Responsive Teaching, Practice & Assessment in Early Learning Programs

Student First

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Section 1. Acknowledgements

The Responsive Teaching and Assessment Working Group has been an essential component of the success of the Education Sector Strategic Plan's Provincial Early Years Outcome. This group of articulate and experienced educators brought a rich and diverse background of practical experience and expertise to the table. The group's aim was to produce a document that brings together best practices from the early learning documents available for Saskatchewan educators.

Thank you to the boards of education and the directors of education for supporting the participation of these individuals. The content of this document reflects the rich diversity in classrooms across our province. Thank you to the many teachers who willingly shared their experience.

Below is the list of working group members who contributed to this document:

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I will be forever indebted to these powerful leaders in education. Their dedication to supporting the best early learning environments for our most valuable resource, our children, is inspirational.

Greg Chatlain
Director of Education, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools

Section 2. Introduction

The *Responsive Teaching, Practice & Assessment in Early Learning Programs* document has been created in response to a need expressed by educators for supporting and responding to the varying needs of children in early learning programs. This document is intended to:

- unify a variety of early learning documents available in Saskatchewan;

- provide a process to identify and respond to the diverse needs of children ages 3-6 in early learning programs;

- enhance assessment literacy of educators and how assessment evidence can be used to inform practices and programming;

- identify responsive supports and examples of targeted and/or small group supports;

- help educators create an inventory of community-based supports and services for children and their families; and,

- provide support and clarification for administrators with respect to indicators of quality and how to support educators.

This document is intended to provide a guideline and direction for educators. It is not suggesting that there is a one-size-fits-all program, or that every educator should be teaching exactly the same way. Rather, this is intended to be a starting place for educators to consider promising practices that will support all learners and then to provide appropriate classroom intervention for children with additional needs. Every child is deserving of the very best we have to offer.

This document will give educators ideas of where to turn when circumstances seem to challenge our current capacity. It is meant to support careful assessment and deliberate, thoughtful, intentional planning. This document does not recommend a certain practice but recognizes the educator's ability in planning and applying research-based, data-driven, evidence-based practice that takes into account principles of early learning and early learning pedagogy. This document does not assume autonomy over provincial or division parameters and guidelines but supports those parameters fully and intentionally. This document asks educators to consider the needs of their students and to support each child by adapting the way they teach to help them learn and experience the joy of learning through play, exploration and inquiry.

Responsive teaching is a way of thinking and being with children that involves making evidence-based decisions within the learning program that meet the needs of the children while valuing relationships. Responsive teaching uses assessment data to provide learning opportunities that are challenging, engaging, strengths-based, culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate.

This document continues to highlight that each child is unique, that each family has differing values and that each educator has different experiences and skills. It is important that each situation is viewed as unique and must be considered on an individual basis to best determine the appropriate response.

Section 3. Navigating This Document

You will find the following symbols throughout the document:

Case Study and Commentary: These case studies show the principles of responsive and deliberate practice as part of responsive teaching.

Check it Out: Essential resources and tools.

Video: Video examples are included online to help show real life examples of effective implementation of practices in this document.

Questions for Reflection: These questions are included as a starting point for reflection and discussion. The answers to these questions may be found within the document or they may be larger questions that cause the reader to reflect.

Section 4. Core Documents and Related Workshops

This document is intended to work alongside a variety of foundational documents available for early learning in Saskatchewan, including the following:

Actualizing a Needs-Based Model (K-12)
Provides pertinent information relative to a needs-based service delivery model in alignment with the Ministry's philosophical ideals and guiding principles.

The Adaptive Dimension
Refers to the concept of making adjustments to variables intended to make learning meaningful and appropriate to support student achievement.

Children First: A Resource for Kindergarten
Offers a framework for planning based on principles of early learning.

Connecting Curriculum to Inquiry, Play-Based Learning & Projects
Focuses on connecting curriculum to inquiry, play-based learning and projects.

Emerging Literacy Checklist: A Reflective Discussion Tool for Educators, Administrators and Support Professionals
Provides support for integrating emerging literacy planning with classroom practice in Kindergarten.

Engaging and Responsive Environments for Kindergarten Children
Provides examples of environments, learning centres, and invitations for learning (digital resource).

Essential Learning Experiences
Assists educators to provide holistic and responsive early learning programs for preschool-aged children.

Family Engagement in Prekindergarten
Supports Prekindergarten programs in creating respectful, reciprocal relationships with families.

Inclusive Education
Outlines the beliefs, attitudes and approaches of inclusive education.

Jouer et Explorer
French version of the *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide.*

Leading for Change
Provides ideas for administrators and child care directors to support the implementation of the *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide.*

Literacy Practices in Kindergarten Statement
Provides an overview of the foundational beliefs and effective practices that support emerging literacy learning and development in Kindergarten programs.

Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide
Provides the vision and principles for early learning and child care in Saskatchewan.

Responding to the EYE Results
Provides educators with ideas to respond to the results of Early Years Evaluation (EYE) data in early learning programs.

Saskatchewan Kindergarten Curriculum
Provides the learning outcomes that Kindergarten children are expected to know, understand, and be able to do by the end of the Kindergarten year.

Supporting Children's Literacy Development – Family Brochure
Supports Kindergarten families to understand the stages of literacy development and the connection to play based learning.

Treaty Education Outcomes and Indicators
Provides outcomes and indicators designed to engage learners on a journey of inquiry and discovery of Treaty Education.

Online Learning Resources

To access these online learning resources through Blackboard, you must request access by contacting Network Services at network.services@gov.sk.ca

- Creating Outdoor Learning Environments
- EAL Immigration and Languages Blackboard Organization
- Early Learning Blackboard Organization
- Early Years Evaluation (EYE) A to Z and PLC Blackboard Organization
- Essential Learning Experiences
- Literacy Practices in Kindergarten Workshop
- Nurturing Resilience Blackboard Organization
- Play and Exploration Phase I
- Supporting Reconciliation in Saskatchewan Schools Blackboard Organization

Additional Resources:

ECERS-3 Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
An easy to use assessment tool that examines a program's environment and learning program.

Hanen Resources and Supports
This Canadian website provides knowledge, resources and training related to supporting young children to develop language, social and literacy skills.

Northern Oral Language and Writing Through Play
This Canadian website offers a variety of publications and resources for addressing the need to close the literacy achievement gaps between aboriginal and non-aboriginal children.

EduGains
An Ontario website of resources to support policies and programs related to improved learning and teaching K-Grade 12.

Section 5. Shared Beliefs

The *Responsive Teaching, Practice & Assessment in Early Learning Programs* document builds on a number of existing beliefs.

Principles of Early Learning

High quality early learning programs use best practices to guide their program — including the way educators interact with and teach young children. The principles of early learning focus on:

- children as competent learners;
- holistic learning and development;
- seeing relationships as opportunities; and,
- stimulating and dynamic environments.

For further information on research-based early learning practices that reflect these principles refer to:

- *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*

- *Children First: A Resource for Kindergarten*

Inclusionary Philosophy and Beliefs

Responsive teaching believes in the value and learning potential of all children.

These beliefs are expanded on in the following documents: *Actualizing a Needs-Based Model*, *The Adaptive Dimension* and *Inclusive Education*. These documents outline the ministry's commitment to improve the learning success and well-being of all Saskatchewan children by:

- "A focus on the strengths, needs and interests of the child;
- Putting an emphasis on the supports that the child requires and the elimination of barriers;
- Nurturing independence and interdependence by providing opportunities that promote the development of personal empowerment and self-determination;
- Maintaining a view that the child is an active participant within the immediate community and wider society;
- Embracing the belief that children are parts of an evolving society that believes all individuals belong in and are valued members of a diverse society;
- Fostering an attitude of respect, appreciation and acceptance of diversity. " (*Inclusive Education*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017, p.2)

Collaboration

"Responsive teaching includes an interdisciplinary team with a collaborative culture of shared responsibility to provide a reflective and holistic approach that is responsive to children's needs and engages the child's family in discussions and decision-making."

(*Actualizing a Needs-Based Model*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015, p.8).

Section 6. Guiding Principles for Early Learning Assessment

Guiding principles for early learning assessment are vital for assisting school divisions, early learning programs, teachers, and other professionals in ensuring developmentally appropriate selection and use of assessment instruments, decisions about assessment approaches and strategies, and use of assessment information with their youngest students.

Assessment and Evaluation

Responsive teaching requires the ethical use of data. All information gained through data collection, whether formal or informal, quantitative or anecdotal, is used in an ethical and appropriate manner to support children's school success.

Assessment and Evaluation in Early Learning

Several key understandings are important to highlight with respect to developmentally appropriate early learning assessment and evaluation:

- the continuous, rapid and variable development of young children across all domains;

- educators' assessment expertise being critical to successful assessment practices (Brooke, 2015); and,

- the process/cycle of assessment as a systematic way of thinking about and planning for assessment (see next page).

> "Assessment is the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting the information… the basic process of finding out what the child knows and can do in relation to their optimum development.
>
> With that knowledge, an appropriate plan for effective instructional strategies to help them develop and learn can be identified, monitoring their progress along the way."
>
> (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004, p.3)

Assessment Cycle

Assessment follows a continuous cycle of collecting, analyzing, responding and reviewing and is carried out parallel to instruction.

What types of data/evidence do we need to gain a better understanding of the child?
Documentation, samples, anecdotal records, information from families, assessment

Collect Assessment Evidence

What is our goal?
What evidence do we have?
What does the evidence suggest?
What areas will be focused on?

Early Learning Assessment Process

Implement Plan and Evaluate Effectiveness

Analyze and Interpret Evidence

Is the plan working?
Are the changes having an impact on children's learning and development?
Do we need to change our plan? How?

Establish Goals and Create a Plan

How will we respond?
What supports are needed for responsive programming & practice?
What steps will we take and when?

Adapted from McAfee, Leong, and Bodrova, 2004; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011; Saskatchewan READS 2015; Read On Arizona.

1. Assessment Competency is Purposeful and Authentic

- Assessment has many components and many purposes. Three common purposes of assessment of young children are:

    - to inform our practice through day-to-day observations, conversations, documentation of children's work, checklists, portfolios, screenings and other formal assessment tools (Tier 1 - triangulation of assessments);

    - to monitor and respond to learning needs and strengths of the child(ren) by adapting instruction (Tier 2 - targeted interventions and supports); and,

    - to identify significant concerns that may require focused instruction and intervention for individual children (Tier 3).

    (Adapted from Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation, 2003)

- Any assessment or screening tool should use methods that are:

    - developmentally appropriate;

    - culturally and linguistically responsive;

    - linked to the child's daily activities;

    - inclusive of families; and,

    - connected to specific, beneficial purposes.

The focus should be on **the continuum of learning and development**.

> "Individually, culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment of all children's strengths, developmental status, progress, and needs provides essential information to early childhood professionals as they attempt to promote children's development and learning."
>
> (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003, p. 3)

2. Assessment Competency requires Professional Judgement and Expertise

- Professional judgement refers to evidence-based decision making from multiple sources. Educators should gather multiple sources of documentation on an ongoing basis to respond to programming needs of children.

- Explicit training is essential.

- Collaborative teams view assessment as a tool to improve learning. In using any assessment tool, including classroom documentation, staff need to clearly understand:

    - its purpose;

    - how it aligns to the curriculum;

    - how to effectively administer it; and,

    - how to appropriately respond to the results.

> "When assessments are properly administered and integrated into instruction, the resulting data can provide valuable information about progress towards instructional goals, success of interventions, and overall curriculum implementation."
>
> (Brooke, 2015, p.1)

3. Assessment Competency is Developmentally Appropriate and Culturally Responsive

- Developing a relationship between the child and assessor is important because it helps the child feel a sense of security and trust with the assessor.

- The assessor should be aware of the context in which the assessment tool is being used. The assessment tool allows for flexibility in areas such as administering the assessment in a child's first language, using manipulatives, providing an appropriate amount of response time and offering a variety of response options such as play-based observations or allowing children to represent their ideas in a variety of ways.

- The assessor should use professional judgement to be sensitive to factors (e.g. fatigue, emotional state, family context) that may influence the reliability of the assessment.

- Classroom observations and documentation should be collected on an ongoing basis.

4. Assessment Competency involves Evidence-Based Decision Making

- Decisions are made using multiple sources of data that identify areas of strength, growth and need with respect to developmental benchmarks.

- Results from assessments guide planning and programming decisions of the early learning classroom. The evidence may reveal need for changes to learning environments and/or pedagogical practice.

- Decisions regarding instructional strategies and supports are developed and implemented in response to individual student needs identified in the assessment results.

- Assessment results may also inform decisions about additional supports required such as the need for more school-based personnel, supporting professionals, or human service agencies and community organizations.

- Assessment results can help inform and guide transition decisions.

- Assessment evidence informs the development of Inclusion and Intervention Plans (IIPs).

"Assessment occurs within the context of communication with family and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop."

(NAEYC & NAECS/STDE, 2003, p.3)

"There is a system in place to collect, make sense of and use of assessment information to guide what goes on in the classroom (formative assessment).

Educators use this information in planning curriculum and learning experiences and in moment-to-moment interactions with children-that is, educators continually engage in assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning."

(NAEYC, 2009, p. 15)

5. Assessment Competency is Strengthened by Collaborative Teams

- Effective and authentic assessment of young learners requires a collaborative team of individuals who share their knowledge, perspectives and expertise. This may include but is not limited to:

    - classroom teams of educators and educational assistants/Prekindergarten associates. This group is knowledgeable and trained in early learning practices, and uses observation and reflection to gain knowledge and understanding about the children in their care;

    - families and caregivers are an important source of information about their child. Engaging parents as partners by communicating regularly and sharing observations and assessments is an important part of planning a child's educational program;

    - in-school administration and school division personnel provide organizational support;

    - supporting professionals and human service agencies such as Early Childhood Intervention Programs (ECIPs), Public Health, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists and educational psychologists provide specialized support; and,

    - children themselves provide insight and perspective as learners.

> "Collaboration with a colleague(s), administrator(s), [parent/caregivers] and consultant(s), provides multiple perspectives that can deepen the understanding of the child's developmental level in relation to the achievement of the outcomes for each area of study."
>
> (*Assessment and Evaluation*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009, p.15)

? Questions for Reflection

- What information am I trying to gather?

- How could parents/caregivers be included in the process?

- What other sources of information do I have or need about the child?

- Is the assessment developmentally appropriate?

- Is the assessment culturally responsive?

- Is the assessment reliable, valid and fair?

- How will the results be used and shared?

Examples of Potential Early Learning Assessments

Below is a list of effective, culturally responsive early learning assessment tools that can help educators determine the strengths and needs of individual children or an entire classroom. Please refer to Appendix B for a glossary of definitions of early learning assessment.

When choosing an assessment tool, it's important to consider the five assessment competencies outlined on pages 10-13. It is also important to recognize that one assessment may serve multiple purposes.

Please note: This is not an exhaustive list of early learning assessments.

The EYE-TA is a required assessment that is used in Kindergarten programs in school divisions. School divisions are given autonomy in selecting early learning assessment tools for Prekindergarten.

Identification Assessments	Progress Monitoring Assessments	Diagnostic Assessments	Summative Assessments
Where are the children at in their learning and development?	What progress are the children making?	Where do I need to focus intervention and supports?	Are the children meeting expectations in their learning and development?
Documentation e.g. observations, checklists, portfolios, learning stories	Documentation e.g. observations, checklists, portfolios, learning stories	Specialized assessments completed by professionals - speech language pathologist, occupational therapist, educational psychologist	Documentation e.g. observations, checklists, portfolios, learning stories
Early Years Evaluation (EYE)	Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3rd edition (ASQ-3)		
Help Me Tell My Story (HMTMS)	The Work Sample System		
Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3rd edition (ASQ-3)			

Responding to the EYE Results
This document supports educators in responding to children's EYE results by offering suggestions for the environment, instructional strategies and suggestions to share with families.

Observation, Documentation and Interpretation – Ministry of Ontario learning series
This learning series developed by the Ministry of Ontario, offers educators "a holistic picture of children's experiences, development and learning, and help to support planning that is meaningful to each child." - Ministry of Ontario Website

Observation and Documentation Webinars – Ministry of Ontario
A series of webinars, developed by the Ministry of Ontario, on observation and documentation in Kindergarten programs.

High-quality early education has a long-lasting impact on a child's life. For this reason, it is important that purposeful and intentional assessment decisions are made during the early years. Developing an assessment plan leads to better use of data, reduces redundancy, fosters seamless integration and supports student progress (Brooke, 2015). As highlighted by Snow & Van Hemel (2008, p.414), "well-planned and effective assessment can inform teaching and program improvement, and contribute to better outcomes for children."

? Questions for Reflection

- Are parents/guardians informed about the information I have learned about their child?

- How will I use this data to inform my practice?

- What is the plan for storing and disposing of children's individual data? How long will it remain in the child's cumulative file?

- Am I aware of the protocols around provincial and local data? Do I know how health records (Health Information Protection Act (HIPA) – an Act administered by the Ministry of Health, Government of Saskatchewan) are regulated?

- Am I aware of my own school division's protocols around data collection, sharing, storage and disposal?

Section 7. Responsive Teaching

Responsive teaching is a way of thinking and being with children that involves making evidence-based decisions within the learning program that meet the needs of the children while valuing relationships. Responsive teaching uses assessment data to provide learning opportunities that are challenging, engaging, strengths-based, culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate.

The text box below provides some insight into the possible reflection and decision-making process of the educator and support personnel to highlight the intentionality which is integral to responsive teaching.

"What are we going to play today?" asks the sweet little voice entering the Prekindergarten classroom in the morning. Although Sarah is still a bit sleepy, she is excited to see what opportunities await her. She is eager to see her friends and her teachers. She has already thought about some of the areas she will explore this morning. A couple of months ago, Sarah started each day with anxiety and fear but now these feelings have nearly disappeared. She knows she is safe and cared for in her classroom. The other children accept her and invite her into their games. They have become accustomed to her communication style. Sarah's dad speaks briefly with the teacher about the team meeting planned for that afternoon. They will be discussing the next steps in her programming and he confirms that their partners from the local health region will be joining them by conference call. Today is a good day for Sarah.

Adaptations or additional supports are developed in response to children who are not responding as expected within the high quality program. These adaptations and responsive supports are provided as needed, being flexible and fluid rather than static to enhance children's learning and development.

Sarah's experience, along with that of her caregivers, is not unique in Saskatchewan Prekindergarten programs. Sarah was identified by her speech and language pathologist in the health district as a child who would benefit from the exposure to language and play that Prekindergarten offers. At first, she was reluctant to go, her parents were nervous and her classmates were unsure of her. Now, through exposure to a high quality program with responsive teaching practices, Sarah is thriving. Her potential for learning is showing through more each day.

Responsive teaching is a continuous cycle of ongoing observation and assessment, collaboration and intentional planning that ultimately leads to strategic implementation and intentional instruction. As a result, responsive adaptations and teaching is reflective practice. Educators monitor the supports to look for successes as well as address ineffective responses that require further adaptation or discontinuation.

Responsive Instruction, Intervention and Supports

An educator's competence in providing responsive instruction develops over time. Each child provides a new opportunity for learning and building an educator's experience and repertoire of ideas from which to draw. Professional development and collaboration with colleagues are also valuable resources for educators to build skills and knowledge.
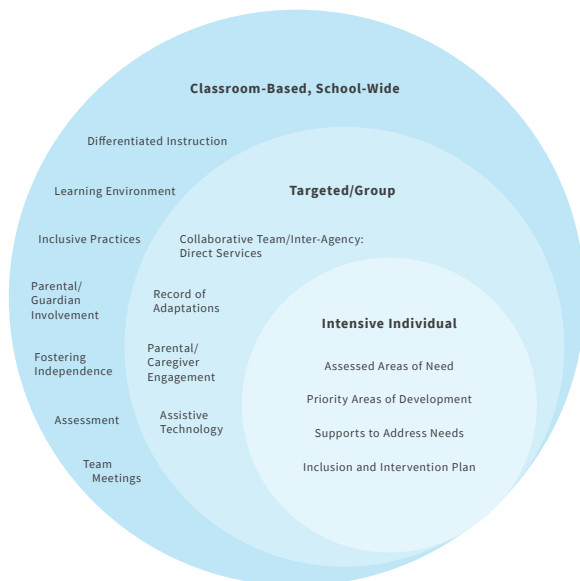
Responsive instruction can be provided at three levels of intensity:

- universal supports available to everyone,

- targeted and/or small groups with a common need; and

- intensive supports, which are individualized for a specific, unique need of an individual child.

(Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015, p.8)

Check it out!

Actualizing a Needs-Based Model
This document is intended to serve the following purposes: to provide pertinent information relative to a needs-based service delivery model; to outline the Ministry's philosophical ideals and guiding principles; and to reflect the provincial spirit of continuous improvement.

Adaptive Dimension
The *Adaptive Dimension* document "refers to the concept of making adjustments to any or all of the following variables: learning environment, instruction, assessment and resources. Adjustments to these variables are intended to make learning meaningful and appropriate and to support student achievement." (*Adaptive Dimension*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017a, p2). Within the context of the Adaptive Dimension, curricular outcomes are not changed; adaptive variables are adjusted so that the curricular outcomes can be achieved.

Inclusive Education
This document outlines the beliefs, attitudes and approaches of inclusive education. "Inclusive education creates environments where students feel accepted, valued, confident and safe to engage in learning and where school personnel, families, students and communities form collaborative teams that are committed to a shared vision to support students in reaching their full potential." (*Adaptive Dimension*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017a, p2).

The following table provides additional information on each level of support.

Classroom-Based School-Wide Interventions (Tier 1)	Targeted and/or Small Group Interventions (Tier 2)	Intensive Individual Interventions (Tier 3)
100 per cent of students exposed to high quality classroom instruction	Small groups of students receive additional instruction in areas of need	May be 1:1 or very small group Very targeted skill instruction based on student need
The team works with all students to meet a generic need	The team plans additional interventions for a targeted and/or small group of students	The team works together to plan additional interventions for a specific student

All Tiers

Classroom-based interventions carried out by the educator include setting up and assigning specific centres for students and purposefully engaging with those students at that centre.

Applying the components of the adaptive dimension in the classroom by the educator include adapting the environment, assessment, instruction and resources.

Families and professionals work together to support the child.

Supports selected are based on data and learning context for the child.

Progress monitoring is tiered to guide frequency and intensity.

(Jackson, Pretti-Frontczak, Harjusola-Webb, Grisham-Brown, Romani, (2009), p.424-434.)

Section 8. Collaboration

"Collaboration is a dynamic interactive process, where there is genuine shared ownership for decision-making, action taking and outcomes. It recognizes that shared goals can be better achieved by working together in an interdependent and reciprocal manner." (Actualizing a Needs-Based Model, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015, p.9)

Sarah had never been to a meeting before. She felt important today. Her dad, the teacher and Ms. Shay, the speech-language pathologist, were all here. The teacher started by asking Sarah's dad about her communication at home. He shared that he is able to understand her better since she has started school. He described how Sarah enjoys going for walks in the forest by their house and talking about the animal tracks they see. Sarah can even identify some bird sounds. "Yeah," says Sarah. "Me know the goose, obin, parrow." "It's great you know the goose, robin and sparrow," replies Ms. Shay.

The teacher shared that she was planning a nature outing for the children. She thought that Sarah and her dad could perhaps be leaders that day and even help her plan the day. Sarah felt proud!

Afterwards, the collaborative team discussed Sarah's learning at school and together they reviewed her progress. They made new goals and planned further support and practice, including some activities for at home.

Collaborating with families plays a key role in supporting a child's development. By having families share their observations and home experiences, connections between home and school can more easily be made. Inviting families to share their interests, talents, hobbies and skills in the classroom strengthens the relationship between home and school. Involving children in this process highlights their competencies too. Sarah's teacher was able to do this when she invited Sarah and her dad to help plan and lead a nature outing.

Involving families in team meetings invites their questions, perspective and observations to be a part of the program planning process. Having families in attendance can also provide opportunities to discuss and model learning strategies that can be used at home and school. Ms. Shay was able to do this for Sarah's dad and teacher when she repeated back Sarah's response with the correct grammar and pronunciation.

Collaboration	
Collaboration is…	**Collaboration is not…**
Trust and mutual respect	Defensiveness or lack of respect for differing point of views
Being open, timely and receptive to family participation	Excluding family participation and done in conjunction with other scheduled school events
Giving equal consideration to the needs of the child and family and their perspective	School personnel seeing themselves as knowing better and prescribing what they feel is best for the child
Making decisions strategically and fostering relationships that are of benefit to the child	Generic and of little or no benefit to the child
Ongoing and continuous	A one-time process

Thomson and Perry (2006) Collaboration Processes: Inside the Black Box
This article defines and describes the processes of collaboration.

Universal Designs for Learning in the Early Learning Context
This 2nd edition book from Edmonton Catholic Schools offers strategies that can be utilized in all levels of intervention.

Partner Agencies Video
A video on ways that the ECIP Director partners with the school division to support children and families transitioning to early learning programs in the Living Sky School Division

Why collaborate in a school setting?

- To share the responsibilities of learning and teaching.
- To build positive relationships among students, families and teachers.
- To share knowledge.
- To achieve greater success for students.
- To collaborate with families presents opportunities to understand their strengths, concerns, resources, training and needs.

One of the key tenets of responsive teaching for children in the early years is that families and homes are primary nurturing contexts.

(Lieberman-Betz, Vail, & Chai, 2013)

What does *collaboration* look like in responsive teaching?

Responsive teaching reflects the following principles of collaboration:

1. Promote a professional climate. Regardless of each person's credentials, all contributions to the collaboration are important. Responsive teams establish norms for meetings and communication.

2. Honour differences. Responsive teams learn about each individual's vision, goals and values.

3. Establish a common vision and goals. Responsive teams share ideas openly, build on the strengths of all involved and regard each member of the collaboration as a leader.

4. Define roles and responsibilities. Responsive teams share leadership and control.

5. Communicate and trust. Responsive teams are open with agendas, meeting notes and encourage communication amongst group members.

6. Reflect. Responsive teams reflect on accomplishments, alignment to goals and challenges.

7. Share decision-making. Responsive teams examine their data and use research to inform decisions. They strive for agreement rather than consensus.

   (Adapted from The Family Literacy Support Network of Los Angeles California, 2013)

Elements of Successful Collaboration: Lessons Learned **by the Family Literacy Support Network (FLSN) Division of Curriculum and Instructional Services, Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), 2013**
An article on the successful strategies school-based teams use for enhancing collaborative practices.

Family Engagement and Collaborative Practice
A video of an educator from Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division sharing ways to engage families and develop collaborative practices.

- What does collaboration look like in my early learning program?

- How have I connected with other early learning agencies/organizations in the community?

- How have I made families feel welcome and valued? How have I incorporated family knowledge into the planning and activities of the program? What can I do to invite families to be more involved in their child's learning?

- How have I invited parents to share their knowledge about and hopes for their child?

- How have I ensured that the cultures, languages and background of the children and their families are reflected in program and embedded in my practice?

Section 9. Environment

Children need multiple opportunities for meaningful play in a variety of settings and environments. "Stimulating and dynamic environments are carefully designed to be aesthetically pleasing and inspire children to wonder, ask questions and be curious. Children are active learners and construct their own understanding of the world by reflecting on and responding to their environments. The environment has a powerful influence on a child's development. As children interact with their environment, they come to understand the world in which they live and learn. A well planned environment can enrich and expand children's experiences, support their growth and development and inspire curiosity. The environment can be the outdoors, the school, the community, the classroom, and, with technology, the world, universe and beyond." (*Children First: A Resource for Kindergarten Children*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 3-5)

Sarah's teacher began the year satisfied that the classroom environment aligned with what research indicates is needed for optimal learning. Related centres and materials were organized, accessible and grouped together; visual displays were at the children's eye level; there were open areas for music and movement; small areas were well defined using shelving units; quiet areas were developed as a refuge for children to retreat to when needed; bins were labeled with pictures as well as words describing the contents; there were many opportunities for meaningful literacy and numeracy experiences; and culturally diverse materials were thoughtfully placed throughout the classroom. There was even a nature corner where outdoor exploration could be continued inside the classroom, a creative arts area for children to represent their ideas as well as a sensory table to engage in inquiry and messy play.

Understanding the social, emotional and learning needs of the students, however, meant that within this well-planned environment, accommodations were made to support the specific needs of learners in the classroom. Sarah had a visual schedule that helped her self-regulate as well as a quiet corner that she could go to (and invite others when appropriate) if she felt overwhelmed. The teacher ensured that there was predictability in the structure of activities with support when a new centre or change in routine occurred. The teacher assigned children responsibilities in the classroom and Sarah became responsible for preparing and sharing the daily snack. The teacher made providing additional opportunities for Sarah to interact with peers a priority. There was daily communication with Sarah's dad about how she managed within the classroom and ideas shared on what they could do at home to help Sarah prepare for the following day.

This year, the teacher started a family photo corner where pictures of parents, grandparents, siblings and caregivers were posted. This was done with Sarah in mind, to help with transitioning, but the teacher noticed that all students benefited from seeing themselves uniquely pictured in their environment.

"Children experience healthy, inclusive and safe settings that enhance their learning and wellbeing. Children see themselves reflected in flexible environments that stimulate communication, invite questions, encourage investigation and promote exploration. Children sense that they and their families belong in the setting." (*Play and Exploration*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008, p44).

'Knowing the learner' is the most important professional practice an early learning teacher can develop. Generally, accommodations that support individual needs specific to one student may actually benefit all students. The environment needs to be flexible to allow for children to be successful. Certainly, general environmental practices and structures that are based on research for young children will be appropriate for most children. However, it is not only the structure of the environment that matters but also how the teacher directs learning within the environment that makes it an effective learning environment. The teacher should be there to observe the children and join in with them appropriately during play — perhaps to suggest role changes, provide vocabulary words related to the activity, or to guide the learning process in a different direction. In the example with Sarah on the previous page, the teacher deliberately structured the environment to support Sarah's learning goal to interact and share with others.

For each and every child, the learning environment plays a key role in supporting their development and learning. The learning environment includes both the social environment as well as the physical space, both indoors and outdoors. Interactions and physical spaces must exist together to build positive learning experiences and nurture student growth.

When challenging behaviour occurs regularly at certain times or in certain areas, it might be helpful to consider changes to the schedule or the environment. To determine if your schedule and classroom space are designed to prevent challenging behaviour, check out the article from the Childcare Exchange Magazine, Setting up your Classroom to Prevent Challenging Behaviors, by McLaughlin and Bishop, 2016.

Setting up your Classroom to Prevent Challenging Behaviors
(McLaughlin and Bishop, 2015)

"Education is a natural process carried
out by the child and is not acquired by listening to words but by experiences in the environment."

(Maria Montessori)

McLaughlin and Bishop (2015) suggested that educators may consider collecting information to identify potential areas where or times when challenging behaviour occur regularly in the environment, through practices and/or relationships. After educators identify the areas of concern, the process of reflective practice begins: analyzing and reflecting on the evidence/data, consultation and collaboration amongst the team and finally, making adaptations. Responsive teaching requires ongoing monitoring of activities and areas to make sure the adaptations continue to be effective, to identify adaptations that may need to be revised and to share the child's progress.

The educator is responsible to ensure the holistic learning and development of each child focusing on the social emotional wellbeing of all children. This can be critical for children who have been experiencing difficulty meeting program expectations. Creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere lends itself to students and their families feeling a sense of belonging where everyone is accepted and celebrated regardless of ability or difficulties. Strong, positive home/school connections built on trust and respect also contribute to developing an effective, responsive learning environment. From the initial contact, children need to know that they can express their feelings and the adults present will empathize and support their emotions. It is essential to the child's comfort that adults demonstrate respect, exercise patience, use a supportive tone and use a language of possibility and potential in culturally responsive ways.

The environment should have a comfortable "at home" feeling, as children need to feel safe and secure to explore and learn about the world around them. The environment should contain well-defined, organized spaces with print and visual prompts or cues. This will help children understand expectations and use of the learning space such as where materials are, which activities occur in which areas or even the order of steps for completing a task.

Materials should be accessible to children. This may look very different depending on the needs of the children in the group. A child who uses a wheelchair may require larger pathways and materials to be off the floor in order to access them easily. A child with a visual impairment may be supported through consistency of furniture placement and material storage.

Often, the best intervention happens prior to the child's demonstration of difficulty. Collaborative planning for anticipated difficulties promotes success. The following table offers ideas for creating an environment that supports all learners.

Tips for Setting up the Classroom for Success (adapted from McLaughlin and Bishop, 2015)		
Environment	**Dynamic Activities/Strategies**	**Relationships**
A responsive environment is dynamic and changes based on the needs of the child. The environment (indoor and outdoor) can act as the "third teacher" within the context of the classroom. The teacher's interaction and planning will support the effectiveness of the environment with respect to the learning of the child. • Learning areas need clearly defined boundaries so children know which activities occur in different areas and teachers are able to see children in all areas when scanning the room. • The design of the classroom should allow children to move within and between activities comfortably. • Ensure equipment and materials are 'child-size' and accessible for children. • Teachers can connect the indoor and outdoor environments by bringing the outdoors into the classroom and creating opportunities for outdoor learning. Third Teacher: A Reggio Emilia term that refers to preparing an environment that is aesthetically pleasing, invites investigation and fosters play and exploration. (Fraser, 2011)	Dynamic activities can captivate a child's interest and offer a balance of opportunities for play, language development, emerging literacy, self-expression, exploration, interactions with peers, personal routines and fine- and gross-motor activities. Dynamic activities support children's engagement and learning. Having a variety of materials that support different types of engagement helps make activities more accessible to all children and supports their ongoing involvement in a range of activities. • Consider the length of activities. Are children getting bored or are they disappointed when they're told to transition to another activity? • Establish a balanced schedule for daily activities that includes time with small or large groups of peers and time for children to play on their own or with peers of their choosing. • Plan the intended learning outcomes for the activity, but be flexible when children take their learning in a different direction. Allow children to have different ways of being or doing. • Integrate a variety of skills as part of an activity.	A responsive environment that meets the needs of the children can prevent the need to remove a child from the environment and their opportunity to learn within it. Providing support within the environment will ensure that the child's safety and wellbeing are reinforced and that opportunities for learning and self-regulation within an authentic learning experience are available. • Join in intentional play activities to support and extend their skills. • Give children ideas about how they might use materials in their play. • Provide children with visuals to scaffold and model different ways to play. • Build off children's cultural identity, interests and skills when engaging in their play.

Adaptations for Experiential Learning Centres: Creating Adaptations for Routines and Activities (CARA)
This kit provides guidance for how to make adaptations for daily activities and routines so that children ages 3 to 6 with disabilities and other special needs can successfully participate in all classroom activities. Contains a CD with resources and a booklet about adaptations. (Division for Early Childhood of the Council of Exceptional Children)

Engaging and Responsive Environments for Kindergarten Children
The Engaging and Responsive Environments for Kindergarten Children digital resource provides examples of high quality, developmentally appropriate environments, learning centres, invitations for learning as well as inquiry-based learning and project work examples.

Careful thought must be given for both indoor and outdoor spaces to ensure the ease of mobility, organization, storage and interesting activities that support development and learning. Children should be encouraged to observe, explore and appreciate their natural environment. Outdoor learning environments include but are not limited to:

- the school yard (not just the play structures) — consider including equipment, tools and materials for exploration, inquiry and creative expression such as magnifying glasses, writing tools, art supplies, blocks, information books and dramatic play props;

- forests, fields and trails in the community;

- local neighbourhood parks and community gardens; and,

- greenhouses, atriums, science centres, etc. where students can continue to explore materials from outdoor learning environments.

Connecting Young Children with Nature
This article discusses the importance of using a nature-based pedagogy in the early learning program and the benefits for young children.

Creating Outdoor Learning Environments – Blackboard Organization
The Creating Outdoor Learning Environments Blackboard Organization is a collection of resources, articles, presentations and links developed to assist early learning and child care programs in creating outdoor learning environments to support children's holistic learning experiences.

Creating Early Learning Environment
This document expands on the early learning principle of stimulating and dynamic environments providing key ideas for creating indoor and outdoor learning environments that accommodate the social-emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual aspects.

Creating Environments for Learning: Birth to Age Eight by Julie Bullard
This professional reference is a dynamic resource for K to 3 educators. The resource offers educators a "balance of theory and application in understanding why and how to design, arrange, and make changes to early childhood learning environments that help children succeed through a play-based curriculum." (Pearson Publishers)

An effective learning environment will spark curiosity and creativity, stimulate imagination, inspire risk-taking and encourage all students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. A key consideration to keep in mind is that it is not just *what* is in the environment that is important but *how* the environment is supporting children's learning and development.

The environment plays an important role in supporting children's development of self-regulation. Creating a place to seek refuge may be a consideration as a Tier 2 intervention (targeted and/or small groups). Bullard (2014) recommends semi-private spaces which allow a special place for quiet, reflective thinking and reducing sensory input and group interaction. This allows children to self-regulate and not become overwhelmed but still supports supervision.

Stuart Shanker videos from Ontario Ministry of Education
This series of videos provides educators with an overview of what self-regulation means, the impacts of stress on children's abilities to self-regulate, ways to enhance children's self-awareness and ideas for creating environments that support children in developing self-regulation skills.

Calm, Alert and Happy – Self-Regulation Definition by Stuart Shanker
An article by Stuart Shanker on the ways that self-regulation supports children's holistic learning and development. The article also includes the key practices that educators can use in their learning environments to enhance children's self-regulation.

An Environment that Positively Impacts Young Children by Rebecca Isbell, Ed.D.
An article suggesting ideas how an environment can positively support children's learning and development.

Consider the Walls by Pat Tarr
An article that "critically examines classroom walls from four perspectives: (1) reading the environment; (2) walls that silence; (3) the purpose of display; and (4) aesthetics. (ERIC website)

Virtual Site Tours
The Early Years Branch in the Ministry of Education is supporting the development of virtual site tours as an accessible and sustainable professional learning opportunity for early learning educators in Saskatchewan.

Designing the Outdoor Environment
A video clip from SunWest School Division for designing and developing an outdoor learning space in a schoolyard setting and the benefits of nature on children's holistic development.

"Creating [responsive] environments for learning is more than simple room arrangement. Responsive environments encompass the values of cooperative play, large muscle activities, [dramatic play and creative arts], messy play, the sounds of childhood, working through conflict and the importance of family engagement (Curtis, 2001 as cited in Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, p.1). In addition, the environment supports the routines, materials and interactions that occur within the space "offering children rich childhood experiences where children can build their passions and attention over time and use open-ended materials" (Curtis, 2001, as cited in Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, p1). When educators recognize the combined power of both indoor and outdoor play spaces, they realize that one area can be an extension of the other." (Creating Early Learning Environments, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, p.1)

"Creating [responsive] early learning environments for young children provides early childhood educators with ideas to enhance the space which children occupy. Educators think intentionally about how to organize the space and involve the children to provide accessible materials that engage children and enhance their play experiences."

(*Creating Early Learning Environments*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, p17).

- Is the environment homelike?

  - Welcoming

  - Divided into usable space for different functions

  - Includes private places to relax and be alone

  - Includes places for people to gather together

  - Provides comfortable furniture and different types of seating

  - Filled with real, functional items

  - Contains objects that have personal meaning

  - Filled with images of the children through photos and mirrors

  - Includes living things

- Is the environment aesthetically pleasing?

  - Beautiful

  - Clutter free

  - Sensory rich

  - Thoughtfully organized

  - Attention given to detail

- Does the environment reflect the children in the program?

- Are there ways that children can personalize the environment?

- Is there an abundance of natural lighting?

- Are natural items incorporated into the environment?

- Does the environment contain a variety of textures and soft elements?

- Are neutral pale colours used for most walls, shelving and floors?

- Are materials on the wall authentic and related to the current group of children?

- Is there a defendable purpose and a balance of form and function for each of the items on the wall and in the classroom?

- Are children distributed evenly throughout the space during center time?

- Can individuals be clearly heard and understood in a normal conversation without raising their voices?

Adapted from: *Creating Environments for Learning: Birth to Age Eight* by Julie Bullard

Section 10. Oral Language and Literacy

"A [responsive early learning program focuses on developing] children's facility with language; providing children with opportunities to:

- learn to use language in a variety of meaningful ways, considering and determining their audience, purpose, and situation;

- learn about language as a necessary tool for thinking and communicating effectively, considering the cues and conventions of language. Good language and literacy skills lay the foundation for social, academic, economic, personal and national success. (Jamieson & Tremblay, 2005, p.1);

- learn through language by applying their knowledge of language in their viewing, listening, reading, representing, speaking and writing experiences."
(*Kindergarten Curriculum*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 30)

Ms. Shay, the speech-language pathologist, is reading the book *Pumpkin Soup* to Sarah's class. Sarah listens closely. She likes the animals in the pictures but she had never heard some of the action words before. Ms. Shay stops reading for a moment and asks the class to demonstrate the actions words. "Walk quietly, tiptoe like the story characters. We tiptoe to be sneaky, or cautious or quiet."

Sarah smiles – this is making sense. Her teacher joins in and says "When we walk loudly we stomp and make a ruckus, a racket – we make a lot of noise!" Ms. Shay says these words are opposites and encourages Sarah's teacher to use words like this to describe what is happening in the classroom throughout the day and add new vocabulary words that mean the same thing (synonyms) or the opposite (antonyms). She asks the teacher and children to keep a list of all the different words they can think of over the next week. It is fun to learn together!

Ms. Shay shared a strategy for vocabulary enrichment which is an area that Sarah is working on. By stressing the words and related words throughout the day, especially when talking with Sarah, it helps her to hear and practice the different meanings multiple times through the day in context rather than just during a short, targeted and isolated time. The teacher and speech-language pathologist worked together to find opportunities and activities where this strategy would work well.

The role of the occupational therapist or speech-language pathologist is evolving in early learning settings. The opportunity to do therapeutic work within a meaningful context of the early learning program is becoming more common. The supporting professional's role is to assist the teacher to provide opportunities to embed goals into daily learning activities and routines. Through collaboration with supporting professionals, the teacher can adapt learning activities to meet the needs of the child and also to build the teacher's capacity to observe and document growth. These strategies support the child through an ongoing plan of intervention and support that happens all day long as a part of the child's learning experience. The engagement of the child's family in this conversation will also ensure that strategies are appropriate and consistent in both environments.

"Language development and emerging literacy are a cornerstone of intellectual development. Language enables individuals to understand and communicate ideas while literacy supports our ability to comprehend and express them within and to a wider community."
(*Essential Learning Experiences*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015, p.46)

Why is language important?

Language includes the way people express thoughts and feelings to each other. It is connected to the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

The importance of oral language development:

- The development of oral language skills is crucial to a child's literacy development, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

- Early language skills and phonological awareness skills are predictors of future success. A student's level of phonological awareness at the end of Kindergarten is one of the strongest predictors of future reading success in Grade 1 and beyond.

- Children develop oral language skills through implicit and explicit teaching.

- Vocabulary plays an important role in fostering reading development.

Susan Swirski - Language and Reading Video
A 20-minute YouTube video developed by Susan Swirski, Speech-Language Pathologist from SouthEast Cornerstone School Division on the "What, Why and How" of language and reading.

Oral language and emerging literacy

- Oral language and emerging literacy are key components in early childhood experiences. Children's language and emerging literacy is supported through rich language experiences embedded within a child's daily experiences.

- Early learning environments should be language and print rich.

- These experiences include "opportunities for watching, listening, responding to and representing understandings in many different forms including asking, explaining, engaging in authentic conversation with adults and peers and using language in play and exploration." (*Essential Learning Experiences*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 46).

- Being able to share thoughts and ideas with an interested and responsive adult is crucial in building a child's language skills which is a precursor to literacy development.

- Language learning is best supported through meaningful social contexts.

> "Children develop emergent literacy during enjoyable social interactions with adults who involve them in real-life uses of print, such as making a list, reading a supermarket flyer or writing an invitation."
>
> (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2010, p.3

Importance of understanding child development

- Children's oral language and literacy development often follows a typical progression. (*Essential Learning Experiences*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015, p.47)

- Knowledge of developmental milestones and emerging literacy continuums helps educators design developmentally appropriate experiences. These experiences support children's emerging literacy learning and development, highlight what children can do independently, and identify what they need to be further supported in.

Stages of Literacy Development

All children go through stages of literacy development at their own pace, and in a variety of ways.

Literacy Skills	Infant	Toddler	Preschool/ PreK/K	Grades 1, 2 and 3
Listening	rhymes, songs, music, sounds, conversations	songs, sounds, music, words, rhymes, phrases, conversations	various texts, rhymes, poems, songs, stories, digital media, conversations	listens to a variety of texts varied in length and purposes
Speaking/ Talking/ Singing	coos, babbles, cries	first words, 2-word phrases	phrases, sentences, takes turns, questions	storytells, inquires, predicts, infers, retells, reflects
Viewing/ Looking	environment, board books	environment, objects in texts	names, letters, common environmental print	views books as sources of information & pleasure
Reading	observes illustrations	requests re-reading stories	makes up stories, explores books on own	independently reads (home & school), understands different text types
Representing/ Showing Ideas	Imitates, signs, gestures	scribbles, copies	draws, creates, builds, paints, sculpts, dramatizes	re-enacts, displays and creates stories both orally and written
Writing	Explores writing mediums and tools		role-play writing, creates lists & cards, copies letters or writing	attaches meaning to text, interested in story structure

Playing Supports Literacy Development

Essential Learning Experiences
This document is a supplement to *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* and is intended to assist educators to provide holistic and responsive early learning programs for young children.

Supporting Children's Literacy Development Family Brochure
A brochure to share with families on ways to support children's emerging literacy development. The brochure briefly explains the connection of play-based approaches related to reading, shares the emerging literacy continuum and provides a list of suggested resources for families to peruse.

Literacy Practices in Kindergarten Statement
A short document that provides educators, administrator and support personnel with an overview of the foundations and effective practices that support emerging literacy learning and development in Kindergarten.

Journey to Literacy: No Worksheets Required
by Krista Flemington, Linda Hewins and Una Villiers
"The play-based learning and individualized strategies in this practical book build on the wide range of literacy skills present in the kindergarten classroom. This valuable resource explores simple ways to use traditional learning centres to provide children with real and authentic reasons to listen, speak, read, write, and view." (Pembrook Publishers)

NOW Play **(Northern Oral Language and Writing through Play) Website**
Based on Canadian research, this website offers a variety of publications and resources for parents and teachers to address the need to close literacy achievement gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

Creative Collaborative Curriculum Activities Playful Learning Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 2
"The information and activities presented in this book are drawn from a long-term action research project titled "Northern Oral Language and Writing through Play" (*NOW Play*), conducted in rural northern communities in four Canadian provinces. This project brings researchers and educators together to explore ways to support rural and Aboriginal children's writing and oral language development through play-based activities." (Creative Collaborative Curiculum Activities)

Responding to children's needs

A number of elements are critical in providing effective supports for children (Berninger et al., 2003; Gillam, Loeb, & Friel-Patti, 2001; O'Shaughnessy & Swanson, 2000; Torgesen et al., 2001; Torgesen, Al Otaiba, & Grek, 2005). These elements include: the choice of materials, repetition of opportunities, intentional/explicit skill focus and scaffolding strategies.

Responding to Children's Needs	
Choice of materials	Language and literacy materials in the program are meaningful, relevant and provide real life opportunities and experiences that connect cultures, languages and familial understandings.
Repeated opportunities 	Activities and structures that allow opportunity with language within and across activities. Play provides repeated opportunities to practice language and literacy in a variety of ways and group arrangements.
Explicit skill focus 	Focused language targets in specific skill areas result in intentional and responsive play-based activities.
Systematic support	Educators use scaffolding to support a child to learn and increase his or her independence with language.

"Children's language development and emerging literacy is supported through rich language experiences embedded within children's daily experiences." (*Essential Learning Experiences*, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015, p.46) To increase children's independence with language and emerging literacy skills, responsive educators use scaffolding strategies daily through the interactions, experiences and conversations they have with children. Scaffolding strategies include: modelling, expanding, prompting, and open-ended questioning.

Scaffolding Strategies to Encourage Language Development	
Model	Model being a good listener.
	Model correct sentence structure when children use errors.
	Think aloud — model your thinking (e.g., "I wonder…", "This reminds me…", "I am thinking…").
	Talk about or describe what you are doing and what the child is doing.
	Describe aloud problems and how you may solve them.
Expand	Expand on what the child has said by adding complexity to his or her sentence structure (e.g., child says "Doggy run" and educator replies "Yes, the dog is running").
Cloze	Provide part of the structure or sentence orally and have the child fill in the missing part, slowly releasing more responsibility to the child (e.g., Grandfather took me fishing at the _____ lake/river).
Question	Use open-ended questions that require more than a yes/no/one-word answer (e.g., "What did you enjoy most today?")

Check it out!

The Hanen Centre
This website provides parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training needed to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills.

Literacy Practices in Kindergarten Workshop
The Literacy Practices in Kindergarten workshop provides educators with a place of reference for developing effective emerging literacy practices and invites educators to reflect on intentional approaches that support children's emerging literacy learning and development.

Emerging Literacy Checklist
The reflective discussion tool provides support to school-based administrators, educators and support personnel to integrate emerging literacy planning with classroom practice. It is intended to identify the aspects of the Kindergarten program that supports emerging literacy learning and development and identify those aspects that may require further supports.

Promoting Language and Literacy Through Print-Rich Environments Powerpoint
This slideshow provides ideas for promoting language and literacy through early learning environments that are print-rich.

? Questions for Reflection

- What is my definition of literacy? How does my definition of literacy influence the learning of my students?

- How am I listening, observing and following children's interests and allowing them voice and choice?

- Do I allow many opportunities in the day for children to talk? Who is doing most of the talking?

- Are the questions I ask authentic? Are they questions I really want to know the answer to?

- Am I commenting and modelling rather than drilling with questions (testing)?

Section 11. Transitions

Transitions are often thought of as an event but transition is actually a process that often involves many people. Transitions are not just something that occurs to a child. Children co-construct their experiences and are active participants in the transition process (Murray, 2014).

Families play an important role in a child's transition into school, as they are the one constant in the child's life (Schischka et al.,2012 & Caspe et al., 2015). The transition into school can be challenging for families (Noel, 2011 and Villeneuve et al., 2012,). This may result from the fact that in the early years, the family is often very involved in all aspects of the child's program, the person(s) in charge of the coordination and ultimate decision maker. This often shifts when the child starts school. Families have described this experience through the metaphor of being forcibly moved from a child's coach to a spectator.

> "No Kindergarten. Stay at PreK," Sarah whined. Her father recognized the waiver in her voice that meant she was on the verge of either bursting into tears or launching into a temper tantrum. He had thought that she would be excited at the idea of going to Kindergarten in the fall and was surprised by her reaction.
>
> Sarah's Prekindergarten teacher also noticed her reaction. "Mr. Bell, the Kindergarten teacher, is a friend of mine and he is sooo much fun. I think you and Sarah will like him too. Sarah, I'd love to take you to visit Kindergarten and meet your new teacher. In Kindergarten they have lots of the same centers we do and many of your friends will be going to Kindergarten with you, too."

> Transitions are difficult for many children but children such as Sarah require deliberate planning. Systemic involvement with the next level in a child's program is critical in vertical transitioning. Sarah's teacher and her father recognized her apprehension in leaving PreK and intentionally began to make connections between her current PreK environment and what she would experience in Kindergarten.
>
> Effective schools have collaborative teams meeting throughout the year to provide ongoing support to the child as they transition in a natural path of growth. Continuity, familiarity, and relationship building (with children and families) support a successful transition. This has to be done with deliberateness and careful planning in response to the identified needs of the child and is recorded on the Inclusion and Intervention Plan (IIP).
>
> Sarah's teacher planned several Kindergarten visits for the PreK children moving on in the fall. The Kindergarten teacher Mr. Bell also hosted an open house to welcome incoming families. A collaborative team transition meeting (family, SLP, teachers, administrator, learning resource teacher) was held to discuss Sarah's progress and plans for the upcoming year. This ensures supports are in place.

Transition is a process of change. Each child will react differently to change based on their personality, past experiences, and needs. Some children adapt easily to changes and see them as positive consequences of maturation and growth. For other children, without the predictability of familiar people, places and experiences, transitions lead to stress and success is challenging. For these children additional support and transition planning may be required.

Effective educational transitions are well planned to prepare children, families and educators for the physical and/or social changes. Children take part in **vertical transitions** such as moving from Prekindergarten to Kindergarten and may have **horizontal transitions** such as moving from one activity to another throughout the day. Because children rely on stability to provide safety and security in order to thrive and learn, it is important to be aware of the transitions a child participates in and their effect to ensure they are not overwhelming or impacting a child's progress. Maintaining continuity, where possible allows the process to occur more efficiently and lessens the impact of the transition on the child and his/her learning process (Fabian, 2006 & Branson and Bingham, 2009).
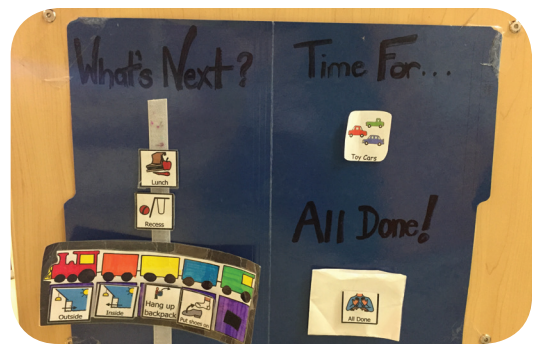
The success of the transition into school can be critical to early school experiences and for future development.

(Villeneuve et al., 2012; Schulting, Malone, and Dodge, 2005; Murray 2014 & Lopez & Chattrabhuti, 2015)

Strategies to Support Transitions	
Vertical Transitions	**Horizontal Transitions**
• Involvement of multiple agencies (e.g., KidsFirst, ECIP and so forth) • Formal team meetings to share information and develop transition plans • Visiting new learning space and environment • Reading stories about change and starting something new • Staggered entry • Social stories/transition books • Establishing a "point" person to stay in contact with the family • Information sharing/orientation meetings for families to welcome and communicate what is expected.	• Visual schedules/cues • Social stories/transition books • PECS (Picture Exchange Communications System) • Gestures • Visual and verbal cues and signals • Visual timers • Rhymes and chants/music • Predictable routines and procedures • Active listening • Activities to do while waiting for others • Limit length of waiting time

Implications for Practice

There can be many agencies and people involved in transitions and as a result communication and collaboration are vital. Because one of early learning beliefs is strong positive relationships, it is important to take time and energy to build positive relationships with the child, family and professionals. There are many relationships and interactions to consider:

- Educator and child

- Educator and family

- Professionals and educator

- Professionals and family

- Child and child

- Collaborative team

Transitions into Kindergarten Video
This video shares an example of how a Prekindergarten educator from Prairie South School Division plans for transitions into Kindergarten.

Striving for continuity between the sending and receiving programs can minimize the adjustments to be made by the child and family. Continuity is built through opportunities for professionals to network and build relationships such as joint professional development events. Educators from sending and receiving programs share information and may spend time in each other's learning program to build a relationship with the child and family, observe current accommodations, and discuss and plan for the transition.

Families identify formal information sharing meetings as a positive support but express concern regarding lack of follow up or decisions made without their input (Villeneuve et al. 2012). Meetings are only one way to build a relationship. Familiarity with what to expect, co-planning or decision making can also be facilitated through additional strategies.

Each child and family is unique and while many strategies will work in multiple situations, each transition plan must be tailored to the individuals involved.

Sample transition book for PreK student to read over the summer.

- What is the difference between a child being ready for school and a school being ready for the child? What is my role in each of these?

- Is there a transition plan in place?

- What does this transition look like/feel like for the child and family? What can I do to make it better?

- How can I involve the child in the transition process?

Using Social Stories to Ease Children's Transitions
An article on ways that educators can use social stories to support children with transitions.

Children's Literature to Support Transitions
An article listing a variety of literature to share with young children on transitions.

Helping Young Children Through Transitions
An article on seven ways that families can support their children with transitions.

Section 12. Early Learning Leader - The Role of the Administrator in Early Learning

The role of the administrator in early learning is to have knowledge and understanding of early learning programming and practices. This early learning knowledge includes identifying indicators of quality, being familiar with early childhood development, understanding early learning pedagogy, developmentally appropriate practices and supporting educators with relevant resources and supports (e.g., classroom materials, professional literature and professional learning opportunities).

Sarah is quiet during large group planning time. The teacher and other children ask so many questions and share so many ideas that just when Sarah starts to say something, there is a new question and she is not able to share her ideas.

During an in-class observation, the administrator noticed Sarah's attempt to communicate and shared his observation with the teacher as part of the follow up discussion. During their conversation the teacher acknowledged that she felt unsure about how to support Sarah's communication in sharing circles.

The administrator suggested that she and the paraprofessionals assigned to the program attend the professional learning opportunity *Learning Language and Loving It* from the Hanen Centre training sessions to build confidence and strategies.

After the attending the sessions, the teacher selected an appropriate strategy to use during the sharing circle. Sarah appreciates being able to share her ideas with the group!

Learning Language and Loving It is a pedagogical approach to language development that provides the teacher with specific strategies to encourage and strengthen language development for both developmentally-ready children and children experiencing developmental language delays. When educators provide learning experiences that focus on strategies for oral language development, children children are better able to interact are able to interact with others and strengthen their oral language within the classroom setting. While this may not replace specific interventions and supports that Sarah is receiving outside the classroom, such as speech-language therapy or occupational therapy, it gives the teacher specific strategies to support classroom interventions throughout Sarah's day.

When administrators develop knowledge and understanding of the early years they contribute to quality early learning programs, effective educators and children's school success. Some administrators may have limited experience appreciating the distinct needs of early learners. As a leader, the administrator may have many questions about early learning programs.

What can the administrator do to enhance learning in all settings?

Once student data has been collected and analyzed, the administrator begins to establish how staff development, learning walks, involvement of the family and accessing community supports can assist educators as they create a quality learning environment and program. Crucial to the enhancement of early learning experiences is the development and awareness of why early learning contributes to ongoing school success.

In her work on pedagogical leadership, Coughlin & Baird (2013) describe the school administrator as the person who leads the study of learning. This 'how to teach' is essential in an environment built on strong relationships. When adults understand children in a positive relationship, this place of strength establishes trust and a disposition of language-filled curiosity, which enhances growth in both the child and the adult. The administrator assists in developing reflective practice that brings intention to the environment through participation in a professional learning community or collaborative inquiry team.

"Research shows that [administrators] alone account for 25 per cent of a school's total impact on student learning, and teacher and [administrator] quality together account for nearly 60 per cent of a school's impact."

(Mead, 2011. p. 3)

Pedagogical Leadership Video Series – Ministry of Ontario
A video series developed by the Ministry of Ontario on how "pedagogical leadership involves leading or guiding the study of the teaching and learning process." (Ministry of Ontario Website)

Principals Want to Know Article – Ministry of Ontario
An article from the Ministry of Ontario that supports administrators in developing effective instructional leadership practices in Kindergarten.

Fundamental to the success of early learning programs in all facilities is the administrator's knowledge that merely mimicking learning approaches used with older children is not beneficial for early learners. "Without fully understanding the critical contributions of early education, principals can also make short-sighted decisions about placement of their most effective teachers." (NAESP, 2013, p. 3)

Davies (2011) highlights the significant relationship between "*Observations-Conversations-Products*" in a high quality early learning environment. Recognizing the connection between these elements helps the administrator make thoughtful decisions about early learning programs, the professionals to place in these programs and how actions and evidence support learning.

As an administrator, how do I respond to a teacher when they identify students who require a targeted intervention and supports (Tier 2)? What questions should I ask?

- What data sources are being used? (Early Years Evaluation (EYE), classroom observations, documentation, family input, etc.)

- Who on the school or division team has been involved?

- In what ways has the family been involved in the conversation?

- Based on the data that has been collected, what strategies have been tried for the child?

- What area is being focused on?

- What strengths does the child bring to his or her classroom?

- Are there other agencies supporting this family?

The administrator must ask critical questions and be curious to a gain a stronger awareness of the unique needs of the children and early learning program. This can be done through learning walks, respectful and trusting relationships and interactions with children, families and the educator. In *Leading for Change* and the *Administrator's Dialogue Guide*, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2009, 2010) provides some tools and information for administrators to use in supporting quality in early learning programs and responsive practices.

Leading for Change
This booklet provides ideas for administrators and child care directors to support the implementation of the *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* in early learning and child care programs. Refer to pages 22 and 23 for a checklist when evaluating effective early learning and child care programs.

The Kindergarten Program: Administrator's Dialogue Guide
This dialogue guide is a support for administrators. It offers topics of conversation between the administrator and the Kindergarten teacher.

Administrators can:	
Idea	**Example**
Demonstrate the belief that educators and other staff members are competent and effective decision makers.	• Engage in collaborative discussions with staff to plan for professional development. • Allow for flexible time-tabling and groupings.
Organize staff collaboration opportunities.	• Organize pairings of staff members to collaborate on a particular topic of common interest or to practise a new skill. • Share project or skill development, including challenges, with the whole group.
Arrange team-building sessions.	• Brainstorm components of a common vision for the program. • Ask each participant to select one component and write a brief example to describe the component. • Discuss these examples and decide which components are most appropriate for the common vision. • Prepare a vision statement with the group. • Modify the vision as new ideas emerge over time.
Encourage reflection, action and evaluation.	• Pose questions for the group to consider. • Discuss the questions with the purpose of enhancing practice. • Propose provocative questions and encourage deeper reflection.
Provide short mentoring/coaching sessions.	• Meet with individual educators to discuss professional interests or needs. • Outline a professional development plan together.
Scheduling and program planning.	• Provide flexibility in timetabling/scheduling. • Discuss expectations in timetabling/scheduling. • Schedule planning time.
Deployment and sourcing of resources.	• Physical resources. • Human resources.

Summary

Teaching is a profession that is constantly reflective and adaptive – as we learn more we become more effective and efficient. Within principles of early learning, fundamental research-based pedagogies and rigorous planning is a creative space that evolves and changes as dynamically as the children in the classroom. What may seem simple and common-sense on the surface is in reality a deeply complex relational negotiation as teachers investigate to find the best way to meet the diverse needs of the learners in their classrooms. Add to that a political and deeply contextual landscape, and an educator may be easily overwhelmed.

The message in this document is to relax and enjoy the discovery. The solution is actually very simple – look at what is needed, and what is working or what has worked for others and try it, continue it, build on it or replace it. Do it collaboratively, utilizing the expertise of families, colleagues, paraprofessionals, supporting professionals, administrators and community partners. Wrap around every child as a loving family would and bring them joyfully into a learning space that meets their needs.

This document is intended to support, guide, clarify and facilitate the process for educators — those of us who are just beginning and are in need of direction. It is also intended for those of us who have been at it for a while and thought we knew — until that one child comes along that says, "No, you don't." The document challenges us to rethink, reconsider and to once again go back to the research for a better solution.

We wish you luck as you follow your chosen path but, more than that, we wish you good planning, deep thinking and lots of support for the important work you do each day. You are setting the foundations for learning that have life-long implications for the children in your care. As parents, neighbors, co-workers, colleagues and friends, we thank you for the hours you spend inside and outside of the classroom on behalf of the children in Saskatchewan.

"Early childhood educators who work directly with children in the classroom might hesitate to call themselves researchers. Yet, if we think of research as a new way of being in the classroom, a process of investigating and studying in order to reach new conclusions, then we can see that early childhood educators who use an emergent approach to curriculum are also researchers. In this type of practice we are immersed in data all day long. If we are paying attention to it, recording it, and using it in order to develop new understandings and approaches, then we are engaged in a cycle of inquiry."

(Stacey, 2009, p. 129)

Appendix A: In-House and Outside Agency Support Inventory

Internal and External Supports Available

This inventory is intended to be completed by the educator during a conversation with their leader and/or others who have expertise in the supports needed for targeted interventions and supports; also known as Tier 2.

The organizational chart for my school division/agency can be found at _____.

The referral process for my school can be found at _____.

If I have questions about the referral process I can talk to _____.

Supports within my school/organization/division:

Role	Name	Contact Info
Resource Teacher		
Behaviour Consultant		
School Counsellor		
Speech-Language Pathologist		
Occupational Therapist		
Psychologist		
English as an Additional Language Consultant		

Supports external to my school/organization/division:

Agency	Role	Name	Contact Info
Vision			
Hearing			
Public Health			
Newcomer			
Autism			
First Nations Educational Organizations			
Play Centers/Family Resource Centres			
Public Library			
Early Childhood Intervention Program			
KidsFirst			
Food Bank			
Museums/Art Galleries			
211 Saskatchewan			
Child Care/Preschools			

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Universal Assessments in the organization/division and the health region or other agency:

Assessment Name	Role	Who is responsible?	When does it happen?	Where do we store the results? How and when do we dispose of the results?

What policies and procedures regarding privacy and permission to share information are there that I need to be aware of? Where do I find them?

Specialized supports and services

- Autism support/services
- The Saskatchewan Alternate Format Materials Library (SAFM) is operated by Saskatoon Public Schools with funding from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education to provide curricular resources in alternate formats for K-12 visually impaired students across the province.
- Early Childhood Intervention Program (ECIP)
- KidsFirst
- Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

Appendix B: Glossary

Early Learning Assessment Terms

Term	Definition
Assessment	Assessment is the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information (McAfee, 2011)
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive	Culturally and linguistically responsive programming, practices and assessment is evident when there is "a welcoming environment that respects diversity, supports children's ties to their families and community, and promotes both second language acquisition and preservation of children's home languages and cultural identities." (NAEYC, 1995). Responsive assessments "respect and value children's home culture and languages and are designed for and validated for use with children's home culture and languages" (NAEYC, 1995).
Developmentally Appropriate Practice	Developmentally appropriate practice is an approach to teaching grounded in the research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education. Its framework is designed to promote young children's optimal learning and development while meeting young children where they are (by stage of development), both as individuals and as part of a group as well as helping each child meet challenging and achievable learning goals.
Documentation	The collection, analysis and synthesis of evidence of learning allow teachers to know with certainty whether or not students learned what was taught. There are many ways to document children's learning and the cycle of observing, planning, reflecting and evaluating. Examples include reflective journals, photographs, videos, children's work, observations, portfolios, narratives and learning stories. (Davies, 2011)
Early Years Evaluation (EYE)	The EYE provides a leading indicator of children's development. It provides accurate data that helps teachers organize their instruction, increase learning time and monitor each child's progress. The evaluation also informs parents about their child's progress.
Formative Assessment	Formative assessments are in-process assessments of student learning that are typically administered multiple times during a unit, course or academic program. These assessments give educators feedback about what students are learning or not learning so that instructional approaches, teaching materials and academic support can be adapted accordingly. (Davies, 2011).
Learning Story	Learning stories are both an assessment tool and a reporting method. The tone of the learning story is positive and created from the view of the child as a competent and capable learner. It promotes a holistic view of the child, reflecting the knowledge and skills that the children are engaged in (e.g., literacy and numeracy) as well as the key learning muscles (habits, dispositions) that are being used.

Term	Definition
Observation	Observation is the process of teaching intentionally, watching and documenting children's skills in a variety of settings. Observing student's processes and skills allow teachers to gain insight into what students know and are able to do. (Davies, 2011).
Pre-assessments	Pre-assessments are used to determine what children know about a topic prior to the material being taught. Pre-assessment results allow teachers to differentiate their teaching based on student's background knowledge and skills. Pre-assessments are formative assessments that are used to determine teaching supports and to provide direction, not used as an evaluative tool. (Davies, 2011).
Screening Tools and Assessments	Developmental screening tools "provide initial information for teachers that can facilitate individual children's learning, rather than motivating teachers to teach to the test. Developmental screening tests are preventive, not remedial. By triggering in-depth assessment, screening instruments help teachers and other professionals decide who needs additional support for learning." (Meisels and Atkins-Burnett, 2015)
Summative Assessments	Summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning at the conclusion of a specific instructional period—typically at the end of a unit, course, semester, program, or school year. Summative assessments are typically scored and graded tests, assignments or projects that are used to determine whether students have learned what they were expected to learn during the defined instructional period (Assessment Of Learning) (Davies. 2011).
Transitions	Transition is a process of change. Effective educational transitions are well planned to prepare children, families and educators for physical and/or social changes. Maintaining continuity where possible allows the process to occur more efficiently and lessens the impact of the transition on the child and his or her learning process.
Triangulation of Data	Triangulation refers to the process of collecting evidence and validating data through multiple sources of learning. Using multiple sources of data (student learning) allows educators to verify their findings, using observations, conversations and students learning samples (products). (Davies, 2011)

Appendix C: Links to Tools

Tool	Description
Ages and Stages	ASQ-3 is a family-friendly way to measure a child's development between one month and 66 months in the domains of communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving and personal-social skills.
Ages and Stages (SE)	ASQ-SE is a parent-completed questionnaire that measures a child's social-emotional development between the ages of 1-72 months in the areas of self-regulation, compliance, communication, adaptive behaviours, autonomy, affect and interaction with people.
Authentic Assessment	Authentic Assessment measures outcomes through observation and conversation. While watching and interacting with children in their play, educators pay close attention to how children make known their ideas, interests and theories. These revelations challenge educators to assess what children are thinking about, how children interpret and communicate what they are doing, what children are learning through the play process, who children are interacting with and how they interact, and where the children might take their interest over the next few days.
Early Years Evaluation (EYE)	The EYE-Direct Assessment (EYE-DA) is an individually-administered direct measure of the developmental outcomes of children ages 3-5 years in the areas of awareness of self and environment, cognitive skills, language and communication, and gross and fine motor skills. The EYE-Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA) provides a systematic framework that teachers can use during the Kindergarten year. It is scored based on educator observations over a period of weeks where children are evaluated in a variety of school settings in the areas of awareness of self and environment, social skills and approaches to learning, cognitive skills, language and communication, and physical development.
Help Me Tell My Story	The *Help Me Tell My Story* assessment uses a holistic approach to assessment that measures oral language development for Prekindergarten and Kindergarten children.
Work Sample System	The Work Sample System collects information on the child's work and compares it to grade-specific developmental guidelines covering seven major curriculum areas: personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, the arts, and physical development, health and safety.

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