

# Classroom Environment

Promoting Literacy | Variety of Materials | Home Language | Learning Centers | Cooperative & Self-Directed Learning

You can support student's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development by creating a TK classroom environment that is engaging, promotes movement, is responsive to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of your transitional kindergarteners and is accessible to students with disabilities or special needs. Young learners need engagement in play-based projects that are connected to theme-based integrated curriculum throughout the day. When carefully designed, the classroom environment can extend and reinforce key curricular goals and concepts that students are learning and support healthy brain development. The classroom space you create, individualized to the needs and experiences of your students, will be crucial in helping them get the most out of TK and thus the school years to come. See a [TK webinar](#) and [Power Point presentation](#) on classroom environment for more information.

## Organizing a Classroom to Promote Literacy

Every classroom area and center can include literacy opportunities for students. Strategies can include:

- stocking all areas of the classroom with writing tools and materials to encourage children to write and explore reading during play;
- placing books outdoors to encourage students to read everywhere;
- including writing in various places such as well-labeled bins, names on items around the classroom, lists and children's names in a pocket chart (this provides an organizational structure and student accessibility, and promote an environment rich in print); and
- creating word walls, dictation and observational drawing to support systematic introduction of new vocabulary and comprehension of content and new ideas.



## Variety of Materials



Offering a wide variety of literacy-building materials allows students to manipulate and practice their literacy skills. Materials should be attractive, inviting and relevant to student's interests and culture. Some suggestions are white boards; magnetic boards and letters; clipboards; felt boards with story scenes and characters reflective of multiple cultures; and letters and numbers in a variety of forms and textures. Other manipulatives might include:

- puppets for retelling stories;
- a listening center for listening and speaking activities;
- picture cards with labels for the writing center; and
- magazines and catalogues for collage work.

The list is endless and can be developed throughout the year in conjunction with project-based learning.

## Reflections of Home Language

Home language and English should be consistently, and distinctly, reflected in the classroom. For example, when modeling writing or labeling, purple can always be used to print in Spanish and orange for English. If the home language is spoken in the classroom by the teacher, it should be at consistent times. Avoid back-to-back translation, and instead, use gestures, photographs, realia, movement and songs to convey meaning. Students using home languages should be warmly supported and gently scaffolded through song, storytelling and other word exploration methods that encourage practice of academic English.



## Learning Centers

Learning centers offer young learners the opportunity to engage in child-initiated learning and explore various interests when rotating through various centers. As you plan for integrated learning across all content areas in your classroom, you can consider the following characteristics and ideas for learning center themes:<sup>1</sup>

### Learning Center Characteristics

- both active and quiet
- predictable and flexible
- familiar and novel
- indoor and outdoor
- helpful in development of fine and motor skills
- structured to draw upon the natural patterns of daily routines (for example, preparing snacks or caring for the environment)
- provides multiple opportunities for individual, partnered, small group and large group experiences to support independent skill development as well as individualized and cooperative teaching and learning

[Click here to find our two-part webinar series on Small and Large Group Instruction in TK \(Sept and Oct 2013\)](#)

### Ideas for Learning Center Themes

- art, music and movement, and dramatic play
- language and literacy including listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- mathematics and manipulatives, including puzzles and objects that encourage interactive play
- science, and technology and computer use



Learn more on pages 20 and 59-63 of CCSESA's [Transitional Kindergarten Planning Guide](#).

## Cooperative and Self-Directed Learning



Young learners need plenty of space and opportunity for cooperative learning experiences that support their social, emotional, linguistic, physical and cognitive development, and also supports their emerging cultural identities. These experiences help children process new information and enables them to makes more substantive connections in their learning. The level of interaction provides children ample opportunity to speak with their peers and builds their language and speaking skills, which is particularly helpful for English learners.

It's important to incorporate time into the daily routine for TK students to freely choose their learning experiences. Creating a welcome environment that children can connect with makes for a more productive learning environment. Among the many strategies to accomplish this, a recommended approach is to have your classroom materials (including items from home or other "real-life" objects) and overall the learning environment reflect the diverse cultures and assets children bring from home. In addition, it can be helpful when areas are organized so students can readily access learning materials throughout the classroom, particularly for students with disabilities.

Labeling areas and materials in the environment will assist students with making choices and identify how specific areas and objects are organized. In addition, the room should include quiet spaces that allow children to relax during stressful times. Resting places should be comfortable, welcoming, and infused with fabrics and textures familiar to children's home lives.

See Transitional Kindergarten Learning Environment in CCSESA's [Transitional Kindergarten Planning Guide](#),<sup>2</sup> for ideas for learning centers in TK classrooms.

<sup>1</sup> California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (2011). [Transitional Kindergarten Planning Guide: A Resource for Administrators of California Public School Districts](#). p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 59-63.