12 Things You Can Do to Make Your Classroom More Developmentally Appropriate

if you are not already...

Have the Art Area open throughout the day, including a variety of collage materials available

Playdough should always be a choice for children

Place a child-size broom (or a wisk broom) by the sand table to allow children to be responsible for any mess they make and to increase self-help skills

Make sure tissues and paper towels are accessible to children, so that they do not have to rely on adults for them

Sand &/or water play should be available daily

Use conflicts between children as opportunities for learning through problem-solving

Do not force children to participate in activities – offer choices

The easel should be open daily

Bring in "real" objects for exploration

Do not cut out patterns for children

Allow children to do what they can for themselves

Do activities in small groups vs. large groups

What You Will See In a Developmentally Appropriate Classroom...

- Respectful, frequent and responsive interactions
- Children offered choices, given opportunities to make decisions, and are active participants
- A print-rich environment with many opportunities for children to interact and explore the written word (including a writing area)
- Open-ended art materials available as a choice throughout the day; Art displayed at the children's eye-level (dictation present)
- A stimulating, interactive science area, with real objects
- Painting at the art easel available daily, as an on-going choice
- Media/Sensory Tables open daily
- Multi-cultural materials incorporated throughout the environment
- Pictures of "real" objects and people (vs. cartoons)
- Children employing problem-solving skills
- Learning areas that are well-defined and inviting
- Woodworking experiences available and utilized
- Self-help skills and independence encouraged
- Adults capitalizing on "teachable moments", and what the children express an interest in learning about
- Age-appropriate expectations *Ex:* Mistakes and accidents ok
- Children's individual needs and skill levels taken into account
- Many opportunities for children to experience success
- Smooth transitions with minimal waiting and lining up
- Children's feelings acknowledged and validated
- Role of the family acknowledged, with participation encouraged and valued
- Activities facilitated in small groups instead of large groups with forced participation
- Physical needs of children incorporated, with opportunities for large motor experiences available daily
- The goal of guidance and discipline with the children being to develop self-control and to make better choices
- The presence of music and laughter

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What You Will See in a Developmentally Appropriate Infant/Toddler Room...

- Loving and nurturing exchanges
- Frequent, respectful, and responsive interactions
- Babies dictating their own schedules
- Lights turned on throughout the entire day
- Acceptance of individual differences and rates of development
- Attempts to communicate acknowledged and reinforced
- Children not made to feel badly, with no negative comments related to bodily functions
- Babies talked to about what is happening to them, and what is going to happen to them, and what they are feeling
- Presence of music and laughter
- Stimulation provided, based on individual needs
- Children not confined or restricted, free to explore
- "No's" eliminated by the childproofing of the room
- Sleeping infants put into cribs (on their backs)
- Age-appropriate expectations – *Ex:* acceptance that children of this age dump toys out; are messy when they eat; don't share...
- Children are encouraged to explore and to learn new things
- Feeding time a pleasurable exchange, with the caregivers focus on the child (no bottle propping)
- Diapering viewed as an opportunity to interact and bond
- Children get "floor time" with an adult sitting by them - interacting, reading, and doing simple games and activities
- Frequent smiles and affection given by caregivers
- Crying infants acknowledged, and if teacher is busy, told that they will be taken care of next; children's feelings validated
- Multi-cultural items reflected throughout the environment
- Cues taken from children; physical needs acknowledged
- Pictures of the children and their families present (at childs' eye-level); pictures of real objects vs cartoon characters
- Role of the family is acknowledged and respected, with good, open, two-way communication about the child and his/her development and needs

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Loose Parts: What does this mean?

Loose parts is a wonderful term coined by architect Simon Nicholson, who carefully considered landscapes and environments that form connections. Nicholson believed that we are all creative and that "loose parts" in an environment will empower our creativity. Many play experts and early childhood educators adapted the theory of loose parts.
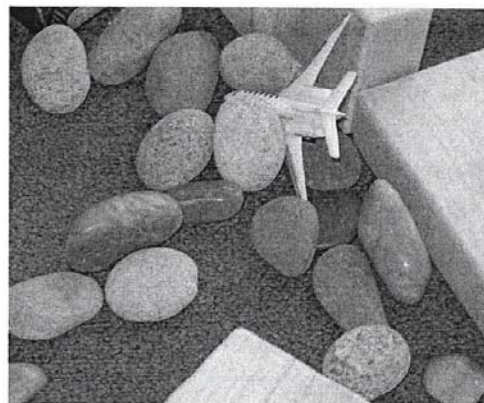
How can I provide loose parts?

Loose parts can be natural or synthetic. It is helpful to think of loose parts as something that will help children inspire imagination and creativity on their own terms and in their own unique way.

Giving meaning to loose parts

Giving meaning to loose parts requires us to think about the possibilities of how a child learns and consider the materials and environments she uses. Loose parts create endless possibilities and invite creativity. For example, if a child picks up a rock and starts to play, most likely that rock can become anything the child wants it to be. Imagination, creativity, curiosity, desire, and need are the motivation of loose parts.

Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. Loose parts can be used alone or combined with other materials. There is no set of specific directions for materials that are considered loose parts. The child is the direction.

Loose parts encourage open-ended learning

A term strongly connected to loose parts is open-ended. Open ended materials, environments, and experiences encourage problem solving and are child centered. Children involve themselves in concrete experiences using loose parts, which lead to explorations that occur naturally, as opposed to adult directed. However, adults do play important, intentional roles in preparing, guiding, and documenting open ended learning experiences.

Consider how often children enjoy bringing materials from one area to another and making connections, such as the child who brings pretend food from the dramatic play area into the block area or the child who offers a plate of rocks and grass and shares his recipe for spaghetti; how creative! When children are encouraged to integrate play materials and areas in their own creative ways, they are experiencing open ended learning.

Examples of loose parts in...

a natural play area:*

water • sand • dirt • sticks • branches • logs • driftwood • grasses • moss • leaves • flowers • pinecones • pine needles • seeds • shells • bark • feathers • boulders • rocks • pebbles • stones

a playground:

balls • hoops • jump ropes • tires • sand • water • dirt • straw • boulders • rocks • stones • pebbles • buckets • cups • containers • digging tools • chalk • scarves • ribbons • fabric
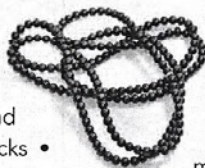
an indoor environment:

blocks • building materials • manipulatives • measuring • pouring devices (cups, spoons, buckets, funnels) • dramatic play props • play cars, animals, and people • blankets • materials • floor samples • water • sand • sensory materials • recycled materials (paper tubes, papers, ribbons, caps, lids, wood scraps, wire, foam, cardboard) • plastic gutters • small plungers • tools • art materials (buttons, spools, natural and colored popsicle sticks, beads, straws, paints, brushes)

*When working with loose parts, be sure not to disturb living things.

Children choose creative, loose parts over fancy toys

During a holiday gathering, two young children were fortunate enough to receive holiday gifts and toys. The parents noticed that the children spent the most time doing three things: eating, playing with their aunt's long necklace of large beads, and pouring water from cup to cup and floating carrots in the water. Yes, the toys were played with, but the most time and joy came from the eating, playing with the beads, and experimenting with the water.

It is in this free exploration and creation from the children that adults can see their concrete ways of thinking and doing, or as the famous psychologist Eric Erickson put it, adults can see their "natural genius of childhood and their spirit of place." The cleverness and connections to formal learning that unfold from loose parts is amazing and is a motivation to make sure practitioners include loose parts in early childhood environments, whether it is home care, center care, or group home care.

Choking cautions

Young children can choke on small objects and toy parts. All items used for children under three years of age and any children who put toys in their mouths should be at least 1¼ inch in diameter and between 1 inch and 2¼ inches in length. Oval balls and toys should be at least 1¾ inch in diameter. Toys should meet federal small parts standards.

Any toys or games labeled as unsuitable for children under three should not be used.

Other items that pose a safety risk and should not be accessible to children under three include, but are not limited to: button batteries, magnets, plastic bags, styrofoam objects, coins, balloons, latex gloves, and glitter.

Be aware of choking risks and food allergies when preparing and serving meals and snacks. Think about the size, shape, and consistency when choosing foods due to the potential choking risks in children. Food cut in large chunks, small hard foods, and soft and sticky foods should be avoided. The top choking hazards for children include:

hotdogs, meats, sausages, fish with bones, spoonfuls of peanut butter, popcorn, chips, pretzel nuggets, raisins, whole grapes, raw carrots, fruits and vegetables with skins, and marshmallows. Be sure that food is cut in small pieces (no larger than ½ inch), grated, or finely chopped. Be sure that children are closely supervised when they are eating.

Classroom clutter clutters learning in preschool

Deborah J. Stewart, M.Ed.

I was invited to participate in the Bam Radio show, along with Rae Pica and Dr. Rebecca Isbell, titled "How Classroom Setup and Clutter Affect Learning and Behavior."

"Classroom setup and structure are critical elements in teaching and controlling behavior and student interactions. What do you need to know? What are the best practices? How might rearranging your classroom help you?" (From the Bam Radio Show)

**Take a minute and listen to the radio show by clicking here or here!**

Rae Pica with Dr. Rebecca Isbell Ph.D. and Deborah J. Stewart, M.Ed.

Classroom Setup

Setting up a preschool classroom is a topic that makes up enough material for an entire book by itself! I have invested a tremendous amount of thought and time into my classroom setup. Having a rather small space to work with, like my preschool classroom, brings its own challenges but whether your classroom space is small or large, the way you setup, care for, and maintain it has a real and tangible affect on classroom management, child behavior, and child engagement in the learning process…

One important part of classroom set up is the issue of clutter. Clutter, clutter, clutter, clutter! Clutter is like chatter – a lot of noise going on all around you all the time and you can never shut it off. Clutter is distracting, stressful, demotivating, and can make a group of children go bonkers…
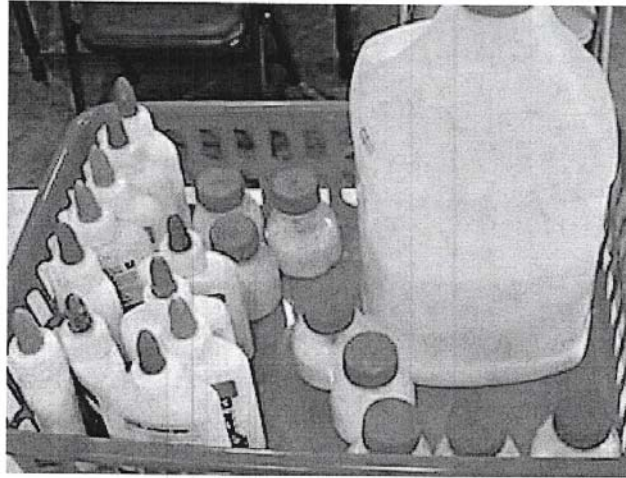
Where does clutter lurk?

Most classrooms usually don't start out at the beginning of the year being cluttered but clutter sort of sneaks up on you. I find clutter building up in my classroom all the time. I literally do a daily search around my room before going home to make sure everything has been put back in its place and I am constantly amazed at how quickly things can start to fall apart and the clutter can start to build up.

Keeping clutter under control takes energy, time, effort, skill and a realization that if you don't manage the clutter – it will absolutely-without-question negatively impact your classroom environment!

Clutter on counter tops…

Sometimes *(well most of the time)* it is my fault when my classroom starts to look cluttered. My teacher area (aka the counter top) is the number one place that starts to get cluttered in my classroom. I will set papers, cups, games, glue, paint, pencils, bags, books, and you name it on the counter thinking I will need it soon and the next thing you know I am adding dishes, measuring spoons, snack items, and more right on top of what is already there…
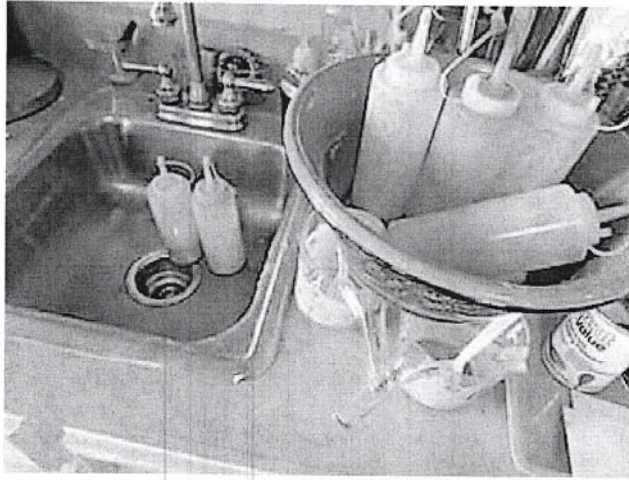
When my counter top gets cluttered, I start to feel unorganized. Well, it is more than a feeling, I actually am unorganized. I knock things over and it takes me twice as long to find something when I need it in a hurry. Clutter complicates teaching – it is a time waster and it adds stress to the day.

So at the end of every week, I wade through the piles of clutter on my counter top and unclutter all the clutter. I make sure that when I leave, the countertop looks clean, inviting, attractive, and organized. I get rid of anything that I don't have to have off the counter top. I find that if I wait and come back to the clutter later, I feel stressed the minute I walk in the classroom so I have gotten into the habit of making sure I unclutter before I head home for the weekend.

Cubby Clutter

The next area that I have to keep an eye on is our cubby area. Our cubbies are composed of hooks for each child on the wall with a basket on the floor underneath each hook. When I visit a preschool or childcare center, one of the first places I can usually find clutter is either in or on top of the cubbies.

A cluttered cubby area does nothing to promote or teach children about organization, care of their personal space or things, or care for the classroom environment. My cubbies look pretty good in these photos but by then end of a week or two – our cubbies can look like a big rock, mitten, pebble, acorn, stick, toy, and paper collection! When the cubbies get too cluttered, the children have a hard time taking care of their things so we purge the cubbies regularly to help the children feel more in control of their personal space and belongings…

Classroom shelves and baskets and toys

Like most preschool teachers, I like to add new toys and activities to my classroom but there comes a time when you have to know enough is enough. Having too many shelves, baskets, and toys is just begging for trouble in the preschool classroom *(having too few can be a problem too but today we are focusing on the too many)...*
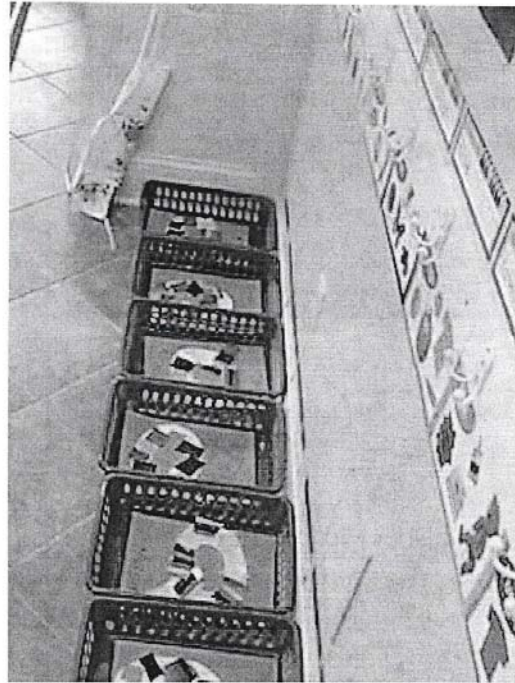
Having a small classroom, I really have to be selective in what stays out all the time and what needs to be rotated so that the children can easily find and independently take part in caring for our classroom. The more you have the more there is to take care of and for young children, too many toys with no specific and clear place for where things belong can be overwhelming...

After awhile, it can seem like the children just don't seem to care about where things belong. When I start finding plastic fruit in the postcard mailbox and toy cars in the bookshelf, I know it is time to declutter and make sure that I have classroom setup manageable and that it makes sense to the children. Once I declutter, I sit down with the children and we have a little reminder session on where things go and how we all need to step up and start putting things away in their propper place.

Observing and reflecting on clutter

Your classroom may not look cluttered at first glance. Things may look neat and tidy but be sure to be an observer of your own classroom environment. Take time to observe the children at play and see where things tend to fall apart and what needs to be done to improve the situation. Be reflective and responsive to the children's needs in the process. For example, in the photo below, you will see my students playing on top of the puzzles. The children have been playing on top of these puzzles for weeks now. They are not playing with the puzzles, they are playing on top of the puzzles....

In the process of their play, the puzzles keep getting shoved aside. Everyday, I find the puzzles set on the floor or on a table. I find them anywhere but on that shelf. These puzzles have been out for quite awhile now and clearly my students would like to use the top of this shelf for their own play but I haven't been responsive. I really like these puzzles on my shelf. They look so pretty there but for the children, they are in the way of their play. They are actually just clutter.

So today, when half of the puzzles came tumbling down on the floor in a loud crash, I knew that I should have moved those puzzles over a week ago. So now I have them all stacked up on the counter with all the pieces (that fell out earlier in the day) sitting in a basket. I will take all the puzzles and store them in a box in my garage for awhile and let the children have the top of that book shelf for their play. The puzzles can come out on another day but right now, the children need that space for their own purposes. I could tell the children that they are not allowed to play there because they are messing up my puzzles – but really, does that make any sense?
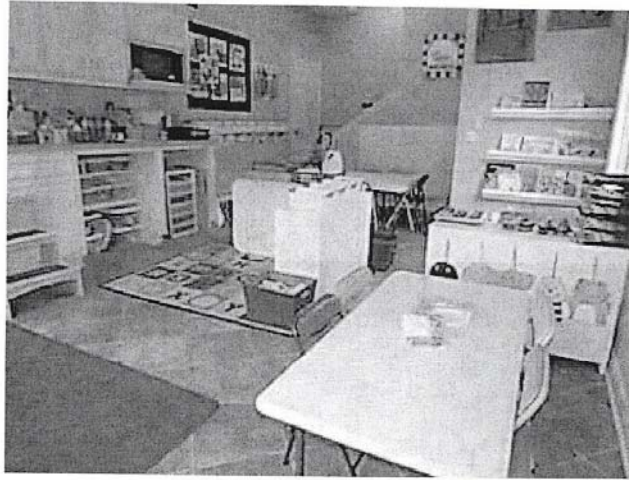
Classroom setup matters and clutter control is an important part of maintaining a positive classroom environment so if you haven't been on clutter patrol in awhile – its time to start! Don't forget, if you would like to hear what the experts have to say about classroom setup and the impact it has on young children, head on over to Bam Radio and take a listen! Click here or here for today's broadcast on classroom setup!

Earlychildhood NEWS

Creating Indoor Environments for Young Children
By Francis Wardle, Ph.D.

An early childhood environment is many things: It's a safe place where children are protected from the elements and are easily supervised, and it's where the important activities of the day take place, such as playing, eating, sleeping, washing hands, and going to the bathroom. Beyond the basics, however, an environment for young children implements and supports a program's philosophy and curriculum.

Philosophies like Montessori, for example, require well-designed classrooms with low shelves, four basic learning areas, and places for children to work and learn independently, and British infant/primary programs have classrooms with a variety of rich learning centers, a cozy reading area with couch and carpet, and a lively science area that contains pets and plants.

How Does Your Environment Support Your Philosophy and Curriculum?
Since most early childhood philosophies stress the importance of play, hands-on-learning, and whole child development, a good early childhood environment supports these activities. Are there well-supplied dramatic play areas? Is there a large block area? What about sand and water activities, manipulatives, art areas, and reading corners? Is the space arranged in such a way that children can make noise while playing without disturbing children in other activities? Can children make a mess in the art area without destroying the books in the reading area?

Meeting Children's Needs
The young of every species have basic needs that must be met for them to develop and mature. Children are no exception. For children, these essential needs include warm, caring, and responsive adults; a sense of importance and significance; a way to relate to the world around them; opportunities to move and play; and people to help structure and support their learning. In the past, these needs were met at home and in the community, but now these needs are being met in our classrooms. According to Jim Greenman (1988), early childhood environments should be:

- **Rich in Experience**. Children need to explore, experiment, and learn basic knowledge through direct experience. Indeed, childhood is a time when we learn firsthand about the physical world the feel of water, the constant pull of gravity, the stink of rotten fruit, and the abrasive feel of concrete on a bare knee.

- **Rich in Play**. Play provides a way for children to integrate all their new experiences into their rapidly developing minds, bodies, emotions, and social skills. Brain research supports this idea, stressing that children learn best through an integrated approach combining physical, emotional, cognitive, and social growth (Shore, 1997).

- **Rich in Teaching**. The role of the teacher is critical in a child's life. Children depend on teachers to be their confidant, colleague, model, instructor, and nurturer of educational experiences.

- **Rich with People**. Clearly children need lots of exposure to other people in their early childhood years. One of the greater weaknesses of Western society is that our children have less exposure to the diverse group of people living in the local village—baker, farmer, gardener, carpenter, piano tuner, bricklayer, painter, etc.

- **Significant to Children**. Young children need to feel important. In past eras children were responsible to water the garden, do farm chores, and care for younger children. Children need to feel that what they do is meaningful to someone besides themselves.

- **Places Children Can Call Their Own**. A basic human need is the need to belong. Children need to feel they belong, too. They need to be close to people they know, have familiar and comfortable objects, and be in a setting that has a personal history for them.

How Teachers Can Create Effective Learning Environments
The components of a learning environment are many and can be overwhelming. What should an environment for young children look like? How do you create an environment that supports learning and meets children s basic needs? Below is a brief description of the most important components needed to make an effective learning environment for young children.

Environments for Young Children Stimulate Learning
Environments for young children should provide multiple sources of stimulation to encourage the

development of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social skills. As you plan your environment be sure to include the following:

Places for developmentally appropriate physical activities. Environments should provide children with opportunities for a lot of developmentally appropriate physical activities. Young children are physical beings. They learn most effectively through total physical involvement and require a high level of physical activity, variety, and stimulus change (Hale, 1994).

Opportunities for concrete, hands-on activities. Young children need hands-on activities—playing in water, building mud pies, making things out of wood, putting a doll to bed, etc. They also need lots of ways to practice and integrate new experiences into existing mental structures—dramatic play, drawing, taking photographs, using language, and making things with blocks.

Change and variety. Children seek out a constant change of stimuli—scenery, textures, colors, social groups, activities, environments, sounds, and smells. As our children spend more time in our programs, the more variation and stimulation they need.

Color and decorations. Color and decorations should be used to support the various functional areas in the classroom and center, provide needed stimulus change and variety, and develop different areas and moods in the room. Vibrant colors such as red, magenta, and yellow work well in the gross motor area; soothing blues and green are good color choices for hands-on learning centers; and whites and very light colors are good for areas that need lots of concentration and light. Soft pastels and other gentle hues, on the other hand, work well in reading areas and other low intensity activities. Decorations should follow the same pattern, with an additional emphasis on changing them often, and providing order around topics, projects, and themes.

Materials and Equipment Contribute to the Overall Environment and Program Philosophy

The success of an early childhood environment is not dependent upon aesthetics and design alone. The materials and equipment given to the children is just as important to learning as the physical space of the classroom. The following materials and equipment can be added to any early childhood environment.

Soft, responsive environments. Children who spend most of their day in one environment need surfaces that respond to them, not hard surfaces that they must conform to. Sand, water, grass, rugs and pillows, and the lap of a caregiver respond to a child's basic physical needs (Prescott, 1994).

Flexible materials and equipment. Children can use sand, water, or play dough in a variety of ways, depending on their maturity, ability, past experience with the materials, interest, and involvement. A jigsaw puzzle, on the other hand, has only one correct solution. Legos® and tinker toys have specific physical qualities that must be adhered to, but are also flexible enough to allow a range of creative activities. Programs should include lots of materials that have an abundance and variety of uses to give children a sense of creativity and control (Wardle, 1999).

Simple, complex and super complex units. According to Prescott (1994), learning materials can be simple, complex, or super complex. Simple materials are those with essentially one function, complex those with two, and super complex, those with more than two. For example, a pile of sand, is a simple unit. If one adds a plastic shovel to the sand it becomes a complex unit. Adding a bucket of water or collection of toy animals to the sand and shovel creates a super-complex unit. The more complex the materials, the more play and learning they provide (Wardle, 1999).

Strategies for Small Spaces

Programs with little space must change their areas often and find creative ways to use community areas such as parks and recreation facilities for gross motor activities. With a little creativity, small spaces can work out very well. For example, I once observed a very well planned and supportive early childhood environment designed under the bleachers of a high school! Lofts were built, there were cozy reading areas, and each Head Start child had a place of their own. When I was teaching in Kansas City, we walked across the street to use the Jewish Community center's gym and swimming pool. When using community facilities, be sure that playgrounds and other equipment are safe and developmentally appropriate for the children in your care.

Private Places

Because so many child care facilities have limited space, it can be challenging to respond to the uniqueness of each child within a collective environment. Young children have unique personalities and needs that require us to respond to them as individuals, not as members of a group. The environment must be responsive to this need. Ease of cleaning, maintenance, supervision, cost, and adult aesthetics should not detract from providing spaces children feel are designed for them. Children need to have private areas, secluded corners, lofts, and odd-shaped enclosures. Individual cubbies for each child's clothes and belongings, photographs of home and family, and at least a couple of secluded areas where two or three children can gather allow children opportunities to maintain their individuality and break away from the group to avoid over stimulation.

Early Childhood Environments Should Be Functional for Both Children and Teachers

Unlike traditional classrooms, early childhood environments need to support both basic functions and learning activities. Look around your classroom from a child's perspective. Are toilets, sinks, windows, faucets,

drinking fountains, mirrors, towel racks, chairs and tables, tooth brush containers, and bulletin boards at the child's level and child-sized? Are classrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, and eating areas close together so that children can develop self-help skills and important autonomous behaviors?

Like children, teachers also need to have spaces that are functional. Teachers need to be able to arrange and rearrange their classrooms for various class activities and supervision purposes. Classrooms that include permanent, built-in features such as lofts, playhouses, tables, benches, alcoves, and cubbies can be problematic. These types of fixed features make it difficult for teachers to create areas for gross motor activities, can cause injury in active children, or prevent inclusion of physical activities altogether. Classrooms built as a basic shell work best.

Accommodating Children With Special Needs

Even environments carefully designed and equipped for young children do not meet the needs of children with disabilities. Adaptations must be made carefully for any child with special needs, be they physical challenges, learning disabilities, or emotional issues. Rifton Equipment (made by the makers of Community Playthings) produces child-size equipment for children with physical disabilities that integrate well with traditional equipment. Brail and large lettering can be used for children with visual impairments, and sign language can be incorporated into the curriculum for those children with hearing impairments. Reducing distractions, glare, and over stimulation helps accommodate children with ADD and ADHD.

Including Diversity

The environment should reflect the importance of children by including examples of their work in progress, finished products, and by displaying images of children. Every child in the program must see examples of themselves and their family throughout the center, not just in the classroom. Visual images are an important part of developing a feeling of belonging in all children, so it is important to display pictures of single parent families, grandparent families, and homes of every race and ethnicity, including interracial, multiethnic, and adoptive families. The entire center should also reflect diversity throughout the world □ race, ethnicity, languages (not just English and Spanish), art, gender roles, religious ceremonies, shelter, work, traditions, and customs. The goal is for children to be exposed to the rich diversity of the entire world (Wardle, 1992). This is done through artwork, photos, posters, and signs on the wall; books; dolls; parent boards, newsletters, announcements, and magazines; and curricula materials such as puzzles, people sets, activity books, music, art materials, artifacts in the dramatic play area, and fabrics.

Obstacles to Consider When Planning Your Learning Environment

When setting up an effective preschool classroom, a variety of factors must be carefully considered and balanced (Olds, 1982). Below are some of the critical environmental issues that must be carefully addressed as you plan the environment.

Storage. Storage areas are a little like entrances and exits—they receive lots of traffic and are noisy and congested. For these reasons, storage areas can sometimes foster disruptive behavior and noise. Provide easy access to materials, allowing children to get what they need quietly and easily. The closer materials are to where they will be used, the better. Storage must also be designed so that materials for independent child use are separate from those teachers control.

Activity Area Access. Activity areas need to be located next to supplies and be easy to clean up. The classic example is the art area. While providing easy access to paint, easels, paper, and brushes, the art area needs to be close to a water source and on a surface that can withstand a mess. Similarly, the reading area must be close to book shelves, magazine racks, and comfortable places to sit.

Noise. Managing noise is important in a classroom. Placing carpet on the floor absorbs noise as does absorbent tile on the ceiling. The reading center should be next to a quiet area like the art area. Blocks are loud, and should be located next to other loud areas such as the woodworking bench. Noisy activities can also be placed in transition areas or moved outside in good weather.

Dividers. Dividers are any physical object that serve to delineate areas within a classroom, create interest areas, control traffic, and distribute children throughout the classroom. Almost anything can be used as a divider, so long as it is safe □ shelves, couches, fabric hung from a line, streamers attached to the ceiling, folding screens, puppet stages, etc. Safety is obviously a critical issue. Some dividers are easy to push over. The larger and heavier they are at the bottom, the safer. A divider can also be secured by fastening it to the floor or a wall. Several equipment companies have introduced dividers that attach directly to storage units and furniture. Ideally, dividers should be multi-functional for use as storage units, play furniture, and display boards. Keep in mind that solid dividers or walls of more than 30-40 inches high disrupt the circulation of air in the classroom and limit supervision of children. Less solid dividers, like fabric, avoid this problem. One teacher creatively used colorful fabric streamers attached to the ceiling as effective dividers.

Evaluating the Environment

The early childhood environment needs to be carefully evaluated and assessed on an annual basis. There are a variety of instruments available, including evaluations from NAEYC and Head Start, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale by Clifford and Harms (1998), and a variety of other checklists. In conducting the evaluation consider these things:

- Carefully select the person who will conduct the evaluation. The person should be objective and familiar with the program and children.

- Evaluate the entire center, including the playground, hallways, and bathrooms. It makes little sense for a program to have a nice, cozy, intimate classroom, with learning centers and children's work displayed everywhere, and long, cold institutional corridors and large bathrooms with adult-size urinals (Wardle, 1989).

- Make sure all the important objectives of the program are addressed. Most instruments list each objective and items that support those objectives.

- Be particularly attentive to ways the environment supports new program objectives. If the program just added a technology objective, are there enough computers and a well-equipped computer learning center?

- Ensure consistency. If the program stresses developmentally appropriate practice and play, then the computer component cannot be designed to support teacher directed instruction and drill/skill activities.

- Balance what we know to be good for children with the new fixation on academics. Many public schools and Head Start programs are emphasizing teacher directed instruction in academics at the expense of meeting all the children's needs.

- Make sure environments designed to support diversity address all forms of diversity. It is as important for an all minority program to show racial, ethnic, and national diversity as a white program; gender, language, religion, ability, and occupational diversity should all be evident (Wardle, 1992).

Once the evaluation is completed, the results should be tabulated, analyzed, and communicated to the program's decision-makers. The information gained from an evaluation is extremely valuable and can be used to design new programs and offerings as well as construct the budget for the coming school year.

Conclusion

A good early childhood environment meets the child's basic needs and supports and encourages children to engage in activities that implement the program's curriculum. Further, the environment is designed to enable staff to facilitate the optimum learning for their children. Finally, the environment makes parents and guardians feel welcome, involved, and empowered.

Francis Wardle, Ph.D., is the director for the Center of Biracial Children, the author of the book, *Tomorrow's Children: Meeting the Needs of Multiracial and Multiethnic Children at Home, in Early Childhood Programs, and at School* (CBSC), and adjunct professor at the University of Phoenix/Colorado.

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E X C E L L I G E N C E
LEARNING CORPORATION

Open-Ended Questions

Some tips for success:

Generate a list of generic open-ended questions, print them in a large
font, and create banners to post around the room. That will help you to use them in the
moment, interacting with children. It takes time for children to learn to respond to open-ended
questions. Provide lots of opportunity for practice. Be patient and allow wait time and model
with other adults in the room.

QUESTIONS LIKE:

What do you think will happen if...?

Why is...?

Tell me what you think about...

How did you decide...?

What if you...?

How else could you...?

Why do you think that?

Can you tell me more?