# Professional Learning Community (PLC) Discussion Guide for the Approaches to Learning Principles

This resource summarizes decades of research on how young children learn and what that means for teaching and leading early childhood education programs. Consistent with nationally recognized frameworks, the Approaches to Learning Guide includes eight principles developed to ensure that children in preschool through third grade have *opportunities to learn* that align with *how they learn best*.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are ideal formats for educators to collaboratively review the research-based concepts regarding how children learn and identify ways to better incorporate them into their instruction. This discussion guide document includes a suggested outline of sessions that PLCs could use to ensure that their discussions cover all aspects of the *Approaches to Learning* Resources. In addition, at the end of this guide there is a *Reflection and Planning Tool* that PLCs can use to structure their discussions and identify the next steps.

## Session 1

### Pre work

Read Section 1 as well as Principles 1 and 2 in Section 2. Look through Key *Resources* and read/skim any that are of interest.

### Discussion questions

* How can we organize our classrooms and select materials to reflect how children, including those with learning differences and those with varied cultural experiences and backgrounds, process information?
* How can we create predictability and safety for students while also allowing for varied opportunities to learn?
* Where in the curricula are there opportunities for children to develop and use their imagination?
* How can we balance opportunities to support creative expression and risk-taking while also ensuring students meet grade-level standards?

**Take notes** on any concrete changes the team or individual teachers may want to make to their practice, or additional information or resources they might need.

## Session 2

### Pre work

Read Section 2, Principles 3, 4, & 5. Look through *Key Resources* and read/skim any that are of interest.

### Discussion questions

* How can lessons be organized or structured to take advantage of the interconnectedness of student learning?
* How can multidisciplinary instruction be adapted to accommodate students with differing learning patterns and strengths?
* What are effective strategies to re-engage students when learning has “stalled,” or students have stopped making progress?
* Why is it important to know the student learning standards for the grade being taught *and* the grades before and after?
* What are effective strategies for monitoring students’ varied progress and for tailoring instruction?
* What kinds of learning supports are appropriate to provide to students and in what contexts?

**Take notes** on any concrete changes the team or individual teachers may want to make to their practice, or additional information or resources they might need.

## Session 3

### Pre work

Read Section 2, Principles 6 & 7. Look through Key *Resources* and read/skim any that are of interest.

### Discussion questions

* Do we address the [New Jersey SEL Competencies](https://www.nj.gov/education/safety/wellness/selearning/) in a meaningful way throughout the school year?
* What are some strategies for helping children build social and emotional skills that facilitate positive relationships?
* How can teacher-directed learning be balanced with student-directed learning but still meet grade-level standards?
* What are effective strategies to encourage and support student agency when students do not seem motivated or confident in making choices?

**Take notes** on any concrete changes the team or individual teachers may want to make to their practice, or additional information or resources they might need.

## Session 4

### Pre work

Read Section 2, Principle 8. Look through Key *Resources* and read/skim any that are of interest.

### Discussion questions

* In what ways can we offer opportunities to learn through play across content areas from preschool through third grade?
* What are the barriers to bringing more joyful learning into the classroom, and how can these be addressed?

**Take notes** on any concrete changes the team or individual teachers may want to make, or additional information or resources that might be needed.

## Session 5

**Pre work:** Read Section 3. Look through Key *Resources* and read/skim any that are of interest.

**Discussion questions:**

* What systems or processes have we put in place to help identify and meet the needs of neurodiverse children?
* Do we give all our students, including those with specific disabilities and those identified as gifted, access to appropriate services and supports?
* How can we learn more about the different learning experiences students have had?
* How can we provide continuity of learning when students may have very different learning opportunities?
* How have our backgrounds shaped who we are and how we approach our role in education?
* How can we be better prepared to engage in what may be difficult conversations about these complex issues?

**Take notes** on any concrete changes the team or individual teachers may want to make, or additional information or resources that might be needed.

## Session 6

### Pre work

Reflect on the overall document and all principles. Consider specific changes that could be made/proposed in individual classrooms, with individual students, or at the grade or school level.

### Discussion

Complete the Reflection and Planning Tool below.

## Approaches to Learning Reflection and Planning Tool

Date of meeting:

Participants:

| **Questions** | **Next Steps** | **Person Responsible/ Timeline** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Where are we now? * What data do we have or need to collect to understand what changes we need to make? * Do we have clear Approaches to Learning goals for student learning and development? |  |  |
| * Where are we going? * Do we have a shared understanding of the principles? * Are there other resources/readings/ websites that we might want to review to get further insight into a principle? |  |  |
| * What is the plan to move forward? * What specifically do we need to change? * What materials or other support do we need to get to where we want to go? |  |  |
| * Have we considered special populations of students, such as students with special needs, ML, students with trauma, etc.? * How do we consider these changes in culturally sensitive and relevant ways? |  |  |
| Who will be responsible for making and taking these action steps? |  |  |
| * Are there other people who should be involved and informed about the action steps we want to take (administrators, other teachers, families)? * What is the best way to communicate ideas to them? |  |  |
| What kind of data will we collect from where and when? |  |  |
| Do we want to have further PLC discussions or conversations with other staff about these ideas? |  |  |
| How will we know when we have achieved our goals? |  |  |
| What are our next steps? |  |  |