

# Considerations for Implementation

*Like growing flowers, where certain specific conditions are provided to produce beautiful blossoms...adults provide the conditions that establish the growing ground for empowered children.*  
Wasserman, 1990

## Introduction

Those who implement the Primary Program consider the principles that support the primary program philosophy. Fundamental characteristics of an enabling environment appropriate for young children and key aspects of curriculum, assessment, and evaluation must be identified. The roles of educators and parents in creating an optimum learning environment for children are all important considerations.

## The Child and the Learning Environment

**Children are unique individuals.** They develop and learn at different rates and in different ways. The learning environment helps develop individual potential. It respects and values differences in children, building upon individual differences rather than stressing conformity. It provides opportunities for continuous learning while allowing that learning occurs in different areas, at different times, and in different ways. It accommodates children with diverse abilities and backgrounds to participate equally. Children are assessed and evaluated in terms of their achievements, not by comparisons to group norms. Children are encouraged to improve their performance and to realize their potential rather than to compete with others.

*Active learning classrooms, based on principles of child development, produce long term gains in general intellectual growth, social and emotional skills, and life coping abilities.*

Peck, McCaig, & Sapp, 1988





**Children are aesthetic and artistic beings.** They learn through sensory experiences; they express and represent thoughts and feelings through a variety of media and forms.

The learning environment provides the time and the opportunities for children to experience and respond to their world through their senses. It allows children to create and to express themselves in a variety of ways.

**Children are emotional and social beings with unique personalities.** They learn best when they feel secure and valued. When they are accepted and appreciated, they are free to take risks, to make mistakes, and to learn from their errors and successes. Children develop and refine their thinking as they interact and communicate with other children and adults.

The learning environment is social in nature, providing a psychologically safe, secure and stimulating climate for all children. It provides time and opportunities for children to take appropriate risks, make choices, and explore and investigate their world. It offers children experiences which encourage them to interact with others, to develop interpersonal skills, and to work and learn cooperatively and collaboratively.

**Children are intellectual beings.** They are curious and enthusiastic learners who want to know about the world around them. As children experience their world directly, they experiment, make discoveries, and form hypotheses. They use language to clarify and extend their thinking and to communicate with others. Intellectual development is a process of acquiring, structuring, and restructuring knowledge. This intellectual development encompasses the dispositions, skills, and knowledge described in the humanities, sciences, practical arts, and fine arts curricula.

The learning environment is experience rich, providing time and opportunities for first-hand experiences. It allows for the development of thinking processes through engaging children in activities that stem from their natural curiosity and wonder. Children are invited to explore and represent their thinking in a variety of forms. The environment is rich with language and literacy experiences, providing time and opportunities for children to communicate with other children and adults, to be immersed in oral and written language, and to become literate in purposeful, meaningful ways.



**Children are physical beings who, to varying degrees, are physically active and energetic.** For children, learning involves whole-body activities, active participation, and play. They need experiences that extend their ability to lead safe, active, and healthy lives.

The learning environment provides time, space, and opportunities for movement, for manipulation of objects, and for acquiring attitudes, dispositions, skills, and knowledge for safe and healthful living.

**Children are becoming socially responsible, caring beings.** They have unique cultural experiences and are developing interest in learning about their immediate and expanded environments.

The learning environment fosters an accepting, tolerant, and flexible attitude toward others and a respect for the natural world. It provides time and opportunities for children to participate in a variety of multi-cultural, nonsexist, and environmentally sensitive activities. It helps children move beyond the personal level toward an awareness and appreciation of social, ethical, and environmental issues leading to positive action.

**Children construct knowledge.** Learning is an ongoing experience where children continually act upon and organize their experiences as they try to make sense of their world. As they interact with information and experiences, they move through the cycle of human learning common to all (see the following Model of Learning and Teaching). This cycle involves movement from *awareness* (exposure to and notice of events, concepts, people, and objects), to *exploration* (figuring out or bringing personal meaning to events, concepts, people, and objects), to *inquiry* (developing understanding of events, concepts, people, and objects), to *utilization* (applying or transferring what has been learned about events, concepts, people, and objects).



The learning environment provides opportunities and support in each level of the learning cycles to foster individual growth and development. Opportunities to revisit experiences and information facilitate a child's movement through the learning cycle as each interaction strengthens current knowledge and challenges the child to move to the next level.



**Children may have challenging behaviors.** Some children need more individualized support than others in order to learn. It is only fair to give them the chance even though it is easy to confuse being fair with being consistent. Every child has different needs, and every child deserves the treatment that is appropriate for her, which means you respond in one way to one child and in another way to another child (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 1999).

In 1999, the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children adopted a concept paper on the identification of and intervention with challenging behaviors of children. The introduction of the concept paper begins with these thoughts:

“Many young children, including children with disabilities, engage in behavior that is labeled by adults as “challenging.” Sometimes, this behavior is short-term and decreases with age and use of appropriate guidance strategies. Additionally, what is “challenging” to one person may not be to another. It is critical for professionals to be aware of and sensitive to how families, cultural groups, and communities define appropriate and inappropriate behavior in young children. Different communities have varying expectations for child behavior. Professionals must respect family, cultural, and community expectations in identifying problems and designing interventions. However, sometimes families or professionals may have inappropriate expectations for young children’s behavior. It is important to understand what behaviors are typically associated with particular age groups. For instance, adults need to understand that young children engage in behaviors that older children do not, such as throwing toys or sitting for only short periods of time. With guidance and instruction most children will learn appropriate alternative behavior. Adults must also explore their own beliefs and emotions about certain behaviors (e.g., cursing or hurting others) in order to respond objectively to children. In summary, care must be taken to consider cultural and community beliefs, developmentally appropriate expectations and one’s own beliefs about behavior, in the identification of children’s behavior as “challenging.”

(Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, 1999)



## Model of Learning and Teaching

<i>What Children Do...</i>	<i>What Teachers Do...</i>
<p><b>AWARENESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experience</li> <li>▪ Acquire an interest</li> <li>▪ Recognize broad parameters</li> <li>▪ Attend</li> <li>▪ Perceive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create the environment</li> <li>▪ Provide opportunities by introducing new objects, events, and people</li> <li>▪ Invite interest by posing problem or question</li> <li>▪ Respond to child's interest or shared experience</li> </ul>
<p><b>EXPLORATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Observe</li> <li>▪ Explore materials</li> <li>▪ Collect information</li> <li>▪ Discover</li> <li>▪ Create</li> <li>▪ Figure out components</li> <li>▪ Construct own understanding</li> <li>▪ Apply own rules</li> <li>▪ Create personal meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Facilitate</li> <li>▪ Support and enhance exploration</li> <li>▪ Provide opportunities for active exploration</li> <li>▪ Extend play</li> <li>▪ Describe child's activity</li> <li>▪ Ask open-ended questions, "What else could you do?"</li> <li>▪ Respect child's thinking and rule systems</li> <li>▪ Allow for constructive error</li> </ul>
<p><b>INQUIRY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Examine</li> <li>▪ Investigate</li> <li>▪ Propose explanations</li> <li>▪ Focus</li> <li>▪ Compare own thinking with that of others</li> <li>▪ Generalize</li> <li>▪ Relate to prior learning</li> <li>▪ Adjust to conventional rule systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Help children refine understanding</li> <li>▪ Guide children, focus attention</li> <li>▪ Ask more focused questions, "What else works like this?" "What happens if...?"</li> <li>▪ Provide information when requested, "How do you spell...?"</li> <li>▪ Help children make connections</li> </ul>
<p><b>UTILIZATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use the learning in many ways; learning becomes functional</li> <li>▪ Represent learning in various ways</li> <li>▪ Apply to new situations</li> <li>▪ Formulate new hypotheses and repeat cycle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create vehicles for application in real world</li> <li>▪ Help children apply to new situations</li> <li>▪ Provide meaningful situations to use learning</li> </ul>

From: NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991

## **Families and the Learning Environment**

### **Parents and families are children's first and most important role models.**

They do their best to provide a nurturing environment that supports children socially and emotionally. Families prepare children for school by building positive home conditions which support learning and appropriate behavior. Families follow the progress of children throughout each school year and during non-school hours. Families project their philosophies, attitudes, and ideas concerning education to their children. Parents and families have needs that change over time.

### **Parents and families are active partners in the education of their children.**

Parents and families provide daily opportunities for learning at home and support learning at school. Families spend time together, conversing, sharing ideas, and reading aloud to one another. They share with and support one another through life experiences. Families engage in open, two-way communication with the school concerning all aspects of their children's educational program. Schools respect the knowledge of parents concerning their children.

### **Parents and families are active learners.**

Parents and families model learning strategies by using information resources. They model and encourage enthusiasm for learning by sharing and seeking information with their children. The home environment supports the conditions necessary for children's learning.

### **Parents, families, and schools support each other.**

Families attend school-sponsored activities such as plays, concerts, sports events, and assemblies when possible. Families help to share and abide by school rules and regulations. Families support school organizations. Schools build upon the strength of families.

### **Parents and families are offered an active role in the life of the classroom.**

Family members have an opportunity to volunteer at school. They may be asked to assist on a regular basis in the classroom, lunch room, office, or media center. Family members may wish to assist with class projects, field trips, or other events. Families are considered as sources of information and support when planning projects and theme studies. The level of participation is determined by the family and is welcomed by the school.



### **Parents and families are advisors and decision-makers.**

Parents and families are welcomed as active members of advisory groups which recommend policies and procedures for the school. They are asked to serve as advisors in curriculum decisions and in the selection of materials.

### **Families and schools are advocates for each other.**

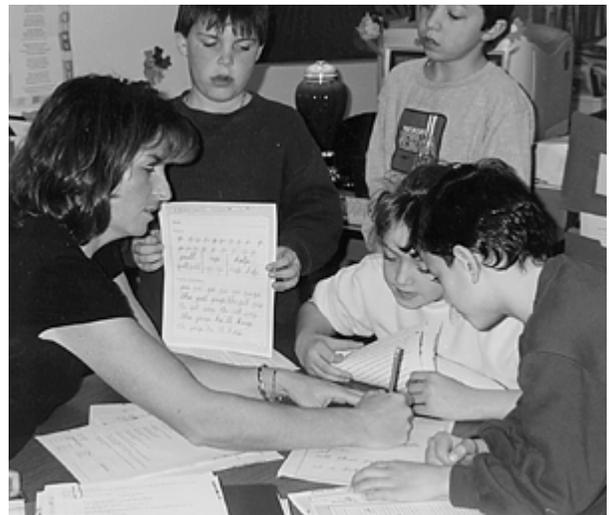
The family encourages positive support for the school within the community. The school encourages positive support for the family within the school and community. Families and schools communicate often and work together to do what is best for children.

## **The Teacher and the Learning Environment**

**The role of the teacher is to facilitate learning.** The teacher guides learning experiences through strategies that encourage children to think creatively, problem-solve, make decisions, and expand their thinking skills.

### **The teacher:**

- Relates to all children with warmth, sensitivity, and caring to establish and sustain a climate in which learning is joyful
- Invites children to participate in planning and creating a rich, stimulating environment which encourages interaction, exploration, and investigation
- Provides encouragement, support, and challenge, as appropriate, to help children develop personal goals
- Models respect for others and the environment
- Collaborates with other professionals and the children to plan, create, and sustain a safe climate in which children may work harmoniously, creatively, and productively
- Draws upon a variety of organizational patterns to make optimal use of space and to integrate a variety of materials and equipment that stimulate active learning
- Provides time, opportunity, and a range of different experiences to stimulate children to interact, reflect, communicate, and learn
- Structures opportunities for children to work individually and with other children; with their teacher and other adults; and in groups of different sizes and composition formed for different purposes
- Focuses on the ongoing learning of individual children and on developmentally appropriate assessment and evaluation
- Draws upon a range of instructional strategies from coaching to direct instruction to maximize children's learnings



*The job of a teacher is to excite in the young a boundless sense of curiosity about life, so that the growing child shall come to comprehend it with an excitement tempered by awe and wonder.*

Quoted by Garrett in Peter,  
1977

- Uses the information gained through assessment and evaluation to make thoughtful, informed, and tactful interventions as required
- Exchanges information about the child with the child and parents on an ongoing basis
- Models and demonstrates enthusiasm and a disposition for learning, and helps children to enjoy learning as meaningful, relevant, and personally satisfying

*What is the Teacher?*

*What is the teacher?*

*A guide, not a guard.*

*What is learning?*

*A journey, not a destination.*

*What is discovery?*

*Questioning the answers, not answering the questions.*

*What is the process?*

*Discovering ideas not covering content.*

*What is the goal?*

*Open minds, not closed issues.*

*What is the test?*

*Being and becoming, not remembering and reviewing.*

*What is the school?*

*Whatever we choose to make it.*

Glatthorn, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990



## The Administrative Team and the Learning Environment

**The role of the administrative team is to lead the learning process.** The team provides the necessary conditions for the implementation of the primary program. These include but are not limited to time, resources, and support for a collaborative environment where those involved study the issues, visit other programs, and practice new strategies.

*The paramount task of the district administrator is not to get this or that innovation put into practice, but to build the capacity of the district and the schools to handle any and all innovations.*

**The administrative team must lead a process that:**

- Articulates the vision and direction of the district with regard to teaching and learning practices
- Analyzes the potential of the primary program to meet an identified need

Fullan, 1991

- Clarifies, supports, and insists on the administrative role as central to building the capacity to implement the Primary Program
- Ensures that support is provided in the form of quality materials, inservice training, technical assistance, and opportunities for teacher interaction and planning
- Allows for modification and adaptation of the Primary Program out of respect for individual needs
- Communicates with and maintains the support of parents, community, and the school board for the Primary Program
- Sets up an assessment system to monitor and adjust if issues arise or problems occur

## The Curriculum and the Learning Environment

**The curriculum fosters the development of the child and promotes learning.** It provides a variety of activities and materials that increase in difficulty and complexity as the child develops skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions.

### The curriculum:

- Begins from where the child is and builds on the child's interests and natural sense of wonder
- Is worth learning, meaningful, and engaging; is appropriate to the child's particular stage of development
- Engages the child in meaningful activities and experiences which provide a context for the development of thinking processes
- Builds on, extends, and enhances success
- Provides a balance of activities and experiences that reflect the five goal areas
- Develops the attitudes, dispositions, skills, and knowledge of the fine arts, humanities, practical arts, and sciences
- Allows for the inclusion of locally developed programs and is appropriately responsive to state and national standards
- Includes a broad-based educational focus in which social, ethical, and environmental issues are presented
- Is integrated wherever and whenever possible
- Invites children to cooperate and collaborate with others



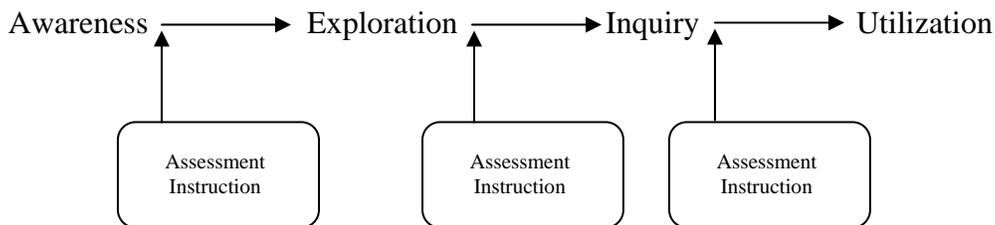
## Assessment and Evaluation and the Learning Environment

**Assessment and evaluation foster the development of the child and promote learning.** Both components are an integral part of the ongoing teaching-learning process but should not dominate or fragment learning.

Assessment and evaluation:

- Involve each child in self-reflection and evaluation
- Focus on each child individually
- Identify and build upon what each child can do
- Identify a child's interests and learning needs to facilitate continuous learning
- Are based on authentic evidence and appropriate practices and materials
- Include and arrange a variety of strategies and resources to suit the child and the purpose of the learning activity
- Are based on the curriculum and help direct the planning of learning experiences
- Acknowledge the whole child by focusing in a balanced way on all five of the primary program goal areas
- Enable learners
- Aid teachers in their ability to help each child grow and develop
- Link home and school in a partnership

### Assessment as it relates to the "Model of Teaching and Learning"



## *Kindred Spirits*

Learning is about relationships.  
Most of which are formed while we make discoveries.  
And no one celebrates discoveries quite like those who know the child within,  
and in others visualize the possibilities with which  
we all began.

This vision makes us Kindred Spirits.  
The kind of spirits who find high rewards in hugs;  
put dandelions in water; sing happy birthday many times a year;  
uses compassion with dead goldfish; take 20 children to the zoo  
and return with the same number; speed-tie tennis shoes  
and black-patent-leather buckles; really celebrate  
February 14th; guard family secrets and overheard conversations;  
accept innocent rudeness; recycle everything and  
believe in serendipity.

These Kindred Spirits have liberty daily, to laugh and cry,  
sit on the floor, paint and swing, hold hands and  
look into faces that reflect life.

Sometimes, the power of the job is frightening.  
Sometimes, the trust bestowed upon us, to care for  
Humanity's child sinks in.  
Then we pause to watch even more closely,  
knowing that the future of this planet sits  
precariously in the laps and arms  
of Kindred Spirits all around this earth;  
with gentle beings who love learning and children,  
and live with a passion for something, everyday.

What do these spirits manifest for the future?  
Compassion, joy, respect,  
curiosity, love,  
honesty, creativity and  
appreciation of life  
through someone else's eyes.

Most people will never know  
what we know,  
about the hand-holding, the dandelions and sweaty hugs.

It is their loss.  
And, it is what makes us Kindred Spirits.

Susan R. Andersen, 1993

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