

CHAPTER II

BEYOND THE BOX

The piecemeal box approach can go on for years. But eventually, there will be a demand for "something more". Typically, you can still count on the following factors:

- * There is continued inconsistency--different children appear every first day.
- * Age groups are always mixed.
- * Many times First Day School materials must be portable.
- * Most adults can be persuaded to leave meeting for worship for not more than two consecutive Sundays to be with the children.
- * Teachers (all meeting adults) seem fairly enthused about doing reading and academic preparation. However, finding and preparing art materials is time consuming and expensive if each individual must purchase supplies.
- * There is a desire for some continuity in terms of theme, but an aversion to "canned" curriculum.

Yet, you have a core group of children and eager parents. It is time to set up a First Day School Committee charged with:

1. Scheduling
2. Organizing teachers
3. Grouping children by age
4. Establishing a routine
5. Choosing curriculum (See Chapter III)
6. Dealing with theology (not usually part of the committee's formal charge, but it always appears on the unwritten agenda)

The handouts of this chapter list many options available to you. Choose what is best for your meeting.

Select Your Schedule

First Day School can be scheduled:

BEFORE, DURING OR AFTER MEETING FOR WORSHIP, OR ON SOME OTHER DAY.

In some meetings, children are in meeting for worship for the first 10-20 minutes then leave for First Day School.

In other meetings, children have First Day School during the first part of meeting for worship, and join the adult meeting for the last 10-20 minutes.

First Day School can be scheduled for the hour before meeting for worship or for the hour after worship. When this is the plan, child care is usually provided during worship and the children join adults for the closing 10-20 minutes.

In some meetings, children and adults worship together for the full hour every First Day, or for one First Day each month. (Highly recommended for community unity)

In a few meetings, each child decides how long to stay for worship, and when to leave for supervised activities in another room or out of doors. Some children return after a time away. When children come and go quietly, at different times, there may be less disturbance than if they come or go at the same time. Meeting for worship may be more meaningful for children when they can decide for themselves how long they will stay.

A sharing time for children and adults, scheduled after First Day School and before worship, provides an opportunity for the children to share of themselves and a chance for adults to respond. This can be a time of preparation for worship.

Some meetings are experimenting with a time after meeting for worship when Friends of all ages can give messages that were not spoken in meeting and can respond to the vocal ministry that was given.

One First Day each month can be set apart for something special such as Junior meeting, family meeting, or intergenerational fellowship. (See Chapter IV, orange)

Adapted from Seeds Into Flowers
by Shella Bach and Elizabeth Ellis,
Friends General Conference, 1980

Organize Teachers

1. Most meetings have more than one teacher for each age group. Sometimes there is a team of two to four rotating teachers who plan the curriculum.
2. Amawalk, New York Meeting signed up teachers in rotating pairs. One was new each First Day; the other brought continuity from the preceding week.
3. You may be lucky and have one person volunteer to teach a class for one semester. Beware of burn-out!
4. Some small meetings rely on one coordinator who chooses a theme and passes a sign up sheet for teachers. Everyone in meeting takes turns. There should be one coordinator for each age group because responsibility falls back on the coordinator when something goes wrong. Taking charge of two or more classes doubles this responsibility.

A coordinator's job is to:

- Sign up teachers and publish a list for one semester at a time. Friends have such busy schedules that they must save time for preparation. One day or one week's notice is too short.
 - Encourage reluctant Friends to sign up for just one session. Many times there is an element of fear that can be overcome by one successful experience. Make sure that this Friend is very comfortable with the topic of his/her session.
 - List lesson topics with dates on the sign-up sheet or circulate a separate list of suggested topics. (See Chapters I and III.) Friends seem to thrive on the latter since we highly value our individuality. Of course anyone is welcome to try an idea that is not on the list, but should check with others first to make sure that the "new" idea was not done last year.
 - Organize a box of supplies for the age group. (This box will get lost or messy or both if the coordinator tries to let it pass from teacher to teacher.) Bring the box each First Day. Choose a box that is not too large. A 1/3 bushel apple box seems about right. Neatly labeled check book boxes work well for scissors, markers, and crayons. Paper can be stored in file folders.
5. If your meeting does not have the resources for teacher training, modify and/or reproduce appropriate portions of this book. (See Chapter V). Give them to each teacher to read at home, on the bus or in the car.

Group Children By Age

1. Infants need loving care. (Consistency is extremely important.)
2. Preschool-kindergarten Young children are happier when separated from a group of older children regardless of what they say or what their parents think. Of all the groups, this one is also most likely to grow as young families search for a religious home. If you have more than one preschooler, start a preschool group. It will grow.
3. Elementary Reading and writing abilities make a natural separation for this group. Further subdivide as needed. Do be mindful of children with learning difficulties. For example, give each child an option when reading aloud.
4. Teens Talk directly with the teenagers recognizing their sense of independence and maturity. When there is only one teenager, a home visit may be the best way to let the teenager know how much meeting appreciates his/her presence. Do not approach teenagers through their parents.

Some ways to involve one or two teenagers in the life of the meeting:

- * Help them feel special. Always recognize the work they have done. Do not take teens for granted.
- * Ask a teen to be a special guest for a younger First Day School group. Perhaps the teen could help tell a story. (See page Y-6 for storytelling ideas.)
- * Find out whether your young person is interested in a regular responsibility in the meeting community. For example, a teenager can set up the chairs for meeting for worship, care for the library, work on a service project, or be in charge of the nursery.
- * Help your isolated teenager attend Friends' gatherings. A young person is often pleased when meeting for business has taken the time to discuss his/her situation and has sent a letter with an offer of travel expenses to gatherings such as Young Friends of North America, the FWCC Youthquakes, Friends' camps, William Penn House weekends, or the FGC Gathering. Watch the ads in Friends Journal for further information on any of these.
- * See "How To Start A Youth Fellowship", page 0-12 if you have two or three teenagers.

Establish A Routine

Children like to know what to expect. It is confusing enough to have a frequent change of teachers and sometimes place. Decide on a routine for each age group. Distribute it to all parents and teachers.

One sample routine is given here. Others are suggested in Chapter III.

Sample Routine

*Meeting for worship

*Arrive in class. Sit at a table or in a circle on the floor and:
a) share significant events of the past or the coming week and/or
b) share briefly what happened last week for the children who weren't there.

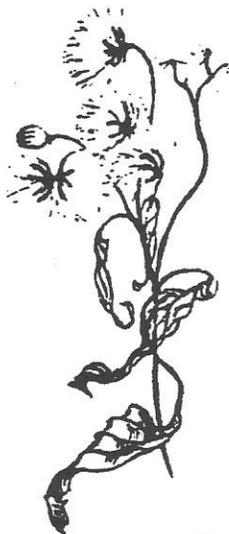
*Story or "telling" part of the lesson

*Activity or discussion (If your group consist of younger children, include some large muscle activity. See "Creative Dramatics", page Y-7.)

*Snack with grace

*Finish up/clean up

*Be picked up by parents or go to meeting for worship. At the close of meeting, tell what happened in First Day School that morning.



Suggested by
Elizabeth Ferry
New England Yearly Meeting

Deal With Theology

During the early stages of First Day School planning, many meetings suddenly come face to face with individual theological views. This can be unsettling. Meetings which have found unity in social issues discover that their foundation is made up of individual bricks, not uniformly poured cement. It is suddenly important to work on the real mortar that binds--a healthy love and respect for one another.

Remember that one reason people are attracted to Friends is our emphasis on the experience of each individual. Not only is the truth revealed to every one of us in a unique way, but our perception of truth will change as we journey through life. We are all seekers at all stages and ages. In fact, most adults readily affirm that the very act of preparing a lesson for First Day School unlocks new spiritual territory within themselves. It heightens their perceptions and opens them to experiences which might otherwise be avoided.

Still, each one of us can teach only from the truth as we come to know it, not as it is revealed to someone else. In the same way that one Friend cannot expect conformity with his/her experience from another, so one parent cannot demand identical views from a teacher. Instead of trying to reach agreement on the unsolvable mysteries of life, we must learn to cultivate a mutual respect for truth as revealed to each person, to celebrate our differences, and to trust one another.

It might help if you ask yourselves the following questions:

1. Do we value one another for our differences?
2. Am I comfortable asking children open ended questions?
3. Can I accept what children say?
4. Am I able to share my own theological views and claim them as such without moralizing? At the same time can I affirm other viewpoints which may be held by children's families?
5. Can I assure children that many people agree with them even if I don't?

Establishing an atmosphere where it is possible for real questioning and growth to take place is very important throughout the meeting. Success among the adults will be reflected in the children's program. Children may learn to celebrate differences and to trust one another, if the adults around them live this lesson well.

Resources for adult discussion and personal growth:

Woodbrooke Study Packets
Bible article, page Y-11