

LEARNING CENTER **Goals, Observation and Assessment**

What is a learning center?

Learning Centers are areas/activities throughout your program that allow children to manipulate materials, explore ideas, discover consequences, build, create and express themselves through art mediums. Learning Centers give the child an opportunity to make decisions and choose the timing of her learning. According to the NAEYC, this is essential to create the best learning environments. (*Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the Early Childhood Classroom*, 1995. NAEYC) Many teachers create *learning stations* (assigned by the teacher) in their classrooms. It is suggested that learning centers involve choice for the children participating. A teacher using the *stations* approach should keep in mind that the center must have an element of choice for the most effective learning environment. True learning centers are not assigned, but give the child an opportunity to choose the center and the timing of his participation.

How do they accomplish this?

True learning center participation can often be categorized as play or manipulating materials.

When setting up learning centers, teachers should consider the following:

- Begin with 1-2 centers to teach children how to participate.
- Set the rules regarding how each center should be used.
- Consider which developmental guideline/skill can be reinforced with the activity (in other words, have a focus for the play).
- Supply materials that are age and developmentally appropriate.
- Allow children to discover the materials through manipulation.
- Observe and assess the children as they participate in each center (centers provide a wonderful opportunity for informal assessment or anecdotal recording).
- Teach children to be good citizens by cleaning up and restoring the center to an orderly learning environment.

What is the value of play and manipulation activities created in centers?

Through play manipulation, a child can learn many important concepts.

- Learning center projects can be great hands-on reinforcement activities to support a new skill taught.
- Learning centers provide an opportunity to function as part of the group and provides the child chance to practice social skills.
- Learning centers are great situations to teach cooperation, teamwork, respect and empathy for other class members.
- Learning centers can help teach a child the rules and regulations of play.
- Learning centers can challenge children to learn what they are capable of doing and what they still need more practice to perform.

- Learning centers are great models for helping children learn to problem solve.
- Learning centers provide an opportunity for children to work on conflict resolution.
- Large motor learning centers can help a child develop physically in strength and skill.

When setting up learning centers, remember the following:

- Learning centers should give children to opportunity to make choices, problem solve and create. If the activity chosen does not fulfill these expectations, rethink the activity. (Example: A coloring book page does not help a child make choices, problem solve or create. Giving children a pre-made page is not a good activity for a learning center or any activity with young children.)
- Each learning center should have a goal or purpose for doing the activity. When a teacher keeps in mind the developmental guidelines for young children she will create learning center activities that have a purpose.
- Learning center activities should be organized so that the children can independently function at the center (or arrangements should be made to help any child not capable for functioning independently).
- Learning center activities and materials should be open-ended enough to encourage children to extend the activity or create an alternative activity.
- Learning centers should be adjusted if children are losing interest or the activity is not positively engaging for the group.

Learning center opportunities are endless, but here are a few suggestions for center activities:

ART CENTER:

Sensory:	Seeing, feeling, pushing, pulling and pounding
Cognitive;	Opportunity to make choices Color identifying Color mixing Using new material and new mediums
Emotion:	Expressing feelings Express ideas, design things that are pleasing to the eye.
Social:	Social experiences through group activities or side by side play.
Problem Solving:	What do I like about this? What do I not like about this? What can I do to make it different? What is the result of colors mixed?
Physical:	Fine motor development through use of painting and writing tools.

GAMES AND PUZZLES:

Cognitive:	Learning to play the game. How to put the puzzle together Problem solving Number, color, letter recognition.
Social:	Following rules, taking turns Sportsmanship Conversation with peers
Language:	Using new vocabulary.
Physical:	Small motor skills, eye, hand, brain coordination.

SCIENCE CENTER

Cognitive:	Learning about life science (themselves and family). Learning about earth science (their immediate world). Learning about technology (cars, trucks, computers etc.).
Language:	Increasing language and vocabulary through use of science terminology.
Physical:	Using five senses to explore all items in the science center.
Social:	Sharing ideas and discoveries through small group activities.

BLOCK/CONSTRUCTION CENTER

Physical:	Using large muscles to lift, carry and stack
Cognitive:	Decision making, problem solving and understanding structure.
Social:	Working with others
Environment:	Using cars, trucks, equipment, community helpers.

LIBRARY

Cognitive:	Working on pre-reading skills. Increased vocabulary. Recognizing letters in words. Learning to manipulate books.
Social:	Learning tolerance and empathy.
Environment:	Learning about other places and people.
Experiences:	New ideas and developing interests. Add to previous experience and interests.

MUSIC

Emotional:	Opportunity for feelings through exposure to different types of music. Enjoys listening and singing with music.
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Cognitive: Expresses their own moods.
Creates their own music.
Listening for different sounds (high-low)..
Identifying different types of instruments..

Physical: Relaxation.
Rhythmic responses.
Movement to music and playing music.

ACTIVE PLAY

Physical: Test own physical strength and endurances
Develops large motor skills
Eye, hand, brain coordination
Body/space awareness

Social: Group play. Allowing other to have a turn

Emotional: Learning that they can't always be the winner.

SENSORY PLAY:

Physical: Touching, seeing, smelling, tasting and hearing.

Cognitive: Learning to identify different sensory material.

Social: Sharing time and space with others at the sensory table.

Emotional: Enjoy the experience of the sensory activity.

DRAMATIC PLAY:

Cognitive: Using tool that adults use. (practical life)
Learning about their community and environment.

Social: Developing empathy for others and animals
Increasing social awareness.

Emotional: Role Playing
Self Expression
Increasing imagination and creativity.

MANIPULATIVE/MATH

Physical: Development of small motor skill
Eye, hand, brain coordination

Cognitive: Improving understanding of math concepts
Counting, sorting and patterning
Enhances problem solving skills
Develops new ideas

Social: Small group activities

Language: Using new math vocabulary

OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT IN THE LEARNING CENTERS

How do we observe and assess what is happening in each learning center?

Observation and Assessment Tools

Learning Centers provide a perfect opportunity to assess and determine the progress of each child. According to the NAEYC Accreditation Standard 4, teachers should use formal, informal, portfolio sampling and anecdotal recordings for tracking individual student progress. This information should also be used as a guideline for choosing activities for the classroom and creating learning centers.

POCET provides the tools to help a teacher do informal and formal assessing during learning center activities. POCET also suggests gathering portfolio samples and anecdotal records during the classroom day.