



VANDERBILT  UNIVERSITY

**Tools of the Mind Environmental Inventory
Observer Manual
Elizabeth Vorhaus, MEd
Deanna Meador, MA
Dale Farran, PhD
Peabody Research Institute
Vanderbilt University
(2010)**

Environmental Scan for Tools of the Mind Curriculum
Vorhaus, E., Meador, D., Farran, D.
Peabody Research Institute (2010)

Tools of the Mind Environmental Inventory Observer Manual

The environmental scan is an observational tool to gauge a classroom's environment and materials. In particular, this scan focuses on the play centers and materials accessible to children. This manual describes the specific instructions for each section of the scan and offers further detail on some of the scan's items.

General Instruction: The environmental scan should be completed when no children are present, ideally during recess or lunch. If necessary, the environmental scan can be completed before school or at the end of the observational period. The observer should take note of only those centers and materials that are **accessible to children**. Materials that are stored in teacher's closets, cabinets, or inaccessible storage bins should not be counted.

Opening Page Instruction: On the opening page, mark whether center time occurred. Answer the two questions about the centers' physical definition and organization. To check **YES** for "Are materials in centers organized?" **all** centers must

- Have only those materials appropriate for that center (e.g. no trucks in the housekeeping center)
- Be reasonably clean (no noticeable dirt, broken toys, or disrepair)
- Have materials placed on shelves and/or storage bin that are intentionally organized (e.g. labeled bins) and are accessible to children

Then identify the type of center time that you observed:

- **Free Play Center Time:** During free play time, students are free to play at all or most centers, usually of their choice. The teacher may prompt students' play activities, but students are not instructed to take on a make-believe role or action. Free play centers often occur at the beginning or end of the day. Free play centers may include Dramatic Play, Blocks, Literacy, Math, Art, etc.
- **Make Believe Play Center Time:** In make believe play center time, students choose or are assigned make believe roles to act out within different centers. These roles and centers may be chosen or assigned to students and should reflect a classroom-wide play theme. For example, a classroom could have a restaurant theme across all its centers. The Dramatic Play Center may become the Baker and the three students in that center may take on the roles of the Baker, Cashier, and Customer.
- **Combined Free Play and Make Believe Center Time:** Students are split between free play centers (non-themed and without make believe roles) and make believe play centers. To check combined center time, at least two centers of each type must be open and used by students.

Request author's permission to use
For research purposes only

Environmental Scan for Tools of the Mind Curriculum
 Vorhaus, E., Meador, D., Farran, D.
 Peabody Research Institute (2010)

Center Page Instructions: On the centers page, you will identify the overall classroom theme and check which centers are in use as either free play or make believe centers. The classroom theme is an overarching topic to which activities and centers may relate. In Tools of the Mind classrooms, the classroom theme should be reflected in the individual theme of each center and the roles enacted by children. Examples of classroom themes include Family, Hospital, and Restaurant. **NOTE: If a classroom does not have a theme, write “NONE” in the appropriate blank.** You will describe the theme of all make-believe play centers in use. Make sure that the make believe play centers correspond to their free play counterpart. For example, when the literacy center becomes the Hospital Waiting Room, write “Hospital Waiting Room” on Make Believe Play Box in line with the Literacy Free Play Center.

Environmental Scan Instructions: To complete the scan, look throughout the room for the materials listed. The materials are listed by type, but may be found in different areas of the room. Remember that you **only count materials accessible to children.** Materials that are stored in teacher’s closets, cabinets, or inaccessible storage bins should not be counted. Please see below for photographs and/or descriptions of a few items:

- **Rhythm instruments:** Musical instruments for the children’s use. These could include drums, maracas, castanets, tambourines, bells, and cymbals.
- **Hardwood unit blocks:** These are wooden blocks in a variety of shapes and sizes. These are often used by children for building structures. (See below for illustration)
- **Hollow blocks:** These are wooden blocks that are hollow and come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They are very similar to hardwood unit blocks and are often used by children for building structures. (See below for illustration)
- **Soft unit blocks:** These are soft blocks (often made of foam or fabric/stuffing) that come in a variety of shapes and sizes. (See below for illustration)

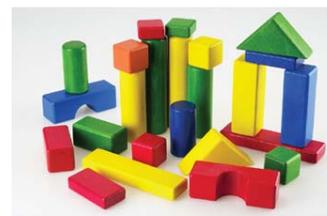
Hardwood unit blocks:



Hollow blocks:



Soft unit blocks:



Literacy Materials Instructions: On the literacy materials page, identify which materials and books you see in the classroom. Estimate the number of books of each type using the drop-down options. To count towards the total number, books must be shelved or stored in places that are accessible to children.

Request author’s permission to use
 For research purposes only

Environmental Scan for Tools of the Mind Curriculum
Vorhaus, E., Meador, D., Farran, D.
Peabody Research Institute (2010)

Post-scan Questions Instructions: Complete the post-scan questions as the last step of the environmental scan. For the second and third question, diverse populations include racial/ethnic minorities, cultures other than the mainstream United States (e.g. Native American, German, Egyptian, Japanese, etc), and people with disabilities. See below for specific instructions for each question

- **Are diverse populations represented in the books?** In this question, representation typically means photographs or illustrations on covers or within books. To check **YES** for this question, the classroom must have at least two books that depict diverse populations and, across all books, must have at least two diverse populations represented.
- **Do play materials (dolls, play people, dramatic play foods, and costumes) reflect diverse populations?** This question involves those play materials used by children. It doesn't include posters and/or classroom decorations. To check **YES** for this question, the classroom must have at least two play materials that depict diverse populations and, across all play materials, must have at least two diverse populations represented.