

Tools of the Mind (7th Edition): “Cheat Sheet” for VA ECE Leaders

This “cheat sheet” is meant to be a quick reference for administrators when planning effective professional development opportunities for PreK teachers. It contains excerpts from the [Head Start Curriculum Consumer Report – Preschool \(reviewed in 2017\)](#) and incorporates an additional CLASS[®] crosswalk resource.

Description: [Tools of the Mind[®]](#), a research-based early childhood program, follows the Vygotskian approach to teaching, and combines teacher professional development with a comprehensive innovative curriculum that helps young children develop the cognitive, social-emotional, self-regulatory, and foundational academic skills they need to succeed in school and beyond. It provides activities sequenced in a developmental trajectory and scaffolds to support children based on their current levels of development

Curricular Materials reviewed in the Curriculum Consumer Report: Pre-K Manual, 7th Edition: Introduction, Background, and Theory; Tools of the Mind[®] Training, Additional Scaffolds; Appendix; Tools of the Mind[®] Classroom Materials: Literacy and Classroom Organization Content Guide and accompanying boxed materials; Math Content Guide and accompanying boxed materials; Public access website: <https://toolsofthemind.org/> eTools curriculum website: Access is provided with purchase of curriculum (e.g., iScaffold and Pre-K Assessment)

Curricular Learning Goals for Children: Tools of the Mind[®] specifies measurable, developmentally appropriate goals for children's learning and development. The goals concentrate mainly on children's underlying cognitive skills (self-regulation, focused attention, and deliberate memory), social-emotional school readiness (e.g., emotional and behavioral self-control), and foundational skills in literacy and mathematics. Each activity in the Training Manual provides a list of learning goals ("Purpose"), the rationale for the activity, and a "What to Expect—Developmental Learning Trajectories" chart showing the developmental continuum of skills across ages. Overall, the learning activities in the curriculum support children in making progress toward these goals. Building on the Vygotskian approach to teaching, the curriculum's activities provide scaffolding strategies to support children in reaching the goals ("Zooming in on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)"). The curriculum also provides the Tools of the Mind[®] Training: Additional Scaffolds Appendix Pre-K Manual, 7th Edition (Additional Scaffolds Appendix Manual) with individual scaffolds for children who need more support in reaching the learning goals and for children who are DLLs.

Professional Development offered by publisher: Tools combines a comprehensive early childhood curriculum with an innovative approach to teacher professional development effectively to transform teaching and learning and improve child outcomes. Tools of the Mind partnership packages include a series of core professional development workshops, a curriculum manual for each classroom, technical assistance support, and access to innovative online resources to support implementation. Curriculum materials kits are also available to support strong implementation. For more information about the program and pricing, contact information@toolsofthemind.org.

Curriculum Materials to Support Implementation: Tools of the Mind® provides a comprehensive set of materials to support implementation. The Tools of the Mind®: Introduction, Background, and Theory; Pre-K Manual, 7th Edition (Introductory Manual) includes a rich overview of the background, theory, and key elements of the curriculum. The primary Training Manual offers detailed information about each of the curriculum's activities, including materials and set-up, steps for implementing each activity, and detailed guidance for teachers about engaging and supporting children during the activity ("Flow and Process"). The Additional Scaffolds Appendix Manual describes strategies for supporting specific learning needs (e.g., developmental delays, self-regulation supports, fine motor supports) and for supporting children who are DLLs. iScaffold, available to curriculum users through the publisher website or app, is a multimedia teaching tool that provides a range of assistance on demand (e.g., learning experiences, learning trajectories, scaffolding ideas). In addition, the Pre-K Assessment appendix provides assessment instruments to identify baselines, document children's development over time, and identify areas of individual need to target scaffolding and intentionally plan instruction.

- **Fidelity Tool:** The curriculum offers Teacher Self-Reflection forms, which can be used to assess fidelity of implementation. The forms provide detailed checklists with key elements for each set of activities in the curriculum (e.g., Opening Group, Make-Believe Play, Literacy Time Block, Story Lab, and Math/Science Small Group Time Block). Teachers can use this tool independently to reflect on their own implementation of activities, or collaboratively with a coach to identify areas of support.

Curricular Supports for Teacher-Child Interactions

- **Crosswalk:** Use this [Crosswalk of Tools of the Mind With the Pre-K CLASS®](#) to help identify curricular components and materials that best support areas of teacher-child interactions (e.g., CLASS Quality of Feedback).
- **Interactions that Extend Children's Learning:** Throughout all learning activities and in its introductory materials, Tools of the Mind® provides specific guidance on how to extend children's play, exploration, and communication. Built on the theoretical foundation of social learning and providing experiences and support within the child's individual ZPD, the curriculum guides teachers to actively scaffold children's learning by providing prompts, hints, and gestural signs and by using "Mediator Cards" with visual reminders of the task in hand. For example, in Story Lab activities, teachers use mediator cards with open-ended questions or other prompts to scaffold children's self-regulation and to expand children's thinking and communication about the book (e.g., "What was your favorite part?" "You can make connections between this book and something that happened to you.").
- **Active Exploration:** Tools of the Mind® provides daily opportunities for children to engage in open-ended, hands-on explorations. The classroom is set up with six interest areas (e.g., science, sensory, blocks, manipulatives), each equipped with sensory materials as well as more complex materials related to the Make-Believe Play theme of the month. Every morning, children freely choose to play at any of these centers. Additionally, the daily schedule includes a time specifically for "Make-Believe Play Center," which offers more opportunities for free explorations during the day. Although the children use some center materials in more structured ways (e.g., according to scenarios related to the theme), children can suggest their

roles and scripts and manipulate objects to create play scenarios. Other daily small group activities such as Puzzles, Manipulatives, and Blocks, provide children with opportunities to explore objects, build, and create with different materials (e.g., blocks, playdough, lacing, pegs, nuts, and bolts).

Curricular Supports for Individualization:

- **Individualization Based on Interests:** Tools of the Mind® provides children with daily opportunities to play in classroom centers of their choice (e.g., Free Choice, Mystery Game Block) and to choose their activities and materials. Children also engage daily in Make-Believe Play. As the year progresses, teachers are instructed to choose play themes that follow children's interests and reflect the community in which the children live. Children invent new actions and scenarios, play different roles, use their imagination to invent props, and expand play themes based on their interests. However, other activities in the curriculum are pre-planned (e.g., Story Lab activities, Math and Science activities), and there is no guidance in on how to plan learning experiences based on the interests of individual children.
- **Individualization Based on Strengths and Needs:** The curriculum offers specific guidance embedded throughout its materials on how to make learning experiences responsive to individual children's strengths and needs. All activities are designed so that children at different levels of development can participate and learn. Within each activity, "Zooming in on the ZPD" provides scaffolds to support children who need extra support. Each activity also includes "Up the Challenge," providing ideas for making the activity more challenging, either by making it more difficult cognitively or by increasing self-regulation demands on children.

Individualization for Dual Language Learners (Scaffolding Strategies): Tools of the Mind® provides specific guidance embedded throughout curriculum materials on how to scaffold the development and learning of children who are DLLs. Each lesson plan includes a section titled "Zooming in on the ZPD" with some specific tips and strategies to support children who are DLLs (e.g., repeat the same finger play several times a day; encourage children to use just gestures at first). In addition, the Additional Scaffolds Appendix Manual offers activity-specific suggested scaffolds for DLLs. This volume also provides the "Tools Teacher Phrasebook." It includes a list of phrases teachers can learn in children's home language (phrases in Spanish are provided) to facilitate communication and allow children to understand routines and directions for critical classroom activities. It is also important to note that strategies such as mediator cards, visuals, and gestures are used with all children as part of the curriculum's learning activities and routines, and provide ongoing supports to DLLs.

- **Individualization for Children with Special Needs (Teaching Practices and Interventions):** The curriculum's approach is that teachers should make accommodations for children with special needs, suspected delays, or other special needs within every activity, as necessary, without making modifications that alter the purpose of the activity. Accommodations are based on children's responses to supports and scaffolds provided by the learning environment in relationship to the child's ZPD. The Additional Scaffolds Appendix Manual provides overview information on scaffolding for individual children with special needs, including children with significant developmental delays, behavior problems (self-regulation), and children who need more fine motor supports. This volume also provides "Additional Teacher Scaffolds," specific supports for children with a variety of needs related to each activity in the curriculum. For

example, in the activity "Share the News," there are scaffolds for a child who has difficulty with expressive language and for a child who has difficulty remembering the steps in the activity.

Child Assessment Tools and Guidance:

- **Ongoing Observation and Documentation:** Tools of the Mind® describes and promotes "dynamic assessment" with specific guidance embedded throughout the curriculum materials for teachers to engage in this process. Through observations, the teacher identifies the child's independent level of performance (ZPD) and how the child responds to scaffolds and instruction. For example, the section "Scaffolding Make-Believe Play" suggests the teacher observe the child's current stage of play, identify a scaffolding goal, provide supports according to the child's ZPD, and observe again to assess the need for further support. Additionally, Pre-K Assessment offers specific assessment resources for observing and documenting children's progress across domains within daily routines and learning experiences (e.g., Scaffolded Writing, Story Lab Listening Comprehension, Math, Social and Emotional Development), as well as guidance for developing and using portfolios that illustrate children's growth over time.
- **Standardized and Structured Assessment Instruments:** The curriculum provides structured assessments but does not provide information about selecting and using standardized assessment instruments. Pre-K Assessment describes and provides some structured assessment tools, such as Listening Comprehension Formative and Summative Assessments and Letter Sound and Name Dynamic Assessments. The curriculum encourages programs to use these assessment tools at regular intervals to track children's progress and adjust learning experiences. However, the tools are not standardized (valid or reliable), and there is no guidance on how to select standardized assessment instruments.