

Play Spaces are Learning Spaces

Before children begin reading books, they are already reading the print in their environment. Therefore, your classroom should be filled with print: labels, alphabets, signs, children's writing.

Play areas should have as much printed material as the real areas they represent. Fill their play world with cereal boxes, magazines, calendars, maps, menus, and phone books.

Every play area should include children's books and children should be encouraged to use those books in their imaginative play.

Encourage children to play at writing and reading: this is a crucial step in literacy development.

Children love to imitate the behaviors of grown-ups when they have the materials to do it. Supply various papers, notepads, telephone message pads, picture postcards, and envelopes with sturdy pencils and crayons. Let them explore the world of writing with these items.



What could be a better addition to a block area than good books about construction? By looking in the books for building ideas, children learn that books carry "real life" information.

The reception desk is stocked with note paper, message pads, stamps, an address box, and magazines for children to read while waiting for their "appointments." The mail box is filled with messages the children have made for each other.



What this Achieves

Play spaces that include books and are print-rich make reading a natural part of the school day.

Early or "pretend" writing teaches children that their ideas can be put into print, and inspires them to write.

When play spaces are designed with learning in mind, opportunities to learn are frequent and fun.

Suggestions

Post several different alphabets in your room, including some made by the children. Every writing area should have an alphabet where it can easily be seen. Use both upper and lower case letters.

Change the printed materials often to reflect the interests and work of the classroom.

Try creating a post office, business office, grocery store, restaurant, television studio, or doctor's office.

Encourage children to role play in all these settings using reading and writing.