



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

CHAPTER 3: Instructional Practices





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 three 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 Three: Instructional Practices



Teacher's Role

Intentional Teaching

Teachers create meaning learning experiences for children and strengthen intentional teaching by reflecting on their instructional strategies and identifying opportunities for growth. Review Rosenshine's (2012) list of effective instructional practices on **pages 82-83** of the TK/K Guide. Reflecting on your own teaching, put a star next to the practices you do well and circle those you would like to improve. Then, use the following questions to guide a conversation with your PLC:

Reflection and Discussion Notes	
Which instructional practice would you like to strengthen in your own classroom to support meaningful learning experiences for children? (select one)	
How might strengthening this practice enhance your intentional teaching and support children's learning?	
As a PLC, which instructional practice will your team focus on improving together? (select one)	

Implicit Bias and Teaching

Examining implicit bias is fundamental to giving all children the education they deserve. Explore your own implicit bias by taking Harvard University's [Implicit Bias Test](#) (2011), referenced on **page 84** of the TK/K Guide. Individually, reflect on what you learned about your own biases. As a team, discuss ways bias might show up in your building.

Reflection and Discussion Notes	
What did you learn about your own implicit biases?	
How does implicit bias show up in your building?	

Individually and as a team, think about the relationships you build with each child. What everyday practices are already in place that help you notice and respond to all children with fairness and warmth? Where might there be opportunities to examine your assumptions or adjust your practices so that no child feels overlooked or misunderstood?

Everyday Practices	New Opportunities



Strategies for Increasing Language Experiences

Effective teacher-child and child-child interactions play a critical role in language development. Watch this one-minute video, [3Ts for Early Educators](#) (2022), found on **page 86** of the TK/K Guide. Thinking of your classroom instruction and interactions with children, identify opportunities to implement the 3Ts: Tune In, Talk More, and Take Turns.

Then, consider your daily schedule. When in your day do you have time to tune in and listen to what children are saying? When do children have time to talk more and take conversational turns? Consider your practice and how you talk with children as a conversational partner. What might you do to tune in better, or take turns? (e.g., I could intentionally get down to a child’s eye level when we talk rather than standing over them.)

	When do I have time in my day?	How might I shift my practice?
Tune In		
Talk More		
Take Turns		

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Review the [Open-ended Questions](#) resource from Georgia's Pre-K Program found on **page 86** of the TK/K Guide. Using this resource and your prior knowledge, discuss with your PLC how you might use open-ended questions to stretch curiosity, enhance reasoning, promote creativity, and build independence. Use the tables below to guide your conversation and record your thinking.

Stretch Curiosity		
What- Which open-ended questions do you think will stretch children's curiosity?	When- When might you incorporate this type of question into daily instruction?	Where- In which learning centers or classroom activities might this question enhance learning?

Enhance Reasoning		
What- Which open-ended questions do you think will enhance children's reasoning ability?	When-When might you incorporate this type of question into daily instruction?	Where- In which learning centers or classroom activities might this question enhance learning?

Promote Creativity		
What- Which open-ended questions do you think will promote children's creativity?	When- When might you incorporate this type of question into daily instruction?	Where- In which learning centers or classroom activities might this question enhance learning?

Build Independence		
What- Which open-ended questions do you think will build children's independence?	When- When might you incorporate this type of question into daily instruction?	Where- In which learning centers or classroom activities might this question enhance learning?

Plan Peer Conversations

Activities that encourage **peer interaction** are listed below. Put a check mark next to each activity you *consistently* offer in your classroom.

- ☐ Partner tasks
- ☐ Group discussions
- ☐ Snack time chats
- ☐ Dramatic play
- ☐ Group games
- ☐ Outdoor Play

Use the following questions to guide a conversation with your PLC:

Reflection and Discussion Notes	
How do you encourage peer conversations and collaborative learning experiences in your classroom?	
Are there other peer interaction activities that you would like to add or improve?	



Learning Experiences

Purposeful Play

Play is an essential aspect of childhood development and should be at the heart of young children’s learning experiences. Fred Rogers called play the work of childhood. As a team, examine the Play Spectrum below that highlights three types of playful learning situations. What do you notice about each playful learning situation? How are they alike and how do they differ?



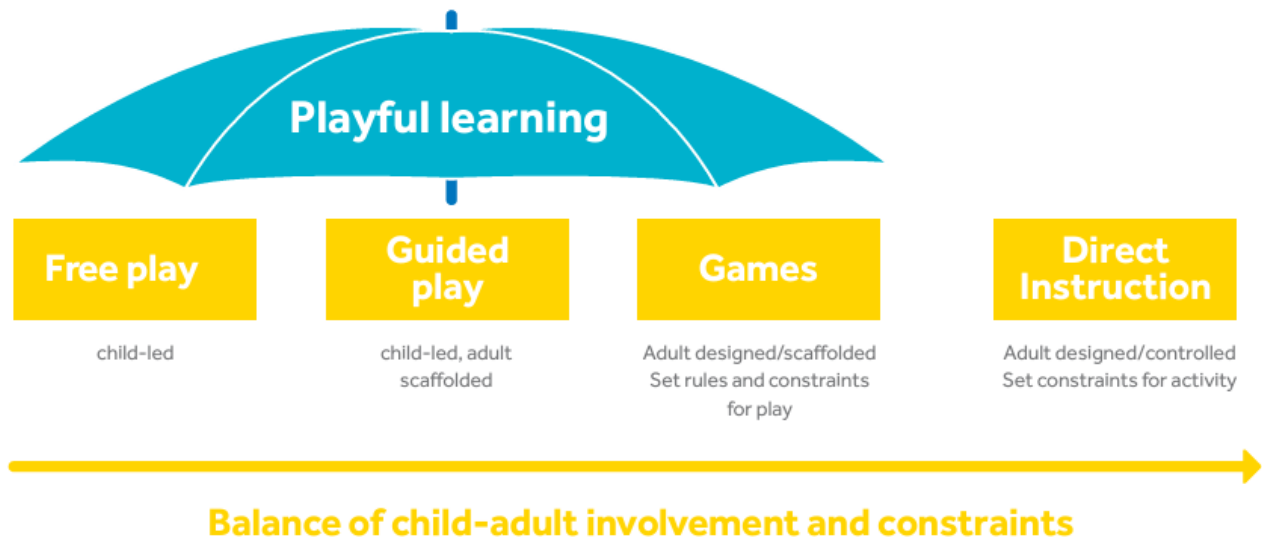
Learn more about these types of play on **pages 87-88** of the TK/K guide. For each type of play, describe its distinct characteristics and unique benefits in the space provided.

Free Play	
Distinct Characteristics	Unique Benefits
Where does free play show up in the classroom?	

Guided Play	
Distinct Characteristics	Unique Benefits
Where does guided play show up in the classroom?	

Games	
Distinct Characteristics	Unique Benefits
Where do games show up in the classroom?	

Next, examine the Playful Learning umbrella image on **page 87** of the TK/K Guide or refer to the image below. What stands out to you? What do you notice about the relationship between playful learning and direct instruction? As you move from left to right on the continuum, how does the level of child autonomy and adult guidance change? How do you intentionally decide when children would benefit most from exploration, guided play, games, or explicit teaching?



In the space provided, estimate the percentage of time students spend daily in each learning experience.

Percentage (%) of Time Spent Daily in Each Learning Experience			
Free Play	Guided Play	Games	Direct Instruction

Referring to the percentages above, use the following questions to discuss what you notice about the learning experiences that are prioritized in your classroom.

Reflection and Discussion Notes	
Which type of learning experience is most prevalent?	

Which type of learning experience is less common?	
What similarities or differences exist across classrooms?	
What do you wonder about why certain types of play might be more or less prevalent in your setting?	

Consider how you might enhance or expand purposeful play opportunities in your classroom and school, and how you might advocate for the important role of purposeful play in children's learning and development.

Discussion Notes	
Ways to Expand	Ways to Advocate

The Teacher's Role in Play

While play is undoubtedly children's work, the teacher's role as facilitator of meaningful play is key. Teachers empower children's learning when they play a supportive role. Reflect on the ways teachers support play, as described on **pages 89-90** of the TK/K Guide.

Use the space below to record what a teacher does in each role. For an optional deeper dive, read [Playful Learning: A Powerful Teaching Tool](#) from NAEYC referenced on **page 96** in the TK/K Guide.

The Teacher's Role in Play	
Planning for Play	
Planning for Play	
Facilitating Play	
Reviewing Play	

Planning for Play

As you plan for play in your classroom, consider these key actions:

- Include play in classroom schedules
- Include a variety of materials
- Create a developmentally appropriate environment
- Provide choices
- Scaffold children's understanding
- Ensure that children feel safe and included

In the space provided, brainstorm at least 2-3 strategies or ideas for intentional planning.

Planning Area	Strategies or Ideas for Intentional Planning
Include play in classroom schedules	
Include a variety of materials	
Create a developmentally appropriate environment	
Provide choices	
Scaffold children's understanding	
Ensure that children feel safe and included	

Facilitating Play

Page 89 of the TK/K Guide explains how teachers facilitate play by asking open-ended questions, leveraging teachable moments, and modeling. As a PLC, discuss these practices and use the matrix below to identify your team's strengths and one area of focus. Then, discuss what you will do differently when you return to your classroom. Keep it simple and record your plan in the space provided.

	We Have Limited Proficiency With This Skill	We Are Getting There	We've Got This	We Excell at This	Our Plan:
Asking open-ended questions					
Leveraging teachable moments					
Modeling					

Indicators of Playful Learning

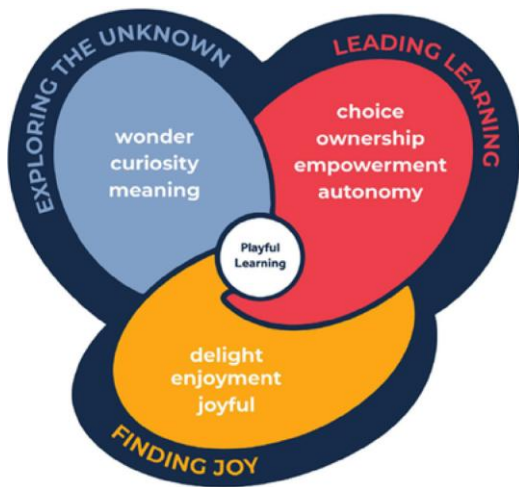
On **page 90** of the TK/K Guide, choose one of the following Project Approach resources to review:

- [The Project Approach to Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Why the Project Approach](#)

After reviewing the resource, discuss the following questions as a team:

What are the benefits of the project approach?	
How does the project approach align with DAP and play-based learning?	
What challenges or barriers make it difficult to use a project approach to learning?	

On **pages 90–91** of the TK/K Guide, Mardell et al. (2023) describe playful learning as having three essential characteristics: children taking ownership of their learning, exploring the unknown with wonder and curiosity, and experiencing joy in the learning process.



Review the [Playful Learning Planner](#) from Harvard’s Pedagogy of Play at Project Zero (2023). As a PLC, plan and reflect together. Complete the chart below using the process outlined in the planning tool.

Identify an experience in which you would like to support learning through play (a particular class, a theme, a unit of learning, or something else).	
Consider how you can structure the experience to encourage one or more of the indicators below.	
Leading Learning	
Exploring the Unknown	
Finding Joy in Learning	



Play in the Classroom

The Plan, Do, Reflect model, as described on **page 92** of the TK/K Guide, is a vital component of the instructional day. Ideally, it is a 60-minute, uninterrupted block of time during which children engage in self-selected play. This allows them to connect with skills introduced throughout the day and week and make personal meaning from their learning.

Review each stage of the model and identify its goal or purpose.

	Goal or Purpose
Plan	
Do	
Reflect	

Consider the roles that both teachers and children play in making the Plan, Do, Reflect process successful. As a PLC, review the charts on **pages 93–94** of the TK/K Guide. In the space provided, describe what the teacher and the child are doing during each stage of the process.

Plan	
Teacher's Role in "plan" phase	Child's Role in "plan" phase
Do	
Teacher's Role in "do" phase	Child's Role in "do" phase
Reflect	
Teacher's Role in "reflect" phase	Child's Role in "reflect" phase

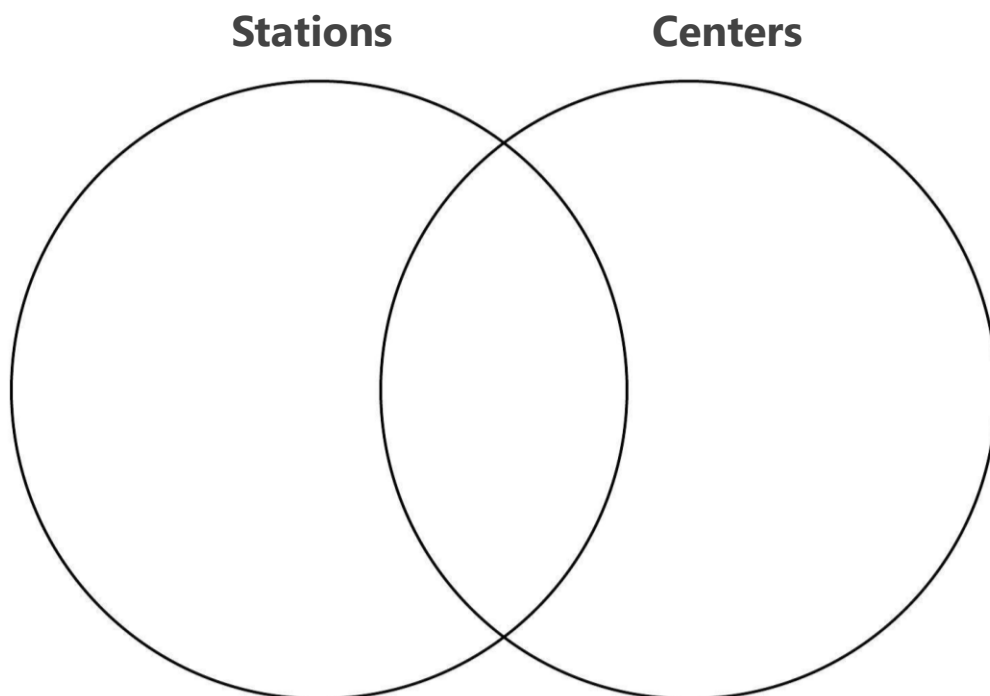
Consider what it takes to successfully implement the Plan, Do, Reflect model. Review your classroom schedules and discuss:

- How closely do your current classroom schedules align with the goal of providing 60 minutes of uninterrupted play?
- If you currently implement the Plan, Do, Reflect model, where does it fit within your classroom schedule, and what strategies have been most successful? If it is not consistently implemented, where could it fit within your classroom schedule, and what steps could you take to incorporate it more regularly?
- What challenges or barriers might make it difficult to implement the Plan, Do, Reflect model, and how might you address them?



Stations and Centers

Stations and centers play a critical role in children's learning and are essential components of high-quality TK and kindergarten classrooms. **Pages 96-100** of the TK/K Guide explore the similarities and differences between stations and centers. Using the Venn Diagram below to record your thinking, discuss how they are alike and how they differ. As a team, reflect on how these structures are currently used in your classrooms. What opportunities do you see to strengthen the use of stations and centers to support children's learning, engagement, and independence?



Determine how much time is currently dedicated to learning in centers and stations in your classrooms. Based on guidance in the TK/K Guide, centers should be implemented daily for a minimum of 45-60 minutes in TK and at least 45 minutes in kindergarten. How well does this guidance compare with current practices, schedules, and daily routines in your classrooms and school? How will you make adjustments to move closer to the recommendations for your grade level?

Time Spent in Centers	Time Spent in Stations
Adjustments to Increase Time	

Creating an environment where children engage in both free play and guided play through centers requires intentional planning. Review the examples of stations and centers on **pages 98–100** of the TK/K Guide. As part of this process, reflect on how centers and stations are currently organized and structured in your classroom to promote meaningful exploration and engagement among children.

Reflection	
What is working well?	
What adjustments could you make to optimize the effectiveness of these learning spaces for all children?	

For an **optional** deeper dive, consider using the [Planning Guide](#) (page 100) to support the design of effective centers.



Small Group and Whole Group Instruction

Thoughtful use of whole-group and small-group instruction helps ensure that learning experiences are developmentally appropriate, engaging, and responsive to children's individual needs. Review the small-group and whole-group guidance on **page 101** of the TK/K Guide.

According to the recommendations:

- **TK small groups** should be approximately **15 minutes**.
- **Kindergarten small groups** should be approximately **10–20 minutes**.
- **Whole-group experiences** in both TK and kindergarten should be limited to **15–20 minutes or less**.

How closely do your current practices align with these recommendations? How do your interactions with children in both settings support learning? How do your small-group and whole-group interactions respond to individual student needs while also fostering a strong sense of community within your classroom?

Small Group	
Individual Student Needs	Sense of Community

Whole Group	
Individual Student Needs	Sense of Community

Small groups typically consist of 2–5 children with similar learning needs. Small group activities should be engaging, offer choices, and be as student-directed as possible.

Reflect on the effectiveness of your current small-group strategies for supporting learning and managing instruction.

Reflection and Discussion Notes	
How well do these approaches meet the diverse needs and learning styles of your children?	
How might you refine them to better support all learners?	

Chapter Reflection

Independently or as a PLC, reflect on your learning from this chapter and your PLC discussions about the importance of developmentally appropriate, play-based instructional practices in TK and Kindergarten. Review your notes and identify three key insights that have influenced or shifted your thinking about developmentally appropriate instruction. How might these insights impact your classroom practices or the experiences you create for children?

Key Insights
1.
2.
3.

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