

Small Groups with Enormous Benefits: Learning Centers that Work!

Dr. Rebecca Isbell
Website: drisbell.com



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Why Small Groups?

Compare (Small Group)

- Child directed
- More opportunities for communication
- Active involvement
- Match of individual interest
- Increased engagement
- Longer persistence

Contrast (Large Group)

- Teacher directed
- Less opportunity to communicate
- Sitting still and being quiet
- Group and teacher interest
- Less focus and involvement
- Short segments

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Organizing Small Group Possibilities (Cont.)

- Child selected
- Teacher selected group
- Task oriented group
- Specific learning focused
- Project group work
- Discussion group
- Helping children learn how to work cooperatively
- Respect and appreciation of others' ideas

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An Effective Environment Matches Children's:



- Cognitive Level
- Active Way of Learning
- Open-ended Materials
- Need for Success and Challenges
- Culture and Experiences

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Small Group Benefits



- Many opportunities to communicate
- Peer teaching and learning possibilities
- Focus is on the choices of the children and relates to their experiences (persistence)
- Learning collaborative skills
- Enhancement of social skills
- Actively constructing knowledge

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Language Development

In Centers, children:

- Communicate using more language
- Discover how to take turns
- Interact with words rather than actions
- Expand vocabulary (grocery store, construction, or camping)
- Are supported with books related to the Center theme
- Are provided with literacy materials (paper, markers, books, signs)
- Can document language use in "real" play



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Motor Development

- Large and small muscle development
- High interest in materials (building, balls, fitness)
- Smaller child and less ability: Bigger the toy or tool
- When learning a new skill, they practice, practice, and practice
- Success builds both skills and confidence



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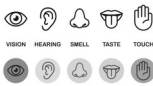
Social Emotional Development

- Emotionally safe environment
- Relationship with a responsive and caring person
- Materials and activities that allow them to be successful (build confidence)
- Opportunities to make choices (self-worth)
- Learning to use words and gestures to communicate feelings
- Opportunities to interact with other children (social skills)

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Sensory Integration (SI)

- This is the neurological process of organizing sensory inputs for function in daily life.
- Five Senses: touch, sight, hearing, taste, and smell. Two additional senses are: Vestibular and Proprioceptive (body position) senses. These develop at an individual pace and through experiences.



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Sensory Integration (SI)

- Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) – Some children have SPD. This is about having difficulty using the information being collected by the brain through the senses.
- Sensory Avoiders
- Sensory Seekers
- Under Responders



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Designing the Environment to Support Sensory Development

- Monitor the design elements in your environment
- Lighting (enough, varied, not too much)
- Sound levels (quiet area, music area)
- Art and Creative Materials (remove clutter, vary tactile materials)
- Playground activities (just "right" activities for individual child)
- Offer appropriate choices
- Respect child's emotions and sensory issues

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Many Forms of Play in Childhood

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Play is...

- Active
- Spontaneous
- Self-initiated
- Connected with real-world
- Intensely engaged
- An avenue to teaching
- Internally Motivated
- Persistent
- Joyful



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Sociodramatic Play

- Adapting the real world to the child
- Taking on Roles: Empathy for others
- Using language in communication
- Working collaboratively
- Persistence on task
- Adjusting roles and activities to other children



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American Academy of Pediatrics Report

- Play is essential for helping children reach social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones.
- Play helps children deal with stress and become resilient.
- Play strengthens the ability to cope with problems and issues.

(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018)

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Role Playing, Communicating, Cooperating, Sequence, Persistence



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Teacher's Role

- Select Centers or work groups to match children
- Designing layout
- Collecting materials
- Become play "tutor"
- Talk with children during choices and after small group time.
- Establish Management Plan
- Be a floater
- Observe how the groups are working
- Document "real" learning during the small group time.

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Selecting Learning Centers Choice Time

- Interests of children in class
- Experiential backgrounds
- Classroom curriculum
- Extending children's learning
- Developmental levels of children

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Traditional Centers

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Hints for Successful Centers

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Block: Construction Play



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Benefits of Block Center

- Use oral language (Isbell research)
- Develop understanding of space
- Refine small and large motor skills
- Solve problems creatively
- Learning cause and effect

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Expansion of Center

- Prop boxes
- Literacy Materials
- Micro people, animals, transportation
- Pictures/posters
- Fabric, foil, paper
- Different building materials: boxes, pipes, cardboard, twigs

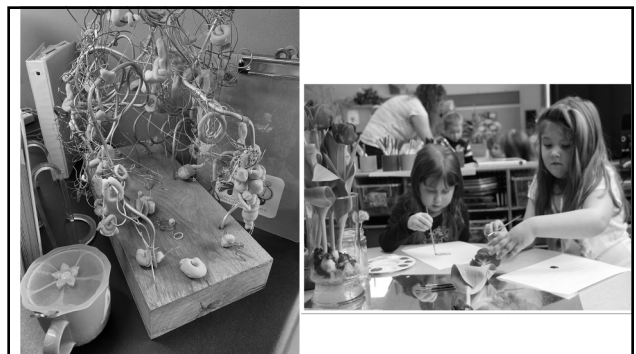
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Art/Studio Center

- Place to express ideas
- Choices of materials/told
- Can create and be messy
- Place to display and store
- Variety of possible work/project
- Individual and group work



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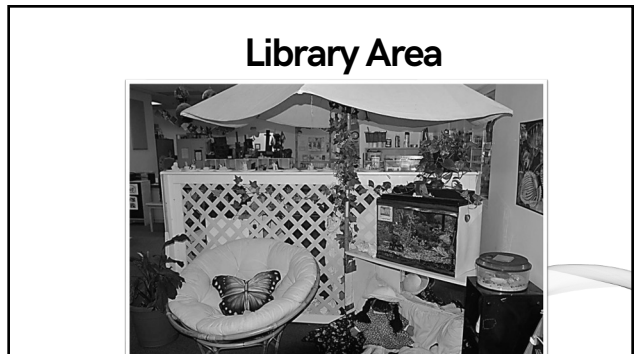
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Essential Library Center

- Variety of Books
- Magazines/papers
- Soft seating and pillows
- Listening tools: books with recordings of the text
- Good lighting
- Posters related to reading
- Book card, signing, stamping



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Home Living



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Add UNIQUE choices that challenge THINKING!!!

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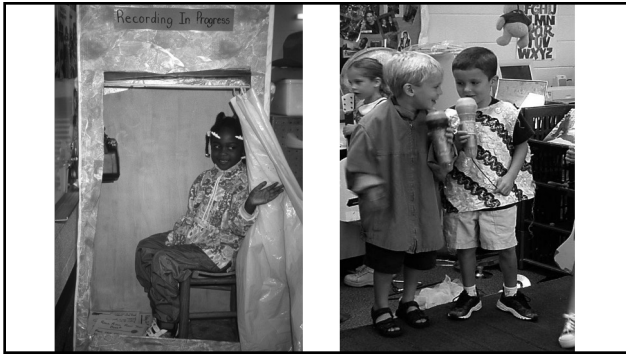
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Music and Sound Center

- Music is essential for development of the "whole" child
- Music activates all parts of the brain
- Music is enjoyed throughout life
- Music center provides the opportunity for experimentation with sounds, instruments, and a variety of music
- Music builds confidence in abilities and interest



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Science and Nature Center



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Sociodramatic Center

- Encourages symbolic play
- Inspires role play
- Uses collaboration skills
- Communication is used in meaningful ways
- Includes literacy opportunities
- Understanding of self and others



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Doctor's Office Center: Vocabulary

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| • ambulance | • nurse |
| • appointment | • records |
| • bandage | • reflex |
| • blood pressure | • scale |
| • check-up | • shot/vaccination |
| • doctor | • splint |
| • emergency | • stethoscope |
| • examination table | • thermometer |
| • height/weight | • tongue depressor |
| • medicine | • X-ray |



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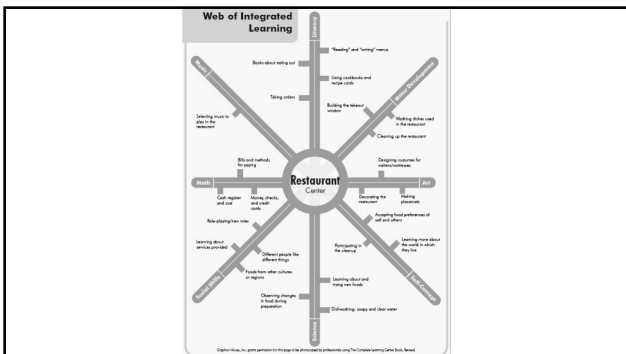
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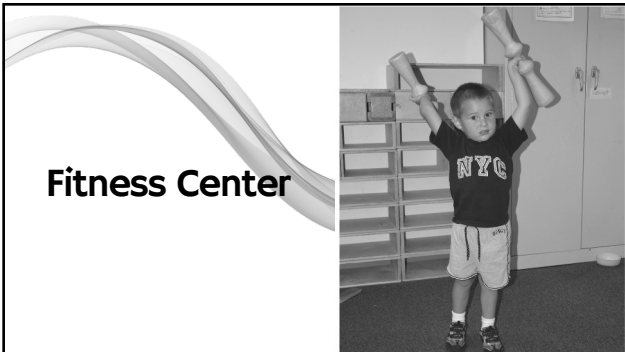
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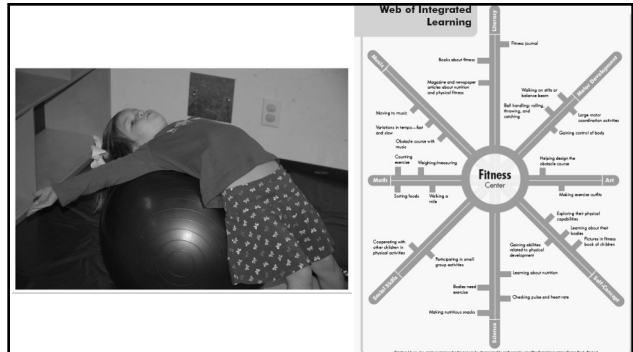
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New Possibilities: Unique Centers

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Outdoor Centers

- New places to inspire play
- Move props around by using wagons and storage boxes (motor activity)
- More body movement
- Meaningful activity



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Centers for All Children

- Open-Ended
- Flexible Opportunities
- Learning Together
- Successful Experiences
- Peer Tutoring
- Working with Diverse People



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Talking About Centers

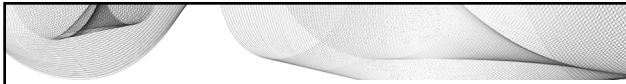


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Reflecting on Centers and Choices

- Return to the circle to share activities in the Center
- Keeping a journal of involvement
- Chart for identifying the Center used
- Collecting or making new props based on discussion

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Small groups provide unique and important opportunities for young children to choose, communicate, learn, play, and collaborate!

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