



Environmental Support for Positive Behavior Management

Physical and Programmatic Arrangement

The hard copy version of this packet contains the following article:

Nordquist, V.M. & Twardosz, S. (1990). Preventing behavior problems in early childhood special education classrooms through environmental organization. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 13 (4), 274-287.

Kansas Inservice Training System (1998)
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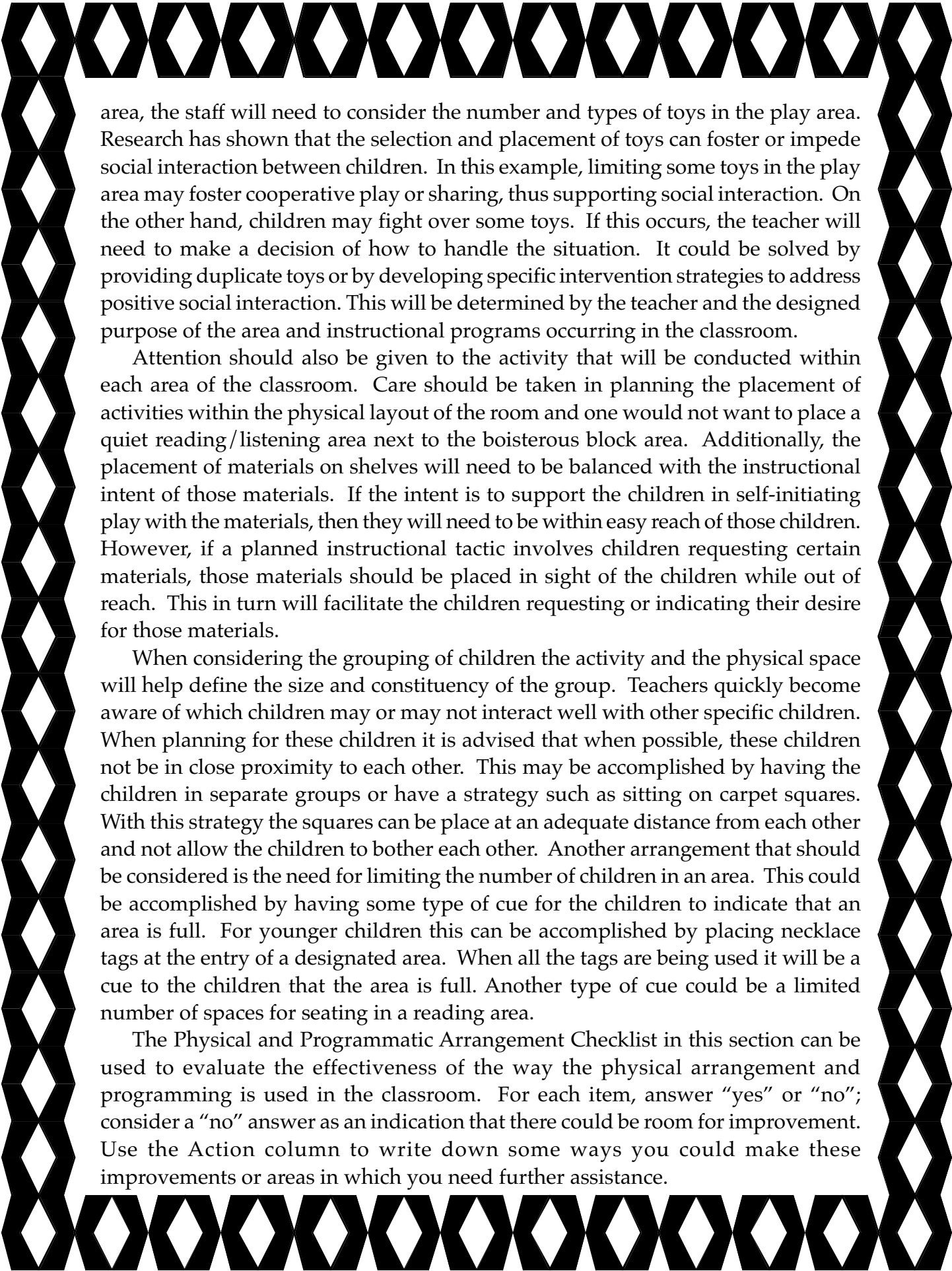
Physical and Programmatic Arrangement

The physical arrangement and programmatic structure of a classroom are pivotal features in developing an environment that supports learning and promotes positive child behavior. Children learn through active engagement and interaction with the social (e.g., peers, adults) and nonsocial (e.g., schedule, materials, activities) components of their environment (McEvoy, Fox, & Rosenberg, 1991). These features of the environment must be clearly designed to support teacher directed instruction, be sensitive and responsive to learning activities initiated by children, promote engagement with learning materials and other people in the environment, and support identified and desired learning outcomes for each child. With effective planning and implementation, these features will provide the necessary cues for children as to what behavior(s) are expected and what activities are to occur in a given physical area of the classroom and at a given time. The accompanying article by Nordquist and Twardosz (1990) outlines some of the essential features of effective Physical and Programmatic Arrangement.

Considerations for the physical arrangement of the classroom are inclusive of the layout of the physical space, placement of the furniture, equipment, toys and materials, and personal items in such a way to maximize the utility of that space. By focusing on these physical characteristics, opportunities for learning will be maximized while the potential for inappropriate behavior will be minimized. Factors that will need to be considered regarding the physical arrangement are further determined by a number of parameters including age and number of children in a classroom, the types of planned activities to occur within the classroom, and special needs or accommodations required by the children in that classroom.

Classrooms should be physically arranged to provide specific and well-defined areas. The purpose of a planned physical arrangement is to support efficient traffic patterns and to divide the classroom into areas clearly designed for structured activities (e.g., small group, individual activities) or less structured activities (e.g., free time, dramatic play). While the utilization of furniture may be used to define these areas, these barriers must not prohibit communication with or visual observation of all children. The Sample Early Childhood Map provides an example of a well-designed classroom.

Each designed area should also support the activity for which it was designed while providing sufficient and appropriate space for children. For example, an area designed to promote social interaction between children will be smaller than an area designed to promote large muscle activity. Further, the materials in the area should support the activity. If social interaction is a desired outcome for an



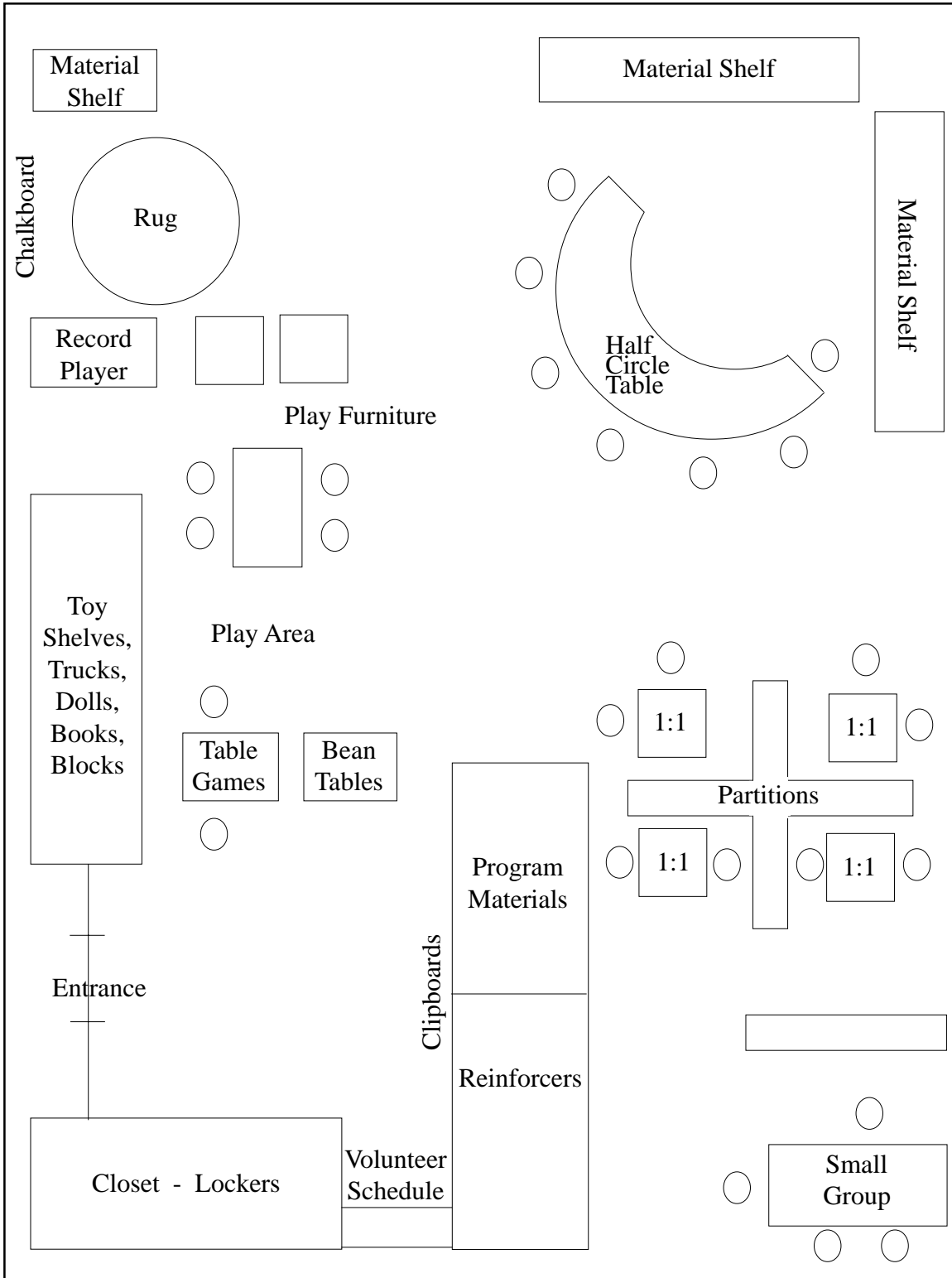
area, the staff will need to consider the number and types of toys in the play area. Research has shown that the selection and placement of toys can foster or impede social interaction between children. In this example, limiting some toys in the play area may foster cooperative play or sharing, thus supporting social interaction. On the other hand, children may fight over some toys. If this occurs, the teacher will need to make a decision of how to handle the situation. It could be solved by providing duplicate toys or by developing specific intervention strategies to address positive social interaction. This will be determined by the teacher and the designed purpose of the area and instructional programs occurring in the classroom.

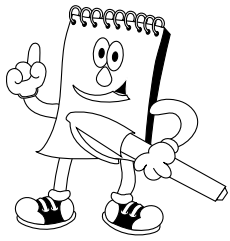
Attention should also be given to the activity that will be conducted within each area of the classroom. Care should be taken in planning the placement of activities within the physical layout of the room and one would not want to place a quiet reading/listening area next to the boisterous block area. Additionally, the placement of materials on shelves will need to be balanced with the instructional intent of those materials. If the intent is to support the children in self-initiating play with the materials, then they will need to be within easy reach of those children. However, if a planned instructional tactic involves children requesting certain materials, those materials should be placed in sight of the children while out of reach. This in turn will facilitate the children requesting or indicating their desire for those materials.

When considering the grouping of children the activity and the physical space will help define the size and constituency of the group. Teachers quickly become aware of which children may or may not interact well with other specific children. When planning for these children it is advised that when possible, these children not be in close proximity to each other. This may be accomplished by having the children in separate groups or have a strategy such as sitting on carpet squares. With this strategy the squares can be placed at an adequate distance from each other and not allow the children to bother each other. Another arrangement that should be considered is the need for limiting the number of children in an area. This could be accomplished by having some type of cue for the children to indicate that an area is full. For younger children this can be accomplished by placing necklace tags at the entry of a designated area. When all the tags are being used it will be a cue to the children that the area is full. Another type of cue could be a limited number of spaces for seating in a reading area.

The Physical and Programmatic Arrangement Checklist in this section can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the way the physical arrangement and programming is used in the classroom. For each item, answer “yes” or “no”; consider a “no” answer as an indication that there could be room for improvement. Use the Action column to write down some ways you could make these improvements or areas in which you need further assistance.

Sample Early Childhood Classroom Map





Physical & Programmatic Arrangement Checklist

Is the classroom arranged to promote positive behavior?

Things to consider:	Yes	No	Comment/Suggestions:
1. Are most play areas large enough for social and parallel play?			
2. Is the environment arranged so that areas and tables are physically accessible by adults and children providing enough entry room, sturdy chairs, and enough floor room?			
3. Does placement of furniture facilitate movement from area to area (e.g. space for wheelchair) while at the same time create distinct areas?			
4. Are chairs or mats available to use for seating or group times? Are carpet squares or mats stored near group/circle time area?			
5. Are the boundaries visibly clear for different activity areas?			

Things to consider:	Yes	No	Comment/Suggestions:
6. Are materials provided to keep toys and equipment in a certain space when they are being used?			
7. Is there plenty of room for each child during table activities? Does each child have their own "working space"?			
8. Are "codes" (i.e., photos, pictures, outlines) placed on storage areas to promote using and putting away materials?			
9. Are materials on open, low shelves where children can help themselves?			

Physical and Programmatic Arrangement: Case Study

Description of the child: Zachary is a 4-year old boy with a mild language delay. On occasion, he acts out in the form of taking toys from other children, running away from teachers and is often noncompliant.

Description of the classroom: The preschool classroom has 12 children and two adults, the primary teacher and an assistant. The classroom is a 20 x 20-foot room, in which all classroom activities (except recess) take place.

Problem: At 10:00 the classroom teachers announce to the children that it is playtime. Zachary looks forward to this time more than any other part of the day. He enjoys playing in the clothes box and with the train set. Today, Zachary and Sarah argue over the Peter Pan hat; Zachary crumples the hat and throws it in the trash. Michael has the train and won't let Zachary join in. Zachary tosses the train in the sink.

Solution:

Solution: One solution might be to increase the number of items in each play activity so that there is more than one item for each type. Additional items will provide more opportunities for the children to select from a variety of preferred items. An alternative strategy would be to specifically teach the children to share the items they have, even when they are preferred items. This would have to involve a specific teaching procedure, not simply reminding the children to share. A final solution would be to try to increase the number of activities that are preferred by Zachary. Involving him in the selection of new items or helping him explore new activities might improve his overall play skills and decrease the frequency of his problem behavior.