

Superior Circle and Sensational Calendar: Simple Adjustments for Getting the Most Out of Whole Group Instruction

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Superior Circle Times

1. Schedule your circle times **AFTER** an active time. It might seem like this gets kids all rowdy, but it actually has the opposite effect; they are ready for a quiet, mellow activity after being physically engaged. If you must do circle time right after a calm activity, take 90 seconds to do a **wiggle song** before expecting kids to sit quietly.
2. Keep circle time **short and sweet**. You can do several 10-12-minute circle times throughout the day.
3. Gauge the length of circle time by carefully observing your children. Are they wiggly? Then move on to small groups.
4. Think about the **layout**. Can all of the children see? Can they sit comfortably? Criss-cross apple sauce may hurt some children's knees or backs. Encourage children to sit comfortably but politely so that others may see and hear. Consider adding a **back row of chairs** rather than insisting that all children sit on the floor. Yoga balls have been shown to improve attention, alertness, and posture. The layout can be flexible. Children can choose where they sit. This is a chance for them to learn some self-regulation.
5. Don't expect children to sit quietly while **waiting** for others to join the circle or for others to be ready to begin an activity. This wastes children's time and causes misbehavior. Use **transition activities** such as songs, finger plays, and movement activities. Choose activities that the new arrivals can quickly join.
6. Is it really **reasonable** to require children to **sit quietly to be released** from circle time? Although this is traditional, what purpose does it serve?
7. Adapt circle time for children with **special needs**. A small tub of **fidgit items** to hold or ribbons sewn on to the edge of a carpet square may help children with attention or sensory issues. Have a child be a **special helper** to keep him/her engaged.
8. If children are disruptive, have the child sit for the first song/activity then be **allowed to go** to a quiet or calming spot. This is definitely better than time out for not participating. Gradually extend the time the child is expected to sit in circle so that the child develops focused attention in the whole group setting over time. Reinforce positive behavior, especially in the beginning to get the child "hooked."
9. Circle time does not have to be a "hands in your lap" experience. **Keep children active!** Physically touching, moving, and signaling responses ("thumbs up if you also have a cat") keeps children engaged and learning.
10. When choosing lessons or activities for circle time, consider whether the objective could be learned better in a **small-group setting**.
11. Think about it: Is your circle time more about **children being compliant or learning?**

Why Calendar Doesn't Do All It Could

1. Our numbering system is base ten. The calendar is base seven.
2. Young children typically know the 1-9 sequence and a bit beyond but often have difficulty identifying the counting patterns for decades (10, 20, 30) and transitions (for example, that 39 signals 40 next) (Baroody & Wilkins 1999). The calendar does not give any counting practice beyond the number 31.
3. Preschool-age children do need to know about passage of time (not telling time) but this is best learned within a school day. E.g. "Before lunch we had centers time. After lunch we will have quiet time."
4. Patterns on the calendar cards often rely on AB pattern. E.g. circle, square, circle, square.
5. Takes time away from more effective, time-efficient math experiences such as centers.
6. It's whole group! Remember that children generally learn better when they can get their hands on materials, talk with peers, and engage with big ideas rather than sit passively, watch another child doing something, or chant repetitiously.

Ten Powerful Ways to Interact with the Hundreds Chart (my favorite type is [pocket chart style](#))

1. Since the cards are moveable, you don't have to use all 100 numbers in the set. Fill in only the first twenty numbers or even ten or five. Use the chart to practice the number sequence. Mix up the cards and have children "fix the chart." Do lots of discussion but keep it brief.
2. If children struggle with teens, build the chart just to twenty. If desired, flip the teens numbers over to red to make them stand out. Do lots of discussion like, "What number is ONE LARGER than 17?" "What number comes BEFORE 15?" Support this experience by having children make sets of fewer than 20 objects (buttons, counters, flat marbles) in a center then having the children show you how many objects there are by pointing to the correct number on the hundreds chart.
3. Build the chart to 50 then show the multiples of ten in red, the multiples of 3 in red (cool design on the board), etc.
4. Ask the children to identify a missing number.
5. Ask the children to flip over a number then tell why that number is special (E.g. it's the number of puppies my dog just had, it's the number in my address).
6. Ask the children to complete a row or column on the chart. (The column one is tough!)
7. Build the chart to 100. Play "Secret Number." For example: Start at 27. Go down one, go to the right one, go down two. Where did you land? 58. Can the kids do it in their heads after a while?
8. Play games where you say a number and the child tells what is one more/two more/one less/two less.
9. Flip the number cards over to create patterns (red, white, red, white for skip counting), red for every multiple of five or red for every multiple of ten, etc.
10. Make the chart one of your centers so that more children can interact with the materials.

NEW SONGS AND FINGERPLAYS

How Are You? (tune: Frere Jacques)

- Hey there, Ben. Hey there, Ben.
- How are you? How are you?
- **Child responds: I am feeling (happy, tired, hungry, etc.)**
- **How 'bout you? (points to a new child) How 'bout you?**

Birds in the Tree (Holbrook & Kjar)

- We will find a little nest
- In the branches of a tree.
- Let us count the eggs inside;
- There are one, two, three.

- Mother bird sits on the nest
- To hatch the eggs, all three.
- Father bird flies round and round
- To guard his family.

Nest: Cup hands together.
Tree: Hold arms up rounded over head.
One, two, three: Count on fingers.

Sits on the nest: Cup left hand; place right hand on top.
Flies: Move arms in flying motion.

My Name Is...

- My name is Dr. Cutler, Cutler, Cutler.
- My name is Dr. Cutler. Who are you? **(points)**
--person says name

- Her name is Sandra, Sandra, Sandra.
- Her name is Sandra, Sandra, Sandra.
- Her name is Sandra. Who are you? **(points)**

Ten Little Chicks

Five eggs and five eggs, (hold up ten fingers)
That makes ten.
Sitting on top is the mother hen. (cover one hand with the other)

Crack, crack, crack, (clap 3 times)
What do I see?
Ten little chicks,
As cute as can be! (hold up ten fingers)



5 Little

- Five little squirrels sat up in a tree.
- The first squirrel said, "Well, what do I see?"
- The second squirrel said, "I see a dog!"
- The third squirrel said, "I see a frog!"
- The fourth squirrel said, "Let's run into the shade!"
- The fifth squirrel said, "I'm not afraid!"
- Then RUFF went the dog, and away the squirrels ran,
- One, two, three, four, five!

Oh, How We Love to Stand (Brown, 1962)

- Oh, how we love to stand
- And turn ourselves around,
- Shake* the left and shake the right,
- But, best of all, sit down.

Actions:
shake (arm)
lift (knee)

- Oh, how we love to stand
- To smile and not to frown,
- Lift* the left and lift the right,
- But, best of all, sit down.

Alternate words and actions:
wave (hand)
bend (waist)
point (toe)
bow (head)