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Class 8 Inquiry: Assessment in Kindergarten and the Early Years

In Kindergarten and the Early Years, educators support students natural learning process with topics that are meaningful and follow children's interests, and through approaches that are individually, culturally, and developmentally responsive to each child. Educators support students learning through developmentally appropriate practice which involves ensuring learning experiences and interactions are individually, culturally, and ability appropriate through creating curriculum plans that respond to children's interests and needs, family and community culture, and Zone of Proximal Development. Developmentally Appropriate Practice is critical for all educators to support children's learning through assets-based approaches in meaningful ways.

There are 9 principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice that inform how educators work with children, including: the dynamic process of development and learning; the value of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development; play-based learning approaches; and the need for environments that promote a sense of belonging (NAEYC, 2020). These principles directly reflect how children learn best and emphasizes a need for integrated approaches where children learn multiple skills across disciplines when it is developmentally appropriate and meaningful to their engagement. Educators should be aware of these principles because they create healthy, responsive environments where children learn best, and in these environments, children can demonstrate their learning for assessments that inform future curriculum planning. Following the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice ensures

educators can document children's authentic learning and skill development to create future learning experiences that support next steps in children's growth and ongoing learning within their Zone of Proximal Development. Using observations, pedagogical documentation, and educator analysis while working with a lens of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Kindergarten also allows educators to share relevant anecdotal comments on communications of learning within the four frames of the kindergarten program to share learning with families while encouraging educators, families, and professionals to work as a team to support children's ongoing development and next steps in meaningful ways that respond to each child (Capacity Building Series, 2020).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's Position statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice is relevant for educators in Ontario because it follows best practices for assessing and evaluating young children that are recognized in the Ontario document: *Growing Success: The Kindergarten Addendum*. Through implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practices that are individually, culturally and ability-appropriate to children, educators notice and name authentic learning as it is happening to reinforce concepts and skills, promote self-regulation for children to develop autonomy over their own learning in play-based environments that foster learning in all domains, and use pedagogical documentation to enhance children's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth (Growing Success, 2016; NAEYC, 2020). When educators work with Developmentally Appropriate Practices, they promote ongoing growth through natural strategies and developmentally appropriate play-based environments that inclusively engages all children in learning within their Zone of Proximal Development.

As a primary educator in Ontario, I will ensure students are set up for success by reflecting on how learning experiences are responsive to children's needs, interests, experiences, culture, and development and complete assessments that take place in authentic learning environments to comply with Developmentally Appropriate Practice while recording, documenting and sharing students learning and growth. I will also strive to create environments that promote a sense of belonging to ensure students see themselves reflected in the environment and to create spaces where children's assets and skills are valued. When children experience a sense of belonging in the environment, they experience a sense of agency which supports learning risks and engagement that constructs students developing understanding of the world around them. By focusing on creating a sense of belonging, I am able to comply with principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and meet students holistic needs to support ongoing learning that is authentic and can be shared with families and other professionals to inform future learning goals and meaningful experiences. I will approach assessment with young children through a play-based approach to uphold Developmentally Appropriate Practice and ensure assessments are meaningful, individually appropriate, allow for all students to engage from multiple entry points, and respond to children's needs. Using play-based practices for assessments in a safe and responsive environment that reflect children's interests, experiences, and culture allows educators to create documentation in authentic environments that show how students use and stretch their skills which can be used to influence future planning and make comments on evaluative documents to share with families.

Good assessment practices are fair, equitable, transparent, and reflect children's interests and experiences (Growing Success, 2016). By ensuring safe environments that are responsive to children's experiences and culture and experiences that are appropriate to each child's ability,

educators demonstrate Developmentally Appropriate Practice and the principles of assessment and evaluation in the Ontario *Growing Success* document. Good assessment practices meet the learning needs of all students, use information gathered from authentic demonstration of knowledge and skills, and use information to inform future learning for each child, despite where they are at in their development because children are continuously learning. By using play-based approaches to assess students authentic knowledge and skills with open-ended opportunities for engagement, educators can observe all children's learning and can use observations to inform future learning.

## References

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