Scheduling Scenarios

You may come across staff who struggle with effective scheduling. Read these scenarios and decide how you would respond.

*Prachi’s Problems*

The families in Prachi’s preschool classroom are very concerned with school readiness, and Prachi has spoken with you about these concerns. You advised her to reassure families about how much children learn during play and to provide families with information from their child’s portfolio and assessment materials. Lately, though, it seems that Prachi has taken a different approach to school readiness. She has started lengthening her adult-directed activities. During your last visit, children were in a large-group storytime for 45 minutes. She has also started doing small-group rotations during free-choice time. Each child must attend two small groups. The focus of small groups is on writing, number skills, and letter identification. This has limited free-choice time to only 30 minutes for each child. How would you help Prachi think about how she schedules time in her classroom?

*It is important to help Prachi focus on learning goals. Are children meeting the goals? What evidence does she have that learning is happening? What developmental areas are being missed by limiting free-choice time and interesting play? What do children learn in play that they do not learn during group activities? Help Prachi focus on a “both-and” philosophy: children need both adult-guided and child-directed experiences. It is also important to remind Prachi of your program’s commitment to developmentally appropriate practice. How are children’s interests, needs, and development taken into consideration in her plans? You might also ask how individual children respond to the changes in the schedule. Is the new schedule working for everyone? How can activities be varied to help all children meet goals? Has challenging behavior increased in the class, or do children seem unhappy, bored, or stressed?*

*Carol’s Concerns*

Lately, you have noticed children wandering aimlessly at one of your after-school programs. They look bored and disconnected from what is going on in the program. They seem to go from room to room, looking at what is going on in each room. Eventually, most of the children decide on an activity, but some children continue wandering or eventually settle in the snack room. During your regular meetings with Carol, the leader of the 6- to 10-year-old program, you mention your observations. She confesses that she has noticed the same issue. She would like to get children more actively engaged, but she doesn’t know how. How could you help Carol focus on her program’s schedule? How could you help Carol make sure children know and understand what is available to them?

*Help Carol reflect on the messages the environment sends to children. Do children and youth know what materials and spaces are available to them right away? Then help Carol reflect on the quality of the experiences available. Are interests reflected? Do materials present an appropriate challenge? Is there enough adult support to get started on an activity? You might help Carol develop a sign-in board that “advertises” what is available as soon as children arrive. You might also plan with Carol and help her brainstorm interesting and engaging activities to add to each program area.*
Trina’s Transitions

Trina is an infant caregiver. She likes her room to run in a very orderly manner. During your early observations, you were excited to see a staff member with such consistent routines. You thought her consistency would be good for the young infants and families with whom she works. Over time, though, it has become clear that what you once thought was “consistent” is now completely rigid. All children’s diapers are checked at the same time, and they are only changed during regularly scheduled diaper checks. Each child has a consistent feeding schedule. Although the schedules are individualized, there is no room for variation. Each child is fed only on his or her schedule. At your last visit, you noticed Trina instruct a classroom assistant to keep a sleepy child awake so he would nap at his regularly scheduled time. How do you address these issues with Trina?

It is important to be direct and focus on the well-being of the infants in your program. Have a discussion with Trina about your program’s philosophy regarding infant development and care. Discuss the importance of child-initiated routines and nurturing relationships. Emphasize Trina’s role as a caregiver. Ask reflective questions to find out what Trina’s beliefs about development and care are. Emphasize the strengths you have noticed in the classroom, but make it clear that it is not OK to leave children in soiled diapers or to keep a tired infant awake. Focus on building Trina’s awareness of children’s cues and needs. Monitor and observe regularly while Trina is building these new skills. Provide positive feedback when she follows infants’ cues, and be prepared to help Trina notice opportunities to follow the cues.