

Literacy Learning in Centers: A Kindergarten Workshop

Time: 3 hour workshop: 5 hour option.

Objectives

In this workshop participants will:

- Understand the importance of centers for young children
- Identify ways to promote literacy in learning centers during choice time and literacy focused centers during the 90 minute literacy block
- Acquire practical tips for making centers successful in kindergarten classrooms

Materials Required

- L7 Overheads or L7 PowerPoint
- Chart pad, markers, tape
- 2 charts for opening: one labeled “The Teacher’s Role” and the other “Characteristics of Activity”
- Props for opening (as many props as participants and 2 or 3 of the same thing is fine: rubber band, light bulb, kitchen utensils such as spatula, strainer, whisk, egg beater, or wooden spoon, coin, slinky, magnifying glass, kaleidoscope, paper clip, magnet, card file box, change purse, etc.)
- Materials for each of the 5 center activities (see handout “Kindergarten Literacy Centers Activity Cards” for specific materials)
- Either set up 5 stations around the room or in 5 bins ready to be placed on tables. Write activity name and directions on index cards. Place index card with directions in the bin.
- Index cards
- A timer

For five hour option:

- Read Aloud Books
 1. Concept books such as *Outside, Inside; Black Cat White Cat: A Book Of Opposites; M & M Counting Book; Rosie’s Walk; Shoes, Shoes, Shoes; Tools*
 2. Narrative books such as *The Three Bears; Jacket I Wear In The Snow; Swimmy; Caps for Sale; Tar Beach; Maebelle’s Suitcase; The Snowy Day; A Chair for My Mother*
 3. Rhyming books such as *How Does The Wind Walk? James And The Rain; I Can’t Said The Ant; Mooses Come Walking; A Pig Is Big; Over in the Meadow; Honey I Love; The Wind Blew*
 4. Cumulative pattern books such as *The Very Quiet Cricket; The Napping House Wakes Up; The House That Jack Built; Joseph Had A Little Overcoat*
 5. Easy to read books with limited vocabulary such as *Are You My Mother? Yo! yes? It’s Not Easy Being Big!; More, More, More Said the Baby*
- L7 Handout “Extending Read Alouds to Centers”

Additional Materials

“Kindergartners Learn Through Environmental Print” by Shelley Hong Xu and Amanda Lynn Rutledge. *Young Children*. March 2003.

“Literacy Enriched Play Centers” in *Make Way for Literacy: Teaching the Way Young Children Learn* by Gretchen Owocki (pages 164 – 180).

Handout List

Agenda

Literacy Learning in Centers in the Kindergarten Classroom

Kindergarten Literacy Centers: Activity Cards (for trainer)

Kindergarten Literacy Centers Rotation Activity (for participants to have a record of the centers they did and to do the reflection following the rotation)

Enriching Learning Centers

Learning Centers vs. Literacy Centers

Extending Read Alouds to Centers

Essential Messages

- Children are motivated to learn when they are actively engaged, working independently and with others, and able to make decisions and choices.
- Literacy activities in centers should promote purposeful learning and provide children with interesting problems to solve.
- The tasks expected in centers are open-ended in ways that are responsive to different levels of learners
- Center experiences should be designed so that children can figure out what to do and feel successful in their endeavors

Trainers' Agenda

1. Opening Activity: “Pick a Prop” (Begin during arrival and 10 – 15 minutes as you begin)

Set up a table by the door with a variety of props so that participants can select a prop as they arrive. Make a sign that says, “Choose a prop and take it to your table. Use the prop as a metaphor to finish this sentence. “To me, my role as teacher in the classroom is like a (fill in the prop) because (fill in your explanation). (And/or use L7 1 Overhead.)

When the workshop begins, ask participants to share their metaphors and explanations with others at their tables. After 5 minutes ask,

“Let’s hear some of the metaphors you came up with. I’m going to ask you to share ones you heard – rather than the ones you invented.” Hear 5 – 6 and listen for ideas that relate to the teacher’s role in making centers work. Ideas might be: flexibility, facilitation, keeping many things going at the same time, keeping things together, organized, creative, inventive, etc. (Capture key words on the chart labeled “Teacher’s Role”.)

Ask: “How would you describe this activity? What were some its characteristics? Let’s hear some ideas.” (Ideas to listen for and record on the chart “characteristics of the activity”: literacy focused– because of metaphors; open-ended because no right answers; you had to think, make choices and decisions, solve problems; involved talking and sharing).

Today's session is about using meaningful literacy centers in your classroom. The activity you just did shares many qualities about why centers are important and as we go through the day, we'll be examining your role (point to the teacher's role chart) and the qualities about centers that make them valuable for children (point to the characteristics chart).

2. Welcome and Logistics (5 minutes)

Use Handout "Agenda" to review agenda and session objectives.

3. Introduce Topic: Kindergarten Literacy Centers (15 - 20 minutes)

Ask:

"How many of you have centers in your classrooms? (Show of hands.) How many of you have center time daily? (Show of hands.) A few times each week? (hands.) Today we'll talk about using centers to foster literacy learning in kindergarten and we'll address two ways to do this: during free choice time in learning centers and during the 90 minute block in literacy focused centers."

If you know that all teachers are using a reading program, acknowledge that their programs include ideas for literacy centers like the ones you'll discuss today. Be sure to validate what they are doing with their reading programs.

Say:

"Let's begin by reflecting on why centers are important for kindergarten children. Take a minute to talk with the person next to you. What is valuable about centers for young children?"

Provide a few minutes and then invite responses. Hear some and then put up Overhead L7 #2 (or PowerPoint). Distribute handout "Literacy Learning in Centers in the Kindergarten Classroom." Review the top part of the handout/overhead validating the ideas offered by participants.

Why are centers important for young children? Center based learning responds to how young children think and learn.

Effective centers offer purposeful, hands-on, active learning

Engage children in thinking and problem solving

Allow for decision-making and choice

Are open-ended and responsive to different levels of learners

Allow children to work independently, collaboratively and successfully

Use learning centers and literacy focused centers to promote literacy learning

Include a portion of each day for children to choose learning centers

Use focused literacy centers during literacy block so that children can work independently while the teacher works with small groups

Using overhead L7 3, review the tips, inviting participants to offer ways they handle these in their classrooms.

At the beginning of the year have fewer centers and keep them simple until children learn the routines.

Establish predictable times on the schedule for centers so that children can anticipate when and for how long they can work.

Teach children predictable routines for working in centers.

Use morning circle time or meeting to teach routines.

Think carefully about the materials you include in centers.

Teach children proper care and use of materials.

Teach children procedures for getting, cleaning up and storing materials.

Label materials in storage bins with pictures and words so that they are easy for children to get from shelves and return.

Establish a clear system for making choices and moving through centers and teach it to children.

Use planning board or choice chart for children to make choices of centers.

Establish procedures for children and teachers to keep track of children's choices.

Vary the materials in centers to keep children interested.

Observe children at work; if a center is not working well, talk with children and encourage them to help determine changes.

Ensure that there is room in each center for 3 – 5 children (depending on the center).

Use a centers checklist or other record keeping method so that you can keep track of where children go

4. Activity: Literacy Centers Rotation (40 – 50 minutes)

Trainer's Note: We have provided five ideas for centers. Our suggestion is that participants spend 10 minutes at each center. However, depending on number of participants and amount of time, you might decide that each participant will only rotate through 3 or 4 centers.

Introduce this activity by saying:

“Let's look at centers in action. In this activity, you will rotate through five centers, each designed to foster engaged, independent and collaborative learning of important literacy skills.”

Tell participants where centers are located. Put them on tables or set them up around the room. Tell participants to count off to form five groups (one group at each center). Use a timer so that each center time will last 10 minutes. Clarify with participants that this is a simulation (10 minutes is not an appropriate duration for centers and that you wouldn't expect children to rotate through 5 in one work period). Each time the timer goes off, the group cleans up and proceeds to the next center.

At the end of the rotation, tell participants to return to their seats. Distribute handout “Kindergarten Literacy Centers (Rotation Activity). Give them a few minutes to review the handout and their Age by Age Accomplishments and reflect on the standards that apply to each activity.

5. Discussion (5 – 10 minutes)

First, going through each center activity, review the standards that apply, checking for understanding.

Then, pose the following questions:

- What were some qualities of the centers that you found valuable?
- What were some of the specific decisions and choices you made to accomplish the tasks at the centers (chart them).
- Think about one center. In what ways was it multi-leveled? In other words, how did the activity address learner's diverse skill levels?
- Let's think about how you would demonstrate the activities to children in advance so that they could be successful.

“Your reading programs include a wide range of literacy center ideas, right? As you implement those center ideas in your classroom, keep in mind the qualities that we identified as valuable.”

What questions do you have? (logistical, practical, etc.)

6. Activity: Extending Literacy Centers (15 - 20 minutes)

Read this quote from Leslie Morrow in *Literacy Development in the Early Years*:

“Plato (a famous philosopher) once said that *What is honored in a country will be cultivated there*. Teachers who honor the development of literacy demonstrate that attitude by providing a rich literate environment.”

Then add:

“Drill and practice are not a recipe for successful literacy development. Engagement and enthusiasm are. Centers – both open-ended or literacy focused - can make literacy come alive in your classrooms. This happens through careful planning and consideration of the key principles we discussed earlier today. Let's briefly revisit them.”

Effective learning centers:

- Promote purposeful, active, hands-on learning
- Engage children in thinking and problem-solving
- Allow for decision-making and choice
- Are open-ended and responsive to different levels of learners
- Allow children to work independently, collaboratively and successfully

“Let’s revisit the centers you just rotated through and develop ways to extend them.”

Put up overhead L7. 4 to explain and clarify the directions. Provide 10 minutes for them to work and point out the place on the handout “Kindergarten Literacy Centers Rotation Activity” where they can add ideas.

7. Discussion (10 minutes)

Invite each table to share one idea. Ask participants to offer comments or questions after each team shares.

Provide 2 – 3 minutes for participants to reflect on one idea they will try when they return to their classrooms.

Hear 2 or 3 aloud.

8. Activity: Enriching Learning Centers with a Literacy Focus (25 minutes)

Note to trainer: You might want to read chapter 10 in Make Way for Literacy on sociodramatic play and literacy (p. 157 – 182).

Distribute handout “Learning Centers vs. Literacy Centers.” and say:

“Take a few minutes to read this piece and underline ideas that resonate for you.”

Provide a few minutes for them to read, and say:

“What did you underline and why?”

Hear a few ideas. Then say:

“When children work at literacy centers, they practice specific literacy skills. In learning centers, children engage in social interaction, use speaking and listening skills, and build vocabulary. At the same time, they discover and apply knowledge across the curriculum. Let’s think about what children can learn while in a dramatic play area set up as an office. Assume that the class is studying jobs; they’ve visited some offices in the school building and perhaps in the local community. They’ve had discussions about the equipment and materials located in an office. They’ve helped to set up the dramatic play area as an office and now they are engaged in play.

“Let’s imagine that we’re in that classroom in the dramatic play area. Let’s add to the chart (labeled “Materials to Add to Dramatic Play) the props we’d hope to see in the dramatic play area.”

List their ideas. (For example, reference materials such as phone books, calendars, manuals; equipment such as phones, typewriter or computer, files, etc.)

“Creating an office with children enriches the dramatic play area with literacy possibilities. Let’s look at the Age by Age Accomplishments. What skills might children use in the dramatic play area when set up as an office?”

Invite responses.

“One way the teacher shapes the literacy learning in the dramatic play area is by organizing curriculum around a theme and then providing first hand experiences for children to gather information (visiting offices). What are some other ways to enrich and extend literacy learning in the context of the office theme in dramatic play?”

Give them a few minutes to talk at their tables. Then invite some sharing. Ideas include:

- Read stories that have office settings and invite children to re-enact the story
- Change the type of office add different office props (for example, a doctor’s office)
- Add new office materials that you introduce at morning circle. Have a discussion about the material and its use.

Put up overhead L7 5, distribute handout “Enriching Learning Centers” and say:

“To enrich learning centers throughout the classroom with language and literacy learning, address 3 questions:

- What materials can be added?
- What specific ideas do children need to guide their work and play so that literacy learning is fostered?
- What standards can be addressed?”

Determine how you will assign groups to centers in advance. Have the group form triads and give each triad a different center to work on. Say:

“With your triad, work on your assigned center. Think about materials to add and ideas you can use to focus and extend children’s literacy learning. As you develop your ideas, think about the standard(s) it addresses. Record your plan on a chart.”

Provide about 20 minutes to work. Have each table present their chart.

9. Discussion (5 – 10 minutes)

Ask for questions and insights.

10. Closure (10 minutes)

Pose these questions and tell participants to do a written reflection:

“As a result of today’s workshop, what is one idea you are really excited to try in your classroom? What is one thing you anticipate will be a challenge for you? How can you make the challenge a learning opportunity?”

Hear a few “excited abouts” and then invite a few challenge/learning opportunities.

Additional Activity for 5 Hour Session

11. Activity: (45-60 minutes)

Begin this activity by reading aloud a story that you like a lot! There are several options in the Trainer's Resource Box. Then, go on to say:

“Children enjoy hearing stories read aloud again and again, especially ones we model enthusiasm for. They also feel proud as they begin to own the text in a favorite story. What are some ways children show ownership and enthusiasm about a book?” (Some ways they show ownership are by retelling it, “pretend” reading the story, predicting accurately what will come next in the story, and describing in detail characters and setting.)

Hear ideas. Distribute handout “Extending Read Alouds to Centers” and put up overhead L7.6. Discuss different ways to extend read alouds, differentiating between literacy center ideas and learning center ideas. Have the group brainstorm a few ideas for the book you read aloud.

Put up overhead L7.7 to go over the directions for the activity. Check for understanding. (You can give each team a selection of books or have them come and choose from a table.) Tell them they will have 25 minutes to work.

Post charts around the room and jigsaw the groups. This means that new groups are formed comprised of one person from each group. When the groups have moved to new tables, give debriefing directions:

- Select a timekeeper.
- Each person has no more than 3 minutes to tell the name of the book, give a 2 sentence summary of the book, and present a brief description of their activities.
- At the end of the presentations, identify one insight to share with the whole group.

12. Discussion (15-20 minutes)

Hear each group's insight. Invite responses from participants to the insights raised. Note common themes. Pose this question:

What standards were mentioned most often? Or, were they pretty evenly addressed?

How do you ensure that you are able to observe and document children's learning in the centers we discussed today? (Get people to brainstorm specific strategies.)

Proceed to closure.