SECTION THREE

Learning Principles and Implications

Documentation and Assessment

Continuities and Transitions
LEARNING PRINCIPLES AND IMPLICATIONS

Beliefs about learning have particular implications for the teaching, caring, and assessment practices of educators. The following principles are pedagogically sound for young children, and, though this is not an exhaustive list, these principles about learning and their implications for teaching are commonly understood as central to promoting the healthy development and joyful learning of young children.

Children thrive when they are nurtured in close, caring, and consistent relationships.28

- Designated educators interact daily with the child and the family to provide for continuity of caring.
- Physical contact and affection that are respectful of cultural norms are part of every child’s day.
- Educators show a sincere interest in what children are doing and thinking, and in making their thinking visible.
- Guidance is consistent; flexible routines mark the rhythm of the day.
- Educators adopt a positive, tactful, and sensitive tone for verbal and physical interactions.
- Self-regulation and self-discipline are encouraged.

Children are unique individuals who learn and develop at different rates and in different ways.29

- Curriculum is shaped to each individual child’s interests, abilities, and vulnerabilities, and capitalizes on their strengths.
- A rich variety of materials, strategies, and teaching approaches is employed.
- Environments are designed to meet a wide range of abilities, interests, and enthusiasms.
- Environments and interactions are adapted to ensure the inclusion of all children.


Learning Principles and Implications

All aspects of children’s development and learning are interrelated and interdependent.  

- Holistic learning, such as a project approach or structured play, engages the child as a person with physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and ethical aspects, simultaneously, in dynamic interplay.
- Authentic everyday experiences are used as the basis for learning to foster the integration of knowledge.
- When focusing their teaching on one area, educators are conscious of how this particular teachable moment implicates other areas of learning.

Children are agents in their own learning, actively building their knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings through first-hand experiences and reciprocal relationships with the people and things in their environment.

- Careful preparation of the physical environment ensures that children have access to a wide range of materials and the flexibility to use them in ways that are personally significant.
- Children are encouraged to initiate their own learning.
- Educators take their lead from children and build on their prior knowledge in order to ensure personally engaging and socially significant learning experiences.
- Educators encourage children to generate theories about the way things work. They refrain from imposing their own understanding of the world on children, recognizing that refinement of understanding is a process requiring time and the active engagement of the learner.
- Educators are aware that similar experiences do not necessarily result in similar learning. Consequently, they observe and document what individuals and groups of children do, to determine what they are learning and how that learning can be fruitfully extended.

Learning Principles and Implications

Children belong to multiple learning communities, and their learning is profoundly influenced by the relationships within and among these communities. The inherently social nature of learning is recognized when educators purposefully plan for and support children’s interactions with other children in large and small groups and with adults. Educators help children make their thinking visible so that ideas and feelings can be shared and thus extended. Communities of children within the centre interact regularly with children from other age groups. Educators are conscious of the way in which their teaching and care relates to the other learning communities to which children belong. People from various learning communities are invited to bring local knowledge into the centre, and children are regularly taken out into the community.

Learning and development are nested within particular social and cultural contexts. Educators respect different social and cultural values and practices as they plan the learning environment and interact with parents and children. Educators are aware of their own social and cultural biases, and take steps to ensure that these do not result in marginalizing any children or their families. Ideas and beliefs are open to discussion. Multiple perspectives are solicited, and social, linguistic and cultural diversity are honoured. Educators encourage children to present and discuss different identities.


33 Janet Gonzalez-Mena, Multicultural Issues in Child Care (Mayfield: Mountain View, 1993); Louise Derman-Sparks, Anti-bias Curriculum; Nadia S. Hall, The Affective Curriculum: Teaching the Anti-Bias Approach to Young Children (Nelson Canada: Toronto, 1995).
Learning Principles and Implications

Multiple languages play a central role in mediating thought and learning. thirty-four

- Oral language, signs, symbols, and written language are deliberately embedded into every aspect of the physical and social environment.
- Children are encouraged to experiment with their mother tongue and other languages — particularly French, the aboriginal languages of the region, and languages that are spoken by their classmates and locally.
- Language play, including songs, rhymes, jingles, and chants, is part of the daily routine.
- Educators are responsive to each child’s language level and act as language providers and role models to stimulate and extend children’s language.
- Educators make provisions for children to express themselves and make their ideas visible with a wide variety of materials and languages, such as music, dance, and the visual arts.
- Educators provide, and access additional support when needed, for alternative or augmentative communication.
- Educators access additional language support for ESL and aboriginal children.

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Documentation and Assessment

The purpose of documentation and assessment is to focus the educators’, children’s, and parents’ attention on what individual children and groups of children are learning within a particular setting.

Narrative assessment illustrates, describes, and interprets the learning of individual children or groups of children through careful listening, photographs, observations, anecdotal records, and multimodal learning stories such as those developed in conjunction with Te Whāriki — the New Zealand Curriculum. This form of assessment builds community and links children’s learning to curricular goals and future planning.

Normative assessment is typically an individual assessment that locates an individual’s development in relation to age-group norms, such as developmental milestones. This form of assessment must be used carefully and thoughtfully, keeping in mind that all norms are socially and culturally biased.

Drawing upon narrative and normative assessment provides differing perspectives and insights into children’s learning and curriculum planning.

Children

Documentation and assessment provide a focus on individuals or small groups of children in relation to the goals, values, and learning principles of the New Brunswick curriculum; they emphasize a strengths-based approach.

Documentation and assessment activities are intended to

- enhance, celebrate, and contribute to children’s well-being, relationships, and learning;
- illustrate and enhance children’s interests, passions, and strengths;
- contribute to authentic family and community involvement in children’s everyday life;
- reflect multiple viewpoints, including children’s perspectives on their experiences and learning;
- provide information for planning learning experiences for individual children and groups;
- create an enduring record of children’s learning and living experiences; and
- relate clearly to the values, goals, and learning principles of the curriculum framework.

**Documentation and Assessment**

*Documentation and assessment activities include:*

- Listening to children;
- Recording children’s conversations;
- Conversing with children to learn about their theories;
- Observing children as they learn individually and in groups;
- Keeping anecdotal notes on individual and group learning;
- Displaying children’s work and words;
- Annotating children’s art work;
- Annotating photographs of children in the process of learning;
- Creating learning story portfolios or albums of learning events;
- Exploring, encouraging, and recording children’s questions and theories;
- Creating and displaying project webs;
- Communicating with home through conversations and notes;
- Communicating through daily invitational family information boards;
- Collecting and preserving samples of children’s work over time;
- Describing the intensity and duration of children’s engagement as an indicator of learning.
Documentation and Assessment

Educators

Educators are responsible for mediating healthy relationships with children, colleagues, parents, professionals, and other adults. In the context of these relationships with children and their families, educators document, plan, and assess children’s learning. In addition, educators plan the use of time, space, and materials within particular environments.

It is important that educators are aware of the importance that various cultures attach to different types of assessments and be able to discuss these beliefs with parents. Also, in some cultures, the educator’s opinion is very strongly respected and educators need to be aware that their viewpoints can be powerful determinants of what parents do with their children.

Record keeping, assessment, and evaluation are intensive processes requiring considerable non-contact time to effectively serve their designated purposes. The creation of time and space for educators’ reflection is vital to increasing the quality of early learning and care. Laevers’ Ten Action Points for Teachers38 and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised (ECERS-R)39 are among a number of tools that can facilitate reflective planning.

Centres

Physical Setting

The critical importance of the environment as “the third teacher” is described elsewhere in this document. Purposeful planning of children’s spaces is a key component of both children’s learning and the documentation and assessment of their learning. It requires thoughtful and ongoing assessment of space and materials in relation to the particular strengths, vulnerabilities, and interests of particular individuals and groups of children.

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38 Ferre Laevers, Experiential Education: Making care and education more effective through wellbeing and involvement (Centre for Experiential Education: Leuven, 2003)
Documentation and Assessment

The ECERS-R and its companion tools40 are also used to assess child care environments. These environmental scans have been implemented in New Brunswick through the Opening the Door to Quality Child Care and Development Project, hosted by the New Brunswick Association for Community Living and funded by the New Brunswick Government.41


Record Keeping/Monitoring

The Province of New Brunswick prescribes the protocol for monitoring the health and safety of individual children and communicating this information to parents. Provincial guidelines for menu and program also elicit indicators of the experiences to which each group of children (but not necessarily each individual) has been exposed.

Program and System

Information is gathered and analyzed periodically to ensure that programs and systems are functioning as designed, and to generate input into new directions and designs. Participatory evaluation models ensure that evaluation is done with the participants, not imposed on them; the most ethically defensible and comprehensive picture is generated when multiple perspectives are included.


41 New Brunswick Association for Community Living, Quality inclusive childcare: Opening the Door to Quality Childcare and Development program (GNB: Fredericton), http://www.nbacl.nb.ca/english/programs/early_childcare.asp.
CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

Transitions are part of everyday life for infants, toddlers, and young children and require adjustments to different environments and different people, often several times a day. These transitions, referred to as “horizontal transitions,” act as a backdrop for larger “vertical transitions” such as the move from home to child care and/or child care to school. The innovative research of scholars such as Stig Bröstrom has integrated the views of young children into the conversation on transitions, and a growing body of evidence is prompting policies aimed at smoothing both vertical and horizontal transitions to provide for enhanced continuities in learning.

42 Stig Bröstrom and Judith Wagner, eds. Early Childhood Education in Five Nordic Countries: Perspectives on the Transition from Preschool to School (Systime Academic: Arhus, 2003).
43 For example, policies to facilitate the seamless or ‘wraparound day’.
44 For example, in the Swedish curriculum the formal designation of the principal to facilitate transitions between pre-school and school.
45 First Duty programs in Toronto facilitate both vertical and horizontal transitions by offering a range of early childhood programs and services, child care, pre-school and early elementary school on the same site.
CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

Typically, transition policies and procedures attempt to offset the fragmentation of children’s lives by addressing the fractured landscape of institutions in which they participate. They strive for coherence and continuity of learning and care by

- Acknowledging the diverse contributions the child and family bring from their
  - social circumstances
  - cultural and linguistic heritages
  - physical environments
- Honouring these contributions and using them to
  - establish routines
  - nourish a sense of belonging for the child and family
  - create responsive curricular experiences
- Enabling educators to share knowledge about rules, routines, and expectations in their respective communities of practice through
  - designated administrative responsibility
  - educator visits to each other’s sites
  - job swapping and shadowing
- Providing for supportive relationships in the new setting through
  - open door policies for families and educators
  - joint teaching during transition periods
- Creating new possibilities for coherence in learning and care, through
  - a series of open questions and ongoing discussions about curricular and pedagogical continuities.

Practiced in the Martenscroft Early Excellence Centre, Manchester, England to familiarize professionals with each others’ work, particularly when children and their families are being served by a number of different professionals.
CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

Transitioning: Home to Centre, Centre to School

When children enter child care, consistent and trusting relationships between families and educators are critical to the well-being of children and their families. In Canada, researcher and educator Susan Fraser\(^47\) has examined the concept of relational teaching. In relationships with families, Fraser makes several suggestions to build and sustain respectful relationships. These include: making families feel welcome; allowing for a lengthy transition time so parents and children have time to form relationships with educators; communicating clear expectations about the program and parental participation; informing parents of their child’s daily experiences and learnings through documentation and/or daily messages; listening and communicating honestly with parents; planning creative ways to involve families; and accepting differences in value systems of families. In many early learning and care programs the primary-caregiver practice is a successful way to implement these strategies. In both child care centres and schools, the practices of looping and multi-age grouping contribute to respectful and long-term relationships between families and educators.

Starting school involves a major transition for children and their families, a transition which often inspires excitement and apprehension simultaneously. Children encounter major changes as they move from home- and centre-based settings to school; for instance, they may leave an environment with a small group of children and low child-adult ratios and move to a larger group with higher child-adult ratios and often same-age groupings. Other changes may entail larger facilities, a more closely prescribed schedule, and more directed learning; additionally, the majority of children will travel to and from school by bus. Hopes are that children, their families, and educators meet this new adventure with confidence, curiosity, an ability to communicate, respect for the contributions of others, and a desire to make contributions to their communities.

\(^47\) Susan Fraser, *Authentic Childhood.*
CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

Pedagogical Continuities
Research indicates that children in socially interactive classrooms develop enhanced interaction skills and demonstrate fewer stress behaviours than children in more didactic settings. Implementation of curricula that are linguistically and culturally responsive to children and their families will create continuities to ease their transition to school.\(^{48}\) Initiatives to connect home, school, and community based programs, and collaborations between child care and school educators, are also critical to smoothing transitions and ensuring continuities of experience for young children.\(^{49}\)

Children’s Success at School
Children’s success at school is influenced by a confluence of conditions that are created and sustained by the combination of federal and provincial policies, community resources, and family income. These factors shape the time parents have available to their children, the level of parental stress, and parenting practices.\(^{50}\) In addition, the quality of early learning and care that the children experience prior to school-entry age tangibly influences school achievement and readiness to engage in a spectrum of school activities with ease and pleasure.\(^{51}\)

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CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

School Readiness

Historically, the concept of school readiness has often been associated with a narrow range of recall skills such as reciting the alphabet, counting to ten, and naming basic colours.\(^{52}\) We now understand that although decontextualizing such skills outside of a broad and balanced curriculum may result in short term gains, in the long run such an approach is likely to cause poorer academic functioning in the elementary years, and higher rates of early school leaving.\(^{53}\) In recognition of the need for a more comprehensive view of school readiness, the concept of school readiness has been replaced by readiness to learn.\(^{54}\)

Readiness to learn addresses two broad categories of learning — the social and the intellectual. Socially, in the years prior to school, children need to experience successful interactions with a group of peers, so that they acquire social skills including taking turns, making compromises, and approaching unfamiliar children.\(^{55}\) Intellectually, children benefit from opportunities for rich hands-on experiences, contextualized interactions with signs and symbols used in their culture, meaningful conversations, and cooperative play with peers who are likely to start school with them. There is ample evidence that children who have had opportunities to engage with peers prior to school entry, and who can enter school together with these peers, will make a smoother transition to kindergarten.\(^{56}\) Although much of the emphasis on school readiness is placed upon individual children being prepared for school, when understood with reciprocal relationships in mind, the term school readiness invites schools to be ready for children and their families.

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56 Kelly Maxwell and Susan Eller, Research in review: Children’s transition to kindergarten, *Young Children* 49, 6 (1994).
CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

Children’s experiences during the early years have critical consequences both in the present and for their own futures (page 8).

NB K-12 CURRICULUM OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK: ESSENTIAL GRADUATION LEARNINGS

**Aesthetic Expression (1)**
Graduates will be able to respond with critical awareness to various forms of the arts and be able to express themselves through the arts.

**Citizenship (2)**
Graduates will be able to assess social, cultural, economic and environmental interdependence in local and global contests.

**Communication (3)**
Graduates will be able to use the listening, speaking, viewing, reading and writing modes of language(s) and mathematical and scientific concepts and symbols to think, learn and communicate effectively.

**Personal Development (4)**
Graduates will be able to continue to learn and to pursue an active, healthy lifestyle.

**Problem Solving (5)**
Graduates will be able to use the strategies and processes needed to solve a variety of problems, including those requiring language and mathematical concepts.

**Technological Competence (6)**
Graduates will be able to use a variety of technologies, demonstrate an understanding of technological applications, and apply appropriate technologies for solving problems.
CONTINUITIES AND TRANSITIONS

EARLY LEARNING & CHILD CARE:
ENGLISH CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR NB

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

- Emotional Health and Positive Identities (4)
- Belonging (2,3,4)
- Physical Health (4)

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

- Imagination and Creativity (1,3)
- Playful Exploration and Problem Solving (2,3,5)
- Dizzy Play (4)

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

- Communicative Practices (2,3,5,6)
- Multimodal Literacies (1,3,6)
- Literate Identities with/in Communities (2,3,5,6)

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

- Inclusiveness and Equity (2,5)
- Democratic Practices (2,3,5)
- Sustainable Futures (2,5,6)