

## **Physical Environment Foundations**

*Best practices that align with ECERS, Creative Curriculum, and NCPMI*

### **1) The classroom is organized to support and encourage children to work independently and with peers in self-selected activities.**

- a) The classroom space is organized into well-defined interest areas (Blocks, Dramatic Play, Toys and Games, Art, Library, Discovery, Sand and Water (Sensory), Music and Movement, Outdoors)
- b) Furniture is used to enclose and divide areas and to eliminate long or wide-opened spaces
- c) Interest areas are arranged in such a way that they do not interfere with one another
- d) Interest areas that share common materials are located next to each other
- e) Adequate space is provided in each interest area
- f) Furnishings and materials are changed to maintain interest and encourage new learning (e.g., the teacher transforms the Dramatic Play area into a shoe store, changes displays to represent current activities, rotates materials to support children's increasing abilities)
- g) Materials are age-appropriate and individually suitable for the children in the group
- h) Materials for children's use are stored on low, open shelves where the children can easily reach them
- i) Materials are labeled (pictures & words) to identify where they belong (e.g., outlines for blocks of different sizes and shapes, pictures and words for toys and games or for cubbies)
- j) Physical modifications are made to accommodate children with disabilities (adaptive equipment/space for wheelchair)
- k) Children's work is displayed attractively, respectfully, and at the children's eye level
- l) Classroom clutter, including too many materials displayed simultaneously, is minimal
- m) The classroom is comfortable and attractive (e.g., it included homelike touches, living things, good lighting, soft furnishings, and quiet spaces that are cozy and inviting)

\*\*Circle is not listed as an interest area because it is **not** one. Circle is a large group activity that should be no longer than 10mins. Look at your areas - which one could be best used for circle? Anchor circle to a wall to with space to display environmental supports (i.e. daily schedule, values/expectations, learning focus).

### **2) Interest areas are visually appealing, available as a choice daily, and supplied with an adequate amount of developmentally appropriate, well-maintained materials.**

- a) **Block** area is enclosed on three sides and includes a full set of unit blocks; at least one other type of block; and props in a variety of categories (e.g., animals, people, road signs, small vehicles). Blocks are organized by size and shape on shelves with outlines to show where each shape is stored
- b) **Dramatic Play** area includes props representing not only home living roles but also a variety of occupations and cultures; the area is transformed throughout the year to match study topics (i.e., a clothing store during a study of clothes)
- c) **Toys and Games** area includes a variety of self-correcting toys; open-ended toys; collectibles (e.g., keys, bottle caps, shells); and cooperative games

- d) **Art** area includes an easel with paint(s) and a variety of materials for painting, drawing, cutting, pasting, molding, and 3- dimensional constructions
- e) **Library** area includes comfortable furnishings; high-quality, age- appropriate books with covers facing out; and a variety of materials for listening, reading, writing, and story retelling
- f) **Discovery** area includes basic tools and a *variety* of materials for exploring and investigating the *physical properties of objects*
- g) **Sand and Water** area includes sufficient sand and water (3-4 inches deep) and a *variety* of props and materials for digging, molding, pouring, and stirring
- h) **Music and Movement** area includes a *variety* of musical instruments and dance/movement props (e.g., scarves, streamers)
- i) **Cooking** includes basic items children can use to complete food-related projects safely \*Typically planned small group activity ideally weekly/monthly
- j) **Computer/iPad** includes equipment and *developmentally appropriate* software or apps that children can use collaboratively and safely (e.g., two chairs at the computer, power cords in back and out of children's reach, protective cases for mobile devices) \*adult monitored and limited use
- k) **Outdoor** includes a *variety of surfaces* and equipment for *large- muscle activities* and materials for nature exploration

**3) The materials, furnishings, equipment, and displays enhance learning in the content areas (literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts and technology).**

- a) The environment is *print-rich* and includes print that labels materials and storage places, identifies classroom practice, gives information and provides narrative descriptions (e.g., dictation about artwork, a chart story about a walk around the block)
- b) Children's names are displayed in a *variety* of locations throughout the room
- c) Books are included in at least 5 different interest areas
- d) Other texts (e.g., magazines, signs, charts, cookbooks) are included in at least 3 different *interest areas*
- e) There are at least 25 books inclusive of all categories: story, informational, alphabet, *predictable*, number and counting, and nursery rhymes that reflect various families, cultures, backgrounds and abilities. \*Use Seed the Way's Equity Audit to assess your library
- f) Materials for writing are included in at least 3 *interest areas*
- g) An alphabet (with related pictures and/or children's names) is displayed at the children's eye level
- h) Materials for exploring mathematical concepts (e.g., number and operations; patterns; geometry; and *spatial relationships*; measurement; collecting; organizing; and representing data) are included
- i) A *variety* of materials for investigating life sciences, physical sciences, and Earth and environment is included
- j) Materials to help children learn about people and how they live and to expand their *geographic thinking* are included
- k) Materials for spontaneous exploration and appreciation of the arts (visual, music, dance, movement, drama) are included
- l) *Tools* and technology to perform tasks, including adaptive tools for any children with disabilities, are included (e.g., funnels, magnifying lenses, balances, tape measures, cameras, computers)

**4) The environment reflects the language(s), family background(s), home culture(s), and exceptionalities of the children in the classroom and beyond.**

- a) Images that are *non-stereotypical* and authentic depictions of children and families are displayed (e.g., photos of classroom children and their families, photos showing other cultures or ethnicities)
- b) Books in children's home language(s) are included
- c) Labels are written in children's home languages(s), and languages are color-coded throughout the classroom (e.g., English in blue and Spanish in red)
- d) Music with lyrics in the children's home languages(s) is included
- e) Materials in *interest areas* reflect the diversity of the families in the classroom and community
- f) Images of children with disabilities are included in the materials and displays.

**5) The environment is healthy, safe and clean.**

- a) Child-sized furnishings are available
- b) Materials are *well-maintained* and in good condition
- c) Materials, equipment, and displays are included to help children care for the classroom environment (e.g., job charts, small brooms, dustpans)
- d) Features and practices that promote safety and health are included (e.g., handwashing charts, food safety procedures, arrival and departure procedures, proper storage of chemicals and medicines)
- e) The outdoor space is safe (e.g., protected from traffic, free from debris, with cushioning materials under the equipment, with no sharp edges) and arranged so that children can be seen and supervised from all vantage points
- f) Furnishings are arranged for good visual supervision

**Predictable Daily Schedule:**

Create and post a schedule with visuals that:

- Includes photographs or clip art for each activity
- Represents all daily activities
- Is posted where children can view and manipulate
- Is designed to accommodate when changes occur
- Is designed to indicate the passage of time; and
- Is visible the entire day

Develop and implement a schedule that:

- Minimizes the number of transitions across the day
- Includes a balance of teacher-directed and child-directed activities that includes play; and
- Includes both large and small group activities throughout each day

Refer to and review the classroom schedule with children throughout the day (i.e. when it is time to change activities, during transitions)

Make visual modifications to the schedule when changes occur and review with children.