The story starts, "Three little bears, one with a light, one with a stick, and one with a rope" and ends with the three little bears running home fast to be welcomed back by their mama. The idea of acting out this story was enthusiastically embraced by the children and we acted this story out repeatedly over a series of days so that everyone would have the opportunity to have a turn. Already there have been some novel contributions to the story. Originally, our sign-up list for the characters did not include the mama, but one girl wanted to sign up for this part and even improvised some lines at the beginning of the story about what the mama would tell her children, "be careful and don't get lost." After we had done the play this way a couple of times, one boy came into the classroom one morning asking about the papa bear. "Oh," the teacher responded, "you're right, there isn't a papa bear in this story, but have you been thinking about having one? What would he do in the play?" The child said, "he's at home making ice cream." And so a papa bear was added to the play and continues to be a part of our version of the story as it is acted out during story time and even during the impromptu playtime versions that have evolved as well. Last week, after we acted out the play, we had enough time for a short book before getting ready to go home. At the close of that book, one child spontaneously offered, "Hey! We could make a play about a jungle!" This idea was also enthusiastically received and so this week kids helped to make a new sign-up list for a book called *Banana!*, a story about a mischievous monkey who throws bananas at a lot of different jungle animals. We plan to continue to offer acting out plays and work our way towards offering children the opportunity to make up their own stories to act out, so stay tuned to see what develops!

Anita & Kerstin