



SMALL GROUPS WITH ENORMOUS BENEFITS

NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR YOUR
EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

Small Groups (3-5 children) allow children to follow their interests, make decisions that influence their play, and use their language in meaningful situations. They are able to identify and solve problems, collaborate with others, and think creatively as they have conversations with others.

Additional ideas for centers and choice time can be found in *The Complete Learning Center Book (Revised)* available on the website below.

PROJECT CENTER

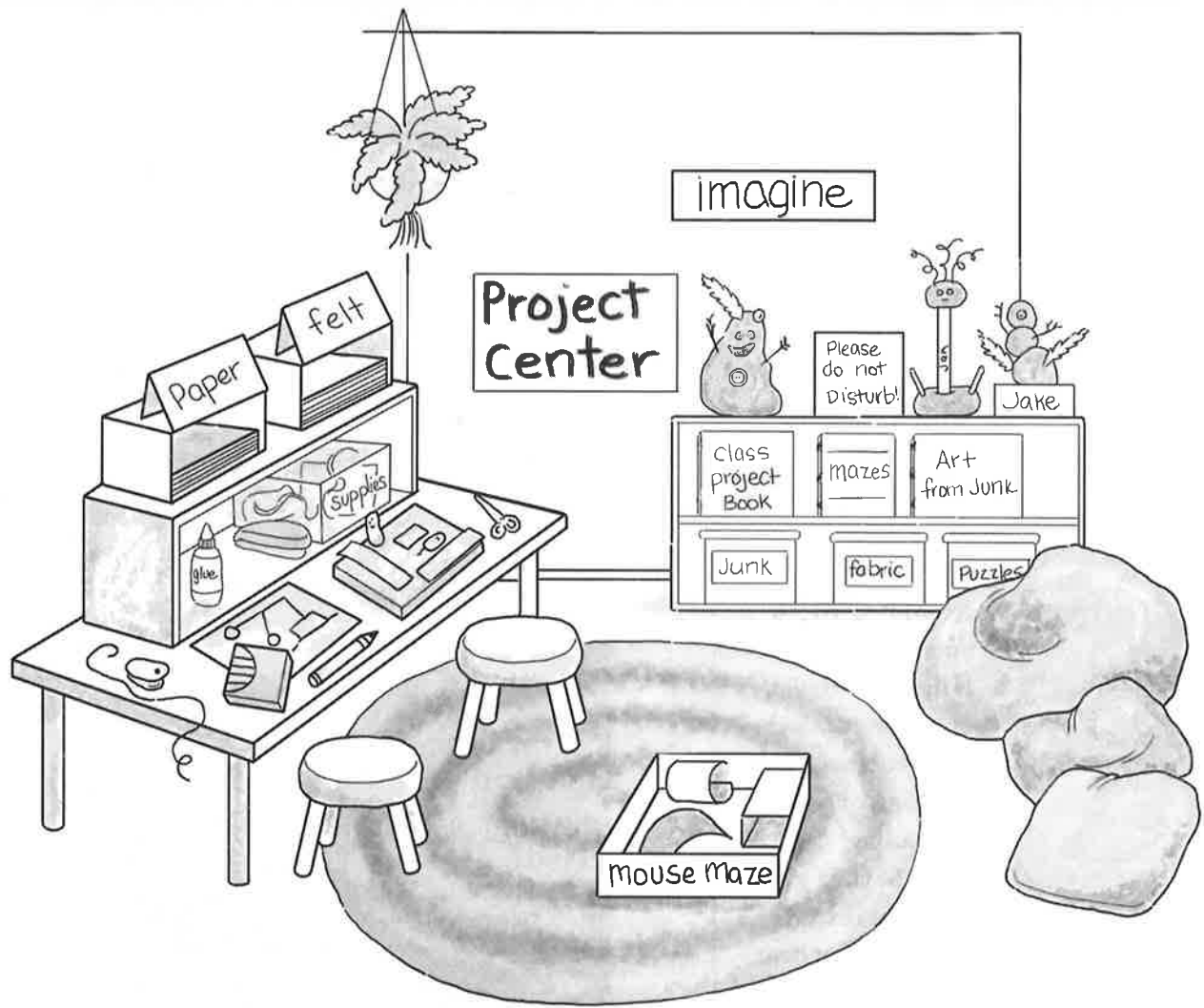


This project center is very flexible and can be shaped to follow the interest of the children.



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Summary

The Project Center provides a working space for children who are focused on a specific project or idea. Center time is the perfect time for a small group of children to work on ideas that might come from class themes, creative ideas, or special interests. While the other children are working in centers, these children can focus on a project that needs more time and that they can return to for an extended period of several days or weeks. This center allows children to experiment with interesting and challenging ideas and more in-depth and complex projects.

Introducing the Center

When children want to continue investigating an idea, they need a place to work. Sometimes, you may observe a budding project. At other time, the children may need you to ask questions to help them think in more complex ways. The Project Center is where they can do this work. You can suggest that certain children go to this area or provide them the option of choosing to go to this center. There may be times when no one is in the Project Center and other times when it is buzzing with activity. By providing this center, you are encouraging children who are intrigued by a project to remain with the work for longer periods.

Learning Objectives for Children in the Project Center

1. To identify ideas and questions that they want to explore.
2. To develop problem-solving and research skills to find information.
3. To build persistence by working on a project for a long time.
4. To participate in a team that is working together on an idea.
5. To examine and complete more complex projects and investigations.
6. To strengthen their self-confidence as they work on their ideas and long-term projects.

Time Frame for the Project Center

Keep this center in the classroom for most of the year or set it up later in the year to encourage more in-depth investigations. If there is limited space, set it up in the Art Center area when project ideas are thriving.



Note: The attached CD contains a sample letter to send to families, introducing them to the Project Center.

Vocabulary Enrichment

(Note: New vocabulary will emerge during each project.)

chart

collaborate

construct

creative

find out

idea

investigate

planning

possibilities

problem

question

record

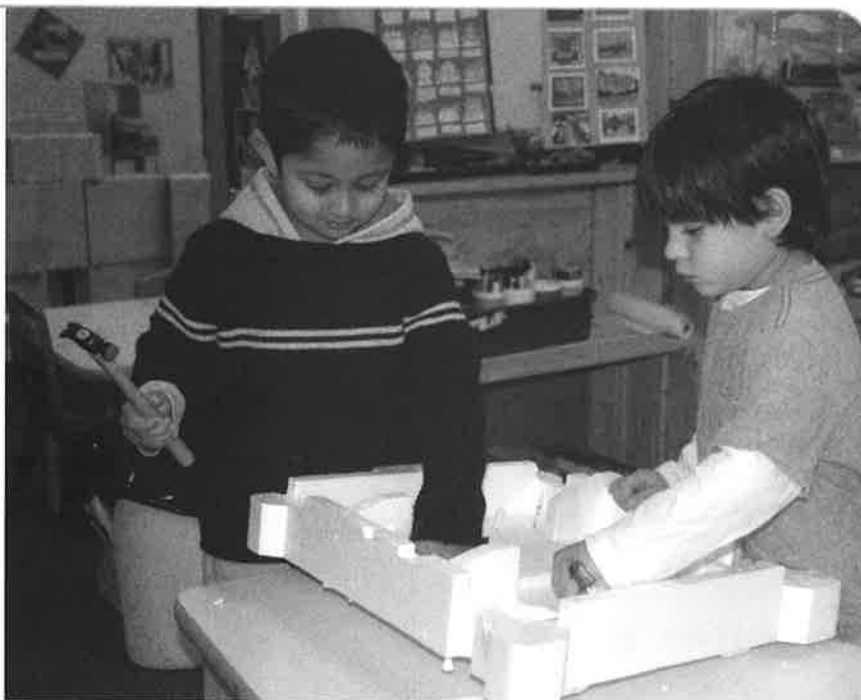
references

research

search

teamwork

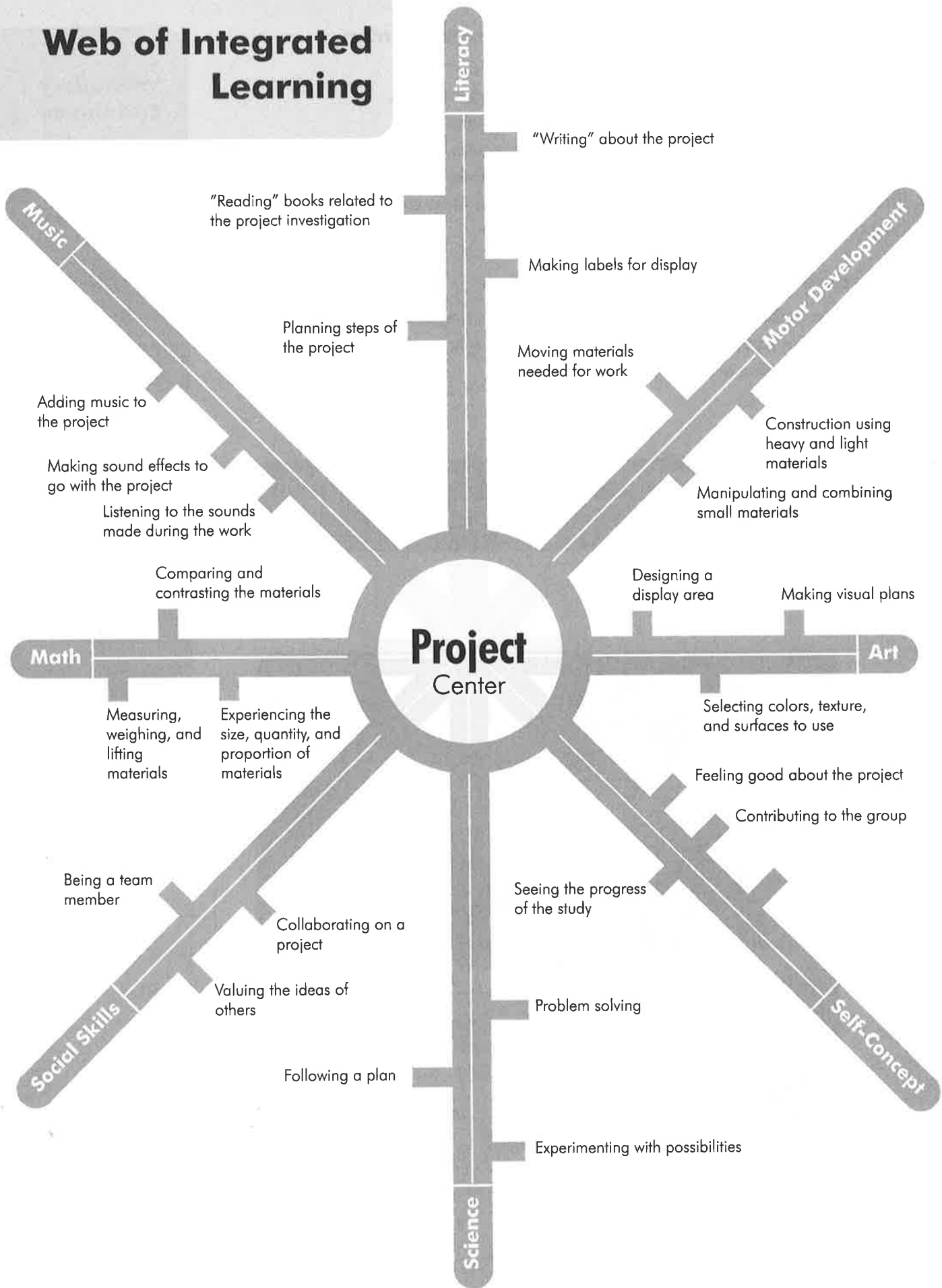
unique



How can this material be used in their project?

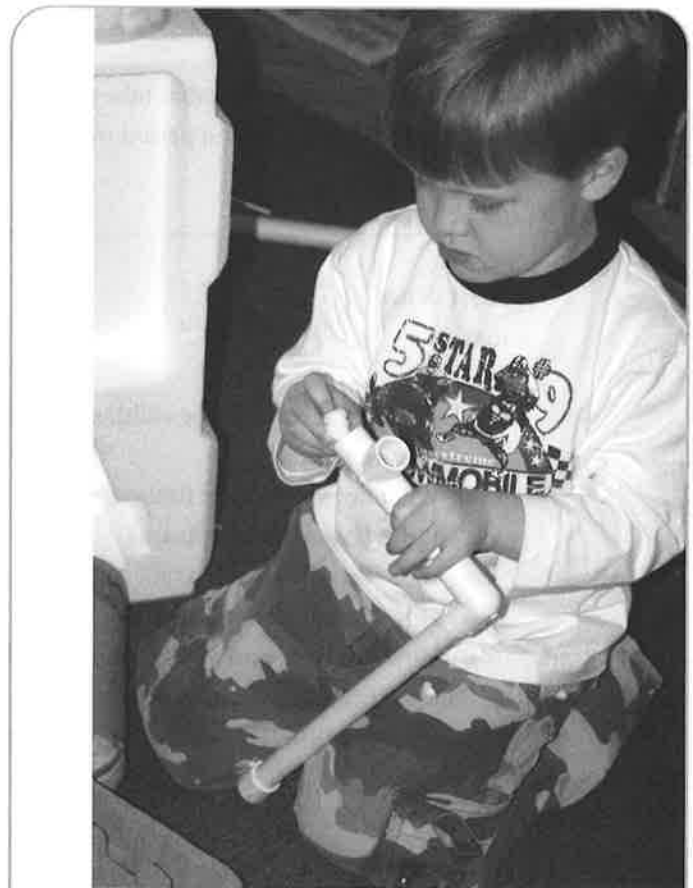


Web of Integrated Learning



Family- or Teacher-Collected Props for the Project Center

- building materials:
 - boxes
 - cardboard
 - fabric
 - large sheets of paper
 - scraps of lumber
- computer, digital camera, and printer
- food trays (for working on messy projects and storing)
- materials for holding things together:
 - electrical tape
 - glue
 - masking tape
 - wire clamps
- junk box:
 - chenille stems
 - foil
 - paper scraps
 - pieces of fabric
 - pieces of screen
 - wire
- large and small clear plastic storage containers with lids
- plastic bottles and jars of various sizes
- roll of plastic
- toolbox:
 - clamps
 - hammer/nails with large heads
 - ruler
 - scissors
 - screwdriver/screws
 - measuring tape
- variety of papers:
 - cardboard pieces
 - foam board
 - newspapers
 - magazines
 - wallpaper
- writing tools:
 - pens
 - markers
 - chalk
 - colored pencils



Unique materials, such as plastic pipes, inspire thinking in new ways.

Child-Created Props for the Project Center

These will match the projects and the investigations. Each will be different based on the project and the ideas developed by the children.

Organizing the Space for the Project Center

Consider the following when setting up space for children to explore projects:

- Create a work area.
- Group materials for projects.
- Determine where materials will be stored.
- Select an area for storing long-term projects.
- Explore the possible areas where the children's work will be displayed.
- Have clean-up materials in the project area.

Activities for the Project Center

The projects and activities that take place in this area will vary based on the specific interests and work of the children over a period of time. The following activities may relate to many projects.

Planning the Project

LITERACY & SCIENCE

chart paper
marker

- The teacher talks with the children who are interested in a specific project and asks them questions, such as
 - What do you want to find out?
 - What do you want to learn?
 - What do you want to try?
 - How are you going to do this?
 - How can you show your classmates what you discovered?
- The teacher can write these questions on chart paper and then record the children's responses to each question. This chart can be displayed in the Project Center.

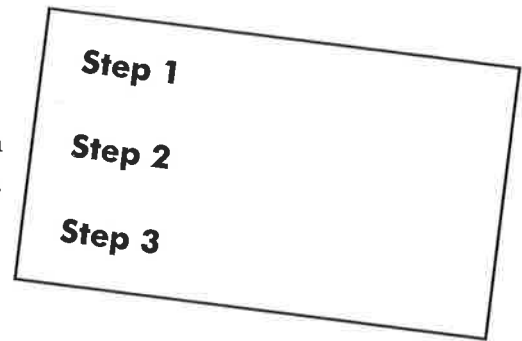
What Materials Are Needed?

SELF-CONCEPT & SOCIAL SKILLS

- Identify the specific materials, tools, or books that are needed to develop this project.
- Children can collect these materials from the classroom or from their homes, or they can find a source for the materials.
- The children organize and store the materials in the project area.
- Be sure the materials include paper, pencils, art supplies, and books.

chart paper
marker

- The children talk and discuss the project and then draw or “write” the steps that need to be followed.
- Be sure the steps include how work will be displayed and shared.



Reference Items for the Project

LITERACY

books and reference material related to the project

- Each project will have books and reference materials that will help the children in their work. Some standard items could be a picture dictionary, informational books, old reference books, how-to books, and books about how things work. Other reference materials will focus on the topic of the project.

Documenting the Project

LITERACY & SELF-CONCEPT

digital camera

- Children can use a digital camera to document their work. These photographs should show each step of the process as it is developing, especially the early stages.
- Children can include their names on the list of workers that will accompany the documentation for a display of the project.

Adding Spark to the Project Center

When children seem to be stalled on a project, pose new questions to them. “What else could you do? Is there another way of doing it? What if you added _____?” Sometimes, the most creative ideas come after a period of difficulty. It may be helpful to encourage another child to join the work—a fresh perspective can help solve problems. If nothing happens, it may be time to bring the project to completion, document what was done, and display the work for others to enjoy.



Reading/Writing Opportunities

(These will vary based on experiences related to a specific project.)

- Children can record information by “writing,” charting, and graphing.
- Children can examine references and books on a topic.
- Children can name, label, and list team members involved in a project.
- Children can determine ways to display and describe their work.
- Children can use oral language and new vocabulary to tell others what they are doing.

Books for the Project Center

Crews, N. 2006. *Below*. New York:

Henry Holt. *Jack and his action figure, Guy, have many adventures together, until one day when Guy falls into a hole in the stairs and it's up to Jack to rescue him.*

Lum, K. 1998. *What! Cried Granny: An*

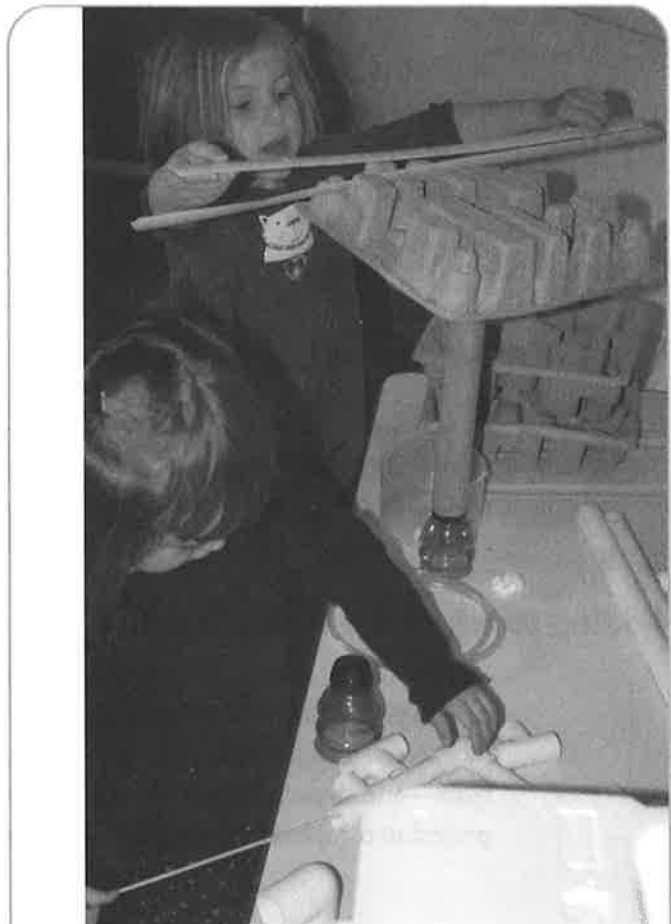
Almost Bedtime Story. Illustrated by Adrian Johnson. New York: Dial. *It's a boy's first sleep-over at his Granny's, but he doesn't have a bed to sleep in. Granny does whatever it takes to care for the boy's needs.*

Robertson, J., & Robertson, B.

2004. *The Kids' Building Workshop: 15 Woodworking Projects for Kids and Parents to Build Together*. North Adams, MA: Storey. *Fifteen projects are explained for parents and children to work with wood.*

Singer, M. 2006. *Let's Build a*

Clubhouse. Illustrated by Timothy Bush. New York: Clarion. *Rhyming text describes how a group of children work together to build a clubhouse, using a variety of tools.*



Construction with new materials helps these girls think creatively.

Evaluation of the Project Center

(This form is on the CD that comes with this book.)

Ask yourself the following questions to evaluate the Project Center in your classroom:

- Are children choosing to work in this area?
- Do children have specific ideas about what they want to do in the Project Center?
- Do you see evidence of more complex investigations?
- Are children carrying creative ideas to completion?
- Have some children returned to the project over time?
- Is teamwork occurring on projects in this center?
- Are sufficient tools and materials available to support the children's research and construction?

Observation of the Individual Child

(This form is on the CD that comes with this book. Always date observations of each child.)

- Is this child choosing to work on projects? Which ones and in what ways?
- What problem solving have you observed by this child?
- Has this child used new vocabulary and language related to projects, investigations, or research?
- Is the child persistent on the project? Is she returning to work on the same project?
- Have you seen this child using reference materials? Which ones and how?
- Is this child participating as a team player? Is she displaying leadership or following the ideas of other? Describe.

