



Facilitator's Guide

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Videos

Stream from http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators_pd/

“Creating the Learning Environment” (Overview)

“Plan and Organize the Space”

“Establish Routines”

“Foster Exploration”

Introduction

This professional development training module is designed to help you lead educators in using best practices to create a positive and nurturing early learning environment. It is one of several modules developed for early childhood educators by the Department of Early Education and Care of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

This training meets the guidelines for Continuing Education Units (CEUs) as outlined by the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children (MassAEYC).

For more information about this professional development training module, visit http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators_pd/.

About this Guide

This Facilitator's Guide provides instructions and narrative for delivering a video-based training for early childhood educators. You'll find an agenda, learning goals, preparation suggestions, talking points, activities, and handouts. You'll also find general tips and resources to help you facilitate the training. Use these materials with the accompanying videos to lead family child care and center- and school-based educators in an engaging, content-rich training.

Note: To view the videos referenced in this guide, go to http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators_pd/. Select “*Creating the Learning Environment*.” Be sure you have access to the videos prior to and while leading this training.

Learning Goals

After participating in this training, educators will be able to:

- Summarize the best practices for creating a learning environment that fosters children's developmental growth.
- Design a learning environment that offers spaces, activities, and materials that prompt children to explore, experiment, and interact in different ways.
- Build a curriculum that uses established routines to support children's developmental growth.
- Plan activities, offer materials, and use explanatory language to promote children's exploration.
- Apply new knowledge to current practices.

Agenda

Introduction	15 minutes
Creating the Learning Environment	5 minutes
Plan and Organize the Space	15–20 minutes
Establish Routines	15–20 minutes
BREAK (optional)	5–10 minutes
Foster Exploration	15–20 minutes
Try It	15–20 minutes
Wrap Up	5–10 minutes
Total Time	90–120 minutes

Preparation

Before leading this training, you should:

- Watch the videos and get to know the best practices.
- Read through the training module. Become familiar with the talking points so that you can share them in a natural, conversational way.
- Obtain and test the technology you need to share the videos with participants and make sure you have a reliable Internet connection during the training.
- Gather any props or materials needed for the Try It activity.
- Rehearse and fine-tune your presentation to “make it your own.” Time yourself to make sure you are within the allotted time.
- Create a handout packet with copies of the following for each participant:
 - Self-Assessment
 - Learning Log
 - Try It
 - Best Practices
 - Learning Guidelines and Standards
 - Training Evaluation
- Consider working with a partner the first time you lead this training. You can learn from and support each other when preparing, practicing, and facilitating. After the training, you can reflect on participants' evaluations together.

Facilitation Tips

Whether you're a new or experienced facilitator, these tips can help your training run smoothly.

- Arrive early to prepare the training room for optimal learning.
 - Place handout packets where participants check in.
 - Have pens or pencils and paper on every table.
 - Check your technology setup to make sure the videos play without problems.
- Create a space that is inviting and comfortable.
 - Play soft music as people arrive.
 - Greet participants with a smile and a handshake. A personal introduction helps set the stage for collaboration and learning.
- Invite partner or small group discussion.
 - Before the training begins, invite educators to identify a partner—people learn best when they have a chance to talk about what they are learning or thinking.
 - Allow a few minutes for partners to introduce themselves to each other.
 - During the training, provide opportunities for partner interaction.
- Keep participants engaged.
 - Follow the “ten-two rule” as you present the training: Speak for no longer than ten minutes at a time and then provide participants at least two minutes of interaction or activity.
 - Avoid simply reading the talking points that have been provided. Become familiar with each point so that you can keep the training engaging, fluid, and conversational.

Icebreaker Ideas

When working with a group of educators who may or may not know each other, it's a good idea to provide a few moments to “break the ice.” This allows people to relax, laugh, move, and get to know each other (and you). Below are just a few ideas you can use to begin a training session.

That's Me!

Read a statement aloud to the group. Ask participants to stand up, raise a hand in the air, and shout *That's me!* if the statement applies to them. It's fun to see which statements apply to all participants and which do not apply to any. Statements might include:

Facilitator's Guide (CONTINUED)

- *I teach at a family child care.*
- *I have worked with children for five years or more.*
- *I was born in Massachusetts.*
- *I write down the funny things that kids say.*
- *I laugh out loud at least once a day.*
- *I check Pinterest at least once a week.*
- *I have no idea what Pinterest is.*
- *I believe that there is no problem that good chocolate can't solve.*

You can come up with your own statements or invite a few participants to come up with statements. When they say their statement aloud, others (including you) can reply, *That's me!*

Weave a Web

Holding onto a ball of yarn, share your name and an interesting fact about yourself with participants. Keep the end piece as you toss the ball of yarn to a participant. Ask the participant to share his or her name and a personal fact, and hold onto the yarn as they toss the ball to another participant. Continue until everyone has had a turn and the "web" is complete.

Two Truths and a Lie

Ask participants to jot down two truths and one lie about themselves or their work with children. For example:

- *I speak Japanese.*
- *I am related to Davy Crockett.*
- *I have three sets of twins in my program this year.*

Form participants into small groups of three or four people. Have each person in the group read their statements aloud and ask the rest of the group to guess which statement is not true.

Four Corners

Post a word from a set of four related words in each corner of the room, such as:

- *lion, bear, eagle, deer*
- *desert, beach, mountain, city*
- *sushi, salad, enchilada, pizza*
- *hybrid, convertible, truck, Mustang*

Ask participants, *Are you a hybrid, convertible, truck, or Mustang?* Direct participants to move to the corner of the room with which they most identify. Ask participants, now in small groups in their corners, to share with one another why they chose that corner and how it represents their interests, so that they can discover common attributes they may share. Have each small group pick one person to share the group’s common attributes with the larger group. Repeat the process with another set of four words as many times as you like.

People Bingo

Photocopy and distribute the “bingo card” below. Invite participants to find people who match a fact listed on the card and have them sign off on that fact. Each person can sign off on only one fact. Explain that when a participant has obtained five signatures in a row (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally), he or she should shout *Bingo!* and introduce the people who signed his or her card to the rest of the group.

People Bingo				
Has traveled outside the U.S.	Likes pineapple on pizza	Has lived in MA for more than 10 years	Knows how to juggle	Has never been on a plane
Can speak a foreign language	Has 3 or more brothers	Likes to camp	Has been scuba diving	Reads the Sunday paper
Likes to scrapbook	Has a summer birthday	FREE SPACE	Likes to garden	Can say the alphabet backwards
Likes math	Does crossword puzzles	Owens a cat	Has been to Alaska	Likes to run
Likes thunderstorms	Has watched a meteor shower	Is afraid of snakes	Knows how to sew	Can play basketball

Training

Introduction

(15 minutes)

Welcome Participants to the Training

- Introduce yourself and share your background and experience.
- Announce the length of the training (1½–2 hours) and note other logistics, such as break times, restroom location, and so on.
- Review the agenda and explain the structure of the training.
 - Participants will watch an overview video and then three short videos that explore best practices in creating a learning environment.
 - After each video, participants will briefly discuss the main points and reflect on what they have learned.
 - Participants will also have the opportunity to share and reflect on their own practices.
- Share the learning goals and objectives. Participants will:
 - Explore the best practices for creating a learning environment that fosters children's developmental growth.
 - Learn how to design a learning environment that offers space, activities, and materials that prompt children to explore, experiment, and interact in different ways.
 - Examine how established routines support children's developmental growth.
 - Discover how to plan activities, offer materials, and use explanatory language to promote children's exploration.
 - Apply new knowledge to current practice.
- Introduce the Learning Log.
 - The Learning Log includes questions to help participants identify best practices and distill the important points made in each video. The *viewing questions* reinforce ideas from the videos. The *reflection questions* help educators draw connections to their own experiences.
 - The Learning Log can also be used to jot down notes, questions, and ideas.

- Consider doing an icebreaker activity to get participants “warmed up” and ready to learn and interact. (See Icebreaker Ideas for suggestions.)
- Ask each participant to identify a partner to work with during the training and encourage them to share ideas. (You can offer small group discussions if you prefer.)

Complete the Self-Assessment

Educators grow and hone their skills by continually identifying their own strengths and training needs and reflecting on their own practices.

- Invite participants to complete the first half of the Self-Assessment to help them discover the skills they already possess and to identify those they would like to work on.
- Explain that toward the end of the training, participants will complete the second half of the Self-Assessment to measure their growth and learning.

Creating the Learning Environment (5 minutes)

Introduce the Topic

An effective learning environment supports children’s social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development. Educators can create an environment in which young children thrive by offering purposeful spaces and materials, incorporating daily routines, and providing opportunities for exploration.

Introduce and View the Video

Introduce the overview video featuring Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Associate Professor of Education at Wheelock College. Use this brief video to set the stage for a discussion of best practices in creating the learning environment.



“Creating the Learning Environment” (approx. 2 min)

Plan and Organize the Space (15–20 minutes)

Introduce the Best Practice

Young children need different types of spaces to promote physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. Every area in the learning environment should be designed to offer activities and materials that prompt children to explore, experiment, and interact in different ways.

- **Open spaces** encourage music, movement, and freedom of expression.

- **Learning centers** (such as the Science and Math, Literacy, and Pretend and Play Centers), invite exploration, conversation, and observation in a small-group environment.

Introduce and View the Video

Tell participants they'll watch a video featuring Maria, a center-based educator, and Laurie, a family child care educator. Although their physical spaces are different, Maria and Laurie share common practices.

Ask participants to look for effective strategies used by the educators in the video. Use these questions to guide their viewing:



"Plan and Organize the Space" (approx. 3 min)

- *How are the environments set up to promote children's development?*
- *How do the activities and materials at learning centers help foster children's growth?*

Partner/Small Group Share

After viewing the video, get participants thinking, talking, and learning together.

- Invite participants to share with each other, in pairs or small groups, what they noticed as they watched. Challenge them to use the language stem *I noticed...* rather than *I liked...*
- Suggest that participants jot down notes, ideas, or questions in their Learning Log.

Review

Share and expand on key points covered in the video. Use the following questions and talking points in your discussion. Ask participants to offer examples from the video as well as to draw upon their own experiences.

How can the learning environment be set up to support children's development?

- **Children need different types of spaces** to promote social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language growth. All areas in the learning environment work together to nurture a young child's development.
 - **Open spaces** encourage music, movement, and freedom of expression. They offer children "breathing room" away from others, as well as opportunities for collaboration and interaction. For example, the music and movement area should be large enough for children to move around freely. It is filled with props that stimulate different types of movement (such as hula-hoops) and has music that prompts children to be creative and interpretive in their physical movements.

- **Circles** allow you to gather children together in large or small groups where they then have opportunities to listen to others, express themselves, and be respectful of boundaries.
- **Quiet spaces** allow children to self-regulate and pull back from the environment if they need to refocus or regroup.
- **Cubbies** support a developing sense of identity, independence, and responsibility. They give each child a place to call his or her own, keep things of personal value, and feel pride of ownership.
- **Learning centers**, such as the Art, Block, ABC, and Technology Centers, are small-group environments that are designed to support observation and exploration. They provide cozy spaces where children interact with others.

How can purposeful activities and materials help children get the most out of each learning center?

- **Activities and materials** can prompt children to explore, experiment, talk, and interact in different ways. For example,
 - At the Science and Math Center, activities and materials encourage children to explore and solve problems. For example, weighing items on a scale prompts children to notice the causes and effects of adding or taking away items.
 - At the Sensory Table Center, children have opportunities to explore textures and surfaces, such as slippery beans in water, scratchy dry sand, or heavy wet sand.
 - At the Pretend and Play Center, dress-up and make-believe activities allow children to develop a positive identity by imagining themselves in the real world, taking on specific roles and responsibilities such as playing a clerk in a grocery store or a doctor in a hospital. The materials also allow children to interact with one another and engage in conversations and negotiations of roles and activities.

View Again (optional)

Emphasize the key messages by showing the video a second time, if possible. Seeing the video again will give participants an opportunity to notice things they may have missed and to expand their learning.

Reflect

Help participants make the connection between what they have learned and what they do in their own programs. Ask them to answer the *reflection questions* in the Learning Log.

Establish Routines

(15–20 minutes)

Introduce the Best Practice

Young children thrive in an environment built around predictable routines.

- **Communicating with families** at morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up gives children a sense of collaboration, partnership, and trust between parents/guardians and educators.
- **Posting and following a daily schedule** helps children feel safe and in control, and helps them develop independence to prepare for what's ahead.
- **Announcing events before they happen** promotes mental preparedness and self-control. Children know what to expect of the group and can transition from one activity to the next more easily.
- **Having consistent rules and routines** helps children develop self-regulation and independence. When the same rules apply inside or outside, from learning center to learning center, and from educator to educator, children learn about social boundaries and how to meet expectations.

Introduce and View the Video

Tell participants they will watch Laurie and Maria to see how the educators use schedules and routines to foster children's learning and growth—socially, emotionally, physically, linguistically, and cognitively.

Ask participants to look for effective strategies used by the educators in the video. Use these questions to guide their viewing:

- *What do you notice about the routines that are in place?*
- *How do the educators help children with transitions?*



"Establish Routines"

(approx. 3 min)

Partner/Small Group Share

After viewing the video, get participants thinking, talking, and learning together.

- Invite participants to share with each other, in pairs or small groups, what they noticed as they watched. Challenge them to use the language stem *I noticed...* rather than *I liked...*
- Suggest that participants jot down notes, ideas, or questions in their Learning Log.

Review

Share and expand on key points covered in the video. Use the following questions and talking points in your discussion. Ask participants to offer examples from the video as well as to draw upon their own experiences.

Why are routines and procedures beneficial to young children?

- **Children need routines, procedures, rules, and transitions** that are thoughtful and consistent. When children follow a schedule, they know what to expect from their day and can better self-regulate.

How can educators help children understand routines and procedures?

- **Create and post a schedule that stays the same** from day to day. A posted schedule with pictures helps foster independence. Children can look to the schedule on their own to find out what is coming up.
- **Teach procedures for daily events.** Knowing and following the procedures for events that happen each day, i.e., drop-off, snack time, nap time, and pick-up, helps children develop independence and self-control. They can feel pride when they hang up their backpacks, check their cubbies, or choose a place for resting—all on their own. Independence, self-control, and a sense of pride are all building blocks for developing social competency.

How can educators use rules to support routines?

- **Establish consistent rules.** Rules help children develop social boundaries. When the same rules apply to all children, they learn what to expect from a group of children, a peer, or a teacher.
- **Communicate about rules with families.** Daily communication with parents/guardians creates a sense of family partnership, collaboration, and trust—especially when positive behaviors and attitudes shown by children are communicated.

How can educators support children with transitions that occur throughout the day?

- **Help children understand transitions.** Announce and prepare children for events before they happen. This helps children to mentally prepare to finish the current activity and move on to the next one.

View Again (optional)

Emphasize the key messages by showing the video a second time, if possible. Seeing the video again will give participants an opportunity to notice things they may have missed and to expand their learning.

Reflect

Help participants make the connection between what they have learned and what they do in their own programs. Ask them to answer the *reflection questions* in the Learning Log.

Break (optional)

(5–10 minutes)

Foster Exploration

(15–20 minutes)

Introduce the Best Practice

Once the learning space is organized and predictable routines are in place, the joy of exploration can begin. Exploration fosters development across all areas—socially, physically, cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally. When children explore, they use all their senses to take in and ask questions about the things they are exploring. The learning environment can foster this exploration.

- **Stimulating indoor and outdoor environments** offer activities and materials that promote questioning, predicting, and experimentation.
- **Explanatory language** allows children to hear vocabulary and use it to engage in conversations and to describe and interact with the world.
- **Activities that allow children to work alongside each other** build skills in communication and collaboration.

Introduce and View the Video

Tell participants they will visit Laurie and Maria's centers once more to see how both environments invite children to explore, communicate, collaborate, and learn.

Ask participants to look for effective strategies used by the educators in the video. Use these questions to guide their viewing:



"Foster Exploration"

(approx. 3 min)

- *How are the environments set up to encourage children to explore with all their senses?*
- *How do the educators use language strategies to engage children in exploration?*

Partner/Small Group Share

After viewing the video, get participants thinking, talking, and learning together.

- Invite participants to share with each other, in pairs or small groups, what they noticed as they watched. Challenge them to use the language stem *I noticed...* rather than *I liked...*
- Suggest that participants jot down notes, ideas, or questions in their Learning Log.

Review

Share and expand on key points covered in the video. Use the following questions and talking points in your discussion. Ask participants to offer examples from the video as well as to draw upon their own experiences.

How can the learning environment be set up to encourage exploration?

- **Allow children time, space, and materials** with which to explore and experiment.
- **Use activities to promote peer interaction.** When children have opportunities to explore alongside other children, they learn how to get along and work together, improve language and communication skills, and solve problems.

What types of materials can educators provide to prompt children to explore ideas in multiple ways?

- **Provide stimulating, interesting, and engaging materials.** Different types of materials encourage different types of exploration. For example, sand, water, plastic cups, blocks, and frozen paint sticks invite children to investigate in different ways. (They can experiment with mixing sand and water, building towers with plastic cups, naming and sorting blocks by shape or color, painting with frozen paint, etc.)

What language strategies can educators use to support children's exploration?

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Open-ended questions prompt children to think deeply and critically. They begin with words like *what* and *how* and generally cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
 - *What do the beans feel like?*
 - *How can you get the ice to melt?*
 - *How could you make your cup tower taller?*
 - *What do you think will happen if...?*
- **Use language that defines and explains.** Guide conversations with children and use them as an opportunity to teach. For example, at the Block Center a teacher can use "size" words such as *big*, *bigger*, *biggest* or *small*, *smaller*,

smallest. This introduces children to math concepts and words that help them learn.

View Again (optional)

Emphasize the key messages by showing the video a second time, if possible. Seeing the video again will give participants an opportunity to notice things they may have missed and to expand their learning.

Reflect

Help participants make the connection between what they have learned and what they do in their own program. Ask them to answer the reflection questions in the Learning Log.

Try It

(15–20 minutes)

The Try It activity helps educators plan how to apply new ideas to their own early childhood program. Ask participants to work with a partner and direct their attention to the Try It handout in their packets.

Map Your Environment

- Ask participants to make a quick map of their current learning environment and label each area.
- Have them share their maps with each other, in pairs or small groups.
- Ask participants to create a revised map, incorporating the best practices learned in the training and the changes they plan to make.
- Have them share their revised maps with each other, in pairs or small groups.
- Ask participants to jot down the new routines and procedures they want to implement. Ask them to create a “to do” list along with a list of materials to gather.
- Have them share their lists and their thinking with each other.

Wrap Up

(5–10 minutes)

- Invite participants to complete the second half of the “Self-Assessment” and then measure their growth and learning.
- Ask participants to look over their notes from the training and jot down three things that they want to remember from today in their Learning Log.

- Invite partners or small groups to meet and share their three “keepers.” Then ask a few participants to share their “keepers” with the larger group.
- Thank participants for attending. Remind them to revisit the video or get activity ideas at Resources for Early Learning: <http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/>
- Encourage them to fill out and return the Training Evaluation.

Glossary

cognitive development: the process of knowing, thinking, reasoning, and remembering

emotional development: the ability to recognize, identify, produce, and respond to emotions in yourself or others

language/linguistic development: the process of developing language skills to understand when others speak and to speak and engage in conversation

physical development: the ability to perform physical activities that require motor skills such as running, jumping, and climbing

self-regulation: regulating or controlling one's emotions, thinking, and behavior

social competencies: the skills needed for successful social interaction; in young children these include making simple decisions, interacting with others in productive ways, and being able to resolve conflicts in appropriate ways

social development: the ability to use appropriate social skills to communicate and interact with others



Self-Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

Before the training: Place a ✓ in the box that best represents your current comfort level.

After the training: Place a ✓ in the box that best represents your new comfort level.

1 = Very uncomfortable 2 = Uncomfortable 3 = Neutral 4 = Comfortable 5 = Very comfortable

	Before					After				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
General										
I am comfortable with my ability to . . .										
Create an environment that stimulates children’s social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development.										
Create opportunities for children to learn from adults and other children.										
Plan and Organize the Space										
I am comfortable with my ability to . . .										
Design centers/areas for children that promote exploration and observation.										
Design a space for children that promotes movement and freedom of expression.										
Design a space for children that encourages role-playing and responsibility.										
Provide materials at centers/areas that support children’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.										
Set up a space that helps children learn independence.										
Establish Routines										
I am comfortable with my ability to . . .										
Incorporate consistent, predictable routines throughout the day.										
Help children transition between activities.										
Foster Exploration										
I am comfortable with my ability to . . .										
Create safe indoor and outdoor spaces where children can explore.										
Choose materials that encourage children’s experimentation and exploration.										
Use language that guides children’s exploration and strengthens their vocabulary and conversation skills.										



Learning Log

Plan and Organize the Space

View

In the video:

- *How are the environments set up to promote children's development?*

- *How do the activities and materials at learning centers foster children's growth?*

Reflect

In your program:

- *Which areas are working well to encourage children's development?*

- *Which areas could be improved?*

- *What adjustments could you make in the setup or materials offered in those areas?*

Notes

Establish Routines

View

In the video:

- *What do you notice about the routines that are in place?*

- *How do the educators help children with transitions?*

Reflect

In your program:

- *What routines do you already have in place? How are they working?*

- *What structures are in place to help children know what is coming up next?*

- *What did you learn that you might incorporate into your program?*

Notes

Foster Exploration

View

In the video:

- *How are the environments set up to encourage children to explore with all of their senses?*
- *How do the educators use language strategies to engage children in exploration?*

Reflect

In your program:

- *How is your environment set up to encourage exploration?*
- *What types of hands-on materials do you already have available for children?*
- *What changes to your environment, activities, or materials could you make to encourage more exploration?*

Notes



BRAIN BUILDING IN PROGRESS

Resources for Early Learning

Creating the Learning Environment

Try It

Map Your Environment

Map your current learning environment and revise it to reflect best practices.

1. Create and label a map of your current learning environment.

Try It (CONTINUED)

2. Create and label a revised map for your learning environment that reflects best practices. Include areas, activities, and materials that promote children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development.

Try It (CONTINUED)

3. What tasks will you need to complete and what materials will you need to gather to implement your new design?

Tasks to complete:

Materials to gather:



Best Practices

An effective learning environment supports children's social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development. Educators can create an environment in which young children thrive by offering purposeful areas and materials, incorporating daily routines, and providing opportunities for exploration.

Plan and Organize the Space

Young children need different types of spaces to promote physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. Every area in the learning environment should be designed to offer activities and materials that prompt children to explore, experiment, and interact in different ways.

How can the learning environment be set up to support children's development?

- **Children need different types of spaces** to promote social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language growth. All areas in the learning environment work together to nurture a young child's development.
 - **Open spaces** encourage music, movement, and freedom of expression. They also offer children "breathing room" away from others as well as opportunities for collaboration and interaction. For example, the music and movement area should be large enough for children to move around freely. It is filled with props that stimulate different types of movement (such as hula-hoops and a parachute) and has music that prompts children to be creative and interpretive in their physical movements.
 - **Circles** allow you to gather children together in large or small groups where they then have opportunities to listen to others, express themselves, and be respectful of physical space.
 - **Quiet spaces** allow children to self-regulate and pull back from the environment if they need to refocus or regroup.
 - **Cubbies** support a developing sense of identity, independence, and responsibility. They give each child a place to call his or her own, keep things of personal value, and feel pride of ownership.
 - **Learning centers**, such as the Art, Block, ABC, and Technology Centers, are small-group environments that are designed to support observation and exploration. They provide cozy spaces where children interact with others.

How can purposeful activities and materials help children get the most out of each learning center?

- **Activities and materials can prompt children** to explore, experiment, talk, and interact in different ways. For example,
 - At the Science and Math Center, activities and materials encourage children to explore and solve problems. For example, weighing items on a scale prompts children to notice the causes and effects of adding or taking away items.
 - At the Sensory Table Center, children have opportunities to explore textures and surfaces, such as slippery beans in water, scratchy dry sand, or heavy wet sand.
 - At the Pretend and Play Center, dress-up and make-believe activities allow children to develop a positive identity by imagining themselves in the real world, taking on specific roles and responsibilities, such as playing a clerk in a grocery store or a doctor in a hospital. The materials also allow children to interact with one another and engage in conversations and negotiations of roles and activities.

Establish Routines

Young children thrive in an environment built around predictable routines.

- **Communicating with families** at morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up gives children a sense of collaboration, partnership, and trust between parents/guardians and educators.
- **Posting and following a daily schedule** helps children feel safe and in control, and helps them develop independence as they use it to prepare for what's ahead.
- **Announcing events before they happen** promotes mental preparedness and self-control. Children know what to expect of the group and can transition from one activity to the next more easily.
- **Having consistent rules and routines** helps children develop self-regulation and independence. When the same rules apply inside or outside, from center to center, and from educator to educator, children learn about boundaries and how to meet expectations.

Why are routines and procedures beneficial to young children?

- **Children need routines, procedures, rules, and transitions** that are thoughtful and consistent. When children follow a schedule, they know what to expect from their day and can better self-regulate.

How can educators help children understand routines and procedures?

- **Create and post a schedule that stays the same** from day to day. A posted schedule with pictures helps foster independence. Children can look to the schedule on their own to find out what is coming up.
- **Teach procedures for daily events.** Knowing and following the procedures for events that happen each day; i.e., drop-off, snack time, nap time, pick-up, etc., helps children develop independence and self-control. They can feel pride when they hang up their backpacks, check their cubbies, or choose a place for resting—all on their own. Independence, self-control, and a sense of pride are all building blocks for developing social competency.

How can educators use rules to support routines?

- **Establish consistent rules.** Rules help children develop social boundaries. When the same rules apply to all children, inside or outside, from learning center to learning center and from educator to educator, children learn what to expect from a group of children, a peer, a teacher, and themselves.
- **Communicate about rules with families.** Daily communication with parents/guardians creates a sense of family partnership, collaboration, and trust—especially when positive behaviors and attitudes shown by children are communicated.

How can educators support children with transitions that occur throughout the day?

- **Help children understand transitions.** Announce and prepare children for events before they happen. This helps children to mentally prepare to finish the current activity and move on to the next one.

Foster Exploration

Once the learning space is organized and predictable routines are in place, the joy of exploration can begin. Exploration fosters development across all areas—socially, physically, cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally. When children explore, they use all their senses to

take in and ask questions about the things they are exploring. The learning environment can foster this exploration.

- **Stimulating indoor and outdoor environments** offer activities and materials that promote questioning, predicting, and experimentation.
- **Explanatory language** allows children to hear vocabulary and use it to engage in conversations and to describe and interact with the world.
- **Activities that allow children to work alongside each other** build skills in communication and collaboration.

How can the learning environment be set up to encourage exploration?

- **Allow children time, space, and materials** with which to explore and experiment.
- **Use activities to promote peer interaction.** When children have opportunities to explore alongside other children, they learn how to get along and work together, improve language and communication skills, and solve problems.

What types of materials can educators provide to prompt children to explore ideas in multiple ways?

- **Provide stimulating, interesting, and engaging materials.** Different types of materials encourage different types of exploration. For example, sand, water, plastic cups, blocks, and frozen paint sticks invite children to investigate in different ways. (They can experiment with mixing sand and water; building towers with plastic cups; naming and sorting blocks by shape or color; painting with frozen paint, etc.)

What language strategies can educators use to support children's exploration?

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Open-ended questions prompt children to think deeply and critically. They begin with words like *what* and *how* and generally cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
 - What do the beans feel like?
 - How can you get the ice to melt?
 - How could you make your cup tower taller?
 - What do you think will happen if...?

- **Use language that defines and explains.** Guide conversations with children and use them as an opportunity to teach. For example, at the Block Center a teacher can use words such as *big*, *bigger*, *biggest* or *small*, *smaller*, *smallest*. This introduces children to ideas, concepts, and words that help them learn.

Glossary

cognitive development: the process of knowing, thinking, reasoning, and remembering

emotional development: the ability to recognize, identify, produce, and respond to emotions in yourself or others

language/linguistic development: the process of developing language skills to understand when others speak and to speak and engage in conversation

physical development: the ability to perform physical activities that require motor skills like running, jumping, and climbing

self-regulation: regulating or controlling one's emotions, thinking, and behavior

social competencies: the skills needed for successful social interaction; in young children these include making simple decisions, interacting with others in productive ways, and being able to resolve conflicts in appropriate ways

social development: the ability to use appropriate social skills to communicate and interact with others

View the self-paced video workshop at <http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators>.



Learning Guidelines and Standards

This professional development training module is aligned to Massachusetts standards and guidelines.

Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

Center and School Based:

- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 2** All staff receive orientation and ongoing formal professional development and supervision in how to support positive relationships and interactions through positive, warm and nurturing interactions.
- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 3** Staff engage children in meaningful conversations, use open-ended questions and provide opportunities throughout the day to scaffold their development of more complex receptive and expressive language, support children's use of language to share ideas, problem solve and have positive peer interactions.
- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 4** Staff utilizes teaching strategies that ensure a positive classroom environment, engage children in learning and promote critical thinking skills.
- **Safe, Healthy Indoor and Outdoor Environments** Program environments are the framework for children's learning. They support the implementation of the curriculum through the use of space, materials, and opportunities for children to experiment, practice their skills, analyze, socialize and problem solve. Environments must provide support for the health, safety and nutrition of young children in order to ensure their optimum development and well being.

Family Child Care:

- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 2** Educator has participated in formal professional development on how to support positive relationships and interactions with children through positive, warm and nurturing interactions.

Standards (continued)

- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 4** Educators engage children in meaningful conversations, as age and developmentally appropriate, use open-ended questions and provide opportunities throughout the day to scaffold their language to support the development of more complex receptive and expressive language, support children's use of language to share ideas, problem solve and have positive peer interactions; Educators utilize teaching strategies that ensure a positive learning environment, engage children in learning and promote critical thinking skills.
- **Safe, Healthy Indoor and Outdoor Environments** Program environments are the framework for children's learning. They support the implementation of the curriculum through the use of space, materials and opportunities for children to experiment, practice their skills, analyze, socialize and problem solve. Environments must provide support for the health, safety and nutrition of young children in order to ensure their optimum development and well being.
- **Safe, Healthy Indoor and Outdoor Environments Level 2** There are at least 3-4 interest areas, depending on the age of the children, with a variety of age appropriate materials and equipment available and accessible to children. Educators utilize teaching strategies that ensure a positive learning environment, engage children in learning and promote critical thinking skills; Demonstrates safe and healthy indoor and outdoor environments.
- **Safe, Healthy Indoor and Outdoor Environments Level 3** Demonstrates quality indoor and outdoor environments.
- **Safe, Healthy Indoor and Outdoor Environments Level 4** Demonstrates stimulating indoor and outdoor environments.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice:

- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning E** Teachers plan the environment, schedule, and daily activities to promote each child's learning and development.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning E.1** Teachers arrange firsthand, meaningful experiences that are intellectually and creatively stimulating, invite exploration and investigation, and engage children's active, sustained involvement. They do this by providing a rich variety of materials, challenges, and ideas that are worthy of children's attention.

Standards (continued)

- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning E.3** Teachers organize the daily and weekly schedule to provide children with extended blocks of time in which to engage in sustained play, investigation, exploration, and interaction (with adults and peers).
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning E.4** Teachers provide experiences, materials, and interactions to enable children to engage in play that allows them to stretch their boundaries to the fullest in their imagination, language, interaction, and self-regulation as well as to practice their newly acquired skills.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning F.2** To stimulate children's thinking and extend their learning, teachers pose problems, ask questions, and make comments and suggestions.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning F.3** To extend the range of children's interests and the scope of their thought, teachers present novel experiences and introduce stimulating ideas, problems, experiences, or hypotheses.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning F.7** To encourage and foster children's learning and development, teachers avoid generic praise ("Good job!") and instead give specific feedback ("You got the same number when you counted the beans again!")
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning H.1** Teachers understand that each major learning format or context (e.g. large group, small group, learning center, routine) has its own characteristics, functions, and value.



Training Evaluation

Thank you for your participation. Please indicate your impressions of the training below.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The training met my expectations.					
I will be able to apply what I have learned.					
The trainer was knowledgeable.					
The training was organized and easy to follow.					
Participation and interaction was encouraged.					
The handouts were pertinent and useful.					

1. How would you rate this training overall?

Excellent *Good* *Average* *Poor*

2. What was most beneficial to you in this training?

3. What suggestions do you have to improve this training?