

**Writing Centers in Preschool Classrooms**

*“Although writing should have a place in every corner of your classroom, the writing center is the central place where children can access materials to write and engage with written language. With your help, children will learn that they can communicate ideas through writing, and that writing is not only an important skill, but an enjoyable one.”*

V. Susan Bennett-Armistead, N. Duke and A. Moses, 2005

* A writing center is a place where children devote time and attention to writing.
* The writing center contains materials needed for children to *engage* with writing.
* An effective writing center gives children ample exposure to the *purposes* of writing-writing is so much more than forming letters or learning the alphabetic principle.
* The writing center encourages children to play with language and focus on the different parts of language.
* The writing center allows teachers to observe the development of writing from scribbling to meaning making to letter formation and beginning spelling. Children must be exposed to a wide variety of fine motor activities-i.e.playdough, Legos-large and small, eye droppers in the water table, peg boards- in addition to writing in order to experience all of the stages and allow for their motor development to progress. Forcing children to use tripod grasp before their arm and wrist muscles have fully developed may result in painful and often negative associations with writing.

**Location of the Writing Center in the Classroom**

Consider a round table in the center or toward the center of the classroom. The round table can be used for any and all other small group activities in addition to seating for snack and meals.

* Children will use the writing center more often if it can be accessed from many learning centers-e.g. need to make a sign for the block area, a list for dramatic play (although those centers should also have writing materials available as well).
* A teacher can place herself at the writing table so she is available to help scaffold and support writing and still supervise other areas of the classroom.
* When sitting at a round table, social interaction around writing is fostered, as well as allowing for more children to participate at one time.

If there is space, a table up against the wall for 1 or 2 children can also be provided. Sometimes, children do want space to concentrate and not be distracted.

The shelf of writing supplies should be accessible to both areas and clearly labeled for each item. Consider many cans/jars of materials so that children can access them easily and put them away. Large bins full of markers are not inviting, tend to get dumped and do not encourage clean-up.

**Suggested Materials for a Writing Center**

A balance of standard supplies and items that rotate is the key to keeping the writing center interesting. When participation wanes, it’s time to add new materials and make sure children are aware of the additions. Materials include (but are not limited to):

* Colored pencils, various size markers, crayons, ballpoint pens, mechanical pencils. Keep some standard materials and add/delete depending on the theme-e.g. gel pens for special invitations, white crayons to use with dark paper.
* Variety of paper-8 ½ x 11, legal, construction, small and large index cards, envelopes, some lined (although children will choose this when they are ready), small pieces of cardboard or oaktag. Keep some standard materials and add/delete as suggested above.
* Rubber stamps (including alphabet letters), ink pads, tape, stapler, scissors, mailing labels, stickers, stamps (such as those included in “junk” mail)
* An alphabet chart should be attached to each space on the table where a child might sit. Upper and lower case should be next to each other. E.g. Aa Bb Cc Dd, etc.
* 2-3 sets of cards with children’s names on a metal ring. All upper case on one side of the card and traditional spelling on the other side-i.e. BOBBY/Bobby. A good idea is to only have 3-4 children’s names on each ring so they don’t have to spend a lot of time looking through so many cards and it makes it easier to share if the writing area is busy.
* Picture dictionary
* “Blank books” are easily made and should always be available. Fold 2-4 sheets of 8 ½ x 11 paper in half and staple. Add a piece of construction paper for a cover.
* Dry-erase boards and markers
* Small chalkboards and chalk
* Small and large clipboards
* Notepads of varying sizes

**Using the Writing Center**

Remember, for some children “writing” may be only scribbling or drawing. Never discourage this activity. Depending on children’s experiences before preschool and their fine motor development, this may be the activity they most enjoy. It is still “writing” in the broadest definition of the center and will begin to have meaning over time.

Activities that may be generated from the writing center include…

* Menus for dramatic play, traffic signs for the block area
* Notes or letters to friends and family members
* Invitations to a party-real or imaginary
* “Stories” to share with the class
* Journal writing to express thoughts and feelings
* Expository writing to share information-pictures of a seed growing, caterpillar stages, etc.
* The more a teacher models writing over the course of a day, the more children will learn the many uses for it.

**Additional Resources:**

*Learning About Print in Preschool* Strickland. D.S. & Schickedanz, J. A. (2009) Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

*So Much More than the ABCs* Schickedanz, J. A, & Collins, M.F. (2013) Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.

*Transforming Literacy Practices in Preschool.* McGee, L. (2007) New York: Scholastic.

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