

Asking Open-Ended Questions

A question like “What color is that block?” evokes a one-word answer. But an open-ended question, “Tell me about the blocks you are using,” encourages a child to describe the blocks or explain what she is doing. There is no right or wrong answer here.

An answer to an open-ended question gives us a window into what the child is thinking and feeling. And the response is sometimes wonderfully creative. In explaining or describing, children also use language more fully.

In our program, we try to think of good questions to ask children. You might hear one of us say to a child,

- * Tell me about your picture.
- * What else can you do with the playdough?
- * What could you use to make the tower stand up?
- * What do you think would happen -?
- * Is there another way to -?

It is difficult to change the closed-end question habit. But when we ask open-ended questions, children reap great benefits as they think through their responses to express what they want to say. And with their answers, we find out more about what they think and feel.

Dynamic Classrooms Are Not Quiet!

Quiet classrooms do not mean that young children are learning. In fact, since oral language is very important during the early years, quiet classrooms may indicate that young children are not learning all they could be.

Talking gives a child the opportunity to experiment with new words. It provides the vehicle for expressing ideas and testing current knowledge.

Shared experiences are important; they give children something to talk about. Children learn the nuances of communication in groups by trying out their language skills. For example, they learn what a question sounds like and how loud is loud enough.

Using words and talking about how things work, making comparisons, and retelling experiences lead to increased intellectual development. When children reconstruct experiences, sequence events, and point out similarities or differences, they are clearly engaging in higher-level thinking skills. And when kids are encouraged to ask questions, they not only gain information from adults' responses but also build their competence – and confidence – as active seekers of knowledge and understanding.

The vocabularies children use in reading and writing are based on the words they are familiar with from listening and speaking. But expanded vocabularies and other aspects of language growth occur through using language. Talking in the classroom may be a little noisy, but positive results are easily heard!

Fine Motor Development

To many people, fine motor development means the way a child holds and uses pencils, crayons, and scissors. But fine motor development is much more. To understand fine motor development it is important to understand a little about how the human body develops.

Human development progresses from the head down and from the trunk outward. The torso and shoulders develop long before the elbows, the hips long before the knees, and so on. In other words, skilled use of one's hands and fingers is the last in a long process of development.

Fine motor development is enhanced early in life by many opportunities to develop and refine large motor skills. It is developed by giving young children big pieces of paper and large crayons, allowing them to practice their movements. We also help children's fine motor development through a variety of activities, such as working with play-dough, constructing with Legos and Tinkertoys, stringing beads, doing puzzles, and playing with pegboards and other table toys.

Such engrossing activities are better than tasks at which the child may "fail" or those that are very repetitive. Through these fun, natural activities, children improve their fine motor development without frustration or boredom.

Fostering Tolerance and Respect

Children are born without biases about other people of any race, culture, gender, or disability. We sometimes wonder if we can raise children free of prejudice by just leaving well enough alone and making sure not to pass on negative attitudes. Unfortunately, it doesn't work this way; society's messages are too pervasive. As parents and teachers, we need to take positive action if children are to grow up comfortable with who they are and respectful of others.

We want to work with you to create a program that helps to counter society's messages of bias and reflects the cultural background of all the children and families. To begin with, we choose books, dolls, and even pictures on the wall, with an eye to finding balance and showing children what they see too little of elsewhere. For instance, we make a point of showing men and women of all ethnic backgrounds doing a variety of jobs, men as well as women doing household chores and spending time with children, and different kinds of families enjoying themselves.

Are we doing all this to be "politically correct"? Not really. We're committed to helping children grow up confident of their own identity, respectful of other people, and aware of the rich diversity of their community and world. We can do this only by working closely with our families, hearing your perspectives, and finding out more about the cultural background that each child brings to the program.

Parents are even more important than teachers in children's development of attitudes. If you have any questions about how our program is addressing issues of bias and diversity or if you want to talk over issues that arise at home, please let us know what you're thinking or wondering. Of course, we are far from having all the answers. We want to hear what you're thinking, and we're happy to talk things over.

Large Motor Development

Running, jumping climbing, skipping, hopping, throwing, and balancing come naturally to young children, but kids need plenty of opportunities to practice them.

These large motor activities are an important part of your child's day here. With daily large-motor experiences, children practice fundamental movement skills that help them develop good self-esteem and physical competence.

A developmentally appropriate movement curriculum facilitates basic movement skills and physical fitness, such as those named above. Children get the chance to run, jump, skip, walk on balance beams, and throw and kick balls. As with all skills, motor skills must be practiced to improve.

You might see us moving like snakes, cats, bears, dinosaurs or frogs. Music gets us moving – we sometimes jog to release tension and we occasionally jump simply for the joy of it.

We want children to be physically fit because it's important to their health. But we also know they learn better when they are healthy and in good physical condition.

Learning With Blocks

Blocks are open-ended materials that stimulate young imaginations, provide choices for discovery and invention, and promote the development of problem-solving skills. One day a block may be an airplane. The next day that block in the hands of the same child can be a sofa for the house he is building.

Building with blocks helps develop young children's eye-hand coordination, visual perception, and large and small motor skills. It builds self-confidence and provides opportunities for creativity and dramatic play. These things occur naturally when children play with blocks.

We also find that working with blocks often deepens children's engagement with literature and literacy. A child may be inspired, say, to construct the three bears' beds and chairs, a pirate boat, or an enchanted castle.

We sometimes take photographs of children's block creations and invite the children to caption the photos. We also encourage girls and boys to make their own signs for their creations. In these activities, children are exposed to print in meaningful ways.

Inviting children to reconstruct buildings and other things they have seen on field trips is one way we encourage their thinking in relation to social studies. They work with the concepts behind maps and models, and as they build block cities, farms, and factories, they work out their own understanding of these complex sites and communities. Children also develop mathematical and scientific concepts, such as balance and gravity, as they work with blocks.

Blocks are engrossing and fun for young children, of course. They are also invaluable tools for promoting children's development on many fronts.

Let The Games Begin

Child learn best when activities are meaningful to them. Experts in the early development of mathematical concepts tell us that children develop mathematical understanding in situations in which number and quantity are relevant and important to them.

Games provide this opportunity. Playing games is a wonderful way for children to share time with family members, to have fun, and to learn. Kids love to play games with their favorite grown-ups.

In simple card games, such as Go Fish, Concentration, or Crazy Eights, children learn many different things. They identify numerals, match numerals or objects, and practice memory skills. They also develop fine motor skills by picking up and handling the cards.

By playing dominoes or games with dice, children learn to count the dots and to relate those dots to the number they represent. Moving game pieces the right number of spaces on a board adds the concept of one-to-one correspondence, and constantly comparing the rolled numbers helps develop number sense.

The games we choose should be appropriate for the age of the child. With commercial games, look at the age recommendations on the game box. Remember, noncompetitive games are best – young children do not like to lose.

As we play games with children, we can extend their mathematical thinking by asking simple questions: How many matches did you get? Do you have more red cards or more black ones? Would you like to deal us 6 cards each? Continued opportunities to play games and talk and think about number concepts help children develop their own math understandings

Let's Pretend

Make-believe play is not only one of the great joys of childhood, it also offers abundant opportunities for children's development. Children develop interpersonal skills, particularly cooperation and conflict resolution, and improve their language and problem-solving abilities in pretend (dramatic) play.

Around the age of 2, children begin to pretend to cry, sleep, and eat. They soon include a stuffed animal, doll, or favorite toy in their play. They also begin to transform objects into symbols - a simple block becomes a fast race car or a stick makes a fine race horse.

As children approach 3, they begin participating in make-believe play with other kids. Dramatic play gradually becomes more elaborate and complex. Four and five year olds engage in socio-dramatic play, which provides opportunities to rehearse adult roles. Such play helps children make sense of the world.

These first experiences often focus on home experiences. Kids pretend to cook, clean, and care for younger children. That's why our dramatic play area has props and equipment that represent the home setting. These stimulate children to act out roles familiar to them.

Dramatic play fosters emotional development as children work through fears and worries in a safe context. Social skills are promoted as children communicate and negotiate their roles and actions. Another plus is that children use language more frequently and more elaborately in make-believe play than they do in virtually any other activity.

Parents can actively encourage dramatic play at home by capitalizing on their children's interest at the moment, developing themes from stories their children have heard or movies they have seen, and providing props for pretend play. Providing a home environment that is conducive to play stimulates intellectual and social development. At the same time, parents will be developing rich memories of their children at play – memories that last a lifetime.

Letting Children Choose

Why do we as adults pursue hobbies such as golf, crochet, or gardening? We spend time in such an activity because we find it enjoyable, we have some control over the activity, and we see it as offering some probability of success. We choose what we will crochet or plant; we decide where, when, and with whom we will play golf or tennis.

Children, too, learn best when they have some control over their learning, When activities are meaningful and relevant, and when they can make choices in the materials they will work with and how they will use them.

Children thrive when they have opportunities every day to make choices in their learning. We facilitate children's choices within a carefully planned environment. We create the environment to allow each child to choose activities that are developmentally appropriate for his or her age. The children choose the peers with whom they will work and play and usually determine how they will use the available materials.

These choices empower children to take control of their own learning. Children use materials and equipment in far more creative and innovative ways than we could ever plan, and they use the materials in ways that meet their own developmental needs.

Research indicates that intrinsic motivation – when we work on a task primarily because we find it satisfying - is the most effective and engaging way to learn. In this program we make an effort to provide materials and activities that provide choice and interest for the children. That's a key reason that you'll see busy, involved children when you visit the classroom.

Making Friends With Puppets

Valuable tools for the early childhood classroom, as well as great toys for your child at home, puppets have many uses with young children. They enhance spoken language, aid social play, promote pro-social behaviors, and allow children to express negative feelings without risk.

Puppets often help children relate to difficult situations by allowing them to identify with the puppet and still maintain an emotional distance. Kids who may not feel comfortable talking to an adult about personal problems might be willing to share those feelings with or through a puppet – either confiding to a puppet or assuming the puppet's character to express their feelings. For example, one child may tell a puppet, "When my mommy's not home, I get scared." But another child may slip on a puppet and have it say, "I know it's scary sometimes when Mommy is gone. When I get scared I talk to my friends, like I'm talking to you."

Adults who are sensitive to stresses a child may be experiencing can offer an appropriate puppet for the child to use. We can model the use of puppets, talking about feelings. If a puppet talks to children about his fear of the dark, kids who share that fear get the chance to work through their own fears.

The adult can have the puppet present the problem: "I'm so afraid when my daddy turns out the light at night! I don't like the dark. What should I do when Daddy turns out the light?" Children will offer the puppet suggestions: "You can have your daddy turn on a night light" or "You can ask your parents to leave the hall light on."

Puppets can be made, found at yard sales or flea markets, or purchased from toy stores, children's bookstores, museums or the internet.

More Than One Kind Of Smart

“He has a low IQ.”

“She’s very intelligent.”

Sometimes we talk as though intelligence were a single commodity that people have in greater or lesser supply. Yet we see all around us adults and children who are very smart in math but not at all good with words, musically gifted but klutzy on the athletic field, and so on. Most of us, in fact, struggle with some tasks and sail through others.

Educators now know more about this variety in individuals’ “intelligences” – the modes we use to interact with the world – thanks to the work of psychologist Howard Gardner. Seven of these intelligences are described by Gardner.

Children with a **musical** intelligence have a natural ear for melody, rhythm, and other musical elements; **spatially oriented** children enjoy reading maps and exploring how mechanical devices work. Other children are more at home using their linguistic aptitude – telling stories, playing with words, and reciting tongue twisters. Strong **logical-mathematical** intelligence shows up not only in math aptitude but in enjoyment of games and problems requiring logic and reasoning.

Children who learn best when they are moving and handling things rely on their **bodily-kinesthetic** intelligence. An affinity for the natural world and its creatures stands out in children with a **naturalistic** mode of intelligence. Finally, children who make friends easily and have plenty of “street smarts” are **interpersonal** naturals, while quiet thinkers and strong-willed debaters shine in the more internal, reflective **intrapersonal** mode.

All of us have preferred modes of intellectual functioning. At the same time, we need to use each of the modes in one situation or another. Recognizing the various ways that children think and learn, teachers can help children both to use their individual strengths and to become more adept in learning modes that are not their strong point.

Moving To Music

Young children are natural dancers. Even infants bounce up and down to the beat of music.

Enjoyable and natural though it is, creative movement helps children learn many concepts. It teaches them balance and coordination through challenging moves and postures. It teaches rhythm and beat as children choreograph their movements with music. It even promotes children's ability to predict what comes next by hearing repeated musical phrases. Creative movement is also an important tool for developing children's self-esteem and body awareness.

It's easy to engage children in dance and creative movement. Just move with them. Kids love dancing with their families. Turn on the radio or put on your old tapes or records and enjoy singing and dancing together.

Add to the experience by using movement props. Sheer or silky scarves are fun to use when dancing. These can be found at local thrift shops or dime stores.

Streamers are also great fun for children. Just glue ribbon or paper streamers to short pieces of dowel rods. Rhythm sticks, used to keep time with the beat of the music, also can be made at home. Foot-long lengths of dowel rod can be sanded smooth and painted or left bare.

Try creative movement with your child. Play different kinds of music to expand the experience. This is a wonderful way to have fun together – and even get some exercise.

Process and Product

As adults, we are concerned with the outcomes or the product of our efforts. We want the report to look nice, the cookies to taste great, or the hedges to be perfectly straight. We participate in few activities just for the fun of doing them.

In part this is because we are not still learning how to do most of these activities. But do you remember when you learned how to play tennis or golf? Or use a new computer program? In the beginning you needed to do a certain amount of time for “messing around” – exploring what happens if you did this or that.

That is the way it is with your child. Kids are learning new things all the time, and they need the freedom to try things out without worrying about the product.

Luckily, young children tend to be more involved with the process or the doing than they are with end product or results. That is why your child may draw all afternoon yet still not be able to tell you what he drew. And why one child can pour rice back and forth between pitchers all day long, and another will string and unstring beads every day for a week.

It is hard for us adults to look beyond the product of an activity and see what the child is learning from the process. Perhaps he's learning coordination or beginning writing skills or making discoveries about triangles or gravity. He's certainly finding out that doing for one's self is very satisfying – and that builds confidence.

Be patient. Allow your child the time to grow and learn through the various processes that are part of the task. Enjoy watching his or her involvement. Later, we all can be proud of the product.

Recipe For Learning

To children, the world of cooking is magical. We combine all kinds of ingredients, then stir, simmer, boil, or bake, and – presto! – something delicious is created.

Being asked to help with cooking makes kids feel grown up and important. And when they cooperate with others to make a dish, they take great satisfaction in producing something for everyone to eat.

Cooking with children - pointing out key words on the recipe as we go along, having them measure, pour, and stir – is a time of learning as well. Reading, science, and math concepts abound in cooking experiences. Children learn to recognize numbers and words from recipes. They begin to use vocabulary related to cooking. And they observe how ingredients change when they are mixed together.

Kids also learn basic math concepts such as counting, measuring, measurement, and part-whole relationships. It will take years before young children fully understand concepts like numbers, weights, measurement, time, and temperature, but repeated experiences with cooking promote the development of these concepts.

Cooking with young children does take more time than cooking alone. But the learning that accompanies cooking and the closeness fostered by the shared experience are worth the extra time.

Sensational Sand

You've probably noticed – in your yard or at the playground - how much your child likes to dig in the sand. Sand is great fun, but it's also a wonderful material for learning.

Children learn mathematical and scientific concepts from playing at our sand table. For instance, when kids pour sand from measuring cup to measuring cup, they are likely to be learning about estimation, volume, texture, and even counting and simple physics.

As children play with sand, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing or experiencing. For instance, we might ask, "Does the sand feel different when it is wet?" or "How did you get the sand so smooth on your castle?"

Have you ever longed to dig your toes in the sand? Sand has the same soothing effect on children. We find that kids who are frustrated, annoyed, or angry often choose the sand center to work out those feelings.

You can encourage sand play at home by providing a sandbox. It does not need to be large. One excellent and inexpensive sandbox is a bin or busboy tray (available at restaurant suppliers and some discount stores and flea markets) filled with sand. Bins and trays are portable, easy to clean, and easily stored. Provide measuring cups and spoons and other plastic containers to support play.

Of course, spills and stray sand go with the territory. With indoor sand play, a sheet or large piece of plastic will help contain the mess, but the benefits are well worth any temporary inconvenience.

The Art For Real Children

We grown-ups provide the time, the space, the materials, and the atmosphere needed to create the wonderful works of art that only children can create. In valuing a child's first artistic attempts, however, we should appreciate the beauty of the color and the design rather than worry about the finished product.

Real art for real children is:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Personal
as
feeling. It is
the child without any | Art can be as simple as colors representing a pretty day or
complex as a series of lives which express a sad
important that each idea be developed by
adult preconceptions. |
| Spontaneous | Always be ready for that creative moment! |
| Inventive
Some
color, and | Children need to have access to a variety of materials.
art masters paint with egg yolks, mash berries for
use sticks for brushes. Experiment! |
| Unique
and a
look the | An original idea, combined with imaginative expression and
materials of the child's choice, encourages ownership
positive sense of self-esteem. No two works of art
same when young children are the artists. |
| Therapeutic
feelings of self- | Art provides children with the means to gain control over their
feelings. A completed creative work establishes
satisfaction and self-confidence. |
| Fun
creative
enjoyment is | Whether kids concentrate alone or work in a shared
group, a positive, enthusiastic atmosphere or
essential! |

The Artful Classroom

A child becomes totally engrossed, immersed in the process of making a work of art. The sensation of feeling the smooth thick paint sliding onto the easel paper calms the child and brings pleasure in the creation. When the child grapples with the challenge of representing an object or person on the page, she is engaging in a task that is both demanding and satisfying.

Teachers provide an assortment of art materials that children may choose from to make their own unique creations. We do not have the children copy a teacher's model or make a designated product. We encourage them to use the materials in different ways. Art is a vital and vibrant part of the early childhood program, contributing to all aspects of the young child's development.

As they draw, paint, and sculpt, children think creatively, make decisions, and solve problems. Children's fine motor skills are developed naturally through manipulation of brushes, crayons, scissors, and clay. All of these activities prepare children for writing in later years. Language also is developed as kids talk about color, shape, and size, and as they describe their work to friends and teachers.

To encourage your child's artistic enterprises, provide large blank paper (the ends of newsprint rolls can be purchased at a nominal cost from your local newspaper, or you can recycle paper by letting your child use the back of office paper), water colors, markers, or chalk for use at home. Art supplies also make great gifts!

Value your child's efforts and expose him or her to quality artwork through visits to museums and art shows. Recognize that young children learn in a variety of ways and that creative activities provide positive, satisfying experiences for all children.

The Best Learning Is Active Learning

Active learning takes advantage of children's natural desire to move and touch. Young children love to manipulate items and explore new ideas. They enjoy the opportunity to see how things work and to test their own theories.

Active learning takes advantage of children's natural motivations, abilities, and interests. Kids get lots of opportunities to investigate what interests them – to solve problems, discover relationships, and make comparisons.

Children use all their senses to make discoveries: How heavy is it? Does it smell? Can I find another one that feels the same? What does it sound like when I drop it? How is it different from the other items? Using their hands, eyes, nose, ears, and mouth to explore an item, children gather more information and remember what they learn.

As they interact directly with the environment, children not only gather sensory information, they also refine their senses and motor skills. For example, it takes very refined movement of the hands and fingers to produce the penmanship required for writing. Squeezing clay, picking up puzzle pieces, and lacing threads through beads are ways for young children to practice using hands and fingers.

We organize the classroom environment to promote active learning, and we do lots of things to encourage children to think and talk about their discoveries and creations. The next time you want your child to learn about something, provide the materials, space, and time. Then step back and watch. You will be surprised at how much the child will discover through active involvement.

The Listening Center

Listening is the language ability that develops first and is used most often. True listening means not only hearing sounds in the environment but also taking meaning from and responding to those sounds.

Listening is an essential part of the development of both written and oral language. We can best help children develop listening abilities by providing experiences that encourage careful listening. Many of these experiences take place in our classroom listening center.

The listening center, a comfortable area where children can use a tape recorder, headsets, and a variety of audiotapes, gives them daily opportunities to listen to oral language and music. Through songs, poems, and stories, children identify and differentiate between familiar or similar sounds, rhyming words, letter sounds, and speech patterns.

Children's vocabulary, comprehension, and critical-thinking skills also get a boost. Listening experiences stimulate kids to express their own reactions in various ways, including verbal discussion, art, drama, or stories of their own. Through these activities children relate what they hear to their own experiences.

Families can extend this focus on "listening with a purpose" at home or during car trips. Try to identify particular sounds. Point out the differences in pieces of music. Play games with words by finding rhyming words or words that begin with the same sound. Don't make this a task – just have fun.

The Play-Full Prop Box

The ability to pretend is very important to a child's future success. To pretend, children must be able to recall experiences they have had and then re-create them. They must be able to picture experiences in their mind.

Children like to try on different roles, act out experiences, recall past events, and work out anxieties. One day a child may act out going to the grocery store, making a list, gathering items, paying at the checkout counter. Another day the child may pretend to be a dentist or a firefighter.

One way to encourage dramatic play – “pretend” experiences that enhance your child's cognitive abilities and encourage creative thinking and problem solving – is through the use of prop boxes or bags. Prop boxes contain an assortment of items centered on a dramatic play theme.

For a day-at-the-beach theme, a box may hold beach towels, old swimsuits, flip-flops, empty suntan-lotion containers, old sunglasses, and magazines. Or a box may contain a baker's hat, rolling pin, cookie cutters, play-dough, pans, spoons, aprons, and dish towels.

Clearly label the containers, perhaps with pictures and words, and store them where your child can reach them. Keep adding to your collections. Yard sales and flea markets are great places to find props. As your child's interests change, start new collections.

Your child will benefit from these collections in many ways other than just having fun. For instance, research indicates that children who have many opportunities to participate in dramatic play use more sophisticated language and become better readers and writers.

Prop boxes are only as limited as the imagination.

The Power Of Play

Have you ever heard someone remark about an early childhood program – even ours, perhaps – “All the children do there is play”? At good early childhood programs there is a lot of play – and there should be!

Years of research on children’s learning and development document the many benefits of play for children’s intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and language development. Children at play are actively involved in creating themes, exploring and establishing environments, solving problems, and developing shared understandings.

Children play in many ways. They play independently, sometimes near each other but with each child engrossed in his own activity. They engage in what is called “parallel play,” perhaps using each others’ toys or even talking, but not coordinating their play. They also play cooperatively, organizing roles and scenarios for group play. As they get older, children are capable of more cooperative, coordinated play. But all kinds of play are valuable.

As kids play with each other, they learn to see other children’s points of view and begin to become more empathetic and caring. They come to understand customs and rules in their own culture and to appreciate those of others. They learn to use language in new ways to describe their play and to interact with others. And in play, children develop their muscles and coordination.

Adults support children’s play by providing space, opportunity, and materials. We set up areas where kids can play without fear of damaging furniture or injuring themselves. We make sure that they have the time to choose and to become engaged in their own play activities. And when we provide them with simple, interesting materials – no newfangled, expensive gadgets required – kids take it from there.

Play is fun. But it is also serious business that pays big dividends to its eager, young investors.

The Reading Area

Our reading area is full of wonderful books that children love and learn from. We have a good collection ourselves, and we are always bringing in fresh books from the library.

Children have the opportunity to slowly leaf through good books that have been read to them, look at the pictures, examine the print on the page, and “read” to someone else. These experiences create a love of books that helps children become eager, and eventually proficient, readers.

The quiet, comfy atmosphere of the reading area gives children a pleasant place to escape from the noisy, vibrant classroom. This is a place for kids to rest, to have some time alone.

We continually look for quality books to add to our reading area. Let us know if you have any suggestions of books to add or if you would like to donate a book or help get good books from the library.

To instill a love of reading and to expand your child’s vocabulary, read to your child at home! Be a partner with us in instilling a love of books in your children.

The Sound Of Music

Kids of all ages are naturally drawn to music. Infants coo at lullabies, toddlers bang on pots and pans with a wooden spoon, and preschoolers sing and dance to music.

Children learn a variety of skills from musical experiences. Shaking, tapping, and beating instruments enhance fine motor development. Children listening for a beat, the sound of different instruments, tones and lyrics are developing auditory discrimination.

Kids can experience the emotional effects of music by listening to and creating music that is soothing, exciting, or funny. Music promotes creative development as children experiment with new rhythms, sounds, and movements.

To encourage your child's exploration of music, you don't have to buy expensive instruments. You can make several simple instruments at home.

Kazoo – Let children decorate a toilet paper tube with construction paper and crayons. Help them put a square of wax paper over one end and secure with a rubber band. Blow through the open end while humming a tune.

Tambourine – Give the child two sturdy, luncheon-sized paper plates. Place a small quantity of dried beans or rice in one plate, then glue the plates together and allow to dry. The child can decorate with crayons, paints, and scraps of ribbon or other material. Shake the tambourine with one hand or tap it on the heel of the other hand.

Drum – Help the child cover the outside of a two-pound coffee can with heavy construction paper and decorate as desired. Replace the lid of the can and beat with hands or spoons.

Sand Blocks – Sand two small pieces of scrap wood to prevent splinters. Help your child glue coarse-grit sandpaper onto one side of each block. Rub the blocks together to make noise.

What Is “Developmentally Appropriate Practice”

You probably have noticed that our classroom has a lot of bustle and noise, that children are up and doing things, talking, playing, and exploring. Such a classroom environment differs from the old grade-school image of a teacher doing a lot of talking at a blackboard while children sit and listen quietly at their desks.

Research and experience tell us that to be effective with young children, teaching practices need to be “developmentally appropriate.” What this means is simply that educators need to think first about what young children are like and then create an environment and experiences that are in tune with children’s characteristics.

Early childhood, after all, is a time of life quite different from adulthood, and even from the later school years. Children 3-6 learn far better through direct interactive experiences than through just listening to someone talk. They learn extraordinary amounts through play and exploration. And the younger children are, the more what they learn needs to be relevant and interesting on the day they learn it, not just in the context of some future learning.

Based on such knowledge about what children of this age are like, we design our program to fit them. It works a lot better than trying to redesign children!

A developmentally appropriate program like ours is age appropriate. But that’s not all. To make the program a good place for every child, we gear our classroom environment and activities to this community and the families involved.

We’re eager to learn as much as we can about each child’s family, cultural background, past experience, and current circumstances. With this knowledge we work to create a program that fits the children and the families we serve.

Wonderful Wet Water

Katie is at the water table, pouring water back and forth between two containers. She watches as the water overflows and runs down the side of one jar. She feels the cool liquid against her skin and listens to the sound of the water as it moves. She observes the containers that float and those that sink, and she tries to get one of the heavier tubs to float. Katie is exploring, discovering, and testing objects in the water.

Children, and adults as well, are naturally drawn to water. Water is comforting and soothing. The feel and sounds are pleasing. The natural attraction makes the water table a perfect activity center for a preschool classroom.

Just think of all the learning that goes on! Children experiment with cause and effect, refine problem-solving skills, and learn basic math concepts such as volume, measuring, and comparing.

As your child takes a bath, encourage water play by adding different size containers to fill and empty or different house hold objects that float or sink.

Colanders and other objects with holes are sure to create some intriguing challenges. As your child and you explore the materials, talk about your discoveries together. Guide and extend the learning by asking questions such as “What would happen if ____?” “How does the water feel?” “Why do you think that happened?”

More opportunities for home water play include watering plants, adding water to the sandbox, blowing bubbles through a variety of frames, and freezing or melting water.