V

The Classroom Environment

CREATING THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT:

As you look at creating a classroom environment that is developmentally appropriate, engaging, exciting and inclusive, first consider…

THE "Seven Principles of Universal Design"
https://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/presentations-and-webinars/ConnPowersBTJ(1).pdf

1. **Equitable Use**: All children can use the same materials and spaces, including children with disabilities. For example, wider openings to a center allow a child in a wheelchair to enter easily. There are table easels for all children, not only the child who needs one.
2. **Flexible Use**: Children use the same materials and curriculum is consistent, but materials and curriculum are adapted so children of varying levels and abilities can successfully learn. There is more than one way to manipulate materials. For example, different types of scissors accommodate differing abilities and right/left-handed.
3. **Simple**: The design of the space is easy to understand. Materials have a place in the classroom or on the playground, and they are labeled with a word and picture. (Words can be viewed in different languages to represent the children in the class)
4. **Perceptible Information**: The spaces provide information in more than one way (visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
5. **Tolerance for error**: There is enough variety to minimize frustration. For example, there are different sized blocks and different sizes and quantities of puzzle pieces to acknowledge varying hand and grip size and strength.
6. **Low Physical Effort**: Toilets, sinks, climbing apparatus are easy to maneuver for children with and without handicaps.
7. **Size and Space for Approach**: There are wide openings for easy accessibility. There is furniture and space for a child to sit or stand in an area.

Think about…

Switching it up (Move the furniture mid-year, create new spaces, create new centers)
Rotating Bulletin Boards (Keep displays current, post some things at children's eye level, include child's name and date, include learning experience)
Materials have more than one use (paint brushes can be used for painting or brushing sand)
Moving the location of a toy creates a new learning experience (small blocks on a table or on the floor or inside a tent, writing materials at a table or at the easel)
Community Boards (show events for families with young children)
Family Photos (celebrate diversity, encourage conversations)

The **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT** plays a central role in encouraging positive behavior. The classroom for young children should be predictable and orderly, inviting and interesting, and set up so children of varying abilities can successfully navigate the environment.

Some things to consider regarding the **indoor physical environment**:

	yes	no
PHYSICAL		
The environment is safe, healthy and sanitary and in compliance with state licensing requirements and fire safety codes (See OEC Safety Regulations https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/centers_statsregs.pdf and NAEYC Sanitary Regulations https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/accreditation/early-learning/clean_table.pdf		
The areas in the classroom have clearly defined physical boundaries (signs with pictures, furniture, pathways)		
The children can be monitored by sight and sound from various places in the room (no blind spots)		
The classroom does not have large open areas which encourage running.		
Children and adults can move easily throughout classroom.		
Visual clues are posted to encourage positive behavior (posters showing how to sit in circle, signs with number of children per center)		
Spaces are available for individuals, small groups and large groups		
Classroom expectations are illustrated and posted at child eye level (child eating at table, children hand washing, stop sign at a door)		
Open containers labeled with words and pictures give children a variety of choices and promote independence		
There are materials available in languages which represent the children in the class		
Some areas are created from the children's ideas		
There is storage space for children and staff personal items		
There is a balance of high and low, large and small workspaces		
There is a designated parent area for sharing information and ideas		
A variety of materials encourage critical thinking		
Materials appeal to range of learning styles. (visual, auditory, kinesthetic)		
Containers of materials are labeled with words and illustrations		
There are books and writing materials in multiple areas (pencils in science center with science books)		
SENSORY		
The classroom temperature is comfortable (not too hot or too cold—near 68* F)		
Lighting is appropriate. Children and staff can easily see without over brightness.		
"Touches of home" like pillows in a book corner create sense of comfort		
There is a balance of soft and hard materials and workspaces		
A small, cozy space exists where a child can calm down and seek comfort		
Items are available to preserve personal space (carpet squares)		
Classroom is visually stimulating without being over-stimulating!		

The **OUTDOOR PLAY ENVIRONMENT** plays a central role in encouraging the development of physical skills, social skills and executive functioning skills. Young children are adventurous, social explorers constantly on the move. They need to run and jump and play. Fresh air and the ability to move freely encourages children to appreciate the environment and to lead healthy lives.

Some things to consider regarding the **outdoor play environment**:

	YES	NO
PHYSICAL		
The areas in the outdoor play space have clearly defined physical boundaries. Fence around entire playground. Play and climbing equipment define areas and create adequate spaces to move and explore.		
Equipment is developmentally appropriate and well maintained		
Running space is free from tripping hazards		
The outdoor space has toys which encourage individual and cooperative play (climbing, running, playing games with rules)		
The play space encourages children to experiment with speed, directionality, and other large-muscle movements		
The outdoor play space encourages children to interact with nature		
The outdoor play area has equipment of varying size, height, complexity but remains safe for all ages, developmental levels		
In addition to climbing equipment, additional play materials promote literacy, science, math and the arts		
SENSORY		
The play area has balance of sensory experiences (ie. opportunity for sand, water, variety of surfaces and outdoor toys)		
There is a balance of wide-open spaces and smaller play spaces (places to rest) which address a variety of senses		
There are shady areas for comfort created naturally (nature) or by tenting		

The **DAILY SCHEDULE** is important. The predictability of knowing what comes next helps young children to feel secure, which makes them more relaxed and cooperative. Predictability also gives the young child a sense of control and encourages them to develop a sense of independence.

Young children tell time differently than we do. They "tell time" by knowing what comes next. We are asked daily "When do we have snack? When do we go outside? For some children, the preoccupation with the question "When is Mommy coming?" limits the child's ability to participate.

Therefore, the daily schedule should be clear, consistent and predictable, with established routines for transitions between activities and spaces in the classroom. Post your daily schedule, in a left to right sequence, with clear pictures of the activities. Encourage children to look at the "picture schedule" often in order to predict what comes next in the day.

Some things to consider regarding the schedule:

	YES	NO
Daily activity schedule is posted with words and illustrations		
The schedule considers the developmental level of children and balances active and quiet activities		
The schedule balances small group and large group activities		
The schedule balances teacher-directed and child-directed activities		
Mealtimes and snack times are adequately spaced		
The schedule allows for flexibility and change		
The schedule allows blocks of time for children to become deeply involved in one activity		
Children are given a warning before transitions		
Children are provided with more than a verbal direction to indicate a transition (ring bell, flip light switch)		
Time for transitions is planned in the schedule		
The daily schedule and learning experiences are reflective of the children's interests, skills, knowledge and backgrounds		

Observe, Assess and Make Changes to the Daily Schedule as needed!!
The Daily Schedule is NEVER set-in stone.

The **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT** and **CURRICULUM** should be developmentally appropriate, engaging, inviting, exciting, respectful of diversity.

Refer to DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES section of this book and CT ELDs for developmentally appropriate learning strands, Birth – 5 yrs.
https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CT-ELDS-Supplement-Domains-and-Strands.pdf

Some things to consider regarding the learning environment:

	YES	NO
Noise level is moderate		
Adult voices do not dominate		
Number of children in centers is optimal for learning and not overcrowded		
Children are supported in utilizing positive peer interactions		
Teachers use positive guidance and reinforcement for behaviors		
Staff are aware of the activities of the entire group even when dealing with a smaller group.		
Staff scaffold learning through meaningful conversations with children as they engage in activities		
Learning styles are respected- Children stand or sit to eat, children sit on floor or on chairs during large groups		
Staff utilize peer models to emphasize rules, sharing and turn taking, conflict resolution and social expectations. Praise positive efforts.		
When you view the room, children and staff transition easily from space to space		
When you view the room, children and staff transition easily from activity to activity		
When you view the room, children are engaged in play and learning		
When you view the room, staff are focused on children (either direct involvement and engagement or conducting formal observation or assessment) who are engaged in play and learning.		

*You will find more information on Curriculum in the next section of this guide.

QUALITY INFANT AND TODDLER ENVIRONMENTS

Safety

Safe environments have developmentally appropriate equipment (babies and toddlers can crawl and climb without getting hurt), non-slip floors, stable shelving and furniture. Safe set of steps for toddlers to reach the changing table.

Health

Areas are kept clean, diapering area separated from other areas, clean floors and surfaces for crawling and exploring. Wash bin for collecting toys that need sanitizing.

Comfort:

Natural lighting, steady flow of air, natural coloring, soft cushions (to support adults on floor) all add to comfort of infant and toddler space. Area rugs for crawling. Reduced clutter provides comfortable movement throughout room. Provide adult size chairs/rocking chair for staff to comfort or rock a child.

Convenience

Little children and teachers can easily access materials and move around room space. Group materials logically. Since infants and toddlers can't read, pictures are important and grouping materials together that make sense will add to convenience of room layout.

Child Size Space

Infants and toddlers should be able to reach, sit, play and work without asking for adult assistance. They can explore what interests them independently, without staff worrying about them getting hurt. Small, low tables, chairs and shelving are safe and encourage independence. Place mirrors and pictures at child height.

Movement

Since they use their whole bodies to discover and process the world, infants and toddlers need an area which encourages movement. Slopes, low steps, play pits and platforms create a safe, multiple level environment which encourages the development of gross motor skills. Surfaces with a variety of textures enhance sensory exploration.

Choice

The environment should allow infants and toddlers to make choices between active and quiet play, small group and individual play. Provide equipment that balances challenge and comfort, which provides a stimulating learning environment.

WHEN THERE IS CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

ENVIRONMENT

Noise – Too loud?
Crowding – Too close?
Visuals – Too Stimulating?
Temperature – Too hot or too cold?
Space – Adequate for quiet play, individual or small group?

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Consistent Routines
Consistent Rules
Smooth Transitions
Balance of physical activity and quiet activity
Balance of small group, large group, individual play
Balanced daily schedule, including mealtimes

CURRICULUM

Balance of Teacher Directed vs Child Directed
Developmentally Appropriate, considering wide range of development
Reflective of Children's Interests, Backgrounds
Balance of Center time learning vs. Circle time learning

Curriculum, Intentional Teaching and Lesson Plans

Curriculum

Curriculum is what you want children to learn and how you plan to achieve these goals. High Quality Curriculum can vary from setting to setting. However, all quality curriculum considers first what children should know and integrates developmentally appropriate learning experiences that address a wide range of abilities. (See Development sections of this guide).

The CT ELDs describes what children, birth to 5 years, should know and be able to do. This document outlines the learning domains and standards which provide a foundation for planning curriculum. It is **not** the curriculum itself, but it provides the benchmarks (also referred to as learning domains or learning strands) which should be addressed through lesson plans, materials and interactions.

- The CT Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS)
  https://www.ctoec.org/connecticut-early-learning-and-development-standards-ct-elds/

Along with learning goals, quality curriculum addresses the teacher's role in supporting children's growth and the needs and interests of groups of children and individual children. High quality curriculum considers how children will be assessed for learning and also how families will be engaged. High quality curriculum is:

1. **Intentional**: All aspects of the curriculum are purposeful and planned with specific learning and developmental outcomes of children and families in mind. (Intentional Teaching is explained next in detail)
2. **Responsive**: Programs and staff respond to the changing social- emotional, academic, physical and/or cultural needs of the children and families they serve.
3. **Reflective**: Staff engage in ongoing, thoughtful consideration and make changes in order to best meet the needs of the children and families they serve.

**From "Supporting All Children Using the Connecticut Early Learning & Development Standards: Building Meaningful Curriculum" (CT OEC, 2015)

CURRICULUM AND PLAY!!

A high quality, meaningful curriculum emphasizes the importance of play. Research shows that play enhances all areas of development. Play supports cooperation, sharing of ideas, communication, problem solving, risk taking, imagination, independence, concentration, critical thinking, listening, rule following, flexibility, and cognition. Be sure to evaluate how much "play time" you incorporate into the infant's, toddler's and preschooler's day!

There are many resources to assist with planning a developmentally appropriate, high quality curriculum for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

The following resources from NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) address curriculum for infants, toddlers and preschoolers:

https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/high-quality-program-for-infant

https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/what-does-high-quality-program-for-toddler-look-like

https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/high-quality-program-for-preschooler

There are also several resources that provide actual curriculum for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. There is a cost for some of these which are listed here:

- The Creative Curriculum
    - https://teachingstrategies.com/product/the-creative-curriculum-for-preschool/
- High Scope Curriculum
    - https://highscope.org/hs-curriculum/

Whichever curriculum you use, or if you create your own, remember the fundamentals are the same. The content and experiences intentionally address and support several developmental domains. Learning experiences are not considered in isolation but built by incorporating the child's abilities and interests across several domains. While it may be appropriate to plan experiences that focus on a particular idea, topic or learning strand, meaningful experiences usually cut across multiple domains and content areas. A meaningful curriculum is integrated so that learning experiences encompass many developmental domains and/or content areas.

INTENTIONAL TEACHING

Intentional teaching refers to the way a teacher intentionally plans the curriculum so that children have a variety of ways to explore their world and share their discoveries. The activities are intentionally planned by the teacher and incorporate all areas of the curriculum. The planning is thoughtful, purposeful and deliberate. The teacher considers the wide span of development, the children's interests, the environment and the materials.

The intentional teacher is engaged in the child's experiences. The teacher

OBSERVES

FACILITATES

ENCOURAGES

QUESTIONS

CHALLENGES

MODELS

DEMONSTRATES

ASSESSES

RESPONDS

to the child's learning to help the infant, toddler or preschooler develop new skills and reach new levels of competence.

More information on Intentional Teaching can be found at:

National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2018/observing-planning-guiding

"Supporting All Children Using the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards"
https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CT-ELDS-Supplement-Domains-and-Strands.pdf

Lesson Plans

Lesson Plans help to outline how goals and objectives for children's learning will be met. They provide a road map which helps teachers to differentiate and plan for the various ability levels and needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers in the classroom. Written lesson plans help to organize thoughts, to remember key elements and to identify necessary materials. Lesson plans also help teachers to scaffold learning by identifying the next steps in learning experiences. Teachers also use lesson plans to communicate with parents and to engage families in their child's learning.

There are many resources available to assist teachers with creating lesson plans to support children's learning and developmental outcomes. Besides the many developmental sections in this guide, some of these resources include:

- Supporting All Children Using the Connecticut Early Learning & Development Standards: **Building Meaningful Curriculum**
  - https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CT-ELDS-Supplement-Meaningful-Curriculum.pdf

- Supporting All Children Using the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards: **A Guide to Domains and Strands**
  - https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CT-ELDS-Supplement-Domains-and-Strands.pdf

- Writing Effective Lesson Plans for Early Childhood Classrooms
  - https://www.continued.com/early-childhood-education/articles/writing-effective-lesson-plans-for-23270

- Observing, Planning, Guiding, How an Intentional Teacher Meets Standards Through Play
  - https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2018/observing-planning-guiding

Creating the Lesson Plan

When creating lesson plans, consider:

- What domains are represented in your learning goals?
- Lessons and experiences can be daily, weekly or spanning several weeks. Remember, learning is ongoing.
- Learning activities should be:
    - Developmentally appropriate- responsive to range of needs
    - Relevant and meaningful to children in your center
    - Able to engage children in hands on, higher order thinking
    - Universal for children regardless of background and ability

Complete the lesson plan across the curriculum

- What key knowledge will children acquire?
- What teacher directed and child directed experiences will you provide?
- What small and large group activities will you provide?
- Adequate Play?? Adequate time for movement?

Consider home school connection

- How can you involve families in learning?
- How can lesson plan be a communication tool for families?

Changes to the Environment

- What materials do you need?
- Will you make changes to scaffold learning or to address individual needs?
- How can you involve children in decisions about the environment?

Observations and Assessments

- How do you assess learning?
- What modifications will you make based on learning?
- How will you evaluate success?
- How do you scaffold learning based on observation results?

The following pages provide examples of lesson planning forms. There are many ways to plan lessons. Use these or create one that works for you!

Lesson Plan Guide

Objectives/Learning Goals/Learning Strands

_____

Topics Explored_____

Age Group _____

LANGUAGE & LITERATURE	
DRAMATIC PLAY	
BLOCK PLAY	
MATH	
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY	
PROCESS ART & SENSORY	
MUSIC	
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL	
HEALTH & WELLNESS	
GROSS MOTOR	
MANIPULATIVES-FINE MOTOR	

TEACHER DIRECTED ACTIVITIES	CHILD DIRECTED ACTIVITIES
LARGE GROUP ACTIVITIES	SMALL GROUP & INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

CHANGES/MODIFICATIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENT INCLUDE:

HOME SCHOOL CONNECTION:

ASSESSMENTS TO LEARNING INCLUDE:

SCAFFOLD- EXTEND LEARNING BY: