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## **Preschool Teaching: The Ins and Outs to Losing Your Sanity**

By Kelsey Pakkala

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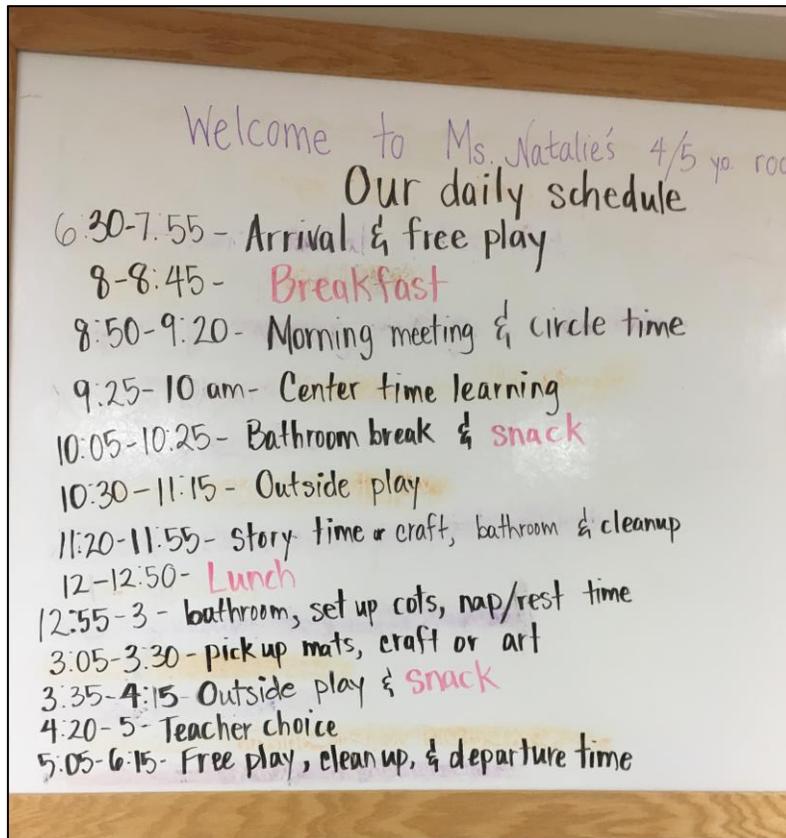
Children are terrifying. Whether it's a 6-month-old baby, an 11-year-old preteen, or anything in between, children are terrifying. However, children, especially children under the age of 5 years old, are the eighth wonder of the world. P.T. Barnum once stated, "to me there is no picture so beautiful as smiling, bright-eyed, happy children; no music so sweet as their clear and ringing laughter," and as an assistant pre-school teacher, nothing holds more truth.

The life of preschool teachers is strenuous. Most of my days Monday through Friday began at 8:00am, and do not end until 6:00pm. In those 10-hour work days, a lot happens; some days are bombarded with behavioral issues from children, some days are poisoned with overbearing parents, and some days are unhinged after surprise visits from the State. Regardless of what happens each day, every preschool teacher's main priority is to care and protect for our children.

In order to care for and protect our children, certain procedures and regulations must be followed. Each day, all the children between 1 years old and 5 years old are given breakfast and lunch, and receive 2 snacks: one in between breakfast and lunch, and the second after lunch before pick-up. The babies under 12 months old follow their own feeding schedules and our job is to maintain them. Another way that we care for our children is by allotting a 2-hour nap time, and various different play times. If the weather is permitting, we take the children outside so they can run around and play on the playsets. If the weather is not permitting, inside play still allows for a plethora of creative opportunities such as coloring or playing number or shape bingo. Play time and nap time are both essential parts of caring for the children because nap time allows the children to rest and rejuvenate, while play time allows for independence and creativity growth.

However, sometimes it isn't as easy to care for and protect the children as feeding them and giving them naptime. Some days, the children become a danger to themselves. Each classroom has its "problematic" children: some involve the typical behavioral issues that every 2-5-year-old has, some involve Autistic behavioral issues. Regardless of what the behavior is, it is important to make sure that the child involved is not a danger to themselves or their peers. A typical day involves one running into another and pushing him or her down, or throwing dirt at another – both of which are easy fixes. After a child does something they shouldn't do to anyone, especially not any of their friends, we sit the child down and explain to them why what they did was not an okay behavior. Once the child is ready to apologize to the friend, they do so and go about their day. The more hectic of days result from parents who are not quite yet ready to say good-bye to their child for the day and thus require direct attention. When a parent becomes too dependent on special attention from one of us teachers, they are then taking away from their children's safety. The children become less supervised as one teacher must console the parent; the same rings true when surprise check-ins from the State occur. The agents pull teachers away from our children to speak individually about random topics such as how many children are sleeping in each room. Our duties as teachers first and foremost is to care for and protect our children – that becomes increasingly difficult when we are always being taken away from our children! Regardless, we make the impossible possible.

With as stressful as it can be to be in charge of 20 very young children, the days feel overwhelmingly long. However, luckily for me and for every other preschool teacher, lesson plans and schedules exist. The schedule first defines what the children will be doing at what time. For example, my children had lunch every day from 12:15pm-1:00pm. Immediately following lunch was naptime which lasted until 3:00pm. Schedules define more than just eating and napping times; the schedule also blocks out the time for academics, playtimes, and special activities as well. Schedules are posted on a large calendar in each classroom so that the children and teachers always know what comes next.



**Figure 1** This is an actual schedule that is posted in Ms. Natalie's 4/5-year-old room. Most of the schedules in the various other age grouped rooms follow a fairly similar schedule. The schedules provide for a structured agenda that teaches the children routines and also makes life a little easier for the teachers.

Lesson plans coincide with the schedules and are centered around the academic aspects of the day. Once one masters the schedule and the lesson plan, preschool children are a breeze. A lesson plan is a detailed, but still flexible, overview of which academic activities will be conducted each day throughout the following week and are written weekly. Lesson plans follow the regular schedule, and specify which academic skill will be focused on and which activity will be conducted to further teach that skill. With my children for example, we block out time every single day for reading; we read a new story every day and to test for comprehension, we talk about the story after it is over. One story we read was Dr. Seuss's, *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*, and we followed up with questions such as: what were some of the fish we read about, how were they different, what colors of fish were there.

MY PRE-SCHOOL DAY		Theme of the Month: Letter of the Week: We are learning/Notes...
Time	Activity...	
Arrival-8:30	Breakfast, free play, large group	Social skills
8:30-9:00	Morning work/ <b>independent work</b> (Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays)	Each day, students will have a different worksheet/packet to complete (letter formation, coloring, etc. to strengthen fine motor skills and independence)
9:00-9:20	Circle Time 9:00- Mon/Tues/Thur 9:30- Wed/Fri	Attendance, calendar, letter of the week, theme of the week helper of the day announced, sight words, pos behvr. chart, etc
9:30-10:15	<b>Fine Motor Activity or Art Project</b> Fine motor examples: scissor, beads on string, writing (please keep theme of the month in mind for art projects)	M- T- W- Th- Fri-
10:15-10:30	Snack	Healthy Snack- students will practice pouring their own water from a pitcher, saying please and thank you, etc
10:30-11:15	Outside Play	Gross motor skills, social skills
11:15-11:45	<b>Math Workshop</b> (could be: number bingo, counting cheerios, etc)	The teacher will provide math lessons to the whole group. Students will then practice these particular skills with a partner and then again individually. Math skill learned this week:
11:45-12:45	Lunch, <b>shared reading</b> (keep theme of month in mind)	After lunch, teacher and students will participate in an interactive reading activity where students join in/share in the reading of a poem, book, or other text. M- T- W-

Th-	Fri-	
12:45-3:00	Rest time	Rest, nap, or read books on cot
2:30-3:00	<b>Centers</b> (for those children who are awake)	Set up three different activities at three different tables, teacher circulates
3:00-3:15	Snack	Healthy Snack
3:15-3:45	<b>Handwriting Practice</b>	Students each have their own whiteboard/laminated sheet and they practice tracing their first name while teacher helps individual students as needed.  Students can finish morning work during this time, as well, in case they didn't finish or missed it altogether.
3:45-4:45	Dramatic Play or Outside Play	Kitchen area, puppets, dress up, etc
4:45-5:15	Teacher Choice  (Plan Tuesday and Wednesday for sure.. other days if you want, otherwise, another teacher will plan the days you leave early)	Each day there will be a different <b>PLANNED ACTIVITY</b> such as centers, art project, early reading books, science experiment, cooking lesson, measurement activity, yoga, <b>games</b> (memory, bingo) M- T- W- Th- Fri-
5:15- departure	Large group/ free play/or teacher choice	Social skills

**Figure 2** This is a blank lesson plan that is used in Ms. Sam’s 3/4-year-old classroom. Lesson plans are intended to give an overview into which academic or motor skills will be focused on each day.

Although lesson plans are formal documents, the writing and diction for them are not necessarily formal. A typical lesson plan is written in the format of a table with each day of the week labeled, and the scheduled time blocks distinguished. When an academic activity is specified, it is not written in an overtly formal manner; if a random person with no interest or training in teaching picked up a solid lesson plan, he/she would still be able to follow and comprehend it. After being drafted by each classroom’s head teacher, lesson plans are ‘turned in’ to the director, Jill, who then reviews them, and then after mild condensing, sends them out to parents.

To an outsider, becoming a preschool teacher may seem like a very difficult to attain goal. Surprise! It is not! To be a preschool teacher one must have a First Aid/CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation)/AED (Automatic External Defibrillator) certification and a Blood Borne Pathogen certification. To receive the blood borne pathogen certification, an online course must be completed along with an online test to prove comprehension. First Aid/CPR/AED is slightly more difficult. An in-person class must be taken, each skill learned must be demonstrated accurately, and a written exam must be passed. Skills required include being able to perform CPR, knowledge and ability to use an AED, and how to administer first aid to a varying degree of injury. I received my certification through Red Cross; Red Cross is not the only agency capable of certifying people, it is just the most common. The biggest component to becoming a preschool teacher however, is the undeniable need for a love of children – that is not a skill or characteristic that can be measured by any exam.

Once all the logistics – such as certifications being acquired and learning basic routines – are out of the way, being a preschool teacher is easy. It is all about fun – having fun with the kids, and making sure the kids are having fun with you. Sure, being a preschool teacher can

unquestionably be exhausting, but on the other hand, the payout is priceless. I got to spend 5 days a week with little humans that not only loved and adored me, but depended on me. Even to this day, 2 months after being away from my kids (thanks to college) I still receive hand-drawn pictures in the mail from my kids. There is nothing that compares to being a preschool teacher, regardless of how difficult it may be.

**Work Cited**

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