Concept Development

Indicators

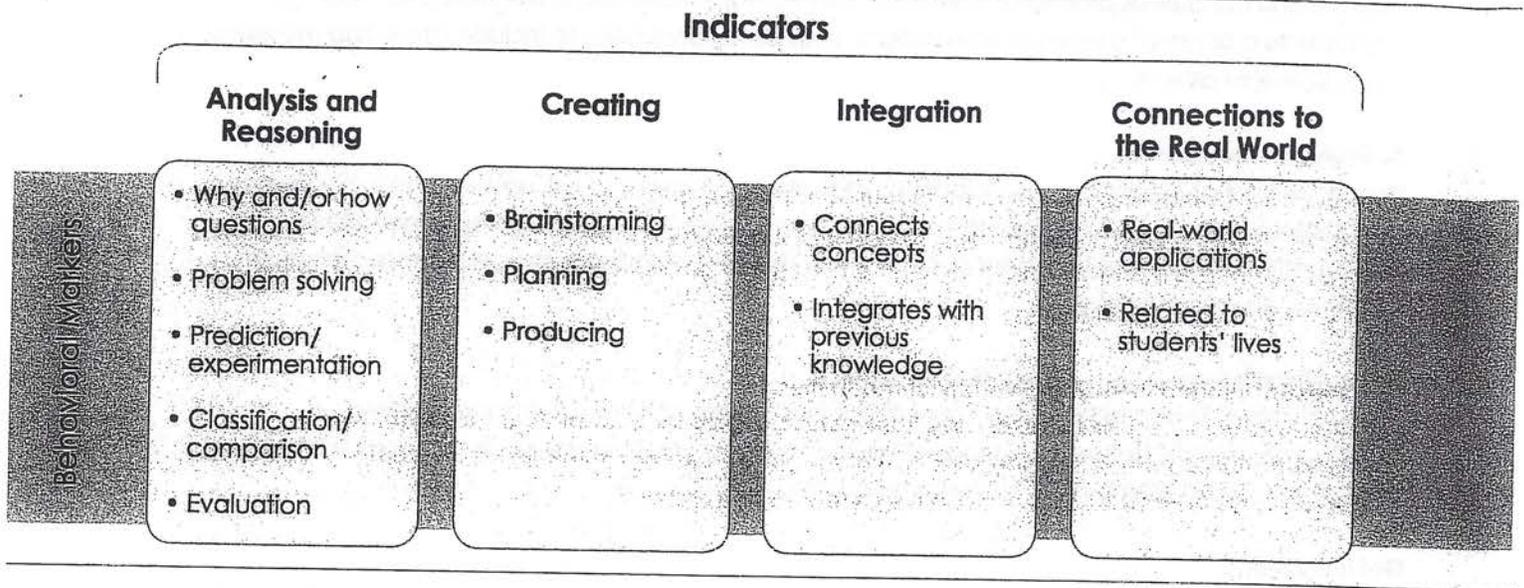|	Analysis and Reasoning	Creating	Integration	Connections to the Real World
Behavioral Markers	• Why and/or how questions • Problem solving • Prediction/ experimentation • Classification/ comparison • Evaluation	• Brainstorming • Planning • Producing	• Connects concepts • Integrates with previous knowledge	• Real-world applications • Related to students' lives

What is it?

Concept development refers to teachers' ways of making learning conceptual and facilitating children's broader understanding of concepts and ideas, rather than concentrating solely on rote instruction and recall of facts. Effective concept development provides children with opportunities to use analysis and reasoning in their approach to problems, to be creative and generate their own ideas and products, and to understand their world through experimentation and brainstorming. Concept development also describes an intentional approach by the teacher to tie together concepts across activities and bring concepts to life by applying them to children's everyday worlds.

Why is it important?

Effective concept development strategies and questions help children obtain a deeper understanding of concepts and develop analytical thinking skills. Children learn more and understand concepts better when teachers provide opportunities for them to analyze and problem-solve, rather than just memorize and recite facts. Concept development strategies also contribute to children's interest in exploration and ability to apply knowledge to the real world.

How can I provide effective concept development ?

Focus on understanding concepts.
Challenge children to think about the hows and whys of learning. Focus their attention on the process of generating solutions to a problem rather than just getting the correct answer. Ask open-ended and thought-provoking questions, such as, "Why doesn't this shape belong with the others?"

Encourage use of analysis and reasoning skills.
Use instructional strategies that focus on critical thinking, such as sequencing, comparing and contrasting, and problem-solving activities. Ask questions that promote thinking, such as, "Why do you think Jon is smiling?" and "How would you feel if this happened to you?"

Promote exploration of concepts.
Ask children to predict, experiment and brainstorm as ways to explore concepts and expand approaches to learning. If a child provides one possible answer to a question, praise her for the thought and then encourage other children to think of alternative solutions.

Link concepts across activities.
Purposefully choose learning activities, both within a given day and across weeks and months, that focus on similar concepts. Make clear connections among these concepts for your children so that their knowledge and understanding can be generalized and flexibly applied in different situations.

Apply concepts to the real world.
During explanation of a concept, use examples that are likely to occur in children's lives and encourage them to add their own examples. For example, if you are teaching children sequencing, ask them to tell you the order of the steps necessary for brushing their teeth.

Take time to plan for concept development.
While you are putting together your lesson plans for the week, take a moment to think about how you might embed more concept development into a few of your lessons. Come up with questions or activities that will stimulate the children to think deeply and understand concepts more fully. For example, during a lesson on identifying letters, rather than testing children using letter cards, encourage them to generate a list of letters they know and then look around the room for those letters.

Encourage children's creativity.
One way to facilitate children's creativity is to encourage them to explore a variety of open-ended materials and use them in different ways. For example, children might use blocks to build a house or railroad. Later, they might cover the blocks with paper and turn them into cell phones to use in dramatic play. When appropriate, take time to support children in brainstorming and planning before they create something. If children want to build a castle with blocks, help them brainstorm the different parts of a castle and who lives in a castle, and provide them with paper to draw their castle before they build it.