INTRODUCTION TO STUDY GUIDE

This Study Guide is intended for Open University Malaysia’s HBEC4303 Quality Physical Environment in Early Childhood Education course. It comes in TWO parts, as described below:

Part One comprises the Course Introduction, which gives you an overview of the course. More specifically, it provides you with the course synopsis, objectives, learning outcomes and study load. There is a brief description of the main textbook(s), which you must read to fulfil the course requirements. There is also a list of additional reading references. You are encouraged to go into myVLE to check out the assessment, assignment and final examination formats.

Part Two comprises the Learning Guide. This starts with an overview, a recommended weekly study schedule to guide your learning process, and a brief description of the various elements in the Learning Guide. There is also a list of topics to be covered. For each topic, you are given the specific learning outcomes, a topic overview and a listing of the focus areas, together with assigned readings and the pages where information on the focus areas is found. To consolidate your learning and test your understanding, a summary of the main content covered and study questions are provided at the end of each topic.

Finally, there are two appendices, Learning Support and Study Tips, to help you walk through the course successfully.

Please read through this Study Guide before you commence your course. We wish you a pleasant study experience.
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PART ONE: COURSE INTRODUCTION

Synopsis

This course is designed to enable you to establish a quality early childhood environment for young children, making it conducive for them to discover, invent, create and learn. It is important for children to learn in a healthy, caring, respectful and supportive environment.

Objectives

The general aims of this course are to:

1. Create quality early childhood environments;
2. Establish professional standards that emphasise on an orderly and safe environment in terms of learning areas and use of materials; and
3. Practise culturally and developmentally appropriate methods in early childhood environments.

Learning Outcomes

By the completion of this course, you should be able to:

1. Design principles for a quality and inclusive learning environment for early childhood learning that includes toddler care and preschool learning contexts;
2. Implement techniques for integrating information from observations, child development theory and planning principles to develop goals and objectives for individuals, small groups and the total group; and
3. Create a quality environment for an early childhood education setting.
Study Load

It is a standard OUM practice that learners accumulate 40 study hours for every credit hour. As such, for a three-credit hour course, you are expected to spend at least 120 hours of learning. Table 1 gives an estimation of how the 120 hours can be accumulated.

Table 1: Allocation of Study Hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>No. of Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading course materials and completing exercises</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending 4 tutorial sessions (2 hours for each session)*</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in online discussions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing assignment(s)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Unless otherwise specified

Main Textbook(s)


Additional Recommended Readings


**Assessment**

Please refer to myVLE for information on the assessment format and requirements.
PART TWO: LEARNING GUIDE

Overview

This Learning Guide is arranged by topic. It covers essential content in the main textbook and is organised to stretch over TEN study weeks, before the examination period begins. Use this Learning Guide to plan your engagement with the course content. You may follow the recommended weekly study schedule in Table 2 to help you progress in a linear fashion, starting with Week 1.

Table 2: Recommended Weekly Study Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic 1: Creating Quality Early Childhood Environment (ECE)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 2: Dimensions of Children’s Setting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 3: Physical Environment for Infants and Toddlers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 4: Physical Environment for Preschoolers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 5: Measurement of Quality Environment in ECE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 6: Quality Physical Layout</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 7: Setting Up the Learning Environment</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 8: Quality Basic Care Environment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 9: Outdoor Learning Environment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 10: Provisions For Adults</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each topic in the Learning Guide comprises the following sections (refer to Figure 1):

- Learning Outcomes: Outline the specific tasks to be accomplished;
- Topic Overview: Briefly explains what the topic touches on so as to provide a general interpretative framework for understanding the topic content;
- Focus Areas: Identify the main and sub areas to be covered;
- Assigned Readings: Help you to navigate the main textbook and reading materials;
- Content Summary: Provides an interpretative framework for understanding the core content; and
- Study Questions: Help you to focus on key subject areas.


**Figure 1:** Organisation of the Learning Guide
Topic 1: Creating Quality Early Childhood Environment (ECE)

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. Explain the influence of environment on children's behaviour and learning;
2. Use criteria to determine appropriate materials that are suitable for playing and learning;
3. Examine the early childhood educator's role in catering for a safe, healthy and challenging environment; and
4. Adapt environments to meet the needs of all children.

Topic Overview

According to Copple and Bredekamp (2006), Jackman (2005), Kohn (2005) and NAEYC (2005), environment is defined as all the influences that affect children and adults in early childhood settings. Environment includes planned physical space, interaction between and among people, and the values and goals of a particular programme, centre or school system. Creating a quality early childhood environment will be the main discussion in this topic.

Focus Areas and Assigned Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
<th>Assigned Readings</th>
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</table>
  Chapter 3, pp 53–73. |
| 1.2 Indicators for Quality Environment |                                                                                  |
| 1.3 Best Practices of Quality Environment |                                                                                  |

**Additional Recommended Reading**

Content Summary

1.1 The Importance of Quality Environment

Quality environment is important because it affects how children learn, behave, develop and form values. Many behaviours in early childhood settings can be reduced or eliminated by creating healthy conditions for learning. If the learning condition is safe and supportive, it encourages children’s natural responses of curiosity, exploration and communication. An inviting environment supports children’s social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual growth and development. In addition, a quality environment enhances children’s positive disposition towards learning and sense of belonging. Therefore, it is vital to carefully design environments that have many aspects such as feature structures, objects and props. This would be very engaging to the children as they would be able to make authentic choices, try their hands at problem solving and investigating, and enjoy discovering their surroundings.

There are a lot of research that justify the effect of classroom environment on children’s behaviour, learning and development. There are also many others that identify the importance of key features that reflect high-quality environments such as the research done by Black (2001), Bredekamp and Copple (1997), Cryer and Phillipsen (1997) and so on.

1.2 Indicators for Quality Environment

To indicate quality early childhood environment, we need to look at appropriateness according to children’s growth, development and learning. These can be seen through the types and uses of age appropriate materials and learning experiences, as well as the interaction and participation of teachers and parents which enrich the environment as a whole. The following are determinants of high quality environments:

(a) Organised, Challenging and Aesthetically Pleasing

To get children to respond, the environment must be predictable, stable and comprehensive. Predictable means there are simple routines and rituals that help children feel safe and secure and understand what behaviours are expected of them. Predictable environment also means having flexible structures that make it easy for everyone to work and be productive.
(b) **Create a Caring Community of Learners**

The environment must support the relationship between children, between adults and children, and also between children, teachers and families. Children should be cared for in a consistent manner and have a positive relationship with a limited number of adults. They should also be surrounded by a limited number of children. There must be a respectful atmosphere which will help to create a healthy relationship and development of children with others and their surroundings. These conditions help children to become a part of the community which makes them have a sense of belonging.

(c) **Reflect Clear Goals**

Every classroom must reflect the relationship between the environment and arrangement. It can be done by allowing children and families to use the space and time to reflect the goals of the programme and individual classrooms. For instance, this can be done by arranging classrooms that help to nurture the curiosity of the child, or by selecting materials for classrooms that relate to children and families. It can also include programmes that are meant to help small groups of children.

(d) **Protect Children’s Health and Safety**

High-quality environment means giving priority to the physical and psychological needs of children, as well as to their health and safety. There are some criteria that have been set up by local or national standards that should be followed. The minimum criteria to be followed for maintaining the physical health and safety of children include food, shelter, rest, medical care and a balance between active, sensory stimulation and quiet opportunities for reflection.

The minimum criteria for psychological health and safety include having a consistent, predictable relationship with caring adults who have high, positive expectations, encouraging strong peer acceptance and supporting children’s creative expression, as well as respecting the children regardless of who they are. An environment that meets these criteria is one where children feel they are welcomed, relaxed and the adults listen and talk to them with respect. It is important to meet the physical and psychological needs of children’s health and safety as it enables children to be able to trust themselves and others and
rely on inner resources when coping with difficulties. Children who do not have these minimum criteria are unlikely to thrive well and become successful learners.

(e) **Provide Access to Age-appropriate Materials and Equipment**
Materials refer to classroom items such as crayons, paints and papers that require regular replacement. Equipment refers to large, costly items such as furniture, cabinets and outdoor structures. The best materials for children should be attractive, have strong sensory appeal, and invite children to imagine and create their own ideas and interpretations that allow active exploration. Make sure the materials are:

(i) Developmentally appropriate for children and match their abilities and interests;

(ii) Open-ended, offer flexibility and variety and have a variety of uses for different ages and abilities;

(iii) Culturally appropriate and reflect children’s family and community; and

(iv) Safe, durable, non-toxic, well-designed and in good condition.

1.3 **Best Practices of Quality Environment**
As early childhood educators, you must create quality environment by:

(a) **Arranging Space to Meet all Learners**
It can be done by determining how to use the existing space. For instance, how to arrange the furniture and materials, and organise space to influence the behaviour and learning of young children. Make sure the space accommodates a variety of learning experiences that cater to different groups of children who differ in terms of developmental needs and physical size.

(b) **Using Time Flexibly**
Bear in mind that time does affect learning and educators’ priorities. For instance, long blocks of time provide children with an uninterrupted period of active exploration and deeper understanding. At the same time, educators also want to provide more concepts for children to solve. These require teaching strategies that are meant for children to engage in learning.
(c) **Selecting Appropriate Materials**
Environments that support children’s learning are dependent on materials that gain and sustain children’s interests and imagination, are stored attractively on shelves and organised. The materials should be developmentally appropriate.

(d) **Creating a Surrounding that Promotes Diversity**
Make sure the surrounding makes children feel they are valued, and can be productive and become engaged learners. Make sure you have classroom surroundings that appeal to the diversity of each child and respect children and families, as well as provide equal access to learning resources and experiences. Children must be instilled with values of cooperation, equality, tolerance and shared learning experience in a high-quality environment.

(e) **Showing that you Care about the Children and their Learning**
Be prepared when you want to become an early childhood educator. Show them that you care about their learning. Show them that you are a high-quality environment educator who cares to find out about the children’s interests, offers a fair amount of support, and expects them to be self-directed and responsible learners.

(f) **Connecting with the Children’s Families**
Strong family support creates strong schools. Educators must connect children with their families because this is very crucial in creating the classroom environment. By involving families, you will be able to convey the message to the children that you value them and want to build a respectful, two-way communication that involves families and teachers in developing their learning.

**Study Questions**

1. Explain the importance of quality early childhood environments.
2. What do you understand by a high-quality environment?
3. Select pictures which match the criteria of best materials for children.
4. As a teacher of preschool children, describe a plan that you can use to support quality early childhood environments.
5. Discuss the main criteria of quality environment practices.
Topic 2: Dimensions of Children’s Setting

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. Describe an early childhood environmental setting that meets the needs of children;
2. Discuss the concept of comfort, softness and competence in the context of early childhood environment;
3. Formulate a plan to provide a healthy and safe environment; and
4. Evaluate the components in designing a good early childhood setting.

Topic Overview

This topic introduces the dimensions of children’s setting which include comfort, softness, competence; safety, security and health as well as privacy, social space and environment that enhance autonomous behaviours. All of these are important due to their characteristics which are close to children’s physical and psychological nature.

Focus Areas and Assigned Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
<th>Assigned Readings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Safety, Security and Health</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3 Privacy and Social Space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Autonomy</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Recommended Readings


Content Summary

2.1 Comfort, Softness, Competence

2.1.1 Comfort
Everybody loves comfort and softness in every place regardless of where they stay and work. Due to the tension and strains of everyday life, life can be comfortable with some sort of cuddle from somebody you love, lying on the sofa or simply taking a shower. This is especially so when we refer to young children, who were previously womb-dwellers and tend to be sensualists. This makes them sensitive to all kinds of senses. Although the understanding of comfort may be subjective, it has to do with something which is soft, responsive, familiar and has a reasonable level of sensory stimulation which is neither too much or too little. All of these bring a sense of calmness.

2.1.2 Softness
Besides comfort, people are also in favour of softness that is characterised by things that are rounded, cushioned and warm to the touch. The exact definition of comfort according to Prescott (1984) refers to things which are responsive and sensual to the child such as:

(a) Malleable materials such as clay and play dough;
(b) Sand;
(c) Laps such as the teacher holding the children;
(d) Single-sling swings;
(e) Grass that can be stepped on;
(f) Water activity;
(g) Very messy materials such as finger paint, clay and mud;
(h) Child or adult cosy furniture such as rockers and couches;
(i) Dirt to dig in; and
(j) Animals that can be held such as cats and hamsters.
When children are given the opportunity to experience softness and are responsive to their physical environment, they feel secure, enabling them to freely explore the world. Children also will feel a sense of being recharged from the hard physical environment. Besides, softness is significant to educational purposes since it requires children to master their sensory-motor experiences.

2.1.3 Competence
Let the children have a place where they can succeed and achieve goals. Along with their development, children continue to enhance skills and struggle with their emerging ideas. To them, competence is their main target. This can be noticed when children take a risk and do something out of the adults’ imagination. They do things like rolling in the sand, and climbing trees or simply keep trying again and again, such as cycling even if they keep falling down.

2.2 Safety, Security and Health
A safe and healthy environment is the main priority for a quality physical environment. In general, the issue of safety and health is not absolute. Accidents can occur anywhere or anytime. Despite that, they can be minimised and controlled by understanding the children’s development and providing a safe and healthy environment. Teaching children how to manage danger and maintain healthy lifestyles is also a very important part of security.

2.2.1 Safety
Every day, there are accidents involving children. Usually, attention is given to the environment to ensure that it is free from hazards or poisonous materials. Besides, the quantity of equipment and materials in the group setting and the number of activities which occurs during the day are considerations that should not be left out in maintaining a safe environment.

The age or level of competence of children should also be taken into consideration. This is due to children under three years of age who are the most vulnerable as they have less experience with the world, people and their surroundings. However, as the children continue to grow, they become aware of danger.

However, there are some teachers who are over-concerned about danger. They do not allow children to use materials and participate in an activity if it involves risk. This is the wrong
practice in ECE. The children are not given a chance to improve their motor skills and the worst scenario is that children will respond to it by becoming anti-social, or hurting other children. The effect of this is that harm is not reduced. Instead, it redirects the children to more harmful activities.

Sometimes, accidents are not a result of using equipment. You have to check from time to time and make sure the environment is safe. It can be achieved by having adequate staff to children ratio and the staff must be trained and be knowledgeable about the programmes offered. There must be continuous maintenance and repair of equipment to make sure it is always in good condition.

2.2.2 Health
A safe and healthy environment should be free from harm and danger. A basic practice a teacher can have is maintaining proper sanitary practices. There must be proper hygienic methods for disposal of diapers, using the toilet, handling food as well as washing and bathing. Also, washing hands should be routine as it is one of the main means of transmitting diseases. Besides, the transmission of diseases and infection in the early childhood setting is frequently associated with the amount of fresh air, number of children and crowding. Everyday exposures to radiation, arsenic, pollution, asbestos and toxics are also concerns that should be looked into by the teacher.

Policies must be practised while attending to children and staff having infectious diseases. Sick children or staff should be given leave or quarantined. For this to happen, the environment must be washable and regular inspection of cleanliness needs to be done.

However, there should not be excessive concern over cleanliness. Bear in mind that dirty and unclean are two different things. Parents should not mistake activities that children participate in early childhood programmes such as digging sand, water play, and moulding clay as unclean like dirt in the bathroom or kitchen.

Aspects of environmental design are also the determiners of safety and health. For instance, the location of certain things such as the location of the sink and the selection of furnishing and so on directly influence safety and health in the early childhood setting.
2.3 Privacy and Social Space

Children’s setting is the social setting. Preschool or nursery for instance is a place where children can mingle around in a structured environment and share social experiences with other children. The design of the early childhood setting must relate to the social needs of children and encourage them to foster positive relationships with other children. A well-designed setting facilitates children during play and encourages children from different levels to participate. It also allows for non-participation.

Non-participation allows children to do things that require seclusion such as stacking block puzzles and reading books. The need for private space is not only meant for retreat, but also for keeping children away from the hustle and bustle of their surroundings so that there is room for imagination to take place.

Mostly, private places are often perceived as limited “cosy corners” shared by many children. It is unimaginable if the place that we want to spend in private and relax is full of people. As a teacher, you must be creative to invent and think of suitable children’s private spaces. You may allow private places under the table, behind and under closets. This seems to work wonders for children to spend their own private time.

Absence of privacy in the children’s setting reminds us of the strict rules and control of power in adult institutions such as prisons and hospitals which require removing doors, placing people in wards and providing them with a common place.

2.4 Autonomy

Autonomy in the context of children’s setting refers to the design of the setting that can develop self-help skills and important autonomous behaviours. As early childhood education (ECE) facilities have a profound impact on their occupants, the design of these facilities, therefore, cannot be understated as young children often spend up to 12,500 hours of their juvenile lives in child development centres (Day, 1983; Vaughan, 2007).

Preschool children are curious and interested in learning about their world; they have many creative ideas and approaches, and they are capable of making decisions and selecting materials to implement projects (Exelby & Isbell, 2001). In relation to that, they need to acquire increased levels of autonomy by making decisions on their own and exercising control. Teachers are often unaware of the
atmosphere they create in their classroom (Devries & Zan, 1994) and this can result in learning environments that are coercive, which have been found to impede children's autonomous thinking (Reeve, 2009).

In contrast to autonomy-supportive behaviours, autonomy-suppressive teaching behaviours are those behaviours that suppress autonomy, or foster heteronomy, in which individuals are governed by someone other than themselves (Kamii, Clark, & Dominick, 1994). Autonomy-suppressive teacher behaviours include teachers monopolising the time talking, holding and dominating learning materials, knowing all the answers, and directly telling children the correct answers without allowing them time and opportunity to discover for themselves (Reeve & Jang, 2006). Children who have caretakers that display autonomy-suppressive behaviours often feel coerced and manipulated by extrinsic incentives or consequences (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Study Questions

1. Visit a childcare centre and observe its surroundings. Does the place provide things that signify softness, calmness and competence to the children? Identify the things and make a report about your findings.

2. Give six examples of scenarios in the early childhood setting that do not adhere to safety or health. Write in separate columns the examples for safety and health.

3. As an early childhood educator, you are facing a dilemma about whether to continue some “unclean” activities such as moulded clay and sand play activities, since some parents discourage their children from participating in such activities. What can you do to continue the activities without disregarding the feelings of the parents? Offer some solutions.

4. What is the importance of social and private space in the early childhood setting? Discuss further and give some creative ideas about what the teacher can do to improve the early childhood environment setting in providing social and private space without involving too much cost.

5. How do we ensure that the environment offers a rich and diverse range of learning experiences while maintaining a level of autonomy in children?
Topic 3: Physical Environment for Infants and Toddlers

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:
1. Discuss the definition of infant and toddler space;
2. Explain the differences between infant and toddler floor plans; and
3. Describe the importance of touch and movement in the infant and toddler environment.

Topic Overview

This topic discusses the needs of infants and toddlers in setting up the physical environment. The issue of needs includes the infant and toddler’s development, sensitivity to caregiver, importance of touch as well as movement.

Focus Areas and Assigned Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
<th>Assigned Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2 The Importance of Touch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The Importance of Movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Floor Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Recommended Readings


Content Summary

3.1 Defining Infant and Toddler Space
The physical environment of infants and toddlers should not reflect the rigidity of the setting of the inside of a crib or preschool. The design should resemble a synthesis of home and school. Thus, as a caregiver or programme developer, you must be a careful observer and watch these little children before planning can be done.

Children at this age are prone to sensory-motor behaviour. They love to use their mouths, skin, eyes, ears and muscles while exploring their surroundings and the things around them. Furthermore, they are entitled to fundamental needs such as responsiveness, trust and a nurturing relationship with their caregiver. Young children should be able to experience the environment around them by seeing, hearing, feeling, touching and moving around independently.

A toddler needs a slightly different environment from that of an infant. Toddlers are children from 10 to 30 months. Compared to preschoolers, they are smaller and less competent. At this stage, where they are no longer infants but not yet preschoolers, they tend to become increasingly mobile, autonomous, sociable, thoughtful with language and most importantly, enjoy testing and experimenting. Therefore, by understanding the needs of toddlers, it is easy for the teacher to provide the appropriate environment.

3.2 The Importance of Touch
Touch is definitely important to young children. When infants and toddlers receive physical contact, it makes them feel safe and secure. Touch is more important than vision and helps their growth and development into healthy young children who are happy to explore. If children are deprived from the sense of touch, they cannot thrive well and this will lead to “skin hunger”. As a caregiver, let the children enjoy the sense of touch such as by holding and picking them up.

3.3 The Importance of Movement
Other than touch, movement is essential to an infant and toddler’s development. Once an infant can crawl and pull his or her body up, moving becomes a major interest.
Young children should be given time to develop their muscles, necks, stomachs and legs. Movement is important for young children to enhance their learning experience by moving around and exploring and getting different perspectives. Indirectly, movement makes the children move from an egocentric view and understanding of space to the real understanding of self, surrounding space and other people.

The issue of movement is closely related to safety concerns. For instance, if the physical environment in the early childcare centre is not interesting enough for young children to move around, they will find ways to climb on tables or high chairs. Thus, the caregiver will tend to restrain the children from freely moving around and exploring the surroundings and thus limit their motor activities. Consequently, children are more often in playpens, infant seats and automatic swings rather than moving around using lofts or riding toys.

3.4 Floor Plan
Creating the floor plan for infants requires planning. All infant classrooms need a place for cribs or sleeping places. Ideally, the napping area should be separated from the play area, providing a quiet atmosphere for snoozing children. Understandably, it is not always possible in a daycare environment. Having the sleeping area in a quiet corner of the room is sufficient. The sleeping area should be as far away from the kitchen, telephone and classrooms as possible. Keep this area of the room softly lit.

Infants need a safe room which is free from debris and choking hazards to explore the environment. Infants spend most of their day on the floor, crawling and rolling.

It is possible to separate an infant classroom into separate learning centres. A soft climbing area, an area for pulling to a stand and ample room for crawling without many obstacles are examples of some areas that can be included. Visit other childcare centres and make notes of the floor plans when considering the setup of your own location.
As mentioned earlier, floor plans for toddlers should be different from infant rooms. They often have a preschool feel to them, with shelving and tables used to create learning centres. The biggest difference between infant and toddler classrooms is the lack of cribs in the toddler room. Most toddlers will nap in the afternoon on cots, freeing up more space for play and learning. A large group gathering area will be necessary, even though circle times should be kept to a maximum of ten minutes at a time. A large rug can be used in a classroom of toddlers. If it is not possible to have a large rug in your classroom, carpet squares from a rug store that can be picked up and put away after circle time are sufficient.

A toddler classroom should also contain a sensory table that is available at all times, a quiet reading area, and an area for creating art. The sensory and art areas can be combined if space is an issue. All sensory and art spaces should be in an area that can be cleaned easily and near a sink if possible. Quiet reading areas should contain soft pillows or chairs for sitting comfortably and exploring books. Provide spaces on the floor for larger toys such as wooden train sets, large Lego sets and building blocks. A home living area with dress up clothes, dolls and kitchen items can be included in the floor plan of a daycare centre. An area for manipulative toys should also have a low table with several chairs.

**Study Questions**

1. Think from a baby’s perspective. List all the things in a childcare setting that might make you feel insecure. Do not forget that babies experience their world with their entire body and all their senses.

2. Observe an infant and a toddler at home or in the playground. What kind of problems do they solve?

3. What would make parents feel that a childcare setting is as welcoming as their own home?

4. What makes infant rooms different from toddler rooms?
**Topic 4: Physical Environment for Preschoolers**

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the characteristics of a good learning environment for preschool children;
2. Design a quality physical environment that encourages choices, problem solving and discovery in the process of learning; and
3. Develop spaces and materials that communicate profound response for children and the teaching process.

**Topic Overview**

This topic discusses the components of a learning environment and how a good learning environment can be established. The importance of incorporating an environmental context that supports curiosity, exploration, play and accepts diversity will be highlighted. You will also be exposed to the floor plan which is appropriate for the preschool setting.

**Focus Areas and Assigned Readings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
<th>Assigned Readings</th>
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*Chapter 12, pp 247–250, 280.* |
| 4.2 Creating a Context that Supports Curiosity, Exploration and Play | |
| 4.3 Accepting Diversity | |
| 4.4 Floor Plan | |

**Additional Recommended Readings**

Content Summary

4.1 Components of Learning Environments
The learning environment should reflect values for children and the values of children’s families. It confirms the children’s identity, connection and sense of belonging. Besides, the learning environment must provoke the children's senses, curiosity and wonder, as well as stimulate their intellect.

Since children are learning all the time, the carefully designed environments should feature structures, objects and props that engage children in authentic choices, problem solving, investigating and discovering. This will create an inviting learning environment that supports children’s social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual growth and development.

4.1.1 Characteristics of a Good Learning Environment
The experiences provided in the learning environment should be developmentally, individually and culturally appropriate. The main emphasis here is, no child is too old, too young or developmentally incapable of doing things. The environment must adapt to the child. Learning centres can be adapted according to the varying abilities of each child. The materials used should also suit the level and capability of the child.
The experiences of the child must be varied but balanced. While the environment should be rich in the use of its materials and activities, it should also be suitable for different children at different dimensions. Children should be given the opportunity for the following:

(a) Active/quiet place;
(b) Social/solitary place;
(c) Novelty/familiarity, challenge and practice;
(d) Open/closed: Open signifies activities which have no correct outcome; closed involves having a clear answer and clear ending;
(e) Simple/complex;
(f) The physical environment can be balanced with real pets or play toys;
(g) Child’s world/world at large: Provide children with materials that reflect the child’s family, community and world;
(h) Time and space should be appropriately organised. Too little room, time or lack of definition of experiences can create problems. The physical space and time should fit the exercises;
(i) Teachers should be fair in preparing and rotating the learning centres and give opportunities and equal experiences to large and small groups, extended projects and so on;
(j) The learning environment must have less set-up and tidy-up time. This will make it easier for the teacher to incorporate learning into routines and available space;
(k) The experiences and materials should be measured in amount and variety. Too few choices and repetition of challenges will make children feel bored easily and might create aggression and unpredictable reactions. Meanwhile, too many choices can lead to indecision;

(l) The senses are important in learning art, science, drama and plays. Light, sounds, colours, aromas, textures and moving objects bring creativity and wonder to learning experiences;

(m) The adults should prepare, monitor and change the environment. They should plan and arrange the type and quantity of materials. They should also observe the environment so that they are able to define problems and generate solutions; and

(n) The adults should fully facilitate the children. They must be close to them, give them full attention, observe, empathise and even intervene in situations when necessary.

4.2 Creating a Context that Supports Curiosity, Exploration and Play
Creating environments for learning is more than simple room arrangement. The context of curiosity, exploration and play should not be ignored. Most of the children’s hours are spent indoors than outdoors. Educators can respond to this issue by exposing children to environments which communicate values and beliefs that relate living and learning altogether. To make this come true, educators must balance indoor activities and outdoor explorations. Educators also can mix natural, commercial or recycled materials to enhance indoor and outdoor setting by manipulating smells, colours, sounds and textures.

4.2.1 Indoor vs Outdoor
Most outdoor environment features are also appropriate indoors. It is totally up to designers or educators to replicate components of the outdoors inside the classroom by being creative with materials, decorations and presentations.
4.2.2 Involve Children in Planning
Invite children to plan the environment. Ask their opinion about where they would like to play, their favourite place in the early childhood setting and so on. By eliciting answers, it gives ideas to educators or designers in setting up the physical environment. Not only that, it engages children in thinking about their learning spaces and encourages early literacy connections with print.

Ideas such as taking photographs, preparing photos books, creating maps of their environments or simply asking them to draw are good methods when assisting children about planning the environment. Indirectly, it supports children’s social-emotional development and higher levels of thinking.

4.2.3 Materials must be Accessible
Materials such as props and objects which are used to enhance investigation and exploration must be accessible to children. The definition of accessible, as mentioned by Harms, Clifford and Cryer (2005), refers to age-appropriate materials, furnishing and equipment that are easily reached and independently used by children.

4.2.4 Relate to the Children’s Interest
Educators need to know the children’s interest when planning and caring for the space. All children regardless of age and ability are easily attracted to aromas, sounds, colours, light, reflections and textures. Try adding materials that invite touching, viewing and listening. All of these broaden children’s experiences as they explore the environment. While planning the programmes, educators must be aware of any sensitivity to natural aromas and allergies which may affect the children, families and staff members.

4.2.5 Create Invitation
Educators may use invitation to organise and present displays and materials. Invitation based on Curtis (2004) is a collection of interesting and carefully combined materials. Educators can aesthetically organise and present the materials or displays which appeal to children on shelves at experiential centres and on tables.
The invitation:

(a) Enhances an emerging interest;

(b) Helps children learn new skills and multiple uses for tools and materials;

(c) Offers activities and experiences with particular content knowledge; and

(d) Introduces children to new concepts or events.

4.2.6 Experiential Centre

Establishing an experiential centre is a good move in early childhood settings. It means to invite children to discover, imagine, investigate, question, think about and test their ideas. This is especially useful to introduce children to materials and tools.

A balance of simple and complex materials and tools should be found in each experiential centre. Once the materials and tools are introduced to them, children are given the opportunity to explore and demonstrate. Examples of this are:

(a) A variety of structures that children can make with different shapes of blocks;

(b) Many ways to use the paintbrush;

(c) How to make play dough or goop; and

(d) Different lines and curves that children can cut using scissors.

4.2.7 Natural Materials

Children will surely be delighted with smells, sounds and textures of the world around them. By adding environmental aspects of the natural world, it can soothe children’s senses and sensibilities. Educators can simply arouse different sensory experiences by filling baskets containing shells, rocks and leaves. To have slightly different activities, use natural materials that can be shaped and formed such as moulding
flour with water, pouring sand into different shaped containers and so on. As children work with these materials, they are learning about themselves and nature that surrounds them by seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, moving and rearranging things.

4.3 **Accepting Diversity**
The term “diversity” applies to everyone in the early childhood setting which is different in terms of culture, religion, gender, ability, language and lifestyle. All of these enrich our lives and make the world interesting to live in. Children begin to notice differences early and, therefore, early childhood education should reflect the classroom environment that is rich with the lives of children and families. Just as our homes should suit our needs, culture and community, so should the early childhood environment suit those of the children.

The environment must be multicultural and free from any bias. Children should be taught to understand and appreciate their own backgrounds as well as the backgrounds of others. The following are some suggestions for an environment which embraces diversity.

4.3.1 **Multicultural Setting:**

(a) Mount up posters on the walls that represent the cultures of children; and

(b) A play centre with dolls, toys and books and music from different cultures.

4.3.2 **Special Needs Children**

Do some adaptations by either adding something in the environment which is not in the early childhood setting or using something in a different way such as modifying, scheduling the use of material so that special needs children can use or participate in the activity.

4.4 **Floor Plan**

When selecting and arranging materials within programme space, educators should consider the following:

(a) Uncluttered spaces that allow children to focus on materials;

(b) Children’s perspectives and interests;
(c) Purpose of areas and enhancement of holistic development;
(d) Available space, features, height and size of environment;
(e) Aesthetic appeal;
(f) Balance of natural, commercial, simple/complex and authentic items;
(g) Flexibility of time and materials;
(h) New possibilities to transform the environment and generate learning;
(i) Diverse and unusual ways to organise, combine and arrange materials; and
(j) Plans that include ample time to learn such as maintaining and changing the resources.

Figure 4.1 shows an example of a floor plan for preschoolers.

![Figure 4.1: Example of a floor plan for preschoolers](http://www.bmcc.edu/Headstart/Bulletins/Issue53/article10.htm)
Figure 4.2 shows a sample of a preschool classroom design.

Figure 4.2: Sample preschool classroom design
Source: http://prekese.dadeschools.net/AS/pbs.html
Study Questions

1. What are the characteristics of a good learning environment should provide?

2. Imagine that you are given a task to set up a learning environment which is meant to introduce children to diverse backgrounds and cultures. How do you set it up interestingly and spice it up according to children’s curiosity, exploration and play? Map your ideas into a sketch or diagram.

3. Below are some common problems that can be remedied by changing the environment. List at least one solution for each problem:
   (a) Too many children crowding into one area;
   (b) Overcrowded shelves;
   (c) Grabbing or arguments over the same toy;
   (d) Hoarding of materials;
   (e) Lack of cooperation during cleanup;
   (f) Wheel toy collisions; and
   (g) Children crying when other children’s parents leave.
Topic 5: Measurement of Quality Environment in ECE

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. List the standard measurements used to evaluate learning environments for babies and young children;
2. Discuss the rationale for using rating scales in evaluating various types of childcare and education settings; and
3. Use assessment instruments in assessing childcare and education setting appropriateness to type and context.

Topic Overview

In this topic, you will learn about the measurements used to evaluate learning environments, namely, Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS) and School Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS).

Focus Areas and Assigned Readings

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Additional Recommended Readings

Content Summary

Why evaluate using a rating scale? As you have learned about quality environment, there are three basic needs of children to be met i.e protection of health and safety, emotional support and meaningful opportunities for learning. These considerations are crucial since a lot of time are spent by children out of home settings such as childcare centres, family day care homes, preschools and kindergartens. In addition, to know whether there is significant influence on all aspects of children’s development, the quality of early childhood environment is very important. Yet, there are many programmes that do not balance the three basic needs (protection of health and safety, emotional support and meaningful opportunities of learning) and puts quality learning environment at stake.

Thus, early childhood educators can use a comprehensive assessment instrument with proven reliability and validity to guide their evaluations to get a clear picture of an actual quality physical environment.

5.1 Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scales (ITERS)
ITERS is designed to assess group programmes for children from 0 to 2½ years of age. It comprises 39 items.

5.2 Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)
ECERS is designed to assess group programmes for preschool or kindergarten aged children, ranged from two to five years of age. The total scale consists of 43 items.

5.3 Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS)
This is a revised version of Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS). It is meant to assess family childcare programmes conducted in a provider’s home. The total scale comprises of 38 items.

5.4 School Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)
SACERS is designed to assess before and after school group care programmes for school age children from five to 12 years of age. The total scale is made up of 49 items, including six supplementary items for programmes enrolling children with disabilities.

All of the mentioned scales have the following characteristics:

(a) Each of the scales has items to evaluate: Physical Environment; Basic Care; Curriculum; Interaction; Schedule and Programme Structure; and Parent and Staff Education;
(b) The scales are suitable for use in evaluating inclusive and culturally diverse programmes; and

(c) The scales have proven reliability and validity.

Study Questions

1. Why is a rating scale important? By referring to the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS) and School Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS), state the differences between the scales, the research done using them and the weaknesses of the scales.

2. Are there any rating scales that are used widely besides the rating scales mentioned earlier to assess quality physical environment? Search for the information on the Internet.

3. How can we become objective and non-biased when evaluating the use of rating scales?
Topic 6: Quality Physical Layout

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. List the elements of quality building and sites for the early childhood setting;
2. Describe the elements of quality interiors of an early childhood environment; and
3. Elaborate on good basic interior designs for infants, toddlers and the early childhood classroom.

Topic Overview

The emergence of early care and education changed the perspective of the way early childhood environments were built. An early childhood environment is not a mere building, but a place equipped with facilities and is meant to be designed according to standards of quality. That is why, this topic will investigate further the building and site, as well as the interior of early childhood environment which encompasses walls, windows, doors and lighting.

Focus Areas and Assigned Readings

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6.1 The Building and Site
The building is usually located on a site. It comprises the size, shape, topography and surrounding which determines its use and appeal. For a childcare centre, it is not only about the building and site, but it also means the location. The location of the building determines the success of enrolment and finance of the programmes. The building, site and location make the children feel that they belong to the programmes.

You must choose a site carefully and weigh a lot of considerations. First, weigh the cost of buying or leasing, then add up costs such as site clearance, landscaping and other costs such as workers’ fees. Another consideration is location. If you are choosing a site for a new business, location plays an important part in your plans. You should think about positive and negative outcomes for both the site and location. Look at the immediate surroundings. Check whether it is close to traffic, near factories, close to a power line, if it is noisy, or simply look at the community that surrounds the site.

6.1.1 Site Size
Site size depends on the use and number of children. It also has to have sufficient outdoor space for parking, playing and learning. Special concerns on the design of the site are:

(a) Safety: The greatest worry is the flow of vehicles in and out of the centre.

(b) Parent partnership: Encourage parents to drop off their children and come into the classroom. So, parking space should be convenient for parents.

(c) Convenience: How far do parents have to walk with the child to the centre? Where do the staff park?

6.1.2 Site of the Building
Since the outdoors is very important for children to play, the site should reflect wind direction, sun angles or shade directions. You also have to take into consideration the effect on parents, staff, children and visitors.
6.1.3 Building Elements
A childcare centre should be a place for daily routines and also have a place for a gallery. The childcare centre becomes the children’s laboratory where they can make a mess and get an opportunity to be curious and ask questions. At the same time, it is a library, workroom and must have a homely touch such as having flowers and plants. The place should not only have chairs and tables and be dimly lit. The place should be conducive to support work, learning, education and care, and serve as a workplace for adults as well.

Rooms that can be found in a childcare centre:

(a) An infant room;
(b) A toddler room;
(c) A young preschool or transition room: Similar to the toddler’s room but excluding the food preparation area and an activity counter with a sink and drinking fountain. This room is for the more independent; having a bathroom would promote independence;
(d) Preschool rooms;
(e) Kindergarten classroom;
(f) School-age rooms;
(g) Back-up care;
(h) Lactation/nursing mothers’ station;
(i) Sick bay/isolation area;
(j) Almost well or get well room;
(k) Multipurpose rooms;
(l) Studio;
(m) Children’s kitchen; and
(n) Children’s library.
6.1.4 Building Layout

The layout of the building is closely related to the relationship between people and functions. The layout of the early childcare and education building is not easy as the site must fit the programmes and meet the building codes. In order to decide on the best, all alternatives must be weighed.

In deciding the process, many factors have to be considered. You have to think of who and what needs to be near, who needs quick access to get outside, the natural lighting, how children, parents and staff can get access to the public areas. The following points should be noted:

(a) Single secure entrance: Other doors meant for playground or emergency exit;
(b) Administrative office near the entrance and away from traffic;
(c) Kitchen must be close to the service entry;
(d) Common area must be at the heart of the building;
(e) Pairing of rooms usually to ease staffing and child transitions; and
(f) Outdoors with ease of access and direct from the classroom.

6.1.5 Building System

In managing an early childhood environment, there must be a system to make things easy and manageable. Getting the system right is very crucial as this costs a lot when something goes wrong and something needs to be replaced. When building early childcare centres, you should try to use sustainable and environmentally friendly resources and materials. Furthermore, consider the long-term costing such as:

(a) Consider the U trap when instilling the toilet as it can trap toys and children’s clothing. This would be cheaper than the cost of repairing the toilet;
(b) Use shut-off valves installed at the sinks as this can save a lot of water wastage;
(c) Floor tiles should be easy to clean, especially for the kitchen and bathrooms;

(d) Consider using hose bibs as it would be useful for water play, watering plants, cleaning; and

(e) Let the fresh air in as much as possible as this is healthy and the place will smell clean. It is also useful if the air conditioner breaks down. Therefore, in the designing process, due consideration should be given to having windows and sliding doors.

6.2 Interiors: Walls, Windows, Doors and Lighting
Painted walls, big windows and doors as well as having good lighting add to the aesthetic quality of the environment. These simple factors help to create childcare centres of quality and are conducive to quality learning.

6.2.1 Good Basic Interior Designs
Good designs help to create a fun and happy learning atmosphere. It makes it easier to support the goals of the programmes of the childcare centre. The designs balance beauty and normality and transform the place into a liveable place which is great for working, learning and most of the entire place will be very welcoming. The following tips will be useful in bringing out the effects of the building.

(a) The use of colour can highlight the architecture by directing attention. Colour can be used to indicate if an area is “active” or “calm”.

(b) Texture which can be tactile or visual such as the feeling of wood, rough plaster, visual pattern of fabrics, walls and floors can help children, especially the visually impaired, to learn using the sense of touch.

(c) The vertical, horizontal and curved lines in a room can create different perceptions especially on the size of the room and windows.

(d) Patterns add life to a room. It can also reflect rhythm when designs and colours merge.
6.2.2 Walls
Walls can be curved, straight or unbroken. In high quality designs, every inch of the wall is used as storage, communication or display. Murals and permanent graphics on the wall are unnecessary because they create a sense of visual clutter and limit the space on the wall. To make walls useful, they have to be made from materials that allow for cleaning and are strong enough for us to hang things on them. Generally, a wall should be made of wood, heavy duty fabric or bricks. A wall can also act as a tactile and visual aid to children. Textured walls or carpeted walls bring warmth and richness to the building.

6.2.3 Windows
Windows act as wonderful sources for light and seeing the world. Children can witness the light, raindrops, and clouds through the windows and experience the wonder of smells and sound. Due to this, windows bring different experiences depending on its type. You can have translucent glass blocks used in windows and this is useful for unsightly areas. Windows leading to hallways or adjoining rooms allow observation and they should be clear and transparent. They should also look very welcoming.

Materials for windows should be shatter free, durable, and easy to clean, away from hazards and should provide adequate security. Allow children to view as much as they want especially if the windows are close to the ground. If it is a high window, educators can arrange furniture or platform close to the windows.

Protection from heat, glare and drafts also should be a concern. The use of blinds and curtains in the childcare centre depends on its durability and safety. Children might pull the blinds or cords or get entangled accidentally. Curtains are convenient as they are less costly and have acoustical value. Awnings and plants located outdoors also provide shade for the indoors.
Windows and window awnings are subjected to hard use. Sometimes, windows remain closed, preventing light from coming in. Therefore, make sure that the hardware you select is durable, clean and can keep the place secure. You also select the design and shape of your windows depending on whether you need childproofing or whether you need accessibility.

6.2.4 Lighting
Light works in the same way that colour does. Educators can use light to impose moods and activities. The effect of reduced light provides a sense of calmness whereby increased light brightens the spirits. Light dimmers can be used to create such an effect.

In considering lights, look at the different angles. Will there be a glare if an infant stares up at the ceiling? Will the teacher be able to darken the room when the children take their naps? Lights also have an impact on the furnishing. The colour of the walls, polished wood or mirrors reflect the light and brightness of the room. For a more homely and soft look, use a variety of direct and indirect light sources. You can use clamp-on lights, track-lighting floor lamps, or table lamps which can be placed near a chair or couch to highlight an area or dark corner.

6.2.5 Doors
Doors have to adhere to fire, safety and health regulations. It totally depends on whether the doors of the bathroom or room entrance requires a full door, double Dutch doors, automatic closer, etc which are often regulated in certain countries. Doors can be used as barriers, portals or windows. A heavier door requires adult assistance to let people in and out.

While doors are generally meant to keep children from going out, it also can serve as a plaything. Children love to push, close and experiment with doors and this can cause accidents. To avoid accidents, adults can restrict the use of the door or keep the door open.
Study Questions

1. Refer to any of these early childhood building elements in developed countries and compare them with the existing building elements in your country:
   
   (a) An infant room;
   (b) A toddler room;
   (c) Preschool rooms;
   (d) Kindergarten classroom;
   (e) School-age rooms;
   (f) Back-up care;
   (g) Lactation/Nursing mothers’ station;
   (h) Sick bay/Isolation area;
   (i) Almost well or get well room;
   (j) Multipurpose rooms;
   (k) Studio;
   (l) Children’s kitchen; and
   (m) Children’s library.

2. Visit any childcare settings and evaluate them in terms of walls, windows, doors and lighting.

3. Create a building layout on your own. Put in considerations of what you have learnt in this topic. Do not forget to label your layout!
Topic 7: Setting Up the Learning Environment

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:
1. Select furnishings and arrange the learning environment based on space availability;
2. List the characteristics of good storage in an orderly manner;
3. Discuss methods of display that encourage learning;
4. Set up play provisions; and
5. Select play items appropriate with children’s developmental stages and space availability.

Topic Overview

This topic discusses the issues of setting up a learning environment. Early childhood education does not only involve didactic instructions and information but also emphasises on both play and learning. Generally, the learning environment is time tested versus learning experiences. Educators or teachers sometimes find that they have limited time and space to provide sufficient value added experiences for children to master. In order to overcome this, suitable furnishings, arrangement of room and space, storage, display and provision of play equipment are essential at the initial set-up of the learning environment.

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Additional Recommended Readings
Content Summary

7.1 Furnishing
There must be specific places to foster relationships in the early childhood learning environment. This includes adult-size furniture that offers comfort. You do not need to spend a lot of money on comfortable furniture as suitable furnishings can be found at thrift stores. You can also source for them through classified advertisements. Sanitary concerns can be addressed by using slipcovers that can be easily removed and washed frequently. Besides, furnishings comprise couches, love seats, overstuffed chairs, gliders, rockers, large floor pillows and hammocks.

7.2 Room Arrangement and Space
The classroom can be arranged in two ways. First, the space can be arranged according to the developmental level of children such as their physical, social or emotional development. Another way is arranging based on curriculum areas such as writing, reading, science and art. Despite the arrangement style, space should not hinder learning. The arrangement of space should have the following:

(a) A spacious area to hold group demonstrations, meetings, or get-togethers;
(b) Small areas meant for children to work in groups, pairs or individually;
(c) Individual areas to facilitate independent work on projects;
(d) Display areas; and
(e) Clearly labelled work areas and easy access to engage materials.
7.2.1 **Spacious Space**  
The spacious area can be anywhere around the room. Some teachers locate this area in the middle or in a quiet corner of the classroom. Others use the library for this purpose.

7.2.2 **Small Areas**  
Dividers such as low bookshelves, tables and other furniture can be used to separate the area to allow an open, uncluttered and unobstructed view. The dividers also can be used as displays for instruction, children’s completed work or storage for materials. A small area can accommodate just enough children, materials and chairs. If the area is too crowded, children will have trouble working productively. Ideas such as arranging desks together can avoid cluster.

7.2.3 **Individual Areas**  
Every classroom should allow children to work individually. Even though children can work independently at the table, they require their own space with their materials. Individual areas also should be away from interference where the children can work without distraction.

7.2.4 **Clearly Labelled Works Areas and Easy Access to Engage Materials**  
Most classrooms include a number of art and writing centres to accommodate children’s interests or needs. These areas should have clear pathways so that the children can safely move in and out. They should be labelled and organised for easy management of the materials that facilitate children’s thinking and curiosity.

7.3 **Storage and Display**  
Storage and display affect the quality of early childhood programmes. Quality storage allows maximum usage of resources and accumulated sources. If the resources cannot be reused or cannot be kept, there is no need to store them. The quality of display allows a programme to be communicated easily and makes visible what others should know.
7.3.1 Storage
Storage brings benefit to both teachers and children. Children’s daily work and finished work used to assess progress and personal belonging need to have a good storage system. Teachers can store classroom resources and materials, toys, administrative materials and even their personal belongings. There are many types and ways of storage. However, when storing, it must be in an orderly manner and should be aesthetically pleasing. Some suggestions are as follows:

(a) Use easy-to-find storage with different and interesting textures such as decorated boxes;
(b) The storage should be balanced with the design of materials, displays and furniture;
(c) Store daily work in labelled plastic tubs or boxes;
(d) Try to use drying racks to dry paintings; and
(e) Use plastic shoe racks to store puppets.

When storing resources, materials or personal belongings of children, do not ignore the developmental level and safety of children.

7.3.2 Display
Displays in early childhood programmes encourage children to observe, question and investigate. Thus, teachers should be mindful of how to display. Crowded walls and over stimulating and unplanned displays discourage learning.

(a) The use of appropriate materials: Teachers can use the walls, display boards, posters and cabinets to do the job. However, consider the shape, colour and decorative quality.

(b) Appropriate location: Determine the audience. Is it mainly for parents, staff or children?

(c) Creates flexibility: Can the display be in two or three dimensions?
(d) Aesthetically pleasing: Decide whether the display serves as a vehicle of the content or merely for classroom aesthetics.

(e) Safety: Make sure the displays are safe. Pushpins are not encouraged for children below five years of age.

7.4 Play Provisions

In order to set up a learning environment for infants, toddlers and preschool children, teachers or educators need to examine how young children learn and develop. This is due to the unique characteristics possessed by each child that will influence his or her experiences with the environment.

Toddlers, for instance, construct an understanding of a ball by feeling the texture of a beach ball, pushing the air filled object and rolling it across the carpeted floor. In order to encourage children at this age, they should be given opportunities to learn by interacting with the environment. There should also be space designed with many opportunities for children to explore physically real materials such as storing varied materials in a place where they can easily select them and placing other items in a not so visible place.

Preschoolers are active learners who continue to examine materials and begin to use objects in more complex combinations. During this stage, they begin to develop symbolic representation as they take on roles and participate in socio-dramatic play. Their language ability during this period expands as they try to find “labels” for the objects and people in their world, question a lot and find the answers. Teachers can help the preschoolers by setting up learning centres. It acts as effective ways to organise and support the developing abilities of preschoolers. Make sure the centre areas clearly communicate to preschoolers in terms of what activity occurs in the areas and the available materials that will stimulate their play. Both traditional and unique centres encourage language interaction, socio-dramatic play and the construction of experiences based on their level of understanding. To spark more learning experiences, add literacy materials such as books, paper and writing tools, which later enhance preschoolers “reading and writing” skills.
When selecting playthings, there are a number of things to consider:

(a) Materials: They must be in the category of open ended materials that can be used in a variety of ways, besides stimulating children to think;

(b) Manipulation: Give a lot of opportunities for children to handle, combine as well as transform materials and ideas;

(c) Choice: Allow children to choose and plan activities on their own;

(d) Stimulating language and thought: Make sure the playthings invite children to describe what they are doing and their understanding of it; and

(e) Scaffolding: Through the help of adults’ talking, joining and play, scaffolding helps children to solve problems.

7.5 Equipment
Equipment denotes furniture and other large items such as climbing structures and cupboards. Equipment is important because it gives direction and provides raw material for children’s exploration, development and learning. There are a few directions in choosing good equipment such as:

(a) Safe, quality and sturdy equipment;

(b) Developmentally appropriate furniture;

(c) Able to provide individual storage for children;

(d) Select the ones with low and open shelves;

(e) Do not forget to consider comfortable seating for adults;

(f) Avoid clutter;

(g) Remove the damaged equipment; and

(h) Model the right use.
Study Questions

1. Visit any preschool setting and observe the surrounding environment. Evaluate the environment by using the checklist below. Then, share what you have observed and summarise your findings. You may show some photographs to discuss your thoughts and findings.

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**PRESCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CHECKLIST**

This checklist, adapted from Feeney, Christensen and Moravcik (2006), is used to evaluate the appropriateness of existing early childhood environment programmes. The items listed below are not necessarily compulsory in the programmes. However, the items labelled with * are essential for quality in early childhood programmes.

**Date**

**Number of staff**

**Number of children**

**Age of children**

*Tick the following as ✓ (yes/adequate) or — (no/inadequate)*

**Overall Atmosphere and Arrangement**

**Room Arrangement**
- 35 sq ft per child*
- Arranged in learning centres*
- Separate noise and quiet areas*
- Easy pathways along the centres*
- All areas are useful*
- Sheltered from outside noise and stimulus
- Well lit with natural light if possible
- Ventilated* and controlled temperature
- Accessible drinking water, sinks and toilets*

**Learning Centres/Areas**
- Blocks centre*
- Library*
- Dramatic Play*
- Toys and Games*
- Art*
- Discovery (science, math, social studies)
- Private area for children
- Outside play environment*
2. There are many types of storage available to store things and materials. Identify what kind of items or materials that can be store using the types of storage below:

(a) Cubbies;
(b) Closed shelves/cabinets;
(c) Shed;
(d) Closet;
(e) Open shelving; and
(f) Pantry.

You can attach the pictures of the types of storage along with the answers.

3. Try to create a display which is three dimensional and functions to spread information about the children in the early childhood programmes.
Topic 8: Quality Basic Care Environment

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the importance of basic care needs that should not be excluded from physical environment;
2. Practice a well-maintained and well-thought-of environment to protect children from illness and injury; and
3. Create a healthy and safe social aspect of physical environment.

Topic Overview

Early childhood educators must understand the importance of a well-established daily routine of basic care for young children. The basic routines during greeting and departing, rules during meals and snacks, when to have a nap and rest as well as toileting and diapering are very crucial to be met by the child care provider. By meeting these needs, the children will feel that they are psychologically safe, secure and accepted, as well as teaching them to be competence and independent physically and socially. Therefore, careful planning in the environment is necessary so the routine of basic needs are predictable and something that all children are expected to follow.

Focus Areas and Assigned Readings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>8.3 Nap and Rest</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.4 Toileting and Diapering</td>
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</table>

Additional Recommended Readings

Content Summary

8.1 Greeting and Departing
Greeting and departing play important roles as it shows that the children are welcomed, loved and surrounded by a friendly and predictable atmosphere. In order to support the successfulness of greeting and departing, there are certain things that can be done in the physical environment.

Opening the door when the child first arrives, for instance, gives the child an impression of whether the place is strange or predictable, unwelcome or warm. A child who is late might feel unaccepted if the doors are shut. Therefore, it is better to install doors with windows or having foyers or open spaces so that the child does not feel shut out upon arrival for the first time.

At the end of the day, the programme should provide a smooth transition for the child to get back to home life. The end of the day is a sensitive time as the children might feel angry or sad depending on what happened earlier. Therefore, it is good to have a foyer with windows so that the child feels comfortable. The teachers can also ensure a routine of helping a child with her things or having a spot in the room where the child, teacher and parents can meet. Do not forget to acknowledge the child when it is the time to go back by using comforting words, waving, touching, smiling or having eye contact.

8.2 Meals and Snacks
Meals and snack times provide positive group experiences such as social and convivial time to touch and talk about experiences. Meal times can be hectic and stressful for both the teachers and the children as they have to teach the children to eat and enjoy the meal and follow the house rules all within a limited time. However, the goal is to make meal times a relaxed social occasion that balances the children’s development and self-help skills like eating independently and cleaning up after that. Thus, special attention should be given to the design, location and layout of the kitchen, food distribution systems, choice of eating areas and choice of furniture and utensils.

Pay attention to the age group being served by the programmes. Check if there are infants or older children. This is due to the fact that infants need individual feeding times and introduction of new foods which adds to the complexity unlike older children. Take into
consideration the schedule and number of children to be served. Although meals and snacks can take place round the clock, how much needs to be served depends on the number of children.

8.3 Nap and Rest
It is natural that children need rest because children get tired playing all day or simply not having enough rest at home. An early child care and education setting needs an area where each child has the opportunity to take a rest away from interruption. Infants and toddlers for instance need a morning nap in a quiet place. The best space for a nap is a space that has acoustic surrounding as it mutes the snores, loud cries or whispers. It should be darkened, with adequate air flow and large enough to allow two to three feet between each sleeping child. Also, the place for a nap or rest can be a room with a couch or a quiet corner with pillows which do not require the child to leave the room.

Nowadays, the majority of toddlers and preschoolers nap and rest in the classroom and they typically sleep on mats or cots. Regardless of that, make sure the things that they sleep on are washable and can be stored. Mats and plastic cots are ideal as it requires less storage and are lighter. Also, if blankets are used, consider where it should be stored. In order to avoid storing, ask the children to bring their own blankets and quilts from home.

8.4 Toileting and Diapering

8.4.1 Toilet
Preschool toilets should be large enough so that the adults can change messy children’s clothes comfortably and at the same time allow other children to use the facility.

When designing a toilet, consider the easy access, cost, security concerns, supervision, respect for children, health and values about privacy, modesty and the development of gender awareness. Pay attention also to sight, sound and smell. Usually, toilets are located away from each room. This is because children might wet themselves and the place. It is important that the toilet is immediately accessible to the children in need. To be cost effective, pairing the rooms near the toilets and sharing toilets are the best.
These are some regulations on toilet usage:

(a) For children below the age of five, separate segregated toilets are considered unnecessary. This hinders visual supervision and allows ample space for an adult to assist a child. Besides, the elimination of doors is useful for contagion controls purposes. Privacy in the toilet can be achieved by having low partitions (30” - 36” high) that allow teachers supervision and visual privacy for the child to use the toilet. By having this, it also avoids idle play among the children and it has better aesthetics.

(b) School-age children require same sex toilet and in some programmes, separate stalls with doors are built for this purpose.

(c) One stool is to cater to 10 to 15 preschoolers or 10 toddlers.

(d) A flush valve needs to be installed rather than tanks which is slower and will result in flushed toilets.

(e) A drinking fountain should be placed outside the toilet to avoid congestion.

(f) A brushing teeth area is a good practice but it is possible only when space permits.

(g) A toilet with access to the play yard is recommended.

Things to consider when designing a toilet:

(a) Ventilation, acoustics and aesthetic are important for the ambience;

(b) Relaxed atmosphere such as soft overhead lighting with mirrors, windows, plants and calm bathroom colours;

(c) Provide storage, cabinets or shelving as it is also a place to store cleaning supplies, wet clothes and assorted materials for messy and art play

(d) Make sure the walls and floor are easy to clean and avoid the retention of water and germs;

(e) Installing floor drains for each toilet;
(f) Easy access for dispensers and towels;

(g) Toilet, toilet paper, sinks, paper towel dispensers should be placed at a child's height; and

(h) Liquid soap is recommended rather than the bar soap and should be placed in such a way so as to avoid dripping.

### 8.4.2 Diapering

Diapering should not be done in a hurry. Instead, it should be a one-to-one interaction between baby and adult. It should also include activities such as talking, eye contact and adult responsiveness. Some considerations applicable to the diapering area are:

(a) It should be adjacent to the play area as it enables the caregiver to attend the child in need;

(b) It should be accessible with water for easy cleaning; and

(c) The location should not be close to the entry, directly at the kitchen or food preparation area.

Also, health and safety play priority roles for the layout of the diapering area. It is not an easy task to undress the child, find for diapers, wash hands, return back to the child, etc. Hence, it is convenience if everything needed such as extra clothes, sink, soap, disinfect or medication is within easy reach. If items in need are unreachable, danger of falling might occur. The toddler diapering area ideally should be in the toilet along with the potty trainers.

### Study Questions

1. Analyse traffic safety in the drop off area in any child care centre that you have chosen. What can be done to improve the traffic safety in the drop off area?

2. Analyse your own thoughts about eating, going to the toilet and sleeping. What environmental aspects that you find make the circumstances pleasant or unpleasant? Apply this thought to an early care and education setting.
3. At a child care centre, try a hands-on experience by changing infants and toddlers diapers. Analyse in term of:
   
   (a) Health: Are you spreading the germs?
   
   (b) Safety: The moment where the teacher is distracted or is attending to a very active baby.
   
   (c) Child and teacher satisfaction: Does the design of the area support one-to-one interaction?
### Topic 9: Outdoor Learning Environment

#### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the importance of outdoor life to children;
2. Plan outdoor areas that are developmentally appropriate; and
3. Maintain the outdoor areas so they are free from hazards and minimise injuries.

#### Topic Overview

The outdoors is full of wonders. However, many parents are reluctant to allow their children outdoors as the sun and rain can be discomforting. It might also expose their children to plants and animals that are poisonous or harmful. Most parents are comfortable with playgrounds. Playgrounds are places for emotional and physical release, social interchange and exploration. This week, we will learn about the importance of an outdoor learning environment for enhancing children's sensory development.

#### Focus Areas and Assigned Readings

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**Additional Recommended Readings**

Content Summary

9.1 The Outdoors in Children’s Lives
Most of the time, children spend their time indoors. They are trapped in the world where the nature that they can see is viewed from windows or through the television. This is the big loss as outdoors offer a lot of benefits such as:

(a) Unpredictable Moments
There are a lot of unpredictable things happening outdoors. In contrast to the life inside, the outside world is evolving and changing.

(b) Bountiful Opportunities
The outside is full of shapes, sizes, colours, textures and other variety of things. It provides wonderful learning experiences such as adventures of science or cognitive development of recognising things through touch to know which are hard, soft, fragile, heavy, light, smooth or rough.

(c) Beautiful Scenery
Crawling ants, rainbows after rains, blooming flowers, rain dripping from the roof are all beautiful scenery outside. By seeing these, children gain an unforgettable experience.

(d) Multi-dimensional Place
While outdoors, children get to lie on the grass, play in puddles or hide behind trees.

(e) Real Thing
Children can experience real-life experiences such as death of ants, the blooming of flowers or the falling of leaves.

(f) Healing and Nourishment
Life would be meaningless without being able to enjoy the sun or breathe in fresh air. Besides, we need the outdoors and nature to present challenges which we can use as part of our learning experiences. The outdoors provides the opportunity for us to watch the wonders of nature and to be happy.
The outdoors is the best place for children to enjoy physical activities like running, leaping and jumping freely. It is the most appropriate area for the practice of ball-handling skills, like throwing, catching and striking. Children can learn skills as pushing a swing, pulling a wagon, and lifting and carrying movable objects. Also, the outdoors helps children with their cognitive, social and emotional development. When they are outside, they are likely to learn new games and express themselves about the world in their own way. Furthermore, the environment outside make them feel safe and in control which should lead them to autonomy, decision-making, and organisational skills.

9.2 Planning Outdoor Areas
A good plan for outdoor play areas should provide an area for everybody to play regardless of their age group. However, the play area must be safe and not jeopardise their safely. Gradual challenges are also important as children can do a lot of physical movement such as reach, jump, climb and slide according to their own ability without frustration and withdraw from the activity without being injured and humiliated. Some ideas that can be contributed are:

(a) Cater to several levels of difficulties for each activity such as steep, steeper and steepest;

(b) Cater to several levels of accomplishment for each activity such as high, higher and highest;

(c) The entry and exit place should be in intermediate level (not so small or tall);

(d) The setting is arranged so the next level of challenge is apparent; and

(e) The challenges must focus on mastery of body in the various physical activities.

Thus, to serve all children, the outdoors play area should not be solely based on the equipment but also on activities that provide a wide range of experience and creativity. For instance, the teacher can create non-identical experiences for all children and organise outdoor play similar as the indoor play like providing multisensory clues, flexibility and loose parts of toys or materials.
9.3 Maintaining Outdoor Areas

In order to maintain safety and lifespan of outdoor play environment, the maintenance needs to be done daily, seasonally or annually. It is necessary as it can save cost in the long run. The following are a few areas that need to be considered:

(a) **Surfacing**
   (i) Try to check any loose fill resilient surface for debris, compaction and depth. Replace and clean when needed.
   (ii) Make sure there are no other surfaces for debris and tripping hazards
   (iii) Monitor sand areas for harmful debris, animal faeces, etc. Rake or clean when necessary.

(b) **Equipment**
   Check the equipments for any:
   (i) Sharp edges, missing items, exposed bolts, protrusions, pinch or crushing points or exposed piling.
   (ii) Wear, rot, cracks, splinters, broken or about to be broken.
   (iii) Moving parts for wear.
   (iv) Entrapment or entanglement hazards.

(c) **Landscape**
   (i) Check for drainage, standing water and clean out drain, water or untended grass, plants, any pesticide or fertiliser and any materials that are unsafe for infants or toddlers.
   (ii) Inspect areas for trash, sharp points, branches, harmful pests, etc.

(d) **Loose parts**
   (i) Check for any loose parts or broken toys or equipment. It may lead to injury and hazards.
   (ii) Make sure the materials are non toxic and non choking.
Study Questions

1. What will children if they are deterred from playing outside?

2. Visit a playground and decide on the traffic flow, the risk of children who might get injured and the variety of experiences that are available for two, four and six-year-old children.

3. Observe a young child who playing at the sidewalk, backyard or in front of the house. What is he or she doing?

4. Look at Figure 4. What can you do to maintain the outdoor area?

Figure 4: Outdoor area
**Topic 10: Provisions for Adults**

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. Create provision for adults in early childhood setting;
2. Plan outdoor areas convenient for parents and staff; and
3. Elaborate on the importance of space for parents and staff.

**Topic Overview**

Early childhood programmes are not only meant for educating and taking care of children. It is also meant to ease the performing of tasks such as setting up and cleaning up, storage, communication with parents and attending other standard tasks. A smart early childhood programme would cater for adults by providing a meeting space for confidential dialogue and communication between the staff and parents.

**Focus Areas and Assigned Readings**

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**Content Summary**

**10.1 Space for Parents**

A conventional nursery school is considered as the place of transition for parents and children's The separation should be understood as not only leaving a child in the nursery but also as a separation of a child from home and parents and he/she is stepping towards a large world. Parents play a major goal in the set-up of a nursery. Parents should be encouraged to be part of the setting as they are needed as sources of information, volunteers, learners or an active support in early childhood programmes.
In early childhood setting, parents should be allowed to feel competent, safe and secure. To support this, it depends by the way the parents are drawn in first; into the centre and then into the classroom. Parents are likely to enter the space if they are the ones who drop the child on their own or the cubbies or the sign-in sheets are inside the room. Despite that, if the daily information sheets asking for response is placed right away next to cubbies and there is a pencil provided, parents will not enter the space but simply write the responses.

Thus, physical space and staff are vital to spread a welcoming and inviting place for parents. It can be done for instance by asking staff to use verbal and nonverbal signs to parents in order for them to hang on to talk or invite them to chat. Besides that, by putting a display of short biographies of the staff, it will make the parents easily recognise the staff rather than remain a stranger. The early childhood setting can also provide places to sit, a communication board, bathrooms or showing photographs of parents and families throughout the centre. Indirectly, it shows the message to parents to understand it is their place and they belong here.

10.2 Space for Staff

It is said that “working is highly depended on the setting”. Staff, who face a lot of pressures such as maintaining minimum adults and children ratio, low operating budgets and working with children and families can easily be dissatisfied if the facilities in the centre are against their working demands. As a result, inconvenience, fatigue and stress will take a toll and affect their mood and performance.

In order to make staff much happier and satisfied, space dimensions in the environment should apply to adults. For instance, adults have the right to a safe and secure environment. They should have a sense of autonomy, be able to adjust time and physical space as well as being able to move around. Besides that, careful planning is necessary. To do this, think about staff’s roles and environment that should be provided such as:

(a) To think and plan: Where, when or is there any work space to cater to these roles?

(b) To organise environment: Where are the staff going to store equipment and materials?
(c) To stock and re-stock shelves: Is the existing storage enough? How much storage is available or accessible? Where will be the location for stocking and re-stocking?

(d) To prepare and do activities: Where to store the materials for the activities and equipment? Where are the activities going to be held?

(e) To clean up and maintain: Are the sinks, closet/janitor’s closet enough? Where to put the equipment?

(f) To teach and guide: Is there enough time? Does the environment support this?

(g) To manage children’s traffic: Does the layout allow this? Does the set-up and equipment hinder traffic?

(h) To set up meals, serving and cleaning up: Where will be the storage for this function? Can the equipment and sinks cater for this?

(i) To do toileting and diapering: How is the room size and scale? Does storage and layout support this?

(j) To work with adults: The space and scale considered for this need? Is there any individual space or work room?

(k) To communicate: Where will be the message and meeting space? Where will be the location for materials and equipments for communication such as telephones and computers?

(l) To keep record: The materials, storage and computer are enough?

(m) To manage staff and parents: How is the space size and scale? How is the layout, traffic?

(n) To host parents and visitors: What is the space size? How is the layout? Any reserved furniture to cater to this need? Will there be bathrooms?
Study Questions

1. Why is space for parents and staff vital in designing an early childhood physical environment?

2. Analyse the space allocated in children’s programme to support staff’s competence in working with children and parents.

3. Conduct an interview with parents who send their child to a childcare. What are the things they like and dislike in the child care?

4. In your creative way, create a chart of staff biographies. Use a Manila card.
Appendices

Appendix A: Learning Support

Tutorials

There are 15 hours of face-to-face facilitation, in the form of FOUR tutorials of three hours each. You will be notified of the date, time and location of these tutorials, together with the name and e-mail address of your facilitator, as soon as you are allocated a group.

Discussion and Participation

Besides the face-to-face tutorials, you have the support of online discussions in *myVLE* with your facilitator and coursemates. Your contributions to online discussions will greatly enhance your understanding of the course content and help you do the assignment(s) and prepare for the examination.

Feedback and Input from Facilitator

As you work on the activities and the assigned text(s), your facilitator will provide assistance to you throughout the duration of the course. Should you need assistance at any time, do not hesitate to contact your facilitator and discuss your problems with him/her.

Bear in mind that communication is important for you to be able to get the most out of this course. Therefore, you should, at all times, be in touch with your facilitator, e-facilitator and coursemates and be aware of all the requirements for successful completion of the course.

Tan Sri Dr Abdullah Sanusi (TSDAS) Digital Library

The TSDAS Digital Library has a wide range of print and online resources for the use of its learners. This comprehensive digital library provides access to more than 30 online databases comprising e-journals, e-theses, e-books and more. Examples of databases available are EBSCOhost, ProQuest, SpringerLink, Books24x7, InfoSci Books, Emerald Management Plus and Ebrary Electronic Books. As an OUM learner, you are encouraged to make full use of the resources available through this library.
Appendix B: Study Tips

Time Commitments for Study

You should plan to spend about 12 hours of study time on each topic, which includes doing all assigned readings and activities. You must also set aside time to discuss work online. It is often more effective to distribute the study hours over a number of days rather than spend a whole day studying one topic.

Study Strategy

The following is a proposed strategy for working through the course. If you have difficulty following this strategy, discuss your problems with your facilitator either through the online forum or during the tutorials.

(i) The most important step is to read the contents of this Study Guide thoroughly.

(ii) Organise a study schedule (as recommended in Table 2). Take note of the amount of time you spend on each topic as well as the dates for submission of assignment(s), tutorials and examination.

(iii) Once you have created a study schedule, make every effort to stick to it. One reason learners are unable to cope with postgraduate courses is that they procrastinate and delay completing their course work.

(iv) You are encouraged to do the following:
   - Read the Study Guide carefully and look through the list of topics covered. Try to examine each topic in relation to other topics.
   - Complete all assigned readings and go through as many supplementary texts as possible to get a broader understanding of the course content.
   - Go through all the activities and study questions to better understand the various concepts and facts presented in a topic.
   - Draw ideas from a large number of readings as you work on the assignments. Work regularly on the assignments as the semester progresses so that you are able to systematically produce a commendable paper.
(v) When you have completed a topic, review the Learning Outcomes for the topic to confirm that you have achieved them and are able to do what is required.

(vi) After completing all topics, review the Learning Outcomes of the course to see if you have achieved them.