

Using Materials to Support Learning Highlight Video

Narrator: Hello, and welcome to this short presentation on materials to support children's learning. This session is one in a series of presentations on well-organized and well managed classrooms. Learn how to select and use materials and toys that can enhance children's participation and learning.

Materials to support learning fits into the foundation of our house. The house framework is a way to illustrate the important practices that support school readiness for all children. The foundation of the house and the foundational teaching practices are effective and engaging interactions and environments. The other parts of the house are the pillars -- research-based curricula and teaching practices and ongoing child assessment -- and the roof -- highly individualized teaching and learning. All the parts of the house interact with each other and are essential for effective everyday practice for all children.

The various materials and toys that are available to children in their classrooms can be used to great advantage. Interesting materials invite children to poke and prod, study and speculate, and participate in a variety of ways that maximize their learning. Interesting materials provoke children's curiosity and allow them to explore, manipulate, extend, and expand their learning. Teachers choose and display materials that are both interesting to children and connected to the children's learning goals.

Let's look at three guidelines for selecting and using materials in early childhood classrooms. Select materials that are engaging, materials that capture children's attention. Select materials that promote social interaction with peers. And arrange materials to promote independence.

Let's start with materials that engage children in learning. Engagement refers to the time that children spend interacting appropriately with their environments. Think about some of the features of materials that attract children's attention. Materials are attractive. They have pleasing colors, shapes, and sounds. They contribute. The materials are likely to contribute to children's development and learning, by creating just enough challenge to encourage children to do and think a little more. They are culturally appropriate. The materials look familiar to the children and they represent the diversity of the classroom and community. They are open-ended. Some materials can be explored and used in a variety of ways.

Teacher: Three, four, five...

Narrator: Another guideline that teachers can use in selecting materials is to look for materials that support interactions with other children. Look for materials that invite children to play together and learn from each other.

Teacher: Logan and Robbie are coming in for some lunch, Kaylie. What did you make them?

Narrator: Teachers often help create and plan opportunities for peer interactions, but remember that the materials can lend themselves to many back-and-forth exchanges and cooperative play.

Girl: Come on, let's go!

Narrator: Here's the third guideline. Teachers arrange materials to promote independence. How the materials are organized and presented can spark the children's interest, and it can also help children understand how to use the materials more independently. There are lots of ways that teachers arrange materials to promote independence. They display the materials in an orderly way using labels and containers. They place the materials within children's view and within their reach. Children see what their choices are. Teachers rotate materials once in a while to maintain children's interests. Not everything needs to be available all the time. Or, trade with the teacher next door to increase the novelty of the materials. Teachers use materials that are durable and safe, so that they will last for a while and resist the wear and tear of active children. Choosing materials and then setting them out to see how children use them is often a fun part of teaching.

Let's hear from some teachers.

Heather Floyd: The first thing I think about is what my children are interested in. Very beginning of the school year, that's based on parent feedback and what I've noticed the kids playing with in their homes. But as the year progresses, then I can start to really tweak it to individualize for the children.

Noreen Stoutt: We have the Legos for building; we have the tracks on the shelf; we have the cars; we have the traffic signs; we have houses to build with; we have community helpers such as the firemen, the policemen. We allow everybody to just be a part of the group.

Girl: Hey, I need this one. [Girls laugh]

Elidia Toledo: But it's pretty much set where they can just come and get materials and work on their own, and our role in here is just to encourage.

Myra O'Leary: Want to try shaking yours? How do you make this work? You know, so much variety, I think -- if you want children to be creative and you want to have children be visionaries and think outside the box, you have to promote that.

Narrator: In this presentation on materials to support learning, we learned about: Selecting materials to engage children in learning, selecting materials to promote social interaction with peers, and arranging materials to support children's learning and growing independence. Have fun selecting and using materials in your own classroom or program.

Learn more in our longer in-service on materials to support learning. Check out our tips, tools, and helpful resources.

Thank you for listening.