





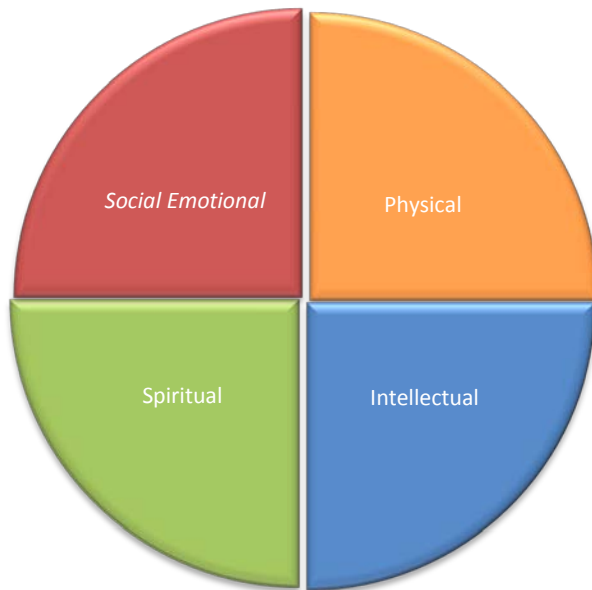
# Essential Learning Experiences for Children in PreK Programs in Saskatchewan

 <b>Social Emotional</b>	 <b>Physical</b>	 <b>Spiritual</b>	 <b>Intellectual</b>	<b>Language and Emergent Literacy</b>
<p>Developing Self Awareness</p> <p>Developing Self Worth</p> <p>Developing a Sense of Others</p> <p>Developing a Sense of Belonging</p> <p>Separating from family without distress</p> <p>Perspective Taking and Empathy</p> <p>Identifying and Regulating Emotions</p> <p>Interacting with Peers</p> <p>Resolving Conflicts</p>				<p>Listening with Interest</p> <p>Incorporating Vocabulary</p> <p>Responding to Others</p> <p>Exploring New Words</p> <p>Inquiring &amp;/Express Ideas</p> <p>Speaking with clarity</p> <p>Engaging with Books</p> <p>Gaining Meaning from Visual/Text Materials</p> <p>Recounting stories</p> <p>Engaging in Word Play</p> <p>Exploring Visual Symbols</p> <p>Representing Ideas</p> <p>Exploring How Print Works</p>

# Introduction to Essential Learning Experiences in Prekindergarten



This resource focuses on those essential learning experiences that provide milestones for young children's development and learning in four domains.



The domains of learning are:

- Social Emotional
- Physical
- Intellectual
- Spiritual

Essential learning experiences in one domain influence development in each of the other domains, for example, social emotional development (as children increase their ability to regulate their own emotions and work cooperatively on a learning project with peers) will influence intellectual development (they will be able to engage in and sustain focus on more complex learning).

The above icon of holistic learning will be used throughout the document to identify a particular area of learning and development as well as a visual reminder that children develop as whole persons. The icon reflects and aligns with the ministry's *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* and *Better Beginnings, Better Futures*.

*All areas of each child's development change or transform (Miller, 1988) in relation to their new learning, their relationships and their activities . . . children function as whole persons whose development is affected constantly by what happens to them, with them and around them.*

(Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide, 2008, p. 28)

# Introduction to Essential Learning Experiences in Prekindergarten



*Essential Learning Experiences in Prekindergarten* is designed to be used primarily by educators of 3 and 4 year old children in Prekindergarten settings. The information presented, however, will also be of interest to Prekindergarten associates, principals, school division administrators and consultants, educators in other early learning settings, and the children's families. In addition, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and psychologists providing services to Prekindergarten children and their families may find this document useful in discussion and program planning with educators.

The resource is intended to support and guide program development and to assist early childhood educators to monitor, facilitate, and scaffold young children's development. Specifically it is intended to:

- identify essential learning experiences that provide a focus for learning programs within each domain of learning - physical, social-emotional, spiritual and intellectual;
- provide a framework for monitoring and supporting children's developmental growth in all four domains;
- provide guidance to educators regarding their role in facilitating and scaffolding young children's development and learning;
- assist educators with planning high quality programs;
- to assist educators to engage in effective pedagogical practices for developmentally appropriate early learning environments; and
- provide a framework and focus for sharing information regarding children's developmental growth with their families.

## Supporting Research

Research conducted by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2004) indicates that a key aspect in the development of high quality early childhood education programs is the determination of common learning goals or directions. Further, program directions must allow for flexibility at the program, teacher and child levels to accommodate children's interests and experiences. The National Association for Young Children (2002 cited in OECD 2004) supports these ideas concluding that clear, research-based guidelines for the content and goals of early learning experiences and pedagogical practices can both focus programming and contribute to later positive outcomes.

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## **Create a Shared Framework**

Clear early learning goals are also seen to contribute to a shared language and understanding for individuals with varied backgrounds and educational levels – such as administrators, teachers, Prekindergarten associates, psychologists, social workers and speech and language pathologists - who work together in the education of young children (Riley, San Juan, Klinkner and Ramming, 2008). Such goals also create a “shared framework for understanding and communicating young children’s development” (p. 131) among professionals as well as with children’s families and can unite all partners around best practice to facilitate and scaffold children’s learning. The goals become a framework teachers can use in describing their programs to families - in explaining why certain experiences have been planned, why various learning areas are included in the Prekindergarten environment and why educators interact with the children in various ways.

## **Inform Assessment Processes**

Program goals or directions along with developmental continua for learning domains also direct the design of assessment processes to determine whether learning objectives are being reached, whether children are engaged in meaningful learning activities and whether changes in learning and development are documented over time (Nieer, 2007). Appropriate evaluation and assessment procedures utilized in early childhood education will be necessarily different from those of traditional schooling. Learning goals and objectives that are designed to support and that are inclusive of best practice, will lead to an evaluation process that reflects the ways children learn in the early years.

In addition, appropriate and effective assessment procedures are considered critical to promote positive child outcomes. With higher quality programs come better intellectual and social outcomes (Government of the United Kingdom, 2004).

In order to achieve quality programming and enhanced learning outcomes for Prekindergarten children in Saskatchewan, it is critical to have a clear understanding of the essential learning experiences for three and four year olds. As educators observe, listen and respond to the play interactions, interests and experiences of young children in their classrooms, they need to be able to consult a set of observable, developmentally significant behaviours that can be documented over time and referred to as milestones of growth and development.

Finally, these milestones of growth and development, these essential learning experiences, if linked with pedagogical practices and responses, can support and guide educators to scaffold children’s learning.

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## Guiding Principles and Related Pedagogical Considerations

This document has incorporated the following principles that are aligned with *Play and Exploration* in addition to some related pedagogical considerations that are specific to the essential learning experiences.

### The Competent, Capable Child

- Children are viewed as capable learners and have numerous competencies and meaningful life experiences that enhance their learning and development.

### Play and Exploration as the Best Mode for Learning

- Play and exploration is viewed as the way that young children learn and is central to children's development. Further, children's interactions and strong positive relationships with others are seen to be integral with play, exploration and learning (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008; OECD, 2010).

### Continua of Development: Both Typical and Unique

- Children's competencies in all domains of learning are viewed as developing along a continuum marked by the milestones of a typical developmental sequence.
- The timeline along which milestones are reached is influenced by the unique skills and abilities of the child, supportive relationships in the child's home and early learning setting, and the typical sequence for development.
- Each child's learning and development unfolds according to his/her individual developmental processes and timeline. There will be variances in development from one child to another, both in the rate and processes of learning.

### Development as Holistic in Nature

- Holistic development and learning integrate the domains of social emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual development into learning experiences (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008).
- Although educators frequently separate learning into areas of development for ease of understanding and for assessment and planning purposes, it is important to remember that progress in one area of the child's development affects progress in others. A change in one area significantly influences all other areas of development. Consequently, programs that address the whole child and

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attend to children’s overall development have the greatest possibility of being successful at improving any single aspect of learning (Diamond, 2010).

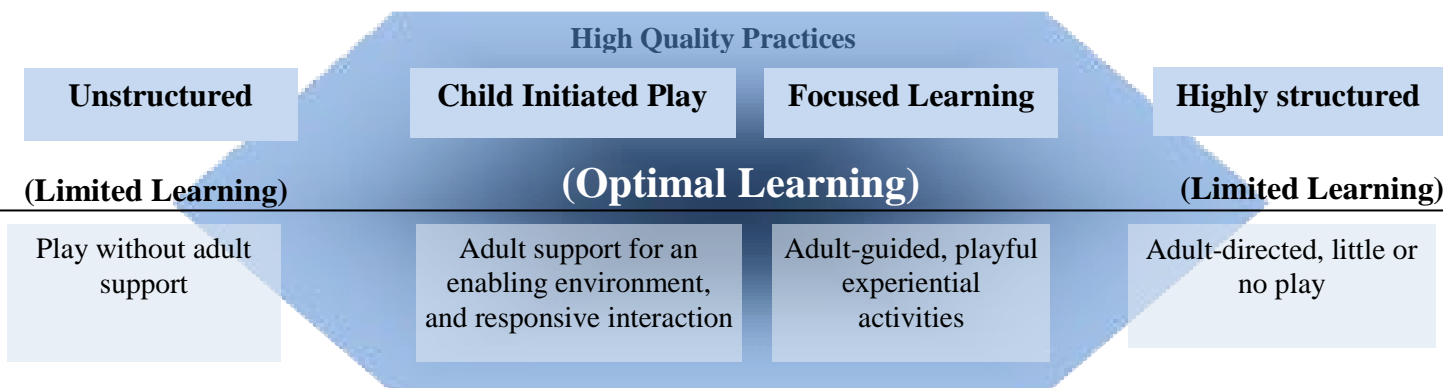
## Responding to Children’s Interests

- Children learn more effectively when daily invitations and opportunities for learning respond to their interests and experience (OECD, 2010).
- Therefore, the Essential Learning Experiences presented in this resource are best observed and documented within learning that is child-initiated and sustained. “It is within these sorts of activities that a child’s inclinations and attitudes [for learning] are richly exemplified (Dowling, 2010, p. 112).

## High Quality Programs and Best Practice as Keys to Supporting Learning

- Programs that adopt child-driven curricula and implement a holistic approach to child development are viewed by the OECD (2010) to better support young children’s learning.
- Challenging and stimulating children’s interests and understanding while at the same time achieving overall learning objectives are seen to be hallmarks of high quality programs.
- Strong positive relationships and positive interactions between children and adults and between the children themselves, is correlated with high quality programs and positive child outcomes (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, Early Years Branch, 2008; OECD, 2004, 2010).
- High quality early learning and child care programs balance adult-initiated learning with child-initiated play based activities. Programs with an appropriate balance between child directed free play and exploration and teacher planned and guided activities, provide young children with varied opportunities to best support development in all areas. (Please see diagram below).

### Balanced Approach of Pedagogical Practice in Developmentally Appropriate Early Childhood Settings



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