

NEW

# DIRECTIONS

for success

TOGETHER

## The kindergarten

Sharing Practices With Christiane

WORKSHOP GUIDE  
FOR THE VIDEOS

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UQÀM SAV  
Service de l'audiovisuel  
Université du Québec  
à Montréal

Éducation  
Québec 

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## OBJECTIVES AND AIMS OF THE MEQ PRESCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM

The program enables 4 and 5 year olds to develop psychomotor, emotional, social, language, cognitive and methodological competencies related to self-knowledge, life in society and communication. With the support of the teacher, children take part in learning situations drawn from their world of play and their life experiences. (MEQ Preschool Program, p. 52)

Play is a central part of preschool education. It makes a major contribution to children's overall development. Although the materials found in the kindergarten class play an important role, organization of space is also a factor to take into consideration. Space must be provided for playing, moving around, storing personal objects and items, and working on projects.

**“The way adults arrange and equip space for children is guided by the ingredients of active learning and influences the way children and adults learn and teach.”**

– Weikart, 1995

The kindergarten class is divided into distinct working areas. They may be called “corners,” “centres,” “areas” or “workshops.” It may be interesting to agree on a common understanding of these terms. The way they are arranged influences the way children interact, play, work and learn in the classroom. Because materials are plentiful and accessible, children can follow their own interests and intentions.



## ABOUT SHARING

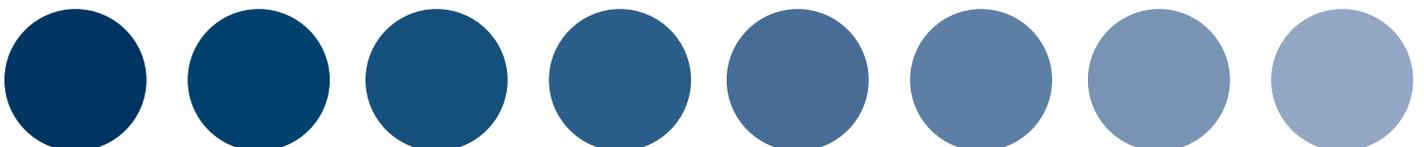
**Sharing resources, ideas and practices is rich in learning for teachers. As we have many sessions providing professional development opportunities, we find ourselves in a continuous learning process. Sharing should also be part of that process. It enables teachers to take the time to exchange know-how and experiences that can be valuable to all: beginners and experienced teachers, administrators, parents, etc. The sharing process also confirms teachers in their practices and gives them a chance to reflect, adjust their intervention and modify their practice. It also allows teachers to think aloud and enables them to put their actions into words.**

From this perspective, the viewing of the video encourages teachers and administrators:

- to look at their class environment and how it is arranged and equipped
- to describe the materials found in each centre
- to see how it can be enriched in light of the different children's interests and projects
- to see how it can be enriched in light of different cultural contexts
- to emphasize children's learning in the different centres in relation to the competencies of the MEQ Preschool Program
- to look at their role as a teacher
- to reflect on the observation and evaluation of children in action.

From this perspective, the viewing of the video encourages parents:

- to be aware of the purpose of their child's classroom and home setting
- to understand what their child is learning when playing in different centres
- to validate learning taking place in different centres in relation to the competencies of the MEQ Preschool Program.



## ABOUT THE VIDEO

Christiane, an experienced kindergarten teacher, offers a tour of her classroom as she shares some of her practices with us. The purpose of the video is to offer teachers a chance to reflect on their practice in a sharing process. From this perspective, it is suggested that the presenter identify the needs and interests of the participants and group them according to their different topics of interest.

During the viewing of the video, it is suggested that teachers be in small groups. To be more effective, teachers in these small groups should, if possible, be from different schools. It would also be interesting to have this session in a kindergarten classroom. As the visit progresses, the presenter may want to stop the video and let the discussion begin. The results of the sharing process may then be discussed in a large group or in a plenary session. This way all participants can benefit from it.



## Viewing the video

There are many ways this video can be included in a professional development session. It may be presented before, during or after the suggested activities described below. It may be used in sessions lasting half a day, a day or many days.

# ACTIVITY 1

## BEFORE LOOKING AT THE VIDEO

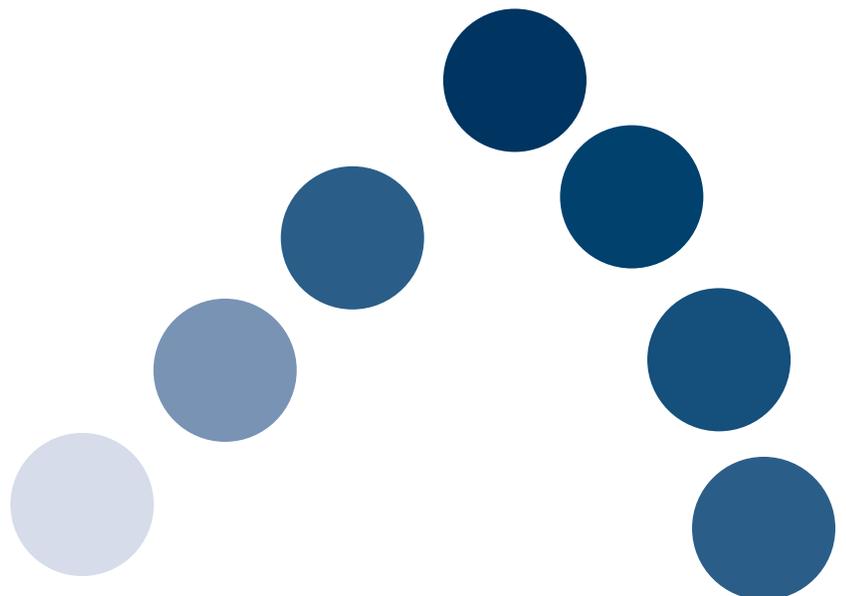
**A.** The presenter may ask the teachers to make an inventory of the different centres in their classroom. As the presenter distributes sticky papers, each teacher writes the names of the different centres found in their class. The presenter may organize the papers on the wall or on a bulletin board in order to make a visual aid that is easy to interpret.

The group will probably notice that most teachers have a paint centre, but less have a sand and water centre. Also new areas may be explored : have teachers explain why certain centres are absent from their class and what materials could be found in these new centers.

**B.** The presenter invites the teachers to brainstorm on other possible centres that may emerge from children's interests and projects during the course of the year. In subgroups or large groups, brainstorm on what other centres could be included.

**C.** How do you decide on the creation of centres? Do you base this on: teacher's initiative, children's suggestions, observing the needs and interests of the children, a parent's idea, etc? (You could use Sheet E)

**D.** What criteria do you use to position the centres in your classroom? [noise, resources (e.g. water source), compatibility of activity, exchange possible between centres (e.g. the builders take their lunch in the kitchen).

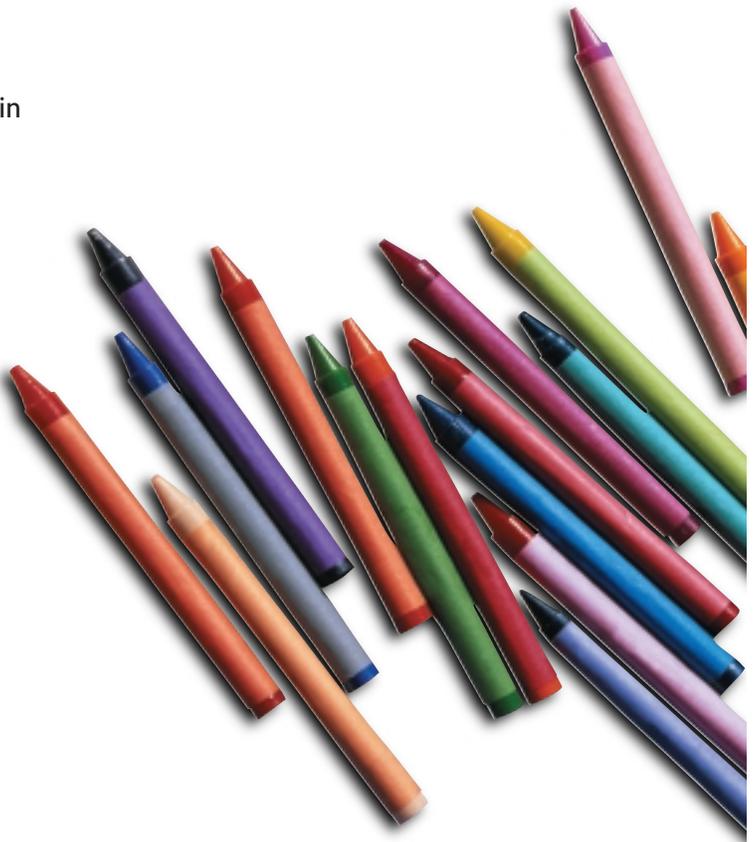


## ACTIVITY 2

### SHARING THOUGHTS AND PRACTICES

**In light of the following, the presenter may set the stage for discussion.**

- What are the daily routines in your class?
- What are the different centres that are or could be included in your class?
- What is the content of the different centres in terms of variety, quantity and openness of the materials? (If you decide on these themes, see Activity 3 and Sheets A, B and C)
- What strategies do you use during transition periods?
- What cultural items can be integrated in the different areas in order to promote awareness of culture?
- How do you ensure that children have a sense of control over their learning?
- What is active learning? What can you do in your class to promote the children's active involvement in their learning process?
- Are children involved in the planning of the space and activities in your classroom? (Use Sheet E)



# ACTIVITY 3

## CONTENT OF A CENTRE

Participants are divided into small groups. Each group chooses a centre. The presenter asks the teachers to:

1. describe the materials found in that centre (See Sheets A and B)
2. assess what children learn in relation to the 6 competencies of the program when interacting at that centre. \*\* (See Sheet C)
3. identify what you can do to facilitate children's learning at that centre (direct/indirect teacher interventions). (See Sheets B and D)

Note:

On Sheet B, we give a series of examples to illustrate how materials determine the play and learning going on in the classroom. The list encourages teachers to have a closer look at their pedagogical environment. The examples are based on the work of Thériault et al. (1987) and Weikart (1995) and offer a starting point for a reflective practice that eventually should lead to change.

The goal of the observation of the classroom environment and materials is to answer the following questions:

- ✓ Is the level of play of the children in line with the developmental stage of 4- or 5-year-olds (using Vygostky's vocabulary, others would say within the proximal development zone)  
E.g. Are the experiences available in the sand area more complex than those they have known since they were 2 and 3 years old?
- ✓ Do the materials/activities offer a sufficient challenge to each child at that moment?
- ✓ Do the materials and environment help children become master players in this area?

\*\* Sheets B, C and D may be reproduced on 11 x 17 paper

***“When an object or environment is open to many interpretations and uses, the child holds the power to tell what it is to be or do rather than it giving the child some preconceived “correct” way to perceive or act.”***

– J. Talbot, 1989



## ACTIVITY 4

### “ I ...as opposed to ..WE

Kindergarten teachers have a tendency to sometimes take ownership of certain activities.

Identify activities that you sometimes do for or in place of the children rather than giving them a chance to get involved as part of their learning process. Then list activities that are initiated, negotiated, planned, achieved by or with the children.

(See Sheet E)

Examples:

- planning and organizing different centres, art projects, etc.
- cleaning up
- planning, gathering and distributing the materials
- deciding on themes, projects, topics, etc.
- finding resources

**“When children participate in changing the environment, they gain a sense of control over their world.”**

– J. Talbot, 1989

## ACTIVITY 5

### OBSERVATION AND EVALUATION

**“In preschool education, evaluation involves the individual children, their peers, teachers and parents. Observation is the favoured means of evaluation: it fosters and respects the learning process and focuses on the children’s attitudes, behaviours, processes, strategies and productions.”** (MEQ Preschool Program, p. 52)

How do you document the play and learning that occurs? (e.g. video, pictures, portfolio, taping, documentation panels, exhibits, journals)

How can you share this with other teachers, parents, administrators and children?



# APPENDIXES



**1- Description (Using Sheet D, the teachers may want to make a list of the materials found in the different centres in their classrooms and add to it as new ideas are shared)**

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**2- What are the significant elements that attract children to this area?**

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**3- How may I enrich it: significant elements I can add in order to promote play or work in that area?**

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**4- How can my interventions facilitate learning?**

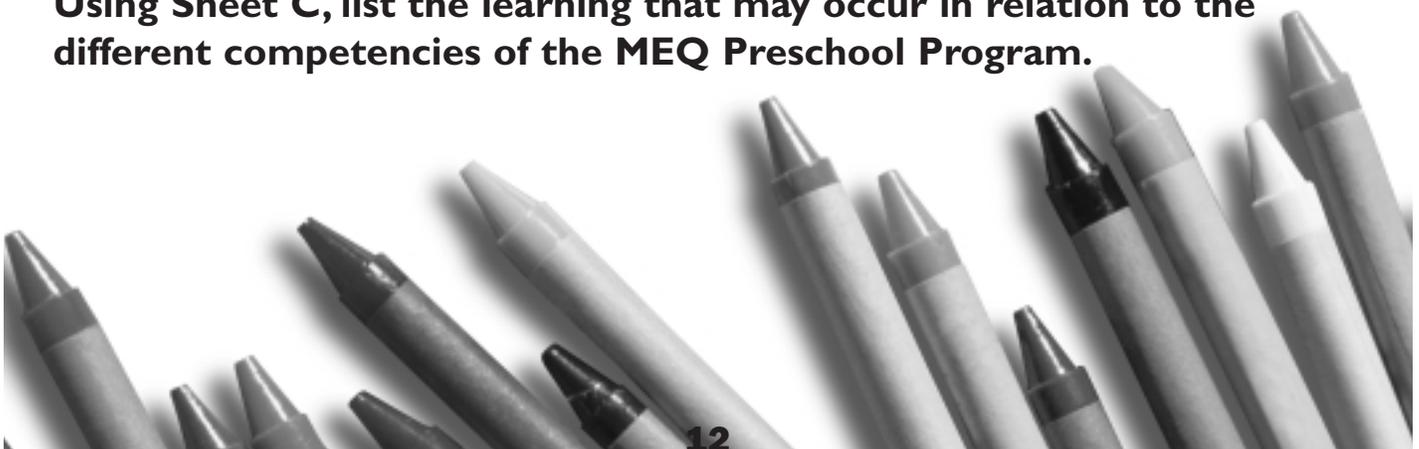
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**5- What can children learn at that centre?**

**Using Sheet C, list the learning that may occur in relation to the different competencies of the MEQ Preschool Program.**



# Sheet B

## A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE MATERIALS ON PLAY BEHAVIORS AND LEARNING

Inspired by the work of Thériault et al. (1987)

ENVIRONMENT AND MATERIALS	CONSEQUENCES FOR PLAY AND LEARNING
<p><b><u>SYMBOLIC PLAY AREA:</u></b></p> <p>Example: the house area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Size and degree of closure or openness of the space: Is the space too small, too big, well identified, too open to promote the necessary intimacy for house play?</li> <li>❖ Positioning of area: Placing the block centre close to the house or restaurant centre.</li> <li>❖ Placement of furniture: logically grouping the elements necessary for each scenario: bed, doll, chairs, rocker, ironing board...all close to each other. A living room will include a sofa, reading materials, a television (made by the children), something to listen to music..</li> <li>❖ How are objects put away? Are dolls' clothes (or props, utensils...) stored in containers by type, size, doll or season (or put indiscriminately in a chest or a drawer)?</li> <li>❖ Are materials in sufficient quantity and variety? Can children find everything they need to act out a scenario (feeding the baby, doctor...)?</li> <li>❖ Does each doll have a complete set of clothes and clothes for different seasons? Are there baby and adult dolls?</li> <li>❖ Do the materials suggest complementary roles (the receptionist at the doctor's office)?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Increased or reduced participation at that centre.</li> <li>❖ May increase participation of boys in the house centre and of girls in the building activities.</li> <li>❖ Increased duration and depth of play: maintains children's interest in the scenario.</li> <li>❖ Children will learn to classify while playing instead of making a mess as they empty the drawer to find what they want.</li> <li>❖ Helps children remain interested in a scenario, play more cooperatively and at a more complex level.</li> <li>❖ The scenario will include more participants, thus promoting negotiation, planning, problem solving, language...</li> <li>❖ The use of adult dolls promotes a higher level of language and wider range of scenarios.</li> <li>❖ Less repetitive play, more varied and extended scenarios.</li> </ul>

- ❖ A variety of props ( for daily life and fiction roles) are available for both boys and girls and promote non sexist attitudes and roles (the “nurse” can be a boy, the doctor, a girl...).
- ❖ Realistic and open materials are present: very young children need realistic objects to make believe (e.g. a cup). But older children can use objects for alternative uses (a block can be a cell phone or a piece of steak).
- ❖ Do children participate in identifying the missing elements for a scenario and in making and gathering props?

### **TABLE GAMES**

Example: Puzzles

- ❖ Do they all offer about the same number of pieces or is there a wide range in the number of components.
- ❖ What mental processes are required? Check the variety of the concepts included (do the puzzles predominantly represent a series of fruit, vegetables, shapes, transportation ...). Do some puzzles have tactile qualities, do some address spatial concepts, conservation of quantity, numbers and grouping, associations, words and pictures?
- ❖ Are they predominantly a series of isolated objects or are they complex life scenes?

- ❖ Opposing gender-biased roles.
- ❖ Open material promotes creativity and free use of the material (e.g. a long narrow piece of cloth is more open to interpretation than a tie. A tie suggests a specific use even though this can be transgressed). Very specific materials dictate the use and narrow down freedom of use. The children do need a number of specific props; if they always need to compensate for missing elements, they will probably abandon the scenario.
- ❖ Sense of ownership and control over the environment, creativity...
- ❖ Children’s interest is maintained and frustration avoided.
- ❖ Increased understanding of many concepts for some children, for others allows them to transfer new learning.

## **OTHER MATERIALS**

Are there

- ❖ two-dimensional materials: materials to string (small beads seem to be missing in many classes), sew, weave, braid, tie (children of this age should be working with real materials).
- ❖ three-dimensional materials: material to bolt, to screw, to assemble, mechanical or electro-magnetic toys?

Example: Games with rules

- ❖ Are the games like lottos, dominos, and circuits renewed during the course of the year?
- ❖ Can children invent other games to be added to the class collection?

## **CONSTRUCTION GAMES**

- ❖ A variety of large and small blocks (and in sufficient quantity) that can be assembled in different ways
- ❖ Figurines (people, vehicles, animals, signs...) are available nearby.
- ❖ Paper and craft materials (cardboard, wire, scissors, play dough...) are available to create (a river flowing under the bridge...).
- ❖ Architect paper, straight ruler, curved ruler, square...(to draw plans or represent buildings) are available.
- ❖ Writing materials are available (to label, create signs...).
- ❖ Pictures of buildings from around the world are available nearby.

- ❖ Increasing children's fine motor skills.

- ❖ Maintaining children's interest in these types of games which help them develop strategies and exercise a number of fundamental cognitive abilities: anticipating, comparing, classifying, memorizing, associating...

- ❖ Different blocks bring different outcomes: large hollow blocks promote large muscle tone; unit blocks promote group projects; lego can be used for individual work or cooperative work. Playing with wood blocks or soft blocks are different experiences. Magnetic blocks bring other discoveries.

- ❖ Complex and varied scenarios.

- ❖ Creativity.

- ❖ An introduction to Mathematics, spatial relations...

- ❖ Promoting literacy in the block corner.

- ❖ Promoting cultural awareness, a window on the world.

- ❖ Pictures of men and women building are available nearby.
- ❖ The size of the area is critical, as is the quantity of blocks available.

## **SCIENCE**

- ❖ Observations in this centre in a number of classrooms have shown that the materials are rarely varied and complex. One should find: magnets, a scale, a microscope, a telescope, binoculars, a magnifying glass, a compass, a stethoscope, a water pump, motors, pulleys, gears and different devices (telephone...) to take apart. Plants, animals, indoor gardens, collections of insects, shells, rocks and objects from the outside environment should also be included. Books serving as references for the children should also be available. This centre can be further developed through outings with the children and the use of resources from the parents' work place.

## **SOCIAL SCIENCE**

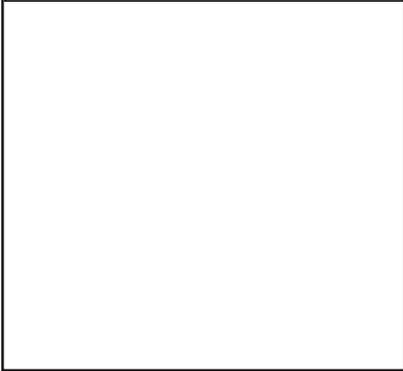
- ❖ Most teacher do not have a specific centre for this. Social Sciences are said to be included in different centres and throughout the curriculum. Keeping track of the activities and making an inventory of the materials scattered in the room that address families, occupations, life in the community as well as cultural commonalities and differences will help you evaluate if this aspect gets enough attention in your classroom.
- ❖ Special activities with the children that include them in community action will develop their feeling of belonging.
- ❖ Field trips are one good way to implement the social science curriculum. Interviews (questioning seniors) and guests (expert in an area preferably linked to an ongoing project) are also a great source of information

- ❖ Addressing stereotyped roles by gender.
- ❖ More children will work together on more complex building projects, for a longer time and in collaborative pretend play.
- ❖ Fill the children's need to manipulate, experiment and discover; to understand (study) the world around them; to learn about the scientific process (asking questions, gathering pertinent information...); and to develop a respect for nature.

- ❖ Role-playing, sharing experiences, visiting and replaying scenarios (hospital...) help children become aware of our society's organization and the part they play and could play in the future as responsible citizens and workers

**Sheet C:** In relation to the 6 competencies of the MEQ Preschool Program, fill in the blocks where appropriate.

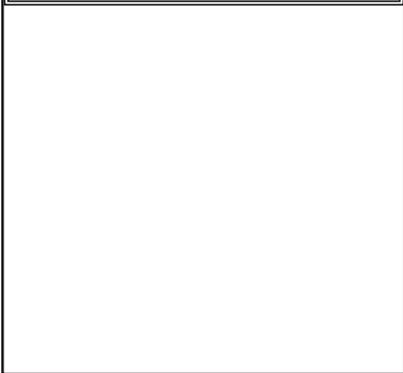
1-To perform sensorimotor actions effectively in different contexts



2-To affirm his/her personality

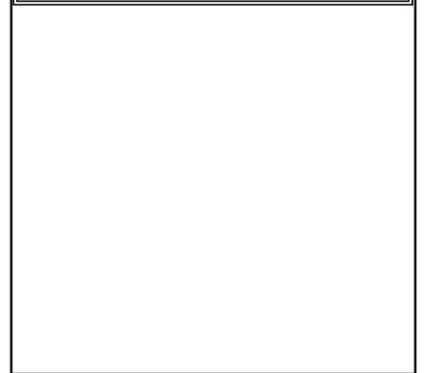


3-To interact harmoniously with others

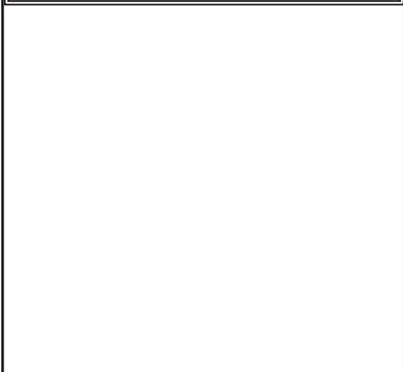


**Centre:** \_\_\_\_\_

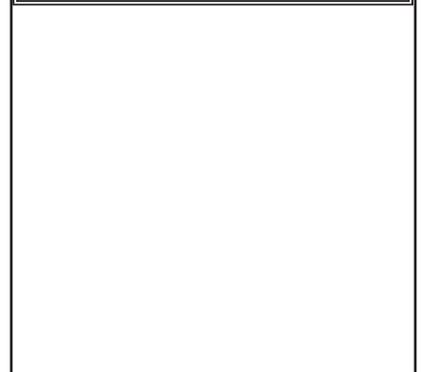
4-To communicate using the resources of language



5-To construct his/her understanding of the world



6-To complete an activity or a project



**Sheet D:** List the materials found in the different centres of your class.  
 What could you add to promote active learning?

Group Gathering	Blocks	Sand Water	House Puppets	Books	Math Manipulative	Art	Paint
Puzzles Table games	Writing Centre	Wood-working	Music Movement	Listening Centre	Science, animals, plants and rocks		

**Sheet E:**

**I... as opposed to ...WE**

<b>I</b> Things I do for or in place of the children	<b>We</b> Things I do with the children


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