



SETTING THE STAGE

Examples of How Early Childhood Teachers Using The Creative Curriculum Promote Learning in Literacy, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies

	LITERACY	MATHEMATICS	SCIENCE	SOCIAL STUDIES
BLOCKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have paper, markers, and tape available for children to make signs for block buildings. Hang charts and pictures with words at children's eye level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggest cleanup activities that require children to sort things by shape and size. Use terms of comparison, such as taller, shorter, the same length. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk with children about size, weight distribution, balance, and stability. Introduce experiments with momentum using ramps, balls, and marbles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include block people that represent a range of jobs and cultures. Display (and change) pictures of buildings in the neighborhood.
HOUSE CORNER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include books and magazines. Introduce uses of print (shopping lists, receipts, letter writing, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add telephones, menus, and other items with numbers on them. Participate in play; talk about prices, addresses, times of day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce props such as a stethoscope or binoculars. Model hygiene skills by washing "babies" or dishes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Display props to reflect different themes. Include props related to different kinds of jobs.
TABLE TOYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite children to describe what they are making. Reinforce vocabulary (names of colors, shapes, sizes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide collections for sorting and classifying. Have children extend patterns with color cubes, beads, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about balance and weight as children use table blocks. Ask children to describe color, shape, size, and texture of table toys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create "flip books" that reflect classroom themes. Include or rotate puzzles according to themes addressed in the curriculum.
ART	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite children to dictate stories to go with artwork. Share books about famous artists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use terms of comparison (the blue paint is darker than yesterday). Introduce cookie cutters with playdough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include sensory materials such as paint, playdough, and clay. Use water and brushes for outdoor painting so children can explore evaporation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Display postcards or other reproductions of artwork from various cultures. Encourage children to paint and draw what they see on a field trip.
SAND AND WATER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write letters in the sand. Encourage children to use words to describe how the sand and water feels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide measuring cups, spoons and containers of varied sizes. Ask estimation questions ("how many cups do you think it will take to fill the yellow pitcher"). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a bubble solution and provide different kinds of bubble blowing tools. Put out magnifying glasses so children can examine different kinds of sand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite children to describe roads and tunnels created in the sand. Hang pictures (of rivers, oceans, lakes, and beaches) near water table.

THE BLOCK CENTER

Blocks are standard equipment for early childhood classrooms and they are essential to a fun and creative curriculum. Hollow blocks are ideal for children who wish to build a house, a bus, or fort. Unit blocks provide a wealth of learning activities that allow children to acquire important concepts in math, science, geometry, social studies, and more.

Wooden blocks are naturally appealing to young children because they are smooth, hard, and symmetrical. Children like to explore their physical characteristics by touching them, stroking them, and banging them together to find out how they sound. Wooden blocks are open-ended play materials that allow children to create whatever they desire. There is no right or wrong way to build with blocks-children can create whatever they want. Sometimes children start with an idea of what they want to make; at other times the three-dimensional designs grow as children place blocks together randomly or in patterns. Like other art, the creations children produce with blocks are often reminiscent of things they have seen, and so they will begin to name what they build: house, road, or rocket ship.

Block building is important to cognitive development. As children experience the world around them, they form pictures in their minds of what they see. Playing with blocks gives them an opportunity to recreate these pictures in concrete form. The ability to create these representations are designed in mathematical units, children playing with them acquire a

concrete understanding of the weight as they select, build, and clean up blocks.

Blocks are valuable play materials for physical development. Children use their large muscles to carry blocks from place to place. As they carefully place blocks together to form a bridge or an intricate design, they are refining the small muscles in their hands, which is important for writing tasks later on in life.

The block corner is a place for children to play together and share experiences. One child's idea of how to build a zoo may differ from another's, but children learn to respect different viewpoints and they learn from one another. As children build together, they solve problems and learn the benefits of cooperation.

THE HOUSE CENTER

The house corner is the area of the classroom dedicated to "playing house." The work children do in the house corner is called dramatic play, or make-believe; it involves taking on a role and engaging in intimate behavior. Socio-dramatic play, a higher level of play, incorporates verbal interactions with at least one other person in this play episode.

Children use the house corner to take on roles extending far beyond familiar family scenes. A common theme for dramatic play is the family. Children also act out roles of real and imaginary characters. Dinosaurs and super-hero's can be

found in the house corner just as easily as mummies, daddies, doctors, and storekeepers.

Children love playing “make-believe” we have all seen a child’s delight in acting like a parent, performing super deeds like a TV hero, or being a demanding baby. In fact, children seem to crave this type of activity.

Why is dramatic play so important to young children? As children act out roles in the house corner, they develop many new skills. They learn about themselves, their families, and society around them. Engaging in dramatic play, they collect and draw upon their previous experiences. They learn to judge and select relevant information in order to enact play episodes. This is an essential skill for intellectual development. Children also learn from one another as they interact in socio-dramatic play. They learn to ask and answer questions and to work together to solve problems. They develop the ability to concentrate as they remain in the same play themes for increasing periods of time.

The house corner provides many opportunities for socio-emotional development. Dramatic play offers children a forum in which to act out fears safely and re-live life experiences. Through dramatic play, children can take on roles they fear and learn to control their anxieties. For example, a child who is worried about going to the hospital for an operation can pretend to be the doctor. By assuming the role of the doctor, he can feel “in charge” and act out his impressions of being a doctor. In this way the **child** gains some control over real fears.

Children also learn to be flexible and cooperate with others by negotiating roles and playing together. Knowing how to pretend helps children become better planners. It allows them to anticipate how they will feel and act in certain real-life situations.

Finally, playing in the house corners provides practice in using small motor skills as children put on and take off dress-up clothes. In a well-labeled house corner, children use hand-eye coordination skills and visual discrimination skills as they put away props and materials.

THE MANIPULATIVE CENTER

Manipulatives can be table toys, games, puzzles, and/or collectibles that children can play with at a table or on the floor. They offer children a quiet activity that they can do alone, with a friend, or with a teacher.

Manipulatives are of great value in an early childhood classroom. Children enjoy their variety and versatility. Rich in texture, color, and shape, Manipulatives offer children challenging opportunities to learn new skills. When teachers work with children individually or in small groups, table toys and Manipulative can also serve as excellent teaching tools.

Children grow in all areas of their development as they play with table toys. They develop confidence in their abilities when

they complete a task successfully and use puzzles and other self-correcting toys. Children learn to cooperate with one another by sharing and taking turns as they play a game or build intricate designs.

Manipulatives offer many opportunities for children to experiment with construction and invention. As they build with table blocks or make designs with pattern blocks and parquetry blocks, children use creative problem-solving skills. Table toys offer extensive opportunities for children to work on emerging math skills such as seriation, matching, and classification.

Physical development is enhanced as children practice eye-hand coordination while completing puzzles or placing pegs in a pegboard. As children string beads or construct with interlocking cubes they refine small muscle skills.

The Manipulative area thus provides a setting in which learning is both satisfying and ongoing.

THE ART CENTER

Most young children naturally delight in art. They love the process of applying paint to paper, gluing things together, and pounding a lump of clay. Working with art materials offers children the opportunity to experiment with color, shape, design, and texture. As they engage in art activities, children develop awareness and appreciation of pleasant

sensory experiences-which is the beginning of aesthetic development.

Using art materials such as paint, clay, markers, crayons, cornstarch, and collage materials, children express their individual ideas and feelings. As they view their own creations and those of other children, they learn to value and appreciate differences. For young children, the process of creating is what's important, not what they actually make.

Artwork benefits all aspects of children's development. As children draw, paint, and make collages, they experiment with color, line, shape, and size. They use paints, fabrics, and chalk to make choices, try out ideas, plan, and experiment. They learn about cause and effect when they mix colors through trial and error, they learn how to balance a mobile and weave yarn.

Through their art, children express how they feel, think, and view the world. Art is an outlet that lets children convey what they may not be able to say with words. Involvement with a rich variety of art materials instills confidence and pride.

Art also offers opportunities for physical development. As children tear paper for a collage or use scissors to cut, they refine small muscle movements. Making lines and shapes with markers and crayons helps children develop the fine motor control they will need for writing.

Art is enjoyable and satisfying for young children. It enables them to learn many skills, express themselves, appreciate beauty, and have fun-all at the same time.

What Art Isn't:

Many teachers wonder if coloring books, patterns, and pre-cut models are appropriate methods for enhancing children's art play. In a creative curriculum these materials have no proper place in the preschool or kindergarten classroom. These materials leave little room for imagination, experimentation, individuality, or discovery. They not only inhibit creativity, but can have a negative effect on a child's self-esteem if the child is unable to follow the model.

Many of these materials are frustrating to three-, four-, and five-year olds who don't have the manual dexterity or eye-hand coordination to stay within the lines, to cut along the lines, or to reproduce a model made by an adult. Beyond this when children are given coloring books rather than pieces of blank paper on which to draw, they receive a subtle but powerful message: "We don't think you can draw things of your own design"

Some teachers defend using coloring books or cutting out pre-drawn patterns on the grounds that such activities are good for developing fine motor skills. However, there are many other more developmentally appropriate ways for children to develop these skills in art-for instance, by cutting out their own designs or learning to use glue, tape, a stapler, or a hole punch.. Instead of coloring books and

ditto a creative curriculum recommends that teachers rely on activities that allow children to be creative and individualistic in their art play.

THE SAND / WATER CENTER

Nearly everyone enjoys the relaxing sensations of walking barefoot on a sandy beach or soaking in a warm tub of water. Children, like adults, are almost instinctively drawn to sand and water. The natural attraction that children have for these materials makes them perfect for the early childhood classroom. Because most children are already familiar with these substances, they enjoy exploring them. The refreshing coolness of water against their skin or the sensation of sifting sand through their fingers is hard to resist.

Children's explorations with sand and water naturally help build various skills. By sifting sand and scooping water, children improve their physical dexterity. By joining others in blowing bubbles or making a sand castle, they develop social skills. At the same time, they enhance their cognitive skills as they explore why certain objects sink in water and others float.

Sand and water play can be two separate activities. Each one on its own provides children with many learning opportunities. As a liquid, water can be splashed, poured, and frozen. As a dry solid, sand can be sifted, raked, and shoveled. Playing with each substance separately can be used to foster children's socio-emotional, cognitive, and

physical growth. However, we have combined sand and water play for two reasons. First, sand and water are both natural materials that are pleasurable for children; they encourage similar types of exploration and learning. Second, sand play and water play are enhanced when the two are merged to form a third type of play-wet sand play. You can, of course, use water or sand play as independent activities. However, by housing the two types of play in one area, you can expand the separate benefits of both.

Wet sand play allows children to encounter principles of math and science first hand. When children mix sand with water, they discover that they have changed the properties of both: the dry sand becomes firm and the water is absorbed. The textures of both materials change, too. Unlike dry sand or liquid water, wet sand can be molded. Individually and together, sand and water play can be used effectively to challenge and soothe children's minds and bodies.

THE READING CENTER

The library can be an oasis in the classroom-a place to get away from more active interest areas, relax in a soft environment, and enjoy the wonderful world of literature. When children are read to regularly and encouraged to look through books on their own, to listen to story tapes, and to make up their own stories, they develop the motivation and skills to read and write.

The library may include a writing center and a listening center with tapes, flannel boards, and puppets. This media, along with storytelling by teachers and children, promote literacy skills (reading, writing, and communication). At the same time, the library area facilitates children's progress in other areas of growth and development. In the library, children:

- Expand their imaginations and creativity;
- Learn about the importance of print as a means of communication;
- Gain information and adjust to new experiences by reading and listening to stories on such topics as the birth of a sibling, moving, going to a new school, or visiting the dentist or doctor;
- Learn to deal with difficult events such as being hospitalized, the death of a family member, the death of a pet, divorce, and sibling rivalry;
- Acquire knowledge of science, math, history, health and safety, and famous people;
- Learn about social responsibilities, such as how to be a good friend, how to care for the environment, share, take turns, and how to behave in specific social situations; and
- Become familiar with different literary genres, including stories, poems, rhymes, folk, and fairy tales, and biographies.

Exposure to books and storytelling helps children understand that their feelings, fears, questions, and problems are not unique to them. Acquiring a love for

books is one of the most powerful incentives for children to become readers.

THE MUSIC CENTER

Music naturally delights and moves children. Whether the music is a lively dance tune or a gentle lullaby, even babies feel its force-both emotionally and physically. An infant only two months old will stop squirming at the sound of music, entranced by what she hears. A baby of ten months will rock her body and wave her arms along, and though they may not get the words or the melody right they love to make music. Preschool and kindergarten children move to music and often make up little dances to dramatize songs or events and to express emotions.

Throughout the early childhood years, children are learning to do new things with their bodies. Young children are also learning that movement can communicate messages and represent actions. A thumbs-up sign means everything's okay; bringing an imaginary spoon to the mouth indicates eating. Young children are able to perform and recognize pantomimed actions such as ironing, stirring, swimming, or playing the piano.

Most young children usually are quite at home with movement. They begin to learn about the world by acting on objects and people, and they "sing with their bodies"

well before they sing with words. This is why body movement is not only fun for young children but also a good opportunity for them to solve problems. When you ask questions that call for verbal responses (“can you think of some other ways that Pooh could get up to the honey tree?” or “ What did we do to make applesauce yesterday?”), some children may have difficulty responding in words. But when questions call for movement (“ What are some different ways you can think of to get from this side of the mat to the other?”), children aren’t limited by their verbal abilities. Movement problems challenge children in different ways and help teachers learn about the problem solving and creative abilities of less verbal children.

Singing or chanting can help make routine activities and transitions, such as gathering children in a circle for a group activity, smoother and more enjoyable. And music helps to set a mood. Quiet, soothing music calms and relaxes children, while a lively marching tune rouses them for an energetic clean-up time. Music and movement are also social activities **that** help children feel part of the group.

As children grow in **their** appreciation of the beauty of music and dance, they acquire a gift that will bring them great pleasure. Music brings another dimension of beauty into our lives. An early childhood program that includes time for music and movement provides an outlet for

children's energy and high spirits and benefits their development in a number of ways.

THE COOKING CENTER

Cooking enables children to experience the world of food firsthand. They learn not only how food is prepared but how it contributes to their health and well-being.

Cooking offers children opportunities to experiment with food, to be creative, and to prepare nutritional snacks. It could be considered a "survival skill" that is basic to the education of all boys and girls.

Cooking can be one of the most satisfying activities in the classroom. Not only is food preparation enjoyable, it's also a true laboratory for learning. As children melt cheese, they learn about science. As they measure a cup of milk for pudding recipes, they learn about the measurement and volume. As they stir their peanut butter, knead biscuit dough, and peel carrots, they develop physical skills and increase their vocabularies. Making hummus teaches children about good nutrition and cultural preferences. When they make zucchini muffins for their morning snack, children see a task through the completion and can take pride in their accomplishment. Cooking appeals to children's senses and provides them a wealth of learning opportunities.

One of the most appealing aspects of cooking for children is that it is one of the few activities in which they

are allowed to do the same things that adults do. In the block corner they can make pretend roads and bridges. In the house corner they imagine they are parents, teachers, and doctors. In cooking they have an opportunity to behave just as grown-ups do-a rare treat for children.

READING TO CHILDREN: DO'S AND DON'TS

DO NOT

- Do not attempt to read a book without familiarizing yourself with the story.
- Do not have children sit in a place that is too dark or too bright.
- Do not have children sit in a place near distractions like an animal in a cage or a high traffic area like near a door.
- Do not begin reading the book with no explanation.
- Do not read too fast.
- Do not continue reading when children are talking or distracted.
- Do not hold the book too high, above children's eye level.
- Do not keep the book in one position.
- Do not block the pictures with your hands.
- Do not read in a monotone.
- Do not read without expression on your face or in your voice.
- Do not read the story word-for-word without explanation or involvement from the children.
- Do not end the reading experience without providing a discussion or closure.

DO

- Do familiarize yourself with the story before reading it to the children.
- Do have the children sit together close to the reader.
- Do have the children pay attention.
- Do introduce the book or draw the children in with a short activity or discussion.
- Do hold the book at a child's eye level.
- Do move the book back and forth so all children can see the illustrations.
- Do represent various characters by changing your voice tone and pitch.
- Do change the rhythm and tone of your voice.
- Do ask questions and repeat phrases when appropriate.
- Do end the reading experience by providing a discussion or closure.

