

Why are they always playing?

A guide for families

One of the most important aspects when looking at quality childcare programs is the children's environments, or play areas.

Why are there different areas in a classroom? I want my child to learn and then play when he is finished learning!

Quality early learning programs are designed to have different activities that children can participate in at the same time. This encourages individual and group learning opportunities. Children learn differently. Some learn by watching others, and some learn by participating with others. Either way is ok. The different areas allow children a choice to participate in one activity until mastered, or decide if they want to participate in something different.

Why are there so many different items in the block area? Shouldn't there just be blocks?

Although the block area, just as other areas are labeled with one name, the design of the area varies by what children would like to accomplish in a particular area. For example, within a block area there may be block trucks and cars, as well as block people. What one may not expect to see in a block area are tablets for writing and documenting, a child's map, or a set of safari animals from the science center. The possibilities for learning are endless! A quality program will help look for children's interest and put them into a learning area to expand their learning.

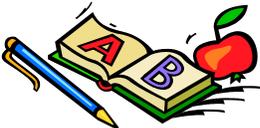
Why can't the toys just be put around the room and all the children play?

There are a few reasons why a room is designed in different areas. One reason is that a few children can participate in one area at the same time, while others are participating in other activities. This allows for more individual and peer-to-peer learning and offers time for children to actively play.

Having a number of children in a classroom at one time, with multiple areas prevents children from getting bored waiting for a toy. In addition, for the safety of the room, areas designed with these ideas in mind also allow a better design, which may reduce the number of children running. This leads to a safer environment for the children.

How are the areas separated?

Each area can be separated by partitions or solid movable shelving units, which hold toys. It is recommended that teachers clearly separate active centers from quiet areas whenever possible. It is a good sign to see small numbers of children interested in many different learning areas.

When my child plays with...	My child learns...
<p>Blocks or stackable items</p> 	<p>Building with blocks is lots of fun and teaches many skills that children will use later. Children can learn about gravity, stability, weight, balance, and systems from building with blocks. Building with blocks also teaches art concepts such as patterns, symmetry, and balance. Children gain pre-reading skills such as shape recognition, differentiation of shapes, and size relations. As children talk about what and how to build, language is enhanced. Building with blocks also fosters a feeling of competence, teaches cooperation and respect for the work of others, and encourages autonomy and initiative.</p>
<p>Music or listening</p> 	<p>Children enjoy both listening to music and making their own. Children learn music the same way they learn language—by listening and imitating. Creative movement, learning to move their body in time to the music or pretending is a creative way to tap into children's imagination and artistic side. Creative movement expands a child's imagination. It is also a fun method of physical fitness. Finger play promotes language development, fine-motor skills, and coordination, as well as self-esteem. Listening to music also teaches important pre-reading skills. As children use small drums, they can play the rhythmic pattern of words.</p>
<p>Art</p> 	<p>Some art projects are a reflection of the interest of the children. Stocked with materials, a good art area can be used in a variety of ways. Using materials in an art area highlights ideas that children have already learned in other areas, but may now be able to express creatively. Some skills that may be learned are sorting and classifying identifying color, shape, and size. These are pre-reading and pre-math skills that help prepare children for elementary school. Art projects also help develop children's fine-motor skills, which are using the small muscles in their hands to pick up, pound and cut materials found in art area.</p>
<p>Math</p> 	<p>Children enjoy playing with a variety of toys that helps develop their math skills. These toys include LEGOS, Bristle Blocks, Play-Doh, Peg-Boards, large beads to thread, and stacking and nesting materials which are precursors for children learning to write.</p>
<p>Reading</p> 	<p>The book area should have books reflecting a range of levels. There should be simple board books, as well as picture storybooks. The area should have pillows and soft areas for children to be comfortable reading. It should be an area where children can look through books by themselves or with other friends.</p>

When my child plays with...	My child learns...
<p data-bbox="228 310 418 380">Table games or puzzles</p> 	<p data-bbox="483 275 1433 373">The classroom should have puzzles that are different sizes, interest and number of pieces, which allows different abilities to participate in puzzles at the same learning center.</p>
<p data-bbox="240 611 407 638">Outdoor play</p> 	<p data-bbox="483 575 1422 779">Outdoor play may be one of the favorite parts of any child's day. Outdoor play refines a child's gross-motor (large-muscle) skills. Children will use multiple skills and create dozens of scenarios as they play. Some of the activities that families may see are digging, hauling, building, riding, running, swinging, climbing, jumping, hopping, and biking. Playground time is also an opportunity to explore and have fun.</p>
<p data-bbox="266 877 381 905">Free play</p> 	<p data-bbox="483 869 1433 1108">Free play sounds as if nothing is going on and no one is watching the children, but is very much a planned activity. Children have the freedom to choose among many different activities, but the teacher has created the classroom environment and arranged the choices. Free play is not time off for the teacher. It is just the opposite! The teacher should be paying close attention to the children, interacting with them, offering guidance and help where necessary, and noting progress and difficulties.</p>
<p data-bbox="240 1234 407 1262">Dramatic play</p> 	<p data-bbox="483 1121 1422 1640">Children think that participating in a grown-up activity is fun! Dramatic play areas help to provide the opportunities for children to explore these ideas and share with their peers. Since cooking is a basic life skill, the dramatic play area promotes a child's sense of inquiry and independence. Using math skills helps children count and measure. When a child stirs, pours, and adds ingredients they are using the small motor skills. A child discovers how things change, such as liquid batter becomes a cake when baked, learning cause and effect. This is helpful as the child becomes more independent. The dramatic play center should include play items and props that encourage young children to play make-believe. Playing make-believe lets a child bring the grown-up world into their world. Dramatic play also encourages children to learn empathy for others, as they will often act out a whole range of emotions when playing pretend. During this type of play, children are encouraged to think outside the box, which is an important pre- reading skill. Children come to understand that words represent ideas.</p>

When my child plays with...	My child learns...
<p style="text-align: center;">Circle Time</p> 	<p>Circle time is an opportunity for children to share and learn about their day and their friends. It can be a time when all the children are engaged in a group activity as a whole. It can also be a way to prepare children for what the day and for sharing and reading stories with the teacher. Students may also use the time for "show and tell." Teachers also include music, songs, and creative movement during circle time.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Snack and lunch</p> 	<p>Snack time is an important part of the preschool experience. Snack time can be an opportunity for children to try new foods, as well as an opportunity for a child to learn social skills. Activities during snack or lunch, such as passing out the snack, distributing a napkin and cups, helps with counting skills.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Clean up</p> 	<p>Children do not think cleaning up is a bad thing! They may not want to do it alone, but usually they view this as a fun activity. Allowing and encouraging children to put away the blocks, wipe down the tables, and put the toys back on the shelves is a valuable educational exercise. Children learn to follow directions, work together, and talk to their friends. They also learn to sort, classify, match, and organize.</p>