

# EDUCATORS' GUIDE TO

## **Capable, Confident, and Curious:**

### NOVA SCOTIA'S EARLY LEARNING CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

IMPLEMENTATION DRAFT 2018–2019





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**Educator's Guide to Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework**

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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
What is an Early Learning Curriculum Framework? .....	4
Terminology .....	5
<b>Early Childhood Education Foundations</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Quality .....	9
Image of the Child .....	10
Family, Community, and Culture .....	13
Role of the Educator .....	23
Learning Goals, Objectives, and Strategies .....	27
<b>Principles and Practices of Early Learning</b> .....	<b>35</b>
Play-based Learning .....	37
Relationships .....	42
Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity .....	45
Reflective Practice and Intentional Teaching .....	53
Learning Environments .....	57
Assessment and Documentation .....	61
<b>Appendix A: What Do Nova Scotia Educators Say?</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>Appendix B: Resources</b> .....	<b>69</b>
Books .....	69
Curriculum Program Guides .....	70
Online Resources .....	71
Websites .....	71
<b>Appendix C: Occupational Standards</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>73</b>





# Introduction





# Introduction

This Educators' Guide builds on the foundation set by *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework*, and supports educators as they implement the framework in their early childhood education programs.

Educators responsible for implementing the framework understand child development, how children learn, and sound early childhood pedagogy. This document is not a How-to guide, and does not provide specific program activities or ideas. Instead it

- reviews the key elements of Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework
- poses strategies and reflective inquiry approaches for educators as they focus on implementing the framework
- provides further explanation of the pedagogical practices outlined in the framework
- is intended to be used by all educators working with all age groups of children—from infants and toddlers, to preschool-age, to school-age
- describes the experiences of Nova Scotia educators—in their own words—during the framework's pilot phase

Educators are encouraged to build on the material in this guide over time in order to refine their approaches, and ensure high quality experiences for children and their families.

This guide may also serve as the beginning of professional development plans for educators, individually or as teams. As educators work through the various elements they may identify areas where they and their colleagues may benefit from additional professional development activities.

**Note:** Underlined terms can be found in the *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* glossary.



## What is an Early Learning Curriculum Framework?

An early learning curriculum framework is a guide for educators who work in early childhood education programs with children from birth to age 8. Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework

- identifies the concept of the Image of the Child, which is a shared belief in what we value about children and childhood; describes a vision of children as competent and confident learners, with ideas and opinions that have value; children are seen as co-constructors of their own learning, who bring their contexts of family, community, culture, and language to learning environments, that reflect children's lived experiences
- sets out broad learning goals to guide the development of early learning environments rather than indicators to measure children's progress; for example, the learning goal of "well-being" guides the design, content, and time for children's play, rather than measuring children's achievement of "well-being"
- identifies exemplary pedagogical practices for educators that guide them in their work with children



In many ways, it is just as important to understand what Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework is not, as much as it is important to understand its purpose and intent. The framework

- is not a prescriptive document, as it does not set out specific program activities that are to be followed
- does not identify themes for educators to use in planning their programs
- does not provide cookie-cutter approaches to early childhood education, so that all programs look the same

The framework appreciates that early learning curriculums are not a one-size-fits-all type of approach. If all programs look the same, then the framework is not being implemented as intended. Each program should reflect the different families, communities, cultures, and languages that are relevant to the children. A program in downtown Halifax will likely not be identical to a program in a small rural community, and vice versa. In the same way, a program should not simply be repeated from one year to the next, since new children are enrolled, children in the program get older, families change, and even communities' characteristics may change over time.

## Terminology

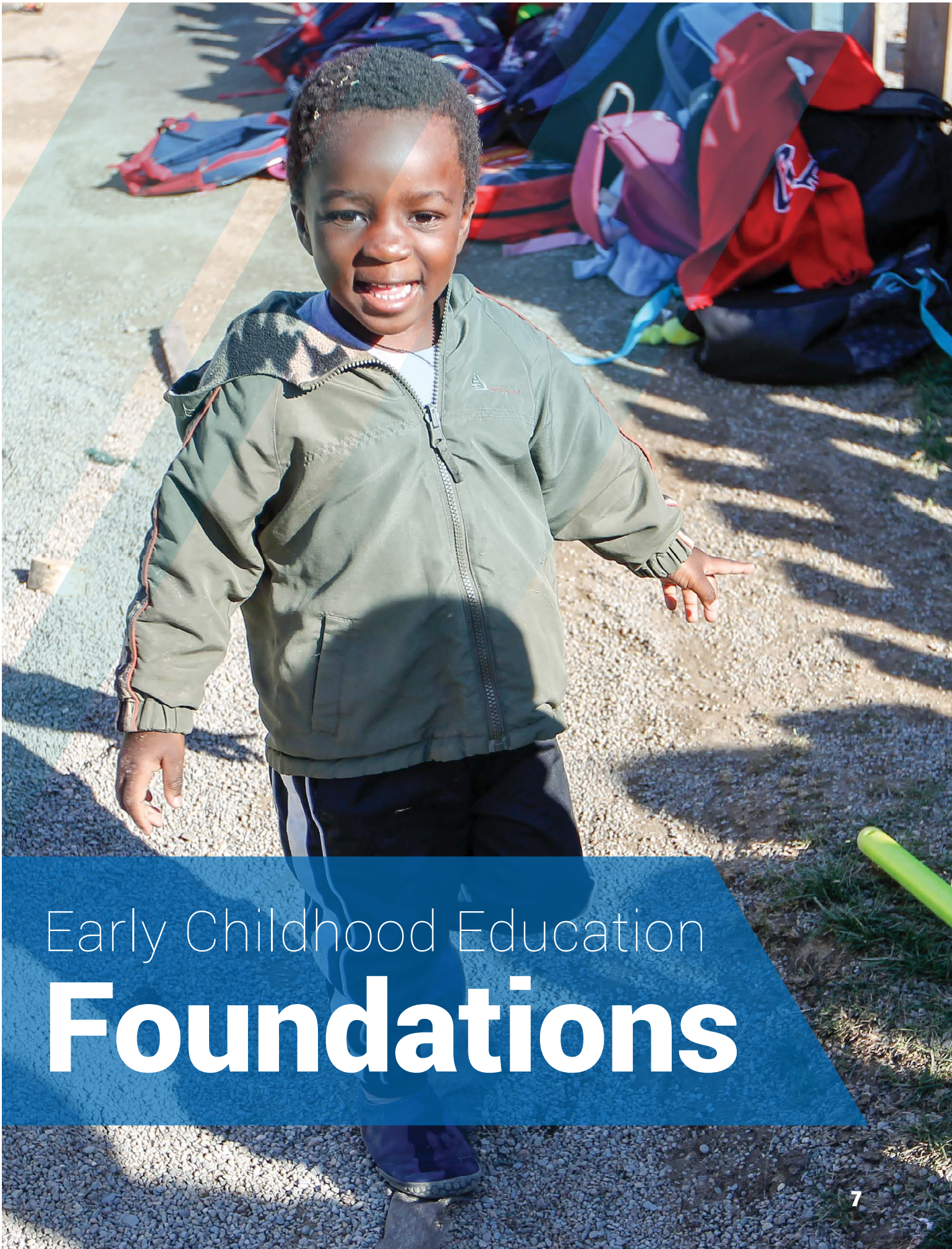
Throughout this document, the term *educator* refers to early childhood educators (ECEs) and early childhood practitioners who work directly with children in early childhood education programs and settings.

The term *children with additional needs* has been used to refer to children who need additional supports to participate in early childhood education programs' activities and reach developmental goals. This term may be used interchangeably with children with special needs, *children with exceptional needs*, and *children with disabilities*. Educators will find a range of terminology in resources and literature.









Early Childhood Education

# Foundations





# Early Childhood Education Foundations

## Quality

The concept of quality in early childhood education programs is one that has been researched, discussed, debated, and woven into numerous policy statements across Canada and around the world. There is international agreement that the quality of the early childhood education program experience is the key ingredient that either enhances or hinders child development outcomes for children who participate in such programs (Sylva 2007).

Quality in early childhood education programs is typically understood to include:

- **structural elements:** Things that can be counted or quantifiably measured (e.g., ratios, group size, square footage, staff qualifications); these are the types of things that are typically addressed through licensing regulations
- **process elements:** Things that are more difficult to measure in a quantitative way (e.g., staff interactions with children, nurturing environments, responsiveness); these types of elements are addressed through early learning curriculum frameworks, and recommended pedagogical practices

While process elements are difficult to measure, they are known to make the most difference in terms of enhanced child outcomes. Researchers have demonstrated that structural elements are likely to predict process elements. Educators with post-secondary education specific to early childhood education are more likely to engage in positive and responsive interactions with children. Smaller group sizes and staff-to-children ratios also contribute to more positive interactions.

Canadian research suggests that human resource factors, including wages and working conditions, impact quality (Goelman et al. 2000). Policy research conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care* identified that early learning curriculum frameworks contributed to the enhancement of quality in early childhood education programs (OECD 2001). In 2004, the OECD recommended that Canada move toward the development of an early learning curriculum framework (OECD 2004). Since then, this challenge has been taken up by provincial and territorial governments.



Early learning curriculum frameworks promote quality in early childhood education programs by

- encouraging the development of a shared Image of the Child
- identifying the important influences of families, communities, and cultures
- emphasizing the importance of inclusion for all children, as well as respect for diversity
- providing a common language for educators to share learnings and explore challenges
- outlining high-quality pedagogical practices
- focusing on authentic assessment

## Image of the Child

The concept of Image of the Child was first introduced by Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy:

*There are hundreds of different images of the child. Each one of you has inside yourself an image of the child that directs you as you begin to relate to a child. This theory within you pushes you to behave in certain ways; it orients you as you talk to the child, listen to the child, observe the child. It is very difficult for you to act contrary to this internal image. For example, if your image is that boys and girls are very different from one another, you will behave differently in your interactions with each of them.*

(Edwards, Gandini, and Forman 1993)



Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework promotes a shared Image of the Child. This image is founded on strong beliefs that children

- have unlimited potential
- are eager to interact with and contribute to the world
- have fundamental rights to realize and expand their potential
- are driven by curiosity and imagination
- are capable of and delight in taking responsibility for their own learning
- listen and are listened to
- have an enormous need to love and to be loved

The way that children's strengths and abilities are recognized, understood, and valued by the people around them is key to implementing Nova Scotia's framework.

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*We all have different images of the child, but we rarely make them explicit in our practice. By examining our practice, perhaps we can gain insight into our image of the child and make this image visible to ourselves as early childhood educators, and to families and children. By making the image visible, we are able to describe and understand in depth our beliefs about children and how those beliefs influence our practices and relationships with children.*

*By making our image of the child visible to ourselves and by talking about it with other early childhood educators, families and ultimately the children themselves, we can further our aims to create respectful programs and environments, which build on the capabilities and complex identities of the children we care for.*

(British Columbia Ministry of Education n.d., 3)

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Likewise, the framework also underscores the importance of children within the founding cultures of Nova Scotia. For example, in reference to children of African ancestry, Dr. Asa Hilliard III, a distinguished African American scholar and psychologist, shares that

*"Many of us do not know it, but African people have thousands of years of well-recorded deep thought and educational experience. Teaching and the shaping of character is one of our great strengths. In our worldview, our children are seen as divine gifts of our creator. Our children, their families, and the social and physical environment must be nurtured together."*

While the framework sets out a foundational Image of the Child, each educator's image is unique, and influenced by their own childhood experiences, family background, spiritual and cultural values, experiences as an adult, experiences as an educator, and their own temperament and personality.

An educator's Image of the Child influences their interactions with children and families, and underpins the decisions they make about the learning environment. If an educator believes that children are independent and can make choices, the learning environment will provide children with opportunities to explore and make their own decisions. Alternatively, if an educator believes that children are not capable of making decisions, then they will often choose activities for the children and plan activities and schedules that are based on a timetable that is more suited to adults than to the needs and preferences of children.

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

When developing their Image of the Child, educators may wish to take time to reflect on their beliefs, values, and practice. This may take place as an individual activity, followed by a collaborative discussion with all educators in the program. It is important that each early childhood education program articulate their collective Image of the Child—one which will guide professional practice.

The following questions are intended to support educators' critical reflection about their Image of the Child:

- Do I have an Image of the Child? How do I describe it?
- What personal values or experiences influence the way I think about children and childhood?
- Are there developmental theories that I've studied that have shaped the way I think about children?
- Have my views about children and childhood changed since I've been working with young children? How and why? What has influenced those changes?
- Is my practice consistent with my Image of the Child?
- Is my image compatible with the images of children expressed or demonstrated by my colleagues?
- What are my personal views on inclusion, gender equity, diversity, and sexual orientation? Do my personal views impact my ability to work with young children and their families?
- How can I encourage my colleagues and others to have conversations about topics such as racism, gender equity, homophobia, and other sensitive issues?

## Family, Community, and Culture

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework very clearly recognizes the critical importance of family relationships for child development. It explains that children's lives are shaped by their families, communities, and culture, and that their earliest development and learning takes place through these relationships. Families are often children's most influential teachers, and building genuine and respectful partnerships with children's parents, guardians, and families helps educators build diversity and familiarity into children's learning environments.

### Family engagement

Engaging families in children's early learning provides early childhood education programs with a better understanding of children's relationships and family dynamics. Family involvement also benefits children, as parents can extend learning activities from the program to the home. One of the most effective things programs can do to engage families in children's learning is to make the learning visible. When educators make learning visible they help families understand the connections between what children do in the program and the development that happens through those activities, such as the learning concepts inherent in sand and water play; the opportunities for social development when children learn to take turns; and how complex socio-dramatic play gives children the opportunity to develop language skills, practice conflict resolution, and learn to take the perspective of others when they take on different roles.

*When we see families as experts who know their children better than anyone else and have important information to share, we value and engage them in a meaningful way.*

(Ontario Ministry of Education 2014)

Family engagement encompasses more than family involvement. It goes beyond newsletters and information nights. It is more meaningful than inviting families to help build a new outdoor play area. Family engagement means that families are invited to give their opinions about the program's policies, participate and engage with other families in learning about how young children learn, and provide feedback about their child's experiences at the program; they are invited to be a part of children's learning communities, in partnership with educators and early childhood education programs. Community engagement implies similar collaborative relationships with community organizations and other professionals who are involved in the lives of the children in early learning programs.



## Cultural influences

Respect for cultural and linguistic differences is more than celebrating different holidays. It involves understanding families' cultural values, experiences, and ways of knowing. Cultural identity comes from people having access to their own culture—its institutions, land, language, knowledge, social resources, economic resources; community and lifestyle, social and environmental codes for living, nutrition, safety, cultural expression and cultural endorsement, and the protection of physical, spiritual, and emotional integrity of children and families (Durie 2003).

*Being culturally competent doesn't mean denying our own culture or having to know everything about all cultures. Rather, it is about being willing to find out more about the cultural identities of the children and families in our community and using this knowledge to develop trusting relationships, respectful interactions, understandings of alternate world views, meaningful learning experiences, appropriate assessments, and firm affirmation of each child and their family.*

(Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010)

Culturally competent educators understand the importance of diversity in communities and in learning environments, and are inclusive of all family groups. This awareness and understanding ultimately impacts on the well-being of all children and families.

For example, French language early learning programming helps children develop positive French linguistic and cultural identities. For school-age children who participate in regulated early childhood education programs before and after school, collaborative working relationships and ongoing communication between the program and school is key to the child's well-being in both environments. When these types of partnerships extend to the wider community, including other support professionals, well-being is strengthened for all.

Early childhood education programs are places and spaces for building social connections and a feeling of belonging to the community. Developing relationships and working in partnership requires understanding and respecting each family's nature, culture, and language(s). Children's sense of well-being and their dispositions toward learning are enhanced when there are obvious connections between their family, community, and early childhood education program. When they establish genuine relationships and partnerships with families, educators find ways to listen to and speak with families.

## Nova Scotia's founding cultures

*The culture that first inhabited our province—the Mi'kmaq—and those that came after—African Nova Scotian, Acadian, English, Gaelic, and others—have helped to define and shape Nova Scotia's unique voice and character. We will use the strength of these cultures to help embrace, nurture, and support those new and emerging cultural voices that are helping to shape the Nova Scotia of today and tomorrow.*

(Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage 2017, 4)

### Implications for early childhood education practices

It is generally accepted that a child's cultural background influences learning (Cole, Hakkarainen, and Bredikyte 2010; Chen 2009; Levy 2008; Willis 1989). As infants, children do not consciously make sense of and analyze their surroundings, but they very quickly begin to understand patterns of activities, different ways of responding, and the sounds and tone of their first language.

There is a substantial body of knowledge that suggests there are connections between children's cultural backgrounds, learning styles and how they make sense of the world (Cole 2010). There are developmental considerations regarding how children make sense of their world; at a very young age, children do not consciously do this:

*"Children are born already knowing the characteristic 'tune' of their native language, learning that is displayed when different attention is given to vocalizations in that language."*

(Kuhl 2006, in Cole 2010)

Educators working in minority language settings create environments that nurture the development of children in that language and culture. This awareness and understanding ultimately positively affects the well-being of children and families as a whole.

### The Mi'kmaq

The Mi'kmaq are the original inhabitants of Nova Scotia and early childhood education programs in Mi'kmaw communities play an important role in the preservation and enhancement of the Mi'kmaw language and culture. These programs are managed in a way that respects the uniqueness of each First Nations community. All children participate in language and cultural activities supported by developmentally appropriate resources that integrate cultural teachings, such as The Seven Sacred Teachings and the Medicine Wheel. Since they are situated in First Nations communities, educators welcome Elders and community members to the centres to share their knowledge of language, history, and culture

including traditional foods and crafts, drumming and dancing, hunting, basket weaving, and drum making. Some centres have community members who speak Mi'kmaw to support language instruction and all centers receive Mi'kmaw language resources and training opportunities. The centres also provide children with opportunities to have adventures in their communities, such as nature walks on medicine trails and visits to places of interest.

Educators in Mi'kmaw communities recognize the important role early childhood education programs have in child development and preserving and enhancing the Mi'kmaw language and culture.

In 2015, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey released its own curriculum framework for Kindergarten that was developed by educators and specialists in Mi'kmaw communities. The framework encourages educators to introduce activities that respond to children's individual learning styles and unique linguistic and cultural identities. It focuses on the areas of

- physical health and well-being
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive development
- social competence
- communication skills and general knowledge

The development of the framework was guided by principles that included a focus on promotion of the Mi'kmaw language and culture, collaboration with parents and guardians, and inclusion of Elders as support in sustaining and enriching the Mi'kmaw language and culture.



First Nations researchers have explored approaches to promote early learning for First Nations children. They have noted that early learning is defined as a developmental process that begins at conception and continues to age 6. Early learning in Indigenous communities is holistic and includes developing children's cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects.

Culture is learned through language, ceremonies, gatherings, stories, music, games, arts and crafts, as well as land-based experiences. It is important for service providers to have a good understanding of their own cultural beliefs and to respect the diversity of cultural beliefs of the children and families they are working with. Elders and other resource people are considered the most important means for cultural knowledge to be transmitted to children and families. (Best Start Resource Centre 2010)

In a study on the views of Indigenous parents, Elders, and educators about assessing children's cognitive development and readiness for school, participants emphasized the importance of building self-esteem as a foundation for learning. In addition to opportunities to enhance oral language, and emergent literacy and numeracy, respondents emphasized a need for more content focusing on community history (how children are related to the land), genealogy (who children are related to), and cultural participation (preparing for roles in ceremonies and sustenance using natural resources) (Ball 2010, 1).

## Acadians and Francophones

Nova Scotia's French-speaking population is dispersed throughout the province, from Yarmouth to Cape Breton Island. Traditionally based in rural areas, recent years have seen rising numbers of Acadians and Francophones migrating to Halifax. French is a first language for 11,935 people living Halifax, representing 34.5 per cent of the total population who speak French as their first language in the province. Overall, about 10 per cent, or 94,310, of Nova Scotians speak French.

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages emphasizes the importance of children learning French during their early years, noting that

*"In minority communities, early childhood is particularly important, on both an individual and a community level. For young children, this is a key time in terms of learning the French language, building identity and developing a sense of belonging to the community. It is also a critical period for community vitality and development."*

(Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages 2016, 4)



As a minority language community in Nova Scotia, French early learning programming helps children develop positive French linguistic and cultural identities. These programs teach children about their identities as Francophone individuals, as well as part of the French-speaking community. Educators and parents help children to value both of Canada's official languages (Gouvernement de Nouveau-Brunswick 2008).

## **African Nova Scotians**

Much of African Nova Scotian culture is rooted in West African culture, traditions, and language. As a result, many African Nova Scotians share distinct cultural characteristics, including patterns of communication, patterns of behaviours, and, "... culturally different ways of learning and making meaning" (Hammond 2015). Willis (1989, 47) suggests, following a review of research, that children of African ancestry generally learn in ways "... characterized by factors of social/affective emphases, harmony, holistic perspectives, expressive creativity, and nonverbal communication".

It is also critical to recognize that the founding cultures of African Nova Scotian communities are diverse and that these cultures are expressed, nurtured, and experienced in many different ways.

Research shows children benefit when there is a relationship between their culture and early childhood education program instruction (Hammond 2015). Therefore, it is important for educators to understand African Nova Scotian history and culture to sufficiently address the learning needs of African Nova Scotian children.

Research also supports the framework's emphasis on the importance of developing relationships that are built on mutual respect and trust with children and their families. Genuinely caring educators who hold high expectations, build and maintain relationships with children and their parents are key to increasing engagement and supporting children in their achievement of program goals (Hammond 2015).

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*Culturally responsive practice requires educators to also seek to understand each child, their knowledges and to utilize this knowledge as a bridge to new learning (Ladson-Billings 1995). In addition, educators must also be committed to utilizing validation, affirmation, building and bridging within their professional practice (Hollie 2015).*

*Educators should create and apply strategies that optimize the learning of all children by incorporating culturally responsive teaching. (Hammond 2015)*

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Many African Nova Scotian children often learn best when educators use culturally responsive practices, such as

- **oral language:** Develop children's oral language skills by building on the strong oral tradition of storytelling in the African Nova Scotian communities, by
  - recognizing teachable moments for telling stories
  - telling stories using wordless picture books
  - reading folktales
  - bringing in community members to share stories

While supporting a child's oral language development, it is important to respect, value, and validate a child's home language.

- **movement:** Cultural groups from the oral tradition tap into the brain's memory systems using movement (Hammond 2015). Educators should include movement activities that incorporate creative expression by providing opportunities for singing songs, dancing, and drumming.
- **collaboration:** The ancestral cultures of African Nova Scotian children were rooted in collectivism (Hammond 2015). Educators should provide collaborative learning opportunities to allow children to build on their own understandings, and to contribute to the understandings of others by providing opportunities for children to work in small groups and praising group efforts.

Educators committed to enhancing the experiences of African Nova Scotian children in early childhood education programs understand the relationship between culture and learning, and the importance of building relationships with children and their families. When educators develop their proficiency in culturally responsive practices, they make a difference in the lives of children and expand their knowledge and skills.

## Gaels

Gaels in Nova Scotia are the original Scots and have their origins in ancient Scotland and Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Included in the Gaels' community in Nova Scotia are their descendants and individuals who embrace Gaelic language, culture, and identity. Gaels in Nova Scotia are a people who speak a Celtic language, Gaelic; live through Gaelic culture; and identify themselves as Gaels.

Gaelic culture is language-based, and as such the Gaels face similar challenges as the Acadian and Francophone population regarding the loss of their language through assimilation. Efforts to retain the language generally happened through the *céilidh* (pronounced kay-lee), which in Gaelic means "the visit". This type of hospitality, story-telling, music, and sharing of food is a traditional part of Gaelic culture.

Some topics that may be explored are Gaelic culture's symbols, stories and literature, and art, such as celtic knots. Many stories of different types of fairies exist, although educators need

to determine which stories may be appropriate for the age group of the children. Children in school-age programs may especially enjoy the intricate art work and symbolism attached to the Gaelic culture.

Educators in Gaelic communities may wish to learn some basic expressions and words, such as

- *Ur beatha a-staigh*—You're welcome in.
- *Gabh òran*—Sing a song.
- *Gabh port*—Play a tune.
- *Gabh naidheachd*—Tell a story.

## Newcomers

Nova Scotia is home to a growing number of newcomers each year, and newcomer children bring their own cultures and languages from around the world to early childhood education programs across the province. It is important to get to know not just the surface parts of culture like food, dress, music, and celebrations, but also the deeper and broader components, such as attitudes, values, and social customs.

Early childhood educators need to be culturally responsive, able to validate and affirm children's cultures, and help children build a bridge to their new learning environment. In the case of newcomer families, educators may be the first relationship families and children form in their new lives. Educators and the impressions they make affect the experiences of newcomer children and their families.

Newcomer families may be navigating a range of settlement issues, including finding employment and housing, credential recognition, securing socio-economic status, seeking community and family support, exploring child-rearing practices in a new country, and navigating the changing roles and responsibilities of family members. In some situations, newcomer families report experiencing racism and discrimination, mental health issues, and issues maintaining their home language and culture.

Therefore, it is important to show interest in newcomer children's families by getting to know their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Embrace a mutual exchange of knowledge, information, and experience when talking with family and community members. Welcoming them to engage with children enriches the experience for all children attending the early childhood education program, not just newcomers. Meaningfully involving family and community members is essential to offering culturally relevant early learning experiences.

A welcoming environment for newcomer children and their families can be established by

- reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of all children through classroom posters, pictures, props, tabletop toys, games, storybooks, media resources, musical instruments, and foods served in the classroom

- providing opportunities for all family and community members to share experiences with children in the classroom, in their home language as well as in English
- providing experiences like field trips and community outings to places where children and families can learn about cultures and the history of themselves and others
- offering opportunities for children, assisted by their parents or other family and community members, to cook food from a wide range of cultural backgrounds
- learning and using key words in the home language(s) of children
- ensuring that all children are respected and valued, and that biases and discrimination are quickly and effectively dealt with when they arise

(Alberta 2009, 10)

Educators play a critical role in children's language development. It is important to be aware that the children who are newcomers do not enter child care programs as blank language slates, but arrive with some proficiency in their home language and some understanding of literacy.

Research shows that children take about two years to master a new language after they are initially introduced to it. Other research has also found that when children are developing two languages at the same time, the development of both languages is enhanced. The stronger children's acquisition of their first language is, the better their acquisition of their second language proficiency will be. Children's first language builds up a linguistic foundation and sets them up for success, because skills mastered in one language can often be transferred to the new language.

The promotion of home languages and literacies in the classroom can help children who are newcomers develop bilingual and biliterate skills, and feel more accepted in their new home in Nova Scotia. Inclusive practices, with their multilingual, multiliterate, and multicultural focus, as well as their promotion of bilingualism are in line with the current research-based principles of children's dual language learning (Chumak-Horbatsch 2012, 43). Therefore, it is important to recognize the importance of home languages and encourage home language use in the classroom. It will help all children experience, understand, and accept linguistic diversity.

***Culture incorporates the scope of human diversity and ways of being, such as gender, ethnicity, class, religion, ability, age, and sexuality. As culturally competent educators we need to think deeply about how our work can support each child's developing identity and self-worth.***

(Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010)



## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Respect for families, communities, and diversity requires educators to act ethically and professionally. To act ethically, each educator needs to think about their own values, beliefs, and attitudes related to diversity and difference, and acknowledge and address the biases they hold. Recognizing and addressing bias is part of becoming a culturally responsive educator. Culturally responsive practices promote equity and respect for diversity, as well as a strong approach to countering racism and biases.

The following questions are intended to support an educator's critical reflection on families, communities, and culture:

- How and when do you begin relationships and communicate with families? How do you continue to build and enhance these relationships?
- How do you celebrate children's success and development with families?
- How do you know about the learning that is valued and expected for children within their family and community in the local cultural context?
- In what ways do you ensure that your early childhood education program, your decision-making, and your employment processes reflect all local families and community members?
- How do you approach difficult issues that arise? How do you engage families in problem solving?
- How is responsibility for learning and teaching shared with families and communities?
- How do you explain play-based learning to families?
- How do you share knowledge with families about your program? What else can you do to make the learning visible?
- How do you share decision-making with families? What are you willing to share decision-making about? What more could be considered?
- What does your parent information and entrance area tell you about the place of families in your program? What messages are given to families about their place in your program? Is there a place for parents to sit, talk with other parents, or speak privately with staff?
- Have you considered doing an annual parent satisfaction survey to gain insight into how families feel about their children's experiences in your program?
- Have you thought about providing a suggestion box for parents near the entrance to your program or centre, where parents may drop notes with anonymous ideas? What other ways could you gain insights from families?
- What are some of the specific things that you do to welcome each child's family and support their confidence to work in partnership with you for their child's learning? Are those efforts working? How do you know? How else could you assess how your environment is supporting well-being?
- Have you considered arranging for professional development for all staff on issues related to cultural sensitivity, racism, and bias?

## Role of the Educator

*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-imaginator 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.*

(Makovichuk et al. 2014)

Educators enhance their knowledge and skills over time, they become more confident and skilled in their interactions with children, individually or in groups. This natural engagement leads some people to believe that the practice of an educator is easy, or something that anyone can do. This phenomenon is similar to the experiences of other professionals. For example, when Olympic athletes or professional musicians perform with expertise, it looks easy until someone actually tries to pole vault, execute the perfect dive, play the saxophone, sing in front of an audience, or create a musical score.

Educators' practice is both a science and an art. They develop their pedagogical practices based on evidence about how children develop and learn. They understand the principles of early brain development, the interconnectedness and impact of a child's early experiences, how language develops, and the types of experiences that support not only language but all other forms of development. Educators appreciate the importance of the learning environment, using both indoor and outdoor spaces to effectively enhance children's learning. They understand the importance of family relationships, peer friendships, and the principles of guiding children's behaviours.

Through their own pedagogical practices, they artfully weave their knowledge into an engaging style of play with children, one that honours and respects children's competencies, ideas, and opinions, and allows for the co-construction of learning. Through critical reflection, educators constantly and consistently assess their own practice, examine their own assumptions, collaborate and consult with colleagues, and regularly modify their practices and learning environments for children as required.

Educators understand the importance of children's interactions and relationships with adults, as well as the effects of those relationships on children. They know that pedagogical leadership at the program level, influenced by their access to professional relationships, organizations, and resources, are key to enhancing the quality of learning environments for children. They work as part of a team, and cultivate collegial and professional relationships with other educators in their program, school staff, and professionals who work with children.

In Canada, there is a level of understanding on the roles of directors of regulated early childhood education centres and of educators who work directly with children. Research conducted by Canada's Child Care Human Resources Sector Council produced *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* (2010) and *Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators* (2013). See Appendix C for more information about Canada's occupational standards.



## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

The following questions are intended to support the educator's critical reflection on their role:

- Do I have a job description? Does my job description match with my overall perception of the role of an educator?
- As a director, how do I provide pedagogical leadership to the staff? Has this been effective? What can I do to be a stronger leader?
- Am I functioning as a good team member? How can I improve, and what supports do I need to do so?
- If I think about my best day this week, what was happening to make it such a great day?
- If I think about my worst day this week, what was happening? How can I change that?
- Do I have the supports and resources I need to do my job? If not, what do I do about this? Who do I tell?

### Using Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework for curriculum decision-making

Researchers in New Zealand found that on average, educators make 936 curriculum decisions in a six-hour day (Podmore and Carr 1999). Some of those decisions are made with practical considerations in mind, and others involve compromises. The curriculum decisions that educators make are influenced by their beliefs and knowledge, and they need to ask and understand: what are our beliefs and where do they come from? What do we know? Are there other beliefs and knowledge that would lead us to different decisions?

Skillful educators are aware of their beliefs and knowledge and the theoretical perspectives that have influenced them. This is important because it helps them understand their decisions about

- planning content for children
- approaching behaviour guidance
- designing learning environments
- selecting program resources
- using particular programs or methods
- deciding which teaching strategies to use
- establishing and maintaining relationships with others
- approaching assessment

(Adapted from the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010)

When educators are aware of their own beliefs and knowledge, and how these affect practice, they can make intentional and wise choices when making decisions about how best to facilitate children's learning. Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework supports the educator in a reflective planning cycle that allows for collaboration between children and educators.



## Reflective Planning Cycle



*Curriculum encompasses all the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development.*

(Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010)

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

The following questions are intended to support an educator's critical reflection on curriculum decisions:

- What are my priorities when planning program activities? How do I collaborate with other staff on this?
- Does our program reflect the unique nature of this community? And if not, who do I need to connect with to make sure that it does?
- Does the learning environment reflect the lived experiences of the children and families in this program?

- What is our program's policy regarding behaviour guidance? When was this developed? Have we discussed this with parents? Does it truly reflect our Image of the Child? Do we follow this policy?
- How do staff, as a team, work together to design and create indoor and outdoor learning environments? Do the learning environments reflect our Image of the Child?
- Do the indoor and outdoor learning environments support the Learning Goals in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework?
- Do we have a process in place to support the elements of the planning cycle for our program?
- How can we involve families in our planning cycle?
- How can we make our documentation meaningful for parents?
- How do we balance human resource challenges, especially regarding to time, with our approach to documentation?

## Learning Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework outlines four learning goals which are intended to be an integrated approach to early learning that recognizes in children's early years, learning is not isolated to specific categories. Early childhood education programs may use a single activity to teach several skills or concepts, such as language, social development, mathematical concepts, music, and fine and gross motor development. The *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* (British Columbia Ministry of Education n.d., 17) notes that

*This framework recognizes that there are no pre-set ways to promote the four areas of early learning. Many factors, including the children's setting, caregivers, language, culture, heritage, religion, temperament, and abilities, shape the experiences that support early learning. It is important to note that the areas of early learning are all inter-related: learning in one area is likely to support learning in all three other areas. As such, the learning goals outlined in each section, and the questions to consider in designing environments to support them, overlap and strengthen one another.*

The values, principles, and broad goals, while presented separately in the early learning curriculum framework, are interdependent and not intended for use in isolation. In practice they are in constant interplay, brought to life by communities of adults and children to constitute the curriculum as an organic whole in which early learning and care are inextricably connected.

As well, the learning goals presented in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework are not intended to be discrete skills. It is not the intent of the document to have programs assess whether children have achieved well-being, discovery and invention, language and communication, or personal and social responsibility. Rather, the learning goals are intended to guide the design of learning environments, and inform the development of program activities and experiences for children.

We know that many, early childhood education programs already reflect the learning goals in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework. The early learning curriculum framework now gives educators across Nova Scotia consistent language to describe their work and programs. It also helps to make learning visible with language that becomes familiar for educators, parents, and other professionals.

The learning objectives in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework further define the learning goals, and suggest concrete ways that educators may design and describe their programs to address them. Each of the learning objectives is further defined by possible learning strategies, which are specific activities that may be used to address the objectives. The strategies are only examples of possible activities. Educators are encouraged to develop their own strategies that build on the expertise of staff, are relevant to children in their programs, and that integrate learning within the context of families, communities, and cultures.

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

The implementation of Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework means educators need to determine how their practices are currently meeting the document's learning goals and objectives. As they consider their practices, educators will find they currently provide experiences for children that meet Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework's goals and objectives.

A possible format for undertaking a review for educators is to list each of the learning goals and objectives, and to provide examples of how their current practice addresses each one.



## Examples

### LEARNING GOAL: WELL-BEING

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children feel safe, secure, and supported.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We create an atmosphere of trust and security by responding positively to all children's concerns, so that children understand that they can turn to the adults in the program if they need help.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children become strong in their social and emotional well-being.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have increasing opportunities for sharing, taking turns, participating in a group.</li> <li>• Each child has their own personal space for belongings.</li> <li>• School-age children practice strategies for conflict resolution.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical well-being.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are supported to be more independent in washing hands, brushing teeth, and toileting.</li> <li>• Children select their own snacks from a range of options.</li> <li>• We provide daily opportunities for energetic physical activity with the children using dance, movement, and games.</li> <li>• Children are actively involved in deciding on program policies and routines, particularly with regard to health and safety.</li> <li>• Four-year-olds participate in a walk about the playground to identify any hazardous objects.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each child's family book contains pictures of family members.</li> <li>• Toddlers have small coaster-size pictures of family members in baskets.</li> <li>• Our children's literature corner includes books and pictures depicting children from many cultural backgrounds, and they reflect the cultures of children in our program.</li> </ul>

## LEARNING GOAL: DISCOVERY AND INVENTION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children develop curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, and imagination.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We encourage children to initiate their own play experiences by asking about their ideas, and encouraging them to figure out how to proceed.</li> <li>• Our learning environment is full of open ended-materials such as loose parts, blocks, etc.</li> <li>• Our arts centre provides loose materials such as feathers, shells, and paints, and we do not provide pre-cut materials or sheets for colouring.</li> <li>• We do a group story time that invites children to make up the story, imagine what comes next, etc., then post those stories and go back to them for review with children, and share them with parents so that children can recreate the story-building activity at home.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesizing, researching, and investigating.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our learning environment includes open ended materials to encourage children's experimentation and discovery.</li> <li>• Staff regularly prompt children so as to extend their thinking, asking "what if"-type questions, and encouraging children to try something different.</li> <li>• Children are encouraged to imagine what would happen if we do "xxx", or what do you think will happen if this block goes on top of this one?</li> <li>• Our science corner always has some type of group project underway where we list our hypotheses, monitor progress, and write up our findings.</li> <li>• Children are regularly encouraged to do class surveys, ask questions, and tally up results; for example, "Who likes pumpkin pie?" or "Who has been in an airplane?"</li> </ul>



## LEARNING GOAL: LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children interact verbally and nonverbally with others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We regularly do a variation on the game Charades with the children, giving teams of two the chance to mime in front of the group and the rest try to figure out what they are doing (e.g., a visit to the doctor, grocery shopping, digging in the garden).</li> <li>• Children are invited to share stories or experiences with the group.</li> <li>• Our socio-dramatic play activities encourage children to converse on a range of topics while playing a range of different roles.</li> <li>• We consistently repeat sounds and squeals of babies and toddlers to create an exchange of sounds with non-verbal children.</li> <li>• We always repeat the words that children are speaking, and depending on the age of the child, will put their short phrases into full sentences.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children engage with a range of <u>texts</u> and gain meaning from them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We interact with children using songs, rhymes, jingles, and finger plays on a daily basis.</li> <li>• Our literature corner provides a range of books from picture books to simple to more complex text.</li> <li>• In our program for school-age children, we regularly ask the them to analyze ads and identify the messages being communicated.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children express ideas and make meaning using a variety of media.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After every field trip, we invite children to draw or paint their favourite part of the trip, then help to provide text to each drawing, using the child's own words to describe what is happening.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children begin to understand how symbols and patterns work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We introduce the concept of quantities to children (more, less, short, long) and how to name those quantities (one, two, three), then introduce the symbols to represent quantities, and associate the quantities and the symbols.</li> <li>• In our school-age program, we encourage children to create pattern cards and share them with others; for example, children create cards with colour patterns, such as red, blue, yellow, red, blue, yellow, and then the other children must predict what comes next.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children use technology to access information, investigate ideas, and express their thoughts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have a collaborative program with the local school for our school-age children. We extend the activities done in school by using art materials for children to represent what they are learning in school; for example, the children have used playdough to create different types of land forms they have studied in school (e.g., island, peninsula, mountains).</li> </ul>

## LEARNING GOAL: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy, and respect.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our school-age program participates in the local Roots of Empathy program.</li> <li>• We have mixed age groups, and encourage older children to help the younger ones when needed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children respond to diversity with respect.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have a blend of cultures represented among the families in our program. We ensure that all parents are invited to work with us to determine how to best represent their culture, customs, and practices. These activities take many forms, including activities, learning materials, stories and books, songs, food, etc.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children become aware of fairness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have introduced a conflict resolution program for the children, that gives them strategies and language to use when issues arise.</li> <li>• When there are disagreements, educators always work with both children to help them to identify the problem with language and seek a fair resolution.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We recycle everything; children have codes to use for different types of recycling, and have learned about and can identify the unnecessary use of packaging that ends up in waste.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities, and how they can actively participate in them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our school-age children participate in a community clean up initiative every spring.</li> <li>• We schedule regular of visits from community members to our program (e.g., letter carriers, public health nurses, firefighters, police).</li> <li>• Our socio-dramatic play centre provides props for children to take on roles of community service providers.</li> <li>• We take children to the local wharf to observe people getting their boats and traps ready for the spring fishing season.</li> </ul>

As educators collaborate on identifying what is already happening in the program to support the learning goals, the extent to which the program is already applying them will quickly become clear. It will also become clear the types of activities that may not align with the goals, and which should be changed.

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Educators may wish to reflect on the following:

- How do the activities, schedules, and learning environment in our program align with the learning goals and objectives outlined in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework?
- Are there areas where we may need to re-focus some of our time and resources?
- Are there activities that are in conflict with the pedagogical practices, goals, and objectives of the framework? Why? How can we change those?
- Given our assessment of our current program in the context of the learning goals and objectives, are there specific areas of in-service training that educators need?
- Have we identified any areas that we are unsure about? Where do we need to consult with our Early Childhood Development Consultant?

It is very likely that through this process, educators and their colleagues will identify other potential learning objectives that support the learning goals. The framework recognizes that many approaches may support creative and innovative ways to address the goals. At the same time, there will often be activities or practices that are relevant to more than one goal. Programs should be confident in bringing these ideas forward to discuss with their Early Childhood Development Consultant, and to share with other colleagues in local communities of learning.









# Principles and Practices

of Early Learning





# Principles and Practices of Early Learning

It is important to remember that the principles outlined in the Nova Scotia early learning curriculum framework are described as a “set of principles” and therefore should be considered as a whole. The Early Learning Principles support quality early childhood practice, and are intended to encourage “a joyful and engaging approach to children’s learning in the context of Nova Scotia’s Learning Goals for children from birth to eight years old”.

The framework’s Principles of Early Learning include:

- play-based learning
- relationships
- inclusion, diversity, and equity
- reflective practice
- learning environments

The province’s early learning curriculum framework does not intend that educators develop expertise in one facet at the expense of the others. For example, very rich play-based learning without positive relationships with parents, is not considered to be good practice. As educators work with the framework, it will become clear that each principle supports the others enhancing the overall quality of their early childhood education programs.

## Play-based Learning

Play has been defined by examining what it is, as much as what it is not. For example:

*Play is a spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable and flexible activity involving a combination of body, object, symbol use and relationships. In contrast to games, play behaviour is more disorganized, and is typically done for its own sake (i.e., the process is more important than any goals or end points). Recognized as a universal phenomenon, play is a legitimate right of childhood and should be part of all children’s life.*

(Smith and Pellegrini 2013, 4)

Play may be defined from a developmental perspective, such as

- **solitary play:** Usually associated with infants, but may also be seen in older children
- **parallel play:** Usually associated with toddlers, where children enjoy playing in the presence of other children, but not “with” others
- **cooperative or group play:** Usually associated with children age three and older, when they are able to do things like share, take turns, communicate with each other about the play, and develop themes

Play may also be defined by the nature of the activity itself, and there are numerous terms that are used to describe the type of play, including dramatic play, fantasy play, constructive play, physical play, silly play, dizzy play, competitive play, rough and tumble play, super hero play, and more.

Many educators would agree that there are challenges explaining the role of play in children's learning. Our society is familiar with expressions such as, "Go on and play," or "They're just playing." Children's play is often seen as frivolous, of little value, and something that children just do when they are not involved in more structured early learning activities. These perceptions of what play is contributes to the misunderstanding that there is no need for higher education qualifications for those who work in early childhood education programs, because 'anyone can just play with children'.

*'Play' is sometimes contrasted with 'work' and characterised as a type of activity which is essentially unimportant, trivial and lacking in any serious purpose. As such, it is seen as something that children do because they are immature, and as something they will grow out of as they become adults. However, ... this view is mistaken. Play in all its rich variety is one of the highest achievements of the human species, alongside language, culture and technology. Indeed, without play, none of these other achievements would be possible. The value of play is increasingly recognised, by researchers and within the policy arena, for adults as well as children, as the evidence mounts of its relationship with intellectual achievement and emotional well-being.*

(Whitebread 2012, 3)



Experienced educators can understand, appreciate, and explain the richness and complexity of children's play. They know that active and imaginative play enhances child development in many areas, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Stuart Brown (2010, 21) points out that, even though there are many descriptions and definitions of play, it is impossible to really understand what play is without knowing what play feels like, "... if we leave the emotion of play out of the science, it's like throwing a dinner party and serving pictures of food".

One of the important things for educators to remember is that children initiate their own play. If the activity is initiated by an adult, it ceases to be play (Gray 2008). Children not only initiate their play, but they can also change it ("Now I'm going to be the sister."), or may stop, either by leaving the group ("I'm not playing anymore."), or by collectively deciding to end it. Similarly, children's play generally has rules that are generated by the children that tend to be fluid, and adapt to changing circumstances. Children's play is more about the act of playing itself. Maria Montessori often gave the example of a child playing on a beach with a bucket and shovel, who used the shovel to fill the bucket with sand, and when the bucket was full would empty it out and start over again.

## The role of educators in children's play

Professional judgement is a key component of early childhood pedagogy, and central to facilitating children's learning. It requires educators to be reflective and intentional, to consider what they do, why they practice as they do, and how their actions impact children and their families. Professional judgement is driven by a vision of children's potential.

*Play ... does not have a priori rules, so it affords more creative responses (than games with rules). This creative aspect is key because it challenges the developing brain more than following predetermined rules does. In free play, kids use their imagination and try out new activities and roles. The child initiates and creates free play. It might involve fantasies—such as pretending to be doctors or princesses or playing house—or it might include mock fighting, as when kids ... wrestle and tumble with one another for fun, switching roles periodically so that neither of them always wins. And free play is most similar to play seen in the animal kingdom, suggesting that it has important evolutionary roots.*

(Wenner 2009, 23)

Educators may be involved in children's play through

- **program planning:** The reflective planning cycle outlines the process for using the framework in program design. As educators articulate their Image of the Child and assess how their individual, group, and program strengths support that image, they will plan the learning environment for children in their program. Careful observation and documentation allows educators to reflect on the learning environment and its activities, and modify, expand, or create new plans for it and children's experiences. They can facilitate children's play by
  - ensuring that there is enough space for children to carry out their play activities
  - providing interesting materials in sufficient quantities that spark children's interest and imagination
  - constantly observing children's activities and behaviours to know when to introduce new materials or when to remove materials, especially if some types of play consistently cause conflicts
- **daily observations:** Educators are constantly observing and reflecting on children's activities through their play. They observe children's actions and listen to children's conversations in play. Some examples of when educators may intervene include those times when they
  - take advantage of an opportunity to extend the children's play and introduce new learning concepts (e.g., a group of children are playing restaurant; they have tables set up, have decided who works at the restaurant, and who are the customers and an educator may intervene to provide some note paper and pencils, so the children can make some menus, take orders, or give out the bills)
  - observe that conflict has arisen, the children are not able to resolve it on their own, and that adult intervention is required
  - help children develop social strategies as needed, such as for sharing, turn-taking, or joining a group

*Much of children's early learning and development takes place through play and hands-on experiences. Through these, children explore social, physical and imaginary worlds. These experiences help them to manage their feelings, develop as thinkers and language users, develop socially, be creative and imaginative, and lay the foundations for becoming effective communicators and learners.*

(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009, 11)



## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

There is widespread agreement that play is important for children's optimal development, and that their learning is enhanced through creative and imaginative play. All early learning curriculum frameworks emphasize play-based learning. The following questions are examples of how educators can reflect on play-based learning:

- Do my colleagues and I agree on our understanding of the importance of play, how to support it, and what it means?
- How can I better explain the importance of play and the implications for children's learning to parents?
- Am I taking enough time to observe children in their play? If not, how can I change this?
- Am I being focused and effective in how I approach my observations of children?
- Have I, individually or with my colleagues, analyzed the various learning and play areas and their impact and contribution to the children's play?
- How can we enhance opportunities for creative play outdoors?
- Have we taken the time to link our play based activities with the learning goals and objectives in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework?
- Am I careful to assess when to intervene in children's play activities, and when to observe?
- When is it appropriate to engage in play with the children?
- Have we discussed the program's approach to supporting children's play-based activities during a staff meeting?
- What additional resources or professional development does the program need to consider to enhance play-based learning for children?



## Relationships

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework emphasizes the importance of relationships and partnerships to children's learning and development. The learning goal of well-being focuses on children being safe, secure, and supported, as well as becoming strong in their emotional and social development.

*Children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement for exploration.*

(Shonkoff and Phillips 2000, 389)

### Developmental considerations

The ability to form relationships is a key indicator of children's emotional and social well-being. From birth, children begin to internalize the understanding that if someone attends to their needs and provides a secure and predictable environment, then the world is a safe place. This type of secure attachment sets the stage for emotional development, and the ability to form relationships throughout life. Alternatively, children who do not receive attention to their needs may become insecurely attached to their caregivers, and may be set on a trajectory that makes it more difficult to form relationships with others.

Zero to Three, a Washington, DC based national organization that focuses on issues impacting infants, toddlers, and their families, notes that

*Relationships are the way babies come to know the world and their place in it. They provide the loving context necessary to comfort, protect, encourage, and offer a buffer against stressful times. It is through relationships that young children develop social emotional wellness, which includes the ability to form satisfying relationships with others, play, communicate, learn, face challenges, and experience emotions. In addition, nurturing relationships are crucial for the development of trust, empathy, compassion, generosity, and conscience.*

Educators who work with infants understand that their non-verbal communication with babies, such as smiles, gestures, facial expressions, and responsiveness to their needs, also helps to set the stage for developing secure and nurturing relationships. At this age, children depend on concrete external cues for developing relationships, like tone of voice, sense of touch, being fed, being comfortable, and the responsiveness of their caregivers.

As children grow and develop, their language skills, both receptive and expressive, begin to influence relationships and friendships—how they are formed and sustained. At the same time, their developing cognitive skills allow children to be more sensitive to interpreting the actions of others, and to have a better understanding of acceptable social behaviours.

By their early school years, children's relationships become more complex, as they are better able to demonstrate social skills independently of their own emotions, such as continuing to be polite even though they are frustrated and tired, rather than crying or acting out. Also by this point, children begin to understand that they may have different types of relationships with other children and adults depending on the context of the situation, for example, a child may have a relationship with another child on their hockey team, but not have that same type of relationship in the classroom (Saarni 2011).

## Scope of relationships

The scope of relationships relevant to early childhood education programs is quite broad and includes relationships between

- children themselves
- children and the educators in the program
- educators and families
- educators and other professionals working with children (e.g., speech language pathologists, mental health professionals, physicians)
- educators and school personnel, especially for school-age child care programs
- educators and communities, such as libraries and family resource centres

Educators have a responsibility to model good relationship skills for children in their daily interactions and conversations. Children observe the tone of conversation, supportive comments, sense of humour, and respectful interactions between educators. Warm and respectful relationships between educators and children's parent(s) or guardian(s) enhances children's sense of security at their early childhood education program and at home.

Professional relationships between educators and other early childhood professionals allow for a collaborative, comprehensive, and consistent approach to a range of interventions. Relationships with community organizations, such as family resource centres and libraries, help to link early childhood education programs to the broader community, resulting in more meaningful and integrated connections between home, early childhood education programs, and community.

For school-age children, and preschool children about to move into the public school system, professional relationships are also advantageous. Such relationships help to

- support the child's transition to school
- support and inform daily transitions between school and school-age child care programs
- create a professional understanding of both early childhood education and school-based curriculum approaches
- suggest opportunities for collaborative professional development

## Professional organizations

Across Canada, professional organizations represent educators and provide resources to enable those working in the early childhood education sector to stay current in their profession with access to research, current news, and professional development opportunities. Professional organizations link policy, practice, and research, and provide opportunities for educators to have a voice in matters that concern their profession. Membership allows them to network with their peers across the province and country. Networking facilitated by these organizations helps to provide opportunities for educators to form mentoring relationships.

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Educators are responsible for implementing pedagogical practices and providing for early learning environments that support children's emotional and social development. A child's ability to form relationships with other children and adults brings confidence in their ability to form friendships throughout their lives, and to feel secure to experiment and explore not only the program's learning environment, but their world.

The following questions are intended to support an educator's critical reflection on relationship building:

- Have I taken the time to develop strong relationships with the children I am responsible for?
- What strategies should be developed to ensure that new children feel welcomed and secure, and are able to develop relationships with the other children?
- Are there any children that may need extra support in developing friendships?
- Are there any children who may need to develop social or communication skills that would help their relationships with other children?
- Does our method of forming groups meet the needs of the children? Are the same age groupings working? Should we consider family groupings? Should we try to match children depending on their skills and personalities? Should we match up children who are introverts with children who are extroverts?
- As a director, how can I ensure that staff have the time to develop professional and collegial relationships with each other? Do we need to focus more on team building?

- How do we resolve conflicts or differences of opinion among the staff at our program? Is this approach effective and constructive?
- As a team, how can we develop stronger relationships with other professionals and community organizations?
- Should we develop a parent survey to find out if parents feel truly welcomed at our program? Or to ask parents how we can improve our relationships with them?
- What are the resources in our community that make sense to link with? Do we know those people? How can we expand our community relationships? How do we engage with the diversities within our community?
- Do any of our staff belong to a provincial early childhood education professional association? What are the benefits? If no one belongs, should we attend a meeting and learn more about it? What about other organizations that focus on aspects of child development, such as learning disabilities and children's mental health?
- How can we strengthen and expand our professional relationships as a program? How can I do so as an individual?

## Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity

*High quality inclusive ECEC programs have three key components: they are accessible to all children and their families; they are designed and carried out with consideration for the unique needs of each child; and they include ongoing evaluation of programs to ensure full participation.*

(Underwood and Frankel 2012, in Underwood 2013, 1)

### Defining inclusion

In Canada, there is not a single definition of inclusion that all provinces and territories have agreed to. However, the existing definitions follow a common theme. SpecialLink, Canada's national organization for child care inclusion defines it as:

*Simply put, child care inclusion means that all children can attend and benefit from the same child care programs. It means that children with disabilities go to the same programs they would attend if they did not have a disability. Inclusion means all children, not just those who are easy and/or less expensive to include. All means all. For children with disabilities, this means that the necessary supports of training, equipment, physical modifications and extra staffing are available to all programs, at no extra cost to parents or to the individual programs. The principle of inclusion goes beyond the notion of physical integration and fully incorporates basic values that promote and advance participation, friendship and a celebration of diversity. Children with all disabilities are active participants, not just observers on the sidelines.*



Early Childhood Australia (2016, 3) defines inclusion as:

*Inclusion means building upon and fostering diversity. It involves working with every child and not particular groups of children. Each child's strengths are built upon, and any barriers to learning facing a child are recognised and responded to. Inclusion seeks to address circumstances where some children may be excluded, under-represented, or are unable to access early childhood education and care. Inclusion means that every child has access to, participates meaningfully in, and experiences positive outcomes from early childhood education and care programs.*

In the United States, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) (2009, 2) have adopted a national position statement on inclusion, and have agreed on a shared national definition of inclusion as:

*Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports.*

SpecialLink's Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale (2009) outlines six principles of quality inclusion, and Nova Scotia strives to ensure these are reflected in early childhood education programs:

- *zero reject: no child is excluded based on their level or type of disability*
- *natural proportions: programs include children with disabilities in rough proportion to their presence in the population*
- *full participation: activities and routines are modified and adapted to include all children*
- *same range of program options: parents of children with disabilities have the same options (e.g., full day, part day, flexible hours) that other parents have*
- *maximum feasible parent participation: parents are actively encouraged to participate in the child care program*
- *pro-action for community inclusion: staff and parents promote inclusion in the whole community*

## Developing an inclusion policy

The above principles focus on the key concepts of **access**, **participation**, and **support** and which can guide programs in developing inclusion policies. Programs may consider each of the key concepts; what each concept means; and how programs' policies support them.

Educators working in an early childhood education program discuss what the concepts mean and how they might inform the development of an inclusion policy or statement for the program by using techniques as described below (Healthy Child Manitoba 2010):

## Key Concept: Access

What does it mean?

**Community inclusion:** Every child can attend typical activities in the community, including early learning and child care facilities. This means that a child's additional support needs do not hinder a family's ability to enroll in any program. It also means families with a child with additional support needs have access to the number of hours and days of attendance available to every family.

Examples:

- All children are accepted into the program
- Program staff identify children on the waiting list who require additional support and ensure the necessary supports are in place upon enrolment
- We keep in contact with external professionals who refer families with children with additional support needs to our program

**Inclusive environment:** The physical environment is set up to consider the unique needs of each child. Areas are accessible to all the children. For example:

- wide pathways between furniture allow for a wheelchair or walker
- materials and equipment are visible and at the children's level so that every child can access items independently
- adaptations are made to equipment and furniture to reduce or remove barriers for children, such as adjusting table heights
- adjustments are made to routines and transitions to make learning experiences positive for all children
- We arrange our learning centres so that all children can reach and use the materials in them
- We closely observe the children so we can understand and meet their needs, such as shortening planned activities when needed
- The sand table has risers so children who use standing chairs can participate

For additional information refer to *Writing an Inclusion Policy—A Guide for Child Care Centres and Homes*: [www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/resources/pubs/writing\\_inclusion\\_policy.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/resources/pubs/writing_inclusion_policy.pdf).

## Language of inclusion

The development of an inclusion policy is more than providing access, participation, and support. How educators speak about children, as well as how they speak to children, parents, and other professionals creates an inclusive culture in early childhood education programs. How they communicate with children impacts the child's awareness of themselves, and influences how other children see and think about children who may have different abilities, languages, or cultures.

Educators are influenced by the language they use, and from the language used by their colleagues. Language frames people's thinking, and contributes to perceptions and attitudes.

When language focuses on children and their strengths, it helps to shape attitudes that focus on children as people.

Children are children, and the language we use to describe them should focus on who children are, rather than on their disability or disorder. A child with a disability is a “child with a disability”, not a “disabled child”. A child with a developmental disorder may be a “child with autism”, rather than an “autistic child”. This language should also extend to conversations with other staff, with parents, and with professionals.

Conversations with parents and professionals working with children should emphasize what they can do, rather than focusing on what the child cannot do. Routine-based plans/ individualized program plans should build on a child's strengths. An educator may write an observation as, “David is a very social child, and enjoys the companionship of other children. David is now part of a small group of children with excellent language skills, and his interactions with them are helping with his use of language for communication. We are monitoring and documenting his increased verbal communications.”, instead of, “David is still not meeting developmental norms for language for his age group.”

Communication with all parents and community members about the program should model inclusive language and emphasize the importance of considering all children as children. A notice may say, “Our program includes children of all abilities.”, rather than, “Our program also includes children with disabilities.”

The above guidelines include both oral and written language, such as communication with parents and other professionals, and assessment reports.

## **Benefits of inclusion**

While educators, parents, and professionals agree that early intervention for a child with additional needs has benefits for development and learning, inclusive programs also have benefits for all children, staff, and the community. For example,

- children in the program learn that everyone has differences, and that they are more alike than different
- families connect to other families and resources
- parents and community see the benefits of inclusion, and that all children are valued and welcomed
- educators develop their skills and strategies for working with children of all abilities, and gain experience collaborating with other professionals

At times, programs and staff may be hesitant to think about planning inclusive programming for children with additional needs, and this is a natural part of moving towards full inclusion. Recent research in Canada has found that in the past, new early childhood education graduates felt less prepared to work with children with additional needs than with typically developing children. However, more recent studies found when graduates feel better prepared, there are more professional development opportunities to support inclusion, and there is more

collaboration between educators and other professionals (Forer, Beach, and Flanagan 2007; Beach et al. 2004, as referenced in Flanagan and Beach 2010, 13).

Canadian researchers have described the professional benefits of inclusive programming to staff who work in these programs. Irwin, Lero, and Brophy (2004) found that positive experiences with inclusion enable early childhood educators and resource teachers to develop stronger commitments to inclusion by providing understanding, learning opportunities, skill development, and more self-confidence. The researchers have described a “virtuous cycle” of inclusion where the increased skills and understanding bring further benefits to the children, which in turn continue to bring benefits to the program, staff, and community.

## Diversity

*When early childhood educators respect the diversity of families and communities, and the aspirations they hold for children, they are able to foster children's motivation to learn and reinforce their sense of themselves as competent learners.*

(Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, 13)

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework emphasizes that the child's family, community, and culture are central to a child's development of personal identity and well-being. When educators provide a welcoming environment for all families and take steps to learn more about the diverse backgrounds of the children in the program, children and their families feel that they belong.

Inclusive practice is not limited to children who need additional support to attain typical developmental goals. Early childhood education programs across Nova Scotia include children from many cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as children who have different types of families, social and economic circumstances, and life experiences. Diversity can also encompass religious affiliations, gender, and age, among many other characteristics.

### Gender-based diversity in early learning environments

As our understanding of gender changes, it is important that educators create early learning environments that are gender inclusive, and that they avoid making gender-based assumptions about children and how they play. Seeing a child as capable and full of potential also means trusting their choices when it comes to toys, play, self-identification, and expression. In the early years, children may be observed to begin to develop a sense of gender identity, a sense of gender that may or may not match with the child's biological sex.

Children in their early years may begin to express their gender identify (gender expression) typically through their appearance, dress, and behaviour. In our communities, there will be children who do not identify with their assigned sex, or with their assigned or expected

gender roles. There will be children who have different cultural or familial understandings of gender and how it impacts their own social contexts. All children need a place in the learning environment to be themselves.

Educators may wish to consider the following when creating gender-inclusive early learning environments and practices:

- Use gender-inclusive language as much as possible. Rather than addressing groups of children as “boys and girls”, use “children” or “everyone”.
- Organize children into groups other than “boys” or “girls”; try dividing them by other means, such as “Everyone wearing red today”, “Everyone wearing blue today”, “Everyone who has a dog at home”, “Who likes rainy days”, which models creativity and shows children that people can be organized in many different ways.
- Avoid using gendered terminology to make it easier for children and families who are gender non-conforming to feel valued and included, because it doesn't require them to make difficult decisions about where they fit.
- Ensure all children have access to all materials and learning centres in the learning environments, and encourage children to explore their full range of interests without gendered expectations (e.g., “This area is for boys.”).
- Include a diverse selection of literature in the learning environment around gender identity, gender expression, and family diversity, such as families with same-sex parents or guardians, single-parent families, grandparent and extended family roles, and foster families.

Educators may wish to engage children in conversations that broaden their understanding of gender, being oneself, and respect for gender diversity. Educators may want to reflect on these scenarios, and be prepared to address gender-related assumptions and stereotypes that naturally occur in the program and explain why those are not representative of everyone. Children may have assumptions about what they or others can or should do based on gender (e.g., “He said I can't play with the trucks because I'm a girl.”). In these situations, educators can encourage children to express themselves in ways that feel genuine, and not reinforce gender stereotypes among each other.

The following are examples of situations that educators may encounter:

- D'eon has worn pink a lot this week, and other children are pointing out that boys don't wear pink. When should I step in to make this a safer space for him? What do I say to him and the other children?
- Poppy has been sharing with the class that her brother is transgender. The other children have questions. How do I explain what that means in a way that is respectful?
- Suri and Sam have two mothers, but do not talk about them much. How can we show the other children that some families have same-sex parents or different structures?



Exploring gender roles, identities, and fluidity is a normal part of child development. Childhood is the time when an inner sense of gender emerges, and children undertake their own journeys to self-understanding. Family, educators, and other caregivers will be invited to support that journey, and should follow the child's lead in determining their needs.

## Equity

Equity is often used to explain that all children should have the same opportunities to participate in early childhood education programs. For this reason, there are various funding mechanisms, such as child care subsidies and inclusion grants, to help remove barriers that may prevent children and families from participating in early childhood education programs.

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework uses the term equity to mean that all children have the same opportunities to participate in their early childhood education program's activities. This means that educators must, as much as possible, remove any barriers that would prevent a child from participating in an activity. Equity does not necessarily mean equality. For example: A program may arrange a field trip to the morning preschool skate at a local arena at no cost to parents, arrange for transportation, and provide skates free of charge for all children. In this scenario, all children have equal opportunity to be part of the field trip. However, the activity is not equitable for children who do not know how to skate, or who may have motor issues, or who may require additional support. The program must also provide for the use of a chair on the ice or for additional staff to remove any participation barriers.

Equity is an important aspect of inclusion and diversity. Educators are responsible for observing, reflecting, documenting, sharing ideas with other staff, and making any necessary adjustments to things like the physical space, the nature of activities, and how food is served to ensure all children have equitable opportunities to participate.

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Issues of inclusion, diversity, and equity are inherent to the work of educators as they work toward implementation of Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework. As discussion on those issues occur, educators may wish to consider the following:

- Does my program have a stated policy on inclusion that is shared with all staff and parents? If not, how can we go about developing a policy? When was the last time we reviewed the policy?
- Can we focus the discussion at our next staff meeting on the topics of inclusion, diversity, and equity and what those topics mean for our work?
- What are my beliefs about inclusion?
- Is the language I use respectful of all children?
- As a team, are all educators in our program modelling inclusive language that focuses on all children as children, as opposed to specific disabilities?

- How do we communicate with parents of children with additional needs? Does this meet parents' needs? How do I know that or how can I find out?
- What do I currently do in my practice that honours the diversity of families in our program? How can I improve this?
- How can I promote positive attitudes toward diversity in our program? Have we made efforts to
  - get to know the families of all children in the program?
  - engage in conversations with all parents or guardians when they come to the program, since modelling welcoming practices gives children and parents a sense of acceptance, pride, and confidence?
  - introduce learning materials that reflect the diverse circumstances of children in our program?
  - introduce learning materials that introduce children to diversity in the community?
  - invite all children's families to participate in activities at our program?
  - speak respectfully about the diverse families in the program to other staff, professionals, and community?
- What type of professional development should I pursue to gain a deeper understanding of issues of inclusion, and how I can improve my strategies for working with children?
- How can I introduce children to concepts of diversity when we live in a homogenous community?
- Have I considered the differences between equality and equity in my program planning? Can we discuss this at our next staff meeting?



## Reflective Practice and Intentional Teaching

Educators around the world have been using “reflective practice” for many years, although the term may be new to some. In fact, people engage in daily reflections about things ranging from everyday events (We used the last of the milk this morning, and I should make sure I add that to the grocery list.) to spiritual and philosophical reflections (Is this what I thought I would be doing at this time of my life?). People engage in such reflections at any time of day, or in any place (e.g., driving home, waiting at the dentist office).

### Different types of reflective practice

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework describes three different types of reflective practice:

- **Reflection-in-action** occurs naturally and continually during the day with children, as educators engage in and observe children's activities. For example,
  - David and Malik have been trying but they do not seem able to resolve their argument, I should intervene now.
  - There is such rich dramatic play happening with that group of 4-year-olds, I should bring some additional props to the children to extend the activity.
  - Rachel is having a difficult time with the paint brush at the easel; I will go over to help.
- **Reflection-on-action** occurs after the fact, when educators reflect on the activities and interactions of the day, and question whether a situation may have been handled differently, or what new insights were gained as a result of children's interactions with each other or adults. This type of reflection can be done alone, or may be done in conversation with other educators in the program. In school-age programs, this type of reflection may be done in collaboration with school personnel. For example,
  - That was such a difficult conversation with Jesse's parents today. They were very upset at hearing my concerns about her gross motor skills. I needed to discuss this with them, but maybe I could have approached it differently. Maybe I need to consult with others on this.
  - Nora really shows an interest and talent in music. What can I do to foster this?
  - Some of the toddlers were very hesitant to play in the snow this afternoon. What can we do to help them to have more confidence?
  - I really disagree with how a situation was handled today. How can I approach my colleagues to discuss this?

- **Reflection-for-action** describes critical reflection, which involves closely examining all aspects of events and experiences from different perspectives. Educators often frame their reflective practice within a set of overarching questions, developing more specific questions for particular areas of inquiry. Critical reflection considers educators' Image of the Child and values they hold, framed against the present set of experiences and circumstances, with an eye toward future changes or actions. For example,
  - I believe that children have the right to decide if they want to participate in an activity or not. Am I following through on that belief in my daily practice?
  - I've been fascinated with how some of the toddlers are quickly building their language skills, while others are struggling. How can I learn more about different theories that may explain this phenomenon?
  - I felt that nothing was going right this week. Am I taking the right approach in my work?

Educators may reflect on their practice privately, with a supervisor, or with other staff. At the program level, reflective practice is more likely to lead to change if it is undertaken as an exercise with other colleagues. Educators may collaborate in their reflections to

- reflect on how a colleague is dealing with a particular child
- reflect and seek feedback on interactions with parents
- reflect on specific situations or recent experiences with a child, a group of children, or a family
- seek advice on a specific interaction or on how to proceed with a challenge
- generate ideas for future professional development
- examine the program's approach to issues such as inclusion and community involvement

## Intentional teaching

When first considering the concept of intentional teaching, one might ask how this is consistent with the belief that children should be able to construct their own learning based on their interests and abilities. Some educators have questioned their role in a learning environment that focuses on child-initiated play, and some have questioned the importance of planning, believing that if the child is to initiate their own play, then there is no need for program planning.



In Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework, intentional teaching, implies a balanced approach to both child-initiated and educator-initiated activities. Educators are intentional when they

- observe that some of the children have become very interested in filling and pouring at the sand table, and they add funnels and sieves to the table
- stand back to observe how children are fascinated with a discovery of a caterpillar, and listen to their questions and conclusions
- observe that an infant is ready and eager to start crawling, and provide a space for the baby to move safely and explore
- intervene in an activity to provide guidance, introduce new language, or pose questions to extend children's thinking
- provide an opportunity for a group of school-age children to reach consensus on developing a mural for the outdoor fence, and provide guidance to the group on conflict resolution
- incorporate the framework's learning principles, goals, and objectives into their practice





Intentional teaching requires knowledge of

- children's development and learning, such as group dynamics, play-based learning, exceptionalities, methodologies, and working with their parents and families
- planning for the design of the learning environment (including materials, daily schedule and time allowed for each activity)
- grouping children
- introducing new activities
- linking to community resources
- taking advantage of "spur of the moment" decisions to take advantage of unexpected opportunities
- acting on educators' knowledge of each child
- scaffolding an activity in an appropriate manner (building on children's learning)

Reflective practice informs how educators approach these aspects of early childhood education.

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Reflective practice and intentional teaching are necessary practices for implementing Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework. Educators may wish to reflect on the following:

- How do I make more time for critical reflection? How do I record my thoughts, so that I may later review them or share with others?
- How can my reflections be used as part of my performance review?
- Do I incorporate my reflections into plans for professional development?
- How can we as a team collaborate in our reflections? Can we do this at staff meetings? Should we have a staff retreat?
- How do I get support when my reflections and those of a colleague are very different?
- How can I better explain intentional teaching to parents?
- Are there topics that I need to study that will help me with being more intentional in my practice?
- How can I better document unexpected learning when it happens in my program?

*Educators who engage in intentional teaching recognise that learning occurs in social contexts and that interactions and conversations are vitally important for learning. They actively promote children's learning through worthwhile and challenging experiences and interactions that foster high-level thinking skills. They use strategies such as modelling and demonstrating, open questioning, speculating, explaining, engaging in shared thinking and problem solving to extend children's thinking and learning. Educators move flexibly in and out of different roles and draw on different strategies as the context changes. They plan opportunities for intentional teaching and knowledge-building. They document and monitor children's learning.*

(Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, 15)

## Learning Environments

*Environments for early learning and care are comprised of social, physical, and psychological elements. People, places, and things all have a profound influence on health and well-being, particularly in the early years when children are most vulnerable to environmental influences. Environments that are beautiful, joyful and rich in opportunities for sensory stimulation, social interaction, language, exploration, manipulation, and representation enhance healthy development and learning, and increase children's potential. This emphasis on the environment casts educators in the role of purposeful design planners, who must take into account the strengths, interests, and desires of the particular children they serve. With the support of thoughtful educators, even very young children can claim ownership to, and take responsibility for, maintaining, modifying, and renewing their immediate environments.*

(University of New Brunswick Early Childhood Research and Development Team 2008, 14)

We know that young children learn best in environments where they can have secure relationships with caring and responsive adults, feel safe, and feel free to explore and learn. The learning environment, however, refers to more than just the room where children play. Learning environments include both indoor and outdoor environments, as well as

- selecting materials for the indoor and outdoor environments
- scheduling activities, and determining the length of time allowed for children to focus on one activity
- transitioning children
- arranging the room, including opportunities for children to explore, find a quiet space, and yet allow educators to constantly observe and supervise children
- responding to children's personalities, strengths, interests, and abilities
- finding opportunities for children to learn to assess risks, especially in the outdoor environment
- considering for adults as well as children
- providing a welcoming space for parents

Within the context of Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework, the learning environment plays a key role in how early childhood education programs implement it on a day-to-day basis. The principles outlined in the framework call for a learning environment that supports the learning goals, allows for play-based learning experiences, allows educators to observe children's interests, abilities, joys, and challenges, and is constantly reflected on and modified as needed.

Planning learning environments considers how and when transitions occur, the time allowed for children to pursue their interests, and how children are grouped. This type of perspective about the learning environment is central to reflective practice and intentional teaching, with

recognition and appreciation of the importance of the indoor and outdoor learning environments, and how these environments affect both children's learning and educators' practice.

*An environment is a living, changing system. More than the physical space, it includes the way time is structured and the roles we are expected to play. It conditions how we feel, think, and behave; and it dramatically affects the quality of our lives. The environment may work for us or against us as we conduct our lives.*

(Greenman 2007, 1)

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework notes that, "Indoor and outdoor environments support all aspects of children's learning and invite conversations between children, educators, families, and the broader community. They promote opportunities for sustained shared thinking and collaborative learning."

*... the Early Years Environment integrates the Reggio Emilia and Montessori visions of environment, and describes the communication between the learning environment, early childhood educators and parents, and young children. When children have the opportunity to experiment and make choices on their environments, ECEs have the opportunity to observe children, note their interests and activity choices, and study their experimentations. ECEs learn from these observations as they assess and make meaning of children's strengths, attitudes, and abilities.*

*Parents are part of the process as they share their knowledge of their children with the educators, and participate in rich communication about their children's activities within the Early Years Centre. With this information, ECEs are able to design, adapt, and modify the learning environment so that it is responsive, inviting, and intriguing for the children, and builds on (scaffolds) children's learning.*

(Flanagan 2012, 46)



Some programs are in facilities that have been specifically designed and created as early learning spaces (for example, low windows, child-size bathroom fixtures, access to the outdoor environment). However, the majority of early childhood education programs must adapt learning environments to the physical structure of the building. Educators find creative and innovative ways to maximize the play environments in order to reflect the interests and diversities of the children within that structure.

## Learning materials

*A good toy is 10 percent toy and 90 percent child. The child's imagination is the engine of healthy play. Simple toys and natural materials, like wood, boxes, balls, dolls, sand, and clay invite children to create their own scenes—and then knock them down and start over.*

(Almon 2003)

Learning materials typically fall into three categories:

- **structured:** The object has one use or purpose
  - scissors can only be used to cut certain materials
  - puzzles can only be used as puzzles
- **semi-structured:** The object suggests a purpose, and it may be used as a springboard for imaginative play
  - trucks in the yard may be used to build an airport, construct a new bridge, or build a road; they may also be used to get sand for the roads, or to pick up lobster to take to the markets
  - dolls may be going to a family dinner, attending a pretend preschool play group, or visiting the hairdresser or doctor's office
- **open-ended:** The objects may be used for any number of types of play where children represent their thinking and learning
  - blocks may be stacked to build a tower, used to build a road, used to represent several buildings in a town, or used as boats, birthday cakes, or slices of pizza
  - “loose parts” are items made from a multitude of different types of objects, including rocks, shells, tree cookies, buttons, pieces of ribbon and yarn, feathers, and may also be used as a multitude of other representational objects

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

When planning learning environments for children, with all of the elements that are inherent to learning environments (space, time, materials), educators may wish to consider:

- Does the physical layout of this room allow for children to move independently, and staff to be able to supervise at all times?
- Does the layout of the room meet the needs of all children in the program? Are there obstacles that prevent any children from being able to participate in an activity? Should changes be made?
- Does the schedule of activities allow enough time for children to engage in complex socio-dramatic play? Do the children have enough time to carry out investigations? Or, is there too much time allowed? Do children seem to lose interest?
- How are snack and meal times working for children? Should we allow them to serve themselves and eat snacks when they want, rather than stop an activity to have a group snack? Would this encourage children to invite a friend to eat, and help to develop social relationships while allowing children to concentrate on their play?
- How have we formed groups? Is it by age? Should we consider family groups?
- Do the learning materials in our program encourage children to use them in multiple ways, or is there only one way to use them? Do the materials invite interaction? Would I be able to explain exactly why each item is in the room? Are we intentional in how we decide on new materials? Do we make changes as needed, depending on children's interests?
- Is the outdoor environment welcoming and interesting for children? How can we extend our learning activities to the outdoor environment?
- Is it my practice to regularly observe the children at play, and make any needed changes to the learning environment based on those observations? How will I then evaluate those changes?
- Do I feel comfortable making recommendations to the director regarding changes to the learning environment that are needed? Do we have the opportunity to have these types of discussions as a team? If not, how can I address this?

*(It is) essential that every child's active engagement is supported within environments that are equipped with materials that promote joy and pleasure in learning and that challenge children to think—sand, earth, and water; blocks; modelling materials, paints, and “beautiful stuff” for construction; collage, drawing, and writing materials; toys and games; picture books and other print materials; scientific, mathematical, and household tools.*

(University of New Brunswick Early Childhood Research and Development Team 2008, 14–15)



## Assessment and Documentation

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework refers to "authentic assessment" to capture the broad range of strategies used in early childhood education programs. Educators may be familiar with the methods of authentic assessment, such as learning stories, pedagogical narration, documentation, or action research.

Authentic assessment means that educators assess children's progress in various developmental domains by observing children in their natural learning environment rather than using a standardized tool for one-on-one assessments, which are often carried out in a separate room, and sometimes with an adult who is unfamiliar to the child.

The framework outlines the many benefits of authentic assessment, including the ability to fully understand children's development in a more holistic manner. For example, educators may share observations with parents about a child's social, physical, and cognitive development by providing an analysis of how a child approached an activity rather than simply speaking about one specific area of development. Authentic assessment allows educators to observe children over time and in different contexts. They are able to talk with children, and gain a fuller understanding about how a child solved a particular problem or approached a particular challenge. Educators are able to assess children's development in children's own cultural and linguistic contexts.

### Observation

Observation is part of reflective practice. It is impossible to reflect on something if you have not seen it, heard it, or had the opportunity to sense the emotion from children's play in order to fully understand what is happening. At the same time observation requires some objectivity, as educators must describe what they are observing rather than interpret:

- **objective observation:** Justin was waiting for his turn, but suddenly took the truck from Riley and threw it against the tree.
- **non-objective observation:** Justin was angry that it was taking so long for his turn, so he took the truck and threw it against the tree so that Riley would not be able to continue to use it.

Observations can be informal as well as formal. Experienced educators make observations throughout the day, and jot them down so that reflection and analysis can be done later. Observations should be specific as often as possible, because a list of notes at the end of the day may not have any significant meaning, and the comments could easily apply to any child in the program. For example, when an infant starts to crawl, it is helpful to record observations on her progress in a systematic way to create an informed analysis of their progress. If a child is working up the courage to go down the slide, observations about how they approach the slide each day until they master it are helpful to not only chart their progress on the slide, but to analyze and reflect on how the child approaches new challenges.

Observations carried out in the program are not only limited to observing children. Educators may wish to observe each other for professional feedback about style, communication methods, or behaviour management approaches. Educators working with children with additional needs may wish to invite other professionals to observe their interactions with a child, or to ask other staff in the program to videotape interactions which may be shared with parents or other professionals for feedback.

## Documentation

Through documentation, educators

*...are making children's learning visible – putting into words, pictures, videos, sketches, and artifacts the story of the child's learning process – in collaboration with the children themselves. This deepens and transforms the learning itself, adding another level of complexity to the work of children. It also serves to communicate with all who participate in the education process what is happening, what children are expressing, what is being experienced in the school. It serves as a way to learn more deeply and to reflect more complexly on what we do with children. Second, they are, in the process of documentation, communicating value to children as well as to any audience of the documentation and showing in a very concrete way that what children do is important and worthy of recording.*

(Chaillé 2008, 7)

There are many ways to make a child's learning visible, so documentation can take many forms, such as:

- artwork
- audio and video recordings
- drawings
- interviews with children
- interviews with parents
- learning stories
- notes from observations
- photographs
- portfolios

## Purpose of documentation

Documentation has a range of purposes. It makes children's thinking, ideas, and learning visible, and makes authentic assessment possible. It demonstrates how programs are implementing Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework. It is a reflective tool for educators to use when planning next steps in response to children's play, activities, and

ideas. It can provide educators and parents with evidence of what and how children are learning. Specifically, documentation informs program planning by providing clear evidence to educators on whether activities are relevant to the capacities of the children, where children's interests lie, what their ideas are, how children approach a new learning activity, and what kind of strategies children use to problem solve and meet new challenges.

#### Documentation

- provides feedback to educators regarding how children interact with prepared learning environments, provides information about how to re-design environments, and suggests areas for professional development topics
- informs parents as to their children's progress, and allows parents to build on learning activities and their children's ideas and interests at home, if parents know their child has been learning about insects, they may wish to visit a park to observe insects, collect insects in jars, and look up names of insects
- may sometimes be focused on the learning goals and learning objectives outlined in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework; this provides consistency in the language used for documentation, and allows early childhood education programs to demonstrate in a concrete manner that the framework is being implemented
- shifts focus depending on the actions and ideas of children, reflections of educators, philosophies of early childhood education programs, and relationships between children, educators, and the environment

## Challenges

For educators and directors of early childhood education programs, questions about documentation quite often focus on human resource issues rather than on the process of documentation itself. Some common questions from educators are:

- When do I find the time to do this?
- What should I be documenting?
- How do I do it?
- What kind of resources do I need?

These questions are all valid. Research recently completed in Nova Scotia on documentation practices in licensed early childhood education centres identified common issues and limitations with the practice of documentation. While participants in the research study agreed on the value and benefits of documentation, they also noted that the time and resources required were challenging. In this study, there were additional limitations regarding training on how and what to document, understanding the curriculum approach, and whether the responsibility to document children's learning was a part of the educator's job description (Harrietha 2012).

## Strategies

Many early childhood education programs across Nova Scotia have been successfully using documentation as part of their ongoing approach to authentic assessment, program planning, communicating with parents, and identifying professional development opportunities for staff. As well, informal interviews with directors of early childhood education programs in provinces with requirements for documentation provide useful insights and helpful strategies for programs that may be approaching this practice for the first time.

If an early childhood education program is starting to implement documentation processes, educators with several years of experience with documentation practices suggest

- seeking professional development opportunities regarding approaches to documentation
- assessing the pros and cons of using paper-based documentation vs. digital technologies
- investing in a digital camera and printer
- taking digital photos because they capture a moment, and a date and time stamp makes it easy to remember when and why it was taken at a later point in time; it is not necessary to print every photo taken
- deciding how and what to document because it is tempting to take digital photos of every single thing that happens; plan ahead to decide what types of activities to document
- having colleagues help each other; if you see that an educator is in the middle of an activity with a child, take a photo for the educator, and ask that they do the same for you should the situation arise.
- taking photos of children in action; do not be tempted to get children to pose for pictures
- investing in a device that can record video
- considering designating one staff person with word processing and editing skills who may mentor others
- starting slowly with a few educators documenting, and learning from their experiences, as well as documenting a select number of children and gradually expanding until all children are included
- starting with staff who work with infants and toddlers because it may be easier for them to have time for documentation due to daily nap times
- talking to educators in other programs as they may have suggestions not yet considered
- allowing activities to happen naturally; if you are in the middle of an activity with a child who is concentrating on an activity, with a rich exchange of communication between you and the child, don't stop to run and get the camera, it can be written up later
- keeping a small notepad in your pocket because individual pieces of paper and sticky notes tend to get lost
- documenting children's progress over time

- involving older children in their own documentation, especially school-age children who may collaborate on projects and document their own experiences and observations
- adjusting documentation practices over time as staff learn what works, what is possible, and gain skills in methods such as preparing portfolios and learning stories
- making sure that everyone's job description includes a statement about educators' responsibilities for documentation if you are in management
- encouraging collaboration among staff; educators working in the toddler room may work together to prepare one set of documentation files for each child; this type of collaboration among educators also has the benefit of broadening the perspectives of educators about the same child, and enrich reflective practices

## REFLECTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

The following questions are intended to support reflection on assessment and documentation:

- In my supervisory role, how can I work with staff to prepare a plan to introduce documentation in our program? Who has the skills to begin this right away?
- How can I organize or inquire about professional development on the topic of authentic assessment and documentation?
- Do the job descriptions describe staff responsibilities for documentation?
- As a director, how can I arrange staff schedules to allow time for staff to work on documentation?
- Can we focus on documentation at staff meetings, by sharing experiences, questions, ideas?
- Are there other educators in other programs who may be able to provide advice for us as we begin to document?





# Appendix A:

## What Do Nova Scotia Educators Say?

Educators from early childhood education programs across Nova Scotia participated in piloting the province's early learning curriculum framework between April and December 2017. They participated in provincial and regional training sessions and staff meetings, and were supported by early childhood development consultants and support site coordinators. At the end of the pilot, educators participated in an online survey and interviews. Their insights helped evaluate the framework's proposed approach.

Participating educators also shared advice for colleagues who are implementing the framework:

- *It may seem overwhelming at first, but as you go on and work as a team, your team will become stronger, and in return you will have a better center for your families who use it. Remember: How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Take baby steps and then later down the road you will see how you grew in leaps and bounds. Every day is a new day with challenges and victories.*
- *For any new centers please take the time to read the educators guide. Ask questions and have an open mind. You will not be disappointed!!!! It works!*
- *My advice would be to keep an open mind while working through the guide. Don't try to change everything at once but rather break it down into workable pieces over a period of time and your program will begin to evolve in ways you will be very proud of. Don't be too hard on yourself and your staff. Slow down and enjoy the journey.*
- *This is a good opportunity for centres to reflect on what they do well and how they need to develop their programs in the future. Although it may be a scary process at first it will create opportunities for in-depth discussions and real change in the way we deliver service to families in our organizations.*
- *As an educator, take your role to new heights as a co-learner and co-researcher.*
- *The educators guide has provided the staff opportunities to share and work as a team. The language used throughout reinforced the positive relationships we strive to develop with our families and children in our care. The guide provided us an opportunity to reflect on where we were as educators and provided opportunities to make enhancements within our program.*

- *When our centre participated in the pilot program we were coming from an emergent back ground and we were nervous this would be a repeat of what we were already doing and not at all beneficial. When we got together with staff to talk about the aspects of the framework it led to very meaningful conversations and the changes we made as a result of the conversations worked really well for children, staff, and parents. Nova Scotia is lucky to have a curriculum framework in place, this will help to increase the quality of Early years learning and support staff and centers in delivering a program that is beneficial to everyone involved.*
- *Our advice is to go slow, break it down in little pieces and really reflect on what you are already doing and how it fits into the framework. Time is needed to read, reflect, discuss, implement, and reflect again.*
- *Network with others. Staff meetings will be required so that you can have the conversations needed to implement the curriculum. During staff meetings have activities and discussions planned for small groups of educators. This will give the educators time to discuss, participate, and reflect. Educators should reflect upon their personal core values and how they fit into the centre's vision, mission, and value statements. I think that is a good first step in preparing to implement the framework, it gives you reassurance that you are on the right page.*
- *It is exciting that, after decades of doing this independently, we will all have a consistent framework and terminology to use when discussing our curriculum with parents and community. This framework is reflective of the work that we have been doing for over 39 years in this province and for some of you a lot longer. We have planned our home-like environments (both indoors and outdoors) and our curriculum based on what is developmentally appropriate (ratios, nutrition, safety, etc.) with the idea that the child is the most important person visiting our centre and we strive each day to honor them. Early childhood education is a continual learning journey and if we always put the child first, and their interests, then we can research and plan for an amazing adventure.*
- *The framework enabled us to look at our practices, see what we are already doing well within our programs, and in which areas we may be able to improve. This framework will help ensure that we have a more consistent model of what licensed early childhood programs should encompass throughout the province of NS.*
- *Overall our experience has been positive. We are still at the early stages of understanding what we need to change or improve. Our center has been in the childcare industry for 40 years. The staff here have many years' experience and are dedicated life long learners. We are still aligning our program with the new frame work. There are many areas that we are looking at. Our board was also at this time participating in strategic planning sessions. Our focus on improvement is ongoing.*

- *To slightly expand on what I have said previously above – I hope every centre feels comfortable in knowing when to pause longer when necessary and not just leap ahead due to time constraints. This should be viewed as a continuing and revolving reflection/practice. You do not finish the book or framework you start to reflect again on your values, etc. With intentional, reflective, and best practice you cannot fail at delivering the guidelines of the framework.*
- *Stand your ground if parents question you! If they are used to having 'school readiness' for example, the idea of play-based learning will make them nervous/unsure. Do your research and share the value in everything they play with and do. Play is learning, and it's our job to educate parents on this.*
- *Don't become overwhelmed! Take a section at a time. Change can be scary but change is good! Once you've completed it you will love it! Some of you are doing this already!*
- *Take it slow and be comfortable with one aspect or area before moving onto another, ensure you all understand and are comfortable!*
- *For us it was how the staff all came together. We enjoyed our Regional Sessions and one suggestion I would have is to meet after the sessions at your centre to discuss any concerns staff may have re: implementing the framework. I would also suggest centres make sure they get advice and support from their consultant. She/he is there to support you on the journey. We had positive feedback from parents on the framework. I think the new Nova Scotia early learning framework is an excellent piece of work. It is a very exciting time for childcare in Nova Scotia.*



# Appendix B:

## Resources

### Books

Beloglovsky, M. 2016. *Loose Parts 2: Inspiring Play with Infants and Toddlers*. St. Paul, MN: Red Leaf Press.

Brown, S. 2010. *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

Chaillé, C. 2008. *Constructivism Across the Curriculum in Early Childhood Classrooms—Big Ideas as Inspiration*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Curtis, D. and M. Carter. 2012. *The Art of Awareness—How Observation Can Transform Your Teaching, 2nd edition*. St. Paul, MN: Red Leaf Press.

Daly, L. and M. Beloglovsky. 2014. *Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children*. St. Paul, MN: Red Leaf Press.

Elkind, D. 2007. *The Power of Play*. Pennsylvania: Da Capo Press.

Epstein, A. 2014. *The Intentional Teacher—Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning*. Revised Edition. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Greenman, J. 2007. *Caring Spaces, Learning Places—Children's Environments that Work*. Washington: Exchange Press.

Gronlund, G. and M. James. 2013. *Focused Observations: How to Observe Children for Assessment and Curriculum Planning, 2nd edition*. St. Paul, MN: Red Leaf Press.

Hammond, Z. 2015. *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain—Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. California: Corwin.

Helm, J.H., Beneke, S., and K. Steinheimer. 2007. *Windows on Learning: Documenting Young Children's Work, 2nd edition*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.

Hopkins, S., ed. 1999. *Hearing Everyone's Voice*. Washington: Child Care Information Exchange.

Keeler, R. 2016. *Seasons of Play: Natural Environments of Wonder*. North Carolina: Gryphon House.

Schön, D. 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. USA: Basic Books Inc.

Shonkoff, J. and D. Phillips. 2000. *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Sullivan, D.R-E. 2016. *Cultivating the Genius of Black Children Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap in the Early Years*. St. Paul, MN: Red Leaf Press.

York, S. 2016 *Roots and Wings: Affirming Culture and Preventing Bias in Early Childhood*. St. Paul, MN: Red Leaf Press.

## Curriculum program guides

- *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice*.  
*Comprendre le Cadre pédagogique pour l'apprentissage des jeunes enfants de la Colombie-Britannique: De la théorie à la pratique:*  
[www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework).
- *Play and Exploration Early Learning Program Guide—Saskatchewan:* [www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=74066](http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=74066).
- *For Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Olds into Practice Booklet—Supplement to Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide:* [www.edonline.sk.ca/bbcswebdav/library/Curriculum%20Website/Kindergarten/Resources/Additional/Essential\\_Learning\\_Experiences.pdf](http://www.edonline.sk.ca/bbcswebdav/library/Curriculum%20Website/Kindergarten/Resources/Additional/Essential_Learning_Experiences.pdf).
- *An Introduction to How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years—Educators:* [www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/EducatorsEn.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/EducatorsEn.pdf).
- *Supporting Documents to the New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care:* [www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/elcc/content/curriculum/curriculum\\_framework.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/elcc/content/curriculum/curriculum_framework.html) (English).
- *Documents à l'appui pour Le Curriculum éducatif pour la petite enfance francophone du Nouveau-Brunswick:* [www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/fr/ministeres/education/elcc/content/curriculum/curriculum\\_educatif.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/fr/ministeres/education/elcc/content/curriculum/curriculum_educatif.html) (French).
- *Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia:* [docs.education.gov.au/documents/educators-guide-early-years-learning-framework-australia](http://docs.education.gov.au/documents/educators-guide-early-years-learning-framework-australia).
- *Educators' Guide to My Time, Our Place Australia:* [docs.education.gov.au/node/2940](http://docs.education.gov.au/node/2940)
- *Aistear—The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for All Children from Birth to Six-Years in Ireland:* [www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum\\_and\\_Assessment/Early\\_Childhood\\_and\\_Primary\\_Education/Early\\_Childhood\\_Education/Aistear\\_Toolkit/Aistear\\_Toolkit.html](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Early_Childhood_Education/Aistear_Toolkit/Aistear_Toolkit.html).
- *Aistear—Supporting Learning and Development Through Assessment:* [www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines\\_ENG/Assessment\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines_ENG/Assessment_ENG.pdf).



## Additional resources

- Centre of Excellence on Early Childhood Development—Canada / Centre d'excellence pour le développement des jeunes enfants: [www.excellence-jeunesenfants.ca/home.asp?lang=EN](http://www.excellence-jeunesenfants.ca/home.asp?lang=EN).  
[www.excellence-jeunesenfants.ca/home.asp?lang=FR](http://www.excellence-jeunesenfants.ca/home.asp?lang=FR).
- Healthy Child Manitoba. 2010. *Writing an Inclusion Policy—A Guide for Child Care Centres and Homes*. Winnipeg, MB: Government of Manitoba. [www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/resources/pubs/writing\\_inclusion\\_policy.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/resources/pubs/writing_inclusion_policy.pdf).
- Lally, J. R. 2009. *The Uniqueness of Infancy: How Infants and Toddlers Develop and How Development is Best Facilitated*. Presentation. Melbourne, Australia: April 2009. [www.rch.org.au](http://www.rch.org.au).
- National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program: *Observing Children—Gathering and Analysing Information to Inform Curriculum Decision Making*: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/NQS\\_PLP\\_E-Newsletter\\_No39.pdf](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/NQS_PLP_E-Newsletter_No39.pdf).
- Play Ideas for Playgroups—New Zealand: [www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/learning-tools-and-resources/play-ideas](http://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/learning-tools-and-resources/play-ideas).
- *Starting Early, Starting Strong—A Guide to Play-based Learning in Manitoba: Birth to Six*: [www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/ecd/ecd\\_birthto6\\_playbased.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/ecd/ecd_birthto6_playbased.pdf).

## Websites

- Association des services de garde à l'enfance de la Nouvelle-Écosse: [www.nschildcareassociation.org/fr/accueil/](http://www.nschildcareassociation.org/fr/accueil/)
- Canadian Child Care Federation: [www.cccf-fcsge.ca](http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca)
- Child Care Exchange: [www.childcareexchange.com](http://www.childcareexchange.com)
- La Fédération canadienne des services de garde à l'enfance: [www.cccf-fcsge.ca/fr](http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/fr)
- National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC): [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
- National Institute for Early Education Research: [www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org)
- Nova Scotia Child Care Association: [www.nschildcareassociation.org](http://www.nschildcareassociation.org)
- Reggio Children: [www.reggiochildren.it/?lang=en](http://www.reggiochildren.it/?lang=en)
- Zero to Three: [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

# Appendix C:

## Occupational Standards

Occupational standards are what a person in a particular occupation must know and be able to do to be considered capable in their job, and the level of skills and knowledge required to do it effectively, safely, and properly (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council 2010). In Canada, there are two sets of occupational standards developed that are relevant to the early childhood education sector, written by the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC). These standards address the scope of work carried out by a particular occupation, and identify tasks within broad categories, sub tasks, the skills required to carry out the task, and the core knowledge required.

*The Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators (2010)* are a revision of the *Occupational Standards for Child Care Practitioners* developed by the Canadian Child Care Federation in 2003. This set of standards includes an analysis of tasks, required skills, and core knowledge in six broad areas:

- child development, learning, and care
- equipment and facilities
- family and community relations
- professional relationships
- personal and professional development
- record-keeping

*The Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators (2013)* include an analysis of tasks, required skills, and core knowledge in six broad areas:

- child development and care
- human resources
- financial
- facilities
- family and community relations
- governance

For more information on occupational standards and profiles, visit: [www.ccsc-cssge.ca/projects-publications/publications#Occupational%20Standards](http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/projects-publications/publications#Occupational%20Standards).

These standards were prepared by the CCHRSC, with funding and support from the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program. With the termination of Canada's Sector Council Program in 2012, the CCHRSC was dissolved in 2013. A continuing trust manages the dissemination of research and publications.

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