SECTION ONE

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In Children’s Best Interests

Values-Based Curriculum Framework

Valuing Children

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Valuing Relationships

Valuing Environments
**VISION**

Our vision is that all children will grow to their fullest potential with dignity, a sense of self-worth, and a zest for living and learning. It is a holistic vision that seeks to provide the environment and resources needed to support dynamic development in young children who are:

- curious, courageous, and confident in their pursuit of knowledge and skills;
- secure in their linguistic and cultural identities;
- respectful of diversity; and
- contributing to the development of a just and democratic society that nurtures connection and care for life on the earth.

In keeping with contemporary research and theory, the framework emphasizes responsive relationships, children’s strengths, and engaging environments. It views children as confident, active learners whose learning, growth, and development are profoundly influenced by the quality of their relationships with people and their interactions with places and things.

Play is acknowledged in the framework as integral to children’s learning and richly formative in their capacity for relationships. Early years educators in New Brunswick echo the views of their colleagues around the world in their belief that play must be accorded a key place in the lives of young children. Research and theory support the long-held contention that play is essential to quality of life in childhood and a primary means of understanding the world. Consequently, this curriculum framework articulates ways in which educators can maximize the potential of play for children’s care and learning.

The *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care — English* values and promotes children’s experience of:

- safe and caring environments where their emotional and physical health, positive self-identities, and sense of belonging are nurtured and protected;
- open and flexible environments where playful exploration, problem-solving and creativity are encouraged and purposefully planned;
- intellectually, socially and culturally engaging environment where their communicative practices, literacies, and literate identities are valued and supported;
- socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments in which consideration for others, inclusive, equitable, democratic and sustainable practices are enacted, and social responsibility is nurtured.
VISION

The uniqueness of each child is implicitly integrated into the philosophy of early learning and child care that underlines the framework. By design, the curriculum will not merely accommodate, but actively honour the diversity of New Brunswick’s children and their languages and heritages. This is a challenging and daunting task, one that requires a clear vision and a resourceful, collaborative, and creative approach to providing for our youngest citizens’ full participation in the social and cultural life of their communities.
**Purpose**

Throughout Canada and the world there is a growing recognition of the need to value and support the learning and child care of our youngest children. The *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care — English* addresses this need by providing the foundation for an emergent and engaging curriculum for children from birth to five, one that will encourage optimum development in an atmosphere of trust, security, and respect. As such it seeks to:

- Articulate common values, goals, and principles for early learning and child care that are open to ongoing input and change;
- Identify essential areas of early learning and care and holistic pedagogies for young children;
- Provide a supportive structure for educators as they co-construct curriculum with children, families, and communities at the local level;
- Affirm exemplary practices while encouraging the ongoing dynamic development of diverse practice in the field;
- Develop a shared professional language for discussion of early learning and child care policy and practice;
- Contribute to ongoing questioning, discussions, and critical reflection about early learning and care in New Brunswick;
- Prompt change by directing attention to questions about our agenda for children and the ways in which we respect children’s capacities, ideas and potentials.

Suited for home-based and centre-based care, the framework can be used as a source of information for parents, early childhood educators, and other professionals and paraprofessionals. It is intended to facilitate continuity of learning and care by connecting to diverse home practices, linking with other community-based programs and supports, and complementing the school curriculum.
**Structure**

In the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care — English*, you will find the following sections:

- Section One describes the context and values from which the curriculum framework flows;
- Section Two outlines four broad goals for early learning and care, which are subsequently expanded in Section Four;
- Section Three addresses learning principles, documentation/assessment, and continuities/transition;
- Section Four is an expansion of each of the four broad goals to illustrate what’s involved in learning, and the provisions and professional practices to support learning and care;
- Section Five includes a literature review and bibliography that grounds the work in contemporary theory and practice;

The values, principles and broad goals outlined in the curriculum are interdependent and not intended for use in isolation. In practice they are in constant interplay, brought to life by communities of children and adults to constitute the curriculum as an organic whole in which early learning and care are always connected. Professional support documents further elaborate the framework in practice.
IN CHILDREN’S BEST INTERESTS

The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all that we do.
— United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3, Section 1

The curriculum framework presented in this document recognizes early learning and care as inseparable in the lives of children. By placing children at the centre, their best interests form a primary consideration in all that we do.

Determining what is in children’s best interests requires ongoing conversation, communication, and negotiation. Diverse families and communities may differ in what they believe to be best for their children, and the children themselves are entitled to a voice. As well, the interests of individual children always exist in fragile balance with the interests of the various groups to which they belong. Consequently, children’s best interests must be understood in the context of their dynamic relationships with families, communities, languages, and cultures.

As children’s first and most influential teachers, the families’ own values, goals, and aspirations are integral to the curriculum for early learning and care. Educators and other professionals must work together with families in mutually respectful and harmonious ways to build cohesive communities that can assure children’s well-being. We must honour diverse family circumstances, languages and cultures even as they celebrate the commonalities that bind them together.

Including all children

Throughout this document we have used the term children to refer to all children, regardless of race, religion, culture, language, social and economic status, gender, sexual orientation, or ability. The use of this inclusive term, without qualifiers, is deliberate. It resists the implication that particular ways of being in the world are “normal” while other ways are not.

Recognizing that each child embodies race, religion, culture, language, social and economic status, gender, sexual orientation, and ability in unique and dynamic ways, we also acknowledge that paying close attention to the sites of difference is requisite to ensuring equitable opportunities for all children. In so doing, we emphasize the need for a curriculum that is responsive to differences, with the capacity to provide additional support as required to ensure each child’s right to full participation.¹

In keeping with contemporary research on curriculum for early learning and care, this curriculum framework is values-based. The values were arrived at through an extensive review of the literature, a process of broad consultation in New Brunswick, and extensive feedback from external reviewers. In the consultations, it was agreed that no single value should be privileged over another. As society changes, values shift. Making values explicit opens them to ongoing negotiation, critique, and change. In the context of a values-based curriculum, childhood as an age in its own right and children’s rights figure prominently.

**The Distinctiveness of Childhood**

We value childhood as an age in its own right characterized by curiosity, rapid growth, vulnerability, and resilience and “todayness.”* It is much more than simply preparation for the future. Curiosity sets in motion exploration, play, and communication as children’s primary ways of knowing about the world. Consequently, the need for protection and belonging is counterbalanced by the need for new experiences and openness to risk taking.


**Children’s Rights**

We value the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, ratified by Canada in 1991, which recognizes children as citizens with rights for opportunities to reach their fullest potential: the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to be protected from harm, to exercise a voice, to engage in play and recreational activities, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.†


**Inclusiveness and Equity**

We value diversities, and honour all individual, social, linguistic and cultural differences. We uphold the right of every child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life regardless of language, culture, race, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, or ability — and encourage the provision of negotiated and equitable opportunities for participation.

**Compassion and Caring**

We value compassion and an ethic of care as essential to nurturing the growth, development, and learning of young children, ensuring the rights of the most vulnerable members of our society and preserving the earth for future generations.
Living Democratically
We value the everyday enactment of democracy that gives children a voice in matters that concern them and provides opportunities to participate in making and questioning collective decisions.

Individuality and Independence
We value the unique personalities, talents, and abilities of every person. We value the capacity for independent action, individual accomplishment, and personal responsibility.

Social Responsibility
We value respect for fellow human beings and the responsibility of each, according to their ability, to contribute to the enhancement of interdependent communities, cultures, and sustainable futures. We value collective responsibility, solidarity, and collective action.

Communication
We value communication in all its forms, for its capacity to transmit feelings, language, and other cultural knowledge; to advance human thought; to develop human relations; and to enhance the distinctly human ability to reflect critically on the past and plan purposefully for the future.

Imagination, Creativity, and Play
We value imagination, creativity, and play for their capacity to produce a dynamic and innovative society. We value play and the arts as particularly fruitful ways for children to imagine new possibilities, explore novel ways of doing things, create unique ideas and products, and reinvent culture.

Aesthetics
We value beauty, pleasure, and desire in the growth of knowledge, understanding, judgment, and expression.

Spirituality
We value the child’s right to a restorative spiritual space for enhancement of moral and ethical development.

Zest for Living and Learning
We value the zest for living and learning that embodies curiosity, playfulness, determination, persistence, pleasure in accomplishment, resilience, and the sheer joy of being alive.
Valuing Children

How we view children and their capacity to learn is embedded in our collective understandings about childhood, children’s relationships, and the material conditions of their lives. Beliefs about children and childhood are constructed and interpreted through social, economic, and cultural lenses. As such, expectations and opportunities for children differ from one culture to another, from one place to another, from one time to another.

In this framework, we acknowledge children as curious and communicative individuals in their own right: young citizens actively constructing, co-constructing and reconstructing their understanding of the world within various communities of learning. This image also presupposes children’s rights to the basic necessities of life and the inclusion of their cultures and languages in everyday experiences.

Children begin learning at birth, and their experiences during the early years have critical consequences both in the present and for their own futures. To thrive as curious, confident, communicative people, they are entitled to nurturing relationships. They also are entitled to engaging and inclusive environments in which well-being is secured, exploration and play supported, home languages and literacies honoured and advanced, and respect for diversity promoted and practised.

5 The image of the child is a concept that been articulated and enacted in the Reggio Emilia early learning and care settings for infants, toddlers, and young children in Northern Italy. Reggio practices are embedded in the learning theories of John Dewey, Erik Erikson, Barbara Biber, Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget. See Susan Fraser, Authentic Childhood (Nelson College Indigenous: Toronto, 2006), 13-47, Chapter two: The image of the child. Also Lella Gandini and Carolyn Pope Edwards, Bambini: the Italian Approach to Infant/Toddler Care (Teachers College Press: New York, 2001), 49-54, Chapter four: The image of the child and the child’s environment.

Valuing Cultures and Languages

New Brunswick is home to the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy Nations as well as established and recent immigrants from around the world. In the 2006 census, 2.4% of New Brunswick’s population identified themselves as aboriginal while visible minorities accounted for less than 1.5% of the total population. Visible minority and ethnocultural groups are, for the most part, small and geographically dispersed; in some parts of rural New Brunswick they are virtually absent. Where non-white children are present, it is highly possible that they may be the only visible minority in their centre or even in their community.

Officially a bilingual province, New Brunswick has a predominantly English-speaking population with a large French speaking minority (approximately one-third); 96% of the population counted English or French as their mother tongue in the 2006 census (Statistics Canada 2006). The indigenous languages of the region — Maliseet/Passamaquoddy and Mi’kmaq — have no official status in New Brunswick and, with a history of assimilation in monolingual schooling (English or French), have only a fragile and precarious existence.

Consequently, while New Brunswick’s cultural mix offers exciting possibilities for cultivating intercultural sensitivities, harmonious relationships and dialogue between the English majority and the French minority, it presents enormous challenges for the cultivation of expansive world views and preservation of the linguistic and cultural identities of indigenous and visible minority children. However, a curriculum framework that upholds the principle of inclusion and seeks the best interests of all children must pursue these challenges vigorously.

The diversity of cultures in New Brunswick is rendered more complex by its socio-demographic diversity. With an almost equal split between rural and urban populations, a curriculum designed specifically for New Brunswick must embrace rural and urban lifeways by creating spaces for the inclusion of local knowledge, a sense of place, and the discussion of differences.

7 Canadian Council on Social Development, Demographics of the Canadian population (CCSD: Ottawa, 2005), http://www.ccsd.ca/factsheets/demographics/.

8 Included in the Aboriginal identity population are those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuit, and/or those who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian, as defined by the Indian Act of Canada, and/or those who reported they were members of an Indian band or First Nation. Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Canada (Statistics Canada: Ottawa, 2006), http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/demo52a.htm.
Valuing Cultures and Languages

Diverse family configurations add another layer of complexity to the cultural mix in New Brunswick. In addition, families may experience particular social and economic challenges as a consequence of factors such as recent immigration, low income, lone parenting, and social or geographic isolation.

We recognize that innovative approaches to the development and delivery of a curriculum for early learning and child care are required to ensure its responsiveness to diverse cultural, linguistic, and family circumstances. In this respect, other countries provide useful leads. In New Zealand, for example, the language rights of Maori children and the protection of Maori language and culture are sought through a bicultural curriculum and the practice of language nests which immerse children in their mother tongue from a very early age. Similarly, special measures have been taken to address the particular needs of children living in socially and economically depressed areas in many European and North American jurisdictions. Britain’s Sure Start Program and Toronto’s First Duty are prime examples of the capacity of “joined up” services to significantly enhance the life chances of children — compelling evidence for a comprehensive approach that embeds a curriculum for early learning and child care in the larger spectrum of social services.

Valuing Relationships

Children’s early learning and care is profoundly influenced by the quality of the relationships they experience. Relationships with the people, materials, and events in children’s various communities are interconnected and reciprocal. For the most part, children’s first relationships occur within a family setting. Their well-being, in the broadest sense of the term, will be intimately connected with the dynamic matrix of family relationships.¹²

Fostering Relationships Between Families and Early Childhood Educators

When children enter child care, consistent and trusting relationships between families and educators are critical to the well-being of both children and families. In many instances, a designated educator takes an active role in helping the child and parents settle in to a new environment.

Families — historically, the mothers — carry intimate knowledge of their children: knowledge that is invaluable to educators as they plan for continuities of learning and care for young children. As societal values shift, and with increasing support to parents, more fathers are involved in the care of young children. Educators at child care centres have a responsibility to cultivate strong reciprocal relationships with families.

Fostering Relationships Between Children and Educators

Deep, caring, enduring relationships between children and educators provide predictability and secure attachment in children’s lives. Forming warm and responsive relationships with children typically means respecting their emotional rhythms, listening carefully to their conversations, taking their suggestions for problem solving seriously, and following their lead in curriculum planning. Flexible educators respond to children’s interests, passions, and strengths; engage children in multiple forms of communication, creativity, and expression; and encourage joint endeavours where children and adults learn and play together.

**Valuing Relationships**

*Fostering Peer Relationships*

When children enter a child care setting, they enter an environment rich in potential friendships. Friendships among infants begin when children are as young as eight months, and from that time forward they are integral to children’s learning and development. Educators play a key role in helping children successfully negotiate a range of social relations that both constitute and convey learning.

*Fostering Professional and Community Relationships*

Educators working with young children need designated reflective time with each other to develop collegial relationships that encourage:

- An appreciation of each other’s learning and teaching approach;
- Engagement in thoughtful daily and long-term planning;
- Participation in professional growth and development activities;
- Consultation and collaboration with other professionals and paraprofessionals;
- Participation in community initiatives and capacity building;
- Opportunities to exchange, share, and advocate with members of the community.

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VALUING RELATIONSHIPS

Challenges in Relationships

Challenges in relationships are often linked to differences in beliefs and values about early learning, child care, and family structure. Successful communication between families and educators can open the door for families, early childhood educators, and other professionals to work together as partners. When families and educators do not share a common language, class, or culture, for example, communication may be more challenging. Careful listening and sensitive communication are always vital, but even more so when families and professionals have differing perspectives on the optimal conditions for early learning and development. To assist with building strong, trusting relationships, it may be helpful to:

- Become aware of one’s own biases and beliefs — how they might differ from others and possibly interfere with communication;
- Emphasize commonalities and shared goals;
- Practise skills for supporting conversation — especially empathetic listening;
- Use documentation of children’s learning to inform families, peers and professionals about children’s daily learning and living experiences;
- Value each other’s wisdom;
- View conflict as a possible pathway to alternative possibilities.14

14 Sherry Rose, Communication to build relationships (DFCS: Fredericton, 2006).
Valuing 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 will enhance healthy development and learning, and increase children’s potential.15

Quality environments for early learning and care are carefully organized to reflect the fundamental values and goals of the curriculum, to produce optimal learning and development. Recognized as an essential component of early learning, the physical environment is often referred to as “the third teacher.”16

Purposeful Environmental Design

The emphasis on environment as “the third teacher” 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 their immediate environments, and take responsibility for maintaining, modifying, and renewing them.

Educators constantly mediate between the child and the multiple environments in which the child dwells by stepping in, or deliberately stepping back, to ensure that curiosity is sustained, friendships promoted, spirits uplifted, rights protected, home and community experience honoured, safety ensured, language developed, and the learning potential of every child is maximized.

It is therefore essential that every child’s active engagement17 is supported within environments that are:


16 Susan Fraser, Authentic Childhood, 52-76, Chapter three: The environment as third teacher.

17 See the ten action points for teachers outlined by Ferre Laevers, Experiential Education (Centre for Experiential Education: Leuven, 2003). Also New South Wales, Curriculum Framework for Children’s Services.
VALUING ENVIRONMENTS

- 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; ¹⁸
- Communication-rich, for language growth and development;
- Developmentally and culturally appropriate; ¹⁹
- Aesthetically inviting and engaging; ²⁰
- Conducive to playful exploration; ²¹
- Supportive of varied physical activity, indoors and out, on a daily basis; ²²
- Responsive to children’s changing, interests, abilities, and desires, and capitalizing on their strengths. ²³
- Responsive to children’s independent initiation of activity, ideas, transitions, and routines; ²⁴
- Considerate of children’s differences;
- Ensuring equitable access to material and social worlds; ²⁵
- Mindful of individuals’ home environments and groups’ collective pasts that impact on their present-day consciousness;
- Supportive of large and small group collaborations;
- Reflective of seasonal and cultural events; ²⁶
- Connected to the broader natural and constructed environments, the local community, cultural life, and the arts. ²⁷

¹⁸ These materials are understood as essential to early learning, in early childhood curriculum documents, professional and academic literature.


²³ NAEYC, Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs.

²⁴ Elinor Goldschmied and Sonia Jackson, People under Three: Young Children in Day Care (Routledge: London, 2004).

²⁵ New Brunswick Association for Community Living, Quality inclusive childcare: Opening the Door to Quality Childcare and Development program (GNB: Fredericton), http://www nbaci nb ca/english programs/early childcare.asp.


²⁷ Young Children (July 2004) focuses on the arts; Online and print resources for exploring the creative arts with young children, Young Children: Beyond the Journal (NAEYC: Washington, 2004), http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200407/resources.asp.
Inclusiveness and Equity          Compassion and Caring
• Living Democratically
• Individuality                     And Independence
• Social Responsibility
• Communication
• Imagination, Creativity & Play
• Spirituality
• Zest for Living and Learning

A Values Based Curriculum

Elizabeth