1. The early educator includes positive approaches to learning as part of his/her program's curricular goals targeting what all children should be learning.

- Recognize that all children need to acquire positive approaches to learning, including children with significant disabilities or from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Gradually introduce and teach children to learn positive approaches to learning, particularly children who have had minimal learning experiences.
- Explain to families the importance of these positive approaches to learning (e.g., taking initiative, being independent, organizing and managing their time), and how they can encourage their children to acquire these dispositions.

2. The early educator balances teacher-directed with child-directed activities to provide children opportunities to take the initiative in exploring their environment and to organize and manage their time and effort.

- Design the physical environment to enable all children to engage in child- and adult-directed activities, and provide easy access to spaces and materials regardless of children’s body sizes or means for moving around (e.g., wheelchair, crawling).
- Use a variety of communication techniques to help children know how to use the environment, for example to put away toys and materials, by including children's home language, English, signs, pictures, labels, signals, and other means.
- Design activities that accommodate a wide range of individual interests, experiences, understanding, and abilities.

3. The early educator chooses activities and materials that are moderately difficult and offer multiple possibilities for each child's interactions.

- Arrange the storage and display of materials to allow for access and reach by all children, including children with different motor abilities, and which support children to take on clean-up responsibilities.
- Plan activities and materials that support different means of exploration and manipulation, accommodating different skill levels and abilities.
- Communicate with families to identify culturally appropriate activities and materials they can carry out at home.

4. The early educator directly teaches children to use more positive approaches to learning by prompting and modeling their use, encouraging and supporting their initial attempts, and reinforcing their efforts and successes.

- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate language models for children to use in figuring out and describing what happened and what happens next.
- Clearly communicate the desired expectations of the child- and teacher-directed activities, using multiple ways for presenting the directions and tasks (e.g., simple sentences, pictures, and models).
- Use different levels of prompting, modeling, and guidance to initiate a specific positive approach to learning. Through minimal cueing or prompting in the beginning, then gradually increased levels of assistance as needed, the child can be encouraged to act.
- Support multiple means of expression (e.g., words, actions, symbols) among children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence-Based Practices</th>
<th>Universal Design Applications</th>
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<td>Table 1 Universal Design Considerations for the Early Educator</td>
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Early educators can design their activities and lessons to ensure all children acquire these positive approaches to learning. Effectively designing early education environments to nurture curiosity, independent exploration, problem solving, persistence, etc. is challenging in programs that include children with diverse family backgrounds and/or skill levels. The need to ensure that all early education programs can embrace this diversity and design effective physical, social, and instructional environments is critical, however. The principles, ideas, and strategies in this brief represent a starting point for giving early educators the tools to make this happen.

Summary & Implications

Positive approaches to learning are important for children to successfully enter school. Early educators can teach and nurture these approaches to learning by creating opportunities, designing appropriate activities and materials, and providing children with the guidance, support, and encouragement they need. These same positive approaches to learning are important for all children to learn, including children who may struggle to implement them because they have had little experience (e.g., poverty, family culture) or because of the presence of physical and cognitive disabilities.

| Topics in this series include ready children (health and physical well-being, language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, social-emotional skills), ready families, and ready schools. |
| The bibliography for this briefing paper series is online at: [http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/ecc/products_research.htm](http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/ecc/products_research.htm) |
What We Know: Important Child Outcomes Associated with Approaches to Learning

Children differ in how they approach new and novel tasks, difficult problems or challenges, and teacher-directed tasks. An individual child’s approach to learning may have little association with his or her level of knowledge or skill. For example, children may have considerable knowledge and skills they can bring to bear on a task or activity; however, their inclination to use their skills may be influenced by their temperament (for example, shyness), the way they were raised (girls politely wait), or their cultural values (showing initiative may be considered rude). Approaches to learning vary in their origin (such as gender expectations, cultural patterns, learned approaches) and malleability. Some researchers believe that there are approaches to learning that reflect predispositions, and are shaped at birth or developed very early. These skills include temperament, gender expectations, and cultural patterns and values. Approaches to learning that are predisposed may be less conducive to change. Learning styles, however, are approaches to learning that reflect the child’s attitudes toward the learning process, and are much more malleable. Learning styles include openness to new tasks and challenges, initiative, persistence, reflection, imagination, and problem solving.

There is research that suggests strong links between positive approaches to learning and children’s success in school. For example, one study found that children with higher levels of attentiveness, task persistence to learn, learning independence, flexibility, and organization, generally did better in literacy and math at the end of the kindergarten school year and the beginning of their first grade year. In addition, children who approach learning tasks or novel situations with these positive approaches to learning are better able to regulate their learning experiences, and more quickly acquire general knowledge and cognitive skills. A review of the literature identifies six key skills or learning dispositions that reflect important approaches to learning.

Situations with these positive approaches to learning are better able to regulate their learning experiences, and more quickly acquire general knowledge and cognitive skills. A review of the literature identifies six key skills or learning dispositions that reflect important approaches to learning (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Approaches to Learning: Important Learning Outcomes

1. Curiosity/Initiative. The child chooses to engage and participate in a variety of new and challenging activities.
2. Persistence. The child is able to persist in and complete a variety of tasks and activities.
3. Attention. The child demonstrates increased attentiveness during teacher-directed activities.
4. Self-direction. The child is able to set goals, make choices, and manage time and effort with increased independence.
5. Problem solving. The child is able to solve problems in a number of ways, including finding more than one solution, exploration, and interactions with peers.
6. Creativity. The child is able to approach tasks with increased flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness.

Figure 1.

What We Know: Effective Early Education Practices

How can early childhood educators promote these positive approaches to learning that successfully nurture and strengthen this learning style? Children who are less organized in managing their time and efforts can receive the guidance and models for approaching tasks to increase concentration and organization skills.

Provide opportunities that elicit these skills. The second strategy for promoting positive approaches to learning is to include child-directed activities during the daily routine. By providing multiple activities from which children can choose, early educators offer opportunities for children to explore activities of their interest. This presents an environment in which children’s curiosity and initiative in approaching tasks is stimulated. It also gives children opportunities to practice how well they can self-direct and organize their time and actions. If the bulk of the activities planned by early educators are more teacher-directed, then children have fewer opportunities to initiate and practice their explorations, self-direction, or problem solving.

Challenge children with moderately difficult tasks. The third strategy involves choosing activities and materials that are moderately difficult and offer multiple possibilities for child interactions. In order to encourage children’s curiosity and initiative, persistence, and problem solving, early educators should choose materials that are neither too easy nor too difficult for the child. If the materials are too easy and familiar, they may not grab the child’s interest, and he or she will be less eager to explore. If the materials are too complex or difficult to interact with, children may quickly become frustrated and lose interest. Choosing activities and materials at just the right level of understand- ing and skill, and in which they have some interest, provides the necessary stimulus for children to approach challenging tasks with some eagerness and self-direction. Likewise, materials that offer more than one right way to interact provide the stimulus for problem solving and creativity.

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Making These Practices Work for ALL Children: The Universal Design of Early Education

The strategies summarized above answer the question, “How can early childhood educators promote these positive approaches to learning that successfully nurture and strengthen this learning style? Children who are less organized in managing their time and efforts can receive the guidance and models for approaching tasks to increase concentration and organization skills.

Approaches to Learning included in the program’s curriculum. The first and most straightforward strategy is to make these positive approaches to learning a goal of early education, to include them as part of the program’s curriculum goals. This strategy is important because it emphasizes children’s capacity for change. While a child’s early temperament may be difficult to change, the approaches identified above are malleable and early educators have their presence in children. A child who is less persistent and unable to complete tasks can receive support and encouragement to