

ACTIVITY OR LEARNING CENTERS

Most preschool rooms are designed with common activity or interest centers or areas of the room. Whenever possible, areas of the room should relate with the theme of the week. For example, if the theme is "fish," the block area could be converted into a large fishing pond and the blocks set up as the bank of the pond. Fish with paper clips attached could be in the end, and the children could use fishing pole magnets to catch them. An aquarium could be used as an interest center. Additional ideas could include live fish in the trough, bulletin boards on fish, and tasting different fish.

Remember--you do not want to include every area in your room every week if you have a small room! Be wise in your choice of areas, what you put in them, and how you set them up!

1. **OUTSIDE PLAY AREA:** This area will be determined by your facility and what is available. Many preschools have permanent pieces of playground equipment such as domes, slides, or climbing apparatuses. If you are just starting a preschool and do not have money for outside play equipment, you may want to consider such items as a large tractor inner tube for the children to jump on or modular gym systems that can also be used indoors and can be set up in a variety of ways.
2. **LARGE MUSCLE AREA:** This area includes equipment for large muscle development. In large rooms, a dome climber or jungle gym are ideal and moveable. They can be used in different areas of the room. Other ideas for a large muscle area include balance beams, slides, or indoor jumping trampoline.
3. **DRAMATIC PLAY AREA:** This area is a place where children can act out family life and imaginary experiences. The housekeeping center will usually contain equipment that allows children to pretend they are in a home setting. A play stove, refrigerator, table and chairs, cupboards, play dishes, a full length mirror, dress-up clothes, and doll equipment may be found in the housekeeping area. There are many other possibilities for the dramatic play area: restaurants, beauty and barbershops, puppet stage, etc.
4. **SENSORY PLAY AREA:** Your classroom may have a trough, tubs, or other possibilities for setting up sensory media (media the children explore with their senses). Such media might be water, sand, clay, cereal, rice, styrofoam pieces, IBM punches, etc. Depending on the media, you may want to include such tools as funnels, bottles, shovels, scoops, cups, beaters, etc.
5. **CREATIVE ARTS AREA:** This area may be an easel or a setup at tables. The media might be paint, paste, glue, play dough, or any variety of activities. When art activities are set up as a learning center in the room, they are used during freeplay by those children choosing to participate as opposed to an activity during the day when all children are invited to participate and do so at the same time.

6. **BLOCK AREA:** This area is often close to or a part of the large muscle area. Many preschool classrooms are large enough to have both large and small unit blocks; however, smaller classrooms usually have only the small unit blocks. Manipulative and creative toys such as small cars, farm animals, zoo animals, or people figures are often used along with blocks to stimulate block play.
7. **SCIENCE AREA:** A science area is often part of the preschool classroom. If the unit theme is "color," different color activities, such as color mixing, could be set up in the science center. The science area may simply be a table with things to explore. For example, one week rocks and magnifying glasses could be set out. Displays and simple experiments may be found in the science area, and they should focus on helping the children explore the world around them.
8. **STORY OR QUIET AREA:** This area is a place to explore the world through books. The quiet area will probably include bookshelves for storage and a selection of books. This area should have either tables and chairs or a rug for children to sit on. Many preschool classrooms have a large rug in the story and quiet area. This is also used for the children to come together for stories, singing, and discussions.
9. **MUSIC AREA:** This area is where children can listen to music, sing, play musical instruments, or perform creative dances. This area should be carpeted or have a rug on the floor. A cassette tape or record player should be available with appropriate tapes or records. In addition, on occasion, rhythm instruments should be available.
10. **MANIPULATIVE PLAY AREA:** This area is where children can use such items as small blocks, pegboards, puzzles, number games, etc. Shelves should be used for display, and tables and chairs should be nearby for the children to take their selections for play.