

Supporting Concept Development: ***Designing Learning Environments***

WHAT'S IN THIS PD2GO PACK?

Learn how to design learning environments that encourage children's exploration, investigation, and discovery. Active participation in these learning experiences promotes children's deeper thinking skills. This pack helps teachers/providers intentionally design the physical learning environment by considering interest areas, open space, and materials.

Your Participants Will... increase their capacity to intentionally create learning environments that support children's active exploration and investigation.



SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Facilitator's Guide Everything you need to facilitate this PD2GO presentation on *Designing Learning Environments*, including an interactive presentation page along with step-by-step presenter's notes.

Coaching Corner One-page resource with self-reflection and practice opportunities that can be explored individually, with peers, and in professional development sessions.

Additional resource materials related to this pack provide opportunities to explore and expand your skills and knowledge through **Digging Deeper**, **Resource Links**, and **Family Connections**.

HOW TO USE THIS FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

This Facilitator's Guide will provide you with step-by-step information on how to present this session using the interactive presentation page and downloadable materials specific to this PD2GO pack. We recommend [opening the pack presentation](#) as you go through this Facilitator's Guide.

THE INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION PAGE

The presentation page includes the following elements:

■ Steps

Click on each number icon to begin the section of the presentation—use the presenter's notes in this guide to facilitate each step of the presentation.



DOWNLOADABLE MATERIALS

■ In This Pack

Click on the downloadable materials hyperlink to access all materials related to this presentation.

■ In This Bundle

Click on the downloadable materials hyperlink to access all additional resources and materials that can be used with this presentation and other related packs.

EXPANDING ON THIS PD2GO PACK

This presentation on *Designing Learning Environments* can be used individually or in conjunction with related packs in the bundle, including *Extending Exploration*, *Deep Learning*, and *Integrated Learning*. Additional resources and materials in this bundle (*Digging Deeper*, *Resource Links*, and *Family Connections*) are designed to extend skills and knowledge around these related packs, provide links to resources, and promote partnerships with families.

MATERIALS

In this pack, you will find:

[Download all \(3.6 MB\)](#)



Facilitator's Guide (3.9 MB)

Everything you need to facilitate this PD2GO presentation on Designing Learning Experiences, including an interactive presentation page along with step-by-step presenter's notes.



Coaching Corner (160 KB)

One-page resource with self-reflection and practice opportunities that can be explored individually, with peers, and in professional development sessions.

In this bundle, you will find:

[Download all \(270 KB\)](#)

Additional resource materials related to this pack provide opportunities to explore and expand your skills and knowledge. The resources include:



Digging Deeper (160 KB)



Family Connections (210 KB)



Resource Links (150 KB)

STEP 1:
START

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE

Step 1

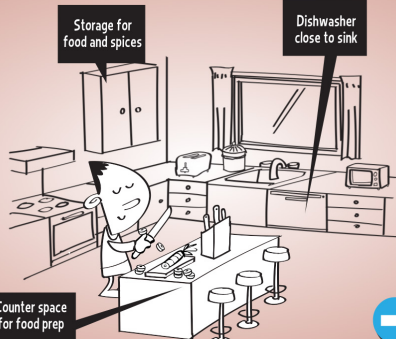



Think about different rooms in your home.




How does the kitchen space support you when you cook a meal?




The rooms of our home are intentionally designed to serve distinct purposes.



Go to step 2: CONNECT

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[3 min]

CLICK 

Step 1 - Start

Facilitator: *Think about different rooms in your home. Each room serves a purpose. The layout of the room is designed to support what people do in that room. You sleep in your bedroom, shower in the bathroom, and cook in the kitchen.*

CLICK 

Facilitator: *Take a moment to think about your kitchen. How does the kitchen space support you when you cook a meal?*

Pause for responses from the group.

CLICK 

Facilitator: *From the available counter space to the placement of appliances, your kitchen was designed to help you prepare food.*

Now, imagine cooking in a kitchen that is poorly designed. If appliances are not where you need them, you don't have enough counter space, or cooking utensils are not easily accessible, you would certainly have a hard time cooking!

CLICK 


Facilitator: *The rooms of our home are intentionally designed to serve distinct purposes. A well-designed space supports what we do in that room.*

STEP 2:
CONNECT

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Step 2


A well-designed early childhood space sets the stage for and supports children's active learning.




[4 min]

CLICK 

Step 2 - Connect

Facilitator: *Just like your home's design helps you accomplish specific tasks in different rooms, a well-designed early childhood space sets the stage for and supports children's active learning.*

Ruby teaches older toddlers and preschoolers. She wants her learning environment to provide opportunities for children to explore, invent, and experiment. These activities are important for children's concept development and lay the foundation for children's learning and readiness for school. Ruby intentionally designed several areas to support active learning.

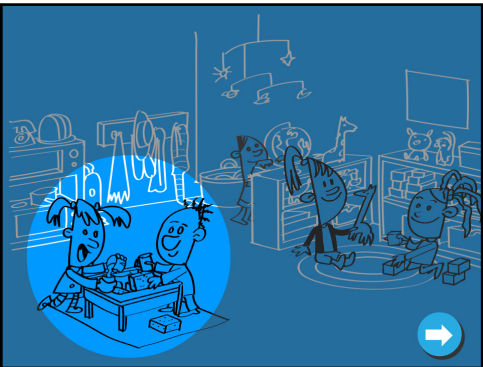
CLICK 

Facilitator: *For example, she set up a water table with sponges and containers of a variety of sizes. If you were an older toddler in this space, what might you do?*

Pause for responses from the large group. As participants respond, probe with, What might you explore and discover?

Facilitator: *Ruby has intentionally placed her water table in this part of the room so children have opportunities to explore on their own and also plenty of space to interact with peers or an adult. She planned for children to investigate properties of water such as volume and absorption in this learning space.*

CLICK 



STEP 2: *Continued*
CONNECT

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Facilitator: *In another part of the classroom, Ruby intentionally left an open space on the circle rug with open-ended materials on nearby shelves, such as blocks and animals. If you were a young preschooler in this space, what might you do?*

Pause for responses from the large group. As participants respond, probe with, *What might you explore and discover?*

Facilitator: *In this open space, Ruby has intentionally offered materials that give the children opportunities to make choices. They can carry out dramatic play with the animals, build with the blocks, or combine both sets of materials and construct a zoo out of blocks for the animals. The children may even use these materials in ways the teacher hadn't considered!*



Facilitator: *Thoughtfully designed learning environments can promote investigation, exploration, and discovery.*


Thoughtfully designed learning environments can promote:

- Investigation
- Exploration
- Discovery



Go to step 3: LEARN




STEP 3: LEARN

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Step 3

Intentionally designing the learning environment means thinking in advance about the purpose for the space.

[3 min]



Step 3 - Learn

Facilitator: *Intentionally designing the learning environment means thinking in advance about the purpose for the space, which is to promote children's learning.*

When designing an environment that supports children's active learning experiences, here are some questions to ask yourself:




Facilitator:

- **Exploration**—How does the learning environment provide children opportunities to investigate? To invent and be creative? To make choices?

Key Environment Considerations:


Exploration 






Facilitator:

- **Access**—Are materials and space available for children to access on their own?

Key Environment Considerations:

Exploration 


Access 






Facilitator:


- **Flexibility**—How can I adapt the physical arrangement or materials based on children's developing interests and skills? How flexible is the environment to allow children with different levels of mobility or children with special needs to explore and investigate?

Key Environment Considerations:

Exploration 

Access 

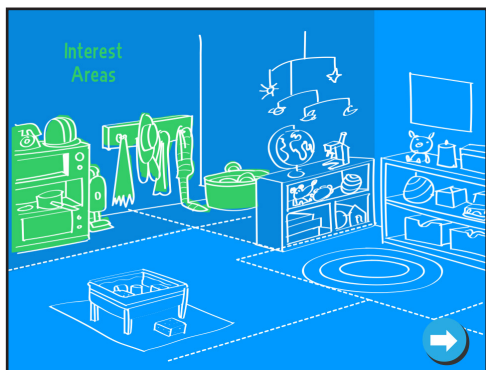
Flexibility 



STEP 3:
LEARN *Continued*

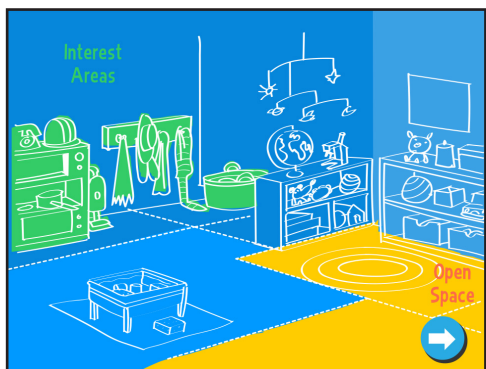
PRESENTATION SEQUENCE

FACILITATOR'S NOTES



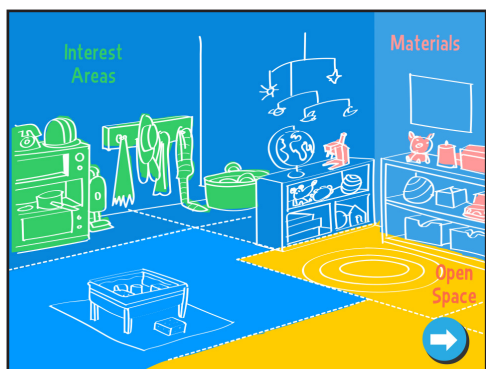
Facilitator: *The layout of the physical environment should include*

- **Interest areas**, or areas with distinct focus, such as a dramatic play area, a block area, or a book area. Some areas allow for quiet or intimate play, while others support small group interactions.



Facilitator:

- **Open space** to explore and manipulate a variety of materials both independently and with peers or adults.



Facilitator:

- **Materials** for children to investigate, invent, and experiment.



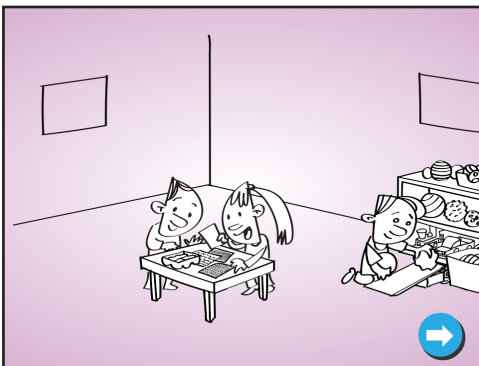
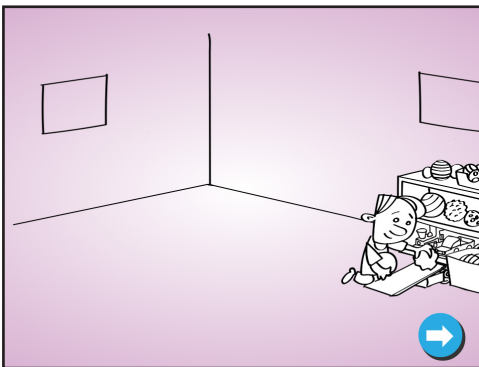
Facilitator: *Opportunities for active exploration and investigation promote children's deeper thinking skills, such as problem solving and creativity.*


Opportunities for active exploration and investigation promote children's deeper thinking skills.

[Go to step 4: PRACTICE](#)

STEP 4: PRACTICE

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[3 min]

CLICK

Step 4 - Practice

Facilitator: *Let's join Ruby as she designs the learning environment. She would like children to have opportunities to explore and discover materials with different textures. Ruby thinks about interest areas, open space, and materials.*

CLICK

Facilitator: *In this open space, Ruby sets up balls of different textures with a couple of ramps. Children can compare and contrast the texture of the balls. They can explore how balls of different textures roll faster or slower.*

CLICK

Facilitator: *In an interest area, Ruby has laid out squares of different textures such as sandpaper, an egg carton, felt, and corrugated cardboard. Turn to a partner and discuss how children explore and discover in this interest area.*

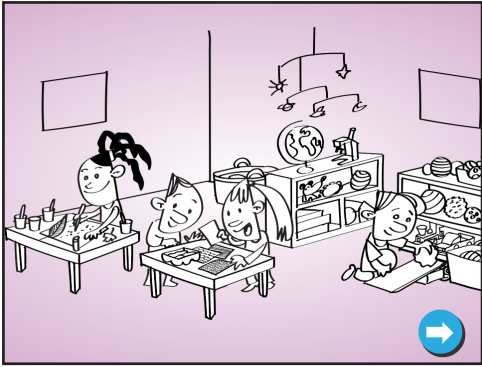




Give pairs some time to discuss their ideas. Ask for volunteers to share their ideas.

If you were helping Ruby design an art interest area, what recommendations might you and your partner give her about the space and materials to promote children's exploration and investigation of different textures?





Give pairs some time to discuss their ideas. Ask for volunteers to share their ideas.

Facilitator: *Based on your recommendations, what might children do and learn in this space?*

STEP 4: Continued PRACTICE

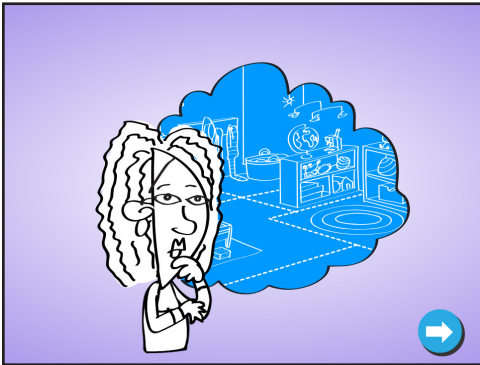
PRESENTATION SEQUENCE	FACILITATOR'S NOTES
	<p>Give pairs some time to discuss their ideas. Ask for volunteers to share their ideas.</p> <p>CLICK </p> <p>Facilitator: <i>Children continue to explore the textures of different materials in this art interest area, like feathers, sand, and paint. They also have the opportunity to invent and be creative.</i></p>
<div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; text-align: center;">  <p>Even small changes in the environment can enhance children's exploration and learning.</p>  <p>Go to step 5: EXPAND</p> </div>	<p>CLICK </p> <p>Facilitator: <i>Even small changes in the environment can enhance children's exploration and learning. To give children more access, you can move materials closer to the children (i.e., from higher to lower shelves). To create more open space, you might move some furniture or materials into storage. Try combining furniture or materials from several separate areas to create new open-ended experiences!</i></p>



STEP 5: EXPAND

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE	FACILITATOR'S NOTES
<div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 10px;"> <p>Step 5</p>  <p>Think about the learning environment in your program.</p>  </div>	<p>[1 min] CLICK  Step 5 - Expand</p> <p>Facilitator: <i>Think about the learning environment in your program.</i></p> <p>CLICK </p>

STEP 5:
EXPAND *Continued*

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE




Exploration and investigation foster children's deep thinking and reasoning—skills important for school readiness.




FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Facilitator: *Identify one or two changes you could make in the learning environment this week to enhance children's active exploration and investigation. Write down this change and the next step you would need to take to make the change. Share the change and next step with the person sitting next to you.*



Facilitator: *The changes you put in place this week can make a positive difference in children's learning. Exploration and investigation foster children's deep thinking and reasoning—skills important for school readiness.*

THIS PD2GO PACK WAS INFORMED BY THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

- California Department of Education. (2010). *California preschool curriculum framework* (Vol. 1). Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.
- Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children birth through age 8*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Jacobs, G. M. (2001). Providing the scaffold: A model for early childhood/primary teacher preparation. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(2), 125–130.
- Rushton, S., & Larkin, E. (2001). Shaping the learning environment: Connecting developmentally appropriate practices to brain research. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(1), 25–33.
- Rushton, S., Juola-Rushton, A., & Larkin, E. (2010). Neuroscience, play and early childhood education: Connections, implications and assessment. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37(5), 351–361.