

A Collaborative Approach

Successful program implementation and transitions between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten are supported through a collaborative approach.

Collaboration between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten educators, administrators and support personnel enhances reflective practices, constructs new knowledge and supports positive sustained changes in teaching.

Collaboration provides opportunities for:

- gaining deep understanding of the ways to support children in holistic development and learning
- planning successful transitions
- establishing relationships and partnerships in the community.

Successful collaboration of all involved facilitates:

- understanding the principles of early learning
- offering high-quality, developmentally appropriate learning experiences
- establishing supportive relationships

This document highlights how Prekindergarten and Kindergarten programs are built on the common principles of high quality early learning and the important role of the educator.

Ministry of Education Resources

Prekindergarten serves 3- and 4-year-old children and is guided by the program documents *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* (2008) and the *Essential Learning Experiences* (2014), an into practice booklet. Kindergarten provides learning opportunities for 5- and 6-year-old children. *Children First: A Resource for Kindergarten* (2009) and the *Kindergarten Curriculum* (2010) provide educators with guidance for planning and programming in Kindergarten.

“...blending programs of knowledge from [childcare, Prekindergarten and Kindergarten] sectors, aligning pedagogical approaches and creating a shared understanding of early learning and development will help strengthen the capacity of educators to deliver programs in which children thrive”.

(CMEC Early Learning and Development Framework)

Principles of Early Learning

There are four common principles for Prekindergarten and Kindergarten. These common principles are as follows:

- strong, positive relationships
- children as competent learners
- holistic development and learning
- stimulating and dynamic environments

Tables 1 – 4 describe how educators in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten implement each of the four principles. The role of the educator is critical to the implementation of a high-quality program based upon these principles. These tables provide educators with examples of the similarities between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten. Reflective questions are offered after each principle.

Strong, Positive Relationships

This principle reflects the following characteristics:

- respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of children and their families by:
 - bridging children’s knowledge, experiences, and understandings with the learning experiences
 - creating an environment that fosters a sense of self, identity, and belonging among students
- partner in program planning with children, families, and community by:
 - encouraging children to develop relationships and communicate with peers, adults, and community members
 - cultivating an environment where children embrace the context of family, culture, and community

- create learning relationships by:
 - supporting children in developing relationships with people, ideas, beliefs, materials, and theories
 - listening, discussing, questioning, theorizing, and co-learning with the children to develop relationships as a community of learners

Table 1. Strong, Positive Relationships

Characteristics	Similarities between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten
Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of children and their families.	Children sense that they and their families belong in the program. Photographs and art posted throughout the classroom represent children and their families. Children’s experiences and cultures are valued and respected by having books, music, photographs, clothing items, or artifacts displayed around the room. Children share their ideas, interests, and knowledge about their culture and their families, supporting healthy relationship development.
Partner in program planning with children, families, and community	As children wonder and inquire, they establish positive relationships with members of both the school and broader community. Children access the wealth of knowledge, experiences, and understandings within their communities.
Create learning relationships	Children develop relationships through holistic learning experiences with people, ideas, beliefs, materials, and theories as they begin to explore, expand, interpret, test, and revise.

Furthering the Conversation about Strong, Positive Relationships

How do my words, body language, and actions respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each child and their family?

As the educator, what can I do to connect children’s relationships, ideas, beliefs, and theories to inquiry and play-based learning experiences?

How do I encourage and support children to form and maintain positive, healthy relationships?

Children as Capable, Competent Learners

This principle reflects the following characteristics:

- co-learn with children by:
 - respecting the abilities, ideas, and experiences of children and their families
 - encouraging children to share their ideas and questions
 - investigating and researching topics while learning together
- plan active learning opportunities by:
 - offering hands-on, multi-sensory experiences
 - facilitating genuine conversations in both small and large groups
 - bridging various perspectives such as prior experiences, previous conversations, and multiple environments
- embrace multiple ways of knowing, doing, and understanding by:
 - accommodating cultural and linguistic diversity, differing abilities, and valuing children's contributions
 - recognizing and encouraging children to represent their responses and understandings in a variety of ways
 - scaffolding children's learning by asking questions and providing hints to help the learner develop a deeper understanding

Table 2. Children as Capable, Competent Learners

Characteristics	Similarities between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten
Co-learn with children	Children and educators share ideas about their interests and inquiries. Educators observe and listen to children’s actions and responses. The educator offers materials to engage the children in developing vocabulary, questions, and confidence. Educators and children research together to find answers to questions that emerge. Children feel comfortable generating questions, finding answers, and sharing ideas.
Plan active learning opportunities	Children are engaged in a variety of play experiences (e.g., block play, dramatic play, sensory play, and individual investigation). A focus on exploration with various open-ended materials. Conversation and interactions in small groups with other children and adults support children as active learners.
Embrace multiple ways of knowing, doing and understanding	Children have many opportunities to choose to represent their learning using a variety of materials (e.g., clay, wire, and music). Children’s creations reflect age-appropriate abilities that are honoured and scaffolded by the adults who respect the diversity of all children.

Furthering the Conversation about Children as Competent Learners

How do I encourage children to be capable, competent and active learners in my program?

How will I need to adapt my teaching practices in order to be a co-learner with the children?

In the classroom what opportunities do I provide for children to share their many ways of knowing, doing, and understanding?

Holistic Development and Learning

This principle reflects the following characteristics:

- integration of the social-emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual domains by:
 - incorporating all four domains into one learning experience, where possible
 - offering materials that support the outcomes and Essential Learning Experiences
 - providing both explicit and implicit holistic development opportunities
 - infusing physical activity into children’s daily learning experiences
 - respecting individual children’s ability to develop within each domain at a variety of rates
- support inquiry, play-based programming and reflective practice by:
 - providing children with large blocks of time to engage in inquiry and play experiences
 - facilitating inquiry projects
 - documenting the learning experiences
 - developing reflective practices and collaborating with a community of learners
 - designing developmentally appropriate investigations and learning experiences

- accommodate children who are developing at different rates by:
 - offering opportunities for individual, small, and large group experiences - allowing children to have flexibility and choice
 - providing a wide variety of open-ended materials
 - engaging children in topics of personal interest that are developmentally appropriate
 - expanding on children’s individual knowledge, strengths, and abilities

Table 3. Holistic Development and Learning

Characteristics	Similarities between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten
Integrate the social-emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual domains	Children engage in a variety of play experiences using a variety of open-ended materials that offer children choices and promote curiosity and creativity. The environment should offer outdoor experiences and natural materials should be brought into the classroom. The educator co-learns with the children as they pose and test theories and inquire on topics of interest.
Support inquiry, play-based programming, and reflective practice	Early childhood research supports experiential play for 60 – 90 minutes a day, in which children engage in hands-on, active play. Educators should observe and reflect, guide, converse, and participate with children during play to enhance the learning and determine content. Children are encouraged to make choices and problem-solve to demonstrate their various ways of knowing, doing, and learning. Reflecting on these experiences, educators consider the possibilities for extending the play over long periods of time.
Accommodate children who are developing at different rates	Open-ended materials provide choices for children to engage in activities that correspond to their developmental levels. Through scaffolding, the educator extends individual children’s learning by building on each child’s current understandings and capabilities.

Furthering the Conversation about Holistic Development and Learning

How do children, developing at different rates, benefit from integrating the four holistic domains?

In Prekindergarten, how do the Essential Learning Experiences help young children be successful when they transition into a Kindergarten program?

Thinking about the Kindergarten outcomes, what holistic experiences do I need to offer 5-year-old children, in order for them to be able to participate and work towards achieving the outcomes?

How can documentation be used in my classroom to demonstrate the development and learning that has occurred through play, exploration, and discovery as well as inform future planning and inquiry?

Stimulating and Dynamic Environments

This principle reflects the following characteristics:

- facilitate play, exploration, and discovery by:
 - establishing a positive, flexible, and engaging environment
 - offering a variety of materials based on children's interests and outcomes to stimulate exploration and choice
 - encouraging and offering children adequate time and space to interact with the environment
 - displaying documentation of photos and children's work samples
 - co-learning with children to enable them to participate through active engagement

- design a developmentally and culturally inclusive environment by:
 - offering high quality, engaging environments and experiences reflective of the cultural backgrounds of children in the program
 - acknowledging and valuing diversity
 - providing accessible equipment, materials, props and resources
 - encouraging stories and questions about various cultures
 - creating a safe, welcoming, and respectful environment for children and their families
- engage the senses by:
 - providing sensory materials rich in colour, texture, shape, sound, taste and aroma (consider any allergies) for children to interact with and explore
 - ensuring natural and open-ended materials permeate the classroom
 - using the outdoor environment to stimulate the senses and holistic learning
 - modeling exploration using all senses (when safe to use all of the senses)

Table 4. Stimulating and Dynamic Environments

Characteristics	Similarities between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten
Facilitate play, exploration, and discovery	Children have access to a variety of materials to engage in discovery and exploration. Documentation (e.g., photos, stories of children, art projects) is displayed to explain the learning. Viewing the documentation stimulates conversation with the children, families, school and community.

Characteristics	Similarities between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten
Design a developmentally and culturally inclusive environment	Invitations are offered to children as developmentally appropriate activities. Songs, artifacts, clothing and a variety of other culturally-specific materials are shared by the children with classmates. Children are encouraged to build on their strengths using a variety of tools and strategies that support learning.
Engage the senses	Educators ask sensory questions and scaffold learning to guide the children. Opportunities are provided for children to engage their senses (e.g., corrugated cardboard, clay, sand, water features, instruments, wind chimes, crystals, mirrors, cinnamon sticks). Natural and live materials such as rocks, pinecones, plants, seeds, and fish are accessible to children.

Furthering the Conversation about Stimulating and Dynamic Environments

How can materials and experiences be used to make my classroom environment more inclusive to all abilities and cultures?

How can the environment engage and support children in exploration and learning?

What kinds of furniture and materials should be included in all Prekindergarten and Kindergarten environments throughout the school division?

How are equipment, materials, props and resources shared between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten programs?

Summary

High quality learning experiences for children in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten support their holistic development and learning. Prekindergarten and Kindergarten have the four principles of early learning in common. These principles provide a strong foundation for children's learning. Knowing that these similarities exist between the two programs enables Prekindergarten and Kindergarten educators to collaborate and support each other in program implementation.

Furthering the Conversation about Educator Roles in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten

Questions have been provided below to stimulate discussion and dialogue regarding collaboration between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten programs.

- What opportunities can be established to foster collaboration between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten in your school or school division?
- How can educators provide inquiry and/or project based learning for both Prekindergarten and Kindergarten children to experience together?
- How can educators extend the principles to other learning experiences within their program or school division?

Further Readings

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