

Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages 3 to 5



Approaches to Learning

Initiative and Curiosity AL.01

Reasoning and Problem Solving AL.02

For young children, growing and learning begins with each child's personal experiences and understanding of the relationship of self to home and family.

Their understanding gradually expands to include the people they meet through activities such as early childhood care and education programs, their neighborhood, the community, and the larger world.

Adults need to identify children's current knowledge and understanding of their world, and use it as a basis for making new experiences, ideas, and concepts meaningful.

The learning experiences for young children need to focus on concepts that are related to the child's everyday life, and provide encouragement for the child to successfully try new things.

Adults need to allow children to learn how to solve problems with their support, rather than solve their problems for them. With just the right amount of support and information (scaffolding), adults guide children into their own discovery and sense of accomplishment. This gives them confidence as learners, and critical thinking skills to draw upon in future situations.

When adults nurture children's natural sense of initiative, curiosity, and encourage their reasoning and problem-solving skills, they set them up for school success.



Initiative and Curiosity (AL.01)



Widely Held Expectations

- Child engages in activities with imagination and creativity
- Child engages in a wide range of new and familiar learning experiences in their daily lives
 - Explores ways to use new materials
 - Carries out complex and varied sequences of activities independently
- Child increasingly uses communication to ask questions and seek answers
- Child follows through with activities with persistence and focused attention
 - Plans and carries out activities with motivation and flexibility
 - Works through frustration and challenges to complete an activity

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:

- Asks adults to read stories, signs, or notes
- Participates with different art materials, dramatic play, and puzzles/toys/blocks
- Shows a willingness to listen to a new story or song
- Notices new displays and materials and discusses them with the adult
- Tries alternative methods to solve a problem and is highly involved and persistent
- Plans steps and organizes materials to create a project, such as making a car out of an empty box

The Adult:

- Explores the outside world and engages in learning experiences along with children
- Asks open-ended questions, which requires more than a one-word response and has no one right answer, to engage children's imagination and expand children's understanding, "What do you think will happen next?"
- Asks questions and helps children find answers through active, hands-on exploration and problem solving
- Responds to children's curiosity and questions with enthusiasm and encouragement
- Provides materials for open-ended activities, manipulation and choices for explorative play
- Provides a substantial amount of time throughout the day for child-initiated activities
- Provides children with feedback and just enough guidance to support children in their attempts to use critical thinking skills and accomplish tasks
- Encourages hands-on and sensory experiences such as touching, holding, exploring, tasting, smelling and manipulating to allow for deeper understanding

The Environment Includes:

- A safe, natural space for children to visit and explore
- Opportunities for sand and water play, clay, paints, markers, books and blocks
- Consistent and new materials for children to explore (empty boxes, various containers, recycled materials children are familiar with, etc.)
- Open-ended computer software programs/smart devices to encourage creative thinking, problem solving and extended interest in the activity

Strategies to Support Initiative and Curiosity

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- Plan and reenact favorite stories. Guide planning through questions and by writing down the children's plans and ideas. Some questions they may come up with include, "What costumes do we need? What materials do we need to make the costumes? Who will play what part? Where will we put on the play?" As children begin to prepare for their play, encourage them to reflect on their progress. "Do the costumes show the characters of the story? Did we include all the characters? Is there something missing to show the setting?"
- Encourage children's involvement and persistence by focusing on the child's effort. Say, "You really tried hard to figure this out." "Tell me about your building. How did you decide that?"
- Offer encouragement when children are frustrated by saying, "That looks hard. Keep going because I think you can do it." When children learn to persist even when working on more difficult tasks, the child will continue to try new strategies.

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Adapt routine times to increase participation.
- Start with what the child can do and wants to do, to work towards independence.
- Use special or adaptive tools to increase a child's level of participation.
- Provide opportunities for natural, ongoing interactions with typically developing peers.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Use vocabulary and phrases in the child's native language when introducing new ideas/concepts.
- Use parallel talk to narrate the child's actions, "Patti, you are using the paintbrush to paint your circle red."
- Repeat new vocabulary, ideas, and instruction using simple sentences.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:

- Use books, materials, and posters that include authentic photographs/ illustrations that accurately reflect the cultures of all children and families.
- Ask families to continuously share information about their children's interests and infuse the information into classroom/group activities and curriculum.
- Create a welcoming environment that reflects children's backgrounds. Include pictures, music, posters, toys, and books that portray children's languages and cultures in a respectful and authentic way.

Reasoning and Problem Solving (AL.02)

Widely Held Expectations

- Child shows increasing ability to classify, compare and contrast objects, events and experiences (past, present, and future)
- Child recognizes cause and effect relationships
- Child tries several methods to solve a problem and is highly involved and persistent
 - Uses active exploration and trial and error to solve problems
 - Increases ability to make predictions and find more than one solution
- Child recalls and reflects on experiences and information, and interprets or draws conclusions based on the information
- Child uses drawings, movement, and objects to represent people, places, or things
- Child uses symbols/images/objects to represent something not present

Learning in Action: Examples

The Child:

- Makes comparisons among objects that are observed
- Describes and explains reasons for classifying and sorting different items
- Asks for assistance after trying for a minute or two to put together a difficult puzzle
- Tries several methods to solve a problem before asking for assistance
- Constructs a bridge with blocks using past experiences as a guide
- Adjusts the force used to throw a ball in order to get closer to the target

The Adult:

- Helps children identify characteristics of objects or events in their environment
- Provides opportunities to increase the child's ability to make independent choices
- Encourages and provides materials for a variety of sensory experiences
- Gives children time and encouragement to problem solve without intervening
- Listens to children's responses and explanations to understand their thought processes
- Asks "why" and "how" questions to support concept development
- Provides feedback to support expansion and/or clarification of concepts
- Connects learning to children's prior knowledge and life experiences
- Ensures the curriculum promotes diverse perspectives, values, attitudes and beliefs

The Environment Includes:

- Opportunities to observe and make predictions about natural events (growing seeds, caring for animals, charting weather)
- A variety of tools that can be used for exploring and investigating (scales, magnifying glasses, measuring cups and spoons, wide range of items to create three-dimensional objects)

- A variety of materials to support planning, reflection and the development of thought processes (writing materials, chart/graph paper)
- A variety of materials and activities to explore cause and effect (water play, technology, wheels, ramps, pulleys, marbles, tubes)

Strategies to Support Reasoning and Problem Solving

Teaching with Intent Throughout the Day:

- Provide a variety of balls (hard, soft, some that bounce and others that don't, different textures) and a variety of materials to maneuver the balls through, over, under and around (different sizes of tubes, planks, hard and soft surfaces, different textured surfaces) and plenty of time for children to explore freely with the materials provided.
 - Ask questions to spark children's interest, "What do we have in our basket today? What can you do with these materials?"
 - Ask questions to encourage comparisons of the materials, "Why did this ball bounce and this one didn't? Which ball do you think will bounce higher?" "When you put balls in each tube at the same time, which ball do you think will come out first?"
 - Ask children to explain their thinking so others can learn from them by asking how they arrived at a particular answer, "Why do you think this ball will bounce higher?"
- Make new learning meaningful by linking concepts and activities to previous learning, and to children's lives, "Yesterday it rained and we got wet when we went outside. In this story it is snowing. How is rain different from snow? Who has played in the snow?"

Supporting Children with a Wide Range of Abilities:

- Provide adaptations to support learning by using multisensory cues.
- Break instruction into simple steps, and demonstrate actions using simple words.
- Use verbal, visual (picture schedule/communication board) and physical cues (sign language/voice output devices) to support communication and participation.

Supporting English Language Learners:

- Use vocabulary and phrases in the child's home language when introducing new ideas/ concepts and reflecting their thought processes.
- Learn how to read the meaning of body language, gestures, and facial expressions, to provide insight into what the child may be trying to communicate.
- Engage in sustained, language-rich activities with children, like a puzzle or playing with blocks, which provides opportunities to model language, and introduce vocabulary.

Supporting Children from a Variety of Cultures:

- Use books, materials and posters that include authentic photographs/ illustrations that accurately reflect the cultures of all children and families.
- Provide opportunities for families and community members to share stories and information in their home language with teachers, staff and children.
- Develop knowledge of culturally and linguistically responsive practices.
- Ensure the environment represents diversity, supporting reflections on past experiences and allowing for opportunity to build on those experiences.

Print Resources

- A Mind at a Time*, Mel Levine (2002).
- Einstein Never Used Flashcards: How Our Children REALLY Learn, and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less*, Kathy Kirsch-Pasek and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff (2003).
- Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs (2nd ed.)* Mary Hohmann and David P. Weikart (2002).
- Engaging Children’s Minds: The Project Approach (2nd ed.)*, Lilian G. Katz and Sylvia C. Chard (2000).
- From Play to Practice: Connecting Teacher’s Play to Children’s Learning*, Marcia Nell (2012).
- Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn: Building Essential Skills in Young Children*, Mary RenckJalongo (2008).
- Making Learning Visible: Children as Individual and Group Learners*, Project Zero and Reggio Children (2001).
- Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs*, Ellen Galinsky (2010).
- Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines: Connecting Children to Nature (2008)*,
http://www.education.ne.gov/oec/pubs/ELG/nature_education.pdf.
- Powerful Interactions: How to Connect with Children to Extend Their Learning*, Amy Laura Dombro, Judy Jablon and Charlotte Stetson (2011).
- Reconsidering Children’s Early Development and Learning Toward Common Views and Vocabulary: Report to the National Education Goals Panel*, U.S. Department of Education (2001).
- What About Having All My Themes and Projects Revolve Around Holidays?*, Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: Best Practices in Early Childhood Education, M. Kostelnik, A. Soderman, and A.P. Whiren (2010).
- Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years (2nd ed.)*, Judy Harris Helm and Lilian Katz (2011).

These resources, and many others, may be available for Nebraska residents to borrow from the Early Childhood Training Center’s Media Center by visiting <http://www.education.ne.gov/oec/mediactr.html> or by calling 1-402-557-6885 or 1-800-89CHILD.

Online Resources

Executive Function: Skills for Life & Learning (Video and pdf)

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/inbrief_series/inbrief_executive_function/.

Executive Functioning Skill Development & Support- videos of children at play and suggestions for skill development http://www.deltraining.com/courses/Executive_Function/content-frame.htm.

Tools of the Mind: a research-based early childhood program that builds strong foundations for school success by promoting intentional and self-regulated learning in preschool- and kindergarten-aged children <http://www.toolsofthemind.org/>.

Understanding Learning and Thinking in Preschoolers <http://www.getreadytoread.org/early-learning-childhood-basics/early-childhood/understanding-learning-and-thinking-in-preschoolers>.

National Education Goals Panel, Essential Domains of School Readiness	Revised Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines Ages 3-5 Domains & Key Elements	Teaching Strategies GOLD® Objectives, Dimensions, and Indicators	Head Start Child Development & Early Learning Framework Domains & Elements	NE K-12 Standards	NE Rule 11 Regs.	NE Child Care Licensing Standards
Approaches to Learning	Approaches to Learning: Initiative & Curiosity (AL.01)	Language 10a.6.	Language Development: Expressive Language	LA 0.3.1a LA 0.2.1a	004.05C 004.06C 004.06D 004.06E	Child Development Program Toys, Equipment and Materials
		Cognitive 11b.6.	Approaches to Learning: Persistence & Attentiveness			
		Cognitive 11d.6.	Approaches to Learning: Initiative & Curiosity			
		Cognitive 11e.4.				
	Approaches to Learning: Reasoning & Problem Solving (AL.02)	Cognitive 11e.6.	Approaches to Learning: Persistence & Attentiveness	SC 2.1.1f SC 2.1.1b	004.05D 004.06C 004.06D 004.06E	
		Cognitive 11b.6.				
		Cognitive 11c.6.	Logic & Reasoning: Reasoning & Problem Solving			
		Cognitive 12a.6.				
		Cognitive 12b.6.				
		Cognitive 13.6.				
Cognitive 14a.6.						

Sources: Teaching Strategies, Inc.: www.TeachingStrategies.com. Revised Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework: [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/Assessment/Child%20Outcomes/HS_Revised_Child_Outcomes_Framework\(rev-Sept2011\).pdf](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/Assessment/Child%20Outcomes/HS_Revised_Child_Outcomes_Framework(rev-Sept2011).pdf). Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Title 391- Children's Services Licensing: http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/cr1_childcare_childcareindex.aspx. Nebraska K-12 Academic Standards: <http://www.education.ne.gov/academicstandards/>. Nebraska Rule 11 Regulations: <http://www.education.ne.gov/legal/webrulespdf/CLEANrule112007.pdf>.