



PLAY, PARTICIPATION, AND POSSIBILITIES:

**AN EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR ALBERTA**

Dedication

Play, Participation, and Possibilities is dedicated to Sherrill Brown—our colleague, friend, and mentor—who reminded us often, and in so many ways, that curriculum comes from the child.

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Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum

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This work draws deeply on the *New Brunswick Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*. We acknowledge, with appreciation, permission from the University of New Brunswick Early Childhood Centre to reprint Section Two “Goals for Early Learning and Care” in its entirety for use in the Alberta framework.

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Preface

Play, Participation, and Possibilities is the result of an intense and exciting two-year collaboration among early learning and child care educators, early childhood academics, government, and professionals working in related fields. The experience has been tremendously rewarding so far, and we have a distinct sense that the adventure is just beginning.

Our journey took flight in April 2012, following a visit to MacEwan University by Pam Whitty, Professor of Education at the University of New Brunswick. Pam was invited to MacEwan as part of the Kule Visiting Scholar Lecture Series to deliver a public lecture *Children as Citizens in Their Own Right: Learning With/From Our Youngest Citizens*. As one of the project directors for the development of the internationally recognized *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*, we also invited Pam to speak to government and community leaders about early learning curriculum.

Inspired by these presentations, Lynn Jerchel, then Director of the Child Development Branch at Alberta's Ministry of Human Services invited faculty from MacEwan Early Learning and Child Care Program and Mount Royal Department of Child and Youth Studies to collaborate on developing and piloting a curriculum framework for early childhood educators working in centre-based child care and family day homes in Alberta. MacEwan faculty took the lead on creating a made-in-Alberta framework for curriculum meaning making based on the New Brunswick model.

In developing the curriculum framework, we looked first to the professional field for inspiration. As faculty in an established professional diploma program, we depend on close working relationships with early childhood educators in the community and in the MacEwan Child Care Centre Lab School to help us bring theory and practice together and to remind us of the complex and multifaceted nature of the work that early childhood educators do every day with children and their families. Knowing that curriculum comes from the child, we knew that curriculum was already happening in early childhood programs and that educators were already making curriculum decisions. In the first year of the project, we worked with the educators, administrators, children, and families at three centre-based child care programs and one family day home, documenting and collecting samples of curriculum making in action, unfolding in/through the everyday experiences of children, families, and educators.

We discovered that the holistic goals from the New Brunswick curriculum framework¹ gave both academics and educators a new and common language to describe and interpret these documented moments of curriculum making and to explore together the meaning of educators' curriculum decisions in relation to children's daily experiences. This process of documenting curriculum in action and educator curriculum **meaning making** in turn contributed to the Alberta

curriculum framework core concepts and **dispositions to learn** and convinced us that the goals developed already by the educators and researchers in New Brunswick resonated in Alberta.

This collaborative work with early childhood educators was invigorating and has deepened, strengthened, and re-energized our relationship with practicing early childhood educators—those who do the real work with children and families every day. As a result, we have come to think differently about curriculum. Rather than implementing a curriculum, we began to think about children, families, and educators in early childhood programs participating together in **co-constructing** curriculum.

Curriculum meaning making conversations that emerged in the development of *Play, Participation, and Possibilities* have been stimulating, challenging, difficult, and inspirational.

In order to maintain an image of the child as a mighty learner and citizen, educators must take on new roles—as *co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginers of possibilities* alongside children and their families and with/in community. Following a professional dialogue of curriculum meaning making, educators and administrators often expressed, with great enthusiasm, sentiments like, “It is this meaningful work with children and families that keeps me in the early learning and child care field.”²

Participating alongside educators as they recognized and reconnected with their identity as professionals and intentional decision makers ignited an energy and enthusiasm—and rekindled our commitment to develop a framework that could embrace the complexity of a **practice of relationships** and the social and cultural contexts of local communities. The curriculum framework has truly created a new and productive meeting place³ for dialogue in the early childhood community, a place where we can reflect critically on early childhood practices and children’s active and engaged participation in care, play, and learning.

Within these processes of curriculum meaning making—where we think deeply with one another about care, play, and learning—an understanding of early learning and child care as a practice of relationships is deepening and a shared professional language is taking shape. This new language of early learning and child care is causing pause and creating rich opportunities for critical reflection and dialogue.

What do we mean by the words we use? How do others understand the words we use to describe children, their experiences, their learning? In these discussions of curriculum meaning making, opportunities arise to examine commonly used terms. What does the term **image of the child** mean in this community? How do we recognize each child as a **mighty learner**? How do our practices align, or not, with our understanding of these terms? How do we rethink practices to align what we say and what we do? These questions reveal some of the ways that early childhood communities are exploring the ideas, values, principles, holistic goals, and dispositions to learn outlined in *Play, Participation, and Possibilities*. These are the conversations that move curriculum from something that

is done to children toward curriculum as a way of thinking about what children are doing in relationships of care, play, learning, and development.

Our process was critically informed by a province-wide advisory committee who brought forward some of the diverse, local perspectives of Alberta early childhood communities, both urban and rural. This eager and enthusiastic group of over 75 individuals participated through face-to-face meetings, video and teleconference, and email, contributing vital and multiple perspectives that informed our curriculum writing process. Formally and informally, they challenged, debated, provoked, and collaborated on the values and principles that support a vision of strong and resilient families, children, and early childhood communities. The participants included front-line educators and administrators of early learning and care centres, representatives from family-centred community programs, individuals who guide and inform policy, and post-secondary academics of early learning, education, and family related faculties.

***Play, Participation, and Possibilities* is informed by significant previous work in Canada and around the world.** In addition to the New Brunswick curriculum framework, we looked to and learned from diverse curriculum frameworks in provincial jurisdictions across Canada and around the world. We were inspired and influenced by *Te Whariki* from New Zealand, *The Practice of Relationships* from New South Wales, Australia, and by the philosophy and pedagogies of the infant-toddler centres and preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The theoretical foundations of these curriculum frameworks are reflected in our image of the child as a strong, resourceful, capable learner—a mighty learner—and in our focus on the significance of **family**, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions on care, play, and learning in early childhood. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child inspires our ongoing efforts to consider children’s participation as citizens in early childhood communities.

“Our image of the child is how we are with children.”

Second year Early Learning and Child Care student

The journey continues. As writers and co-creators of *Play, Participation, and Possibilities*, we hope that early childhood communities will engage with these ideas in ways that are meaningful and authentically representative of their own hopes and dreams for children, families, and communities. We know that our own journey will take new directions as local and diverse early learning and child care communities in Alberta take up and continue curriculum meaning making.

With an additional year of funding from the Government of Alberta, we will be expanding our collaborative work with early childhood educators, collecting additional samples of curriculum meaning making in action from diverse communities of practice. We hope this will help us to understand more clearly how family, social, and cultural practices and traditions in local communities

contribute to a rich and deep understanding of the multiple images of the child as a learner and a citizen that inform the work of early childhood educators.

We recognize that curriculum meaning making in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities has not been addressed. With humility and ethical responsibility, we acknowledge that we cannot speak authentically about early learning and child care in these communities nor can we take the lead on bringing these voices to the Alberta curriculum framework. This will require critical leadership from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Alberta, as well as dedicated resources.

Acknowledging that young children are already co-constructing curriculum and that educators are already making curriculum decisions is at the heart of curriculum meaning making. *Play, Participation, and Possibilities* is a guide for reflective thinking and an interpretive tool for imagining possibilities, one that helps each of us to see and think about children as mighty learners and citizens always and already.

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SECTION 1

**PLAY, PARTICIPATION, AND POSSIBILITIES:
AN INTRODUCTION**

Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Framework for Alberta frames curriculum **meaning making** that highlights the relationships and curriculum decisions shaping responsive practices in early learning and child care communities. It is a guide for early childhood educators to use in their everyday work with young children and their families in Alberta. It builds on early learning and child care frameworks that have been developed in other parts of Canada and around the world, in particular the *New Brunswick Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*.

The Alberta framework recognizes, appreciates, and values:

- ☆ the practice of relationships among educators, children, and families that make visible the uniqueness of each child care centre and family day home in Alberta.
- ☆ the **co-constructed** nature of early learning curriculum: recognizing the unique nature of learning in early childhood, educators make curriculum decisions “in the moment,” extending play and learning through thoughtful reflection and dialogue with children, families, and other educators.
- ☆ the search for a shared professional language—a language that may cause pause, calling upon us to reflect deeply in order to make the values, principles, and goals that frame practice in early learning and child care clear to ourselves and visible to others.

An early learning and child care curriculum framework is different than a traditional curriculum. In early childhood, curriculum is focused on broad holistic goals rather than specific outcomes for each subject area. Early learning and child care curriculum frameworks embrace children’s everyday experiences as the sources of curriculum meaning making. Early childhood educators use the goals in the curriculum framework to describe and interpret children’s everyday experiences. In early childhood, curriculum content is integrated, emerging from children’s fascination with the world. When educators notice children’s interest in exploring nature, people, places, and objects as well as print, stories, numbers, shapes, and patterns, and when they name the connections between these experiences and early literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, music, and art, they are co-constructing early learning curriculum with young children and making the curriculum visible to others.

Early childhood curriculum is embedded in children’s daily experiences with their families and in local communities. These experiences inform the care routines, play, learning, and developmental experiences in early learning and child care programs. They are reflected in the curriculum decisions that early childhood educators are already making. These

decisions inform their interactions with each child and **family** and are revealed in the selection of play and learning materials, design of the care, play, and learning space, and organization of daily routines.

The following sample narrative is one of many moments of curriculum meaning making that can be described and interpreted in relationship to the goals, values, and principles in *Play, Participation, and Possibilities*.

Marco is playing with the small cars when the educator calls, “Clean-up time.” Marco continues to play with the small cars and when the educator approaches, she suggests to Marco that he hold on to one of the cars while she models putting the other cars into the box. Marco uses the one car to drive the other cars into the box. When the cars (except the one in Marco’s hand) are in the box, the educator reminds Marco that they are going to go outside next and reminds him of the big trucks in the sandbox. Noticing that Marco is still holding on to the small car, she asks, “Do you want to save that car on the shelf or in your cubby?” He smiles as he holds her hand and heads towards the coat area to put the car in his cubby.

A first reading of this simple narrative may not reveal Marco’s discomfort with daily transitions. Working in a **practice of relationships**, however, the educator recognizes that Marco is reluctant to leave the cars he is playing with inside, to join others outside. She acts with sensitivity and respect for Marco. She models tidying the cars and invites Marco to hold on to a prized object—his preferred small car. She knows that she is caring for Marco’s feelings, and by doing so, she communicates that caring is a valued disposition in this community. In this way, she participates with him in a “gentle” transition from one activity to another and highlights what will happen next (going outside to play with trucks). She assures Marco that he can save the small car in a place of his choice, allowing his anxiety to ease. This educator understands the curriculum goal, Well-Being. She knows that her interaction supports Marco’s emotional health and positive identity. As she shows respect and responsiveness to him, he is experiencing trust and compassion with children and adults.

This is a sample of how a curriculum framework guides educators as they use curriculum goals to interpret a child’s everyday child care experience. It illustrates how curriculum decisions reflect early childhood professional

The **Vision** of this curriculum framework highlights the potential of strong, active, and energetic early childhood communities grounded in the rights of children and reflective of Alberta's diverse families.

values (democratic citizenship and equity) and principles (children are citizens and active participants in society). The framework can help educators reflect on their practices in ways that may shift them from doing what has always been done toward intentional curriculum decision-making. The curriculum framework can help educators see, think about, and reflect on why this interaction—along with many other daily interactions—has the potential to shape and extend children's play experiences and their sense of belonging.

Play, Participation, and Possibilities is grounded in a **Vision** of strong, active and energetic early childhood communities—**places of vitality**—where the rights of children as citizens are recognized and where the diversity of Alberta families is reflected and can be expressed. A preliminary set of shared professional **Values**—values for early childhood communities, values for early learning processes, and values for meaningful relationships with families—emerged from the provincial consultation process. The framework's **Guiding Principles** emphasize the significance of children's family and early experiences for their learning and **citizenship** in early childhood communities today and in the future.

In Section 2, the main ideas in the framework are organized around five interrelated, core concepts:

- ☆ **The Image of the Child: A Mighty Learner and Citizen** introduces the theoretical foundation of the framework and reflects critically on the multiple **images of the child** that are embedded in the multiple perspectives of learning that inform our work.
- ☆ **A Practice of Relationships: Your Role as an Early Learning and Child Care Educator** describes the complex and multifaceted relationships that frame the dynamic work of educators, who co-construct curriculum meaning making as **co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginors of possibilities** alongside and in relationship with children, families, other educators, and professionals.
- ☆ **Mighty Learners: Nurturing Children's Dispositions to Learn** explores the rich potential that each child already brings to every learning situation—their **dispositions to learn**—and the educator's role in strengthening these dispositions as part of a strong foundation for learning in early childhood. The **co-inquiry** planning process and the documentation of children's experiences through **learning stories** is introduced.
- ☆ **Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, and Participation** considers how the major framework concepts—the image of the child as a mighty learner and citizen, the practice of

relationships, and the dispositions to learn—are reflected in and revealed through the everyday experiences, interactions, and routines in an early childhood program.

---☆ **Transitions and Continuities: Supporting Children and Families Through Change** reflects on the critical role of educators and early childhood programs in enhancing the continuity of the child and families' experience during the many transitions that occur in the early childhood years—the daily transitions with/in programs, as well as transitions between programs and into formal school settings.

In Section 3 the framework goals and dispositions to learn are described in more detail, focusing on their use in practice. **Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development**—well-being, play and playfulness, communication and literacies, and diversity and social responsibility—are reprinted from the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*. **Children's Dispositions to Learn**—playing and playfulness, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring—are described along with sample narratives. The goals and dispositions to learn are the basis of a common professional language of curriculum meaning making in early childhood, a language that educators use to describe what children are doing, reflect on the decisions that shape daily interactions with children and families, and co-imagine the multiple possibilities for deepening and extending children's learning.

The **Reflection and Planning Guide** of Section 4 is a practical tool for putting the framework ideas to work in everyday practice. In Section 5, **Curriculum Sample Learning Stories** illustrate some of the curriculum decisions that early childhood educators are already making every day in practice, along with the process of reflective dialogue that facilitates educators' use of the holistic play-based goals to describe, interpret, and extend children's play and learning. They are meant to be samples, rather than examples, that is, they show one possible way to interpret children's experience, not necessarily the only way. They are offered as a starting point for discussion and reflection.

Play, Participation, and Possibilities is intended to stimulate curriculum meaning making through professional dialogue within and across vibrant early childhood communities. Thinking about early learning and child care programs as early childhood communities reframes our image of educators as co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginings of possibilities with/in relationship with children and their families. Early childhood communities focused on strengthening family and community relationships become places of vitality for children, families, and educators.



1.1 Vision

Places of vitality are strong, active, and energetic early childhood communities that welcome and invite participation of children, families, educators, and others.

Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta is inspired by a vision of strong, active, and energetic childhood communities—**places of vitality**¹—that welcome and invite the participation of children and their families. It is a framework of possibilities situated in the social and cultural experiences of families in local communities. Each child’s care, play, learning, and development are nurtured as educators work within a **practice of relationships**, appreciating **family**, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions and embracing a strong capable image of the child, as a mighty learner and citizen.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that every child has the right to protection, participation, and provision for survival and development without discrimination.² Regardless of social, cultural, and economic background and differing capabilities, our strength-based perspective recognizes the potential within each child. While resisting categories that marginalize children by culture, ability, gender, or socio-economic status, we recognize that circumstances arise when specialized supports are necessary to ensure that children experience success in programs of family choice and thrive within their early childhood communities. Such assistance may involve physical, cognitive, or emotional supports and services, as well as additional supports for families. These supports are intended to reveal each child’s potential and create equitable early childhood communities.

This curriculum framework will inspire, provoke, and guide educators in their work with children and their families—a framework of possibilities:

- ☆ for nurturing each child’s identity as a mighty learner and citizen
- ☆ for valuing play in the lives of young children
- ☆ for making children’s play, learning, and development visible for children, families, and educators
- ☆ for respecting family, social, and cultural practices and traditions in local communities
- ☆ for reflecting on the everyday experiences of children that are the basis of curriculum meaning making in early childhood communities

The vision is for **Play, Participation, and Possibilities** to be a living document and that educators will use it to question, discuss, and reflect on curriculum **meaning making**.



1.2 Purpose

Children’s play is central to this curriculum framework as an active, exploratory, creative, expressive process, deeply embedded in children’s everyday experiences and through which children participate in, learn about, and actively make sense of the world.

Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta is intended to guide the significant work of early learning and child care educators with young children and their families in centre-based child care and family day home settings.

This curriculum framework is a flexible framework for thinking about how children learn and experience their worlds, as well as a guide that fosters strong early childhood communities. Developing the framework created spaces for early childhood educators to begin to articulate professional values, principles, goals, and **dispositions to learn** that are the foundation of curriculum **meaning making** in early learning and child care.¹ This framework may confirm what educators already do intuitively in their work with children and families; it may also provoke new ways of thinking about common practices.

This framework is deeply grounded in theories of learning that recognize the significance of family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions. It focuses educator’s work on the integrated nature of children’s play and active learning, building inspiring curriculum content that relates to children’s and families’ experiences.

The purpose of this curriculum framework is

1. **to articulate a set of holistic play-based goals for children’s learning and care** (Well-Being, Play and Playfulness, Communication and Literacies, and Diversity and Social Responsibility). Though each goal provides a particular frame for interpreting children’s daily experiences, educators will notice that they are overlapping and integrated. This is intentional—an effort to maintain focus on the whole child.

Prior to formal school entry, these goals are intended to nurture children’s

- sense of **well-being and belonging** in a caring learning community.
- opportunities for **play and playfulness** with others in purposefully designed outdoor and indoor environments.
- growing confidence in **communication and literacies**, through opportunities to express and develop ideas with others using multiple representational languages.
- growing awareness of **diversity and social responsibility**, of their own and others’ identities; their responsibility to themselves, one another, and the environment; and their emerging understanding of themselves as citizens.

Children’s play and playfulness are recognized as both a goal and a disposition to learn in the curriculum framework.

A practice of relationships is created through complex and dynamic interactions among diverse community members and begins to grow and evolve as educators learn with and alongside children and their families.

2. **to nurture children’s dispositions to learn** (Playing and Playfulness, Seeking, Participating, Persisting, and Caring). In this framework the dispositions to learn help educators to appreciate and nurture each child’s unique identity as a learner. Though each disposition describes a particular set of inclinations towards learning, educators will notice how these dispositions to learn overlap within children’s daily experiences. By focusing on dispositions to learn, we begin to value the diverse ways that children engage with others, ideas, materials, and the world.
3. **to work with families, building and strengthening early childhood communities, in the care and learning of their children. Family involvement is essential for creating places of vitality** as described in the curriculum framework *Vision*. A **practice of relationships** fosters places of vitality. Places of vitality are healthy communities—communities where “people exist in relationships that encourage growth, creativity, innovation, problem solving, and progress, as people come together and pool their individual perspectives, wisdom, strengths, and skills.”²

Understanding the complexity of working within a practice of relationships in early childhood communities calls upon educators to be open to the continual shifts, flows, and fluid structures in which early learning and child care practices are shaped and changed. It requires an approach to building early childhood communities where differences are the seeds for imagining possibilities.

4. **to engage educators as co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginiers of possibilities with high regard for children’s potential.** The framework is intended to help educators notice and name how each child approaches play and learning. It provides a context in which educators can consider further curriculum possibilities and multiple perspectives regarding children’s care, play, learning, and development. As well, it assists educators to make visible what each child is exploring through daily experiences using a shared professional language. In this framework, the role of the educator is to foster each child’s sense of belonging and identity within safe, healthy, and **responsive environments**.



1.3 Structure and Format

The design of the curriculum framework iBook was inspired by our image of educators beginning with questions that emerge out of their daily practice, seeking ways to think about and describe the curriculum already taking place in playrooms with children. Multiple entry points and multiple pathways through the framework are made possible through technology. Although the curriculum framework content is organized in a linear way with clearly defined sections, the iBook format provides additional features, such as in-text pop-up glossary definitions, opportunity to move back and forth between sections, as well as digital bookmarking, highlighting notes, and the possibility of adding personal notes as readers might do in a traditional book.

Readers will see bolded words and phrases in the text. **Bolded red words and phrases** indicate a glossary term. In the iBook format, touching these terms will show the glossary definition in a pop-up window. **Bolded orange words and phrases** indicate an internal section of the framework itself. **Bolded black terms** are used for emphasis. Active links to the [curriculum framework website](#) are printed in the typical blue.

Sample narratives in the text of the framework and curriculum sample **learning stories** are included to connect real world practice to curriculum concepts. These narratives are emphasized with boxes and are intended as illustrations, not to be interpreted as the only way for curriculum to be lived.

The use of combination words such as with/in, with/for, and I/we are intentional. These word combinations highlight the complex relationships in early childhood curriculum making. As well, relationships are integral to learning and teaching. The role of the early learning and child care educator has been envisioned as co-learner, co-researcher, and co-imager of possibilities. The prefix “co” signifies the reciprocity between learning and teaching, playing and learning, researching and learning, and imagination and possibilities for children and for educators.

This curriculum framework is organized in the following way.

Section 1 includes **vision, values, purpose**, and **guiding principles** foundational to the curriculum framework with a framework overview. The iBook format provides educators with an active link to the curriculum framework website for a printable version of the curriculum framework **overview**.

Section 2 includes curriculum framework core concepts. The core concepts provide educators with the key ideas that support the perspectives of learning and care that guide early learning and child care practice, including **The Image of the Child, A Practice of Relationships, Mighty Learners, Responsive Environments**, and **Transitions and Continuities**.

Section 3 lists the holistic play-based goals for learning and care and describes children's **dispositions to learn**. Each goal includes three facets and a list of descriptors. These descriptors provide a common language that illustrate children's daily curriculum making. Reflective statements and questions along with the goal descriptors may provoke further thinking. The section on children's dispositions to learn includes sample narratives of everyday child care experiences along with a discussion about educator curriculum decision-making. These narratives are intended to demonstrate the responsive nature of early childhood practice.

A **reflection and planning guide** is included in Section 4 and can be used to support curriculum planning and reflection processes. There's an introduction for how one might read and apply the guide. In the iBook format an active link connects to the curriculum framework website for a printable version.

A **glossary** of curriculum framework terms provides definitions of the emerging professional language.

The twelve **curriculum sample learning stories** of Section 5 were documented in the first year of curriculum framework development in collaboration with educators from three centre-based child care centres and one family day home in Alberta. These learning stories tell of everyday experiences of educators and children. Following the story, a question and answer discussion between the educator and pedagogical mentor is provided to make visible the educator's decision-making and reflection of children's curriculum making. The descriptors that explain what the children were doing connect their activities to the holistic goals. An additional 30 curriculum sample learning stories can be found on the curriculum framework website, www.childcareframework.com.



1.4 Values

The following values emerged through consultation with a provincial advisory committee. Establishing a shared set of professional early childhood values that resonate in both local and global contexts was recognized as a significant base for the framework.

Values for Early Childhood Communities

- **Democratic citizenship**
- **Equity**
- **Intercultural competence and communication**
- **Environmental sustainability**

Democratic Citizenship

In early childhood communities, we value the opportunity to participate—actively and authentically—in the daily decisions of life and living.

Democratic citizenship means that children and their families have opportunities to participate, to make choices, to express ideas, and to act upon their daily experiences by asking questions and expressing their opinions in matters they relate to. This involves informing children and their families and giving them options to participate in the healthy development of their early childhood community.

Equity

In early childhood communities that value equity, each member has the opportunity to participate and have one's perspectives heard and respected. **Equity** means that each member of the community receives what is needed to participate and contribute. For example, making accommodations for meeting times or language interpreters for families; providing additional supports to ensure that every child is able to explore and share ideas with others, such as adding braille preschool picture books to your library. Everyone contributes to healthy early childhood communities in the ways that they care for and about one another. Young children can gain awareness, appreciation, and respect for one another when they play and learn in communities that explore questions such as, What is fair? What is equal? What is equitable? How am I valued? How do I value others?

Intercultural Competence and Communication

Early childhood communities are **tapestries of dynamic differences**. In honouring our differences, we create opportunities to know others and ourselves in new and deeper ways. In early childhood communities, intercultural competence and communication is revealed in the ways that we act and also in ways that we relate to/with one another. Understanding, appreciating, and respecting our commonalities and our differences strengthens our local communities and cultivates a rich experience of sharing and learning about many ways of being and knowing the world. In early childhood communities, **intercultural competence and communication** requires acknowledgment that there are many ways of doing, being, living, and learning, and that these differences connect to how people experience and view the world—their social and cultural experiences.

Environmental Sustainability

Deeply connecting with/in our physical world begins with being **responsibly playful** in nature. In early childhood communities, this means spending time outdoors, planting gardens, and creating imaginary worlds in nature through play. In Alberta, it may mean taking opportunities to appreciate the uniqueness of the seasons and changes in weather and daylight at different times. Valuing **environmental sustainability** means developing a stewardship of nature and living things through learning and watching and acting and caring about the world, on the ground, in the water, and through the air.



Values for Early Learning Processes

- **Active engagement and participation**
- **Meaning making and co-constructing knowledge**
- **Play and playfulness**
- **Creativity and imagination**
- **Multimodal literacies**
- **Interconnectedness of ideas**
- **Reciprocity of relationships**
- **Diverse perspectives for learning**
- **Inclusiveness**

Early learning and child care educators value learning as an active, social process that begins in infancy. From their earliest moments children are learners, make meaning of self, others, and the world. Knowledge in the early years is **co-constructed** through each child's engagement with people, places, objects, and ideas.

We value **play**. It is one of many **multimodal literacies** and an essential medium through which children explore and participate with others and in the world. Children's active, collaborative, complex, communicative, vivacious playfulness within commonplace and imaginary events and experiences is a **meaning making** process. In early childhood communities, this means that we provide children with many opportunities to co-construct their knowledge.

Children's **active engagement and participation** in learning is demonstrated through their theory building, **creativity**, problem solving, **playfulness**, and **imagination**. Educators who value children's active learning processes provide diverse materials and media for exploration and representation. Through these kinds of experiences children develop a strong and resilient learner identity—they become **mighty learners**, as described in ***Mighty Learners: Nurturing Children's Dispositions to Learn***.

Children experience **reciprocity of relationships** and **interconnectedness of ideas** in **inclusive** early childhood communities where educators value children's contributions and seek out **diverse perspectives of/for learning**. Learning becomes dynamic as educators and children come together to explore, communicate, examine, question, problem-solve, and challenge what is known and what is yet to be understood. Educators value children's ways of knowing about the world through their senses and whole body exploration. Within this dynamic care, play, and learning environment, ideas bring people together, and **active engagement and participation** is what helps those ideas deepen and grow more meaningful.



Values for Meaningful Family Relationships

- **Knowledge and appreciation of family, social, and cultural practices and traditions**
- **Belonging to family and community**
- **Learning from elders and community leaders**
- **Respect and social responsibility within family and community**

Entering early childhood communities is often the first time families look to the broader community for support and partnership for the care of their children. It is a significant step for both the child and his or her **family**. Within a **practice of relationships**, the educator demonstrates care, respect, honour, sharing, and thoughtful listening to gain **knowledge and appreciation of family, social, and cultural practices and traditions**.

Families know their children in ways that no one else can. This particular knowledge of the child has roots in family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions.¹ Family practices and parent–child interactions influence and are influenced by stresses, demands, and joys of daily living and desires for the child. The child’s sense of **belonging to family and community** is strengthened through respectful and reciprocal relationships, where educators recognize the value of family connections and contributions in understanding how each child makes meaning of the world.

Opportunities to **learn from elders and community leaders** can provide authentic and meaningful experiences that connect curriculum to living and life. Cultural artifacts, such as the daily tools for eating and sharing food, help bring authenticity to care, play, learning, and development as children make new meaning of their own family experiences and those of their friends.¹ These connections to family, social, and cultural practices and traditions have the potential to build appreciation for differences and nurture **respect and social responsibility within family and community**; they can become part of our daily conversations and experiences rather than disconnected celebrations of cultural-specific food, art, music, and dance. In this way we understand culture as who we are, as well as who others are, in early childhood communities.



1.5 Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles

These guiding principles¹ inform and shape our work and curriculum decision-making. Principles are statements that reflect what we consider to be current truths in our work with young children and their families. When reflecting upon practice, early learning and child care educators can look to these principles to guide their curriculum decisions and interactions with children and their families.

The developers of *Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta* chose to adapt the principles of the Alberta Education Kindergarten Program Statement to build continuity between the early learning and child care field and formal schooling for children and families in Alberta.

Children’s life-long health, well-being, learning, and behaviour are strongly connected to their early childhood experience.

Research suggests that early childhood experiences have a life-long impact.² Each child’s **family**, social, and cultural identity, as well as each child’s identity as a learner and citizen is influenced (though not solely determined) by their early experiences. Educators working with this understanding recognize that their curriculum decisions can support children’s early experiences in ways that nurture each child’s sense of well-being, learning, and **citizenship** in the early childhood community.

Childhoods differ depending on social, cultural, and economic circumstances.

Understanding that family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions are embedded in how children learn and experience the world is foundational to the **socio-cultural perspective of learning** within this curriculum framework. The educator’s appreciation and respect for family, social, and cultural practices and traditions influences children’s experiences of well-being, learning, and citizenship in early childhood communities. Educators working with this understanding recognize that children arrive with many experiences and ways of being that contribute to the vitality of the early childhood community.

Children interact and learn in multiple learning communities and their learning is profoundly influenced by the relationships within and between these communities and, specifically, with respect to the relationship with the family.

Learning is not limited to the hours children spend in school or child care. The experiences children have at home and in the broader community hold possibilities for children's learning. Educators working with this understanding support strong communities through building strong relationships with families and other community members for children's well-being, learning, and development.

Children thrive when they are nurtured in close, consistent relationships, and their families benefit from these close caring relationships as well.

The relationships that each child forms with educators influence their sense of belonging and identity as a learner and citizen of the early childhood community. When children feel secure in their relationships, and with the relationships between the educators and their families, they are more ready to explore the world and to approach the challenges of learning and living well. Educators build close, nurturing relationships with children and families through a **practice of relationships**.

Children are active co-constructors of knowledge through first-hand experiences and in reciprocal relationships with people and things in their environment.

Learning environments that provide multiple opportunities for children to actively explore ideas and materials, and talk about their ideas with others, offer children experiences to think about their play and learning endeavours and themselves as learners. As children actively **co-construct** knowledge, educators learn about each child's learning processes. The process of engaging children to revisit and talk about their own learning experiences can contribute to each child's learner identity, as well as educators' understanding of learning processes.

Children are unique learners who construct and represent knowledge using multimodal literacies for exploration and expression.

Blocks, art materials, and story play are a few of the many ways that children explore and represent what they know about the world. Through active engagement with **multimodal literacies** and with the support of knowledgeable educators to scaffold their learning, children are able to solve problems, create and test theories, and express ideas, thoughts and feelings. Educators, in the design of a responsive learning environment, nurture children's dispositions to learn³—their many ways of playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. These dispositions to learn are used in the curriculum framework to describe each child, as a **mighty learner and citizen**.

Children are citizens and active participants in society.

Citizenship begins with the notion of active participation and engagement in local and global communities. Children have the right to participate⁴ in their early childhood communities and to be valued and respected for who they are and what they bring to the community. Educators working with this understanding invite children to participate in making choices, communicating ideas and opinions, and influencing the community through collaborative decision-making. In this way educators show regard for each child's citizenship. Creating **places of vitality** in healthy early childhood communities means that educators, children, and families participate in matters of local and global concern.



1.6 Overview

Play, Participation, and Possibilities

An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta¹

Values	Guiding Principles ²
<p>Values Guiding Early Childhood Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratic citizenship Equity Intercultural competency and communication Environmental sustainability <p>Values Guiding Early Learning Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active engagement and participation Meaning making and co-constructing knowledge Play and playfulness Creativity and imagination Multimodal literacies Interconnectedness of ideas Reciprocity of relationships Diverse perspectives for learning Inclusivity <p>Values Guiding Meaningful Family Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belonging to family and community Knowledge and appreciation of family, social, and cultural practices and traditions Learning from elders and community leaders Respect and social responsibility within family and community 	<p>Children's life-long health, well-being, learning, and behaviour are strongly connected to their early childhood experience.</p> <p>Childhoods differ depending on social, cultural, and economic circumstances.</p> <p>Children interact and learn in multiple learning communities and their learning is profoundly influenced by the relationships within and between these communities and specifically with respect for the family relationship.</p> <p>Children thrive when they are nurtured in close, consistent relationships, and their families benefit from these close caring relationships as well.</p> <p>Children are active co-constructors of knowledge through first-hand experiences and in reciprocal relationships with people and things in their environment.</p> <p>Children are unique learners who construct and represent knowledge using multimodal literacies for exploration and expression.</p> <p>Children are citizens and active participants in society.</p>



[Download a PDF version of the Play, Participation, and Possibilities Overview](#) (90 kb)

Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development³

Well-Being	Play and Playfulness	Communication and Literacies	Diversity and Social Responsibility
Children participate within safe and caring environments where their vitality, health, well-being, and sense of belonging and identity are protected and nurtured.	Children participate within open, engaging, and responsive environments where exploration and play are encouraged and purposefully planned.	Children participate within intellectually, socially, and culturally engaging environments where language and multiple literacies are valued and practised.	Children participate within socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments in which social responsibility for self, others, and the world is enacted.
Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities	Imagination and Creativity	Communicative Practices	Inclusiveness and Equity
Belonging	Playful Exploration and Problem Solving	Multimodal Literacies	Democratic Practices
Physical Health	Dizzy Play	Literate Identities With/In Communities	Sustainable Futures

Mighty Learners: Nurturing Children's Dispositions to Learn

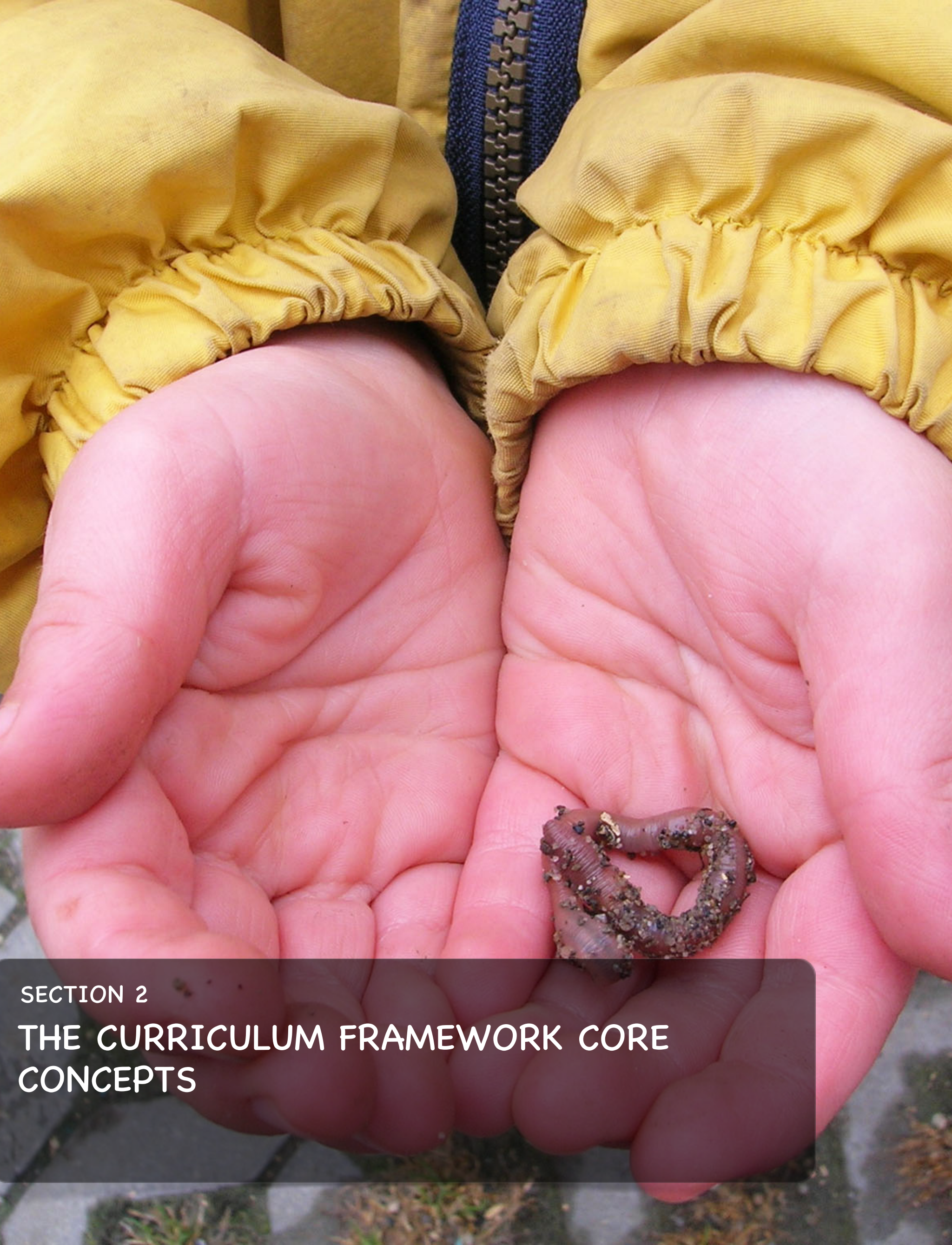
I/we are playing and playful, I/we are seeking, I/we are participating, I/we are persisting, I/we are caring

The Image of the Child: A Mighty Learner and Citizen

"How do you invite me to listen and communicate and respond to my own particular efforts?" ⁴	"How do you organize time and space for me to explore my thinking and imagination independently and with others?" ⁴	"How do you encourage and facilitate my endeavours to be part of the wider group?" ⁴	"How do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitivity?" "How do you appreciate and understand my interests and abilities and those of my family?" ⁴
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A Practice of Relationships: Your Role as an Early Learning and Child Care Educator

...as co-learner	...as co-researcher	...as co-imaginer of possibilities
<p>Plays, Seeks, Participates, Persists, Cares</p> <p>Alongside children and families, educators openly seek to learn about children and their families. This learning informs curriculum planning and is foundational for a practice of relationships. Educators use their knowledge and learning to create places of vitality with children and families.</p>	<p>Questions, Investigates, Reflects, Interprets, Shares</p> <p>Educators actively engage children, families, and colleagues to investigate, make meaning of, and communicate about what children are doing and thinking. They engage with families to learn about how children engage in their world. Interpretations reflect an understanding that learning is socially and culturally constructed.</p>	<p>Wonders, Imagines, Creates, Invents, Risks in the Spirit of Learning</p> <p>The role of the educator is to value the questions that can lead to possibilities created along with children, families, and colleagues, rather than have all the answers. Possibilities begin with wondering, imagining, and taking risks in the spirit of creating authentically shared places of vitality with children and families.</p>



SECTION 2

THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK CORE CONCEPTS



2.1 The Image of the Child: A Mighty Learner and Citizen

Our image of the child affects everything we do with children.

What does it mean to be a child?

How do we view children and childhood?

Every society, every culture, every family imagines children and childhood in its own way. These images are evident all around us—in family stories, in books, on TV, movies, digital and social media, as well as toys and advertisements, and within school and child care services, and government policies. Images of children and childhood are expressed in phrases like “boys will be boys,” “children are our future,” and “the innocence of childhood.” In early childhood communities, multiple images of the child may co-exist and create complexity for early learning and child care educators. The Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta is intended to awaken the image of a strong, resourceful, capable child—a **mighty learner and citizen**.

Our own social, cultural, economic, and political perspective determines the image of the child, and for educators it is also informed by theories of learning. Current and historic theories of early learning view children in particular ways and influence our image of the child.¹

- ☆ **Developmental perspectives of learning** view children as developing in universal ages and stages toward maturity. This perspective is historically the foundation of early childhood education and views young children as active learners.
- ☆ **Socio-cultural perspectives of learning** view children not only as active, but also social learners within historical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts that influence what children learn and how children learn. This socio-cultural perspective of learning understands the influences of each child’s family, social, and cultural practices and traditions in their learning.
- ☆ **Post-foundational perspectives of learning** examine issues of power, equity, equality, and fairness as critical influences on how and what children learn within relationship with others in the social, cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts of everyday living.²

Together these views and the images of the child that they produce are embedded, often unconsciously, in the early childhood environments we provide. These perspectives of learning evoke particular images of the child and our image of the child affects everything we do with children. It shapes our decision-making about daily routines and experiences of children’s care, play, learning, and development, as well as our interactions with each child

and their **family**. The image of the child is evident in the materials we provide, our organization of time and space, our participation in children's endeavours, and the relationships between educators, children, and their families.

The infant and preschool programs of Reggio Emilia, Italy, describe the image of the child as **rich, strong, capable, and competent**.³ Though many Canadian educators may support this image of a capable and knowing child, our colleagues in Reggio Emilia emphasize that countless common actions and interactions with young children are not always consistent with this image. For this reason, continuous re-examination of the image of the child is important to ensure that practice is aligned with this image.

Is an image of the child—a strong, resourceful, and capable learner and citizen—evident in your design of the care, play, and learning environment? Is this image of the child evident in your interactions with each child and his or her family?

The Alberta curriculum framework for early learning and child care views the child as a mighty learner and citizen—strong, resourceful, and capable. This image affirms each child's right to be listened to, to be treated with respect, and to participate in daily decisions that affect him or her.⁴ This understanding of each child as a citizen and as a strong, resourceful, and capable learner shifts the intention of our interactions from “doing to” a child toward “participating with” each child.⁵ This image of the child—a mighty learner and citizen—calls on us to continually re-examine our own practices, our interactions, and our assumptions about children, childhood, learning, and play.⁶

Each child's learning unfolds in social, cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts and relationships of everyday life. Like adult views of children and childhood that are socially, culturally, economically, and politically constructed, so too are each child's view of him- or herself socially, culturally, economically, and politically constructed.⁷ So if we—as educators—think of a child who resides in disadvantaged circumstances as the poor child who lacks resources, that child's view of self is socially constructed by us—whose image of the child is lacking. In contrast, if we acknowledge the resourcefulness of each child, regardless of economic or other social circumstance, then that child has the opportunity to see him- or herself as a strong, resourceful, and capable learner and citizen regardless of life circumstance. Our thoughts and actions are deeply connected and often convey hidden and powerful messages to children who are keen observers of the significant people in their lives.

How does your image of the child influence your interactions with children?

Following each narrative sample below is a description of how an educator might respond to a child in everyday experiences. Each response is considered using the perspectives of learning foundational to this curriculum framework. Not every situation is considered from all three perspectives: developmental, socio-cultural, and post-foundational. Some experiences lend themselves to particular perspectives of learning more than the others. Through these descriptions you can see how theories of learning reveal a particular image of the child; in turn, how our images of the child influences practice.

Held in one's arms, a tiny infant reduces a well-versed adult to babbling and cooing. As she grows, she discovers that when she drops a spoon from her perch in a highchair, a responsive adult willingly participates in her game of "Drop and Pick-Up" again... and again.

From a developmental perspective of learning, we notice this child's attention is drawn to an adult's cooing and is maintained through the adult-child eye gaze and smiles shared. This common early social interaction is interpreted as the child's ability to bond with significant caring adults. We notice the child's ability to grasp, hold, and release in the naturally playful, repetitive, spoon-dropping game. This game often comes to an end when the adult puts the spoon out of reach and begins to feed the child, shifting the focus of the child-adult interaction from playing together to caring for.

From a socio-cultural perspective of learning, the infant is viewed as someone who is already forming her identity as a citizen and learner in relationship with others. The adult coos knowingly, engaging the infant in a socially reciprocal exchange that communicates, "You are important to me." The child responds with her gaze and cooing in a way that communicates, "I am interested in knowing you." This adult understands this interaction as having potential influence on how the child views herself as a social learner and citizen already. As the child grows, she engages an adult in the "Drop and Pick-Up" game. The adult's willingness to follow the child's initiative communicates, "You are someone who can make things happen." Again, the adult views the interaction as a significant moment in how the child sees herself as a learner and citizen—as someone who can make things happen. In our role as educators, this perspective also allows us to consider that the spoon as a cultural artifact may be representative of the child's family, social, and cultural feeding practices.

Two preschool children, a girl and a boy, are in the house corner with the dolls. The girl states, “You are the dad. You have to go to work now.” Following the directions of his friend, the boy begins to leave the house area. Another young boy moves into the house area and is confronted by the boy who is the dad, “No, you can’t play. I’m playing here.”

The boy turns away and walks over to the adult who is sitting with some children at the drawing table. He snuggles into her. After briefly rubbing his back, she helps him to a chair and puts paper and crayons in front of him without a word. He sits for some time fiddling with the crayon. He doesn’t respond to her queries about what he will draw and seems uninterested in what the children around the table are drawing.

From a developmental perspective of learning, play is understood as the child’s domain, not to be interrupted or interfered with by adults. **Learning through play** philosophy, grounded in a developmental perspective of learning, supports the view that children develop through universal and predictable stages of play, from solitary to parallel to the more complex sustained episodes of cooperative socio-dramatic play, which is understood as the most sophisticated form of play achieved by children later in their development.⁸

Educators are positioned as providers of play spaces, who supply child-size props that represent real world objects. They also provide time and multiple activities that offer children choices for their play and learning experiences. Educators spend time with small groups of children at various play centres supervising the use of materials and managing conflicts between children as they arise.⁹ In this scenario, the girl and boy were participating harmoniously and therefore no adult was present in the interaction. This reflects an image of the child at play as innocent and just having fun. The exclusion of the second boy went undetected by the educator. Yet, what do you suppose he learns about himself in relationship with others through this interaction?

From a socio-cultural perspective of learning, the educators might join the children’s socio-dramatic play, thoughtfully and respectfully becoming a co-player and a co-learner. As a co-player in children’s play, educators are in a unique position to extend children’s ideas and/or challenge inequities that arise. Through this perspective, educators view each experience as a learning opportunity alongside the children. In this case the educators may explore the social and cultural dynamics of the group of children in relationship with one another and adults. What roles does this child typically play? When does he take on a lead role? When does he control and direct

the play? When does he exclude others from play? How often is the other boy excluded from play? How can I watch for further incidents of exclusion? When is this boy engaged in social play? Is he ever able to negotiate a role for himself with other children? As a player, the educator has an opportunity to imagine possibilities along with children by wondering about other roles that would enable the boy to join in the play.

A post-foundational perspective views these children as actively exploring relationships of power and identity and children's play experiences as opportunities for educators to learn about children and how they relate with others.¹⁰ Educators would listen to, observe, and reflect on their own interactions to identify unintended messages related to **equity** and fairness. In this sample narrative, the educator may not recognize that she could be responding to boys differently than girls when they are upset. By considering this, she would have an opportunity to question and reflect on her interactions with children and move toward more equitable practices regarding gender.



Sophie finishes washing her hands and scans the table for a seat at lunch. She has two choices: to sit in a chair beside Nora or Dakota. She chooses the chair beside Dakota. Later that day, Sophie explores the tubes and funnels in the water table. Nora puts on a water shirt and joins Sophie. Sophie immediately leaves the water table.

The following day, Sophie is painting at the easel with Emily. Nora enters the room with her mom. Sophie leans over to Emily and whispers, “She is so ugly. Look at her skin.” Fran, the educator, is startled by Sophie’s comment. She doesn’t know how to respond.

Later that day, Fran shares her observation with her team, “I don’t understand why Sophie would say that about Nora. Sophie has the same skin colour as Nora and the same colour hair. Why would she say that Nora is ugly?” After a lengthy conversation, the team decides to examine their environment for evidence of diversity and cultural representations of their families. They decide to record who is playing with whom and to talk with families about which friends their children talk about at home. The educators are focused on learning about the social and cultural dynamics between the children in this group to understand what is happening between Sophie and Nora. They consider their own interactions with individual children as well.

From a developmental perspective of learning, educators may view the comment as an expression of either the innocent child or the misbehaving child. Both views elicit opportunities to teach the children appropriate social skills about what one should, or should not, say to a friend. The kind of comment shared by Sophie might be considered as “unintentional” and ignored; or perhaps the educators might consider the behaviour “unkind” and teach the children how to talk with friends using “kind” words. If the negative behaviour continues, the educators might move Sophie away from Nora in efforts to minimize the problem behaviour.

From a socio-cultural perspective of learning, educators view the social and cultural context of the learning environment as influencing factors in the way children learn about social and cultural norms. From this perspective, children are seen as **co-constructors** of knowledge actively interpreting what they have seen and heard. As co-learners and co-researchers, these educators understand that children learn about discrimination through social and cultural experiences. The educators select children’s picture books that help the children to see characters of varied cultural backgrounds in strong and capable roles.

The educators continue to examine the early learning and child care environment for hidden messages about culture and race, which reflects a

post-foundational perspective of learning. The educators focus on learning about how the child care environment may be communicating discriminatory messages and work to understand and resolve the inequities for the benefit of children as well as families. For example, storybooks may highlight princesses who are white, blond, and blue-eyed and villains who are dark skinned, with dark hair and brown eyes. Further incidents would be talked about with children, and perhaps stories regarding exclusion and inclusion may be shared to provoke conversations with the children to challenge assumptions of gender, race, colour, ability, and ethnicity.

As educators, when you understand how the image of the child is constructed and influenced by theories of learning, you begin to understand how your curriculum decisions are reflected through your daily interactions and the design of the care, play, and learning environment.¹¹ A view of the child as innocent may make the inequities that can exist in children's play invisible. A view of the child as incapable or deficient may limit how learning occurs and miss opportunities for imagining creative and novel ways of playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. A view of the child as bad or good communicates the child's value in the community. When you choose an image of the child as a strong, resourceful, and capable mighty learner and citizen, you enter into relationships with children to learn about what they know and want to know and you have an opportunity to respond to that information through your curriculum decisions.

Constructing an image of the child: a strong, resourceful, capable child –a mighty learner and citizen.

How do you notice and name each child as a mighty learner and citizen? The following sample narratives highlight children as **mighty learners**. They are followed by reflective questions to help you think about your practice in relationship with children as mighty learners and citizens.

A toddler's father slouches over, walking along behind his infant son with his hands held ready. He does not interfere with the boy's walking adventure in the uneven outdoor space. The father patiently and supportively encourages his son's risk-taking endeavour and, in doing so, his son learns that he is a **mover** in the world.

As an educator, how do you view children's risk-taking ventures? **Think about** opportunities for children to test their own limits in ways that are challenging, yet safe.

A preschooler's many questions engage her experienced and patient grandparents in their effort to explain the curiosities of a familiar yet wondrous world, "Why Gran, why do the stars only shine at night?" "Where do they go in the day?" "How do they turn on?"

How do you as an educator view children's questions? **Think about** when your answer to a child's question ended the conversation. **Think about** when children's questions have provoked further thought and exploration for the whole group.

Many young learners persist with rolling objects down a ramp, filling and dumping buckets of water, or building and rebuilding towers of blocks. It is these trials and observations that help the child to build, and then refine, his or her theories about how the world works.

Who listens to those theories in your child care setting? Will the children's theories be heard as cute comments or potential possibilities for learning? **Think about** how theories can initiate further exploration and problem solving with children.

A young child, so aware of his community, eagerly joins each and every new experience that his peers engage in. He busily moves from play space to play space. He is interested in what others are interested in. He is interested in connecting with others and soon settles in with a group who are dancing to recorded music along with their educator.

As an educator, how do you view the "busy" child? **Think about** how a "busy" child is responded to by peers and adults. **Think about** how that child's "busyness" can inspire further inquiry and playfulness in the community.

When you adopt a strong, resourceful, capable image of the child you respond to children's dispositions to learn within children's everyday play and social interactions.

With the help of their educators, a group of children have researched healthy options for yogurt as a snack item. They are presenting their research to Ella, the centre cook. They are about to request that she consider information about a different kind of yogurt for snack.

What image of the child provoked the educators to support the children's activism for challenging decisions regarding food choices in the child care setting? **Think about** the ways children can express preferences for something different or concern for others, the environment, and living things.

Each of these children is learning about how the world works and who they are in the world in relationship with others. As you see from everyday experiences with children, one child may be more willing to pursue his ideas in the presence of difficulty. Another child may be more willing to be a risk taker by challenging her own physical limits. Within this curriculum framework, we have identified **playing, seeking, participating, persisting,** and **caring** as important dispositions to nurture in young children for their learning and **citizenship**. When you adopt a strong, resourceful, capable image of the child you respond to children's dispositions to learn within children's everyday play and social interactions.

You construct an image of child as a mighty learner when you notice and name them:

- ★ **playing**, creating, inventing, imagining the many possibilities with blocks or paint or glue or clay. A child playing with storytelling and creating a character role alongside others in an imaginative story or story of family practices is a mighty learner. A child playing with ways to express ideas with music or drama or building or images is a mighty learner. Each playing and playful child is a mighty learner.
- ★ **seeking**, asking many questions, exploring the world with all or some of his or her senses: touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing, and whole body exploration. Each child seeking and wondering about all kinds of ways that the world is familiar, different, changing, and challenging is a mighty learner.
- ★ **participating** with others, observing what others are doing, or listening and sharing ideas and opinions, negotiating for shared understanding or for turns. Each child participating with materials and ideas and others is a mighty learner.
- ★ **persisting** with challenges and difficulty with ideas and with others. Each child persisting with new strategies, by asking for help when needed or trying again another day, is a mighty learner.

—★ **caring** about family, self, and others. Each child caring about the world and all living things, someone who says and demonstrates “I can help,” is a mighty learner.

For support to think about **how** and **what** you might do to reflect on your image of the child and plan for children’s learning and citizenship, see:

- ***Mighty Learners: Nurturing Children’s Dispositions to Learn***
- ***A Practice of Relationships: Your Role as an Early Learning and Child Care Educator***
- ***Reflection and Planning Guide***
- ***Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, and Participation***

As well, you will find a collection of ***Curriculum Sample Learning Stories*** highlighting a strong, resourceful, and capable image of the young child—a mighty learner and citizen.



2.2 A Practice of Relationships: Your Role as an Early Learning and Child Care Educator

Families, children, and educators create places of vitality together—strong, active, and energetic communities, fostered by educators engaged in a practice of relationships.

When asked, “What is it about your work that keeps you going?” early learning and child care educators often respond with a sentiment that goes something like, “It’s the love I have...” “It’s the caring that I feel...” “It’s the joy I experience each day as I work with young children and their families.” Yet, your work as educators is more than love, caring, and joy—it is work that is multifaceted, complex, and dynamic. Your role as **co-learner, co-researcher, co-imaginer of possibilities** calls for a playful and seeking spirit, a willingness to participate, persist, and care, even when it is challenging. As well, your role is made more dynamic through imagining, creating, and inventing possibilities.

A **practice of relationships**¹ describes the complex and dynamic relationships with diverse community members and begins as you learn with and alongside children and families. When you engage in a practice of relationships, you create **places of vitality** in early childhood communities with children—as **mighty learners** and citizens—and their families.

Families, children, and educators create places of vitality together.

Places of vitality are strong, active, and energetic communities, fostered by educators who engage in a practice of relationships.²

Educators work within a practice of relationships with children and families.

Appreciating the significance of the family in the life of the child, you enter into a relationship with families along with the relationships you nurture with children.³ It is the quality of the relationships between educators, children, and families that characterizes the early childhood community experience for families and remains in their memories and the memories of their children. In a similar way to the image of the child, the image of the family is also constructed within social, cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts.³ The image of the family that you hold influences your participation with families and communicates to children how their family is valued in early childhood communities. When you value family connections and contributions, you are more likely to engage families in open, respectful, and reciprocal dialogue to share and generate ideas, solve problems, and learn more deeply about children. In turn, their relationships with you can add value to family life.

Families know their children in ways that no one else can.

This particular knowledge of the child has roots in family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions.⁴ Family practices and parent–child interactions influence and are influenced by the stresses and demands of daily living and are interwoven with the family’s hopes and desires for their child’s future. Their image of their child unfolds over a lifetime.

Healthy communities are places of vitality “where people are in relationships that encourage growth, creativity, innovation, problem solving, and progress, as people come together and pool their individual perspectives, wisdom, strengths, and skills.”⁶

Family, social, and cultural practices and traditions are the typical experiences families share. These practices and traditions take shape and become meaningful within family life and everyday living. They are the rituals around what happens on Thursday evenings or Sunday afternoons as much as they are about cultural celebrations. Practices and traditions may involve connection to extended family members, religious communities, as well as ethnic groups. They are expressed through daily experiences and parenting practices like sharing food, bedtime rituals, and toilet learning. They include experiences such as cooking with Opa or going to the park with Auntie (who is a very special community elder and auntie to many in the community). As educators listen to, reflect on, and consider the significance of family practices and traditions they support each child’s identity within their family and the family’s identity within the early childhood community, and deepen their practice of relationships.

Without question, the relationships between educators, children, and families are primary; yet, the relationships that you build with other community members also support and strengthen the experiences of families and children with/in the early childhood community. You work in relationships with colleagues to share information and to collaborate on planning for care routines and children’s play, learning, and development. You also work in relationships with government officials to ensure policies and standards are established and maintained. At times, you work in relationships with individuals who provide specialized services to families and children. You seek and build relationships with community members to enhance and extend children’s learning experiences. As well, you seek relationships with the broader early childhood community for your own professional growth. This network of relationships supports your complex, dynamic, and multifaceted role as an educator. We describe your work within this network as a practice of relationships—a practice that nurtures healthy early childhood communities where diverse people come together for the benefit of children’s care, play, learning, and development.⁵

Healthy communities are places of vitality—“[early childhood] communities where people are in relationships that encourage growth, creativity, innovation, problem solving, and progress, as people come together and pool their individual perspectives, wisdom, strengths, and skills.”⁶ Your role as an educator is central in facilitating and nurturing the multiple relationships that co-exist in early childhood communities. Within a practice of relationships, you gather information from a range of community members who present unique perspectives about families and children. However, you also have particular knowledge of families and children—knowledge situated within the context of your own early learning and child care environment. Mediating and transforming multiple perspectives is an ongoing challenge.

Caring for children and their families, you take on many roles while keeping in mind an image of the child: a strong, capable, and resourceful learner and citizen.

Co-construct refers to a process of creating in relationship with others. Learning takes place in a social context—as children interact with and work together with educators, other children, and materials.⁷ The prefix “co” is used throughout the framework to remind us of the importance of social relationships in children’s early learning.

The dynamic and complex role you take on as an educator is supported by

- ★ **your knowledge of unique family, social, and cultural practices and traditions** gained through thoughtful, respectful, and open communication with families.
- ★ **your current theoretical knowledge of child development** that supports your design of environments for children’s care, play, learning, and development that are both actively engaging and appropriately challenging.
- ★ **your knowledge of theories of learning** that assists you in recognizing the importance of responsive early learning environments that include thoughtful consideration for time, space, materials, and participation, thereby influencing how each child **co-constructs** his or her own learner identity, sense of belonging, and **citizenship** with/in the community.
- ★ your understanding of the four Alberta curriculum framework **holistic play-based goals for children’s responsive care, play, learning, and development** (Well-Being, Play and Playfulness, Communication and Literacies, and Diversity and Social Responsibility)⁸ along with the five **dispositions to learn** (playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring), which support your reflection and planning of learning experiences that connect to and expand on children’s interests.

As an educator, you are always evolving your practice within multiple relationships. You may sometimes think of yourself as a gardener or an artist, sometimes a plumber or handy fixer of small toys, and sometimes a builder and designer of spaces. Caring for children and their families, you take on many roles while keeping in mind an image of the child: a strong, capable, and resourceful learner and citizen.

The framework describes your role of educator as a **co-learner**, a **co-researcher**, and a **co-imaginer of possibilities**. The prefix “co” reflects our belief in the importance of you co-constructing knowledge with children, their families, and colleagues, rather than only transmitting knowledge to the learners or leaving the learners to construct knowledge on their own. This image of the educator aligns with the Alberta curriculum framework’s **socio-cultural perspective of learning**.

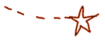




Educator as Co-Learner

As an educator, you guide, scaffold, nurture, model, and facilitate children's learning and through this work you learn about what children know and how children make meaning of the world. As you engage as a co-learner with and alongside children, the children see that learning is valued for all community members. Children's dispositions to learn are nurtured and strengthened over time and within care, play, and learning environments.⁹ As a co-learner, you make visible your own dispositions of playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. These dispositions to learn are described in greater detail in ***Mighty Learners: Nurturing Children's Dispositions to Learn.***



When you participate with children and families as co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imagers of possibilities, you create responsive environments for children's care, play, learning, and development that reflect an image of the child as a mighty learner and citizen—strong, resourceful, and capable.

For you as co-learner,

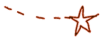



-  **playing is inventing, creating, imagining, and taking risks in the spirit of learning, building theories, and co-authoring narratives alongside and with children.** To be playful means that you are willing to follow children in their play, to respond to children's playful endeavours, ideas, thoughts, and ways of being in playful ways. Through your own playfulness, you take risks in the spirit of learning, and you honour the playfulness of children.
-  **seeking is being curious about others and the world.** Asking questions, exploring with your senses, being curious, and trying new and different ways to do something are ways that you are a seeker. What can you learn about this child and/or this family that will help you to support a sense of belonging in this community? What do you know about this child as a learner? What do you know about this group of children? Who are you as a learner? Your willingness to inquire and to pursue questions over time and with/in relationship with others fosters a strong and dynamic early childhood community of learners.
-  **participating with children and families and the broader community** involves inviting other points of view and other ways of being. You demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness through careful listening and thoughtful observation. Your participation with children may be in the role of a model, observer, and/or facilitator of their care, play, learning, and development. As well, your participation may involve you as a co-player alongside children who are leading the play. Your participation with children offers you a unique perspective to learn about what children know and are trying to accomplish in their daily experiences. As well, your participation with families may involve advocating with and on behalf of families as you learn about and then help them access supportive community programs.
-  **persisting is pursuing an idea and/or looking for solutions.** Trying a new approach, gathering more information, and learning from others are ways that you can co-create solutions to problems and concerns. Families, children, and colleagues of early childhood communities are valuable sources of information and inspiration for you.
-  **caring is demonstrating concern for, providing time for, and suspending judgment of others.** To care is to act ethically in decision-making and in relationships. Care is central to a practice of relationships.

Educator as Co-Researcher


It is by acting as a researcher that you gain an understanding of the complexities of how children and their families experience early childhood communities, and local and global communities. The process of research involves asking questions, investigating, reflecting, interpreting, and sharing the results with families, children, and local communities.



For you as co-researcher,

-  **asking authentic questions—questions you do not know the answers to—offers you opportunity to gather insights and perspectives.** Questions may explore your centre’s or your own decisions relating to daily practices and policies; children’s care, play, learning, and development; family, social, and cultural practices and traditions; and issues of equity and fairness. Your questions should provoke further action in the form of observation, investigation, reading, and reflection to inform your curriculum decisions.
-  **investigating what has or could take place offers you opportunity to understand many perspectives.** Investigating can involve careful listening and observing, documenting using photography, video, scribing words, and anecdotal recording of particular situations. Investigating requires an open mind. By suspending your assumptions you can hear other perspectives. Your investigation may require further information from a range of sources including conversations with families, professional resources, and/or may include entering into children’s play as a co-player to understand what the children are experiencing or trying to accomplish.
-  **reflecting on and revisiting experiences of the children and families offers you an opportunity to think deeply about each child’s care, play, learning, and development and their family’s perspective.** This can involve looking at your own practice, documented moments of children’s care, play, learning, and development, and your interactions with families. Reflection offers you opportunity to take a step back and think about your practice and children’s experiences with respect to pursuing a deeper understanding of what might be taking place from other perspectives. Reflecting with others invites multiple perspectives and inspires further questions for inquiry.
-  **interpreting information offers you an opportunity to understand children’s care, play, learning, and development experiences with respect to current understandings of curriculum.** This involves considering what you think children are trying to do, communicate, and accomplish in their play and learning. It also involves thinking about what families might value and want for their children and how that relates to your daily work with each child. Your interpretations reflect your own values, knowledge, and social and cultural experiences, as well as your image of the child and your image of the family.

Children flourish in environments that are beautiful, joyful, and rich with opportunities for sensory stimulation, social interaction, language, exploration, manipulation, and representation.

 **sharing what you have learned offers you an opportunity to talk** about, visually and verbally, the children’s daily care, play, learning, and development experiences as they relate to your curriculum decisions—your professional practice. Sharing with families and local communities can be in the form of written and visual documentation and/or story, as well as dialogue with families, the children, and the broader community. Making children’s learning visible in ways that advocate for children may help to gain support and awareness of children’s potential as mighty learners and citizens.

Educator as Co-Imaginer of Possibilities

There are many ways of being, doing, and relating. As you work in collaboration with families, children, and community members you seek out diverse perspectives and in turn co-imagine creative and novel ways of thinking about familiar and/or new experiences.



For you, co-imagining possibilities

- ★ **is being playful with others, ideas, and ways of being.** “I wonder...” “What if...?” Your participation with children and families to co-imagine possibilities holds potential for expanding and deepening learning experiences and appreciation for family, social, and cultural practices and traditions.
- ★ **involves imagining, creating, and inventing** what you hope for and/or want to see. Through your own participation and inviting the participation of children and their families, the potential for creating healthy communities—places of vitality—becomes possible. Co-imagining possibilities may involve working with others to advocate for more government and community programs that can promote families’ and children’s well-being.
- ★ **may require taking risks and facing challenges within the spirit of learning,** for example, experimenting with new care routines and/or play and learning experiences to support children and families in meaningful ways that are safe, caring, and honouring of the many ways children and adults participate and live together.

When you participate with children and families as co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginors of possibilities, you create **responsive environments** for children that reflect an image of the child as a mighty learner and citizen. As well, you draw on your knowledge of child development, theories of learning, and curriculum values, principles, goals, and dispositions to learn. This work that you do is multifaceted, complex, and dynamic—it is an always evolving practice of relationships.



2.3 Mighty Learners: Nurturing Children's Dispositions to Learn

Every child is a mighty learner. A mighty learner brings body and mind—his or her whole being—to play and learning. To be mighty means to be powerful, robust, vigorous, stalwart, and awe-inspiring. The image of the child described within this curriculum framework is a strong, resourceful, capable child—a mighty learner and citizen.

As an early learning and child care educator watches, two young preschoolers sit in the sandbox with scoops in hand and one container between them. Both children are focused on scooping sand and take turns pouring the sand from their scoops into the container. Once the container is filled, they look at one another and smile. They stand up and attempt to lift the sand-filled container. The educator photographs the children as they briefly exchange ideas and then tip the container over to empty some of the sand. They pick up the half-filled container and take it to the playhouse where their play continues. She comments to them, “You solved your problem.”

These children are **mighty learners**. They demonstrate flexible thinking when confronted with a problem—a very heavy full container. Their theory appears to be that if they remove some of the sand they will be able to lift the container. By testing their theory, they solve their problem and their play continues. The educator has designed the environment through the provision of materials and time and space for social play, offering these children opportunity to work collaboratively and to solve problems within their play. These experiences nurture and strengthen children’s learning. When educators closely observe children’s play, they can plan further opportunities for children to create and test theories within active and social play situations.

A preschooler is drawn to the cry of his friend. He offers a stuffed teddy bear in an attempt to bring comfort to his friend who just said goodbye to his mom. His educator acknowledges his caring attention, “You cared for Emil when he was upset. Look, the teddy bear is comforting him.”

This young child is a **mighty learner**. He already acts in a caring way toward his friend. By offering the comfort toy, he demonstrates his understanding of comfort objects, possibly from his own experience. His educator’s response acknowledges and affirms his effort to comfort his friend by naming his actions and, in this way, his educator communicates that caring for others is valued in the early childhood community.

The term “mighty” was used by a mother who expressed her hopes and dreams for her daughter to always pursue her passions, even when considered different than passions of others.¹ As developers, we adopted this term to exemplify the learning potential of each child. Along with the holistic play-based goals, dispositions to learn² are introduced as a reflective and interpretive frame for educators to make this learning potential

Educators make this learning potential visible when we recognize the dispositions to learn that young children already bring to every situation.

As young children learn about the world, they also learn about who they are as learners.

“It is not about the blocks or the dough. It is about the activity being the vehicle for the acquisition of dispositions to learn.”⁴

visible to children, families, and ourselves. The dispositions to learn that are highlighted in this curriculum framework focus on the dimensions of **playing, seeking, participating, persisting,** and **caring.**

Educators make this learning potential visible when we recognize the dispositions to learn that young children already bring to every situation. In the curriculum framework, we understand dispositions to learn as inclinations that are revealed in unique ways through children’s play, learning, and living in early childhood communities. Children are often described using these inclinations: “He is so caring,” “They are playful friends with one another.” In early childhood research, children’s dispositions to learn are recognized as a foundation for/in learning and for developing later school-based learning competencies.³

The notion that each child learns every day through every situation is a central idea in the Alberta curriculum framework. The rationale to focus on nurturing and strengthening each child’s dispositions to learn recognizes that as young children learn about the world, they also learn about who they are as learners. When educators see each and every child as a mighty learner and citizen—as someone who plays, seeks, participates, persists, and cares—each child begins to see him- or herself in this way.

Children’s dispositions are revealed to us in their play, learning, and daily experiences. “It is not about the blocks or the dough. It is about the activity being the vehicle for the acquisition of dispositions to learn.”⁴ In this curriculum framework, dispositions to learn are understood as

- coming from within each child and emerging over time.
- inclinations that educators and others can nurture, strengthen, or diminish through our everyday interactions with each child in the social context of learning and living.
- inclinations that each child draws upon in both new and familiar learning experiences.
- having culturally specific meanings and value revealed through family, social, and cultural practices and traditions.⁵

Recognizing that there are many dispositions that children demonstrate in their care, play, learning, and development, the dispositions to learn described in this curriculum framework are intended to support the image of the child as a mighty learner and citizen. Dispositions to learn are situated in the context of care, play, and learning and therefore are expressed as active verbs,⁶ as well as from the perspectives of “I/we.” The “I” refers to each member of the learning community as unique—each child, family member, and educator who also draw upon these dispositions to learn. The “we”

reflects the notion that children, educators, and families **co-construct** knowledge and learning together and within a context of the learning environment including time, space, materials, and our modelling, participating, and interacting with children in our care, play, learning, and development. We use the combination “I/we” intentionally to remind us that care, play, and learning are always both individually and socially constructed.

The following five dispositions to learn have been selected based on feedback from the curriculum framework provincial advisory committee, as well as input from several **family** focus group conversations. These dispositions to learn (not intended to exclude other dispositions to learn) reflect the image of the child described within this curriculum framework—the image of a capable, strong, and resourceful child who is an **agentic** and active learner—**a mighty learner and citizen**.

- ☆ **I/we are playing and playful.** I/we are inventing, creating, and imagining. I/we are creating and testing theories. I/we are telling and directing narratives and stories. I/we are exploring and representing our knowledge using multimodal literacies. I/we are taking risks in/for learning.
- ☆ **I/we are seeking.** I/we are questioning. I/we are exploring with all our senses. I/we are wondering and are curious. I/we are solving problems in our play and learning.
- ☆ **I/we are participating.** I/we are engaging with others. I/we are listening to and sharing ideas, thoughts, and feelings. I/we are negotiating, taking turns, and observing.
- ☆ **I/we are persisting.** I/we are persevering with challenges and/or difficulties. I/we are trying new strategies. I/we are asking for help. I/we are striving to reach our own goals.
- ☆ **I/we are caring.** I/we are helping. I/we are caring about our families, one another, and ourselves. I/we are caring for the world and living things.

What educators do matters! When you notice, name, and nurture each child’s dispositions to learn, you cultivate a community that values each child’s identity as a mighty learner and citizen.

Noticing, Naming, and Nurturing Children’s Dispositions to Learn

Dispositions to learn are nurtured and strengthened, or diminished, through daily interactions of care, play, and learning, as well as through the design of the play and learning environment (time, space, materials, and participation). A learning environment that provides for and acknowledges multiple ways for children to explore and/or create with open-ended materials and with others nurtures and strengthens each child’s dispositions to learn. In contrast, an environment that insists on children doing the same thing at the same time in the same way diminishes dispositions to learn. For example, this kind of environment limits children’s opportunities to play with ideas and others and persist through challenges to invent problem solutions.

What educators do matters! How do you model these dispositions to learn in your everyday practice for children to see? As well, when you notice, name, and nurture each child’s dispositions to learn, you cultivate a community that values each child’s identity as a mighty learner and citizen.

Play is central to the Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework. “Play and Playfulness” is a holistic play-based goal. Play(ing) and playfulness are both conditions for and dispositions to learn.

Understanding the importance of playing and playfulness as a disposition to learn shifts our view as educators from, “Oh, the children are playing,” to “What can I do to support and extend the play experience for these children in ways that support their playing and playfulness, as well as their opportunities for seeking, participating, persisting, and caring to flourish.” Our focus on nurturing and strengthening each child’s dispositions to learn creates opportunities for learning that reflects each child and their learner identity authentically.

Play is central; playing and playfulness are both conditions *for* and dispositions *to* learn.



Documenting Children’s Dispositions to Learn

Making children’s dispositions to learn visible is an important aspect of our role as educators. Children’s dispositions to learn are not intended to be measured and do not lend themselves to checklists of accomplished tasks; rather, educators are encouraged to document children’s growing dispositions to learn within the context of the early childhood environment. Documenting children’s care, play, learning, and development using photography, recorded words, and collected artifacts of children’s work makes children’s dispositions to learn visible. Children’s documented play and learning endeavours can be used to engage children, families, and educators in meaningful conversations about not only the outcome of learning events but, more importantly, the processes and qualities of being a learner.

A **Learning Story** is one approach to documenting children’s dispositions to learn within daily experiences of care, play, learning, and development.⁷ These stories should be shared with children, offering them opportunity to revisit their experiences and talk about their own accomplishments in play and learning. **Learning stories** can provide families with documentation of their child’s learning for building continuity across early childhood communities, such as when making the transition from child care to formal school.⁸ In addition, documentation of children’s care, play, learning, and development can help us as educators to reflect on their curriculum decisions for the design of the playroom environment as well as their interactions with children.

The five dispositions to learn—I/we are playing and playful, I/we are seeking, I/we are participating, I/we are persisting, I/we are caring—are described more fully in **Children’s Dispositions to Learn**. Included are sample narratives to illustrate how an educator might notice and name a child’s dispositions to learn. These sample narratives are intended to highlight the relationship between an educator’s image of the child as a mighty learner and citizen and curriculum decisions. Following each narrative, a series of questions encourage reflection on one’s own practice.



2.4 Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, and Participation

The environments in which children live, play, and relate can open up or limit opportunities for their care, play, and learning. The early learning and child care educators' role in designing the environment is central to children's experiences. The educators' knowledge helps them to understand the kinds of play and learning experiences that support each child's care, sense of belonging, as well as nurture their dispositions to learn.

Socio-cultural perspectives of learning take seriously the child as a social learner who **co-constructs** knowledge in relationship with the environment and in relationship with other learners, both adults and children.

Environments that encourage **multimodal literacies** acknowledge that there are many ways to explore and demonstrate knowledge and, for children, this is often through play. Creating **responsive environments** requires awareness that the image of the child—a mighty learner and citizen—must be continually reflected on as educators respond to children's interests and exploration through the design elements of time, space, materials, and participation.



Time for play, for inquiry, for thinking, and for pursuing an interest alone or with friends and educators is important if learning is to become meaningful for the learner. Rigid daily routines can create imbalances in daily experiences and minimize the importance of play and learning that children are engaged in. When children experience fluid time that reflects their rhythms in care and play, they are able to develop their ideas alone and with others. When educators consider children's natural rhythms in the design of the environment, they create a responsive environment. When educators organize time so that children can continue their play over hours and days, children are able to develop their ideas deeply. This may mean that children's play materials are saved as they have left them or that lunch routines are adjusted in response to children's play.

Consider how time is used and organized:

- ☆ Do the routines of the day dominate? Are your daily routines flexible enough to respond to children, as learners and citizens, to participate in decisions that concern them?
- ☆ Are all the routines and transitions necessary for this group of children? Do your routines happen because they have always been done a particular way?
- ☆ How do you invite children to be decision-makers in the organization of their daily experiences, routines, and rituals?
- ☆ What would happen if "clock time" did not determine your daily experiences? What would happen if your daily routines were determined by children's internal rhythms?



The organization of time is more art than science. Educators are encouraged to find the flow and flexibility that enhances each child's day.

Space for play, for alone time, for social play with others, and for focused opportunities to pursue an interest are important for children as learners and as citizens. Through the organization of space, educators consider both familiar and novel play spaces that can ignite possibilities for children’s exploration, imagination, creativity, and decision-making. As educators design space, their intentions to open up opportunities for children are evident through the elements of time, materials, and participation with others, materials, and ideas.

Consider how space is organized and designed:

- ☆ How do the spaces you create for/with children reflect who they are as learners and citizens?
- ☆ How do the spaces you create for/with children nurture their playfulness, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring dispositions to learn, in familiar and novel ways?
- ☆ How can each child see his or her family and self in the playroom space?
- ☆ How do you create spaces for/with children, as individuals and group members, including both healthy and flexible indoor and outdoor spaces? Do they inspire imagination and possibilities?
- ☆ How do your playroom spaces support children, families, and educators to share time together or be alone as they wish?

The organization of space—both familiar and novel play spaces—can open up opportunities for children to make choices.

Materials open up possibilities or limit possibilities for young children’s care, play, and learning. Considering the connectedness between the elements of time, space, materials, and participation can result in children having an **encounter with materials**.¹ Offering materials in a beautiful, thoughtful, clean way and using light and shadow to bring attention to the shapes, colours, or contrasts in the materials inspires the child’s participation. Inviting children to become familiar with materials—exploring, inventing, creating, and changing—infuses the materials with their ideas, thoughts, and feelings. By observing and documenting or participating alongside the children’s encounter with the materials, you may get a glimpse of what children are thinking and feeling through the materials.

A variety of materials, including purchased, natural, recycled objects, and loose parts can inspire children’s creative sensibilities in diverse ways and support learning and understanding of family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions. When selecting materials, consider whether they offer multiple ways for children to explore and use them in practical and imaginative ways. Equally important in offering interesting and open-ended materials is the manner in which they are made accessible to children.

It is an art to find balance between too many and not enough materials, to organize materials so that children can see and access choices, and to present them in ways that intrigue children—provoking thinking and inviting manipulation.

Consider how materials are selected and presented:

- ☆ Are your materials for play and learning interesting for and reflective of this group of learners? Are the materials respectful of family, social, and cultural practices and traditions?
- ☆ Do the materials and how you offer them invite children to access them independently and use them in a variety of ways? Are materials presented in a thoughtful, clean, beautiful manner and respectful of the natural world?
- ☆ Do the materials and how you offer them invite children to explore ideas, thoughts, and feelings by inventing, creating, and/or changing the materials over time and with others?
- ☆ Do the materials invite children to engage in a wide range of learning experiences, independently and with others? Can the children
 - ☆ be creative, explore, and represent in meaningful ways?
 - ☆ explore, inquire, and create theories and solve problems?

- ☆ build real-world and/or imaginative structures?
- ☆ author, act, direct, and produce personal narratives and stories?
- ☆ collaborate, take turns, share, negotiate, and challenge their ideas with others?
- ☆ learn and practice skills for their learning and development?
- ☆ Are the materials you offer to children representative and respectful of their family, social, and cultural practices and traditions and ways of knowing?

By observing and documenting or participating alongside the children's encounter with the materials, we begin to understand what the children are thinking and feeling through the materials.



Participation of educators, children, and families is central to a practice of relationships and is revealed through the early childhood environment. *A Practice of Relationships* describes the complex and dynamic role of the educator within multiple relationships that can contribute to the well-being and sense of belonging for each child and family in the early childhood community.

As educators, you are called on to listen carefully to children and families and critically reflect on experiences of inclusion and exclusion while making curriculum decisions. Your attention to the curriculum framework values, principles, holistic play-based goals, and dispositions to learn supports your curriculum decisions and the design of the care, play, and learning environment. Do your decisions ensure that each child has the time, space, and materials to participate within the environment and with others? The environment reveals how you value the contributions of family, social, and cultural practices and traditions and also the many ways that children participate with materials and others. Think about how participants are able to contribute openly and how they may be silenced.

Consider your participation and that of others:

- ☆ Who are you in the early learning and child care community?
- ☆ How do you recognize each child and his or her family within the time, space, and materials?
- ☆ How do you help to create opportunities for families and children to participate in decisions that concern them? How do you listen and attend to families and children when they participate?
- ☆ How does the environment you have created nurture children as learners, risk takers, and citizens?
- ☆ How does the environment communicate value for each family's social and cultural practices and traditions? In what ways are family, social, and cultural practices and traditions reflected in routines of the day? ...in the child's play and learning materials?
- ☆ How do you recognize and value children's and families' personal rituals within daily routines?
- ☆ How do your decisions, participation, and communicative practices invite children, their families, and friends to become active participants within this community?

The infant and preschool programs of Reggio Emilia, Italy, refer to the **environment as a third teacher**.² This philosophy considers how time, space, materials, and participation are influential elements in children’s learning and **citizenship**. The environment is not a substitute for you; rather, the environment is a reflection of who you are in relationship with the children—as **mighty learners** and citizens—and their families. The design of the care, play, and learning environment communicates an image of a child.³

The socio-cultural perspective, which is foundational to *Play, Participation, and Possibilities*, recognizes that knowledge is co-constructed by children, families, and educators together and is also demonstrated in many different ways. Educators support early literacy through providing various materials for children to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings—through multimodal literacies. When you think of the artist, the dancer, and the architect and what they are able to communicate and inspire through their language of paint, sculpture, movement, dance, and design—this is what multimodal literacies can offer a child as well. In Reggio Emilia, they describe this idea as the “hundred languages of children.”⁴

How you think about children, as mighty learners and citizens, how you value family connections and contributions, and what you consider as important learning processes are reflected in your design of time, space, materials, and the act of participation—this is early learning and child care curriculum.

The environment extends who you are in relationship with the children—as mighty learners and citizens.





2.5 Transitions and Continuities: Supporting Children and Families Through Change

A socio-cultural perspective of learning recognizes that social and cultural processes shape all aspects of childhood.¹ This perspective sees learning as a context-dependent, socially mediated process that results in development.

Children experience many transitions within a day and throughout the early years. Transitions are embedded in daily living and also mark important milestones for each child's learning and development. Transitions can be defined as the movement between one activity, relationship, or place and another new or familiar activity, relationship, or place. Continuity is defined as a fluid or uninterrupted flow. In early childhood communities the flow between care practices, daily routines, and learning experiences is grounded in educators' values and perspectives of learning and also related to their relationships with children and families. The socio-cultural perspective of this curriculum framework supports educators in their work with children and families to enhance continuity in the many transitions that children experience. Enhancing continuity in transitions for children's experiences influences their well-being and learning as they move within and between the familiar and unfamiliar in their daily living, playing, and learning.

Children experience many transitions; here are just a few.

- ☆ The transition between home and child care, and back again, happens daily and is often one of the first significant transitions that the child and family experience.
- ☆ Daily transitions between care, play, and learning in the program are intended to provide important nurturing for children's well-being and learning. When children do not know what to expect in daily routines, the transitions between them can prompt feelings of insecurity and confusion.
- ☆ Transitions brought about by the flow and movement of life events, sometimes unexpected, can generate excitement, as well as stress for children and families as they resituate themselves within new early childhood communities.
- ☆ The milestone that marks a child entering formal school is another transition that is exciting yet can create uncertainty for a child and family with its unfamiliar rules, expectations, and people.
- ☆ The transition between formal school and out-of-school care continues for children as they grow beyond the early years toward their middle years.

A practice of relationships supports educators to work with children, families, and others in the early childhood community to co-construct continuity in transitions for the benefit of each child and family's well-being and learning.

As an educator, when you work with children and families to thoughtfully plan ahead for change, you contribute to children's learning and well-being.

The **socio-cultural perspective of learning** promotes strong family and strong early childhood community connections for young children's well-being and learning. As educators, when you apply this perspective to the various transitions within early learning and child care, you can foster continuity in transitions for each child and his or her family. When you work with families and children to think about and talk about transitions—how each member experiences a transition and the ways for making transition experiences more fluid—you create spaces where people come together to imagine possibilities for each child and family. A **practice of relationships** supports educators to work with children, families, and others in the early childhood community to **co-construct** continuity in transitions for the benefit of each child and family's well-being and learning.

It takes time to build new relationships. As educators support and respect each child’s relationship with his or her family, they help each child to build new and trusting relationships within early childhood communities. Thoughtful and unrushed transitions have the potential to foster positive relationships in the way that people meet and exchange information.

Understanding how each child and family experiences transition rituals as they move between home and child care supports everyone in the early childhood community—children, families, and educators. Educators working within a practice of relationships are respectful of family rituals that form these transitions. Rituals and transitional objects such as a treasured stuffed bear, a photo of family, a shared story with dad before he leaves, wearing mom’s scarf, or high fives at the door—are family rituals that reflect each child’s family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions.

Think about:

It takes time to build new relationships.

- ☆ the child–family rituals that you see in your child care setting.
- ☆ how you organize time, space, and materials in ways that help a child to feel connected to family members while in the child care setting.
- ☆ how you make room for children to have transitional objects from home.
- ☆ how you design the child care environment to support child–family relationships.
- ☆ how the care and learning environment reflect each child and family.
- ☆ how you document the child’s daily experiences in ways that help families to see their child with/in the play, learning, and care environment. What information about each child is important to the family?

Continuity is enhanced when children and families participate in making decisions and imagining possibilities for routines and transitions.

Children experience many care routines and transitions throughout each day in early learning and child care environments, such as when they move from one experience to another, from indoor to outdoor play spaces, and from periods of activity to periods of rest. A strong, resourceful, and capable image of the child calls to mind each child's right to participate in decisions that affect him or her. When children are invited to make decisions about when and how transitions occur, they understand what is expected of them and what is coming next. This knowing reduces the stress and uncertainty that is often associated with transitions.

When you encourage children to participate in creating familiar and novel routines, you acknowledge children's right to express an opinion and make decisions and choices in daily experiences.

When a toddler sits at the table and waits to be spoon fed because his parent routinely spoon feeds him, he is expressing his expectation of this familiar family routine. When you feed him, you honor his family practice.

When your team of educators negotiate ways to take three or four children who are already dressed outside for play, rather than having them wait for the whole group, you are making decisions that respect the rights of children and that honour children's time.

When you respect children's unique rhythms for rest and wake activity, you are responding to children as individuals.

When you inform children about daily events through pictures and print, you respect children's right to be informed about daily events.

Educators can intentionally select practices that help children know what to expect and that respect them as citizens with rights in early childhood communities. Stepping back to reflect on how daily transitions and routines foster children's and families' well-being is important reflective practice.

Think about:

- ☆ what you know about the social and cultural practices of families and children that can help you to design routines and transitions that are familiar and respectful of this group of children.
- ☆ what children are telling you (non-verbally and verbally) that communicates their comfort or discomfort in/through routine and transition times.
- ☆ how you encourage children to make choices in their daily experiences that support their learning and living as citizens.
- ☆ how you help children to know, anticipate, and make decisions about how their day will unfold.
- ☆ how you document children's experiences through transitions in ways that reveal an image of the child as a learner and citizen.

When educators work together with children and families to build continuity in the transition between early childhood programs, they help families and children build familiarity with these new circumstances.

Enhancing continuity is particularly important during transitions within and between early learning and child care programs, and formal school settings.

This can happen when there is a change in educators at a child care centre, a change in playrooms for a child, or when life events create change for families, taking them to a new early learning and child care environment. It also occurs when children transition from child care to formal schooling and from child care to out-of-school care. These transitions can involve shifting relationships, when a child and family leave the care of a familiar and well-loved educator of a playroom or community to begin a relationship with someone new.

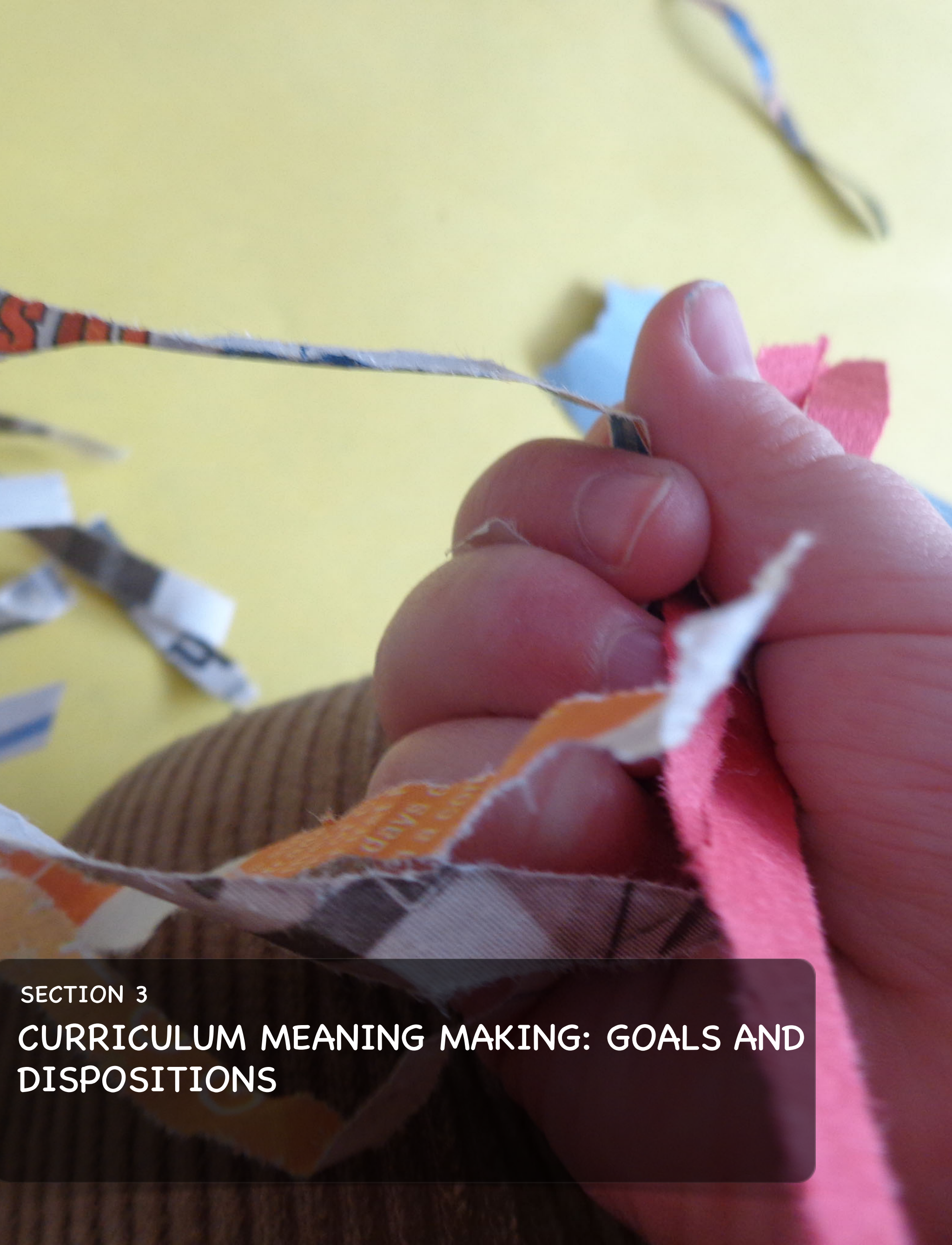
Often underlying all transitions is the strain of uncertainty for children and their families. What will the educators or teachers be like? What will they expect of me? Will I know their rules? Will they like me? Change can be both exciting and stressful. It takes time to build new relationships and adjust to new rules, routines, rhythms, and spaces. When educators work together with children and families to build continuity in the transitions between early childhood programs, they help families and children build familiarity with these new circumstances. Planning ahead, gathering information, and visiting all help children and their families to become familiar and more confident about making the transition to a new early childhood program. This preparation is enhanced when educators and teachers work collaboratively with each child and family in ways that support them moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Working this way can foster continuity for children's learning and well-being, as well as for the family.

The following reflective statements and questions are intended to guide your thoughtful planning for enhancing the experience of continuity for the child and family during transitions between early learning communities. These ideas can be used to guide discussions, share perspectives and information, and imagine possibilities with children and families.

Think about:

- ☆ what you document about each child’s play and learning that will help his or her family to communicate who this child is, as a mighty learner and citizen, to the educators or teachers in the new early learning and child care setting or school community.
- ☆ what you do to help this family and child begin a respectful and reciprocal relationship with educators or teachers in the new early childhood community. **Think about** time for building relationships with new adults and peers, making visits to the new playroom or classroom. Is there opportunity for the child and family to spend time playing in the outdoor space of the new early learning and child care setting?
- ☆ how you support the child’s learning and sense of belonging to flourish as he or she moves into a new learning community. What are her questions? How might you help him to prepare for and embrace change? How do you support her to gather important information about rules and routines? How can you support the transition in the months before—and first few weeks of—the transition to a new early childhood or school community?
- ☆ how you help families find information regarding expectations, rules, and routines in the new early childhood or school community.

By coming together to address these ideas, the possibility for continuity in transitions between early learning and child care environments and formal schooling is enhanced. When you view every child as a learner already, rather than “getting ready to learn” as they enter school, a shift in perspective occurs. The socio-cultural perspective situates each child as a learner from birth, a mighty learner and citizen. When you work alongside children and their families to nurture each child’s learning, well-being, and sense of belonging, you foster continuity for each child’s care, play, learning, and development—today and tomorrow.



SECTION 3

CURRICULUM MEANING MAKING: GOALS AND DISPOSITIONS



3.1 Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development

We cannot consider one aspect of a child's care, play, learning, and development without considering the whole context of family, social, and cultural practices and traditions and the early childhood community.

The holistic play-based goals of the Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta have been adopted from the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*.¹ As developers of the Alberta curriculum framework, we discovered through the development and advisory process that New Brunswick's carefully researched goals, grounded in a socio-cultural perspective of early learning, resonate with what we want for children in Alberta.

We use the terms “holistic” and “play-based” to describe the Alberta goals. The word **holistic** means that we always consider the whole child in our work—intricately entwined in relationships, in play, in learning, and the environment. Children's care, play, learning, and development are always considered within the context of family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions and the early childhood community. The word **play-based** brings attention to the central role of play in curriculum **meaning making**. Children's **play** is central to this curriculum framework as an active, exploratory, creative, expressive process, deeply embedded in children's everyday experiences and through which children participate in, learn about, and actively make sense of the world.

Everything children do has meaning for them. Curriculum decisions in early learning and child care begin with children.

Everything children do has meaning for them. Curriculum decisions in early learning and child care begin with children. These goals help early learning and child care educators think about and describe what children are experiencing in the early childhood environment and consider further possibilities that can enrich children's care, play, learning, and development. In addition, the goals provide educators with a common professional language as they share the stories of children's experiences with families and colleagues.

Katie, an educator, explains, “The goals helped me to see what the children are already doing and to consider further possibilities.”²

The four holistic play-based goals can be used to reflect on and interpret the experiences of children, including infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Each goal is expanded into three facets—aspects of the broader goal. Each goal facet is further expanded into a list of descriptors. Goal descriptors can be used to describe what children are doing in their care, play, learning, and development. In this way, educators can begin to talk to one another and to families about children's experiences using a common language. Along with the descriptors is a section called “For Reflection.” The questions and prompts are intended to support reflection and planning. These questions and prompts are intended as starting points. Educators may have further questions and wonderings that emerge from their own understanding and relationships with children and families.

Although each goal provides a frame for thinking about care, play, learning, and development there is an overlapping and integration of the goals. When educators use the goals to describe children's experiences, the relationships and connections between them are immediately obvious, for

example, how play and playfulness contribute to well-being. The holistic nature of the goals means that one cannot be considered in isolation from the others; they are integral to children’s daily experiences.

Each of the goals—Well-Being, Play and Playfulness, Communication and Literacies, Diversity and Social Responsibility—are briefly described below.

Well-Being expands into three facets: emotional health and positive self-identity, sense of belonging, and physical health. This goal helps educators to see and describe how children develop a sense of themselves, a sense of belonging as citizens, and a sense of place: “Who am I? How do I belong?” As well, this goal helps educators to see how children develop an understanding of their health, safety, and physical abilities.

Play and Playfulness expand into three facets: imagination and creativity, playful exploration and problem solving, and dizzy play. This goal helps educators to see many ways that children use imagination, creativity, exploration, and problem solving in their participation in active and **agentic** play and learning. Dizzy play is a relatively new term used to describe the important learning and development that happens for children when they create disorder and reorder within playful experiences. Elements of dizzy play are present in experiences such as rough and tumble play, full body exploration, and humour and language play.

Communication and Literacies expand into three facets: communicative practices, **multimodal literacies**, and literate identities with/in communities. This goal helps educators to see the many diverse communication processes that children use to express their ideas, including spoken languages and non-verbal gestures. Multimodal literacies describe the many ways possible to express and represent ideas, thoughts, and feelings and include language, art, music, math, movement, and dance. As well, communication and literacies are deeply embedded in social and cultural practices, stories, popular culture, media, and digital technology.

Diversity and Social Responsibility expand into three facets: inclusiveness and **equity**, democratic practices, and sustainable futures. This goal helps educators to see children as citizens—members of a diverse community who have caring relationships and responsibility for both the social and physical world. This goal also provokes educators to consider and guide opportunities for children to participate in democratic practices that involve making decisions, expressing opinions, and speaking against perceived injustices, as well as to nurture ethical responsibility for and stewardship of our environment.

“I have always known that children’s play was important; now I have the words that help me to explain to families and visitors what the children are doing in their play.” Brittany, ELCC Educator ³

Using the Curriculum Framework Goals to Interpret Children’s Experiences

As we developed the Alberta curriculum framework, we engaged with educators in curriculum meaning-making dialogues beginning with documented moments of children’s experiences. When educators use the curriculum goal descriptors to interpret what children are already doing in their play, they express appreciation for a language that describes what they sense about children’s play and active learning processes. “I have always known that children’s play was important; now I have the words that help me to explain to families and visitors what the children are doing in their play.”³ The following examples illustrate what an educator might observe a child doing, how she might look to the curriculum framework goals as an interpretation, and what next steps might be considered for planning.

Observation of a child at play (Observing and Documenting)	What does it mean? (Reflecting and Interpreting) Goal, facet, and descriptors	Possible next steps (Planning and Taking Action)
<p>Khalil picks up a rock and tosses it into the kiddie pool that is filled with water. He repeats this process again and again. With each toss of a rock, he watches it splash. He selects a tiny pebble and tosses it, watching the plop it makes as it passes through the water surface. He selects a larger rock that fills his palm. Again he tosses it and watches the splash that it makes. He selects another larger rock and smiles as he watches the splash that it makes.</p>	<p>Goal: Play and Playfulness</p> <p>Facet: Playful Exploration and Problem Solving</p> <p>Descriptor: Children learn about the properties of objects through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects • experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect 	<p>Additional materials are collected that promote further exploration, both challenging the size–splash relationship, as well as provoking wonder about the concept of floating and sinking. Time and space are provided for further exploration.</p>
<p>Greta finds a caterpillar on a bush. She carefully picks it up and places it in the palm of her hand. She runs to her friend who is playing in the sand nearby. “Look what I have,” she exclaims, with her hand stretched out toward her friend. A small group gathers around her to look at her find. She explains, “It’s a baby. When it grows up it will be a beautiful butterfly.” Zeb seems excited for his turn. Greta assures him, “You can hold it in two minutes.” Zeb seems pacified by Greta’s promise.</p>	<p>Goal: Diversity and Social Responsibility</p> <p>Facet: Sustainable Futures</p> <p>Descriptor: Children develop a sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bringing all their senses to exploring nature • taking pleasure in natural beauty • connecting to and respecting the natural world 	<p>Photos are taken of the caterpillar and the children. These images are printed and displayed along with pastel crayons and paper on one table and on another table an image is provided along with plasticine. The educators wonder if the children will create images of a caterpillar as well as images of the caterpillar’s butterfly or moth phase.</p>

Co-inquiry is a learning and research process that helps educators to co-construct knowledge with children. It involves observation and documentation, reflection and interpretation, and planning and taking action.⁴

As educators, your work with the curriculum framework goals, facets, and descriptors can deepen your understanding of each child. In turn your insights of each child, as an active and agentic social learner, help you design **responsive care**, play, and learning environments. Each child is a mighty learner who is actively engaging his or her dispositions to learn—playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. As well, as you work with the curriculum framework goals, you may begin to imagine further possibilities for nurturing and strengthening each child’s dispositions to learn.

The early learning curriculum framework can guide a way of being with children—a way of thinking about what children know and can do and want to be doing; and what you can do to extend and expand children’s participation with others and within a responsive play and learning environment. Your role as co-learner, co-researcher, co-imagining possibilities alongside children is supported when you use the curriculum framework as an interpretive tool—an informed perspective to help you understand what children are doing and trying to accomplish in their play, learning, development, and in care routines.

As a co-learner, you observe, document, and think about what children are doing with materials, ideas, and others. As a co-researcher, you gather insights and information and use the curriculum framework goals to reflect on and interpret what you understand about what children are experiencing. The process of observing and documenting and reflecting and interpreting supports your planning and taking action in ways that can expand, extend, and enhance children’s engagement with ideas, materials, and others. As a co-imaginer of possibilities, you may work with families or colleagues to take action through designing of play spaces, gathering materials, or planning a visit into the community that enhances the children’s experiences.

The process of observing and documenting, reflecting and interpreting, and planning and taking action is introduced here as a **co-inquiry** process.⁴ The co-inquiry process supports you in your role as co-learner, co-researcher, and co-imaginer of possibilities. It is a process that is made visible through documentation and **learning stories** that highlight children’s daily experiences.

Observing and Documenting

Being curious about what children are doing and wanting to accomplish in their play, learning, and development situates you as a co-learner alongside them. Your recorded observations might be an assortment of many different forms of documentation, such as photos, video, audio recording, anecdotal notes, and collected artifacts made by children and/or scribed words expressed by children. As you revisit and reflect on your documentation, you might begin to see patterns in children's play, such as continued interests, repeated use of objects, common play groups. As well, you may notice and name particular dispositions to learn that a child demonstrates in care, play, learning, and development.

Reflecting and Interpreting

Reflecting on your observations and documentation may cause you to have further questions. You may begin to wonder: How are other children using this play space? In what other situations does this child explore her persistence? What other natural materials will encourage seeking for these children? What other materials would nurture his participation in play? In what other ways does this child demonstrate her caring for others? Thinking about what you saw children doing and trying to accomplish, what surprised you? You may have questions for the child's family or your colleagues regarding how a child is approaching particular ideas, materials, and social play experiences.

The curriculum framework goals can be used to interpret your observations of the children's play, learning, and development. As a co-researcher you may also gather insights from families and colleagues to help you understand more deeply what children are doing or trying to accomplish in their play, learning, and development. Consider an article you read recently about this or connect this to a workshop you attended. Seeking additional information and insights from children, families, and colleagues, workshops, professional journals and books, and conferences can help you to further understand your observations and reflections of children's experiences and your curriculum decisions.

Planning and Taking Action

Your observation and documentation and reflection and interpretation inspire further experiences that invite children to pursue their ideas and theories, challenge ideas, explore, invent, create, and play in active ways that engage their senses and whole body movement. Co-imagining possibilities is made more dynamic as you invite the children, families, and colleagues to invent and create further opportunities to expand on children's experiences. Your curriculum decisions are made visible in the design of a responsive play and learning environment and the design of care routines, as well as your interactions with children and families.

The various forms of documentation mentioned above, as well as learning-story documentation, are tools that help you to create a history of what has taken place in the early childhood community and, also, are tools for reflecting on your curriculum decisions. The curriculum goals help you to see what children know and can do, as well as consider further possibilities for their care, play, learning, and development. At the same time, the goals provide you with a professional language to describe what children know, do, and want to do. The **Reflection and Planning Guide** can support your reflection on the co-inquiry process in the design of the care, play, and learning environment and for further information regarding documentation and learning story documentation, visit www.childcareframework.com.

As you work with children and make meaning of what they are doing and want to be doing, the curriculum framework goals support you to observe and document, reflect and interpret, and plan and take action for further possibilities. As you work with these goals, you may begin to see your own areas of strength. You may also see areas and possibilities that you might not have considered previously, such as engaging children in caring for the natural world, or inviting family stories, or looking for opportunities in the community to plant with the children. We encourage you to always begin with the children and to use the goals in ways that help you to see what is and what might yet be.

Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development

The following material, pages 91-116 is reprinted with permission from Section Two of the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*, “Goals for Early Learning and Care.”¹

Well-Being

Children experience safe and caring environments where their emotional and physical health, positive identities, and sense of belonging are nurtured and protected.

This goal has three facets:

- ☆ Emotional Health and Positive Identities
- ☆ Belonging
- ☆ Physical Health

Play and Playfulness

Children experience open and flexible environments where playful exploration, problem solving, and creativity are encouraged and purposefully planned.

This goal has three facets:

- ☆ Imagination and Creativity
- ☆ Playful Exploration and Problem Solving
- ☆ Dizzy Play

Communication and Literacies

Children experience intellectually, socially, and culturally engaging environments where their communicative practices, languages, literacies, and literate identities are valued and supported.

This goal has three facets:

- ☆ Communicative Practices
- ☆ Multimodal Literacies
- ☆ Literate Identities With/In Communities

Diversity and Social Responsibility

Children experience socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments in which consideration for others, inclusive, equitable, democratic, and sustainable practices are enacted, and social responsibility is nurtured.

This goal has three facets:

- ☆ Inclusiveness and Equity
- ☆ Democratic Practices
- ☆ Sustainable Futures



3.1.1 Well-Being

Children experience safe and caring environments where their emotional and physical health, positive identities, and sense of belonging are nurtured and protected.

- ☆ Emotional Health and Positive Identities
- ☆ Belonging
- ☆ Physical Health

Well-Being

Well-being is important to all human beings. For young children and their families, a positive sense of well-being is nurtured through participation in an environment that is consistent and where respectful, responsive relationships and community connections are valued.

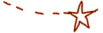
Children actively **co-construct** their identities in relation to the people, places, and things within the various communities to which they belong. Communities that support persistence, perseverance, and pleasure promote a zest for living and learning.

Children have the right to feel safe. When provided with the space and freedom to take healthy risks, their willingness to do so reflects a sense of security, self-confidence, courage, and body strength. Over time, participation in healthy risk taking builds the skills, knowledge, and resolve that will sustain them as they face new pleasures and challenges.

This goal has three facets:

 Emotional Health and Positive Identities

 Belonging

 Physical Health

Emotional Health and Positive Identities

Children's identities are shaped throughout their lifelong negotiations within personal, social, and cultural landscapes. Learning requires that adults treat children with respect, show compassion, and honour established relationships while encouraging new ones.

Children develop a sense of self

- ☆ Developing recognition of self
- ☆ Co-constructing their identities
- ☆ Experiencing growing self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiative
- ☆ Growing in their capacity to express feelings, concerns, and needs
- ☆ Pursuing interests, passions, and strengths
- ☆ Being curious and questioning
- ☆ Persevering and persisting

Children develop a sense of other

- ☆ Supporting, encouraging, and listening to others
- ☆ Caring for others
- ☆ Experiencing trust and compassion with children and adults
- ☆ Learning constructive ways to negotiate a range of relationships

For Reflection

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on? Describe how your responses to a child's gestures, facial expressions, play patterns, verbal expressions, and work helped to increase a child's belief in herself or himself.

How do people and policies at your centre honour children's initiatives through thoughtful planning, documentation, and/or responses? Think about how your centre builds upon children's interests.

How do you provide access to materials for children? Think about shelving, displays, containers, and open-ended materials. How often are materials changed or added to? Which materials are not used, and why? Who uses the materials, and what are the patterns of usage?

In what ways does your centre build upon dispositions of optimism, joy, and a zest for living and learning? Think about positive self-talk, problem solving, curiosity, humour, contribution, accomplishment, and care.

Belonging

Children and their families have the right to experience social recognition and acceptance, and to see themselves reflected in their learning communities. Learning requires secure and consistent relationships, the affirmation of social and cultural practices, and opportunities to form connections with new people and places.

Children develop a sense of place

- ☆ Negotiating new spaces
- ☆ Identifying, creating and using personal landmarks
- ☆ Becoming familiar with the sights, sounds, rhythms, and routines of new situations
- ☆ Generating a shared repertoire of narratives and memories
- ☆ Making connections between the centre, home, and broader communities

Children build respectful and responsive relationships

- ☆ Developing cherished as well as casual friendships
- ☆ Forming close relationships with a range of adults
- ☆ Growing in their awareness that their actions contribute to the well-being of others
- ☆ Participating in group initiatives

For Reflection

How do you support children in new situations? Think about children's moments of anxiety and their responses to new situations. How do you plan for welcoming new children? How do you plan for room changes, field trips, or walks?

In what ways are family contributions invited and honoured within the centre? Think about contributions of materials, interests, time, and cultural knowledge.

How does your centre build relationships of trust between people? Think about adult/adult, adult/child and child/child relationships. How does the centre's space reflect the lives of the children, their families, and the educators?

How do you encourage the participation of every child? Think about children's friendships, patterns of exclusion, activity choices, gender, race, and class. How are children's contributions to your site invited and accepted? Think about toys, stories, cultural artifacts, ideas, questions, and children's theory building.

Physical Health

Children experience a safe and nurturing environment where healthy eating, daily physical activity, and safety—indoors and out—are practised. Learning requires that children have time, space, and encouragement to practise personal care skills; to enjoy familiar and unfamiliar foods; to develop food tastes and prepare food; to move, play, and challenge their physical capacities.

Children take responsibility for personal care

- ☆ Growing independence in self-care routines
- ☆ Learning about individual differences in self-care practices
- ☆ Helping others with personal care

Children learn about food and nutrition

- ☆ Understanding the relationship between food and their bodies
- ☆ Building confidence to try new foods
- ☆ Exploring a range of cultural practices of eating and sharing food
- ☆ Making decisions about food consumption, preparation, serving, and clean-up routines

Children explore body and movement

- ☆ Participating in a variety of physical activities, indoors and out
- ☆ Learning about their bodies in space
- ☆ Increasing bodily awareness, control, strength, agility, and large motor coordination
- ☆ Increasing fine motor capacities
- ☆ Knowing and stretching physical limits
- ☆ Releasing and restoring energy in outdoor places

For Reflection

How do people and policies at your centre work within food safety standards to include practices around food from a variety of homes? Think about Canada's Food Guide in various languages or other models such as a vegetarian food guide.

What experiences are provided at your site to promote children's active engagement both indoors and out? How do you plan for age and physical capacities? Think about access to play in the outdoors, what materials are rotated through outdoor areas, and what activities are available in the outdoors.

Discuss the implications of using food for curricular activities—for example pasta or rice for collage materials. What messages might this convey about food? What non-food materials might be substituted?

How do you address children's comments and questions about individual or family differences in self-care routines? Think about learning about families' practices, having open discussions, and taking what children say seriously.

How do you infuse daily chores and errands with vigorous physical activity?



3.1.2 Play and Playfulness

Children experience open and flexible environments where playful exploration, problem solving, and creativity are encouraged and purposefully planned.




- ☆ Imagination and Creativity
- ☆ Playful Exploration and Problem Solving
- ☆ Dizzy Play

Play and Playfulness

At play, children are empowered to learn on their own terms, in their own ways, and in their own time; this freedom is what distinguishes play from other activities. Play allows children to take the initiative, to test their physical and mental limits, and to explore positions of power and questions about good and evil. In play, children use words and symbols to transform the world around them, creating worlds where they can act “as if” rather than “as is.” Play is a pleasurable and highly motivating context in which children can explore possibilities and solve problems that are beyond their reach in ordinary life.

Early childhood communities that acknowledge the educative and developmental potential of play make provisions for a range of different kinds of play: playful exploration and heuristic play, for children to learn about the physical properties of materials and rules of thumb for problem solving; constructional play, for them to invent new connections as they design and create with mud, sand, twigs, cardboard, and blocks; socio-dramatic play, so that they can take up cultural roles and practices, play out their hopes, fears, and dreams, test relations of power, and imaginatively explore new possibilities; board games and word games, songs and rhymes that require deep concentration or just invite fooling around with language in order to take possession of it; games of courage and chance; outdoor play that exercises the muscles, lungs, heart, and mind—running, jumping, digging, swinging, rolling, and strolling; and shouting and squeaking and twirling and swirling—dizzy play for the pure pleasure of being on the edge and sharing the joy of laughter and life with others.

This goal has three facets:

-  Imagination and Creativity
-  Playful Exploration and Problem Solving
-  Dizzy Play

Imagination and Creativity

Through play, children invent symbols to explore relations of power, truth, and beauty as they move between the world as it is and the worlds they create. In these possible worlds, children have the liberty to push the boundaries and explore who they are as members of communities engaged with age-old issues such as good and evil. Learning to be imaginative and creative requires open and flexible environments, rich in materials and role models that reflect the cultural life of their communities—the songs, crafts, languages and artifacts—and opportunities for children to invent their own cultural forms and symbols; to explore unique and innovative approaches to understanding their worlds.

Children develop dispositions for flexible and fluid thinking

- ☆ Seeing people, places, and things in new ways
- ☆ Expressing unique and imaginative ideas

Children invent symbols and develop systems of representation

- ☆ Making up their own words, marks, and movements
- ☆ Negotiating the meaning of symbols with others
- ☆ Taking up and reshaping cultural experiences
- ☆ Developing awareness of the imagined and ordinary worlds they move between as they play

Children create imaginary scenarios in which they explore new possibilities and take possession of their worlds

- ☆ Creating social spaces and shared narratives
- ☆ Creating alternative systems of power
- ☆ Coping with emotional pressure

For Reflection

What open-ended materials are available in the spaces where children play? Think about materials that can be used in a number of ways: construction materials such as blocks, sand, cardboard, and wood; art materials such as crayons, paints, glue and “beautiful stuff;” and props for dramatic play.

How does your site’s scheduling promote or interfere with time to play and create? Think about flexible scheduling. Think about time allotted to play, routines, and adult-directed activities.

How do you support and value the worlds and fantasies that children create? Think about ways in which fantasy and imagination can be extended for children and documented to illustrate their value.

How do you make use of and reflect the community around you to engage, model, and develop children’s creativity, imagination, and play interests? Think about musicians, local artists and artisans, families’ expertise, and cultural contributions.

Playful Exploration and Problem Solving

Using all their senses, children explore the physical and social worlds around them. In the process they refine their senses, test their personal capacities, and construct knowledge about people, places, and things. At play, children learn to make their thinking visible, build theories about how the world works, and practise skills and dispositions for inquiry, negotiation, and problem solving. This learning requires support for involvement in various types of play—exploratory, heuristic, imaginative, language and literate, constructive, and physical; access to a wide variety of materials and equipment; and adventuresome, playful, and persistent role models who actively engage children in processes of playful exploration, investigation, and problem solving.

Children learn about the properties of objects

- ☆ Playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects
- ☆ Experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect
- ☆ Creating patterns and relationships—sorting and matching, sizing and ordering, sequencing and grouping
- ☆ Developing a vocabulary to describe similarities and differences, patterns and relationships

Children test their limits

- ☆ Testing their powers of observation and sensory discrimination
- ☆ Testing strength, speed, agility, and control over movement

Children learn to negotiate the complexities of joint undertakings

- ☆ Negotiating rules of time, space, and roles
- ☆ Making collective plans and decisions about the directions of their play
- ☆ Developing a sense of fair play

Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems

- ☆ Developing sustained, shared thinking
- ☆ Raising questions and making hypotheses about how and why things happen
- ☆ Choosing from a range of materials, tools, and languages to investigate, experiment, and make their thinking visible
- ☆ Creating imagined worlds in which they can explore possibilities and test alternative solutions

For Reflection

How do you provide ways for children to explore on their own, with peers, or with adults? Think about materials to act upon for cause and effect, open-ended materials for in-depth investigations, and children's own interests or questions.

Do children have access to a variety of games, both competitive and cooperative, that challenge thinking and encourage social relations? Think about peek-a-boo games, aiming games, chasing, hiding, and guessing games.

How do adults model problem-solving behaviours? Think about talking through situations such as dividing materials fairly, fixing a broken toy, working out turn-taking for special activities or favourite playthings.

Dizzy Play

Children's play sometimes erupts suddenly in loud, boisterous, physical bursts. This kind of play is exhilarating and infectious, creating communities through shared laughter. Children love to twirl until they are too dizzy to stand up, laugh with others over nothing in particular, babble nonsense words in a riotous conversation, put their pants on their head or their jacket on their legs, and perform for their friends. They revel in their power to turn the world upside down, playfully confident that they can restore it. Educators recognize and accept this kind of play, valuing it for what it provides for the children: a release of physical energy, a sense of power, and often an expression of pure joy. It also requires tolerance, as this can be a noisy and seemingly senseless activity. Educators, aware of the resilience of children, must also assure that they are safe as they push their physical limits.

Children take pleasure in being on the edge

- ☆ Engaging in rough and tumble play
- ☆ Experiencing exhilarating physical release
- ☆ Playing at games of disrupting and restoring order

Children take pleasure in sharing the joy of laughter

- ☆ Making nonsense
- ☆ Clowning and physical humour

For Reflection

How do you value and respond to rowdy, physical dizzy play? What is your comfort level and how does this affect the allowances you make for this type of play? Think about times when children's joy has been infectious, for example, sliding down hills, dancing barefoot, or singing at the top of their lungs.



3.1.3 Communication and Literacies

Children experience intellectually, socially, and culturally engaging environments where their communicative practices, languages, literacies, and literate identities are valued and supported.

- ☆ Communicative Practices
- ☆ Multimodal Literacies
- ☆ Literate Identities With/In Communities

Communication and Literacies

Children communicate right from birth. Sounds, silences, pauses, gestures, movement, eye contact, and body language—our first modes of communication—stay with us throughout our lifetimes. Children interpret and re-invent their worlds using multiple forms of communication and representation.




Children learn to express, represent, and interpret their feelings, ideas, and questions through speaking, listening, reading, writing, dancing, singing, drawing, moving, and constructing. They learn these wide-ranging literate practices through their interactions with others and within particular social and cultural contexts.

What it means to be literate changes over time and place, and within and across cultures. In the twenty-first century, technological innovations are shifting the meaning of being literate from a dominant focus on language and print to a multimodal literacies approach. Multimodal literacies involve the simultaneous use of the modes of image, print, gaze, gesture, movement, speech, and/or sound effects.

Reading picture books, fiction and nonfiction, is one of the most accessible and popular multimodal forms of literacy engagement. Other forms include singing, painting, dramatic play, blockbuilding, photography, television, and computers.

Through their participation in various communities, children contribute to changes in what it means to be literate. This is because they are active rather than passive learners in the process of making sense of their worlds. They both influence and are influenced by language and literacy practices in their homes, neighbourhoods, and wider communities. Children's personal, social, and literate identities are co-constructed in their interactions with others, and by the expectations held by others for example, gendered expectations. Children's creations and productions tell us who they think they are and who they might like to be.

This goal has three facets:

-  Communicative Practices
-  Multimodal Literacies
-  Literate Identities With/In Communities

Communicative Practices

Multiple ways of communicating begin at birth. Infants, toddlers, and young children use a variety of ways—or modes—such as gaze, touch, gesture, mark making, movement, speech, image, and sound effects to communicate. These multiple modes help children to form relationships, to grow in their understanding of the conventions of language, and to extend ideas and take action. Learning requires numerous ongoing and varied opportunities for children to engage with others in responsive and reciprocal relationships, immersed in an environment that is rich in language, joy, and playfulness.

Children form relationships through communicative practices

- ☆ Recognizing and responding to human presence and touch
- ☆ Becoming attuned to rhyme, rhythm, pitch, tone, and vibrations
- ☆ Practising and playing with sounds
- ☆ Initiating and responding to gestural and visual languages

Children learn conventions of their languages

- ☆ Growing in their implicit understanding of the conventions of language
- ☆ Growing in their understanding of vocabulary
- ☆ Developing confidence in using language(s)
- ☆ Growing in their understanding of how others use language(s)
- ☆ Experiencing and developing diverse linguistic repertoires

Children extend ideas and take actions using language

- ☆ Using language to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas
- ☆ Using language to make friends, share materials, structure, negotiate, and create imaginary worlds
- ☆ Using language to ask for help or information, argue, persuade, clarify, celebrate, or instruct

For Reflection

Consider the different spaces needed to communicate with infants, toddlers, and young children at their physical level. Think about soft spaces with blankets where adults and infants can interact with materials and each other using all their senses.

Are adults engaged in playful conversations with children during routines such as eating or clean-up times? Think about the use of humour, tone, and tact in everyday conversations, and the ways in which children learn, through modelling and imitation of these aspects of non-verbal language. Think about extending children's understandings of conventions through modelling rather than correcting. Think about the range of vocabulary you model for children through conversations, books, songs, poems, and chants.

When children use formal modes of communication, such as Braille, Sign Language, or pictograph, how are they included in the classroom community and what opportunities exist for their peers to engage in reciprocal communication? Think about incorporating symbols from a child's pictorial communication board into the classroom routines for all children.

How do adults value and incorporate the languages of the children's families within your centre and the larger community? For example, think about how the home languages of your children's families are incorporated in the centre through speakers, books, images, songs, visitors, and field trips. Think about the range of languages valued and spoken by your families—how are these valued and made verbal and visible in your centre? Recognize that bilingual and multilingual children switch languages and express ideas differently in different languages.

Multimodal Literacies

Children make use of various sign systems as they construct meaning through multiple modes of image, print, gaze, gesture, movement, and speech, often using these modes simultaneously. Language, art, mathematics, music, and drama are unique sign systems that each have primary symbols—for example, language uses the alphabet; art uses line, colour, shape, and pattern; mathematics uses numbers; music uses notational marks; and drama emphasizes gesture, posture, and speech. Learning requires that children are acknowledged as participants in literate communities that integrate a range of symbols from language, art, mathematics, music, and drama. Using talk, alphabet and numeric print, dance, gesture, action, music, image, sculpture, graphing, map-making, and construction block-building, they make meaning and communicate.

Children explore a variety of sign systems

- ☆ Becoming familiar with the sign systems of language, music, math, art, and drama
- ☆ Engaging in multiple forms of representation
- ☆ Transforming knowledge from one mode to another

Multimodal meaning making

- ☆ Engaging with the symbols and practices of language
- ☆ Engaging with the symbols and practices of music
- ☆ Engaging with the symbols and practices of math
- ☆ Engaging with the symbols and practices of art
- ☆ Engaging with the symbols and practices of drama

For Reflection

What accessible resources and sustained interactive time do children have on a daily basis to support their integrative symbol use within the five sign systems? Think about children's access to tools for mark-making in a range of areas in the room, props for shaping and extending dramatic play, a range of books, musical instruments, magazines, pictures, charts, labels, number games name tags, signs, notes, videos. How are materials cared for, displayed, changed for novelty, and transported from one area to another? How are home languages of all children valued in spoken and printed form?

How does the social experience gained from peer interaction contribute to multimodal literacy engagement and production? Think about how ideas, thoughts, and experiences, songs, dance, block building, poems, letters, lists, and jokes are shared with children. How are pleasure, curiosity, and persistence modelled and honoured?

Ensure that the methods your centre uses for documenting children's language and literacy growth within the five sign systems honours their knowledge, skills, and playful exploration. Think about how adults and children honour children's invention of stories, songs, games, poems, maps, 3-D structures, and drama. How does that documentation inform your responses to children's learning in individual and collective ways?

How do parents and adults share their collective knowledge about children's growth in language and literacies across the sign systems of language, art, mathematics, music, and drama?

Literate Identities With/In Communities

Using language and literacies, children figure out ways of holding on to, exploring, and transforming their experiences and identities. Children are systematic observers, imitators, listeners, speakers, readers, authors, illustrators, inventors, actors, performers, dancers, builders, music and art makers. Learning requires that educators listen for and learn the range of experiences children bring with them, to ensure that children have opportunities to use their knowledge as they access multiple texts from a range of sources. While creating and using texts with children, educators raise questions to explore multiple interpretations, assumptions, and biases.

Children co-construct a range of literate identities

- ☆ Creating texts reflective of family, local, and global literacies
- ☆ Learning various local literacy practices within a range of communities
- ☆ Learning the uniqueness and similarities of their family's literacies and those of others

Children engage critically in the literacy practices of popular culture

- ☆ Transporting and transforming the literacies of popular culture from home into the centre
- ☆ Exploring various identities and characters embedded in popular culture
- ☆ Growing in their capacity to ask critical questions

Children use the literacy tools of digital technologies

- ☆ Representing their experiences with technologies in everyday life
- ☆ Accessing and using digital technologies

For Reflection

Become knowledgeable about the artistic and cultural life of your children, their families, your community and beyond. Think about your own participation in events and communities—do you communicate your excitement and interest to the children and build upon theirs?

Explore media representation by asking questions that challenge representations, such as, “What toys do you think both boys and girls would like to play with?”

How do you record and honour children's thoughts, feelings, and inventiveness through multiple forms of documentation? Think about the use of camera and tape recorder in conjunction with writing down what children say. Think about putting their words into print, captioning their paintings, drawings, or three-dimensional constructions. Extend conversations by naming, using keywords, explaining and talking about objects and events, and discussing the recent past and near future.

What new technologies are available for use in your centre? How is this technology used to document children's learning as a way to communicate thinking, interests, and growth between home and centre? How do teachers, families, and children use technologies in and beyond the centre?

Investigate with your families to find out their child's favourite characters from TV, books, oral storytelling, music, sports, place of worship, cultural holidays, and/or family members. Think about how taking on these different identities informs children's literate play.



3.1.4 Diversity and Social Responsibility

Children experience socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments in which consideration for others, inclusive, equitable, democratic, and sustainable practices are enacted, and social responsibility is nurtured.

- ☆ Inclusiveness and Equity
- ☆ Democratic Practices
- ☆ Sustainable Futures

Diversity and Social Responsibility




Membership in communities involves interdependency. It is as simple and as complicated as this: we need to take care of each other, and we need to take care of the natural and constructed world around us. When children engage in respectful, responsive, and reciprocal relationships guided by sensitive and knowledgeable adults, they grow in their understanding of interdependency.

We live in a democratic country. Ideally, early childhood communities reflect the democratic values of inclusiveness and equity. All children and families have equal rights to a voice in decision-making; differences and dissent make valued contributions to the group. With the inclusion of diverse heritages, histories, and customs, democratic principles are honoured, opportunities to learn from each other are enriched, and possibilities for living peacefully together are enhanced.

As children practise living with heart and spirit as well as with mind, they require caring adults who listen responsively to what they have to say. They learn to find their voices, to speak freely, and to hear the voices of others as they engage in matters that concern them.

Cultivating an understanding of interdependency and the practice of compassionate care moves beyond the boundaries of local contexts and extends to global **citizenship**, appreciating biodiversity and environmental responsibility. This involves learning in and about the natural world, and learning how to act in environmentally responsible ways to become good stewards of the earth.

This goal has three facets:

-  Inclusiveness and Equity
-  Democratic Practices
-  Sustainable Futures

Inclusiveness and Equity

All children, regardless of race, religion, age, linguistic heritage, social and economic status, gender, or ability are entitled to inclusion in everyday activities and routines. When inclusiveness and equity are practised, children come to appreciate their physical characteristics and their gendered, racialized, linguistic and cultural identities. They become sensitive to the effects of poverty and begin to contribute to local and global initiatives that address it. Learning requires inclusive and equitable environments where children work and play within diverse groups, and engage in meaningful, respectful interactions with people, materials, and content that embody diversity.

Children appreciate their own distinctiveness and that of others

- ☆ Learning about their cultural heritages and those of other families within the centre and the broader society
- ☆ Becoming knowledgeable and confident in their various identities, including cultural, racial, physical, spiritual, linguistic, gender, and socioeconomic

Children engage in practices that respect diversity

- ☆ Forming positive, inclusive relationships with all children
- ☆ Learning about differences, including cultural, racial, physical, spiritual, linguistic, gender, social, and economic
- ☆ Learning about and engaging with communities representative of Alberta society⁵
- ☆ Learning about and participating in helping projects—locally and globally

Children raise questions and act to change inequitable practices that exclude or discriminate

- ☆ Recognizing and challenging inequitable practices and situations
- ☆ Negotiating equitable solutions to problems arising from differences
- ☆ Standing up for themselves and others in a fair manner

For Reflection

How do children respond to people who are different from them—linguistically, culturally, racially, emotionally, physically, intellectually, socially, and economically? Think about the reasons children give for excluding peers (language, skin colour, gender, or possessions). Think about how children react to unfamiliar foods, clothing, behaviours, and languages.

How do you find out about sites and opportunities for learning outside the centre—locally and globally? Think about local museums, places of worship, soup kitchens, shelters, small businesses, farms, small factories. Think about global projects that could have local connections.

How do you challenge negative stereotypical language and exclusive practices amongst children? Think about how children talk with each other in describing differences. How do they invite or prevent access to different play areas? Think about how adults notice, record, and involve children in discussions about access. Think about how you respond when particular children monopolize particular areas or if particular children are regularly excluded.

Democratic Practices

Children grow in the understanding of their roles as responsible citizens as they participate daily in communities where their voices are heard and their contributions valued, and where they learn to value the contributions of others. Learning requires that educators assure children equitable opportunities and fair procedures and processes, while participating in the making, following, questioning and re-working of rules, rituals, and procedures in their everyday world.

Children learn to be responsible and responsive members of the community

- ☆ Showing sympathy and empathy for others
- ☆ Giving help, comfort, and encouragement, and valuing others' contributions
- ☆ Respecting the materials, equipment, and spaces shared with others

Children practise democratic decision-making, making choices in matters that affect them

- ☆ Beginning to understand their rights and responsibilities, and those of others
- ☆ Voicing their preferences and opinions, and developing an awareness of other points of view
- ☆ Questioning, co-constructing, and reworking rules and procedures

Children practise fairness and social justice

- ☆ Voicing and negotiating their understandings of fairness and unfairness
- ☆ Identifying issues and becoming socially active in their local communities

For Reflection

Are children supported as they initiate and maintain relationships with each other and the adults in their everyday worlds? Think about ways to facilitate friendships and collaborations.

Do educators encourage and support children who act with empathy and sympathy? Think about children who reach out to victims, practise kindness and inclusiveness, and show concern for the well-being of others.

Are the contributions of each child valued and is appreciation shown for many views? Think about how you listen and respond to all children.

How do adults model empathy, sympathy, a sense of fair play, and curiosity about difference? Think about opportunities that exist during dramatic play or outdoor play, or during conversations or storybook reading time.

In what ways are families and the local community involved in decisions regarding the programs, procedures, and policies? Think about community cultural practices, local livelihoods, and history.

How are children engaged in decision-making in matters that concern them, such as the establishment of rules, rituals, routines, and processes? Think about the day-to-day opportunities for children to “have a say” in such things as eating, napping, and sharing.

Does the setting ensure equitable access to materials and social worlds for children? Think about race, class, gender, age, and family background. Do educators challenge behaviours that exclude or discriminate?

Think about ways that you help children to work through problems and return them to the community as contributive members.

Sustainable Futures

Children's affinity to nature, of which they are part, provides a basis for understanding and questioning the place of humankind in nature and for developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to contribute to the development of sustainable futures. This learning requires children's involvement with caring, compassionate, and courageous role models who actively support their first-hand engagement with the natural and constructed world and their participation in environmentally and socially responsible communities.

Children develop a sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world

- ☆ Bringing all their senses to exploring nature
- ☆ Taking pleasure in natural beauty
- ☆ Connecting to and respecting the natural world

Children learn to recognize and record patterns and relationships in nature

- ☆ Noticing regularity, repetition, and changes in nature
- ☆ Learning to systematically observe, name, and record natural phenomena
- ☆ Raising questions about changes, connections, and causes, and undertaking first-hand investigations

Children develop a sense of appreciation for human creativity and innovation

- ☆ Bringing all their senses to exploring the constructed world
- ☆ Learning to appreciate beauty, creativity and innovation in art, architecture, and technologies
- ☆ Exploring the mechanical advantage of tools and machinery
- ☆ Designing and evaluating technological solutions

Children learn about natural resource development and manufacturing

- ☆ Making connections between raw materials and finished products
- ☆ Developing an appreciation for the work of others
- ☆ Learning that different approaches to resource development and production have different impacts

Children learn environmentally and socially responsible practices

- ☆ Reducing consumption
- ☆ Reusing and recycling
- ☆ Participating in care of plants and domestic animals, and stewardship of local plant, insect, and animal life
- ☆ Participating in local restoration and regeneration projects

For Reflection

How are children supported in exploring natural and wild spaces? Think about how to ensure access, celebrate the joy of being outdoors, and help children focus all their senses.

In what ways do your policies and practices contribute to sustainable futures? Think about energy and waste reduction, recycling, composting, and environmentally safe cleaning products.

How can you support children in the creation of their own sustainable futures? Think about their influence and control; for example, taking care of animals and plants, planting vegetable and flower gardens in their own playgrounds and communities, or exploring possible solutions to environmental problems in their imaginations—in literature or at play.

How do you provide children with opportunities for first-hand learning about natural resource development and manufacturing? Think about crafts, farming, fishing, forestry, mining, tourism, and manufacturing operations that you might visit in your locality, and/or workers who might visit your centre. Consider how the involvement of parents can work to enhance children's learning about local resource development and manufacture.



3.2 Children's Dispositions to Learn

The notion that children learn every day through every situation is a central idea in *Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta*. Within this curriculum framework, in consultation with educators and parents, we identify five dispositions to learn: playing and playfulness, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. Children demonstrate these dispositions to learn¹ through their play and living in early childhood communities. These dispositions are often used to describe a child or children: “He is so caring,” “They are playful friends with one another.” In early childhood research, children’s dispositions to learn are recognized as a foundation for/in learning and for developing later school-based learning competencies.² In this curriculum framework, dispositions to learn³ are understood as:

- ☆ coming from within each child and emerging over time
- ☆ inclinations that educators and others can nurture, strengthen, or diminish through our everyday interactions with each child in the social context of learning and living
- ☆ inclinations that each child draws upon in both new and familiar learning experiences
- ☆ having culturally specific meanings and value revealed through family, social, and cultural practices and traditions.⁴

The rationale for nurturing each child’s dispositions to learn recognizes the experiential learning processes unique to each child. Noticing and naming each child’s dispositions to learn acknowledges and values each child as a learner who is already playing and playful, seeking, participating, persisting and caring. When you, as an educator, notice and name each child’s dispositions to learn, you encourage his or her learner identity for today and the future.

Dispositions to learn are situated in the context of care, play, and learning and therefore are expressed as active verbs,⁵ as well as from the perspectives of “I/we.” The “I” refers to each member of the learning community as unique—each child, family member, and educator who also draw upon these dispositions to learn. The “we” reflects the notion that children, educators, and families **co-construct** knowledge and learning together and within a context of the learning environment including time, space, materials, and our modelling, participating, and interacting with children in our care, play, learning, and development. We use the combination “I/we” intentionally to remind us that care, play, and learning are always both individually and socially constructed. For example,

I/we are playing and playful

I/we are seeking

I/we are participating

I/we are persisting

I/we are caring

Dispositions to learn are not taught to children; however, what educators do matters. When you respond to each child's dispositions to learn—extending and expanding their playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring, you value and acknowledge each child's learning potential. In this way, you create a **responsive care**, play, and learning environment that encourages the many ways that children explore and create. Documenting each child in daily experiences makes visible their dispositions to learn in ways that can engage the children and their families in meaningful conversations about not only the outcome of learning events but, more importantly, the processes and qualities of being a learner.

The following five dispositions to learn reflect the image of the child described within this curriculum framework—the image of a capable, strong, and resourceful child who is an **agentic** and active learner—a **mighty learner and citizen**. The descriptions of each of the dispositions to learn include a sample narrative to highlight everyday experiences where children are demonstrating playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. Each narrative includes a sample of an educator's on-the-spot curriculum decisions that respond to the child or children in ways that nurture their dispositions to learn, and include reflective questions for you to consider how you can provide experiences for children that support their playing and playfulness, as well as their opportunities for seeking, participating, persisting, and caring to flourish.



3.2.1 Playing and Playful

I/we are inventing, creating, and imagining.

I/we are creating and testing theories.

I/we are telling and directing narratives and stories.

I/we are exploring and representing our knowledge using multimodal literacies.

I/we are taking risks in/for learning.

I/We Are Playing and Playful

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice, and name for children their disposition to play and be playful. Playfulness with ideas, thoughts, and materials strengthens children’s flexible and fluid thinking and supports their creativity. Children use play as a means to explore and make meaning of the world. The disposition to **play and be playful** is revealed in the way that children are inclined to play with ideas, thoughts, and feelings often within the imaginary worlds they create with others and with materials. Children’s playing and playfulness can be nurtured and strengthened through experiences of active participation with others, and with natural, real-world materials that provoke imagination, creativity, innovation, problem solving, personal narratives, and story development in diverse and unique ways.

The socio-cultural perspective for learning situates you as an active and sensitive co-player with/in children’s play.¹ When you thoughtfully join children’s play in ways that maintain their leadership, you gain insights through your close observation and can respond to children’s ideas, theories, and conflicts that arise in their play. The insights you provide by participating and observing children’s play influence your planning and reflection, in ways that deepen their playing and playfulness with others and/or ideas. As well, when you model your own playful disposition, you communicate that playing and playfulness are valued dispositions to learn in the early childhood community.

Sample Narrative	Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator
<p>Niko arrives early Monday morning. He excitedly reports the adventure his family had on the weekend. They had taken a ride on the newly opened Light Rapid Transit from one end to the other end. Niko reports, “It goes into a tunnel and over a bridge and into another tunnel and then out the tunnel. It goes almost to my home. I get to ride it every Thursday when Nana picks me up.”</p> <p>Niko spends his day in block play. He stacks the blocks in a rectangular shape. He takes on the role of driver. Others join his play as passengers. He tells them when to get off. He tells them when he has stopped the train for them to get on. He passes out tickets and makes announcements when he stops, “Stopping at University. Have a great day.”</p>	<p>An educator joins Niko’s play for a time during the morning. She is taken with the excitement and knowledge that Niko demonstrates in this play. He knows about tickets, stopping for passengers, that there are different stops for the LRT, and that passengers and drivers are important roles. She remembers Niko’s description of the tunnels and stops. She gathers materials that she thinks will extend and deepen his play experience. She talks with her colleagues to plan further.</p> <p>By Wednesday, she locates a large box to create a tunnel in the block area. She opens both ends of the box and supports the shape with blocks on each side. When the children arrive that morning, their LRT play continues to evolve with the addition of the tunnel.</p> <p>By supporting their play, she has strengthened their playing with ideas, roles, and concepts of the world around.</p>

- ☆ Think about how the environment supports children’s playing and playful ideas. Think about how the open-ended materials and space support their imagination and creativity. How might time and routines be made more flexible to support social play, exploration, and invention through play?
- ☆ What do you see as playful about the educator’s response? How do you express your playful nature with children?
- ☆ Think about the role you take in children’s play and how that supports their playing and playfulness. How do you use your observations about children’s playing and playfulness to extend and expand their play and learning and reflect on your participation in their play and learning?

For further reflection refer to the Curriculum Framework Core Concepts section for

Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, and Participation

To make further connections between the disposition to play and be playful and the curriculum framework goals, see the curriculum meaning-making section for

Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development

As well, a ***Reflection and Planning Guide*** is provided to support your curriculum **meaning making**.



3.2.2 Seeking

I/we are questioning.

I/we are exploring with all our senses.

I/we are wondering and are curious.

I/we are solving problems in our play and learning.

I/We Are Seeking

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice, and name each child's curiosity as she or he explores the world around. When you value children's seeking dispositions, you provide the experiences that engage children's wondering, questioning, and theory-building potential. Early learning is an active process and, therefore, planning and provisions that strengthen children's inquisitiveness involve experiences that engage all of their senses and whole body in exploration. When you provide a range of open-ended materials and social play spaces inside and outside for children to actively engage in seeking, wondering, questioning, and exploring, you nurture children's natural inquisitiveness and curiosity. There is a significant relationship between a child and other children, and each child and you, with/in learning processes that involve seeking, curiosity, wondering, and questioning dispositions. As well, play and learning experiences that invite sharing ideas, collaborating, and debating, nurture the disposition to seek through the quest for multiple perspectives, ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Children are keen observers of the significant people in their lives. When you model your own disposition to seek by wondering, asking questions, and sharing your theories, children learn that the disposition to seek is valued in the early childhood community. As well, when you participate alongside and with children as co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginings of possibilities, you observe, listen, and reflect on their playing and learning experiences. In this way you are seeking a deeper understanding of each child through their playing and learning—each child as a mighty learner and citizen of the early childhood community.

Sample Narrative	Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator
<p>The toddlers watch out the window at the leaves blowing across their play yard.</p>	<p>The educator observes the toddlers as they notice the blowing leaves. Their observation takes shape in the planned experiences for the day. The educator gathers a range of materials to explore flying and falling inside as well as outside. She offers the toddlers feathers, leaves, paper pieces, and ribbons, as well as some heavier objects such as cardboard and recycled plastic objects. She stays close and throws the objects up and watches each of them fall. The toddlers are drawn to her and her use of the materials. Each of the children chooses objects to throw into the air. She describes what happens. The toddlers repeat her words, "Fly, fall, blow, gentle, fast..."</p> <p>To deepen the children's inquisitiveness about wind and movement, the educator ties those same materials to rings that the toddlers can hold. Outside, the toddlers watch the materials blow in the wind; they let go of the rings and watch them fall to the ground.</p> <p>The toddlers' play continues inside, as the rings with the tied materials are tied to a blowing fan.</p>

- ☆ How do you invite children's questions and curiosity through active whole body and sensory experiences?
- ☆ Think about how the educator engaged with the toddlers in their learning and play and exploration. What do you think she understands about how these children express their seeking and questioning behaviours?
- ☆ Why do you think she moved the experience from inside to outside and inside again?
- ☆ How can you use the insight from this example in your setting and with your group of learners, in ways that will extend the children's curiosity, wondering, questioning, and seeking about their world?
- ☆ Think about how you can help children explore their own questions in active whole body and sensory play and learning for themselves and others.

For further reflection refer to the Curriculum Framework Core Concepts section for

Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, and Participation

To make further connections between the disposition to seek and the curriculum framework goals, see the curriculum meaning-making section for

Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development

As well, a ***Reflection and Planning Guide*** is provided to support your curriculum meaning making.



3.2.3 Participating

I/we are engaging with others.

I/we are listening to others, and sharing ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

I/we are negotiating, taking turns, and observing.

I/We Are Participating

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice, and name how each child participates in his or her own way. Valuing children’s unique ways to participate, you ensure each child’s equitable participation in play and learning. As an educator, you provide many opportunities for children to observe, debate, collaborate, negotiate, and express and share their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and questions with one another in many ways—both non-verbal and verbal.¹ You support children’s participation with others as you notice and name, model and invite each child’s unique ways to communicate and participation in play and learning experiences.

You have a crucial role to facilitate **equity** of participation in care, play, and learning for each child. When you support children’s social learning opportunities by facilitating each child’s efforts to observe, share ideas, be heard, solve problems, and participate, you support their participation in play and learning. When you support the many ways that children participate and attend to every child’s voice—the loud, the soft, and the silent, you strengthen each child’s disposition to participate by acting on questions such as, “How can I help her to share her thoughts, feelings, and ideas with others?” “How do I interpret and respond to the diverse ways that children participate in the early childhood community?” “How do I model fairness, equity, and inclusive attitudes in the early childhood community?”

Sample Narrative	Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator
<p>In the preschool playroom, many of the children are involved in block play that supports their imaginary story-play of travelling to outer space. The children have created a spaceship with seating for passengers, as well as two spaces for drivers of the spaceship. The children have a range of objects that represent space rocks, air packs, luggage, and food items.</p> <p>Sasha stands at a table near the block play. He is watching the play while he absently rolls a rolling pin back and forth on the surface of the table. Not evident to an uninformed visitor, this child has limited verbal language.</p>	<p>The educator watches the group play for some time. He is also watching the child who is standing at the table outside of the group play. Understanding that Sasha benefits from observing his peers, the educator considers how to support him to move from an observer to an active participant in the play.</p> <p>Thinking about transitional objects as helpful to mediate one’s movement between spaces, he gathers a basket of play food and approaches Sasha standing at the table. “I want to go for a ride to the moon, but I am nervous. Please come with me.” Sasha looks up at his educator and smiles his willingness to join him. Together they move into the block play and offer, “We would like to go to the moon. We brought lunch with us.” After a slight hesitation, tickets are offered and the two are helped to the seats in the spaceship. The play resumes as Sasha sits stiffly on the block chair. As the travel, landing, and moon exploration play continues his body relaxes.</p> <p>The educator remains part of the play throughout, interpreting Sasha’s verbalizations and body language for the other children. All the players are learning that communication takes many forms. As well the children learn about Sasha’s desire to be a participating player in the social play with them.</p>

- ☆ What image of the child do you think this educator holds? How does that image connect to the role he enacts through this experience?
- ☆ What do you think about how the educator used the basket of food to enter into the children's play?
- ☆ How long do you think the educator remained part of the children's play? How can you help all children communicate their ideas with others in their play and learning? Think about how you notice and respond in situations when children are silenced by adults or peers.
- ☆ In what way does this example reflect how you see your role in the playroom you share with children?

For further reflection refer to the Curriculum Framework Core Concepts section for

Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, and Participation

To make further connections between the disposition to participate and the curriculum framework goals, see the curriculum meaning-making section for

Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development

As well, a ***Reflection and Planning Guide*** is provided to support your curriculum meaning making.



3.2.4 Persisting

I/we are persevering with challenges and/or difficulties.

I/we are trying new strategies.

I/we are asking for help.

I/we are striving to reach our own goals.

I/We Are Persisting

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice, and name for children their disposition to persist with their ideas. Children will often demonstrate their disposition to **persist** with experiences that are both interesting and intellectually engaging to them. Children persist when they are able to pursue their own questions and theories in play. Independently and with others, when children are exploring materials and ideas that are interesting to them, they demonstrate focused attention that matches their level of interest and as they strive to reach their own goals in learning and development.

The kind of experiences that you provide to mindfully and creatively engage children's disposition to persist are often experiences that engage them to create and test theories, ask questions, and gather information about topics of interest. As well, when children ask for help as they pursue interesting concepts, you understand that this is another way children persist. Learning environments that offer open-ended materials, space for social learning, and time for appropriately challenging inquiry nurture children's disposition to persist through asking questions of why and how, trialing and testing theories, sharing ideas, and/or telling stories.

You model and encourage persistence as a disposition to learn in the way you talk about your own trials, your own wondering, and your own questioning pursuits.

Sample Narrative	Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator
<p>The children and educators of the preschool room begin the midmorning transition, tidying the playroom of the early morning play experiences and dressing for outdoor play.</p> <p>Caleb, having just arrived a short time ago, expresses his disappointment, "I don't want to go outside!" Caleb had been enjoying bathing the dolls in the soapy water at the water table. He continues to bath the dolls as the other children dress for the crisp autumn weather.</p>	<p>Recognizing Caleb's engagement with the dolls, the educator locates a doll stroller. The educator knows that Caleb is interested in baby play since the arrival of his baby sister. She also knows that Caleb enjoys outdoor play as well. The educator understands Caleb's resistance to end his doll play as a desire to persist with his ideas longer. To support Caleb's disposition to persist with the doll play, the educator considers ways that can support him to pursue his play and even extend his doll play in the outdoor environment.</p> <p>"Caleb, I heard your doll say that she wants to play with the wagons, fallen leaves, and sand outside. I found this stroller. What do you think if we dress her to keep her warm today? I think she would like to play outside now that she has had her bath. She will probably get dirty again and need another bath when she is finished playing outside."</p> <p>Caleb stops his protests and considers this idea. He helps to dress the doll and places it in the stroller. He then puts his own boots and coat on.</p> <p>Caleb is learning that he has time to pursue his ideas in this environment. His disposition to persist with his play and learning is supported through the educator's willingness to help him continue his play ideas in both indoor and outdoor play spaces.</p>

- ☆ Think about how materials, space, and time offer children opportunity to explore and build theories to investigate, independently and with others. Think about how the schedule interrupts children's persistence and perseverance with ideas and creativity in play.
- ☆ What does this educator believe about children's play and learning? What might be the outcome of this educator's decision to allow indoor toys outside?
- ☆ How can children be supported to pursue their ideas, play, and learning when routines and schedules get in the way of their disposition to persist? What is your role in supporting their persisting behaviours?
- ☆ How do you model and demonstrate your own persistence, ask your own questions, and wonder aloud with children in play and learning?

For further reflection refer to the Curriculum Framework Core Concepts section for

Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, and Participation

To make further connections between the disposition to persist and the curriculum framework goals, see the curriculum meaning-making section for

Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development

As well, a ***Reflection and Planning Guide*** is provided to support your curriculum meaning making.



3.2.5 Caring

I/we are helping.

I/we are caring about our families, one another, and ourselves.

I/we are caring for the world and living things.

I/We Are Caring

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice, and name the many ways that children care for family and friends in group situations. You understand that caring is learned within respectful and reciprocal relationships. Through being cared for and through seeing caring attitudes and behaviours in others, children learn about many ways to care for self, others, materials, and the environment. When you observe, listen, and reflect on ways that caring can be enacted, you are better prepared to acknowledge and nurture each child's disposition to care.

You and your colleagues model caring attitudes through your actions and interactions with families, with colleagues, and with children. You know how attuned children are to the actions of adults, how adults care for others, and how adults care for the environment. When diversity and differences are respected through flexible routines and transitions and diverse learning experiences, children learn that diversity and differences are valued with/in the learning community. When you approach routines in flexible ways to accommodate the time it takes for a child to help another child, children learn that they can actively care for one another. When you notice and name children's efforts to care for the environment and materials, living things and others, and help children to take positive actions in equitable ways, children learn that their concerns are valued and that their actions can have positive influences in the community, locally and globally.

Sample Narrative	Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator
<p>The children notice the prints in the snow. They talk about what animal might have left the prints they have been seeing.</p> <p>Later in the day, Raj is observed as he watches out the playroom window and sees a hare hopping across the play yard. His excitement draws many of the children to the window, but they are too late—the hare has already disappeared under the fence. The children conclude that the hare is the animal visitor leaving prints in the snow.</p>	<p>The educators respond to the children's excitement. An educator wonders aloud, "I wonder why the hare is visiting our play yard."</p> <p>Raj declares, "He is looking for food." This response reveals what he understands about the physical needs of living things.</p> <p>The educator inquires further, "What do you think he might eat?"</p> <p>With help from the educators, Raj along with several of his friends make a list of possible food items and then make plans to collect the food.</p> <p>The following day, the educators and the children place the selected food outside, near the window and under a tree. The children have selected the place for the hare to eat declaring, "He will be safe by the tree branches."</p> <p>Over many days, the children watch for their new friend. They replenish the food that continues to disappear. Surprised, they have learned that the hare likes fruit more than carrots. They are eager to read many informational books to learn more.</p> <p>The educators recognize that this experience is connected to the children's disposition to care. By responding positively, and supporting the children's ideas, they support and strengthen the children's caring attitudes and learning about living things.</p>

- ☆ Think about how the educators responded to one child's comment. What do these educators understand about how children demonstrate their disposition to care?
- ☆ What do you think the educators might have to suspend in the way of planned experiences to follow the spontaneous interests of young children?
- ☆ In what ways do you think adult ideas of caring overshadow children's natural disposition to care?

For further reflection refer to the introductory section of the curriculum framework to see

Values

Guiding Principles

To make further connections between the disposition to care and the curriculum framework goals, see the

Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development

As well, a ***Reflection and Planning Guide*** is provided to support your curriculum meaning making.




SECTION 4

REFLECTION AND PLANNING GUIDE

This section is intended to support early learning and child care educators in their reflection and planning processes. The reflection and planning guide assumes a strong, capable image of the child and family, described in the previous documents, *The Image of the Child: A Mighty Learner and Citizen* and *A Practice of Relationships: Your Role as an Early Learning and Child Care Educator*. Within the Alberta curriculum framework, curriculum content begins with the experiences of children and engages educators as co-learners, co-researchers and co-imaginors of possibilities. In these roles, educators are encouraged to make use of a **co-inquiry** process¹ and emergent curriculum² planning in ways that notice and name what children are doing in their play, learning and development; reflect and interpret using the curriculum goals and children's dispositions to learn; and then co-imagine possibilities with children, families, and colleagues for further exploration and play. The physical and relational environment—including time, space, materials, and participation—changes to reflect how educators make meaning of the curriculum that children are already engaged in within this emergent and reflective process.


As co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginors of possibilities, you are

 **Observing and documenting** what children are doing in the environment—with others, with materials, and within the organization of time. Being curious about what children are doing and wanting to accomplish in their play, learning, and development situates you as a co-learner alongside them. Your recorded observations might be an assortment of many different forms of documentation, such as photos, video, audio recording, anecdotal notes, collected artifacts made by children, and/or scribed words expressed by children. As you revisit and reflect on your documentation you might begin to see patterns in children's play, such as continued interests, repeated use of objects, common play groups.



Reflecting and interpreting your observations. Reflecting on your observations and documentation may cause you to have further questions. You may begin to wonder: How are other children using this play space? In what other situations does this child explore her persistence? What other natural materials will encourage seeking for these children? What other materials would nurture his participation in play? In what other ways does this child demonstrate caring for others? Think about what you saw children doing and trying to accomplish; what surprised you? You may have questions for the child's family or your colleagues about how a child is approaching particular ideas, materials, and social play experiences.

The curriculum framework goals can be used to interpret your observations of the children's play, learning, and development. As a co-researcher you may also gather insights from families and colleagues to help you understand more deeply what children are doing or trying to accomplish in their play, learning, and development. Seeking additional information and insights from children, families, and colleagues, as well as workshops, professional journals and books, and conferences can help you to further understand your observations and reflections of children's experiences and your curriculum decisions.

 **Planning and taking action** to provide further experiences that invite children to pursue their ideas and theories, challenge ideas, explore, invent, create, and play in active ways that engage children's senses and whole body movement. Your observation and documentation, and reflection and interpretation of what children already know and can do and/or are trying to do in their play, learning, and development helps you to make further curriculum decisions that can nurture and support their efforts. Co-imagining possibilities is made more dynamic as you invite the children, families, and colleagues to invent and create further opportunities to expand children's experiences. Your curriculum decisions are made visible in the design of a responsive play and learning environment and the design of care routines, as well as your interactions with children and families.

The co-inquiry process and emergent curriculum planning are cyclical. When you observe and document, reflect on and interpret, and plan and take action in ways that expand and extend children's play, learning, and development, and nurture their **dispositions to learn**, you create a **responsive care**, play, and learning environment. A responsive environment reflects each child as a strong, resourceful, and capable mighty learner and citizen.

How to read and use the *Reflection and Planning Guide*

At first glance, you might read the *Reflection and Planning Guide* from top to bottom and left to right. This is not the only way to read the chart. As you become more familiar with a co-inquiry process and emergent curriculum planning that originates with children, you may start to explore the ideas in the guide from multiple points of entry.

To begin, however, reading from left to right across the top of the guide, the title *Environments for Learning and Care: Time, Space, Materials, Participation* is followed by seven dimensions of the environment. These statements are intended to provoke you to think about and look at the playroom environment that you share with children and families. Words and statements such as offer; provide and model; talk and reflect on; model, facilitate, and scaffold; welcome and invite; plan and participate; and be intentional in what you model are intended to inspire you to take action in collaboration with children, families, and colleagues.

Reading from top to bottom along the left side of the chart, five dispositions to learn are listed: I/we are playing, I/we are seeking, I/we are participating, I/we are persisting, and I/we caring. Children demonstrate these **dispositions to learn** in many ways such as the dimensions that are expanded on in the adjacent boxes. In *Mighty Learners: Nurturing Children's Dispositions to Learn*, dispositions to learn are described as

- ★ coming from within each child and emerging over time
- ★ inclinations that educators and others can nurture, strengthen, or diminish through our everyday interactions with each child in the social context of learning and living
- ★ inclinations that each child draws upon in both new and familiar learning experiences
- ★ having culturally specific meanings and value revealed through family, social, and cultural practices and traditions³

The third area of the *Reflection and Planning Guide* stands ready for you to complete. The sample provides one possible set of questions related to one disposition: I/we are playing. The relationship between children's **dispositions to learn** and the physical and relational environment is complex. We use the combination "I/we" intentionally to remind us that care, play, and learning are always both individually and socially constructed. These questions examine how a child or group of children is experiencing play, playing, and playfulness through the arrangement of spaces, organization of time, and choices of materials present in the early learning and child care environment. Our intention is that you will use this *Reflection*

and Planning Guide by transforming or replacing these questions with reflective questions that help you to understand children in the context of your playroom space—the physical and relational environment.

For example:

Educators with a group of toddlers notice that one child has been playing by himself. They notice that when another child comes close, he moves away. At first glance, the educators did not think much about his distance; however when his isolated play persisted they used the reflection and planning guide as a way to understand what might be happening for the young child within the larger group.

The educators changed the reflective questions in the following way to help them understand this child as a participant.

- ☆ What is this child telling me or showing me about how he **participates** with ideas on his own and with ideas from others?
- ☆ What experiences and materials invite his **participation** with ideas and/or others?
- ☆ How do I help him to talk about and think about how he **participates** with ideas and others?
- ☆ How can we support, scaffold, and facilitate the children's **participation** through sharing their ideas and interests with others, including families?
- ☆ Do we offer the children uninterrupted blocks of time and flexible spaces so that children can collaborate with others around ideas?
- ☆ How do we model our own **participation** with ideas and others for the children to see?
- ☆ How do we recognize and document the ways children **participate** such as listening, observation, active participation, sharing ideas, turn-taking, and/or negotiating over materials?
- ☆ How do we invite families to share ideas and insights about how they **participate** with ideas and with others?

How has this guide been used by others?

In the development of this curriculum framework, educators from participating child care programs were invited to trial the *Reflection and Planning Guide*. The following are two examples of how the guide supported educators in their work with children and families.

One child care centre used the guide to plan a family evening. They changed the questions to ask themselves what to plan in relation to **time, space, materials, and participation**. They used the dispositions to learn (**playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring**) to think about how they might invite families to actively participate during the event. They reported that the event was a huge success and more dynamic because of the different ways that the guide helped them to think about the experience.

An educator was working to create documentation of children's word play through rhyme and word patterns. She used the sample questions of the *Reflection and Planning Guide* to help her talk about and reflect on the experiences of the children. She reported that the guide helped her to see how her role in the children's word play extended and deepened the children's playful exploration of rhyme and patterns.



[Download a PDF version of the Play, Participation, and Possibilities, Reflection and Planning Guide \(61 kb\)](#)

Reflection and Planning Guide Sample

<p>Environments for Care and Learning:</p> <p><i>Relationships</i> <i>Space</i> <i>Time</i> <i>Materials</i> <i>Participation</i></p>		<p><i>Offer</i> choices of interesting and meaningful experiences that are familiar, novel, and appropriately challenging.</p>	<p><i>Provide and model</i> multiple forms of literacies that offer children diverse and meaningful ways to express ideas, explore theories, and represent their ideas and feelings.</p>	<p><i>Talk and reflect on</i> learning and thinking as ways to build children’s knowledge of positive learning dispositions.</p>	<p><i>Model, facilitate, and scaffold</i> children’s learning skills for inquiry, problem solving, and representation through purposeful experiences.</p>	<p><i>Welcome and invite</i> family participation and insights regarding children’s dispositions to learn.</p>	<p><i>Plan</i> appropriate blocks of time and <i>participate</i> with children as they work on joint ventures, pursue inquiry, develop theories and solve problems, and represent ideas.</p>	<p><i>Be intentional</i> in what you model for young children. Model your dispositions to learn that support a capable image of a mighty learner.</p>
<p>I/we are playing</p>	<p>Inventing, creating, imagining Telling and directing stories Exploring, representing Taking risks in/for learning</p>	<p>SAMPLE</p> <p>“I/we are playing...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the children telling me, or showing me, about how they play out their ideas? • What choices of experiences and materials do I make available that encourage the children to invent, create, and imagine? • How do I help children to talk about and think about their play and playful experiences? • How do I support, scaffold, and facilitate children’s skills for collaboration, theory building, authoring, and directing in joint and individual endeavours? • Do I offer uninterrupted blocks of time and flexible spaces for children to play with real-world and/or imaginary ideas? • How do I model my own playfulness in the environment for children to see? • How do I recognize and document the children’s playfulness, creativity, theory building, and imaginative thinking in joint and individual endeavours? • How do I invite family participation and insights that celebrate, honour, and value children’s play? 						
<p>I/we are seeking</p>	<p>Questioning, wondering, curious Exploring with our senses Solving problems</p>							
<p>I/we are participating</p>	<p>Engaging with others Listening to, sharing ideas, thoughts, and feelings Negotiating, taking turns, observing</p>							
<p>I/we are persisting</p>	<p>Persevering with challenges and/or difficulties Trying strategies Asking for help Reaching our own goals</p>							
<p>I/we are caring</p>	<p>Helping Caring about our families, others, and ourselves Caring for the world and living things</p>							



SECTION 5

CURRICULUM SAMPLE LEARNING STORIES

Sincere appreciation is extended to the educators, children, and families who contributed to the collection of curriculum sample learning stories. Your willingness to engage with us in this curriculum development work has helped to bring curriculum to life and illustrate a practice of relationships. The children's play and exploration has helped us to document and make visible educator decision-making for others to see.

“Looking at what the children and I achieved,...I was proud of us. I knew the children’s play in this experience was important; the curriculum framework gave the experience so much value; every child was achieving at their own level.” Brittany, ELCC Educator.

“The curriculum goals have really helped to "label" what I am already seeing the children doing and it has helped me to see where I could go next. I also feel that it has highlighted to families the importance of play as I am able to provide them with professional language to help explain their children's learning.” Katie, ELCC Educator

Our work to develop a "made-in-Alberta" early learning and child care curriculum framework took us from our office spaces into early learning and child care playrooms to document educators in three centre-based child care programs and one family day home setting. The following curriculum sample **learning stories** document educators within the context of their everyday work with children and are intended only as a beginning. As curriculum framework meaning making takes shape in your programs, we anticipate that you will develop your own curriculum learning stories.

Each of the following stories reflects an individual educator’s curriculum meaning making, one of many possible interpretations. The intention of documenting the educators was to highlight the curriculum decisions already taking place and the curriculum already embedded in children’s early learning and child care experiences. The following learning story structure was adopted for the purpose of the curriculum framework. The structure includes a narrative about everyday child care experiences, curriculum meaning making, and curriculum connections and reflections.

Each story begins by describing an everyday experience involving educators and children in early learning and child care programs in Alberta. The documentation process created an opportunity to talk with educators about their curriculum decisions underlying their practice with children.

These professional dialogues have been retold and included in the curriculum sample learning story as *Curriculum Meaning Making*. Repeatedly, the educators demonstrated their intentions in the ways that they talked about what they knew about each child and how their knowledge influenced their decisions and interactions. The purpose of these dialogues is to make visible the knowledge and relationships that shape educators’ curriculum decisions within the context of their work with children.

The holistic play-based curriculum goals enrich professional dialogue and inspire educators in ways that brings value to their work and the children’s child care experiences. You will see educators using the curriculum goals to notice and name what the children were doing. The process of applying curriculum descriptors to describe children’s care, play, learning, and development is called **cross-checking**.¹

This observation, documentation, reflection, and interpretation process unfolded somewhat differently for the family day home provider who worked with us during the development of the curriculum sample learning stories. Being the only adult with a group of children meant that time to reflect had to be arranged beyond the child care day. The documentation of her work with children was shared through an online dropbox. She responded to the learning stories, adding information, interpretations, and reflection at her convenience. What initially presented as a limitation, resulted in deeply

“I often worry that as a single mother on a budget, I won't be able to supply the children with all the materials and equipment that I want to supply to them as a caregiver. But I am learning that there is so much valuable play going on right here in my backyard with snow, sticks, rocks, and leaves!” Sylvie, FDH Provider.

reflective and descriptive written responses from this family day home provider.

As educators revisited and reflected on the documented moments of their practice, the opportunity to think about how their decisions influenced children's care, play, and learning experiences proved to be significant for how they thought about and valued their role as an educator. In addition, using the language of the curriculum framework goals to describe what the children were doing has helped the educators to understand and articulate children's experiences and value their own work.

All too often, in the busyness of early childhood community living and life the really significant moments of children's care, play, and learning are overshadowed. This documentation and reflection process has been insightful for both the educators as well as the pedagogical mentor and curriculum developers. Revisiting and reflecting on each moment is rewarding and validating for educators—a reminder of the joys of working with children and their families.



5.1 A Tactile Inquiry



Jennifer, an early learning and child care educator, sits on the side of an indoor sandbox beside Lucas. She notices that Lucas has bare feet in the sand. She removes her shoes and places her feet in the sand as well. Her coloured toenails draw his attention. He seems intrigued and lifts Jennifer's foot. She doesn't seem to be bothered by his inquiry.

Jennifer talks with him, "We have bare feet in the sand." Lucas sprinkles sand on her foot. "The sand is cool," she comments.



Lucas continues his exploration, now pouring sand from a small cup over Jennifer's foot. Lucas wipes the sand away; then pours sand on Jennifer's foot once again. He repeats this process several times.

Jennifer follows his process by pouring sand and wiping the sand away from Lucas's foot.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What do you understand about the group that you are working with, in particular who Lucas is a learner, that motivates you to remove your shoes and join him in the sand experience?

Jennifer explains, “At the time of this experience, Lucas did not have a lot of verbal vocabulary. I remember feeling that he wanted to share an idea with me; so I decided to remove my shoes and join him in the sandbox. I thought that this would help me to be closer to his experience and bridge the limitations of him being able to articulate his ideas.

What do you feel about Lucas’ interest in your feet in the sand?

Jennifer reflects, “I think he was surprised that an adult would meet him in the sand experience and match his sensory experience. Then, I think when I did—I think he was able to engage me in his own sensory experience with bare feet in the sand.”



What do you know about Lucas as a learner?

“Currently, Lucas is able to verbally express his ideas and needs. Just the other day, he was standing at the top of the slide. He requested the child who was at the bottom of the slide to move and then he waited for her to respond to his request. That is a lot of growth for him in the short time that I have been in the toddler room.”

Tell me about how you think about your role in children’s learning processes.

Jennifer reflects, “Sometimes, standing back and watching is beneficial; yet getting into the children’s play and following their lead is best. They tell me what they are thinking and they lead the experience. I think they know that I value them—their time is important... the time for them to share their thinking and experiences.”

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Playful Explorations and Problem Solving

Children learn about the properties of objects through

- ☆ playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects
- ☆ experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect
- ☆ creating patterns and relationships—sorting and matching, sizing and ordering, sequencing and grouping

Children test their limits through

- ☆ testing their powers of observation and sensory discrimination

Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems through

- ☆ developing sustained and shared thinking
- ☆ raising questions and making hypotheses about how and why things happen

Communication and Literacies

Communicative Practices

Children form relationships through communicative practices by

- ☆ recognizing and responding to human presence and touch

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

Consider the different spaces needed to communicate with infants, toddlers, and young children at their physical level. **Think about** soft spaces with blankets where adults and infants can interact in a visual, aural, and tactile way with materials and each other. **Think about** active, sensory experiences that engage many toddlers.

Think about how Jennifer entered the sandbox space with Lucas, to first experience what he was exploring so to gain an understanding of how he experiences the learning environment.

Think about how that knowledge helps her to create further experiences for Lucas as well as the other children of the playroom space.



5.2 Zoe Exercises



Zoe exercises after getting her head band on. She explains her intentions to Kayla, her early learning and child care educator, "I'm tired, so I need to exercise before I go outside."

Kayla acknowledges, "You're exercising your muscles." When Everleigh stops her dressing to briefly engage with Zoe, Kayla does not intervene with the children's interaction.

Zoe explains to her friend, "I am exercising."



Everleigh watches for a few minutes and then returns to her outdoor dressing.

Kayla does not stop Zoe or redirect her from her idea. Kayla, in a skilful manner, supports the group of children as they dress for outside while being aware of Zoe.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What do you know about who Zoe is as a learner and a citizen of this community?

Kayla explains that she recognizes Zoe's uniqueness. It is common for Zoe to come up with ideas and want to play them out.

Allowing her the time and space to “exercise” helps Zoe to understand that she is honoured as an individual and her ideas are honoured even at a time when the group is getting organized in a transition from inside time to outside time.

What do you know about the group of children?

Allowing others to interact with Zoe, as she plays out her idea, communicates that Zoe has important ideas. Kayla expressed that she doesn't worry that this activity will interfere with routines. She explains that routines are flexible for children to contribute and play out ideas.

Had Kayla approached Zoe using a developmental perspective for learning, she might have redirected Zoe to get dressed for outside time along with all the other children.

Instead Kayla approaches Zoe's ideas using a sociocultural perspective for learning where individual ideas have a place in the space of a day.

As well, Kayla was accepting of Zoe's activity as well as accepting that other children were interested in what Zoe was doing regardless of the adult planned transition time.

Aware, but not redirecting Everleigh when she stops to watch Zoe, Kayla supports Zoe with her ideas and also her social connections with peers. Kayla's response communicates that the playroom is a safe place for ideas.

The invisible supports that enable children's unique expression occur in fluid and flexible routines. In this playroom, once a small group gathers at the door ready for outside play, they leave with one of the educators. The children who remain dressing are accompanied outside with the other educator.

There is no long wait for children who are bundled in winter clothing and there is opportunity for individual expression in routines that shape each day. The atmosphere remains positive as children dress at individual paces and levels of independence.

This supports developing self-help skills without being hurried and herded as a whole group. It takes trust and understanding from the educator that what is taking place is important for children's sense of belonging and positive self-identities.

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

- ☆ developing recognition of self
- ☆ co-constructing their identities
- ☆ experiencing a growing sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiative
- ☆ growing in their capacity to express feelings, concerns, and needs
- ☆ pursuing interests, passions, and strengths

Belonging

Children develop a sense of place through

- ☆ making connections between centre, home, and broader communities

Children build respectful and responsive relationships through

- ☆ forming close relationships with a range of adults

Physical Health

Children learn to take responsibility for personal care through

- ☆ growing in their independence in self-care routines
- ☆ learning about individual differences in self-care routines

Children explore body and movement through

- ☆ learning about their body in space
- ☆ increasing bodily awareness, control, strength, agility, and large motor coordination

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Imagination and Creativity

Children develop dispositions for flexible and fluid thinking through

- ☆ expressing unique and imaginative ideas

Children invent symbols and develop systems of representation through

- ☆ making up their own movements
- ☆ negotiating the meaning of symbols with others
- ☆ developing awareness of the imagined and ordinary worlds they move between as they play

Children create imaginary scenarios in which they explore new possibilities and take possession of their worlds through

- ☆ creating alternative systems of power
- ☆ creating social spaces and shared narratives

Communication and Literacies

Communication Practices

Children extend ideas and take actions using language

- ☆ to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas
- ☆ to ask for help or information, argue, persuade, clarify, celebrate, or instruct.

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on?

How do people and policies at your centre honour children's initiatives through thoughtful planning, documentation, and/or responses?

How does your site's scheduling promote or interfere with time to play and create? **Think about** flexible scheduling. **Think about** time allotted to play, routines, and adult-directed activities.

How do you support and value the worlds and fantasies that children create? **Think about** ways in which fantasy and imagination can be extended for children and documented to illustrate their value.

How do you make use of and reflect the community around you to engage, model, and develop children's creativity, imagination, and play interests? **Think about** family expertise and community connections to expand Zoe's ideas about physical fitness.



5.3 What's for Snack?



Winnifred offers Sophia some cereal for her snack. Tooran visits with Sophia and Zinaye while they snack.



Sophia doesn't want the cereal so Winnifred trials peaches with her. Tooran signs "More" for Zinaye.



Zinaye seems interested in what Sophia has on her tray. Having shown interest in the peaches on Sophia's tray, Zinaye is offered peaches as well.

Sophia has something in mind for her morning snack and patiently waits as Tooran and Winnifred, her early learning and child care educators, discover what she wants today. Sophia uses word approximations and gestures to explain what she wants. This pre-verbal communication is interpreted by Tooran and Winnifred.

Cheerios and Cheerios with milk is offered and declined.

How about some fruit for Sophia? No, she doesn't want fruit either.

Ahhhh, pabulum, yes it is pabulum!

Zinaye watches the choices offered to Sophia who is sitting next to her. She snacks on the Cheerios and when she sees the fruit on Sophie's tray, she leans over to get a closer look.

Tooran notices this gesture and offers Zinaye fruit as well. She receives a big smile from Zinaye confirming her understanding.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

Why do you work to provide Sophia with choices for her snack?

Winnifred and Tooran explain that they believe that each child has rights. They recognize that even very young children can make choices and show preferences for foods, as well as particular play materials and people. Winnifred explains, “Honouring children’s choices values them as citizens.”

How do you know Sophia is making choices?

Winnifred and Tooran explain that they watch and listen very closely to the gestures and sounds the infants are making. They interpret and respond to the infant’s communication, which helps Sophia and Zinaye know that what they are doing has meaning and purpose.



How do you think your responsiveness nurtures Sophia’s positive self-identity and sense of belonging?

Winnifred and Tooran express their deep conviction in knowing that their responsive practice supports Sophia and Zinaye as effective communicators. In addition, their responsive practice fosters positive and secure relationships with each child, leading to each child having a sense of belonging and self-identity.

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Communication and Literacies

Communication Practices

Children form relationships through communicative practices by

- ☆ practising and playing with sounds
- ☆ initiating and responding to gestural and visual languages

Literate Identities With/In Communities

Children co-construct a range of literate identities through

- ☆ learning various local literacy practices within a range of communities

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

- ☆ co-constructing their identities
- ☆ growing in their capacity to express feelings, concerns, and needs

Belonging

Children build respectful and responsive relationships through

- ☆ forming close relationships with a range of adults

Physical Health

Children learn about food and nutrition through

- ☆ understanding the relationship between food and their bodies
- ☆ building confidence to try new foods
- ☆ making decisions about food consumption, preparation, serving and clean-up

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on? (Consider Sophie as a decision maker and citizen; consider how Zinaye demonstrated awareness of Sophie's food choices.) What can this mean for further understanding about how infants relate to the differences between self and others?

Think about verbal and non-verbal expressions of independence and forthright expressions.

Think about ways young children demonstrate independence and make choices for themselves. How do you support very young children to make choices for themselves?

How does your centre build relationships of trust between people; in particular, between educators and children? How does the environment encourage children to take initiative and make choices? How do you support their efforts in taking initiative or being a self-starter?

How can you engage in playful conversations with very young children during routine times?

How do you support very young children to engage with one another?

How are children engaged in decision-making in matters that concern them, such as the establishment of rules, rituals, routines, and/or making choices for snack? **Think about** day-to-day opportunities for children to have a say in such things as eating, napping, and sharing.

Think about ways that you help children to work through problems. **Think about** the many ways that children express feelings, wants, and needs.



5.4 Balancing Is Gymnastics



Josie and Elena are soon joined by Amelia and together lay blocks to create a long balance beam. Josie tries out the balance beam throughout the building process. Each time she ends with a jump, landing on two feet with arms spread wide.



Accepting of visitors in her playroom, Josie invites me to watch her gymnastic moves. She begins with a narrow wooden ramp on the floor, runs three steps onto the ramp and jumps off, landing with two feet on the ground and two arms in the air. She repeats this action several times while I (Manuela) watch attentively.

Josie then adds several blocks making a long narrow shape. She steps across the length of the blocks and jumps. Again she lands two feet together on the floor and two arms spread wide above her head.



She adds several more blocks and tries the “balance beam” again. She attracts Elena’s attention, who comes to join her building and gymnastic performances.

In no time the pair attract the attention of several more children in the room. As I watch, I see the group speeding up the activity. Wanting to extend the experience, I recognize that I need to do something as two children have already fallen when their fast stepping tips the blocks over; I offer, “Can I give you a challenge?”

“Can you balance a book or a beanbag on your head when you walk across the balance beam?” Eagerly, the group takes up the challenge and all efforts are accepted and celebrated. The children become focused on balancing the beanbag rather than running across the blocks. They are enjoying testing their physical limits.



With my encouragement, Amelia tries again after falling on a block. Amelia is initially hesitant and holds my hand.

Once she makes the first crossing successfully, she wants to try again. She is a little hesitant to go alone, yet she doesn't want to hold my hand. We offer another challenge.

“Can you hold a beanbag in each hand, stretched out, while walking the balance beam?”



Amelia accepts the challenge.

This challenge offers her an opportunity to experience increased success and gain confidence in her physical abilities.

Her attention to her steps slows her down and decreases the potential for falling. She is pleased with her achievement and continues to challenge herself.



Amelia is ready to balance the beanbag on her head.

Again, her focus on the challenge to balance slows her steps and maintains a safe level of activity for all involved.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What do you understand about Amelia that guides you to first ensure that she is okay and then to support her in the ongoing play? What do you think Amelia experienced through this?

Manuela shares her thoughts about her understanding of Amelia and how she looks up to her peers. She explains, “Amelia wants to be able to meet them in their play experiences. Knowing this I helped her to stay in the play by helping her to feel successful. I knew that I made the right choice as Amelia was able to continue with the play on her own.”

What do you think the challenge did for the builders and those who joined the balancing experience?

Manuela reflects on the introduction of the “challenges” that shifted the experience from one that was becoming questionably unsafe as the children began to rush, to one of focus with an appropriate level of challenge. She reflects, “The children felt confident and in control of their play. I did not need to shut down the experience, rather the challenge to balance objects seemed to extend the children’s idea.”

How do you think children see themselves in environments that support them to create play spaces for self and others?

Manuela describes how the balancing continued outside on the beams in the play yard and while some children were unsure of crossing the balance beam, others, like Amelia, offered to hold their hand as they cautiously made their way across. “The children are proud that their ideas are taken up by others. They appreciate being leaders in their play. Amelia was able to be a leader as the balancing play continued outside.”



Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a positive sense of self through

- ☆ co-constructing their positive self-identities
- ☆ experiencing a growing sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiative
- ☆ growing in their capacity to express feelings, concerns, and needs
- ☆ pursuing interests, passions, and strengths
- ☆ persevering and persisting

Belonging

Children develop a sense of place through

- ☆ generating a shared repertoire of narratives and memories

Children build respectful and responsive relationships through

- ☆ developing cherished as well as casual friendships
- ☆ growing in their awareness that their actions contribute to the welfare of others
- ☆ participating in group initiatives

Physical Health

Children explore body and movement through

- ☆ participating in a variety of physical activities, indoors and out
- ☆ learning about their body in space
- ☆ increasing bodily awareness, control, agility, and large motor coordination
- ☆ knowing and stretching their physical limits

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Imagination and Creativity

Children develop dispositions for flexible and fluid thinking through

- ☆ seeing people, places, and things in new ways
- ☆ expressing unique and imaginative ideas

Children invent symbols and develop systems of representation through

- ☆ negotiating the meaning of symbols with others
- ☆ developing awareness of the imagined and ordinary worlds they move between as they play

Children create imaginary scenarios in which they explore new possibilities and take possession of their worlds through

- ☆ creating social spaces and shared narratives

Playful Exploration and Problem Solving

Children learn about the properties of objects through

- ☆ playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects

Children test their limits through

- ☆ testing their strength, speed, agility, and control over movement

Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems through

- ☆ developing sustained and shared thinking

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on? (**Think about** verbal and non-verbal expressions that open up or limit children's exploration and risk-taking behaviours.) **Think about** how children respond to people, places, and materials.

How do people and policies at your child care setting honour children's initiatives through thoughtful planning, documentation, and/or responses? **Think about** how your centre builds upon children's interests.

Reflect on your own learning and what fuels your energy as a learner. **Think about** the pleasure you take in persistence and perseverance and accomplishment, and how risk-taking is rewarded, or not, in your life.

How does the environment encourage children to take initiative? What role do you take in children's self-directed play? Does your role extend possibilities or limit children's pursuits? **Think about** how Manuela provided the appropriate challenges that extended the children's exploration of balance and offered children opportunities to engage at their individual levels of ability.



5.5 Parachute Play



Brittany carries a package under her arm and approaches a few children, “Would you like to go outside? I have a parachute.”

Several children respond to the invitation by getting their coats and boots. The day is sunny and one of the few warm days following the long cold winter. A day that has the smell and feel of spring.

A growing group of eager children begin to gather at the door. Brittany asks a few more children, but these children seem more interested in pursuing experiences inside the playroom. The Dolphin Room educators make a quick calculation and agree that one educator will stay inside with those who are not yet ready to join the larger group outside.



“Mama put the popcorn kernels in the pot. She turned up the heat. Now the pot is getting hot. And then those popcorn kernels start to pop, pop, pop, pop...”

Brittany, Hadla, and Jennifer, educators from different playrooms, play the parachute game along with the children on the playground. All are welcome to join in. The educators introduce a song as they play. Repeating the song many times invites the children to sing along, too. Soon all the children, from the novice to the most experienced, are singing and playing and laughing. Spring, after an Alberta winter, has an energy that inspires song in all of us!

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What inspired the parachute play? When, if ever, is participation limited?

Brittany explains, “I brought a parachute out because the playground was so dull at this time of the year. The sun was shining, but the ground was still frozen and the snow was so hard for the children to dig in.

“At first, the balls I brought out weren’t flying very high. Jenn, an early learning and child care educator from another playroom, offered other balls from the toddler room which worked much better for the popcorn song. It was great to have three educators in this game. As we, educators, worked together more children could participate. All age groups work together in these games.

What policy and structures support educators to offer children choices for inside and outside play spaces?

Brittany reflects, “The community spirit here supports children to make choices in their daily experiences. We work together. Someone will stay in when children want to have more time inside. When children want to go outside, we work with one another to ensure adult–child ratios are maintained. We are flexible on field outings as well. Sometimes a small group of children from two different playrooms go out in the community, leaving small groups of children in the centre to do something that they would like to do. Being flexible is important to allow children to make choices for their daily experiences.”



Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Imagination and Creativity

Children develop dispositions for flexible and fluid thinking through

- ☆ seeing people, places, and things in new ways
- ☆ expressing unique and imaginative ideas

Children invent symbols and develop systems of representation through

- ☆ negotiating the meaning of symbols with others

Children create imaginary scenarios in which they explore new possibilities and take possession of their world through

- ☆ creating social spaces and shared narrative

Playful Exploration and Problem Solving

Children learn about the properties of objects through

- ☆ playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects
- ☆ experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect
- ☆ developing a vocabulary to describe similarities and differences, patterns and relationships

Children learn to negotiate the complexities of joint enterprises through

- ☆ negotiating rules of time, space, and roles

Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems through

- ☆ developing sustained and shared thinking

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Communication and Literacies

Communicative Practices

Children form relationships through communicative practices by

- ★ recognizing and responding to human presence and touch
- ★ becoming attuned to rhyme, rhythm, pitch, and tone
- ★ practising and playing with sounds

Children learn the conventions of their language through

- ★ growing with their implicit understanding of the conventions of language
- ★ growing in their understanding of vocabulary
- ★ developing confidence in using vocabulary
- ★ experiencing and developing diverse linguistic repertoires

Children extend ideas and take actions using language

- ★ to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas
- ★ to make friends, share materials, structure, negotiate, and create imaginary worlds

Multimodal Literacies

Children explore a variety of sign systems through

- ★ becoming familiar with sign systems of language and music
- ★ transforming knowledge from one mode to another

Multimodal meaning making through

- ★ engaging with the symbols and practices of language
- ★ engaging with the symbols and practices of music

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

- ☆ co-constructing their identities
- ☆ pursuing interests, passions, and strengths
- ☆ persevering and persisting

Belonging

Children build respectful and responsive relationships through

- ☆ participating in group initiatives

Physical Health

Children explore body and movement through

- ☆ participating in a variety of physical activities, indoors and out
- ☆ increasing bodily awareness, control, strength, agility, and large motor coordination
- ☆ releasing and restoring energy in outdoor places

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on? **Think about** how children respond to people, places, materials, and events.

How does your centre build relationships of trust between people? **Think about** adult–child, adult–adult, and child–child relationships. How does the environment encourage children to take initiative? **Think about** access to materials.

What experiences are provided at your centre to promote children’s active engagement both indoors and out? How do you plan for age and physical capacities as well as for co-operative games. What playground songs do you encourage and model for children?

How do you provide ways for children to explore on their own, with peers, or with adults? **Think about** materials for indoor and outdoor experiences.

What role do you assume in outdoor experiences? Do you model active and engaged play outdoors? In what ways do you invite playful games and group initiatives?



5.6 The Show



Ned tells Brittany, "I need to make tickets." Ned had been in the block area when Hadla, an early learning and child care educator, and a group of children were recalling the performance the children had created the previous afternoon. Ned went directly to the art area where he could use paper and drawing materials to create tickets. Once he made a ticket, he returned to the block area to share his idea. He ignites tremendous interest by the group who, inspired by his idea, go to the art area to make more tickets.

When several children ask Brittany to write the word "ticket," she responds, "Maybe you could write 'T' and then we will know that it means ticket." This seems a manageable idea as the children then worked independently with great focus.



Staying a step ahead, Brittany enters the block area and moves a few items that seem to be cluttering the space.

The ticket-making group returns to the block area and gives their tickets to other children and the adults in the space.

"Do you need a stage?" Brittany asks, then rephrases, "Oh look, you have three stages." The audience with the tickets settle onto a bench and Brittany offers a curtain. The three performances begin all at once.



Brittany takes her place alongside the show, waiting and supporting the children's playful performance. She watches carefully, as there is no pre-established script to follow. These are "impromptu" performances that flow and are shaped in the moment. It requires the attention of a willing audience and stage crew.

The audience is willing. Not one child or adult leaves the performance. The stage crew is equally willing, waiting for the cue that will communicate it is time to drop the curtain signalling the end of the performances.

Shea's performance takes some time. He is the last performer, long after Ranen and Raleigh are finished. They, too, become audience members while Shea holds the attention of the entire room.



Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What do you understand about this group of children that helps you to respond to their initiatives in play?

Brittany reflects, “I know that the majority of the children involved in this socio-dramatic play could draw the letter “T”. As a group we had been exploring symbols on maps as well as in our community. I felt that the print was second to what the children were really exploring, which was all that they knew about live performances. I was surprised by how much they knew.

“I felt that my role was to support the conditions for the children’s play and play making. I was the curtain for them. I wasn’t intruding in their play. The curtain provided something concrete and visual. I know what it feels like in the theatre when the curtain goes up—it’s exciting!

“There is lots of fabric in the room and the children use it for many different things. Fabric offers tons of possibilities.”



Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Imagination and Creativity

Children develop dispositions for flexible and fluid thinking through

- ☆ seeing people, places, and things in new ways
- ☆ expressing unique and imaginative ideas

Children invent symbols and develop systems of representation through

- ☆ making up their own words, marks, and movements
- ☆ taking up and reshaping cultural experiences

Children create imaginary scenarios in which they explore new possibilities and take possession of their world through

- ☆ creating social spaces and shared narratives
- ☆ creating alternative systems of power
- ☆ coping with emotional pressure

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

- ☆ co-constructing their identities
- ☆ experiencing a growing sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiative

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on? **Think about** how Brittany offered a simple alternative to printing the word “ticket” to maintain the flow of the children’s play.

How do you provide access to materials for children? **Think about** shelving, displays, containers, and open-ended materials. How often are materials changed or added to? Which materials are not used and why? Who uses the materials and what are the patterns of usage? **Think about** the fabric that Brittany used as a curtain in this experience. **Think about** how the blocks became a stage. **Think about** how these materials offer flexibility and opportunity for imagination to children.



5.7 The Joy of Dizzy Play



Aushon, Ali, and Drake begin a game of chase as the group begins to dress for outside time. Paulina is close by helping another child to dress and affords the boys an opportunity to explore this “dizzy play.”

It lasts for only a few minutes. The game seems to have the rule of following the person in front, up the step, down the step, and around; up the step, down the step, and around again.



Dizzy play offers children an experience that can be described as losing and regaining control.

It can be to express a burst of energy, to test their own boundaries, and to experience joy with others.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What guides you to allow time and space for children’s dizzy play?

Paulina reflects, “I was helping another child. If you just expect others to sit and wait, that isn’t good for them. They are doing something that isn’t having them sit for others. When I was ready to help them, they were ready for me to do that.” She also recognized that the boys had a safe space to engage with dizzy play making it possible for the activity while others were preparing to go outside.

What do you understand about these children, this space, and the time of day for this play to have value?

Paulina also expressed that “dizzy play” was a new term for her. She hadn’t understood the importance of dizzy play previously, yet she could identify with the typical activity of children in groups.

Paulina recalled, “I always go back to the idea of noise. With a past group of toddlers who were “noisy,” we began to reframe the idea of noise as sound. We, the educators, began to look at it differently and then the learning happened. For three to four months, the children were involved with exploring and making sounds and it influenced our whole year. Our frustration went down and the learning went up.”



Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Dizzy Play

Children take pleasure in being on the edge through

- ★ engaging in rough and tumble play
- ★ experiencing exhilarating physical release
- ★ playing at games of disruption and restoring order

Children take pleasure in sharing the joy of laughter through

- ★ clowning and physical humour
- ★ making nonsense

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How do you value and respond to rowdy, physical, dizzy play?

What is your comfort level and how does this affect the allowances you make for the children's rowdy, physical play?

How do you ensure safety and allow for children to experience exhilarating physical release?

Think about times when children's joy has been infectious, for example, sliding down hills, dancing barefoot, or singing at the top of one's lungs.



5.8 Stack and Crash



Jayden is focused on a box. Jessica, an early learning and child care educator, sits alongside him and begins to stack some boxes. She is provoking an idea. Will he respond to it?



It takes some time, but Jessica's patience is rewarded. Jayden's attention shifts from the single box to the tower of boxes she has created.



With a gleam in his eye, he swings his arm and knocks the stack over.

Both pause, looking at the scattered boxes...



Jayden stays attuned while Jessica begins to create a tower of boxes again. He waits in anticipation.



The excitement is too much, Jayden uses both hands to push forward and knocks the tower over.

A wide smile of knowing signifies his satisfaction. Jayden is a mighty learner. He has the power to make things happen.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What made you think to stack the boxes alongside Jayden? What do you understand about Jayden as a learner?

Jessica reflects, “I noticed Jayden kept looking at the boxes blankly, possibly unsure of how to use them. I began stacking the boxes to see if he would become more interested in them after seeing how they could be manipulated. Creating a sense of wonder in its simplest form, I suppose!”

What do you think Jayden understands about himself as a learner and citizen in the learning community? What tells you that?

Jessica explains, “As a learner, Jayden has the energy and potential to understand anything. I also know that he needs to be introduced to concepts, materials, people, and environments in many different ways in order for him to make connections in ways that make sense to him. I also see Jayden exploring, taking initiative, observing, and taking risks to learn more about himself and his surroundings. Jayden is not just a toddler; he is a scientist, climber, baker, and sometimes an artist.”



“As a citizen in the learning community, Jayden understands that he has a right to be here and deserves to have as many opportunities as anyone else,” Jessica reflects. “He shows this by participating in all activities with other children. He is not afraid to grab a toy or book and eagerly babble at us (possibly asking us to read it). I think that Jayden feels safe in his environment with Barb and me because he independently explores with confidence. His sense of autonomy tells me he is comfortable testing his limits and taking risks to learn more. At first, Jayden struggled with playing gently with others and taking toys from others. He would become so frustrated he would cry. This told us he was having trouble understanding our expectations, so we saw this as an opportunity to change our approach.”

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What other experiences do you provide that help the group of toddlers to experience their “mightiness” in their own learning?

Other experiences include: open-ended art/sensory activities; outside play—they can challenge themselves while nature provides learning opportunities and a healthy boost; songs and finger-plays—motivate them to make the action, dance, and participate; play along to their own games—they are in control and recognize themselves as a leader and an individual, not just a follower in a group

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Playful Exploration and Problem Solving

Children learn about the properties of objects through

- ☆ playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects
- ☆ experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect

Children test their limits through

- ☆ testing strength, speed, agility, and control over movement

Children learn to negotiate the complexities of joint undertakings through

- ☆ negotiating rules of time, space, and roles

Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems through

- ☆ developing sustained and shared thinking

Dizzy Play

Children take pleasure in being on the edge through

- ☆ playing at games of disrupting and restoring order

Children take pleasure in sharing the joy of laughter through

- ☆ clowning and physical humour

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

- ☆ developing recognition of self
- ☆ co-constructing their identity
- ☆ experiencing growing self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiative

Belonging

Children build respectful and responsive relationships through

- ☆ participating in group initiatives

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How do you provide ways for children to explore on their own, with peers, or with adults? **Think about** materials to act upon for cause and effect, open-ended materials for in-depth investigations, and children's own interests and questions?

How do adults model problem-solving behaviours? **Think about** talking through situations such as building towers, crashing towers, and then rebuilding.

How do you value and respond to rowdy, physical, or dizzy play? What is your comfort level and how does this affect the allowances you make for children's rowdy, physical play? **Think about** times when children's joy has been infectious, for example, repetitive dump and fill or drop and pick-up experiences that youngest children initiate.

How does your concept of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on?



5.9 Group Time with Toddlers



Paulina, an early learning and child care educator, gathers the group of toddlers in the transition to outdoor play while others finish tidying the play space.

Aushon indicates that he would like to sing a song. He stands on a tree block, an impromptu stage, to sing his song. The group that has gathered sings along with him.

Drake is next. "I want to sing too." Drake sings on his own while others listen to his song.

Greta expresses her desire for a turn. She stands on the tree block, then hesitates. Paulina asks, "Would you like us to sing along with you?" Greta nods. Paulina asks, "Should we sing ABC." Greta nods. The whole group sings with Greta who sings along as well.

This group time continues as each willing child takes a turn on the tree stage.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

How are group activities planned? What kinds of activities do you typically do with this group of toddlers?

Paulina considers this group of toddlers. She explains, “Sometimes they want to sing, sometimes they want to dance and sometimes, they want to do yoga. These children want to be doing rather than watching.”

Paulina shares how this group of children are so different than the previous toddler group. She expresses appreciation for the team planning meetings that have provided time for the team to reflect on who these children are as learners.

How do the children let you know when the group time is finished? Are there choices for children who do not want to be part of the group experience?

She explains that the toddler group time is flexible. Sometimes it happens spontaneously as a group of three children gather with an educator to read a story, sing a song, or dance. Paulina

explains that group time offers children choice for their participation; although sometimes, the whole group gathers to ready for a change like the transition for outdoor play. Paulina describes how she watches the children’s body language to know when they are ready to move onto another experience. She explains, “Group time reflects how the group wants to be together.”



Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How do people and policies at your centre honour children's initiatives through thoughtful planning, documentation, and/or responses? **Think about** how your centre builds on children's interests.

How do you support children in new situations? **Think about** children's moments of anxiety and their responses to new or familiar situations. How do you plan for room changes, transitions between activities, field experiences, or walks in the local community.

How does your centre build relationships of trust between people? **Think about** adult-adult, adult-child, child-child relationships. How does the centre's space reflect the lives of the children, their families, and the educators?

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question/answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

Communication and Literacies

Communication practices

Children extend ideas and take actions using language through

- ☆ practicing playing with sounds
- ☆ Initiating and responding to gestural and visual languages

Literate Identities with/in communities

Children co-construct a range of literate identities through

- ☆ learning various local literacy practices within a range of communities

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

- ☆ co-constructing their identities
- ☆ growing in their capacity to express feelings, concerns, and needs

Belonging

Children build respectful and responsive relationships through

- ☆ forming close relationships with a range of adults

Physical Health

Children learn about food and nutrition through

- ☆ understanding the relationship between food and their bodies
- ☆ building confidence to try new foods
- ☆ **making decisions about food consumption**, preparation, serving and clean-up

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question/answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on? (Consider Sophie as a decision maker and citizen; consider how Zinaye demonstrated awareness of Sophie's food choices.) What can this mean for further understanding about how infants relate to the differences between self and others?

Think about verbal and non-verbal expressions of independence and forthright expressions. Think about ways young children demonstrate independence and make choices for themselves. How do you support very young children to make choices for themselves?

How does your centre build relationships of trust between people; in particular, between educators and children? How does the environment encourage children to take initiative and make choices? How do you support their efforts in taking initiative or being a self-starter?

How can you engage in playful conversations with very young children during routine times?

How do you support very young children to engage with one another?

How are children engaged in decision-making in matters that concern them, such as the establishment of rules, rituals, routines, and/or making choices for snack? Think about day-to-day opportunities for children to have a say in such things as eating, napping, and sharing.

Think about ways that you help children to work through problems. Think about the many ways that children express feelings, wants, and needs.



5.10 Making Toast with Toddlers



Trina, an early learning and child care educator in the toddler playroom, has invited a group of children to make toast. She places two slices of bread in the toaster and then offers a slice of bread to each: Charlotte, Cason, Lily, and Cale.

She offers each child a butter knife and immediately, they begin to use the knives to cut butter for their bread. As they enjoy spreading the butter and eating the bread and butter, they talk about the bread in the toaster.





Attentive to Cason and Charlotte's close proximity to the increasingly hot toaster and knowing their inquisitiveness nature, Trina is watchful of the children. She keeps attuned to Cason's animated description of how the toast will pop up.

"Pop! Pop! Pop!" he says as he demonstrates with his hands in the air. Cason continues his description of the toast popping long after the toast is finished and the toaster has been placed on a high counter to cool.



As the cooking experience concludes, the children and Trina talk about and eat the toast they made.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

How do you decide on what to prepare with the children?

Trina reflects, “Cooking is an interest of mine and through talking with families, I discovered that a few of our children enjoyed cooking experiences that involved cooking with heat. As a whole team, the children’s snack menu was being switched-up. So making toast with the children seemed a good beginning. I thought this cooking experience might inspire more experiences involving bread making.”

How do you decide who will be part of the cooking experience?

Trina explains, “The families were talking with us about how they prepare food with their children at home. Lily and Cason already had experience with food. I invited Charlotte and Cale because I thought that they would enjoy the food experience and also because they enjoy smaller group experiences.”

What other types of cooking experiences do you do with children?

“Another day, we made fruit smoothies. Then things really took off. The children seemed much more interested in the fruit and how the smoothies had different colours depending on the fruit we used. The children would talk with one another about the fruit they had cut up to make the smoothie. They had bigger stories to tell one another after making the fruit smoothies than they did making the toast. This is what told us, their educators, that the fruit smoothies held more interest for them.”




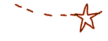




Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

-  developing recognition of self
-  co-constructing their positive self-identities
-  experiencing a growing sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiative
-  being curious and questioning
-  pursuing interests, passions, and strengths
-  persevering and persisting

Physical Health

Children learn about food and nutrition through

-  making decisions about food consumption, preparation, serving, and clean-up routines

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your response to the different identities children take on? **Think about** how policies at your centre honour children's engagement in food preparation. **Think about** what children learn about self and others through food preparation and sharing.

Trina, supported by the toddler playroom team, was able to work with a small group of children around the use of a toaster. Reflect on your own learning and what fuels your energy as a learner. **Think about** the pleasure you take in persistence, perseverance, and accomplishment, and how risk-taking is rewarded, or not, in your own life.



5.11 Music Play



Both Meghan and Jody join Emalee's music play.

Emalee watches both educators respond to her music making.

Through Emalee's continued music play, she demonstrates a keen awareness of how responsive her educators are to her ideas. Meghan sings a familiar song and then asks, "What song?" Emalee responds with another familiar song. Meghan continues the music play by joining Emalee's sing-along.

Curriculum Meaning Making

The following is a question—answer recap of a professional dialogue between educators about this story.

What do you, as Emalee’s educators, know about her and her music play? How do you think Emalee feels about your engagement in her play?

Jody, a new team member, explains, “I’m just beginning to develop relationships with the children. Responding to Emalee’s music play was a way to foster my relationship with her. I hope that by engaging in her play that she feels that I am someone she can trust.”

Meghan knowingly recognizes that Emalee enjoys her interactions with adults and therefore responds to her efforts and initiatives. Meghan extends the instrument play by singing a familiar song with the music. She asks Emalee, “What song?” Emalee sings parts of familiar songs and Meghan sings along. In this way, Meghan ensures that Emalee is the leader in the music play. “Emalee is learning that she is a capable learner who can lead as well as contribute to our shared experiences.”



Meghan recalls Emalee’s enthusiasm when community musicians visited the centre recently. She describes how Emalee was focused on the music and dance the entire presentation—longer than the educators could have imagined.

What do you think this says about Emalee and her sense of identity and sense of belonging?

Meghan explains, “Emalee closely watches us and expects us to respond to her ideas in a positive way.”

Both Jody and Meghan express understanding that Emalee wants and appreciates their presence in her play. They wonder what other musical experiences they could create. Perhaps family cultural experiences could be shared with the group of toddlers.

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

- ☆ co-constructing their identities
- ☆ experiencing a growing sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiative
- ☆ learning who they can depend on for care
- ☆ pursuing interests, passions, and strengths
- ☆ persevering and persisting

Belonging

Children develop a sense of place through

- ☆ generating a shared repertoire of narratives and memories
- ☆ making connections between the child care centre, home, and broader community

Children build responsive and responsive relationships through

- ☆ forming trusted connections with a range of adults
- ☆ growing in their awareness that their actions contribute to the welfare of others
- ☆ participating in group initiatives

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Imagination and Creativity

Children develop dispositions for flexible and fluid thinking through

- ☆ expressing unique and imaginative ideas

Children invent symbols and develop systems of representation through

- ☆ making up their own words, marks, movements, and musical score
- ☆ negotiating the meaning of symbols with others
- ☆ taking up and reshaping cultural experiences

Children create imaginary scenarios in which they explore new possibilities and take possession of their worlds through

- ☆ creating social spaces and shared narratives
- ☆ creating alternative systems of power

Playful Exploration and Problem Solving

Children learn about the properties of objects through

- ☆ playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects
- ☆ experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect
- ☆ creating patterns and relationships

Children learn to negotiate the complexities of joint enterprises through

- ☆ negotiating rules of time, space, and roles

Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems through

- ☆ developing sustained and shared thinking

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Communication and Literacies

Communication Practices

Children form relationships through communication practices by

- ☆ recognizing and responding to human presence
- ☆ becoming attuned to rhyme, pitch, and tone
- ☆ practising and playing with sounds
- ☆ initiating and responding to gestural and visual languages

Children extend ideas and take actions using language

- ☆ to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas
- ☆ to make friends, share materials, structure, negotiate, and create imaginary worlds

Multimodal Literacies

Children explore a variety of sign systems through

- ☆ becoming familiar with the sign systems of language and music

Multimodal meaning making through

- ☆ engaging with the symbols and practices of language
- ☆ engaging with the symbols and practices of music

Literate Identities With/In Communities

Children co-construct a range of literate identities through

- ☆ learning various local literacy practices within a range of communities
- ☆ learning the uniqueness and similarities of their family's literacies and those of others

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How does your concept of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to different identities children take on? **Think about** how Emalee invites her educators into the music making experience and how they extended that play by inviting her to contribute songs for their shared experience.

How do you provide access to materials for children? Emalee was able to access real musical instruments for this musical play. That inspires a notion in Emalee that her music play is real and important.

How do people and policies at your centre honour children's initiatives through thoughtful planning, documentation, and/or responses? **Think about** how Meghan and Jody joined Emalee's invitation.

In what ways are family contributions invited and honoured with/in the centre? **Think about** how one child's initiative can be extended through materials, interest, time, and cultural experiences. I wonder what music Emalee enjoys at home. I wonder what community musical experiences could be experienced.

How do you support and value the worlds and fantasies that children create? **Think about** how Meghan extended the music play by asking Emalee to sing a song and how she followed Emalee's lead by singing along.



5.12 Our Snowman



Sylvie notices Derek's attention on a fallen snowball that had been part of their snowman. She talks with him about how it had fallen—how the snowball was stuck in the snow now.

Derek seems to want to do more about it. It isn't words he uses to express this idea; rather, it is his focused attention and close proximity to the fallen snowball. Recognizing his interest, Sylvie remains with him—talking about the ball in the snow.



Logan and Derek and Sylvie get closer to the fallen snowball. Logan, not convinced that the snowball is really stuck, pushes it with his legs.



It surprises everyone, especially Sylvie, when the snowball begins to move in the snow.

Sylvie asks, "Should we put it back up?"

Yes, Logan nods, he wants the snowman to be together again.





Placing the fallen snowball on top of the bottom ball becomes a fun game of “lift and roll”. Derek thinks it is great fun and discovers that if he gives it a slight nudge, it will roll down. Sometimes the ball rolls down without his nudge.

Sylvie is a willing player in the game, happily replacing it again and again. Derek laughs each time the ball rolls off. Logan watches the playful interaction, patiently waiting for the game to run its course.



Finally, the snowball settles into a resting place on top of the bottom ball. Derek then moves on to something equally interesting; however, Logan remains with the snowman.

When Sylvie notices the black hat under the snow, she retrieves it, shakes the snow off, and places it on top of the snowman. “Hat,” she identifies.

Logan repeats, “Hat.”



Sylvie and Logan then identify the hat on others playing in the play yard. Each time, Logan repeats, "Hat."

Logan seems satisfied now that the snowman is complete again. He moves over to share the story of rebuilding the snowman with me, a silent observer. "Hat," he says pointing to his hat.

Curriculum Meaning Making

Time for professional curriculum meaning making between the family day home provider and pedagogical mentor was organized in response to the structures of family day home life with children. Dropbox and email created a virtual space for sharing the documentation and reflections. What was initially thought of as a limitation made possible Sylvie's deeply thoughtful written reflection.

“I got the snowman story. I have to tell you, reading the story today made me reflect on how meaningful this snowman has become to the children at the day home. I am not sure if I told you the story behind how our snowman came to our house, so I will tell you now.... (it ended up taking me a lot longer than I anticipated writing this story—sorry for the length!).” email from Sylvie, April 12, 2013.

Sylvie continues...

In November when it first snowed, my daughter and a couple of the other girls in the day home built a snowman. A really tiny snowman. They loved it. They dressed it, and it remained there for months. In the meantime, the children and I went for a walk and passed through the school nearby. The children there had rolled balls of snow through the school yard and my daughter wanted to see if she could bring one home. She tried to push it, but it was too big. She asked for help. Four others and I joined in pushing this snowball. We got it to move maybe 20 to 30 feet, and then it became way too hard. We brainstormed ways to get this snowman home. There was no way we were getting it there. We pushed, we pulled, we poked at it, we used our hands, we used our feet... nothing was working. We went to my house and tried to build our own snowman, but we had missed the opportunity and the snow was not working with us at that point. This only fueled their desire—the children really wanted to get that snowball to my backyard! The next day we went for a walk again and found that the original snowball we had wanted to take home had disappeared! Luckily we found three others, and we took them home by pulling them on a sled!

When we got the sled back, we had to figure out how to assemble the snowman. The children tried connecting the pieces with sticks, but they weren't strong enough. It took a lot of problem solving to figure out which balls should go on the bottom, middle, and top. It took some trial and error. With a lot of effort and team work, we managed to get all three snowballs one on top of the other to build a snowman. We stuffed snow all over the place to hold the balls in place. We dressed him; he had several wardrobe changes over the months. We also painted him over and over again with colored water in spray bottles. We changed his arms (sticks) and his face (rocks and leaves) and his outerwear often.

Curriculum Meaning Making

Sylvie continues to reflect...

When he began to break apart, we fixed him, time and time again. When you came over that day, I really thought this was the end of "Frosty" (the children named him). The older children had discussed how he was broken and we wouldn't be able to fix him up because he was melting. I really did not think he would become unstuck and put together another time. I was shocked when Logan and I were pushing our legs on the snowball and it started to move. The day after you came, Frosty had fallen apart again. The game of fixing him up continued.

Fast forward to today (April 2), with all the snow melting over the last few days, Frosty had seen better days... but the snow today was perfect for building with and we managed to fix him up one more time. We were able to salvage his lower body but we made him a new middle and top ball. I know Frosty won't last much longer, and it makes me a little sad... It amazes me that this play has extended since November—nearly five months and they are still invested in our friend, Frosty the snowman.



Frosty has taught the children social skills such as problem solving and turn taking, negotiating, and planning. He has given us opportunities to use our large and small muscles to build him (from dragging him in pieces to our house in a sled to the little details of his buttons and face) and decorate him (spraying red and blue makes purple!). We have counted numerous buttons, eyes, noses, arms, and legs... We have created him and had a sense of accomplishment for our hard work so many times, and we have been sad to see him fall apart just as many times!

Frosty has been the one thing in my yard that I can say has truly captured the attention of all the children in my care from my 18-month-olds right to my oldest 5-year-olds.

Frosty came to us from snow. We have manipulated him and changed him and made him bigger and watched him shrink and changed his colours and I actually think for awhile he had a baby snowman or snow pet.... A lot of day home providers stay inside and hibernate in the winter months. I often worry that as a single mother on a budget, I won't be able to supply the children with all the materials and equipment that I want to supply to them as a caregiver. But I

Curriculum Meaning Making

am learning that there is so much valuable play going on right here in my backyard with snow, sticks, rocks, and leaves! I can't wait for next winter to do it all again! (Well okay, maybe I can wait—but I am excited for next winter all the same!)

Sylvie, early learning and child care educator

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Well-Being

Emotional Health and Positive Self-Identities

Children develop a sense of self through

- ☆ developing recognition of self
- ☆ co-constructing their identities
- ☆ experiencing a growing sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiatives
- ☆ being curious and questioning
- ☆ pursuing interests, passions, and strengths
- ☆ persevering and persisting

Belonging

Children develop a sense of place through

- ☆ generating a shared repertoire of narratives and memories

Children build respectful and responsive relationships through

- ☆ developing cherished as well as casual friendships
- ☆ forming close relationships with a range of adults
- ☆ growing in their awareness that their actions contribute to the well-being of others
- ☆ participating in group initiatives.

Physical Health

Children explore body and movement through

- ☆ participating in a variety of physical activities indoors and out

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Play and Playfulness

Playful Explorations and Problem Solving

Children learn about the properties of objects through

- ★ playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects
- ★ experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect
- ★ creating patterns and relationships...sequencing and grouping

Children test their limits through

- ★ testing strength, speed, agility, and control over movement

Children learn to negotiate the complexities of joint enterprises through

- ★ making collective plans and decisions about their play

Children learn to employ creative approaches to identifying and working out practical problems through

- ★ developing sustained and shared thinking
- ★ raising questions and making hypotheses about how and why things happen
- ★ creating imagined worlds in which they can explore possibilities and create alternative solutions

Dizzy Play

Children take pleasure in being on the edge through

- ★ playing at games of disrupting and restoring order

Children take pleasure in sharing the joy of laughter through

- ★ clowning and physical humour

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Communication and Literacies

Communicative Practices

Children form relationships through communicative practices by

- ★ recognizing and responding to human presence and touch*
- ★ practising and playing with sounds*
- ★ initiating and responding to gestural and visual languages*

Children learn the conventions of their language through

- ★ growing in their understanding of vocabulary*

Curriculum Connections

Making links to holistic goals

Diversity and Social Responsibility

Inclusiveness and Equity

Children engage in practices that respect diversity through

- ☆ learning about and participating in helping projects—locally and globally

Democratic Practices

Children learn to be responsible and responsive members of the community through

- ☆ giving help, comfort, and encouragement, and valuing others' contributions
- ☆ respecting the materials, equipment, and spaces shared with others

Children practise democratic decision-making, making choices in matters that affect them through

- ☆ beginning to understand their rights and responsibilities and those of others
- ☆ voicing their preferences and opinions and developing an awareness of other points of view
- ☆ questioning, co-constructing, and reworking rules and procedures

Children practise fairness and social justice through

- ☆ identifying issues and becoming socially active in their local communities

Sustainable Futures

Children develop a sense of appreciation for human creativity and innovation through

- ☆ learning to appreciate beauty, creativity, and innovation in art, architecture, and technologies

Children learn about natural resource development and manufacturing through

- ☆ making connections between raw materials and finished products
- ☆ developing appreciation for the work of others

Children learn environmentally and socially responsible practices through

- ☆ participating in local restoration and regeneration projects

Curriculum Reflections

Considering implications for further learning and practice

How does your conception of childhood and what it means to be a child influence your responses to the different identities children take on? **Think about** verbal and non-verbal expressions of affection, anger, shyness, frustration, risk-taking behaviour, independence, and forthright expressions. **Think about** how children respond to people, places, and materials. Consider how Sylvie’s listening and attention to the toddlers resulted in fixing the snowman.

How does your child care setting build relationships of trust between people? **Think about** how Sylvie responded to Derek’s game of “lift and roll”.

How do you provide ways for children to explore on their own, with peers, or with adults? **Think about** materials to act upon for cause-and-effect—open-ended materials for in-depth investigations, children’s own interests, or questions.

How do you value and respond to physical and/or rowdy dizzy play? What is your comfort level and how does this affect the allowances you make for children’s physical play? Do you enable children to lead games, such as the “lift and roll” game Derek played with Sylvie.

Endnotes

Acknowledgments

1. Please note that organizational and departmental affiliations and names may have changed during or following the project.

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Section 1: Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Introduction

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Glossary

AGENTIC

Agent is defined as “a person or thing that causes something to happen.”¹ In early learning and child care, children are thought of as being agents in their own learning processes and acting in **agentic** ways (that is, as an agent) when they are actively exploring and investigating objects and building theories about why and how things happen.

CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship refers to new thinking about “the young child as a social actor who shapes her and his own identities and creates and communicates valid views about the social world and has a right to participate in it.”² This thinking helps us view young children as citizens in early childhood communities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by nearly every country in the world in 1989, is a legal document that outlines the rights of children as citizens.

CO-CONSTRUCT

Co-construct refers to a process of creating in relationship with others. Learning takes place in a social context—as children interact with and work together with educators, other children, and materials.³ The prefix “co” is used throughout the framework to remind us of the importance of social relationships in children’s early learning.

CO-INQUIRY

The **co-inquiry** process originated with John Dewey (1993; 1938). Dewey believed that “teachers construct knowledge through inquiry with [others] who help them refine and clarify their ideas about their learning and teaching experiences.”⁴ As educators you engage in co-inquiry as a way to solve problems, as well as in professional development processes toward understanding and improving your teaching practices.⁵ In Play, Participation, and Possibilities, the co-inquiry process provides you with a highly connected process of observation and documentation, which focuses your reflection and interpretation of children’s play and learning. This process informs further planning and action in ways that expand and extend children’s exploration and experimentation in the world. These three parts make up a cyclical and evolving process toward helping you explore the teaching and learning relationship in early childhood play and learning.

CROSS-CHECKING

Cross-checking is a process that begins with children's daily experiences: playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring within early learning and child care programs. When you, as educators, observe and document children in daily experiences and use curriculum framework goals to describe and interpret what they have observe children doing, they are cross-checking curriculum. This curriculum cross-checking positions "curriculum as something co-created and negotiated...whereby curriculum emerges from relationships rather than from requirements".⁶

CULTURAL PRACTICES

Cultural practices refer to the understandings, patterns of behaviours, practices, and values shared by a group of people. These shared understandings help groups of people make sense of their world and communicate with one another.⁷

CURRICULUM

Curriculum is the whole range of experiences, planned and unplanned, direct and indirect, that occurs within an environment designed to foster learning.⁸

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Curriculum Frameworks “establish the value base and programme standards on which early childhood services ... are to be founded. The aim is to encourage a shared sense of purpose between parents and early childhood centres; to promote social and cultural values important for society; to ensure a certain unity of standards and to inform and facilitate communication between staff, parents, and children.”⁹

Curriculum frameworks may include principles, values, and goals of the program, as well as program standards and guidelines through which educators support children’s learning.⁹

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES OF LEARNING

A **developmental perspective of learning** describes the naturally developing child undergoing the process of individual growth and change as she and he progress through predictable age-appropriate developmental stages. As they develop, children acquire the following skills: social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, speech/language, and physical including fine and gross motor.

DISPOSITIONS TO LEARN

Dispositions to learn¹⁰ refer to the manner in which a child approaches learning, individually and within groups. Dispositions to learn are coming from within each child and emerging over time inclinations that educators and others can nurture, strengthen, or diminish through our everyday interactions with each child in the social context of learning and living inclinations that each child draws upon in both new and familiar learning experiences having culturally specific meanings and value revealed through family, social, and cultural practices and traditions.

ENCOUNTERS WITH MATERIALS

Encounters with materials¹¹ is a process whereby one acts upon materials and in doing so, the individual builds an awareness of how the material responds to and reflects their ideas. Encounters with materials may involve combining materials with elements such as light, water, or reducing materials into parts and then restructuring the parts to construct a deeper understanding of the shapes, consistency, and colours of materials. The process of building awareness of materials is made over time in the context of exploration and investigation—playing with materials.

ENVIRONMENT AS THIRD TEACHER

Environment as third teacher¹² refers to the philosophy from Reggio Emilia, which emphasizes the profound impact that the physical and relational organization of the classroom has on children's experience. It insists on an active role of the educator as a purposeful and deliberate planner and decision-maker about the classroom environment. Consideration is given to the strengths, interests, and desires of the particular group of children in the class. Children also have a role in maintaining, modifying, and renewing their play and learning environments.

EQUITY

In early childhood communities, the term **equity** is primarily concerned with providing every child with access to fair, just, and non-discriminatory early learning and child care. Equity refers to ideas of fairness and social justice in order to provide different treatment or special measures for individuals or groups to ensure they have equal opportunities to succeed. Equity does not mean providing the same experiences for every child; instead it requires educators to recognize and actively deal with often unseen barriers to learning. It is important to make the distinction between equity and equality. **Equality** refers to the same conduct in communication, contact, quantity, or values for all individuals.¹³

FAMILY

For the purpose of the early learning and child care framework, we have selected an inclusive definition of **family** as defined by the Vanier Institute of the Family.¹⁴

Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth, and/or adoption or placement, and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following:

- physical maintenance and care of group members
- addition of new members through procreation or adoption
- socialization of children
- social control of members
- production, consumption, distribution of goods and services
- affective nurturance—love

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

Intercultural competency involves adapting to cultural differences through increased intercultural sensitivity, an appreciation of multiple perspectives, and the ability to behave appropriately and effectively in another cultural context. Underlying intercultural competency is the understanding that cultural differences are embedded in family practices and traditions and that this diversity is a resource for learning and strengthening early childhood communities. Intercultural competency is not focused on creating neutrality by making us all the same; rather, intercultural competency deliberates on our differences in ways that honour multiple ways of learning, living, knowing, and know how, and potentially reshapes early learning practices in ways that highlight our cultural diversity.¹⁵

LEARNING STORIES

Learning Stories were developed by Margaret Carr, University of Waikato, New Zealand, and Wendy Lee, Director of the Educational Leadership Project, New Zealand. A **Learning Story** is a story that educators tell to the child, and family, and themselves, about the child's play and learning.¹⁶ There is not one right way; rather, it is a story that begins with the child's initiative in the care, play, and learning environment and is shared through the educators noticing, documenting, and telling. Stories are always about positive events and communicate what is valued in the early childhood program. The story unfolds as the storyteller tells of their observation, explains why the child's play and learning is significant, and identifies possible next steps for the child's learning to continue. Learning stories often invite the child and/or the family to contribute their thoughts and insights.

MEANING MAKING

Meaning Making “is evaluation as a participatory process of interpretation and judgment, made within [local communities] and in relation to certain critical questions: for example, what is our image of the child? What do we want for children? What is education and care?”¹⁷ As a participatory and democratic process, meaning making is focused on documented moments of children’s learning and reveals multiple ways of knowing and understanding curriculum moments in early childhood settings.

MIGHTY LEARNERS

A **mighty learner** brings body and mind—his or her whole being—to play and learning. To be mighty means to be powerful, robust, vigorous, stalwart, and awe-inspiring. The image of the child described within this curriculum framework is a strong, resourceful, capable child—a mighty learner and citizen. Every child is a mighty learner.

MULTIMODAL LITERACIES

Multimodal literacies involve how children make use of various sign systems as they construct meaning through multiple modes of image, print, gaze, gesture, movement, and speech, often using these modes simultaneously.¹⁸

PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

Pedagogical documentation is a tool of meaning making—for reflecting on and revealing the way people look at and think about early childhood practices.¹⁹ Documented moments of children and educators create the focus for pedagogical dialogue through images, child-made artifacts, and recorded words. This documentation provides the forum for sharing perspectives and examining the meaning of practice and decisions in relation to how one perceives the experiences of the children and their families in early childhood centres. Pedagogical documentation is a democratic process whereby value is placed on many perspectives that contribute to a broader understanding of what may be happening for children, families, and the early childhood community.

PLACES OF VITALITY

Places of vitality are strong, active communities that welcome and invite participation of both children and adults. This community vitality is foundational to the ideas described in the Alberta curriculum framework beginning with ***The Image of the Child: A Mighty Learner and Citizen*** and is expanded on in ***A Practice of Relationships: Your Role as an Early Learning and Child Care Educator***; ***Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children's Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development***; ***Responsive Environments: Time, Space, Materials, and Participation***; and ***Mighty Learners: Nurturing Children's Dispositions to Learn***. Places of vitality support the belief that children are strong, resourceful, and capable learners and participating citizens.

PLAY

Play is a complex and diverse phenomenon in both the animal world and human culture. There are so many different kinds of play that it is difficult to define. Children's play is most frequently defined as a behaviour or an activity "that is intrinsically motivated, controlled by the players, concerned with process rather than product, non-literal, free of externally imposed rules and characterized by the active engagement of the players."²⁰

Play scholars tend to emphasize the perspective of the players in defining play:

In spite of the complexity and diversity of play behaviour, there is general agreement by specialists in the field that play is controlled by children rather than by adults, and that it is undertaken for its own sake and not for prescribed purposes. The term "free play" is often used to distinguish this from organized recreational and learning activities.... The characteristics of free play—such as control, uncertainty, flexibility, novelty, non-productivity—are what produce a high degree of pleasure and, simultaneously, the incentive to continue to play.²¹

POST-FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF LEARNING

A **post-foundational perspective of learning** encompasses a variety of perspectives, for example, postmodernisms, post-structuralisms, and post-colonialisms. Post-foundationalism recognizes that any phenomenon—early learning and child care education for example—has multiple meanings, that any knowledge is perspectival, and that all experience is subject to interpretation. Recently these theories have informed practice and allowed educators to reconceptualize approaches, unpack taken-for-granted assumptions about children, learning, and practice, and think about how things might be otherwise.²²

PRACTICE OF RELATIONSHIPS

A **practice of relationships**²³ describes the complex and dynamic relationships with diverse community members and begins as you learn with and alongside children and families. When you engage in a practice of relationships, you create places of vitality in early childhood communities with children—as mighty learners and citizens.

RELATIONSHIP

Relationship refers to the notion that children's well-being is profoundly influenced by the quality of the relationships that they experience. Relationships that are deep, caring, and stable provide predictability and security in children's lives. Relationships are sustained by interactions with people, events, and materials that further the child's, their family's, and educator's well-being, learning, and development with the intent of learning from each other.²⁴

RESPONSIVE CARE

Responsive care occurs in positive and beneficial interactions between educators and children when educators observe and read children's signals and communication and then respond with understanding, to give children a sense of being cared for and cared about.²⁵

RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Responsive environments embrace social, physical, and psychological elements. Children flourish in environments that are beautiful, joyful, and rich with opportunities for sensory stimulation, social interaction, language, exploration, manipulation, and representation. The environment is open and flexible, allowing for playful exploration alone or in groups, problem solving, and creativity. Materials and equipment are conducive to playful exploration, are developmentally and culturally appropriate, support language growth, and challenge children to think and learn—sand, water, blocks, modelling materials, paints and “beautiful” stuff for construction, collage, drawing and writing materials, toys and games, picture books and other print materials, and scientific, mathematical and household tools.²⁶

SCAFFOLDING

Scaffolding, within the socio-cultural perspective, is a pedagogical practice, in which the educator's decisions, actions, and interactions build on the children's existing knowledge and skills to enhance their learning.²⁷

SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF LEARNING

A **socio-cultural perspective of learning** is informed by Vygotsky's theories and recognizes that social and cultural processes shape all aspects of childhood.²⁸ This perspective sees learning as a context-dependent, socially mediated process that results in development.