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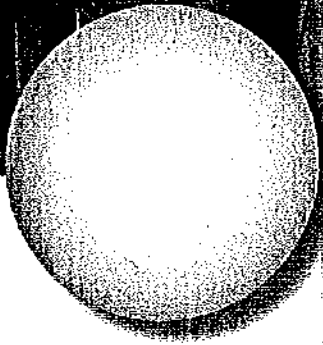
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Kev

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Eric

9

Preparing the Environment

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- explain the value of planned indoor and outdoor space.
- name the basic activity areas in a center, along with the functions of each area.
- list criteria to consider when choosing playroom furniture and color schemes.
- summarize factors that affect the organization of space in a center.
- organize basic activity areas of the classroom and outdoor playground.

Terms to Know

isolation area
staff room
audiovisual board
acoustic material
cubbies
cool colors
warm colors
traffic pattern
sensory table
stationary equipment

Michiko is running. Susie is hiding. No one saw Mary take the fish out of the bowl. There is no place for Jose to play with the blocks. The behavior of children in this classroom is affected by the way the space is arranged.

In another classroom, the space is carefully organized. All the children are engaged in constructive play. The layout encourages active exploration, independent learning, and communication. There are few, if any, behavior problems. Heather is smiling. Fred is looking at books in a quiet corner of the classroom. At the same time, Wong and his friends are building a large block structure.

In a developmentally appropriate, well-organized environment, children grow and learn. The teacher is responsible for creating a pleasing environment that is shaped by the needs and interests of the children. It should be designed to promote self-help and independent behavior.

Classroom arrangement reflects program quality. It also provides clues about expected behavior. A well-planned setting usually promotes interesting play, provides children with choices, and reduces behavior problems. It should encourage interaction with other children and adults, as well as active exploration. Well-planned space is arranged based on the children's temperaments, developmental needs, interests, experiences, and program goals. The classroom should also be attractive and inviting.

A nurturing, safe environment is critical for children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Children need space to build, move, sort, create, pretend, spread out, work, and interact with friends. They need diverse materials in sufficient quantity to keep them actively involved. They need a place to be quiet, be active, talk, and move. Space affects the activity level of children. The choices children make and the way they carry out their choices are also affected by space. Space can even affect the children's concentration and the length of time they will remain with one activity. Therefore, space should be arranged according to children's needs and interests. However, the space should also be convenient for the staff. See 9-1.

Quality early childhood programs have ample space for children and teachers.

Value of Planned Space

The early years are crucial for the cognitive development of children. Before arranging a classroom, review the developmental objectives of the program. For example, two-year-old children do not have refined large motor skills. To promote safety and motor development, they need large, open spaces. They need to be able to find adults when they need them. The classroom should be planned with these goals in mind.

An attractive, well-arranged classroom is welcoming and visually pleasing. It conveys a sense of order. It encourages children to use materials and do things for themselves. It respects the children's curiosity and nurtures a desire for exploring. It also molds their behavior. Boundaries found in this type of classroom make the children more responsible. They know where to find classroom materials. They also know where to return them when they are finished.

Safety is an important concern in planning space. When children feel safe, they feel free to learn. Open spaces must be provided so adults can supervise the entire room. The ratio of caregivers to children also affects safety. If the number of caregivers is low, the room arrangement should be simple to make supervision easier.

Studies have shown that the arrangement of space greatly affects teachers' behavior as well as children's. In centers with well-planned space, teachers were more friendly, sensitive, and warm to children. These teachers taught their children to respect others' rights and feelings. In centers with poorly-planned space, teachers were often more insensitive to their students.

The goals for a well-planned space include:

- providing a physically safe environment for the children

- providing children with areas that promote cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth

- providing an abundance of materials so children can make choices

- providing adults with a space that is easy to supervise

- providing space that is pleasing to the eye for both adults and children

- providing easy access to materials when needed so children are able to direct themselves, 9-2

- providing a space with high activity and low stress where children can work and play comfortably

Physical Space

The physical space of a center may be divided into seven main areas. These basic areas include the following:

- entrance
- director's office
- isolation area
- kitchen or kitchenette
- staff room
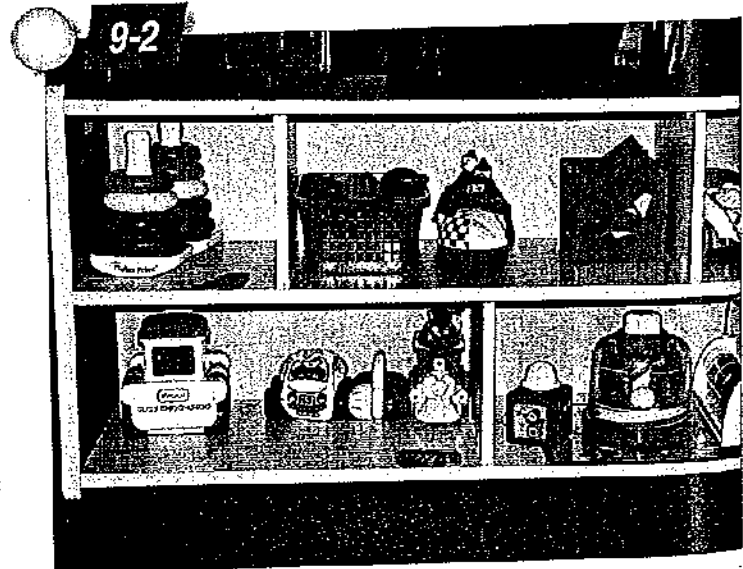
This infant-toddler classroom features low shelving units that allow children to choose their own activities and clean up after themselves.

- bathrooms
- classroom or playroom

Entrance

The entrance to the center should be attractive and appealing to children and adults, 9-3. Plants, the children's artwork attractively displayed, and a bulletin board for families will enhance the appearance. If space permits, chairs and a sofa are welcome additions for families who need to wait.

Director's Office

The director's office should be just inside the center's entrance. School records, children's records, and public relations material can be stored here. This office can also be used for family interviews and conferences. Some directors also have a small table in their offices for teachers' meetings and planning sessions.

This child care center has an entrance area that helps families feel welcome.

Isolation Area

Most states require centers to provide a special room or space for children who become ill or show signs of a communicable disease. This room, often called an **isolation area**, should contain a cot and a few toys. If the space is not available, a cot may be placed in the director's office when needed.

Kitchen

The size of a center's kitchen depends on the amount of daily food preparation. Even if meals are not served, most centers have a small area with a sink, refrigerator, and stove for preparing snacks. Regardless of the kitchen's use, the local health department personnel should inspect it. They can tell you if all legal requirements are being met.

Floor coverings in the kitchen should be easy to clean. Vinyl coverings and ceramic tile are recommended floor coverings for the kitchen, bathroom, and art area.

Staff Room

Adults need an area for their own use. This **staff room** should contain a locked storage space for personal belongings. A coat rack, sofa, and tables or desks should also be available. Most staff members prefer having a computer, telephone, professional journals, and curriculum guides available, too. Privacy is also important for the staff area. This area may be used for meeting with families or other staff members.

Bathrooms

Most states have laws requiring a certain number of toilets and sinks for a group of young children. Some states require at least one toilet for every 10 children. However, a higher ratio is more convenient. There are many times during the day that several children may have to use the bathroom at the same time.

The size of the toilet fixture will vary with the size and age of the children. A group of two-year-old children would be comfortable with toilet fixtures 10 inches from the floor. Five-year-old children would find 13-inch toilet fixtures more comfortable.

If small toilets are unavailable, a sturdy wooden step can be used for smaller children. This same wooden step can be used in front of the sinks that are too high for children to reach.

For safety purposes, the water heater that supplies water to the children's bathroom should be set on low heat.

Bathroom flooring should be easy to clean. Tile is recommended. Also, it should not be slippery. Avoid having wax applied to the flooring in this area.

Indoor Environment

The classroom or playroom should be on the ground floor close to an exit. A rectangular room is the best shape as it allows for optimal supervision. This shape also allows for many more space arrangements than other shapes.

Studies show that aggression increases in programs that lack adequate space. Quality child care centers need to have enough space for children and a variety of materials and equipment. The recommended amount of space varies from state to state. It can range from 35 to 100 square feet of indoor space per child. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends at least 35 square feet of free indoor space per child. This amount should not include hallways or space taken up by equipment, built-in cabinets, closets, or toilets.

Walls

All walls should be painted with lead-free, washable paint. Many teachers like to attach bulletin boards to the walls. This provides space to hang artwork and papers, as well as absorb sound, 9-4.

9-4

A brightly decorated bulletin board is a welcome addition to any classroom.

Chalkboards can also be attached to walls. They should be installed at the children's eye level.

Instead of bulletin boards and chalkboards, some centers use audiovisual boards. An **audiovisual board** can serve as a bulletin board, chalkboard, and movie screen. It is usually white, off-white, or beige. The disadvantage of the audiovisual board is that magnetic strips must be used to hold up objects when used as a bulletin board. These strips can be costly.

Floors

A recent trend for playroom floor coverings has been carpeting. Carpeting is easy to maintain. It also adds warmth and provides a sound cushion for noise control. Carpeting can also add visual appeal, comfort, warmth, and softness to a room. Use a tightly woven carpet that has a flat, firm surface. This will minimize balance problems for children while stacking blocks.

Windows

Windows in the playroom should be placed so children can see outside. Screens should be installed outside all windows. All windows should open in case of a fire.

Drapes or blinds may be used to help control light. They also add interest, softness, and color to a room. Drapes or blinds reduce glare, heating bills, and noise. One disadvantage of drapes is that they become soiled easily. This is caused by children brushing by them with dirty hands or art supplies.

For a different effect, you might wish to hang a valance above each window. This can be a nice addition to a classroom if the colors complement the decor. If you use valances instead of drapes, also use miniblinds or pleated shades to reduce glare.

Doors

Doors should be lightweight. To guard against injury, the doors should push out to open. Doorknobs should be low enough so children can reach them.

Acoustics

Studies show that noise affects children's behavior. For this reason, make an effort to use materials that reduce or eliminate noise.

Acoustic material is used to deaden or absorb sounds. Carpets, drapes, bulletin boards, pillows, stuffed toys, and sand are examples. Due to the physical makeup of these materials, noise can be reduced or eliminated. For instance, carpeting will absorb the sound of footsteps.

If the classroom is still noisy after the addition of draperies, carpeting, and bulletin boards, acoustical tile may need to be installed on the classroom ceiling. If possible, the ceiling should be 10 to 12 feet high to reduce noise and provide a feeling of spaciousness.

Temperature

Temperature is important in planning a comfortable environment for young children. They cannot attend to or process information in an uncomfortable environment.

Usually a temperature range of 68 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit will be comfortable.

When vigorous physical activities are planned, the temperature should be decreased. In order for children to be comfortable, adults may have to wear a sweater.

Humidity

Humidity, like temperature, influences the comfort of the environment. Usually a 40 to 60 percent relative humidity range is considered comfortable. To maintain comfort, the relative humidity should be decreased as the temperature rises.

Electrical Outlets

For safety purposes, electrical outlets should be above the children's reach. When outlets are not being used, safety caps should be inserted for protection. Many times a room arrangement will be influenced by the location of electrical outlets. For example, the music area would be located near an outlet so a record, tape, or CD player could be used. For the safety of the children and staff, do not use long electrical cords. These can cause someone to trip or fall. Because of this danger, many states ban the use of long extension cords in the classroom.

Furniture

Classroom or playroom furniture should be durable, washable, and stackable. Tables and easels should be adjustable. Then they can be adjusted to fit each child who may use them. To check if an easel is the proper height, have the child stand next to it. Ask the child to touch the middle of the easel pad. If the child has to bend or reach to touch the middle of the pad, adjust the easel.

Chair and table heights are checked in a different manner. Ask the child to sit on a chair. Then push it under the table. If the table and chair are suited to the child, there will be room between the bottom of the table

Health and Safety

Sanitizing Surfaces

Keeping surfaces free from harmful bacteria and viruses can be a challenge in a child care setting. A simple sanitizing solution of ¼-cup household bleach to one gallon of water can be used for this purpose. You can use this mixture in spray bottles. After spraying the solution on a surface, wait two minutes before drying to kill any infectious agents. You can also allow surfaces to air dry since chlorine evaporates. Commercial sanitizers are also available; however, be sure to check your state and local guidelines regarding products that are safe to use around children, adults, and food.

and the child's knees. The child should be able to place his or her feet flat on the floor.

Chairs

Children's chairs are often used in the art, dramatic play, and dining areas. Chairs should always be the proper height for the children. Plastic, stackable chairs are preferred by most teachers. Plastic chairs have other advantages. They are light enough for the children to move, and they do not require refinishing. An adult-sized rocking chair may be used by children in the library or dramatic play area. The chair may also be used by adults as a special place to hold or comfort a child.

Tables

Classroom tables should be hard, smooth, and washable. The tables should be light enough to move. Most preschool teachers prefer tables that are large enough to seat four to six children. Rectangular tables are often preferred over round tables. The rectangular shape allows children to have their own space. This reduces the chance for aggression. Low, round tables are sometimes used in the library and dramatic play area.

Storage Units

Storage units should be organized for easy access of equipment and supplies. Blocks, books, art supplies, games, and other classroom materials are kept in storage units, 9-5. These units should be arranged to encourage children to independently remove and return materials. For flexibility, all storage units should have casters so they can be moved easily. The casters should be equipped with locks so they do not move accidentally. For units without casters, hardware can be bought and easily installed. Keep in mind that pegboard or corkboard

Blocks and other toys are well organized on this shelving unit.

can be attached to exposed sides and backs of units. These can serve as bulletin boards.

Storage units should match the height of the children. The children must be able to reach the materials. Therefore, choose small, lightweight sections of cabinets.

If doors are needed on the storage units, sliding doors are best. When opened, swinging doors can cause safety hazards.

Lockers and Cubbies

Children can learn responsibility for their own belongings when they are provided personal storage space. Each child enrolled in the program should have a locker, 9-6. The lockers should be labeled with a photograph or other visual clue, depending on the age of

the child. Most lockers for preschool children are 10 to 12 inches wide and 10 to 15 inches deep. Each locker should contain a hook for hanging a coat.

The primary purpose of lockers is to store children's clothing. Finished artwork, library books, parent letters, and other valuable items must also be stored. For storage of these items, many lockers have a top section. These are often called **cubbies**. If the lockers do not have cubbies, containers can be stacked to store the children's belongings. See 9-7.

Lockers and cubbies should have a coat of varnish or paint. This coating will help prevent staining from muddy boots or wet paints. If lockers are painted, use a washable enamel paint.

Lockers should be placed near the entrance. This will save families time when
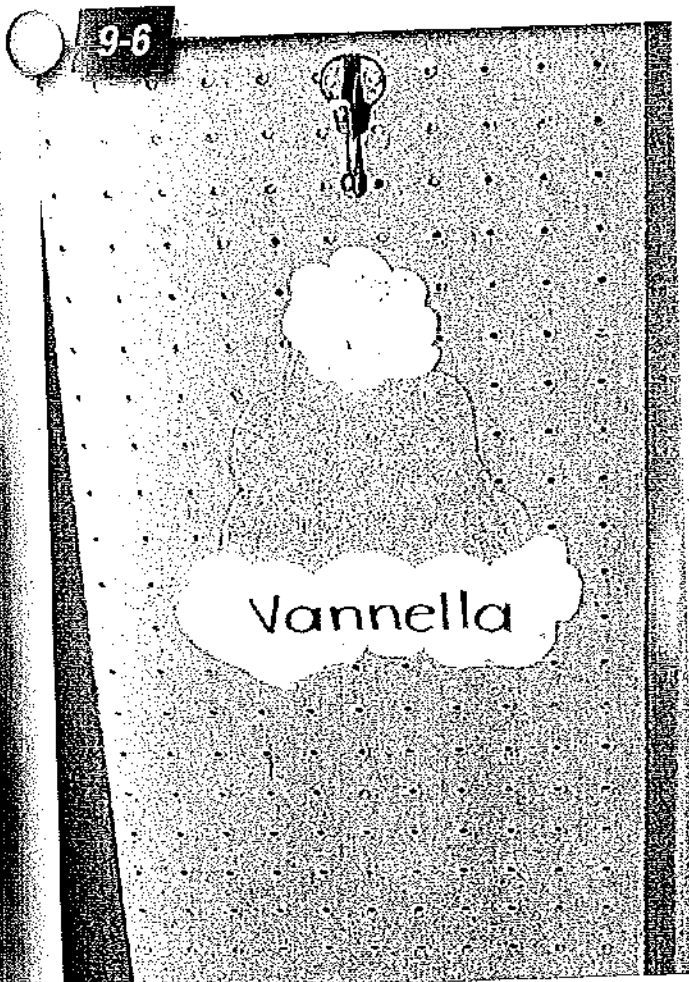
Use symbols on lockers to help young children identify their space.
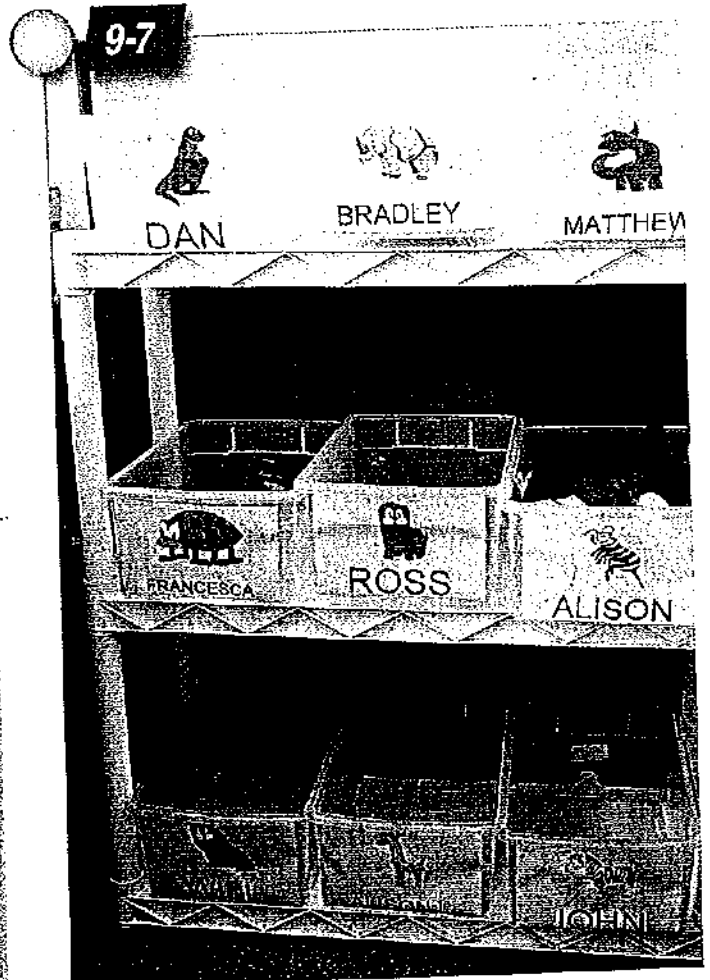
Empty containers can be used to store children's small personal belongings.

picking up children. It will save the class from being disrupted when someone must go to his or her locker. It will also save cleanup time during bad weather.

Color Choices for Child Care Centers

An attractive environment contributes to a child's well-being and appeals to the senses. The use of color can affect how teachers and children feel about their classroom. Colors can either calm or stimulate young children. Because of the emotional effects of color, select colors carefully. The goal should be to create a room that looks pleasant and feels spacious. This can be done using **cool colors**, such as blue, green, and purple. Cool colors make a room appear larger. They create a feeling of openness. **Warm colors** make a room seem smaller. These colors include red, yellow, and orange. Studies show that children prefer warm colors until about age six. After the age of six, they start to prefer cool colors.

Other factors affect color selection. These include the amount of available light in the room and the amount of time spent in the room. For example, if the room does not have much light available, a warm color will help the room appear brighter.

Since child care centers are active places and contain a lot of colorful materials, white is often used in classrooms. Children respond well to white. White rooms are perceived as clean and cool. White is an excellent color for the eating, isolation, administration, and reading areas. It is also a good color for the bathroom.

Light blue is often used in child care centers. Children respond to this color by feeling comfortable, soothed, and secure. Therefore, light blue is useful in the nap, reading, eating, and isolation areas.

Light green, like light blue and white, creates a positive response. It makes children feel calm, refreshed, peaceful, and restful. It is useful for isolation, nap, reading, and eating areas.

Yellow makes people feel happy and cheerful. It is a good color in art and music areas. Playground equipment is often painted yellow.

Orange is a welcoming, forceful, energetic color. Its use should be limited. Clearly, an orange room can be overwhelming. However, orange can be used effectively in small areas, such as an entrance.

As with orange, the use of red should be limited, 9-8. Overuse of red can be too stimulating for children. Children may become overactive. Red is best used on indoor gross-motor equipment, outdoor equipment, and teaching aids designed to stimulate children.

The color purple can have a mournful effect. It is best used only as an accent color on equipment, bulletin boards, and teaching aids. When used as a wall color, limit its use to reading areas.

The use of red on this decoration creates interest without being overpowering.

Factors That Affect Space Organization

An organized classroom can inspire children to take part in the activities of the day. The space should be arranged to define the scope and limits of activities. Space will also affect the children's use of and care of materials. Therefore, the space must provide for proper learning experiences.

When planning classroom space, many factors should be considered. These factors will greatly affect how the classroom is organized. They include licensing requirements, program goals, group size, scale, and traffic patterns.

Licensing Requirements

All states have their own licensing requirements for child care centers. You will need to know your state's requirements before you begin planning classroom space. Requirements vary from state to state. However, some common requirements exist. For example, they all require a minimum number of fire extinguishers. Also, all exits must be clear, and entrance doors must open to the outside. In addition, a minimum number of square feet of space must be available for each child.

Program Goals

A program's goals should be based on the children's abilities, age, and skills. The goals a teacher selects should represent the major stages of development and growth. (These stages were discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.) The environment, as well as planned classroom activities, should stimulate growth and development.

Caregivers concerned with all developmental areas might select the following program goals:

- to promote a positive self-concept
- to promote independence
- to promote problem-solving skills
- to promote fine-motor coordination
- to promote gross-motor coordination
- to promote self-control
- to promote language skills
- to promote prosocial behavior
- to promote an appreciation of cultural diversity

After the goals for the children are listed, review each goal. Decide how each goal will be supported by the classroom environment. For instance, most teachers set a goal to develop independence in children. The arrangement of the room can help children achieve this goal. Materials, locker hooks, and shelving units should all be within easy reach for the children. This will encourage children to act without help from adults in many cases. Chart 9-9 lists a number of ways to meet various program goals.

Program goals should also reflect state licensing requirements. Therefore, if the state requires that children receive one meal and two snacks each day, a program goal might state that children receive nutritious meals and snacks. Some states even state how many toys are needed in the classroom.

Group Size

Group size is an important factor to consider when arranging space. A large number of children crowded into a small area will cause problems. Children are likely to become upset and fight more when crowded.

9-9

How Goals Are Supported by the Environment

Goal	How Goal Is Supported by Environment
To promote independence	Similar materials are stored together. Drawers, shelves, and containers are labeled with outlines of contents. Materials and equipment are easily accessible to children. Coat hooks are low enough for children to hang their own clothing. Individual storage is provided for each child.
To promote a positive self-concept	Equipment is developmentally appropriate. Children's work is displayed. Unstructured materials are available in each area. A variety of materials are available for children to choose.
To promote problem-solving skills	Equipment is developmentally appropriate. Open-ended materials, such as blocks, are available. A variety of materials are available for children to choose. Materials are rotated to create interest.
To promote fine-motor coordination	A classroom area is devoted to manipulative equipment. Enough material to maintain children's interest is available. Materials are easily accessible to children. Materials are changed frequently to create interest.
To promote gross-motor development	A classroom area is devoted to gross-motor activities. An adequate amount of space is provided to encourage play. The traffic flow does not interfere with the children's use of materials. The area is located away from quiet activities.
To promote self-control	Enough space is provided for children to use materials in each classroom area. The classroom traffic flow permits children to work without interruption. Noisy areas are located away from quiet areas. Sufficient variety and quantity of materials are available in each area.
To promote language skills	A book display space is placed at children's eye level. Classroom materials are labeled. A wide variety of materials, including books, puppets, and tapes, are available.
To promote social skills	Boundaries between areas are defined with low shelving units. A sufficient amount of materials are available to encourage cooperative play. The area is set up for small groups of children.
To promote an appreciation of cultural diversity	Dolls, puppets, puzzles, picture books, posters, and bulletin board figures represent various cultural and ethnic groups. Music and musical instruments reflect various cultural and ethnic groups.

Defining program goals is the first step toward well-organized space.

Likewise, a small number of children with too much space will also cause stress. Too much open space encourages children to run. You must strive to create an arrangement that will be the proper size for the group.

The more children, the more empty space is needed. A good rule of thumb is to plan between one-third and one-half of the classroom for open space. Also, the room arrangement needs to be fairly simple. Children will feel safe and secure in this arrangement.

Arrange shelving units and other furniture with group size in mind. A good arrangement allows teachers and children to move easily through the room. It also allows for teachers and children to see and be seen easily. This will promote a relaxed setting.

Scale

The classroom environment must be scaled to the size of its occupants. Child-sized furniture should be purchased or built. Bulletin boards, toilets, water fountains, sinks, pictures, and other items should all be at the children's level. One method to judge if the setting is scaled for children is for an adult to walk on his or her knees through the entire classroom. Anything positioned too high for the children should be noted and adjusted.

Traffic Patterns

The arrangement of a classroom centers around the traffic pattern. This is the way children move through the classroom area. Furniture should be arranged to create a useful traffic pattern. For instance, children should be able to walk from the art area to the blockbuilding area without going through the middle of the library area.

Program activities will affect traffic patterns. For example, most child care centers provide breakfast and lunch. These meals may be prepared on site or contracted.

Whichever plan is used, the food will likely be made in or delivered to a kitchen. For this reason, the kitchen should be near a delivery door and near the eating area of the classroom.

Organizing Basic Activity Areas

Classrooms arranged according to activity areas provide an ideal environment for active learning. Each activity area should clearly convey to the children what those choices are. For example, the art area should have an easel and art supplies. By displaying these materials in an inviting manner, the children will be aware of what is available to them. This gives them the chance to make their own choices.

Each activity area is a space of its own, and each area supports the program goals. Each area should be defined, but the space should be flexible. Shelves placed in *U* or *L* shapes can create boundaries for classroom areas. The shelves can be moved when the shape of the space needs to be changed.

Arrange activity areas by function. Think carefully of each area as wet or dry, active or quiet, 9-10. Wet and dry activities should be placed far away from each other. Sensory and science activities are examples of wet/active activities. Art, eating, and cooking are types of wet/quiet activities.

Active activities should take place far from quiet activities. Woodworking, blockbuilding, music, and dramatic play are all active activities. Each of these could disrupt a quiet activity. Sleeping, reading, and small manipulative play are all examples of quiet/dry activities.

Most teachers prefer to map out two or three possible area arrangements. This helps them see what will work best and why. Some room arrangement principles are shown in 9-11.

Remember that rather than being static, room arrangements must be dynamic.

9-10

Basic Activity Areas

Active

Gross-Motor
Music
Woodworking
Science Sensory { sand / water }   Blockbuilding
Dramatic play

Wet ← → **Dry**

Art
Eating

Small manipulative
 play
Library
Sleeping
Private space
Writing center
Technology area

Quiet
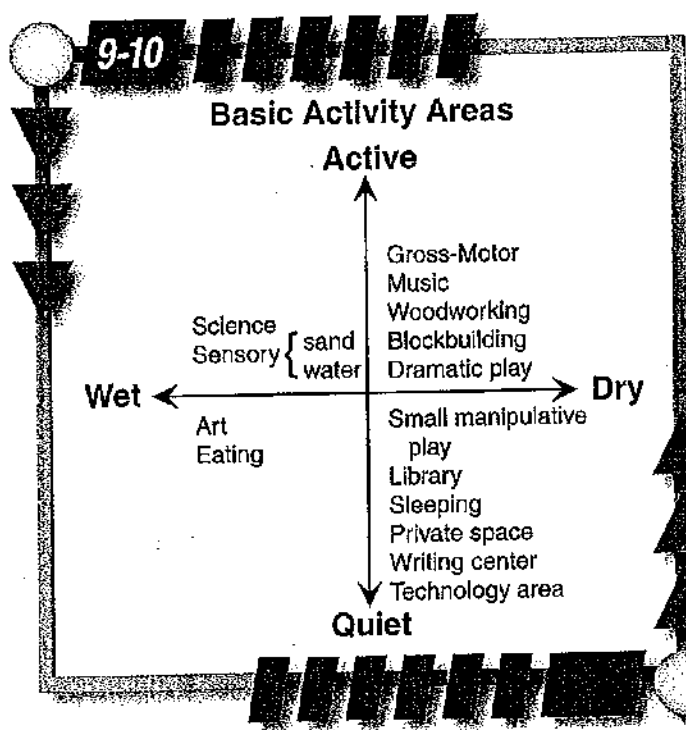
Planning space requires that you consider each activity as it relates to other activities that take place in the same area.

Rearranging the classroom areas is necessary when the children's interests change. With changing interests, the addition and elimination of equipment and materials needs to be considered.

Introducing Activity Areas

Children require an introduction to the activity areas in the classroom. They need to learn what materials are in each area. They need to learn what activities take place in that area. They also need to learn the safet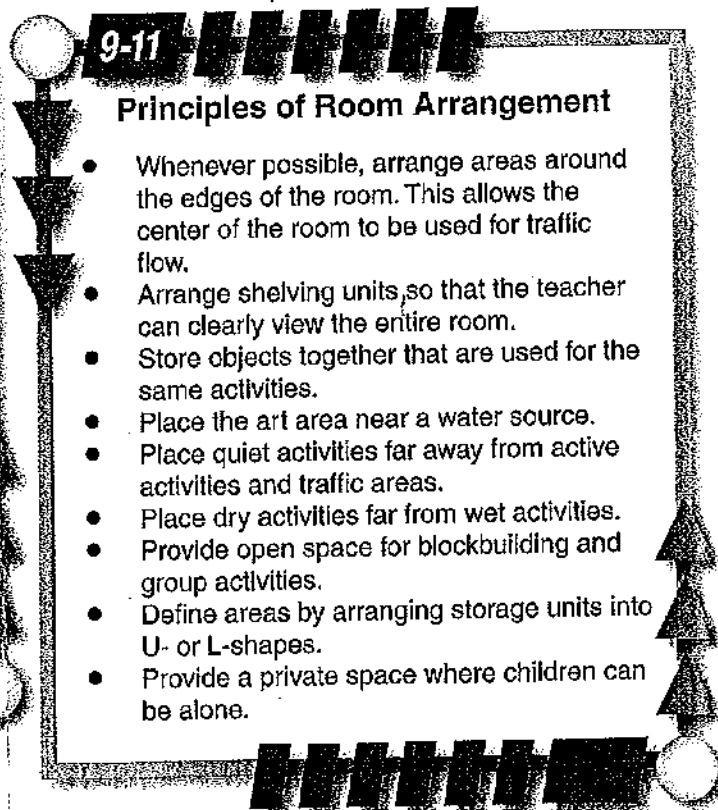y and cleanup rules of the area. In programs that operate for nine-month sessions, the children can be introduced to the areas at the start of the session. In programs that operate throughout the year, children can be introduced to each area when they first enroll in the program. Children who have been in the program for a time may help the teacher introduce the areas to new students.

Children need to learn the routine for using and replacing materials. Carefully arranging materials will enable the children

9-11

Principles of Room Arrangement

- Whenever possible, arrange areas around the edges of the room. This allows the center of the room to be used for traffic flow.
- Arrange shelving units so that the teacher can clearly view the entire room.
- Store objects together that are used for the same activities.
- Place the art area near a water source.
- Place quiet activities far away from active activities and traffic areas.
- Place dry activities far from wet activities.
- Provide open space for blockbuilding and group activities.
- Define areas by arranging storage units into U- or L-shapes.
- Provide a private space where children can be alone.

Keep these principles in mind when planning space. Would you add any guidelines to this list?

to help maintain the learning environment. To help children feel comfortable in using and moving about the areas, use labels and signs, 9-12. Labels and signs direct children's attention. This then helps children become

9-12

lockers and lunch-room
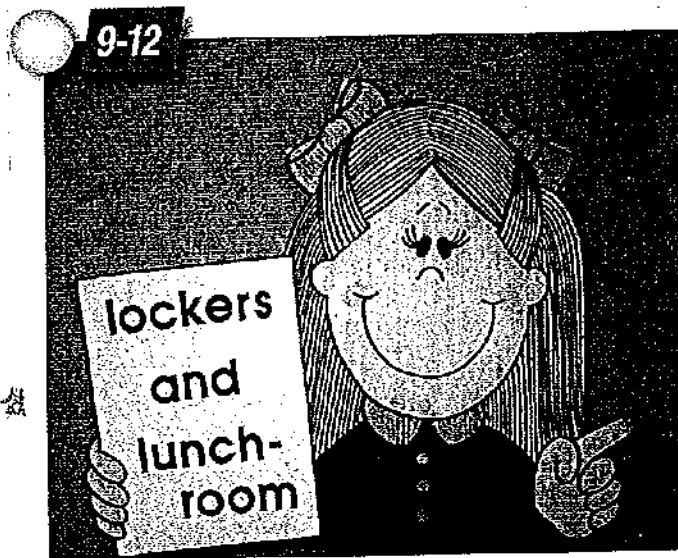
With the help of labels and signs, children will learn to move around their environment easily.

self-directed learners. Labels and signs also encourage children to return materials to storage areas. Tape pictures to the storage areas to serve as reminders.

Blockbuilding Area

Blocks give children practice sorting, grouping, comparing, arranging, making decisions, cooperating, and role-playing. Therefore, this area should be well-equipped and well-defined. See 9-13.

The best location for blockbuilding should be on a carpeted area. Carpeting helps by reducing the noise level. Define the area with low cabinets. Allow enough room for building. Children will need room to build structures that go around, up, and out.

To stimulate play, provide items other than blocks in the blockbuilding area. Examples include plastic zoo and farm animals, people representing different cultures, traffic signs, wheeled toys, pulleys, and boxes.

Use the low cabinets that define the area for storage of materials. Make sure there are enough shelves to arrange the blocks according to shape. Place all blockbuilding materials at the children's eye level and within their reach.

Large, heavy blocks (and other heavy materials) should be placed on a bottom shelf or on the floor to avoid accidents. Save higher shelves for lightweight items. Label each shelf with the shape of the block that can be found there. Labels help children return the blocks to the correct shelf. Labels also provide matching practice and reduce cleanup time.

Art Area

Place the art area near a water source. Arrange the space so either groups or individuals can use the area. Use tables, chairs, easels, drying racks, and shelving units that are easy to clean and maintain. See 9-14. Label the shelves with the materials found there.

Dramatic Play Area

The dramatic play area is also known as the home living or housekeeping area. For younger children, this area should be arranged to look like a real home. A stove, refrigerator, table, chairs, sink, and doll bed are basic furniture you may wish to provide. Some centers even include child-sized sofas. Other props may be added. For instance, you
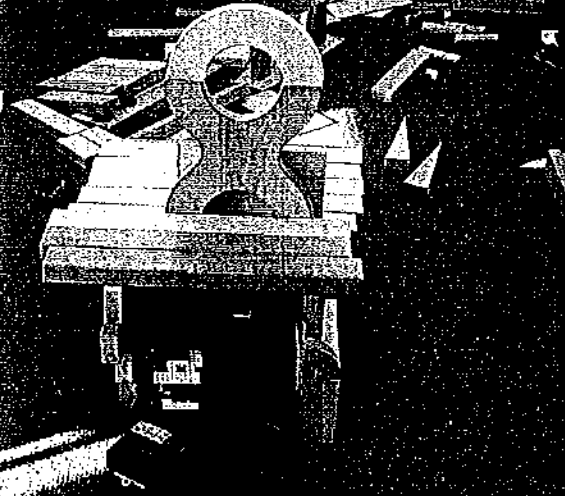
Blockbuilding areas are very popular. Make sure this area is well equipped and spacious.

Make efficient use of space by placing a drying rack for artwork overhead.

may wish to provide dolls, kitchen utensils, cleaning tools, and dress-up clothes. For older children, other props may be added to help them extend their understanding of the world. For example, the area could be set up as a hair salon, bakery, fast food restaurant, or post office.

Sensory Area

The key piece of equipment in the sensory area is the **sensory table**. It is also known as a water or sand table, 9-15. The size of the table will depend on the amount of space available and depend on the age of the children. Two- and three-year-old children love the sensory appeal of water and sand. A sensory table can give the children practice interacting with others.

Not all centers have sensory tables. Some centers use plastic wading pools or washtubs. Whatever container is used, it should be placed near a water source. Children and teachers enjoy adding water to the sand to change the feeling.

Other items are often used in the sensory table. Provide rustproof spoons, shovels, sand pails, measuring cups, funnels, strainers, and other kitchen items. Place shelving units near

or under the table for storage. Items can also be stored in plastic buckets or laundry baskets.

Woodworking Area

After building wood sculptures, many children enjoy decorating them with paint. For that reason, locate the woodworking area near the art area, 9-16. For the children's safety, place this area outside the line of traffic.

Items you may wish to provide at the woodworking bench include safety goggles, tools, wood scraps, and styrofoam pieces. Hang a pegboard next to the wood bench, within children's reach. It can be used to hold tools. To encourage the return of tools, paint outlines of the tools on the pegboard. The children can replace tools by matching them with outlined shapes.

This sand table has extra built-in features to increase the children's enjoyment.

The woodworking table can hold the attention of children for extended time periods.

Sleeping Area

Most preschool children rest or nap after lunch. In fact, most state's licensing rules and regulations require that children under age five rest or nap. Not all programs, however, have separate sleeping areas. For those that do not, a flexible room arrangement is key. Such an arrangement can be quickly and quietly altered during or immediately after lunchtime into a sleeping area. Allow sufficient space for sleeping. Some states require that two feet of open space exist between cots. Check your state's regulations.

Small Manipulative Area

The small manipulative, or small motor, area should be located in a dry, quiet area of the playroom. Table blocks, puzzles, plastic building pieces, parquetry blocks, stringing beads, lotto boards, sewing cards, and color cubes with pattern cards are some items you may wish to provide. These materials should represent various levels of difficulty. Many teachers also include math materials and equipment in this area. A table, chairs, and shelving unit are also useful in this area.

Language Area

The language area should be located in the quietest part of the classroom. Often this is next to the manipulative area. In addition to providing books and magazines, you will want to promote language arts. For example, paper, pens, pencils, and felt-tip markers encourage writing skills. Shelving units, a table, and chairs are all useful in this area. See 9-17. For comfort, pillows may also be added. Many centers also carpet this area or add an area rug.

Music Area

Rhythm instruments; tapes, records, CDs, and players; puppets; and scarves are
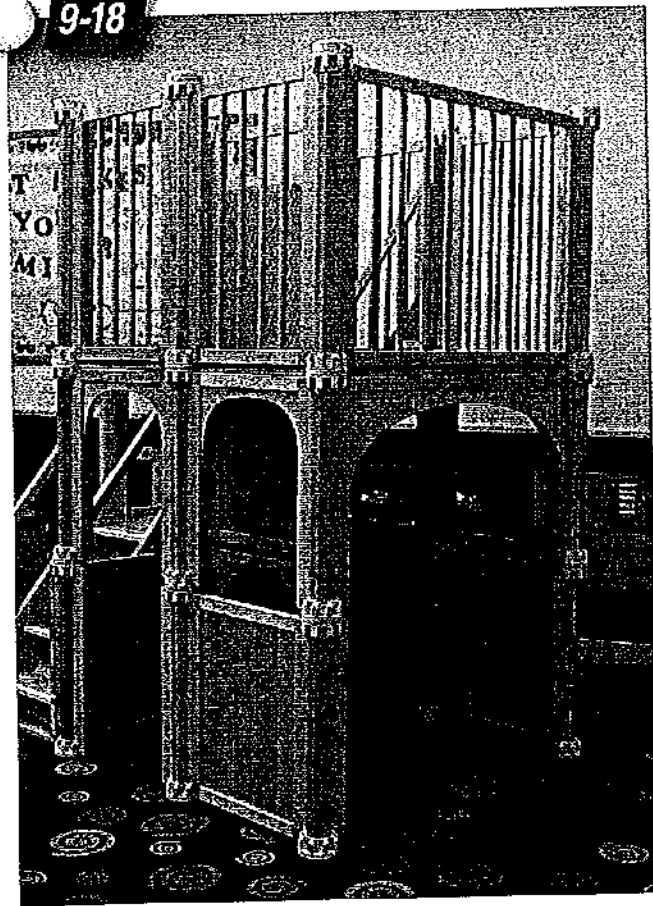
Display books at the children's eye level in the library area.

found in almost all music areas. When space permits, some centers have a piano. For other centers, an Autoharp® or guitar is an option. Space should be provided in the music area for movements and dancing.

Private Space

Provide a private area in the classroom where children can be alone. Children then have the option of limiting contact with others when they choose. This reduces the pressure of being around others when they wish to be alone. Set a classroom rule stating that children who go to the private space will not be disturbed by others.

A loft is one unique way to provide private space, 9-18. In programs where a wooden loft is not in the budget, large cardboard boxes and wooden crates can serve the same purpose.

The private space should be small, allowing room for only one or two children at a time. The children in the private space

9-18

Children sometimes like to be alone. This loft provides a perfect setting.

should not be visible to other children in the room. However, the teacher must be able to see into the private space.

Science Area

Place the science area in the wet, active area of the classroom. Most science areas contain at least one table. A shelving unit may be placed here. Small caged pets and project materials would be also found in the science area of the classroom. When possible, place this area near a light and water source for growing plants.

Technology Area

The technology area should be in the quiet, dry part of the classroom. A technology area might be a small area with just one computer and printer or a larger, lab-type section. Electrical outlets are needed for computers and printers. If Internet access is desired, a phone jack will also be needed in this area.

Where you place the computer affects how often children will use it. Keep the monitor visible throughout the classroom. This placement increases children's curiosity about the computer and encourages children to interact. It also helps the teacher supervise from anywhere in the classroom. Store software near the computer. For older children, keep software easy for them to access on their own.

Finally, choose computer furniture designed for young children. Injuries or strains can occur if children must adjust their bodies to reach the mouse or keyboard from adult furniture. Position the top of the work surface two inches below the children's elbows. When seated, children should be able to see the center of the monitor by looking directly ahead. Having a few extra chairs in the area encourages the children to use the computers together.

Eating Area

When space is available, provide a separate eating area. This area could also serve as a special interest area for cooking activities. It should be located near the kitchen. This allows for easy service and cleanup.

If space is limited, have children sit at tables in other areas of the classroom. The daily schedule will have to be arranged to allow for this.

Chart 9-19 summarizes each classroom area and the furniture, materials, and equipment you may wish to supply in each. In each of the activity areas, include ethnic and cultural materials and artifacts whenever possible. Items such as artwork, fabric,

9-19

Classroom Area	Furniture	Materials and Equipment
Blockbuilding	labeled shelving units	large hollow blocks; solid unit blocks; wheeled toys: cars, buses, trucks, fire engines, tractors, planes; small toy people of various ethnic backgrounds; small colored wooden blocks; zoo animals; farm animals
Art	adjustable easels shelving unit tables and chairs drying rack	clay, pencils, crayons, colored chalk, ink markers, paper, tempera paint, scrap paper and fabrics, tape, glue, paste, brushes, scissors, painting smocks
Dramatic Play	child-sized refrigerator, stove, sink, cupboard, and doll bed trunk or tree to hold clothes tables and chairs	child-sized cleaning equipment: broom, dustpan, and mops; doll clothes; telephones; mirror; dishes and cooking utensils; empty containers, tubs, buckets, and pans; dress-up clothes, costumes; purses, backpacks, suitcases; dolls of both genders and various ethnicities
Sensory	sensory table shelving unit (optional)	funnels, pitchers, hoses, spoons, sponges, measuring cups, containers, strainers, rotary beaters, water toys, scoops, shovels
Woodworking	woodworking bench	saw, screwdrivers, hammers, vice, nails, screws, scraps of soft wood and foam, glue, protective goggles
Sleeping	cots mats	blankets, pillows, soft music
Small Manipulative	shelving units table (optional depending on space) chairs (optional depending on space)	hand puppets, blocks, puzzles, plastic forms for joining, Lego® plastic building blocks, parquetry blocks, stringing beads, board games, sewing cards, colored cubes with pattern cards, bingo games, rods and blocks of different sizes, flannel board numerals, number puzzles, wooden numbers, magnetic numbers, measuring containers, scale, rulers, Tinkertoy® building blocks
Language Center	table chairs rug soft pillows (optional) bean bag (optional) shelving shelving unit flannel board chalkboard	picture books, children's magazines, child-authored books, charts, games, alphabet letters, pens, pencils, felt-tip markers, chalk, different-colored lined and unlined paper, photographs, word lists, picture dictionary
Music	piano (optional) shelving unit cassette, record, or CD player	rhythm instruments; tapes, records, or CDs; silk scarves or streamers for dancing; puppets for song activities
Private Space	loft TV box wooden crates	pillows
Science and Math	aquarium table shelving unit terrarium	magnets; microscopes; scissors; prism; measuring instruments; jars and other empty containers; collections of related objects such as leaves, nuts, rocks, and insects; magnifying glasses; small pets; scales; mirrors, thermometers

Continued

Providing materials and equipment for activity areas is a thought-provoking process. Many everyday materials can be used for learning.

Eating	tables chairs	vases and centerpieces, place mats, plates, eating utensils, cups
Technology Center	child-sized computer workstations or tables and chairs extra chairs computer printer	software, printer paper, manuals for computer and software, typing stand, mouse and wrist pads
Gross-Motor	balance beam steps walking boards jungle gym	balls, ropes, hula hoops, fabric tunnels, tumbling mat

9-19 Continued

jewelry, tools, utensils, toys, and children's books should be included.

Displaying Children's Work

The work of the children should be displayed throughout the activity areas. Bulletin boards, wall hangings, clothesline, or appliance boxes can be used for display purposes. Display areas should be placed at the children's height, allowing them to mount and view their own work.

A wall hanging can be made from a 36- or 52-inch wide piece of felt, burlap, or sailcloth. The length of the hanging can vary. Hem each end of the hanging. Then insert a dowel through each hem.

Colored yarn or a piece of clothesline can also be used to display work. Colored plastic clothespins can be used to clasp work to the line.

A large appliance box can provide a free-standing display area. The advantage of this type of display is that it is portable. It can be used in any area of the center. Even after it is assembled, it can be moved.

Recognize the work of all the children when putting displays together. To keep displays interesting, set a time limit for each display. Change the work often.

Outdoor Play Environments

Developmentally appropriate programs value outdoor as well as indoor play. Children need to take part in both indoor and outdoor activities. Many classrooms do not have the proper amount of space for large muscle activities. Other activities such as science, art, and music can also take place outdoors during pleasant weather. The outdoor playground can fill these needs, 9-20.

The playground is an exciting and fun place for children.

In outdoor areas, the required number of square feet per child varies from state to state. Usually the requirement ranges from 75 to 200 square feet per child. A rectangular space is most functional. Such a playground can be seen from end to end. U- or L-shaped playgrounds are more difficult to supervise and arrange, 9-21.

Planning the Playground

The playground, like indoor space, needs to be studied in terms of use and then broken into areas. A well-planned playground usually has empty space and a wheeled vehicle path. These two items aid movement through the playground.

The wheeled vehicle path divides the activity areas of the playground. This path creates space between areas and makes moving about easier. Without a path, children may constantly be bumping into each other.

To determine where a path should be laid, the teacher should kneel down to be at the children's eye level. The path should be wide enough and clear enough so children can see all areas of the playground, even when outside school grounds.

Empty space should be located in the center of the playground. Activity areas can be placed around the outside of the playground, around the empty space. You may also need to leave empty space around some pieces of equipment.

When planning playground space, consider the following guidelines:

- Equipment should be far enough apart so a child using one piece of equipment cannot touch a child using another piece of equipment.

- All equipment should be visible to the teacher from any spot in the playground.

- Children should not have to walk through one area to get to another.

- Between one-third and one-half of the playground should be used for play equipment and the remainder should be open space to allow for ease of movement.

This playground is designed to be completely visible from this angle. This allows for better supervision.

In addition to paths and empty space, there are other factors to consider when planning an outdoor playground. Among items to be considered are fences, the playground surface, landscaping, storage, wheeled toy paths, stationary equipment, a water source, and animal shelters.

Fencing

Most states require that playgrounds be fenced for safety of the children. Fences prevent children from wandering away or strangers from entering the playground area. This makes outdoor supervision easier for teachers.

Selecting the proper fence requires careful thought. The goal is to purchase a fence that can keep children safe. The fence should fasten securely at the gate. There should be no sharp metal pieces or splintered wood to hurt children.

Two types of fences are commonly found in playgrounds: chain link and wood. Each type of fence has its good and bad points. For instance, because chain link is an open design, it is possible for the children to observe activities outside of the playground. This gives the playground an open feeling. However, some children are able to climb chain link fences. This can be dangerous. In addition, many people feel that chain link fences are unattractive.

Wood fences that complement the center design are very pleasing to the eye. However, the fence must also be designed with the children's safety in mind. Children should not be able to climb over or through a well-designed wood fence. The boards should be sanded to prevent children from getting splinters.

Surfaces

A portion of the playground area should have grass. This is best for running and organized games. Under equipment, the best surface for safety is loose material such as bark nuggets, shredded bark, or sand. When children fall on such material, they receive fewer and less severe injuries than when they fall on hard surfaces. A good cushion requires 9 to 12 inches of loose material.

The drawback to loose materials is that they tend to pile up in one spot. They shift under weight placed on them. In high traffic areas, they will thin out and pile up around the edges of the area. Therefore, the material must be raked or shoveled back into position fairly often.

Landscaping

A well-landscaped playground makes for pleasant surroundings. In addition, landscaping can also be used as part of the science program by encouraging the abilities to observe and make discoveries. Trees, shrubs, and flowers in a variety of sizes, colors, and growing cycles will interest children. Trees are also a good source of shade, beauty, and sound control. A well-landscaped playground gives children a place to be alone, as well as corners for play. Hills in the playground can be used to develop large muscle skills.

Before choosing flowers or shrubs, consult a landscape architect. Some plants are poisonous. Any landscape architect can tell you which plants to avoid. The architect can also recommend shrubs and flowers from a number of growing cycles. This will ensure that children will always have a seasonal plant to study and view.
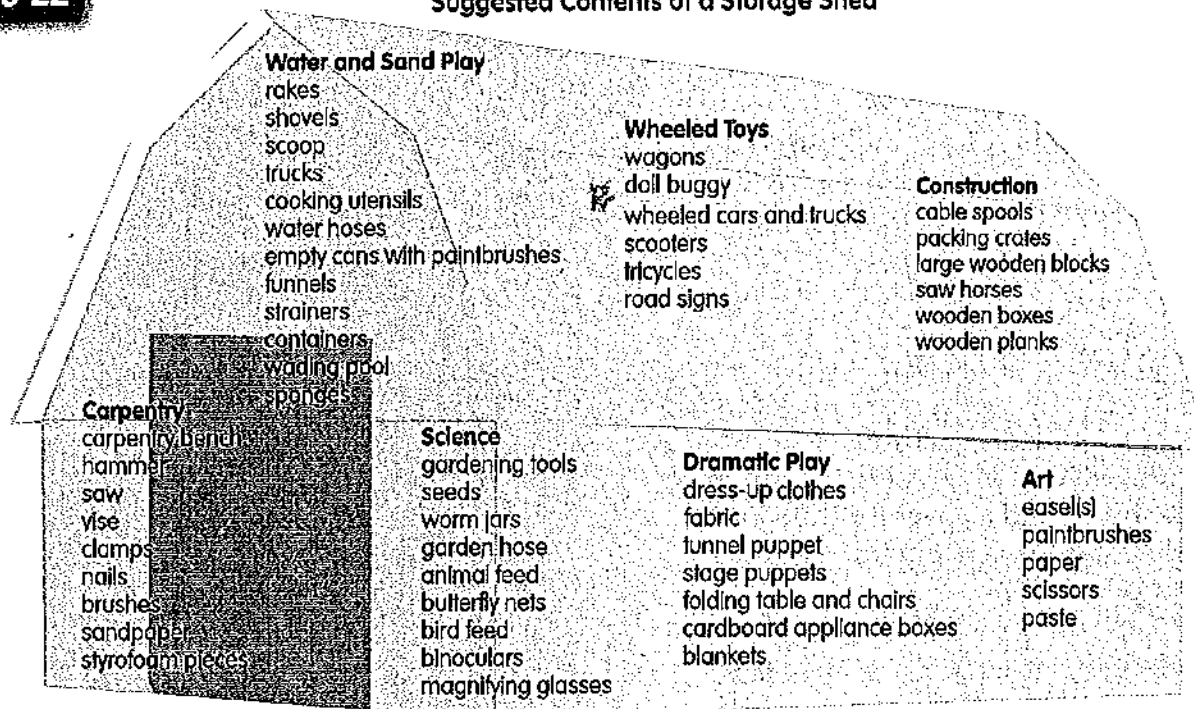
Storage Shed

Tricycles, wagons, scooters, shovels, rakes, balls, plastic wading pools, and gardening tools are just some of the items you may want to keep in a storage shed. See 9-22. The materials stored will vary with the climate of the area.

Storage space should be arranged so children can return materials themselves. Painted lines on the floor of the shed can be used to outline parking spaces for wheeled toys. Large barrels or baskets can be used

9-22

Suggested Contents of a Storage Shed

Water and Sand Play
rakes
shovels
scoop
trucks
cooking utensils
water hoses
empty cans with paintbrushes
funnels
strainers
containers
wading pool
sponges

Wheeled Toys
wagons
doll buggy
wheeled cars and trucks
scooters
tricycles
road signs

Construction
cable spools
packing crates
large wooden blocks
saw horses
wooden boxes
wooden planks

Carpentry
carpentry bench
hammer
saw
vise
clamps
nails
brushes
sandpaper
styrofoam pieces

Science
gardening tools
seeds
worm jars
garden hose
animal feed
butterfly nets
bird feed
binoculars
magnifying glasses

Dramatic Play
dress-up clothes
fabric
tunnel puppet
stage puppets
folding table and chairs
cardboard appliance boxes
blankets

Art
easel(s)
paintbrushes
paper
scissors
paste

The contents of storage sheds varies from center to center.

to store many types of materials. Rakes and shovels can be hung on hooks from the wall.

Wheeled Toy Paths

A path that children can use to push or ride wheeled toys is key for two reasons. The first reason is safety. A path with one-way traffic will prevent children from riding into each other. The second reason is protection of the outdoor play area. A path gives children a place to ride so they do not destroy grassy areas, 9-23. Set limits regarding the use of wheeled toys and paths, and enforce these rules.

The path should be joined to the storage shed. Children can then drive their toys directly into or out of the shed. The path should be designed with curves instead of sharp right angles. This will allow children to make easy turns on curves, keeping them from tipping over on sharp turns.

Stationary Equipment

Jungle gyms, slides, and tree houses are all **stationary equipment** that are set permanently in the ground for stability. For

added appeal, place large pieces of stationary equipment in different corners of the playground. For safety reasons, spacing is also

9-23

Wheeled toy paths should have a hard surface.

needed for pieces of stationary equipment that are designed for different age groups.

Sandbox

Children will play in sandboxes for long periods of time. If the sandbox is in a sunny area, children are at risk for sunburn. Therefore, place sandboxes in shady areas. If there is little or no shade in the playground, build a roof over the sandbox for protection. Also, place the sandbox near a water source. By adding water to dry sand, children can build more detailed structures.

To prevent cats from using the sandbox as a litter box, build a cover for the sandbox. When the sandbox is not being used, place the cover over it, 9-24.

Water

Water play is a pleasant activity for children during warm weather. For this reason, some centers have built-in wading pools. Other centers use plastic, aboveground wading pools when licensing permits. Regardless of the type of pool, constant supervision is necessary. For reasons of safety, pools need to be emptied at the end of each day.

A garden hose is also useful in the playground. Attach it to a sprinkler so the children can play in the water during hot weather. The hose can also be used to water gardens and other plants.

Animal Shelter

Playgrounds for young children often have a number of animals. The type of
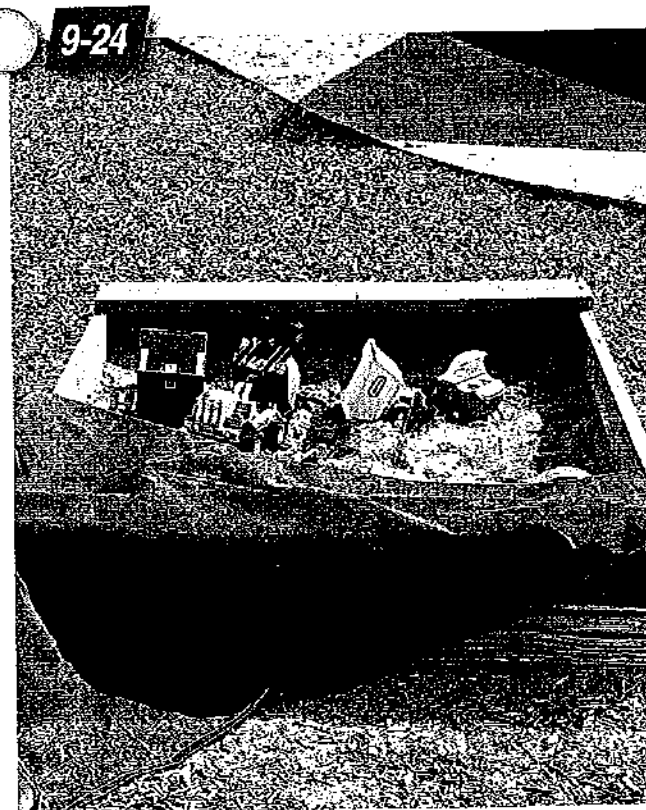
This sandbox can be covered with a tarp when not in use.

animals may be determined by city zoning laws or state child care licensing rules. Some states are beginning to exclude animals in early care and education programs. Therefore, it is important to check your licensing requirements before purchasing animals.

To shelter animals, use cages. These should be large enough for the animal, have a mesh floor to keep the cage tidy between thorough cleanings, and have a quality padlock to protect against vandals. Place the cages where animals will be protected from wind, sun, and rain. Provide adequate protection from extreme heat and cold, too.

Summary

Properly organized space is a key to promoting children's learning. It provides children with the option of working alone or cooperatively. It defines expected behavior for children. Properly organized space frees the children to play without interruption. They will stay with activities for longer periods of time, increasing their attention spans. Properly organized space also provides children with choices.

Space should reflect children's developmental needs, interests, and experiences as well as program goals. In such a space, children are more relaxed and positive. They feel good about themselves. As a direct result, teachers can spend more time nurturing and less time redirecting children's behavior.

Review and Reflect

1. Properly planned space is arranged based on _____.
   A. children's developmental needs
   B. children's interests
   C. program goals
   D. All the above.

2. True or false. Teachers are affected by the arrangement of their classrooms.

3. List four goals for well-planned space.

4. What is the purpose of an isolation area?

5. A _____ room is the best shape for a classroom.

6. Name three uses for an audiovisual board.

7. List four examples of acoustic materials.

8. Storage units should be selected based on the _____ of the children.

9. The top part of a locker is often called a _____.

10. Until about age six, children prefer _____.
    A. warm colors
    B. cool colors
    C. plaid

11. Organized space should define the scope and _____ of activities.

12. List two ways to promote
    A. self-control through the classroom environment
    B. social skills through the classroom environment

13. Are problems created when a small group of children have too much space? Why or why not?

14. _____ are the paths people follow through an area.

15. Activity areas are best defined by arranging storage units into _____ or _____ shapes.