

# Unit 3 – Social–Emotional Development

## Key Topic 2: Getting to Know Environments and Materials That Support Social-Emotional Development

### Focus Statement

Students explore essential concepts and fourteen characteristics of environments and materials that support social-emotional development and learning.

### Before You Start

The text in the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1 (PCF, V1)* relating to environmental arrangements and materials that support social-emotional learning is found on pages 42-44. Depending on your coursework and students, this can be assigned for reading prior to class or can be read in class. If it is read in class it can be done silently or, depending on your students, you can have students take turns reading sections of the text aloud.

Active learning for this key topic is designed so that the topic can be explored in a short period of time, or it can be expanded so that students have opportunities for further exploration through observation and planning. Again, the purpose is to provide students with opportunities to become familiar with the content of the domain.

Eventually, students will use this domain in the framework as part of an integrated approach to curriculum planning, but its usefulness in that process will be greatly enhanced when students know what is in this domain.

Most of the active learning in this key topic can be organized in several ways: pairs, small groups of three or four, and whole group discussion. For some of the active learning exercises, it might be best to go through one together so that students gain a better understanding of what is asked of them.

### Information Delivery



Slide 2

The “Getting it started” exercise that follows can be used to uncover the essential concepts in the introductory section of environments and materials:

- Environments provide expectations for behavior.
- Environments reflect a program’s philosophy.
- High-quality environments provide opportunities for social-

emotional exploration and growth.

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## Active Learning

### Getting it started

After students have read the text on pages 42-43 of the PCF, V1 that introduces the topic, ask them to find a sentence or phrase that stands out to them as especially important to remember.

Remind them that many are important, but ask them to find one that they particularly connect with and can remember.

One way to stimulate discussion on these key sentences or phrases is to ask each student to do this individually (allow about three minutes for this) and then discuss his or her choice with one or two others. Finally, as a whole group, find three or four sentences or phrases that will be important to remember as students plan environments and materials.

### Keeping it going

Fourteen characteristics of environments and materials that support social-emotional learning and development are listed in bold-faced type on pages 43-44 of the PCF, V1. Assign at least two of these to each pair of students or groups of three or four, depending on your class size.

Ask students to read through the characteristics they have been assigned and provide some specifics or concrete examples that they have seen or read about. Also suggest that they note any vocabulary that is not familiar.

For example, for the first characteristic listed, “Challenging and developmentally appropriate materials,” ask the students to think of some specific examples such as certain art supplies and problem-solving materials.

Depending on their level of experience and education in early care and education, students might further describe how these could be presented to children—for example, an art table with different open-ended materials each day. It is important not to spend too much effort here; the purpose is to expand students’ awareness but not to be definitive. Hopefully, this stimulates thinking and will enable students to see how the social-emotional development domain in the framework can be used as a resource when they return to it in the future.

**Taking it further**

Following or during the “Keeping it going” exercise, ask students to brainstorm what social-emotional learning each characteristic might support. When the group has reviewed the organization of the social-emotional development domain (Key Topic 1 in this domain) and are somewhat familiar with its strands and substrands, they can try to find which of the 14 characteristics might support various substrands. This can be done as a whole group or in the original pairs or small groups with their assigned characteristics. The summary of strands and substrands on page 44 of the PCF, V1 will be helpful here. A sample handout is provided following this key topic.

Two cautions are important. First, students are not likely, at this point, to have deep knowledge of the content of the substrands. Suggest that, in this task, they are to confer with their partner or others in their group and come up with some general thoughts on how different environmental arrangements and materials support the substrands. The purpose of doing this is to become familiar enough with the 14 environments and materials listed and where they might be useful in supporting social-emotional development that students can go back to them as a resource for their work in the future. Second, it will be important here to point out that many of the characteristics of environments and materials that support social-emotional learning can be relevant to many of the substrands. In other words, there will not be one environmental arrangement or set of materials that will support one substrand only, but rather many things can be intentionally done to support development and learning in more than one substrand.

This exercise will yield varying levels of breadth and depth, depending on the educational and experiential levels of your students. It is a chance to strengthen students’ understanding of the link between intentionally planning environmental arrangements and social-emotional development. For students with more experience or education in the field, it is an opportunity to see that the PCF, V1 provides support for concepts that are important and foundational to the field.

**Putting it together**

Following this exploration of environments and materials or instead of it, students can be introduced to these characteristics through video or on-site observation.



Slides 3-4

Some programs use video as a means of documentation. If any of your students have this available, it could be used for the following exercise. Take great care here to ensure that all applicable permissions and video releases are in place.

If students have access to early care and education programs and can obtain permission to observe through several segments of the schedule, ask them to do an observation of an early care and education classroom. This can be done individually or in pairs.

For either type of observation, ask students to prepare the following as a written assignment or for class discussion or both. At this point, you might choose to expand the number of characteristics assigned to each pair or team of students. Duplication of characteristics across students is sometimes a good way to facilitate deeper discussion, as different students will find different examples in different environments.

Using their assigned characteristics, ask students to consider the following questions and provide written descriptions of their responses:

1. What examples did you see of your assigned characteristic(s)?
2. How did these examples suggest that teachers had prepared the environments and materials intentionally and with careful planning?
3. Was there evidence of attention paid to the needs of children with diverse home languages, families, or traditions?
4. Did you see examples where environments and materials supported
  - development of the child's self-awareness or self-confidence,
  - the child's competence in interactions with adults or peers and/or the child's relationships with adults and peers?

If the students' responses are then shared with the whole



group, they can provide broader understanding of what these characteristics look like when intentionally put into practice.

### **Another approach**

Assign students in pairs or small teams to develop a floor plan that would provide support for social-emotional development. For students with more experience, this could include some indication of materials that would also support social-emotional development. For example, students might set up an area for individual children and some tables for work in small gatherings of children. They might be able to indicate what materials would be used at the tables that would encourage cooperation and sharing.

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### **Reflection**



Slide 5

The following questions can be used to support reflection on this key topic. These can be done as a journaling exercise or as a class discussion.

- What was new information in this key topic?
- How did this new information surprise you?
- What was familiar?
- How can you use this information in your work now or in the future?

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### **Deeper Understanding**

Ask students to explore a commercially available curriculum or curriculum that has been developed for a setting they are working in. As a written assignment, ask them to take the three main concepts in the introductory text and describe how they are addressed in those curricula. The three concepts are listed here for reference:

- Environments provide expectations for behavior.
- Environments reflect a program's philosophy.
- High-quality environments provide opportunities for social-emotional exploration and growth.

**Which of the Social-Emotional Development Strands and/or Substrands Would Be Supported  
By Each of the Suggested Environments and Materials?**

Suggested environments and materials	SELF			SOCIAL INTERACTION				RELATIONSHIPS				
	Self-Awareness	Self-Regulation	Social and Emotional Understanding	Empathy and Caring	Initiative in Learning	Interactions with Familiar Adults	Interactions with Peers	Group Participation	Cooperation and Responsibility	Attachments to Parents	Close Relationships with Teachers and Caregivers	Friendships
Challenging and developmentally appropriate materials												
Ample supply of materials												
Organized learning areas												
Appropriately sized small group activities												
A variety of small group activities												
Aesthetically appealing												
Public and private spaces												
Furnishing and materials accessible to children												
Display of children's art work												
Space for children's belongings												
Reflection of diversity												
Space for arrival and departure												
Supportive of children's active engagement												
Outdoor area supportive of social-emotional development												

**Social-Emotional Development:**  
**Handout 1 – Getting to Know Environments and Materials That Support Social-Emotional Development**