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Individualization in kindergarten with learning centers

Cheryl Strong

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INDIVIDUALIZATION IN KINDERGARTEN
WITH LEARNING CENTERS

Master Project 600a
Fall Quarter, 1974

Cheryl Strong
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................ 1
Research of the Literature .......................... 4
Definition of Learning Centers ....................... 9
Characteristics of Learning Centers ................. 10
Organizing For Learning Centers .................... 11
Room Environment ................................... 16
Introducing Learning Centers ....................... 17
Developing Learning Centers ....................... 18
Recording Learning Center Activities ............... 21
Aides and Volunteers ................................ 30
Conclusion ........................................... 32
Bibliography ......................................... 33
Bibliography of Ideas For Teacher Made Learning Centers .... 34
Traditionally it has been felt that the proper emphasis of the teacher was working with the whole class group, with all the children involved in the same activity at the same time for a large portion of the day. However, teaching with this approach has been found to present problems in that not all children want or need to do the same activities. This results in some children breaking away from the group and avoiding an interest in what is taking place within the group. This breakdown in turn often disturbs and creates behavior problems for the individual.¹

As a result of such problems based in the traditional approach to teaching and in response to changing social values, in the setting of contemporary education, the classroom teacher is ever increasingly confronted with the desirability to "individualize." This building concern with individualization is exemplified by trends in recent literature and legislation. In examining the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature one can quickly gain a feeling for the changing position of individualization. Under the topical heading of "individual instruction" articles have been appearing at the following annual frequencies:²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Articles Per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-1961</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962-1967</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7 months of 1974)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Recent growth in legislative concern with individualization is found in the California Education Code 6445.1 of Early Childhood Education. This enactment states: "... a comprehensive program of early childhood education is needed to restructure public education in California. The objects of this plan will include assurance that each child will have an individualized program to permit the development of his maximum potential. ..." Under this new program teachers must provide for the individual needs and differences of children. Individualized learning comes about by varying the teaching and learning processes according to the interests, preferences, learning styles, abilities, and achievements of the children within each classroom.

The concept of individualized learning is not meant to suggest that the teacher instructs every child individually. Grouping students for academic and social learning is a necessary aspect of an individualized classroom. Learning to interact, cooperate, and work as a member of a group is vital to the development of each child as an individual. Flexible groups which pull children together for a specific purpose aid the teacher in individualizing learning. The children's membership in various groups are intended in order to have a wide variety of experiences. The goal of individualization is to insure that no child becomes a permanent member of either a high, average, or low group.

In order to know where and how to begin to individualize, the teacher should focus attention on how students learn, rather than on the content of the subjects taught. The teacher needs to become a specialist in the relationships of child to child, child to teacher, and child to learning.


There are many methods available for teachers to help them in individualizing learning. This paper focuses on the development and use of learning centers as a successful means for individualized learning at the kindergarten level. Learning centers are demonstrated to be one means by which children are moved away from teacher-dominated learning experiences and moved toward student-selected learning activities. It will be illustrated how learning centers may organize and direct learning experiences for students through an arrangement of freedom within a provided structure.\(^5\)

\(^5\)Ibid., p. xv.
RESEARCH OF THE LITERATURE

The development of individualization in modern kindergarten could probably be best placed in Blankenburg, Germany in 1837, under Friedrich Froebel. Froebel's kindergarten was educational materials which were devised for the purpose of drawing out of each child every potentiality of his nature. Froebel believed that curriculum should be built around the child. He denied the validity of a content-centered education. An outstanding feature of Froebel's approach was the recognition of the importance of play in the development of the child; thus play was used for encouraging self-development. Songs, games, stories, movement, as well as poetry, and aspects of nature study were all included in Froebel's program. By designing materials with a definite sequence and by supplying explicit directions for their use, Froebel provided an educational system with clear directives for the teacher. The sense of unity of Froebel's kindergarten curriculum fostered its expansion as a total unit. This is the manner in which the kindergarten idea spread to the United States.  

John Dewey was the one in the United States who picked up on Froebel's ideas. John Dewey established a laboratory school at the University of Chicago in 1896 to test his educational theories. Dewey agreed with Froebel that education should direct the play experiences of the young child toward effective social living. Dewey also felt that there was a demand for a motor outlet for expression and this should be immediate. Hence the subject-matter for these years was selected from phases of life entering the child's own social surroundings. These were reproduced by the child in the forms of play, games, arts, stories, occupations, and conversation. The material was not presented as lessons, but rather as something to be taken into the child's own experience.

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through his own activities as in weaving, cooking, shopwork, modeling, dramatic plays, conversation, discussion, story-telling, etc. These areas were emphasized in the school program as the connection between knowing and doing for the child. The aim was for the child to go to school to recapitulate typical phases of his experience outside of school and to enlarge, enrich, and gradually formulate these experiences.  

In the early 1900's an educational method that attracted widespread interest was the Montessori system in Italy. Maria Montessori broke completely with surrounding school tradition by organizing activities for the individual rather than for the group. Formal class teaching was dispensed with, along with desks, benches, and stationary chairs. These were replaced by moveable chairs, shelves, and cupboards the children could reach. This organization of learning promoted individual instruction. The children were given freedom to use material of their own choosing either individually or with a small group of similarity interested children.  

The Montessori system was considered a rival to the established organization of the American kindergarten and as such was the focus of examination and investigation by American educators. This led to the awareness of some leaders in American education of a non-directive role of the teachers. Many felt that the Montessori materials could find a place among other available equipment. The importance of letting little children participate in the practical work of the classroom was impressive to some educators.  

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It was during the first quarter of the twentieth century that the kindergarten came into the mainstream of American education. The popular focus of the kindergarten turned away from the theories of European educators and centered upon proposals of educators on the American scene. As a result of kindergarten's growing popularity and the changing influences, this period between 1900 to 1925 resulted in curricular confusion, experimentation, and redirection.

In this period child studies developed in response to the existing climate. Child studies were used to examine the appropriateness of portions of the curriculum for young children. Recommendations stemming from child studies tended to divide into two distinct contexts: one group related experiences to organized bodies of subject matter; the other group dealt in terms of children's needs and interests.\(^\text{10}\)

The child study approach revealed some of the kinds of learning within the capabilities of the young child. The child's interests and background experiences were considered in selecting and offering materials and projects to be used in kindergartens. Young children's natural love of manipulating and experimenting with objects came into recognition. Toward the end of this period of the child study movement sprang many new proposals for kindergarten programs presented by competing colleges of education. Two such proposals that were used and very popular were "projects" and "free play." The term "project" was given a great range of interpretation from a project being any experience involving activity on the part of the child to one requiring that the purposes and plans be those of the children and not of the teacher. The "free play" curriculum suggested the possibility of extending freedom of choice throughout the entire session so that a child interested in a personal project could work on it as long as he chose. Holidays and seasonal activities formed the one consistent

\(^{10}\)Ibid., pp. 83-93
choice of subject matter for discussion and for projects. The home, the school, the grocery store, and other community enterprises found in the child's social environment formed the other major source.\textsuperscript{11}

In the 1930's the definition of the kindergarten organization was changed. What had earlier been called projects were designated as units of work, centers of interest, or even an activity program. These organizing procedures were used in connection with many of the familiar phrases of the period: "developing the whole child," "education through activity," and "building social living."\textsuperscript{12}

The centers of interest suggested were the home, a grocery store, a post office, a circus, holidays, etc. These were very similar in content to the earlier units. The distinguishing feature seemed to be the flexibility in the centers of interest, both in time-span and in number of children included.

Still another concept of the center of interest equated it with available materials which gave variety to experience and allowed for choice. Centers included separate ones arranged for housekeeping, block building, art materials, books, puzzles, science, and a work bench where tools and wood were available.\textsuperscript{13}

The words had changed somewhat, but essentially they stood for the same experiences provided for children in the twenties - block building, sand play, easel painting, celebration of holidays, studies of seasons, learning more about home and community helpers.

The kindergarten education years of the 1940's through the 1960's may be best noted for the development of a recognition of the importance and necessity for having the child's intention to learn and the teacher's intention to teach both incorporated in the same program. The unit of work, center of interest,

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., pp. 140-144.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 189.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 190.
activity curriculum or area of interest, became a method of bringing activity into the classroom and carrying knowledge out of the classroom.¹⁴

Educators felt that if the unit of work was to be worth while it would have to measure up to certain set standards. First, the activity would be one that grew out of the children's experience. Second, the activity would be sufficiently complex to demand a variety of responses so that children could make contributions in keeping with their own abilities. Third, it was to be an activity which would broaden the outlook and social understanding of the group. Fourth, the activity was to be one that would lead on into other related units of work. Fifth, the activity would be one that would further the children's physical health and well-being. Sixth, the activity would give children some degree of satisfaction.¹⁵

The late 1960's and early 1970's have witnessed a thrust in education toward individualization. The familiar terms used in the 1940's through the 1960's such as unit of work, center of interest, and area of interest have been replaced with updated terms such as "learning centers" and "interest centers." Although the words have changed the basic underlying concepts remain the same. Through the years kindergarten teachers have provided children with many and varied activities to work with in the classroom such as the playhouse, block area, art materials, books, puzzles, science, math, social studies, etc. These activity areas are still very much a part of the "learning center" concept. This paper will further develop these learning areas through "learning centers" as an approach to individualizing in the kindergarten.


¹⁵Ibid., p. 128.
DEFINITION OF LEARNING CENTERS

The continued use of a particular teaching-learning method seems to depend, in part, on whether it corresponds to current ideas and directions in educational theory. Survival of a teaching method also depends upon whether teachers can easily put it to use in their classrooms and achieve the desired results. Thus taken into account, the "learning center" approach appears to be one of the popular innovations, certain to become a permanent teaching method.16

In an effort to eliminate confusion of similar terms, it is important to specify what exactly a "learning center" involves. A learning center refers to a location of study and activity, in or near the classroom, that has been provided for the structured exploration of a particular subject, topic, skill, or interest. It is a place for using materials that relate to a special interest or curriculum area. It may be in a corner, on a wall, on the floor, next to a bookcase, or on a table; that is, a learning center exists somewhere in the classroom or school.17

To meet individual needs effectively, it has been established that a learning center should include several standards: materials for decision-making, materials that range from simple to complex; materials that can be assembled and disassembled; materials which change periodically; task cards; directions, verbal or written; and some form of record-keeping.18

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17 Ibid., p. 4.
18 Eleanor Dunn (director), Lexilogs (Riverside, California: Riverside County Superintendent of Schools, Prolexia ESEA Title III), p. 21.
CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING CENTERS

One important characteristic of a learning center is that it does not demand the direct and continuous presence of the teacher as an information giver. Pupils, after seeing a demonstration or hearing the directions to a learning center, may go directly to a learning center and begin work. Thus to support other directions or as occasion may develop, each center should have clear, plainly written directions for beginning and completing work. Even though most kindergarten children cannot read, the directions are very useful for any adult working in the classroom.

Each center can present ideas, materials, and activities on a variety of levels of difficulty. The basis for this is the requirements of the individual and his response to the centers.

Important to each learning center is the concept of challenge. Each child should be asked to achieve specific objectives which are clear to the child. The operation of the center must direct and specify the task to be done and indicate the desired final objective.

Ideally learning centers include a method of recording the student's participation and achievement at that center. In the kindergarten and beginning levels the use of an individual log as a recording device is easy and simple for children to record their center activities.19 (See page 22)

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19George, "Learning Centers Approach To Instruction," p. 4-5.
ORGANIZING FOR LEARNING CENTERS

The traditional classroom can be converted to the individualized learning approach by an arrangement of furniture and supplies into major learning and experience areas. What is placed in the room and how it is arranged determines the atmosphere and the expectancies for learning. Consideration of the actual arrangement will vary according to the size and shape of the room and the quantity and nature of tables, chairs, book cases, easels or other furnishings to be used. The greater class group must be kept in consideration so as to facilitate its smooth operation as a group. Arrangement should be such that children can move freely from place to place with a minimum of disturbance to others. Attention ideally should be given to the comfort of the learning areas so as to minimize distractions. The learning centers themselves should be attractive, providing an interesting, inviting place to work.20

Within each planned learning center location are placed the respective materials for that center. There is no prescribed order for categorizing of activities within centers, however, the writer has experienced success with the following arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Playhouse equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clothes for dress-up and role-playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dolls and doll clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Maintenance equipment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hollow blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Table blocks and floor blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lego blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tinker toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lincoln logs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Trucks, cars, planes, bus, train, and boats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Game Center**

1. Teacher made games  
2. Dominoes  
3. Bingo  
4. Lotto  
5. Puzzles  
6. Checkers  
7. Concentration

**Woodwork Center**

1. Work table  
2. Real woods  
3. Building materials  
   a) soft woods for easy nailing  
   b) cardboard  
   c) plywood  
   d) metals  
   e) wire  
   f) glue  
4. Nails, screws, tacks

**Language Art Center**

1. Flannelboard and flannelboard stories  
2. Puppets  
3. Listening posts  
4. Television  
5. Typewriter  
6. Blackboard  
7. Slates  
8. Telephones  
9. Camera  
10. Perceptual activities  
11. Picture files  
12. Magazines  
14. Materials for writing

**Library Center**

1. Book racks  
2. Display board  
3. Area rugs  
4. Large pillows  
5. Rocking chair  
6. Books & magazines  
7. Poetry  
8. Class-made books  
9. Child-made books  
10. Teacher-made books  
11. Old fashioned bath tub
**Math Center**

1. Number puzzles  
2. Magnetic board and numbers  
3. Games  
4. Balance scale  
5. Peg boards and pegs  
6. Beads and bead patterns  
7. Cuisenaire rods  
8. Attribute blocks  
9. Individual flannelboards  
10. Counting objects  
11. Measuring cups and spoons  
12. Ruler, tape measure and scissors  
13. Paper, pencils, and crayons  
14. Individual chalkboards

**Science Center**

1. Books for research  
2. Magnets  
3. Ant farm  
4. Globe  
5. Magnifying glass  
6. Batteries  
7. Mirrors  
8. Collections  
9. Aquarium  
10. Terrarium  
11. Garden plot  
12. Water table  
13. Sand table  
14. Cages with animals  
15. Display tables

**Cooking Center**

1. Equipment for cooking  
   a) stove or hot plate  
   b) broiler oven  
   c) electric fry pan  
2. Small bowls  
3. Large mixing bowls  
4. 2 or 3 cookie sheets  
5. Baking pans, square pans, loaf pans, & sauce pans  
6. Measuring cups and spoons  
7. Strainer, peelers, spoons, spatulas, sifter, knives  
8. Potholders, paper towels, dish towels  
9. Foil, waxed paper  
10. Timer  
11. Recipe books  
12. Chart rack to hang recipes  
13. Individual aprons
Audio-Visual Center

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Record player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Filmstrip projector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Filmloop projector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Overhead projector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Tape recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Listening posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Viewmasters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Records with accompanying books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Music Center

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Autoharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Rhythm sticks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4. | Rhythm instruments  
  a) tom-tom  
  b) xylophone  
  c) tone bars  
  d) song bells |
| 5. | Audio-aids  
  a) record player  
  b) listening post  
  c) musical filmstrips and records |
| 6. | Materials to make original instruments |

Art and Craft Center

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Variety of paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Finger paints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Easel paints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Sponge painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Objects for printing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Colored chalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Scissors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Crayons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Felt pens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Materials for collage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Weaving materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Styrofoam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Wallpaper books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Boxes and egg cartons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Glue and paste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Starch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Tin foil and wax paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Pipe cleaners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Glitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>String and colored yarn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptual-Motor Development Center

1. Large muscle activities
   a) balance beam
   b) ropes
   c) balls
   d) old tires
   e) maze

2. Small muscle activities
   a) blackboard
   b) bean bags
   c) clay
   d) nuts and bolts
   e) sponge
   f) templates and chalk
   g) collage materials
   h) jars and lids

The materials listed in the learning centers mentioned are suggestions. The centers must be organized and arranged to suit the class needs and situation. Flexibility and responsiveness of the arrangement of the centers are central to success.²¹ & ²²

²¹Barbara Baron, "The Open Classroom Approach In The Kindergarten" ERIC Document Service, ED 077 588 (1972), pp. 7-17.
²²Dunn, Lexilogs, p. 25.
ROOM ENVIRONMENT

Once the arrangement of furniture and materials in the learning centers has been established the learning centers need to be labeled and signs posted in order to focus the children's attention on what and where things are in the room. Because signs and labels help to direct children, the teacher is free to spend more time with individuals and small groups of children. The use of signs and labels also reinforces the skill of following and interpreting directions, as well as, developing self-directed learners.23

Another very important aspect of room environment is the displaying of children's work. The classroom should reflect the children who live and work in it. Displaying children's work helps to give recognition to each child as an individual and may act as a stimulus to others.

Since the classroom is the source for initiating and organizing learning activities, what is included, and its availability to the children is of primary importance. The following room environment checklist has been included as a guide. All of the points listed are important and should be given careful consideration.24 & 25

Room Environment Checklist

1. Providing space for both quiet and noisy work areas.
2. Providing areas for independent study and group interaction.
3. Locating art and cooking centers near a sink for easy cleanup.
4. Locating electrical outlets for centers needing electrical equipment.
5. Labeling areas and posting directions within each area.
7. Providing individual cubbies for each child.
8. Creating places to display children's work.

23Kaplan, Change For Children, p. 8.
24Ibid., p. 2.
INTRODUCING LEARNING CENTERS

The beginning of the kindergarten school experience is a time of uncertainty for many young children, a time when they are confronted with new surroundings and strange faces. For this reason, the first weeks of kindergarten are best spent in familiarizing children with school and developing social awareness of the other children. The introduction of one learning center may require several days in order to explain how to use materials. As children develop an understanding of centers and they begin independent use of the centers, care must be taken to assure that each child is in a center area and not idly wondering. This initially may be done by identifying each center with a different color. Each child may then wear a correspondingly colored yarn circlet around his neck verifying his location, the number of available circlets of a color allowing for control of the ideal number of children for a particular center.26

Because children of the kindergarten level normally have brief attention and concentration spans, it is important to allow frequent opportunity for movement from one learning center to another. Movement should be based on provisions as follow: (1) completion of the work at the present center; (2) proper replacement of the equipment and materials at the present center; and (3) a decision of which learning center to go to next. When the child changes centers he also changes his yarn circlet. The circlet arrangement in itself is instructional, however, when the children thoroughly understand the learning center arrangement, they will not really need the circlets.27 A recommended time for learning center activities is one hour per day. Of course, individual time in individual centers will vary widely.

27 Ibid., p. 18.
DEVELOPING LEARNING CENTERS

When procedures are smoothly established, and children are familiar with the learning centers in the room, normally the second or third month of school, the centers begin to take on a new look. Within each large center area may be found several small centers. For example, within the original art center several small centers would be found: (1) easel painting; (2) finger painting; (3) collage assembling; and (4) paper weaving. Each smaller center would be self supportive in that it would have written directions, examples of work when possible, and all the necessary materials for that center. Under this expanded arrangement children are provided with more choices allowing more accordance with individual preference and interest. Along with the added choices in each center more materials are needed. With the use of many diverse materials it is important to stress that these materials need not all be commercial. Some of the best materials are those developed by teachers from common components found in the classroom and community.28 (See bibliography of ideas)

By this stage the yarn circlets will not be needed as a method of regulating the numbers of children at each center. Rather such control will be accomplished by simply limiting the number of chairs at each center. The child must understand that movement to another center is possible only when a vacant chair is available for him at that center. If the center of his choice does not offer a vacancy then he must make another activity selection. The centers that do not require chairs may use a sign indicating the number of children the center will hold. This sign is placed next to the color sign for that particular center.29


29Dunn, Lexilogos, p. 19.
An important aspect of learning center development that has been mentioned, but not discussed, is written directions for center activities. Besides being a valuable learning tool for those children who can read, the written directions may also offer other uses: (1) Aides and parent volunteers can easily understand the written directions at each center without having to disrupt the teacher for instructions. (2) The written directions may act as lesson plans for each center when a substitute teacher is needed. (3) Visitors in the classroom can read the directions at each center and know what that center contains without taking up the teacher's valuable time with questions. (4) The written directions offer easy exchange and use by other teachers. (5) The directions are in themselves a good means of keeping activity ideas for future reference and use.

An additional educational value of written directions can be the practical experience in reading gained by older elementary student helpers as they themselves help the kindergarten children at that center activity.

A means of writing and keeping directions that has been tested by use in a classroom with children and proven very successful is the manila filing folder. The outside of the folder contains the name of the center activity, the materials needed for that center, and the skills involved in that center activity. Example:

```
Materials Needed
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

Skills
1. 
2. 
3. 
```
The folders can be filed by the name of each activity and kept in a filing cabinet for easy accessibility and storage. The inside of the folder contains the written directions for that activity and whenever possible an example of the activity. Example:

A folder with only directions. A folder with a sample and directions.

It is a good idea to print the directions in distinct form so they can be easily read. If the activity requires several directions then each direction may ideally be written with a different color for clarity. The direction folder, when completed as described and kept with the corresponding learning center material, lends itself to easy filing and fast recognition of the various materials.
RECORDING LEARNING CENTER ACTIVITIES

In order to ensure that each child is achieving a balanced exposure to the available centers a system of recording his work should be developed. There are a number of ways to successfully record children's activities. (1) A teacher may keep a checklist in a folder of children's names and centers available to them. This can be used to compile a quick daily account of work covered. (2) A large chart may be set up on a wall with each child's name on it. A star or other symbol for each center would be added by the child's name as he completed an activity. He could then see his progress and determine which centers he had yet to cover. (3) A center check sheet may be kept at each center with all the children's names listed. As a child works at the center, he checks his own name or marks it out. This, of course, furnishes a tally of those who have worked at the center. It is desirable that children be involved as much as possible in the development of the records they will use. Having children keep track of their own daily activities helps them assume responsibility for the completion of their work and is an aid to the teacher as well.30

The main purpose of records is to enable both teachers and children to monitor the learning, the child's interests, his strengths, his deficiencies; thus the teacher has some idea of the child's feeling of self worth, his confidence in attacking or trying new tasks. In response to his level of development, proper choices of new activities can be made. The simplest methods of keeping records are often the best ones, and when they can be fun at the same time, their use is even more attractive to children.31

30Voight, Invitation To Learning, p. 25.

The recording methods that have been mentioned so far are simple and easily checked by the teacher, but may prove to lack desired meaning and attractiveness to children. Since it is advantageous to have children involved in recording their own activities by themselves without repeated teacher follow-up, a method of record keeping which emphasizes student motivation needs to be considered. Such a method is the weekly log. It is simple and easy for kindergarten children to use; and the log has meaning for both the teacher and children. The weekly log method of recording activities is similar to contract teaching. It provides an individualized instructional program to meet the interests, abilities, and needs of the children through the use of learning centers. The log is a written contract agreement between the teacher and child that specifies the work to be accomplished by the child in a given amount of time.32

The following descriptions are examples of "logs" which have been used by children and have been found highly successful as a method of recording based on teacher observation and child response.

A color clown (Figure 1) can be a log that is used individually by each child for a week. Each child prints his name on the front of the picture sheet and keeps the log in his own cubby for his completion at his own pace. Each learning center is color coded. When a child has worked at a particular center he can fill one of the circles on his log with the color of that center. For example, a child that has painted a picture at the art center, which is designated as red, would then color in a red circle on his log. Each center is only recorded once on the log although a child may work at the same center more than one time. Each child is responsible for the completion of his own log, but he has free choice as to when he does each center. At the end of a week each child

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My Log

figure 1
should have all the circles colored in with a different color for each of the
given number of centers (10 in this example). This is a good log to use at
the beginning of the year when children are learning colors.

The vegetable log (Figure 2) is an example of how a log can be a learning
tool as well as a recording device. This log can be used during a unit on
plants, gardening, or nutrition. As well as color coding as in the color clown
log, each center would be represented by a different vegetable. The children
would color in each vegetable as he completed the center. The vegetables on
the log are also divided according to those that grow above ground and those
that grow below ground which is a lesson in itself. The name on this log would
be printed on the back.

Many variations are possible using the basic format of the vegetable log.
An example is a sea shell log incorporated with a seashore learning unit (Figure 3).
By adding to or varying the designation of each learning center and its corres-
ponding part of the log, a variety of learning or lesson reinforcements can be
involved in an activity recording log. The Easter egg log (Figure 4) illustrates
such a development. It has been used prior to Easter to record children's activ-
ities. The log has the word for a color written in each section of the log. The
children are to match the correct color with the word after working in the cor-
responding learning center. For those children who have difficulty matching the
letters and words an example log already properly colored might be displayed in
a central location.

An important aspect of record keeping is the report to the parents. In order
that parents can be kept aware of the work their child is doing, a checklist or
form sheet of each week's work may be sent home together with the child's weekly
log. This weekly form sheet can be a valuable addition to the regular report card
and parent conference. Experience with the form sheet method of reporting to
parents has been found to reinforce, broaden, and stimulate ongoing school learning activities.\textsuperscript{33}

Figure 5 illustrates an example of a form sheet that has been used in conjunction with a weekly log (next page). The form sheet gives information as to required centers and their respective color or other log coding and information on extra activities. The form sheet is sent to the parents together with that week's log, ideally on opposite sides of one sheet of paper. By comparing the completion of the log with the respective activities listed on the form sheet the parents quickly know which learning centers were utilized by their child. The extra activity area can be completed by the teacher free-hand and the space allows for comments if desired.

Record keeping has been found to be a clearly useful means of allowing proper response to the child's activities. The parent response to frequent updated records of activities has been found to support the learning center approach to teaching. When performed through the use of weekly logs, record keeping holds the added advantages of developing into a learning activity of its own and creating a stimulus toward the continuation of other learning activities.

# Log
**May 6 - 10**

## Required Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>brown</td>
<td>writing table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>green</td>
<td>sequence cut &amp; paste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orange</td>
<td>SRA materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>red</td>
<td>finger painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white</td>
<td>balance scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purple</td>
<td>puzzles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blue</td>
<td>classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>black</td>
<td>listening post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pink</td>
<td>library</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Extra Activities

*figure 5*
1. Reading a story to groups of children.
2. Working with children involved with programmed materials.
3. Assisting children in understanding learning center directions.
4. Playing educational games with children.
5. Working in the library.
6. Helping children use audio-visual equipment.
7. Guiding children from one center to another.
8. Distributing and collecting materials.
9. Assisting with snacks.
10. Working with children using outdoor equipment.

Certainly, the above suggestions of involvement will vary with classroom and teacher. However, whatever the specific arrangements, several points should be kept in mind to insure success:

1. Be prepared with some type of lesson plan or instructions telling the helper what to do and how it is to be done.
2. Have a special time for planning sessions, especially with aides.
3. Develop a schedule of daily activities and post it.
4. Praise the efforts of the helpers. It is important that the volunteers feel needed so they will want to return again and help in the classroom.

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35 Dunn, Lexilogos, p. 121.
CONCLUSION

Research of educational literature reveals that kindergarten children from the time of Froebel to the present have had the same basic needs and desires. Kindergarten children are resourceful, creative, and curious. They are fascinated with objects in the world around them. They continually use their senses to learn as much as they can about their world. This nature of children is the focus of the learning center approach to primary education. The learning center is a refined method of teaching which has been developing along with modern education. It provides a place of discovery and involvement where every child may be able to enter into active participation in learning at his or her individual level. The arrangement of learning centers in the classroom and the content of the center may vary widely. When the centers are offered with a general structure of arrangement and operation there can be a wide span of benefits directly or indirectly related to the lesson involved. Clearly the learning center holds great promise in response to individual, social, and teaching demands while offering stimulating and rewarding learning experiences for both the child and the teacher.
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