



EIGHT CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO OPTIMIZE PRE-K LEARNING



Early childhood teachers have many roles and are focused on creating a supportive learning environment, guiding children's learning and assessing their progress. Importantly, teachers must keep children safe and healthy while providing opportunities for their development and learning while ensuring lessons run smoothly.

To teach effectively, a classroom must be managed to optimize student learning with systems that sustain an orderly and joyful environment, enhance academic skills and further children's social and emotional development.

Implementing strategies to optimize learning can feel overwhelming for early education teachers. In this guide, we provide a blueprint to help build a successful learning environment that is safe and effective.

The 2021-2022 school year will include unique challenges. Children and their families have felt the effects of a global pandemic and the obstacles to learning it created. It's important to focus on not only academic skills, but to nurture their social-emotional needs with mindfulness and intention.





1. Establish Clear Classroom RULES

Children thrive when there are clear rules and know what to expect in any situation. In the classroom, establishing rules and expectations will allow pre-K learners to feel secure and be equipped to learn new skills. These rules should be taught by discussion and in practice while applied equitably and transparently.



TIP: An example of 5 clear classroom rules for pre-K children

We follow these rules to stay safe:

1. Listening
2. Sharing
3. Using kind words
4. Walking feet
5. Keeping hands and feet to ourselves



2. Create Consistent ROUTINES

Creating consistent routines in the pre-K classroom will help children feel comfortable and secure in their environment. Routines provide structure and make the day well-ordered and predictable. Stability from schedules makes the day go smoothly and helps build trust in the teacher. Be sure to balance resting time with active time and remain flexible to address the individual needs of the children. Children will appreciate being offered choices during specific periods throughout the day and learn the concept of time as they follow a consistent schedule. Implementing consistent routines leads to a more engaged class and less behavior issues.

TIP: Be sure to include these in your daily schedule

- Arrival and departure routines
- Nap time
- Food breaks
- Self-help skills
- Clean-up times
- Activity transitions

Day 1	
GREETING CIRCLE	
MORNING MESSAGE	Show me your ears.
MUSIC & MOVEMENT	
READ-ALoud #1	 Introduction Discuss vocabulary <i>amazing</i> and <i>awesome</i> . Introduce <i>Here Are My Hands</i>
LITERACY SMALL GROUPS	VOCABULARY Discuss <i>awesome</i> and <i>amazing</i>
MATH Spatial Relationships	Top, Bottom, Middle Use location words to identify position of body parts on body
READ-ALoud #2	 Introduction Introduce <i>Your Fabulous Skin</i> as informational text
STEAM "I" is for Technology "A" is for Arts	Present the Problem What art materials and tools can we use to create artwork?
CLOSING CIRCLE	



3. Ease into TRANSITIONS

Transitioning from one activity to another is typically a difficult time for young children. To keep things running smoothly, give students sufficient notice that a transition is coming and what is expected of them with clear and consistent directions. Have children help during transitions by assigning tasks – this teaches responsibility, teamwork and how to take care of their environment. With clear, reasonable and age-appropriate expectations set, the frequency of challenging behaviors will be reduced and a more positive tone will be set in the classroom.

TIP: Help ease children into transitions

- Explain what is coming next
- Establish a daily schedule and display it if possible
- Give time for children to process sensory input
- Do not expect children to wait
- Use fingerplays, songs and rhymes to entertain children
- Plan carefully before beginning a new activity
- Make sure you have all the materials and have tried out the activity first

Are You Listening? (Tune: “Are You Sleeping?”)

Are you listening?

Are you listening?

Classroom friends, classroom friends?

Come and join our circle.

Come and join our circle.

Sit right down.

Sit right down.



4. Implement BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT Strategies

All children, regardless of race, socioeconomic background or culture, can exhibit challenging behavior at times. These behaviors are likely a response to the environment, a medical condition or to communicate a need. Identifying the reason is key to finding a solution to the problems caused by the behavior and developing strategies to prevent it.

Sometimes, a challenging behavior is not deliberate; it is a reaction to an unmet goal. Young learners may not be able to express their feelings and may not have been taught the appropriate behavior yet.

Common Goals for Children

- Self-control
- Cooperation
- Social skills
- Joy in learning
- Pre-academic skills
- Self-confidence

TIP: Connect with children who exhibit challenging behavior

- Use puppets to captivate and invite interaction
- Sing directions
- Find their interests and build on them
- Help children make friends
- Be a role model for behavior
- Encourage young learners to solve problems themselves



5. Evaluate the PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Children learn best in an environment where they can explore, experience and interact. While teachers do not have control over the architecture of the classroom, they can strategically create a warm and inviting space. Consider setting up the classroom so students can be always seen, ensure there is adequate space for flow of traffic and set up activity centers to maximize engagement. It is better to make changes to the environment incrementally during the school year to keep a sense of familiarity for children.

- Arrange the room with distinct centers to encourage small groups of children to play and learn. These small, focused areas are less distracting. Too much empty space may unintentionally stimulate running and is not ideal for focusing.
- A well-organized classroom will give students cues for choosing appropriate activities in specific areas and an understanding of where materials belong. Keep toys and materials on low shelves in clear containers labeled with pictures and words. Keep clutter to a minimum to prevent over-stimulation by storing unneeded materials in cupboards out of sight. Clutter can lead to difficulty navigating a classroom safely and create a sense of unrest. Children cannot focus or work productively

and may have negative interactions when clutter is overwhelming.

- Keep the room balanced and arranged to encourage more productive and free play.
- Create pathways and boundaries with furniture, shelves or carpets to lead children deliberately from one activity to another. Use rugs to define space and provide comfort. Separate loud activity areas from quiet spaces. Benches offer the possibility of connection and collaboration and can easily become a child's road, boat, table, platform or theatre.
- Make use of color and texture. Bright colors are stimulating, and muted colors are calming. Keep 20 percent of wall space clear to avoid distractions. Children

are unable to focus or ignore all the elements when the walls are over-decorated.

- Create a sense of belonging by providing an area for children to keep their items from home.
- Consider adding light to increase stimulation or decreasing light for a calming effect. Quiet music or sounds of nature are also soothing.
- Enrich areas with rotating materials and toys to keep children interested. Entice them with new objects and organized options to choose from periodically.
- Be sure the space meets the needs for children with special needs – either physical, learning or social-emotional needs.



Pre-K educators offer children a space to play, create and learn by following classroom arrangement guidelines. A place is where significant connections and interactions occur. So, while ensuring the space is safe and effectively designed for optimal learning, it's also important to consider what children do within the space, how they make it their own and what social interactions and relationships are encouraged within that space.

TIP: Ask yourself these questions about your classroom environment

- How do you feel when you look into the room?
- What materials do the students use frequently? Where can these materials be put for easy access?
- Are there materials that are outdated or haven't been used lately? Are they still needed?
- Is there enough storage?
- Could materials be stored in a better way?
- Is there a better place to put student work and folders?
- Are the quiet and active interest centers well-defined and separated from one another?
- Are traffic patterns clear for easy movement?
- Are children playing happily without conflict?





6. Promote SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL Intelligence

Children must learn social-emotional skills in their early years to be successful in school and life. Every child has unique interests, abilities and needs that need to be respected and valued, along with their cultural, ethnic, linguistic, gender identity and ability differences.

Early learners should be taught the connection between feelings and behavior by setting goals to help them control impulses, express their feelings, learn to cooperate and use conflict resolution without resorting to physical aggression. Teaching them words that describe feelings will allow them to express those feelings and work through them.

Frog Street Pre-K curriculum includes a social-emotional program through their exclusive partnership with Conscious Discipline®. It also includes cultural responsiveness strategies to help teachers communicate an anti-bias mindset.

Celebrating culture and background in the classroom allows students to gain a sense of identity and encourages social awareness. They learn to value and respect their differences and develop friendships. Through these daily experiences, children also gain self-esteem as they confirm their abilities and sense of self-worth.

Learning happens in a more flowing and natural way when children feel secure, included, important and respected.

TIP: Promote their sense of identity

- Use props in dramatic play areas that are familiar to children's experiences
- Learn a few words of a child's home language
- Read stories about different cultures
- Invite families to share customs and recipes from their culture with the class

Children need to feel*:

- Respected
- Important
- Accepted
- Included
- Secure

*Source: Dr. Gerald Newmark, "How to Raise Emotionally Healthy Children"





7. Decrease STRESS

Stress in young learners can stem from a variety of sources: family, friends, school or from within. Children can experience developmental stress (normal growing factors), critical stress (common but not experienced by everyone), or catastrophic stress (severe, caused by unexpected events). Parents and teachers should be aware of possible stressors and recognize the symptoms of stress.

Symptoms of Stress:

- Headaches
- Anxiety
- Anger/tension
- Depression/mood swings
- Trouble concentrating
- Acting out
- Lying
- Bullying
- Defying authority
- Clinging
- Fears
- Change in appetite

Stress causes the release of thousands of chemicals in the brain that affect how we perceive, feel and behave – which interrupts the process of learning. Teachers can support children experiencing stress by singing (increases oxygen which increases the “feel good” chemicals in the brain), encouraging breathing activities (increase oxygen), giving space and time alone, offering sensory and physical activities, following routines and schedules, offering choices to help children feel empowered and increase self-esteem, and providing proper rest and good nutrition to help increase coping skills.

TIP: Decrease Stress

- Establish a consistent schedule and a routine for daily events
- Concentrate on building and nurturing your relationship with each child
- Accept, acknowledge and celebrate individual differences
- Include plenty of time for self-directed play
- Offer choices
- Emphasize cooperation and minimize competition
- Warmly greet children as they arrive
- Listen when a child shares their ideas. Reflect back to them what they have said
- Recognize when children master a skill and celebrate it
- Provide activities that are developmentally appropriate and are open-ended and focus on the process rather than the product
- Find something you like about every child and tell them





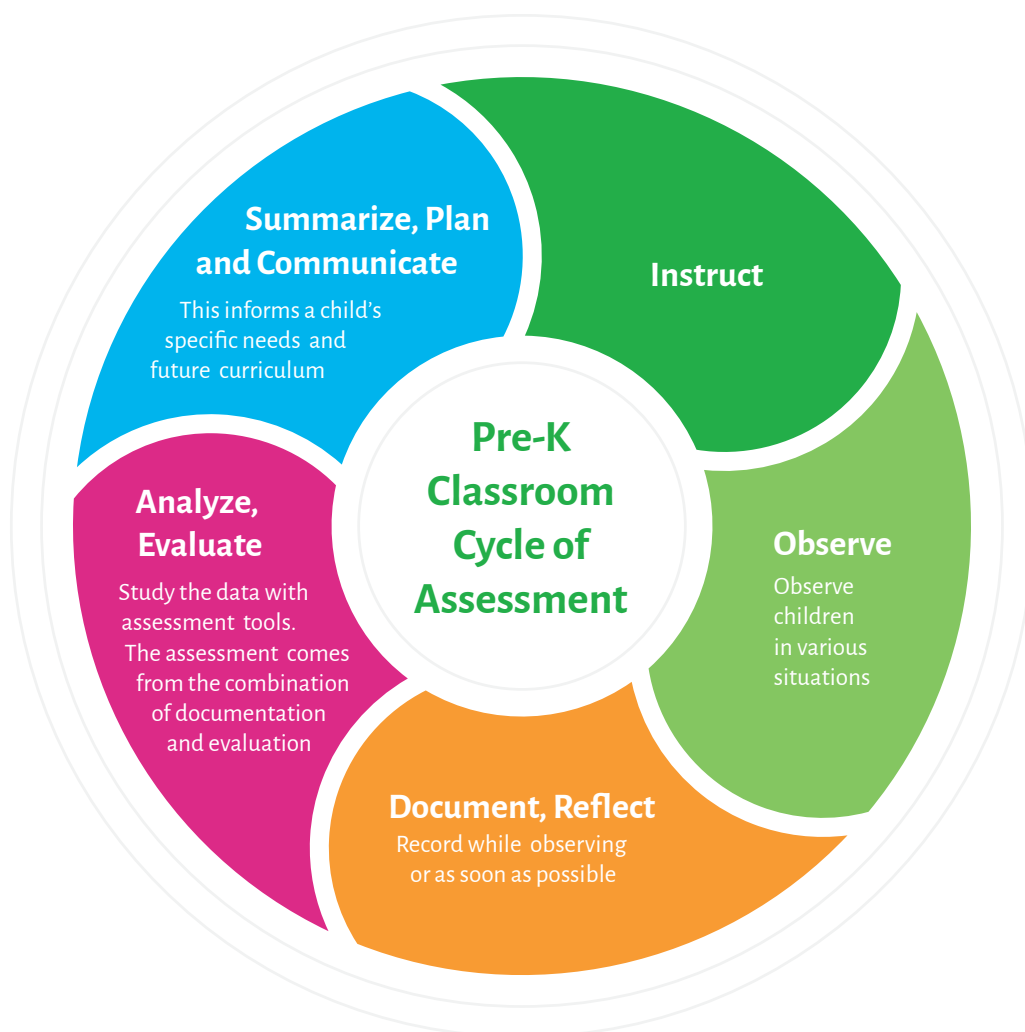
8. Make Time for Authentic ASSESSMENT

Assessment is a critical part of high-quality, early childhood education. Observing children, reviewing data and documenting information allows teachers to plan appropriate curriculum and effective individualized instruction.

Authentic assessments provide a record of growth in all developmental areas (cognitive, physical/motor, language, social-emotional) and help identify children who may need additional support. They are an important tool for creating individualized instruction as well as evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of a program overall.

TIP: Make time every day for assessment

- Build a collection of data across time ... not a single point in time
- Make it a functional part of your curriculum and your routine in the classroom
- Assess children in their natural environment as they perform actual tasks
- Gather data by observing and interacting with children working with everyday objects and materials on everyday performance tasks
- Share the responsibility of gathering data with everyone working with the children





8 CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO OPTIMIZE PRE-K LEARNING

1. Establish clear classroom **RULES**
2. Create consistent **ROUTINES**
3. Ease into **TRANSITIONS**
4. Implement **BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT** strategies
5. Evaluate the **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**
6. Promote **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL** intelligence
7. Decrease **STRESS**
8. Make time for authentic **ASSESSMENT**

Build a successful learning environment by implementing strategies that make pre-K children feel safe, joyful and confident in their academic and social-emotional development. Consider your goals and prioritize them while staying in line with your values to make the process your own – and find support and resources to keep you on track.

Find more teacher and administrator resources in the Frog Street resource center.

Founded by teachers and with 30 years of experience, Frog Street understands the needs of early childhood teachers and administrators. We remain dedicated to providing a comprehensive continuum of research-based curriculum both in English and Spanish. Our curriculum is joyful, well-organized and intentional, empowering educators to meet the diverse needs of our youngest learners.

To speak to your Account Executive and learn more about our products and services, contact us today.

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