



## Unit 2 – History–Social Science: Key Topic 2: Getting to Know Environments and Materials that Support History–Social Science



History–Social Science Domain:  
Key Topic 2 – Getting to Know Environments and Materials  
that Support History–Social Science

### Focus Statement

Students review the 12 characteristics of environments and materials that support children’s learning in the history–social science domain and explore how each characteristic relates to the different substrands.

### Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP) Student Learning Outcomes

The Curriculum Alignment Project’s (CAP) lower division eight courses and student learning outcomes are mapped onto each instructional guide learning experience. See Appendix A for the specific student learning outcomes, objectives, and examples of course content and topics for the courses listed below.

- Child Growth and Development
- Introduction to Curriculum
- Principles and Practices of Teaching Young Children
- Observation and Assessment
- Practicum-Field Experience

### Instructional Methodologies

- Class discussion
- Class presentation
- Development of a resource tool
- Interview
- Observations
- Pairs or small groups
- Panel/guest speaker
- Reflective discussion
- Short paper or report



## California Early Childhood Educator Competency Areas to Consider

The Faculty Initiative Project will undertake a comprehensive process in the future to map the content of the instructional guides to the California Department of Education, Early Education and Support Division's *California Early Childhood Educator Competencies*. The "Competency Areas to Consider" below are listed in this instructional guide as a preliminary exploration of how particular competency areas might be addressed through these learning experiences.

- Child Development and Learning
- Culture, Diversity, and Equity
- Observation, Screening, Assessment, and Documentation
- Learning Environments and Curriculum
- Professionalism



## Unit 2 – History–Social Science: Key Topic 2: Getting to Know Environments and Materials that Support History–Social Science

### Before You Start

This key topic provides an opportunity for students to link the 12 characteristics of the environment and materials with the substrands in the history–social science domain. Students review the sections on curriculum planning and environments and materials in the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3* as preparation for this learning experience.

In the “Deeper Understanding” segment, students can learn directly from early care and education professionals by either (1) observing a classroom and interviewing the teaching staff or (2) hearing from a speaker or panel and viewing photographs of a classroom. Depending on students’ familiarity with preschool programs in their community, instructors may wish to prepare a list of programs that students can visit. It is also important to remind students to check with the program director about policies and procedures for observation visits. If faculty choose to have a speaker or panel, it would be helpful to provide the speaker(s) with a copy of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3* and point out the section on Environments and Materials (pp. 46–48).

If students visit classrooms, they are asked to take photographs of examples of the 12 characteristics. If some students do not have access to a camera or other photographic capability such as a cell phone or tablet (i.e., tablet computer), students may do their observations in pairs or groups of three. Instructors may choose to have students do these classroom visits in small groups regardless of photographic capability to encourage more discussion.

Handout 1, which is included with this key topic, is a table or matrix that students can use to record how each of the 12 materials and environments characteristics helps to support children’s learning in one or more of the substrands. An electronic version of this handout will be available when this instructional guide is online at <http://facultyinitiative.wested.org/>.

### Information Delivery

This key topic focuses on the 12 characteristics of environments and materials that can support children’s learning in history and the social sciences. Each characteristic includes an explanation and/or



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examples that can help students better understand why the environment and materials are a critical part of the preschool learning environment. The 12 characteristics are found on pages 46–48 of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3*.

The section on curriculum planning in the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3* is also referred to in the “Getting it started” segment:

- “Curriculum Planning” (pp. 15–29)
- “The environment as curriculum: Interest areas to support children’s play and child-initiated learning” (pp. 21–22)

## Active Learning

### Getting it started

Begin this key topic by asking students to read and discuss the “Curriculum Planning” section of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3* on pages 15–29. Ask them to note key points from the section titled “The environment as curriculum: Interest areas to support children’s play and child-initiated learning” (pp. 21–22) and the section titled “Daily routines as curriculum” (pp. 22–24).

### Keeping it going

Next ask students to read the “Environments and Materials” section in the history–social science chapter of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3* (pp. 46–48). If this is the first time students are working with one of the three volumes of the curriculum framework, explain that there is an “Environments and Materials” section for each of the nine domains.

Make sure that students recognize how some of the examples for a characteristic reflect one or more substrands. For example, under “Extended projects that are centered on a topic in history or social science and emerge from children’s interests or inquiries” (p. 47), the example about group decision making supports the Skills for Democratic Participation substrand. The example about caring for the earth is a direct link to the Caring for the Natural World substrand.



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Then explain that students are to identify how the other examples in the 12 characteristics of environments and materials support children’s learning in specific substrands of the history–social science domain. Faculty can provide Handout 1 for students to use or ask them to create a similar one. Instructors may choose to have the students work individually or in small groups.



### Taking it further

After students have identified examples from the curriculum framework, ask them to add other examples. It is suggested that students list at least one substrand for each characteristic.

#### Online Options

Students could post their completed handouts and review their classmates' handouts online.

### Putting it together

After students have completed the handout, provide time for them to share their work. This can be done in a number of ways:

- If students have worked individually, they can find one or two partners and compare their ideas. Or students can pass their handouts to a student seated to one side, for instance going in a clockwise direction, until all the students have had a chance to review all the other students' handouts. With either approach, encourage students to note ideas that are different from theirs and present a new way of thinking about the environmental characteristic or material.
- If students have completed the handouts in pairs or small groups, students share their work with someone from another group. Again ask students to look for similarities and differences in their results.
- If there is space in the room, post 12 large sheets of paper on the walls, one for each environmental characteristic or material. Students then write their examples and substrands on the appropriate sheet, moving from one sheet to the next. Depending on the time allotted for this learning experience, instructors can ask students to write an example and substrand on all 12 sheets or just on three or four sheets, making sure that there are some

#### Online Options

If online-discussion capability is available for the course, students could discuss the similarities and differences they notice in the completed handouts.

#### Online Options

If document-sharing is available, faculty could facilitate a discussion of the 12 environmental characteristics and materials and ask for students' suggestions. The instructor or a student could then write the suggestions while the other students are viewing the document.



examples on each sheet. Then provide time for the students to review the examples for all 12 characteristics.

### Another approach

After reading the “Curriculum Planning” section of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3* on pages 15–29 and the “Environments and Materials” section on pages 46–48, ask students to write a two- to three-page paper about the 12 characteristics. Then, ask them to describe why they think that particular characteristic is important in supporting children’s learning in history and the social sciences. They should pay particular attention to characteristics that could be included for other domains or as part of curriculum in general.



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### Reflection

Conclude this key topic by asking students to reflect on the following questions. Students could respond individually in journals, or a class discussion could be held.



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- When you reviewed the 12 environmental characteristics and materials in the history–social science domain, which ones stood out for you?
- Which ones were easier to apply to the substrands? Which ones were more challenging? Why?
- What do you think are the most important environmental characteristics or elements to include in a preschool program that support children’s learning in history and the social sciences?
- How would you ensure that you are including these elements? What supports might you need?

This second set of questions is more general and can be used for individual reflection for this key topic and with the other key topics.



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- What are some ideas, concepts, or strategies that you learned from this class session?
- Which ones reinforced what you have already learned or experienced? Which ones were new or caused you to think differently about teaching preschool children and/or engaging their families?
- Why do you think the content of this class session was presented the way it was? How did this approach help you understand the



content? What else would have helped?

- How will you decide what to apply from this class session in your work with preschool children and/or their families? What will you do to ensure you will implement what you have decided to use?

## Deeper Understanding

Students can continue their exploration of the environments and materials by talking with teachers and observing classrooms that contain many of the characteristics described in the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3*. This can be done in two ways.



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1. Ask students to visit a preschool classroom, take photos of the environment, and interview the teacher(s) about the ways the teachers plan and implement many of the 12 characteristics. Faculty could then ask students to prepare a written summary of the visit or do a class presentation on the interview.
2. Invite a teacher to be a guest speaker or several teachers to be a panel. Ask them to bring some photos of their classroom environments (indoors and outdoors) that illustrate some of the 12 characteristics and to be prepared to describe how they incorporate these characteristics over the course of the year.



### Handout for the History–Social Science Domain: Getting to Know Environments and Materials



History–Social Science Domain:  
Key Topic 2  
Handout 1 – Handout for the History–Social Science Domain:  
Getting to Know Environments and Materials

Environments & Materials	Examples	Substrands
Extended projects that are centered on a topic in history or social science and emerge from children’s interests and inquiries		
Reflective of diversity		
A balance between child choice and adult direction		
A variety of materials to support children’s inquiry-based learning and practice in the skills of social science		
Materials that connect children to times and places		
Real experiences with nature and other environmental education materials		





Environments & Materials	Examples	Substrands
Tools and practices for appreciating and caring for the earth and its resources		
Display of children’s work and experiences		
Dramatic play props and materials that represent firsthand experience with social roles and occupations, as well as consumer actions		
High-quality children’s books with content related to self, family, and community		
Extension of learning into the local community to help children learn in the “here and now” of the world around them		
Family involvement in program planning		