BLUEPRINT

For Early Learning

A Comprehensive Pre-K Curriculum

Foundations

DRAFT VERSION

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Chapter 1
Anything is Possible

Take a glimpse into a Pre-K classroom and see how components of the Blueprint curriculum at work...

It is a February day and a trail of four year olds escape the cold by checking themselves into the warmth of their classroom. They slip through the grasp and comfort of a family member's hand to be greeted by their teacher, whose excitement makes it seems like she hasn't seen them for weeks. They are gently directed toward their daily "sign-in chart," where the classroom assistant welcomes them with the same spirit. For some, the assistant reads aloud the question that heads the chart paper, "What can we stir with?" Before answering, Carl tries mixing the soup pot of pom-poms and small blocks with a big plastic spoon. Mia uses a wooden dowel, and Tesa examines the whisk. She proudly tells the assistant that her family has a whisk at home. They use it when they bake and they call it un batidor! They ponder for a moment before providing a response and proudly cast their vote, adding their name under the photo of the mixing tool they like best on the chart. The awakening of their senses this morning has launched the upcoming day like every other, engaged, motivated, and inspired to learn.

As they make their way past the sign-in chart, the children naturally peek around the corner at a strikingly large and white rectangular dry erase board that sits upon a bright, royal blue stand. This is their message board. They know that the discussion of stirring will come up again in the message their teacher writes this morning. The Intentional Read Aloud book Is That Wise, Pig? propped up against the message board further confirms their predictions as they count down the minutes to their favorite part of the day, Message Time Plus. Other than the brief moment at the sign-in table, no adult has been closely monitoring their morning routine. They are growing more and more independent.

The children spend the next fifteen minutes or so playing and working at centers, some returning to the blocks center to continue working on the ramp they began the day before. Some are clearly thinking and writing about their experiences with mixing flour and water the day before. When Samuel is asked what he is doing, he says confidently, "I am writing," and clearly verbalizes his message while pointing to scribbles and symbols. Children are further supported as they gaze at samples of writing hanging from clothespins and glance around the room at the variety of authentic print littering the walls, both their teacher's and their own. This environment says to them, "I am valued, I am a writer."

A few children stroll over to the classroom library and pull out books by their favorite authors and page through them, retelling the story with expression. They are familiar with these titles because their teacher uses them as models during read alouds. Two children sit elbow to elbow at a round green table occupied with a class book called they created earlier in the year Our Buildings. One child has created a picture using splashes of blue, red, and green crayons piled on top of one another on the page, while the child next to her has letter-like symbols strung in a row with an exclamation point at the end. Children talk with one another about the big ideas they have learned and collaborate around how to share it. Two children sit elbow to elbow at a round green table occupied with a class book they created earlier in the year called Our Buildings. As they look through the book, they notice that one child has created a picture using splashes of blue, red, and green crayons piled on top of one another. On the next page in the book, a child has used letter-like symbols strung in a row with an exclamation point at the end. As the children read the class book, they recall the big ideas they learned from this unit. They remember the diagrams they helped to draw of different buildings in their community, the photographs of buildings from the local community that families sent in, structures they made from shoeboxes the teacher brought in.

This room is bursting with color and authentic print. Small lamps and pillows decorate corners, and books with covers facing out, invite children to become part of this world. The math table beckons with dice to roll and shapes to match and to create designs with. The children don't know yet, that in the weeks ahead they will read books about making lemonade and engage with their senses, especially taste! They will be comparing methods for making different types of lemonade and exploring volume, as they count how many scoops it takes to fill a jar with different materials.

In just a few moments, children will have the opportunity to hear their teacher think aloud about what she is going to write. She will follow this by modeling appropriate letter formation, concepts of print, and punctuation as she writes them a message connected to what they have experienced and learned this week. It is clear that this teacher has already succeeded in modeling her enthusiasm for writing as her Pre-K children take on this daily task independently and without hesitation. By the time they have arrived at the rug for Message Time Plus, they have been motivated by their own reading, writing, and science practices, enticed by their sign-in, and engaged by their teacher's "think aloud." She has told them that her writing today comes from a connection she made between a prior read aloud of the book Is that Wise, Pig? and watching children "stirring in the big pot" that very morning. Now able to anticipate the words the teacher will use by listening to her connection and recalling the book they read along with her as she writes the message:

Spoons help us mix.

They read most of the words without the teacher's help and easily predict the word "mix" as she writes the letter m. She then takes a moment to affirm children's strategy of using the first letter to predict a word that makes sense. They smile in recognition. During the re-reading of each sentence and then of the entire message the teacher is able to lower her voice and chime in only to maintain the fluent reading of the message, gradually releasing the responsibility of reading to the children.

When the lesson is finished, the teacher takes this opportunity to add movement to their growing bodies after sitting on the rug. Up they go to make the back and forth movement of a whisk, swishing their shoulders and hips and knees, amid giggles of delight with the freedom that movement brings. Josh breaks out in song, "Swish, swish, swish it up, all the way through!" remembering a line from the song they learned at Greeting Time and others are quick to join in.

In this classroom, children of all backgrounds and ability levels are developing as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, artists, movers, and thinkers. A child's development begins early in life, with the Pre-K experience playing an instrumental role. Teachers spend a lot of time thinking, planning, and reflecting on how to provide supportive, nurturing instruction. The decisions we make as teachers are grounded in an understanding of childhood development and learning progressions. By thinking first about the "what" and "why" of early childhood development, we can then move on to the work of planning for what our classrooms will look like and sound like and implementing effective practices.

"Seeing" this classroom in action allows us to consider the sheer possibilities that come along with quality early experiences in school from the moment children walk in the door, sign their name, stir a mixture of objects, and are captivated by an environment that is dedicated completely to their learning. With an exemplary teacher and quality curriculum, anything seems possible.

Chapter 2

Getting To Know Your Preschool Students

What a joy it is to spend the day with preschoolers! Their inquisitive minds and carefree spirits invite teachers to create environments and activities that inspire play, learning, and growth. But before teachers can begin to shape their classroom space, fill it with engaging materials, and plan activities, they must understand what it means to be a preschooler and how young children view the world and their place in it. Child development, the process of going through social, emotional, cognitive, and physical changes from birth to adolescence, has a predictable set of milestones. Yet, each child takes their own unique path on this journey of mastering the skills and understandings key to these milestones. When it comes to planning, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development must be at the front of preschool teachers thinking. Let's take a look inside the developmental world of three to five-year-olds.

Physical Development

Preschoolers are on the move and always seem to be in motion! Their bodies become longer and leaner as they mature in age, and they become more coordinated, more balanced, and faster. Refer to Table X: Physical Development and Milestones to see how children's physical skills develop over time.

When we foster children's physical development, we actually focus on both large and fine motor development. Gross (or large) motor skills involve the larger muscles in the arms, legs, and torso. Gross motor activities include walking, running, throwing, lifting, kicking, etc. These skills also relate to body awareness, reaction speed, balance, and strength. Giving children time for unstructured play, especially outdoors when they can climb and run, is a natural way to help them develop these skills. There are many other engaging ways you can support their development. Invite children to walk on their toes or heels, walk with their toes pointed in or out, or walk like an animal such as a crab or a bear or hop like a rabbit or a frog. Yoga, which involves stretching and balancing, is also a powerful guided physical activity.

Fine motor skills can be defined as small muscle movements that occur in the fingers, in coordination with the eyes. All fine motor activities are built upon four important skills: grasping objects, reaching out to objects, releasing objects deliberately, and turning the wrist in various directions. These all take time and practice. Adding toys and items such as puzzles with small pieces, peg boards, tongs, tweezers, construction and building sets, buttons, snaps, and other fasteners in activities or at centers will give children practice using their fine motor skills. Stringing and lacing activities, painting, drawing, and cutting also give children fine motor practice.

Table X: Physical Development and Milestones

Age 3	Age 4	Age 5
Climbs well Runs easily Pedals a tricycle Walks up and down stairs, one foot on each step	Hops and stands on one foot up to 2 seconds Catches a bounced ball most of the time Pours, cuts with supervision, and mashes own food	Stands on one foot for 10 seconds or longer Hops; may be able to skip Can do a somersault o Uses a fork and spoon and sometimes a table knife Can use the toilet on her own Swings and climbs

(Source: https://www.cdc.gov/NCBDDD/actearly/pdf/checklists/All_Checklists.pdf)

Spotlight on Movement and Vocabulary

Connecting movement into learning activities and lessons is important too. Moving is one way that children make meaning from instruction. When children are engaged in a kinesthetic activity, they are moving, touching, and interacting with their learning. And a great side benefit is that kinesthetic learning activities are usually lots of fun! For example, in Unit 4: "We Are Architects!" as teachers read Construction by Sally Sutton, they encourage children to echo words and join in on the actions such as:

- "Dig the ground." Scoop your hand like a big shovel.
- "Fill the holes!" Use your hand to pour concrete in a hole and spread it out.
- "Cut the planks." Push a saw forward and back.
- "Build the frame." Hold a hammer, and tap in a nail.
- "Raise the roof." Look up and hold a drill above your head as if working on the ceiling.
- "Spread the paint." Move your arm up and down as if using a paint roller.

Cognitive Development

Young children's cognitive development, those skills and understandings related to thinking and learning, is growing at a fast rate as they explore and interact with the world. Three to five-year-old children are developing their ability to use symbolic thought (this is part of Piaget's Pre-Operational Stage of cognitive development). This means that they will use objects, events, and actions to represent things. For example, in the dramatic play area, you might find children engaged in a scenario where they are acting like people who are boarding a train. You may observe roles being assigned and props being set up such as chairs to represent the seats on the train. The child who is playing the conductor might walk around the chairs, collecting tickets from the passengers. They may use small blocks from the dramatic play area to act as the tickets. This representational play shows children recreating objects, events, and roles they have viewed people take on in the world.

Three-year-olds' memory is developing rapidly! Yet, they most likely recall short term, immediate events. This is why they enjoy structure and routine. The predictability of the school day is reassuring to young preschoolers. As children turn four and five, their ability to remember grows and they begin to understand concepts of time. Four and five-year-olds love to retell events from a story in, mostly, the correct order.

As children approach five years old, they become more sophisticated in many cognitive skills that are mathematical in nature, such as sorting and classifying shapes and objects. While three-year-olds are beginning to understand the unique attributes of items (color, shape, and size), four-year-olds are able to sort items based on one of these characteristics. By five years old, they can sort based on more than one characteristic. Five-year-olds are also using positional words to describe where objects are located.

Preschoolers are curious and want to know everything! In the classroom, you might hear the questions "why?" and "how?" with great frequency. You can encourage cognitive exploration and development in your classroom by offering items and activities that spark young children's natural curiosity and interest in the world around them. Try the following strategies to ensure that you are challenging young children's cognitive growth:

- Reflect on arrangement - How can you refresh an area/center in your classroom? By organizing classroom materials in new ways. Add some stuffed animals in the classroom library. Arrange them on a bench, seat, sofa, or pillows where children can see them "reading". Using materials in interesting ways helps children investigate abstract ideas by using their imaginations and inspire symbolic play.
- Reflect on language - How can you help young children describe and represent verbally what they see and experience? Fill the day with robust language and include words that describe size, shape, amount, and concepts of time. Categorize, sort, compare, match, and contrast with toys and other materials.
- Reflect on sensory experiences - How can you incorporate a variety of sensory modes? Give children daily opportunities to explore with familiar objects in new, exciting ways. Pour rice, water, and beans in funnels at the sensory table. Hide objects in a touch box where children can use their reasoning and logical thinking skills to figure out what is inside. Children can ask questions, make predictions, solve problems, and test out solutions as they learn how these materials work.

- Reflect on teacher support- Young children are learning how to problem-solve. Give them opportunities to figure out a problem by not stepping in immediately but, rather, prompting with a question such as, "What should we do?" and encourage the child to figure it out.

Social Development

Three to five-year-olds are curious about what is happening in their surroundings, especially how people interact with one another. Preschool teachers will notice that younger children, the three-year-olds, tend to either play alone or near adults or other children. This type of play is referred to as parallel play. As cognitive and language skills develop, children begin to establish social relationships and figure out how to interact with their peers in play. First friendships are formed and children have a strong desire to make their friends happy. This is reflected in their actions in play.

You will notice that those three-year-olds that are engaging in parallel play will also often observe and experiment with how things work socially. They tend to mimic what they see in the world. As children get older, they begin to understand how to cooperate, take turns, and share. Again, growing language skills allow these things to take place.

Preschool teachers can help promote positive social development in the classroom by thinking about room arrangement, grouping, and your role in supporting young children's social-emotional growth. Refer to Table X (Promoting Positive Social Development) for tips on doing so.

Table X: Promoting Positive Social Development

Structuring your space- By having a well-planned environment with interesting materials, children will want to engage in play with peers!	Strengthen your social environment- By offering structured activities and reflecting on how you group children you can encourage positive interactions.	Assist peer interactions- By supporting young children in building relationships with peers we help to support their growing social skills.
Try- Everything in its place! Defining boundaries with furniture and reflecting on the noise level of centers can be factors in encouraging social interaction. How many? Too many or too few children at a center can affect social dynamics. What will you offer? Provide materials that encourage conversation, interaction, and reflect children's home cultures and languages. What will you display? Show positive visuals of social interaction from a variety of cultures.	Change your groupings: Try assigned seating, mix up small group members, and encourage new grouping at centers. Partnering: Strategically partner children who exhibit stronger social skills with children who may benefit from this kind of peer encouragement. Activities: Student of the week, show and tell, and other celebrations give children who are more reluctant to socialize more structured opportunities to communicate their likes to their peers.	Role play: Use puppets to help children explore different outcomes in social scenarios. Modeling: Modeling provides you with a way to show children how to interact and use language that might be new to them. Giving feedback: Give specific praise so that children learn to repeat positive behaviors. Prompting peer interactions: Help children by encouraging conversation. Encourage children who speak the same language to partner together.

(Based on: http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201001/OstroskyWeb0110.pdf)

Emotional Development

In preschool, children are learning how to identify and name the wide range of emotions they experience throughout the day, such as happy, sad, mad, etc. They tend to "live in the moment" and their emotions work in response to that. By the time they are five years old, most preschoolers begin to develop the ability to regulate their emotions. Self-regulation comes with the help of changing cognitive understandings and growing verbal skills. In your classroom, you might notice a three year old react with great emotion when another child takes a toy they had their eye on. In the same situation, a four year old is beginning to understand that they can control their emotion, which can then help to get through any conflict in a calmer manner.

In your classroom, you can help children as they learn to self regulate their emotions by:

Using quality literature - Use read alouds to teach "emotional literacy." Discuss characters' emotions while looking at illustrations. Talk about how the characters feel and why they feel that way.

Scaffolding - Model how you might respond to a stressful situation, giving children ways to respond appropriately. You may need to come up with different strategies unique to each child. Some children may need assistance taking deep breaths to calm down or help finding a quiet place in the room to draw a picture of how they are feeling.

Affirming - When you help a child to understand that it is okay to experience a range of emotions such as frustration, anger, happiness, etc. it gives them comfort. Using sentence stems, such as "Everyone feels _____" will help children understand the universal nature of all emotional responses.

Encouraging and developing the social-emotional skills of your preschoolers has immediate and long-term effects. In your classroom, the direct benefits include a calmer environment with children that are working to communicate feelings and express themselves. Long term, children that exhibit positive social skills perform better academically and are often stronger problem solvers. When you include social-emotional skills in your daily instruction and model positive strategies, you are helping to give your students the key for success and emotional well-being.

As you move forward through this guide to Blueprint, make the development of your young students the foundation for all that you do. Each decision you make should be grounded in your growing or experienced understanding of how children are changing from three to five years of age. When you consider how you will arrange your classroom environment, ask yourself how the choices you make will impact the ways children mature socially. When you plan your instruction, ask yourself how the language you use will encourage cognitive growth and curiosity. Successful teachers of young children ask themselves these kinds of questions, continually reflect on their practice, and make decisions in which the ultimate goal is to create a child-centered, developmentally appropriate, intellectually robust, and kind classroom.

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Chapter 3
Quality Early Instruction

Now that we have defined some key concepts associated with early childhood development, let's think about what is essential in early childhood instruction. High-quality early childhood instruction combines approaches where children are empowered to make choices and seek out knowledge, while teachers create environments and activities that meet state standards, follow learning trajectories, and are respectful of and responsive to children's individual needs.

Blueprint is based on the constructivist approach to early childhood education in which children are immersed in meaningful learning experiences with the explicit and intentional support of caring adults. In this approach, children are active learners, developing their identities, engaging in ideas in the context of their background knowledge, and creating new understandings based on their exposure and participation in integrated activities. Teachers nurture children's curiosity, invite inquiry, and actively connect to children's background knowledge. Teachers respond to children's interests, skills, strengths, and needs through guided learning experiences that occur in a variety of settings, planned and individualized to the needs of each child.

- Children initiate play. Their open-ended exploration, manipulation of objects, and dramatic play make critical contributions to children's development. Play allows children to express and represent their ideas and new knowledge, making it their own.
- Learning is integrated into knowledge-building experiences throughout the school day. For example, children have exposure to print and books during exploration in science, math, and other content area subjects.
- Children are exposed to concepts and skills in the context of real and authentic experiences, rather than in isolation. These include things like solving a problem, designing a tool, and interacting with print in their environment (name cards, labels).
- Children learn in a robust environment, one that contains authentic displays of children's work and contains learning materials that represent children's home cultures.
- Equity is furthered through the recognition and appreciation of children's diversity and the inclusion of their cultures in the curriculum.

Children's developmental needs are met.

Developmentally appropriateness is defined as the settings, materials, experiences, and social support that evidenced-based research tells us is suitable for young children at four years old, in line with what we know about how this age group learns and flourishes. Developmentally appropriate teaching practices, therefore:

- Meet learners where they are
- Identify goals for children that are both challenging and achievable
- Differentiate for learners based on their knowledge, experiences, and skills

Blueprint includes an explicit, well-organized, and progressive scope and sequence based on trajectories of learning for optimal child growth and development. Each specific learning objective is known as a "teaching point." The teaching points and best practices of Blueprint come from a comparison of state early childhood standards, NAEYC, Head Start Outcomes, and other national organizations standards such as WIDA and DEC-CEC. Blueprint is consistent with research on how children develop and learn. The measurable teaching points in Blueprint focus on skills, behaviors, and knowledge that are observable and consistent with well-established developmental progressions. Blueprint provides guidance on how to use the teaching point aligned activities to individualize learning experiences for all children by breaking down some activities into smaller chunks or extending the learning to a higher level. Blueprint also contains suggestions on ways individual children can revisit and have more practice with the teaching point in other classroom experiences such as centers or outside time.

The Blueprint curriculum offers exemplary lesson plans to guide your instruction, while allowing you the flexibility to adjust that plan based on the developmental needs of different learners in your classroom. As you would with any curriculum, you

will need to preview the Blueprint lesson plans with your own children in mind, making adjustments in your language and teaching moves based on the needs and interests of your children.

Blueprint considers the developmental appropriateness in all areas of instruction by embracing the approach of "intentional and explicit exposure." In other words, teacher language and actions should intentionally and clearly expose children to behaviors and skills without pressuring them to apply these concepts until they are developmentally ready. How can you do this? Let's take a look at two examples:

- When reading aloud, you may mention that before you read you will think about what the book is about, and then be explicit about HOW to do this (look at the cover, think about the title, think about your own experience) and WHY it is important (when we think about what the book is about, we will better understand it as we read).
- When writing in front of children (modeled writing), you may say aloud that you are putting finger spaces between your words and/or that you ran out of room on this line so you need to start writing on the next line.

Children's individual needs are met.

While constructivism provides a general framework for approaching the school day, children's individualized needs must also be met. The principles of "Universal Design" put the needs of the learner front and center. This approach invites teachers to focus on both the content of their lessons (what they are teaching) and their pedagogy (how they are teaching it). Teachers are encouraged to think about, plan, and create accessible and flexible learning environments and experiences, so that all children can participate. This is done through varying means of engagement (giving children choices and making it relevant to their lives), varying how new information is presented (using video, audio, print, etc.), and varying how children show what they know. These processes help to ensure that the needs of all children are met.

- During Small Group lessons, children are often invited to select items or tools that they want to investigate or use first. In addition, children are welcome to contribute ideas for new materials that they want to explore. For example, in Unit 7: "Let's Eat!" when learning about kitchen tools, children are invited to browse and discuss the use of various tools. They choose which tool they would like to investigate and share what they are learning about it.
- During Message Time Plus lessons, teachers use varying materials to engage children as they participate in activities. For example, when learning about animals that build nests in Unit 8: "Animal Architects," children listen to audio clips of various bird sounds. They discuss what they hear and describe the sounds.

Children's cultures and languages are valued.

"All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society."

(Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education, NAEYC Position Paper, 2019)

Language and cultural diversity are strengths that should be celebrated, extended, and protected. All languages and cultures are valuable and contribute to learning and growth in our classrooms. All home languages and cultures need to be honored and built upon in the classroom culture and environment.

In Blueprint, we encourage teachers to support children in developing their self-identity and taking pride in it. We encourage teachers to support children in recognizing and celebrating diversity. No one individual or group is superior or inferior to another group. We also invite teachers to help children recognize when things are unfair or unjust, and teach them strategies for ways they can help.

Using the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, Blueprint invites children to share their background knowledge and invite teachers to incorporate it into children's learning experiences. Blueprint is structured around 90 intensely curated children's books that encourage a reflective and anti-bias cultural responsiveness, where children can see themselves and others for their unique strengths and gifts. Blueprint further provides guidance on how to modify and enhance curriculum plans and materials to build on these strengths, abilities, experiences, and interests with the goal of incorporating each child's culture into the classroom.

Table X. Terms

- Home language- the language a child speaks with their family and local community. Home language refers to languages other than English as well as variations of English
- Language of instruction- the language used in the classroom to deliver content and to assess
- Language diversity- the variety of languages spoken by children in any given classroom
- Multilingual learners – children who are learning more than one language (e.g. the language of instruction in school (English) and their home language(s))

Even if you do not speak children's home languages, here are strategies you can use to engage and support multilingual learners' level of comfort in the classroom, their participation, and comprehension.

Incorporate children's home languages and cultures.

- Invite children to use their home languages to share what they know.
- Invite children to teach the class how you say a new word (e.g. "pool") in their home language; this fosters an inclusive environment while helping them connect words they know in their language to English.
- Invite children to share items, routines, and customs from their home cultures.

Interact with children.

- Use non-verbal signals such as smiles and nods to build relationships.
- Use parallel talk - as children play and make observations, use parallel talk to repeat what they are saying, or reword it to give exposure to synonyms and varied vocabulary.
- Learn key words in the children's home languages.
- Narrate what you see children doing.

Support comprehension.

- Use realia (concrete objects).
- Draw pictures.
- Provide visuals/audio.
- Point or gesture.
- Act out/dramatize.
- Use opposites to illustrate your point (e.g. "He is not smiling. He is frowning because he dropped his ice cream.").
- Use cognates – cognates are words in different languages that have the same linguistic origin. Some are perfect cognates, or spelled exactly the same, while others are near perfect cognates. For example, "community" (English) and "comunidad" (Spanish) are near perfect cognates. Pointing out and recording cognates helps language learners bridge what they know about one language to the new language.
- Use sentence frames (e.g. I learned, I wonder…).
- Use anchor charts as references for oral and written communication throughout the unit. Record in English and children's home languages.
- Invite children to use multiple modes of expression for their ideas and thinking processes - using pictures and drawings to share their observations and ideas; act out their responses.
- Invite children to share their prior knowledge and experiences.

Be strategic with your grouping.

- Pair students new to English with a trusted peer and/or a student who speaks the same home language. If you have two children that speak the same home language, but one is more fluent in English, sit them next to each other. Tell the child with more English that she gets to be a special helper, a translator! That's a person that hears what is said in one language and says the same thing in a different language to help people understand each other better.
- Have children work in groups with mixed language abilities to foster relationships and natural language exchange.

Engage families.

- Ask families to translate important content/theme words.
- Provide materials in families' home languages.
- Form relationships with families to learn about their child's development, culture, home language, and background.
- Encourage children to show and describe artifacts to their families- how they made it, what the parts are, etc. in their home language. Some parents may think that they need to speak English to give the child practice. In fact, building their ability to describe and explain in the home language creates a foundation for acquiring English.

Spotlight on Layered Questioning

When we interact with children, how can we ensure that ALL children understand and participate, regardless of their level of language development? Layered questioning, an intentional assessment-based teaching strategy for varying the types of questions children are asked, can help you reach this goal. We utilize this strategy throughout the curriculum, showing you how and when you can use gestures, yes/no questioning, either/or questions, and open-ended questions to empower children at all levels of language proficiency to express their thinking, extend their content knowledge, and be an active member of the classroom community.

Reflection

None of us are raised in a vacuum. We all bring certain ideas about people and cultures to our work. The more you know about yourself and your conscious and unconscious biases, the better able you will be to proactively support the diverse children in your classroom. Consider taking an anti-bias test to uncover your thinking. There are many available tools online (both Harvard University and the Anti-Defamation League have resources available). After you take the test, reflect on what you have learned about yourself. How does what you learned impact you as a teacher, responsible for the care and education of ALL children?

Read and Think:

"White European American culture has an individual orientation that teaches children to function independently, stand out, talk about themselves, and view property as personal. In contrast, many other cultures value interdependence, fitting in, helping others and being helped, being modest, and sharing property. In fact, some languages have no words for I, me, or mine." (Kaiser, Rasminksy 2019/2020). What does this quote make you think about? How does it reflect the culture you create in your classroom? How can you change your environment and activities to reflect your children's cultures?

Spotlight on Culturally Responsive Tools

One way to be a culturally responsive teacher is to use cultural learning styles and tools. Zaretta Hammond, author of Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain, suggests three ways to do this:

- Make it a game - Games get the brain's attention and require active processing. Throughout the curriculum, children play games in Small Group lessons. In Unit 5: "Life on the Farm," children play thematic board games with dice and game pieces. They roll and count dots on the dice. They then apply this number to the board and use their game piece to move the corresponding number of spaces.
- Make it a story - The brain is wired to remember stories and use story structure to make sense of the world. For example, in several Talk Times throughout the curriculum, we guide children to construct a story together. To help children build on one another's ideas, we make group oral storytelling a tangible activity. One child holds a ball and tells part of a story, and then they roll the ball to another child who adds onto the story.
- Make it social - Relying on each other builds on children's communal orientation. For example, we play cooperative games with a parachute in units 2, 8, and 10 during Movement Time. Children work together to move the parachute in different ways (i.e. lift it up and down slowly, shake it quickly, etc.). They also challenge themselves as a team to try to keep items, such as balls or plastic eggs, inside the parachute as they shake it together.

Source: https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/culturally-responsive-teaching-strategies/

Children's learning is scaffolded.

Quality pre-k programs allow children to be supported with the necessary scaffolds for them to achieve success and eventual independence. "Scaffolding" is the process of helping a child build knowledge and understanding. Just as a scaffold helps a builder reach a high roof, scaffolding helps a child perform skills at a higher level than they could by working independently. Your verbal directions, physical assistance, and probing questioning help children figure out how to approach learning tasks, improve skills, and acquire knowledge. See Table X for more examples.

Table X. Scaffolding Strategies

There are many ways to scaffold children's learning. Look for the sidebar tips labeled "Scaffolding Children" in the curriculum. You will see examples such as:

- Share connections you make before asking children to share theirs. "Thinking aloud" like this scaffolds children's learning by providing a model for how to think and talk.

- Motivate children by giving them time to explore new materials. This scaffolds children's learning by getting them interested in the topic!
- Ask children to make predictions before reading the ending of a book or before doing a science experiment. This scaffolds children's learning by preparing their expectations.
- Pre-teach a key word that children will hear in a book. This scaffolds children's learning by supporting their comprehension.
- Model what we want children to do before we ask them to do it. This scaffolds children's learning by giving them an example of the completed actions.
- Give children the chance to talk to a peer before sharing with a large group. This scaffolds children learning by giving them time to process what they are learning and rehearse what they might say to the group.

The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model is built on the premise that a teacher should scaffold a child's learning by slowly releasing support to the child as they demonstrate their ability to perform tasks on their own.

Through this model, the responsibility of who does the cognitive work shifts. At first, it is with the teacher as they model. Next, children and teachers have shared responsibility in the learning. Finally, children take over the task independently. By using the gradual release model, the teacher is reaching children in their zone of proximal development. According to Lev Vygotsky, the psychologist who coined this idea, instruction in this zone of proximal development, with a "knowledgeable other" supporting new skills and understandings, is the most effective way for a child to grow.

The Gradual Release of Responsibility model can guide our teaching and learning practices. A modification of the model is the "To/With/By" model of teacher and child relationships. The chart below explains this model and its three "steps" in relation to effective practices.

Step in the Gradual Release	To	With		By
What is happening?	Model Teacher is reading or writing TO children.	Share Teacher is sharing the reading and writing with children.	Guide Teacher is guiding children as they make their own attempts.	Apply Children are reading or writing on their own in accordance to their developmental levels.
When is this happening? (effective preschool practices)	Reading Aloud, Modeling Writing	Shared Reading, Shared Writing	Small Groups, Interactive Writing	Center Time

Chapter 4
Critical Role of the Teacher

Children look to you, their teacher, as a model, a guide, and an encourager. Research on the significance of adult-child interactions in early childhood development has shown that relationships matter (see Table X). Warm, supportive relationships encourage children's motivation, engagement, self-direction, cooperation, and positive attitudes toward school. What messages are you sending to your children through your words, actions and practices?

A Teacher's Role

Adults…	In order to send the message that	Teaching Practices that support these behaviors
Develop warm, supportive relationships	I care about you and what you are going through. I want you to do the best you can. I want you to have friends and learn strategies for developing relationships.	Take time to talk to every child every day. Ask them about their experiences inside and outside of school (and conversely, take time to listen!) Arrival time greetings are important in starting the day. Build a classroom community through activities that invite children to learn about each other's interests and lives and give children a chance to problem solve obstacles they may be facing academically and socially. Large group Gathering Times are great times to do this.
Engage children's interest	I want you to be engaged in the learning we do every day so that you can enjoy learning in our classroom.	Use animation and enthusiasm in your tone and behaviors throughout the day in your interactions with children. Adapt curriculum materials to match children's interests.
Maximize children's cultural expertise	I value the tremendous resources you bring to the classroom. I will incorporate your knowledge into our activities, interactions, and classroom environment.	Co-create responsibilities and procedures that take into account children's home cultures and traditions. Invite children to share their experiences and cultural expertise and include them as you adapt your curriculum.
Maximize children's linguistic expertise	You are an expert in the language that you speak at home. I will help you build upon that expertise to leverage your learning in our classroom. I will help you use what you can already do and already know to learn new things.	• Incorporate children's home languages into anchor charts, classroom labels, routines, and procedures. • Ask children to contribute home language words and phrases that they know for key English vocabulary in each lesson (e.g. "does anyone know another way to say this? How do you say this at home?"). • Form collaborative relationships with the families of your children to learn about their child's development, culture, home language, and background (using community translators and/or translation tools as necessary). • Use a variety of presentation tools and experiences (e.g. visuals, realistic objects, peer-to-peer partnerships).
Support children's individual strengths and needs	I want to give you access to every activity. I want you to feel supported and successful.	Reflect on your lesson goals to ensure they meet the needs of the children in your room. Assess where your children experience challenges. Make changes to your materials and/or activities as necessary so children can be as independent as possible. Use children's favorite items to increase participation and engagement. Adapt your classroom environment to meet the physical needs of your children.

Create challenging but achievable goals	I want you to reach your potential without pressuring or overwhelming you.	Be explicit with children about what you are trying to teach them and why it is important for them to engage in the learning. Get in tune with how children are feeling about school and specifically about learning in different domains (e.g. reading and writing). You can do this by carefully observing, checking in with children verbally, and continually assessing what they are interested in and like about school.
Model behaviors and approaches to learning	I want you to be able to watch how I ask questions, problem solve, and persevere so you can work on making these behaviors your own.	Show children how problems are opportunities to learn. Use authentic situations that arise from classroom experiences. Address injustice as it occurs or as children notice it. Discuss how you might act in a situation where someone is being hurtful to another. Focus on fairness. Be explicit when you think aloud about these behaviors so children can try them out on their own. Remember that explicit exposure is different from expecting or pressuring children to actually utilize these strategies on their own.
Support and encourage children	I want to guide you by offering you the right amount of support you need to be successful.	Sit side by side with children as they are working and playing and encourage their attempts. Provide prompts and cues without giving them the answer. Try saying, "Tell me about this…" Offer specific praise for both children's products and their process. Be clear on what they are doing well, so they can continue and replicate these behaviors. Try saying, "I noticed that you_____, this helped you _____."

Teachers as Reflective Practitioners

In addition to acting as a model and guide in children's learning, you need to be a reflective practitioner by giving deep thought to your planned instruction. Research shows that excellent teachers are not only well-prepared teachers but those who continue to participate in professional development during their careers.

The Most Effective Teachers:

Are reflective practitioners that engage in a continuous process of questioning, planning, trying out, and evaluating their own and their children's learning.

Work toward establishing a professional community in which they rely on the collective expertise and mutual support of colleagues to inform their day-to-day judgments. Teacher study groups that provide opportunities for teachers to engage in reading about new ideas, reflective planning, and evaluation are effective forms of collaboration.

Seek opportunities to learn about research-based strategies and pedagogy and then apply that learning in their classrooms. The support of coaches who help teachers with new strategies for teaching is critical to the success of their application.

(Lesley M. Morrow Rutgers University, Language and Literacy in Preschools: Current Issues and Concerns, Literacy Teaching and Learning Volume 9, Number 1)

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Chapter 5
Family Engagement

"You are a much more effective teacher when you understand each child's unique family. There is so much that you can learn from families: their expectations and hopes for their child, their childrearing strategies, how they handle challenging behavior, what they see as their child's strengths, and concerns they may have about their child's development. You can also learn about a child's daily routines and rituals; the family's religion and the special days and ways they celebrate; their home language and the child's interests and how the child approaches new experiences. The more you know, the more you come to appreciate the context of a child's life and the more effective you are as a teacher." (Derman-Sparks, Edwards, Goins 2020).

Teachers who create a program that supports children's social, emotional, language, physical, and cognitive development, who have strong background knowledge on child development, and create warm, responsive classrooms are creating the foundation for children's success. The final piece of the puzzle is family engagement. Research shows that family involvement is important for children's development and has a big impact on their cognitive development, vocabulary growth, literacy skills, expressive language, and math skills (Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos, 2007; Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2007). It can boost their social skills (Best & Dunlop, 2011; Van Voorhis et al., 2013). Overall, children tend to do better when their families are more engaged.

Quality preschools engage family members as an integral part of the program with children's growth and development at the center. Authentic family engagement allows you to:

- BUILD positive, trusting relationships – Active family engagement involves families and educators working together as equal partners who share responsibility for the learning and successes of the children. One of the benefits of this partnership is that educators report greater job satisfaction and more positive associations with families when this partnership is strong.
- SHARE information – Unlike other fields where innovation may take the form of technology or a product, innovation in education takes the form of creative uses and sharing of resources. Finding out from the school how to support a child's development and learning will better equip families to carry out these responsibilities. Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better because parents and professionals are bridging the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.
- LEARN more about each other's needs – Families and educators can discuss expectations for each child, and their partnership in helping children meet these expectations. Teachers can learn how to support families at home, and families can learn how to support the work teachers are doing.
- SHIFT dynamics to build agency – A true partnership with respect and strong lines of communication enables children to be successful because all stakeholders see themselves as able to effect change. There is a deep investment when parents and school personnel have a mutual relationship. Children achieve more, have higher grades and test scores, and exhibit more positive attitudes.

Spotlight - Six Principles of Family Engagement

NAEYC and PreK Now determined six exemplary family engagement principles that include:

- Inviting families to participate in decision making and goal setting
- Engaging families in two-way communication that is timely, continuous, and reflective of the language families choose
- Engaging families in reciprocal communication that includes seeking, sharing and using information
- Providing learning activities for the home and in the community
- Inviting families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts
- Implementing a comprehensive program-level system of family engagement

Source: https://naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement/principles

Communicating with Families

As NAEYC discovered, two-way communication is key to building relationships with families. There are several ways to establish and maintain strong communication pathways.

- Be sensitive. As Randall B. Lindsey reminds us, "Parents/guardians...have to know the cultural norms and expectations of schools, which may conflict or be different from those in their communities, their countries of origin or their cultural groups. In ideal conditions, their children are developing bicultural skills, learning to "code switch" to meet the cultural expectations of their environments. However, parents may not have these skills for adapting to new and different environments. Parents or guardians and their children may be penalized because they do not respond to the norms set by educators because they do not navigate well the educational systems of the public schools." Reflect on any barriers that might exist in engaging families and work to offset them. Work with colleagues and other school personnel to brainstorm ways to include ALL families, to see how they have met with successes and to learn more about families' cultures.
- Model positive language. In the classroom, we know that we are careful with the words that we choose. We use positive and empowering language because children will mimic the content and tone of our words. The same is true for the families we work with. Use positive and constructive language; set the tone for the relationship you want to build.
- Differentiate communication. In our classrooms, we know the importance of differentiation. We let one child lay down on the floor during reading time. We give another child more time to eat. We offer another child directions one step at a time. The same is true for families. We need to think of the varied needs of our families and how we can best respond to them. We can try different modalities of communication (e.g. notes, newsletters, phone calls, texts). We can also be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic differences of the families we serve and adapt to their needs as well (see Table X: Launching a Communication Plan).
- Be reflective. Some of the best teachers are reflective ones; the ones who review and revise their planning and instruction based on children's strengths, needs, and engagement. The same can be true, of course, for our family engagement work. Are your families as engaged as you would like? What could the potential barriers be? Limited resources? Lack of time? Lack of transportation? Lack of child care? Something else? We can reflect on how it is going, identify our strengths, analyze where we want to grow, and go for it! We mentioned that family engagement is a process… well, reflection is a key component of that process.

Spotlight – Launching a Communication Plan

Get to know how to communicate with each family you are working with right from the start. For example, you might ask:

- Which adult will be the primary contact for the child in your class? Is there more than one?
- What is their preferred language for communication? Is there more than one?
- What mode of contact is best? Would they prefer conversations, texts, emails?
- What support do they need? For example, if your school uses a specific app, do they need help downloading the app? Logging in?
- What times of day are best to reach out to them?

Remember to be prepared to have other members of your school or local community available to support you in exchanging information with families for whom English is not their primary language. Also, be sure to explain the methods of communication you prefer and your routines around them as well. Remember to keep it flexible and have multiple points of entry for families.

Collaboration

When we talk about collaboration, we are focusing on authentic collaboration, a true partnership between the adults in the children's lives who are responsible for their growth and development. The goal is to transcend traditional ways of "doing business" and create new strategic and system-wide approaches for building and sustaining partnerships, all with the goal of supporting children's development. Collaboration requires shared responsibility in contrast to individual responsibility that tends to be one-directional. Families are equal stakeholders when they meet with teachers on a regular basis to share their experiences and explore children's successes and needs.

A menu of ways to collaborate:

- Talk to families about their children. What are their children interested in? What do they enjoy doing? What are families' expectations for their children?

- Greet families as they walk in the door. Make sure to share positive stories about their children!
- Near the entry area, create a bulletin board or space for families to view calendars, special events, newsletters, children's work, etc. All materials should appear in children's home languages. Invite families to post photos or their children's work as well.
- Invite families to share what they see their child doing at home.
- Each family has cultural traditions that influence the choices they make. Invite families to share these traditions and include them in your program.
- Keep families informed about what is happening in class through a weekly or monthly newsletter. Be sure to send it home in families' preferred language.
- Encourage families to sign up for the Blueprint @ Home text tip service.
- Offer family workshops. A few times a year, invite families to come to school during the evening to learn strategies for reading at home, for example, with their child.
- Send home activities that mirror what children are doing in school. Include directions and any supplies they might need.
- Invite families in for class celebrations.
- Ask families to donate items for special projects.
- Ask families to donate items that reflect their cultural traditions so the classroom environment better reflects children's diversity.
- Ask families to share books in their child's home languages.
- Ask families to help with special projects in school.
- Invite families to be guest readers in your classroom.
- Ask families to translate labels or anchor charts in your room so the print celebrates all children's home languages.
- Invite them to be guest visitors to share their experiences and expertise with the class.
- Invite families to record songs and stories in their home languages.
- Ask families what role they see in playing in the classroom.

Spotlight - Home Visits

Plan home visits. Visiting a child's home once in the beginning of the year and/or a few times throughout the year is known to have a lasting effect on young children's development. It is important that you and families speak the same language, and if not, you should bring along someone who speaks the families' home language. During this visit, in addition to inquiring about any assistance they might need in supporting their child and expressing interest in their home environment, you could model strategies for the parent (reading aloud, playing with words, etc.).

Spotlight: Samples of Family Resources in Blueprint

A unit newsletter (available in both English and Spanish) describes what children are learning and how families can support and engage in the learning.	Add images in this column
"Keep It Going…at Home." This letter (available in both English and Spanish) provides families general tips in four areas of child development: Physical Development (Keep Them Healthy & Active); Social-Emotional Development (Develop Their Emotional Well-Being); Language and Literacy (Help Them Communicate); and Cognitive Development (Explore Their World).	
Class Book Prior to creating each unit's class book, families receive a letter describing the topic of the class book. It invites families to discuss the topic with their child before the lesson in school. They can send their conversation notes back to school.	
Family Engagement Activities Each unit also includes family engagement activities that mirror what children are doing in school such as yoga poses and games.	

Spotlight - Reading at Home

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that families read to their children beginning at infancy. Research shows that reading, talking, and singing regularly with young children from birth stimulates brain development. This stimulation in turn builds language, literacy, and children's motivation to learn. Ask families about their routines for reading at home. You can also share some of these ideas.

- The first—and best—tip for sharing books is to have fun together. If children are engaged and enjoying themselves, they are learning. When children have positive interactions with books, they are developing good feelings about reading, which will motivate them to continue seeking out books and other literacy materials as they grow.
- A few minutes at a time is okay. And don't worry if you don't finish the book. Young children can only sit for a few minutes for a book, but as they grow, they will be able to sit longer. Let your child decide how much (or how little) time you spend reading. And you don't need to read every page. You may find that your child has a favorite page or even a favorite picture. They may want to linger there for a while, and then switch books or activities. When you let your child explore books in the ways that interest them, the reading experience will be more meaningful.
- Talk or sing about the pictures. You do not necessarily have to read the words to tell a story. Try "reading" the pictures in a book for your child sometime and have your child do the same.
- Make the story come alive! - Create voices for story characters and use your body to tell the story.
- Make it personal. - Talk about your own family, pets, or community when you are reading about others in a story.

  Ask questions about the book, and invite children to ask questions too! - Use the book to have a back-and-forth conversation with your child. Talk about familiar activities and objects you see in the illustrations or read about in the book.
- Make books a part of your daily routine. - The more that books are woven into children's everyday lives, the more likely they will be to see reading as a pleasure and a gift.

Spotlight - Storytelling at Home

Another invaluable and worthwhile way families can support their children is through storytelling, sharing family stories orally, and singing some songs, in their home languages. These rich cultural and linguistic interactions can bolster children's sense of themselves and their primary language skills. Research supports that ultimately it is easier to master a second (or third) language and school learning when your primary language, culture, and sense of identity are stronger.

Sharing family histories, experiences, and cultural stories in families' home languages can strengthen children's speaking skills. Children can gain a stronger sense of who they are when they have conversations with their families in their home languages. Language is, after all, an important part of our identity

Encourage families to use their home language(s) to:

- Share family stories orally
- Sing favorite songs
- Read books together (If the books are in English it's still worth having discussions about them in the home language as comparisons with family experiences can be made.)
- Read signs, labels, or other visuals in the environment
- Discuss events, stories, movies, or games
- Show children how to do something
- Create art or crafts

Rich cultural and linguistic interactions can bolster children's sense of themselves and their primary language skills. Children can master a language and academic learning when their primary language and culture are stronger.

Source: https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Family-Connections-Home-Languages-Flyer.pdf

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Chapter 6

The Physical Environment

The design and layout of your classroom furniture, materials, and visuals are an essential part of your Pre-K learning environment. They collectively make up the physical environment. When these elements are thoughtfully arranged, you can optimize learning and create an inclusive environment for all children in your class.

Imagine stepping into a Pre-K classroom. You notice a large group area, with a rug that has enough seating so each child can fit into a circle as the group gathers, encouraging social development and peer interaction. A nearby bulletin board contains a chart that captures children's thinking on the current thematic unit. It is placed at a child's line of vision. A rack with related children's literature is on display at the edge of the rug, within children's reach. Children's names and samples of their writing are near this area, on bulletin boards and in class made books, and throughout the room. The rest of the furniture is arranged into distinct center areas where children can explore their ideas, make choices, problem solve, and interact with their peers. Authentic materials, including items from children's home culture, are in evidence, as are labels in the languages children speak.

Think about the following:

- What message does this physical environment communicate to children and families?
- How does this space encourage learning?

Let's take a look at some important factors to consider as you design or update your classroom's physical layout. As you think about the layout of your classroom, make sure to consider how children of all races, genders and abilities can see themselves reflected and celebrated in the environment.

Universal Design

"To effectively support the needs of all children in your classroom…think about ways to design the classroom space…so [it is] adaptable and can be used with and by many children in a variety of ways...This concept of proactive design and flexibility [is] known as universal design for learning (UDL)." Brillante, 2017

Applying the concepts of universal design will help you effectively transform your classroom into a space that is accessible to all children. The concept of universal design originated in architecture and relies on core principles of design that are intended to make physical spaces usable for people of all ages and abilities. These have been adapted to apply to education.

When focusing on your physical environment and applying concepts of universal design, you can ask yourself the following questions:

- Are the spaces and materials accessible to all children?
- Are the equipment and materials easy to use by all children?
- Is the classroom safe for all children?

Source: The Essentials: Supporting Young Children with Disabilities in the Classroom (2017)

Spotlight on: Physical Elements of Your Space

Think about how you might balance the following physical elements in order to create an environment that is responsive to all children's needs:

- Softness and hardness: The surfaces and areas of the classroom should have items that are soft and hard in them. For example, pillows in the classroom library allow children to get cozy with their favorite books.
- Open-ended and closed-ended activities: Open activities and materials, like blocks, provide opportunities for unlimited creativity. Closed-ended activities, like puzzles, provide focus and quiet.
- Simple and complex: Provide a mixture of materials that encourage different levels of use such as paper towel tubes and fabric. Some items might have one traditional use while other materials allow children to imagine creative ideas for multiple uses.
- Intrusion and seclusion: Arrangement of furniture should allow for spaces that promote peer interaction and others should provide places for individual work.

- Risk and safety: Children should feel confident that they can try tasks that are new to them, but the environment should be set up in a way that it is safe for them to do so with teacher support. For example, a child that is learning how to use scissors should have access to a child-friendly pair and the teacher should be available to guide the child by showing them where their fingers go.
- High mobility and low mobility: Children should have opportunities for high mobility (space to move around) and low mobility (quieter activities that require calm and sitting still).
- Large group, small group, and individual: To balance the social structure of your classroom, provide children with a balance of large group, small group, and individual experiences.

Reference: Gestwicki, C. (2007). Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Curriculum and Development in Early Education (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Using Furniture to Define Your Space

When your physical space is well-designed, it communicates to children that their interests and experiences are valued. They way you set up the furniture in your classroom helps children see that they can work in various ways and feel safe. Using child sized furnishings that are appropriate for pre-kindergartners, you can create clear spaces for the activities of your day. This includes different sized gatherings and learning centers.

Creating Space for Working in Various Groupings

Children will work in many areas of the classroom throughout the day! Therefore, you will want to layout the furniture so that you can supervise every child at all times. You will have children gather together with the entire class for large group time. This time is often done on a rug, with area to accommodate children in chairs or wheelchairs within this space. Consider materials you will need during these large group experiences, possibly placing a shelf nearby. Some classrooms position their rug within the classroom library, making this a cozy, literacy rich area.

You will meet children in small groups, as well. Some teachers designate a small group table or area of the classroom, where they have teacher items that they need nearby such as sticky notes, crayons and magnetic letters. Others rotate this gathering to an available table.

Creating Space for Safety and Comfort

As you layout the large furniture, plan for clear, safe pathways to help children navigate the room. Ensure that the space is safe for children of all abilities. Consider things in your classroom that are fixed and cannot be moved such as electrical outlets, built-in furniture or bookshelves, sinks and bathrooms, etc.

The level of noise and activity of different areas of the classroom should be accounted for in your design. Typically, you will want to separate quiet areas from more noisy ones.

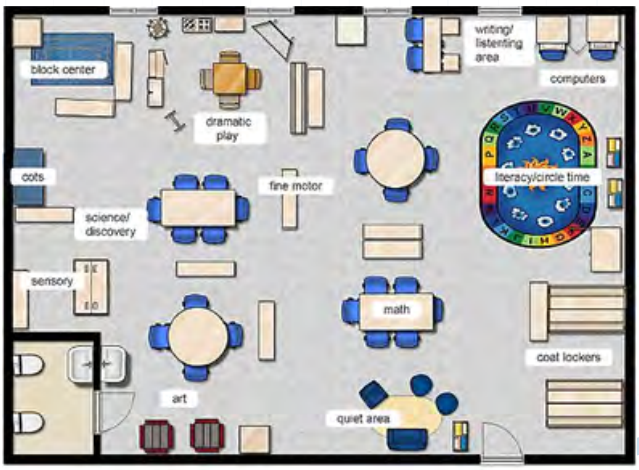
Think about what the activity might need. For example, classroom libraries need to be well lit. A cozy library area located by windows allows natural light to warm and brighten the space. Art areas tend to be messy! If there is a sink in your classroom, arrange the art center nearby.

Reflect on how and where the children will arrive and be dismissed. Children should have an area to store their belongings. If caregivers assist children into the classroom as they transition to the day, this space should have enough room for everyone.

Creating Space for Learning Centers

Children will spend a lot of time in various centers. Blueprint includes activities for each unit guide for the following centers: art, blocks, dramatic play, library, math and table toys, science, sensory table, technology, and writing. Each center varies in activity, noise level, and materials. In Chapter __, we explore each specific center in depth, with multiple material suggestions. Some things to keep in mind as you plan the overall space of your classroom to accommodate these different areas:

- Consider if the center needs tables or floor space. Writing and math and table toys are two centers that children might want to work on a flat surface, like a table.
- Consider how many children will be at the center. Make sure there is enough room for children to move and play. For example, if four children are at dramatic play, will they have enough room to move around?
- Consider if the activity is calm or active, messy or noisy.



Take a look at this example of a Pre-k classroom layout. What do you notice?

From this example of a classroom's layout, it is clear how the furniture is used to create defined learning centers. The large group area has plenty of room to accommodate all children and access to wall space. Children's belongings have a place near the door. This teacher has clearly thought about how learning centers might have an impact on classroom volume. Quiet areas are away from more active areas. The sensory area and art center are located by a sink. Shelves are used to separate and define spaces. There are clean paths (with space!) for walkways. When children walk into the classroom they see space that is intended for them. When families walk into the classroom they see interesting and engaging areas of the classroom for children to learn.

Take some time to sketch out a map of your classroom using page ___ (Table 2) in the index. Work with other teachers or special educators such as speech, occupational and physical therapists to help you apply the concepts of universal design. Create a layout that meets the needs of all your children.

Selecting and Organizing Your Materials

After thinking about the physical layout of furniture and rugs, you'll want to turn your attention to the types of materials children use in learning centers and throughout the day and how you organize them so all children have access. Carefully selected materials and their placement in the classroom help children to see that they can make choices, the materials are for them and value their interests and experiences, and help build confidence.

Types of Materials

The materials you select should not only be developmentally appropriate but also provide children with open-ended experiences that promote problem solving. These types of materials, such as blocks, allow you to plan differentiated instruction that accommodates your young learners' differing needs.

As children engage with learning materials, they gather information about the world, develop language and cognitive skills, and practice social skills. Therefore, materials should be real and authentic whenever possible.

Toys and manipulatives in the Pre-K classroom should invited children to enjoy and experience the process, not just the product. Make sure to provide enough materials for children to use at each center. It is helpful to rotate materials, according to interest, ability, and theme.

Spotlight: Assessing Materials

The materials that make up your classroom (and those that are missing) send powerful messages to your children. To reduce bias and strengthen inclusion, thoughtfully assess your materials.

Do they show a diversity of:

- Gender roles
- Cultures
- Ethnic groups
- Family structures
- Economical classes
- Physical abilities
- Skin tones
- Body shapes
- Sizes
- Clothing within cultures

Do they avoid:

- Stereotypes
- Only historical/traditional portrayals of groups of people
- Tokenism

Source: Anti-Bias Education for Young Children & Ourselves, Derman-Sparks, Edwards and Goins 2020.

Organizing Materials

A classroom with well-organized materials communicates to children the value of choice and independence. Keep materials logically organized and labeled, within children's reach. Use baskets and bins to sort and contain small items or manipulatives. This, in turn, helps guide children to take care of the classroom materials and put them back when they are finished.

As you rotate materials, you will likely have the current toys and manipulatives that support your unit or learning objectives available. When displaying specific collections of thematic materials, get creative by placing materials on a special piece of fabric or a tray. This will draw children's attention to the items. When storing materials, keep items in zip lock bags or bins in cabinets or higher shelves. Again, keeping out of use materials organized is helpful for when a child requests a loved item or has an idea about using a materials that is put away.

Environmental Print and Visuals

Visual materials such as environmental print (labels, schedules, charts) and images help children to understand the values of the classroom environment. Visual materials include charts that show routines and procedures. These reminders help offer visual cues to children as they work and play in the classroom. Displaying images that show the classrooms diversity (family structure, culture, ability, gender) in the home languages of your children promote a sense of belonging and are culturally welcoming.

Use pictures and labels, in the language of instruction and children's home languages, of the contents of bins of materials to help children know what is inside. Use the same on the shelf so children can match.

Post the daily schedule, procedure charts, anchor charts, and children's work at children's eye level. Include photographs of children working, children with their families, and communities throughout the environment. Children's names should be displayed in several areas of the room including cubbies, centers, and anchor charts. Avoid filling up the walls with print before the children arrive. Let the environment grow with charts you develop together and for children's writing. This authentic print is much more meaningful than store bought materials!

Create a bulletin board or space for families to view lesson plans, calendars, special events, newsletters, etc. Families enjoy viewing children's work on display in this area, as well. Invite families to construct this area with you.

Positive Message for Children	How Your Classroom Layout Can Support These Messages
This is a safe and comfortable place.	- Room dividers and shelves are at the children's eye level; they can see everything and the teacher can see the children. - Workspaces are purposeful and appropriate for child use. - Learning areas offer homelike, cozy spaces. - There is space to move around; the room is not crowded or congested. - There is a safe place for each child's personal belongings. - Children can see the teacher at all times. - The furniture is in good condition. The room has a clean, neat, and uncluttered appearance.
I belong here.	- Pictures and materials reflect the children's families, communities, and home languages. - The environment is designed to meet the (developmental, cognitive, physical, and language) needs of all children. - Wall and board space is devoted to learning resources and children's work. - Children can find their names posted in several places in the classroom, including their cubbies/lockers. - Labels around the classroom are also written in the children's home languages.
I can make friends and share.	- The classroom contains an area for small group or partner time. - There is a rug in a large group meeting area, which is big enough to accommodate the class and is used daily. - Materials are grouped for shared use and there are sufficient quantities.
I know what I'm supposed to do.	- Labels are used for materials and centers so children can find things easily. - Materials are within reach. - Materials are reflective of children's learning styles and developmental needs. - The daily schedule is posted at children's eye level. - Anchor charts with pictures of classroom responsibilities are in clear view.
I can do interesting work here.	- The room and materials are organized in attractive ways. Everything looks inviting! - There are sufficient quantities of books, objects, games, and collections for children to explore and investigate. Enough to go around but not so much that it is overstimulating. - The classroom contains authentic and purposeful print largely related to the topic of study (but not so much that is overstimulating). - Wall space is devoted to children's work. - Books are displayed at different centers around the room.
I can find what I need and put things back where they belong.	- Materials are logically organized and labeled. - Smaller items are in containers or baskets so they don't get lost. - Shelves are labeled with words and pictures to show where materials belong (in the language of instruction and children's home languages).
I can make choices.	- Materials are placed on shelves where children can reach them. - Options for work materials are available for children to select on their own. For example, the science center has different kinds of natural materials such as pine cones, shells, and rocks (that children may have helped collect).

BLUEPRINT
For Early Learning

Chapter 7
Building Classroom Culture

The pre-k classroom is often the first community to which young children belong outside of their own homes. As early childhood educators, we are charged with creating a space where each and every child feels safe, supported, and a sense of belonging. Classroom culture can support all facets of children's social and emotional needs and development. Children thrive in a community where their individual and social identities are valued and respected. When the culture of the classroom is based in inclusion and equity, children can engage in responsive social interactions that uphold the principles of fairness and justice.

Within the context of a caring, equitable classroom culture, children begin to take responsibility for their own learning, the choices they make, and the quality of their interactions with others. Your classroom community, the dynamics of which will change yearly depending on your group of children, develops through careful thought, conversation, and action. Be flexible and know that your approaches may evolve as you get to know the unique personalities of your children, their diverse cultures, and their varied background knowledge. As you invest the time with your children to develop a healthy classroom culture, think about how you will create:

- A place for every child's voice to be heard and culture to be honored
- A community where everyone is respected and valued
- An atmosphere of kindness, fairness, and respect
- An environment that supports children in learning to handle their emotions
- A child-centered but teacher-guided environment
- An experience of equitable learning opportunities
- A safe space for children's social emotional growth
- A sense of agency in achieving social justice for all

Children entering school are just learning about the different roles and responsibilities that exist in a community. Everyone has an important role to play! When children understand these relationships, it helps them to know how they are supported in their learning, and what they are capable of doing. Moreover, it can empower children to contribute to a community where every member is responsible for the wellbeing of the whole group. Take a look at the following techniques that support children in growing their sense of responsibility as valuable members of their classroom community.

Offer choice	By giving children choice they have the opportunity to take responsibility and feel confident in their choices. Choice allows children to explore their growing independence. Choice can be simple or more complex. For example, you might ask children which song they would like to sing during a transition. More complex choices include how to approach a design challenge.
Practice problem solving	Use Talk Times to practice social emotional problem solving. Empower children to brainstorm different solutions to relatable scenarios, to think through how they might go, and then to role play some of them out. When authentic problems arise, support children in working through solutions together.
Create anchor charts	Anchor charts help promote classroom culture by organizing the group's thinking around certain areas of focus. As a "living" document, it remains open to revision and serves as a reference tool when issues arise. For example, we created a chart about what we think kindness sounds like. So, how can you use kind language to express how you are feeling right now?
Sing songs and use chants	Songs and chants are excellent for building classroom culture. They help to set a calm tone during times of transition and support classroom routines. When you encourage children to chime in, they hear all voices come together, building a community focused on the task at hand. When incorporating this technique, feel free to get creative! Adapt a familiar song, chant, or rhyme with new words to address a particular need in your classroom.

These are just some of the ways you can build a positive classroom culture. However, social emotional issues will still naturally arise in the container of your classroom. An issue can pertain to an individual child, an interaction between children, an interaction between a child and an adult, or the whole group. You can have intentional conversations to address anticipated challenges, such as troubleshooting how to take turns at a center or helping someone when they feel left out. And, you can talk with children in the midst of and in response to challenges. Any problem can be an opportunity for tremendous social emotional learning! Here are some examples of talking it out:

- Mediation - When children experience a problem with one another, work with them to mediate it. Most often, conflict arises when children have difficulty communicating. Make sure to model positive, problem-solving language. With practice, children can learn to use negotiation skills to solve problems independently.
- Guidance Talks – When children have a problem with an adult, guidance talks are positive ways to have conversations. The talk is private, in a space in the where other children are not part of it. These talks are not lectures, but conversations in which the adult draws out the child's point of view and helps to brainstorm alternative ways to resolve the situation. For children just learning social emotional skills, these talks highlight the difference between how you feel and what you choose to do.
- Talk Time – For general experiences that may impact the whole class and to work through particular social emotional areas of focus, use Talk Times. These meetings should include everyone since these issues are about the classroom culture and whole community. Teachers can help guide children to discuss their feelings, think through their social interactions, and focusing on discovering solutions to their problems.
- Read Alouds – High-quality children's books can spark rich discussions around relatable and relevant issues within social emotional learning. Have discussions about the characters' problems and the solutions. Use familiar characters to connect to real life classroom issues. Draw from characters' experiences and voices in the read aloud books of the Blueprint curriculum or other cherished books in your classroom.

The Power of 3

Take Care of Ourselves
Take Care of Each Other
Take Care of Our Environment

Classroom culture is created through the language we use and support, the responsibilities we model and encourage, and the actions we choose and highlight. The Power of 3, a unique feature of Blueprint, is a framework for understanding how everyone contributes to the success and wellbeing of the classroom community. The Power of 3 conveys the ways that, as community members, we have the agency to "take care of ourselves," "take care of each other," and "take care of our environment."

In the Blueprint curriculum, we launch the Power of 3 in Unit 1: "Building Our Classroom Community," introducing the three categories—taking care of ourselves, each other, and our environment—as well as the first couple of responsibilities listed under each one. This is the foundation for the "Power of 3" anchor chart that you will begin in Unit 1, and build over time. The chart serves as an anchor as it will be referenced consistently throughout the year. In units 2-5 we add a couple more responsibilities to each category. For example, when exploring their local community in Unit 3, we discuss how each member is responsible for keeping our community clean and add "Throw away trash."

Here is an example of a "completed" Power of 3 anchor chart by the end of Unit 5:

Take Care of Ourselves	Take Care of Each Other	Take Care of Our Environment
Move safely.	Play together.	Put things away.
Say, "I can do it!"	Be helpful.	Handle books and toys carefully.
Calm down.	Act kindly.	Throw away trash.
Keep on trying.	Think about how others feel.	Treat living things carefully.

The Power of 3 anchors your classroom culture and drives conversations around social emotional learning. Unlike standard "rules" charts, the Power of 3 allows you to create, teach, chart, discuss, revise, and reinforce responsibilities that truly shape your classroom culture. Remember, the Power of 3 is not owned by the teacher; rather, it is by and for everyone in the classroom community. Invite children to contribute ideas for the responsibilities they want to embrace in their community to keep it a safe, fair, healthy, and happy place. Be sure to remain flexible, too, adapting the responsibilities included in the Blueprint curriculum so that they meet the needs of the children in your class.

When teaching introductory lessons around the Power of 3:

- Begin with a discussion about responsibility and what it means.
- Present responsibilities in simple and child-friendly language.
- Add children's home languages to the anchor chart.
- Include visuals (images are available to download from the Blueprint portal).
- Discuss each part of the Power of 3 individually before adding it to the chart.
- Facilitate conversations that let children process and reflect on the responsibility.

Also think about how the "Power of 3" anchor chart can become a "living" document. Suggestions include the following:

- Provide plenty of opportunities for children to practice enacting the responsibility.
- Celebrate when you see children using the responsibility by posting their picture/name beside it.
- Refer to the chart during class discussions and relevant lessons.
- Use puppets and role play scenarios that help illustrate the Power of 3 in action.
- Use read aloud books to focus on the responsibilities listed on the Power of 3.
- Celebrate children's effort and improvement toward responsibility goals!

By using the Power of 3 you can communicate your belief in each child's ability to be responsible and to thrive. The Power of 3 is an effective tool to help children understand that the language, behavior, and attitudes they exhibit each day have a strong impact on the dynamics of the classroom. In pre-k, children are exploring and learning about themselves and their relationships with peers and adults. The Power of 3 provides you with a way to uncover complex relationships, feelings, and actions.

Importance of Social Emotional Learning

More and more, research is confirming what teachers have always known: it is important to teach children social emotional skills from a young age. Children who get explicit instruction in social emotional skills exhibit less aggression and anxiety, and become better problem solvers. Social emotional skills in children are strongly linked with later positive academic performance and mental health. When you teach children to express and manage their feelings, and to treat others with respect and kindness, you set them up for success in the classroom community now, and for their entire lives.

Start by giving children permission to feel and express sadness, fear, anger, worry, and loneliness, as well as joy, delight, excitement, enthusiasm, and other positive emotions. When you acknowledge and validate children's feelings, it sends the message that it is natural and normal to have these different feelings. Teach children to identify their feelings and appropriately express them. In many cases, they may not have the language to articulate their experiences. The "Feelings" chart we suggest using in Blueprint is a valuable tool for helping children learn the language around feelings. Even if children don't have the words for how they are feeling, they can point to the picture that matches how they feel.

No matter what a child's current skills are, you can help them to develop and move on a path towards more social emotional awareness. And, like any other skill children are learning (but even more so!), social emotional learning happens in the context of relationships. The most important thing needed to develop emotional competence in children is to establish a personal, nurturing, predictable, and responsive relationship with a caring adult. The interactions that children see modeled, participate in, and initiate will reflect and influence their social emotional development.

The Power of 3 serves as a springboard for key areas of social emotional growth. After introducing the concept and anchor chart in Unit 1, each subsequent unit features a particular social emotional focus. Units 2-5 each introduce one focus, to be unpacked over the course of the unit. Then in units 6-9 we spiral back to each focus as an opportunity to dive deeper. Equal time is spent exploring ways we can take care of ourselves and take care of each other. For taking care of ourselves, in units 2 and 6 we focus on managing our feelings with the responsibility "Calm down," and in units 4 and 8 we focus on persistence with the responsibility "Keep on trying." For taking care of each other, in units 3 and 7 we focus on kindness with the responsibility "Act kindly," and in units 5 and 9 we focus on empathy with the responsibility "Think about how others feel."

Social Emotional Areas of Focus

Talking Care of Ourselves: Managing Feelings (Units 2 and 6)

Teaching children to identify and label their feelings is an important step in helping them learn how to manage them. The word "upset" is an umbrella term that can describe many big feelings that children have, such as anger, frustration, and sadness. As teachers, dealing with children's upsets is not easy. Some common responses of adults when faced with children's emotions may include the following:

- Ignore their feelings. ("Just ignore Kaya. She always cries when she wakes up. She'll stop in a few minutes.")
- Minimize their feelings. ("It's not that bad. There's no need to cry about it.")
- Scold them for being overly emotional. ("Big boys don't cry when they spill their milk.")
- Try to cheer them up. ("Relax. It'll be okay.")

Instead of these responses, show explicitly that you care about children's feelings. Once children feel cared for, they will be more open to calming down and problem solving. When a child is feeling strong emotions, you can:

- Approach them calmly, and get down physically to the child's level.
- Set limits if the child is doing something that is unsafe ("The kicking must stop.")
- Establish an emotional connection to the child with your posture, facial expressions, and language, so that the child feels understood.

- Acknowledge how the child is feeling by naming the feeling ("You seem frustrated.")
- Listen to the child, and accept – without judging – whatever the child is feeling. This can be difficult, especially if their response doesn't seem reasonable to us as grownups. However, it is often unhelpful to judge what another person feels or how they respond to a situation.

Once children name what they are feeling, teaching them strategies for how to calm themselves down, or ease their tension, in socially acceptable ways is the next step. When children are calm, practice calming strategies, such as taking deep breaths or talking to a stuffed animal, so they begin to learn how to take care of themselves when they are upset. As a general classroom practice, activities that engage children in relaxing, focusing, and breathing support them in modulating their stress response and building executive function skills. When children are relaxed, they are able to think logically and creatively about their behavior and the challenges they face. Be intentional about creating lessons and opportunities for children to practice relaxation, breathing, and focus on a daily basis to support their brain development, which will influence their relationships, learning, and success for a lifetime.

Recommendations for Helping Children Practice Self-Regulation

- Introduce and regularly practice calming strategies while children are relaxed, so they can then draw on the strategies when they feel upset.
- Recommend the use of your classroom's "Calm Corner" as a comfortable place in the room where children can go to access resources and calm down.
- Prior to Center Time, review methods for calming down and where relevant resources can be found.
- Provide one-on-one support to children experiencing difficult emotions during Center Time. Soothe them and then acknowledge and validate their feelings. Scaffold children by providing choices for what to do when they begin to calm down.
- When a child has successfully calmed down, take some time later to help them to reflect on their experience. Talk about what worked for them when they were upset so they might use the same methods in similar circumstances.

Taking Care of Ourselves: Building Persistence (Units 4 and 8)

Have you ever seen…

- Children struggling to zip their jackets before going out to recess, getting frustrated, and then asking you to do it for them?
- A child working in the block center all morning, trying to build a structure just right but it keeps falling over, before eventually giving up and moving on?
- A child sitting quietly at lunch, not eating or drinking anything, because they can't open their milk or bag of carrots?

All of these situations have something in common: they require persistence. Persistence is when you continue to try even if something is difficult. In each of the above situations, we see a child struggling with something that is difficult. They each have varying responses to the difficult tasks in front of them. Sometimes children ask a teacher or family member to complete a difficult task for them. Sometimes children simply give up and try something easier. Sometimes children don't even know how to ask for help, and so they shut down and don't do anything. None of these responses are what is desired.

Teaching children persistence gives them a variety of ways to solve problems and cope with challenging situations. Yes, you could zip a child's jacket, open their milk carton, or stabilize a block structure for them, but in the long run they will have missed the opportunity to try, fail, and then try again to find a solution to their problem. The difficulties children face may not seem overwhelming to adults, which is why you may feel inclined to step in and take over. But the difficulties children face as they get older will become increasingly complicated and require more independence than is required of them now.

By providing an environment in which it is safe to take risks and sometimes fail, you give children the opportunity to develop their persistence skills. Consider the above situations through a lens of teaching and encouraging persistence:

- When a child struggles with his jacket, you can build their persistence by offering to show them how to zip the jacket and then encouraging them to try again on their own.

- When a child struggles to stabilize a block structure, you can support persistence by asking open-ended questions to help them think about why their structure keeps falling over. ("Why do you think your structure keeps falling over?" "What could we change or add to x that?" "Have you thought about trying...?" "What can we try next?").
- When a child shuts down at lunch, give them language to ask for help. That may be the focus of his persistence skills for a little while. Then once he has mastered asking for help, show him how to open the milk and carrots. Hold their fingers to guide and support fine motor skills.

In these kinds of situations, always validate children's progress. Encourage children to keep on trying and remind them that you will continue to be there to support their efforts. How else can you create a culture of persistence and a classroom environment that encourages risk taking, confidence, and strategic problem solving? Take a look through the suggestions below:

- Provide plenty of time for children to explore materials and create during play. Allow children to save their work and come back to it later.
- Provide materials and activities that are open-ended and give children an opportunity to create and solve problems in a variety of ways.
- Offer gentle guidance and support when children begin to get frustrated. Allow children to take a break and come back to whatever is frustrating them.
- Help children identify emotions of frustration or anger and give them appropriate skills to express these emotions before trying the task again.
- Give children choices during play and other activities.
- Resist the urge to fix a problem for children. Instead, ask questions and provide guiding statements that will lead children to create a solution on their own.
- Give specific feedback and encouragement as children are making progress toward their goal and once they have completed their goal.
- Model how you correct your own mistakes. Show children that sometimes you have to try again to complete a task and demonstrate how you handle the emotions of not getting it right the first time.

Taking Care of Each Other: Acting Kindly (Units 3 and 7)

"Kindness is showing concern for others."
"Kindness connects us to others and helps us understand other people."
"Sometimes when we act kindly, our hearts feel good."

These are some of the ideas we focus on when we talk with children about kindness. Kindness is intrinsic, but children benefit from having role models who implicitly teach kindness through their caring and loving interactions with them, and who also explicitly teach them how a kind act looks, sounds, and feels. Time spent teaching and modeling the importance of respecting others and treating each other with kindness is certainly time well spent.

When you are purposeful about teaching kindness, you work toward creating a classroom community where children cooperate and care deeply about one another. Be intentional about noticing and recalling acts of kindness that occur in the classroom. When you observe children being kind, caring, or helpful, give them specific feedback by telling them exactly what they did and how it affected another person or the environment. You can also retell or replay this scenario using your social emotional class puppets. By noticing and emphasizing children's positive contributions, you are increasing their awareness of how they can nurture a culture of kindness. For example:

- Focus on how children can be helpful to each other and work together to achieve common goals.
- Create occasions for children to be cooperative in order to increase the opportunity to emphasize these qualities.
- Use the book collection to have discussions that support children in developing kindness. Ask questions such as: "How do you think ___ feels? How do you know?" "What could ___ do that would be (helpful, kind, caring)?" "What's another way that ___ could solve this problem?"

Importantly, connect how children's acts of kindness contribute to a positive and safe community both in the classroom and outside it. Children who learn to act kindly with each other

grow their sense of inclusion for the diversity of individual and social identities of their fellow community members. Instilling the value that each and every person is worthy of respect and kindness fosters the sort of cultural equity that we seek to extend far beyond the classroom.

Taking Care of Each Other: Growing Empathy (Units 5 and 9)

Empathy is the ability to understand how someone else is feeling and to respond in a caring way. It is the ability to put yourself in someone else's position or take on another person's perspective. Asking children to imagine how they would feel in various scenarios helps them to understand that we all can experience the same feelings. This realization helps children make a stronger connection between themselves and others.

Observation is a key feature of empathy. Children are beginning to read the gestures, facial expressions, and actions of others to figure out what they are feeling. It is important to acknowledge the vast range of feelings that both ourselves and others can experience. Engage children in conversations about the causes and effects of emotions. Our read aloud books can be another great source of examining and discussing others' feelings. This can be done with books specifically written to address social emotional issues and ones that are not. Asking questions and holding discussions like this help children understand the range of emotions that others feel in various situations.

Another important way children learn empathy is through experiencing relationships where their feelings are validated by others. When children are upset, they may not be able to articulate their feelings with words and instead may show their feelings of anger, sadness, or frustration in other ways. In these moments, model empathy by noticing the child's behavior and helping them to identify the emotion they're experiencing. You can then try to understand the child's perspective about the situation and to reflect that in a way that validates the child's feeling. Your reflection and validation of the child's perspective provides a mirror for the child to understand their own experience which builds self-awareness, which is the foundation of empathy. In addition, your empathetic response promotes a deep sense of connection and creates a strong culture of caring in the classroom. The Power of 3 can help you clarify and reinforce children's responsibility in practicing caring behaviors with each other.

After focusing on and spiraling back to these key ways of taking care of ourselves and each other throughout the year, in Unit 10: "Celebrating Our Classroom Community," activities are focused on helping children recall and integrate the social emotional learning that has taken place. Lessons guide children to review and share their understanding of the social emotional skills that they have gained and shared through the Power of 3, and to consider how these skills impact themselves, each other, and the environment. Children are able to reflect on their own learning, so it can be a powerful practice to invite them to reflect on their personal and collective growth. The goal, of course, is for children to move beyond your classroom community, fully equipped and empowered to contribute to a more equitable society.

Spotlight: The Impact of Trauma

Everyone experiences stress. Learning how to cope when bad or scary things happen is an important part of healthy development. When babies and young children feel stress (for example, they feel hungry, uncomfortable, or lonely), they cry, and ideally their caregiver soothes them, bringing their stress down and their body's response back to the baseline. This is how our bodies learn to regulate and deal with stress. But some children are exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as neglect or abuse or are exposed to household or community distress as a result of health scares, racial discrimination or economic hardship. Some children may not have a consistent, predictable protective relationship with a caregiver. Children in these situations may not learn to regulate their stress. It changes their brain architecture. Their brains and bodies become "wired" for stress rather than wired to regulate it.

In the brains of traumatized children, neural pathways (nerve cells that feed information to the brain) associated with fear and survival responses are strongly developed, leaving some children in a state of hyperarousal that causes them to overreact to incidents other children would find nonthreatening. For example: The child who, when asked to put down the crayon, throws the

crayon at you… That child heard "put down the crayon" as a threat and reacted like they might to a physical threat. Increased cortisol and adrenaline from toxic stress create a state of hyperarousal – causing the flight or fight response – or hypo arousal – causing a child to freeze or withdraw. It is important to note that when children are having a stress response, they are operating out of their "survival" brain, and are not able to access their "thinking" brain. This means that they cannot make choices, reason, or consider the consequences of their actions. Children who operate under stress and trauma can exhibit challenging behavior, such as impulsivity, aggressiveness, defiance, or withdrawal . And, it affects their ability to learn. Children who have a trauma background may experience delays in different areas, such as attention, cognitive functioning, executive functioning, and ability to play.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has suggested that about 1 in 4 children have experienced ACEs. Therefore, knowing and incorporating trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive practices into your classroom culture is crucial. Many of these practices are ones that are essential in any Pre-K classroom but take on more importance when working with children who have experienced ACEs. Some strategies include:

- Building relationships - an essential component of any Pre-K classroom's culture, and especially important in this case. Children need the stability of loving, nurturing, and predictable relationships with the caregivers in their lives, especially those of adults who remain calm and understanding in the presence of children's "survival" reactions. Teachers who see the strengths and funds of knowledge children bring to the classroom can truly form transformational relationships.
- Providing a stable, consistent schedule is another important strategy to help children feel safe. Be sensitive and let children know ahead of time if there will be any changes to the schedule so they are not taken by surprise.
- Giving choice – another essential element of Pre-K culture – empowers children who have experienced trauma and the helplessness associated with it.
- Working with families – communication and collaboration with families is one of the most powerful ways we have as educators to support children. In this case, it may be even more important. Work with families to learn more about their child and work together to help support their growth.

Be sure to lean on the guidance of mental health professionals in your building to learn more about individual children's needs and the best ways to support them.

Resource: https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2015/trauma-sensitive-classrooms

BLUEPRINT
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Chapter 8
Using Time Well

Young children thrive on routine and predictability. Creating a consistent, organized, and developmentally appropriate schedule helps young children make the transition from home and family to the school family. When children know what to expect, they feel secure, and therefore are free to focus on the work of play, learning, and socializing.

Establishing a daily schedule supports children's growing executive functioning skills, which includes the development of self-control and regulating emotions. For example, knowing the daily routine is essential for the child who just cannot wait to go down the slide at the playground! Children come to expect (and will remind you!) of what activity comes next in the day or if something gets skipped or is out of place. Having this consistent routine helps children to remain calm and flexible in their thinking. In a classroom that lacks a predictable daily schedule, the child excited for outside time might repeatedly ask when it is time to go play and get easily frustrated. But in a classroom with an established routine, that same child would be comforted knowing that outside time follows lunch, allowing them to focus on the task at hand.

The Pre-K daily schedule includes all the activities of the day and the transitions between them that allow children to move from one component to the other. When developing the schedule, consider the following:

- Will children have opportunities to work in various groupings?
- Will children engage in a range of higher-energy to lower-energy activities?
- How much time does each activity require?
- How will children transition from one activity to another?
- What procedures need to be established to help children feel calm and confident as they move between activities?

Varying Grouping Experiences

In an effective Pre-K classroom, teachers make decisions about instruction and learning experiences, keeping the developmental needs of their children in the front of their thinking. Young children benefit from having a variety of grouping experiences in their day. Being flexible with grouping throughout the day helps you to address the range of needs of your particular group of children.

Blueprint Curriculum provides opportunities for these experiences:

- Large Group: Gathering children in a large group is a wonderful opportunity to work together and build community. During this grouping, you might be introducing a skill or concept, having a group discussion, or reading aloud. In Blueprint, Gathering Times are whole group experiences. The class gathers together to greet each other, move, and talk.
- Small Group:. Meeting children in Small Groups helps you use your assessment data, be strategic in selecting your teaching point, and adapt your instruction to meet children's learning needs and styles. Small group instruction is the perfect opportunity to address skills a specific group of children need. It gives you the opportunity to work in the children's zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is their optimal learning level. In Blueprint, daily Small Group lesson plans mainly engage strategically selected groups of children with STEM concepts and skills
- Individual or Partner: This kind of grouping, individual or partner work, provides perfect opportunities for extending, reinforcing, and practicing skills and strategies. For example, children may work in partners or independently during center time. Blueprint provides suggested activities for centers in your classroom.

Routines, Activities, and Time

As you begin putting the pieces of your daily schedule together, there are three components to reflect on: what routines and activities to include, how much time is developmentally appropriate to allocate to each, and in what order to do them.

Many pre-K classrooms have a combination of the following daily schedule routines and activities. In addition, your center or school might have activities that you'll need to incorporate. Timing may vary, depending on the type of program. Be reflective of your children's ages and developmental stages. Time may adjust during the course of the year.

Daily Schedule Routines and Activities	Length of Time	Remember that…
Arrival and Dismissal Times	10-15 minutes	- Arrival time can help set the tone for the day. Schedule enough time so that you don't feel rushed, but not too much time that children become off-task. - If caregivers drop children off in your classroom at the door, make time to greet them in a relaxed manner. Reflect on families' cultures and values to make this time inclusive and welcoming. - Schedule enough time for a smooth transition to home. Depending on how your school dismisses, plan enough time to close out the day.
Gathering Times (*Blueprint Curriculum component)	15 minutes	- Gathering Time includes three components that can be separated or done consecutively.
Center Time	60 minutes	- Children need ample time for choice and interaction with materials and their peers. This is a well-loved time of day.
Small Group Time (*Blueprint Curriculum component, can be incorporated with Center Time)	15 minutes	- The rest of the class will need to be engaged while you meet with small groups of children. One suggestion is to meet with small groups during Center Time. - Being prepared with materials is key to helping this time run smoothly.
Gross motor and/or outdoor play	15-30 minutes	Consider scheduling a calmer activity after this kind of play.
Intentional Read Aloud (*Blueprint Curriculum component)	15 minutes	This is often a large group experience.
Message Time Plus (*Blueprint Curriculum component)	15 minutes	Message Time Plus can be done in a large group or small group.
Mealtimes and Snack	Varies; 15- 40 minutes	Schedule time for meals and snacks to be relaxed and unhurried. These are perfect opportunities for children to develop self-help skills and socialize!

Quiet Time/Rest Time	Varies; 30 minutes- 2 hours	· This time can vary, based on your center or school. - · It is helpful to prepare a calm activity after rest time, as children may need to gradually wake up and engage with the energy of the classroom.
Reflection Time	10-15 minutes	· Wrapping up the day with a meeting helps to summarize activities, provide time for problem solving, and prepare for future learning.

Take some time to think through the flow of the daily schedule. On index cards, list each individual routine or activity that you wish to include in your day. Put the index cards in order. Imagine the types of activities and what children will be doing. Do you foresee any challenges? Try to balance your schedule with activities that:

- Are led by the teacher and are child directed
- Give children experience with fine motor and gross motor skills
- Vary in activity level
- Get children working in groups or partners and allow for play time alone
- Are silly, loud, or playful and then provide time for calm, quiet, and rest
- Utilize the different areas of the classroom

Sample Schedule (with Activities and Times)

Each pre-K program and schedule is unique! Once you have framed your schedule, you will want to post it in your classroom. Use simple language and colorful visuals to accompany print. It is helpful to have easy to swap out cards for less frequent events (field trips, visitors, etc.) and changes to the schedule (a rainy day might mean indoor gym equipment instead of outdoor play). Communicating variations in the schedule to children and then physically adjusting the schedule chart helps children adapt to any changes.

The following two daily schedules are examples of how you might allocate your time in a developmentally appropriate pre-K day.

Sample Full Day Schedule:

8:15-9:00	Arrival and Breakfast
9:00-9:15	Gathering Times
9:15-10:15	Center Time
10:15-10:30	Message Time Plus
10:30-11:00	Outdoor Play
11:00-11:15	Intentional Read Aloud
11:15-11:30	Transition/Prepare for lunch - restroom, hand washing
11:30-12:00	Lunch
12:00-12:15	Outdoor Play
12:15-12:30	Read Aloud
12:30-1:30	Quiet Time/ Rest
1:30-1:45	Snack
1:45-2:30	Center Time/Small Group Instruction
2:30-2:45	Reflection Time
2:45-3:00	Pack Up/ Dismissal

Sample Half-Day Schedule:

8:15-9:00	Arrival and Breakfast
9:00-9:15	Gathering Times
9:15-10:15	Center Time/Small Group
10:15-10:30	Message Time Plus
10:30-11:00	Outdoor Play
11:15-11:30	Intentional Read Aloud
11:30-11:45	Reflection Time
11:45-12:00	Pack Up/ Dismissal

Transitions

Transitions can take place whenever children move from one activity in the day to another. The key to keeping your classroom calm and relaxed during transitions is planning and practice. In order to have a smooth transition between the events in your daily schedule, children need:

- To be alerted to the ending of one activity. (For example, tell children that there is five minutes left before clean up time.)
- To be aware of any procedures that need to take place. (For example, how to clean up materials at the art center and where to put their work.)
- To be cued to move from their current activity and on to the next. (For example, everyone joins in as the teacher leads the class in a song.)

Each Message Time Plus lesson plan includes a transition activity related to the teaching point or the thematic content. These can be used at the end of Message Time Plus or for any other transition! Transition children individually or in small groups. For example, when children leave Message Time Plus (which might be conducted whole class or half of the class), dismiss two or three at a time.

As you develop your own transitions, it is helpful to keep them quick and engaging. A transition might be a song, finger play, or a simple game. Children enjoy made up songs or rhymes that connect to your theme. Puppets and props help cue children to participate in the transition. If children could use extra practice with concepts (such as colors, counting, or letter recognition) find or create a quick transition activity to address this need. Make sure to use verbal and non-verbal cues before and during transitions. Children with different learning styles will benefit from this accommodation.

Consider how much time you will need for transitions. If children are leaving the classroom to go outside or to the lunchroom, they may need coats, hats and gloves, or lunch bags. These transitions might need more time and a few extra helpful procedures to keep things running smoothly.

Problem Solving Using Transitions:

- Is there a line for the restroom? Try staggering large group transitions. Dismiss one group at a time from centers to avoid this problem.
- Are children not quite ready to move from one activity to another? Children can feel frustrated if they haven't finished a project. Invite them to put their name on an index card next to their project and find a time in the schedule where they can finish.
- Is energy high after a fun time at the playground? Plan a quieter, calmer transition to help children ease into the next routine of the day. For example, a calming transition such as breathing or a mindful moment might just be the perfect cool down.

Spotlight: The First Days of School

Remember that children need time to adjust to the new routines, schedule, and people in their school day. This may be the first time they are spending time away from their families! In the first few days (and possibly weeks!) of school you will probably need to shorten the amount of time children spend in each routine of the daily schedule.

Be sensitive to children's attention spans. When activities linger too long during the first few weeks of school, before children are fully comfortable with routines, you risk losing their attention and focus and behavior challenges may occur. Note children's growing comfort and success with classroom routines by offering specific words of encouragement. Say what children did ("you put the books back on the shelf") and how it was helpful ("now the library center is clean for the next group of children") to solidify routines.

Planning and Teaching Procedures

Routines and procedures are key for helping the daily schedule run smoothly. Procedures should be introduced, explained, modeled by you, attempted by children, and then modeled and practiced again. When children understand the procedures for routine tasks, they feel comfortable, independent, and capable.
An easy tool to use to determine the procedures you need to teach is the "MAP" organizer.

- Materials: Which materials need a procedure for how to be used and organized? Common materials procedures include reading books, putting books away, using art supplies, working with math manipulatives, and using items in dramatic play.
- Area: Which areas of the room need to be taught a procedure on how to use? Think about what children need to know to be successful during whole group time on the rug, at learning centers, and the small group table.
- Process: Which parts of the day need a procedure? For example, you might consider procedures on hand washing, using the bathroom, lining up, arrival, dismissal, and lunch.

In the appendix on page ___ (Table 3), you will find a MAP organizer to help you list out which routine tasks need procedures in your classroom.

After you list all the routine tasks that need procedures, think about what the steps are for each one. Make sure to keep them short and simple as not to overwhelm children. Thinking carefully about how and when you will teach procedures is key to success! Avoid overwhelming children with too many procedures at once. For example, in Unit 1 of the Blueprint curriculum, you will begin by introducing a few centers, and the procedures that go along with them, each week. Building in lots of practice and encouragement helps children feel confident as they learn to use their new classroom. You will want to add on your own procedures that are necessary for your group of children and classroom.

When teaching the routine or procedure, use the following five-step approach to make sure your instruction is explicit and consistent:

Table X: Five-Step Approach for Teaching Procedures

Name what you are teaching.	If I need to get your attention, I will let you know by clapping my hands like this [demonstrate an easily repeatable pattern such as two short claps and three long ones].
Explain why it is important.	Our classroom is a busy place. Sometimes I will need to tell you something important! I will need you to get your attention.
Model how to do it.	When you hear me clap like this, please take a break from what you are doing or saying [make the hand motion for stop], and clap the same way back. Make sure to look at me [point to your eyes] when you clap.
Give children practice.	Let's practice now.
End with a quick summary.	Now you are learning what I will do when I need your attention. And you are learning what you should do, too!

Continue to revisit your procedures and teach new ones to proactively address children's needs and to problem solve as situations arise. Throughout the year, you may add or change the procedures based on the unique needs of your group of children.

BLUEPRINT
For Early Learning

Chapter 9
Building Classroom Culture

An essential part of your day is Center Time. Center Time supports the development of children's creative, social, cognitive, and language skills. Children anticipate center time because they have an opportunity for choice, exploration, inquiry, problem solving, socialization, and creativity.

Open-ended exploration is of vital importance during Center Time. However, centers can contain specific activities that support and extend your instruction that children can work on independently. Each unit in Blueprint has suggested theme-related activities and a timetable for introducing them. Of course, you will offer other choices as well that reflect your children's interests and needs. Centers are also a great place for children to continue practicing and extending their learning from small group and large group activities. Look for "Keep It Going" tips throughout the unit guide where we suggest ways to incorporate materials and ideas from lessons into your centers.

Introducing Centers

When launching centers in your classroom the key to success is modeling! Showing children how a center works and explaining its purpose helps to give them guidance before they begin independently working in them. Plan what you are going to say to children and rehearse it beforehand! This helps to ensure that you are clear, use child-friendly language, and eliminate any confusing or unnecessary information. We also recommend that you observe children using the centers, so that you can be proactive in planning effective procedures and introducing materials. Included in Unit 1 are lessons on cleaning up, joining play, choosing a center, and moving to a new center. In addition, you may need to plan lessons on the following procedures.

Procedural Lessons That Support Center Time:

- What center should I go to first?What do I do if the center I want is full?
- What if I want to switch centers?
- What if someone has the [toy, object] I want to use?
- What if someone asks to use the [toy, object] I am using?
- What are some things I can do at the center?
- How do I clean up at the center?
- What do I do with my [project, design] if I am not done with it?
- What should I do if I spill something?
- What if I have to go to the bathroom while I am at centers?
- What if I can't find what I am looking for?
- What if we run out of [paper, pencils, etc.]?
- What if no one wants to play my game?
- What if it's too noisy at the center?

Managing Centers

For Center Time to run smoothly, it is important to think about how your children will communicate their choices and what your expectations are. Teachers have devised many different ways to manage center time. In Unit 1, Blueprint includes lessons on creating center labels with stickers to show how many children can be at the center. Children then use clothespins with their name to attach to these signs. We invite children to choose their own center, to understand which centers are available and which are not, and to problem solve around what to do if the center they want is full.

Other examples of managing centers include the following:

- Hang a center board in the large group area on which children can move their name to the center they choose.
- Each child places a popsicle stick with their name on it in a library pocket with the name of the center they are choosing.

Interacting with Children at Centers

When interacting with children at centers, use the strategy of "Layered Questioning." This involves scaling the discussion to each child's language ability, so they can respond anywhere from using gestures to one word answers to more open-ended responses. This will build their confidence and

stretch their language skills. For example, when working with children at the art center, you can use what you know about each child's language skills to start conversations:

- Gesture: Point to the [art material]. Show me where the [art material] goes.
- Yes/No: Do you want to use [art material] today? Did you use [art material] to make that?
- Either/Or: Do you want to use [art material] or [art material] today? Did you use [art material] or [art material] to make that?
- Open-ended: What do you think we can do with [craft sticks, feathers, pom-poms, glue, scissors, etc.]? Tell me about what you created. How did you create [project]? Can you tell me how you made all those colors? What could you use if you wanted to make [child's art idea]?

Blueprint Curriculum Centers

Blueprint for Early Learning features suggested activities for nine centers in each unit. The center ideas are thematic and connected to the learning of the unit and they support skills of the various areas (literacy, math, science, etc). But beyond these activities, children should have access to a variety of materials at centers that not only invite open-ended inquiry and exploration but also reflect the family cultures of the children in the classroom and their community.

As you design and fill each center, consider the following tips:

- Involve families: Offer opportunities for the families of children in your classroom to be involved in center learning. They can bring unique knowledge, skill, or share materials in the learning environment. Blueprint provides ways to engage families in the weeks in review.
- Provide materials that show diversity within and beyond the classroom: Include materials in your classroom that reflect race, ethnicity, gender, economic groups, ability, and family structure of your classroom. (NAEYC, Anti-Bias Education for Young Children & Ourselves)
- Consider volume and activity: When selecting the area of the classroom for a particular center, consider the volume in placement. Typically, you will want louder, more active areas near one another, away from quieter, calmer centers. Think flexibly about this! You cannot fully anticipate the library area being quiet if children are acting out a favorite read aloud.
- Infuse Literacy: Include relevant books (from the library or child or class made books) at each center. For example, if your class wrote a book of recipes, you might put it in the housekeeping center.
- Incorporate visuals: Post charts that show children step-by-step instructions on how to use the center. For example, you might post a chart that uses pictures and words to help children remember how to turn on an ipad. Add photographs of children modeling each step and using the center.
- Model and practice procedures. Make sure children are clear on how to choose a center, where to get materials, how to get started, how to work in a center, and what to do when their work is done.
- Opportunity to increase vocabulary: Label materials to teach vocabulary for real materials such as calculator or measuring cup.
- Invite independence and choice. Provide enough materials for children to work independently. To empower children to make their own choices, try using "I can" statements with photographs. These provide reminders of what children can do at a center. For example, in the library center, you might post a picture of a child sitting in a bean bag chair as they read a book. Add the text, "I can read a book."
- Materials management. Rotate some materials and exchange items based on units, themes, and children's interest. Keep materials organized by placing labels and pictures on bins. Materials should be easy to reach and ready to use.
- Encourage collaboration between centers. For example, if a group of children are recreating their neighborhood in the block center they might ask children at the art center to paint or draw signs or make them when they visit that center next.
- Preview new materials. When you are introducing new materials to a center, take the time to show children and explain how to use the material. Determine if the material and the center will need more teacher assistance to use. For example, if you are using shaving cream at the sensory center, you will need to introduce this material, review safety tips, and plan for an adult to assist children.

The following charts explore each center's purpose, set up, types of materials to make available, and ways children might interact at the center. These charts can guide you as you plan or reflect on the current centers in your classroom.

Center	Art	Purpose	*To explore various art tools and media *To engage in open-ended creativity
Possible Materials	- Crayons, markers, coloring pencils in a range of skin tones - Variety of paper: construction, watercolor, newsprint, tissue paper, in a range of skin tones - Paint: finger paint, tempera, watercolor, including a range of skin tones - Paintbrushes and paint rollers - Clay or playdough - Collage materials such as confetti, beads, paper shapes, stickers, yarn, etc. - Chalk - Old magazines and newspaper - Cotton balls - Ink pads, sponges, and stamps - Stencils - Washable mats and smocks - Glue sticks and tape - Safety scissors		
Setting Up	- If you have a sink in your classroom, situate the art center nearby. - Use mats for easy clean up. - Include different areas and surfaces for creating such as an easel and tabletops. - Keep items, like paint, in a teacher cabinet. Place smaller amounts of these types of items in easy to use containers. - Use a drying rack or vertical shelf for messy projects that need to dry. - Use a nearby bulletin board or hang a rope across your room and use clothespins to display work.		
Children might…	- Engage in open-ended exploration with rotating art materials. - Design and create artwork related to topics and themes in class. - Create props for retelling stories or read alouds.		

Spotlight on Safety

Please be mindful about supplying materials and careful about supervising children in centers. Small objects and parts can become a choking hazard. We recommend appropriate and reasonable supervision at all times based on the age, capabilities, and needs of each child.

Center	Blocks	Purpose	*To experiment with building, cause and effect, and problem solving *To offer opportunities for small and large motor control and hand-eye coordination *To explore with shapes and size *To engage in imaginative play
Possible Materials	- Blocks of various shapes, sizes, and materials - Writing materials for labeling and drawing - Figures of people and animals - Transportation vehicles - Traffic signs - Maps and/or rug map - Photographs of buildings, streets, etc. - Construction hats - Fabric - Masking tape or painters tape		

Setting Up	- Place the area where children will have room to build. - Create an area using a rug or carpet that is easy to build on. - Organize blocks on the shelf by size and shape. Use a shape cutout to help children return blocks to the correct shelf.
Children might…	- Use balls and ramps to explore cause and effect. - Draw a map and Uuse it to recreate a town, city, or neighborhood. - See how high they can build towers before they fall. - Create an obstacle course for toy vehicles or characters to try out.

Center	Housekeeping Center	Purpose	*To give children opportunities to learn about the world through role play *To support children's creativity through pretending/make believe *To encourage communication among peers *To provide opportunities for social skill growth
Possible Materials	- Table and chairs - Stove, sink, refrigerator - Pots, pans, dishes, utensils - Dolls, that are a balance of gender and diversity - Doll bed or cradle - Stuffed animals - Telephone - Cash register - Mirror - Play food, that represents the diversity in your community - Puppets - Dress up box with clothes and props (hats, bags, etc) - Hooks or clothing stand - Toy iron and board - Menus - Cookbooks and/or recipes - Notepads and writing tools - Materials that represent the home lives of the children and families of the classroom		
Setting Up	- Make sure to rotate items in and out to keep creativity fresh. Too many props might overwhelm children. - Thrift stores and garage sales are great places to find inexpensive props!		
Children might…	Play with reading and writing in the housekeeping center by incorporating it in creative ways. Children can write food orders on notepads Aat the dramatic play restaurant or receipts for purchases on index cards at the dramatic play store.		

Spotlight on Home Environment

Best practice suggests that maintaining a home living or housekeeping center throughout the year is important for children. It gives them the opportunity to re-enact, retell, and relive familiar situations. Be sure to collaborate with children on ideas for refreshing the center and its related materials as the year progresses.

Spotlight on Dramatic Play

Beginning in Unit 2, we suggest an idea for co-creating a Dramatic Play Center connected to the thematic content (see Table X: Dramatic Play Centers). Co-creating dramatic play areas with children gives them an opportunity to role play and explore new situations.

Table X: Dramatic Play Centers

Unit	Dramatic Play Center
Unit 2: "Healthy Kids"	Doctor's Offer choice
Unit 3: "Exploring Our Local Community"	Community Store
Unit 4: "We Are Architects!"	Construction Site
Unit 5: "Life on the Farm"	Farm
Unit 6: "Mix & Make"	Science Lab
Unit 7: "Let's Eat!"	Market
Unit 8: "Animal Architects"	Nature Center
Unit 9: "Look Up!"	Weather Station
Unit 10: "Celebrating Our cClassroom cCommunity"	Party Space

When launching a new Dramatic Play, prepare a space in your classroom and gather some relevant materials. However, leave plenty of room for children to co-design and co-create the center! Invite them to brainstorm what supplies, props, clothing, and signs they might need. Encourage children to get creative and make what they can using classroom resources. Ask them to think about where to get other items that they brainstormed. Involve families, and make the center relevant to children's home and community lives, by requesting examples of items they may have available. Guide children to see their families, as well as school staff and local stores, as resources for gathering additional items. Collaborate with children on writing notes to ask for items and thank you notes when the items come in.

Also, be sure to support children's experiences with the new Dramatic Play Center by discussing and planning what they could do there:

- What jobs could they do?
- What kinds of activities can they engage in?
- How could they interact with each other?
- How could they use the materials in different ways?

Once the Dramatic Play Center is up and running, remember to take photographs of children at play. Invite them to help decide what needs to be documented with a picture. Children love to see themselves in action!

Center	Library	Purpose	*To expose children to diverse, high-quality children's literature *To place books and reading at the heart of the classroom *To provide a calm, inviting area for exploring print
Possible Materials	Books, newspapers, and magazines that contain different languages and diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, and ability Labeled book bins/baskets Class books Book shelves or racks Chairs, couches, bean bag chairs, pillows Lamp Notepads and writing tools Puppets, stuffed animals and other props like magic wands or pointers Rug		

Setting Up	- The classroom library can be in a central part of the classroom, visible to all who enter the classroom. - The library should be well lit by natural and/or ceiling lighting. Try adding a sturdy floor lamp or table lamp. - Adding a variety of reading materials (big books, board books, interactive books, etc.) to accommodate children's readiness, interests, and learning styles. - Keep the library away from noisy center areas.. - The library should be organized in a clear, child-friendly way. Include labels (with words and pictures) on book baskets in the language of instruction and children's home languages. - Use small stickers to help children know where to return books. Try numbering them, too! For example, all books with a red circle that have a number 1 belong in a certain basket. - Books can be organized according to theme (farm books, animal books), genre (abc books, number books) or author (books by Donald Crews). - Display books at children's eye level on shelves, using baskets with the covers of the books facing out (instead of spine out). - Arrange a variety of books on display using a book rack. Book racks can also be used to display books related to the theme you are currently investigating. - A rug or carpet helps to make the area warm, inviting, and marks the boundary of the center. Seating options, such as kid-sized chairs, couches, bean bags, and rocking chairs, makes reading comfortable. - The job of classroom "librarian" can be responsible for keeping the library organized. - Try using a procedure for a "book hospital" for books that are torn or damaged. - Display children's work and writing about books so that they see themselves as authors and illustrators. Include class made books!
Children might…	- Teach children different ways to read, such as partner reading, independent reading, and big book reading. - Write reviews of books on notecards (using pictures, words, or a rating system) to make recommendations to their peers. - Read books made by peers or by the class! - Act out stories with props and puppets.

Center	Math and Table Toys	Purpose	*To practice fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and visual discrimination *To develop an understanding of math concepts *To inspire exploration with math materials
Possible Materials	- Lacing beads - Puzzles - Games such as bingo and memory (including games played in Small Group and other lessons) - Counters and sorting containers - Gears and wheels - Zip, tie, and snapping boards - Peg boards - Math books - Pattern blocks - Linking cubes - Tape measures - Two- and three-dimensional shapes - Measuring cups - Calculator - Clock - Play money - Rulers - Paper and writing materials		

Setting Up	Provide options for using materials such as a table and chairs and/or a floor area with a rug.
Children might…	- Sort and count. - Use various measuring tools, such as measuring cups and tape measures. While there's no expectation that children will use these tools with accuracy and precision, exposure is key. - Include paper and writing tools so that children can draw or write.

Center	Science	Purpose	*To develop an understanding of science concepts *To inspire exploration with science materials *To build background knowledge
Possible Materials	- Balance scale - Magnifying glasses - Eye droppers or pipettes - Prisms - Magnets - Mirrors - Clipboards, paper, and writing tools - Seeds and plants - Rulers - Science Journals - Science theme books - Collection of natural objects that children help collect		
Setting Up	- Use sealed bags or containers for small parts. - Try setting up the science center near a window so children can observe the weather.		
Children might…	- Draw and write about science experiments in Science Journals. - Free exploration with science manipulatives. - Observe seeds, weather, and/or plants.		

Spotlight: Take Science Outside Too

In Unit 2, we suggest you collaborate with children in creating an outdoor science kit, so children can use common science tools outside. Include materials such as a notebook and pencils, tape measure, rulers, bucket balance, magnifying glasses, books about birds or insects, and a thermometer. Create a job in your classroom called "Outdoor Kit Keeper." This child can be responsible for bringing the kit outside and back in again for outdoor playtime.

Center	Sensory	Purpose	By giving children choice they have the opportunity to take responsibility and feel confident in their choices. Choice allows*To provide opportunities for children to explore their growing independence. Choice can be simple or more complex. For example, you might ask which song they would like to sing during a transition. More complex choices include which learning centers to select. environment and materials using their senses

Possible Materials	- Sensory table - Filler material: water, sand, dirt, cotton balls, ping pong balls, beans, rice, etc. - Shaving cream - Playdough - Plastic animals (sea creatures, farm animals, etc.) and other toys - Scoops, shovels, and buckets - Funnels and sifters - Tweezers - Cooking utensils (tongs, ladle, spatula) - Plastic mats and smocks - Plastic trays - Dust pan and broom
Setting Up	When using water, sand, and other smaller or messy items, it is helpful to lay a mat under the table for easier clean up. Or, locate the center near the sink. If there isn't a sensory table, use plastic trays or buckets to contain items and place on tabletops.
Children might...	Explore with their senses (except taste!). Engage with everyday objects in new ways. Use scoops to pick up small sensory items like beans, rice, and cotton balls. Use tongs or tweezers for fine motor practice. Have boat races in water. Make playdough and explore.

Spotlight on Food

We do not recommend using real food in centers. Having some items that are edible and many items that are not edible could cause confusion. Children could ingest an edible or inedible item, which could result in choking or other serious health hazard. In addition, children may ingest real food and suffer from an allergic reaction. Excluding food from centers can mitigate the risk of children ingesting or attempting to ingest items that could potentially cause harm.

Center	Technology	Purpose	*To engage children in the exploration of ways to understand and respond to our increasingly digital world *To build knowledge of basic functions and features of technology *To give children the opportunity to explore ways in which technology can be used to find information, as well as write, draw, and otherwise process that information.
Possible Materials	- Tablets - Computers - Cell phones - Power strips - Power cords - Extensions cords - Mp3 players - Headphones - Flash drives, external hard drives, etc. with matching cords - Digital cameras		

Setting Up	Provide labels for each device and accessory. Make sure that any fragile items can be easily and safely stored when not in use. Have disposable or reusable screen wipes on hand! Children may need help with guidance to different apps and programs at first. You can create a poster-sized replica of the tablet screen with construction paper to help them find the correct app. Posters labeling functions of other technologies may be helpful as well (on/off switches, volume control, etc.). Many of these items will need to be charged after use. You can engage children in this practice by asking them to plug the device back in after they are done.
Children might…	- Encourage children to explore old cell phones, digital cameras, and other devices to see how the buttons function. Ask them to look for numbers, words, or letters that they recognize. - Invite children to use writing and drawing apps to share stories and ideas. - Using an unplugged power strip, invite children to plug in power cords and extension cords. Engage them in a conversation about how they work and how to use them safely. - Create a playlist of story read-alouds that children can listen to or watch.

Center	Writing	Purpose	*To allow children to see themselves as writers *To encourage children to explore with writing materials *To begin to discover the writing process and explore with letters and words *To understand that writing is a form of communication
Possible Materials	- Beginner pencils, crayons, colored pencils, markers - Blank books (construction paper cover with blank pages) - Different shapes, sizes and kinds of paper and envelopes - Clip boards - Safety scissors - Dry erase boards and markers - Date stamper - Magazines that can be cut up - Index cards - Name chart - Picture dictionary - Alphabet books, cards, poster - Alphabet puzzles - Magnetic letters and cookie trays - Play dough - Literacy games - Sand paper - Wikki Stix		
Setting Up	Provide children with options for working at the writing center. For example, writing at a table or using a clipboard to another part of the room.		

Children might…	- Write letters or cards to family and friends. - Draw and/or write about familiar stories. - Create books (alphabet, number, or narrative). - Match uppercase and lowercase letters. - Form letters with play dough, wikki stix, in shaving cream or trace letters written on sandpaper. - Build the names of children in the classroom.

BLUEPRINT
For Early Learning

Chapter 10
Play

Play is one of the first things that come to mind when we think of early childhood education. Pre-K teachers see play in action every day! Maria Montessori referred to play as the "work" of childhood. So when we see a child building a tower with blocks, climbing on the monkey bars, or wearing a cape and dashing around the playground, let's remember that the child is actually working. Perceiving play as children's work certainly elevates its importance. Play is the way that children learn about themselves, the people around them, the world they live in, and how things work in their world. Play is the way that children naturally explore, and the way that they gain and practice skills they will use for their whole lives.

What is special about play?

Play is often defined as activity done for its own sake. Work has a definite goal, but in play the process is more important than any end point or goal. Play is what one wants to do as opposed to what one is obliged to do. Children are flexible when they play. Objects are put in new combinations, or roles are acted out in new ways. Games tend to have rules and a "winner." Play is less structured; there's no one "right way" or "wrong way." And, almost always, children have a positive affect when they play. They often smile, laugh, and say they enjoy it!

Spotlight on Screen Time

Screen time is not generally considered meaningful play. One of the problems with screen time is that screens offer children only a symbolic representation of the real world and do not give them direct experience with people and materials. The more time children are watching screens, the less opportunities they have for play and interaction with their peers and nurturing adults – both of which are critical to healthy development and learning.

Play helps the whole child develop.

- Play gives children opportunities to feel good about themselves. There is no right or wrong way to play, which can positively influence their sense of self.
- While they imitate and re-create roles they see in their daily lives, they have opportunities to problem solve in real time.
- Play helps children learn how to cope with more challenging feelings such as anxiety and frustration.
- When children are engaged in play, they use language to interact with their peers. They participate in the turn-taking of conversation and use new vocabulary.
- Children often strengthen their gross motor development through the use of their large muscles when they jump, dance and move. Other types of play activities, such as cutting, buttoning, painting, and dressing, provide for their fine motor development.
- Play also has cognitive benefits. Children learn so much informally through play. As they interact with objects, they learn sensory information (How does it feel?). They problem solve (Why does my tower keep falling down?). They compare objects (My ramp is taller than that one!) and experiment (What if we roll the balls down the ramp at the same time?).

Spotlight on Loose Parts

Unlike a jigsaw puzzle, whose pieces are meant to fit together in a specific way, loose parts can be moved, combined, lined up, taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. They are materials with no specific set of directions. A scarf, for example, can become a blanket to swaddle a baby, a platform for a picnic, a fishing pond, or a cover for a fort. Having baskets of loose parts in your classroom for children to explore supports flexible thinking (an important executive function skill). Loose parts encourage creativity and imagination. Children can co-collaborate on suggesting and collecting items for loose parts baskets (which can contain both natural and artificial materials).

Guided Play

"My mom is a Pre-K teacher. She's not like a real teacher. All she does is play with the kids."
- overheard on a playground

Pre-K teachers are real teachers and they do play with kids. When you play with children, it's called

"guided play," and while it is joyful and supports relationships with children, it is also complex and very important work!

Free play is spontaneous, child-selected, and child-directed. As teachers, we provide children with time and space to play. We value, support, and encourage free play. But, when we get involved, we can do a lot to support children's development in all domains: language, physical, cognitive, and social emotional. Guided play is an important component of children's Pre-K education. Here are some ways you can support children during guided play.

- Set the stage for children's play. Bring in props that will enhance their play and remove items that are no longer needed. Set up spaces, nooks, books, paper, and writing utensils for the children to use. Invite families to send in items that reflect their cultures and languages. The supplies and materials, spaces and arrangements raises the level of their play. Provide for play experiences that are safe, challenging, inclusive, and enjoyable. Provide children with choices about what to do and when. Structure the indoor and outdoor environment so that it reflects children's individual strengths, interests, cultures, abilities, and needs.
- Be a play buddy. Play buddies are great for children who are having trouble getting started, moving along, or in need of some mediation. Play buddies stay until the play is moving along smoothly. Play buddies are careful not to take over and are aware of and respectful of children's feelings, language, ability, background, and culture during play.
- Scaffold children's play. Your interactions can take children's play to higher levels. You take children from "what they know" to "what else they could know." You can scaffold and help children shift to deeper levels of understanding. See Table X for a list of several strategies you can use to scaffold children's play.

Table X: Strategies for Scaffolding Children's Play

Strategy	Description
Observe and Delight in the Drama	What can you learn by simply observing children as they play? What do children learn when a teacher sits nearby, completely absorbed in the task of attentively watching them? Use this strategy, called Observe and Delight in the Drama. Dedicate some time to focusing on play by positioning yourself near the action at a center. Become engrossed in watching the pretend play develop. Use body language and facial expressions to encourage children's play by quietly conveying that you are very curious about their ideas and that you are delighted with their play. You will get to know them well and they will get the message that dramatic play and their own ideas are significant in the classroom and important to you.
"Yes, and…"	Improvisational acting can be somewhat like the pretend play of young children. At its best, everyone at play, whether it be adults or children, is respecting the ideas and the initiative of their fellow "actors" by reacting to those ideas in a complementary way to keep the play (or the story) moving forward. There is something really special about jumping into the imaginary world of the children in your care. Try this strategy called "Yes, and…" to jump into the imaginary play of children. Respond like an improvisational actor to the scene, roles, and actions that children set up. As an idea is expressed, show that you hear and value the idea with a "Yes, and…" Then go all in! Add on and embellish their ideas in the spirit of building on, without trying to guide the play yourself. Put them in charge and see where they take you. You will learn a great deal about them as originators and storytellers. Children will learn to generate good ideas, use self-regulation, focus, follow their inspirations, and collaborate to build on the ideas of others.
Talk the Talk and Talk It Up!	You can elevate the oral language and literacy level in your classroom by jumping into pretend play with a strategy we call Talk the Talk and Talk It Up! We are all natural communicators, so exploring new ways to express ideas, share information, and influence others is purposeful, satisfying, and powerful. First "Talk the Talk" in order to enter into children's play in a way that respects and acknowledges their words and actions. Adopt the language they are using and their non-verbal expressions by restating what they said or did. Then "Talk It Up!" in order to elevate the talk and encourage more sophisticated language use and vocabulary. Model mature phrasing, introduce vocabulary, encourage reading and writing activities, and share theme-based content as you play.

Narrate the Play and Connect the Players	See interesting imaginative play happening? Go over and wonder aloud about what the children are up to. You can boost the level of play by jumping into the role of narrator - describing out loud what you are seeing them do. Make educated guesses based on what you see and invite them to correct you. Use robust words to say back to them what you heard them say. Or, perhaps you discover that some children are playing alongside each other but their play doesn't really intersect. Help those children connect their play ideas together. Model expressive language skills, to inspire children to incorporate those language skills on the spot, and to match children up in play situations that promote positive social connections.
Freeze Frame!	You know how fruitful it is to jump into the dramatic play or to sit nearby observing so that you get a sense of what children are interested in exploring, what they know, and how they are learning through symbolic play. Yet, sometimes it is difficult on any given day to devote long stretches of time to facilitating or observing play. "Freeze Frame" is a great strategy to use when you are unable to stay in the area to facilitate constructive pretend play. It is an easy, lighthearted way to efficiently gain valuable information and promote independent play by helping children organize their thoughts and clarify their roles within the play scene. Interrupt the action in the dramatic play area by calling out "Freeze Frame!" Wait until you have everyone's attention. Quickly poll the children by asking who they are pretending to be, where they are, and what they are doing. Repeat their answers using full sentences and address any confusion or concerns that are revealed. When done, say "Melt!" and the children resume play. You come away with a snapshot of the pretend play content and some of the learning therein, and the children gain new clarity, purpose, and perspective.
Tell Your Story of Play Today	During a large group gathering, highlight and support the imaginary play of children by using the strategy of "Tell Your Story of Play Today." You simply start a conversation with the children about what they already pretended and played. When children are asked to "tell your story of play today" they tell their classmates (through a retelling) the basic story they were pretending, who the characters were, and where their story took place. They might even be asked to explain what materials they used in their play. By sharing what was already pretended, children are able to reflect on their play, and in doing so, provide inspiration for the play of their classmates. This conversation also allows the teacher to ask children to reflect on any problems or challenges that arose during their play and share how they overcame those obstacles.
Send Out for Supplies!	You can support children in becoming flexible, sophisticated thinkers by guiding them towards increasingly imaginative play. In other words, don't provide only realistic, representational materials. Instead, encourage creativity and executive functioning by providing some open-ended supplies that can be used symbolically or manipulated to represent a variety of things. Ask, "What do we need in our play today? What can we find or what can we make to suit our purposes?" You can also use this strategy to give children the experience of enriching their own symbolic play by making for themselves what is needed for their play or by using existing materials in new and innovative ways. With this strategy, you are also extending the boundaries of the dramatic play area, allowing children to plan together and then head out into other areas of the room (e.g. art center, block center, etc.) for the supplies they need to play out their envisioned play sequence.
Make It Noteworthy	With this strategy you can learn about your children and teach at the same time. Taking anecdotal notes while children play provides you with important information. You can learn about their interests, social emotional growth, mastery of fine motor and cognitive skills, and language and literacy development. Make it obvious to children that you are watching their play so that you can learn about them and support their play. Convey your openness to children interacting with you as you take notes, and when they do, you'll have opportunities to explain the purpose of your note taking, as well as the process and power of writing!
Present a Problem to Solve (a.k.a. "Uh, oh!" or "What's That?")	Enrich the dramatic play and content learning of your children by using this strategy. Enter into children's play and present a problem for them to address. Or place found objects that are related to the theme you are studying in the play area. Inviting children to respond creatively to a problem or the possibilities of an object (or group of objects) communicates that you expect children to be agents of their own learning through play. They can and should grapple with problems and approach unfamiliar situations curiously and expectantly by: using what they know and relating it to the unknown, asking questions, garnering outside resources, experimenting with new ideas, and applying new information. This strategy can foster a dynamic culture of inquiry and problem solving in your classroom.

Troubleshooting

Of course when children play, problems may arise. They may exclude others, throw things, not share, not take turns, not clean up, be excessively loud, or even sometimes hit. Let's begin to understand and address playtime challenges by focusing on one very important idea: Be realistic about your expectations. Don't ask or require children to do things that they are not developmentally ready to do. Can three-year-olds share or take turns? How long can they wait? Can four-year-olds put books back in bins by the author's last name? Consider their ages and stages when setting expectations.

Gauging the level of support needed for a group of children is not easy. Focus on what each child can do and what may be impacting on their play, and then modify the environment to help the child play. Some children need a little longer to make a choice, to solve a problem, or to remember where things are kept. They may not know how to start an activity, or when they start doing something they may need longer to practice. This is fine; one of the benefits of play is its flexibility, and it can be adapted to suit each individual child.

Be Proactive

Keeping children's developmental skills in mind, the first and best approach to solving problems at playtime is to be proactive. Anticipate what problems might arise and get ahead of them. By simply having an orderly, clutter-free, well-organized environment, you reduce the possibility of conflict. People feel better in a clean, organized environment. Here are some other ways to be proactive:

- Give children choices in how they position their bodies – they can sit or stand, work on a horizontal or vertical surface, etc.
- Give children choices in materials.
- Give children a choice where they want to play.
- Limit the number of children at individual centers.
- Develop a schedule that promotes child engagement and success. For example, balance activities that are active and quiet, small group and large group, teacher-directed and child-directed.
- Explicitly teach and practice routines. When children know what to do and how to do it, the chances of conflict are diminished. For Pre-K children, practice is crucial. Engage children in role play or use of puppets for demonstrating tasks that need practice, such as putting materials away.

Problem Solving

We know that even though we have a well-organized, attractive, and inviting classroom environment; have taught procedural lessons that the children know and understand; are observant and attuned; and keep our centers fresh and interesting, problems will still happen. But let's remember, the problem is the action, not the child.

- Involve children in problem solving. If they left the block center messy, enlist their help in making it neat.
- Teach self-soothing strategies (e.g., count to ten, take a deep breath, take a walk, cuddle a stuffed animal, etc.).
- Teach feeling words to enable children to express their emotions. In Blueprint we encourage you to create an Anchor Chart titled "Feelings." Honoring children's feelings provides the validation that they are being seen and heard.
- Don't force apologies. Coercing a child into saying something that they do not mean is counterproductive and creates negative feelings.
- Don't ask why. They don't know why and they certainly can't explain it. Four-year-olds can't articulate, "I gave into an impulse. I didn't think it out carefully."
- Stay attuned to the children to anticipate their needs. Most three- to five-year-olds are at their best when they are well-rested and fed. So schedule free play time early in the school day or after nap time.
- Conflict often arises due to boredom, so refresh play areas as needed. Introduce new props. Rotate materials to keep things interesting. When you notice that children are no longer enjoying themselves or are attending for shorter periods of time, it's time to re-envision the center. Capitalize on children's interests.

BLUEPRINT
For Early Learning

Chapter 11
High Quality Books

High quality literature is an essential component of effective instruction. We know that reading aloud to children is beneficial to their academic and social emotional growth. We also know that the quality of the book matters. Blueprint for Early Learning includes 90 carefully curated and diverse books. These books underwent a rigorous screening process to ensure that they were the very best books - the books we want in our classrooms - and that they:

- Provide engaging read aloud experiences that will help children form positive relationships to books and reading
- Offer exceptional instructional value with multiple entry points
- Provide positive, accurate messages about the diversity of cultures in our society, the importance of every child's contribution to their community, and the potential for every child to succeed and thrive

In her essay "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," Rudine Sims Bishop shows how books can be mirrors for children, showing them a reflection of themselves, and windows, offering them a view to the wider world. Bishop writes, "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part." (https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf) It is imperative that we choose anti-bias books that send affirming, validating, empowering, and accurate messages to students about themselves and others.

The right books can be hard to find. According to statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, only 23% of children's books published in 2018 featured characters from diverse backgrounds, specifically African/African American, Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific American, Latinx, or American Indian/First Nations. (https://readingspark.wordpress.com/2019/06/19/picture-this-diversity-in-childrens-books-2018-infographic/) We have an obligation to our children to correct and raise that percentage in our classroom libraries, so that the diversity of characters depicted in our books truly reflects the diversity of our schools, neighborhoods, country, and world.

Below are some resources for finding high quality and anti-bias books. These lists offer a starting point for teachers researching read aloud options connected to particular content areas or to boost the diversity of a classroom library. The next step will be to evaluate each book.

Award winners

American Indian Youth Literature Award

- https://ailanet.org/activities/american-indian-youth-literature-award/

American Library Association Youth Media Awards

- http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards/browse/yma?showfilter=no

Coretta Scott King Book Awards

- http://www.ala.org/rt/emiert/cskbookawards/coretta-scott-king-book-awards-all-recipients-1970-present

Schneider Family Book Awards

- http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards/1/all_years

Pura Belpre Awards

- http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal/belprepast

Asian/Pacific American Award for Young Adult Literature

- https://www.apalaweb.org/awards/literature-awards/

Diverse Books

American Indians in Children's Literature

- https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/

American Library Association's Rainbow Book List

- https://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/

Books for Littles

- https://booksforlittles.com/category/book-collections/

Diverse Book Finder

- https://diversebookfinder.org/books/

Here Wee Read

- http://hereweeread.com/toddler-book-lis

Latinxs in Kid Lit

- https://latinosinkidlit.com/

We Need Diverse Books

- https://diversebooks.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-books/

Anti-Bias Books

Social Justice Books – book lists

- https://socialjusticebooks.org/booklists/

We Need Diverse Books: Resources for Race, Equity, Anti-Racism, and Inclusion

- https://diversebooks.org/resources-for-race-equity-and-inclusion/

Lee & Low

- https://www.leeandlow.com/

Once you have a book in your hands, read and evaluate it yourself. Whether or not you choose to read the book aloud to the children in your classroom will depend on their interests, your instructional goals, the quality of the book, and the messages it sends. See Table X (Checklist for Evaluating Books), a tool you can use to support you when evaluating the quality of books.

Table X: Checklist for Evaluating Books

Yes/No	What to Do	What to Look for
	Check the illustrations	Look for stereotypes and tokenism. Pay attention to who is visible and who is missing. Is a group rendered invisible because it is not depicted on the pages of the book? Illustrations should be engaging and vibrant, drawing children into the visual world of the book and complementing the text.
	Check the text	Are the words respectful of groups and individuals? Are any parts of the text negative or offensive? A high quality text will include rich vocabulary, an engaging plot, and language and style appropriate for its audience. Read the book out loud. Does the text flow? Is it likely to hold children's attention?
	Consider the overall message	Is this book culturally relevant and respectful? How will kids feel when they see themselves represented in this book? What is the story, implicit or explicit, that they are hearing about themselves? About others? How does the book support or improve children's learning?
	Consider the context	Who wrote and illustrated the book? Are the author and illustrator members of the group featured in the story? When was the book written? Is it current? Is it dated?
	Consider length and size	Is the book one you can read in one sitting, or will it require multiple readings? Is the book an adequate size for a large group read aloud, or would it be better suited for one-on-one reading? Will children be able to see the pictures clearly from any spot on the rug?
	Get a second opinion	Whenever possible, ask one or more adults to read and evaluate the book. Engage in conversation with colleagues or parents for different perspectives on the impact a book's text, illustrations, and message might have on children.

Below are some examples of guides and checklists that can be helpful in evaluating children's books.

Social Justice Books – Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books

- https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/

Teaching Tolerance Reading Diversity Tool for Selecting Diverse Texts

- http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Reading%20Diversity%20Lite%E2%80%94Teacher%27s%20Edition2.pdf

How to Tell the Difference: A Guide for Evaluating Children's Books for Honest Portrayals of Raza Peoples

- http://decoloresreviews.blogspot.com/p/how-to-tell.html

How to choose excellent children's books by and about Native Americans – Debbie Reese

- https://www.embracerace.org/resources/how-to-choose-excellent-childrens-books-by-and-about-american-indians-debbie-reese

Finally, having weighed the experts' ideas about high quality literature and conducting your own evaluations, remember to note your children's responses to the books you choose. Were the text and illustrations as engaging as you thought they would be? Did the book make the children laugh? Did it surprise them? Did the story inspire the class in any way? Did children react to parts of the book you didn't even notice? Not all high quality books will work in every situation, with every group of children. Knowing your criteria and knowing your children will help you find the very best books for them.

Spotlight on Commercial Books

Be wary of books about commercialized characters (such as those that originated in television shows or as toys). Including some of these books in your collection because the characters are of interest to your children may be important, but they should not dominate your collection, nor should they be the books you read aloud with intention and purpose. These books often lack sophisticated language and/or plots that make a text ideal for using as a teaching tool.

Spotlight on Reading Critically

High quality books provide a perfect opportunity for critical thinking and reading. When we read critically, we think beyond the text itself. Rather, we examine it through a more interpretive lens. We begin to unpack some of the deeper or underlying messages conveyed by the book, including those that may be implicit and subtle. In this way, high quality books can serve as a jumping off point for discussing issues of gender, family, race, culture, and diversity. Encourage children to think through these topics, and to generate their own questions. Having critical conversations about books helps to raise children's awareness about themselves, others, and the world.

Throughout the curriculum you will find tips in the sidebars of Intentional Read Aloud lessons called "Reading Critically." These tips point out an aspect of the book that can be given more critical thought. One example of a "Reading Critically" tip is in Unit 8: "Animal Architects" alongside the book Listen to Our World. In this book the authors spotlight mothers giving wake-up kisses and good night kisses. The illustrator only shows female caregivers in the corresponding illustrations. However, we know that many family members can wake up their children, put their children to bed, and offer affection. So, ask children questions like: What other family members can give children wake-up kisses? What other family members can be caretakers? Why do you think the authors only included mommies? These kinds of questions help children to become critical thinkers and readers.

BLUEPRINT
For Early Learning

Chapter 12
Gathering Times

Gathering Times are designated times each day for the whole classroom community to gather together. These times provide a consistent forum where every child's presence is respected and valued. As children actively contribute to their own positive classroom culture, they begin to realize that each individual is an integral member of the larger community.

Our four Gathering Times are:

- Greeting Time
- Movement Time
- Talk Time
- Reflection Time

While the first three components can be taught consecutively, one right after the other, each part can also stand alone. For example, you may use one component as a transition activity, or repeat a favorite song, movement, or game at other times of the school day. Reflection Time, though, is intended for the end of the day to give children closure on their daily experiences.

Let's take a closer look at each component of Gathering Times!

Greeting Time

At Greeting Time, children begin their day of learning together. There is a featured greeting each week. What types of greetings can you expect to see?

- Songs – At Greeting Time, children often sing a song or recite a poem related to the content of the week. A list of song and poem titles can be found in the Appendix. Singing or chanting together is a powerful way to greet the members of your classroom (or any!) community. Music serves many additional functions, including enhancing children's listening skills, increasing their vocabulary, and adding joy!
- Games - Another recurrent Greeting Time format is inviting children to connect with one another through games. Here they often sort themselves in order to meet and greet a partner or within a smaller group. For example, each child gets a card related to the unit's content and uses it to respond to various prompts. In Unit 8: "Animal Architects" each child gets a card with an animals who constructs a home in nature (i.e. mole, worm, owl, etc.) and responds to prompts such as: If your animal can fly, flap your arms like wings and come to the center of the circle to greet each other.

When children greet each other, they practice using and reading others' social cues, such as looking at and listening to each other. They regularly practice taking turns, whether it entails going around the entire circle or meeting one-on-one with a partner. Children also learn, practice, and create different ways to greet each other. For instance, they can choose from different nonverbal hand gestures, such as a wave, high five, or fist bump.

Of course, there is plenty of space for verbal greetings as well. Greeting Time seamlessly becomes multilingual as children share greetings in various languages. In Unit 3: "Exploring Our Local Community," we build a chart titled "Ways to Say Hello." Children and families are invited to contribute to the chart to create a bank of greetings that are representative of the home languages in your classroom community. You could also add additional greetings in languages not spoken in your children's homes or common in your own local community. Be sure to model using a variety of greetings, and encourage children to do the same!

While the basis of a particular greeting stays the same for each week, we offer a variation of it each day. For instance, when children are sorting or matching animal cards, they often incorporate different phonological skills, for instance, one day identifying which animal names rhyme and another day noticing which contain the same number of syllables. It is important to involve children in designing and implementing greeting variations. For example, children can brainstorm and decide together how to modify the words or whole verses of a weekly song or poem to reflect their new learning as the week's content evolves.

Spotlight on Phonological Awareness

Greeting Time activities and variations often lend themselves to word play, encouraging children to explore with spoken words and sounds. This kind of word play supports the development of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is an umbrella term used to describe how spoken language can be broken down into its components. Concepts include:

- Identifying and generating rhyming words: Rhyming words are words that sound the same at the end, such as "tile" and "smile." Even if the words are spelled differently, such as "bite" and "light," or they are nonsense words, such as "vit" and "jit," as long as they sound the same at the end, they rhyme.
- Segmenting syllables: Syllables are commonly called "beats" or "chunks" because they are the basic units of words. A syllable usually contains one vowel sound. For example, the word "watermelon" has four syllables: wa-ter-mel-on. Children can touch their head, shoulders, knees, and toes as they say each syllable in the word.
- Blending onset and rime: The onset of a word is the initial consonant or consonant cluster. The rime is the vowel and anything after. For example, in the word "gift" g- is the onset and -ift is the rime. In the word "trust" tr- is the onset and -ust is the rime.
- Identifying the beginning sound or initial phoneme in a word: A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound. There are 44 phonemes in the English language — 24 consonant sounds and 20 vowel sounds. Once children are working with phonemes, they are practicing phonemic awareness, which is a sub skill of phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness is the foundation for the phonics skills that are necessary to become a capable reader. Phonics is the understanding of how written letters and sounds are related. In order to set a strong phonological foundation for your children in Pre-K, provide plenty of opportunities for them to hear and manipulate speech sounds. Unlike phonics, phonological activities can be "done in the dark" because they are all about oral language! Keep in mind that children, including multilingual learners, benefit when phonological activities are embedded in meaningful context, which often means providing visual cues.

Movement Time

Movement Time features a range of activities that promote children's physical development, such as gross motor skills and spatial awareness. Children explore different ways of moving their bodies, from coordinating their upper and lower limbs to do jumping jacks, to balancing a beanbag on their head while walking across a path. Regular exercise helps children:

- Develop strong muscles and bones
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Sleep better
- Feel more motivated and focused

Most children develop movement milestones along the same sequence but at different rates. For example, walking backwards, from the toe to the heel, is a major milestone for children ages four-to-five. Children may be ahead, behind, or right on time for these milestones. Expose them to these types of activities, giving them lots of time and practice to develop these skills. In addition to Movement Time, be sure to incorporate these movement activities throughout the day. For example, use movement as a brain break or transition, or to promote additional classroom community building.

At Movement Time, children often participate in games, which contributes to their executive function and social emotional development. Children learn how to interact skillfully, negotiate roles, and build a sense of teamwork as they play cooperative games. Recurring example activities include passing items to each other in different ways (i.e. overhead, twisting side to side, etc.), and working together to keep items inside a parachute as they shake it.

Children also play traditional games such as "Freeze Dance," "Simon Says," and "Duck, Duck, Goose." We suggest playing more inclusive versions of these games. For example, no one gets "out" when they make a mistake. Rather, everyone stays part of the game, maintaining each child's sense of belonging in the community. Like the daily variations of a weekly Greeting Time, games at Movement Time also are modified to connect with the evolving content of the week. For example,

"Simon" is replaced with the name of a character from one of the week's read aloud books, and "Duck, Duck, Goose" becomes "Calf, Calf, Cow" as children learn more about farm animals in Unit 5: "Life on the Farm."

Movement Time is an opportunity for children to tap into their creative expression. They often use their imaginations to bring certain actions to life. For example, in Unit 3: "Exploring Our Local Community," they use paper plates like steering wheels as they pretend to drive mail trucks on a "road" set up in the classroom. And in Unit 8: "Animal Architects," they act out the way some animals, such as moles and worms, burrow or tunnel underground.

Spotlight on Yoga

One type of creative movement that is featured throughout the curriculum is yoga. When children practice yoga, they move their bodies to look, feel, and sometimes sound like what they are pretending to be. Yoga has both physical and mental benefits. Bending and stretching helps children develop strength, balance, and flexibility. In addition, as they pretend and imagine, yoga helps children to maintain focus, think creatively, and channel their energy.

Each unit's yoga poses relate to the content of the week, so for example, when children explore construction tools in Unit 4: "We Are Architects!" they do yoga poses like hammer, screwdriver, saw, and ladder. Step-by-step instructions and visual supports for all of the yoga poses can be found in the book Blueprint Yoga. There are also videos for each pose available on the Blueprint website. Also, on the website, you can download and print individual cards of each yoga pose. Create a basket or ring with these cards and make them accessible throughout the day. Use them to take yoga breaks and invite children to do the same! Involve families as well by sending home directions for the yoga poses children learn. A set of direction cards can be found in the appendix of each thematic teaching guide.

Spotlight on Math and Movement

The benefits of daily movement span many categories of children's learning and development. For example, Movement Time often includes opportunities for children to practice key mathematical skills, including the following:

- Counting: It is natural to incorporate numbers and number sense into kinesthetic activities. If children are doing jumping jacks, why not count out five of them? When counting actions with children, be sure to slow down enough to clearly isolate each one. This supports children's understanding that we count one number for one movement. It also supports their sense of cardinality, or the number of elements in a set or group. Remind children that when they get to the last number, they have to stop counting.
- Coding: In several units, children play a game called "If/Then" which helps children develop early coding skills. Computer programmers use simple commands to build more complex functions. Likewise, in this game, children combine the same two codes in different ways to create several kinesthetic, or movement-based, patterns. For example, in Unit 6: "Mix & Make," when children learn about making lemonade mixtures, they use spoons and straws as symbols to enact the codes: If you see a spoon, then stir your hips around. If you see a straw, then reach your arms up and stretch long. Children enact these codes throughout the week in progressively complex patterns, such as AB, AABB, ABB. They even try the codes randomly, or when not set up in a pattern.
- Positional words: As children develop more spatial awareness, the usefulness of positional vocabulary emerges. Positional words allow children to understand and describe how they are moving in relation to a particular reference point. For example, children play "Simon Says" using a paper plate as a prop. They practice situating the plate "in front" of their belly or "behind" their back. There are also opportunities to combine using positional words in a kinesthetic pattern. For example, children pass a block down a line in a pattern of "over" their heads and "under" their legs.

Spotlight on Executive Function

Executive function is the broad term used to describe children's ability to regulate their own behavior. It is an umbrella term that includes: working memory, attention, inhibition, impulse control, and flexible thinking. Many of the things that happen in the Pre-K classroom can facilitate the development of children's executive function. Here are some examples of how Gathering Times activities can support different aspects of children's executive function:

- When you add on new verses to a familiar song, or alter it somehow, it helps develop children's working memory.

- Turn taking games help children develop self-regulation. When waiting for a turn they learn impulse control.
- Yoga helps children reduce stimulation and focus their attention.
- In a game like "Freeze Dance" children have to regulate when they pause and resume moving.
- When children try out new and perhaps challenging activities, they need to focus and monitor their attention, and control their emotional responses.
- As children learn how to follow multistep directions, their memory gets a workout as they keep the order of directions in mind.
- Oral storytelling, where they need to add on to the plot, helps children develop their attention and their working memory.
- Encouraging children to consider others' perspectives helps them develop flexible thinking.
- Give children the opportunity to brainstorm options when there is a problem to solve. Let them think about what would happen if those options were selected.
- "What else could you do?" is a great question for helping children develop cognitive flexibility.
- Teaching relaxation strategies helps children develop self-regulation skills.
- Self-regulation begins with the ability to understand and identify our emotions. Adults can help children by giving them permission to feel and express sadness, fear, and anger, as well as joy, excitement, and other positive emotions.
- Children need to learn to self-monitor and self-correct their actions. Giving children choices helps them develop these skills.

Talk Time

At Talk Time, children share their ideas and discuss relevant content through a variety of formats. Classroom discussions seek to activate children's knowledge of and experience with new content. Children are invited to share their ideas, and ask questions about what they want to find out or what they wonder about the subject. It is a time to explicitly process their thoughts and feelings with one another. Their contributions often are charted to provide a concrete reference point for reviewing, adding to, and revising children's thinking.

There are countless opportunities and ways for children to talk with teachers and peers. But Talk Time is a daily designated time for conversations and discussions. Therefore, it provides the perfect forum for supporting oral language development. Oral language is a child's ability to understand and use spoken words and sentences. Specifically, it includes the ability to:

- Use increasingly complex sentences
- Use a growing vocabulary both in quantity and diversity of words
- Use language for different social and cognitive purposes (for example, understand and talk about feelings, create and enact roles, establish and maintain relationships)
- Attend to listening for longer periods of time, such as when people are telling stories and during conversations
- Respond to directions (for example, follow one- and two-step directions)
- Understand that people communicate in many ways, including through gestures, sign language, facial expressions, and augmentative communication devices
- Ask questions and make comments related to the topic of discussion

Children develop oral language skills in their own unique time. Embedded in Talk Time is the balance of structured and free-flowing conversation. According to Fountas and Pinnell in Literacy Beginnings, children in Pre-K can begin to learn the following conversational skills:

- Taking turns
- Looking at the speaker
- Responding to the topic of the speaker or signaling a change of topic
- Using particular phrases, such as "thank you" and "you're welcome"
- Addressing people by name
- Knowing where and when it is appropriate to talk
- Adjusting tone of voice to fit the setting (classroom, playground, large/small group)
- Building on others' comments
- Asking questions to support dialogue
- Choosing topics that expand vocabulary and show new learning
- Clarify meaning
- Have a point when speaking

- Informing others and being informed
- Negotiating responsibilities
- Expressing opinions and feelings

Spotlight on Social Emotional Development

Talk Time is often the home for explicit social emotional instruction. It is a place to introduce, discuss, and reflect on the ways we take care of ourselves, each other, and our environment as part of the Power of 3. At least one Talk Time each week throughout the curriculum is devoted to addressing the particular social emotional focus of that unit. Teachers hold space for children to share their feelings, self-regulate, practice empathy, and build confidence. In this way, Talk Time is a safe space for children to practice their growing social emotional skills.

We suggest designating two puppets as the class social emotional puppets, which children regularly use to role play developmentally appropriate scenarios. This allows you to be proactive about addressing inevitable challenges, and also to respond to real observations of interactions between children. For example, in Unit 1: "Building our Classroom Community," the class puppets present a common problem: two friends wish to use a single toy. Children are invited to brainstorm and act out various solutions to the problem. This kind of problem solving in real time promotes the development of flexible thinking. In Blueprint we suggest using two puppets we named Sayeh and Elijah; of course, you can adapt these names based on your children's interests, languages or cultures. You can even ask the children to name them!

Spotlight on Mindfulness

At Talk Time, children regularly practice and reflect on mindfulness. Mindfulness tries to help people focus on the here and now. You will find "Mindful Moments" in each unit throughout the curriculum. These Mindful Moments can be used to calm children, relax them, and/or simply raise their awareness of the present moment.

One example of a Mindful Moment is one introduced in Unit 5 called "Find the Pause." This mindfulness exercise gives children practice noticing the pause between their breaths. This concept could then be applied to other times when they could pause before taking action.

You will find Mindful Moment cards with step-by-step instructions on the Blueprint website. In Unit 2, we suggest setting up a "Calm Corner" in your classroom, where you can store these Mindful Moment cards and other tools for helping children to self-regulate their emotional needs. Model and guide children in using mindfulness, and encourage them to use these resources on their own as well.

Spotlight on Analyzing Data

Another recurring Talk Time activity stems from a survey question. Before gathering for Talk Time, children are given the opportunity to respond to a question and represent their answer on a chart or graph. Then at Talk Time they analyze and discuss the results of the survey. The questions always tie directly to current learning. For example, before children investigate three different foods in small groups in Unit 7: "Let's Eat!" they vote on which one to do first.

Asking questions like "Which food got the most votes? How do you know?" gives children the chance to reason abstractly and quantitatively. They must look at the number of votes, know how many that is, and figure out that six comes later so it must be more than four. Eventually, children can look at a number line to reason that six (with six dots) is farther to the right than four (with four dots), so it must be larger.

Reflection Time

Reflection Time at the end of the day allows children to process their learning together. Each day you will find a suggested reflection question that ties together or extends relevant content. The daily question is shown in the Week at a Glance grid in the beginning of the week, as well as at the bottom of the Gathering Times page in the unit guide.

- Here is a sample series of Reflection Time questions from Week 2 of Unit 9: "Look Up!"
- What are you learning about clouds? to Launch
- Where did you see water today? How did you use it?
- What is special about clouds and rain? 3
- Do you wish it rained/ didn't rain today? Why?
- Which of your senses tells you the most about the weather? Why?

As you can see, the reflection questions are open enough to allow for a wide range of responses from children. They are meant to spark authentic conversation among the valuable members of the classroom community for their final Gathering Time of the day.

BLUEPRINT
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Chapter 13
Message Time Plus

Message Time Plus is a powerful instructional practice designed to support emerging readers and writers. MTP lessons incorporate modeled writing and shared reading in order to provide children with an authentic, engaging learning experience. With MTP, the learning of many academic topics is facilitated through the lens of reading and writing.

Modeled writing is a process in which the teacher brainstorms, plans, composes, and transcribes a piece of written text as children watch and respond. The teacher not only models the thoughts and ideas behind drawing and writing, but the actual composition as well. The teacher is "thinking aloud" while writing. For children this modeled process is crucial!

Modeled writing provides the perfect opportunity to demonstrate concepts to beginning writers, such as how to compose a message by thinking before you write, where you start writing on a page, how you make connections between letters and sounds to write printed words, how you label pictures and compose one thought or idea in writing and, eventually, how you form more than one thought in writing. Note that the progression you move through in MTP closely resembles the developmental writing stages that emerging writers progress through. You begin by modeling how print conveys meaning by just labeling a picture, and in later units, you move to demonstrating how one or more sentences convey meaning.

Table X (let's insert a table that shows how messages progress] –

Shared reading is a process in which the teacher and children join together to read a piece of written text. Children learn to recognize letters and sounds in context, understand concepts of the print, and increase and develop new vocabulary. Shared reading takes place at least twice during the lesson.

Message Time Plus lessons are thoughtfully and intentionally designed to cover a wide range of learning concepts. Teaching points vary to introduce or expand on literacy skills such as phonological awareness or vocabulary and STEAM skills such as physical sciences or numbers and number sense. In addition, each lesson gives children practice with the teaching point. Children do this in many ways: through conversation, drawing, movement, games, and creating charts.

Message Time Plus is a robust and engaging learning experience built on the foundation of modeled writing and shared reading. MTP lessons invite children to learn about a concept, observe modeled writing about the concept and participate in shared reading of that writing, and then practice the concept.

Spotlight: How is MTP different from a Morning Message?

Many teachers utilize the practice of morning message. Morning Messages are typically prewritten on the board and begin with a familiar prompt such as "Good Morning…," "Dear…" or "Today…." The message is often about what is happening that day. It is a whole class activity and highly teacher directed.

Message Time Plus is an enhanced version of a morning message. It is tied to the thematic content of the curriculum and is beneficial to your overall instruction in so many ways:

- It is written in front of the children (Modeled Writing). This provides children with a real time experience of how writers think and act.
- The message is always different! The lesson models how real writing begins in relation to the content and purpose of the writing.
- The content reflects the life of the classroom and what children are learning. The learning happening in this practice is connected to learning happening throughout the day, like in intentional read alouds, gathering times and centers.
- The format and structure (list writing, labeling a picture, etc.) of the message vary day to day in accordance to the content and purpose of the writing.
- The teaching point of the lesson focuses on many academic areas: such as literacy, math, and social studies.

- Message Time Plus includes opportunities for engagement and participation. In addition, children interact with the teaching point during an activity designed to practice, review, or enhance learning.
- Message Time Plus follows a simple before/during/after lesson structure.

Why Is It Important?

When you combine these two practices of modeled writing and shared reading into one – as we have done with MTP - the benefits are incredible and truly support children's pre-reading skills. At four and five years old, children's writing development is emerging, which means that young children are beginning to understand that writing is a way to communicate. MTP supports and nurtures this developing growth! In just a few minutes of instruction, Message Time Plus provides children with practice and exposure to numerous skills through the lens of reading and writing.

Let's take a look at how MTP is beneficial for growing readers and writers:

- MTP is Varied – One of the highlights of MTP is that format and the content vary on a daily basis. In Unit 4: "We Are Architects!" you draw and label the parts of your classroom. In Unit 7: "Let's Eat!" you sequence and write about the life cycle of a seed. Exposing children to different forms of writing and connecting your writing to other curricular areas adds variety and keeps your children engaged.
- MTP is Connected – The content of the message is always connected to the thematic content of the unit. This helps children learn more easily and has a greater instructional impact. For example, children learn about the letter e in Unit 5: "Life on the Farm." Therefore, the message is about something that comes from a farm: eggs!
- MTP is Authentic – Because the writing reflects the content of the curriculum and is intended for the needs and interests of the group of children in front of you, MTP is truly an authentic literacy experience. You are writing in front of the children to focus them on using their concepts of print in context and to assess and give immediate feedback. You create a safe learning zone for children to explore what they know and take risks while learning something new.

How is MTP structured?

Message Time Plus has an easy to follow structure of Before, During, and After. Let's take a closer look at each component of an MTP lesson.

Before you write the message, you introduce the teaching point and connect to the content of the unit. Teaching points vary academically. Some are literacy based and explore phonemic awareness components such as rhyme, syllables, and initial sounds. Some are STEAM based. For example, in Unit 6: "Mix & Make" one teaching point is to explain why some tools are good for mixing, which is a science concept connected to form and function. A few lessons later, the teaching point is math: comparing the size of objects.

As you introduce the objective of the lesson, children are invited to participate with the new concept. They may recall parts of a read aloud, have a quick discussion or share an idea, listen for a new vocabulary, or skywrite a letter they are learning. For example, think about the math teaching point just referenced (comparing the size of objects). In the before of the lesson, children practice using comparative words to describe the size of three balls.

As you transition to writing the message, you invite children to be on the lookout for the new learning. This helps children be focused as teacher's model writing. Let's highlight our math teaching point example again. In this lesson, as the teacher moves to the modeled writing, she says, "watch as I draw and label three balls with the words that best

describe their size." This helps to focus children during the lesson and reinforce the teaching point.

Table X: Example of Ways to Engage Children in the Before

We use many strategies for engaging children in the teaching point.

Strategy	Example from Blueprint
Turn and talk	In unit 10, children read the book Jabari Jumps about a boy who jumps off a diving board. During MTP, children turn to a partner to discuss what they would like to learn.
Listen for…	In unit 4, practice identifying rhyming words. The teacher reads a marked page from the book Dreaming Up and children are invited to listen for the words that rhyme.
Movement	In unit 2 children learn about body parts. Children are invited to touch their head, shoulders, and feet.
Use ASL	In many vocabulary lessons children are invited to listen for the targeted word as the teacher rereads a page from a read aloud. Children make the "I hear" ASL sign when they hear the word. For example, in unit 4 when children sign "I hear" when the hear the word "haul" in the book My Friend Robot.
Guided practice	In unit 6 children learn about tally marks. The teacher demonstrates and invites children to in making tally marks with their finger in the palm of their hand.
Props	In unit 7 children compare items and determine which might go in the Kitchen Tool Collection Box. The teacher prompts children to discuss by asking if the items belong in the box and why or why not.
Play a game	In unit 8, children play a game where they use clues to guess an animal. The teacher names several clues, including "it leaps from tree branch to tree branch" and children state "squirrels!"

During the drawing of the picture and writing of the message, you engage children over and over by providing opportunities for participation! As you prepare to draw, you first think aloud about the intent of your picture. You extend an invitation to children to collaborate with you on your thinking. For example, during the math lesson on descriptive words from Unit 6: "Mix & Make," you draw a small ball and then ask children what to draw next. Then you complete the drawing. In every lesson, a sample drawing is provided.

Next, you write the message! Each lesson includes a suggested message that can be modified for your particular group of children. Over the course of units 1 and 2, messages move from drawings, to one word, to short sentences. If your children would benefit from one-word messages for a longer amount of time, simply adjust the lesson and write the word that best represents your drawing.

As you model writing you move slowly and deliberately, choosing how you will articulate what writers do as they write. One unique feature of this section of the lesson is called the "Pause to focus on…" While you write, we encourage you to pause to focus on or review a particular literacy skill. These vary to include phonological awareness, concepts of print, vocabulary, and writing structure. This brief pause is a think aloud, designed to engage children in reviewing and highlighting literacy content during writing. For example, as you label the images in the math example from unit 6, you pause to review the math vocabulary "small, smaller, and smallest." Again, based on what you know about your children's strengths and needs, you can adapt or modify the "Pause to focus on…" to meet your learner's needs.

Once the message is written, children attempt to read it along with you. Your emerging readers will delight in joining the group in the reading of the message! This shared reading experience helps to practice concepts of print and phonological skills. Rereading all the words you wrote together helps children listen to the way the message sounds and then helps them make meaning from the printed words.

Table X: Pause to focus on…

Here's a list of items we pause to focus on…

- Letter-sound correspondence
- Punctuation
- Concept of a word
- Writing a list
- Spaces between words
- Rhyming words
- Writing labels
- Letters make up words
- Defining vocabulary words
- Syllables
- Print directionality
- Forming numerals
- Speech bubbles
- Uppercase and lowercase letters

- Identifying beginning sounds
- Identifying ending sounds
- Positional words
- Comparison words

After you write the message, you engage children in a brief activity focused on exploring and practicing the teaching point. Remember, the teaching points are varied in academic content, so activities are ranging, too, but are always engaging and include opportunities for participation. See Table X for examples of After activities

Table X: Examples of After Activities

Activity	Description	Standard
Act it out	In unit 7 when children learn the word "glide," they practice moving smoothly across the floor.	Literacy: Vocabulary
Play the game, "Look Like the Letter."	When children learn about the letter x in unit 6, they make their arms in the shape of the letter.	Literacy: Phonological Awareness
Play the game, "Identify the Sound."	When children learn about birds and their nests in unit 8, they listen to audio clips of bird sounds and describe what they hear.	Science: Scientific Inquiryw
Create a page in the class book	During class book lessons, in each unit, children brainstorm ideas for their page in the class book. They might begin to draw and write, too!	Literacy: Writing
Play the game, "Is This a Sphere?"	Children reach into a mystery bag and identify if an object is a sphere when they learn about this shape in unit 6.	Math: Geometry and Spatial Relations
Label illustrations	When children learn about seeds in unit 7 they help to generate labels to describe what is happening in images of the life cycle of a seed.	Literacy: Comprehension

Once you finish the activity, you guide children to reread the message one more time in order to build their fluency.

Spotlight on Transitions

At the end of each MTP we feature a transition. This transition is a fun way to practice new skills and concepts as children move on from the lesson to their next activity. You can use these transitions at any time of the day. Examples include:

- Letter sound practice. For example, when learning about the letter t, children tiptoe off the rug and say the sound /t/.
- Act it out! In unit 3 when children learn about the job of a doctor, they pretend to use a stethoscope to listen to a patient's heart.
- "Teach" the word. Vocabulary lesson transitions invite partners to rehearse how they would teach a new word.
- Answer a question. In unit 5, children learn the multiple meanings of the word "kid." As they leave the rug they describe one way they are different from a kid goat.
- Hold up a number of fingers. In unit 6 children count syllables in words. As they transition, they use their fingers to show how many syllables are in their name.
- Use their finger to write in the palm of their hand. In unit 7, children identify the beginning sound in words. During transition, they practice writing the letter with their finger in the palm of their hand.
- Sign "yes" or "no." In unit 9, during transition children view two letters and sign "yes" if they match, "no" if they do not.

The predictable structure of Message Time Plus allows children to feel comfortable to take risks and learn. Celebrating their efforts and promoting their literacy growth is a natural result of MTP.

How Do You Prepare For an MTP Lesson?

As you prepare your classroom for the year, your designated large group area will be used for MTP. This space should contain a large dry erase board or easel and easy access and organization of markers, a pointer (to track print as children join you in rereading of the message), read alouds, chart paper, etc. Have your observation binder nearby to jot down what children say and do during the lesson. Keeping this area clean, organized and updated will help your lesson run smoothly. Having supplies at your fingertips means you can focus more time on engaging children with the content

and less time looking for materials!

In the beginning of the school year, you will most likely be gathering the large group for MTP. Once children settle into the daily routine, MTP can be conducted in two groups, with half the class in each. This allows children to have greater opportunities to participate and gives you more time to observe and notice how children engage with the content of the lesson.

As your prepare for a week of lessons in your unit, one of the first things you will do is consult the week in review. Make sure to get an understanding of the teaching points and standards of your MTP lessons. This will help you begin to think of your specific group of learners, what they know about the academic areas being covered during the lessons, and begin to think if you will need to adjust which children you will group together.

As you prepare for a particular Message Time Plus lesson, begin by pre-reading the lesson. Start with the sidebar and think about what you will need for the lesson. What materials do you need to gather ahead of time? Will you need to prepare anything? Some preparation is quick: you may need to bring one of the read alouds and add a sticky note to mark a page. Or, you may need a little more time to download and print some images from the Blueprint website, review a specific ASL sign, or procure a prop or material. Make sure to have relevant anchor charts and unit charts nearby for reference.

Sidebars are so much more than just materials preparation! Make sure to reflect on the teaching tips. For example, during an MTP in Unit 5: "Life on the Farm," children review and practice the word "squeal." During the lesson, children are invited to share the sound of their squeal. A sidebar tip gives you suggestions on ways to manage the classroom during this potentially noisy lesson!

Finally, MTP lesson sidebars include a section called Keep It Going. Previewing these ideas before the lesson can help you envision how you will continue the lesson beyond this message. Included are engaging extensions and invitations to revisit the concepts and teaching points from the MTP. For example, during an MTP in Unit 9: "Look Up!" children help diagram an astronaut's uniform. One suggestion in the Keep It Going is to gather a group of children and use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast an astronaut uniform with the uniform of another type of job.

As you can see, the Sidebar is not an afterthought but, rather, an integral part of planning your MTP! Next you will focus on reading through the lesson script. As you do this, make note of when and where you will use the materials you have gathered or prepared. Think about your expression, gestures, and possible places to slow down and linger on concepts.

This is also a good time to anticipate how children will react during the lesson. What might they say or do? For example, you might know a particular child that is highly engaged in the vehicle focus during week 3, Unit 3: "Exploring Our Local Community." You may want to give this child time to play with the tow truck hook you create.

How Does MTP Support Diverse Learners?

MTP offers a variety of supports for diverse learners.

- Lessons incorporate ASL signs.
- Many activities use images as support for activities such as listening to sounds in letters.
- Lessons invite children to have discussions with partners who speak the same home language.
- Sidebars include a section called "Keep It Going." These are short, detailed activities to be done in small groups to extend or reinforce the learning for children who could benefit from

Spotlight on Progression of Phonological Awareness

Developing phonological awareness is a big part of the Pre-K experience! Phonological awareness is the ability to:

- Hear the "parts" of oral language, such as sentences, words, syllables, onsets and rimes, and phonemes. This includes the ability to recognize words that rhyme ("cat" and "bat") and produce words that rhyme (give me a word that rhymes with "bed").
- Manipulate the parts of oral language.

It is important to focus on the hearing and manipulating of speech sounds. Keep in mind, all

children, including multilingual children, need these phonological activities to be embedded in meaningful context, which often means providing visual cues.

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term that we use to describe how spoken language can be broken down into its components. Once we start describing things children do with phonemes (the smallest unit of sound in language), we are talking about phonemic awareness. This is a sub skill of phonological awareness.

As children learn to listen for and manipulate the various pieces of language, they typically proceed from larger to smaller units of sound and build upon one another on a continuum. Concepts we teach include:

- counting words in sentences;
- counting or saying the syllables of a word;
- dividing a word into its onset and rime;
- recognizing and generating rhyme and alliteration;
- phonemic awareness, which includes isolation, blending, segmenting and addition/ deletion/ substitution of individual phonemes.

Letter Learning and MTP

MTP is the springboard for learning about the alphabet. There are 28 letter learning lessons (including consonants with two sounds such as the letter g and letter c) paced out over five units. Lessons are interactive, engaging, and connected to the thematic content of the unit. Each lesson has a familiar rhythm and predictable routine. See the Appendix for the order that letters are introduced.

Letter learning lessons begin with a review of letters previously learned. Then teachers invite children to explore and practice the:

- letter sound (I hear /t/ at the beginning of the word teeth)
- letter name (the letter t makes the /t/ sound)
- letter form- (to write the uppercase letter T, drop down and make a bridge on top). Children join the teacher in skywriting the letter in the before of the MTP lesson and again in the during as part of the Pause to focus on. This practice reinforces the formation of the letter.

Use these other effective practices to engage and support children as they learn the alphabet!

- Assess- Use an assessment to record and review children's understanding of letters and sounds (see the Blueprint portal for an example of an assessment you can use).
- Differentiate- Vary the amount of instruction by monitoring children's learning progress. Assessment data can help you identify what letters children would benefit from reviewing. This information will help you make decisions about instruction and when to plan "Keep It Going" lessons.
- Practice - Give children authentic opportunities to learn about letters in the classroom environment. For example, starting in unit 1, children learn about the letters in their name and their friend's names. They look at their names on index cards and match letters using magnetic letters. In unit 2, children engage in making a class made alphabet chart. At the writing center, children engage in many letter exploration activities such as pressing magnetic letters into modeling clay, going on letter hunts in the classroom, and making letters with toothpicks. In addition, children participate in reading alphabet books such as Eating the Alphabet.

Teaching Tip Articulating Letter Sounds Correctly

An important part of your phonological awareness instruction is being able to model the pronunciation of letter sounds correctly. For example, the sound of the letter l is /l/ (not /la/), and the sound of the letter a is /a/ as in apple and not as in art or aunt. Be careful not to elongate or exaggerate the vowel sound that is necessary to pronounce consonant sounds (e.g., clip the "uh" sound at the end of /b/). Visit the Blueprint website to view videos that demonstrate the correct sound pronunciations for all letters.

Spotlight on Writing Instruction

Beyond the modeled writing that occurs in Message Time Plus, there are many other opportunities for writing.

Independent Writing: To become writers, children need ample opportunity to draw and write. Time to write can occur at any time of the day! When children first come in, before lunch, while waiting to be picked up or during center time. Create a writing center where children can practice literacy and fine motor skills. The writing center is meant to provide children with opportunities to explore their own ideas and draw or write about them to build their identities as writers. Encourage children to explore using a variety of writing materials so ultimately they see writing as a useful and powerful form of communication. In addition to the writing center, make sure to add writing supplies to other classroom centers. This

offers children invitations to draw and write ideas or thoughts as they engage with center materials and activities.

When independent writing occurs, interact with children one on one or in small groups.

- Honor them for their writing attempts, no matter what developmental stage they are in!
- Guide the thinking they are doing when they are composing writing, helping them to do things like plan out a book and decide what will be included.
- Find the right "entry" points to "nudge" children along. For example, for writers who are only using illustrations, teachers can nudge them to start to add letters or words to the page.
- It is also important to keep in mind that frustrating or overwhelming young writers is the last thing you want to do. Letting go of your "nudging" strategy and providing more direct assistance to writers who require it may be necessary if the situation demands it.
- Provide developmentally appropriate supports to engage individual writers. For example, special paper (blank, one line, multiple lines), magnetic letters, picture cards, etc.

Shared Writing: Shared writing is a practice in which the teacher and children share the responsibility for creating a piece of text. The teacher and children collaborate on the content and form of the writing while the teacher is primarily responsible for doing the actual writing. Shared writing is an effective way to validate children's contributions while still having control over the modeling of formal writing conventions. It can be done prior to or in response to texts, play or other experiences children are having inside and outside of school.

Interactive Writing: Often referred to as "sharing the pen," interactive writing is a practice in which the teacher and children share the responsibility for creating a piece of text and actually writing it. The teacher scaffolds by making decisions about when and how often to invite children to write different letters, words or punctuation marks in the text, based on children's abilities and what is being taught. This practice gives children the opportunity to practice connecting letter sounds and forms and other concepts of print. Like shared writing, interactive writing can be a precursor or follow up to read alouds, centers or other activities during the preschool day.

Spotlight on the Class Book

In each unit, children contribute their own drawing and writing to create a class book. Class books are valuable for many reasons. Children are exposed to the bookmaking process and are excited to view themselves as authors. Once completed and bound, the class books are added to the classroom library for children to read over and over again. In addition, the class book provides a way to showcase and highlight children's learning and thinking about the content of the unit.

The topic of the class book is launched in a Message Time Plus lesson, during the beginning of the unit. Before this lesson, teachers send home a letter to families to help spark ideas about the content of the class book. This letter provides a unique opportunity for families to engage with the learning in the classroom ahead of time. For multilingual learners, discussing ideas with their families in their home language helps to solidify and extend their learning.

During the class book MTP lesson, children observe and participate as teachers model thinking, drawing, and writing their page for the class book. Children are invited to begin their page of the class book during the MTP lesson. Once the message is written, teachers' distribute clipboards and writing tools to children and guide them to think through what their page might look like.

Beyond the lesson, children are invited to continue working on their drawing and writing at the writing center and, if they would like, contribute more than one page to the book. It is important to continue to connect to the class book during the course of the unit. You might encourage children to complete their page or read what the class has produced so far.

Spotlight on Math Vocabulary During MTP

There are many opportunities for engagement with skills and concepts during the drawing and writing of the message. One important thing to highlight is math vocabulary! There are several categories of mathematical language you can address as you think aloud and draw. For example:

- Directional key words: As you draw, you describe the types of lines you are drawing (straight, curvy) and the direction you are drawing on the board (horizontal, vertical) or positional vocabulary (on top, next to, under, etc.).
- Shapes: Depending on what you are drawing, think aloud or invite children to name the shape (circle, oval, square, etc) of an object or the shape it resembles.
- Quantity and Numerals: Invite children to count how many objects, lines, etc. in your drawing. Or, you might ask children to name how many of something you might draw.

BLUEPRINT
For Early Learning

Chapter 14
Intentional Read Aloud

"The fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading. It isn't achieved by the book alone, nor by the child alone, nor by the adult who is reading aloud. It is the relationship winding between all three bringing them together in easy harmony." - Mem Fox, Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever

What is an Intentional Read Aloud?

Reading aloud to children is one of the most enjoyable and useful activities in any Pre-K classroom. It helps to create a positive classroom culture, develops a shared language around literature, and inspires a love of reading. There is nothing wrong (and a lot right!) with picking a favorite book off the shelf, gathering children, and reading aloud for the sheer pleasure of it.

But reading aloud to children can also be a powerful instructional tool! A read aloud becomes intentional when you have a purpose and plan for reading. An Intentional Read Aloud focuses on a specific objective. The teaching point is stated in child-friendly language before reading aloud. It is then threaded throughout the lesson, during and after reading aloud. The lesson is intentionally planned to teach a skill, strategy, behavior, or concept, while still leaving room for other learning opportunities.

The Intentional Read Aloud (IRA) serves as a springboard for children to interact with books and to enhance their communication skills. This instructional practice creates a daily space for children to make meaning out of books and to exchange ideas with their teachers and peers. Through IRA, you establish a stable of high-quality children's books and developmentally appropriate skills that the class knows. You can use this instructional practice to explore the big ideas and themes that make reading meaningful.

Benefits of IRA

Why is reading aloud to children beneficial? In general, reading aloud includes opportunities to:

- Encourage a love of books and a desire to want to read
- Familiarize children with different genres and text structures
- Invite children to see themselves in books and to understand others
- Expose children to new information and robust vocabulary in an authentic context
- Introduce children to different authors and illustrators
- Model phrased, fluent, and expressive reading
- Develop listening comprehension skills
- Support the development of phonological awareness
- Stimulate experimentation with language by imitating patterns heard in books

When reading aloud becomes intentionally planned and implemented, there are even more benefits to the practice! In particular, Intentional Read Aloud lessons provide opportunities to:

- Model for children how readers access and make meaning from books
- Teach thinking and monitoring strategies before, during, and after reading
- Increase vocabulary knowledge, acquisition, and usage
- Encourage critical thinking when responding to higher-order questions
- Expand children's understanding of the world and heighten awareness of others
- Develop imagination and problem-solving skills
- Help children learn about diversity and fairness
- Introduce children to the big ideas, messages, themes, and concepts found in literature
- Support content in subject areas such as social studies, science, math, and the arts
- Engage children in meaningful book discussions

Rereading Books

With such a long list of benefits, this is a practice that not only can be done every day, but also lends itself to taking a deeper dive into the selected texts. Blueprint lessons normally include more than one IRA lesson using the same book. Rereading books in IRA lessons allows you to approach a book through a different lens and in service of another teaching point. Also:

Children love rereading their favorite books! By revisiting their favorite books, children gain more of the predictability and comfort they love. Hearing books read aloud several times helps children to appreciate them more intimately.

The more chances children get to listen to and look at a book, the more they notice, which gives them more to think and talk about. For example, they may figure out what an unfamiliar word means, or they may notice repeated patterns.

Rereading builds confidence. Listening to books repeatedly allows young readers to internalize the stories and structures, which builds their repertoire of important pre-reading skills.

Structure of an IRA

"Our intentional acts of teaching will lead them to new understandings." - Fountas & Pinnell, Literacy Beginnings

Intentional Read Alouds are purposeful in that both the book and objective are thoughtfully planned ahead of time. How can we continue to be intentional when actually implementing the lesson? The structure of an IRA lesson is organized by what the teacher and the children do before, during, and after reading the book. Here are some key aspects of what can take place during each component:

Structure	What You Can Do	Example from Blueprint (Unit 6: "Mix & Make" Day 6)
Before Reading	- Invite children to the rug. - Build or access children's background knowledge of the book, topic, or concept. - Read the title, author, and illustrator. - Call attention to part of the book: cover, author blurb, table of contents, etc. - Set the purpose for listening and responding. - Invite children to make predictions. - Occasionally take a picture walk. - Potentially discuss pertinent vocabulary.	- We are learning about bubbles. Let's pretend to blow bubbles now... - Today we are going to read a book called Bubbles, both written and illustrated by Kit Chase. Look at the picture on the front cover. What do you notice? - We see a little kangaroo [point] on the ground and a koala [point] in the tree. Both animals are blowing bubbles. - Think for a moment about what might happen in this book. If you would like to share your prediction, please sign "I predict" [demonstrate]. You can say, "I predict..." - You are getting ready to read by predicting. Let's find out what happens in Bubbles!

During Reading	- Hold the book open so that everyone can see the pictures.
	- Model reading with fluency and expression.
	- Explicitly teach preselected vocabulary words.
	- Facilitate comprehension by asking questions.
	- Think aloud to demonstrate the literacy objective and other reading strategies.
	- Engage the children and invite them to actively participate in the lesson.
		- Pause 1:
		  - Kangaroo sees bubbles that are mysterious. Can you say "mysterious"? Let's find the beats or syllables in that word: mys-te-ri-ous. When something is mysterious, it seems strange. You don't know about it or understand it. Let's add "mysterious" to the list of words we are learning. Do you know any words that mean the same thing?
		  - How are these bubbles mysterious to Kangaroo? Yes, she doesn't know where they are coming from.
		  - Where do you think the bubbles are coming from? What do you think Kangaroo will do next? If you would like to share your prediction, sign "I predict." Say, "I predict..."
		- Pause 2:
		  - Kangaroo sees more bubbles floating through the air. Did she blow these bubbles? Who do you think is blowing them? Why?
		  - Think about what Kangaroo might do next. If you would like to share your prediction, sign "I predict." Say, "I predict..."
		- Pause 3:
		  - What do you predict will happen next? Sign "I predict" if you'd like to share...

After Reading	Reinforce the objective. Discuss and respond to the book. Check for understanding by asking open-ended questions.	- Kangaroo and Koala blew so many bubbles in this book. They also popped the big bubble monster! - Let's pretend to pop a big bubble monster too! Use your hands to make a round shape in front of you, like a bubble [demonstrate]. Blow three times to make the bubble grow bigger, bigger, bigger, and then clap your hands together one time and say, "Pop!" Let's try it together...

Engagement

Once you know what book to read and what objective to teach, it is important to be intentional about how to engage children in the lesson. How do you invite children to participate in read alouds? What are some ways you make reading aloud interactive? How can you appeal to the needs of diverse learners? Using a variety of engagement techniques appeals to different learning styles, such as visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic. Some effective and fun engagement strategies include:

- Choral reading/join in reading a repeating refrain (i.e. "Good food makes me strong!")
- Oral cloze in a rhyming book or predictable text (i.e. "…a very busy tree, come and…")
- Incorporating the use of relevant props (i.e. hold up character stick puppets)
- Act out key parts of the book (i.e. spin your arms each time the truck mixes)
- Create, add to, or refer to a relevant chart (i.e. What else are we learning about farms?)

All of these engagement strategies provide opportunities for children to actively participate in a read aloud and to enhance their reading experience. You would not do all of these things every time you read a book. However, you can be intentional about what strategies you use with a particular book, for a specific teaching point, and with your unique group of children!

Comprehension

The reason we seek to engage all children in an IRA lesson is to support their comprehension of the book. Comprehension is the ability to read or listen to and understand text. It is how children make meaning of print. Simply put, it is the ultimate goal of reading! In Unit 1: "Building Our Classroom Community," the first week of IRA lessons focuses on what children can do to understand the book. In particular, we teach them how to look at the pictures, listen to the words, and think about the book. This sets the foundation for all future lessons and broader reading experiences.

As we know, IRA is structured to support children in thinking and talking about books before, during, and after reading. Therefore, it is also important to be intentional about when to stop to think and talk with children about the book. A good estimate for the number of times you should stop in an IRA lesson is three (depending on the length of the book, the lesson, children's engagement, etc.). When you are rehearsing a lesson, you can mark the pages where you plan to stop with sticky notes to help you remember when to pause and what to say or do. Plan pauses to:

Model Your Thinking:

A hallmark of an Intentional Read Aloud is that the teacher models their thinking. As an experienced reader, the teacher makes transparent to children how they understand a book, what questions they ask, and what connections they make to the text. In Blueprint, each IRA includes at least one stopping point where it is suggested the teacher model their thinking. Often, but not always, the teacher's thinking aloud links directly to the lesson's teaching point.

Use American Sign Language:

Children learn to use American Sign Language (ASL) to signal when and how they are thinking about a text. The thinking readers do is internal; using ASL sign helps children show their thinking (and helps teachers "see" their children's thinking). It also strengthens communication among teachers and children who may speak different home languages. Using sign language can also help to address a variety of learning styles, such as visual and kinesthetic.

Have Children Turn and Talk:

Turn and Talk provides a forum for children to process and enhance their comprehension. It is an effective engagement practice because it gives

all children a chance to share their ideas in a more intimate setting (with a peer) and feel that their ideas are valued. Teach children how to turn and talk, sitting "knee to knee" and "eye to eye" with their partner. Also teach a signal to guide them in taking turns listening and speaking. Encourage children to share with a partner who speaks the same home language.

Ask Questions:

Ask children questions before, during, and after reading a book. Have them to refer to the text when responding to some of the questions. Questions should not be interrogations; rather they should lead to discussion and promote oral language development. Different kinds of questions include: literal (check for comprehension), inferential (require a deeper level of understanding), and open-ended (think more critically about the text). Children can respond in a variety of ways as well, based on their skills in the language of instruction. They might use a gesture (thumbs up), say "yes" or "no," or give a more elaborate response.

Spotlight on "Readers Can Say"

In Blueprint, over the course of units 1-3, we build the anchor chart titled "Readers Can Say." This chart displays the signs and corresponding sentence stems, or sentence starters, for key ways that children can think and talk about books. The more familiar children become with using these signs and stems, the more they will begin to internalize these strategies as they grow as readers.

The ASL signs and sentence stems featured in Blueprint include:

- I like…
- I predict…
- I remember…
- I learned…
- I see…
- I wonder…

Using sentence stems expands children's comprehension skills as well as oral language development. Sentence starters, such as "I like…" provide a framework for children's oral responses. Sentence stems provide an effective language model and help children to respond in the form of a complete sentence. Stems also provide scaffolding for children to focus more on what they want to say, rather than thinking about how to formulate their response.

Spotlight on Turn and Talk

When Children Turn and Talk:

- Be strategic in how you pair children. Pair children new to English with a trusted peer and/or a child who speaks the same home language. Remember, all multilingual learners, whether they are new English language learners or completely fluent in English, benefit from talking with a partner who speaks the same home language. Thinking and sharing in both of their languages solidifies their learning.
- Give children time to think before they turn and talk to each other. This strategy slows children down so that they don't necessarily say the first thing they think of.
- Children may turn and talk about ideas that seem off-topic to you. Delve into their conversation to find out what prompted their thinking. You can also gently redirect the conversation. You might repeat the question or prompt. Begin thinking aloud about the topic at hand, and then invite children to continue building on the idea.
- Bring the book with you as you listen in on a partnership. Invite children to locate the page and point to the picture that is sparking their thinking. Model referring to specific parts of the book to prompt more conversation or ask further questions.
- Use parallel talk to facilitate conversations between children. Restate what you hear children say to reinforce their ideas. This gives children another opportunity to practice actively listening to their partner's ideas before offering a response.
- Assess their comprehension. Choose one partnership to focus on. Listen to what the children are saying and/or observe how they are responding.

Spotlight on Open-Ended Questions

Here are some examples of effective open-ended question stems:

- What do you think?
- Can you say more about it?
- What might happen if …?
- Have you ever…?
- Do you remember when …?
- What do you know about …?
- What might you do if …?
- What do you think the character might be thinking/saying?
- What made you think that?
- How do you know?

Teaching Vocabulary

"Perhaps the greatest tools we can give students for succeeding, not only in their education but more generally in life, is a large, rich vocabulary and the skills for using those words." Templeton & Pikulski

To comprehend a book, a reader needs to know 85% of the words. It is clear that having a large number of words in your vocabulary is strongly correlated to how well you understand what you read. Children come to school with vast differences in the amount of words they know. Luckily, we know that preschool is the ideal time to develop a child's vocabulary.

The Intentional Read Aloud offers a platform for growing children's:

- Receptive vocabulary: words we hear or read
- Expressive vocabulary: words we say and write

Simply exposing children to the language in books by reading aloud can help to broaden children's vocabulary. However, to be more intentional about developing their receptive and expressive vocabularies, we suggest explicitly teaching one to three pre-selected words from each book. Our selected vocabulary words are what Isabel Beck calls Tier 2 words in her book Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction.

- Tier 1 words: everyday speech, not considered a challenge to average native speakers
- Tier 2 words: appear more often in written texts than in speech, subtle or precise words that authors use in place of more common, familiar words
- Tier 3 words: specific to a domain or field of study, appear more often in informational texts than in literature, often explicitly defined by the author of a text

Vocabulary words are purposefully selected because they are essential to a deeper comprehension of the book, and also are usable in children's lives. In each unit, teachers and children build a chart of new Tier 2 words called "Words We Are Learning." Charting the words allows for more frequent reference and repeated exposure to the words.

The "Words We Are Learning" chart and children's vocabulary development also become multilingual. Each time you introduce a new word, invite multilingual children in your class to share the words they use at home for these ideas if they are familiar with them (which they may or may not be). Making connections to words they already know and new English terms will support language acquisition. A translation app or website can assist with spelling.

In addition to charting the words, we also need to be intentional about how we teach them. Helping children associate a word with a visual or an action gives the word context and helps them remember the meaning. Instructional supports include using:

- Visuals such as pictures, drawings, or real-world objects
- Gestures, pantomime, and role play to "act out" the word

Just as vocabulary words arise from the authentic context of IRA, we can authentically connect the words to other parts of the school day. When a word can be used multiple times in multiple contexts, children will better retain its meaning. Children learn words incrementally, getting a more accurate fix on a word every time they see or hear it. Frequency is the key to vocabulary development. You can reinforce words by:

- Highlighting or repeating the word during other instructional practices (i.e. During MTP, take a deeper dive into understanding and using a word from an IRA book.)
- Using applicable words in conversation with children at Center Time (i.e. Doesn't this mud feel "oozy"? That's just like the muddy swamp we read about!)
- Incorporating the words into class transitions (i.e. Let's "creep" to the cubbies.)

Spotlight on Words We Are Learning

Here is a list of IRA books and the suggested "Words We Are Learning" from Unit 9: "Look Up!"

IRA Book Title	Tier 2 Vocabulary Words	Child-friendly Definition
Up, Up, Up!	blend	to mix or blur together
Picture the Sky by	masterpiece background	a great work of art what is behind the objects in a picture or scene
Clouds: A Compare and Contrast Book	wispy	light and floaty
Rain	gushed cracked	flowed or poured out quickly showing lines from splitting without coming apart
What the Sun Sees/What the Moon Sees	bustling	busy and moving
Max and the Tag-Along Moon	orb	sphere
One World, One Day	horizon	the line where the sky seems to meet the earth
Hey-Ho, to Mars We'll Go!	launch	to take off; start a big move
Mission to Space	mission	an important trip

Be Responsive

For an IRA lesson, invite children to gather in your classroom's large group meeting area. To make your physical space an optimal learning environment, teach and practice procedures that support all children being able to engage with the lesson. As mentioned, encourage them to look at the pictures, listen to the words and think about the book. However, remember to provide choices and be flexible to meet the needs of individual learners. For example:

- Children need to move far more frequently than adults. Additionally, their muscles are still developing, and some children may not be physically able to remain in one position for lengths of time. Be sensitive to their needs and wiggly movements.
- Accommodate children's different ways to sit comfortably and focus on the book. Many children can sit with their legs crossed on the rug the whole time. But others may prefer to sit on a cushion, carpet square, hula hoop, stool, or child- sized a comfortable chair.
- Make accommodations for children with special needs. For example, position your furniture so a child using a wheelchair, for example, can be part of the group at the rug.
- A typical IRA lesson should last approximately 10 minutes. You may notice behaviors that signal your children are not focusing on the book. These may include: lack of attention, increased activity, or sleepiness. These can be signs that children need a "brain break." It may be time to move on to a different activity!
- When children sit on the rug, they may discover items that grab their attention, such as pieces of string or broken crayons. To help them focus on the lesson, suggest they put these items in a Discovery Box that lives in the science center, where they can explore these items later. This is one way to show respect for their curiosity.
- Consider doing a movement activity before asking children to listen to a book to balance active and passive activities.
- Classroom assistants can help keep children engaged. Ask them to sit with a child and model what readers do by whispering into their ear things like: "Oh, I wonder what will happen next?" or "I'm listening very carefully so I won't miss this next part."

Preparing for IRA

In your Blueprint curriculum, daily IRA lessons are outlined. To prepare to teach them, consider the following steps:

- In your teaching guide, preview the week of IRAs to find out which books you will read on which days, how many times you will read each book, what the objective is for each lesson, and how the books relate to each other and the topic of the week.

- Pre-read the books. First, read the book to yourself to get the gist of the content, both in the words and in the pictures. Then practice reading it aloud, either to yourself or another adult. This allows you to rehearse fluent, expressive reading to model for the children. It also gives you the chance to practice pronouncing any unfamiliar words.
- Read the lesson plans in your teaching guide. Explore potential modifications. Do you need to teach or reinforce procedures associated with the read aloud lesson? Do you need to adapt the lesson for your group of children (e.g. younger learners, individual learners)? How do you think your children will respond? What will you do or say in response?
- Remember to plan your stopping points by posting a sticky note on each page, perhaps with a written reminder of what to say and do.
- Check the lesson sidebars to find out if you need to make or prepare anything for the lesson (i.e. Do you need to review how to do an ASL sign on the Blueprint website?). Make sure you have all of the necessary materials in your large group meeting area (i.e. We often refer to the "Readers Can Say anchor chart).
- Sidebars often contain additional information. Read the tips and blurbs that can support instruction of that particular lesson. Learn ways to enhance and extend the content of the book and the learning that takes place in IRA. Maybe the author has a website to explore, or your children would enjoy an outdoor activity related to the book.

Long after children leave the rug, the effects of the Intentional Read Aloud linger in their minds and lives: gathering with other readers, learning thematic content, connecting with memorable characters, asking fascinating questions. IRA inspires children's critical thinking and sparks potent discussions. It is a joyful and worthwhile practice that broadens children's perspectives, and enriches their relationship with themselves, others, and the world.

BLUEPRINT
For Early Learning

Chapter 15
Small Group Instruction

Small Group is an invitation to learn in a small, easily adaptable environment. Small Group lessons provide teachers opportunities to individualize instruction and respond to children's needs. As teachers guide children through Small Group, they welcome their questions or ideas and adjust by slowing down to linger on a concept or adapt for children who have acquired a skill. For children, small group time is when they work with their teacher and peers in a collaborative setting, with many opportunities to participate, work with materials, and make decisions.

The activities of Small Group are hands on and adaptable. Lesson plans contain multiple opportunities for active engagement and multiple entry points for children based on their individual strengths and needs. The teaching points are primarily STEAM focused (STEAM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, art, and math). They are always connected to the thematic content of the curriculum. This helps children to link learning across the instructional areas of the curriculum. In this way, mathematical or scientific learning, for example, is not separate and disjointed, but rather woven in to the topic of each unit.

In Small Group, children are encouraged to wonder and explore in engaging, fun learning experiences. They count, compare, and make sense of numbers. They are also given problems and invited to ask questions, make plans, test ideas, and improve their ideas. Table X provides some sample activities in different learning areas.

Variety in Learning Areas Addressed and Variety in Activities:

- Math- Children scoop a handful of teddy bear counters and count (unit 2), stack and compare towers of linking cubes (unit 4), and create patterns with animal cards (unit 5).
- Science- Children investigate fruit with different types of seeds (unit 7) and explore how shadows are made (unit 9).
- Art- Children create a rain stick (unit 9) and draw self-portraits (unit 10).
- Technology and Engineering- Children build an obstacle course for toy cars (unit 3) and design a blueprint for a cow bell (unit 5).
- Social Studies- Children explore maps and use one to go on a treasure hunt in the classroom (unit 3).

Small Group lessons are often planned to build or expand on teaching points and concepts over several days. For example, when learning about building, children investigate materials. In one lesson, they explore, sort, and count materials in a building materials collection. In related Small Groups, they investigate the same materials to determine if they are transparent and/or waterproof.

In Small Group lessons, there are multiple entry points for children to be active in the lesson, no matter their skill level. Small Group sidebars offer teachers ways to be flexible and adapt lessons to meet their children's skills and needs. Exploration and learning in Small Group is documented through pictures, charts, and children's Science Journals.

Small Group- Why Is It Important?

Small Group is an ideal setting to get to know your children, provide time for them to share their ideas and thoughts, and to take note on ways you can develop their understandings about skills and concepts. These opportunities alone are important for growing pre-kindergarten children's social and academic learning. In addition, this block of time in your day is valuable for the following:

Small Group is Collaborative- Teacher's act as a guide through children's inquiry and investigation of STEAM concepts during Small Group. This collaborative approach offers children ample invitations to share their ideas, thoughts, and learning.

Small Group is Responsive- Small Group lessons can be adapted to children's skills and understandings along learning progressions in various content areas. Teacher's can choose to

adjust their pacing and spend more time building background knowledge for children that need it. Or, teachers can use the suggestions on how to stretch children's thinking to the next concept or understanding, if they are ready. Small Group lessons are sequenced using learning progressions but teachers have the flexibility to spend more time on specific skills based on observations of children's work.

Small Group is Hands On- Small Group lessons are highly engaging because they use authentic and purposeful materials! Children are excited to use and explore various collections they participate in making such as the Kitchen Tool Collection Box and a rock collection.

Small Group- How Is It Structured?

Small Group lessons have the following components: Build Interest, Build Understanding, and Build Experience. This structure invites children to engage with a specific topic or concept and build knowledge through active engagement. Here's how each section works:

The Build Interest is meant to spark curiosity and excitement about the topic, learning, or investigation of the day! This component begins by connecting to the thematic learning or to the classroom culture. Then, lessons engage children through several strategies that get children excited about the exploration or investigation.

For example, in unit 3 children engage in a Small Group problem-solving lesson. In the Build Interest, the teacher reminds children that they have been collecting items from nature from the community (a tie to the theme of the unit, "Exploring Our Local Community.") Then, the teacher shows a bucket the children have been using and points out the handle is broken and missing. The teacher gets children invested in the lesson by asking open-ended questions such as, "How are we going to carry the bucket?" and "How can we solve this problem?"

More Strategies to Build Children's Interest:

- Exploring new materials. For example, in unit 2 children roll dice and count out quantities of snack. In the Build Interest, the teacher distributes dice and invites children to explore. Children discuss what they notice about dice, talk about when they have used them, and practice rolling. Previewing materials and giving children time to engage ahead of time with new items helps children stay focused later in the lesson.
- Playing games. For example, in unit 5 when playing farm animal board games with dice, the teacher distributes dice and invites children to try to roll a two.
- Invitations to share. In unit 7 children learn about food and participate in some investigations about cooked and uncooked foods. The Build Interest in three lessons invite children to share their experience with, cooking, and eating specific foods like rice and green beans.
- Connecting to Science Journals. In unit 8, children participate in a design challenge to build a sturdy nest. On the day they are building their nest, the lesson begins with children reviewing blueprints that were sketched in their Science Journal.
- Wondering aloud about a new concept or idea. In unit 9, children learn about the sky. To prepare children in a lesson about clouds, the teacher says, "I wonder, how does water form a cloud?"
- Revisiting read alouds. For example, in unit 4 when children are learning about construction sites, the teacher shows a page from the read aloud Building a House, then aks, "Why are walls important?"

Now that children are curious about the topic, the lesson expands on the topic with the next component, Build Understanding. During this section, teachers connect to what children already know to help explain the activity or investigation. They often begin by restating or summarizing what children said, did, or noticed in Build Interest. Then teachers bridge this knowledge to new understandings. During this time, teachers collaborate with children in a variety of ways to scaffold and guide them. Children are always active participants in this section of the lesson.

This is also an opportunity for guided practice, where teachers can adjust the lesson, what they say and do, based on children's responses and understandings of key ideas and concepts. During Build Understanding teachers can determine how to offer support by using scaffolding techniques such as:

- Asking questions- Why do you think…
- Modeling- I'll try it and then you try.
- Suggesting a range of ideas or answers to consider- Would you like to try ___ or ____.

Think back to the unit 3 lesson about the missing bucket handle. In Build Understanding, the teacher discusses the children's thinking and summarizes that when a bucket is full, the handle might break off. Then, the teacher brings out chart paper and markers to make a list of children's ideas about how to solve the problem. This includes encouraging children to make note of the materials they would like to try.

Ways the Build Understanding Is Collaborative:

- Children help choose materials or items. For example, in unit 6 children make mixtures. Instead of watching the teacher model a mixture, they collaborate with the teacher to make the mixture. Children choose which materials they want to mix first from a collection the teacher has gathered or from materials they have brought to the group.
- Children learn about and play a game with the teacher. In unit 8, children hop like a kangaroo along a paper number line on the floor. Children are invited to hop along the number line as they learn how to play the game.
- Children engage in a discussion with the teacher and their peers. For example, in unit 2 children view self-portraits by several artists. The teacher invites them to share what they notice.

Teachers give children time to work on the investigation or activity during the Build Experience. Children are encouraged to choose how they want to work and whom they will work with. Teachers continue to offer guidance, encouragement, and gentle nudges as children gain experience.

For example, in unit 3 when children are exploring how to fix a broken handle on a bucket, the teacher gives children time to work. They choose their own materials, make their own plan, and get to work to fix that broken bucket handle! Teachers invite active engagement (thinking, learning, and doing) by asking questions such as:

- Show me how you want to begin. Oh look! You are [adding a piece of string, tape, etc.]. Let's try it! I wonder if [model observing and formulating questions].
- Are you [adding a piece of string, tape, etc.], or are you [using a rod, ribbon, etc.]? Let's try it! Does this help us lift the bucket, or should we try something else?
- How will you begin? What materials do you need? How will you see if your plan worked?

To wrap up the lesson, teachers bring the group together to restate objectives and invite children to share their learning. In many science investigations, children are invited to reflect in their Science Journals. Teachers have already added a copy of the Science Journal reflection page to their notebook. This page has questions that teachers read to children, which can be used to help guide them as they draw or write.

Returning, again, to our example from unit 3, the teacher concludes the lesson with a summary. Lessons offer open-ended sentence starters to help guide the discussion for the unique experiences of your children during the small group exploration. Children are invited to contribute their ideas to the wrap up!

Ways to Summarize Small Group Learning- :

- We wondered…
- We tried…
- We discovered…

Spotlight on Science Journals

Beginning in Unit 2, children use a journal to record their thinking during science focused Small Group lessons. These journals (created out of a composition book, notebook, etc.) provide a place for children to draw and write their reflections from lessons. They are an authentic science tool; scientists record their thinking, ask questions, analyze data and draw conclusions as part of their work as well.

Consult the sidebars of Small Group lessons to see which lessons include science journals. The sidebar contains the name of the journal page and reminds you to download the related resource page from the portal, print, and insert into children's journals. Attaching them to children's science journals before the lesson saves time.

The journal pages themselves include a range of open-ended reflection questions that can be read to children to help prompt their drawing and writing. Keep the journals in the science center, so children can use them when they choose. Revisit the

science journals frequently to affirm how children use them. Science Journals are one more source of data, providing you with insight into children's growing understanding of science concepts and their developmental stage of writing. They can also be sent home so families can see what their children are learning and doing.

How Do You Prepare for a Small Group Lesson?

When you begin to create your space for Small Group lessons, two key elements to start with are location and set up. Small Group lessons might take place at a designated area of the classroom or be in flexible locations. Depending on the type of Small Group lesson, you may meet children at a table, in a center, or gather them on the rug. As you prepare for Small Group, think about what makes most sense for the lesson you are planning and your classroom's unique needs.

Supplies for Small Group lessons will vary though, typically, they are items commonly found in Pre-K classrooms such as markers, paper and blocks as well as upcycled materials such as cardboard tubes and empty containers. Ask families to participate in sending in some of these items – leave a bin by your door where they can drop them off. In the lesson plan sidebars, materials are listed in detail. In addition, check the week in review for materials that you want children to bring from home (such as stuffed animals or toy cars) or that you can gather from nature with your children such as leaves and pine cones. As you plan for a week of Small Groups, prepare and store needed materials ahead of time in an organized way. In addition, you will want to have your observation binder handy for recording children's strengths and needs.

Because Small Group addresses a variety of instructional areas, your groupings might change based on the content area. To prepare for a week of Small Group lessons, you'll want to preview the teaching points and standards and reflect on how you will create the groups. Will you adjust groupings based on children's background knowledge or assessment data? Make notes about groupings ahead of time will help to ensure Small Group lessons are targeted, effective and engaging.

To prepare for individual Small Group lessons, make sure to pre-read the plan. Just like you will with the other content areas, start with the sidebar so that you understand the materials you will need. It is possible you will be gathering items from center areas such as math or science. You might want to tell children that you have borrowed the linking cubes, in case they are looking for them! In addition, you might need to make cards for a math lesson or even bring materials from home or ask families to contribute to a collection. If you need to download materials from the Blueprint website, check to see if you need copies and prepare the correct amount so that each child in your group has what they need. This includes preparing pages to attach to the Science Journal.

Small Group sidebars have three unique and extremely valuable sections: Build Background Knowledge, Stretch Their Thinking, and Listen/Look For. Build Background Knowledge provides a prompt to help children access the information in the lesson or practice before the lesson. After reading this section and looking at your Observation Binder, you might adapt the lesson to spend more time with a concept ahead of the lesson. Stretch Their Thinking is a way to extend the lesson for children that are ready. Listen/Look For are questions that will help guide you as you observe and record how children work during the lesson.

Sidebars also contain other tips, including ways to prepare for the lesson, scaffold children, respond to needs, and more. Reading the sidebar and tips ahead of the lesson will help you prepare to meet children's needs.

After reading the sidebar, it is important to preview and read through the lesson.

Imagine what children might do during the Build Interest. Have they used the materials before? Do you anticipate a lively discussion or lots of questions?

Think through the Build Understanding. What might children say or do as they learn a new game or explore a new topic? What might they need more practice with?

Finally, what will children need during the Build Experience? Any extra supports, more time? What will you do to extend the lesson and keep the concepts going in your classroom?

Spotlight on Using Data to Inform Instruction

Data, or the collection of information about children's learning, is an essential tool teacher's use to adapt their lessons to meet the instructional needs of the classroom. Blueprint for Early Learning suggests teachers use several tools for data

collection during Small Group. Let's take a look:

- Observation Binders- This tool is an anecdotal notebook that teacher's use to write down what they notice about individual children. Observation binders are excellent places to write narratives of children's experience with materials. Every Small Group lesson sidebar includes a section called "Listen/Look for." These are questions to guide your observations and note taking. For example, in unit 4 when children sort building materials, the Listen/Look for suggests observing: Are children able to explain how they sorted? and How do children count and compare quantities of materials sorted?
- Science Journals- These are created in unit 2 and used during many science Small Groups. They are a place for children to record their thinking and learning. Teacher's can refer to these journals as they seek to understand children's engagement and learning with the content of Small Group lessons.
- Photographs and charts- Teachers use photographs to document children's learning during Small Group lesson. In addition, they create charts with children to record their ideas. The input children have on charts can help to determine whether concepts need reinforcing or review.
- The online portal also contains many other formal and informal assessment tools to help guide your strategic grouping and planning.

Spotlight on Layered Questioning

Many Small Group lessons incorporate examples of layered questioning. Layered questions offer you a menu of different types of questions you can ask children to ensure that all children understand and participate, regardless of their level of language development. For example, a lesson in Unit 5: Life on the Farm, where children create patterns with farm animal cards, contains layered questions. During the Build Experience, the following teacher language from the lesson highlights four types of questions:

- Gesture: Point to the [animal] card that you want to start with. Point to the [animal] card that comes next. Thumbs up/down: is this a pattern?
- Yes/No: Do you want to start with the [animal] card? Does the [animal] card come next? Is this a pattern?
- Either/Or: Do you want to start with the [animal] card or the [animal] card? Does the [animal] card come next, or does the [animal] card come next? Is this a pattern, or is this not a pattern?
- Open-ended: Describe your pattern. How will you check to see that it is a true pattern?

Spotlight on Games

Game playing is an engaging and exciting activity for four and five year olds! Small Group lessons are the perfect environment for giving children practice with skills and concepts through games. Game playing provides opportunities for children to work with new materials like dice, game boards, and playing cards. Children often work with partners but can also choose to play individually. Game playing encourages critical thinking and cooperation as children learn rules and follow multi-step directions.

Here are some examples of games playing in Small Group:

- In unit 2, children learn about 10 frames, a counting tool with five empty squares on top and five on the bottom. Children fill the frames with counters. In a Small Group lesson, children play a game where they match their 10 frames to look like the teachers.
- In unit 3, children play the game "Match the Pebbles." They choose a numeral card, find the matching numbered cup, and fill a cup with the quantity of pebbles.
- In unit 5, children play board games such as "Horse on the Farm" in which they roll dice and move along on the game board.
- In unit 7, children play the game "Who Has More?" using a number line and numeral cards. They compare numbers on each player's card to determine who has the higher number.

Spotlight on Design-Based Learning

Design projects, which foster creative problem-solving skills, are thematically incorporated into three units in the Blueprint Curriculum. Each inquiry based, child-led project takes place over several consecutive Small Group lessons. The design process is introduced in Unit 4: "We Are Architects!" Children read books that feature characters implementing the design process themselves. For example, in The Little Red Fort,

the main character Ruby designs and builds a fort. This book acts as a springboard to create the Unit Chart: "How to Design." The design process is written in the following developmentally appropriate terms: plan, build, try it out!

Children continue to observe more characters plan and build during read alouds. In Small Group lessons, children work through the design process, too. Children are given the challenge to use classroom building materials to create a strong house – one that will stand even when it is blown on! Lessons unfold over the course of five lessons:

- Children test out materials to see what happens when they blow on them.
- Children plan their house by sketching a blueprint.
- Children build their house with classroom building materials.
- Children test their house by blowing on it.
- Children redesign, strengthen, or help another classmate improve a house.

Children participate in a design challenge in unit 5 when they build a cow bell that will make noise when they move, and then in unit 8 when they design a safe nest that will stay balanced. In the design challenge, children are invited to build something specific (for example, a house or a nest) with a particular objective (for example, so it won't blow down, to balance) but are not told HOW to build it. They use what they are learning about concepts such as material strength, items that make noise, and shapes and sizes of nests, and apply these to their own design.

It is important to note that during these design challenges, it may be difficult for children to see their structure fall or not work they way they intended. An important role for the teacher as facilitator of these experiences it to stress the importance of the redesign. Your guidance helps children to see their successes, even in failures, and build stamina and grit as children persist with the task of trying again.