



What to Look for in a Tools of the Mind Head Start Classroom

Tools of the Mind is a research-based, comprehensive early childhood curriculum that improves outcomes for all children by embedding the development of executive functions and self-regulation into the design of all teaching and learning activities. We leverage make-believe play and a classroom culture of co-regulation and peer scaffolding to build the foundational skills children need to be successful in school and life. Partnering closely with teachers and districts, we empower teachers with the understandings and tools they need to create positive classroom cultures, facilitate intentional playful learning, and support the development of self-regulated learners. Tools of the Mind is being implemented by early childhood programs, Head Starts, and public school districts in 23 states and 3 countries. The program and professional development are available in English and Spanish. When you visit a Tools of the Mind Head Start classroom, here are some things to look for:

Environment

- **Play themes** are evident at each center in the form of props and sets (including ones made by children) that support children's engagement in immersive make-believe play experiences. Children and teachers co-construct themes in response to children's interests, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences.
- **Visual mediators** meaningful to the children are used throughout the classroom environment to help children understand routines, navigate the classroom environment, and learn concepts with increasing independence.
- The classroom **schedule works in concert with the environment**, creating predictable routines that foster children's engagement. Whole-group learning periods are intentionally kept short in length and unoccupied wait times are minimized to support self-regulation development. The schedule works in full-day and half-day programs and with multi-age and single-age classrooms.



Children

- Children are frequently engaged in talking to think, including talking out loud to themselves, engaging in meaningful exchanges with peers, and responding verbally to questions posed by teachers.
- During transitions, children actively engage in cleaning up materials and in the **attention-focusing activities** teachers lead. Children may be observed chanting, singing, and doing "pretend transitions" to go from one activity to the next.
- During **make-believe play**, children draw from their own experiences as well as from what they have learned and practiced in class about the play theme's setting, roles, and common scenarios that might take place in the setting. As children's intentional play skills mature, there is more peer-to-peer interaction in roles and more negotiation about play.

- All activities are designed with **developmental breadth** so children with a wide range of skill levels, abilities, and special needs access the program in English and Spanish. Additional visual mediation is used to facilitate the participation of English Language Learners. Visual mediation as well as assistive technology may be used to facilitate the participation of students who are nonverbal or currently have little language.
- Literacy, math, science, and social studies **knowledge and skills are developed** in meaningful, playful, and intrinsically motivating activities. Small group and partner interactions are maximized, and teachers provide frequent one-on-one scaffolding.
- Activities are intentionally designed to **promote positive peer interactions** and friendship development

Adults

- Through close observation and interaction, teachers learn about each individual child's developing skills and provide instruction and one-on-one scaffolding to meet them in their **Zone of Proximal Development**.
- Teachers **approach classroom management proactively**, co-constructing classroom rules and leading activities that build and replenish children's self-regulation.
- Teachers engage children in using **interactive response styles**, inviting choral responses and turning and talking to peers rather than hand-raising.
- During frequent partner activities, teachers facilitate partnerships so that every child partners with all of their peers over time, creating an **inclusive classroom culture**.
- By modeling what mistake-making looks like, teachers **normalize making mistakes** as an important part of the learning process.
- Dynamic assessment techniques embedded in classroom activities and tied to scaffolding empower teachers with an understanding of children's development over time.
- **Families are seen as important partners** with much to share about their child. Specific tools such as Family Connect, a texting platform with language translation capabilities, support teachers in building relationships with families.

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Toolsofthemind.org

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Structure of the Day

- Free Choice & Mystery Games
- Opening Group
- Make-Believe Play Center Block
- Large & Small Group Literacy
- Math & Science
- Outside Play
- Mealtime: Breakfast/Lunch/Snack
- Closing Group

