



DRAMATIC PLAY



Dramatic play, where the child takes on adult roles is a natural medium of learning through which the child expresses an understanding of life. A child naturally becomes a part in that environment and identifies with it. A child reproduces phases of the experience as they internalize concepts from all area of the kindergarten curriculum.

Dramatic Play Center

The value of play in the kindergarten classroom is immeasurable. Play serves an important function in the cognitive, creative, language, social and physical development of young children. Research tells us that the kind of play which allows children to choose their learning focus and fosters a broad range of developmental goals, should be included as an essential element in the kindergarten classroom.

The dramatic play center is just such a medium for learning. Through this center, the kindergarten teacher can create the conditions where process and content are woven together, as they are in our everyday lives. The process areas of language like; reading, writing, speaking and listening can be naturally integrated with the content areas of mathematics, science and social studies.

Development of the Dramatic Play Center:

Dramatic play center themes can be generated in four major ways:

- from free play and/or child interest
- one type of dramatic play generates another
- the whole class chooses a topic
- teacher choice

No matter how the dramatic play theme is chosen collaboration, at some point, between the children and teacher is an important part of the process. The theme should fit certain criteria:

- does it directly relate to a life situation that is meaningful for the children?
- is there enough physical space to produce constructive and valuable play?
- can the theme be supported by gaining information from other sources; such as, field trips, classroom visitors, audiovisuals or books?
- will the choice of theme lend itself to opportunities to expand children's interests, experiences and concepts?
- does it offer opportunities for discussion and problem solving of social situations as a means of fostering personal growth and building a sense of community?

Setting Up the Dramatic Play Center:

Materials in the dramatic play center can be very simple and will vary with the integration of thematic units. The materials should be set up in a contained area of the classroom. It may be located next to an adjacent center where interaction and cooperative play would be appropriate. The items in the center should be arranged in an orderly manner. The orderliness invites constructive use. A system of labeling, plus

thoughtful arrangement will facilitate clean up and foster independence. The equipment should be sturdy enough for group use and small enough for a child to use alone. Many times materials from other centers can be appropriated to enhance the dramatic play center. Hollow blocks are particularly useful in “building” the foundation for furniture and other play structures in the center.

Introducing the Dramatic Play Center:

Introducing the center and modeling the kind of play to take place there is critical. We shouldn't assume that children would know how to use the materials appropriately. Role-playing some brief activities in the center provides an ideal opportunity to solicit the children's help in setting limits and developing rules for play. Depending on the type of dramatic play center, four children at a time has proven to be a reasonable number in most classrooms and is an effective playgroup.

Dramatic Play Center Example:

Development

The kindergarten year in Ms. Sample's room, started with a house theme in the dramatic play center. Ms. Sample chose this theme because she felt all children could relate to some type of home environment, the theme was part of her school curriculum and she could use materials and props that were readily available. After several weeks of initial free play in the center, Ms. Sample noticed the children consistently role-playing as customers and waiters. She then guided the class in a discussion of eating establishments. They explored the roles of the workers and customers in a restaurant and Ms. Sample scheduled a field trip to a local pizza parlor. They decided their next center would be the “Kinder Cafe”.

Set Up

With the children's help, Ms Sample gathered materials for the cafe and decided what furniture from the house could be used. She decided to use the same house area because it was relatively self-contained and far enough away from quieter areas of the room. In an adjacent area, the block center, she placed a wooden steering wheel platform and hollow blocks that could be used to “build” a car to take diners to the restaurant. Within the cafe space she arranged two seating areas and a kitchen. Props included:

- ▶ play food: sorted into six labeled containers (meat, vegetables, bread, fruit, dessert and drinks)
- ▶ cash register
- ▶ table service for four
- ▶ checkered tablecloths
- ▶ glass coffee pot (painted brown to look full)
- ▶ silk flowers in a vase (2)
- ▶ student-made menus with magazine cut-outs to match the six food categories
- ▶ serving tray
- ▶ telephone

- ▶ aprons and chef's hat play money
- ▶ teacher-made "Guest Check" booklets with the same six divisions
- ▶ salt and pepper shakers (2 sets)

Introduction

Ms. Sample asks the class to gather around the "Kinder Cafe". She chooses individuals to help model the parts of customers, server and chef. The customers are given wallets or purses with play money and told to "call" the cafe to make "reservations". A board with class names is next to the telephone and the server crosses off the customers' names when they arrive. The chef is busy writing on a wipe-off board that's labeled: "Today's Special". After seating the customers with menus, the server returns with silverware and cups and asks for the order. Ms. Sample shows how the server takes the order form to a board labeled "Orders In". The chef fills the order, puts the filled dishes on a serving tray and then moves the form to "Orders Up". Ms. Sample guides the server in delivering the food and tallying up the check. The customers leave a "tip" on the table and pay the check at the cash register. As they leave, Ms. Sample models "Please come and see us again!" She's sure to have *steady* customers!

Recommended List of Dramatic Play Materials - (prioritized)

- telephones (2)
- full length mirror / hand mirror
- high chair
- cradle
- clothes rack
- steering wheel platform
- housekeeping set (broom, mop, and dustpan)
- set of toy pots/pans
- dress-up clothes
- grocery cart
- play money
- ironing board/iron
- doll stroller

Dramatic Play Center Themes

Homes

Farm
House
Teepee
Trailer
Log Cabin

Recreation Areas

Aquarium
Bowling Alley
Puppet Theater
Children's Museum
Campsite
Zoo
Cafe/Restaurant

Offices and Factories

Architect's Office/
Construction Site
Bank
Chicken Farm/Hatchery
Doctor's Clinic
Invention Factory
School Office
Space Center
Veterinarian's Office
Science Laboratory

Stores and Shops

Pet Shop
Beauty Parlor/Barber Shop
Department Store
Farm Stand
Greenhouse/Nursery
Grocery Store
Ice Cream Parlor
Toy Shop
Shoe Store
Book Store
Carpentry Shop

Public Service

Fire Station
Driver's License Bureau
Hospital
Library
Police Station
Post Office
Airport
Weather Department/ TV Station

Curriculum Connections for Dramatic Play Centers

The following are curriculum connection ideas for the dramatic play center. Although all play center themes will not relate as easily to some curriculum areas as others, the kindergarten teacher should strive to focus on at least one or two areas for each thematic center. By nature, the dramatic play center is a language-rich environment. The process areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening are easily integrated. But many opportunities exist to incorporate ideas that will enhance learning in the content areas of math, science and social studies, as well.

Labeling center props and environmental print are two of the easiest ways to bring reading into the center. Many times writing opportunities are best served in a separate center where the writing assignment serves as a “ticket” to enter the dramatic play area. Cooking activities and science experiments that are part of the play center will need to be simple and designed for independent child use with little adult supervision needed.

Ideas for curriculum connections:

R = Reading **W** = Writing **M** = Math **S** = Science **SS** = Social Studies

Homes:

- print labels for common household props; telephone, couch, dresser, stove, refrigerator, window ---**R**
- measurement activities related to cooking ---**M**
- environmental print labels; Hoover, Comet, SONY, Whirlpool ---**R**
- pad/pencil set to create “To Do” list of household chores ---**W**
- artifacts and reproduction tools; animal skins, arrowheads, mortar and pestle (teepee) ---**SS**

Recreation Areas:

- simple mapping activities; north/south, mountain, mileage key (campsite) ---**SS**
- labeled exhibits; mammals, reptiles, coral reef, open ocean (zoo/aquarium) ---**S**
- score-keeping with a tallying system (bowling alley) ---**M**
- matching menu items to guest check booklets (cafe) ---**R**
- wipe-off board for announcing show times/play titles (puppet theater) ---**W**

Offices and Factories:

- office machinery; adding machine computer, typewriter ---**R**
- sorting activities to develop money concepts (bank) ---**M**
- materials for basic independent experiments (laboratory) ---**S**
- letter identification in the form of an eye exam (doctor’s clinic) ---**R**

Stores and Shops:

- growing plants from seed (nursery) ---**S**
- using scales (grocery) and cash registers (retail) ---**M**
- labeled produce sections (farm stand) ---**R**
- making grocery list at separate center before shopping ---**W**
- price tags and receipts (department store) ---**M**

Public Service:

- poster illustrating the water cycle (TV station) ---**S**
- filling out simple health forms (hospital) ---**W**
- labeling basic road signs (driver’s license bureau) ---**R**
- I.D. tags for emergency room workers; ambulance driver, nurse, doctor, orderly (hospital) ---**SS**