

Fundamental Principles of Play-Based Learning

1. Play is recognized as a child's right, and it is essential to the child's optimal development.

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes “the right of the child ... to engage in play ... appropriate to the age of the child” and “to participate freely in cultural life and the arts”.¹
- Play is essential to the development of children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) recognizes play as necessary for all children and critical to children's optimal growth, learning, and development from infancy to adolescence.²
- Educators recognize the benefits of play for learning and engage in children's play with respect for the children's ideas and thoughtful attention to their choices.

2. All children are viewed as competent, curious, capable of complex thinking, and rich in potential and experience.

- In play-based learning, educators honour every child's views, ideas, and theories; imagination and creativity; and interests and experiences, including the experience of assuming new identities in the course of learning (e.g., “I am a writer!”; “I am a dancer!”).
- The child is seen as an active collaborator and contributor in the process of learning. Together, educators and learners plan, negotiate, reflect on, and construct the learning experience.
- Educators honour the diversity of social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds represented among the children in the classroom, and take each child's background and experiences into account when interpreting and responding to the child's ideas and choices in play.

3. A natural curiosity and a desire to explore, play, and inquire are the primary drivers of learning among young children.

- Play and inquiry engage, challenge, and energize children, promoting an active, alert, and focused state of mind that is conducive to learning.
- Children's choices in play are the best starting points for the co-construction of learning with the child.
- Educators respond to, challenge, and extend children's learning in play and inquiry by:
 - observing;

1. Article 31, “Convention on the Rights of the Child” (Entry into force 2 September 1990), United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Retrieved on January 14, 2016, from <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

2. J. P. Isenberg and N. Quisenberry, “A Position Paper of the Association for Childhood Education International -- Play: Essential for All Children”. *Childhood Education* (2002), 79(1), p. 33.

- listening;
- questioning;
- provoking;³
- providing descriptive feedback;
- engaging in reciprocal communication and sustained conversations;
- providing explicit instruction at the moments and in the contexts when it is most likely to move a child or group of children forward in their learning.

4. The learning environment plays a key role in what and how a child learns.

- A learning environment that is safe and welcoming supports children’s well-being and ability to learn by promoting the development of individual identity and by ensuring equity⁴ and a sense of belonging for all.
- Both in the classroom and out of doors, the learning environment allows for the flexible and creative use of time, space, and materials in order to respond to children’s interests and needs, provide for choice and challenge, and support differentiated and personalized instruction and assessment.
- The learning environment is constructed collaboratively and through negotiation by children and educators, with contributions from family and community members. It evolves over time in response to children’s developing strengths, interests, and abilities.
- A learning environment that inspires joy, awe, and wonder promotes learning.

5. In play-based learning programs, assessment supports the child’s learning and autonomy as a learner.

- In play-based learning, educators, children, and family members collaborate in ongoing assessment *for* and *as* learning to support children’s learning and their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.
- Assessment in play-based learning involves “making thinking and learning visible” by documenting and reflecting on what the child says, does, and represents in play and inquiry.

3. In education, the term “provoking” refers to provoking interest, thought, ideas, or curiosity by various means – for example, by posing a question or challenge; introducing a material, object, or tool; creating a new situation or event; or revisiting documentation. Provocations spark interest, and may create wonder, confusion, or even tension. They inspire reflection, deeper thinking, conversations, and inquiries, to satisfy curiosity and resolve questions. In this way, they extend learning.

4. Ensuring equity is one of the four goals outlined in the Ministry of Education’s *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (2014, p. 8), which states: “The fundamental principle driving this [vision] is that every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or other factors.”