

Types of Centers and Activities

Place Based Centers

Place based centers are centers that their work is confined by where it is located and can support a fixed number of students like a sensory table. That center has to take place at the sensory table and the sensory table can only support a fixed number of students. Other place-based centers could be an art center if the work takes place on an easel, or dramatic play center if the dramatic play takes place around a cash register or house or other piece of furniture.

Place based centers are good because they can spread our students out around the room but they can also be problematic because they can have limited space or bring our students in close proximity with each other which can create problems. Finding the balance between the number of place-based centers and other types of centers is important and determining if a center that exists in a place is truly place based. For example, you might have a blocks center that takes place in one part of the room. The blocks are probably stored in a bin which can move so it could be possible that the blocks center doesn't have to be place based.

Materials Based Centers

Materials based centers are centers that are materials dependent. You might ask aren't all centers materials dependent? Not always. You might have centers in which students do a task or activity with paper and pencil or markers and crayons that are in abundance. So a writing center might be making a card to a friend and the card is paper folded in half that are either pre-folded or can be folded by the student.

Some materials-based centers might be blocks, puzzles, a science and discovery center, or a math games center (depending on the game) where you only have a certain amount those materials.

The important thing to recognize with materials-based centers is the right number of students to have engaged in a materials-based center so that the students can work in the center without conflict. If you are noticing that a particular center seems to have more disagreements than another it is possible that the limited resources or the lack of space is causing the issue. You could consider if it is materials based, limiting the number of students in that center until you find the number that works with the materials and space you have.

Interest Based Centers

Interest based centers leverage the interests of your students that you can predict or you learned about as the year went on to teach other skills. This might be dramatic play, cars, blocks, or a class pet. You take items or activities you know your students love and weave activities into them around your learning goals.

For example, in a kitchen dramatic play center you might include order forms like a server might have in the restaurant along with a menu with images and words of food items to encourage writing, reading and vocabulary development. You could then swap out materials based on the season or other skills like a cash register and money to practice counting and writing numbers.

In a car center you might have bins of cars. You could tape numbers to the roofs of the cars and students could park them in a parking lot you designed on chart paper to match the numbers to the spots. You could do the same thing with letters or park cars to build words. @the.darmodys on Instagram shares another car [activity](#) that work on fine motor and writing skills. You take a piece of chart or butcher paper, draw lines of different colors that lead from one side of the paper to the other and students drive the car of the same color as the line on the line to the other side. For added fun build little garages with magnetic tiles or draw parking spots to park them in when they reach the other side.

The art center is another good one. Not only are students interested but it also is a great way to build those fine motor skills that they will need in other parts of their day through an interesting and engaging activity. What do your students love to do? How can you weave in content into that thing they love to do?

Floor Based Centers

Floor based centers aren't hard to guess what they do! They are centers that best take place on the floor. These might be things like building blocks, puzzles, a train set, etc. Having floor-based centers is great because it allows students to move and use their body in a different way than just sitting on the carpet or in their chair. They can lie down or move farther. Some floor centers might be really big which can require a lot of movement which gives some of our students exactly what they need.

Table Based Centers

Table based centers, like their counterpart, floor-based centers, are exactly what they sound like. These are centers that are best completed on a table. In some classrooms they use the tables as the centers so the yellow table is the word work center, the red table is the letter formations center, and the green table is the rhyme center.

This works well for predictability and makes it easy to change out materials and rotate but it requires students to sit or be at their tables for a long period of time. It also can put students in close proximity to each other which can be problematic.

Another way to approach table-based centers is that one or two tables function in this way but not all the centers. This works really well with an art center if you don't have the dedicated art area in your classroom. That makes one place that will get paint on it and other messes. Another table-based center might be those tables that are designed for particular purposes like a sensory table or a tuff table or tray.

The last way to think about table-based centers is that these are activities that are best done at a table. That could be writing activities that can't be done on a clipboard because of materials or design. Other ideas might be fine motor activities like lacing or bead work and certain math manipulative activities. Keeping track of the materials and keeping them organized can sometimes be easier at a table.

Movement Based Centers

Movement based centers are crucial to have in the classroom because we know that we will always have students who need to move. In our chapter on designing the environment we talked about the zones we wanted to create in the classroom and a space for movement is key but sometimes these centers can be portable or support movement.

You could have a movement-based center that is also space based like a movement or mindfulness center where students do big body movements like planks, tree pose, wall sits, etc to engage those big muscles so they can they do fine motor work or long sitting work.

You could also have materials-based centers that support movement like blocks. Student could have to move the blocks from one part of the room to another to build something for example. So, you could purposefully spread out the materials to increase the amount of movement required.

If your space allows or you can use the outside space or a hallway you could have some floor-based activities that require movement like hopscotch style work where students jump to build words or jump on numbers in order. You could have sensory walks that require students to do different movements like walk on all fours, the hop, walk on their tip toes, jump or take large steps.

Many of these are space dependent but think about who in your class would benefit from big body movements throughout the day. How can you allow them to do that but incorporate learning into the process?

Digital Centers

Digital centers are those centers that take place on a device. They could be apps that allow our students to receive personalized support around a certain subject area. They could be ways to allow students collect observations and photos, narrate and explain their thinking about something, document their work, or create digital masterpieces.

These digital centers might be materials dependent, place dependent centers. This could be a way to incorporate reflection or that confessional idea shared earlier in the book. Often in centers students create something they want to share and not all creations can be taken home. The digital center could be a good way for students to document their creations and share them in a portfolio by snapping a picture and narrating what they want to share. These would be incredible artifacts to have at parent teacher conferences or to go home from time to time.