CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

A CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR MOTHER-TODDLER GROUPS
IN THE NURSERY SCHOOL

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Education
with a Specialization in Early Childhood

by
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The thesis of Elaine Blumberg is approved:

California State University, Northridge
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To Dr. Joanne Cooper,

without whose guidance, encouragement and generosity

in giving of her time and concern,

this paper would not have taken form.
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Young women today are finding that living in a culture where the role of women is changing makes motherhood difficult. Mother-Toddler programs presented by qualified teachers in the nursery school have a positive effect on the mothers and children participating in them. Many of the toys and much of the equipment in the nursery school, used by slightly older children, are suitable for use by the toddlers and offer them stimulation and enjoyment. Learning to relate to the other children in the group helps the individual child feel comfortable in a group situation and promotes ease of separation from his mother at a later date.

Mothers find that some of their anxieties about child rearing are lessened when they meet other mothers with similar problems. They become more comfortable in their mothering role and discover new strengths in themselves to meet the needs of their children. The teacher,
through her skill in meeting the needs of mothers and children, makes new friends for the school she now serves.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have shown that what happens to the child during the first three years of his life affects his later development. During this period he reacts to the problems and attitudes of family members, although he is unable to fully understand what is going on around him. Any program seeking to exert a positive influence on his early development has to do so within the context of his family life, and be in a position to influence parental attitudes as well. The formation of groups for mothers and toddlers as part of the regular nursery school is an effective way of doing this.

Nursery schools have a long history of devotion to early childhood development, and experience in working with parents. Normally these schools meet the preschool child close to his third birthday, when certain attitudes between parents and child are fairly well established. A Curriculum Guide for Mother-Toddler Groups in the Nursery School is offered to teachers in nursery schools who would welcome the opportunity to meet mother and child a year earlier. At two, the child is emerging from babyhood, and his relationship with his mother is undergoing changes as profound and exciting to both of them as the changes which are
taking place in his development.

The environment in the nursery school can be easily adapted to the needs of Mother-Toddler groups by the minor changes discussed in this curriculum guide. Finding participants for the program would not be difficult. The Mother-Toddler program is available to mothers preregistering their children at the nursery school for the following school year, as well as to other mothers in the community interested in sharing with their children in their first group experience outside the home.

Many women today start their careers as mothers with little prior preparation. This program can offer them invaluable support in their mothering role at an important time in the lives of their children. The school, through the Mother-Toddler program, is in a position to encourage mothers in their personal growth, and to influence them in the formation of attitudes that promote the mental health of their children.

The children attending the group are subject to the direct influence of the Mother-Toddler program, in addition to its impact on their lives through its effect on their mothers. Participation in this early group experience with their mothers present is not only enjoyable and stimulating, but is a means for gaining confidence in their own abilities to meet new situations successfully. This confidence, in turn, prepares children to be able to separate comfortably from their mothers at a later date, and is good
preparation for future attendance at nursery school.

What Is a Mother-Toddler Group?

"Mother-Toddler" is the name used to refer to parent participation groups in which the mother and her child, aged 22 to 30 months, come to school together to participate in a social experience with other mothers and young children. It provides each mother an opportunity to consider how to meet the needs of her child, and offers her a time to think of herself in her maternal role, as she begins the task of finding her own answers, and of formulating her own philosophy of child rearing. It also offers her a time to consider how to satisfy personal goals to some degree, during this period when the demands of the young child are most time consuming.

The child is offered a nonfrustrating first group experience in a setting designed to appeal to his age level, where he has a chance to make social contacts with other young children under the skilled guidance of a teacher. He may move from his mother's side as he wishes, and is free to return to her at any time. In this early group experience the groundwork for later separation is taking place. As the child builds confidence in his own abilities and trust in other adults, his mother is developing a readiness to permit others to enter the exclusivity of her relationship with her child.
Historical Perspective

The history of nursery schools in the United States dates back to the first World War, but the emergence of Mother-Toddler groups in the nursery school is a recent phenomenon, about which little can be found in current literature. Recent studies have shown the importance of the earliest years to later development, and pioneers in the field of early childhood have demonstrated that infants and toddlers can be well taken care of in group day care if elements known to be important to the nurturing of such young children are provided. However, joint mother and toddler participation in an early nursery school program has little precedent, and is the product of the last decade.

Play groups for very young children are not new. Some are organized in park settings as child development classes, but because of their public nature and fluctuating population are impersonal in nature and overwhelming to children. Other groups exist, organized to meet the specific needs of handicapped children and their parents, who need help in accepting that their children are not normal, and in setting realistic goals and limits for them, in spite of their infirmities. An example of the above is schools organized for children with cerebral palsy. A third kind of group exists to offer information on child development, nutrition and health to parents struggling with inadequate budgets, and problems related to lack of education. A
fourth classification consists of groups organized and run by parents, to provide play stimulus to their children and some free time for themselves, through cooperative babysitting.

Mother-Toddler groups, like park groups, offer information on child development to the parents, and the opportunity for both to participate in a group experience. Unlike the park group, however, the program can be tailored to meet individual needs because it is so much smaller. In many ways, the toddler program resembles the parent organized play groups, which are built around active parent participation, but differs from these in providing skilled leadership, in addition to active participation.

Social factors that contribute to the need of young mothers to look for the kind of group involvement and experiences offered by membership in a Mother-Toddler group are many, and include:

1. A lack of prior preparation for caring for children.
2. The mobility of middle-class families, resulting in a sense of dislocation and uprootedness.
3. A lessening of the influence of the extended family, either through distance or disaffection.
4. The trend toward smaller families, providing less occasion for interaction between children in the home.
5. The role of women's liberation in affecting how a woman thinks of her role, causing her added
ambivalence and frustration in the performance of tasks demanding postponement of personal satisfactions.

Where can these young women turn for help in confronting their anxieties about their children's development and their sense of isolation and frustration? Pediatricians may be able to guide mothers in meeting the health hazards and the nutritional needs of their children, but few have the time or preparation necessary to provide them with the consistent help that may be indicated for mental health in their interpersonal relationships with their children. It is in just this area that a nursery school with a sound Mother-Toddler program may be of great service to mother and child alike, by offering guidance to the parents and by functioning as a replacement for the extended family of yesterday, and, when indicated, as a resource center.

The reasons mothers join Mother-Toddler groups vary. One may join for a pleasurable social experience with her child and another for the opportunity to see how her child compares to other children close to him in age, to assess the effectiveness of her mothering. Sometimes a mother joins a group because she is already experiencing conflicts with her child and is looking for a therapeutic situation to ameliorate problems that could stem from a denial of her nurturing role. Or, perhaps, the behavior of her child is such that she cannot respond to him naturally, and she is looking for insights into her problems and techniques.
for dealing with them. Another mother may act as though her relationship with her child is free and easy. But if the mother insulates her child and herself from active participation her ambivalence keeps both from benefitting from being in the group.

Because Mother-Toddler groups meet different needs for different parents, the teacher must wait for a mother to be ready to share her child with the group. But, by gently wooing the child, she may be able to lead the mother into fuller participation. Sometimes it is easier for the teacher to help a mother and child where the existence of ambivalence is recognized than it is for her to break through the barriers set up by a mother who uses the group as a private playtime with her child. Whatever the mother's overt reasons for joining, the primary function of a Mother-Toddler group is to help mother and child in the process of individuation, which is a necessary prelude to the child's ability to make a healthy separation at a later date. Thus, when a nursery school is able to present a Mother-Toddler program, not only is it offering a very special service to the community, but at the same time it prepares participants for attendance at nursery school.

Goals of the Program

Before making a list of individual goals for Mother-Toddler groups it is necessary to consider ultimate goals of child-rearing practices. How can we prepare our children
to live in the future when we cannot predict what their world will be like when they are grown? How can children be helped to go into adult life with the maturity to enable them to meet the challenges that their world will present?

Frances J. Wickes (1927) defines the mature adult as one who is capable of an individual way of life, as distinguished from collective standards; as one who accepts his responsibilities as an individual within a social order; as one able to exercise conscious control of his intellectual and emotional life; and, finally, as one who accepts himself and the task which life is presenting.

The immediate task in Mother-Toddler is to encourage the child to move in the direction of later independence. This is done by encouraging him to make choices and simple decisions in the classroom. At the same time, the program helps his mother shift the emphasis of her nurturing to permit this to occur. This is difficult, for neither mother nor child wants to sacrifice any of the closeness of their earliest bond. During the first year of life the child's development depended on the closeness of his bond with his mother. During the second year his mother already has had to modify her nurturing to give him room to grow. Now, at the age of two, the child's individuation has progressed to the point that his mother often finds herself in conflict with his growing independence. How can she encourage his growth and still set the limits necessary to contain him? These challenges the Mother-Toddler groups
seek to meet through their program.

Specific goals for the child in Mother-Toddler.

1. During infancy the child learned to rely on the continuity of outer providers to meet his needs. The program will expand the sense of trust built from his relationship with his parents to include other adults in new situations (Erikson, 1950).

2. During infancy the child learned to trust himself and the capacity of his organs to cope with his urges. The program will expand his confidence in himself through success in meeting new situations. He will be encouraged to make choices among activities in the play area, for any of which his level of performance will be adequate.

3. The muscular maturation of the two-year old makes it possible for him to move from his mother's side and act on his own in social situations. The program will take advantage of his capacity for independent action by helping him develop social skills through an opportunity to relate to other children.

4. Language is an important tool for establishing relationships. The program will increase the child's ability to communicate by providing situations that will stimulate language development.

5. The child's satisfaction in himself will be enhanced by confidence in his motor achievements. The programs will increase his motor skills by providing equipment scaled to his size and present abilities.

6. The child of two is striving to act independently, but lacks inner controls to modify his behavior.
The program will set limits that will protect him when his behavior is out of bounds.

7. Children learn to understand and master life through play. The program will provide an environment encouraging to imaginary play, so that the child can come to a better understanding of his world.

8. The ability to separate comfortably from his mother is important for the child's independent development. The program will provide positive group experiences for him that will make later separation easier.

9. The child must like himself if he is to like others. The program will help him develop a positive self-image through showing him respect as an individual.

Goals of the program for the mother. These goals are:

1. To increase her understanding of the child's developmental stages in order that she may be realistic in her expectations from him.

2. To help her establish training procedures appropriate to her child's development and respectful of his need for autonomy.

3. To help her develop techniques for resolving differences between her child and other children that will be constructive for all concerned.

4. To help her formulate a personal philosophy of child rearing by considering and evaluating with her information available on child development.

5. To encourage her to recognize the validity of meeting her own needs at the same time as she is focusing on meeting the needs of other family
members, so that she may arrive at a viable balance between stresses.

6. To establish a relationship between home and school so that the school may serve as a resource center for her.

7. To present the opportunity for early intervention when the development of the child suggests the need, or when the relationship between mother and child is uncomfortable.
CHAPTER II

SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENTAL PERIODS AS THEY RELATE TO MATERNAL ADJUSTMENTS IN MOTHERING

This chapter focuses on the development of the child from birth through the preschool years. During this time he changes from a biological entity whose existence is completely dependent on others to a vigorous child ready to move independently into the outside world of school. During this period the relationships within his family are all important. But as he develops, these relationships are forced to adjust to the changes in him.

The purpose of this review is to consider the nature of the changes in nurturing that are necessary to keep up with his development. From time to time, making these adjustments puts particular stress on his mother. She must learn to recognize and interpret the cues presented by his behavior in order to know how and when to modify her care of him. She is sometimes hampered in this task by an unreadiness to see him move toward greater independence, which she may interpret as a lessening of the bond between them.

For this reason, one of the goals in Mother-Toddler is to encourage the mother to find alternate satisfaction through personal growth, so that she can permit her child
to grow without experiencing his development as a loss.

The First Year of Life

Infancy for the human child is a relatively long period during which he must be nurtured. Born with a certain constitutional temperament, certain elements must be present in his environment if he is to develop into an individual capable of maturing and of dealing with the world around him. To deal with the world around him he must begin to see himself as separate from his surroundings.

Before birth the infant is part of his mother, and after birth he and his mother continue to be a psychological entity. Symbiosis between mother and neonate is complete; the mother meets her own needs through administering to his. How then does his personality develop?

According to Bruno Bettelheim (1967), personality is that with which the individual interacts with others, so it cannot exist apart from the outside world of people and things. It develops to deal with the external world, and if the infant does not receive a comprehensible response to his efforts he will have little motivation for developing structures for achieving such a goal.

Bettelheim states that there is a sequence to the unfolding of personality, which is conditioned by the rate of neurological development but is independent of physical maturation. He suggests that there are critical periods in which organism and environment must react to produce a
given personality feature. In the infant, personality develops because he is active. What is important to the infant is not that he is dependent but that his efforts are monumental, and really count. Nursing, and what happens around it, seem to be the nuclear experience out of which develop all later feelings about oneself and other persons. The infant is not passive in this situation but works very vigorously at nursing and at communicating his needs, acting within a context of mutuality to shape the experience to his otherwise dependent state (Bettelheim, 1967).

The infant demands attention by crying and cooing. He learns to relate to the outside world if his mother responds to his demands in an appropriate and positive way. Her different ministrations relieve different forms of discomfort, and the infant's sensations become less diffuse, becoming located by which part of the body senses them most keenly. As he becomes able to differentiate between his sensations a feeling of self, or the body ego, develops. What makes it a humanizing experience for him is that his crying for food brings about his satiation by others, according to his timing (Bettelheim, 1967, p. 25). Provence and Lipton write in Infants in Institutions (1966) that it is through the mutuality between mother and child, which develops by his receiving personalized care from her and through her involvement and interest in him, that specific motor behaviors are triggered which will later influence every phase of his physical development. Among these are his awareness
of himself and his ability to form relationships and to become involved in the world outside himself.

The first year sees the child becoming increasingly mobile. His mobility follows the law of cephalocaudal development: he learns to hold up his head, use his eyes, manipulate his face, organize his back and arms, lower trunk and legs. Large muscle control of limbs and body precedes the finer coordination of hands and fingers. Although there is evidence that sensory organization takes place in the infant before birth, sensory modalities of sight, hearing and touch become progressively organized during that year, bringing changes in sleeping and eating patterns. With increased motor capacity, the infant demonstrates increased capacity to utilize foods of various kinds and consistencies and to modify patterns of elimination.

As the child progresses, his mother begins to sense that in establishing his own identity he is growing away from her. The mother wishes her child to grow up, but in establishing certain patterns of his own he is no longer completely dependent on her. When he is enabled by the possession of teeth to bite, she may find herself not only being attacked, but by an independent being, a behavior over which the child has little control (Work & Call, 1965).

The beginning of the development of language is concurrent at this time with his increased mobility. The roots of speech may be found in the infant's crying and
cooing, and in his discovery of the world of objects. His development toward language during the preverbal stage moved from touching, grasping and manipulating, to holding, showing and pointing to, and later from comprehending to expressing through crying and demanding.

During the development of speech, the first function of the sounds the infant made were expressions of undirected appeals, denoting his emotional state. During the second stage, his communications were signs or signals directed to a specific person, while only in the third phase of this development did his communication become an experience shared between speaker and listener.

Provence and Lipton (1962) write that the normal development of speech is dependent upon the integrity of the infant's congenital, somatic and mental apparatuses, as well as upon certain stimulating and organizing influences in the environment. The personal relationship is the carrier of a variety of stimuli, without which normal language development appears to be impossible.

During this first year the infant's life is completely dependent upon receiving good physical care. His healthy mental and emotional development is dependent on the quality of his relationship with his mother, and the nature of her involvement with him. Erikson (1950) characterizes the first year as one in which a sense of trust, or mistrust, is being built into the personality pattern.
Josselyn (1948) writes that the early dependency period is of real significance in terms of ultimate personality pattern. Lack of gratification during this period does not result in growth, but rather in a continual search for satisfactions that are not forthcoming. An individual passes more readily from one emotional level to the next when gratification has been optimal. Inadequate gratification of early dependency needs tends to arrest the individual at that level. By the same token, a child who receives consistent positive mothering learns to find his world predictable, and that he can trust his mother to take care of him.

Erik H. Erikson, in Childhood and Society (1950) writes:

The infant's first social achievement, then is his willingness to let the mother out of sight without undue anxiety or rage, because she has become an inner certainty as well as an outer predictability. Such consistency, continuity, and sameness of experience provide a rudimentary sense of ego identity which depends, I think, on the recognition that there is an inner population of remembered and anticipated sensations and images which are firmly correlated with the outer population of familiar and predictable things and people (p. 247).

To summarize, the elements necessary to the infant for his healthy emotional development during the first year include a relationship with a primary nurturing person, instinctual gratification within this relationship of mutuality, and encouragement to act on his own behalf.
The Second Year

The year from one to two is a period of great change for mother and child. At the beginning of the second year of his life the child is basically still dependent on his mother. By the end of that year, with his increased motor abilities and intellectual development, he has taken great strides toward independence. These major changes in the child's life must be met in some fashion by the parent, who sees in the child's urge toward independence a renunciation of his dependence.

At the beginning of the second year, the child has gotten to his feet, taken a few steps, and his words, if any, are monosyllabic (Work & Call, 1965). His capacity to feed himself is rudimentary except for hand-mouth activity. But by the end of that year he not only walks but runs, talks, and may occasionally use short sentences; he handles the ordinary tools we use for eating and, in many instances, has some control of his sphincters. All social and motor development involves some modification of his desires, instincts, and personal aims by his environment.

It is no wonder that parents may meet these changes in their child with feelings of ambivalence. On the one hand, though they may delight in his new capabilities and be impatient for each new advance, they find themselves constantly saying "no" as he intrudes into what was formerly their exclusive domain, and his wilfulness and attempts to do things for himself may lead to open warfare with him.
On the other hand, each new advance demonstrates that they are losing their baby, and for many mothers this represents the loss of the feeling of fulfillment that comes from meeting his dependency needs. The child's threatened independence foretells a time when the mother's fulfillment will have to be attained through her own personal growth rather than from living through her child.

Work and Call (1965) remind us that problems of day to day management of the child are fraught with conflict.

Dependent as he has been, he is unaccustomed to the demands that are made on him, and finds himself in a difficult situation of wanting to be liked by his parents, and yet having strong feelings against them. This conflictual situation is a further source of the ambivalent feelings that all of us derive from this particular period. The parents, demonstrating strong aggressive drives in an effort to force compliance, give rise to reactive patterns of belligerence. The powerful drives towards autonomy which the child possesses run into the constricting demands of the parent and may very easily lead to hatred and hostility.

... The crucial aspect of the struggle which may develop, either around feeding or around the toilet training process, is that it may spread over to other general control activities.

Josselyn (1948) writes of this period that the ability to control means the power to give and to withhold. In early infancy the child's omnipotence was passive, but now his power has become active. With his capacity to control his excreta, he has a tool for direct attack upon the parent, and thus a means of expressing his hostility. Tantrums at this period can result through repression of the mounting anger and ambivalence he experiences to his parents, for he is no longer helpless and he resents
demands that he deny himself gratification through his own self-control. Eventually, the secure child gradually accepts the patterns demanded of him by the outside world, for the rewards of growing up are greater than the deprivations imposed.

The child of from 18 to 24 months is in a position to shape his relations to his environment, if permitted to do so, for he can approach or avoid through mobility and talking, and he is striving toward mastery. At the same time, he experiences a great deal of frustration because of discrepancies that exist between his need to do for himself and his immaturity. Others should be sensitive to the lag between his abilities and his desires in order to avoid severe imbalance. Conversely, this is also the period when his need to do active clinging is at its zenith, and contrasts with his desires for autonomy. According to Bettelheim (1967), it is a critical period in the development of autism, for he is as vulnerable to psychological disturbances as he was during his earliest months.

During the second half of the second year, the child is beginning to formulate a concept of the type of person others love, and which he can also accept as a model for himself to emulate. He complies to training because of his wish to fulfill that ideal. The ego ideal affects not only the course of toilet training but also manifests itself in the associated areas of training, in which the child is learning to control his other impulses. His sense
of power creates ambivalence as he worries about his parent's reaction. This discomfort can be relieved by living up to certain patterns (Josselyn, 1948).

Selma H. Fraiberg (1959) writes that most of the two-year old's behavior is controlled by his parents. He has some ability to control his urges for parental approval, but finds it difficult to oppose his own wishes. It is not that he is stubborn, he just lacks the ability to say "no" to himself. She suggests that he can be helped to learn the beginnings of self-control through redirection and substitutions. Anxieties of this period can be laid to flaws in the self-control system. Fraiberg writes of the importance to the child of imaginary play, through which he can deal with his fantasies and unmastered dangers, and thus be better able to handle the frustrations of the real world.

**Difficulties of this period.** What can be done to avoid some of the difficulties of this period? Work and Call (1965) suggest that efforts should be made not to prolong the child's dependence, but to permit him a gradual unfolding independence and to refrain from babying him too much, permitting him to operate alone. Of course, the child cannot think for himself in many instances, so independence does have to be curbed and controlled, and limits set progressively, so that

The child can feel the process of growth and develop the concept that there is an increase
in responsibility given to him. . . . If the
child can come through this period of life with
some self-satisfaction in both his growth and
learning, he will be in a good position to enter
the next learning period which involves a wider
use of his social and motor activity. If, how­
ever, the impact of the training period is nega­
tive, there will be aroused in the child a deep
sense of shame which he will carry with him as he
approaches the other stages of his social growth
[pp. 86-87].

Many parents delay training their children to exercise
positive sphincter control because they dread the possibil­
ity of conflict with them, while other parents may impose
training at a very early age. It is helpful to be able to
recognize readiness in a child for any new learning experi­
ence, but important to realize that more than physical
maturation is involved in toilet training.

Although a sense of autonomy for the infant begins
with active striving in the oral stage, the role of toilet
training in the anal period cannot be overestimated in its
importance for developing a sense of self-hood, convincing
the individual that he is in charge of himself, and of the
functioning of his own body. According to Bettelheim
(1967, p. 35), learning the delimitation of self through
intake is negative because the bottle or breast (gratifi­
cation) is perceived by the infant as not-self, and as
something which can be removed by another. But the de­
limitation of self through elimination is positive, with
the child learning that what seemed self (stool) is not
self, but that through his own actions he controls
elimination.
Often, adding to the tensions of this period for mother and child, is the mother's pregnancy and fatigue, followed by the birth of a sibling. Much has been written about the feelings of jealousy suffered by the young child toward his new brother or sister, but less about the feelings of guilt and frustration suffered by his mother in having less time for him now and less energy to meet his heightened demands. Short of sleep and short of temper, her pleasure in the new baby may be lessened as she minimizes her care of the infant to try to cope with her toddler's sense of rejection. It is at this point that mother and child may enter a Mother-Toddler group. However, before discussing the structure of this group experience, it may be well to consider the direction his development will take during the next two or three years.

The Preschool Years

During the following three years, the preschool child will be consolidating his social and physical abilities. He will be striving for mastery in motor skills, his language will be becoming rich and varied, and his steady growth will be matched by a curiosity extending in all directions of the social sphere, starting with interest in his own body and moving outward. But if his sexual curiosity is inhibited, curiosity in other phases of learning may also be stunted. He will need help in finding answers to his questions in a way that will neither overeducate
nor overstimulate him.

During this period the child will be working on his relationship with his parents, and on resolving some of his jealous and ambivalent feelings. The parents and child who have been able to reach a positive resolution of earlier developmental crises will have a better chance of meeting this new situation successfully. Success in this situation, for the child, will come through his ability to identify with the parent of the same sex, thus affirming his own sexual identification.

A major task faced by the preschool child is to learn to feel comfortable in social situations without his mother. Here, again, he will build on earlier successes. As his contacts enlarge, there will be more places that he can feel at home, and the number of children he can play with at one time will grow larger. Work and Call (1965) write that

The child who has not been stunted by an overprotecting dependency is capable of conversing and communicating with his peers. Such communication grows rapidly during these years, and the greater number of satisfying peer contacts the child has, the more comfortable he grows [pp. 90, 91].

Bettye M. Caldwell (1970) makes the premise that "the first three years of a child's life represent the most important period for priming a child's cognitive, social and emotional development. . . ." It is a critical period during which the environment "will exert maximum effect for either facilitation or inhibition of the child's genetic
potential for development."

By the formation of Mother-Toddler groups recognition is given to the importance of the child's earliest years in setting patterns and attitudes that will persist long after those years are past. Mother and child are met at a time when their relationship is still fluid, and can be influenced toward growth in directions that will bring lasting satisfaction to both parties. The child is offered a group experience providing sensory and motor learning, and a chance to make social contacts with other children under a teacher's guidance. His mother is offered practical help in working with him. She has the opportunity of facing the pleasures and frustrations of child rearing with a peer group. She is encouraged to consider the validity of meeting her own needs, as well as those of her child, and to set developmental goals for herself as well as for him.
CHAPTER III

GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING MOTHER-TOODLER GROUPS

Qualifications of the Teacher

Since the first three years of a child's life are a critical period during which the environment will exert maximum effect on a child's genetic potential for development, a teacher for a toddler group should be educationally well qualified in the field of early childhood development. This preparation would enable her to know how and when to be supportive to the child as he becomes increasingly more self-reliant. She should enjoy working with young children, and relate well to them. She should have prior experience as a teacher of preschool children, which would give her confidence in working with these children with their mothers present.

The person who plans to conduct a Mother-Toddler program should have enough maturity to be able to identify and empathize with the mothers in their maternal role. Preferably, the teacher should also be a mother, for motherhood provides practical experience that enables her to be more realistic in her approach to other mothers, and more tolerant of human frailties.

Most nursery school teachers who are accustomed to starting a group of young children with their mothers
staying for the first few days of school, know that the presence of the mothers causes them added tension in conducting the class. In a Mother-Toddler group not only are the mothers always present but much of their communication with the teacher is on a nonverbal level. They are sensitive to the way they think the teacher is reacting to them and to their child, and defensive. They feel that the way the child behaves is a reflection on their mothering. Although the teacher may feel that she knows what she herself is putting into the group situation, she cannot always tell what message the parent is taking out of it. A young teacher who may still be identifying with the children she teaches, in their relationship with their mothers, does not yet have the maturity to cope with the complexities involved in this group experience.

In an alternate plan for a Mother-Toddler program, two teachers may divide the management of the group between them. One teacher may work with the children only, while the other teacher will be available to help the mothers in the classroom situation. During the second half of the program when the children move with their teacher to their second location, either inside or out, their mothers may not need to follow them. The second teacher will be able to stay with these mothers and take part in their discussions. Some of the mothers, however, will continue to follow their children in preference to taking part in a discussion. This may be because they hate to miss watching
their children in action, or because they are reluctant to separate from them. For this reason, the monthly meeting of parents and teachers, without the children in attendance, is necessary. This provides an opportunity to discuss group management as well as the concerns of the parents.

A variety of factors may influence the decision whether to use one or two people to conduct the Mother-Toddler program. Paramount among these may be economic reasons, or the personalities of available staff. But either method of conducting the group can be successfully used. Combining the functions of teacher for the children and guide for the parents in one person has the advantage of fostering a closer working relationship with the parents. But it does not allow much opportunity for the teacher to take part in discussions with the mothers. Having two people available, with one specifically for the mothers, permits a continuing discussion to take place. In addition, it encourages some of the mothers to permit their children to make a limited separation from them during the course of the meetings.

The Orientation Meeting

The first meeting sets the size of the group (maximum: 10 children), the time, length and frequency of meeting days, and the number of weeks the program will span. A program should have a definite beginning and ending date to help focus on goals.
The purposes of the program are discussed in very general terms, and the validity of personal parent goals for attending is emphasized. Which days will be set aside for parent discussions without children present are determined.

The structure of the experience is outlined, explaining the activities to be presented and how the time will be divided. It is easier to start the program outside, if possible, where staggered arrivals and conversations between parents are less distracting to the children than they are in the classroom.

Parent participation is discussed in terms of how much guidance to give their own children and how to help the teacher.

It would be preferable if Toddler groups could be scheduled for morning sessions, but if the nursery school is used for regular preschool classes at that time, twice-a-week meetings from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. are suggested. The first few meetings should be less than two hours long, ending before the children are tired. Later, as their tolerance for being in a group increases, the time should be extended to two hours.

**Suggested Daily Time Schedule for Afternoon Group**

2:00-2:50 p.m. Arrival. **Outside time.**

2:50-3:00 p.m. Bathroom time. Parents help their own children wash hands. Some children use toilets.
3:00-3:10 p.m. Milk, cookie, and story time at the table. Coffee is provided for parents. Some children may wander off, but the teacher should be prepared to stay with the children who are eating. She will talk to them, and may show a simple picture book, encouraging them to name pictures. Parents will supervise the other children, without offering them additional stimulus to take focus away from the table.

3:10-3:35 p.m. Inside playtime. Materials to be used can be ready on trays, to be set up when preceding period at the table is over. If set up in advance these activities are distracting to the children.


3:40-3:50 p.m. Music time. Parents and children participate, singing or responding to simple rhythm records. Rhythm instruments are successful here.

3:50-4:00 p.m. Time to go home.

Preparing the Environment

Outside. For the youngest children, learning takes place through sensory stimulation. Young children need concrete experiences with materials they can feel with their bodies, as well as with their hands. The sandbox offers opportunities for digging, pouring, mixing and carrying. With the addition of water the texture changes. Sand feels different to walk on than grass or pavement.

Shovels, spoons, and containers for the sandbox should be provided. The children enjoy water play in many forms, and the teacher can vary the program by setting out brushes to paint with or sponges to use for washing. A wading pool
is a nice addition in pleasant weather.

Equipment suitable for the youngest nursery school groups can be used successfully with toddlers. An extra step up to the climbing apparatus and bucket seats for the swings should be provided. The simplest wheel toys are used, but the trikes may need to be omitted in the beginning. As with the older children in the nursery school, these young children have a strong drive for physical mastery, and take much enjoyment from activities that stimulate large muscle development and control.

The teacher will station parents to help with the different activities, but will stress that they leave the initiative for choice with the children. It is better if the children climb only so far on the equipment as they are presently able to do, rather than have the parents put them on. The equipment is inviting, and the children should be permitted to gain confidence at their own rate, as they find how to climb up on it. The child who is overconfident, who climbs fearlessly without sufficient experience, needs to be protected from falling by an adult, and helped to find his footing.

Inside. The normal nursery classroom, with its well defined areas for housekeeping, block play, and open shelves of toys, provides the toddler with more distractions than he can comfortably assimilate. The classroom can be modified by turning some cabinets to the wall and
eliminating toys that are too difficult for the toddler. The teacher can further simplify by limiting the number of activities planned for the hour inside.

Because early childhood is the period for sensory learning, the program stresses the use of a variety of malleable materials with different textures and degrees of wetness. Paints to be used on the easel should be thick enough to run very slowly, if spilled. Again, as outdoors, water play is very popular with the children, whether they use it in the housekeeping corner or in the bathroom. It is not unusual to see a child neglect other play activities in the classroom to spend a half hour with running water in the bathroom. Several large bath towels should be on hand to mop up spills.

When the children move indoors for the second half of the program, their mothers take them into the bathroom to wash their hands. Although some of the toddlers are still in diapers, it is helpful to them to see other children use the toilets. It is desirable for the children to move from the bathroom to the table for snack time. Materials to be used by the group after the snack should be readily available, but out of the way, offering no distraction to the children on their way from the bathroom.

Working with Parents in the Group

Parents take an active part in the management of the group and in supervising the activities. This frees the
teacher to be able to move from one area to another, and slowly build her relationships with the individual children. Her effectiveness with the children deepens with her ability to establish a warm working relationship with their mothers. It is through the mothers' confidence in the teacher that the children receive tacit permission to accept her.

Each play area needs adult supervision. When a child approaches a mother who is supervising an activity, she should see that he has a place to play and materials to use. She should try to be as solicitous of his needs as she would be those of her own child.

During the time the parents are supervising activities outside, it is important to stress safety. Mothers are often so involved in their conversations with each other that they fail to notice what their own child is doing right beside them, until he falls. On the other hand, parents should not be concerned if their children hold back for a while, because they are learning what to do by watching the others. Providing a child with too much passive enjoyment by swinging him continuously, or pulling him around the yard in a wagon, may keep him from experiencing other opportunities to be active. The objective is to have the children move in their own behalf.

The group situation is helpful to the mothers in many ways. Since toilet training has begun for some children by age two, seeing these children use the toilet encourages
other children to be receptive to their mothers' training procedures.

**Snack time.** Snack time is a gathering time for the group. Most of the children come to the table readily, but an occasional child is resistant. The teacher may save a place for him but no pressure should be brought to force his compliance. The child may find something to play with by himself, but his mother should avoid finding him something to do while the other children are at the table. The teacher should use the time the children are at the table to read to them, showing them pictures, and encouraging them to participate by naming objects pictured or relating to the picture in their own way. The books the teacher chooses for the toddlers should have simple illustrations and depict happenings within the range of the children's experiences. The same books can be used over and over, for familiarity with the stories and pictures builds vocabulary and confidence, and participation becomes a game.

**Period following snack time.** Materials previously prepared can be quickly set out. Some children may stay at the table to use play dough, but others will move on to try the blocks or play with toys. Although parents are very anxious for their children to see all possibilities for enjoyment, the children are encouraged to concentrate on one activity by blocking out other distractions. If a child is offered too much, he will move from one activity to
another without really enjoying anything. This will be a clue to the teacher that further simplification of the program may be in order. It is by keeping the environment simple that the children are encouraged to concentrate. The day-to-day sameness of the activities offered and the repetitiveness of the structure within the program make the experience predictable to the children. This frees them to make contacts with each other as they play.

**General principles of working with mothers.** Often situations occur between the children that need the teacher's help. Parents are quick to remove their child from a potential confrontation with another child, but with the help of the teacher in interpreting one child to another, children and parents build techniques for handling difficulties.

Although the teacher may sometimes be uncomfortable with the way she sees a mother treating her child, she will not criticize her for what she is doing. Mothers want to present themselves in a favorable light to the other mothers and to the teacher. The behavior of her child, to which the mother is responding in this unbecoming manner, is probably a source of embarrassment to her. Because the teacher is sympathetic to her predicament and does not challenge her actions at that time, she will have a better chance of influencing the attitudes with which the mother approaches her toddler. The teacher will try to understand
the underlying tensions between mother and child, to be in a position to help the mother find a more effective way of handling the situation. The mother needs to feel that the teacher approves of her and of her child, and is not threatening their relationship. When the mother finds that she is accepted unconditionally by the teacher, she can examine what is going on between her and her child that triggers the unfortunate chain of events, and make the necessary changes herself. At that time the teacher may be able to make suggestions for an alternate way to handle the situation.

During the course of a session, mothers often consult each other on facets of child management. Although there may not be time for uninterrupted conversations, the teacher will be able to pick up the threads of these unfinished discussions at a later meeting.

Working with mothers and children in a toddler group is not too different from working with them in a beginning nursery group. The main difference is that with the passage of the additional year a mother is usually more realistic, and recognizes that she cannot live through her child. The child's growing sense of himself forces her to accept him as a separate individual and puts him more often in conflict with her. Working with the mother of a toddler is more intense because mother and child are still a dyad, and conflicts are cloaked in ambivalence. The teacher is advised to move very cautiously in delivering home truths.
to the mother, for what does not get said is less apt to cause trouble. The teacher will not be able to continue to work with a mother she has made uncomfortable, for the mother has sought the group on a voluntary basis and will withdraw herself and her child if she is unhappy.

The teacher may wish to emphasize how important it is for the mother to find time for herself. If she can receive gratification on an individual level through personal growth she will not need to prolong her child's dependence on her. This, in turn, will make it possible for her to make appropriate demands on her child while permitting him to experience a growing sense of autonomy. But if her personal needs are only met through the closeness of her bond with him she is less able to separate his need for growth from her need for him to continue to be dependent on her. Another factor is at work here, too. Even though a mother may feel unselfish in postponing or putting aside personal goals to care for her child, such hidden desires have a way of contributing to the underlying conflict by causing her to resent their sacrifice.

The Monthly Discussion Meetings

The monthly discussion meetings have several purposes. The first is to present an opportunity to plan for smoother operation of the toddler group. In spite of the original orientation meeting, actual participation in the group raises issues for which parents are unprepared. These
meetings give the teacher a chance to elaborate on her choice and scheduling of activities, and the parents an occasion to ask what is expected of them in given situations. Discussions may be raised regarding how much conformity to try to exact from their children in relation to what is going on in the classroom. From here, the discussion might move to a consideration of how much freedom to give a toddler, and what are reasonable expectations from him. As Aline B. Auerbach (1968) writes, "Children need guidance and control, as well as appropriate freedom and independence."

A second purpose for the monthly meetings is to increase the mothers' understanding of their children and their ability to cope with them comfortably, by discussing child development and techniques of child management. The teacher will be prepared to offer information about child growth and techniques of child care, because parents do need this knowledge. She will make it clear that techniques are peripheral, for it is not only what parents do but how they feel that is important in influencing how they act (Bennett, 1972).

A third function of the group meetings is to help individual parents lose their sense of isolation and gain a better perspective of their own situation through learning about the experiences of others. The teacher will make it clear that this is not the kind of experience in which she is an authority figure to bring them words of wisdom, but
one in which they will be helping each other through personal sharing. She will ask them not only to think about meeting the needs of their children but to recognize that they have needs separate from those of their children which need fulfillment.

These meetings offer the teacher a chance to pick up any threads left dangling from uncompleted discussions that were interrupted in the regular sessions. The possible topics may range from handling aggression, the problems of noneaters and sleep disruption, to a mother's fatigue. Parents will share many of these problems, and will be able to identify with the feeling of concern produced in the mother by the presence of these anxieties.

The teacher will try to find how the concerns of an individual mother are applicable to the group. She will need to listen without criticism. As Daphne Nelson Bennett suggests in *Parents Should Be Heard* (1972), she will need "to receive uncritically and completely wherever a person is in his perception of his world. . . . She will withstand the temptation of reassurance . . . but convey compassion for the present situation."

And lastly, as Bennett (1972) reminds us, the teacher does not directly answer questions dealing with the parent's personal problems in coping with her own situation. "To do so tends to focus on content, and take responsibility for choice away from the parent."
In conclusion, the purpose of all group discussions, whether in the monthly meetings or in regular sessions, is to help the mothers clarify issues that concern them in relationship to their children. The teacher does not have the "answers" that a mother is seeking, nor is she a marriage counselor. She can, however, by her sympathy and understanding, help a mother in her search for her own solutions.
CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS OF MOTHERS AND TODDLERS

Kinds of Questions Mothers Ask and the Problems They Discuss

The concerns of mothers and toddlers seem to fall in three general categories. The first involves the idea of a critical time for some event to take place or development of the child to occur. The second is how to protect the child from experiencing frustration. The third has to do with how others perceive them in their mothering role.

The idea of whether there is a critical time for learning or doing something new which, if missed, will have serious consequences for the child, is a recurrent theme that haunts mothers. The concept of "readiness" forms part of this concern. But how do you recognize when the child is ready to give up the bottle or to be weaned from the breast? And will he let you know when he is ready to be toilet trained? Is there a critical time to move a child from his crib into a regular bed? If you did not move him at the right time what possible repercussions would there be?

Mothers whose anxieties fall under the category of protecting their children from frustration have trouble setting limits. This is illustrated by children being permitted to turn night into day, who awaken at two in the
morning for juice and a playtime, or who refuse to go to bed without crying interminably. Or, by children who turn dinner time into a shambles for their parents by their constant demands for attention. Another example is presented by mothers who have trouble with their own feelings of guilt for having presented their child with a new sibling. In spite of their fatigue from meeting the demands of an infant, these mothers go to great lengths to make it up to the toddler.

Under the third category are young mothers who are concerned with what other people are thinking of them as mothers. They feel the need to prove themselves to their own mothers and mothers-in-law, whose expectations from the grandchildren conflict with theirs. They hear from their parents that they were trained at a much younger age. Or, if their child is given to tantrums, these mothers feel that everyone is watching and criticizing them for what they are doing. What is the nature of the teacher's response to these problems and concerns?

The Response of the Teacher

The underlying purpose of Mother-Toddler is to help the individual mother evaluate the situations for which she is seeking answers. Therefore, it is not the function of the teacher to be didactic. Instead, she does the mother a great service by helping her bring into the open the underlying considerations coloring the problem, so that
she herself can find the answers for which she is looking.

When the teacher considers with a mother the right time for an activity to take place she knows that more is involved than the question of the child's stage of development. The issue is far more complex and may define the relationship between mother and child at this period. A mother may feel embarrassed that her child still takes a bottle, but finds bedtime easier with it. Or, if she is still nursing her child she may not really wish to wean him because she is reluctant to see him move away from his dependence on her.

A mother may think it is time to begin toilet-training her child, but be unwilling to help him assume some responsibility for this action by putting him in the kind of clothes he can pull down himself. She may be unwilling to forego the convenience of diapers when they go out.

Should the child be moved into a big bed? The teacher is in no position to advise the mother without knowing if the reason for desiring this move at this time is to free the crib for a younger sibling, or for not desiring to make this move is to control his night wandering.

Sometimes the underlying conflicts are apparent to the teacher but hidden from the parent. Should the teacher share her insights with the mother? The teacher can afford to take her time, for many situations have a tendency to solve themselves. Parents may tire of a child's bedtime antics, or refuse to give more than a drink of water to the
child waking at 2:00 a.m. for refreshments and playtime. When they tire of the game they have been playing they become able to give him the clear message that bedtime is time to sleep.

Outside events and pressures influence the mother to change what she is doing with her child. She cannot help making mental comparisons between her child and the children of her friends. When her own child, who is not developmentally slower, seems more babyish, she may question what is going on. It is at this point that a few timely suggestions from the teacher may be appreciated. The teacher must bear in mind that she is treading on sensitive ground and try to approach a problem from the mother's point of view, rather than put her on the defensive. What the teacher is trying to do is influence certain attitudes on the part of the mother, rather than her behavior, so that the change in attitude may modify her approach to her child. Nothing positive is accomplished in making a mother feel inept or guilty in what she is doing. Positive changes can only come about as she gains confidence in her ability to set appropriate limits. When the mother finds that the teacher is not judgmental, she will be able to share situations in which she feels uncomfortable and be ready for a sympathetic ear and an alternate approach.
Problems of Toddlers

What are problems presented by toddlers that alert the teacher to abnormalities in the relationship between mother and child? When a teacher sees that a young child enters a new situation with his mother but does not use her as a focal point for interpreting the scene, she feels that something is missing. When a child refuses to accept the boundaries of the areas being used, indoors and out, but insists on taking off on his own, leaving his mother behind, it suggests that either she has real difficulty in setting limits for him or he is unaccustomed to paying attention to her. When a child uses materials inappropriately, pouring out juice from his cup, painting on anything but the paper, and his mother takes no action to check him, it becomes apparent that this is how she expects him to behave. It may also suggest that the child is more invested in destructive actions than in finding pleasure in a positive way.

When a child has a tantrum because someone else is using the swing and throws himself on the ground, banging his head, even if he is careful not to hurt himself, the reaction is excessive. When the mother of such a child does not contain him, but leaves him to work through the storm of his emotions alone, they are in trouble. When a child makes demands but does not address them to a particular person, and refuses to meet the eyes of the person addressing him, the teacher will have to work very hard to make him recognize her existence.
Another situation is presented by the child who keeps his mother glued to his side. The intensity of his demands on his mother's attention may suggest that the child is trying to control their relationship. The fact that his mother is so giving in this situation may offer a clue to the teacher that the mother may not be meeting some of the child's legitimate needs and is overcompensating here.

The parent who wants her child to be "free," with no conformity to even the loosest structured program, presents a different problem. She may be trying to work out her own problems with authority through her child. She puts her child on his own to make decisions that are beyond his capabilities at this time. Another parent "loves" the program but does not want her child to have to leave the sandbox to go in when the other children are ready to move on, because he is having such a good time. What is the teacher's responsibility here? Should she leave mother and son outside to pretend that they are alone together at the park? If so, why do they need the program? The teacher can continue with her program for the benefit of the other children, secure that before it is over this mother's concern that her child might be missing something will cause her to bring him inside.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Young women today are finding that living in a culture where the role of women is changing makes motherhood difficult. Having elected motherhood as the role to fulfillment at a time when society is concerned with the rights of women, they feel self-conscious in their mothering role, and face their tasks with some ambivalence and little prior preparation. Membership in a Mother-Toddler group can be helpful to them in bridging changing times, by offering them and their toddlers a first-group experience where they can receive guidance and support.

The history of nursery schools in the United States dates back to the first World War, but the acceptance of children of 22 to 30 months and their mothers in Mother-Toddler groups within the nursery school is a recent phenomenon. Nursery schools are in a unique position to be able to offer this specialized service to mother and child because the school environment can be adapted for this purpose. Many of the toys and much of the equipment in the nursery school, used by slightly older children, are suitable for use by the toddlers and offer them stimulation and enjoyment. Because the early years are so important to the child's later development, this program can have a
lasting positive effect in promoting attitudes conducive to good mental health. Teachers with a background of training and experience in early childhood development can help a child learn to relate to the other children in the group, which helps the individual child feel comfortable in a group situation and promotes ease of separation from his mother at a later date.

Mothers find that some of their anxieties about child rearing are lessened when they meet other mothers with similar problems. Many of the situations between mother and child that cause concern improve in the group. Some lend themselves to modification by the group process alone, while others are improved through the teacher's ability to work with mother and child. But there are some problems that do not improve easily. The teacher should be aware of community resources and have skill in making referrals, for she is in a position to suggest outside intervention. Hopefully, through early intervention, a mother can be helped to form a new relationship with her child before any lasting damage has occurred. Thus, through her skill in meeting the needs of mothers and children, the teacher makes new friends for the school she serves.
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