

# Engagement in Self-Selected Activities

DOMAIN: Approaches to Learning

CLAIM: Students can maintain focus and persevere to accomplish collaborative tasks whether those tasks are chosen by them, or assigned to them.

## **RATIONALE**

“Attention-related skills such as task persistence and self-regulation are expected to increase the time during which children are engaged and participating in academic endeavors. Research has shown that signs of attention and impulsivity can be detected as early as age 2.5 but continue to develop until reaching relative stability between ages 6 and 8 (Olson, Sameroff, Kerr, Lopez, & Wellman, 2005; Posner & Rothbart, 2000). Studies linking attention with later achievement are less common, but consistent evidence suggests that the ability to control and sustain attention as well as participate in classroom activities predicts achievement test scores and grades during preschool and the early elementary grades (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993; Raver, Smith-Donald, Hayes, & Jones, 2005). These attention skills, which are conceptually distinct from other types of interpersonal behaviors, are associated with later academic achievement, independent of initial cognitive ability (McClelland, Morrison, & Holmes, 2000; Yen, Konold, & McDermott, 2004) and of prior reading ability and current vocabulary (Howse, Lange, Farran, & Boyles, 2003). Examining attention separately from externalizing problems has clarified the role of each in achievement, suggesting that attention is more predictive of later achievement than more general problem behaviors (Barriga et al., 2002; Hinshaw, 1992; Konold & Pianta, 2005; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Normandeau & Guay, 1998; Trzesniewski, Moffitt, Caspi, Taylor, & Maughan, 2006; Duncan et. al, 2007, p. 1430). As mentioned in *Engaging and Re-Engaging Students in Learning at School* (2008), “Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) conclude: Engagement is associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school; and it is higher in classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and sufficient structure” (pg. 3).

Children learn in different ways. Therefore, when only one teaching method is used, and children do not have a choice about that method, many children may not achieve the learning objective. In order to ensure that all children learn a particular skill, a variety of approaches must be provided. When teachers provide purposefully planned and relevant opportunities from which students can choose, they are increasing possibilities for students to develop autonomy, self-reliance, and self-esteem as well as increasing the students’ ability to solve problems, think divergently, accept responsibility for their actions, and learn persistence and task completion (Grossman, 2007).

## **ALIGNMENT TO NC STANDARDS**

### **NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development**

Goal AP-7 Children demonstrate initiative.

Goal AP-8 Children maintain attentiveness and focus.

### **NC Standard Course of Study (Common Core State Standards & Essential Standards)**

As Local Education Agencies embrace the NCSCOS, they will work to empower educators to use a variety of instructional approaches that address the diverse needs of their students. These efforts will be made to improve the academic performance of all students. The NCSCOS does not define these varied instructional practices. Nor does it define how students should approach the learning of these standards. However, the introductory sections of the NCSCOS documents encourage best practices and provide explanations of effective learning cultures. These descriptors bring clarity to possible ways to provide opportunities for students to exhibit these approaches to learning behaviors.

The instructional support components of the NCSCOS documents complement the standards and provide guidance to educators as they develop a desirable pedagogy that allows students to learn by taking risks and overcoming challenges to acquire new knowledge. For example, the preamble to the NC Essential Standards for K-2 Social Studies states that there are two primary purposes of social studies. “The first is to develop young people who are knowledgeable, critical, and capable of making informed decisions about the world and their place in it. The second purpose is to prepare young people to participate actively and responsibly in a culturally diverse, democratic, and increasingly interdependent world.” Therefore, you will find reference to skills such as independence, setting goals and demonstrating initiative within the introductory & supplemental materials of the NC Standard Course of Study documents, including the Common Core State Standards.

## ENGAGEMENT IN SELF-SELECTED ACTIVITIES

UNDERSTANDING	<p>Children understand that daily classroom routines provide opportunities for them to make choices of interest.</p>	<p>Children understand that making choices allows them to pursue their interests.</p>
SKILLS	<p><b>A. Wanders, examining many options for self-selected activities in the classroom environment, but does not settle with one particular choice.</b></p>	<p><b>B. Begins to make purposeful choices for self-selected activities that are highly engaging and begins to sustain engagement in a chosen activity.</b></p>
PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTORS	<p>Felipe is in the block corner observing other children using file cards and markers to make road signs. He notices activity in the dramatic play center and moves to that area of the classroom. Felipe briefly interacts with the cash register and grocery props, but he decides to leave and go to the Art Center.</p> <p>In the Media Center, Abigail is given an opportunity to choose a book to be checked out. She walks from shelf to shelf and mimics the actions of peers by pulling the books off the shelves. Before Abigail takes an interest in any book, she notices other peers in a different location of the media center. Abigail drops a book on a table to migrate to that other area in the media center. Abigail repeats the action of pulling books from shelves, without selecting any particular book.</p>	<p>Aiden chooses to enter the Dramatic Play Center and stays there to explore the materials. He begins to remove items from the stove, the cupboard, etc., and piles them in the middle of the dramatic play table. Aiden explores the items, but he does not appear to be trying to accomplish a specific task.</p> <p>Diego chooses the Math Center and stays there to explore different materials. He selects the counting bears, pours them onto the table and arranges them in various ways.</p>

## ENGAGEMENT IN SELF-SELECTED ACTIVITIES

<p>Children understand that they can make a plan and accomplish a task of interest to them, even when there are other things going on around them.</p>	<p>Children understand that when they are working toward completion of a plan, there may be distractions and interruptions, but that their task will be there when they get back.</p>	<p>UNDERSTANDING</p>
<p><b>C. Sustains engagement in a self-selected activity, ignoring task-irrelevant information and low-level distractions from peers or other classroom activities.</b></p>	<p><b>D. Sustains engagement in self-selected activities, while increasingly resisting distractions. Resumes or re-engages in activities following interruptions.</b></p>	<p>SKILLS</p>
<p>Angel begins to build in the block corner. She removes a collection of blocks from the storage shelf and piles them near the foundation of her building. Angel proceeds to build a tall building until all of the chosen blocks are used, ignoring the various distractions of other children also building nearby.</p> <p>Brandon goes to the Art Center and chooses a large popsicle stick out of the bin. He doesn't stay to work in the Art Center but quickly takes the popsicle stick to the puppet corner and uses the popsicle stick as a puppet while performing a puppet show.</p>	<p>Diamond goes to the Bookmaking Center and selects various materials including paper, a stapler, and markers to make a book. Liam comes over to show Diamond his Lego® structure. After stopping to admire the Lego® structure, Diamond returns to making her book. But before the book is completed, the entire class is asked to stop what they are doing to go to lunch. After lunch, the teacher allows children to return to what they were doing, and Diamond returns to the Bookmaking Center and continues to work until her book is completed.</p> <p>Luis goes to the painting easel, produces a painting, and leaves it to dry. Later during a free choice time, Luis returns to the art center, takes the dried painting, and uses pieces from the collage box to further develop the design by gluing pieces onto the painting.</p>	<p>PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTORS</p>

## RESOURCES USED

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## SITUATION: *Engaging in Purposeful Choices*

Selecting Learning Target(s)	Understanding: Children understand that daily classroom routines provide opportunities for them to make choices of interest.	Understanding: Children understand that making choices allows them to pursue their interests.	Understanding: Children understand that they can make a plan and accomplish a task of interest to them, even when there are other things going on around them.	Understanding: Children understand that when they are working toward completion of a plan, there may be distractions and interruptions, but that their task will be there when they get back.
	<b>A. Wanders, examining many options for self-selected activities in the classroom environment, but does not settle with one particular choice.</b>	<b>B. Begins to make purposeful choices for self-selected activities that are highly engaging, and begins to sustain engagement in a chosen activity.</b>	<b>C. Sustains engagement in a self-selected activity, ignoring task-irrelevant information and low-level distractions from peers or other classroom activities.</b>	<b>D. Sustains engagement in self-selected activities, while increasingly resisting distractions. Resumes or re-engages in activities following interruptions.</b>
Identifying Opportunities for Eliciting Evidence of Learning	<p>Children demonstrate their ability to make purposeful choices when provided with opportunities to self-select tasks throughout the day. Observing children as they make choices in these situations can provide evidence of their engagement and focus. Throughout the day children may be observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing a standards-based, cross-curricular learning center or station based on interest</li> <li>• Selecting and using materials</li> <li>• Selecting a seat at lunch or during group time</li> <li>• Deciding to work independently, with a group or with a partner</li> <li>• Participating in an activity on the playground</li> </ul>			
Eliciting Evidence of Learning	<p>Based on their interest, children choose from open-ended and meaningful standards-based learning centers/stations. Sufficient time is provided for children to explore the various learning areas, freely choose areas in which to work, and become invested in the activities, allowing for personal, authentic inquiry and ownership.</p> <p>These standards-based learning centers or stations could include: blocks, creative arts, drama, math, puzzles and games, reading, science, and writing. Each learning area offers intentionally selected materials that are easily available for children, such as: art supplies (e.g., variety of paper, drawing and collage materials, paint, play dough), various levels and types of books, building materials and accessories, manipulatives (e.g., counters, shapes, letters), writing supplies (e.g., assortment of paper, pencils, markers), and creative and dramatic play items or unit-themed items (e.g., menus, telephones, cash registers, keyboards). Each inviting learning area is appropriate for young learners and offers carefully selected materials that build on student strengths and interests.</p> <p>As children explore various learning area options, the teacher moves among the children observing their ability to choose and sustain a choice. It will take several observations for the teacher to have enough evidence to feel confident about a pattern of behavior for the child.</p>			
Eliciting Evidence of Learning: Suggested Probes	<p>A. After several days of the teacher modeling the routine of selecting a learning station, a child continues to walk around the room from place to place not making a decision to remain.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: I see you are walking around the room, have you selected a learning station?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: I see you have not selected a place to work, do you need help?</p> <p>B. After several days of providing a time during the day for children to choose a learning area and work, a child is observed multiple times quickly making a decision but engages in each decision made on a minimal basis.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: With so many learning station choices, why did you choose this work area?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: I noticed you quickly selected this learning station, can you tell me why?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: What do or did you like about this learning area?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: What made you leave?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: I see that you chose X choice. Tell me what you are thinking of working on there.</p>			

Eliciting Evidence of Learning: Suggested Probes	<p>C. After the teacher helps children know the routine of returning to a learning area after an activity and making a choice to work on something of interest until others are finished, a child is observed doing so during a variety of transitions.</p> <p>After lunch, a child moves quickly to a learning station where he/she was previously engaged and continues to work where he/she left off.</p> <p>After completing an assigned task, a child knows to get a familiar book and reread until the others at the table have completed the task.</p> <p>T: Please take your reading materials back to your desk and return to your morning activity center. After circle time, a child knows to return to his learning space and continue with a morning activity of choice until the next transition occurs. After an interruption such as a fire drill, lunch, or recess, ask the students to return to their learning station work area.</p> <p>T: Now that we have returned to the classroom, please go to your selected learning station and complete your work.</p> <p>D. No probe is needed if the child returns to the previous task after an interruption. The teacher’s comment to the child who returns to the previous task could serve as a probe to another child who overhears it.</p> <p>T: Wesley, thanks for going right back to the writing center! I know you were working on your Thank You letter before the fire drill. Show me what you have left to do.</p>
Eliciting Evidence of Learning: Probes to Avoid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Maybe you need to stay here and finish your painting, since many artists fill their whole canvas. Possibly add some more colors.”</li> <li>• “I think you should go to the writing center today.”</li> <li>• “Stay here and finish this puzzle.”</li> <li>• “Please go back to the block center and finish building the block tower with Jeremy.”</li> </ul>
Interpreting the Evidence	<p><b>Observation:</b> During center time the teacher observes a child wandering about the room looking at several things, but not selecting a center or becoming engaged. The teacher invites the child to the block center and attempts to engage her by asking her questions like, “What do you like to build?” and “How can you use the blocks to make it?” The child engages in building and becomes focused on creating a house. She sustains her attention to the task briefly, but gets distracted by other children who are next to the block center in the dramatic play area. She gets up and goes to them instead of continuing to build. The teacher attempts to re-engage the child in the block center, but the child remains with the other students a few moments, and then moves on again.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify Learning Status on Construct Progression: A. Wanders, examining many options for self-selected activities in the classroom environment, but does not settle with one particular choice.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Observation:</b> The teacher observes a child scanning the learning center choices in the classroom. The child keeps walking around the room, but after a probe from the teacher the child chooses to play in the block center. He begins to build a structure, but leaves the center after a few minutes when he notices another center across the room. The child engages in the new center for several minutes as well, but is distracted by interruptions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify Learning Status on Construct Progression: B. Begins to make purposeful choices for self-selected activities that are highly engaging, and begins to sustain engagement in a chosen activity.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Observation:</b> The teacher observes a child choose the block center. The child removes a collection of blocks from the shelf and piles them near the foundation. The child proceeds to build until all the chosen blocks are used and ignores the possible distractions of other children also building nearby.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify Learning Status on Construct Progression: C. Sustains engagement in a self-selected activity, ignoring task-irrelevant information and low-level distractions from peers or other classroom activities.</b></li> </ul>
Adapting/ Responding to Learning Needs	<p>Once the evidence is interpreted and the learning status is identified on the construct progression, continue to adapt and respond to the learning needs of the student, addressing the same learning target if the student hasn’t met it. If the student has met the learning target, work with the student to select a new learning target for teaching and learning.</p>