

Spiderman impersonators and garden spiders are not the only ones who may be seen webbing in early childhood classrooms. A web—a visual organizer—is an excellent tool that teachers can use throughout the day to encourage children in creative exploration.

What can early care professionals web?

Anything!

- Characteristics of a child
- Interests of a child
- Observations about a child
- Children's responses to "What we know about..."
- Questions we wonder about a given subject
- Children's interests
- Domain-specific ideas related to a topic
- Activities to do related to a topic/interest

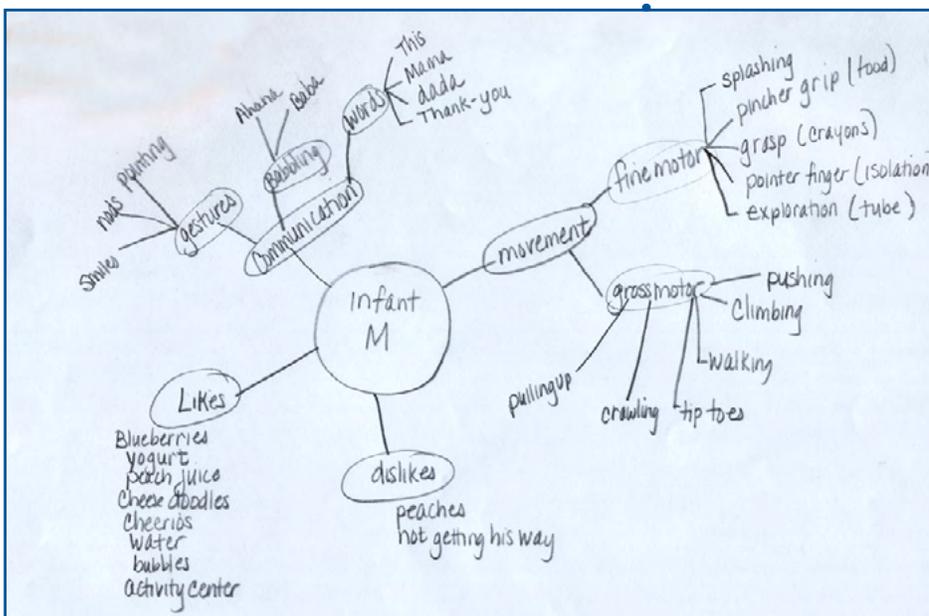
Why use webs?

Webs are a great way to capture diverse ideas and to build a project over time. It allows for additional ideas or comments without dismissing earlier thoughts.

When a teacher uses a web to capture lots of thoughts from a group of children, she is demonstrating "brainstorming" in a concrete way. Webbing is very visual. Sometimes children and adults don't think in a 1-2-3 step linear way. Webbing appeals to the artistic, creative mind and encourages many divergent ideas. It communicates to a child that every idea is valuable and has a place in the plan. It communicates that there are many "right" ideas and possibilities for exploration. It visualizes grouping and connections made in the mind.

As a child learns to use webbing, she is practicing important 21st century skills that she will need to succeed in her schooling and adult life. Professionals have stressed that children need more expertise in creative thinking, problem-solving, communication, goal-setting, interacting with others, and considering diverse perspectives. (Partnership for 21st Century Skills) Webbing nurtures all these abilities.

Webbing



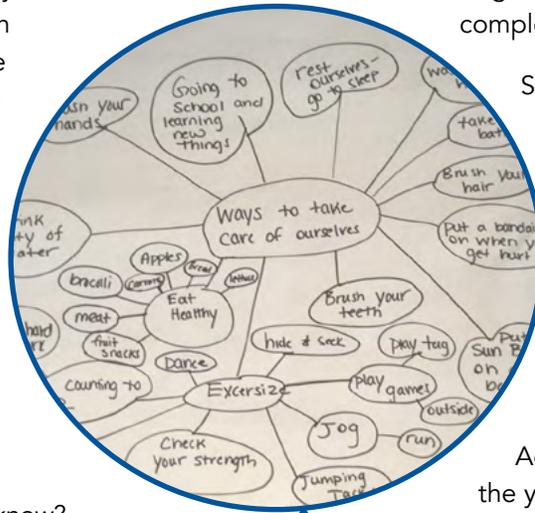
How are webs made?

There are two main steps: 1. Generating ideas or comments (brainstorming) and 2. Grouping related comments.

If a staff member is using webs to capture children’s ideas, usually it is done during a large group time, and he asks the children what they “know” about a certain subject and also what they “wonder” about that same topic. Webs can also be done by individuals and can be done over time, with people adding their parts to the web as new ideas occur. Like so many other things in early care and learning, there is more than one right way to create or use a web.

A topic web is one of the most popular uses for a web. In a topic web, teachers record children’s responses to things like:

- What do the children already know?
- What would they like to find out?
- To whom do they think they could talk?
- What places could they visit to help them find out more?



The key to success in making webs with young investigators is in the preparation and support given to the children during the first webbing experience and the care taken to be sure that children have enough prior knowledge of the topic to relate to the web in meaningful ways.

What is needed to make a web?

Whiteboard, flipchart or poster board to record responses, and markers. For emergent readers, it is helpful to have a photo/drawing in the center to help understand the focus. Some providers like to record comments on sticky notes and then organize them after the brainstorming period is complete.

Webbing may take more than one gathering time to complete.

Sometimes inexperienced teachers hesitate to use webs with younger children who can’t read and are just beginning to group and relate ideas to one another. “However, experienced project teachers report that young children seem to understand and respond to webs more readily than to lists. The process of having their words written down appears to be understandable to many 3-year-olds. Adding drawings or photos to the web assists the youngest children in connecting the written representation with their words and the words of the other children. Many 4-year-olds are actually able to explain the relationships between words when the teacher connects them on the web and are also often able to recognize the words.

Resources

Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Tools & Resources: www.p21.org/tools-and-resources

The Project Approach Catalog 3, Section 1: The Project Approach: <http://ecap.crc.illinois.edu/eecearchive/books/projcat3/section1.html>

Topic Webs in Project Work: <http://illinoispip.org/lesson-planning/topicwebs1.html>

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