



Organizing the learning environment

There are many factors to consider when organizing spaces for children's programmes such as the ages of the children, their interests, community and culture. Does the environment look welcoming? Is there enough space? Are there interesting materials for children to play with and manipulate? What local materials and resources can be used in the programme?

The following guidelines for organizing spaces for children is from *The Madrasa Pre-school Curriculum Kit (2009, pp. 23-31)*:

The pre-school classroom needs to be organised in such a way that the children are offered a variety of appropriate activities. It is therefore useful to arrange the classroom into several activity areas that are permanently set up. If the following areas are provided then the children are offered all the basic resources required for a well-balanced pre-school curriculum.

The activity areas are:

- Home Area
- Block Play/ Construction Area
- Natural Materials Area (Sand/ Water)
- Art/Creative Area
- Games Area
- Book Area
- Outdoor Play Area

When setting up the areas it is useful to consider the following guidelines (*adapted from the High/Scope Curriculum- Educating Young Children*).

Divide the room into clear learning areas.

To make it easier for children to choose materials it is important to divide the room into clear learning areas where the materials are logically grouped.

These areas can be changed and added to as you observe how the children use the areas and what their interests are.



Choose names for the areas that the children can understand.

Names of the areas need to make sense to the children. It is important the names tell the children the kinds of activities that take place in that area.



When you are planning the kinds of materials to have in your school think about the kinds of materials that will help children to:

- Role play
- Make and build things
- Explore materials
- Actively use their large muscles
- Play with small materials they can manipulate
- Write, read and count
- Be creative

Have clear divisions between each area

When you clearly divide the different learning areas it helps the children to find what they need and encourages choice.

You can make boundaries between the areas by using shelves that the children can see over. Try making shelves from tree stumps and planks/bricks. If your pre-school does not have shelves then think of ways that the furniture you have can be arranged so that children know the boundaries between areas. Where furniture is very limited, drawing lines on a sandy floor or arranging mats to show boundaries can be other ways to mark areas.



Also think of where they can:

- Play alone
- Play side by side
- Play in groups

All these forms of playing come naturally to children and are important for their development.



Plan the areas so that many different kinds of play can take place.

Children play and learn in many different ways, and need different types of materials to help their learning.



Make small changes to the areas throughout the year.

Add new materials and interest areas as the year progresses. This helps keep children interested in their environment. Involve the children and parents in bringing materials that you need regularly, for example dried coconut shells, banana leaves, coconut fibre for paint brushes, empty plastic pots, baskets made from palm leaves, stones, shells, corn cobs.

