Literacy learning centers in a second grade classroom

Tammy Ann Hermann

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LITERACY LEARNING CENTERS
IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Reading

by
Tammy Ann Hermann
June 1998
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Date 5/4/98
ABSTRACT

This paper describes the importance of implementing Learning Centers as a pedagogical strategy to enhance reading and writing opportunities for second grade students. The purpose of the paper is to provide a practical guide to construct meaningful activities for all students. Learning Centers are discussed and the two basic designs are exposed in the debate regarding the use of Learning Centers. The debate discusses whether the centers are student or teacher centered. This paper examines these two ideas and discusses the relationship between classroom management and student engagement while a student is participating at a Learning Center.

This paper examines the research supporting student centered Learning Centers and discusses the effectiveness of student centered Learning Centers. Teacher centered Learning Centers are another method of using centers that is organized by the teacher with a written product as a final outcome for the center. This type of center requires a written record of some kind to be completed at the end of the task assigned at the center. The teacher is involved at a later time to check the work a student completed at the center in order for the center to be educationally authentic.

The project describes a way to use centers to develop a system that will work for many teachers. It discusses ways to organize and incorporate materials a teacher may already have in the classroom. Then the centers can be evaluated on the effectiveness of the activity and if the centers are running as smoothly or as effectively as the teacher expected. In addition, the outcomes and limitations of these type of centers are discussed and any modification if any can be made to accommodate more students.
The appendix gives a ready to use guide for the teachers who are ready to start today at trying centers in the classroom. Thirteen centers are suggested by which a teacher can implement centers and each of the centers has ideas that are offered. The centers are a beginning teacher’s guide to centers with directions and guidelines on how to get started. Each of the thirteen centers has some ideas for activities and some examples of what types of materials that can be used.
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To My Loving Husband Steve
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Chapter One

In the next few years teachers are going to be making some changes in how they teach reading in their classrooms as a result of significant changes in state standards. New standards require that schools implement a more balanced literacy program. In order to accomplish this goal, classrooms have a twenty to one ratio of students to teacher. This reduced class size allows teachers to work with students in small group settings in order to enhance their reading opportunities. While providing an exciting opportunity for students and teachers, this pedagogical strategy of grouping students within the classroom results in one major problem: teachers must construct an engaging activity for each group of students even those who are not directly working with the teacher. I propose that teachers establish Literacy Learning Centers in the classroom. These centers have the potential of not only addressing the more rigorous literacy requirements but enable all students to remain educationally engaged while at the same time, the teacher can manage classroom behavior.

As an elementary classroom teacher for five years, my view of reading has changed significantly over the last year. I have come to realize that successful reading is achieved by teaching children to find meaning in what they read. In order to accomplish this, teachers must increase reading opportunities for their students. Smith (1985) states, “Children learn to read by reading, so teachers must help children to read by making reading easy, not by making it difficult” (p.128). Goodman (1996) discusses the importance of providing a very print rich environment in order to further extend a child’s prior knowledge about literacy. He states, “Classrooms ought to be richly literate
environments, providing lots of support for extending and strengthening the literacy development that began before the children ever entered school” (p.119).

In order to insure that classrooms are providing many meaningful reading activities for students, I argue that teachers should create Literacy Learning Centers. These centers allow students to work independently at their own reading and writing level of proficiency without constant guidance from the teacher. The teacher is able to work with one small group while the other children are working in their learning centers. Centers are also helpful with classroom management because all students are participating in interesting, challenging activities that they have chosen.

Learning Centers can take various forms. One such form is a Listening Center. Listening Centers respond to the goals of Riverside Unified School District's Course of Study for Language Arts (RUSD). According to Bloomburg, (1989) RUSD's Goal 2.3 states, “Students will listen to and visualize events in tapes” (p.2). Listening centers provide a perfect venue for authentic activities for children. Instead of working on such passive activities as worksheets, students have the opportunity to be actively involved in their learning. Listening centers can be as simple as listening to a story being read to them while they hold a copy of a book in their hands. The book could be a story they have already heard or it could be another book on the same subject they are learning about. Learning Centers can enhance a reading program by providing a productive activity for students.

Another type of Learning Center is a Word Works Center. This center can allow students to practice poems and rhyming words, or put sentences together from a story
they have read. As in other Learning Centers, children have the opportunity once again
to be engaged in learning through strategies that develop their literacy skills.

A Book Box Center is another excellent example of a Learning Center that engages
students but also helps the teacher embellish on a particular subject being covered in
social studies, science or language arts. For example, in this Center, students can read
books on trains for a train unit, re-read a book they have already read in class or as part
of a guided reading lesson. These types of centers are effective strategies because
learning is tied to familiar themes; therefore, they have meaning to the children. Students
can make sense of what they are learning and thus are more able to recall the information
that has been taught to them. Traditionally, teachers have utilized worksheets to keep
students busy and to hone their literacy skills. Fountas (1996) says, “Research does not
support such activities, and too much teaching time is lost when the [teacher’s]
management plan relies on them” (p.53). Constructing activities such as those afforded
by Learning Centers incorporates activities that have already been taught in the classroom
and they are child centered.

As a teacher, I believe children should be involved in activities that are meaningful to
them. Worksheets do not fit my needs. To be most effective, I want an activity that
reinforces what I have taught in my classroom and promotes more reading practice. The
material presented in a Learning Center can include previously learned material or offer
the child time for further exploration on a topic being studied. They are an effective tool
that can be used to teach all subjects in a primary classroom curriculum.

Learning Centers are also an excellent way to individualize a child’s learning.
Forte (1972) in *Nooks, Crannies and Corners* states that if a teacher is “interested in individualized instruction for his students...[he or she should] consider the learning center approach as a means to this end” (p. 5). Individualized learning is the best tool to assure that the needs of the various students in the classroom are met. There are many ways to learn and individuals have different methods in which they as students learn best. Some learn better by reading, others by listening or touching. Learning Centers respond appropriately to what Gardner has termed “multiple intelligence’s”.

Cunningham and Allington (1994) point out that Learning Centers facilitate individualized instruction.

One of the major reasons for providing a “combination approach” to literacy is children bring different personalities into our schools. While it is not possible to clearly determine which children will learn best with what approach, it is clear that when a teacher provides more routes to the goal of literacy, more children will find a route to take them there. Hall, Prevatte, & Cunningham, 1994 (p.16-17).

Learning Centers allow all students in the classroom to benefit. The need for individualized learning can be addressed within Learning Centers because various teaching methods can be employed at each center to expand literacy competence. Students work at their own level. They can work as slowly or quickly as they are able. Centers also provide opportunities to develop skills in areas where individuals need more practice. For example, students may need practice with listening skills or writing skills. Centers allow the students to monitor their own behavior, encourage responsibility with
Learning centers encourage the students to think independently and not rely on the teacher for all of the learning that takes place in the classroom. Students are required to take charge of their own learning. The teacher gives materials and suggests how the materials can be used. It is up to the child to listen to the teacher, try what was suggested and/or think of new ways to use the materials employing the concepts taught by the teacher. Students are free to create other methods that will accomplish the same goal.

For example, in a Word Works Center the teacher directs the students to use word cards to learn homophones (words that sound the same, but have different meaning). Students match the word with the homophone they have found. Students have the flexibility of merely matching the words, playing a memory game or inventing another game to meet the objective. Centers provide thought-provoking activities that require a student to think about the materials provided. Students are encouraged to experiment, try new things and discuss with other students' thoughts they may have on ways to use an activity that would spark their interest in learning. Forte (1972) argues that by providing this type of learning environment, "we have accorded to him [or her] the freedom to initiate, to respond, to choose, to create, to direct..." student learning (p.4). Johnson (1975) states "it is cooperation that is most productive in creating fruitful learning climates and in promoting the accomplishment of most cognitive and affective outcomes" (Johnson, 1975, p.39).

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) discuss the importance of a working, learning environment where the teacher and students work together to accomplish the learning
goals for the year and where students are given the independence to guide their own learning. The teacher establishes a routine at each center. Through many guided practice lessons, students are taught how to take care of the materials they will use and accomplish the objective of the center. As a result, students are able to “sustain productive behavior on their own, which is not only a literacy skill but a life skill” (Fountas, 1996, p.70).

Learning centers promote the development of learning skills in students because they are now in charge of their own learning. In traditionally organized classrooms, students typically ask the teacher, “What do I do next?” and “Is this how you want me to do this?” These questions will not arise as frequently if a classroom has student learning centers. If they do ask these questions, Nations (1976) suggest that “They [students] may be telling you to re-examine your teaching to see how successful you really are in attaining one of the most important goals for all students: the development of the desire and ability to learn independently” (p.8).

In a classroom organized around Learning Centers, the students know what to do while in a center, and what to do when they have completed the task at a center, and they know from experience when it is time to try another center. They learn how to choose activities that will allow them to have many experiences and opportunities to learn and “provide at the same time a horizontal flexibility that promotes independence in decision-making and self-direction and allows for unlimited alternatives and personal choices by [his or her] pupils” (Forte, 1972, p.5). This is the ideal situation according to Forte (1972) because it fosters a great learning environment for all students in the classroom.
Students learn what is expected of them at the center, how to act and work in a center, and at the same time meet the expectations of the teacher.

One additional advantage to Learning Centers is that students learn to work collaboratively with other students. This teaching strategy has been found to be successful in raising academic achievement (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard and Lintz, 1996). Johnson (1975) states "it is cooperation that is most productive in creating fruitful learning climates and in promoting the accomplishment of most cognitive and affective outcomes" (Johnson, 1975, p.39).

In summary, Learning Centers provide many benefits to the elementary school teacher and student. This educational tool not only meets district and state standards to raise educational outcomes in reading but also offers the student a more active and engaging learning environment. Instruction is individualized, matching student’s level of skill development. Students are able to work independently and collaboratively in groups, increasing literacy and the development of important life skills. Teachers benefit from improving classroom management and raising the academic achievement of their students.
In reviewing the many perspectives concerning the use of learning centers in elementary education at the second grade, the following topics emerged as important for analysis and discussion: various perspectives of learning centers, whether centers are student or teacher focused, the organization of learning centers, the evaluation and effectiveness of centers, and Learning Centers as tools for classroom management.

**Various Perspectives of Learning Centers**

Cooper (1981) offers her perspective on Learning Centers. She has some concise opinions about what centers are and are not. She states that “learning centers are a ‘tool’ [and] they are used to: a. Reinforce initial teaching; b. clarify concepts that have been taught; [and] c. provide needed drill and practice” (p. 528). Cooper also believes that centers are a place to learn not play, and they can be a great motivational tool for students.

Some authors describe Learning Centers as tools that provide activities suitable to all students at their individual level of skill development. Forte (1972) reports that a “learning center must include multi-leveled activities or experiences to meet the instructional needs of every child who will visit the center” (p. 9). She also says that a Learning Center must offer some choices among the activities so a child can have a “part in planning and executing his own learning” (p. 9). Cosgrove (1992) describes a center as “areas [a corner of the room or even a desk] that defines a specific focus or affords an unique learning opportunity not otherwise (sic) possible in the classroom” (p. 4). Both Cosgrove and Forte describe Learning Centers as places that offer well-organized
activities, with many choices that encourage students to want to engage in learning.

Some educators point out that Learning Centers offer problem solving activities that help students think and write creatively because they use many different types of materials that require students to think about how best to use the materials. Centers are organized around problems whereby students, in order to complete the learning objective, must decide on a form of action.

Carboni’s perspective (1990) on Learning Centers is that to be effective they must create independent activities for the children and enable the students to help with the creation of their classroom environment. Strickland (1989) defines Learning Centers as strategies that supply students with a variety of materials. Students are given experiences with “...independent reading, drawing and writing...in and out of school [that] must not be left to chance but planned as important daily opportunities” (p.722).

Carlson’s (1985) perspective on Learning Centers includes some ideas on how students can improve their problem solving skills. The opportunities provided through Learning Centers are designed to help the child with their problem-solving skills and this in turn encourages creative thought. Students are asked to sew, make kites, work with clay and tie-dye. All of these tasks require that students hone their problem-solving skills. Carlson (1985) found students benefited from participating in such activities. He states, “we have concluded that our Learning-by-Doing Centers program has increased our students’ overall ability to apply cognitive skills to problem-solving situations” (p.307).

Some educators have noted that Learning Centers allow a forum by which to
incorporate computers in the classroom. The introduction of this technology benefits more students. One teacher discussed the way in which she integrated computers into her second grade classroom. In *What Got Me Hooked* (Novelli, 1993), the teacher states; “I can remediate and accelerate...by pulling up the level of software best suited to a student’s particular needs. The learning center approach facilitates this individualized and small-group instruction” (p.39).

Educators have pointed out that Learning Centers can have many different kinds of activities. Cosgrove (1992) lists some activities available at Learning Centers, which adds to our understanding of how centers can be organized in the classroom. Centers can be organized around a theme. For example, if a class is studying dinosaurs all of the activities can be focused on dinosaurs. The center might include the following activities: “place pictures of dinosaurs into alphabetical order, solve word problems using dinosaur manipulatives, sort dinosaurs into categories, locate dinosaur habitats on a world map and create dinosaur fossils with clay (p.6).”

Fountas (1996) has another viewpoint regarding the organization of Learning Centers. Rather than theme-focused centers, the activities would be organized around a literacy skill such as phonics, compound words, reading comprehension, contractions, spelling and grammar. In these centers, students are assigned into heterogeneous groups (mixed ability groups); scheduled for certain literacy tasks, and rotated through each center by the teacher each day. Teachers use “Work Boards” to inform children about which center they should be in and when they should move to a new workstation.

Some teachers in the Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) are also organizing
their Learning Centers around tasks. They have started what they call “seatwork centers.” Janet Hansen who works at RUSD has started this new idea and during an interview had this to say; “I came up with this idea because I felt the centers I originally had set up had been a waste of time and I was looking for something that was more meaningful. I have the kids do phonics, reading, writing, and word activities at their desks while I read with groups of kids” (Personal Interview, February, 1997). Hansen also asks students in one of her centers to read in their basal books and find words that have “ing” endings and compound words. Students at another center would be asked to cut out sentences on a sheet that was copied and put the events of the story into sequential order. These types of activities are meaningful and very structured in that there is one task to complete in each center and there is a final outcome that each student must complete. These centers teach the children certain skills and yet gives them a chance to practice previously learned material.

**Learning Centers: teacher focused or student focused**

Whether a center is theme focused or task oriented, the first question a teacher might think to ask when creating Learning Centers is whether the centers should be student centered or teacher centered. According to Cosgrove (1992), the difficulties some teachers have with employing centers in their classroom results in a debate as to whether learning centers should be teacher designed and assigned or student designed and independently chosen by students. “The pendulum (sic.) of educational practices historically swing[s] back and forth between essentialist and progressivist philosophies [curriculum centered vs. child centered]” (p. 4). Cosgrove states that “Learning centers
are an attempt to bring these opposing ends together because they are organized and yet permit the child to make choices” (p. 4). The centers have a meaningful activity planned by the teacher, yet at the same time allow the student to make a choice as to which center to use.

In a study performed by Lewis (1979) on reading attitudes, Barnett’s (1994) analysis of Lewis’ early study (1979) compared the use of traditional methods of instruction such as worksheets and direct classroom instruction, to activities where the teachers read to the students and where the teacher created activities to foster reading. The study showed a significant difference in achievement over the more passive traditional methods of teaching (r = .47, p < .05). Barnett (1994) argues that “This implies that the more traditional and direct the classroom instruction, the less students liked to read, while the more teachers rely on trade paperbacks and avoid the use of worksheets and direct instruction, the better students like to read” (p. 117). Learning Centers create more child-centered activities and avoid activities that are teacher centered.

Nations (1976) cautions that Learning Centers “should be set up so that students have no difficulty figuring out what they are to do. At the same time they should be open-ended so that students can modify or add to the activities at the center” (p.10). This gives students the opportunity to be involved in their own learning, which in turn promotes greater student involvement in the center.

Cosgrove (1992) reports that if centers include an objective that is more student centered, they have more meaning for the child. Some educators who believe Learning Centers should be more student-centered, advocate for a developmental language center
over traditional centers because the “activities in a developmental language center are
designed for a child’s instructional level” (Foster, Nancy G., 1992-1993). This means it
is targeted to their learning level, albeit a little higher than what they are tested so they
will be challenged. Foster points out that these centers play “an important role in
solidifying a strong foundation for the growth and development of reading fluency”
(p.77). In addition, developmental language centers can promote greater interest for the
students because the center is tailored to fit each child’s needs.

For those who advocate a student centered Learning Center, computers offer an
important resource. Hopkins (1985) suggests that by incorporating a computer into a
classroom, children can rotate through various centers so that every child has the
opportunity to work at the computer. He states, “many teachers who already teach with
small interactive learning centers simply move the computer into one of their centers”
(p.8).

Novelli (1993), describes the way in which computers were used in two different
situations in two grade levels. Although teachers discussed the complexities of starting a
program in centers with computers, they claim there are many reasons to do so. Novelli
(1993) talked to Kristine Lynes, a teacher from New Hampshire. Lynes, “...found what
she was looking for in National Geographic Kids Network, an open-ended computer and
telecommunications-based curriculum” (p. 37). This teacher valued the open-ended part
of the computer program because it enabled the students to interact with other students
through the Internet. Lyne’s students “[were] writing for meaning” (Novelli, 1993,
p.38). In a computer discussion with students from kids in North Carolina, Lyne’s
students wrote about the devastating flood that had just occurred there. They discussed the events in a personal way. One student said, "We read about it and saw what happened on TV...But big whoop! We really know these people!" (p.38). By using the Internet, students were able to communicate in a meaningful way. Computers gave students the opportunity to focus on learning and learn about real life.

Student centered Learning Centers are often organized around themes. One teacher described how she organized her first grade class around frogs. Piech (1991) explains that one center focused on frog vocabulary. The vocabulary had been discussed already in class as a whole and was then put into a center to have students match the word with a picture, like a puzzle. Another center was an observation center where students observed the growth of frog embryos. After studying the process of development, students would move to another center where they would illustrate the growth of the embryos in stages that had been previously identified. They were given reference books to help them. The next center had the students put sentence strips into sequential order according to the stages of embryonic growth. Later, the students checked their accuracy against a bulletin board that displayed the correct answer. A listening center was also available with several Frog and Toad adventures on tape. It included books for the students to read along with the tapes. A math center was also available. Students were instructed to remove paper tadpoles from an envelope, measure them for length, and to place them in order from smallest to largest. The next two centers included books about frogs that students had written, previously. They also included published books and poetry about frogs and toads that they had previously memorized as a whole class. This article
detailed an explanation of Learning Centers that utilized a thematic approach to learning and offered instruction in how to incorporate such an idea into a classroom.

**Organization of Learning Centers**

The organization of Learning Centers requires three major considerations. The first is to consider room environment and class design. The second is to determine the teacher's goal in using Learning Centers. Whether the teacher wants to set up the centers, by the system, method, or philosophy and its purpose in the teacher's room. The third is to consider how classroom management will be affected while students are working in their centers.

**Learning Centers Environment and Classroom Design**

When designing the room environment and deciding how the classroom will be organized, some authors have suggested developing a plan. According to Forte (1972) "the importance of the classroom environment cannot be overemphasized" (p.105) because room environment can have a negative or positive effect on student learning. Plans should include a positive room environment that would have colorful displays and easy access to materials. He suggests arranging space in the classroom for centers so that the room will be neat and free of clutter. He also suggests that there be quiet and noisy areas in the room, in order for center discussions to continue harmoniously without distractions. Students need to have comfortable places to read and work that facilitate individual and group activities. Materials should be "easily accessible and should be clearly marked to enable children to make optimum use of materials...." (p.108). Isbell (1995) suggests that boundaries be made between centers, "If boundaries do not exist,
children wander in and out or run aimlessly between the centers” (p.26). Isbell also says that these boundaries keep the attention of the children on their own center and they stay focused on their own learning. These boundaries can be made of various materials such as bookshelves and hanging strips of paper to divide up a space in the classroom.

Hall (1983) suggests another format for centers that allows the center to be moved around and be portable. This center is, “a wood frame with bulletin board material inserted [to make] two sections hinged together and is fastened with a window lock” (p.31). Hall designed this center to train teachers but it could also be used for children.

The appearance or attractiveness of the centers will also affect the environment of the classroom and the attitude of the children. Edward’s (1995) argues that “a barren, drab environment is not conducive to creative work. Rather, children’s work is fostered by a space that has natural light, harmonious color, comfortable and child-sized areas....” (p.2). Forte (1974) states:

An attractively stimulating classroom environment is in itself an invitation to creative learning. The classroom “alive” with ideas, color, materials and projects in keeping with students’ developmental needs and interests is sure to be “peopled with” intellectually curious and vivaciously motivated learners (p. 14).

These comments illustrate the important connection between classroom attractiveness and student engagement in learning. They provide examples of what teachers might consider when creating centers in the classroom.

There are other things to consider with regards to room environment. Cosgrove (1992) suggests that teachers consider the following: “1- space - tables and storage, 2-
traffic flow - doors, windows, and desks, 3 - number of people in your room - children and adults, 4 - availability of equipment and materials” (p.7). A large concern for teachers is finding adequate space for the centers. Students need space to spread out or work at a table in a center. If the class is large, this requires a large number of tables. These tables then are arranged in a way to maintain good traffic flow. There also must be enough materials so that all students can be working. There must be adequate storage for the materials.

Nations, (1976) also has some suggestions for what to look for when setting up centers. He says centers “should include manipulative materials whenever possible and appropriate” (p.10). In addition, students will have difficulty figuring out what to do at the center if it does not have a clear and precise explanation of what to do at each center. Weiner (1997) has some good suggestions on how to organize centers efficiently and easily to minimize space. She buys hanging shoe bags to save shelf space for materials and at the end of the summer she purchases a child’s plastic pool to house manipulatives so they do not become lost and can be stored together. She also “tape[s] cardboard that’s 2 to 4 inches high around the edges of a desk to keep materials from falling off the sides a’ la a pool table” (p.96).

Piech (1991), also discusses the concern over space. She states that “Classroom size needs to be taken into consideration when setting up activities, especially if those activities call for the use of many materials” (p.446). Ideally the centers are spread out throughout the room so the students will not be distracted by other centers. In addition to concerns regards to space for materials at centers Piech suggests that centers be
introduced slowly. "I kept only two or three activities open to the students at one time, so children would not become confused or forget what needed to be done at each center" (p.446). Coons (1993) echoes Piech’s concerns, “A word of warning: too many groups can be confusing for the younger children. They can’t remember where to go” (p.22).

Both Piech and Coons discussed the importance of considering the ages of the students when deciding whether the centers should be taught one at a time and introduced very slowly or if students could handle being taught two or three centers at a time. Class size should be considered when designing how many students will participate or be at each center. The classroom may not have enough materials, or the floor and table space may be limited and not able to accommodate a large number of students. Therefore, teachers should think about the following when designing centers for their classrooms: class size and the age of the class, space and quantity of materials. Each of these factors will enhance or destroy the classroom environment.

**Learning Centers and Teachers Goals**

There are many ways to structure a learning center program and the teacher's philosophy or purpose for centers should be considered. Who uses the center and the duration of time spent at the center must be consistent with the goals of the teacher. Cosgrove (1992) suggests that “center time usually takes one hour, so in most classes the children will use two activities with two to four children at a center” (p.7). The groups have about twenty minutes for each center including setup and cleanup time. Cosgrove’s philosophy in creating Learning Centers requires that, students are “taught directly and the routine introduced slowly.... [Later teachers can] have their students self-selecting
centers of their choice for at least one day per week” (p.7).

1. Teacher’s goal — Limited Choices.

If a teacher’s goal is to establish more control over their Learning Centers they may offer students limited choices. Forte (1974) has collected a series of ideas that “have been designed to afford limited choices and alternatives...” for the students to use at a center (p.32). These centers have a specific outcome assigned to each activity. For example, one center called Believe It Or Not requires that students write their own myths. Forte’s students are asked specific questions that must be answered and turned into the teacher. “How did the turtle get his shell?, How did the giraffe get his long neck?, How did the lion get his roar?” (p.35) Students work is later reviewed by the teacher and returned to the student. The center is designed to encourage students to think and write creatively. There is not a precise answer. Teachers give students feedback on their responses in order to keep the center authentic or valuable for the kids. This center is an example of a teacher directed center. The teacher has a specific task and outcome for the student to complete and consequently fits more comfortably within the goals of some teachers who want to maximize their control over learning.

2. Teacher’s goal --- Student Oriented.

If a teacher is less concerned in control and more interested in creating student centered centers they can be more flexible in their design. In each of these centers the activities can be very open-ended, giving the students the opportunity to have a lot of free exploration within the centers' perimeters.

Another author describes a way to include centers in an already full classroom by
putting the center on a bulletin board. This would give the room more print for the
students to read and at the same time allow for further reading and exploration. Cummins
(1989) writes, “a bulletin board learning center was used to improve the spelling
performance of six students with learning disabilities in our resource room” (p.33). This
is another example of a structured center with directions and only one outcome for the
student to solve. Hopkins (1985-86) and The Rigby Company (1995) have similar ideas
about centers as Cosgrove (1992) by stating that the kids are in-groups and they rotate
around the centers in assigned groups and allow only one day or so to be the free choice.
The students then go to the center they want out of the centers open for them to choose.
The teachers establish a routine, the centers are taught to the kids and Fridays are usually
make-up days or free choice day. However, these centers are more open ended in what
they ask of the students because there are a few guidelines but on the most part the
centers are very open to explore a concept or idea placed by the teacher. Fountas (1996)
has the same ideas and she gives examples from her Work Board; “Read around the room
with a partner, read a big book, read at the overhead center...” (p.54). Read around the
room is a center, in which the students carry a pointer and read what is on the walls of
the classroom in any order they want. The students choose from what is on the walls as
to what they are interested in reading. The overhead center has poems and stories that
have been previously taught and are left for the child to choose from to read with a friend.
Big Books in a center follows the same format. They are large printed big books that
have been read before by the teacher and the students revisit them again for practice. The
format of these centers are more open ended in what the child may choose to read or do at
the centers. The children move from center to center when the teacher assigns their center for them. In this way only though is this method structured, otherwise centers designed like Fountas' are all open exploration centers.

Some teachers may be comfortable with students choosing their own centers. Isbell (1996) argues that, “Children who are given a choice of the center they use will become more involved in the play, follow their interest and maintain their activity longer” (p.27).

On her work board she has five traditional centers, one changing center and one literature based center. There are six children at each center and they work at their center until they are done with the activities at the center. One center that is described as changing does change depending on the theme the class is studying. Isbell (1996) creates a planning board. Younger children can have logos or pictures on the planning board instead of words so the students know what center they have chosen. To ensure that the right number of students go to each center, she arranges only a few chairs at each center. If there is no chair the students must choose another center. Rather than assigning a child to a center, children are to choose their center and then walk to another center when space is available at another center.

The recommended time at a center is often debated. Isbell (1996) argues, "A minimum of thirty minutes is recommended for sustained play to occur. Longer periods, from 45 minutes to one hour, encourage more involvement in play”(p.26). The more involvement the student has with a center the more likely they will be on task. This will help with classroom management because the students will be engaged in their center activity and have less opportunity to be distracted. Edwards (1995) states' students,
“should not be artificially rotated, that is, asked to move to a different learning center or activity when they are still productively engaged and motivated by a piece of creative work” (p. 2). Making sure students have adequate time at each center will enhance student engagement.

Instead of a chart with specific centers written out, a teacher could use a chart that is more flexible to show what tasks the children are allowed to do at Learning Center time. Poppe (1991) suggests a system such as this for running a learning center program. A wheel is made and is divided into four sections. (Reading, Seatwork, Learning Centers, Boardwork) The students are divided into four reading groups based on their reading level. Each reading group is assigned a color and the wheel is turned to a section of the board where these four activities are listed. The wheel moves clock-wise and the children go to all four activities a day. During the reading section of the chart is when the teacher reads with the students in reading groups while the rest of the class is at seatwork, learning centers or doing the boardwork. “The groups rotate until they have completed the four areas (approximately two hours every morning)” (p. 4). Isbell (1996) discusses the importance of allowing the children to stay at a center until they are done with the activity. Assigning the students to centers and only allowing thirty minutes (the recommended time by Isbell) is good but extending it to forty-five minutes is going to promote more engagement from the students enabling them to stay on task and complete the centers’ activities.

A good example of a rotating center system for young children is Poppe’s (1991) design. She has a system of keeping track of the students at centers and it also tells the
students what center to go to next. A cut out of a puppy face has a number written on it, a number for each center and the child’s name on it. The teacher divided the class into four-color groups then she will “circle a different number on each child’s marker in the red group with a marking pen” (Poppe, 1991, p.12). This ensures that each child will start at a different center and the right number of students will go to each center. Poppe (1991) also states that if a child is absent then “AB” is written by that number on the child’s card and the work is not made up because then there would be too many students at that center. This is another example of how a center system can be implemented into a classroom’s design.

**Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Centers and Classroom Management**

The authors represented in this paper offer a range of ways to evaluate the effectiveness of centers. Hopkins (1985-86) schedules a time in her day to evaluate the centers and students’ progress. He suggests that “Teachers conduct class discussions about what they learned in centers” (p.8). By allocating time each day, Hopkins can determine if the students completed the tasks in centers and if they understood the activity. Cummins (1989) also offers suggestions for evaluation of centers. Students should fill out packets in the centers detailing what they have done in the center. The teacher can later read their work, correct and make comments on the work and determine if the child has understood the many concepts they were to learn at the center. Cosgrove (1992) suggests that the teacher have a checklist at each center for the students to check off their name if they worked at that center in order for the teacher to determine if all the
students have worked at all the centers. Then later the teacher can conference with the students about what centers they have used. Cunningham & Allington (1994) assess the students are while they are working. They make notes and record their behaviors and try to assist the children while they are actually involved in the center. Cunningham & Allington (1994) make a folder for each child and include notes about the students' achievements in their folder. They offer the following example to illustrate how evaluation is carried out during the time children are in the center. “She [the teacher] then helps the child count some letters correctly and notes [any] directional confusion on a label that she will attach to his folder” (p. 211). The teacher trying to help a student counts the letters and notices that many students are counting from right to left. The teacher can use this assessment as an opportunity to later teach a lesson on directionality, reading left to right.

In order to help record student achievement, Isbell (1995) describes using anecdotal notes while a student is at centers. “This information is factual..., This type of information provides clear examples of children’s development in real situations” (p.351). Anthony (1991) shares ways to record these anecdotal notes of student's growth in the classroom. One idea is to write the notes on sticky tabs that later would be affixed to a sheet of paper with the student's name. “An alternative to keeping a notebook, involves the use of a large sheet of paper that is ruled into small squares, one for each student” (p. 71). This note system is easy to use when kept in a convenient place for the teacher to write in during center time. Later, this record sheet can be referred to for further discussions with the student at reading time.
Poppe (1991) suggests another way to evaluate the centers. When students rotate around the centers, they are instructed to come to the reading center when it is time to read to the teacher. The students bring their work from previous centers to discuss with the teacher. A variety of evaluation criteria can be used at this time in order to assess student work such as; completion of work and ability to follow directions. The teacher can assess what are the students needs. Isbell (1995) states, “observation during center time can lead to improvement in centers and adjustments to suit children’s needs” (p. 29). This can be a time to reflect on the center’s effectiveness and whether the needs of the students are being met.

Learning Centers are criticized by some because evaluation is thought to be difficult. Cooper (1981), while admitting that Learning Centers are a valuable tool, feels they are a lot of work because the teacher must be able to plan, implement and evaluate the students. Yet, the research of Isbell and others have offered many excellent suggestions not only for easy implementation of Learning Centers but for evaluation strategies that fit with the daily routine of students and have the added bonus of providing immediate feedback to their students.

Classroom management is a common concern for many teachers when implementing Learning Centers for the first time. Fountas (1996) suggests individualized learning, made possible by Learning Centers “creates independence because it frees both teacher and children from constant distractions related to management” (p. 70). The teacher is able to read with a group of children while the rest work quietly at their centers.

Classroom Management according to Forte (1972, p.80) will improve if “rules for
classroom living that are developed ‘by’ the group ‘for’ the group...” are established.

When students are given the opportunity to decide on the rules for the class then there will be a better chance the rules will be followed. Classroom management is then not a problem and the students and the teacher achieve their goals.

Learning Centers are very beneficial for good classroom management because the students are enthusiastically engaged in centers and therefore are not inclined to play and talk excessively. Students are interested and on task and working to their potential. As a result teachers should experience less disruption while using Learning Centers.
Chapter Three

The goal of this project was to offer an introduction to literacy learning centers as a strategy for working with small groups while the rest of the class is actively working at a meaningful activity. In this chapter I will focus mainly on Learning Centers for a second grade classroom. Modifications can certainly be made for other grades as necessary. In addition, the activities and most of the research were gathered based on a “regular” classroom of children. There were few children with learning disabilities and special needs. It was the author’s intention to provide a method to teach a heterogeneously mixed group of children in a small classroom setting. Learning Centers allow children to be grouped homogeneously by reading level while at the same time allowing for movement and flexibility across groups.

The ideas presented in this paper are the premise that a child needs to explore and try new ideas. The teacher has a role to encourage students to try new ways to use the materials provided so that they will improve their creative thinking. A major goal of this project is to show how Learning Centers can promote creative thinking in the student and the teacher and to provide a basic outline of ideas and projects by which a teacher can begin to use this important educational tool. The teacher can then modify and expand on the ideas described in the Appendix of this paper to construct and individualize their own Learning Centers.
Limitations of the paper

This paper was designed with second graders in mind. However, some modifications to the centers can easily allow for slightly younger or older students to participate in them. A teacher with students who have special needs or are severely handicapped, can alter the design and activities of this paper to accommodate their needs and the goals of the teacher. Teachers of limited English Proficient students will find Learning Centers helpful, but the ideas presented here were not designed specifically for them.

Outcomes of the paper

The outcomes of the paper are to provide teachers with a good understanding of what Learning Centers are and how to use them. This paper will offer a basic program by which to begin to implement Learning Centers in the classroom and offers suggestions regarding materials to be used and where to find them. To help facilitate the decision-making process for teachers starting Learning Centers the paper provides many ideas on how to organize the centers to meet a teacher’s philosophy of learning, such as student or teacher centered centers.
APPENDIX A

A Guide To Learning Centers
A Guide to Literacy Learning Centers in a Second Grade Classroom

This is a beginning teacher’s guide to learning centers that include only activities that involve reading and writing for second grade classroom’s. These centers offer a sample of the many ideas available to teachers as they begin to consider the implementation of centers in their classroom. This chapter will hopefully encourage and excite you into wanting centers in your classroom.

When I began my research on Learning Centers I quickly became committed to the importance of creating them for my classroom yet I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task to accomplish before the beginning of school. Forte’s (1974) work on Learning Centers provided ideas for centers but most of the centers required a lot of preparation. For example, she suggested an activity that required the teacher to assemble these items; magnets, wood iron filings, and containers of water, paper, cloth, metal objects, copied sheets of the activity sheets and pencils. Students were instructed to detail which materials were attracted or repelled by the magnets. Students were then directed to determine which magnet created the most pull and why. This learning center activity required a lot of preparation time and required the teacher to check the work completed at the end of the day. As teachers, we need activities that are easy to assemble, with little preparation time. Teachers need activities that are easy to maintain, provide quick evaluation of learning, teach an important skill and yet requires little if any paperwork (grading). Centers should provide activities that are meaningful to the students because students need to feel they are learning something that is important for them to learn.
The centers described below are educational, easy to set up, and have little if any paperwork involved when the students complete the center. The work of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell have helped me to design a great center program for my second grade class and the students love them. They claim it is the highlight of their day – mine too!

The following descriptions of the centers will include ideas and also resources and companies to call in order to get the materials necessary to begin some of the basic centers. I will describe thirteen centers, all of which include some type of reading or writing activity. Each center requires a response activity that will promote skill development in the child using the center.

Getting Started:

The first thing you need to decide is which center you want to prepare first. I usually start introducing my centers to the students one at a time. One group works at the center while the rest of the students do silent reading. I can watch and assist the students if they are having difficulties in this center because the rest of the class is busy reading quietly at their desks.

I start with some of the easy to teach centers such as big books, book corner, listening center, book box, and puzzles. I explain to the children what materials to use and where they go when they are done and what I expect of them at centers. The most important thing I want the kids to know is that they are learning centers and there is a purpose behind each center. I also tell them I have a job to do during centers and that is to read with my small groups without interruptions from them. We discuss what an
appropriate interruption is and go over this frequently so they do not forget.

It might take me two to three days to discuss centers in the students and teach them about the last few centers and what I expect of them. By this time most of my students tried out the various centers. I choose the centers for them until later in the year when I feel they are competent to choose fairly which center they should go to. Getting students to this stage has taken up to four or five months depending on the class. When I say to the students “choose fairly” this means they do not go to artist studio everyday or listening center but they are going to a variety of centers each week. You can make a checklist of your centers and check off which centers each child is going to or you can keep assigning the centers to all or a few of the students.

The centers can be put into bins or on shelves. Just try to use the materials and the space you have available. If table space or a corner is available then use it, however, the students can just as easily grab a box or tub with the materials and go to their desks to work at a center. Centers can be simple or complicated by adding materials such as paint to the artist studio and many more materials that I suggest later to put in a center. However, the students will have more difficulty working on their own when there are too many choices to choose from in a center. So in planning a center and deciding what materials you are going to include, remember to think of your class and experiment. If the center is too complicated and there are arguments or confusion then there might be a problem with either the design, placement of the center, the students themselves or the materials. Remember Learning Centers are not an exact science and you do what you feel comfortable doing with your students. If you do not like the way centers are
operating then stop and change the centers. Every so often take time from reading groups and just walk around and talk to the kids to see if the students are learning what you have planned for the center and reflect on what is working and what is not working at centers.

Continue to teach the centers whole class about the purpose for the centers and what you expect from each center. As you are nearing the end of teaching the basics about each center to your students move your time frame for centers to another part of your day when you want to teach your guided reading lessons. Another idea to keep in mind for your students while they work in centers is to continually add materials to the center for variety. Taking a center away for a week or so can also stimulate interest in the center again. These are all ideas that can help rejuvenate the student’s interest in learning centers and allow center to be more responsive to their needs.

**Learning Centers -- Set Up**

The set up of the centers is not difficult even if there is limited space. A chart can be made out of colored tagboard that is of a light color like yellow. (Refer to picture 1.) I have found that a bright color like yellow is pleasing to look at and it is easier for the students to read the words on the edges of the tagboard. On the edges of the board write the name of each center and draw in colored dots next to each center signaling the number of students allowed in each center. (Later in this chapter, I will offer a suggested number of students for each center.) These dots make it easy for the kids to quickly tell how many students are allowed at the center and if there is any space left in that center. Then write each student’s name on a clothespin. Each student will take their clothespin
with their own name written on the side of the clothespin and clip it to the chart on top of one dot on the chart. This will show the rest of the class and the teacher which center this child has chosen. Hang the chart up in the room where it will be easily accessible to the students. Each center has its own materials and space for each activity.

Learning Center Rules:

You and your students can make up rules for the centers. However, here is a recommended set of rules that you might want to think about when starting to use centers:

1. Put away materials when you leave a center.
2. Use quiet voices.
3. Take care of the materials.
4. Only go to the center that has your clothespin.
5. Try to go to a variety of centers each week.

These rules pertain to all the centers. The students need to put all the materials away when they are done with a center. They should use quiet whisper voices so you can read with your reading groups and not be disturbed. Taking care of the materials is using them with care and putting them away in their places when done using them. The clothespins are to be clipped to the center they are going as indicated by the chart and when they move to another center they move the clothespin to the area on the chart that indicates the new center. I try to check and see if my students are going to a variety of centers each week, sometimes I tell them where to go if they have not been to a center in awhile. I tell my students not to go to the same center twice in one week. Usually the
students go to two centers in a forty-minute period, approximately twenty minutes for each center.

LEARNING CENTERS:

Well now that I have given some information on how to set up a center the following pages are all about thirteen of my literacy learning centers that I have used in my classroom. Remember to start slow, teach each center one at a time and be very clear as to what you want your students to do at each center. Have fun!

1. Read the Room Center:

Purpose: The purpose for this center is to reinforce reading skills already learned. This also provides further reading practice for the students and gives them the opportunity for them to read what their classmates have written. Reading what another student has read is very beneficial because the language is simple and they can usually relate to the stories written.

Read the room consists of having the students use sticks and read from the walls. (Refer to picture 2.) This center can be incorporated easily when the students have written stories individually or as a class project. Place anything that the kids write on the walls for them to read and practice including poems that the teacher and students have written. If the kids write individual books, place them on a bulletin board for them to read. Two to four children can be at this center at a time. Children use sticks to point to the words while reading. They can be thick branches from a tree or cut dowels from a hardware store \( \frac{1}{2}'' \) to four feet long. Explain safety rules on how to carry the sticks and
how they will be used in the classroom. Instructions should include how to carry the sticks point down while walking and to be aware of where the ends are when walking. Store the sticks in a cupboard or in a slender tall box or tin can. That way they will be out of the way and available for another activity. The same sticks will be used for the overhead center and big books center.

Read the Room Center Directions:

1. Walk carefully with sticks, point down.
2. Read materials on walls around the room.
3. Use a whisper voice when reading.
4. Put sticks away in appropriate box.

2. Big Books Center:

Purpose: The purpose for this center is for the students to practice reading. This also gives them the opportunity to read stories the teacher has already read in a shared reading experience.

The big books for this center can be bought from many companies. To order materials or a catalog, here are some names and phone numbers to call. (Refer to picture 3)

The Wright Group (pre k-8) 1-(800) 648-2970
Sunshine (pre k-8) 1-(800) 523-2371
Troll Educational Catalog 1-(800) 927-TROLL
Modern Curriculum (pre k-8) 1-(800) 321-3106

In addition to the large big books, the students need a place to put the books while
they read. The kids can put the books on the floor or they can use a big bookstand, which you can purchase along with many other materials through these companies.

Lakeshore 1(800) 421-5354

C & M School Supply 1-(800) 464-6681

Students use sticks or dowels and point to each word as they read the book. This action teaches them to read closely and carefully so they do not skip any words while they read. Two children at this center at a time are plenty. Since the students read aloud, this center can get noisy if there are more than two students. They can share a book or read individually. The books can be stored in a big bookrack or by just leaning them against a wall.

Big Books Center Directions:
1. Read big book with a friend or alone.
2. Read books on bookrack or on the floor.
3. Use a whisper voice when reading.
4. Put books back on rack when done.

3. Book Box Center:

Purpose: This center provides further exploration on a theme the class is learning about. It can also enhance a student's knowledge on a subject and allow for more reading practice.

The book box center can be any assortment of books that you would like to target in an area of study. (Refer to picture 4) For example, if you are studying dinosaurs then the books could be at a variety of reading levels about dinosaurs. The students can take the
box to the floor and read with one or two other students. So in this center two or three children can be at this center at one time, this will keep the noise level down. The box can be stored either on a shelf or somewhere on the floor.

Book Box Center Directions:

2. Use a whisper voice when reading.
3. Book Box can be taken to a desk or the floor.
4. Put box back when done reading.

4. Pocket Chart Center:

Purpose: The purpose of this center is to provide more practice on poems or songs that have already been taught in the class. This center provides a great opportunity to practice reading, formation of sentences and rhyming words.

You can use the pocket chart center in a variety of ways. Poems written by the students, can be cut into parts that they have to put back together. (Refer to picture 5) Students could do the same thing with a story they have written by cutting the story into parts and also retell a story by putting the main ideas back into order. For the poem activities or any activity that requires the child to put a detailed story back together again, those activities should have a copy of the original story and the pieces of the poem or story in a labeled bag. Then the kids can easily check on the paper with the poem on it to see if they put the poems back together again correctly. A good resource for ideas for a pocket chart is The Pocket Chart Book By: Valerie Schiffer Danoff and the publisher is Scholastic Books. The ideas in this book can help you get stated on your own ideas and
allow you to expand on other activities from there. The pocket chart can also be purchased through C & M School Supply or Lakeshore.

Pocket Chart Center Directions:

1. Use poems or songs in bags to put together on the chart.
2. Look at original copy to see if it was put together correctly.
3. Read or sing song softly with a friend.
4. A stick may be used to point with when reading.
5. Put all materials away when done.

5. Book Corner Center:

Purpose: The purpose of this center is to provide many genres of literature to the students at various different reading levels. The students practice reading different types of stories about many topics from the library.

The book corner center is the classroom library that can be your personal books or borrowed books from the school library or local libraries. (Refer to picture 6) The books can be held in shelves or in a bookrack purchased by C&M School Supply or Lakeshore. There can be two to four children in this center depending on the space in the room and the student's attention. In addition, this center could also include class made books for the students to reread. This center is an easy one to have ready toward the beginning of the year and just remind the students they are to read. So this means that a variety of leveled books should be available for the students.
Book Corner Center Directions:

1. Read book on shelves alone or with a partner.

2. Use whisper voices when reading and discussing books.

3. Put all books away before leaving center.

6. Listening Center:

Purpose: The purpose of this center is to provide reading support to a student who may not be able to read a higher level book. Students listen to a tape and read along as the story is read. This is great reinforcement for a child learning to read and it is fun and entertaining for the student especially those tapes that provide music or sound effects to enhance the reading experience. This center is one of my student’s favorite centers to visit.

A listening center can be either in one place at a particular table or it can be portable in the classroom. At this center students will use headsets, tape recorders, books and tapes often available from the school library. The teacher can also make their own books and read the books into a tape recorder to further supplement or in place of library materials. If you are interested in buying the books, they can be bought through C&M School Supply and Lakeshore. The materials for the listening center can be stored in a cupboard and pulled out when not in use or they can be housed on a table assigned for this purpose. There can be two to four students at this center depending on the space and the children.
Listening Center Directions:

1. Hook up all equipment.

2. Play a tape to go along with the books provided.

3. Read along with tape.

4. Put all materials away appropriately when done with center.

7. Artist’s Studio Center:

Purpose: This center can be focused on a theme to enhance what the students are learning. For example, when we study the water cycle I tell my students to draw the water cycle and label the various stages. This gives them practice on a subject we are learning and they are allowed to color or use markers to draw the picture. I also allow them to draw pictures (in keeping with the theme) and to write a sentence about the picture on their paper. For those students that love art, this center is a wonderful tool for them to express themselves about a topic studied or read about. In addition, the students who have difficulty writing about what they know, can illustrate in a picture what they know or understand about the subject being studied.

You can include in artist's studio: pencils, all kinds of (paper construction paper and drawing paper), colored pencils, pastels, markers, stencils of all sorts of things, paints and stamps of letters, words, or animals. (Refer to picture 8) The students illustrate a story they have read in class and write about the story. This center can be a free for all with the kids unless they are given explicit instructions. I have found this center to be the most difficult to keep the kids on task because they are inclined to draw pages of pictures.
This center is best when limited to two students.

Artist Studio Center Directions:

1. Do assigned tasks only.
2. Put all materials away when done with center.

8. ABC Word Games Center:

Purpose: The purpose of this center is to practice phonics and spelling.

In this center I use magnetic letters on a metal file cabinet. (Refer to picture 8) Word tiles are also a good item for you to use for this center and the students can use these materials to spell out sentences or words that are in the stories they have read in class. This center has magnetic letters stuck to a file cabinet at all times or the tiles can be kept in a container on a shelf. The tiles or other activities can be carried to the floor or a child’s desk. The materials can be purchased at C&M School Supply or Lakeshore.

Another activity can include cards with words and a picture that match with its homophone [words that sound the same but are spelled differently], and play concentration with the cards. They can flip the cards upside down and turn cards over, two at a time, to see if there is a match. If a student has a match then they continue to take turns until they do not have a match. Then the second student takes a turn and the person with the most word matches wins.

Make-A-Word Bingo is another activity that requires students to practice reading
words and working with the sounds the words make. You can make flip cards where the parts of the words change, such as cat, hat, mat, fat and so on. The fist letter is the part that flips and the kids can practice reading them.

Students can also play a game called Opposites where the students match pictures that have opposite actions such as (up, down; open, closed; walk, run). This activity could also ask the students to write the words on paper and describe why the actions are opposites. The students can also play concentration or memory with the cards and find matches for the pictures.

Make-A-Word Bingo #05030

School-Zone Publishing Company

http://www.schoolzone.com

P.O.Box 777, Grand Haven, MI 49417

Opposites #MB7766 Media Materials

Two children are recommended for this center so only one game is in play at a time and the noise level is still quiet enough to read with your groups.

ABC Word Games Center Directions:

1. If the game chosen is for two players, pick a partner.

2. Use quiet voices.

3. Follow the directions of the game.

4. Follow specific directions to each activity as taught by the teacher for each game.

5. Put all materials away when done at the center.
9. Writer’s Corner Center:

Purpose: The purpose of this center is to get students writing. It focuses on explanatory writing.

In this center students are given games that require students to respond in writing. For example, a set of sequencing cards with pictures are to be put in order. (Refer to Picture 9) Students must then write about the cards. This center can be kept in a small box or bag on a bookshelf and can be carried to the student’s desk or to the floor to be completed.

Two children at this center is recommended.

Sequencing Cards -- Frank Schaffer Publications  #FS-3753

23740 Hawthorne Blvd.

Torrance, CA. 90505

Envelopes from Hallmark Cards

Writer’s Corner Center Directions:

1. Write a story using the sequence cards.
2. Use stamps to write a letter or story.
3. Work with a partner to help with spelling.
4. Put all materials away when done with center.

10. Overhead Center:

Purpose: The purpose of this center is to provide a chance for the students to teach to their partner in the center the games, poems, songs and other activities in this center that have already been worked on previously in class. This center provides more practice with reading and since the students are teaching each other, it helps the students
internalize what they have learned.

You will need an overhead projector and a screen for this center. (Refer to picture 10) These can be purchased by C&M School Supply or Lakeshore along with the transparency film used to copy poems and other activities so the students can project them onto the screen to read. Traditionally use of the overhead has been a teacher-focused activity. This center reverses that arrangement and allows the students to do the teaching. The students use a stick to point to the words on the screen. Students read copies of poems that the class has previously practiced in class, or students read science sheets done as a class. While this paper has focused on reading and writing, we know as educators that these activities should not be relegated to language arts activities exclusively. Expanding reading and writing throughout the curriculum, offers students an opportunity to enhance these skills and improve content area subject matter as well. If you are studying science and have made an overhead transparency of the body parts of a fish then this can be added to the center. The students are reading and discussing the parts of the fish. A United States of America map can also be put on the overhead and the students can read the states and discuss these. This center is limitless and can include all areas of the curriculum. You may use anything that was practiced or discussed in class and then later you can put these into the overhead center for further exploration and practice. Do not limit the possibilities of this center as it is a powerful teaching tool and the students love to use the overhead. The overhead can be in the middle of the room or pushed aside on a desk or some sort of table. I recommend that only two students use this center at a time.
Overhead Center Directions:

1. Plug in overhead. (Teacher should do this.)
2. Turn on overhead.
3. Use a stick to read poems and stories on screen.
4. Put all materials away and turn off overhead when done.

11. U.S. Mail Box Center:

Purpose: The purpose for this center is to practice writing letters and to encourage writing in the students.

This center is one of my student’s favorite centers because it is so personalized to fit their interests. The items needed for this center include a mailbox that can be made out of a cardboard box with an opening at the top to put the envelopes in and to take them out. (Refer to picture 11) The box can be covered with blue paper and the letters U.S. Mail cut out and glued to the front of the box. Students must place the name of the child they want to send the letter to, on the front of the envelope along with the students room number if they are enrolled in the same school. The students are not allowed to take mail out of the box once it has been put in. Envelopes and paper are provided and the kids can write a letter to anyone they want. However, I inform the students that I will read the letters before sending them out to the people and only polite and correct letters will be sent. The envelopes can be purchased or they can come from discarded envelopes from card stores. This center should have two to four children at it and the student’s should work sitting at their desks so they can use their dictionaries. The mailbox can be kept on a shelf so it is visible and the letters can be mailed once a week.
U.S. Mailbox Center Directions:

1. Use lined paper to write a letter to someone.
2. Put the letter in an envelope with the names; To: ___ and From: ___ on the front.
3. Put letter in U.S. Mail box and the teacher will send out mail once a week.
4. If the letter is to go to another student in the school, put the room number of the student on the front of the envelope.

12. Extra’s Basket Center:

Purpose: The purpose of this center is to review and practice previously learned material.

The “extra’s basket” is a basket or box full of all the extra papers copied and used in class for all areas of the curriculum. Kids can choose worksheets to practice again.

(Refer to picture 12) Worksheets include copied reading and comprehension sheets, math, science activities done as a whole class or art projects that were dittoed off and there were extra copies of them. You can keep this center in a box under a table or on a shelf and the kids can either take the box with them or take what they want and go to an area on the floor or their desk. Two students at this center are recommended.

Extra’s Basket Center Directions:

1. Complete any of the left over work in the Extra’s Basket.
2. Basket is not to be moved around the room.
3. Put back any unused work.
13. Puzzles Center:

Purpose: The purpose of this center is to teach learning strategies by arranging the puzzles and encourage problem solving.

The puzzle center can include alphabet puzzles, student made puzzles, or puzzles with pictures on them that were purchased through C&M School Supply or Lakeshore. The students take the puzzles from a shelf or cupboard and take the puzzle to the floor or their desk depending on whether they are floor puzzles or the standard fifty-sixty piece puzzles. This center can accommodate two to four students depending on the number of puzzles. This center is still functional even if two or three puzzles are all that is available.

Puzzles Center Directions:

1. Take one puzzle off shelf at a time.
2. Work floor puzzles on the floor.
3. Small piece puzzles complete on a table.
4. Put all pieces back into box when done and put away.

The ideas for Learning Centers presented in this chapter represent a sample of the many ideas that can be included in a student-centered learning center program. It is my intention to guide you through the beginning stages of center development and create greater opportunities for student learning. I would caution teachers to start slow, teach the center, demonstrate the center, have fun, relax and enjoy. Learning Centers enable the teacher to teach in a small group setting without having to monitor the behaviors of the rest of the students who are out in centers. In this way the teacher can best meet the
needs of all of the children. The centers described above are maintenance free and if introduced slowly, with a lot of guidance in the beginning, students will remain on task and learn!

**REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS:**

By using centers in my classroom I have accomplished the following goals: provided literacy-balanced program, provided interesting and challenging activities, improved classroom management, and allowed time to read with small reading groups giving all the children more time with me. When I began my research on Learning Centers I did not know the extent of support I would find for Learning Centers. It has enhanced my ability to create more innovative and challenging Learning Centers for my students. Although I have been using these learning centers for four years in my class, I continue to develop a program that suits my needs. My research on Learning Centers was very exciting to me because I was able to articulate more carefully my teaching philosophies and to relate more carefully my ideology and beliefs in relation to other authors' ideas about centers. In spite of Cooper's ideas as reported in the article *What Centers Are and Aren't* (1981) her ideas were very insightful to me. My research on Learning Centers has been very exciting for me because I have been able to reexamine my teaching philosophy and more carefully construct Learning Centers in my classroom to meet my goals. I have found through practice that Learning Centers promote good thinking skills. The students learn a lot more in centers that are open-ended and provided with a variety of materials, students are able to take charge of their learning. If a teacher wants to ensure a successful program, centers are crucial. If the teacher does not instill in the students the purpose for
the centers, which is the possibility to work in small groups with the teacher, then their
students will not believe in the program and can take advantage of the situation by not
using the centers as they were designed to be used. In my few years of experience with
these centers I have learned that for centers to be effective they must have careful teacher
guidance, explicit directions and a well-organized program. I have found the set up the
program to be important. If rules are not followed then the students lose out on valuable
center time.

Unlike the traditional method of using worksheets to educate children, learning
centers by their very design allow teachers to respond to new topics, stimulate creativity
and respond to the needs of the students. They allow for the implementation of new
technology (computers) and allow children to be in control of their own learning.
Experimenting with new ways to construct Learning Centers has allowed me to see more
ways to include other materials into my centers. Computers, by example, are now put
into Learning Centers. The computer allows students to read and answer questions and
play activity games that enable the practice of other skills and make learning fun.
Computers allow practice in writing letters and are just plain fun for the students. In
addition, the number of materials available for each center will grow every year because
teachers can buy more materials for their classrooms. By using centers I have provided a
literacy-balanced program, interesting and challenging activities, improvement in
classroom management and allowing time for me to read with small groups in my
classroom. My students enjoy learning while at Learning Centers and I think this is a
wonderful technique to teach energetic and enthusiastic children!
APPENDIX B:

Photographs of Literacy Learning Centers
REFERENCES


