Playing to Learn, Learning to Grow

The Heart of the New TK Ed Code

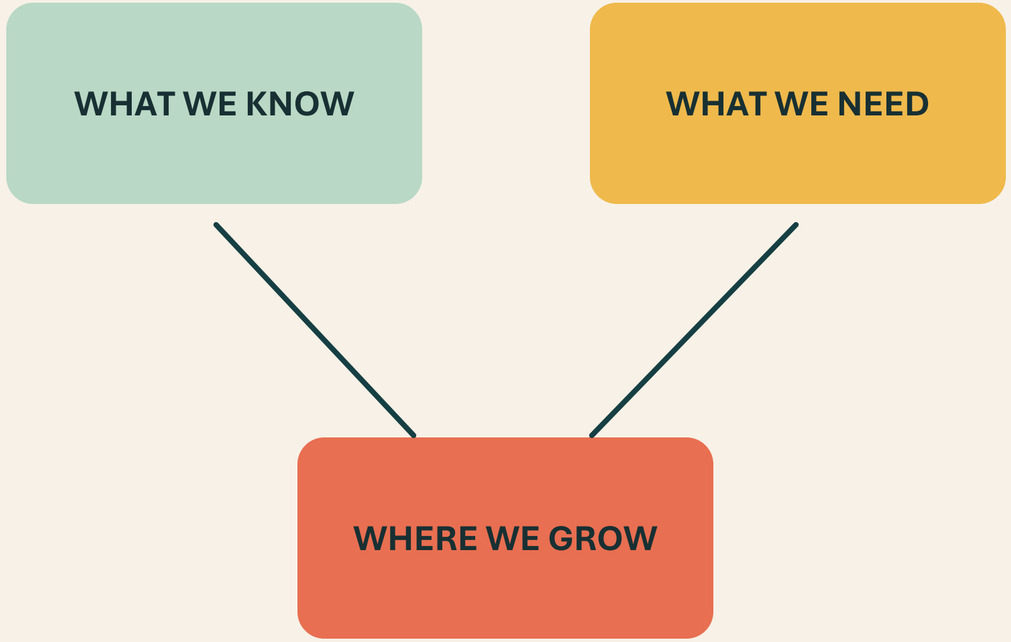
A Professional Educator Session

October 24, 2026



Conversation over lecture. Curiosity over compliance.

Understand current TK teacher experiences, knowledge, and goals within TK's unique expectations and challenges.



Grounded in early education and preschool practice

Where are we starting?

Conversation over lecture. Curiosity over compliance.

1. I know the new TK Ed Code language about play-based learning.

2. I have been trained on the PTKLF

3. I use PTKLF in planning or observations

4. I feel pressure to make learning look academic or teacher-directed.

Now, rate the conditions

How confident are you explaining the learning happening when children are engaged in play?



How supported do you feel by your administration in using developmentally appropriate, play-based practices?



How confident are you that the other adults in your classroom understand their role in supporting learning through play?



How manageable does implementing these expectations feel right now?



What's one thing you wish people outside your classroom understood about TK?

The New TK Ed Code – DAP

“curriculum that is age and developmentally appropriate”

- **Instructional practices that promote child development and learning through a strengths- and play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning that address the domains of development in the department’s Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations (PTKLF).**
- **A cohesive set of principles, learning goals, intentional teaching strategies, activities, experiences, environments, and materials designed to help children learn and thrive in ways that are appropriate to their age and stage of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, as well as their individual needs, home language(s), and cultural experiences.**

01

Am I already doing this?

Connect new language to strengths-based, joyful practice across developmental domains.

The language helps us name and communicate what we already value.

Four ways DAP can show up

Examples—not a checklist

Schedule play alongside intentional goals

Supporting children’s interests

Build belonging and emotional safety

Support gross- and fine-motor growth

Which is a strength? Which is hardest to protect?

Your curriculum. Your approach.

- What sounds familiar?
- What already supports learning through play?
- What feels new or difficult?
- How has your approach changed since TK started?

Choose one question. Share a story, not a perfect answer.

02

How do we make play intentional?

INTENTIONAL ≠ CONTROLLED

Plan environments. Observe. Ask. Introduce materials. Respond to children’s interests.

How do we encourage learning when outcomes aren’t clearly defined?







Environment as an invitation

LOOSE PARTS

Sort • count • compare • build • solve

SCIENCE MATERIALS

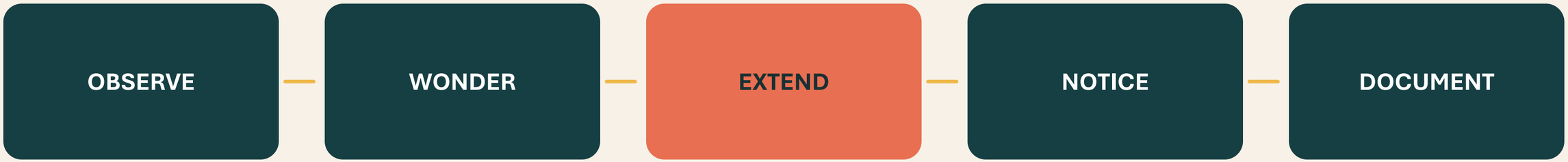
Observe • predict • test • revise

PROVOCATIONS

Connect materials to children’s questions

What might children learn from “just playing”?

The teacher’s role during play



When do you step in—and when do you let play continue?

A shared language for adults

Paraeducators • assistants • co-teachers

OBSERVE

LOOK FOR THINKING

ASK

OPEN A DOOR

SUPPORT

HELP JUST ENOUGH

Extend learning—don’t interrupt it. Clarify when to watch, wonder, prompt, or support directly.

03

How do we make learning visible?

Document and communicate learning to families, administrators, and colleagues.

What happens when learning isn’t visible to observers?

Make thinking visible

Capture questions, ideas, and problem-solving.

Connect observations to PTKLF domains and progressions.

Use photos + children’s words + work samples + notes.

Show the learning goal—not only the activity.





PTKLF is a lens, not a checklist

Foundations describe emerging knowledge, skills, and competencies over time.

Children show skills differently—and at different points.



Observation builds understanding.

Understanding informs the next invitation or step.

What would increase your comfort using PTKLF?

Translate the learning, not the play

“Why so much play time?”

Name the thinking, language, regulation, movement, and collaboration you observed.

“Why so much outdoor time?”

Connect environment, developmental goals, and next steps to the instructional approach.

Documentation is a reflection + planning tool

What support would help you explain and defend DAP with confidence?

Notice. Name. Share. Grow.

Intentional experiences begin with attentiveness to learning—and the confidence to communicate why play matters.

Before you leave

One thing I already do that aligns with this approach is…
One thing I want to think about differently is…
One way I could make learning through play more visible is…
One question I still have is…
One thing I need from my colleagues or administration is…

NEXT STEPS

Check state guidance, local resources, and UPK/TK professional learning opportunities.

Thank you — questions and follow-up are welcome.