The Kindergarten Chronicles

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NEPF Standard 2: Learning Tasks have High Cognitive Demand for Diverse Learners

How do teachers ensure appropriate high cognitive demand for all students in their kindergarten classroom? We need to be aware of learner differences and match the tasks to the learners' needs. High cognitive demand does not refer to the difficulty of a task per se, but rather to the appropriate level of challenge that the task poses. The nature and level of the task will vary among students. Below are some important concepts to consider in order to ensure that the needs of all learners are being met.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): ZPD is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. It is a concept introduced by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. In the classroom context, this means that teachers engage students in learning that is within their ZPD, (not too hard and not too easy) through tasks that involve the gradual release so that the learning ultimately becomes part of the student's independent achievement. Click **here** for more information on the ZPD.

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Indicator 1

Tasks purposefully employ **all** students' cognitive abilities and skills

Indicator 2

Tasks place appropriate demands on each student

Indicator 3

Tasks progressively develop **all** students' cognitive abilities and

Indicator 4

Teacher operates with a deep belief that all children can achieve regardless of race, perceived ability and socio-

Gradual Release Model: The goal of guided instruction in the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model is to guide students toward using different skills, strategies and procedures independently. The student will assume more responsibility with less support from the teacher. Often referred to as "I do it, we do it, you do it," the model proposes a plan of instruction that includes demonstration, prompt, and practice.

Questioning and Critical Thinking: Did you know that on average, teachers ask 80 questions each hour, while students ask only two? If we take the time to teach students how to ask high-level questions, their thinking will follow. One way to increase the rigor in the types of questions and tasks we use in our classroom is Webb's **Depth of Knowledge (DOK)**. DOK is a reference to the complexity of mental processing that must occur to answer a question, perform a task, or generate a product. Click **here** for more information. Wondering what critical questioning looks like with five-year-olds? **Heidisongs.com** does an effective job of demonstrating *kindergarten* examples of critical questioning.

Gradual Release Model

	Teacher	Student
I do it *Direct Instruction*	• Provides direct instruction • Establishes goals and purpose • Models • Think aloud	• Actively listens • Take notes • Asks for clarification
We do it *Guided Instruction*	• Interactive instruction • Works with students • Checks, prompts, cues • Provides additional modeling • Meets with needs-based groups	• Asks and responds to questions • Works with teacher and classmates • Completes process alongside others
You do it together *Collaborative Learning*	• Moves among groups • Clarifies confusion • Provides support	• Works with classmates, shares outcome • Collaborates on authentic task • Consolidates learning • Completes process in small groups • Looks to peers for clarification
You do it independently *Independent Practice*	• Provides feedback • Evaluates • Determines level of understanding	• Works alone • Relies on notes, activities, classroom learning to complete assignment • Takes full responsibility for outcome

Engagement: Real learning is not a spectator sport. How do we gain and keep students' attention and interest? Below are some suggestions to promote active and engaged learning:

- **Surveying** - Instead of asking one student, ask everyone the same question. This may require more of a multiple-choice or yes/no method. Students hold up a card to reflect their answer. Teacher asks, "Which one do you believe is correct? Why?"

- **Individual white boards** - Everyone writes and displays an answer, instead of one child answering. This is a great way to ensure everyone is thinking about the topic and a helpful formative assessment.

- **Call and response** - Having students repeat, chant, sing, or choral read is a high-energy way to engage everyone.

- **Building schema** - How can real life be applied to this discussion? What connections can be made? Have students discuss this as a class or with a partner.

- **Scavenger hunts** - Have students look for or find certain pieces of information in order to synthesize meaning at the end of the lesson, unit, etc. This could be as simple as fill-in –the-blanks notes or built-in clues that students have to figure out to construct meaning.

Don't forget www.rpdp.net for **NEPF Standard 2** resources and videos as well!

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