

Supporting Children's Mastery

- Mastery is when a child has fully developed a skill and can consistently demonstrate it. Mastery is achieved through repetition and practice.
- Remember that the child's mastery is not about the teacher. It is about the child's accomplishments. When commenting on a child's accomplishments, focus on the child. Examples include: "You tried and tried, and you finally got it!", "Wow, you did it!", "It looks like you feel good inside to be able to finish the whole puzzle without any help!" Focus on the **internal** feelings of the child. Often teachers are heard saying "I'm proud of you." This kind of statement is about the teacher and is an **external** statement. Praise without recognition of the child's feelings can become rote and ultimately meaningless. Although the child may feel pleasure at being recognized by the teacher, what is really important is how the child feels about him or herself.
- One of the most helpful concepts in understanding mastery is understanding how the child utilizes the help of supportive adults to accomplish the process of obtaining each skill they need to learn. The adult supports mastery in three stages:
 1. Doing for the child – the teacher cuts paper with scissors **for** the child who is unable to use scissors.
 2. Doing with the child – the teacher helps the child position her fingers in the scissors handle and helps her open and close her hand.
 3. Standing by to admire – the child is able to cut using the scissors without physical assistance, but she needs the adult to admire her accomplishment.
- Children's mastery of skills and feelings at school requires trusting relationships with the adults who care for them. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers are intentional in their efforts to build trust with the children they are working with.
- Supporting preschoolers' mastery involves creating an environment where they can explore, practice, and refine their skills at their own pace. Here are some key strategies based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and child development principles:
 1. Provide Hands-On Learning (Concrete Experience)
 - Offer sensory-rich activities like playdoh or water play.
 - Use real-life experiences, such as cooking, gardening, or nature walks.

- Encourage pretend play to practice problem-solving and creativity.
 - Offer activities and materials that reflect the interests of the children to encourage engagement.
2. Encourage Reflection (Reflective Observation)
- Ask open-ended questions like “What happened when you mixed the colors?”
 - Use storytelling and discussions to help children recall and process experiences.
 - Provide time for quiet observation, allowing them to notice patterns and differences.
3. Help Them Make Connections (Abstract Conceptualization)
- Relate new experiences to what they already know (e.g., “Remember when we saw a plant grow? What do you think will happen here?”).
 - Introduce simple explanations and concepts in a fun, engaging way (e.g., “Seeds grow when they drink water, just like you!”).
 - Use books and visuals to deepen understanding.
4. Support Repetition & Experimentation (Active Experimentation)
- Allow multiple opportunities to practice skills (e.g., pouring, cutting, drawing).
 - Create a safe space for trial and error, encouraging them to try different ways.
 - Celebrate effort over perfection, reinforcing persistence and confidence.