

Learning-Based Play Centres

“Young children actively explore their environment and the world around them through a process of learning-based play. Play is a vehicle for learning. It provides opportunities for learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive. Play and work are not distinct categories for young children, and learning and doing are also inextricably linked for them.” (The Kindergarten Program, 2006 p. 14)

Through play, children learn and develop many skills in many areas, increase confidence and build healthy relationships. A learning centre is a place within the classroom where children can play and pursue learning activities. There are three main types of centres commonly found in Kindergarten classrooms: literacy centres, discovery or exploration centres and dramatic play centres. Literacy centres focus on reading and writing development. The writing centre, alphabet centre, library, listening station, and language centre are examples. Discovery or exploration centres enable children to explore materials with a curriculum focus. Examples are the science centre, math centre, computer centre, sand and water tables, art and painting centres. Dramatic play centres usually focus on simulations of real-life experiences for children. Examples of dramatic play centres are the puppet centre, house or drama centre and toys or puzzles centres.

Well-planned learning centres are at the core of the Kindergarten program and provide opportunities for **children** to:

- Explore, experiment, manipulate and problem solve;
- Progress at own rate of development;
- Practice and apply skills and concepts;
- Relate ideas from one material to another;
- Develop communication skills; and
- Acquire literacy and numeracy skills in real-life situations.

Learning centres provide opportunities for **teachers** to:


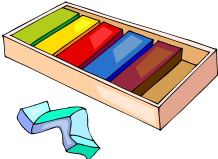
- Meet the needs of individuals;
- Interact, instruct and assist individuals and small groups;
- Encourage appropriate social skills;



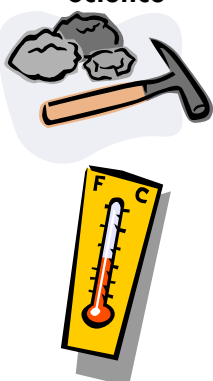

- Meet curriculum expectations through play; and
- Observe and record observations as children play.


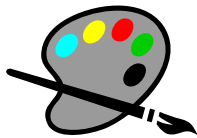

When planning and organizing learning centres it is important for teachers to:


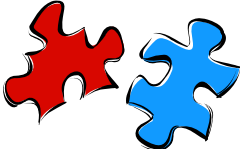


- Label centres, shelves and bins with words and pictures.
- Limit the number of children at the centres.
- Balance quiet and noisy centres.
- Place related centres in close proximity to each other.
- Change or add materials to maintain interest.
- Signal when activities will cease.
- Set acceptable noise limits.
- Teach cleaning up strategies.
- Decide how to track and monitor what is accomplished at the centres.


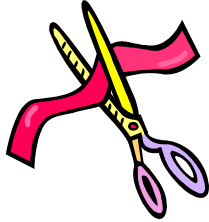
Possible Kindergarten Learning Centres

| Centre | Materials | Considerations | Adding Literacy and Numeracy |
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| Reading  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Book rack, shelf, baskets ▪ Variety of books of all genres ▪ Magazines ▪ Student created books ▪ Interactive charts ▪ Environment print (e.g., flyers, labels, brochures) ▪ Comfy seating or pillows ▪ Big books ▪ Pointers or “funny” fingers ▪ Class-made charts ▪ Poetry box ▪ Posters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Select a quiet location ▪ Create a warm, inviting atmosphere ▪ Display or highlight theme-related books ▪ Include reading materials that reflect children’s racial and ethnic backgrounds. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide retelling materials (e.g. flannel cut outs, simple story props, stick puppets). ▪ Add math concept books. ▪ Add simple class graphs for students to graph favourite books. |
| Play dough  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Play dough or modelling clay ▪ Placemats and trays ▪ Rolling pins, modelling tools ▪ Cookie cutters ▪ Word and letter cards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage children to work on placemats or trays. ▪ Store modelling clay or play dough in an airtight container. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add alphabet and numeral cutters. ▪ Provide large laminated numeral and letter models. ▪ Display Barbara Reid books. ▪ Provide paper and markers for children to label their creations. |

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| <p>Puppets</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Puppet stage or theatre (purchased or created from a science fair board or large appliance box) ▪ Various puppets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage children to present plays to peers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add paper, markers, and crayons for children to create invitations or posters. |
| <p>Mathematics</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pattern blocks and pattern cards ▪ Attribute blocks ▪ Collections for sorting ▪ Sorting trays or mats ▪ Unifix cubes ▪ Dice and spinners ▪ Calculator, clock, timer ▪ Tangrams ▪ Counters ▪ Geometric solids ▪ Materials for patterning ▪ Balance scale ▪ Pegboards and pegs ▪ Geoboards and elastics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take time to introduce materials and demonstrate how to use them ▪ Store materials in labelled plastic containers or baskets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add math concept books and posters ▪ Add paper and various writing tools for children to record their work. |
| <p>Science</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hand lenses, kaleidoscopes ▪ Thermometer ▪ Balance ▪ Magnets ▪ Plastic animals ▪ Mystery objects to stimulate questions and observational skills ▪ Collections of natural materials (e.g., rocks, shells, pinecones) ▪ Marble run ▪ Plants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Change items to keep children challenged and interested. ▪ Encourage talk about the objects ▪ Consider safety of objects. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add non-fiction books and magazines. ▪ Label items with pictures and words. ▪ Add lab coats, pencils, notepads and observation journals. ▪ Add sorting trays or mats. ▪ Add simple scientific posters. |
| <p>Computer</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Computer ▪ Computer station or table ▪ Developmentally appropriate software ▪ Headphones | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Locate in quiet area. ▪ Post a schedule to allocate time fairly. ▪ Set up close to an electrical outlet. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Invite children to sign their name on a posted paper to indicate that they have been at the computer. |

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| <p>Blocks</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Large and small blocks ▪ Wooden and plastic blocks ▪ Lego, Duplo, Tinkertoys, Brio ▪ Baskets ▪ Traffic props ▪ Hard hats ▪ Markers, paper and craft sticks for labels and signs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider placing this centre close to the house centre so that the blocks can easily be integrated into dramatic play. ▪ Provide a carpeted play area. ▪ Store blocks in tubs that are labelled and easily accessible and manageable. ▪ Add supportive props (e.g., animals, cars, trees, people figures etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Label tubs with pictures and words. ▪ Add books about building, construction or blocks. ▪ Include materials for student-created signs and labels. ▪ Include neighbourhood or city maps. ▪ Add geometric solids cards that show various structures for children to build. ▪ Add a wooden ramp for rolling and sliding. |
| <p>Painting</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Painting easel ▪ Brushes and painting pots ▪ Painting aprons ▪ Paper and paint ▪ Sponges ▪ Clips or clothes pegs ▪ Drying rack | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain and encourage proper routines for storage of wet paintings. ▪ Wash brushes frequently. ▪ Locate this centre near the sink. ▪ Replenish paint on a daily basis. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add materials nearby for students to write about their paintings. |
| <p>Writing</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Paper of various sizes, colours and types ▪ Discarded greeting cards, postcards, envelopes ▪ Writing pads ▪ Shape books ▪ Pencils, pens, markers, crayons, scissors, erasers, glue and stapler ▪ Typewriter ▪ Name cards ▪ Alphabet cards ▪ Stamp set ▪ Letter tracers ▪ Whiteboards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide stimulating and novel activities for writing. ▪ Locate near the word wall. ▪ Locate near a bulletin board so work can be displayed. ▪ Allow time for sharing in the author's chair. ▪ Provide real purposes for writing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add books on writing and picture dictionaries. ▪ Include math books. ▪ Create student mailboxes. |

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| <p>Sand</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sand table ▪ Sand ▪ Sieves, shovels, buckets, moulds and sifters ▪ Cars, trucks, plastic figures and plastic animals ▪ Plastic containers of all sizes and shapes ▪ A small hand broom and dustpan ▪ Natural objects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Place broom and dust pan nearby to facilitate independent clean up. ▪ Use play sand or sterile sand. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hide foam or plastic letters and numbers in sand for children to find. ▪ Add road signs. |
| <p>Toys and Puzzles</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wood, foam and floor puzzles, puzzle rack ▪ Plastic animals ▪ Toy train set ▪ Vehicles, signs and road mat ▪ Farm, airport, garage play sets ▪ Doll house set | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number or colour-code pieces of each puzzle. ▪ Organize toys into labelled bins or baskets. ▪ Maintain hygiene by washing toys. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add books about the farm, the airport, the garage etc. ▪ Include number and alphabet puzzles. |
| <p>Water</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Water table and water ▪ Water pump, water wheel and measuring cups ▪ Buckets and various sized and shaped containers ▪ Toy boats and ducks ▪ Sponges, eye droppers, squirt bottles, siphons, plastic tubing and funnels ▪ Water proof aprons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Locate water table on tiled floor near a sink. ▪ Change water frequently. ▪ Equipment needs to be drained and stored nearby. ▪ A regular cleaning routine is necessary for hygiene purposes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add letter and number confetti for children to spoon out and identify. ▪ Invite children to sort items that sink/float. |
| <p>Language</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Felt letters and felt board ▪ Magnetic letters, plastic letters, foam letters ▪ Cookie sheets ▪ Letter stencils and tracers ▪ Chalkboard and chalk ▪ Pocket chart and sequencing strips ▪ Language games ▪ Letter and word puzzles ▪ Trays of sand/salt for tracing letters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Label bins with pictures and words. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include student name cards and word wall words for children to create with various materials. |

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| <p>Listening</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tape recorder, listening station and headphones ▪ Books with accompanying tapes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Used coloured dots to label start/stop buttons on the tape recorder. ▪ Label book and accompanying tape with same sticker and store in a plastic bag. ▪ Set up close to an electrical outlet. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include books and accompanying audiocassettes that support class themes. |
| <p>Cut and Paste</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Markers, crayons, glue, scissors, pencils, tape, stapler and hole puncher ▪ Table covered with plastic ▪ Recyclable materials (e.g., egg cartons, paper rolls, fabric pieces, wallpaper, boxes) ▪ Craft materials (e.g., string, ribbon, craft sticks, glitter, yarn) ▪ Various paper | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide an area where artwork may dry. ▪ Store craft materials in sturdy containers. ▪ Limit amount of materials available at one time. ▪ Ask parents for contributions. | |
| <p>Drama/House</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kitchen play set ▪ Small table and chair set ▪ Dishes, pots and pans ▪ Multicultural play foods ▪ Plastic action hats ▪ Long mirror ▪ Doctor's kit, tool kit ▪ Cash register, shopping basket or cart ▪ Telephone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Change the drama centre to reflect different themes (e.g., store, vet office, flower shop, post office etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide print materials that reflect various themes (e.g., envelopes, stamps, map of the world for a post office) ▪ Add empty containers of food items (e.g. cereal boxes, cans etc.) ▪ Add note pads and other writing utensils ▪ Add a telephone book ▪ Add calendars and food flyers |

Management is key to effective learning centres. In order to maintain learning centres and ensure their effectiveness, Kindergarten teachers:

- Introduce a few learning centres gradually to the whole class and then gradually increase the number of centres.
- Generate and review expectations for each centre.
- Explain and model the use of materials at the centre and clean up routines.

- Control the number of students at each centre through posted centre signs, a planning or management board or sign-up system.
- Demonstrate the way to move from one centre to another.
- Teach students how to help one another at the centres. Model problem-solving situations.