

Management of the Technology Center

***KidDesk* and Literacy**

Encourage children to do as much as possible for themselves as they access their desktops through *KidDesk*, a desktop management program. *KidDesk* offers children the opportunity to have customized desktops similar to adult desktops. Running *KidDesk* automatically provides maximum hard disk protection while allowing children the most independent access. It can be customized for individual children, allowing each child access to a limited number of programs. Customization also allows a child to operate the program through scanning with a switch. Scanning is an input option which can be saved for an individual child.

Many of the desktop accessories encourage the development of emergent literacy skills as children do the following tasks: (1) read environmental print when choosing the accessories or software programs on the desktop, (2) develop word and story concepts when sending electronic mail (e-mail) to a classmate, (3) communicate with family members when producing notes and calendars, and (4) read messages from friends when opening their own e-mail. Figure 2 contains a brief description of *KidDesk* accessories. Some accessories can be hidden from individual desktops if there are too many choices.

Figure 2. *KidDesk* Accessories

Picture Frame: The child can choose an icon or draw a picture. If a child's photograph has been added to *KidDesk*, the picture frame may display the photograph.

Address Card File: Addresses, phone numbers, birthdays, and notes can be stored in this area for quick access.

Phone/Voice Mail: Record messages via a microphone attached to the computer, and send messages to friends. Use the answering machine to listen to incoming messages.

Mailbox/E-Mail: Send and receive written messages to and from classmates.

Clock: Click on the analog clock to hear the time spoken and see the time displayed on a digital clock.

Lamp: Dim or brighten the screen by clicking on the desktop lamp.

Note Pad: Customize stationery and type a note with four different font sizes. Print notes using the printer icon at the bottom of the screen.

Pencils & Pens: Click on the Pencils & Pens cup to select a different desktop to fit a personality or mood. The desktop retains the same tools, but changes the shapes. For example, the dinosaur desktop mailbox may look like a large dinosaur egg.

Calendar: The calendar is easy to use with a print icon located at the bottom of the screen.

Calculator: Children can experiment with numbers on an oversized desktop calculator.

Name Plate: This adds the child's name to personalize the desktop.

KidDesk offers versatility to the classroom. The technology center becomes child-centered when hard disk protection is offered. A wide range of accessories allows independent access customized to fit each child's abilities.

Peer Helpers

Another management strategy for the technology center is to encourage the use of peer helpers in the classroom. Children can learn from each other as they use the computer in small groups. Research has shown that spontaneous language tends to increase through group computer use. Encourage children to help each other and work cooperatively at the computer. Instead of asking for adult assistance, children can be encouraged to discuss their questions with other children who have used the software.

To help children choose software independently at the technology center, the front covers from the software boxes or screen snapshots from the program can be used to represent choices. Each time a program is purchased, cut the front cover off of the box and attach Velcro or tape to the back. Make a choice board by adhering the software pictures to a large, laminated poster board; a board covered with Dual-Lock material; or some other suitable surface. Another option is to make one screen snapshot for each program, print them out, and laminate them. These can then serve as the software choices from which children can choose. The choice boards are particularly helpful for children who are unable to verbally communicate their choices.

Managing the Technology Center Through Sign Up

The sign-up sheet or book is an essential management tool in a child-centered computer environment. Young children sign up for computer time to facilitate the turn-taking process. Not only are children writing their names for a real purpose, they are recognizing and learning to read other names. For those children who are unable to hold a pencil or marker to write their name, a laminated picture of the child can be used. If desirable, an adult can assist the child in holding a writing tool to form the letters of his or her name. Although it is recognized that children need to take turns, children should not be timed when using the computer. If given the opportunity, children will limit their time and take turns with peers with little assistance from the adult. The following two activities—"Managing the Technology Center with a Sign-Up Book," and "Sign-Up Sheet for the Technology Center"—are examples of tested and successful computer sign-up applications.

Activity #1: Managing the Technology Center with a Sign-Up Book

The sign-up book is an easy and relatively inexpensive project. Bind 30 blank pages (the back of scrap paper works great) together between card stock. Use one book for each month. With each new day, record the date on the top of the page. Place the book next to the computer along with a pencil.

On each day of the week, open the book up to a new page. Emergent writing incorporates different stages. Some children will write their names with conventional spellings, while others might use invented spelling, and still others might make a mark or scribble across the page. Any of the stages are acceptable. Encourage each child to write his or her own name. To help adults in the classroom recognize the child's name, the adult may write the child's name in parentheses next to the child's writing.

Teachers can place numbers by names to indicate the order of children. It is interesting to note that although we do not require children to place their names in a particular order on the page, children will begin to see that having their names at the top of the page means they get their turn quicker. Tracking children's writing samples over time revealed that children gradually moved to the left and towards the top as they moved through the stages of writing. Toward the end of the year, the teacher might number down the page and draw lines. Children can then


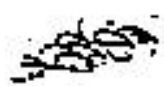

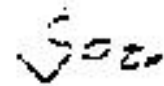


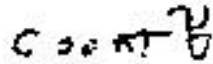

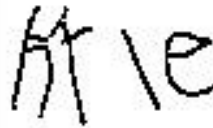
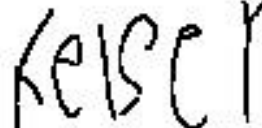
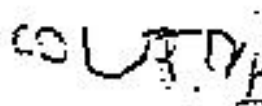

sign up by a number and write on the line. Children are learning that print is read from left to right, top to bottom, and that there is a sequence.

If many children have signed up on one day, but only a few are able to take a turn at the computer, the teacher might carry the names over to the next day. With this method, children are less anxious over not having a turn. Two methods are recommended when carrying over names:

1. Turn to a new page, write the date at the top of the page along with the names of the children who did not have a turn. This model is good for children as the adult writes at the top of the page in a conventional method.
2. Open and date the new page and then explain to the children that they did not get a turn today and each child can sign up for a turn tomorrow. The next day, other children can sign up on the rest of the sheet.

Some teachers suggest that children cross off their names when their turn is completed. Part of the routine includes marking off their name when they are done and telling the next person it is his or her turn. This offers children the opportunity to learn classmates' names and to socialize with others. The computer sign-up book also provides a good record of children's writing over time. A sample page from a sign-up book is shown in Figure 3, and Figure 4's sample of children's writing over time is evidence of the progress children can make in a short period of time when they are encouraged to use the sign-up book.

Figure 4. Sample of Changes in Children's Writing

Kyle	Kelsey	Courtney	Serena
 Date: 11/9/94	 Date: 11/14/94	 Date: 11/14/94	 Date: 11/9/94
 Date: 12/5/94	 Date: 1/26/95	 Date: 2/2/95	 Date: 12/5/94
 Date: 3/9/95	 Date: 3/7/95	 Date: 3/20/95	 Date: 2/7/95

Activity #2: Sign-Up Sheet for the Technology Center

This version of the sign-up book includes children's pictures along with their signatures. As with the sign-up book, this sign-up sheet is kept next to the computer, providing a great way to manage computer time and help children increase their literacy skills. This version of the computer sign-up sheet is geared toward classrooms with younger children or those children who may have disabilities which prevent them from holding and using writing tools. This sign-up sheet can be used by all of the children. They can place their picture next to a number for their turn. Those who are able can also sign their name next to their picture. Adding the children's pictures makes it easier for them to associate the writing with the name of that person. The children know when it is their turn at the computer, and they also have a reason to practice writing their names. Children enjoy signing their names on a sign-up sheet for their computer time.

Materials needed for the sign-up sheet include white construction paper, black magic marker, school photos of the children, masking tape, a photograph of the technology center, and pencils or markers. A laminator is optional. Print each child's name on a blank piece of paper. On

another sheet, create a sign-up sheet as shown below. Draw the three columns and numbers with a black marker (see Figure 5).

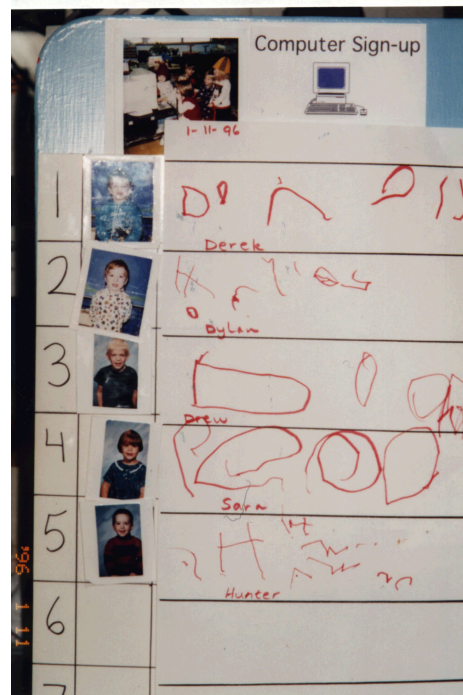
Figure 5. Sample Sign-Up Sheet

	Photo	Signature
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

Laminate the sign-up sheet for durability. Post this sheet near the technology center. On top of the sheet, display a sign with the technology center picture that says, "Technology Center." Take small amounts of masking tape and make enclosed circles of tape. Tape these to the backs of the children's photographs. Near the sign-up sheet, tape these classroom photos of the children on a nonporous surface (like a metal bookshelf). These photos can easily be attached to the sign-up sheet by the children.

A variation of this type of sign-up sheet could be handled in the following way: Before circle time ends, encourage the children to sign up for computer time. When the child approaches the teacher/facilitator to sign up, have the name listing (a sheet of paper with each child's name printed in a vertical listing), a dated blank sheet of paper, and a marker ready. From the listing, the child can pick out his or her name. Encourage the child to write his or her name on the blank paper. At the beginning of the year, the child's name may not be recognizable. After all the children in the classroom have signed this sheet, tape it near the technology center. Then, have the children place their photo by their signatures. During class, ask the children, "Whose turn is it on the computer?" If no one responds, ask them to look at the sign-up sheet. In some classrooms, the children will be looking at the sign-up sheet and keeping track of whose turn it is. By keeping a sample of these sign-up sheets throughout the year, improvement in the children's signatures will be evident as the year progresses. Figure 6 contains an example of a computer sign-up sheet from one preschool classroom.

Figure 6. Example of a Computer Sign-Up Sheet



Adult Management Techniques

In order to offer children an appropriate environment for technology and literacy, the teacher, support staff member, or family member must first become familiar with many different software programs and any needed adaptations for individual children. Technology use adds a new responsibility, requiring time to look at and review software and to design computer curriculum activities. “Helpful Hints for a Frazzled Classroom Teacher” and “Helpful Hints for a Frazzled Classroom Teacher (Windows)” in the Appendices provide some shortcuts which can be posted near the computer to help those staff and family members who are new to the technology and can’t remember the commands needed in some software. Although software money may be limited, there are programs which, if chosen carefully, can offer almost endless activity possibilities. The effectiveness of a software program relies on the teacher’s ability to utilize it creatively by developing computer-related activities, which are all set in a well-designed environment.

Helpful Hints: Internet with Children

Many schools are becoming wired for the Internet, and teachers are faced with many questions on how to use it effectively, productively, and safely. Experienced teachers who use the Internet in their classroom, with children ranging from preschool through third grade suggest the following list of “helpful hints”:

Internet:

- Discuss the Internet with the children in the class. Helpful books include *My First Book About the Internet* and *Internet and World Wide Web Simplified* (2nd Edition). A website that explains the Internet in simplified terms is <muttley.ucdavis.edu/SPIT/Internet.html>. Creating a simple drawing of what the Internet looks like will also help children understand how the computers are connected to each other.
- Visit the Internet as a group. If it is possible to connect the computer to a television monitor, introduce the Internet to the whole class. Small groups can view the Internet in front of the computer monitor.
- View a website before sharing it with the children. Even if someone has suggested a URL, it is still important to take the time to visit it first.
- Discuss why it takes “a long time” for some pages to load. These pages probably have “bells and whistles” on them such as sounds and movies. If the websites are difficult to load, it would be best to practice patience when loading them or simply choose a different website.
- Create bookmarks that mark “safe sites” to visit. The bookmarks could be filed in a folder that says, “<Mrs. Blue’s> Internet Sites.” The children would know that these were the websites that they could visit on their own or with friends. Another idea is to create folders within the main folder to categorize the websites, such as “Reading,” “Math,” “Museums,” or “For Fun.”
- Determine if the school has an Internet policy for early elementary students. Review the policy with the students, discussing the issues that are important for children their age.
- Make sure children understand that if something comes up that they don’t understand, they need to tell a teacher/facilitator immediately.

E-mail:

- Participate in “group” e-mail. In small groups, with the teacher’s assistance, children can e-mail a friend in the classroom or someone in another classroom. The children will learn the components of a letter, communication courtesy, and problem-solving skills by interacting with one another.
- Encourage children to e-mail preapproved classroom friends, family members, and classmates. A simple way to manage the e-mail addresses would be to add these names to the browser’s address book. Participating in e-mail results first in the younger child beginning to understand that print has meaning to more complicated skills where older

children are actually composing letters.

The Internet can be a fun and educational place to visit. With a few precautions and simple planning, it can add a whole new dimension to learning.

Summary

Many factors must be taken into consideration to arrange the environment for technology literacy activities. Designing a literacy-rich classroom with suitable reading and writing materials and appropriate software ensures that young children have emergent literacy opportunities. Computer management techniques which incorporate the use of *KidDesk*, peer helpers, and the sign-up book/sheet promote children's independence and control of their own learning.