

Overview

CIRCLE's recommended center management system helps children transition between centers, takes children's interests into account, emphasizes name-recognition skills, and enables teachers to keep track of children's activities and choices. The system is child-directed, giving children the freedom to manage their own center time. Each day, each child chooses from all the centers, interacts with different children in an unrestricted way, and decides for him or herself when to move to another center.

In this activity, you will learn about and reflect on CIRCLE's center management system, many elements of which you saw implemented in Karrie Woodard's classroom. Like Karrie, you may already have a center management system in place. We encourage you to read the description (provided below) of CIRCLE's center management system carefully, try the system out in your classroom, and see how it works for you.

Objectives

- To learn more about CIRCLE's center management system, a system which provides structure, but gives children a choice and a voice in the classroom.
- To reflect on the kinds of center management practices that facilitate smooth transitions between activities and centers throughout the day.

Materials

- Poster board
- Center icons
- Markers
- Craft sticks
- Hooks, Velcro[®], magnets, clothespins, or pockets

Instructions

1. Examine Your Current System
 - Consider your current center management practice.
 - Do children know where to go and what to do in the classroom? Or do they seem to be confused about what things are, where to find them, or where things go?
 - Read the description below of CIRCLE's recommended center management system. Note that there are some differences between

CIRCLE's system and the system you saw Karrie use in the teaching example.

2. Make a Center Management Chart

We encourage you to try out CIRCLE's system in your classroom. To make a Center Management Chart, follow these steps:

- Make a chart for each center with the name of the center and an icon to go with it. Decide how many children should be in a center at any given time, and show that number on the chart. (For example, if four children will be in a center, that center's chart should have four hooks/clothespins to hold four children's "tickets.")
- Print children's names on craft sticks (these will be the tickets).
- Guide the children through the center routine and management system and have the children practice using it.
- Have each child choose a center.
- The child will find his or her name card, and place the name card/tickets on the corresponding chart (which is located on the outer edge of each center).
- When children move between centers, they will move their name cards/tickets from one center to another, "checking out" of one center and "checking in" to another. (Remember that though the children can check in and out of centers at will, it is up to you to limit the number of children in each a center. Once the spaces for tickets have all been filled in, children must understand that the center has "closed.")

3. Prepare to Share

- Reflect on your experiences in this exercise and have your thoughts and notes ready to share with other teachers taking this course in *Share Ideas*.

CIRCLE's Center Management System

How CIRCLE's Center Management System Works:

CIRCLE's center management system is very child-directed: the children choose which centers to go to, who to go with, and how long to stay in each center. Each child has a ticket with his or her name on it on a central Center Management Chart (these tickets are important as early literacy name-recognition learning tools as well!) Each center has its own management chart, a chart which indicates how many children can be in that center at any given time. For example, if four children at a time are allowed in the Construction center, the Construction center's chart will have spaces for only four children's tickets.

When one child leaves the Construction center, he or she will remove the ticket from the chart and sign into a different center, enabling another child to move into the Construction center. The children are given the freedom to manage themselves, while the teachers rotate around the room, leading mini-lessons for small groups. (Read the tips below for more information on managing center time and transitions.)

How Karrie's System Differs from CIRCLE's:

Karrie's ticket system differs from the CIRCLE recommended ticket system in that it includes elements of a rotation system. Karrie divides her children up into learning groups, and each group chooses between two centers each day. Karrie prefers this learning group and rotation system because it helps her track her children's movement around the room, and it enables her to match children with one another strategically (for example, she might group native English speakers with English language learners or avoid grouping children together who tend to conflict with one another.)

CIRCLE's recommended ticket system is a little less teacher-managed. The children are not divided into learning groups. Each day, each child chooses from *all* the centers, interacts with different children in an unrestricted way, and decides for him or herself when to move to another center. They manage themselves, checking into open centers as individuals, on their own time, and at their own will.

Center Tips:

- Children learn by working in centers. Centers are not a place to go after you finish the "important stuff." Centers are a place to go to do the "important stuff."
- During center time, teachers and assistants move from center to center, interacting with the children and scaffolding language.
- Small-group read alouds and other small-group activities can also occur during center time.

Transition Tips:

One key aspect to managing a center-based classroom is ensuring that transitions happen easily and smoothly. Transitioning games and activities are used to:

- Gather children into large or small groups.
- Move children from one activity to another.
- Fill short periods of time between activities.
- Help move children through the day.

Transitions should:

- Be quick and fun.
- Be planned (if possible).
- Provide a change of pace.

Tips for Teachers with Assistants:

Karrie and Peggy consistently use “we” (as opposed to “I”) when they discuss their classroom, their plans, their centers, and their classroom management practice. Peggy, as an assistant teacher, takes responsibility for the classroom’s evolution, progress, and management and is very involved with the children. The two teachers work together, as partners. An assistant can be a prominent and active contributor to a classroom, not just a helper who stays on the sidelines doing prep work.

Of course, not all teachers have assistants or aides in the classroom. Though Peggy contributes a great deal to the classroom, teachers who teach alone should not be discouraged! If you do not have an assistant, you still can create a room as rich and as well-managed as the one you see here. Here are a few tips that might help:

- Bring in parent volunteers. Give volunteers specific, simple jobs (such as reading stories to children) so that each time they come in, they know what to do and can take charge of the activity on their own.
- Develop children’s ability to work independently in order to free yourself up.
- Have children stay in each center for a shorter amount of time (depending on behavior and attention spans).