

# Learning Centers

## Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Action

We know that 4 year olds have developmental needs and we want children to have the opportunity to play , explore materials, and be actively engaged with peers, teachers, and tasks in learning centers. Learning centers (or interest areas) play a major role in young children's learning, particularly when well planned and facilitated by teachers. Careful attention to the classroom space and materials is one important aspect to planning.

### What it looks like in action:

- 1+ hour uninterrupted choice time
- Enough space and materials in each center (extra space for blocks and dramatic play!)
- Rotate center choices (e.g., repurpose areas, use prop boxes and tray activities)
- Center materials:
  - ✓ labeled, organized, accessible to children
  - ✓ provide a range of challenge for all learners (e.g. small-large paintbrushes)
  - ✓ promote literacy, math, and other development
- Teachers join centers to facilitate children's thinking and active engagement (e.g., ask questions, pose problems to solve)
- Teachers monitor, respond to academic and social- emotional needs (e.g., peer conflicts)



### Avoid:

- Short center time <1 hour (excluding clean-up) which limits child engagement
- Directing children to a certain center or when to rotate centers (limits choice)
- Children crowded and fighting over limited materials/space in centers
- Same centers/materials every week
- Materials that only work well for children at some levels of development
- Children "just playing" without teachers facilitating learning
- Children demonstrating repeated academic or social-emotional needs (e.g. frustrations, disengagement, conflicts) without teacher support to resolve

- Are children getting enough time, space, and choice in centers?
- Which learning centers need additional materials to increase the level of engagement and learning for all children?
- How am I facilitating learning and responding to individual needs of children in centers?

**REFLECT**

## Intentional Teaching

- When planning lessons each week, plan for learning center materials and "activities"
  - "How are my materials meeting learning objectives?"
  - "What changes do I want to make from last week to activities/center choices?"
- Observe how children are participating in learning centers and capture authentic assessment information that you can use to plan more differentiated instruction.