



THE **EARLY CHILDHOOD** LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

EARLY CHILDHOOD/FAMILY
EDUCATION PROGRAMS



OKLAHOMA

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THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT is an important and powerful teaching tool. Much of the early childhood teacher's work is done before the children even arrive. If the environment is set up with the knowledge of how children learn and develop, it can positively support teaching and learning. A teacher experiencing difficulty with student behavior should carefully evaluate the daily schedule, classroom arrangement, materials within each learning center, and the curriculum.

■ BEST PRACTICES

In creating a positive early childhood environment, the following practices should be observed:

- The classroom should be organized to foster exploration with learning materials.
- Learning materials should be concrete and relevant to a child's own life experiences (open-ended but purposeful).
- The classroom environment should be set up for choices.
- Learning experiences should be planned so teacher-initiated or child-initiated opportunities exist in small group contexts for acquiring new skills.
- Schedules should reflect active and quiet learning activities; large group, small group, and individual learning time; teacher-directed and child-initiated activities; and indoor and outdoor activities.



■ THE DAILY SCHEDULE

A daily schedule is essential to the basic structure of each day. Consistency enables children to feel secure, giving them the confidence and freedom to explore the environment. Although consistency is important, it is also necessary to remain flexible. Extra time may be needed if children are particularly interested in an activity or topic of discussion.

At the beginning of the year, shorter blocks of time are planned for large and small group activities. As the year progresses, learning center time will encompass a smaller portion of the day. Large group activities become fewer in number and often

longer in length. Sample classroom schedules are available on the Early Childhood/Family Education website at <http://sde.state.ok.us> under the "helpful forms" link.

A Well-Planned Schedule Will:

- Prioritize the need for children to interact with their peers, teachers, and learning materials.
- Allow sufficient time for children to initiate and complete activities, and participate in creative movement and self-expression.
- Alternate active and less active learning moments rather than lengthy periods of sitting still.
- Respect the need for young children to rest or be active as is appropriate and does not compromise quality learning time.
- Reflect integrated teaching rather than class time separated by subject.
- Provide ample time for children to learn through center-based instruction.
- Allow for smooth transitions between activities or classrooms, with the teacher capitalizing on these transitions as learning moments.
- Provide opportunities for children to share with the group and take pride in their accomplishments.
- Structure time for collaborative planning so students develop ownership with classroom learning activities.

■ TRANSITIONS

Transition is the process of moving from one activity to another. This is often difficult for young children. The teacher must prepare and prompt children for the change. Teachers use "attention getters" such as songs, signals, finger plays, rhymes, games, and puppets to signal change. Teachers who use transition activities will have calm, organized classrooms with happy, cooperative children. When used properly, transitions can become teachable moments. For examples of transition activities, please visit the Early Childhood/Family Education website at <http://sde.ok.gov> under the "helpful forms" link.

Helpful Hints for Smooth Transitions

- Give adequate warnings before the next activity.
- Follow the daily schedule as closely as possible. Young chil-

Children thrive on routine when they know what to do and what is expected. Flexibility means shortening or lengthening a part of the day, not changing the schedule entirely. Always prepare children before “special” changes occur.

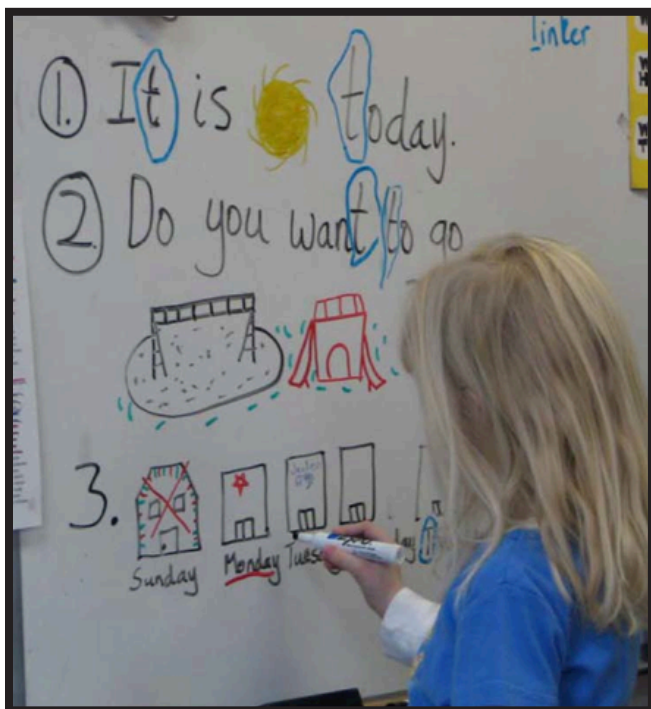
- Plan carefully. Collect materials before the activity. Think through each transition and build transition activities into your daily plan.
- Link transition signals to specific activities.
- Use songs and finger plays.
- Keep a notebook or file box of transition activities.

■ GROUP TIME

Group time is one of the most important times of the day. During this time, the teacher, teacher assistant, and children come together as a community, developing trust and acceptance as they share, learn, listen, and participate in meaningful activities. A group time that follows predictable patterns that are consistent throughout the year allows students to gain the confidence that comes from knowing what to expect. Group time provides children with the information, skills, concepts, and strategies necessary for success when working independently and in small groups.

Guidelines for Group Time

- The length of group time is determined by the age and development of the children. At the beginning of the year, group time may last only ten or fifteen minutes.
- Have clear objectives for each group activity and gather all materials needed in advance.
- Create a balance of activities that include listening, singing, discussing, and moving. Provide opportunities for choral and individual responses.



- Relate the activities to children’s past experiences and prior knowledge.
- Let the children be the guide for determining the success of an activity. Lengthen or shorten the time as student interest indicates.

Suggested Activities for Group Time

- Morning meeting
- Calendar and weather
- Read aloud
- Picture/vocabulary development
- Rhyming activities
- Problem solving activities
- Phonological awareness for Pre-Kindergarten or alphabet and word wall activities in Kindergarten
- Movement activities (songs, finger plays, rhythms, and games)
- Group games
- Student sharing
- Class community meeting
- Introduction of new concepts
- Guest speakers
- Modeling the appropriate use and care of classroom materials
- Group writing activities
- Review of classroom rules

■ SETTING UP THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The environment of the classroom communicates to students what is expected of them. Independence and a joy of learning is what should be conveyed. In the early childhood classroom, the use of learning centers is a key component to ensuring the success of students.

Classroom Arrangement

When planning where to set up centers, take a close look at your classroom. Three basic settings are needed: a place for the whole class to work together, a place for students to work independently, and a place for teacher-directed small group work. It is helpful to use a map of the classroom with scale cutouts of furniture and equipment to try different arrangements. Once you have set up your room and observed students in the environment, it may be necessary to do some rearranging to better accommodate their needs.

Keep the following considerations in mind:

- Create logical traffic patterns so students can move about easily from one area of the room to another without disturbing others.
- Consider fixed items such as sinks, built-in shelves, carpeted and tiled flooring, and electrical outlets; use space efficiently.
- Separate quiet and noisy activities.
- Provide a large floor space for group activities.
- Create an area for teacher-directed small group activities.
- Provide spaces for individual work.
- Store appropriate materials and equipment near the center in which they will be used.

Suggested Learning Centers

The following is a list of centers that are typically found in the early childhood classroom. Suggested materials and activities are included in the discussion of the center areas.

- Art Center
- Literacy Center
- Library Center
- Listening Center *
- Writing Center
- Math Center
- Science and Sensory Center
- Block Center
- Dramatic Play Center
- Music and Movement Center
- Cooking Center
- Computer Center
- Woodworking Center

*Pre-Kindergarten classrooms may want to combine Language, Literacy, Math, and Science Centers into one large Game Center.

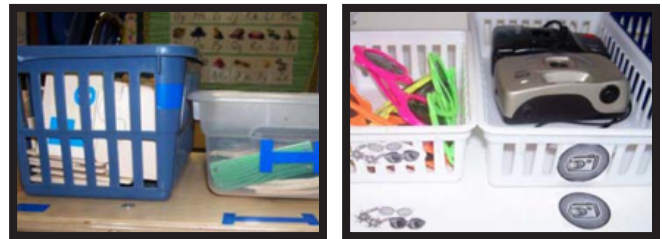


Guidelines for Learning Centers

Materials in learning centers are selected and arranged to foster involvement, independence, decision making, and responsibility. Students are given extended opportunities to practice these skills by selecting and using the materials offered at each center. To ensure the success of students and centers in the classroom, the following guidelines are suggested:

- Introduce each learning center with discussions regarding rules, use of materials, and responsibilities.
- Students can be scheduled into centers using a rotation system or a self-selected system. When using a rotation system, students move through centers in small groups in a systematic way. When using a self-selected system, students move themselves through the centers.

- All learning centers have a broad range of activities to accommodate each student's interest and level of development.
- The skill level in each center increases during the year through a variety of open-ended activities.
- Always model new activities.
- Define center boundaries with low shelves, carpet, or tape.
- Organize materials on low shelves close to their point of use so the materials in each center are always accessible to the students.
- Organize small items in labeled tubs or baskets for easy clean-up.
- Use a sign to describe the skills learned while working in each center.
- Place pictures, words, or outlines of objects on shelves to assist students in putting materials away when an activity is completed.



ART CENTER

Creativity is the process of putting together new ideas and products based on past experiences. It is a natural developmental process that begins during infancy and is at its peak during a child's early years. The use of self-expressive materials at the art center is one of the primary ways creativity is developed.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The Art Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Develop muscles used for fine motor skills; refine eye-hand coordination, fine motor control, and the sense of balance

Social/Emotional Skills: Enhance self-expression of feelings, the ability to channel frustrations and anger in a socially acceptable manner, instill pride and confidence, foster an appreciation of differences, and promote cooperation and sharing on group projects

Language Skills: Enhance verbal expressions as projects are described, increase vocabulary through exposure to different materials, tools, colors, texture, and positional words are refined

Intellectual Skills: Provide opportunity for sorting, classifying, making choices, decision making, expressing knowledge of the environment; stimulate interest, imagination, and creativity; and develop planning skills and concepts of cause and effect

Points to Remember

- Begin with simple, basic materials and add more complex material as children's skills increase.

- Display children’s work at their eye level.
- Treat children’s work with respect. Discuss it with them by commenting on the colors and materials they have chosen or by saying, “Tell me about your picture.” Never say, “What is it?”
- Model appropriate behavior for use and cleanup of center.

Provide daily opportunities that encourage open-ended creative expression as opposed to assembly line or cookie cutter products.

Suggested Art Center Materials

- Sink/water clean up
- Glue or paste
- Table
- Modeling dough or clay and tools
- Easels
- Paint (tempera, finger, and watercolor)
- Paper (various kinds, shapes)
- Brushes (various sizes, shapes, colors)
- Craft sticks
- Felt
- Pipe cleaners
- Collage materials (for example: macaroni, string, buttons, pom-poms, ribbons, sequins, beads, tiles, marbles, feathers, wooden shapes)
- Clothespins
- Hole punch
- Tissue paper
- Coffee filters
- Scissors
- Markers
- Pencils
- Paper clips
- Chalk
- Tape
- Yarn
- Crayons
- Brads
- Sand aprons or old shirts
- Objects and tools to print with (for example: stamps, pencils, markers, paper clips, chalk, tape, paper sacks, yarn, crayons, brads, sponges for cleaning, sand, wallpaper scraps, fabric scraps, cardboard, items found on a nature walk or the playground [leaves, twigs, straws, grass, nuts, etc.])
- Paper cups
- Lace
- Rick-rack
- Wiggle eyes
- Glitter/glitter glue
- Pie tins
- Table covering
- Paint tools (sponges, cotton, potato masher, shower brushes, foam brushes, mini paint rollers, toothbrushes, eye droppers)

■ LITERACY CENTER

Through the Literacy Center, children practice essential skills for reading, writing, and spelling. They have the opportunity to reinforce and extend these skills while working independently or in small groups. The Literacy Center activities enable children to confidently move toward becoming successful readers and communicators.

Child Development

The Literacy Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Strengthen eye–hand coordination, fine motor skills, visual discrimination, and auditory discrimination

Social/Emotional Skills: Develop cooperation, self-control, self-esteem, and confidence

Language Skills: Develop an understanding of the importance of sounds and print in communication, build vocabulary, sound memory, comprehension, listening skills and verbal expression

Intellectual Skills: Provide opportunities for naming, identifying, recalling, predicting, sequencing, patterning, decision-making, and creativity

Points to Remember

- Clearly define the literacy center area.
- Change activities to maintain and stimulate interest.
- Provide multi-level activities to accommodate children’s abilities.
- Introduce items one at a time, explaining and modeling the care and handling of the equipment and supplies.
- Provide a system for student accountability.
- Children engage longer in activities that are meaningful, such as creating a menu, collecting phone numbers, or writing an original story.

Suggested Literacy Center Materials

- Books of all sizes and types
- Magazines and newspapers
- Pocket charts
- Sentence strips
- Pictures, words, and objects for sorting
- Letter tiles, stamps and stamp pads
- Writing materials
- Flannel board with pictures, letters, and words
- Reading-the-Room pointers and “glasses”
- Tape recorder and blank tapes
- Tape players
- Commercial, teacher-created, and student-created tapes
- Phonics phone
- Wall charts (including names, alphabet, environmental words, nursery rhymes, and poetry)
- Magnetic letters and boards
- Author’s chair
- Eight-page mini books

- Sight-word list
- Picture dictionary
- Wallpaper samples
- Simple word searches
- Hole punch
- Class list of names
- Graphs
- Grids
- Venn diagrams
- Story maps
- Flip books
- Placemats
- Popsicle sticks
- Diary
- Games
- Overhead projector
- Greeting cards
- Sliding masks or flags
- Story prompts
- Sign language chart
- Modeling clay
- Letter and number cutters
- Computer
- Paper money and coins
- School staff poster with names
- Sand trays
- Salt trays
- Blank books for student-made books
- Paper
- Crayons, markers, pens, pencils
- Interesting or unusual writing utensils
- Maps
- Magnifying glasses
- Labels
- Envelopes
- Recipes
- Menus
- Mailboxes
- Nameplates
- Notebooks
- Typewriters
- Journals
- Stapler
- Sticky notes
- Yarn
- Shoelaces
- Clipboards, full size and miniature
- Flyswatters with hole cut on die-cut machine for pointer or sliding mask
- White boards and markers
- Pipe cleaners

■ LIBRARY CENTER

The Library Center should be a comfortable place where students can relax and enjoy a good book, fostering a love of reading. It is a place where students can interact with each other as they read with a partner or discuss books they have read.

Child Development

The Library Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Strengthen eye–hand coordination, eye movement, and fine motor skills

Social/Emotional Skills: Provide an opportunity to communicate feelings and deal with difficult situations, develop concern and understanding for others, enhance self-esteem, and encourage sharing time and materials with others

Language Skills: Build vocabulary, comprehension, listening skills, verbal expression, story telling, and reinforce the importance of print in communication

Intellectual Skills: Develop letter and word identification, understanding of symbols, prediction, sequencing, application of past experiences to new situations, and imagination

Points to Remember

- Make the Library Center an inviting place.
- Model care and responsibility for books.
- Each week display “My Very Favorite Book” in the Library Center.
- Use mini-easels or cookbook holders to highlight featured books.
- Organize books thematically.
- Introduce new sets of theme books throughout the school year.
- Develop a system for families to check out books.
- Provide a reading log for each child to keep track of books they have read at school.
- Encourage children to develop an organizational system to categorize books, such as animal books, plant books, and people books.

Suggested Library Center Materials

- Picture books
- Number books
- Storybooks
- Nursery rhyme books
- Shape books
- Poetry books
- Big books
- Student-made books
- Theme-related books
- Fiction books
- Nonfiction books
- Magazines and newspapers
- Books with tapes
- Tape recorder and headsets
- Flannel board and props

- Bookmarks
- Read-the-Room pointers
- Pillows, beanbag chair, child-size rocker
- Small tent or wading pool for reading
- Small area rug
- Lamp
- Book display stand
- Bookcases
- Tubs for books
- Author's chair
- Sentence strips with text to songs, poems, or stories
- Charts, chants, songs, and poems
- Book bags for checkout
- Posters about book handling
- Sing-along books
- Cookbooks
- Phone books
- Puppets
- Prop boxes with items related to particular stories
- Eyeglasses
- Computers
- Bulletin board
- Sign-in sheet
- Reading log

■ LISTENING CENTER*

The Listening Center offers students opportunities for independent listening activities.

Points to Remember

- Use color-coding to indicate buttons on the tape recorder, such as green for play, red for stop, and yellow for rewind.
- The Listening Center is for listening and recording. Let students record an original story or book.
- Label a blank tape for each student. Throughout the year, students can record themselves reading a story, singing a song, reciting a poem, etc.
- Let parent volunteers tape-record books.
- Make a tape as you read a book to the whole class. Leave the tape on as you discuss the story. Students love hearing themselves and their classmates.
- Store books and tapes in re-sealable plastic bags, large-size tin cans, or tubs. These are good ways to keep books and tapes together.

Suggested Listening Center Materials

- Books and tapes
- Sign-in sheet
- Sanitizing wipes
- Storage tubs
- Teacher-made tapes
- Shelving

- Blank tapes
- Student-made tapes
- Extension cords
- Tape recorder
- Headphones
- Individual tape players
- Class-made books and tapes
- Follow direction tapes
- Familiar sound tapes
- Table
- Power strip

*Could be combined with Library Center

■ WRITING CENTER

Children love to write and read their writings to anyone who will listen. The Writing Center gives children the opportunity to communicate through writing in a variety of different experiences. The Writing Center encourages children's early interest in writing and provides a foundation that reinforces their beginning efforts and desire to write.

Child Development

The Writing Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Enhance fine motor skills, develop visual discrimination, and develop eye-hand coordination

Social/Emotional Skills: Allow for the expression of feelings and emotions, develop appreciation for the writing of others, and promote cooperation, teamwork, sharing, and collaboration

Language Skills: Increase oral communication skills and vocabulary, develop spelling, phonetic skills, understanding of the purposes of writing, and extend reading skills

Intellectual Skills: Develop thinking, reasoning, questioning, creativity and imagination, and promote problem solving skills

Points to Remember

- Establish the center with clearly defined boundaries.
- Model the appropriate use of materials.
- Provide a variety of real-life, purposeful, writing materials.
- Add additional items and props to enhance writing and the current theme.
- Provide a place to display children's writing.
- Participate when invited and model writing. Encourage children to read what they are writing to you and others.
- Use labels and pictures to show where items belong to facilitate clean up.
- Create literacy-rich center with word cards, word walls, dictionaries, and appropriate books.
- Keep materials in good working order, such as replacing dried-out markers.
- Enlist the help of adult volunteers to help with publishing tasks.

Suggested Writing Center Materials

- Pencils
- Pens
- Chalk and chalkboard
- Magic slates
- Acetate sheets
- Stapler
- Paste or glue
- Sharpener
- Stationary
- Colored pencils
- Crayons
- Alphabet stamps
- Letter and design stencils
- Hole punch
- Tape
- Envelopes and cards
- Markers
- Stamp pads
- Index cards
- Scissors
- Old magazines
- Alphabet charts
- Book binding materials
- Picture dictionaries
- Paper
- Mailbox
- Sand and salt trays
- Word wall
- Class list of names
- Alphabet strips
- Date stamps
- Computer
- Table or desks
- Number stamps
- Journals



- Writing prompts
- Props for office play, card shop, and post office
- Print materials from doctors' or dentists' offices
- Dry erase board and markers
- Chart tablets
- Easel
- Notebooks
- Sticky notes
- Folders
- Labels/stickers
- Yarn
- Pipe cleaners
- Adding machine tape
- Macaroni and spaghetti
- Highlighters
- Picture prompts
- Word search

■ MATH CENTER

It is easy to get students involved with numbers, measuring, and problem-solving when the Math Center is equipped with a wide variety of concrete materials. This provides a solid foundation for exploring beginning math concepts, practicing new skills, and applying skills they have mastered.

Child Development

The Math Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Strengthen fine motor control, and refine eye-hand coordination

Social/Emotional Skills: Develop self-control, promote perseverance and confidence, and enhance cooperation through sharing materials and working together to solve a problem

Language Skills: Introduce the language of mathematics and enhance the ability to ask questions and explain solutions

Intellectual Skills: Introduce and refine sorting, matching, classifying, sequencing, patterning, one-to-one correspondence, rote counting, number combinations, problem solving

Points to Remember

- Introduce new math materials one at a time.
- Model appropriate use, care, and clean-up procedures.
- Let students freely explore the materials before asking them to do a specific task.
- Have students use a variety of math materials to work on the same skill or concept.
- Search out math materials that are fun and unusual.
- Make math meaningful (for example: making change for a store, measuring for cooking, dividing snacks into equal shares, or graphing choices for a class field trip).
- Provide a variety of ways for students to record what they have done in the math center: drawing, charts, graphs, books, rubber

stamps, stickers, or real objects.

- Observe and listen to students as they work in the center. This will give insight into their emerging concept of number.
- Extend student activities by introducing mathematical language during their play.

Suggested Math Center Materials

- Collectible manipulatives: buttons, keys, colored pasta, shells, rocks, bread tags, colored paper clips, beans, toothpicks
- Plastic counters
- Pattern blocks
- Pattern cards
- One-inch colored cubes
- One-inch wooden cubes
- Color tiles
- Attribute blocks
- Multilink cubes
- Parquetry blocks
- Sorting trays/bowls
- Measuring instruments such as rulers, yardsticks, cups, measuring spoons
- Balance scales and things to weigh
- Geoboards and rubber bands
- Pegboards and pegs
- Stringing beads
- Games and puzzles
- Dice and spinners
- Floor graph
- Magnetic board
- Magnetic shapes and numbers
- Individual marker boards and chalkboards
- Clock
- Play money
- Rubber stamps
- Math-related books, songs, poems, charts, or posters
- Toothpicks
- Timers
- Dominoes
- Calendar
- Shells
- Keys
- Beads
- Nuts, bolts, washers, or screws
- Paper clips
- Ice cube trays
- Shape templates and writing supplies
- Spools
- Clothespins
- Straws
- Number stencils
- Number stamps and pad
- Number lines

- Calculators
- Sorting containers
- Jars
- Cans
- Tubs
- Zipper seal bags
- Stickers
- Playing cards
- Adding machine tape for creating patterns
- Cash register
- Price tags
- Egg cartons
- Coupons
- Measuring cups
- Math big books
- Notebooks
- Counting charts
- Placemats
- Color word charts
- Trays
- Shape charts
- Lunch bags or gift sacks
- Games
- Bulletin board
- Hula hoops for defining spaces

Science and Math Centers

■ SCIENCE AND SENSORY CENTER

The Science and Sensory center is an integral part of the curriculum and stimulates children's natural curiosity and desire to learn about the world around them. It may be called the "Let's Find Out Table," where children are encouraged to explore something about their world in more detail.



Child Development

The Science and Sensory Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Enhance eye-hand coordination, fine motor control, and balance

Social/Emotional Skills: Develop cooperation with others, pride in seeing an experiment through to completion, and responsibility for clean-up at the conclusion of play

Language Skills: Develop vocabulary, verbal expression, ability to ask questions and describe objects and events

Intellectual Skills: Develop thinking, reasoning, observing, exploring, questioning, discovering, decision making, and conservation of volume, problem solving, comparing and contrasting, cause-and-effect, and creativity

Points to Remember

- Introduce children to the scientific method, which includes:
 1. Making observations
 2. Thinking of possible reasons why things happen
 3. Trying out these reasons or potential causes
 4. Observing the results
 5. Drawing conclusions
- Keep experiments uncomplicated and straightforward, such as what happens when blue and yellow are mixed or when ice is placed in the sun.
- Ask questions such as “What made that happen?” “What would happen if?” or “How could we find out?”
- Have children put their conclusions into words or represent them in drawings.
- Be prepared by doing research ahead of time about the topic.
- Follow children’s lead as they design their own experiments.

Suggested Science and Sensory Center Materials

- Plants
- Kaleidoscopes
- Books
- Shelves
- Items of nature
- Color paddles
- Feathers
- Bird nests
- Sand
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Rice
- Beans
- Funnels
- Dried leaves
- Soap bubbles
- Animals (as permitted)
- Animal supplies
- Thermometer
- Binoculars
- Tape measure

- Magnets
- Rocks
- Balancing scales
- Tubs (sink or float)
- Tweezers, tongs, eye droppers
- Mirrors
- Insects
- Lab coats
- Labels
- Discovery tubes
- Writing utensils
- Science journals
- Paper towel tubes
- Tables
- Mirror
- Animal growth charts
- Water
- Sand and water wheel
- Bowls
- Shovels
- Popcorn
- Pine cones
- Globe
- Maps
- Graphs, charts, posters, books
- Magnifying glasses
- Sand table
- Water table
- Sensory materials
- Tubs for storage
- Rulers
- Yard sticks
- Safety goggles
- Flashlights
- Pinwheels
- Plastic animals/insects
- Lab coats
- Labels
- Discovery tubes
- Writing utensils
- Multicultural artifacts



- Class growth chart
- Soil
- Watering cans
- Pump bottles
- Water pumps
- Light table
- Shells
- Sink and float materials
- Cooking supplies
- Rebus cards

Using Science Process Skills and Inquiry

■ BLOCK CENTER

Blocks are a key example of how young children learn through play. Young children do not often preplan their structures. They just let it happen. Their creations are influenced by what has been seen in the environment.

Child Development

The Block Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Develop large muscles as they carry blocks from place to place, refine small motor skills, eye–hand coordination, and sense of balance as they stack and place blocks together

Social/Emotional Skills: Promote cooperation, working with others, sharing, and acceptance of others’ ideas, self-esteem, and confidence

Language Skills: Increase vocabulary and communication skills, such as conversation, asking questions, labeling, making up stories, and using comparative language such as larger, taller, or bigger

Intellectual Skills: Develop concepts of number, size, shape, length, height, weight, area, part-to-whole relationships, problem solving one-to-one correspondence, sequencing, cause–effect relationships, fractions, adding, subtracting, testing ideas, estimating, and measuring

Points to Remember

- The Block Center should be well defined with a rug, shelves, or tape.
- Introduce hollow blocks and unit blocks first.
- Have the children make simple rules concerning how many children can be in the area, who can knock a structure over, when a structure can be saved, and how tall the structure can be.
- Model how to take blocks off the shelf one at a time.
- Label the shelves with cutouts of the block shapes for easy clean-up.
- Introduce props and figures as needed to coordinate with the thematic unit and enhance the value of the play.
- Take pictures of what the children build to place in a portfolio.

- Use teacher-made materials to enhance the block center (boxes or milk cartons stuffed with newspaper, empty paper towel or tissue rolls for log cabins, and colored tape for roads and highways).
- Stimulate language by having the child dictate a story about the structure.

Suggested Block Center Materials

- Cardboard blocks
- Baskets or tubs for accessories
- Alphabet blocks
- Signs and labels for buildings
- Bristle blocks
- Farm animals
- Unit blocks
- Zoo animals
- Hollow blocks
- Community helper figures
- Foam blocks
- Traffic signs
- Family figures
- Prop boxes
- Wooden cars and trucks
- Books
- Dinosaurs
- Hula hoops for defining boundaries
- Paper towel or plastic tubes
- Writing supplies
- Ramps
- Posters
- Area rug
- Mirrors
- Paper
- Balls
- Interlocking blocks
- Linking disks
- Parquetry blocks
- Linking cubes
- Globes
- Pattern blocks
- Multicultural blocks
- Pictures of homes around the world



■ DRAMATIC PLAY CENTER

Young children love make-believe activities. The Dramatic Play Center allows children the opportunity to act out their real world. They can experience different roles, express feelings, and imitate actions and character traits of those around them. It is a place where the most creative, spontaneous, and involved play occurs. The open-endedness of the Dramatic Play Center allows each child to be successful on their own developmental level.

Child Development

The Dramatic Play Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Develop fine motor skills, extend gross motor development, and develop visual discrimination and eye–hand coordination

Social/Emotional Skills: Provide a means to express feelings and emotions; develop awareness of self, family, and society; promote cooperation, working with others, sharing and taking turns

Language Skills: Increase oral communication skills, extend and enhance vocabulary, extend gross motor development, develop pretend reading and writing

Intellectual Skills: Develop creativity and imagination, promote problem-solving skills, and extend symbolic use of items and abstract thinking

Points to Remember

- Arrange the Dramatic Play Center next to other noisy, active areas.
- Create boundaries on three sides of the area to keep materials contained.
- Place only a few items in the Dramatic Play Center when it is first introduced.
- Add additional items and props to enhance play and the current theme.
- Keep props clean and in good repair.
- Use labels and pictures to show where items belong to facilitate clean-up.
- Interact on the child’s level by sitting or kneeling.
- Participate when invited and model play. Encourage children to talk about what they are doing.
- Allow children to resolve conflicts independently.
- Provide small, labeled boxes or baskets for small items and hooks or coat rack for clothes.
- Provide for literacy opportunities, such as books and writing materials.

Suggested Dramatic Play Center Materials

- Cups
- Dinnerware
- Table and chairs
- Kitchen items
- Vase and flowers
- Empty food boxes

- Broom and dustpan
- Phone and phone book
- Silverware
- Cookware
- Kitchen furniture
- Aprons
- Plastic food
- Dish towels
- Belts, shoes
- Living furniture
- Dress up clothes
- Wallets
- Dolls and baby items
- Toiletries
- Old hair dryers without the cord
- Full-length mirror
- Lunch boxes
- Child-safe tool belt, tools
- Magazines
- Suitcases
- Purses
- Notepad and pencils
- Multicultural clothing and materials
- Cell phones

Prop Box Ideas

Provide dramatic play and prop box enrichments as opportunities to build upon skills and learn concepts.

The Beach

- Blankets
- Picnic basket
- Beach umbrella
- Sunglasses
- Beach ball
- Pretend suntan lotion
- Beach towel
- Buckets and shovels
- Shells
- Snorkels
- Fins
- Flip flops

Restaurant

- Tablecloth
- Napkins
- Tableware
- Menus made with food pictures
- Dishes
- Aprons
- Trays
- Play food

- Hats Sign for restaurant
- Order pads/pencils

Firefighter

- Yellow rubber raincoats
- Old vacuum hose
- Whistle
- Stepladder
- Phone
- Flashlight
- Boots
- Fire safety posters
- Gloves
- Baby dolls (to rescue)
- Walkie-talkies
- Fire hats

Post Office

- Envelopes
- Stamps (seals/stickers)
- Duffle bag
- Mailperson hat
- Cash register
- Old blue shirt
- Stickers
- Paper punch
- Postcards
- Scale
- Mailbox
- Pens
- Pencils
- Paper
- Junk mail
- Boxes
- Packages
- Checkbook
- Date book
- Play desk

Bakery

- Fresh play dough
- Rolling pins
- Aprons
- Oven mitts
- Cookie sheets
- Chef's hat
- Muffin tins
- Cake pans
- Cake decorations
- Order pads
- Measuring spoons
- Pictures of baked goods

- Mixing bowls
- Spoons
- Recipes
- Cookie cutters
- Flour shaker
- Cookbooks

Veterinarian

- Stuffed animals
- Gauze
- Surgical masks
- Pamphlets on animals
- Cotton balls
- Plastic gloves
- Play money
- Needle-less syringes
- Exam table
- Empty medicine bottles
- Pet brushes
- White lab coat
- Pet carriers
- Magnifying glass

Grocery Store

- Play food
- Egg cartons
- Check out area
- Play money
- Grocery cart or basket
- Aprons
- Paper bags
- Cash register or scanner
- Sale flyers
- Purses and wallets
- Plastic fruit/vegetables
- Coupons



Police Officer

- Pad for writing tickets
- Stop signs
- Small clipboard
- Police hat
- License plates
- Whistle (siren)
- Steering wheel
- Black belt
- 911 signs
- Blue shirt
- Walkie-talkie
- Badge

Bank

- Play money
- Bankbooks
- Adding machine/calculator
- Rubber stamps/ink pads
- Teller window
- Deposit slips/checks
- Cash box
- Paper/pens
- Coin rolls
- Magnifying glass
- Newspaper



■ MUSIC AND MOVEMENT CENTER

Music delights young children and invites them to participate. A well equipped Music and Movement Center is a place where children experiment with sounds while they create their own music. They gain an appreciation and love of music that will bring them enjoyment for years to come.

Child Development

The Music and Movement Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Enhance fine and gross motor skills, develop rhythm, balance, and spatial awareness

Social/Emotional Skills: Provide a means to express feelings and emotions, enhance self-concept, promote cooperation and working with others, and induces feelings of calm and relaxation

Language Skills: Increase oral communication skills, vocabulary growth and listening skills; develop an appreciation for poetry and rhyme, and increase auditory discrimination skills

Intellectual Skills: Develop creativity and imagination, promote problem-solving skills, enhance concept development, and encourage exploration and promotes discovery

Points to Remember

- Music can set the tone for the classroom. Soft music calms a busy room, whereas loud or fast music stimulates the students.
- Music activates the brain. Learning set to music, like the “ABC” song, embeds learning more quickly and on a deeper level.
- Music is effective during transition times such as clean-up, calming down for a story or rest, or getting ready to begin or end the day. Do not limit music experiences to just center time.
- Music can be a tool of classroom management. Singing can often attract a child’s attention when a speaking voice cannot. Include classroom transition songs on charts for students to sing along with at center time.
- Music can be experienced and enjoyed by a whole group during circle time, in small groups, and individually.
- Use a voice range for singing that is comfortable for children.
- Let music be spontaneous, planned, or an outgrowth of another activity.
- Music can be used to create appreciation of other cultures.

Suggested Music and Movement Materials

- CD player and CDs
- Rhythm sticks
- Scarves
- Radio
- Books that are songs
- Toy or real microphones
- Charts with favorite songs
- Cassette recorder, cassettes, and blank tapes
- Drums
- Bells

- Cymbals
- Piano
- Song-based books
- Shakers
- Mirrors
- Area rug
- Multicultural musical instruments
- Piano music
- Staff paper
- Costumes
- Guitar
- Recorders
- Sanitizing supplies
- Posters of bands and orchestras
- Dance rug
- Ballet shoes
- Hats
- Large ball
- Keyboard
- Materials for creating instruments
- Mirror
- Shelves
- Tubs with labels
- Posters of ethnic musical instruments or experiences
- Exercise chart
- Exercise mat
- Rebus exercise cards
- Work out props
- Exercise records, tapes, and videos
- Books
- Journals
- Plain paper
- Writing utensils
- Dance costumes
- Maracas
- Sand blocks
- Chimes
- Triangles
- Television
- Video player
- Finger cymbals
- Xylophone
- Tap shoes
- Canes

■ COOKING CENTER

Everyone loves to eat! The Cooking Center provides rich, sensory experiences and gives children first-hand opportunities to practice skills in math, reading, science, and communication.

Child Development

The Cooking Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Enhance fine motor skills, and develop hand/eye coordination

Social/Emotional Skills: Promote good manners, develop awareness of other cultures through preparing and tasting different foods, promote cooperation, working with others, sharing and self-esteem

Language Skills: Increase oral communication skills and vocabulary, develop the ability to “read” picture recipes, extend understanding of the purposes of writing, and enhance left-to-right directionality

Intellectual Skills: Develop knowledge of nutrition and raise health awareness, promote problem solving skills, and develop math/science skills

Points to Remember

- Provide a balance of independence and safety. The more children do, the more they learn.
- Provide symbolic picture recipe cards that give directions for tasks and can be read while cooking. The first direction is always “Wash hands.”
- Assemble all ingredients and materials ahead of time.
- Use individual portion recipes.
- Set up the cooking center near a sink whenever possible.
- Enlist outside volunteers to assist with shopping and supervising the cooking experience with children.
- Link cooking activities and recipes to your thematic units.
- Use Popsicle sticks with each child’s name to label the portions.
- Fill small pitchers or measuring cups with liquids so the child is able to lift and pour easily.

Suggested Cooking Center Materials

- Cooking utensils
- Measuring spoons
- Measuring cups
- Bowls
- Pot holders
- Can opener
- Cookie sheets
- Strainer
- Muffin tins
- Popsicle stick spreaders
- Hand mixer
- Pots and pans
- Potato masher

- Cutting board
- Rebus cards
- Books
- Writing utensils
- Trash can
- Multicultural posters and pictures
- Allergy warnings
- Favorite recipe charts
- Popcorn popper
- Electric skillet
- Toaster oven
- Wax paper
- Recipe cards
- Aprons
- Whisk
- Health and nutrition posters
- Food pyramid posters
- Crockpot
- Electric burner
- Refrigerator
- Cookbooks
- Clean-up supplies
- Access to running water
- Child-friendly serving supplies
- Hand sanitizer and instruction poster
- Class-made cooking safety poster
- Sign-in sheets
- Gloves



■ TECHNOLOGY CENTER

The Technology Center is a valuable addition to the early childhood classroom if it is set up with knowledge of children’s development as well as knowledge of the equipment and available software. Your Technology Center will only be as good as the materials in it, so consider this item carefully before purchasing equipment. Adult interaction is the key to a successful Technology Center.

Child Development

The Computer Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Enhance fine motor development by using the keyboard and manipulating the mouse, and eye–hand coordination and visual perception by tracking on the screen and moving the cursor

Social/Emotional Skills: Promote responsibility, cooperation, working with others, and persistence

Language Skills: Increase vocabulary and knowledge of print by linking words to pictures

Intellectual Skills: Develop cause-and-effect by observing what happens on the keyboard, following directions, and a variety of other skills depending on the software selected

Points to Remember

- Introduce the computer or other technology to one or two children at a time.
- Observe the children so you know how to discuss and interact with them to further their level of use.
- Ask open-ended questions that focus on what they are doing.
- Consult the *Survey of Early Childhood Software* by Warren Buckleitner, published by the High Scope Educations Research Foundation, for appropriate software.
- Consult *Creative Curriculum* by Dodge and Colker for comprehensive information about setting up a technology center.

Suggested Computer Center Materials

- Computer screen
- Magnifying glasses
- Mouse
- Binoculars
- Hard drive
- Telephone
- Surge protector
- MP3 player
- Computer table
- Radio
- Sufficient power and electrical outlets
- Speaker
- Mouse pad
- Label maker
- Appropriate software programs
- Light show props

- Table
- Calculators
- Camera
- Weather station
- Video cameras
- Thermometer
- Tape recorders
- Analog clock
- Word processing programs
- Digital clock
- Class website
- Watches
- Web design programs
- Educational video games
- Television
- Video player
- Compact disks
- Compact disk player
- Digital video disks
- Digital video player

■ WOODWORKING CENTER

If a teacher has never worked with wood, the thought of hammers and saws may be uncomfortable. However, with careful planning and knowledge, teachers can create an experience that will bring hours of joy, excitement, and enthusiasm to boys and girls alike. When a young child announces proudly, “I made it!” the teacher will understand the growth a child has made physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

Child Development

The Woodworking Center offers many experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Strengthen and enhance fine and large motor skills, and develop eye–hand coordination

Social/Emotional Skills: Promote self-esteem; develop self-confidence, and promote cooperation, sharing, and collaboration

Language Skills: Develop sequencing skills, increase oral communication skills, and increase vocabulary

Intellectual Skills: Develop creativity and imagination, promote problem-solving skills, develop concept building, thinking, reasoning, and attention span, and promote understanding of size, shape, color and measurement

Points to Remember

- Design the activity to the appropriate level of the child’s development, for example, hammering into Styrofoam instead of wood, or sanding for enjoyment.
- Establish the center with clearly defined boundaries, away from quiet areas and heavy traffic. A corner space provides two walls to help contain noise and activity.

- The teacher must be knowledgeable and confident in the use of tools and model each step of the activity.
- Safety goggles must be worn at all times.
- Introduce one tool at a time, emphasizing safety.
- Check all tools regularly for damage and remove ones needing repair.
- Provide adult supervision at all times.
- Enlist the help of adult volunteers to help with woodworking.
- Limit the population at the Woodworking Center to two children.
- Create a literacy-rich center with labels for tools, appropriate books, and writing materials to name their creations.
- Choose high-quality hand tools.
- Sawing and hammering nails into large pieces of Styrofoam and sanding wood (classroom blocks can be cleaned each year) are satisfying ways to practice beginning skills.
- An old tree stump is great for pounding nails.
- For a permanent center, hang a pegboard against the wall and mark an outline of each tool so children can return tools to a place of safety.

Suggested Materials for Woodworking Center

- Workbench or table and tubs for organizing
- Safety goggles
- Screwdrivers/screws
- Crayons
- Golf tees and Styrofoam
- Brushes
- Wood glue
- Aprons to protect clothing
- Rulers, tape measure, or yard stick
- Bolts
- Egg-beater type hand drill
- Saw
- Nails (short with big heads or roofing nails)
- Safety mat
- Books about construction
- Chalk line
- Sandpaper
- Cloth scraps
- Vise clamp
- Pliers
- String
- Carpenter’s pencil
- Hammer (eight-ounce claw)
- Markers
- Paint
- Wood scraps
- Objects to nail
- Nuts
- Blueprints
- Gloves
- Tool belt
- Class-made safety chart
- Level, angle, plane, chisel

■ OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

The development of motor skills is essential to the total growth process of children. Current research indicates that movement activates the brain and prepares it for learning. The outdoor environment is the natural place for this to occur. Carefully planning outdoor and motor activities is an opportune way to capitalize on children's natural motivation to move and learn.

Child Development

The Outdoor Environment offers experiences to facilitate growth and enhance skills in all areas of development.

Physical Skills: Enhance large motor and eye–hand coordination, balance, strength, endurance, and manipulation

Social/Emotional Skills: Nurture cooperation, negotiation, turn taking, and role playing

Language Skills: Facilitate vocabulary development, positional words, and conversational skills

Intellectual Skills: Reinforce sorting, classifying, creativity, imagination, problem solving, exploration, discovery, spatial relations, and conversation through sand and water activities

Suggested Outdoor Environment Materials

- Slide (appropriate height)
- Equipment for crawling and tunneling
- Trucks and cars
- Jump ropes
- Pouring and scooping materials
- Child-sized stilts



- Impact material (pea gravel or sand)
- Parachute
- Games (ring toss or bean bags)
- Climbing structure
- Riding equipment
- Push and pull toys
- Walking path
- Trash cans
- Trees
- Sand toys
- Assorted balls
- Low balance beam
- Hula hoops
- Wagons
- Scooter boards
- Teeter totters
- Outdoor easels
- Tables and benches
- Sand and water table
- Science discovery tools
- Garden and gardening tools
- First aid kit
- Sidewalk or hard, smooth surface
- Sidewalk chalk

Arrangement

Arranging the outdoor environment is essential for effective planning. A well-planned play space maximizes the freedom of choice and independence of children. Teachers must continually assess the overall effectiveness of the outdoor area and make adjustments when and where needed. Many of the same considerations used in planning the indoor environment can be used when planning the outdoor environment.

- Space is large enough to accommodate the number of children and equipment.
- Children are easily supervised from any position.
- Sufficient equipment is available so children do not have to wait in line.
- A variety of age-appropriate materials and equipment are provided.
- A storage shed is available to store material and equipment.
- There is a balance of sunny and shady areas.
- There are clear pathways for running and riding toys.
- The play area is fenced and protected from traffic.
- Bathrooms and drinking fountains are easily accessible.
- Accommodations for the specific needs of each child are considered and addressed when appropriate.

Safety

Children are exuberant with their outdoor play; therefore, planning for safety is critical. The best protection against injury is prevention. Include the following in your safety plan:

- Provide continuous supervision.
- Provide sufficient impact material under climbing equipment.
- Provide ample space around each piece of equipment.
- Maintain equipment regularly and report any equipment that is broken or unsafe.
- Select equipment and material that is appropriate for the child's intellectual, social/ emotional, and physical development.
- Report accidents or hazardous situations to appropriate school staff immediately.
- Teach children the appropriate method for lining up and exiting the playground quickly in the event of an emergency.

Classroom

The outdoor environment can also be an extension of the indoor classroom where learning blossoms. For this to be possible, add the following equipment to your classroom.

- Sand and water table
- Fence or free-standing easels (paint the flower you can see)
- Book tub on wheels (read in the shade of a tree)
- Dramatic play materials (barbecue center, picnic table and basket, tent, gardening center)
- Science discovery tools (magnifying glasses, binoculars, butterfly nets, bug catching equipment)
- Woodworking materials
- Almost anything on wheels



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