

Approaches to Learning: Resources for Self- Reflection and Planning

New York State Education
Department



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The Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core outlines early learning expectations linked to K-12 standards, organized by key domains of learning. The NYSED, Office of Early Learning is developing a series of resource sets to assist teachers and administrators as they reflect on program practices and supports in each of the key domains. This set focuses on Approaches to Learning and includes a tool for teachers, coaches and specialists to use to reflect on teaching practices that support children's engagement, persistence, curiosity, initiative, creativity and imagination. The set also includes a school-wide reflection tool for administrators and teams to plan and implement program improvement, resources, and supports.

Contents

**Part 1:
Teacher
Resources**

1. Overview

This overview provides an introduction to the set, including ideas for use and how it's organized.

2. Teacher Resource for Self-Reflection and Planning

This section includes a tool to help teachers, coaches, and specialists to reflect on teaching practices that support children's foundational skills within the Approaches to Learning domain. The tool is organized by the subcategories: Engagement, Persistence, Curiosity & Initiative, and Creativity & Imagination.

**Part 2:
Administrator
Tool**

3. School-wide Reflection Worksheet: Program Improvement, Resources and Supports

The School-wide Reflection Worksheet is designed for school leaders and teacher teams to reflect on the systems and supports that promote children's development in the Approaches to Learning domain that are aligned to the Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core.

This series was developed by the New York State Education Department, Office of Early Learning, in partnership with the Northeast Comprehensive Center.

For more resources in this series, visit www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning



NORTHEAST COMPREHENSIVE CENTER

1. Overview

This reflection and planning tool was developed to help teachers, coaches, specialists and school leaders reflect on the extent to which they are incorporating approaches to learning standards from the *New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core* (PreK Foundation) across curriculum and instruction and to provide a basis to guide discussion and planning. While this tool is based on the learning and development at the prekindergarten level, teachers working with children in kindergarten to third grade can use the subcategories to reflect on the practices that support children’s approaches to learning in the upper levels.

This resource tool can be used in multiple ways, including as a topic builder to inform workshops, as a reflection and planning tool for teachers, to spark professional learning community discussions, as an observation tool for mentors/coaches, to prepare principals/site managers for classroom visits, and for instructional planning.

Teacher Resource for Self-Reflection and Planning

The first section of the tool, *2. Teacher Resource for Self-Reflection and Planning*, is designed for classroom teachers, coaches and specialists to reflect on teaching practices. Teachers and specialists may use it as a self-assessment while coaches may use it as a springboard for discussion. It features foundational skills within the approaches to learning domain, organized as follows: **Engagement, Persistence, Curiosity & Initiative, and Creativity & Imagination**. Each foundational skill area begins with descriptive information followed by three columns with the prompts; Children demonstrate by, Teachers support by, and Reflections on implementation. The first column, Children demonstrate by, describes how preschool children may demonstrate increasing awareness of the skills. Next to the descriptions of how children demonstrate the skills are examples of how teachers support children’s development. Finally, the last column provides an opportunity for teachers, coaches, and other specialists to reflect on ways they are specifically supporting the children’s learning in the area.

School-wide Reflection Worksheet: Program Improvement, Resources and Supports

The last section of the tool, *3. School-wide Reflection Worksheet: Program Improvement, Resources and Supports*, is designed for school leaders and teacher teams to reflect on the systems and supports that promote children’s development in the Approaches to Learning domain that are aligned to the PreK Foundation.

APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Shaping and supporting the behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions that are essential for lifelong learning.

Engagement refers to attentiveness and the ability to focus on an activity and to concentrate for a sustained period of time. When children are engrossed in a learning activity, they are motivated to explore and overcome obstacles. When children are engaged in learning through play and developmentally-appropriate teacher-supported activities, they are better able to retain information, make connections, and apply new knowledge.

ENGAGEMENT

CHILDREN demonstrate by...

- Interacting with a variety of materials and using material in multiple ways
- Engaging with purpose and enjoyment in pretend, imaginative and self-selected play
- Connecting prior and new knowledge
- Working with purpose, determination and enjoyment on tasks or activities
- Selecting/choosing activities that may have been challenging or that are new
- Communicating with peers and adults to work through challenges

TEACHERS support by...

- Creating learning environments that allow for active learning; invite children to explore a variety of classroom structures and play
- Planning activities and learning environments within themes to build prior knowledge and create opportunities for connections
- Responding to children's needs and interests as they play and engage in activities
- Developing caring and responsive relationships with each child
- Helping children identify and apply prior knowledge; asking about what children already know
- Learning about children's interests
- Planning activities with multiple levels for scaffolding; allowing children to work at different levels on different activities
- Connecting with families

Reflections on implementation

- *What activities were most engaging to children today/this week and why?*
- *What parts of the day did children seem to lose interest and how might I plan differently?*
- *Am I struggling to engage any specific children or groups?*
- *What structures or strategies can I use to engage children who are struggling?*
- *How do I keep track of engagement?*

APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Shaping and supporting the behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions that are essential for lifelong learning.

Persistence refers to the ability to stick with a task, even when it is challenging. It is also demonstrated by children's interest in trying something again and again to achieve success, or to accomplish a higher level of achievement. Persistence has been found to be one of the critical elements in successful learning and is a particularly important skill in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).

PERSISTENCE

CHILDREN demonstrate by...

- Maintaining focus on a task, with support
- Seeking support when the next step seems unclear or appears too difficult
- Modifying strategies to complete a task; attempting multiple ways to solve a problem
- Coping with frustration or disappointment

TEACHERS support by...

- Setting goals and demonstrating the steps to get there
- Providing specific support and encouragement through tough tasks; pointing out the separate steps toward a goal
- Recognizing progress, successes and completion (in groups and individually)
- Encouraging peers and adults to puzzle-out challenges together
- Modeling by engaging in think-alouds; breaking down more challenging tasks into smaller parts
- Allowing more time
- Asking questions and fostering inquiry and collaboration
- Allowing children to work at different levels on different activities; differentiating instruction and individualizing

Reflections on implementation

- *Which activities provided opportunities for children to learn about and work through challenges/problems today/this week?*
- *When did children seem to give up on tasks?*
- *Which strategies/activities/interactions supported children to persist?*
- *Were any particular children or groups struggling to stick with tasks? If so, what strategies might help them next time?*
- *How do I keep track of persistence?*

APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Shaping and supporting the behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions that are essential for lifelong learning.

Children's curiosity prompts exploration and experimentation. Early childhood learning environments should foster opportunities for children to direct their own learning, or have initiative by taking on tasks or risks to learn more. Curriculum is most effective when it takes advantage of children's natural curiosity and fosters children's imagination.

CURIOSITY & INITIATIVE

CHILDREN demonstrate by...

- Exhibiting interest and willingness to learn new things
- Asking questions using who, what, how, why, when, where, what if
- Expressing interest in learning new things
- Actively exploring how things work
- Investigating areas of interest
- Taking objects and materials apart and attempting to put them back together
- Seeking out activities and materials to support curiosity
- Using trial and error approaches
- Willingly engaging in new experiences and activities

TEACHERS support by...

- Planning activities that allow for exploration and experimentation (expanding on an idea from a book, playing with different endings, conducting long-term experiments)
- Asking meaningful questions (why, how, what if, what else)
- Providing opportunities for children to ask questions and explore responses, reason and problem-solve, and use both deliberate and trial and error approaches for investigations
- Rotating materials, tools, and books in learning centers that connect to interests, projects, units, and themes
- Allowing time for exploration and revisiting experiences and topics
- Planning across multiple content areas, such as science, math, and social studies, to engage curiosity and initiative
- Providing opportunities for children to take on responsibilities or leadership roles

Reflections on implementation

- *What specific activities provided opportunities for children to experiment and explore today/this week?*
- *Are there any topics that seem to be of particular interest to the class (as a whole and individually)?*
- *Is the learning environment supporting children's curiosity (e.g., are materials engaging, do they help deepen/expand thinking)?*
- *Are any children reticent to explore or struggling to engage? What strategies might I use to support them?*
- *How do I keep track of children's curiosity and initiative?*

APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Shaping and supporting the behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions that are essential for lifelong learning.

Creativity is considered the foundation for innovation and invention. It helps children to problem-solve and apply multiple strategies to overcome challenges. Creative learners seek multiple solutions and are able to see things from multiple perspectives. Children need opportunities to be imaginative and have autonomy to experiment without judgment so they will extend and elaborate on ideas.

CREATIVITY & IMAGINATION

CHILDREN demonstrate by...

- Approaching tasks, activities and challenges with creativity and imagination
- Choosing materials/props to convey ideas, characters and objects
- Identifying additional material to complete a task
- Experimenting with things to learn more
- Seeking support to learn more
- Communicating more than one solution to a problem

TEACHERS support by...

- Ensuring that children have opportunities to initiate and design their own play
- Providing opportunities for children to self-select and use a variety of materials in an open-ended manner
- Ensuring opportunities for children to express themselves through multiple art forms, including dance/movement, drama, music, painting, etc.
- Ensuring art forms reflect multiple cultures
- Encouraging and helping children to express ideas and be playful
- Engaging in play to prompt new ideas (e.g., using “what if...” and “I wonder...” questions)

Reflections on implementation

- *In what ways am I encouraging children to show originality and be inventive?*
- *In my interactions with children, how have I supported originality (e.g., reserved judgment, encouraged original ideas, adapted to their ideas)?*
- *Have I provided new materials and resources to support creative thinking?*
- *Have I modeled creative and imaginative thinking (e.g., using character voices during read-alouds, trying a new dance)?*
- *Are any children or groups of children finding it difficult to engage? What strategies might support them?*
- *How do I keep track of children’s creativity and imagination?*

3. School-wide Reflection Worksheet

Program Improvement, Resources and Supports: Approaches to Learning				
	CURRENT STATUS			Next Steps
	Already in Place	N/A	Area to Develop	
<p>A. Program Leadership</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Principal/site manager promotes approaches to learning as essential to achievement. Principal/site manager identifies professional development and other resources to support Approaches to Learning. Principal/site manager ensures preschool staff are aware of and understand state and district learning standards. 				
<p>B. Research-Based and Effective Curriculum and Instruction in Support of State and District Standards</p> <p>Principals/site managers ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> All preschool staff receive training/orientation to teaching practices that support approaches to learning. Preschool staff have resources to select books and materials that support approaches to learning. Planning activities and materials include goals to support teaching practices that support approaches to learning, e.g., lesson plans, activity plans, daily schedule. The physical space supports children’s approaches to learning, e.g., options for exploration, materials for experimentation, varied materials and props. 				

	CURRENT STATUS			Next Steps
	Already in Place	N/A	Area to Develop	
<p>C. Supporting Teachers in the Classroom Principals/site managers ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers have opportunities and access to coaches or mentors to support approaches to learning integration. 2. Teachers receive feedback about their implementation of practices and techniques that support approaches to learning. 3. Teachers have access to learn about teaching skills and techniques that support approaches to learning, including opportunities to learn from other teachers. 4. Paraprofessionals and volunteers are included in training and feedback opportunities. 				
<p>D. Assessment and Progress Monitoring Principals/site managers ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers use authentic opportunities to assess students' progress on approaches to learning standards and maintain records (e.g., anecdotal records, teacher developed checklist). 2. Instructional leaders/teams review student progress (e.g., meetings, professional learning community, shared planning). 3. Instructional leaders/teams review program strengths and needs at least annually for continuous program improvement. 				
<p>E. Engaging Families and Community Principals/site managers ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School/preschool program has ongoing and reciprocal communication with parents about approaches to learning. 2. School/preschool program provides information to families in ways they understand about approaches to learning and ways they can support children's development. 3. School/preschool program provides paid time for staff to learn about children's interests and activities. 				