



Curious Learning Collective's

GUIDE TO

Building Environments

For Play & Integrated Inquiry-
Based Learning Centers

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Thank you for joining us!

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Developmental appropriateness. Language, pacing, and expectations should be adapted to reflect the ages, abilities, and individual needs of the children in a given setting.

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Areas & Centers

Playful environments are designed with children's development in mind. They are often made up of nooks and small spaces called "focus areas". Typically one focus area, the rug, is also large enough for a whole group to gather together. Dividing the room into smaller spaces supports children's independence, ability to focus, and multiple ways of making meaning. A center might live at a table and be taken out and put away each day, whereas an area is constant. A classroom ***might*** contain some of the following spaces:

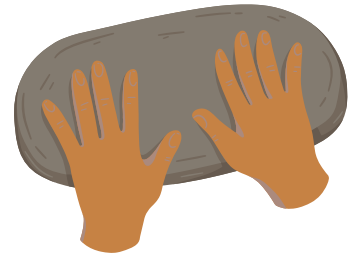
Message Center

Tools include paper, pens and invitations for children to explore mark making or writing.



Sensory Area

Materials may change as studies and needs shift. Invitations to touch and explore happen here.



Dramatic Play

Props and realia from home can populate this space. It changes along with studies.



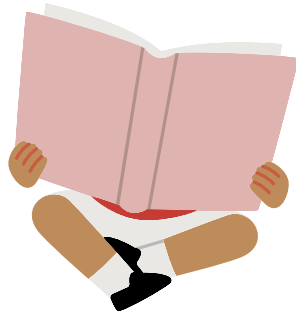
Small World

Miniature worlds can be built and explored in this space.



Library

Beloved books and an invitation to look and explore happen here.



Discovery

This space encourages investigation through looking closely at something with magnifying glasses, and other materials.



Makerspace

This area centers the act of creation through the use of recycled materials.



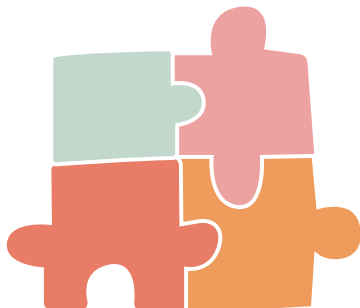
Art

Changing materials that increase in complexity. You might start with simple materials like colored pencils and then add in more like water colors.



Puzzles and Games

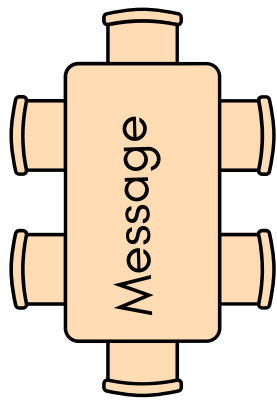
Options here shift to reflection the changing goals of the classroom.



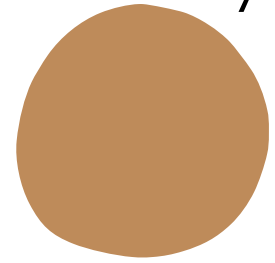
Building

Classic wooden blocks form the backbone of this space.

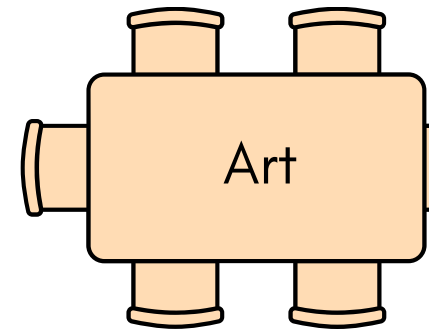
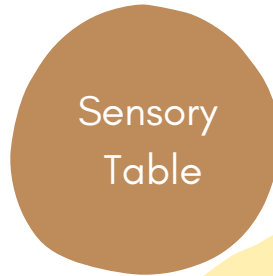
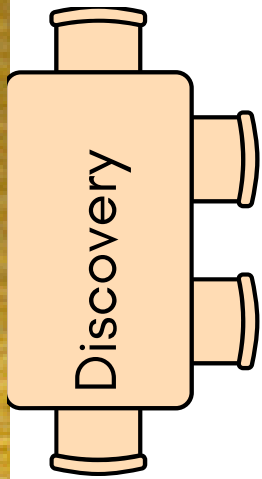




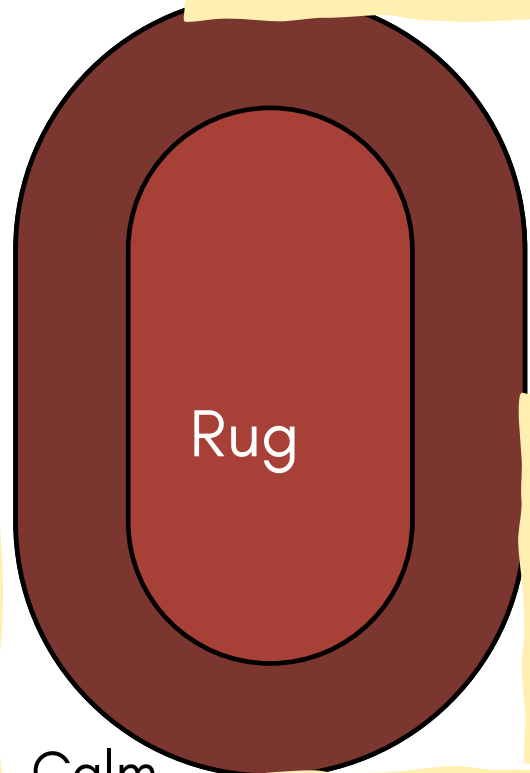
Dramatic Play



One Classroom Layout



Blocks



Library

Small World

Calm Area

DOOR



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NOTES ON **THIS** ROOM DESIGN

- No designated "seat work" area. Low bookshelves create cozy nooks throughout, and seat work can happen anywhere.
- Whole class instruction is short and on the rug.
- Fewer tables than students – floor/laptop desks add flat surfaces without adding furniture.
- Small group instruction happens within centers or on the rug, wherever the work makes sense.
- Storage is on the bookshelves.

AESTHETIC CHOICES THAT IMPACT ROOM DESIGN:

Plants soften a room and symbolize a growing community. Find them at moving or end-of-season sales.

Natural light and small lamps (check yard sales and thrift stores) reduce visual stimulation and create cozy nooks.

Minimal decorations keep walls free to highlight student thinking and lived classroom and life experience.

Wood and warm colors reflect light in a way that gives off a comforting, enveloping feeling.

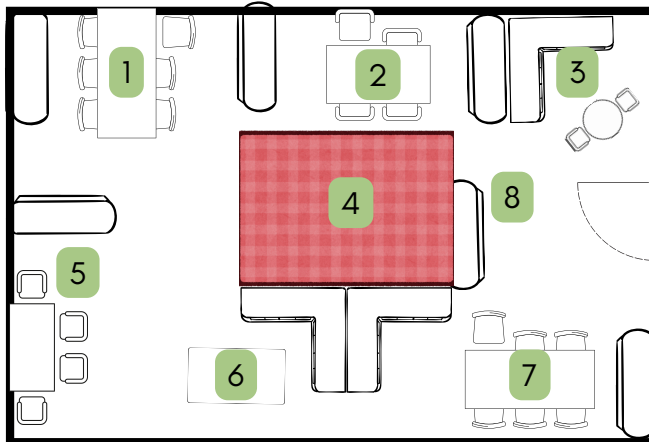
REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS (from a child's point of view):

Ease of social connectedness	Does the room encourage social interaction, and where does it naturally happen?
Ease of movement/safety	How easily can I move through the space? Where do people most often travel, and can personal space be maintained?
Sensory stimulation	How does this space feel: auditory, visually, tactilely?

Room Design Inspiration

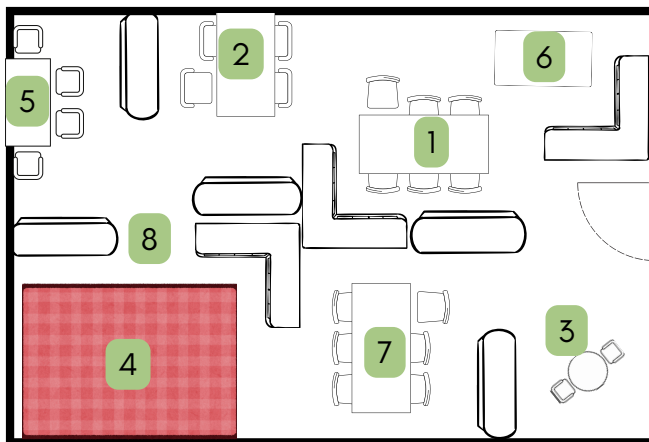
Trying to rethink your room? Try one of these floor plan options!

Rug in the center (26 students)



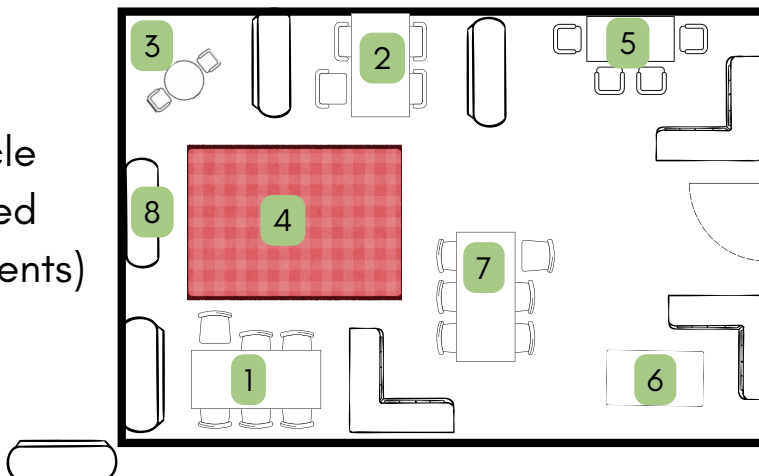
1. Art/makerspace area and related shelves
2. Sensory bins and related shelves
3. Dramatic play
4. Rug (no projector, back of bookshelves hold schedule, etc)
5. Discovery and shelves (by window)
6. Blocks/ small world and floor table
7. Message center/puzzles
8. Library shelf

Shelves in the center (26 students)



1. Art/makerspace area and related shelves
2. Sensory bins and related shelves
3. Dramatic play
4. Rug (no projector, wall holds schedule, etc)
5. Discovery and shelves (by window)
6. Blocks/ small world and floor table
7. Message center/puzzles
8. Library shelf

Cubicle Inspired (26 students)



1. Art/makerspace area and related shelves
2. Sensory bins and related shelves
3. Dramatic play
4. Rug (no projector, wall holds schedule, etc)
5. Discovery and shelves (by window)
6. Blocks/ small world and floor table
7. Message center/puzzles
8. Library shelf