SETTING UP THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT WITH WISCONSIN MODEL EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS IN MIND

It is essential to be intentional in creating a supportive and inclusive environment for our young learners. An understanding of the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) can help us do just that.

The WMELS are designed to outline developmental expectations for children from birth through the entrance of 1st grade. The standards are guided by the belief that all children are capable and competent and learn through play and the active exploration of their environment. The WMELS encompass the following five developmental domains, each representing an essential area of development.

APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Support curiosity, creativity, and adaptability by offering a variety of materials that cater to different learning styles. Allow children to have choices in their activities, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-direction.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Stimulate critical thinking and problem-solving by selecting materials that support exploration and investigation. Create a well-organized environment with clearly defined centers to promote independent thinking and decision-making.

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Encourage physical activity and movement by providing ample space for children to explore, play, and engage in sensory activities. Offer a variety of materials that promote fine and gross motor skills.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Ensure a rich language environment by offering a diverse selection of books, materials, and resources that promote language/multilingual skills. Encourage child-directed activities and choices, empowering children to express themselves verbally and non-verbally.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Foster a sense of belonging and emotional well-being by creating defined centers that reflect children's identities and encourage collaborative play and interactions. Consider the placement of visual materials at eye level to provide a sense of structure and security, supporting children's emotional development.

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Remember, a well-planned environment fosters meaningful experiences that positively impact a child's growth and development in every domain. Don't be afraid to experiment with different arrangements and observe how they impact the children. Be open to modifications based on what works best for the children's needs and interests. Use the following questions to reflect on your classroom.

"In order to act as an educator for the child, the environment has to be flexible: it must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers in order to remain up-to-date and responsive to their needs to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge."
-Lella Gandini

- How can you ensure that each developmental domain is adequately represented in your classroom environment?

- Are there any specific areas where you can enhance the connection between the standards and the materials, activities, or furnishings in your classroom?

- How can you promote inclusivity and accommodate the diverse needs of all children, including those with disabilities, within your classroom design?

- Are there any changes you can make to the classroom layout to encourage more child-directed activities and engagement?

- What strategies can you employ to regularly assess the effectiveness of your classroom environment in supporting whole child learning?

- How can you incorporate students' culture, language, and elements of home into the classroom to promote a sense of belonging and celebrate diversity?

- Are there ways to integrate diverse perspectives and cultural elements in the materials?

- How effectively am I utilizing the outdoor environment to extend the learning experiences?

Additional Resources

- [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#)

- [Pre-K Spaces - DESIGN FOR A QUALITY CLASSROOM](#)

- [Designing Environments](#) Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center

- [The Indoor Environment: Designing and Organizing](#) - The Virtual Lab School

- [The Outdoor Environment: Designing for Learning](#) - The Virtual Lab School

- [Early childhood environments: Designing effective classrooms](#) - The IRIS Center

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