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ABSTRACT

Desirable characteristics of beginning learning experiences and materials for migrant children in day care or early childhood programs are indicated, and a model for planning, constructing, and implementing helpful learning experiences is presented. Specific activities illustrating the application of the model are additionally described. Guidelines are provided for developing learning activities for 4-, 5-, and 6-year-old children in several curriculum areas: social and emotional development, reading and language arts, mathematics, science, art and creativity, and physical education. It is emphasized that every activity caregivers provide should give the child something to think about, something to do, something to talk about, and something to take away. Graphic illustrations of several learning activities are appended. (RH)

Caring About Learning in Migrant 4-, 5-, and 6-Year-Olds

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Paper presented at the New York State Migrant Child Care Conference, June, 1982, Utica, New York.

Caring About Learning in Migrant 4-, 5-, and 6-Year-Olds

To give the best care, those who work with 4-, 5-, and 6-year-olds must be concerned with facilitating the social, emotional, and intellectual development of the migrant child. The subtle but unproductive walls between day care and preschool programs have sometimes made this difficult. Every day care and early childhood program should provide interesting and appropriate learning experiences which will enhance children's development and help prepare them for pleasure and success in later elementary school learning.

This article will discuss what "interesting and appropriate learning experiences" might be and will present a simple but useful model to guide the planning, construction, and implementation of such learning experiences. Finally, some specific activities which illustrate the application of the model will be described.

An Overview of 4's, 5's, and 6's.

Children age 4, 5, and 6 are usually curious and love to touch things. They're sometimes noisy and almost always full of language. They move around a lot and learn by doing things for themselves. They often want to share in adult activities. They want unique attention from their teacher. Their attention span is variable, but can be quite long in certain

circumstances, especially when "work" and "play" merge into self-chosen, self-sustaining activity. They need successes and enough freedom and confidence to permit "successful failure" wherein mistakes are welcomed as opportunities for learning and invitations to "try again."

Beginning Learning Activities

Beginning learning activities must match these characteristics of young children. The following model will help assure that they do. Every activity should present the child with something to think about, something to do, something to talk about, and something to "take away." The child should know what she did, what she learned, how she felt about the activity, and so on. Activities should

--involve the full and active participation of each child,

--consist of hands-on, manipulative experiences,

--encourage extensive use of language,

--exist in sufficient number and variety that each children can find an activity he or she wishes to do,

--provide for well-timed interaction with an adult,

--enable the child to work at any of several levels of ability, and

--be meaningful, in the dual sense of relevance to the child's life and interests, and of matching what the child already knows.

The environment should be responsive to the child and well organized.

Materials that encourage learning also need careful consideration. Some criteria include the following. First, much of the materials should be teacher-made, partly because children seem to enjoy these activities more, but also because materials constructed by the teacher tend to reflect specific tasks and may result in higher achievement than commercial materials. Some purchased materials are useful, for instance, those that need to stand up to rough handling or those with numerous small pieces. Regardless of the source, the materials should be chosen not for their attractiveness, but primarily because they serve a purpose--each should be used for a reason. Materials should be open-ended enough so that children can work with them at several levels, making individualization more likely. Good materials help adults provide encouragement and guidance in whatever the children try. In a more practical vein, materials should be constructed to stand up to repeated handling through lamination or contact paper protection, each item needed for completion of the activity should be included with the activity, each item should have a box or compartment for storage, and activities should be aesthetically pleasing.

Besides setting up the classroom with appropriate activities, the teacher performs the essential role of interacting with the child while he is working and when he is

finished. This discussion time is an essential part of the learning process, as the teacher demonstrates that the child's work has value and interest for her. She may ask such questions as: "Can you tell me about your work?" "What did you learn (find out; make; etc.)?" "Would it have been alright to do it this way?" "Would you explain your work to your friend?" This is a time of warm sharing, of intense personalized instruction, of language development, and of observation. The teacher should attempt to guide the child towards an explicit understanding of the task, his own learning and thinking, and his own needs and goals.

Curriculum Areas: Activities

For the purposes of organization, activities discussed in this section will be grouped by curriculum area. Such an organization also helps the teacher to assure an adequate coverage of the various disciplines; however, it should be remembered that for the children, all areas of the curriculum are, and should be, integrated and overlapping. The following suggestions are not meant to be exhaustive; rather they represent an outline that teachers can adapt and fill in according to their own orientation, needs, and creativity.

One other point should be made: the organization into curricular areas suggests a continuity with elementary school experiences which is intentional and, I believe, beneficial to children. However, the curriculum for 4-, 5-, and 6-year-old

children should not be a direct transplant of the primary school curriculum; it should consist of experiences which are interesting to and appropriate for the children, which build a foundation for later school learnings.

Social and emotional realm. The social and emotional development of the child is of primary importance to caregivers and teachers of young migrant children. It is the overarching concern, permeating all the other areas. Indeed, it is just this that the teacher works on when he or she smiles and says, "Hello" to the child for the first time! Self-esteem has a powerful impact on school achievement and it is especially crucial for the young migrant child. It is also important that the child have a good working relationship with the teacher, including identification with her.

To promote the growth of a positive self-image and this process of identification, the caregiver/teacher can be overtly appreciative of the child's culture and language. If she believes the children can learn, expects good performance, distinguishes between classroom mistakes and personal failure, avoids pressure on the children, and practices positive classroom management, she will provide an appropriate atmosphere. It is especially important that the caregiver or teacher direct attention to each individual, and respond fully when the child initiates play or conversation. Self-concept influences achievement in school, but it also may be the case

that achievement raises self-concept! So it is important to maximize each child's successes.

The caregiver/teacher can also facilitate the child's social and emotional growth through personalized and democratic guidance. She encourages verbal give and take, shares the reasons of policies and decisions, and asks for the child's opinions. The caregiver is a careful listener, receiving the child's message and rephrasing it so the child knows she was understood. The child is encouraged to work out her own problems: the caregiver asks the child what she thinks and feels; encourages her to generate solutions; acts as a model, catalyst, or guide in her attempts at problem-solving; and supports the use of interpersonal problem-soving skills. Following these guidelines, the caregiver/teacher enhances the child's feelings of self-confidence, of control over that which affects her, of self-esteem, and of concern for others.

Reading and the language arts. Reading experiences and reading readiness experiences should not be seen as separate; they develop together (actually, one should probably say reading readinesses, as each child will vary on his or her needs and abilities on these also). We can take a lesson from the child's success in learning to talk. Speech is acquired slowly and gradually. We should similarly ease children into reading, ensuring that each has some success, especially at first. As in talking, the child's interests are the basis for

the content; the purpose of the act is personal communication; and expressive and receptive modes are learned together. The curriculum should be a language arts curriculum, focusing on each of the interrelated strands--speaking, listening, writing, and reading--whenever that is appropriate. This allows each child to take a personal path to reading and emphasizes the need for language enrichment throughout the year. It capitalizes on the young child's egocentrism; for example, their favorite words--their names--can provide experiences in the concepts of "word" and "word space," in letter naming, in capitalization, in printing, in letter sounds, and, of course, in reading. It provides many meaningful opportunities to learn about language and reading in ways that are interesting and free from pressure.

These varied and inviting opportunities are presented throughout the year and throughout the curriculum.

1. The Whole Word Approach

--names on cards for attendance

--names of the days of the week

--play with word cards: "Can you make Randy's name go visit Bob's?"

--labels and signs ("Girls"; "STOP"; etc.)

--food packages (play supermarket)

--cooking (e.g., a recipe: "Pudding. Mix. Heat. Chill. Eat.)

--signs on trucks, etc.

Note that many of these examples provide a real-world referent which bridges school/out-of-school life.

2. The Writing Approach

--art work: names and captions

--grocery lists for a play store; menus for a play restaurant

--signs for block buildings

3. The Phonics Approach

--the "sound of the day"

--puppets: "Does Mr. Mixup like Milk? Lettuce?"

--simple phoneme substitution

day-> May pay
hay lay
Ray play
etc.

4. Books

--phonics: Mike Mulligan and Mary Ann

--titles (especially for service words)

--finding words within the book

--book/records

--Bill Martin books; e.g., Brown Bear

--books without words

--manipulative books

All promote interest in reading and language development.

5. Art

--titles and labels (e.g., dinosaur names on clay sculptures)

--titles on covers of homemade books

6. Music

--hold up letters for the song "Bingo"

--Old MacDonald: hold up first a labeled picture, then just the label to specify which verse is to be sung

7. Language Arts Activities (see Appendix for illustrations of the following activities)

A. Discrimination

--color and shape lotto

--inch cube design cards

--peg board design cards

--mazes

--language master tactile cards

B. Writing

--geoboard letters

--individual chalkboards

--dictated sentences/word cards on paintings

--sand trays

--acetate-covered alphabet board

C. Letter Naming

--letter boxes

--electric letter matching

--magnetic abc board

--abc beanbag throw

--abc plates

--jumping game

D. Phonics

--lift-a-flap cards

--finish-the-word game

--the arrow game

As mentioned, language development is the primary concern in every activity. However, specific techniques are also helpful:

--Ask questions! Can you tell me about your work? What did you learn? Why did you do it that way? How else could you have done it? How do you feel about it? etc.

--Correcting a child's grammar is not effective, and may be detrimental. Instead, give the child natural feedback. Child: Her done it. Adult: She did it, didn't she!

--Sometime, expanding on a child's utterances is appropriate. Child: That big. Adult: That building is taller; but this one is wider.

--For the migrant child, it is especially important to teach language through concrete representations and action.

Mathematics. Mathematical experiences, properly planned, facilitate the development of logical thinking and problem-solving skills. It is especially beneficial to promote

the children's explicit awareness of mathematical processes; to help them "think about thinking about it." However, it should be remembered that each child must construct mathematical meanings for herself; therefore, adequate time should be allowed for development/learning and each child should be actively involved. The following is an outline of some illustrative activities:

1. Patterning--the heart of mathematics. The search for patterns and the development of patterns aids in the basic understanding of number, counting, and sequencing. It lays the foundation for later work with functions and number theory (see Appendix).

2. Geometry. The everyday world of adults and children is a maze of geometry. From the first time a child handles objects in the crib, he is interested in shape, size, and movements. If one agrees with Piaget that children must transform objects to understand space, shape, and geometry, then working with "the shapes of things to come" is the proper approach to this area (see Appendix).

3. Graphing. Even very young children can learn about and learn from graphs if they help to create them. The visual or pictoral characteristic of graphs makes this activity a "natural" for preschool mathematics. Construct real graphs (What snack did you choose?--lay on napkins in columns; Which paste jars need filling?--line up); picture graphs (Are you a

boy or a girl?--each child pastes picture of appropriate sex child in columns); and symbolic graphs (Do you like spinach?--list names under yes/no heading). Ask questions about each graph: Which has the most? the least? How many more ... than ... are there? etc.

4. Probability. "Really? For young children? I don't understand it that well!" Probability, in its advanced form, may appear forbidding, but every day we are affected by some application of it. For example, how you will dress might depend on the probability that it will rain. If thought of in terms of "what are the chances that..." then many activites can be enriching and fun. For example, one by one have children draw blocks out of a brown paper bag in which you secretly placed 20 red blocks and 10 blue blocks. They should replace the block each time. Ask them to play a game, trying to guess each time what the color will be. Which color did they guess more often? Why? Which color do they think there is more of in the bag? Or, try this activity that combines probability and graphing. Get several dice. Have small groups of children roll one and graph the results on a large grid (see Appendix).

5. Counting. Probably the most important skill for young children to learn to use is that of meaningful counting. How can we assure that it is meaningful for children?

--count for a purpose: have children count the number of pencils their group needs; the materials themselves will

correct them!

--count to solve quantitative problems that arise in the classroom; i.e., are there enough chairs for everyone who wants to draw?

--help children to be explicitly aware of the facets of the counting process: saying the number names in correct order, touching one and only one object as each name in spoken; saying the last number name uttered to answer the question, "how many?" etc.

--encourage the use of counting strategies; i.e., to add two sets, count on from one of them, rather than counting every object again.

--let children figure out for themselves how to model and solve simple word problems.

--be sure a variety of problems are presented; e.g., for beginning subtraction, use take away, comparison ("how many more...?"), combine ("six chairs, four are red and the rest are blue...how many are blue?"), and equalize (Bill has five and Michelle has seven...how many more does Bill need to have the same number as Michelle?") problems.

--discuss the "parts" and the "wholes" in situations.

Science. Science is "finding out about things." In his constant effort to understand the world around him, the child must construct concepts (categories) and put things in order. Classification and seriation (ordering) are, then,

logical abilities that are of basic importance to the development of both mathematics and science. Children should have the opportunity to classify toys, junk, logic blocks and the like in as many ways as they can think of; however, the most important classification is meaningful classification. For example, putting all the things that float in one pile and all the things that sink in another. Likewise for seriation: experiences putting sticks in order by length, objects in order by weight and so forth is helpful; but ordering to make sense of the world is most beneficial. Another important skill in mathematics and science is measurement.

1. Measuring activities can serve well to integrate mathematics, science, and the language arts. For instance, a child can choose two labeled objects, estimate which weighs more, place them in a balance, record her results, and "read" this record to others. Other types of quantities invite similar activites (see Appendix).

2. A water table can provide experiences in floating and sinking, constructing things that will float (i.e., can you make plasticine float? can you make paper float? sink?). A water board allows for an endless variety of experiments with water flow (see Appendix).

3. Cooking helps children see transformations (e.g., making jello with ice cubes, or making butter), as it develops the ability to follow directions. To integrate many curriculum

areas, make edible playdough, roll out letters, and eat your favorite letters! Recipe: One measure (for individual servings, a teaspoon) of each of peanut butter, powdered sugar, powdered milk, and corn syrup. Mix well, and roll out on model letters covered by wax paper.

4. A wide variety of experiences with magnets help children to expand their definition beyond the one offered by a 5-year-old: "Magnets are a bar with an 'N' on one end." Children can sort objects into categories (attracted by the magnet or not) or experiment with pushing and pulling, magnetic lines of force (notice these can also be seen in three dimensions: suspend iron fillings in some corn syrup left over from the above cooking activity and place a bar magnet encased in a thin plastic tube into the mixture), etc. (see Appendix).

5. Provide children with batteries, bulbs, a few pieces of wire, and nothing else. Challenge them to light the bulb in as many different arrangements of materials as they can find.

6. If your children are entranced by magic, show them the Magic Falling Ball and let them discover the "trick" (see Appendix).

7. Stress that science is finding out many things through all the senses. Play with mystery "feely" boxes, smelling bottles, and "shaking bottles" (sound).

8. Work with shadows. Trace around the children's shadows outside, and have them try to "fit into" their own and others'

shadows. Using an overhead projector, have the children experiment with making different shadows with several objects. Play a guessing game with these shadows.

9. Experiment with color mixing in different media: colored water (introduce this with Leo Lionni's book, Little Blue and Little Yellow), paint, home-made playdough in two colors, water color markers, and light. With the last, some children may enjoy composing sentences with word cards to show what they found. Mount red, yellow and blue cellophane in simple cardboard frames. Children place two together, discover what color is produced, and manipulate word cards to write, for example, "blue and yellow make green" (note that the color words should be written with a marker of that color).

10. Raise animals in the room. Observe them, discuss them, and write about them. But don't stop there! Plan an experiment with the children to test their food preferences. If they have babies, measure and graph their growth. Keeping different kinds of animals expands learning immensely; try flies, worms, ants, etc.

11. Play with air. Blow up balloons; release them; attach them to a toilet-paper roll and release them again; blow them up while they are inside a container; etc. Blow bubbles with straws into glasses of water. Air cannot been seen, but it can be felt: blow up plastic baggies and feel the air in them. Air can move things: use a folded paper fan to move light

objects.

12. Experiment with pushing, pulling, rolling (down an incline), throwing, and blowing (through a straw) objects.

13. Provide experiences with: bones and X-rays; musical instruments; kaleidoscopes; mirrors (single and hinged) prisms; magnifying glasses; pulleys; locks and keys; old clocks or record players, egg timers; shells; rocks; tuning forks; thermometers; etc., etc.

14. Dinosaurs are always a fascinating topic for young children. Fossils, books, and pictures can be provided; but the subject is also a "natural" for art, the next area to be considered.

Art and creativity. Of all the powers of people, perhaps creativity is the most unique. It is to the credit of teachers/caregivers of young children that they provide more creative experiences than teachers of any other age level. Creativity enhances the quality of life. It is required by our fast-changing world. It has been shown to aid the development of reading, mathematics, and the like. Lastly, its growth is aided by good teaching.

1. Simple materials for drawing, painting, and sculpting should be freely available every day. Just as important, interested, responsive adults should be present to encourage extension of ideas, to listen, and to value the creative process.

2. Provide opportunities for the children to paint in as many different ways as possible: with deodorant cans filled with tempura paint; with brushes with unusually-shaped handles; on plexiglass; with water on a shed or sidewalk; with their fingers; with sponges; etc.

3. Encourage the flexible use of materials. Blocks can be used to make huge tracks, one's name, or a cage for the class pet.

4. Whip Ivory Flakes into a thick bubble mixture for sculpting.

5. Children love to paint dinosaurs, but they often are more able to express the sheer massiveness of the creatures through sculptures of clay or plasticine. These can then be labeled by the children, promoting pride in worksmanship and reading/writing skills at the same time.

6. Sing and dance, in planned and spontaneous activites, every day. Promote rhythmic expression in body movement, the spoken word, and the playing of instruments.

7. Creativity should be encouraged in every area of the curriculum. Ask open-ended questions: What if (the opposite) had happened? Why do you think that? Tell me about that. Teach creative thinking--brainstorm solutions, ask for metaphors (How is the wind like an animal?), challenge children to use materials in new ways, ask for multiple endings to stories, etc.

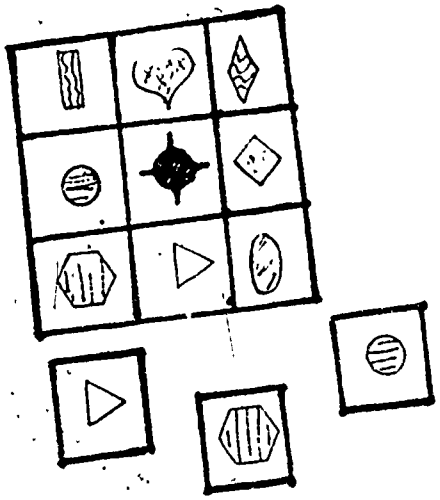
Physical education might include work with tire swings, large body balances, large boxes (for caves, tunnels, and cooperative vehicles in which two children walk), balance beams, climbers, gunny sacks stuffed with newspaper, tractor tires filled with sand or stacked with a ladder between them, balls of all sizes, running, hopping, skipping, jumping, etc. Remember that this play offers a perfect opportunity to develop concepts and vocabulary: up, down, backwards, balance, gallop, under, over, inside, outside, around, between, and so on.

Summary

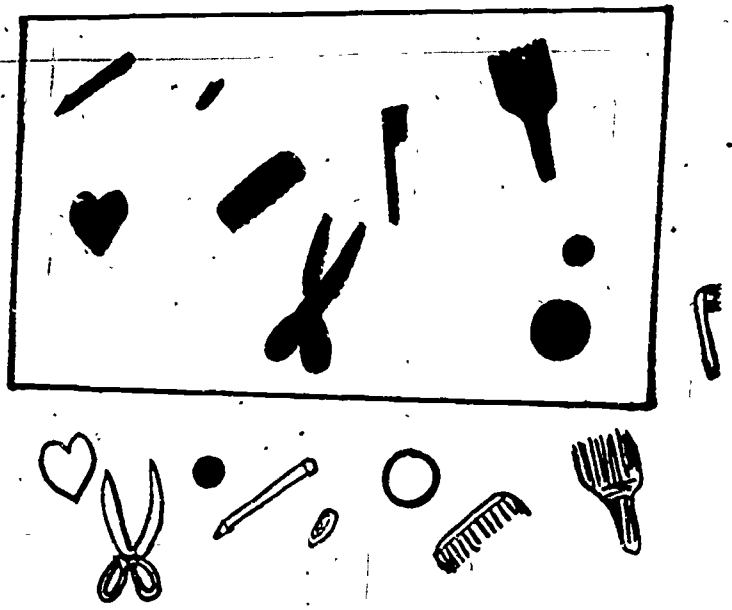
Finally, the need for integration and balance cannot be emphasized too much. All areas are important. Take, for example, the classic apple for the teacher. Well, apples can be discussed, labeled, investigated on a field trip, and sorted; their number estimated and counted; the number of seeds estimated, counted and graphed; the pattern of seeds observed; they can be read about, written about, described, smelled, tasted, made into applesauce, tasted again; they can be the subject of art work, stories, finger plays, and crafts. But there is an even more important integration. Self-esteem requires abilities and skills to sustain it; likewise, abilities are developed in concert with self-esteem, trust in one's ability to learn, and interest in the subject. In considering the curriculum for the young migrant child, a balance can be achieved: of free play and directed activites,

of freedom and direction in management, of sequenced series of lessons and approaches emphasizing intuition and explorations. To judge ourselves in this respect, it might be appropriate to keep the child in focus. For every activity we provide should give the child something to think about, something to do, something to talk about, and something to take away.

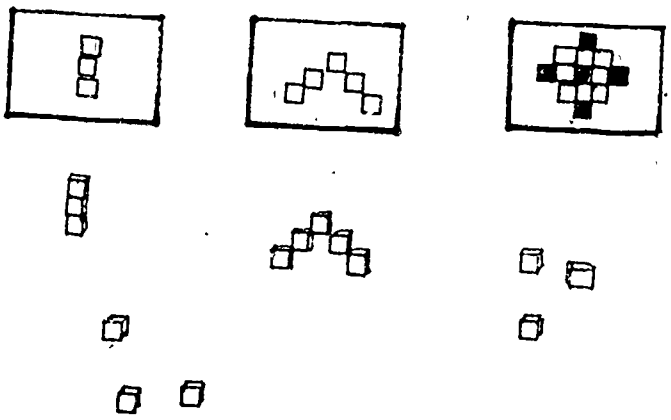
Discrimination



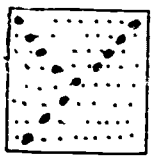
Color and Shape Lotto

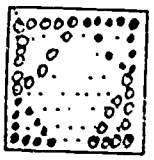


The Shadow Game

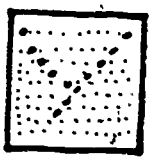


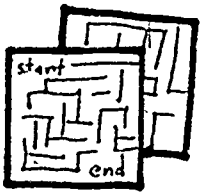
Inch Cube Design Cards



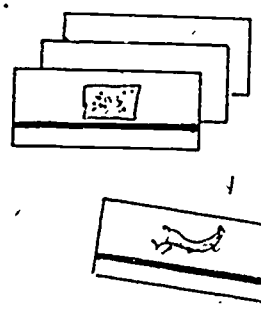


Peg Board Design Cards



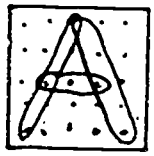


Mazes

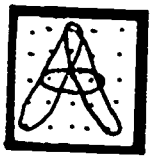


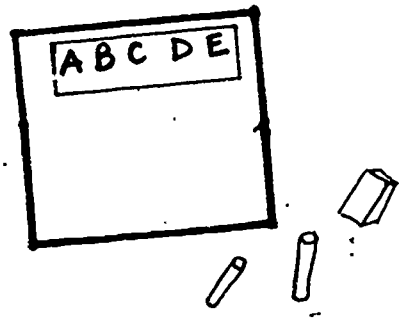
Language Master Tactile Cards

Writing

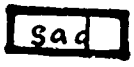


Geoboard Letters

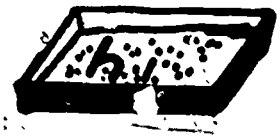




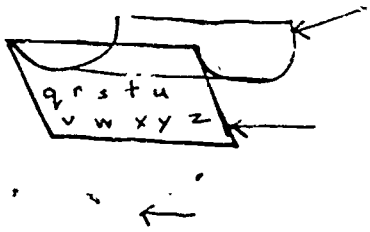
Individual Chalkboards



Dictated Sentences/ Word Cards on Paintings

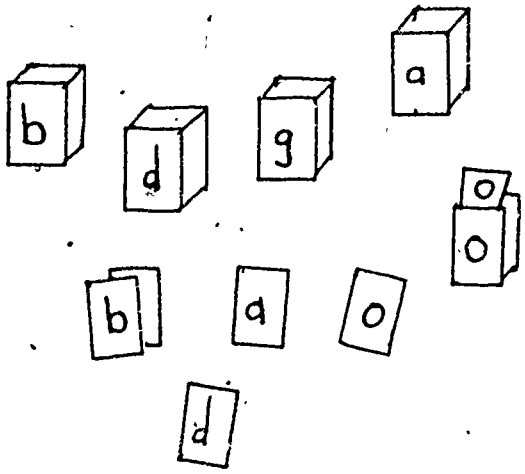


Sand Trays

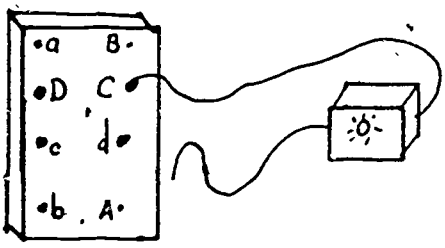


Acetate Covered
Alphabet Board

Letter Naming

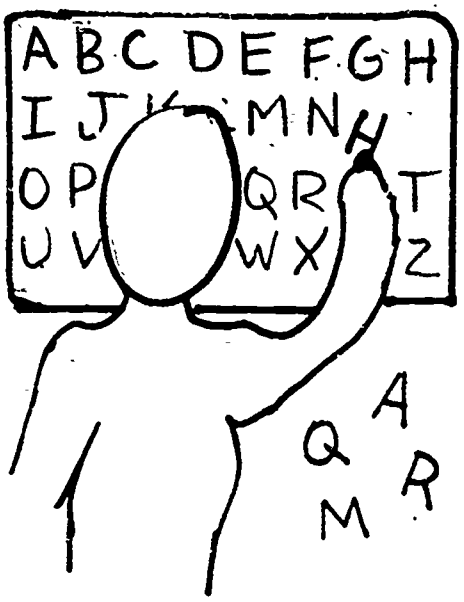


Letter Boxes

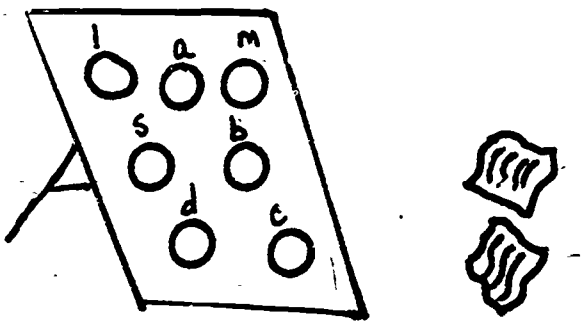


Electric Letter
Matching

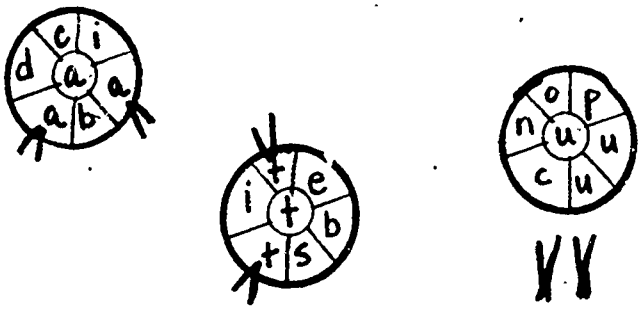
Letters - cont.



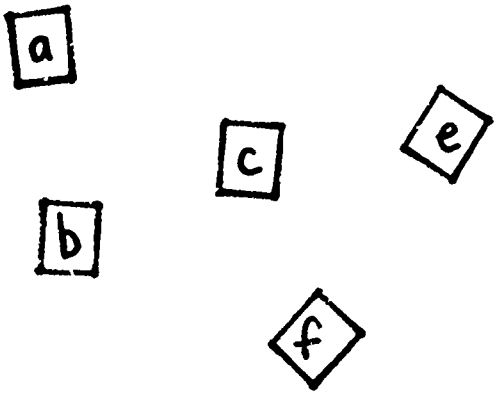
Magnetic ABC Board



ABC Beanbag Throw

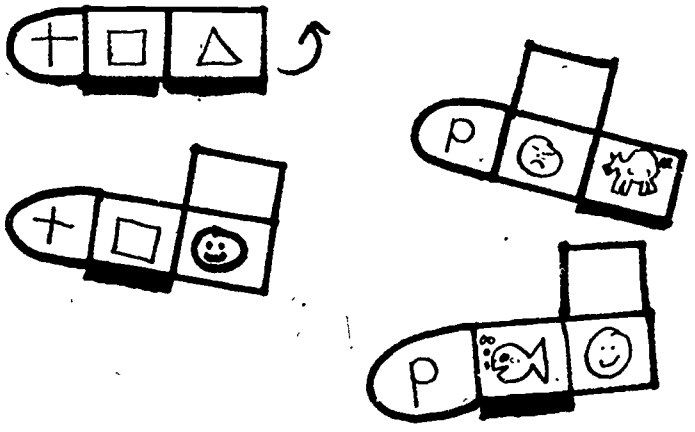


ABC Plates



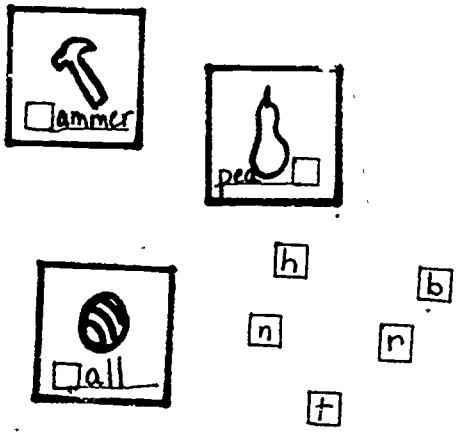
Jumping Game

Phonics



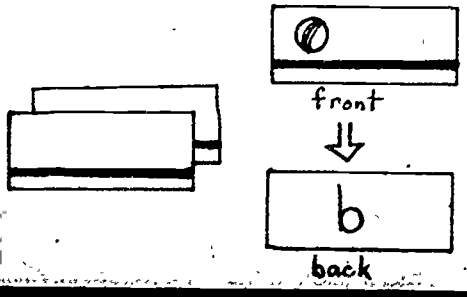
Lift-a-flap

Letter Sounds Cards



Finish the Word Game

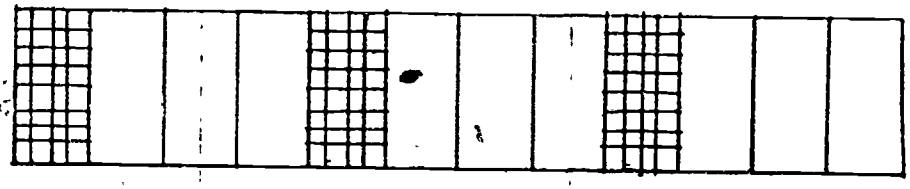
The Arrow Game



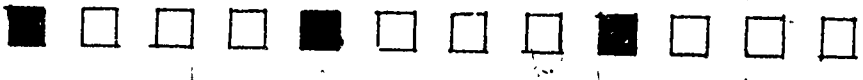
Patterns Around Us

a

lights in our cafeteria ceiling



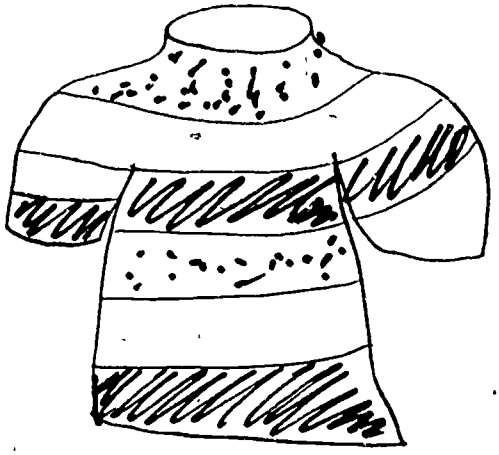
unifix cubes →



A B B B A B B B A B B B

1 3 1 3 1 3

my shirt



☒ C

☐ B

■ A

☒ C

☐ B

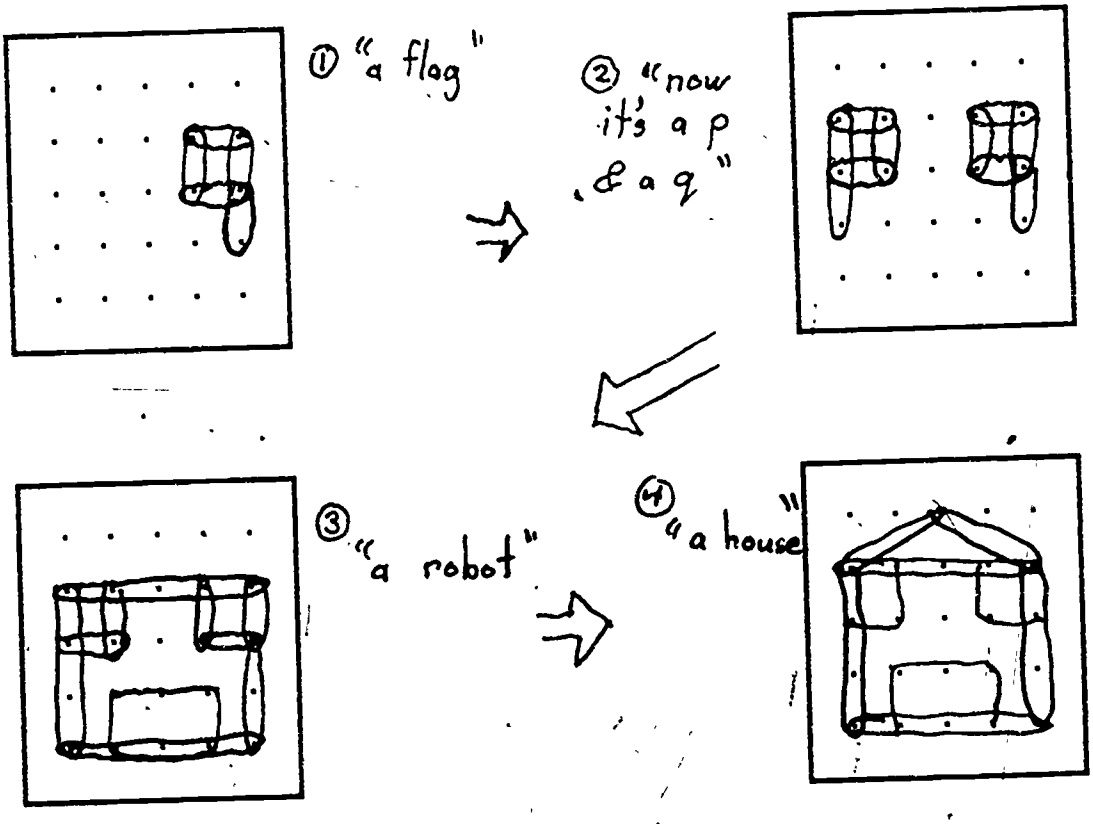
■ A

b

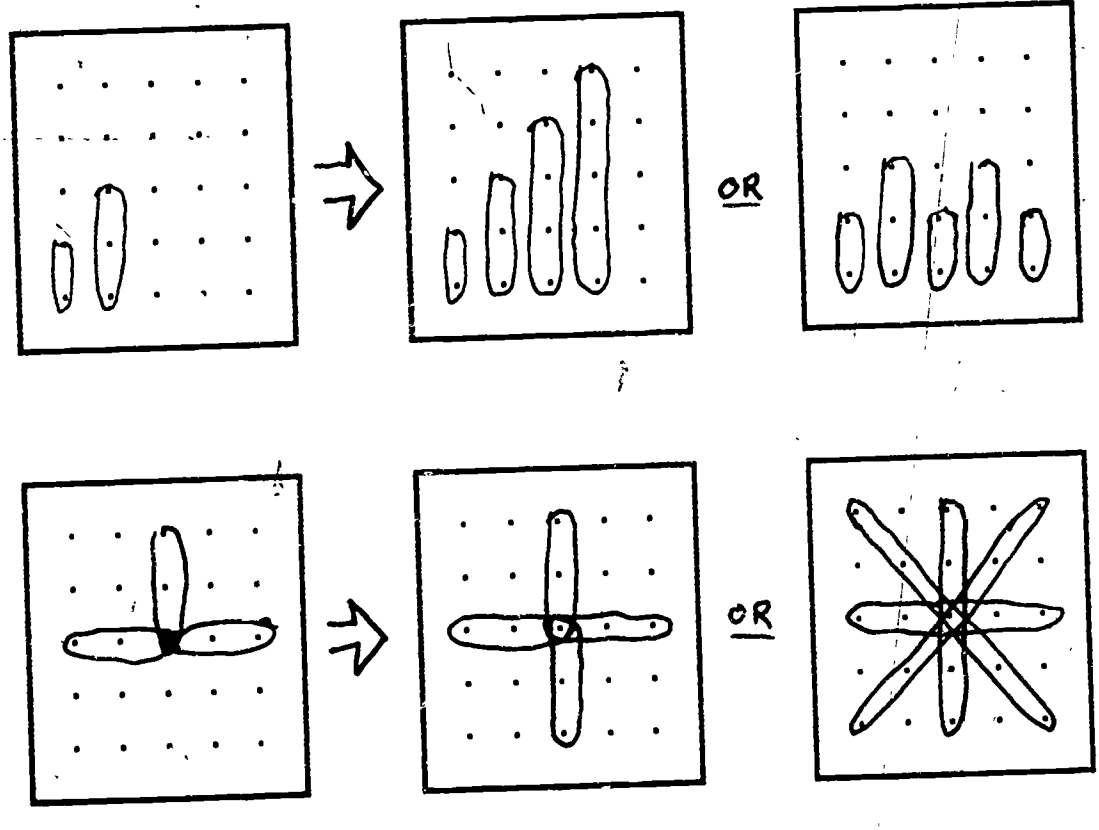
swimming pool markers

Geoboards

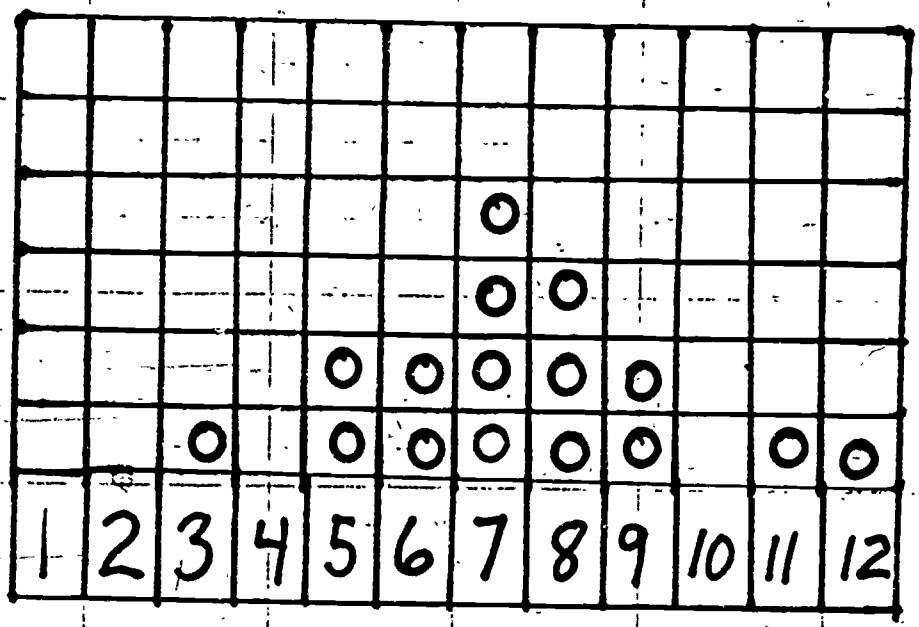
Free Explorations

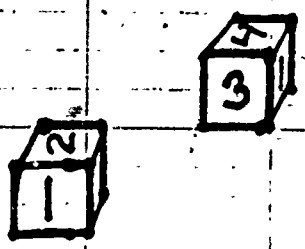


Finish the Pattern

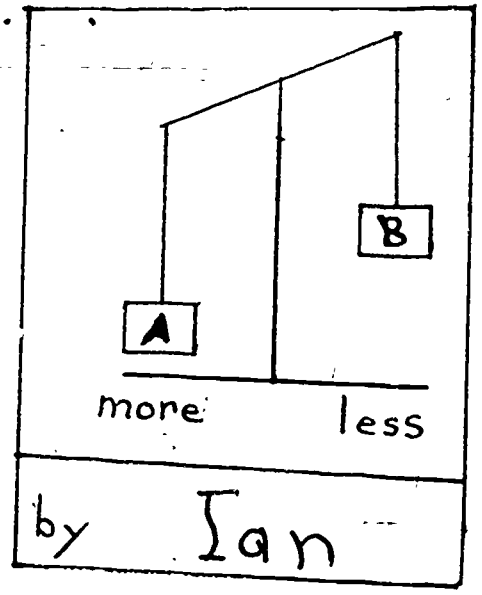


the dice graph



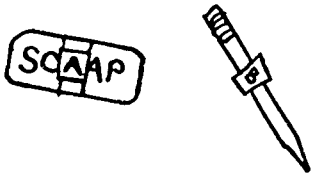


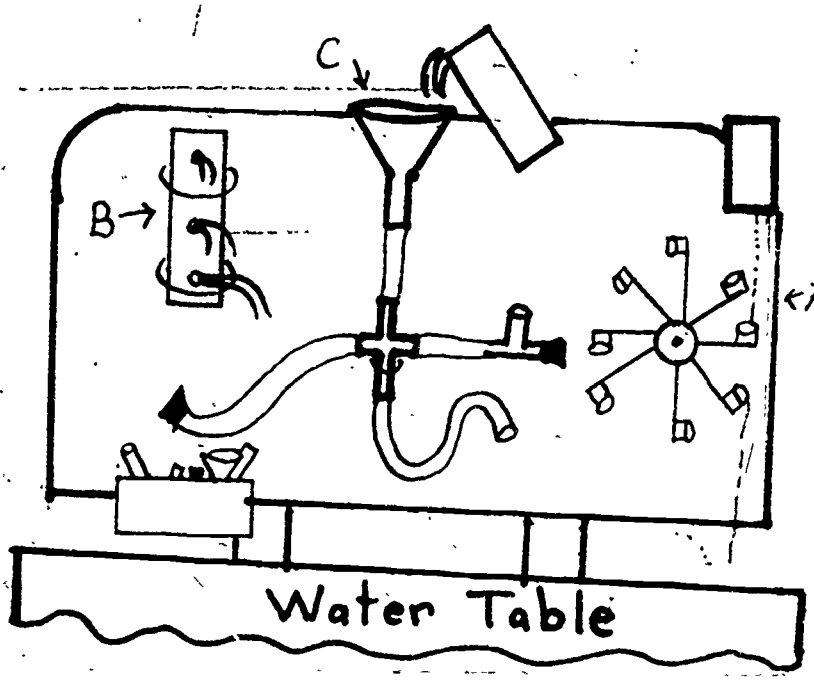
Science



by Ian

Measuring: The balance





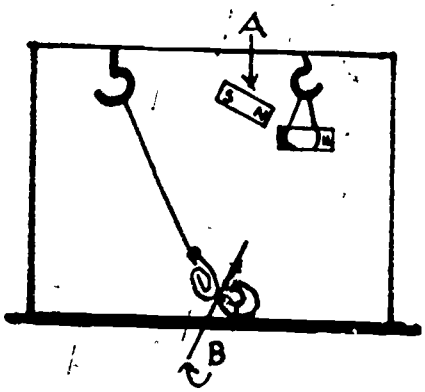
The Water Board

A. water wheel--how? why?

B. where does the water come out farthest?

C. "hook up" the tubes any way you can... where will the water go?

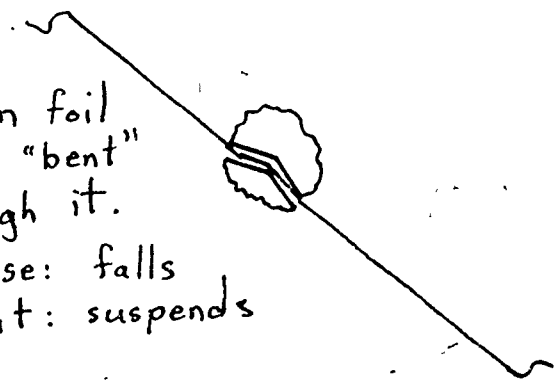
Magnets



A. Push/pull

B. What material, inserted, makes the paper slip fall?

The "Magic" Falling Ball



Aluminum foil ball with "bent" hole through it.

string loose: falls

string taut: suspends