

HOW TO MANAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Of course, we don't really manage relationships. Time management experts say that we don't manage time, we manage ourselves with respect to time. Similarly, when we talk about managing relationships we talk about ways we manage our preparation, tasks and responses in order to provide a safe, consistent environment for the community of children.

All of so-called classroom management is really the support of the community of children. It removes as many of the setups for misbehavior as possible so each child will leave feeling competent, confident and deeply happy.

THE TWO TEACHING ROLES: DOOR PERSON AND STORYTELLER

Each teaching role primarily fosters respect for the children and the Godly Play space. For example, parents are left at the threshold of the Godly Play space and teachers remain at the children's eye level. Both practices keep the room child-centered, instead of adult-centered. (Some day you will be sitting on the floor and an adult will come into the room. Suddenly, you will realize where all the children's stories about giants come from!)

Similarly when the storyteller presents a lesson, he or she keeps eye focus on the materials of the lesson—not the children. Instead of being encouraged to respond to a teacher, the children are invited, by the storyteller's eyes, to enter the story. Throughout the session, the storyteller “anchors” the circle of children, whether they are getting ready, entering into the story, wondering together, choosing work, sharing the feast or saying goodbye.

The teacher whose place is by the door is hard to name, because he or she does many different things to help the Godly Play process move forward. The theme these activities have in common is *thresholds*. This person's contribution has much to do with transitions—entering the room, leaving the circle to get out work, laying out and entering into expressive art, engaging with a chosen lesson, putting work away, preparing for and serving the feast, putting feast things away, cleaning up spills, caring for the room, saying goodbye and leaving the room.

Naming the door person is difficult because his or her task is clearly much more than being a greeter or supporting the hospitality of the feast. The door person is not “the heavy” or the “cop.” “Doorway person” or “threshold person” are cumbersome, and even silly, names. I choose “door person” as merely good enough for right now. Someday we will find the right name for this role. Perhaps you will discover it!

In a typical Sunday morning session, only two adults will be present in the Godly Play space: the door person and the storyteller. These are their respective tasks during a typical session:

DOOR PERSON

Check the shelves, especially the supply shelves and art shelves.

Get out the roll book, review notes and get ready to greet the children and parents.

Slow down the children coming into the room. You may need to take and put aside toys, books and other distracting objects. Help them to get ready. Take the roll or have the older children check themselves in.

Close the door when it is time. Be ready to work with latecomers and children who come to you from the circle.

Avoid casual eye contact with the storyteller to help prevent the adults in the room from turning the children into objects, talking down to them or manipulating them.

When the children choose their work, listen so that you can help them get out their work. They may need help setting up artwork and getting materials from the shelves for work on a lesson, either alone or in a group.

Stay in your chair unless children need your help. Do not intrude on the community of children. Stay at the eye level of the children whenever possible, as if there is a glass ceiling in the room at the level of the taller children.

STORYTELLER

Check the material to be presented that day.

Get seated on the floor in the circle and prepare to greet the children.

Guide the children to places in the circle where they will best be able to attend to the lesson. Visit quietly until it is time to begin and all are ready.

Present the lesson. Model how to "enter" the material.

Draw the children into the lesson by your introduction. Bring your gaze down to focus on the material when you begin the actual lesson. Look up when the wondering begins, or if there is a disruption or interruption that requires your attention.

After the lesson and wondering, go around the circle, dismissing each child to begin his or her work, one at a time, as each child chooses what to do. Go quickly around the circle the first time, returning to the children who did not decide. Go around the circle for decisions until only a few are left—who may be new or for some other reason cannot make a choice. Present a lesson to these children.

Remain seated in the circle unless children need help with the lessons they have gotten out. You may need to help with art materials. Keep yourself at the children's eye level when you help.

DOOR PERSON

Help the children put their work away themselves, and also help the children who are getting ready to lay out the feast.

Sit quietly in your chair, but be sure that the trash can has a liner in it. Support the children's careful depositing of things there. "Why, we never have slam dunks here!"

Greet the parents and begin to whisper the names of the children whose parents are there and who are ready.

If a child starts for the door without saying goodbye to the storyteller, remind him or her to return to the storyteller to say goodbye.

Remember to give back anything that may have been taken at the beginning of class.

When the children are gone, check the art and supply shelves and clean.

Sit quietly and contemplate the session as a whole.

Evaluate, make notes and discuss the session with your coteacher.

STORYTELLER

When it is time for the feast, go to the light switch and turn it off. Ask the children to put their work away and come back to the circle for the feast. Turn the light back on. Go to the circle to anchor it as the children finish their work and return.

Ask for prayers, but do not pressure. The feast is also a good time to visit, or to memorize the Lord's Prayer or Psalm 23, just by repeating them. There is not much time, but singing a simple, repetitive song, like a Taize chant, is appropriate. After the feast, show the children how to put their things away in the trash.

Help the children get ready to have their names called.

As the children's names are called, they come to you. Hold out your hands. Children can take your hands, give a hug or keep their distance, as they like. Tell them quietly and privately how glad you were to see them and what good work they did today. Invite them to come back when they can.

Take time to enjoy saying goodbye, with all the warmth of a blessing for each child.

When all are gone, check the material shelves and clean.

Sit quietly and contemplate the session as a whole.

Evaluate the session, make notes and discuss the session with your coteacher.