

Of course, the children’s ability to learn from this multidimensional activity is dependent on the teacher’s use of the key components of a responsive style as previously described. In this example, the children’s learning can be advanced to a greater extent within this teacher-guided book reading activity than it can in an independent activity, such as a child looking at a book on his own. This only occurs, however, if the teacher’s reactions incorporate rich and appropriately paced language input and are warm, supportive, contingently responsive to the child’s signals, considerate of ELL development, and used in ways that build on the child’s focus of attention. When the content areas known to predict school readiness are presented in this responsive style, children make great progress and can leave prekindergarten ready for success in school.

Responsive Style + Content + Planning Effectively Build New Memories

Before outlining general ways to build language, literacy, math, and social skills, the teacher can better assure that children learn—build sustained knowledge—through effective planning and implementation of activities that provide new information. It is well documented that children learn a new concept (such as the name and characteristics of a new object) if they have closely repeated experiences.

For example, a child might hear for the first time about an object during a science or a read-aloud activity. In the first exposure, the child hears about and sees characteristics of the object. Touching the object helps the child remember more about it. This new vocabulary word and what it means is more likely to be learned if the child has multiple related exposures or experiences with it that occur close in time to the first exposure. Attention to this as early childhood teachers plan the activities across a day, week, and month will support effective teaching. The use of rich themes (e.g., underwater sea life, things that fly, gardens, or construction) makes building repeated related experiences easier. When children learn about gardens across many days through related but varied activities, they begin to make connections among the tools needed to plant in a garden, the flowers and vegetables that grow in gardens, gardening clothes (gloves, hats, boots), and the purpose of soil, nutrients, sun, and water.

It is easy to see from this example how much fun a teacher can make learning about gardens. With thoughtful, intentional planning and playful activities, new vocabulary skills are promoted. As children think about the beginning letters and sounds in the new words, they are exposed to literacy, and math occurs as they count out the seeds they will plant. Of course, social/emotional skills are supported as they share their garden tools with their classmates, take turns digging or describing plants, laugh together as they make up silly alliterations or sing rhyming songs (“Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?”).

This approach assures effective learning, in part, because it incorporates the three Ps.

- Purposeful
- Planned
- Playful

Teachers with attention to the three Ps, will always ask, “What is the purpose of this?” before they put an activity in their lesson plans. The answer should be that it

- builds one or more of the skills necessary for school readiness,
- expands and builds on children’s current level of understanding, and
- encourages the understanding of new information that has direct links to what children will need to succeed in kindergarten.

If the activity meets these criteria, careful planning occurs and includes the following: