Planning an Effective Early Childhood Environment

**Furniture and Equipment**
The physical space in a library can set the stage for children’s developmental learning. The contents must be durable, functional, safe, and versatile and arranged to provide an active learning environment with opportunities for children to make choices and decisions. Providing child-sized furniture and equipment for group and independent use, as well as adding diverse materials aids children’s emotional and physical development. All these components, arranged to create an age-appropriate environment, have a profound effect on everyone who enters the space.

**Block Play**
Blocks are an important aspect of early childhood programs. The unstructured nature of blocks provides opportunities for open-ended manipulation, coordination, and imaginative play. While children are learning about size, shape, and balance, they develop social skills as well. Different types of blocks including animal sets, family and career figures, car sets, window and doors, different sizes of locking blocks, and “see-thru” blocks all expand imaginative play.

**Math and Manipulatives**
Manipulatives cultivate children’s number concepts, perception, eye-hand coordination, and give confidence through success in problem-solving. They also help develop children’s fine motor control. A variety of sequential skill levels are needed to continually challenge the many developmentally diverse children who come through your doors. The materials should be at various levels of learning so children can practice emerging skills and scaffold to the next level.

**Science, Nature, and Nutrition**
An early childhood environment should offer opportunities to experiment, discover, and observe the living, growing, physical world. Building young children’s curiosity leads them to question what is happening around them. Fostering their inborn sense of wonder guides their need to make sense of the world. Carefully selected materials, along with a guiding educator, enable their scientific inquiry to become more meaningful. Concepts learned here will be the basis for in-depth thinking later in life, and a healthy quality of life.