

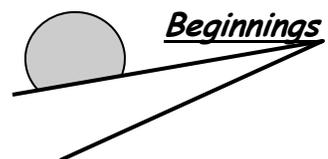
# Creating Beautiful Environments for Children

*Beginnings* 2007-2008 (2)

Arkansas Department of Human Services

Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, Little Rock, AR

School of Human Environmental Sciences, 1 U of A, Fayetteville, AR

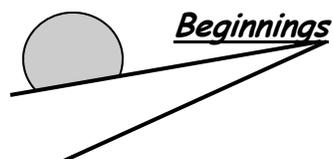


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*"Children are miracles. Believing that every child is a miracle can transform the way we design for children's care. When we invite a miracle into our lives, we prepare ourselves and the environment around us. We may set out flowers or special offerings. We may cleanse ourselves, the space, or our thoughts of everything but the love inside us. We make it our job to create, with reverence and gratitude, a space that is worthy of a miracle! Action follows thought. We can choose to change. We choose to design spaces for miracles, not minimums." p.13*  
*—Anita Rui Olds, 1999*

## *What Makes a Beautiful Classroom?*

### Physical Beauty

- A variety of textures, shapes, and colors
- Soft elements
- Creative spaces
- Materials that are well cared for
- Nature
- Touches from home

### Environmental Beauty

- Acceptance and support
- Empathy
- Love and respect

*"No building ever feels right to the people in it unless the physical spaces (defined by columns, walls, and ceilings) are congruent with the social spaces (defined by activities and human groups)." p.137*

*—Christopher Alexander*

Olds, A. (2001). *Child care design guide*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill

## Personal Elements Home Away From Home

When adding personal elements to your classroom,  
you are making connections between home and school for children.

**Family Photos-** framed, displayed, photo panels

**Comfortable Seating-** for both adults and children

**Soft Elements-** cloth, pillows

**Beyond Plastic-** think about wood, rocks, metal, fabric

**Lighting-** lamps, lower wattage bulbs, dimmers

**Bringing the Outdoors Indoors-** house plants, flower arrangements

**Flexibility-** opportunity to make choices, go where they need to go- another learning center, bathroom, etc.

\*\*\*\*\*Project Idea\*\*\*\*\*

The children at the University of Arkansas Nursery School investigated what was in their environment. Letters were sent home with parents, asking them to explore two rooms in their home to examine environmental elements that were in their home. Then the children examined environmental elements at their school. The children were able to investigate all aspects of the Nursery School. They even went to the basement and in the kitchen (all appliance's turned off, of course). The children carried clipboards to draw what they saw during their exploration of the grounds. When they had additional questions about the school, community experts were called in. The children thought that there were toys and treasures in the attic above the ceiling tiles. The teachers called the University of Arkansas's Facilities Management to help resolve the mystery. Facilities Management removed one of the ceiling tiles for the children to see that there were no treasures in the attic. The children were able to find out that some items were the same/different in their home and at their school.

## Color in the Classroom

Color in our environment is very important. Colors can affect our mood, thoughts, and feelings. Children are no exception to the effects of color, so keep that in mind when choosing colors of walls, toys, and furniture. Typically, different colors can illicit different feelings. Here are the basics of color moods.

### Red

*Energizing*  
*Exciting*  
*Stimulating*  
*Intense*  
**Suggestion:** *Use sparingly*

### Blue

*Calming*  
*Relaxing*  
*Serene*  
**Suggestion:** *Use extensively in certain areas- reading room, nap mats, etc*

### Yellow

*Welcoming*  
*Uplifting*  
*Energizing*  
*Happiness*  
**Suggestion:** *Can be exhausting to the eyes; use sparingly*

*According to the website below, babies tend to cry more in a yellow room.*

### Green

*Pleasant*  
*Relaxing*  
*Comforting*  
*Warmth*  
**Suggestion:** *Easy on the eyes, consider using in the entrance*

Source:

<http://freshome.com/2007/04/17/room-color-and-how-it-affects-your-mood/>

## Remember Your Own Favorite Places to Play

- Dress-up in your Mom's closet- Create the perfect dramatic play area with adult clothes. They may be oversized, but the children will still love to pretend to be Mommy and Daddy.
- The mud pit in the backyard- Create your own mud pit with a plastic swimming pool, some dirt, and water. Let the fun begin! Watch young children closely to make sure the dirt is not eaten.
- Drawing on the kitchen table- Part of the fun of drawing on the kitchen table was the lighting. Most kitchen tables are near natural lighting, so set up the art table near a window.
- Playing "pretend" with friends- We all love playing with friends! Indoors or outdoors children love to play dramatic play. Remember that the simplest items can become great pretend tools.  
Paper towel rolls become a telescope or shiny pebbles become hidden treasure!
- Climbing the tree at the park- This is best done with parents, so have a family picnic near many climbing trees. Safety is key when climbing trees.
- Splashing in the creek at Grandpa's- No matter how difficult, try to offer water outside when the weather is appropriate. Always wear water shoes!

### *Additional ways to gain the perspective of children*

- **Get down on your hands and knees**- literally walk around your classroom on your hands and knees to gain the height perspective of your children.
- **Observation is key**- frequently observe children in different play settings. Observe and record how many children play or would like to play at the sandbox or in dramatic play. Modify particular areas based on what you find.
- **Just ask**- Involve the children in changing the environment of the classroom by asking their opinion. If you ask, you may find out information such as, many children say, "We don't like the music center near the block center."

## Room Arrangements

Consider the following suggestions when rearranging an early childhood classroom

- Place the block area away from heavy traffic
- Place the art center near a water source
- Consider a separate area for the reading center- hang fabric and add pillows to the area for soft touches
- Use furniture to designate traffic paths and room dividers
- Try to create smaller spaces in larger rooms- create a separate area by hanging fabric or beads from the ceiling
- If pressed for space, multiuse areas- for example, the cooking area can be in the science center sometimes
- Place the potentially messy centers (art, science, cooking, etc.) on washable surfaces.
- The reading and dramatic play centers should be on carpet or an area rug. The cloth will absorb some of the noise and be more cozy.
- An alone space is a must. Form nooks by moving furniture.
- Loft spaces should be planned with care. When a loft is placed near dramatic play, the children will incorporate the equipment into their play.

# Language Arts

*Children use their prior knowledge of books read as well as play skills to pretend, or act out a familiar story, and relive the joy of literacy. Set up opportunities for revisiting stories by placing props in the literacy area. Use stuffed animals, blocks, flannel pieces, containers, and anything that will spark the children's interests in retelling a story.*

***How can you encourage children to re-enact stories?***

- *Provide a place to display books and props.*
- *Place mats and other soft, colorful items in the center.*
- *Include baskets to hold items for the stories.*
- *Add stuffed animals, plastic toys, and any prop that can be fashioned into an important part of the drama. It doesn't have to be exact or a perfect replica.*
- *Carefully select books.*
- *Allow time to explore the materials.*
- *Make sure there are pillows or rugs for other children to sit and enjoy the re-enactment.*

## Books and Props

*Goldilocks and the Three Bears* by Paul Galdone.

- Small doll
- 3 sizes of bears, bowls, chairs, and beds (Use doll house pieces and unit blocks to make the furniture.)

*The Three Billy Goats Gruff* by Paul Galdone.

- Blocks to make a bridge
- 3 sizes of billy goats (stuffed or small plastic figures)
- Small toy figure to be the troll (Add a small flannel hat to any figure.)

Modify this story by using less powerful words. Change the ending by asking the children how they could solve the problem without hurting one another. For example, the troll needs a friend or the goats help him find something else to eat.

*Old Black Fly* by Jim Aylesworth.

- Large plastic black fly (As the children turn the pages of the story, make the fly land on each item on the page.)
- Cardboard or plastic magnetic letters. (Added bonus, this book is an alphabet book.)

*The Kissing Hand and A Pocket Full of Kisses* by Audrey Penn.

- Small woods animals or stuffed animals (Both of these books are easy for children to retell using props. These books are about emotions so stuffed animals add to the children's sense of security and well being as they explore their own emotions.)
- Heart stickers or construction paper hearts

**Benchmark 2.1:** Shows creativity and imagination in play with materials and props

# Book Reviews

*Earl the Squirrel*  
By Don Freeman  
(Author of *Corduroy*)

Young Earl the Squirrel is trying to learn life lessons about gathering acorns and being responsible. One morning he receives a beautiful *scarlet* scarf as a gift from a human friend named Jill. The scarlet scarf helps him to find many acorns. During his acorn hunting adventure he learns some responsibility lessons. The illustrations are simple black and white, pen and ink drawings, with a touch of red for the scarf.

**Activity:**

Offer children white paper and black pens with various points-fine to heavy. They may be inspired by the *Earl the Squirrel* illustrations and want an additional color, like the scarlet in the story.

**Benchmark 4.8:** Uses writing and drawing tools with control and intention

Freeman, D. (2005). *Earl the squirrel*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

***A Kiss Goodbye***  
**By Audrey Penn**  
**Illustrated by Barbara L. Gibson**

*A Kiss Goodbye* is another sweet story about Chester the raccoon. Chester is sad because the tree that he has lived in all his life is being cut down, and he and his family have to move to a new tree. Like always, Chester does not like the idea of changing what he already knows but ends up finding a special surprise at the new tree.

**Activity:**

Plant a tree. Since Chester's tree has been cut down, have the class plant a "Chester tree." The children will love to watch it grow as they grow throughout the years.

**Benchmark 1.12:** Demonstrates interest and participates in classroom activities

Penn, A. (2007). *A kiss goodbye*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

***When Sheep Sleep***  
**By Laura Numeroff**  
**Illustrated by David McPhail**

A story for every age! A child is having trouble sleeping, so she begins to count sheep. The sheep are asleep though! She then tries to count deer, cows, pigs, puppies, birds, cats, bears, and rabbits- all of which are asleep, too. In the end she is so exhausted trying to count the animals, she falls sound asleep.

**Activity:**

While reading this book, turn down the lights, offer the children pillows and blankets, and read very quietly. The children will enjoy pretending to sleep with the animals.

**Benchmark 3.17:** Show understanding of different relationships of objects in space (spatial relations)

Numeroff, L. (2006). *When sheep sleep*. New York, NY: Abrams Books

# Dramatic Play

*In our quest for safe, orderly classroom with lots of materials, learning centers, and toys, we sometimes forget about beauty in the classroom. Children deserve to have a beautiful classroom environment. Too often classrooms are filled with look-alike plastic toys, vivid primary colors and florescent lighting. A harsh environment can negatively affect behaviors. Improving classroom acoustics and adding softness and beauty to the classroom can improve some behaviors. A classroom containing many elements of beauty is much more pleasant for the adults in the room as well.*

Dramatic play is the perfect place to add beauty to the classroom.

Try to collect some of the following to make your dramatic play center more inviting:

- **Children's art** or art posters framed and hanging on wall
- A **pretty tablecloth** on the table; cloth napkins (easy to find at a garage sale)
- A **real plant** or perhaps herbs
- "**Authentic**" materials- empty spice containers that the children can still smell, real potholders, small pots and pans
- **Baskets** rather than plastic containers to hold pretend food, dishes, etc.
- A basket with a pillow, blanket, and bottle for each **baby doll**.
- **Mirror** on the wall or small unbreakable mirror for children to use
- **Wooden furniture**
- A framed **group picture** of children and teachers in the class
- **Scarves** in a variety of colors
- An **element of surprise**- a vase of flowers, music playing, a teacher in costume- all can add beauty and interest to a dramatic play center

## **A Page of Prop Boxes**

### **Convenient boxes of dramatic play themes**

- **Restaurant**- pretend foods, menus from local restaurants, paper flowers or other decorations, cookbooks, soft music
  
- **Formal tea party**- hats, gloves, vase with flowers (real or pretty synthetic ones), white tablecloth, cloth napkins, pretty tea set, pretend cakes and cookies on pretty tray
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Library**- books with cards taped inside, date stamper, pretend library card for each child, book bags, magazines, book posters on the wall. Children take turns being librarian and stamping card inside book, while others use library card to check out books
  
- **Bus ride**- chairs (use classroom chairs), steering wheel (real or paper), money, tickets (small pieces of paper), babies, ties, vests, dresses, dress shoes
  
- **Post Office**- messenger bag, paper, envelopes, stamps/ stickers, pencils, mailbox, blue, button-down shirt
  
- **Construction site**- hard hats, tool belts, aprons, tools, legal pad, pencil, large blocks
  
- **Nature watch**- binoculars, stuffed/ plastic animals, camouflage or tan clothing, small notebooks, pencils, houseplants (or even house trees), field guide books of birds, insects, trees and plants

**Benchmark 2.3:** Assumes various roles in dramatic play situations

# Creative Arts

*A beautiful and inviting art studio area can be an inspiration for young artists. They will be gaining an appreciation of beautiful objects, and being exposed to inviting spaces, intriguing colors as well as various shapes and forms. Such experiences help ensure that children will grow into adults who appreciate the beauty that is found in our world.*

## **Items to Bring Into the Art Center**

*Consider adding or rotating some of the following items to the art center.*

Streamers or swatches of fabrics in different textures and colors  
Hang some from the ceiling

Display a variety of artwork from featured artists (in addition to the children's artwork)

A variety of rocks, pebbles, shells, and other natural items

Shiny objects such as translucent plastics. Sparkly things are almost always a hit

Prisms and a variety of light sources

Does “a beautiful and inviting art studio” sound like a fairy tale? Is the art center one of the dismal areas that is slated to be organized and revamped sometime in the future, but the future never comes? Do you find the frequent paint spills, sticky glue residue and overflowing boxes of supplies frustrate you when you have to clean up? **If so, face this problem by consider using some of the following tips.**

**Evaluate your location:**

Is the art area away from the main traffic flow?

Is a water source close at hand?

Is the floor covering easily cleaned?

**Organize materials and supplies:**

Keep it simple—too many materials can be confusing.

Organize materials, label them and keep some of them accessible to children.

Rotate beautiful items and accessories for children to use in their artwork. Crystals, rocks, and shells are examples. Unusual, texture-rich fabrics can be displayed as well.

**Display artwork** from famous artists and from children.  
(old calendars that feature artists are a good source)

Make sure that the area is **well-lighted**. A spot light on a featured artwork adds to its importance.

Keep **clean-up materials handy** and teach children to clean up their materials and workspace.

Include **photo albums and magazines** for cutting and pasting and to generate conversation about art.

Set up a **sculpture area** where clay creations and constructions can be kept up and added to for a few days.

**Capture the light! Make SUNCATCHERS**

*Light is fascinating. Create some suncatchers, hang in a sunny window and enjoy the changing light show.*

**Materials**

Old crayons

Waxed paper

Old towels or newspapers

Iron (adults only!)

Small pencil sharpeners

Peel the paper from old crayons. Fold a piece of waxed paper. Let children "sharpen" the crayon, allowing the shavings to fall on the waxed paper. When the desired colors have been added, close the fold, Place on newspapers or old towels, cover with newspaper. Use warm iron to melt the crayons. The colors change almost instantly. Cool and cut into whimsical shapes. Make a hole with hole puncher and add ribbon or yarn. Hang in a sunny window. . . enjoy!

**Variations for suncatchers—**

In addition to, or instead of, using crayon shavings, place small leaves, flowers, glitter, bits of ribbons, etc. inside the waxed paper or contact paper.

Cut into a variety of shapes. Encourage children to help select what to add and what color of yarn or ribbon should be used to hang it.

## Beautiful Tile Mosaics

Nothing brings out the “oohs” and “aahs” than bright, shiny pieces of plastic or glass. These simple tiles can be displayed individually or assembled into a larger design.

### Materials:

6"x6" ceramic tiles (available from samples at building supply stores or from parents, friends, who have some left over from projects.)

Assortment of shiny, glittery objects (buttons, tiles, fish gravel for aquariums, etc.)

School glue

If possible, display books and/or posters that feature tile mosaics. Place one or two tiles in the interest center with available pieces and let children experiment placing items without gluing. Then, . . .distribute the tiles shiny pieces, and glue. Glue items to tile. Let children create their own designs. Suggestions can include — borders, center point or interest. Older children may want to create animals, flowers, or other figures based on realism.

## Enjoy the Colors

*This simple painting experience will help children notice colors that famous artists have used in their paintings.*

### Materials

Copies of famous paintings

Tempera paint

Brushes

Encourage the children to look at selected painting. What colors do they see? Identify three or four colors. For example, Van Gogh's "Starry Night" is primarily blue, yellow and black. Note that some colors have white and black added to make them look different. After looking and talking about the selected painting, allow the children to paint using the identified colors. Do not suggest that they “copy” the paintings; just thinking about color is enough.

# Poems & Fingerplays

It seems that when a fingerplay is most needed is during transition time. Does your mind often go blank during those difficult times? Well to make life a little easier, consider posting classroom fingerplay favorites on the walls. Mat the songs with pretty paper, laminate them, or even add pictures of the hand movements. The children will enjoy seeing these and singing along.

## Home Sweet Home

A nest is a home for a robin; (cup hands to form a nest)

A hive is a home for a bee; (turn cupped hands over)

A hole is a home for a rabbit; (make a hole with hands)

And a house is a home for me. (make roof with peaked hands)

## Trees

Elm trees stretch and stretch so wide,  
Their limbs reach out on every side.

Pine trees stretch and stretch so high,  
They nearly reach up to the sky.

Willows droop and droop so low,  
Their branches sweep the ground below.

## I'm Glad the Sky is Painted Blue

I'm glad the sky is painted blue  
And the earth is painted green,  
With such a lot of nice fresh air  
All sandwiched in between

## Window Watching

See the window I have here,  
So big and wide and square. (Draw a square in the air.)  
I can stand in front of it,  
And see the things out there.  
(Shade eyes as if looking at something in the distance)

# Music & Movement

*There are ways to make the classroom more beautiful with sounds. Have music playing in the entire classroom during some portions of the day. You may have one type of music during centers and another type of music during snack time. When playing music in the classroom, remember that music can elicit particular actions. During snack or nap time, play something that is soft and calm, like soothing classical music. However, during outdoor play, play music that is fun and fast paced. Good music is beauty to the ears!*

## For the of Love Music

### Babies

- Play a variety of music in the classroom.
- Sing to them everyday, very often.
- Provide for them objects or toys with different tones.
- When singing, sing in different tones and speeds.
- Play and sing familiar songs.
- Encourage movement to music.

### Preschool

- Play games to echo short musical phrases.
- Provide a variety of musical instruments.
- Experiment with familiar songs.
- Play freeze by turning the music on and off.
- Read stories for young children about music and musicians.
- Encourage free form, creative movement to music.

## As Quiet As a...

### Materials

Large note cards

Marker

Soft music

Large area for movement

- Ask the children to suggest things that are quiet- a mouse, a snake, rain, snow, wind, a whisper, etc.
- Draw the images on large note cards as the children suggest them.
- Then play soft music in the background. When you raise one of the note cards, the children will act it out while the soft music plays in the background.

**Benchmark 2.5:** Enjoys singing games, dramatizing songs and moving to music

## What Instrument Was That?

### Materials

Variety of musical instruments (4 or 5)

Small table

Sheet or curtain

- Place the instruments on a small table.
- Play each of the instruments for the children.
- One child is chosen to come play an instrument behind the curtain.
- Children guess which instrument the child played.
- Note: children can also clap, stomp, click their tongues, or sing-even more instrument choices!

**Benchmark 2.8:** Identifies the source of a variety of sounds

## Successful Music Center

- Introduce every instrument to children
  - Visit the center often to model and encourage beautiful musical sounds
  - Dance and move while playing instruments- Make it fun!
  - Be particular about the instruments that are placed in the center- which instruments sound good together
  - Designate some instruments as "outside instruments"- large drums, cow bells, etc.
  - Dress it up! Lay down fabric (silk, textured, patterned, etc.) to display the instruments
  - Only put out a few (3 or 4) instruments per week
  - Create a marching band and move with the instruments
- 
- Provide dress-up clothes (ties, black dresses, suit jackets) for a "professional concert."

**Benchmark 2.6:** Expresses through movement what is felt and heard in various musical tempos and styles

# Math & Science

You can always find beauty in the investigation and exploration of nature. In nature science and math are intertwined to create the most beautiful sights- birds at flight, sunflower seeds all in a perfect row, white caps on the water, the list is endless. The complexity of nature should be explored by children, and nature will inspire beauty in all other areas of your classroom- art, blocks, dramatic play, everywhere.

## Counting on the Environment

### Materials

Pen

Paper

Clipboards

Children can search throughout the classroom to find environmental traits in their classroom.

Ideas:

- "Let's count all the **blue toys** in the classroom."
- "Let's count **how many lamps** we have in the classroom."
- "Let's count **how many children** are at each center."

Record the result of your finds. If you do this frequently during the year, you're likely to find out a lot of information about your classroom.

**Benchmark 3.10:** Classifies objects by physical features such as shape or color

## Setting the Table

Give children the opportunity to take turns setting the table for snack and lunch

When children set the table they learn the following skills:

**One-to-one correspondence**- each person gets one plate, one cup, one napkin

**Counting**- how many people sit at this table?

**Sequencing**- "My day to set the table is after John Paul's day"

**Pairing**- "I know that Jessica and I always set the table at the same time."

To make snacks and meals even more enjoyable, consider making/ purchasing cloth napkins. The napkins will both help the earth's environment, and create beauty at the table!

**Benchmark 3.13:** Demonstrates one-to-one correspondence

## Overhead Projector Lighting

### Materials

Overhead projector or light table

Transparent color paddles (purchased from school supply catalogs)

Transparent color blocks (purchased from school supply catalogs)

White sheet or wall

Set up the projector to project the light onto a white sheet or wall. Children can place various transparent items onto the projector to create different lighting. Children can also experiment by using their hands to create shadow puppets. If you can, dim the classroom lights to make the lighting more dramatic.

**Benchmark 1.4:** Shows curiosity and desire to learn

## Animal Homes

Children can connect with the environment as you introduce the topic of animal homes. With the children, investigate different animal homes. Just think about it; birds can live in birdhouses, nest, cages, or even in water. After researching different animal homes, create a home for an animal using the information that you have learned.

### Make a Bird House

#### Materials

Gallon milk jug

Knife (adults only)

Wooden dowel rod

String

Masking tape (optional)

Brown paint (optional)

Empty, wash, and dry a one gallon milk jug. Once dry, adults cut a hole on the side of the jug. This hole will be the entrance to the bird's home, so consider the size of the hole for the size of the bird. Directly, under the first hole cut another hole for a perch. On the bottom of the jug make small holes for water to drain. To add to the bird's environment cover the entire jug with masking tape and paint it brown.

<http://www.billybear4kids.com/holidays/earthday/birds/house.htm>

**Benchmark 2.13:** Recognizes and responds to beauty in the environment

# Food & Nutrition

*Creating a welcoming cooking environment can enhance the classroom environment, and help children develop socially, intellectually, creatively, and physically. Just the smells of homemade food will make the classroom seem more pleasant! There are several things to think about when setting up a cooking environment. Think about how you envision the classroom cooking experience- Do you want to make cooking a place to prepare morning snack? Do you want it to be a regular part of your curriculum? How much supervision will the activity need?*

## Preparing Children for Cooking in the Classroom

- Let the children explore the ingredients and utensils.
- Start with the basics- flour, measuring cups, measuring spoons, and bowls.
- Experiment by adding water to flour, cornmeal, or sugar.
- Cook in small groups.
- Always have plenty of supervision.
- Safety is key.
- Keep the recipes simple.
- Provide a picture for every step of a recipe.
- Wash hands, wash hands, wash hands.

These recipes are individual serving sizes  
that can be cooked in a child's light bulb oven or toaster oven  
(of course, with adult supervision)

### **Blueberry Muffins**

#### **Ingredients**

3 tablespoons of dry muffin mix  
3 teaspoons of water

#### **Directions**

Stir 25 times. Spray muffin pan with oil. Pour into the pan. Bake 10-12 minutes  
Remove from oven and enjoy!

### **Snickerdoodle Cake**

#### **Ingredients**

3 tablespoons of biscuit mix  
1/2 teaspoon of sugar  
3 teaspoons of water

#### **Directions**

Stir 25 times. Spray pan with oil. Pour into the pan. Sprinkle cinnamon and sugar  
to cover top of cake. Bake 10-12 minutes. Remove from oven and enjoy.

**Benchmark 4.7:** Uses small muscles for self help skills

McKenney, D. (1996). *Cooking with light bulbs and gadgets*. Milwaukee, WI: Dream Catcher Resources.

## Fruit Stacked English Muffins

### Ingredients

2 English muffins, split  
1 (8 ounce) container of pineapple yogurt (other flavors could also work)  
3/4 cup sliced fresh strawberries  
3/4 cup drained crushed pineapple

### Directions

Lightly toast the English muffin halves in a toaster. Spread each half with pineapple yogurt. Top each half with strawberries and pineapple. Serve while the English muffins are still warm.

Source:

<http://allrecipes.com/Recipe/Fruit-Stacked-English-Muffins/Detail.aspx>

## Tortilla Rollups

### Ingredients

1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese, softened  
1 cup sour cream  
1 (1 ounce) package dry fiesta-style ranch dressing mix  
1 cup chunky salsa  
1 1/2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese  
10 (10-inch) flour tortillas

### Directions

In a medium bowl, mix the cream cheese, sour cream, fiesta-style ranch dressing mix, chunky salsa and Cheddar cheese. Spread even amounts of the mixture onto the tortillas. Roll tortillas and chill in the refrigerator until ready to serve. To serve, slice the chilled, rolled tortillas into 3/4 inch slices.

Source:

<http://allrecipes.com/Recipe/Tortilla-Rollups-IV/Detail.aspx>

**Benchmark 4.3:** Tries new foods before deciding whether he/she likes them

# Blocks

**Did you know that block play can help children in the area of literacy? A 2007 study entitled, *Effect of Block Play on Language Acquisition and Attention in Toddlers*, found the following:**

In this pilot study, we found that distributing blocks was associated with significantly higher language scores in a sample of middle- and low-income children. Previous studies of Reach Out and Read programs have documented that the distribution of books in a clinical setting can promote reading and literacy. This study suggests that a "reach out and play" program to distribute blocks may also have efficacy in promoting development (p.2).

Christakis, D., Zimmerman, F., & Garrison, M. (2007, October). Effect of block play on language acquisition and attention in toddlers. *Arch Pediatric Adolescent Med*, 161(10). Retrieved December 13, 2007 from [www.archpediatrics.com](http://www.archpediatrics.com)

## Saving Structures

Children can be more encouraged to play with blocks if they know that their structure is safe. Imagine working on a huge castle, then someone comes along and knocks it down. It may have been an accident, but it is still devastating to the builder.

Here are some helpful hints to create a safe block environment:

- Create block center guidelines
- Consider the space that you have for structures- only allow a limited amount of children in the center, dependent on space
- Let children create safety borders around their structures, using bigger blocks or caution tape
- If possible, provide opportunities to let children work on structures for multiple days.
- Take pictures of structures throughout development, so if it does need to be recreated, you will have a picture.
- Make an announcement to the class- make everyone aware that Billy wants to continue working on the structure, so that the children use careful feet around the structure.

## Block Play Props

- People- remember diversity- ethnic groups, age, and abilities
- Animals- zoo, farm, wood and pets
- Trucks, cars, tractors, buses, planes, and boats
- Construction equipment- back hoes, tractors, dump trucks
- Road signs
- Buildings- doll house, barn
- Found items, fabric and beautiful junk

**Benchmark 1.5:** Enjoys experimenting and problem-solving with ideas as well as with concrete materials

# Outdoor Play

How could we make the outdoors better when nothing is as perfect as fresh air? Try to keep the outdoors the outdoors. Plastics is very durable, but often over used in child care, so use natural objects to create play spaces. Large rocks can make great walkways or trails. Driftwood will make dividing spaces for the sandbox or story quilt area. Consider different natural textures for children to be exposed to-sand, wood, rock, and water.

## Treasure Hunt

### Materials

Sandbox or sand table

Treasure- sequins, shiny pebbles, bright necklaces, etc..

Sand sifter

Small shovels (helpful, but not necessary)

Pirate wear- eye patches, pirate hats (optional)

Treasure box

Bury the treasure in the sandbox or sand table, and let the exploring begin!

**Benchmark 4.6:** Coordinates eye and hand movements to complete tasks

## Bubbles

### Materials

Dishwashing liquid

Karo syrup (optional)

Food coloring (optional)

Large Plastic tubs or small swimming pool

Make the bubbles by mixing 1 cup dishwashing liquid with 10 cups of water (for stronger bubbles add a couple of tablespoons of Karo syrup. Add the food coloring for colorful bubbles. Great fun!

Ross, M. (1995). *Sandbox scientist*. Chicago, IL: College Review Press.

**Benchmark 1.7:** Demonstrates ability to play independently

## Story Quilt

### Materials

Box or basket of books

Quilt

Special spot on the playground (the quieter, the better)

Find a lovely spot on the playground to create a story quilt area. Sometimes children need rest while on the playground. Consider putting baby dolls in the area, so the children can read to babies.

**Benchmark 3.3:** Demonstrates knowledge of how to use a book

### How many ways can we use sidewalk chalk?

- Create a bike trail
  
- Hopscotch
  
- Color the wood on equipment (even more dramatic color dip the end of the chalk in a little water)
- Body outlines
- Shadow tracing
  
- Tightrope- walk on or jump over a chalk line
- Drawing-always a favorite!

**Benchmark 4.9:** Freely participates in gross motor activities

## Infants at Play

### By Kim Kearney

When thinking of planning a play environment for a group of infants, there are a few things that every caregiver must consider: **safety, play objects, and ambiance.**

**The first and most important component in planning for an infant's environment must be safety.** One of the first safety issues for infants is choking. One way of deciding if an object is too small to be in the play area is the toilet paper tube test. Get an empty toilet paper tube and check to see if objects in the play area fit into the tube. If the play things can slide down the tube they can also slid down a child's throat, posing a choking hazard. Get it out of the room.

**Check the play area everyday for damaged playthings,** chipped paint, and splintered toys. Anything that could cut, poke or choke a child needs to be taken out and repaired or disposed of. Another requirement to think about when exploring play items is whether it can withstand multiply cleanings. Infants learn by putting everything into their mouths. Toys must be able to be cleaned either by using a bleach water solution or by being put into a washing machine or dish sanitizer.

**Always be aware of recalled toys, clothing and equipment.** Make and post lists of recalled items for the staff as well as for parents. The more people aware of dangerous items, the more likely we are to keep them out of reach of children in our care. The official site is: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prerel.html>

**How should we set up the infants' area so that it is appealing and inviting to children?** Bold colors, bright lights and music are fun and exciting. Such an environment may beckon you like an amusement park; you just can't wait to go in and play. Then there comes a point when you get tired and want to get away and rest. If your room is like an amusement park, the children may come in excited and happy, but they may easily grow tired of all the stimulation. As you know, an over-simulated, tired infant is not a happy infant. Many times the whole mood of a room can be toned down by just **turning off some of the lights.** Lamps provide a warm feeling, if you have a safe space for them. If not, natural sun light can't be beat, so open up the blinds and let the outside in. Avoid using overhead lights that shine into infants' eyes as they drink their bottles.

**Next, try for some blank space in the room.** Blank space is not boring, it provides a place for the infant's mind and eyes to rest. By putting a few play things out on a low shelf with lots of blank space between the toys, the child can see each object clearly. Each play thing looks much more inviting and interesting than do several things all crowed together. Having a few things out at a time helps the room feel more organized and calmer.

**Every room is as unique as the children in it.** They all have advantages and challenges. So the next time you look at your room, try to create an environment that is safe, predictable, and that evokes feelings of calm, warmth and love. And in doing that your room invites children in to play and learn. That is what makes a room beautiful.

## Spaces for the Adults in Your Child Care Environment

### By Mardi Crandall

Nothing trumps the needs of children in a child care environment. However, don't make the mistake of thinking that adults don't count when it comes to planning the environment. In fact, meeting adult needs in the environment helps foster quality experiences for children due to the special synergy between children and adults in a care setting. It is through this interconnected, adult-child relationship that supportive community is born.

**What can you do to make sure your space works for the good of *all*?** First, check that your space—even in the smallest of centers—provides some elements that say, “Adults Welcome Here!” Hooks for adult coats and bags, a coffee pot in a safe nook, or an adult-level rack for parenting brochures let adults know that you have planned for their needs.

**Consider an entry that invites everyone into the center for drop off and pick up.** Last summer, I visited a program two states away which included an entry with a large loft for children to climb, adult furniture arranged in conversation groups, and coat hooks at all levels. The home-like elements clearly said, “This is a place for all of us.” Adult restrooms with diaper changing station, a clock, and phones, were close at hand.

**Adults should be able to navigate to classrooms without need for a road map.** I have visited some large programs that accomplish this by stationing a receptionist at the door. Others accomplish the same thing more cheaply by using a variety of identifying paint colors on doors. Still other centers are so tight on space that the welcome area is found by the door of a single classroom.

**Even the smallest family child care home can include a parent board, a handy sign-in area, and parent mailboxes that encourage communication.** Encourage parents to use this space to swap coupons, post clothing or equipment they wish to sell, or share recipes. Some programs find it is helpful to place a suggestion box in this area as well.

**Teachers also need devoted space—for taking breaks, working, and communicating with each other.** A break space should say, “This program recognizes the challenges of your work and cares that you have a relaxing place to center yourself and replenish.” Plan for soft lighting; calm, adult wall colors; and equipment for storing and preparing food.

**Communal work space should be available for spreading out projects, researching resource books, and meeting together.** However, teachers also need private places to stash their purses, hang their coats, and keep confidential papers. If space and budget allow, staff could have access to a shower for personal refreshing and computers for record keeping and researching.

**Some “double duty” spaces—a break room that also serves as a parent conference room, for example—may work in small centers.** Sometimes necessary because of space and budget constraints, too many “double duty” spaces may be counter productive.

For more detailed information about adult spaces, consult Anita Old's wonderful work, *Child Care Design Guide*, published by McGraw Hill in 2001. Another classic favorite is Jim Greenman's *Caring Spaces, Learning Places: Children's Environments That Work* published by Exchange Press.

# References & Resources

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