

Creating the Environment for Movement



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Components of developmentally appropriate preschool movement programs that relate directly to the learning environment include scheduled activity, class size, equipment, play, facilities, allowance for repetition and success, participation for every child, and integration of movement into other subject areas (COPEC 1994, 2000). Physical and social environments for young children should encourage and enable them to participate in safe and enjoyable physical activities (CDC 1996). Movement environments will look different based on the structure each is given by individual teachers and center administrators and depending upon available facilities.

Theoretical foundations

The developmentally appropriate movement environment parallels the child-focused classroom drawn from the work of Jean Piaget ([1936] 1963). Piaget conceptualizes that children travel through stages of cognitive development and that the force for this cognitive development comes mainly from the child. Lev Vygotsky's work (1962) also influenced the development of the child-focused classroom. His developmental theory has much in common with Piaget's but puts a stronger emphasis on the social and environmental factors important in learning.

From S.W. Sanders, *Active for Life: Developmentally Appropriate Movement Programs for Young Children* (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2002), 18–19.

Vygotsky emphasizes that development is influenced not only by biological developmental stages but also by society. His work further suggests that environmental conditions for learning are important to the child-focused classroom. The teacher provides various kinds of assistance or support (*scaffolding*) that are geared to the child's *zone of proximal development*, which refers to the level of difficulty at which the child can accomplish a task but can do so only with the aid of an adult or more knowledgeable peer (Berk & Winsler 1995).

The child-focused movement environment, therefore, ensures a wide range of movement experiences so that children can work and learn at developmental levels that are individually appropriate. At the same time the environment is designed to provide opportunities for children to observe and learn from their teachers and knowledgeable peers. Allison and Barrett (2000) suggest that child-focused classroom environments include the following key ideas:

1. Learners create their own meaning for their educational experiences.
2. Children's learning is the focus of child-focused teaching.
3. Content is organized around big, general ideas and viewed as flexible and adaptable.
4. Content is relevant to the learners.
5. The children are seen as a community of learners.
6. Diversity enhances the potential for children's shared learning.
7. Children have important roles in assessing their own learning.

For some educators, this child-focused learning environment leads to the mistaken conclusion that the movement classroom environment is a do-as-you-like approach. This is not the case. Allison and Barrett describe the child-focused movement environment in this way:

When [children] are given the freedom to explore and invent, outcomes are unpredictable. When teachers take the view that content is flexible, what is taught could change unexpectedly during a lesson. When diversity is valued, differing perspectives are allowed to emerge within the community of learners. . . . It does not mean that planning for learning is unnecessary...that few restrictions are imposed on the learners...that direct instruction is ineffective and, therefore, should never be used. What it does mean is that classroom environment, lesson planning, rules, and teaching methods are defined differently. . . . (2000, 12)

The physical environment

Before considering what an environment might look like complete with children and movement activities, the first step is to look specifically at the physical environment, what should be included and how the elements might be arranged. A space design that is simple and straightforward is ideal. Of utmost importance is having a large, open space free of obstacles. Next is the practical need to keep equipment in a place close to the movement space, usually a storage cabinet or closet. Teachers who have to carry equipment



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from another part of the building are less likely to provide movement experiences for children.

A final aspect of assessing the physical environment is determining the placement of equipment before the children arrive for movement. Locating the equipment around the perimeter of the room works best, with items of equipment near the wall's baseboard and several feet of space between each item. This arrangement provides the space children need to pick up equipment without bumping into classmates.

Teachers may find it helpful to attach shelves and hooks to the walls of the movement space or use other means for hanging equipment. Such an arrangement works well when the space is dedicated exclusively to movement activities. It is a less appropriate solution in spaces also used for lunchtime, music activities, performance of plays, and other events.



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Suggested Starter Equipment for Movement Curriculums

What follows is not a complete list but equipment that will get your movement curriculum off to a good start. Included are short descriptions of each item—equipment you will need to do many activities in this book.



Balance beams

Balance beams give children a chance to practice balance skills by moving on a narrow strip of wood usually 4 to 6 inches wide and less than 30 inches off the ground. Balance beams are usually purchased from a physical education equipment company. These beams are expensive but are usually of high quality and durable.

Balance boards

A balance board is a fun way to help children develop balance skills by constantly placing them off balance. A balance board is a small platform raised off the ground usually with a 2-inch by 10-inch narrow base of support that children sit or stand on.

Balls

Preschool physical education programs call for a variety of lightweight foam, rubber, and plastic balls. Foam balls are easy for children to throw, catch, and kick. Rubber playground balls 8 to 10 inches in diameter provide children more challenge and can be used to practice bouncing skills when children are ready. Small plastic balls are used to throw, catch, and strike. Old tennis balls also can be hit off a tee with a bat and can be used to play catch.

Bats

Plastic bats are better than wooden bats to use when introducing striking skills. Plastic bats are lighter, safer, and easier for a young child to swing. Bats are usually about 28 inches long and 2 to 4 inches in diameter. Foam bats also are light and have the added advantage of a larger diameter head, giving children more chance for success.

From S.W. Sanders, *Active for Life: Developmentally Appropriate Movement Programs for Young Children* (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2002), 97–98. Reprinted, by permission, from S. Sanders, *Designing Preschool Movement Programs* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1992), 116–18.

Beanbags

Both square and cubed beanbags are great for throwing, catching, and balancing. Square beanbags should be 5 inches by 5 inches and filled with plastic pellets. Cubed beanbags are easier to catch because they better fit a child's hands.

Carpet squares

Small square or rectangular carpet samples have many uses, such as pretend 'lakes' to **jump** into. Usually thrown away when they are out of date, most businesses gladly donate samples to schools.

Cones

Traffic cones are used as boundary markers and as tees off which children can strike balls with paddles or bats.

Foam bowling pins

Unbreakable Ethafoam bowling pins 3 or 4 inches in diameter are great for targets and stacking. Two-liter plastic soda bottles are good alternatives.

Foam crawl-through shapes

These are made of 2-inch-thick unbreakable Ethafoam. Each 3-foot-by-2-foot crawl-through obstacle has a colored band and a small, matching geometric shape. These are used for body awareness skills and to help children identify colors and shapes. Large cardboard boxes are good alternatives; cut large holes in the boxes in desired geometric shapes.

Foam hockey sticks

Made of Ethafoam material, these foam sticks are safer than plastic hockey sticks and are excellent for teaching the hockey or golf swing. For young children, use sticks with 24-inch handles.

Foam stilts

These stilts let children experience walking 8 inches off the floor while they learn dynamic balance. These stilts are durable even for adults and have a safe Ethafoam base with plastic stick.

Hoops

Hoops usually come in 24-, 30-, and 36-inch diameters and are made from plastic. Smaller diameters are best for young children.

Jump ropes

The best type of jump rope to use with young children is one 7 feet long with plastic beads along the length to add extra weight to help children swing the rope over their heads. A longer rope tends to tangle; a shorter rope is more difficult for children to get over their heads. Bulk rope cut into 7-foot-lengths works almost as well as plastic beaded jump ropes.

Launch boards

A great way to help children catch successfully is to use a launch board. When a child steps on one end of the board, a beanbag on the opposite end flies into the

air within catching distance. (Launch boards are easily made following simple instructions.)

Mats

Mats are expensive but essential if your program is going to introduce rolling skills to children. If your school does not have mats, it is better that rolling not be taught.

Paddles

These are perfect for introducing children to striking skills. The paddle face is made of light, durable Ethafoam. Three different available lengths of plastic handles give children the opportunity to practice striking using both short- and long-handled paddles.

Punchball balloons

These heavy rubber balloons are durable and move slowly through the air so children have a better opportunity to learn to throw, catch, and strike. Balloons should be inflated to a diameter of about 16 inches.

Records, tapes, and CDs

You'll find dozens of sources of music for use in a preschool movement program.

Rhythm sticks

Rhythm sticks are about 5/8 inches in diameter and a foot long and are made of wood or plastic. Children strike them together during rhythm activities.

Ribbon sticks

Children use ribbon sticks to perform expressive rhythmic movements. Sticks are 18 inches long. Ribbons range from 6 to 12 feet long. Younger children need shorter ribbons.

Scarves

Scarves can be thrown, caught, and used in rhythm activities. Lightweight, silk-like scarves fall slowly when tossed—great for catching. Scarves for young children are usually 11 to 16 inches square.

Scoops

Plastic scoops serve as extensions of children's hands and arms to help develop their catching skills. Homemade scoops can be made from plastic milk jugs.

Target board

This is a plywood target that children can throw at both overhand and underhand. Targets can be constructed of materials other than plywood. Teachers should not feel limited to using a predesigned target board.

Wedges

Foam wedges can be purchased through most physical education supply companies or made from a block of dense foam.