

PART 4
Early Elementary Resource
Guide to Integrated
Learning

Strategies for

Implementing
an
Integrated
Curriculum

As planners, providers, and evaluators of learning, early elementary teachers continuously make decisions about the use of time, space, materials, equipment, ideas, and strategies to support learning. The information presented in this part of the Resource Guide is designed to help teachers with the daily decision-making process. It is also intended to help create learning-centered environments to support student achievement of the learning standards.

PART 4

Making It Happen: Implementing an Integrated Curriculum

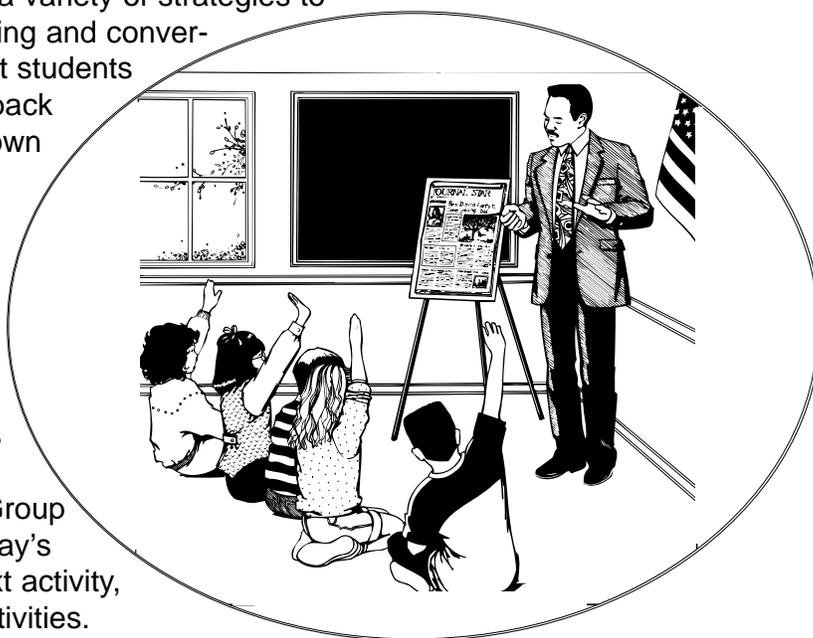
The New York State learning standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do beginning in the early elementary grades. Early childhood research and practice provide evidence that all aspects of learning are interrelated. Therefore, the foundation for implementing an integrated early elementary curriculum lies in an understanding of how early elementary students learn and develop. Ensuring that learning activities are developmentally appropriate is a critical element in providing a quality early elementary program. An integrated curriculum approach focuses on both the developmental level of a class and on individual students. It provides many opportunities for students to discover connections among the skills, concepts and processes introduced through the curriculum. It also enables students to work toward achievement of multiple learning standards.

Daily Schedule

Early elementary students need time to observe, manipulate and explore their learning environment, as well as to interact with their teachers and classmates. Also, they need to feel a sense of connectedness among the various activities that comprise their day. A flexible but predictable daily routine helps address this need. The daily schedule should provide opportunities for independent, small and large group activities. Routines should provide a balance of quiet and active experiences, as well as blocks of time for students to pursue an interest, participate in a project, or to reflect on the day's experiences. Transitions, such as arrival, dismissal, clean up, and lunch, must be carefully planned, as these time periods are easier to manage when they serve as natural breaks between the various other activities that fill the school day. The daily schedule needs to be visible, reviewed often and evaluated periodically for effectiveness.

Teaching Strategies

Teachers, as facilitators of learning, use a variety of strategies to foster student achievement. Active listening and conversation help teachers stay attuned to what students are thinking and doing. Descriptive feedback and questioning help students put their own thoughts and feelings into words. These techniques also challenge students to think, provide direction for and extend learning, and help students make connections between past and present experiences. Group meetings can provide a regular time for teachers and students to listen to each other, share ideas and experiences, plan activities, make choices, and review accomplishments. Group meetings may also set the tone for the day's activities, serve as a transition to the next activity, or provide a forum for planning future activities.

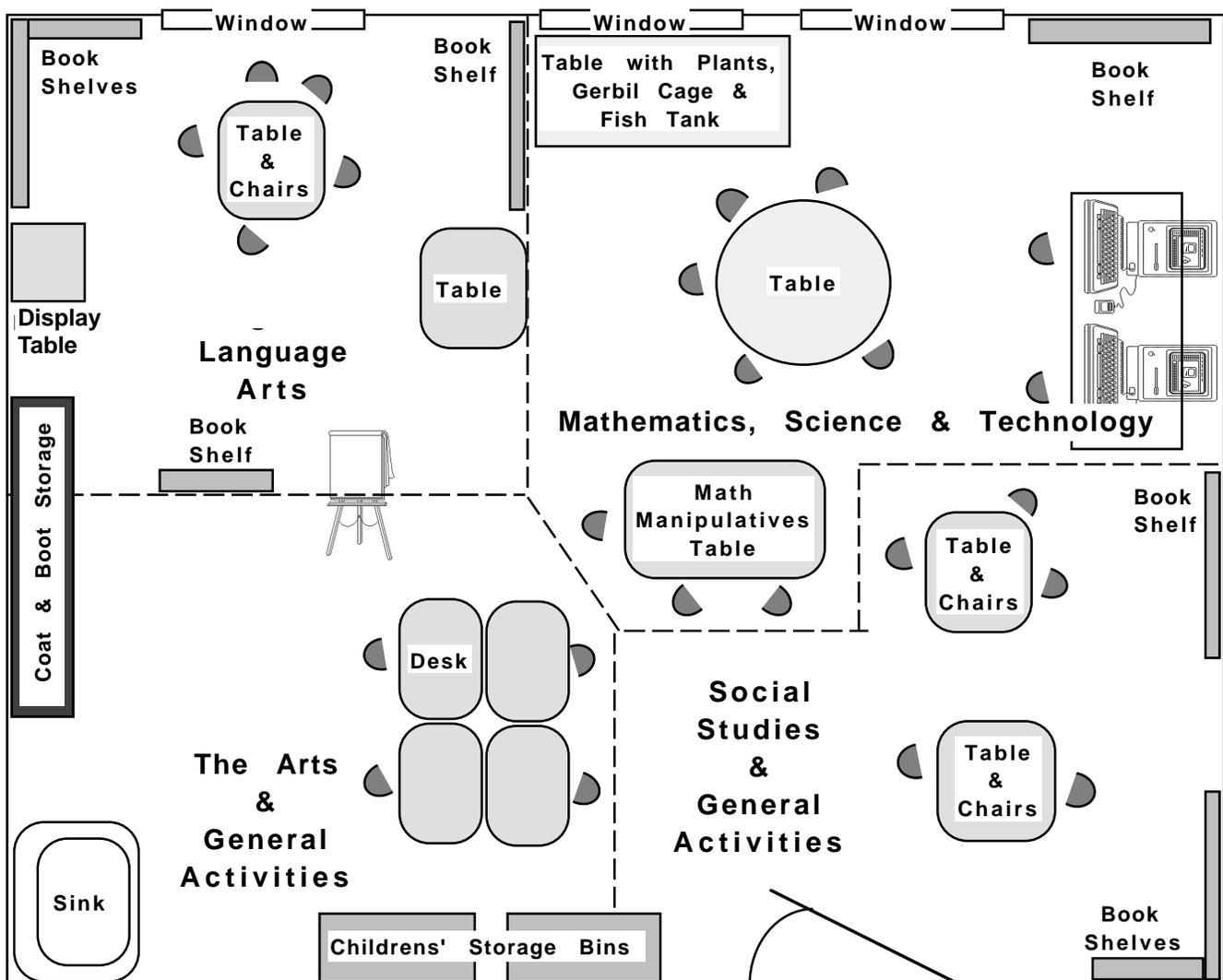


Learning Environment

Early elementary students learn by having many opportunities to observe, manipulate, question, and explore their environment. One way to create an effective learning environment is to arrange the classroom into clearly defined interest areas which are accessible to all students. Such an arrangement helps create a sense of order and accessibility, allows students to explore materials based on their own interests, exposes students to a variety of materials which support a topic or theme, and provides opportunities for students to make inquiries associated with various themes and concepts. Interest areas may be organized by subject, (e.g., science, math, writing, reading, social studies, music, etc.). They may also be organized around interest areas which include a broader focus on exploration and divergent thinking. These areas may include:

- creative and performing arts;
- blocks and construction;
- library and media;
- mathematics and math manipulatives;
- science and nature;
- writing and publishing; and
- role playing and housekeeping.

The Floor plan below represents an activity-centered classroom



Materials and Equipment

Early elementary students learn best through active engagement with developmentally appropriate materials and equipment in a supportive environment. Developmentally appropriate materials are:

- age appropriate;
- safe and healthy;
- easy to grasp and manipulate;
- provided in sufficient quantity;
- flexible and adaptable;
- interesting and stimulating; and
- linked to the learning standards.



Materials and equipment should be organized in ways which make it easy for students to use, share and return them to a designated place. They should be located within reach of the children, clearly labeled and, when appropriate, stored in clear containers. Such an organization encourages students to choose their own activities, to work together on an idea or project, and to share responsibility for maintenance of the classroom.

Teachers using an integrated approach prepare the environment to enable students to apply what they learn across the curriculum. For example, reading, writing and listening skills may be learned and applied in each content area. Students, therefore, should have access to a variety of writing and illustrating tools on a daily basis, for example, pencils, pens, crayons, markers, and paint brushes. Books, magazines, print material, and recordings pertinent to specific topics and themes will help create a language-rich environment.

Assessment

At the early elementary level, assessment is a continuous, contextual, and comprehensive process. It begins with the teacher's first contact with each student and continues to inform teaching and learning throughout the school year. Assessment happens within the context of each child's learning experiences. A teacher might use a variety of tools and techniques to collect information about each student's growth and development. For example:

- informal anecdotal notes recorded by the teacher as she or he observes student performance, especially the student's use of language;
- student interviews conducted and recorded to document what students know about a topic, what questions they have, and what they have learned during a particular experience;
- conversations with parents and resource teachers to provide additional observations and perceptions of a student's performance and progress; and
- student portfolios, purposeful collections of student work, including performances which provide evidence of effort, achievement, and progress toward meeting specific learning standards.



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Bibliography

Suggested Resources

This part of the Guide contains some suggested resources which may be valuable to teachers as they continue their efforts to improve the teaching and learning environment in their classrooms.

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