



Transition to Kindergarten and Kindergarten Professional Learning Community (PLC) Discussion Guide

CHAPTER 2: Learning Environment (Part 1 & Part 2)





TK & Kindergarten Professional Learning Community (PLC) Discussion Guide

This guide was created to support conversations in Transition to Kindergarten (TK) and Kindergarten Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Use this PLC Discussion Guide along with chapter 2 in the Washington State Transition to Kindergarten and Kindergarten Guide to engage in a deeper understanding of what developmentally appropriate practice looks like in your district, building, and classroom. If you work in a smaller district and you are the only TK teacher, consider connecting with kindergarten colleagues in your building. If you are the only Kindergarten teacher in your district, consider starting a PLC with other TK and K teachers in neighboring communities.



Chapter Two:

Learning Environment

Part 1: Classroom Community & Child Guidance



Classroom Community

A warm and welcoming classroom community is essential to high-quality TK and kindergarten programs. When grounded in children's cultures and experiences, a warm and welcoming community supports learning, safety, well-being, and positive relationships. Prioritizing social-emotional learning is a foundational part of building this sense of community, as it helps children develop the skills needed to connect with others and engage in learning. Cultivating such communities requires intentional planning and reflection across multiple factors, as outlined in this section.

Developing Relationships

Referencing the examples in the TK/K Guide on pages 41-42 and drawing from your own experience, discuss what positive and supportive relationships look like and sound like in a warm and welcoming classroom community. Record your answers in the space provided.

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Adults	
What might you see adults do to develop adult-child and peer-to-peer relationships in their classroom community?	What might you hear adults say to develop adult-child and peer-to-peer relationships in their classroom community?
Children	
What might you see children do because they have strong relationships with adults and peers?	What might you hear children say to adults and peers because they have strong relationships?

Student Autonomy

As a PLC, refer to the strategies in the TK/K Guide on page 42 and discuss what student autonomy looks like and sounds like in a warm and welcoming classroom community. Record your answers in the space provided.

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Adults	
What might you see adults do to develop autonomy in the classroom community?	What might you hear adults say to support autonomy in the classroom?

Children	
What might you see children do because they have autonomy in their classroom community?	What might you hear children say because they have autonomy in their classroom community?
Environment	
What visuals might you see in the classroom environment to support student autonomy?	

Self-Motivation

As a PLC, take 5 minutes to watch [A Study on Praise](#) by Ragan (2014). This video is referenced on page 43 of the TK/K Guide. You will learn about Carol Dweck's research on how the type of praise we use shapes children's motivation and mindsets.

Video Notes	
When researchers studied the difference between praising a child for intelligence vs. their effort, what did they find out?	
What does Carol Dweck say about the impact of praising a child on their intelligence? What does she mean by a fixed mindset?	
What does Carol Dweck say about the impact of praising a child on their efforts? What does she mean by a growth mindset?	

What are the implications of this study? How does this research impact your practice moving forward?	
Reflection and Discussion Notes	

Friendship Skills

Reflecting on the strategies listed on page 44 of the TK/K guide and your own experience, discuss what friendship skills look like and sound like in a warm and welcoming classroom community. Record your answers in the space provided.

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Adults	
What might you see adults do to support friendship skills?	What might you hear adults say to support friendship skills?
Children	
What might you see children do because they have the support needed to build their friendship skills?	What might you hear children say because they have the friendship skills needed to positively engage with peers?
Environment	
What visuals might you see in the classroom environment to support friendship skills?	

Emotional Literacy

Referencing the examples in the TK/K Guide on page 45 and drawing from your own experience, discuss what emotional literacy looks like and sounds like in a warm and welcoming classroom community. Record your answers in the space provided.

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Adults	
What might you see adults do to support emotional literacy?	What might you hear adults say to support emotional literacy?
Children	
What might you see children do because they have the emotional literacy skills needed to identify and communicate how they feel?	What might you hear children say because they have the emotional literacy skills needed to communicate how they feel?
Environment	
What visuals might you see in the classroom environment to support emotional literacy skills?	

Emotional Regulation & Calming Down

Use the information on page 46 in the TK/K guide and your own experience to guide a discussion about what regulation and calming down looks like and sounds like in a warm and welcoming classroom community. Record your answers in the space provided.

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Adults	
What might you see adults do to support children with emotional regulation and calming down?	What might you hear adults say to support children with emotional regulation and calming down?
Children	
What might you see children do that indicates they are ready to calm down independently or with support?	What might you hear children say that indicates that they are ready to calm down independently or with support?
Environment	
What visuals might you see in the classroom environment to support emotional regulation and calming down?	

Problem Solving

Watch the four-minute video [Problem Solving in the Moment](#) from Administration for Children & Families (ACF). Using the table below to guide your discussion, work with your team to identify and describe what problem solving looks like and sounds like in the video vignette.

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Adults	
What might you see adults do to support children with problem solving in the classroom?	What might you hear adults say to support children with problem solving in the classroom?
Children	
What might you see children do that indicates they are ready to solve problems independently or with support?	What might you hear children say that indicates that they are ready to solve problems independently or with support?
Environment	
What visuals might you see in the classroom environment to support problem solving?	

Child Guidance

The goal of effective child guidance is to help children manage their behavior safely and respectfully. It highlights the importance of engagement-based classrooms over compliance-based classrooms.

Refer to pages 48-49 in the TK/K guide and review the [Center for Inspired Teaching's White Paper](#) on engagement. Work with your PLC to answer the following questions:

Reflection and Discussion Notes	
The white paper states, "<i>The absence of misbehavior does not necessarily indicate the presence of learning.</i>" When have you observed learners who appeared compliant or well-behaved but were not fully engaged in learning? What evidence helped you recognize this?	
The paper describes four types of engagement: intellectual, emotional, physical, and behavioral. Which of these are most present in your current classroom? Which feels hardest to foster with TK/K students, and why?	
Look at the engagement vs. compliance comparison chart. Choose one row that surprises, challenges, or resonates with you. What might you want to change or celebrate in your own practice?	

Research shows that young children are naturally motivated to learn. What experiences in school might diminish motivation? How can you nurture and protect children's innate motivation to learn?	
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Behavior Expectations and Classroom Rules

Discuss how you currently create rules and expectations in your classroom and record your thinking below.

Reflection and Discussion Notes

Refer to pages 50-51 of the TK/K guide and use the additional resources listed below to discuss the following questions: How will you determine behavior expectations? How will you teach your behavior expectations?

Additional Resources:

- [Visual Example of Preschool Rules from NCPMI](#)
- [NCPMI Behavior Expectations Strategies and Poster](#)

Reflection and Discussion Notes

Handling Disruptions

Refer to pages 52-53 in the TK/K guide and use examples from your experience to respond to the questions below regarding what handling disruptions in a developmentally appropriate way looks like and sounds like in a warm and welcoming community.

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Adults	
What might you see adults do to handle disruptions in the classroom?	What might you hear adults say to handle disruptions in the classroom? (ACT approach p. 53)
Environment	
What visuals might you see in the classroom environment to support handling disruptions?	

Challenging behaviors are not easy to navigate, but you are not alone. To feel prepared for disruptions and challenging behaviors, it can be helpful to identify personal hot buttons. It also helps to know the hot buttons of the adults on your team, making it easier to support each other "in the moment."

Refer to page 52 in the TK/K Guide and take time to complete the [Hot Buttons Activity](#) independently. When you are finished with the activity, share what you learned about your own hot buttons. Consider discussing the following questions: Now that you know which behaviors challenge the adults on your team, how can you support one another? What systems can you put in place to help adults calm down when their buttons are pushed?

Anti-Bias Education and Classroom Community

Refer to the Classroom Tip on page 54 of the TK/K Guide, then watch the 13-minute video titled [TEDx talk from Grace Lin](#) together. Discuss your key takeaways from the video. Then, go to your classroom and look for windows and mirrors as described in the video. Return to your PLC and share what you noticed. Do you need to include more mirrors or windows?

Evidence of Mirrors	Evidence of Windows

Remember to come back to this activity. As the children in your classroom change, so do the mirrors and windows.



Chapter Two: Learning Environment Part 2: Physical Space



Classroom Layout

A thoughtfully designed learning environment is key to effective teaching and learning. Intentional spaces encourage exploration, foster relationships, support independence, and provide the consistency children need to feel safe and confident. This section highlights the important components of an effective learning environment.

Discuss with your PLC what is most important to you when you arrange your classroom environment. Use the questions below to prompt your thinking or follow your own authentic conversation.

- How do you decide where things go?
- What do you hang on your walls?
- What goes out on the shelves?
- Do you have interest areas? Why or why not?
- What colors do you choose for your classroom? Why do you choose those colors?

The self-assessment below was developed from the information on page 57 of the TK/K Guide. Complete the self-assessment independently by placing a check mark in the column that best reflects your current classroom practice. Once you have finished, discuss your responses with your team. What are you going to focus on? What are you struggling with? How can you support one another?

Self-Assessment of Classroom Layout				
	Not There Yet	Getting There	Got This	Notes:
Spaces should be clearly defined. Define boundaries with furniture (shelves and tables) and floor coverings (rugs). Consider floor coverings in sand and water and creative art.				
Avoid large open pathways. Traffic patterns allow for free, convenient movement without encouraging running.				
Materials Integration. Tables and chairs are integrated into the classroom and spaced throughout the room (avoiding rows of desks). Various materials (e.g. writing materials and books) should be available in all areas.				
Noise levels. Keep quiet areas separate from noisy areas (e.g. house center away from the library). Provide a space for children to be alone.				

Visual Supervision. Ensure that the entire room can be seen at all times. Furniture should not block any part of the classroom.				
Consider logistical needs. Place the art area near the sink, if possible, for easy cleanup.				
The classroom has well-defined interest areas that include <i>(as listed in the WA State full day K Guide)</i>: ✓ Large Group ✓ Blocks ✓ Literacy ✓ Dramatic Play ✓ Math ✓ Art ✓ Science ✓ Quiet Area ✓ Sand and Water ✓ Outdoor area for gross motor skills				

Centers

As a team, look at The Kindergarten Continuum on page 60 of the TK/K Guide, or refer to the image below. Independently consider where your classroom management falls on the continuum. As a team, use the Continuum to discuss what you would like TK/K to look like in your building.

The Kindergarten Continuum

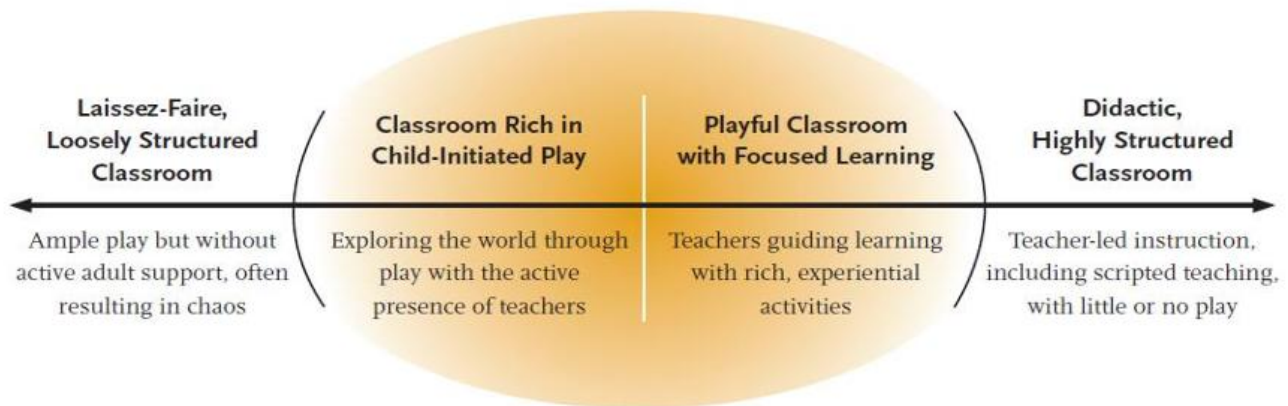


Figure 1. Continuum of approaches to kindergarten education (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Considerations for each center:

The Needs Assessment checklist below was developed from the content on pages 61–73 of the TK/K Guide. Use this checklist to independently reflect on space considerations, furniture, and materials in your classroom. Then, take time as a team to look at your checklists together and discuss the following questions:

- Consider what furniture and materials you have that you could share as a team.
- Consider what you might want to order this year.
- Create a wish list for future needs.

Needs Assessment Early Learning Centers			
	Space Considerations	Furniture	Suggested Materials
Block Area	☐ Place in an open space near group area (tip: can double as a group area) and/or ☐ Place in a corner to use two walls as boundaries and/or ☐ Place near other noisy areas such as dramatic play	☐ Open shelving with labels-picture labels of block shapes ☐ Low shelves ☐ Carpeted area or rug to absorb sound and provide a boundary	☐ Blocks (wooden unit blocks, cardboard blocks, etc.) ☐ Wooden hollow blocks (can be shared between classrooms) ☐ Manga-Tiles ☐ Lincoln Logs ☐ Small cars and trucks ☐ Figurines (people, animals, etc.) ☐ Traffic Signs (consider creating community signs to create a language rich block center)
Literacy Area	☐ Quiet area ☐ Carpeted area or rug ☐ Welcoming lighting ☐ Comfortable place to sit ☐ Language-rich environment	☐ Couch or bench ☐ Pillows ☐ Rocking chair ☐ Beanbags ☐ Large pillows for floor seating ☐ Bookstand or bookshelf (ideal if book covers can face front instead of seeing the spine) ☐ Tablets ☐ Table and chairs for writing ☐ Shelf for writing materials	☐ A variety of books that are representative of diverse cultures, family structures, and abilities ☐ Variety of books from different genres: picture books, non-fiction books, wordless pictures books, poetry, fairy tales, concept books (shapes, numbers, colors, alphabet, opposites, textures) ☐ Book making supplies ☐ Writing supplies (several varieties,

			pencils, pens, markers, crayons) ☐ Different types, sizes, and colors of paper ☐ Listening center with headphones ☐ Storytelling props (puppets, felt pieces) ☐ Felt board
Dramatic Play Area	☐ Carpeted area or rug (if not using a table)	☐ Kitchen set ☐ Pretend food (representative of different cultures) ☐ Kitchen items (dishes, silverware, baking, utensils, pots, pans, broom) ☐ Aprons ☐ Child-sized table and chairs ☐ Dolls (representative of different cultures) ☐ Doll bed, clothes, blankets ☐ Dress-up clothes (multicultural, community helpers) ☐ Theme-related materials. (e.g. cash register, shopping cart) ☐ Paper, writing utensils, cookbooks, menus ☐ Puppet theater, puppets	☐ Open shelving with labeled containers ☐ Tables and chairs or large rug ☐ Kitchen (start the year with a kitchen area, and adapt as the year progresses)

Aligns with Chapter 2: Learning Environment (Part 1 & Part 2)
Washington State TK/K Guide

Math and Manipulative Area	☐ Carpeted area or rug (if not using a table) ☐ Table embedded in area	☐ Open shelving with labeled containers ☐ Table and chairs or large rug	☐ Legos and other construction materials ☐ Sorting bowls (commercial and/or ice trays, muffin tins) ☐ Math and sorting manipulative (e.g., pattern blocks, snapping cubes, two-sided counters, counting bears, buttons, small colored blocks, shells) ☐ Number chart to 20 for TK, 100 for kindergarten ☐ Dice and spinners ☐ Board games, playing cards ☐ Lacing cards and lacing beads ☐ Dominoes ☐ Puzzles (wooden, floor) ☐ Puzzle storage Paper, clipboards, writing utensils ☐ Marble run
Art Area	☐ Tile floor ☐ Close to sink ☐ Close to drying area for wet art projects ☐ Near shelf with art supplies	☐ Open shelving with labeled containers (a moveable art cart can be used if space is limited) ☐ Easels (can be used if space is limited) ☐ Tables and chairs ☐ Drying rack or space for drying	☐ Easel ☐ Smocks ☐ Drying rack ☐ Paint brushes, paint pots with lids ☐ Playdough with tools: rolling pins, scissors, cookies cutters ☐ Scissors (class set) ☐ Staplers

			☐ Hole punchers ☐ Tape dispenser ☐ Consumables: tempera paint, masking tape, scotch tape, watercolors, oil pastels, pencils, crayons, markers, colored pencils, construction paper, watercolor paper, drawing paper, sequins, buttons, cotton balls, toothpicks, craft sticks, pipe cleaners, recycled materials/loose parts, fabric, stickers, glue and glue sticks, yarn, natural objects or items
Science/ Discovery Area	☐ Against wall or other support ☐ Near natural light (window) or close to an outlet for light source for plants ☐ Near a water source	☐ Open shelving with labeled containers ☐ Table (to maximize space, consider using the top surface of shelving unit for children's exploration; children can stand) ☐ A computer/tablet so children can look up information, take pictures and observe	☐ Scale or balance ☐ Magnifying glasses, bug magnifiers ☐ Tape measure, ruler ☐ Tweezers ☐ Sensory bottles (e.g., sound, smells) ☐ Natural materials for sorting and exploration (ex. leaves, rocks, sticks, shells) ☐ Magnets and magnet wands ☐ Paper, clipboards, writing utensils

			☐ Integrate materials based on current units of study
Water/Sensory Area	☐ Tile floor with rug to absorb spills ☐ Next to containers with sensory toys ☐ Place to hang smocks and towels	☐ Sensory table with clear sides or clear plastic bins on top tables ☐ Sand table ☐ Open shelving, baskets clear plastic bins with materials	☐ Sand table/sensory table with lid ☐ Smocks ☐ Sensory materials (e.g. sand, soil, water, beads, shaving cream) ☐ Measuring toys ☐ Funnels, sieves ☐ Sponges ☐ Shovels, rakes ☐ Rocks, sticks, leaves, and other natural materials ☐ Tongs/tweezers ☐ Cups, small buckets ☐ Small animal or vehicle toys
Break Area	☐ Quiet, cozy space for 1-2 children ☐ Carpet or rug	☐ Floor pillows or bean bag ☐ Soft tent	☐ Soft furnishings (pillows, bean bag chair) ☐ Quiet activities like board books, beads to string, breathing ball, sensory tube ☐ Visuals for self-regulating strategies ☐ Emotion chart ☐ Squish toys



Manage Centers

Allowing children to select activities and determine when to transition between centers supports autonomy, engagement, and self-regulation. Discuss your prior experience managing centers. What worked well for you? What did you find stressful?

Refer to pages 73-74 in the TK/K Guide. Discuss how you would like to manage centers to support children:

Considerations for Managing Centers		Reflection and Discussion Notes
Will you have a maximum number of children in each area?	Consider labeling your areas with the number of children allowed so children can count to see if the center is full. Refer to the picture cues on page 73 for ideas.	
What is the expectation when a center is full?	Consider using a waitlist. When the center is full, the child signs their name on a small list next to the center and waits for their turn. Consider using a visual sand timer that will determine when the child on the waitlist can enter the center.	

Do children need to clean up before moving to another center?	Consider a visual reminder to help children remember to clean up. Remember to pre-teach and re-teach this expectation. Give many opportunities for children to practice.	
What other questions do you want to address regarding managing centers?	What considerations do you want to share?	

Visuals

Effective visuals help children remember and follow expectations and routines, reinforce and support current learning, make language and concepts more accessible for all learners, and promote independence by reducing reliance on adult reminders.

Discuss what is currently displayed on your classroom walls and how often you intentionally refer to it with students.

- What visuals do you use regularly and will not move?
- Do the walls reflect the teacher or the children in the classroom?
- What visuals need to be moved so that children can easily access them? (e.g. The alphabet is hung up high, and you want to move it to child level.)
- What do you have on your walls that you do not use and could be taken down?

Read [Do's and Don'ts of Classroom Decorations](#) (Terada, 2018) referenced on page 74 of the TK/K Guide. Discuss the article and what stood out to you.

Reflection and Discussion Notes

Referring to page 75 in the TK/K Guide, review the list of considerations together. Discuss what you are already doing and what you might want to consider in your own classroom.

Materials

Access to a variety of materials fosters children's creativity, imagination, experimentation, and independence. Referencing page 77-78 of the TK/K Guide, create a list of open-ended materials and close-ended materials that your students can regularly access. What materials might be shared between classrooms to ensure a variety and balance of learning opportunities?

Open-Ended Materials	Closed-Ended Materials

Review [Loose Parts: A Start-Up Guide](#) referenced on page 77 of the TK/K Guide. What could you do with recycled materials and loose parts in your classrooms?

Reflection and Discussion Notes



Outdoor Play

Outdoor play facilitates children's physical activity, social interaction, problem-solving, and creativity. It may enhance children's connection with nature and promote their mental health and well-being.

Refer to OSPI's one-pager titled [Outdoor Education and Social Emotional Learning Connection](#) linked on page 79 of the TK/K Guide. List the five benefits of integrating social emotional learning into outdoor play experiences. Then, discuss as a PLC how you might intentionally use time spent outside the four walls of the classroom to support social-emotional learning.

Benefits of Integrating SEL Into Outdoor Play

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Reflection and Discussion Notes

Explore the blog referenced on page 79 of the TK/K Guide called [Incorporating Nature into your Early Childhood Program](#).

Based on what you read in the TK/K Guide and the blog, consider ways that you can bring nature into your classrooms. Discuss why bringing nature into the classroom benefits your children. What challenges or barriers can you plan for?

Reflection and Discussion Notes

Chapter Reflection

Independently or as a PLC: What have you learned about the importance of setting up the learning environment? Write down three key points that have shifted your thinking about how to create a warm and welcoming classroom community. Review your notes from each section of this chapter:

- Classroom Community and Child Guidance
- Physical Space

Three Key Points about Environment
1.
2.
3.

If you complete this activity independently, share your key points with your PLC when you are finished.