

SAMPLE



Managing Instructional Groups in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Classrooms



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Introduction

It is center time in an early childhood classroom that promotes quality learning. Young students are talking to one another while they are actively exploring books, writing tools, blocks, puzzles, and other materials located in the centers. The teacher is sitting at a table with a group of six children who are placing plastic letters in sequence on alphabet arcs. The students say each letter's name quietly to themselves as they place it on the arc. As these students are working, the teacher leaves her chair to monitor the rest of the class. There are students in the home center, the block center, the art center, and the classroom literacy area. A five-year-old named Asusena is sitting on a bean bag chair in the classroom library reading *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* to a group of stuffed animals. The teacher picks up the camera and takes a picture of Asusena reading. The photograph, along with an anecdotal record documenting the student's ability to hold the book correctly, turn the pages, and retell the story by referring to the pictures, will be placed in the student's portfolio to demonstrate her emerging understanding of print.

After taking the picture, the teacher returns to the group working on the alphabet arc to help them build words with the letters. The teacher says, "I am going to say a word that has three sounds and three letters. After I say the word, I want you to find the letters you need to spell the word and place them in order under the arc. The word is *cat*. Let's say the sounds slowly

together /k/, /ă/, /t/, *cat*. Find three letters to spell *cat* and place them under the arc. What are the letters? That's right, *c*, *a*, *t*. Now, take away the letter *c* and replace it with the letter *m*. What new word did you spell?"

As the teacher helps the students build new words, she quickly scans the room. She notices that José seems to be looking for something in the writing center. José stops looking and walks over to Asusena for help. She puts her book down, finds a stapler, and hands it to José. Both children then go back to their previous activity. The teacher smiles to herself as she thinks about how teaching the students to ask each other for help while she is working with other students significantly cuts down on the amount of interruptions she has during small-group time.

The students finish with the word building activity and are dismissed to work in centers as a new group of students come to work with the teacher. These students need assistance in letter/sound awareness. For this reason, the teacher has the students work in pairs to sort picture cards by the beginning sounds. After explaining the activity to the students and watching to see that they understand the directions, the teacher once again briefly leaves the table to monitor the rest of the class.

A child in the art center has just completed a painting. It is a series of vertical stripes in multiple colors. The child notices the teacher looking at the painting and says, "Look, I made lines." The teacher responds, "You have used

many different colors of paint to make the lines you painted go up and down. The red line is the longest line." In her comments, the teacher uses vocabulary words the student needs to learn in math and other subject areas. The student removes her painting from the easel and places it on the counter to dry. She then collects the paintbrushes she used, washes them in the sink, and puts them in another container to dry before going to work on a puzzle in the math center.

It is obvious that this student's teacher has spent a great deal of time planning the design of the classroom, organizing the materials, and teaching the students how to act responsibly while in the centers. The classroom looks, feels, and functions differently than most of the classrooms that older students attend. This classroom is center-based and has been designed to facilitate students' learning as the teacher guides them. She assesses students' learning daily and then uses the assessments to plan ways to move students forward in their learning.

Managing an early childhood classroom is very challenging. Teachers need to know how to meet the needs of students who come from a variety of background experiences. Daily schedules need to be prepared to ensure there is a balance between times students are expected to sit and listen and times when students are actively learning through exploration and conversation. The optimal arrangement of the classroom provides space for whole-group and small-group instruction, as well as for learning centers.

Learning centers are especially critical in early childhood classrooms.

They provide a means for teachers to facilitate their students' language and literacy development through play-based literacy instruction. (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). For students to learn successfully in centers, they must:

- have extended periods of time to work in them with other children
- be given appropriate materials
- be provided specific instruction on how to use the materials and for what purpose
- have a teacher who scaffolds their learning within the center
- have a teacher who spends time observing and interacting with them to gather information to plan for future instruction

This book, *Managing Instructional Groups in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Classrooms*, provides information on designing a well-organized, literacy-rich classroom that ensures students are "...learning, growing, and acquiring the right skills for their advancement" (MacDonald, 1997, p. 17). Strategies are presented for designing centers that support students' learning of the curriculum. Techniques are provided to ensure a variety of teaching strategies occur in the classroom during whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction. The book also provides teachers with information on assessing students' learning by observing students in action, taking pictures, collecting work samples, and writing anecdotal records.

Description of the ABC and Word Study Center

The ABC and Word Study Center is full of manipulatives for students to use to learn the names and sounds of letters (Figure 2.10). The letters are made of different materials: felt, sandpaper, plastic, etc. They are sorted by the material they are made of and placed in labeled containers on low lying shelves. By manipulating letters, students become aware of each letter's unique features which helps them distinguish one letter from another. At the beginning of the year, students spend a lot of time either sorting letters or matching the letters to a printed word on index cards. When sorting, the goal is to encourage the students to notice the letters' features in order to group them appropriately. Students should be able to determine which letters have straight lines, curved lines, or both. Once the letters have been grouped, they should learn to explain how the letters were sorted.

There are several activities that help students learn the features of the letters through matching. Students enjoy matching plastic letters to the letters printed on an alphabet arc. With practice, students are able to place the letters in sequence within a couple minutes of time. It is also helpful to provide students with picture cards that have the picture's name printed underneath it in the same size font as the plastic letters used in the center. This helps students begin to make letter-sound connections to the word they are spelling on the card.

The ABC and Word Study Center is also designed to help students learn to

Spelling Words with
Magnetic Letters



Figure 2.10

read and write words. Word sorts are a great way to help students notice different features words have. For instance, in order to learn to read the words *cat* and *hat*, students need to determine that the first word begins with a *c* and the second word begins with an *h*.

Words can be sorted in many different ways. Teachers often use students' name cards or words from the high-frequency word wall in sorting activities. To do a word sort using words from the high-frequency word wall, the teacher writes ten of the words on index cards and places them in the center. A typical kindergarten classroom may have the following ten words on the word wall: *a*, *and*, *at*, *he*, *in*, *I*, *is*, *see*, *you*, and *we*. Sometimes, students are told how to sort the words by same number of letters, same vowels, same beginning letter, etc. Other times, students will sort the words in their own way. Once again, it is important to have the students explain how the words were sorted.

ABC and Word Study Center

Materials for ABC and Word Study Center

- Alphabet arcs
- Alphabet bingo
- Alphabet concentration cards
- Alphabet poster with pictures that correspond to the letters
- Alphabet puzzles
- Alphabet sentence strips
- Easel
- High-frequency word bingo
- High-frequency word wall
- Index cards
- Letter stamps and stamp pads
- Letter tiles
- Letters made of foam, felt, sandpaper, wood, rubber, etc.
- Magna Doodle® magnetic drawing board
- Magnetic plastic letters and board
- Name word wall
- Phonics games
- Pictures for sorting activities
- Pipe cleaners for forming letters
- Plastic alphabet letters
- Rhyming bingo
- Wikki Sticks®
- Word games
- Word tiles

Reading and Writing Supplies

- ABC books
- Concept books
- Paper
- Writing tools

Learning that Occurs in the ABC and Word Study Center

Listening Skills

The children learn to:

- Listen to each other as they discuss the features of letters
- Listen to each other as they explain how they sorted letters, pictures, and words
- Follow simple directions for creating words with manipulatives
- Listen to alphabet books on tape

Using New Vocabulary

- alphabet
- beginning
- consonant
- curved line
- describe
- different
- first
- horizontal line
- last
- letter
- medial
- rhyming
- same
- sort
- spell
- syllable
- vowel
- word

The children learn to:

- Use vocabulary related to letters and their features
- Use vocabulary related to words and their features
- Learn names of objects located in the center
- Speak in sentences of increasing length
- Discuss with others the words they have made
- Discuss with others the ways they have sorted letters and words
- Use language to explain how to create new words from existing words
- Ask questions and make comments about picture, letter, and/or word sorts

Understanding Print

The children learn to:

- Track words while reading an alphabet book
- Create a cover for a self-made alphabet book that includes a title, author, and illustrator
- Sort letters from numbers
- Recognize labels, signs, and other types of environmental print
- Read a class-made environmental print book
- Sort uppercase letters from lowercase letters

Learning that Occurs in the ABC and Word Study Center (Continued)

<p>Learning Letters and High-Frequency Words</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify letters in an alphabet puzzle • Read and write some high-frequency words • Name, identify, and write the letters of the alphabet • Connect sounds to letters to begin to read and write words • Manipulate letters to make new words from existing words • Sort letters and words by different features • Describe letters by their features • Sort picture cards by beginning, medial, and ending sounds
<p>Motivating Students to Read</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and discuss alphabet books • Enjoy reading and writing words independently
<p>Understanding Literary Forms</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize alphabet books by their covers • Self-select an alphabet book to read • Look for words in pictionaries
<p>Writing</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write their names and the names of their friends • Write the uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet • Read and write words by connecting letters to the sounds heard in the word • Write words from left to right • Read and write the labels in the room • Write an alphabet book • Write a letter book
<p>Other Subject Areas</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an alphabet book about a topic being studied in the content areas: animals, oceans, plants, etc. • Make lists of important words being studied in the content areas

Activities for the ABC and Word Study Center

- Explore letters
- Sort pictures by the beginning sound
- Sort pictures by the ending sound
- Sort pictures that have the same medial sound
- Sort pictures by the number of syllables in the word
- Sort pictures that rhyme
- Sort letters by different features
- Match letters to an alphabet arc
- Match letters to printed words on picture cards
- Spell their names and the names of their friends using different types of letter manipulatives
- Put uppercase and lowercase letters in alphabetical order
- Sort uppercase letters from lowercase letters
- Match uppercase and lowercase letters
- Read alphabet books
- Make an alphabet book
- Make an individual letter book
- Read easy decodable books
- Complete an alphabet puzzle
- Read the name word wall
- Read the alphabet poster
- Sort names by different features
- Write names of classmates in a list
- Put together name puzzles
- Write the uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet
- Sort words on the word wall by the number of letters they have
- Provide students with the following letter groups and have them build as many different words as they can *a, b, c, f, h, m, p, r, s* or *a, m, c, f, n, p, r, t*
- Sort words that have the same vowel sound
- Sort words by beginning, medial, and ending sound
- Write a list of rhyming words
- Spell words on the word wall using magnetic letters
- Write words displayed in the room that begin with a given letter

Assessing Student Learning in the ABC and Word Study Center

Yes	No	Are Students:	Anecdotal Record
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Putting letters in alphabetic order?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sorting letters in different ways and explaining how they were sorted?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sorting pictures by the beginning, medial, and/or ending sound?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identifying letters and the sounds they represent?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sorting name cards in different ways and explaining how they were sorted?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Making words with plastic letters?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sorting words in different ways and explaining how they were sorted?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reading and writing some high-frequency words?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Using words from the high-frequency word wall to make new words?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referring to an alphabet poster to assist them in their writing?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reading and writing some consonant/vowel/consonant (cvc) words?	

Description of the Block Center

The students have just returned from spring break and are anxious to begin working in centers. The block center has always been one of the students' favorite centers. It has over 300 different types of blocks to manipulate. There are unit blocks, one-inch cubes, three-dimensional solids, and a lot of accessory items. The blocks are stored on low-lying shelves. They have been placed on the shelves by size and type. The smallest blocks are on the top shelf in the left-hand corner and get progressively larger as they move across to the right side of the shelf. The biggest blocks are on the bottom shelf. The teacher has traced the outline of each shape and placed it on the shelf to help the students return the blocks to the appropriate location after using them (Figure 3.3).

Several students are being observed by the teacher. She marvels at the progress the students have made. At the beginning of the year, many of the students were experiencing blocks for the very first time. Being in the first stage of block building, the students enjoyed taking the blocks off the shelves, carrying them around the room, putting them in boxes and other containers, and then returning them once again to the shelf. They did not construct anything with the blocks. Soon, the students entered the second stage of block building. They began using the blocks in two ways: to make rows on the floor or to stack the blocks in a pile. Students received great enjoyment doing these activities over and over again.

The activity in the block center is

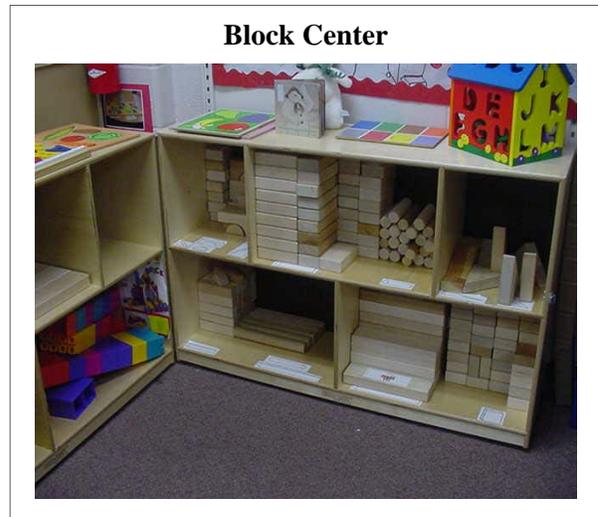


Figure 3.3

much different today. One child has begun to make bridges with the blocks, thus indicating that he has entered the third stage of block building. He has become proficient at spacing the columns so a third block can be placed across them and not fall through. Another child is placing farm animals inside an enclosed space she has created with the blocks. This child is in the fourth stage of block building.

As the year continues, the teacher will look for evidence of students' continued progress in the ways they build with blocks. She will watch for the following:

- Students creating designs and patterns in their constructions
- Students naming their buildings according to the function they serve in their play
- Students creating buildings to enhance their dramatic play scenarios. These buildings will actually represent a structure the students are familiar with in their everyday lives.

Block Center

Materials for Block Center

- Airplanes, helicopters, boats, etc.
- Blocks of many different sizes, shapes, and colors
- Boxes and other containers of varying sizes and shapes
- Bristle Blocks®
- Cardboard brick blocks
- Cars and trucks of different sizes, colors, and types (dump trucks, pickup trucks, cement trucks, etc.)
- Community workers of different ethnicities and sexes
- Dollhouse and furniture
- Hollow blocks for building areas students can enter
- Large Tinkertoys®
- Legos® and Lego® table
- Lincoln Logs®
- One-inch colored cubes
- Play tools for construction: hammer, saw, screwdriver, etc.
- Rope, pulleys, ramps, and wheels
- Scraps of fabric
- Sets of dinosaurs, farm animals, zoo animals, forest animals, pets, etc.
- Small family figures of different ethnicities, ages, and sexes
- Three-dimensional shapes such as sphere, cone, cube, etc.
- Traffic signs
- Trains and train tracks
- Unit blocks (rectangular, square, and triangular blocks that are cut in regular, predictable intervals)

Reading and Writing Supplies

- Advertisements from hardware stores
- Books on architecture and building houses
- Books on dinosaurs, zoos, farms, forests, pets, etc.
- Books on transportation and community workers
- Floor plans or blueprints for houses
- Furniture catalogs
- Maps
- Measuring tools
- Paper to draw buildings and maps or to prepare signs and label buildings
- Photo album with captions of students' constructions
- Photographs of the neighborhood around the school
- Pictures of houses
- Real estate section of the newspaper
- Scrapbook of students' drawings of their constructions
- Writing tools

Learning that Occurs in the Block Center

<p>Listening Skills</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to each other and participate in extended conversations about what they are building • Listen to each other and answer questions pertaining to their play in the block center • Follow simple directions on how to construct a structure
<p>Using New Vocabulary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action words: construct, stack, destroy, and design • Map, blueprint, floor plan • Names of construction tools, animals, community workers, and buildings • Pattern • Ruler, measuring tape, inch, foot • Words that describe location: under, over, beside, near, far, left, and right • Words that describe shape, size, length, and width 	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use vocabulary related to the block center in conversations with each other • Learn names of objects located in the block center • Make verbal connections to what they are doing in the block center and their personal experiences • Speak in sentences of increasing length • Discuss the constructions made in the block center • Use language to role-play scenarios taking place in the center
<p>Understanding Print</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to a floor plan to recreate it using blocks • Read simple maps • Read informational text about architecture, building houses, transportation, community workers, etc. • Read simple directions to construct a building • Read the captions in the photo album that has pictures of constructions made by students • Draw pictures of their constructions and label them • Create signs to enhance their play in the block center • Use pictures and print to obtain information
<p>Learning Letters and High-Frequency Words</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write signs using some letter/sound matches • Write their name on their pictures of their constructions and identify the letters • Read environmental print used in the center
<p>Motivating Students to Read</p>	<p>The children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read environmental print, maps, books, advertisements, etc. independently • Write signs and maps independently • Read books, maps, etc. with each other • Enjoy discussing books about architecture and construction

Learning that Occurs in the Block Center (Continued)

Understanding Literary Forms	The children learn to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read a book while playing in the block center• Handle books, newspapers, maps, etc. appropriately when reading them in the block center• Read informational books aloud to a friend
Writing	The children learn to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draw their constructions and label the parts• Write labels for their buildings• Write signs such as “Don’t knock down my building”• Draw maps of the town, classroom, etc. that they have created with blocks• Make some letter/sound connections when writing labels, signs, maps, etc.• Write labels, signs, maps, etc. from top to bottom, left to right, and with some spacing between words• Write their name on their drawings of buildings
Other Subject Areas	The children learn to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe buildings using words such as more than, same number as, etc.• Count blocks• Create simple patterns using blocks• Name the shape of the blocks• Describe creations using prepositions• Predict what the structure will look like by putting two or more blocks together• Cover an area with blocks• Fill containers with blocks• Use measuring tools to measure constructions• Place three or more blocks in order by size: largest to smallest, smallest to largest• Sort blocks by size, shape, color, etc.• Explain how constructions are the same or different• Investigate the use of pulleys, ramps, bridges, etc.• Make buildings for toy dolls, animals, etc.• Identify what blocks and other objects are made of• Work cooperatively with others to make buildings• Recognize cause-and-effect relationships• Use blocks to build a house, school, town, zoo, etc.• Describe the location of buildings• Make and interpret maps

Activities for the Block Center

- Match blocks to the outline of blocks drawn on bulletin board paper
- Construct the same building as your friend
- Create a design with blocks and explain how to make it to another student
- Find objects in the classroom that are smaller, larger, and almost the same size as a unit block
- Determine how many one-inch cubes it takes to cover the surface of different-sized unit blocks and record the results
- Determine how many one-inch cubes it takes to go around the perimeter of different-sized unit blocks and record the results
- Measure how tall a structure is by using inch cubes
- Make patterns using blocks and record the patterns
- Sort dollhouse furniture and explain how it was sorted
- Draw a picture of one of your constructions
- Make signs and other environmental print for your constructions
- Use family figures, vehicles, and blocks to tell a story
- Sort blocks and explain how they were sorted
- Measure your constructions and record the results
- Make a graph showing the type and number of blocks used to make a construction
- Rebuild a construction previously recorded in a photograph

Building with Blocks



Figure 3.4

Assessing Student Learning in the Block Center

Yes	No	Are Students:	Anecdotal Record
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Holding extended conversations about their constructions with each other?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Making patterns with the blocks?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dramatizing different scenarios created with small figures of people, vehicles, animals, and blocks?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reading and writing for authentic reasons while in the center?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referring to books, pictures, maps, etc. to build their constructions?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Working together cooperatively to build their projects?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Drawing and labeling their creations?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Measuring their constructions?	

Appendix

Full-day Classroom Schedule

Time	Minutes	Subject
8:00 - 8:10	10	Arrival, sign-in, look/read through books
8:10 - 8:30	20	Morning activities—Modeled writing: Morning Message, Daily News, and Calendar
8:30 - 8:50	20	Whole-group early literacy lesson
8:50 - 9:30	40	Centers/Small-group instruction/Student observation
9:30 - 9:45	15	Restroom break/Snacks
9:45 - 10:00	15	Shared Reading/Retellings, etc.
10:00 - 10:30	30	Making books/Journals/Author's Workshop
10:30 - 10:55	25	Whole-group science/social studies lesson
10:55 - 11:45	50	Lunch/Restroom break/Recess/Large-motor experiences
11:45 - 12:05	20	Teacher read-aloud
12:05 - 12:35	30	Quiet Time/Rest
12:35 - 1:00	25	Whole-group math lesson
1:00 - 1:45	45	Centers/Small-group instruction/Student observation
1:45 - 2:30	45	Specials
2:30 - 2:50	20	Wrap-up using large circle time
2:50 - 3:00	10	Prepare for dismissal
3:00		Dismissal

Half-Day Classroom Schedule

Time	Minutes	Subject
12:00 - 12:10	10	Arrival, sign-in/look/read through books
12:10 - 12:30	20	Afternoon activities—Modeled writing: Morning Message, Daily News, and Calendar
12:30 - 12:50	20	Whole-group early literacy lesson
12:50 - 1:20	30	Centers/Small-group instruction/Student observation/Restroom break
1:20 - 1:35	15	Recess
1:35 - 1:50	15	Whole-group math lesson
1:50 - 2:20	30	Centers/Small-group instruction/Student observation
2:20 - 2:35	15	Whole-group science/social studies lesson
2:35 - 2:55	20	Wrap-up using large circle time/Author's workshop
2:55 - 3:00	5	Prepare for dismissal
3:00		Dismissal

Appendix

