

## Literacy Matters: Creative Circle Time

Source: ConnectAbility.ca

### Plan

**When?** Choosing the right time to hold your circles will greatly support the success. Planning to have it when the children are most alert, interested and when you have full staffing to support the children will offer the greatest learning opportunities.

**Where?** Music circles are traditionally held on the carpet in a large gathering area.

Points to consider: define the circle space with the carpet or shelves as barriers, remove or cover up distractors (e.g. toys on nearby shelves), and ensure the space comfortably fits the children so that they can see you and you can see them.

**Length of Circle?** It is important to look at setting realistic goals for the group of children based on their developmental and learning goals. A five-minute dynamic circle can be more valuable than struggling to keep the children interested for 25 minutes. The objective should be to stop when everyone is still interested and involved, not when they become bored.

### Props

Use props and materials as part of your planned circle time activities (e.g., puppets for a story, toys or objects for a song, scarves for creative movement). Let the children use the props as much as possible to help them take part in the activity and to focus for longer periods.

**Tip:** Keep all the circle time materials and props in a bin. Bring the bin with you to each circle and the songs, props and visuals are ready to go at your fingertips. Rotate the materials in the bin on a regular basis to encourage the children's ongoing interest.

**Learning Opportunities:** The use of props can promote children's learning in a variety of areas. For e.g., cognitive skills such as counting (finger puppets for 5 little monkeys), sensory awareness (spray bottle for Feel the Water), and social skills development for self-esteem and confidence building (pompom for hooray song).

### Movement Songs and Games

Alternating sit down and whole body movement (e.g. Hokey Pokey), engages children and creates anticipation of upcoming activities. Gross motor games provides children with an opportunity to engage in physical activities, have sensory input (e.g. Catch the Bubbles) and share group experiences (e.g. parachute games).



## Self- Regulation

Songs and games, which require children to listen to directions and respond to them, teach self- regulation in a fun manner. For e.g. "If You're Angry" song provides strategies for dealing with anger but also requires listening to directions to engage in the corresponding actions.

## Cooperative Games

Cooperative games emphasize participation, challenge, and fun rather than competition. All participants engage together in activities and no one is left out. These games help children attend to what is happening around the circle and respond to the activity. This develops children's ability to focus on a joint experience, take turns and wait for each other. For e.g., Simon Says can be played without tricking children and Musical Hula Hoops is similar to Musical Chairs, however all children can fit in the remaining hoops.

## Story Telling

Story Telling used effectively can promote many skills including: enhanced listening, new vocabulary, thinking capacity, curiosity, increased memory and knowledge (of self and others, places, relationships), imagination, and a sense of wonder.

It is important to identify the purpose when you use books. Have goals for your story time and choose books that are interactive. Make reading more interesting through the use of props.

## Using Dialogic Reading to Support Storytelling

A good way to teach children to become storytellers using books is called **dialogic reading**.

**What is it?** Dialogic reading is simply children and adults having a conversation about a book. Children will enjoy this more than traditional reading as long as you mix up your prompts, vary what you do with each reading and choose books that the children enjoy.

## Did You Know?

During Dialogic Reading, rather than require or expect the child to sit quietly, adults should encourage children to:

- Make comments
- Ask questions
- Elaborate on the story
- Retell the story

## What Research Says

Children who have been read to dialogically are substantially ahead of children who have been read to traditionally on tests of language development. (Whitehurst, et al.)