

Foundational Skills for Instructional Change

The goal of this manual is to serve as a guide in selecting appropriate teacher goals, especially at the beginning of year, to help you quickly decide on an appropriate path for mentoring. Using this simpler set of priorities with your teacher will keep him/her from being overwhelmed by the extensive list of CEC items and COT behaviors and the comprehensive offerings of CIRCLE manual activities.

The new COT contains a three part leveling system that is designed to help mentors narrow down to a set of attainable or appropriate goals from amongst the many choices, depending on the needs of individual teachers and classroom contexts.

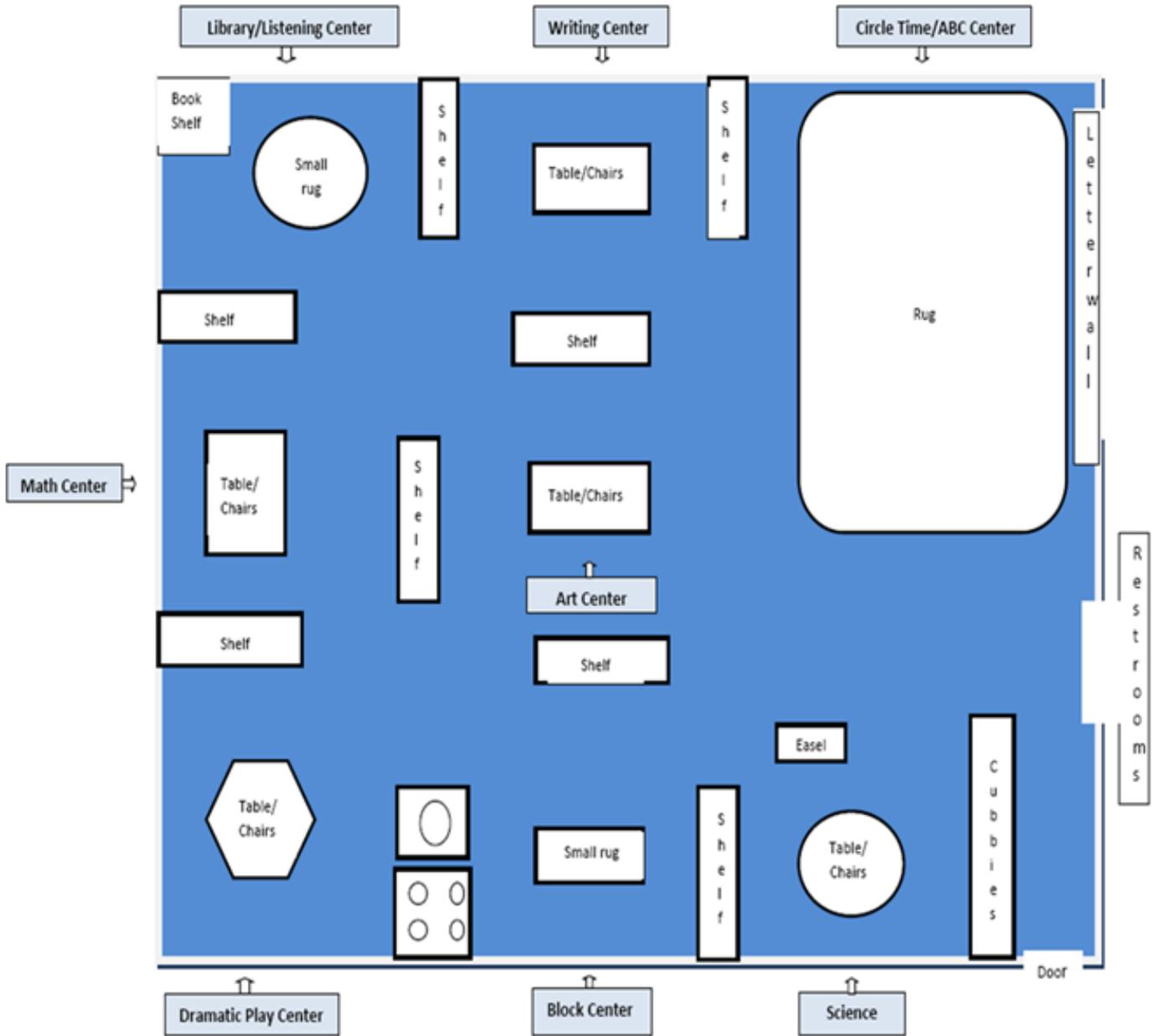
Teachers may start the year with some skills that are at a basic or introductory level but other skills may be intermediate or even advanced. Although teachers are unlikely to fit “neatly” into a level, a leveled set of goals can help to narrow the scope of possible goals. This manual includes a variety of Level 1 behaviors from the COT and pulls together selected activities from the CIRCLE manual to support teacher instructional change.

Mentors should use instructional planning time to get a basic/modified schedule in place. Use modeling or co-teaching strategies at every classroom visit. Mentors will determine which additional mentoring strategies can best support a teacher during classroom instruction.

Room Arrangement

Creating a positive classroom community requires establishing a relationship with each child. Children who feel a connection with their teachers are more likely to follow classroom rules, work cooperatively and behave appropriately. Early learning occurs within relationships. Early learning environments in which teachers are attuned to temperamental differences among children may help to provide a comprehensive basis for the development of skills important for learning. (Clancy Blair, 2004)

The arrangement of the classroom affects how children learn and play together. Room setup is the physical layout of the classroom. Setting up a classroom environment requires a lot of thought and strategic planning. Additionally, the overall room setup and design plays a significant role in the level of interaction and engagement for learning. The setup should support the child’s social and emotional development and cognitive learning.



Circle Time/Large Group Meeting Area

The circle time/large group meeting area is where the teacher and children come together to learn about different topics and engage in hands-on activities.

The circle time/large group meeting area allows for:

- Developing children’s language skills
- Practicing taking turns
- Sharing ideas and feelings

- Learning and developing new skills and concepts
- Introducing new information

Setting up circle time/large group meeting area

- Include a rug for comfort and to define space
- Provide space for all children to sit comfortably
- Engage children in a variety of different activities
- Include children's names to define a space for each child
- Include space for a letter wall
- Include wall space for management charts and curriculum materials
- Provide an easel or large tablet for shared writing

Learning Centers

Learning Centers are subdivided areas of the classroom devoted to one topic or type of activity, where children play, talk, and work in small groups.

Setting up the classroom with well defined centers

- Promotes higher quality verbal interactions
- Provides opportunities for increased cooperative play
- Increases ability to focus on specific tasks with fewer distractions
- Helps children make choices more easily

Setting up Learning Centers

- Include the following 7 learning centers
 - o Library/Listening Center
 - o Construction Center
 - o Writer's Corner
 - o ABC Center
 - o Creativity Station
 - o Pretend and Learn Center
 - o Math/Science Center
- Arrange centers with 2-3 sides (use furniture, shelves, walls, tables, etc. to form centers)
- Separate noisy and quiet centers
- Integrate tables and chairs into centers as appropriate
- Label materials and shelves with words and pictures
- Include books and writing materials in every center
- Include theme related materials in every center

Teacher's Full Day Schedule

Mentors should support teachers to plan for a daily schedule that includes a minimum of 3 hours of cognitive instruction. The schedule helps teachers to use time wisely throughout the day.

| ACTIVITY | TIME FRAME |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Meet and Greet | 10 minutes |
| Breakfast Routines | 15 minutes |
| Cognitive Transitions | 2-5 minutes |
| Circle Time/Large Group Meeting | 20 minutes maximum |
| Cognitive Transitions | 2-5 minutes |
| Center Time | 60 minutes minimum |
| Cognitive Transitions | 2-5 minutes |
| Circle Time/Large Group Meeting | 20 minutes maximum |
| Cognitive Transitions | 2-5 minutes |
| Outside Time | 20 minutes |
| Restroom/Cognitive Transitions | 10 minutes |
| Circle Time/Large Group Meeting | 20 minutes maximum |
| Cognitive Transitions | 2-5 minutes |
| Lunch | 30 minutes |
| Prepare for rest time | 10 minutes |
| Rest time | Depends on policy |
| Snack Time Routines | 15 minutes |
| Circle Time/Large Group Meeting | 20 minutes maximum |
| Cognitive Transitions | 2-5 minutes |
| Center Time | 30 minutes minimum |
| Cognitive Transitions | 2-5 minutes |
| Outside Time | 30 minutes |
| Closing Circle Time/Reflection Time | 20 minutes maximum |

Using Lesson Plans

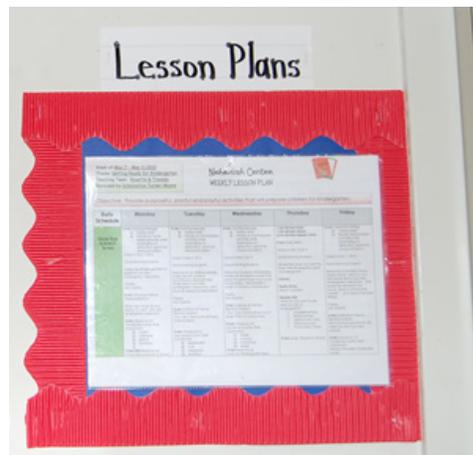
Mentors can use instructional planning to support teachers in developing a detailed written lesson plan. The lesson plan includes specific goals, objectives, and methods of delivery used for instructional lessons.

Lesson planning allows for:

- Focusing on teaching goals and objectives
- Becoming more thoughtful in the selection of activities being taught
- Gathering materials and make appropriate choices before children arrive
- Choosing interesting and effective instructional strategies for children
- Using assessment results to target content areas that need to be taught
- Determining what type of instructional settings will be used
- Reflecting on content areas that have been taught

Lesson plans include:

- learning objectives
- outside activities
- theme
- materials and resources
- circle time activities
- vocabulary words/letter wall words
- center activities
- references (curriculum, CIRCLE manual)
- read alouds
- special events



Circle Time

Circle time is a time during the day when teachers and children meet together for valuable large group learning experiences.

Circle time allows for:

- Building a sense of community
- Sharing information and ideas
- Introducing new topics
- Developing and teaching specific concepts and skills
- Fostering language development
- Engaging children in social interaction and cooperation with other peers and adults

Planning and implementing circle time

- Provide 2-3 circle times per day
- Maximum 20 minutes each meeting
- Always include cognitively challenging activities
- During circle time, children engage with the teacher, peers and materials through a variety of curriculum activities.

Suggested activities

| | |
|--|--|
| Shared reading | Introduce activities/materials |
| Language activities | Discuss events of the day |
| Phonological awareness activities | Discuss theme concepts |
| Letter knowledge activities | Songs, poems, finger plays, nursery rhymes |
| Letter wall activities | Movement games/activities |
| Shared writing activities (daily news, etc.) | Discuss classroom helpers, rules, routines, etc. |
| Mathematics activities | Explain and/or review center activities |
| Read alouds | Calendar/weather (maximum 3 minutes) |

Transitions

Transitions are times during the day when children change from one activity to another.

Transitions allow for:

- Moving from one activity to another
- Practicing cognitive mini lessons (phonological, letter knowledge, math, language)
- Getting children's attention
- Filling time between activities
- Gathering children into large or small group
- Keeping children on task
- Limiting off task behavior

Planning and implementing transitions

- Quick and fun
- Planned and purposeful
- Provide a change in pace
- Provide a cognitive connection
- Help move children through the day
- Vary in length according to purpose

During transitions, include mini lessons that allow children to practice cognitive skills.

During Instructional Planning, mentors help teachers choose appropriate transitions such as the following suggestions:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Say the beginning sound of words | Identify a letter on the letter wall |
| Name thematic items | Jump a number of times |
| Clap syllables (names, theme words) | Clap or snap a pattern |
| Name item and describe | Give the opposite of a word |
| Ask the definition of a word/item | Same and different concepts |

Place a word on the letter wall
Give two rhyming words
Name starts with the same letter

Make compound words
Count the words in a sentence
Identify a number

Center Time

Center time is a time during the day when children construct their own knowledge through exploration and play with instructional learning materials.

Center time allows for:

- Establishing a center management routine
- Accommodating a variety of learning styles and skill levels
- Learning through engaging hands-on activities
- Promoting independence and self-direction
- Integrating curriculum content
- Building on children’s current interest
- Promoting cooperative and independent play
- Scaffolding children’s learning within a center
- Developing language through rich opportunities with peers and teachers
- Engaging children in planned small group activities

Planning and implementing center time

- Half day—allow a minimum of 1 hour each day
- Full day—allow a minimum of 2 hours each day
- Children have free choice of centers and activities
- Refresh materials/activities in the centers according to curriculum theme
- Small group instruction occurs during center time

During center time children explore, and reinforce or extend learning. Support children’s learning in a variety of ways by including cognitively challenging activities.

Suggested center activities

Participate in conversations with children
Take dictation
Ask open-ended questions
Encourage writing
Scaffold language and learning
Emphasize beginning sounds of words
Discuss features of letters
Count items with children

Use new vocabulary words
Read a book, poem, environmental print
Encourage peer to peer talk
Compare sizes, shapes, dimensions
Discuss letter names and sounds
Encourage story retelling
Identify words that rhyme
Clap syllables in words and names

Using the Center Management System

Using the Center Management System supports the social emotional domain of self-control/regulation. This is the child's ability to function independently and make choices in the classroom community. Preschool children feel safer and function more successfully in the classroom when rules and routines are consistently followed. A well-organized classroom with well-prepared activities helps children extend their attention span and builds self-control and personal responsibility. Management charts are external reminders that help children learn self-control/regulation through their daily routines.

- Display in appropriate centers
- Display at children's eye level
- Use center management system daily during center time
- Include children's name and picture on card



Introducing the Center Management System

Mentors can support teachers with implementing the Center Management System by using the following scenario.

“In our classroom, when you go to centers, you are going to get to decide which centers you would like to play in. Since we cannot all go into one center, we have a chart at each center. Each chart has name tag boxes for the number of children who can play in each center. When it is your turn to choose your center, you will take your name tag and attach it to the center chart.” (Model placing a name tag on the center chart.)

“Let's practice.”

Give each child a name tag. Have four (4) children put their name tag on the chart.

“What do you notice when there are four names on the chart? (Allow children to respond) Right, there is no more room. When a chart is full, you need to choose another center. When you move to another center, you take your name tag with you and place it on the new chart.”

Teacher will select a center chart

Have four (4) different children put their name tag on the chart.

Say, “Great, let's practice this today when we go to centers. I will be here to help you if you have any questions.”

Scaffold children as needed as they learn how to use the management system.

Ongoing Use of the Center Management System

Reinforce the use of the Center Management charts

“You are doing a great job of remembering to take your name tag with you when you change centers.”

Attendance Charts

The attendance chart is a visual cue of children’s presence in the classroom and provides a quick check of attendance.

The attendance chart allows children to:

- Recognize names of other children
- Make comparisons between their name and classmates’ names
- Use print in an authentic way

Setting up and using the attendance chart

- Display chart at the children’s eye level by the classroom door
- Include all children’s names on chart
- Use the chart interactively with the children



Introducing the Attendance Chart

Mentors can support teachers with implementing the attendance chart by using the following scenario.

Show the attendance chart, point to the home and school icons and say, “Boys and girls, look at this chart. What pictures do you see?” (Children respond.)

“This chart is a way for you to show whether you are here at school or at home. When you get here in the mornings, you move your name tag to school. When you leave in the afternoon, you move your name tag to home.”

Hand out a name card to each child. Have four children at a time place their name cards under the school picture. Continue until all names are on the chart.

At the end of the day, ask children to move their names under the home picture so they are ready for the next day.

“Attendance Helper” could be one of the jobs on the helper’s chart. The attendance helper makes sure everyone moves their name tag both to school and back to home.

Ongoing Use of the Attendance Chart

Say, “You have been doing a great job of moving your names from “Home” to “School.” This helps us know who is here and who is absent.”

The attendance chart can also be used to reinforce math concepts such as counting the number of children at school and home, simple story problems, etc.

Rules Charts

Young children thrive on solid and clear-cut rules and routines that are meaningful. The children know what to expect and what will be expected of them. One way to do this is by using a rules chart. A rules chart is a visual reminder of classroom rules. Visual rules and routines give children a sense of security. When children know the rules of the classroom, they are more successful and independent.

The class rules chart allows children to:

- Manage their own behavior
- Develop a sense of social responsibility
- Know the expectations for classroom behavior

Setting up and using the class rules chart

- Display the rules chart at children’s eye level
- Display in circle time/large group area or on the back of a shelf
- Use the chart to remind children of class rules throughout the day
- Use positive wording



Introducing the Rules Chart

Mentors can support teachers with implementing the rules chart by using the following scenario.

Say, “Boys and girls, when we are at school, there are certain ways that we have to act so that we can learn and stay safe. We call these rules. What are some rules that you have at your house?” (Allow children to respond.) “To help us remember our rules, we have a classroom rules chart.”

- Read each rule and discuss how it helps children learn or be safe.
- Point to each rule and track the print as you read.
- Refer to rules chart when children need reminders throughout the day.

Ongoing Use of the Class Rules Chart

Use the rules chart during a “teachable moment” in the classroom. For example, children are getting in line and several children run. Say, “We are having some problems with running in the classroom.”

- Say, “Is running in the classroom safe? What could happen?”
- Accept responses. “We walk so everyone will stay safe. What is our rule about walking?”
- Point and review rule number 1 (We walk).
- Have children role play and practice walking.
- Say, “That’s right, you are getting the idea. Walking will keep us safe.”

Throughout the day and year, reinforce classroom rules. Include specific praises about what the children are doing when they are following the rules, as well as reminders about following the rules when they are broken.

The children’s daily schedule is a visual plan of the day with words and pictures that help children understand and learn the routines of their classroom. It is a concrete way to represent time and allow flexibility across the day when special events occur.

Children’s Daily Schedule

The children’s daily schedule chart allows children to:

- Predict the daily sequence of events
- Use print in a meaningful way

Setting up and using the children’s daily schedule chart

- Display in circle time/large group meeting area
- Display at children’s eye level
- Use chart interactively with children
- Change sequence or time as needed when the schedule changes

Introducing the Children’s Daily Schedule

Mentors can support teachers with implementing the children’s daily schedule using the following scenario.

- Show the schedule and say, “Boys and girls, look at this chart. What do you see?” Wait for children’s responses.
- “You’re right; the chart has pictures of children. The pictures help us know what is going to happen next in our classroom.”
- Discuss what is happening in the pictures, making connections to what your children will be doing during each part of the day.
- Say, “Boys and girls, we use our daily schedule to help us see what comes next.”
- Attach a clothespin beside the current time frame. “We will move the clothespin as we move through the day.”
- Say, “One of you will be the ‘schedule helper’ and move the clothespin on the daily schedule when we change activities.”



Ongoing Use of the Children's Daily Schedule

Use the daily schedule to help children who are anxious about when their caregiver is going to return for them. Show where you are in the day, and point out when the day will be over and caregivers return.

The Helper's Chart

Co-teaching is an effective mentoring strategy to use to support teachers in implementing the helpers chart. Mentors can assist teachers in customizing appropriate classroom jobs that fit the needs of the classroom.

The helper's chart allows children to:

- Learn responsibility and gain a sense of ownership
- Feel a sense of belonging to the classroom community
- Recognize letters and names

Setting up and using the helper's chart

- Display in circle time/large group meeting area
- Display at children's eye level
- Use chart interactively with children
- Include a job for every child
- Change jobs weekly
- Include children's names and pictures



Introducing the Helper's Chart

Mentors can support teachers with implementing the helper's chart by using the following scenario.

- Say, "Our classroom is like our home. We are all part of our classroom family. Just like at your home, there are certain things that need to happen. At your home, your dishes and clothes have to be washed. The furniture has to be dusted. These are called jobs. What are some jobs that you help with at your house?" (Children respond.)
- "What jobs do we need to do in our classroom?" Wait for responses.
- Point to the helper chart and say, "This helper chart shows the jobs that need to get done to help our classroom run smoothly."
- Discuss two or three jobs, giving explicit modeling and instructions about how each job will be completed.
- Have the children practice doing each job as it is introduced.
- Continue introducing and practicing jobs until all jobs have been introduced.

Ongoing Use of the Helper's Chart

Reinforce the use of the helper chart by praising specific examples, such as,

- “The classroom looks great due to our wonderful clean up managers.”
- “We are the best class in walking down the hall since our line leader and caboose set a good example for us.”
- Say, “Now we’re going to play a game as we choose our jobs.”
- Put job cards in a bag and have each child choose one.
- Sing the following song and have children take turns saying the name of their job: Sing to the tune of “Are You Sleeping?”
We are helpers, we are helpers,
Look and see, look and see,
What is your job? What is your job?
Please tell us, please tell us.
- Children say the name of their job and place the card in the pocket chart.
- Use the helper chart throughout the school year in various ways such as:
 - o Choose a job and have children give ideas about what the job is about and how you would do it correctly.

Letter Wall

The letter wall is an organized display of letters from A to Z and includes words with pictures under the appropriate matching letter.

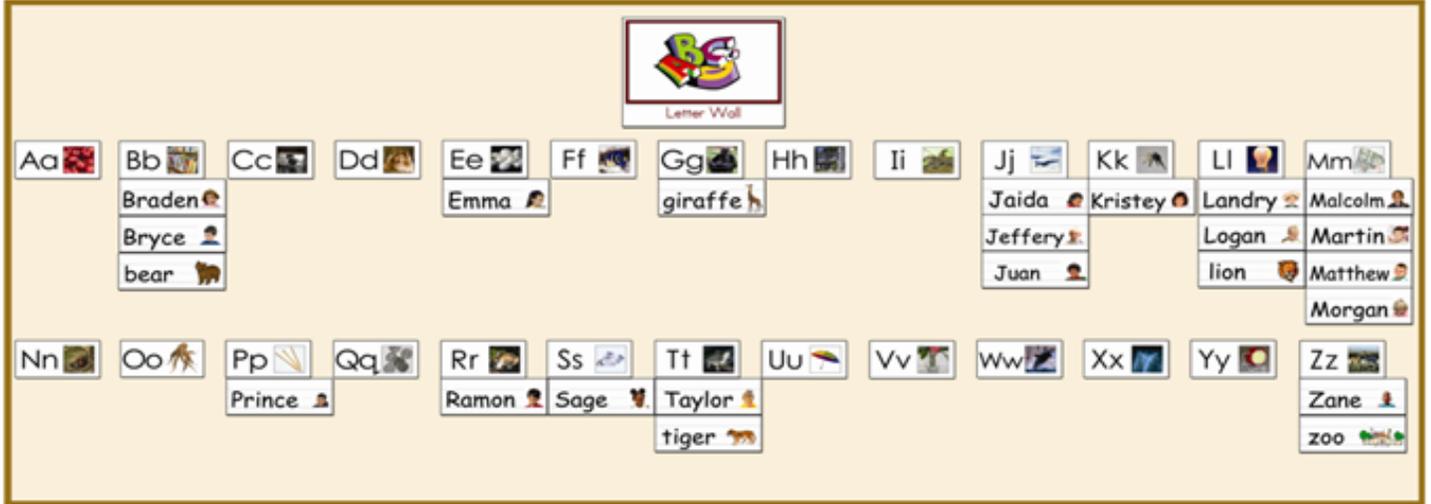
The letter wall allows children to:

- See the letters displayed from A to Z
- Learn letters in a meaningful way
- Interact with letters and words
- Have a specific place to look for children’s name cards and vocabulary

Setting up and using the letter wall

- Display in circle time/large group meeting area
- Display at children’s eye level
- Have room for placement of 4-5 words under each letter
- Have all word cards placed directly under the matching letter
- Place word card directly under appropriate letter
- Add children’s name with pictures
- Add thematic word cards with pictures/icons
- Include word cards with lowercase letter (except proper nouns)
- Use interactively with children daily

Letter wall should be displayed as follows:



Language Development

Co-teaching is an appropriate mentoring strategy to use to support teachers in using language building strategies and activities. Mentors should encourage teachers to have conversations with all of the children in the classroom throughout the day.

Language Building Strategies

Language building strategies are ways to expand and extend the language heard and used by children. As new objects/concepts are introduced, using these strategies provides children with a deeper and broader meaning. The first two strategies to try are labeling and describing.

Label: Labels are names for objects, concepts and actions. It is best to provide labels for objects when children are actively engaged with that object or in that action. Since they are already paying attention children easily connect what you are saying to the appropriate object or action. This occurs during book reading, “See the apron the cook is putting on.” and during play (Child says, “Put this on me.” Teacher responds, “You want to wear the apron?”).

Describe: Describing is telling how something looks, tastes, sounds, feels, and smells. By adding a description, the children have an additional way to think about the object or concept. For example, “An apron is something you wear over your clothes when you are cooking.”

Picture Walk activity

Materials: Book

Procedure:

In a picture walk, pictures are discussed, but the book is not read.

- Gather children close enough to be able to see and discuss the details within the pictures.
- Show the children each page of the book as it is discussed.
- Use the language building strategies label and describe to discuss the items in the pictures.



Example

- Say, “Today we are going to look at a book called *The Little Red Hen*. Let’s take a picture walk to find out what the story is about.”
- Point to the cover and say, “What do you see on the cover of the book?” (Children respond.)
- Say, “Another word for chicken is hen (label). That’s who this story is about... the little red hen. She is called the little red hen because her feathers are red (describe). I see some tools on the cover. Do you know what they are?” (Children respond.)
- Say, “Yes, these are tools that can be used in a garden for planting. This one (point to hoe) is called a hoe. Let’s say the word together: hoe. Does anyone know what we use a hoe for?” (Children respond.)
- Say, “Let’s turn the page and see what we can find out by looking at the picture.”
- Turn the page and continue the process by discussing the pictures on the next page.
- Say, “Look at the mailboxes. Can you tell who lives in the house by looking at the mailboxes?” (Children respond.)
- Say, “That’s right. A cat, a dog, and a mouse all live in the house with the little red hen. Which of those animals are usually pets?” (Children respond.) “Pets are animal friends.” (describe)
- Say, “What do you see in the little red hen’s hands?” (Children respond.) “Yes, it is a broom (label). A broom is a stick with bristles on it.” (describe)

What’s in the Bag? activity

Materials: Bag with theme related objects

Procedure:

This activity is part of the ongoing theme discussion in the classroom. Use these language building strategies to model how to talk about one of the objects in the bag.

Label—Labels are names for objects and actions.

Describe—Describing is telling how something looks, tastes, sounds, feels and smells.

- Say, “Yesterday we read a book about cooking. In my bag, I have some of the things we read about in the story.”
- Show the apron. Say, “This is an apron.” (labeling) Have children repeat the word.
- “An apron is something you wear over your clothes when you are cooking.” (describe)
- Have a child pull an object from the bag.
- Have a conversation with the children about the object.
- In this conversation have children label, describe, explain, compare and link the object by asking questions and scaffolding children’s responses.
- Continue until each child has had a turn.
- As more objects are described and explained, the children connect the new concepts to deepen their understanding of cooking and the utensils used.

Conversations Throughout the Day

A conversation is an informal talk or discussion one has with one or more participants. Often when we talk to children, we are giving directions or information. In a conversation we are not just talking to children but with them. Conversations should occur at arrival time, circle time, center time, outside play, and meal time.

Children learn to use language by engaging in conversations. Limited opportunities to talk limit language development. Conversations can be used as a way to introduce new words and to extend and enrich children's thinking.

To build language structure, teachers observe, listen, and respond to children while engaging them in extended interactions and conversations.

To Have a Conversation

- Get down on children's level and make eye contact, close enough that the child can see and hear you.
- Listen to what the child says.
- Ask an open-ended question that requires several words in response. Begin questions with "wh" words who, what, where, when, why, (and how).
- Give children time to think about questions and wait for their responses. Giving children time to respond (the "five second rule") encourages them to keep talking.
- Engage children in back and forth conversations of three or more turns.

Questioning

Mentors help teachers use different levels of questioning. Asking questions is not the same as teaching information. Remember, teach children the concepts first, and then ask questions to determine children's understanding.

Bloom's Taxonomy (Revised)

| | Cognitive Level | Starter Verbs | Child Expected to: |
|---|-------------------|--|---|
| <p>Simple</p>  <p>Complex</p> | Remember | Define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce, state | Recall or remember the information |
| | Understand | Describe, classify, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase | Explain ideas or concepts |
| | Apply | Choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write | Use learned materials in new ways |
| | Analyze | Appraise, compare, contrast, explain, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test | Distinguish between the different parts |
| | Evaluate | Appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate | Justify a stand or decision |
| | Create | Assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write | Create new product or point of view |

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to detect the sounds in language without thinking about the meaning of what is said and can be taught before children have begun to make a connection with letters. A crucial understanding that letters or groups of letters can represent sounds or phonemes (alphabetic principle) requires phonological awareness.

Children can hear larger “chunks” of sounds in the beginning, moving to increasingly smaller parts of words. Children acquire this sensitivity to sound by playing with language through manipulating the sounds in words by blending, segmenting and changing sounds within words.

Modeling and co-teaching would be appropriate mentoring strategies to use to support teachers in implementing phonological activities. This handbook emphasizes the listening level of the phonological continuum.

Listening

- To allow children to practice focusing their attention on particular sounds of interest
- To sharpen children's ability to attend selectively to sounds
- To listen for a particular sound and pair it with its source
- To set the stage for all other phonological awareness skills

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear activity

Procedure:

Recite the chant, "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear" with the children.
Children must listen and perform the actions as said in the poem.

**Teddy bear, teddy bear, reach up high.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the sky.**

**Teddy bear, teddy bear, bend down low.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch your toe.**

**Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the ground.**



Say the poem again. After saying of one of the pairs of rhyming words, pause at the next rhyming word and have the children fill in the word that rhymes.

**Teddy bear, teddy bear, reach up high.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the ____.**

**Teddy bear, teddy bear, bend down low.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch your ____.**

**Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the ____.**

Sounds Like... activity

Empty film canisters* make excellent sound containers.
Fill each canister with two or more of each different object:

- door keys
- beans
- rice
- paper clips
- pennies

Have a picture of each object that you place in the containers. (If you don't have pictures, just glue an additional object onto an index card.)

The children:

- shake the container,
- listen for the sound and
- place the container on the correct picture.

To make the activity self-checking, place matching colored sticky dots on the bottom of the container and the back of the picture/index card.

- Prescription bottles (thoroughly cleaned) may be substituted.

Extension:

Have two canisters of the same sound (objects). Children find the pairs that match.

- paper clips
- pennies

Letter Knowledge

Letter knowledge consists of being able to associate the names, shapes and sounds of letters. Teachers must engage children in print and letter knowledge activities that help them understand the function of print. Children also need to be able to discriminate between letters and to move both from sound to letter, as well as from the letter to the sound each letter stands for. Letter knowledge is an essential component of learning to read and write. Young children learn best when information is presented in a meaningful context connected to experiences.

This handbook focuses on letter identification, letter discrimination and letter-sound correspondence. Mentors should support teachers in implementing activities that focus on these skills.

Name Sort activity

Materials:

- Name card for each child
- Baggie for each child containing letters in their name and a few that are not in their name
- T-chart for each child (see reference section—in your name/not in your name)

Procedure:

Say, “In your baggie are the letters of your name and some that aren’t in your name. Look at your name card and then at each letter. Decide if the letter is in your name.”

“If the letter is in your name, place it on the side of the chart that says ‘Letters in my name.’”

“If the letter is not in your name, place it on the side of the chart that says, ‘Letters not in my name.’”

After the children have placed the letters on the chart have each child say and point to the letters in their name.

Extension: Have children compare letters in their name. Examples: Say, “Tracy has an ‘a’ in her name. Do you have an ‘a’ in your name? Kevin has a ‘v’ in his name. Do you have a ‘v’ in your name?”

Provide experiences to help children begin to compare and contrast letters.

- Talk with the children about the letters of the alphabet.
- Point to the alphabet chart or letter wall to ask, “What shapes do you see?”
- “Some letters have straight lines, some have circles, some have curves, some have slanted lines. Each letter has its own shape.”
- Some letters look almost alike and some letters look very different.

Letter Sort activity

Materials:

T-chart labeled with Straight Lines/Curved Lines

Letters (T, Ll, F, E, I, H, Ss, Oo, Cc)

Procedure:

- Say, “Today we’re going to look at the shapes of letters. “Some letters have straight lines and some letters have curved lines.”
- Hold up the letter T and point to the straight lines as you say, “This letter has straight lines.”
- Hold up the letter S and point to the curved lines as you say, “This letter has curved lines.”
- Choose a letter and say, “I choose this letter. It has straight lines. It goes on this side of the chart.” Place the letter on the side of the chart that says “straight lines.”
- Have each child choose a letter, tell if it has straight or curved lines, and place it on the correct side of the chart.
- Continue until all letters have been sorted.

Variation:

Follow the above procedure using other sorting rules such as: round and not round, tail and no tail, short and tall, uppercase and lowercase, etc.

T-Chart

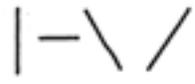
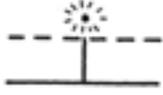
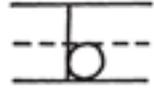
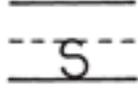
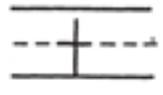
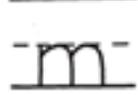
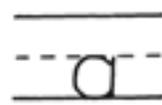
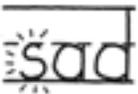
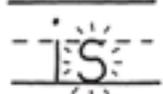
Name _____

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Place sorting rule here. | |
| | |

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Researchers say that questioning the text is at the core of comprehension. Questioning or wondering causes children to predict, to infer, or to analyze more closely. That is why asking questions is the first step in building comprehension. The kinds of questions you model should be real wonders that stimulate thinking, not teacher contrived wonders. Asking real or honest questions helps children deepen their understanding about the text. For example, as children hear text, they should be thinking about what they are hearing and have questions that come into their minds. "I wonder..." or "How did that happen?" may be questions they think about as they are listening.

Sorting Rules

| | | | |
|--------------|---|------------------|--|
| sticks |  | no sticks |  |
| round |  | not round |  |
| slanted |  | straight |  |
| dot |  | no dot |  |
| tail |  | no tail |  |
| tall |  | short |  |
| in your name |  | not in your name |  |
| uppercase |  | lowercase |  |
| beginning |  | end |  |

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Letter Sounds

Knowing how letters function in writing and how letters connect to the sounds children hear in words is crucial to children's success in reading. Combined with phonological awareness, letter knowledge is the key to children understanding the alphabetic principle. Children will use this sound/letter connection to begin to identify printed words, such as their names and other familiar words.

Sound Sort activity

Materials:

- Two trays
- Two letter cards
- One basket of small objects or pictures that begin with two distinct letter sounds

Procedures:

- Place two trays on the table.
- Name the items in the basket.
- Show the letter card and ask, “What letter is this? What sound does it make?” Place the letter card in one of the trays.
- Show the second letter card and ask, “What letter is this? What sound does it make?” Place the letter card in one of the trays.
- Say, “Now let’s play a sound sort game. You will choose an item from the basket; tell what it is and what sound it starts with. Next, you will decide which letter makes that sound and place it on the correct tray.”
- Model by saying, “I choose the turtle. Turtle starts with /t/. Since T says /t/, turtle goes on the tray with the T.”
- Let each child have a turn to place an item on the tray.
- •After all items are placed on the trays, say, “Let’s name all of the things that begin with the letter T and make a /t/ sound.” Name the items together.
- Say, “Let’s name all of the things that begin with the letter M and make a /m/ sound.” Name the items together.

Book Reading

Book reading is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading (Reading Across the Nation, 2007). The major goal of book reading is to expand children’s understanding about each particular story, knowledge of the world around them and the way book language differs from oral language. Books can be read in a large group or small group setting.

Reading Aloud to Children:

- Promotes an enjoyable experience with books
- Motivates children to want to learn to read
- Provides a good model of fluent and expressive reading
- Helps develop a sense of story
- Builds background knowledge
- Builds comprehension
- Increases concept and vocabulary knowledge
- Provides opportunities to hear and understand more formal language
- Inspires writing

Mentors should encourage teachers to plan questions to use when reading a book.

Planning for a Book Read

- Read through the book completely before reading it aloud to children.
- Think about words that may be unfamiliar to the children and how you could explain the word with a child friendly definition.
- Think about how to extend the book into centers.
- Think about other books you could read related to the theme.
- Gather all necessary materials before each read aloud.

Before, During, and After Reading

- Before reading: Introduce the book, discuss book concepts and key vocabulary. Help children make predictions and personal connections to the story.
- During reading: Read with expression, stop for children's comments, questions and predictions, explain new words, ask what characters may be doing/feeling and ask open-ended questions.
- After reading: Ask open-ended questions and plan and conduct extension activities such as acting out the story, retelling the story or creating graphic organizers to retell. Create vocabulary mini lessons to help children learn and use the new vocabulary introduced in the read aloud.

Teachers build excitement and engage children in the book read by:

- Using different voices for characters
- Using sound effects
- Reading faster in some places and slower in others
- Using a variety of voice pitches
- Using body language
- Showing excitement
- Being dramatic
- Showing your own enthusiasm for reading

Title, Author, and Illustrator Introduction

Before Reading:

- Point to and read the name/title of the book.
- Point to and read the name of the author and illustrator and discuss what they do.
- What does the author do? (The author writes the words.)
- What does the illustrator do? (The illustrator draws the pictures.)

Mentors can support teachers with introducing the Title, Author, and Illustrator by using the following song.

“The Author Writes the Words” (Tune “The Farmer and the Dell”)

The Author writes the words, the author writes the words.

Hi Ho, oh don't you know, the author writes the words.

The illustrator draws the pictures; the illustrator draws the pictures,

Hi Ho, oh don't you know, the illustrator draws the pictures.

Using Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge is what is already known about a topic. The focus of this strategy is on children's knowledge and understanding about a topic. The teacher asks a question or gives a prompt to stimulate children's thinking about a personal connection with the book.