Managing the Classroom: Designing Environments

Narrator: Hello, and welcome to this short presentation on Managing the Classroom: Designing Environments. This presentation will provide an opportunity to think about the way the classroom space is organized and how to optimize children's participation in the classroom spaces, how to make them areas for learning.

The House Framework illustrates the important practices that support school readiness for all children. The foundation of the House and the foundational teaching practices are Effective and Engaging Interactions and Environments. This module on designing environments fits into the foundation of our House. The other parts of the House are the pillars, Research-based Curricula and Teaching Practices and Ongoing Child Assessment, and the roof, Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning.

Designing an effective and engaging classroom environment takes careful thought and planning, but it's important. A well-organized classroom that is interesting, orderly, and attractive contributes to children's participation and engagement with the learning materials and activities. This engagement, in turn, contributes to children's learning. It's all a part of helping children achieve school readiness and success in school and beyond.

Let's look at it from a child's perspective. We want children to feel safe and comfortable in the classroom. We want them to be interested in the learning activities and to take full advantage of being at school and take full advantage of the activities you've planned and the materials you've selected. It can be helpful to get down at a child's level and take a look at the classroom. Does it feel welcoming and inviting? Is there enough room to move, make choices, and stay involved with a toy or activity or project? And does the room help the child know what to do and what's expected?

There are all sorts of classrooms. They differ by size and shape, amount of light and wall space, placement of sinks and counters, and amount of storage. Figuring out how to design the physical space and to maximize children's interactions within the space will take some time. Make a floor plan. Move things around. Take a look at other classrooms and see what works.

Here are a few things to think about when designing your space and making it as workable as possible. Think about the number of interest areas or centers that you want or need for the group of children. Arrange the space so that noisy areas are separated from quiet areas. Locate centers next to needed storage or equipment. Use furniture or other items to provide boundaries. But, make sure that the adults can see all of the areas of the room. Make a space for the whole class to gather as well as areas for smaller groups to work and play. Think about traffic patterns. Plan so that children can move easily from space to space, but also discourage running and wandering. It will take some time and creativity to make it all work.

The learning materials, toys, and other objects and equipment are also important. Once again, it takes careful thinking and planning to make the right selections. Ideally, all of the materials contained in a center or an interest area will support children's development and learning. So, think about how the materials relate to lesson plans and learning goals. Make sure they are culturally relevant and meaningful to children's lives. Provide sufficient variety and quantity, but not so much as to overwhelm the children. And plan for integration of learning across domains, as well as what you'll need to individualize for the children in your group.

We include one more feature of the environment when designing the environment for maximum learning. Teachers want to be intentional about how they group children, whether it's a decision made in the moment or as part of lesson planning. Match the size of the group with the purpose of the activity. Think about the children who will be in the group. Young children need opportunities to participate and learn with the whole group, smaller groups, and they will thrive with a bit of one-on-one time with an adult.

The purpose of this presentation was to provide an overview of the important aspects of designing an engaging and effective early learning environment. Some of those aspects are the physical space itself; the content, such as toys, materials, and other objects; and the ways that children are organized and grouped to encourage their meaningful participation and to maximize learning opportunities. You can learn more about designing your learning environment in our tips and tools and helpful resources that accompany this presentation. See examples and try out different ways to organize your own classroom. Thank you for listening.