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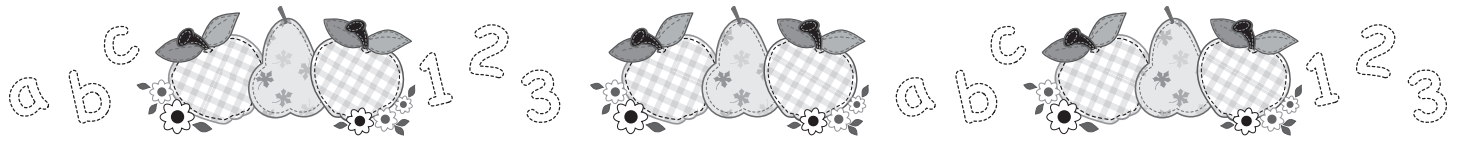
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Dear Teacher,

We all want to do what is best for children—the children whose lives become a part of our lives forever—the students in our classroom. Each year that we teach, we struggle to use the time we are given with our little ones as effectively, efficiently, and meaningfully as possible.

As teachers, if we truly want to know what is best for orchestrating our students' learning, we need to watch them in natural play and during everyday interactions. What we discover is that they want to be actively involved in their learning. Sometimes they want to move during their investigations.

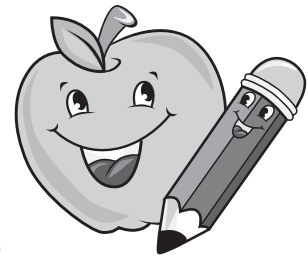


Sometimes they want to play with others in a give-and-take relationship to solve problems and learn together. Sometimes they want to work alone, undisturbed as they manipulate objects, toys, and materials in their environment.

Sometimes children want help from us as they seek to construct meaning from their play-like experiences, and sometimes they want to do it all by themselves with no interference from anyone. Some children watch and observe carefully to learn, others listen to what's going on before participating, and others will jump right into an activity.

If we are to be successful in our attempts to meet all children's unique needs in responsive

ways, then we need to work to meet the early childhood standards in ways that are developmentally appropriate, academically appropriate, and learning-styles appropriate for the children in our classrooms.



We need to provide multiple areas in the room with varying types of materials and activity levels geared to facilitate learning based on the various modalities of our students. **And with that, fellow teachers, we have just defined learning centers!**

I have three main goals for this book. The first is to provide information, or what we need **to know** about centers relating to child development and the standards. The second is to suggest generic materials, or what we need **to have** for effective centers. The third is to offer lots of ideas and specific activities **to do** during the center time experience. Use this resource to discover ways you can maximize your students' learning, minimize your preparation time, and, together with your students, build a joyous community of active learners in your classroom—all with the help of learning centers.

Dr. Maggie



Introduction

What is a center?

A center is a small area of the classroom where teachers have introduced a variety of hands-on materials and meaningful activities for children to actively use in risk-free ways. Its purpose is to help children develop new ideas, reinforce previously taught information, or meaningfully review concepts or facts. It is important to remember that centers do not always generate a product to “turn in.”



What types of centers should I have?

Over the years, as programs for young children have come into and gone out of fashion, confusion has grown over the use of centers and the types of centers that should be introduced. The following three types of centers are appropriate for early childhood classrooms:

- **Developmental Centers**—traditional play time or exploration centers
- **Literacy Centers**—work time centers involving skills practice
- **Theme Centers**—developmental and literacy centers incorporating a common theme

Why should I use centers?

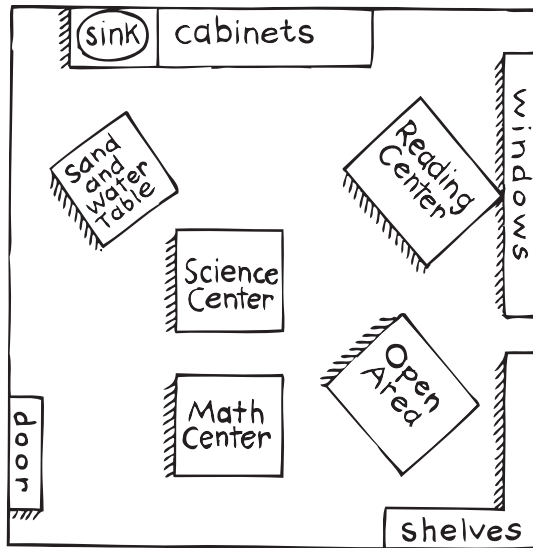
Learning centers are an integral and meaningful part of early childhood classrooms. Centers provide children the opportunities they need “to do” and “to practice doing” in order to internalize a process, master a skill, or understand a concept. In addition, centers provide teachers a manageable way to differentiate instruction so that children experience multiple ways “to get it.”

Centers provide varying levels of opportunities for children to achieve the following:

- Explore, discover, and be creative
- Respond and record
- Engage in critical thinking and problem solving
- Develop social/emotional skills
- Use listening and speaking skills for different purposes
- Practice and apply content skills in meaningful ways

Planning for Centers

Every early childhood classroom is different. You will need to discover for yourself the optimum way to use the space and resources available to you. Use the following ideas to help you plan for room arrangements, materials storage, and working with limited space.



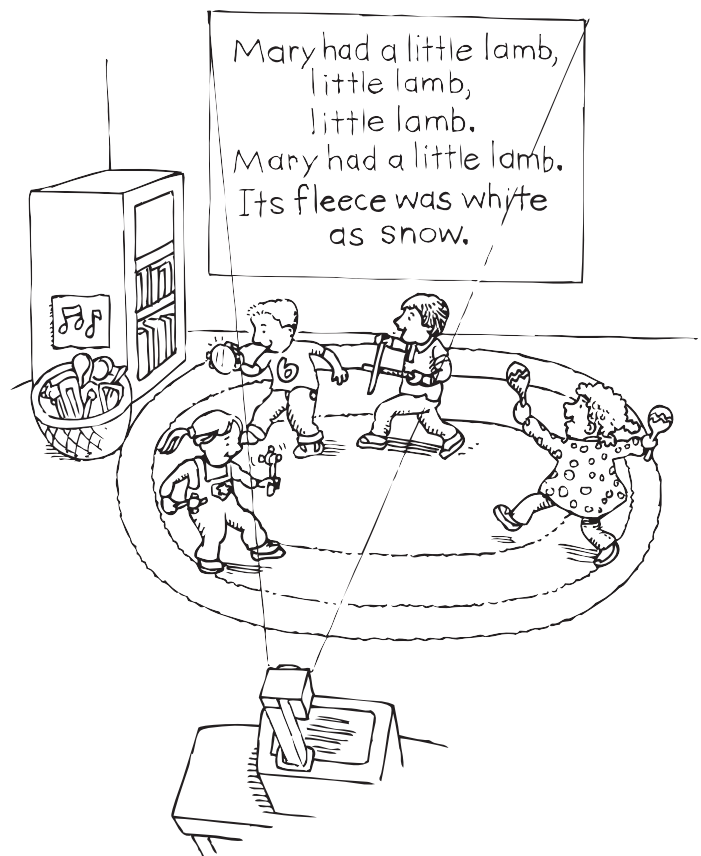
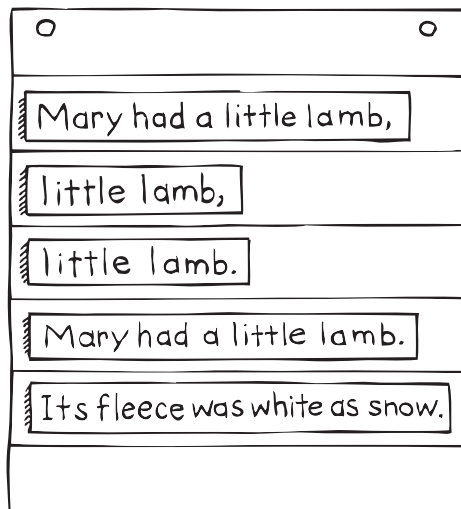
Setting Up the Room

Floor Plan Map

Sketch the shape of your room on a large piece of chart paper and mark all permanent features that cannot be changed. Use small sticky notes to represent moveable storage, furniture, cabinets, and center areas. Be aware of how the sink, windows, and doors will affect the natural traffic flow in your room. Remember to set aside a "quiet spot" for children who need a little space and to be sure that all parts of the room can be clearly seen. When you are pleased with how it looks on paper, try it. This provides a good starting point.

Give Us Space

As you think through your room set-up, remember to save space to create an open area for your circle time, class meetings, shared reading, dramatizations, and music and movement.



During center time, make this same open area available for children who are in centers that require more space. Allow children to migrate to the area, taking their center props, games, or activities with them.

