

Tip Sheet for Practice and Play: Prekindergarten Blocks and Building Center

Supporting children's learning and development through learner-centered environments, well-developed and intentional learning experiences, and frequent, high quality language interactions.

What happens in a blocks and building center?

In the blocks and building center, young children have opportunities to use their imagination to create structures, bridges, ramps, and engage in dramatic play. As children create structures, they negotiate how to make blocks balance, how they can stabilize the structure to prevent it from falling over, they identify shapes, learn new action words and positional words, collaborate with others, describe what they are doing, and problem solve.

Teachers can plan to use the blocks and building center to support children's learning in multiple ways. For example, teachers may create an activity where children can work independently or in small groups to build a structure, use it as a free play center option, and/or as a station to work with small groups of children or individual children to observe, build specific skills and differentiate instruction.

Teachers ensure the blocks and building center offers:

- A location away from foot traffic, with enough space for building substantial structures
- Shelving to hold sets of several different types of blocks and building materials (e.g., wooden blocks, connecting blocks, foam unit blocks, multiple shapes of blocks)
- Props, materials, and accessories that extend block and building play (e.g., figurines, vehicles, road signs, ramps)
- Selections of books and texts about building and landscapes; rotated to link to specific themes and/or learning goals
- Art and craft materials and supplies for children to plan and create additional structures and accessories

Key Connections to the NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Domain Areas:

Approaches to Learning: Engagement, Creativity & Imagination, Curiosity & Initiative, Persistence

Physical Development and Health: Physical Development

Social and Emotional Development: Self-Concept and Self Awareness, Self-Regulation, Relationships with Others, Accountability

Communication, Language and Literacy: Background Knowledge, Representing, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Cognition and Knowledge of the World: Geometry, Counting and Cardinality, Operations and Algebraic Thinking, Measurement and Data, Scientific Thinking, Physical Properties, Geography, Foundations to Technology

Find out more: visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/> ***Designing Learning Centers to Support Cognition and Knowledge of the World: A Resource Set***

Resources:

Cryer, D., Harms, T., & Riley, C. (2003). All about the ECERS-R. New York, New York: Teachers College Press

Jackman, H. (2009). Early education curriculum a child's connections to the world, 4th (Ed). Belmont, CA: Delmar Cengage Learning

Tip Sheet for Practice and Play: Prekindergarten Creative Arts Center

Supporting children's learning and development through learner-centered environments, well-developed and intentional learning experiences, and frequent, high quality language interactions.

What happens in a creative arts center?

A creative arts center is a designated area where children have opportunities to explore multiple art forms to express themselves artistically and experiment with a variety of materials. Creative arts include visual arts, music, theatre, dance and movement. A creative arts center is a dedicated area where children are free to express emotions and ideas, experiment with art forms and materials, practice fine motor skills and movement, actively explore how things work, use their imagination, and listen for distinct sounds.

Teachers can plan to use the creative arts center to support children's learning in multiple ways throughout the day. For example, teachers may create an activity where children work independently or in small groups on theme-based art projects, use it as an open-ended free play center option, as a social and emotional support area, and/or as a station to work with small groups of children or individual children to observe, build specific skills and differentiate instruction.

Teachers ensure the creative arts center offers:

- Dedicated space near a clean-up area
- Multiple work surfaces for individuals and groups (e.g., tables, easels, floor areas)
- Illustrated books and sample art work, at children's level, organized by theme or genre and inclusive of multiple cultures and art forms
- Displays of children's art work and storage for ongoing projects
- Variety of drawing, painting, and natural materials for exploring color, form, and texture (e.g., brushes, straws, paint, crayons, different sizes of paper)
- Three-dimensional and tactile objects for sensory exploration and experimentation (e.g., beads, string, modeling clay, rocks, pine cones)
- Props to extend book experiences, such as flannel boards and pieces, puppets, and other story character figurines to recreate stories or represent experiences
- Audio station for listening to different styles of music
- Musical props and instruments for exploring dance, music and sound
- Materials for creating instruments (e.g., boxes, rubber bands, strings)

Key Connections to the NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Domain Areas:

Approaches to Learning: Engagement, Creativity & Imagination, Curiosity & Initiative

Physical Development and Health: Physical Development

Social and Emotional Development: Self-Concept and Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Relationships with Others

Communication, Language and Literacy: Representing, Integration and Knowledge of Ideas, Phonological Awareness, Text Types and Purposes, Comprehension and Collaboration

Cognition and Knowledge of the World: All sub-domains under the Arts

Find out more: visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/> ***Designing Learning Centers to Support Cognition and Knowledge of the World: A Resource Set***

Resources:

Cryer, D., Harms, T., & Riley, C. (2003). All about the ECERS-R. New York, New York: Teachers College Press

Jackman, H. (2009). Early education curriculum a child's connections to the world, 4th (Ed). Belmont, CA: Delmar Cengage Learning

Tip Sheet for Practice and Play: Prekindergarten Dramatic Play Center

Supporting children's learning and development through learner-centered environments, well-developed and intentional learning experiences, and frequent, high quality language interactions.

What happens in a dramatic play center?

Dramatic play is a key opportunity for children to express themselves and learn about the world around them. While dramatic play should cross into multiple learning areas – e.g., pretending to be scientists in the science center, an engineer in blocks – preschool classrooms should include a fixed dramatic play center. This learning center provides opportunities for children to explore different roles and real-world situations, using authentic tools and materials. This is a creative space that can be altered according to the theme or special project (e.g., into an office, restaurant, pet adoption center, grocery store, firehouse, service station etc.)

Teachers can plan to use the dramatic play center to support children's learning in multiple ways throughout the day. For example, teachers may add props and materials to reinforce or extend a book topic or abstract concept, convert the area to align with the theme, use it as an open-ended free play center option, as a social and emotional support area, and/or as a station to work with small groups of children or individual children to observe, build specific skills and differentiate instruction.

Teachers ensure the dramatic play center offers:

- Space for up to four children in a noisy area of the room
- Variety of props for dramatic expression that reflect diversity in gender, culture, and occupations
- Play equipment and furniture that can be moved and converted (e.g., table and chairs, shelving, kitchen, safety mirror, benches, storage bins etc.)
- Play props and materials that promote dramatic play and role playing (e.g., office equipment, workshop items, puppets, pretend food, dress-up clothes, dolls and figurines, cash register, pretend money, stuffed animals etc.)
- Authentic props and materials (e.g., calculators, writing materials, clipboards, arts/craft materials for making signs and props, coupons, newspapers, etc.)
- Props to extend book experiences, such as flannel boards and pieces, puppets, and other story character figurines to recreate stories or represent experiences
- Multiple text types, including narrative, informational, and other kinds of texts; books with diverse characters and topics; and books at varying levels

Key Connections to the NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Domain Areas:

Approaches to Learning: Engagement, Creativity & Imagination, Curiosity & Initiative

Physical Development and Health: Health and Well Being

Social and Emotional Development: Self-Concept and Self-Awareness, Relationships with Others

Communication, Language and Literacy: Representing, Integration and Knowledge of Ideas, Comprehension and Collaboration, Knowledge of Language

Cognition and Knowledge of the World: History, Civics, Citizenship and Government, Economics, Career Development, Theatre/Dramatic Play, Cultural Differences

Find out more: visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/> *Designing Learning Centers to Support Cognition and Knowledge of the World: A Resource Set*

Tip Sheet for Practice and Play: Prekindergarten Literacy Center

Supporting children's learning and development through learner-centered environments, well-developed and intentional learning experiences, and frequent, high quality language interactions.

What happens in a literacy center?

While books, texts, and writing materials should be part of every center in a prekindergarten classroom, the literacy center is a specialized and designated area. Literacy centers provide opportunities for children to fully engage with books, text materials, writing materials, and tools such as computers and devices, to meet literacy goals. A rich collection of age appropriate books, text materials, and writing materials and tools provides opportunities for children to explore the parts of books and print conventions, engage in pre-reading and reading, explore new vocabulary and concepts, talk about story elements, listen to stories, explore writing and drawing, and practice using technology tools.

Teachers can plan to use the literacy center to support children's learning in multiple ways throughout the day. For example, teachers may create an activity where children can work independently or in small groups on specific projects, use it as a free play center option, and/or as a station to work with small groups of children or individual children to observe, build specific skills and differentiate instruction.

Teachers ensure the literacy center offers:

- A quiet, comfortable, cozy area of the classroom
- Books and texts (about 20) that are on display, forward facing and rotated often according to current interests, topic, and/or theme
- Additional books in labeled bins, at children's level, organized by theme or genre
- Multiple text types, including narrative, informational, and other kinds of texts; books with diverse characters and topics; and books at varying levels
- Props to extend book experiences, such as flannel boards and pieces, puppets, and other story character figurines
- Books in multiple formats (e.g., listening on CD, digital books, interactive books)
- Writing materials with pencils, markers, crayons, and pens, and materials to write on such as paper and book making materials; alphabet and numeral strips and stamps
- Word wall depicting topic/theme-base words; common words and rare words with illustrations or depictions
- Computers/devices with developmentally appropriate games and activities linked to learning goals; scheduled to ensure equity

Key Connections to the NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Domain Areas:

Approaches to Learning: Engagement, Creativity & Imagination, Curiosity & Initiative

Social and Emotional Development: Self-Concept and Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation

Communication, Language and Literacy: All sub-domain areas within Approaches to Communication and English Language Arts and Literacy

Cognition and Knowledge of the World: Geography, History, Visual Arts, Cultural Differences, Foundations to Technology, Using Technology

Find out more: visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/> ***Creating Rich Language and Literacy Environments: A Resource Set*** and ***Designing Learning Centers to Support Cognition and Knowledge of the World: A Resource Set***

Resources:

Cryer, D., Harms, T., & Riley, C. (2003). All about the ECERS-R. New York, New York: Teachers College Press

Jackman, H. (2009). Early education curriculum a child's connections to the world, 4th (Ed). Belmont, CA: Delmar Cengage Learning

Tip Sheet for Practice and Play: Prekindergarten Math and Manipulatives Center

Supporting children's learning and development through learner-centered environments, well-developed and intentional learning experiences, and frequent, high quality language interactions.

What happens in a math center?

The math and manipulatives center provides opportunities for children to explore number sense, measurement, one-to-one correspondence, and patterns. A math center ensures a dedicated space where objects can be manipulated, sorted, ordered, quantified, and measured. Objects should be organized with labeled bins that are easily accessible and of interest to children. The math center should include age-appropriate games, puzzles, texts and writing materials of varying degrees of difficulty to engage all children. In the math center, children can model with math manipulatives to discuss their thinking with peers and adults and demonstrate their understanding.

Teachers can plan to use the math center to support children's learning in multiple ways. For example, teachers may create a series of math activities and games where children can work independently or in small groups to problem solve, use it as a free play center option, and/or as a station to work with small groups of children or individual children to observe, build specific skills and differentiate instruction.

Teachers ensure the math center offers:

- Work spaces for children to work with materials, including tables and floor areas
- Shelving to hold sets of several different types of objects, sorting bins, graph paper, materials for making patterns
- Manipulatives such as pegs, sorting materials, Cuisenaire rods, nesting and linking cubes, shape patterns, counting beads, measuring tools, scales etc.
- Posted math visual aids such as number lines (including flat number lines), number lists and representations, calendars, simple graphs, height measurement stick, etc.
- Games and activities: games that rely on counting, puzzles, pattern games, games with dice or number spinners, matching games, math computer games and apps
- Selections of books and texts that feature counting, themes with shape patterns, comparisons

Key Connections to the NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Domain Areas:

Approaches to Learning: Engagement, Curiosity & Initiative, Persistence

Physical Development and Health: Physical Development

Social and Emotional Development: Self-Regulation, Relationships with Others, Accountability

Communication, Language and Literacy: Background Knowledge, Representing, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Cognition and Knowledge of the World: All sub-domains under Mathematics, Foundations to Technology, Using Technology

Find out more: visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/> *Designing Learning Centers to Support Cognition and Knowledge of the World: A Resource Set*

Resources:

Cryer, D., Harms, T., & Riley, C. (2003). All about the ECERS-R. New York, New York: Teachers College Press

Jackman, H. (2009). Early education curriculum a child's connections to the world, 4th (Ed). Belmont, CA: Delmar Cengage Learning

Tip Sheet for Practice and Play: Prekindergarten Science and Discovery Center

Supporting children's learning and development through learner-centered environments, well-developed and intentional learning experiences, and frequent, high quality language interactions.

What happens in a science and discovery center?

In the science and discovery center, young children have opportunities to observe, gather, and explore objects. Early learners are naturally curious and the science and discovery center can provide an opportunity for children to engage in experiments and observations, problem solve, talk about and record observations, and think about what it means. The science and discovery center provides hands-on opportunities for young children to explore abstract concepts and develop understanding of new vocabulary.

Teachers can plan to use the science and discovery center to support children's learning in multiple ways. For example, teachers may create a lab where children can work independently or in small groups on special experiments, use it as a free play center option, and/or as a station to work with small groups of children or individual children to observe, build specific skills and differentiate instruction.

Teachers ensure the science and discovery center offers:

- A location near sunlight for growing plants
- Work spaces and tables for individuals and groups to conduct experiments and make observations (e.g., wall space, tables, floor areas)
- Displays and collections of natural objects (e.g., rocks, leaves, sand, dirt, roots) and depictions of science-related topics (e.g., posters, models, graphics, digital displays, videos)
- Variety of tools and materials for using senses, observing, and experimenting (e.g., natural materials, magnifiers, art supplies for recording, measuring devices, trays, droppers etc.)
- Selections of books and texts about science; rotated to link to specific themes and/or learning goals (e.g., earth and space, living things, physical properties)
- Selections of games and puzzles that are related to science areas, such as healthy bodies, animals, weather, living things, space, movement etc.
- Paper and writing materials to draw or record observations

Key Connections to the NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Domain Areas:

Approaches to Learning: Engagement, Creativity & Imagination, Curiosity & Initiative, Persistence

Physical Development and Health: Health and Well Being

Social and Emotional Development: Self-Concept and Self Awareness, Relationships with Others, Accountability

Communication, Language and Literacy: Viewing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Comprehension and Collaboration, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Cognition and Knowledge of the World: Measurement and Data, Scientific Thinking, Earth and Space, Living Things, Physical Properties, Foundations to Technology

Find out more: visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/> to explore *Designing Learning Centers to Support Cognition and Knowledge of the World: A Resource Set*

Resources:

Cryer, D., Harms, T., & Riley, C. (2003). All about the ECERS-R. New York, New York: Teachers College Press

Jackman, H. (2009). Early education curriculum a child's connections to the world, 4th (Ed). Belmont, CA: Delmar Cengage Learning

Tip Sheet for Practice and Play: Prekindergarten Sensory Center

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What happens in a sensory center?

A sensory center is a designated area where children explore sand and water or other appropriate materials in a specially designed table using a variety of props to extend experiences and language. Children have opportunities to use materials to try out simple experiments, to measure, compare, and problem solve. Working individually or in small groups children learn to negotiate materials and space, describe, ask questions, experiment, and play creatively.

Teachers can plan to use the sensory center to support children's learning in multiple ways throughout the day to include math and science experiences. For example, children may pour water from one container to another in the water table and learn about measuring. In the sand table they may mist the sand which gives children and opportunity to use both dry and wet sand. Teachers may change the materials in the table to coincide with themes. For example, when studying plants, they may add soil to the table or when learning about the sense of touch they may provide materials of different textures.

Teachers ensure the sensory center offers:

- Dedicated space near a clean-up area
- Table or area specifically designed for sand, water, or other sensory play
- Smocks to protect clothing from getting wet in the water table
- Interesting materials that are rotated to provide a variety of sensory and language experiences such as hay, dirt/mud, sticks, rice, corn, rye, bean, pretend or real grass, oobleck (cornstarch and water), bubbles, or finger paint
- Props to extend play and talk in the sand table such as small figurines, cars and trucks, scoops, buckets, paper with scissors for cutting
- Props to extend play and talk in the water table such as small water droppers or basters, sink and float materials, or adding colors to the water
- Mop, broom, and dust pan for cleaning up spills

Key Connections to the NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Domain Areas:

Approaches to Learning: Engagement, Creativity & Imagination, Curiosity & Initiative

Physical Development and Health: Physical Development

Social and Emotional Development: Self-Concept and Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Relationships with Others, Accountability

Communication, Language and Literacy: Representing

Cognition and Knowledge of the World: Measurement and Data, Scientific Thinking, Physical Properties, Visual Arts

Find out more: visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/> ***Designing Learning Centers to Support Cognition and Knowledge of the World: A Resource Set***

Resources:

Cryer, D., Harms, T., & Riley, C. (2003). All about the ECERS-R. New York, New York: Teachers College Press

Jackman, H. (2009). Early education curriculum a child's connections to the world, 4th (Ed). Belmont, CA: Delmar Cengage Learning

Tip Sheet for Practice and Play: Prekindergarten Writing Center

Supporting children's learning and development through learner-centered environments, well-developed and intentional learning experiences, and frequent, high quality language interactions.

What happens in a writing center?

In the writing center children have opportunities to use materials to experiment with writing (i.e., drawing, scribbling, making letters and letter-like forms, random letter strings, pretend writing, invented spelling, etc.) . Writing centers are dedicated spaces stocked with paper and writing/drawing materials, but writing opportunities should be encouraged beyond the writing center through teacher dictations, functional writing connected to routines and play-related writing opportunities across centers.

Teachers can plan to use the writing center and other centers to scaffold children's writing skills based on what individual children know and understand. By experimenting with materials in the writing center and in authentic ways in other centers and routines, teachers can support children to learn about print, start making print-sound connections and learn about the meaning of print. Creating name cards for each child with their picture and name and using a similar card in the center management system will allow children to begin to recognize their name in print. Pointing out letters and words during the morning meeting and read aloud sessions will allow children to see print has meaning which will spark enthusiasm for incorporating writing across centers and play.

Teachers ensure the writing center offers:

- A table and chairs to accommodate at least two children
- Variety of writing implements to include markers, crayons, colored pencils, elementary pencils, and regular pencils
- Variety of sizes of paper to include lined and unlined paper
- Upper case and lower case alphabet stamps and ink pads
- Word wall depicting topic/theme-base words; common words and rare words with illustrations or depictions
- A variety of ABC books that allow children to expand vocabulary while identifying upper and lower case letters
- Environmental print such as fronts of cereal boxes or snack boxes that are gathered together in a book for students to use
- Word strips with a picture and a word that coincide with the current or previous themes bound together for children to use as a sample
- Materials for making simple books including a stapler or paper fasteners
- Clipboards with paper and pencils attached or white boards with dry erase markers and an eraser so children can take the clipboards to write around the room
- Letter tiles or magnetic letters for sorting letters

Key Connections to the NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Domain Areas:

Approaches to Learning: Engagement, Creativity & Imagination, Curiosity & Initiative, Persistence; *Physical Development:* Physical Development

Social and Emotional Development: Self-Concept and Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation; *Communication, Language and Literacy:* Representing, Vocabulary, Print Concepts, Phonological Awareness, Phonics and Word Recognition, All Writing Standards; *Cognition and Knowledge of the World:* Visual Arts

Find out more: visit <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/> ***Creating Rich Language and Literacy Environments: A Resource Set*** and ***Designing Learning Centers to Support Cognition and Knowledge of the World: A Resource Set***

Resources:

Feldman, J. & Karapetkova, H. (2009) I love letters: More than 200 Quick & easy activities to introduce young children to letters and literacy. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, Inc.

Pinnell, G.S. & Fountas, I.C. (2011). Literacy beginnings: A prekindergarten handbook. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

www.readingrockets.org/article/how-do-i-write-scaffolding-preschoolers-early-writing-skills