

Say Yes to the Mess*

Responding to students' spontaneous and playful ideas

Considerations

1. Plan with saying yes in mind, allowing for time in lessons when you can be open to students' suggestions. Requests to play can be explicit ("Can we change where we are sitting?") or implicit (many side conversations between children might be a request to talk to one another).
2. Consider the request and say yes when students can explain how their ideas relate to learning goals or provide a good answer to the question, "How will this help you/us learn?"
3. If you are unsure, ponder the request out loud and involve students in the decision-making process (e.g., "Pedro thinks we should go outside to look at more trees. I'm wondering if taking that time will help us in..." or "I like this idea, but I'm worried that..."). If there is another adult in the room, enlist their advice.
4. The play doesn't have to be immediate; you can put the idea into operation later in the day or week (write the idea on the schedule to ensure follow-through).
5. It is OK to say no, for reasons of safety, time, and other competing priorities.
6. Trust the children and take risks; such risks are part of being a playful teacher!

Tips for Using This Tool

- ▶ If you say yes, check to make sure things are going as "planned," students are keeping to their agreements, and the play is supporting learning. Consider taking a photo or short video to debrief the decision later.
- ▶ Debrief with your students how the "Say Yes" decisions went. Acknowledge any problems you saw and celebrate when things go well. How do students feel the decision went? Saying yes won't always be the right choice. The ultimate aim is to build a community understanding about when play supports learning.
- ▶ Build your sensitivity about when and why to follow children's ideas. Reflect on times you said yes (or no) and what occurred. Talk to colleagues about your experience and ask about theirs. Discuss the Say Yes Scenarios—mini-case studies with no right answer where teachers must pick whether to say yes to play.¹
- ▶ For teachers with shorter time blocks, saying yes can wait until the next class period.
- ▶ There is no right answer regarding when and how to say yes to children's playful impulses. Depending on your group, the time of year, and more, saying yes may be the right move.



Notes

* The title and ideas in this tool come from the “Say Yes to the Mess” Study Group (Gabriela Salas Davila, Athina Ntoulia, Rachel Palmer, and Kathrin Schaller) at the International School of Billund, Denmark. The group also created the Say Yes Scenarios.

1. The **Say Yes Scenarios** can be found at: www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/activity-say-yes-scenarios