Case Study 2*

This is my first year of teaching and I feel lucky to have found work at a high-quality ECE center with a child-centered philosophy. I am in charge of a class of eighteen 4-year-olds and have a teacher’s aide to assist me. Like me, most of the children are Hispanic and have parents who are working to make a better life for their children. Many of these parents were born in Mexico.

I started working with the class in the late summer, as the children made the transition from the 3-year-old to the 4-year-old classroom. By the end of September, I felt comfortable with my aide and pleased with the way the class was running. The children have learned so much! I thought everything was going well for my first year, until back to school night.

I was nervous about leading my first back-to-school night, but my aide and my director helped me plan my presentation. I really appreciated their advice since both of them have been through back-to-school night at this center before. When Tuesday night arrived, I was glad to finally have the opportunity to get to know all the parents and explain the exciting curriculum I had planned.

Although I knew most of the parents by name, we had never had a long conversation. I began the evening with introductions so the parents would know each other and get to know me better. My aide and I taught the parents one of the children’s favorite songs, “Five Little Ducks,” and I explained how this song helps children learn language and counting skills.

Next, we presented a slide show of our daily activities. I planned this so that the parents would understand why we move from individual to small group to large group activities throughout the day, and it also gave the parents the opportunity to see cute pictures of their children. I made sure all children were in at least a couple of pictures. As we looked at each activity, I explained how it benefited children’s communication, academic, and social skills. From their smiles and comments, I could tell the parents loved looking at the slide show.

I pointed out the developmental progression of early literacy skills and tried to help parents understand what “typical” behavior and activities for this age would be. Because I remember my own parents’ difficulty knowing what to expect from US schools, I especially tried to help these parents understand what would be expected from US kindergarten. Then I let the parents explore some sample activities and centers that I had set up around the classroom.

At the end of the evening, the group gathered together one more time. I asked the parents if they had any questions. One father spoke up and asked, “How do we know that the children will be ready for school? It seems to me that my son is mostly playing here.”
I smiled, trying to keep the tension out of my voice. Then I explained once again how interactive play, songs, and stories developed children’s language, literacy, and other academic skills.

Tariq’s mother raised her hand next. “But how about learning to write their letters and numbers? Shouldn’t they have some time with worksheets so they can practice tracing letters? Tariq loves the workbooks we have at home.”

Another mother jumped in, saying, “I have some workbooks at home that I could give to the class. My older daughter got them from her second grade teacher.”

This time I took a deep breath. I was starting to get really nervous, because it didn’t seem like these parents understood anything I said. The children are too young to be sitting with worksheets! I couldn’t believe the parents wanted to push elementary activities on these little kids.

I tried hard to smile as another parent started talking before I could. “I think it’s important that children take school seriously,” she said. Learning is not all fun, and they need to get used to it. I’m worried about all this playtime.

I began to panic. I thought we had planned everything so well and I had explained why developmentally appropriate curriculum is important. Clearly I had not gotten through to the parents.

I lost my confidence and confusion set in. Was I wrong? I was having a hard time putting myself in the parents’ position. I knew I had to do something quickly, before the conversation got out of hand, but I didn’t know what to say or do.

* This case study was adapted from Rand, M. (2000). *Giving it some thought: Cases from early childhood practice*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.