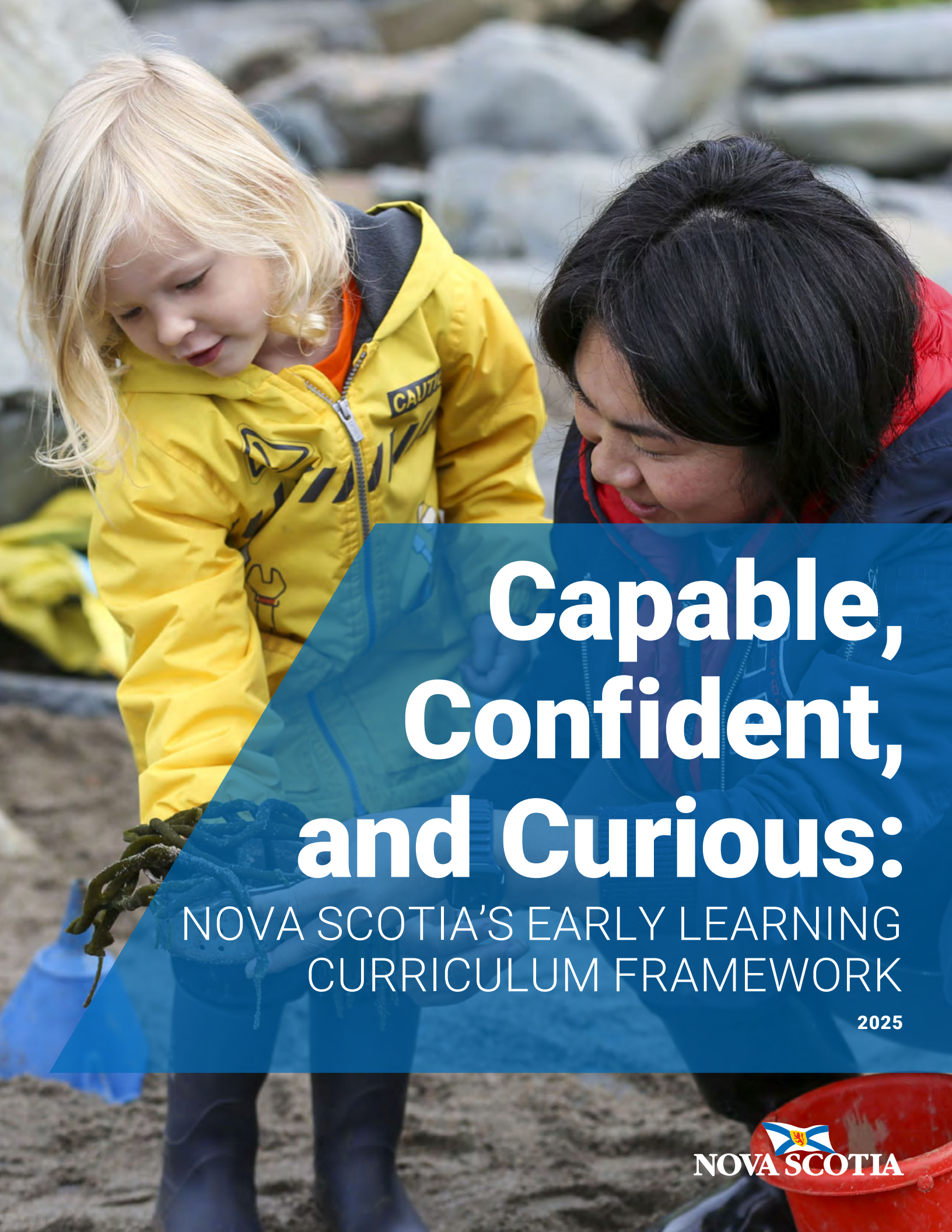




Capable, Confident, and Curious:

NOVA SCOTIA'S EARLY LEARNING
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

2025

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Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework

ISBN: 978-1-55457-717-0

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Prepared by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development



Dedication

To Shelley Thompson

Shelley Thompson devoted her life to early childhood education. A caring and outstanding champion for children and families, she led with genuine kindness and selflessly gave of her time and expertise to the community.



“ The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences.”

—Loris Malaguzzi, "Your Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins" (1993)

Acknowledgements

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) acknowledges the following partners for their thoughtful and constructive feedback in the development of this revised framework:

- Internal branches of EECD and other government partners:
 - African Canadian Services
 - Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial
 - Education Innovation Programs and Services
 - Gaelic Affairs
 - Office of L'nu Affairs
 - Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey
 - Mi'kmaw Services
 - Student Services and Equity
- Community and professional partners:
 - Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
 - Child Care Centre Directors and Educators
 - Jane Norman College Family Home Agency
 - Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services
 - The Youth Project
- Academic partners, ECE training institutes, and Early Childhood Development Support Centres:
 - Centre d'appui à la petite enfance de la Nouvelle Écosse
 - Jane Norman College
 - Mount Saint Vincent University
 - Nova Scotia Community College
 - Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education

We also gratefully acknowledge the effort, time and expertise of Bernice Cipparrone-McLeod, Professor, School of Education, George Brown College, and Gail Hunter, Professor, School of Education, George Brown College for their contributions in the review and development of this revised framework.

The department would like to thank the following early learning and child care programs and their staff for allowing us to photograph early learning in action:

- Allegro Child Care Centre
- A Tiny Lab for Early Learning
- Dr. Jane Norman Child Study Centre
- Duc D'Anville Elementary School (Pre-primary)
- ForestKids Early Learning Centre
- Fox Hollow Child Care Centre
- Health Park Early Learning Centre
- Inglis Street Elementary (Pre-primary)
- Chebucto Family Home Agency
- La P'tite Academie
- Le Petit Voilier (Centre le Tournesol)
- Leeds Street Child Care Centre
- Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre
- MSVU Child Study Centre
- Nelson Whynder Elementary School (Pre-primary)
- New Glasgow Academy (Pre-primary)
- Point Pleasant Child Care Centre (Rice location)
- Small World Learning Centre
- Tallahassee Early Learning Centre
- The Fox and The Hare Day Care
- University Children's Centre
- YWCA Early Learning Centre

Special thank you also to all the families, family home care providers, and early childhood educators who contributed and permitted the use of the photos of the children. These images have brought this document to life. Additional thanks to the staff at La P'tite Académie Société, who named the framework.

And finally, the department acknowledges Australia's *Belonging, Being and Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. With permission, contents in the sections Principles of Early Learning and Practices in Early Learning draw heavily on the Australian framework.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are in *Mi'kma'ki*, the ancestral homeland of the *Mi'kmaq*. We recognize the *Mi'kmaq* as the original people of this land, who, since time immemorial, have moved freely throughout the land for purposes of trade and resources, as well as to establish relationships with neighbouring nations. It was customary to acknowledge yourself as a visitor to the area that you did not steward.

As with all Indigenous Peoples, the *Mi'kmaq* share a foundational connection with the land. They honour *Wskitqamu* (Mother Earth) through a relationship of respect, assumed responsibility, and reciprocity, the four values of *Netukulimk*.

In the 1700s, the *Mi'kmaq* entered into Peace and Friendship Treaties with the British Crown. These treaties were established on the premise of nation-to-nation relationship building and continue today.

Acknowledging the ancestral lands of the *Mi'kmaq* is a way of honouring our shared Treaty relationship and its inherent responsibilities—a critical step towards Reconciliation.

We are all Treaty People. *Msit no'kmaq* (All my relations).



MI'KMA'KI

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WSKITQAMU

<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/wskitqamu.mp3>



NETUKULIMK

<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/netukulimk.mp3>



MSIT NO'KMAQ

<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/msitnokmaq.mp3>

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Introduction

Note: Throughout this document, the term educator refers to adults who work directly with children in **early learning and child care programs** (child care centres, family home child care programs, **Pre-primary** programs) including **early childhood educators**, and **care providers**.

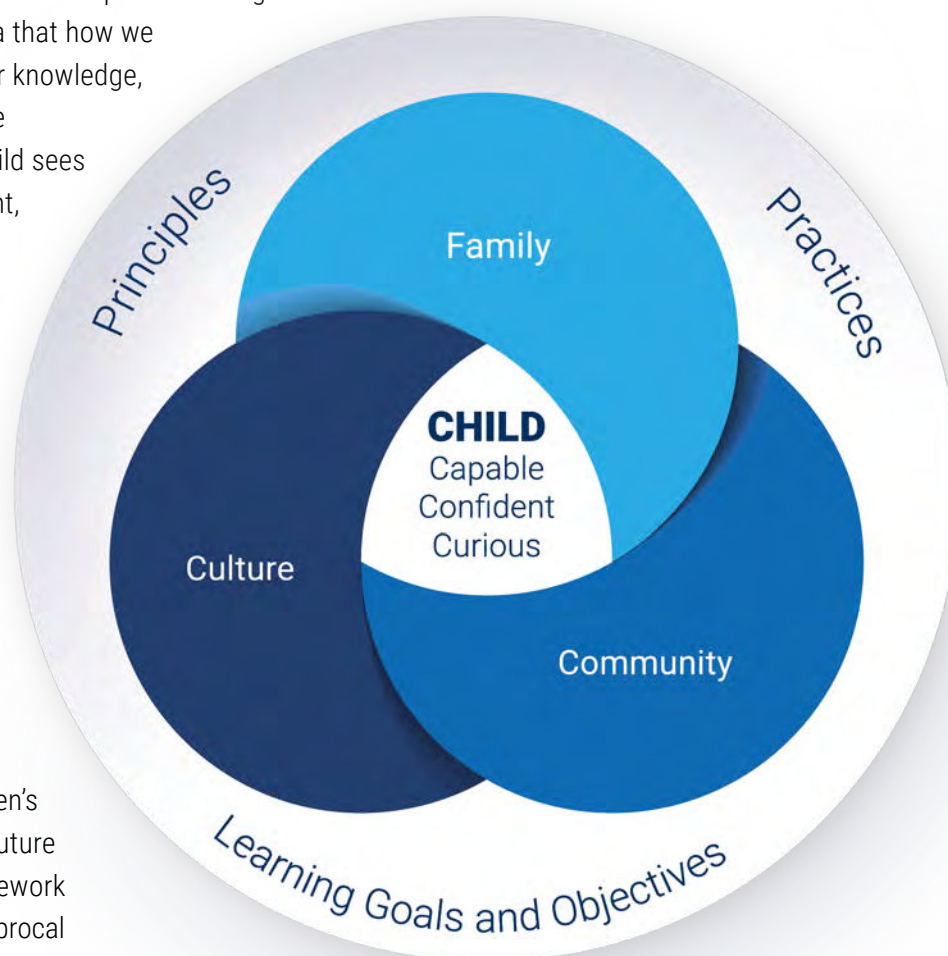
Definitions for bold terms are included in the Glossary.

Introduction

Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework (referred to as the **framework** throughout this document) provides educators with a structure that supports Nova Scotia's vision for children's learning. With a focus on children from infancy to eight years of age, it has been developed for educators, **pedagogical leaders**, and administrators involved with children in **early learning** and child care programs.

The framework provides a shared language to facilitate communication among families, educators, and other **early childhood professionals** (e.g., family resource centre staff, developmental interventionists, and elementary school teachers) who may also find it to be of use and interest in their work with young children. It defines key elements evident in high-quality early learning and child care programs and lays out how educators in these programs approach early learning.

The framework is based on the concept of the image of the child, which is the idea that how we see children is shaped by our knowledge, experiences, and **biases**. The framework's image of the child sees children as capable, confident, and curious. To support this image, educators must be willing to grow in their practice through critical reflection, and intentionally design play-based outdoor and indoor **early learning environments**. The framework honours and values children for who they are. It recognizes that educators, families, cultures, and communities play an integral role in children's learning, development, and future success. Central to the framework is the belief that building reciprocal relationships and including the principles of **equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism** in early childhood helps children in a **holistic** way.



Implementation of the framework depends on a solid understanding of child development and strong pedagogical leadership. To support successful implementation, the framework is organized into five key elements:

- **Vision:** main purpose and long-term goal based on the belief that all children are capable, confident, and curious learners
- **Principles:** foundational approaches to early learning with an emphasis on holistic development; reciprocal relationships; partnerships with families and communities; equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism; and critical reflection
- **Practices:** ways educators put the principles into action including responsiveness to children; linguistic and cultural responsiveness, **play-based learning** and **intentionality**; inclusive learning environments; **authentic assessment**; and continuity of learning experiences
- **Learning Goals:** broad categories of focus for children's learning and development that include well-being; discovery and invention; language and communication; and personal and social responsibility
- **Learning Objectives:** statements that identify specific aspects of children's progress towards the learning goals; serve as reference points for educators to plan for programming that meets the needs of all children; and allow educators to document and communicate children's progress and needs to families, other educators in early learning and child care programs, early childhood professionals, and educators in schools



The evidence-based approach to early learning presented in the framework is intended to be flexible and applicable for all types of programs and for educators of all levels of experience. It is intended to encourage educators, and others who use it, to consider every aspect of their interactions with children. The quality of these exchanges profoundly influences each child's development—now, and into the future. The framework is meant to challenge and to inspire pedagogical practice and leadership. Educators are encouraged to use the framework in ways that work best for them as they plan for each child's optimal development. An educator may read the framework individually to reflect on their own professional practice, values, and beliefs, or share it with colleagues to inspire professional growth. A pedagogical leader may use the various sections of the framework as a reference point for discussion. An administrator may use the framework as a guide for developing a new policy or protocol. Educators are encouraged to use the framework in other ways that support them, the children they care for and their families and communities.

Two tools provide Nova Scotia's educators practical information and support as they implement the framework. The first is the Appendix, "Cultures of Nova Scotia," which provides brief histories and contexts of four major cultural groups in Nova Scotia, the Mi'kmaq, Acadians, African Nova Scotians, and Gaels, as well as the context of Newcomers to the province. It was developed by contributors from the early childhood education field, EECD, and other provincial government departments to ensure all educators' practice is informed by reliable and truthful information. The second, the accompanying *Educator's Guide to Capable, Confident, and Curious* (referred to as the *Educator's Guide* throughout this document) provides guidance for educators in using the framework: to plan for responsive learning experiences; incorporate a wide variety of **learning strategies**; and extend and enrich the learning goals and objectives within their daily practice.

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

It is recommended educators regularly refer to the *Educator's Guide* to engage in critical reflection about the children in their early learning and child care programs. This will assist educators to create inclusive environments that are welcoming and interesting, and that support children's optimal learning, well-being and sense of belonging. <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/nselcfeeducatorsguide.pdf>





A Vision

for Children's Learning

A Vision for Children's Learning

In Nova Scotia, the vision for early learning is for all children to be joyfully engaged in spaces intentionally designed for early learning that support them to flourish as capable, confident and curious individuals.

All children are welcome, supported, heard, respected, and treated equitably on their unique journey in life. All children are capable of constructing their own understandings, making decisions that affect them, and contributing to the learning of others. All are confident in their full potential, who they are, where they come from and where they belong, and curious to discover and learn about the world around them through meaningful and playful experiences.



The framework recognizes that both the child's and the educator's journeys are influenced by individual, social, and cultural experiences, shared histories, and diverse values. Within the framework's structure, each educator embarks on their own continuous learning journey alongside the children. They consistently seek new ways to foster meaningful relationships with the children, families, and communities they interact with every day. They develop a true appreciation for and understanding of children, **family**, language, and social and cultural practices and traditions. They recognize and positively seek to eliminate the existence of underlying organizational barriers (e.g., biased or racist policies or behaviours). This all comes together to enhance the overall vision for Nova Scotia's children's learning—and, simultaneously, educators' learning. Both the framework and

accompanying *Educator's Guide* contain valuable information to support each educator as they take on the responsibility of assuming their role as a pedagogical leader and change agent for inclusive, culturally, and linguistically responsive practice.

Nova Scotia's framework is founded on three fundamental concepts of learning with and caring for children. These essential components of the framework are: an image of the child as being capable, confident, and curious individuals; the fundamental rights of children; and a **social pedagogy**.

Image of the Child

The concept of image of the child refers to how people think about children's capabilities, development, motivations, purpose, and **agency**. It is what people believe, understand, and assume about the role of children in education and society. An individual's image of the child, and definition of childhood itself, is influenced by one's own culture, values, and beliefs and often, unconsciously, by their personal experiences as a child.

While educators and early learning and child care programs contribute greatly to children's holistic development, children's lives are most importantly shaped by their families, cultures, and communities. Their earliest development and learning take place through these relationships, particularly within families, who are children's first and most influential teachers. How adults see children as capable, confident, and curious varies greatly



from one person to another. To promote Nova Scotia's vision for children's learning, the framework leads educators to develop an image of the child in the context of family, culture, linguistic heritage, and community.

The framework views children's learning as dynamic, complex, and holistic. Educators understand that physical, personal, social, emotional, linguistic, cultural, **spiritual**, and cognitive aspects of learning are all interrelated. Children come from many different family backgrounds and cultures. Similarly, educators all draw on a vast range of life experiences to inform their own image of the child. The image of the child for one individual may be different for another, based on their own culture, upbringing, abilities, and ways of being and knowing. Even the shape of their families can have a profound effect: one person grows up in a large, involved family with many siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents; another person grows up an only child. Though both may have been equally loved, each may have very different ideas about the meaning of "childhood." Regardless of these differences, this framework promotes a positive and strong image of the child.

This strong, positive image of the child has a profound impact on what happens in early learning environments (Moss 2010). When an educator believes children are capable human beings with a natural curiosity and love of learning, the indoor and outdoor early learning environments they create allow children to confidently explore their surroundings, ask questions, and use their senses.

"The concept of the image of the child can be imagined as a pair of glasses that adults and teachers unconsciously wear and through which they come to see children in a particular way. It matters which glasses teachers look through because the way they see and understand children informs the curricular and pedagogical choices they make as teachers."

—Daniel Whitaker, "The Image of the Child" (2019)

At the core of this image of the child are three important characteristics—children are believed to be capable, confident, and curious.



Capable

Society sometimes perceives children as not yet capable, as still needing to be led. The framework asks educators to see them as already capable and to take action to

address the barriers that hinder a child's success. This is equity in action: the understanding that children from all life circumstances with individual abilities, experiences, opportunities and preferences have the capacity to succeed. They are skillful, able, talented, competent, and up to the task. All children are capable of new learning and independence, when given enough time and practice.

When an educator sees children as being capable, they recognize each child's diverse abilities. They plan intentional play-based learning environments and experiences that further develop those abilities. Educators who are aware of the physical well-being of the children in their care know what adaptations and accommodations to make, and when, to ensure all children are able to fully participate in learning experiences and social interactions. An educator who sees children as capable beings observes them in action from a safe distance to document their challenges, attempts, and successes to reflect on how best to build upon each child's skillset and potential. When educators acknowledge children as having the qualities required to do something, anything, they reaffirm within each child what they already know: that they are capable.

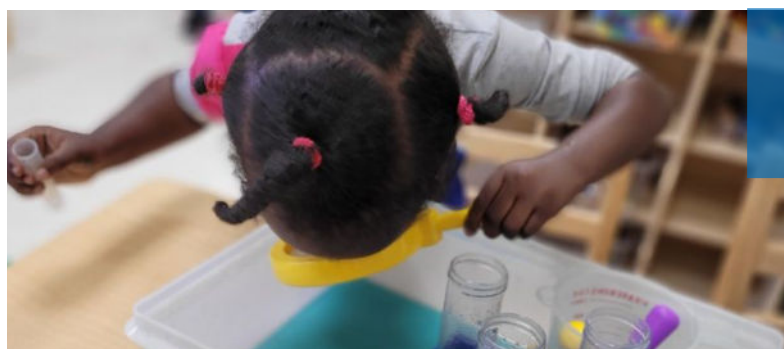


Confident

Children need to first experience full trust in the people and things around them to be confident. The information provided in the framework supports educators to be

confident in their own capacity to support children's growth and development and create welcoming, safe indoor and outdoor early learning environments where children have the information and supports they need to freely explore, take risks, fail, and be successful. As a result, all children have equitable opportunities to develop a healthy self-image and experience the positive, trusting relationships needed to become confident individuals.

Educators who consistently provide all children with individualized support, encouragement, and care, help children develop trust and confidence in their relationships. An educator who asks for children's input in the daily experiences and learning environment design allows children to be confident in their own thoughts, words, and decisions. An educator who is mindful to include all children in interactions and conversations allows them to be confident in their value within the early learning and care program. When an educator respectfully and openly discusses safety and well-being, children gain confidence in recognizing and preventing potential hazards for themselves and for others.



Curious

Children are born curious. This is evident when **infants** looks towards

sounds, faces, and other interesting objects, and in **toddlers** when they put a toy in their mouth to discover more about it. The framework emphasizes how the availability of resources and educators who encourage children's **play** and development can influence how children continue to use curiosity throughout their learning journey into adulthood. Guided by the framework, educators can help support children in fostering their sense of wonder and curiosity. To do so successfully, educators must also nurture their own sense of curiosity and spirit of **inquiry**.

Educators draw on what they know about the children in their care, their interests, and their understanding of things. Educators rely on this knowledge to create play-based learning experiences and environments that are fun, interesting, and inspire curiosity. An educator who seeks to discover more about the experiences children share with their families and in their communities encourages them to be curious about other cultures, languages, and traditions. When an educator takes notice of children's intrigue or challenge with certain materials, they take time to reflect on creative ways for children to expand their vocabulary, learn new concepts, and make other interesting discoveries. Educators who acknowledge children's natural curiosity answer their questions factually and in developmentally appropriate ways, candidly acknowledging when they do not know something.

As educators learn alongside the young children in their care, keeping this framework's vision in mind, they recognize that all children require different and appropriate support, but they also recognize one shared truth: All children are capable, confident, and curious.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

With a positive image of the child and an awareness of the Rights of the Child, educators take notice of children's natural, self-driven play, encouraging them to further develop their ideas, knowledge, and imagination. Educators promote and protect the inherent rights of all children. By respecting these rights, educators encourage children to share their ideas with confidence, and listen to and respect the ideas and opinions of others. Educators whose practice is guided by the framework welcome, respect, and value children's right to participate in making decisions that affect them—including the early learning environments and **curriculum**.

As educators implement the framework, they must keep the following children's rights in mind. They recognize every child as:

- having the right to relax, play, and participate in cultural and artistic activities;
- being capable of forming their own views;
- having the right not to be discriminated against;
- having the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, either orally, in writing, or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice;
- having freedom of thought, conscience, and religion;
- having the right to choose their own friends and join or set up groups, as long as it isn't harmful to others;
- having the right to physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social well-being;
- having the right to an education; and
- having the right to enjoy and use their own language, religion and culture.



Consult The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – The Children's Version, in particular articles 2, 12, 13, 14, 15, 27, 28, 30, and 31.
<https://www.unicef.org/media/60981/file/convention-rights-child-text-childfriendly-version.pdf>



Early Childhood Pedagogy

Pedagogy is how educators understand, approach, and support children's development and education. The term pedagogy stems from the Greek terms pais (child) and ágō (to lead, to guide).

Pedagogy is guided by an educator's philosophical approach to learning and their practice, the "techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, **skills**, attitudes, and **dispositions** ... It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment (which includes the concrete learning environment, the family and community)." (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2011, 28)

Early childhood pedagogy encourages educators to observe children, engage in conversations, and intentionally guide children's experiences based on the information they gather. This enables educators and children to **co-construct** the curriculum. It allows children to actively construct their own understandings, act independently, and contribute to the learning of others. At the same time, educators explore and learn from families and communities; this helps inform the construction of a more **culturally responsive**, inclusive curriculum. When educators view children as capable learners and establish respectful and caring relationships with them and their families, everyone works together to create curriculum and learning experiences relevant to children in their local context. These co-constructed experiences gradually and meaningfully expand children's knowledge and understanding of the world.

In a rich, inviting, child-centered environment, pedagogy informs curriculum decision-making and facilitates overall learning and development.

Curriculum is what educators do to nurture children's belonging, well-being, learning, and development. It is the complete sum of the defined activities, planned experiences, and events that occur within an inclusive environment intended to produce a specific outcome, and requires collaboration between educators, children, families, and communities.



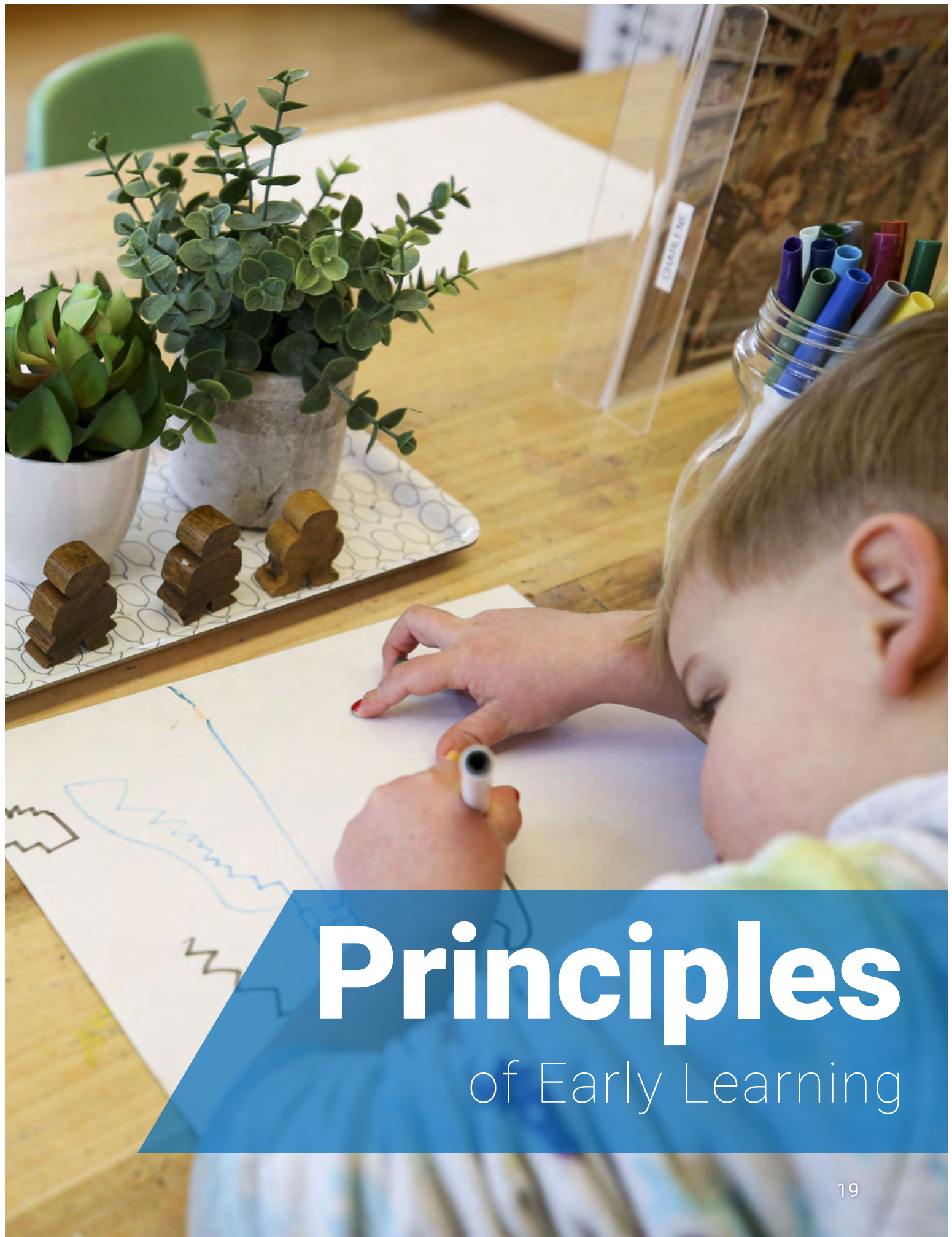
Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework is founded on social pedagogy—a pedagogy that:

- takes a strength-based approach
- emphasizes diverse and responsive adult–child relationships and experiences that promote a sense of well-being, **belonging**, and acceptance
- represents, respects, and values all children, families, educators, and communities
- validates all children's diverse knowledge, connections, experiences in the context of their language, culture, race, sexual orientation, **gender** identity, and abilities
- affirms individual needs, identities, and distinct ways of knowing, being, and learning from their natural and cultural environments
- builds upon and bridges children's and adults' understanding and knowledge, respectful of individual linguistic and cultural identities

This pedagogy requires educators who work with children and families from across the province to exercise informed professional judgement—to be reflective, intentional, and driven by a vision of all children's potential, and to make decisions guided by an image of the child (and of themselves) as being capable, confident, and curious. The framework's principles and practices outline fundamental values and beliefs to guide the way.

A recommended starting point for implementing the framework is for educators to reflect on their own unique pedagogy: who they are, what interests them, how they relate to others, and how they may affect others. The *Educator's Guide* is designed to intentionally support this professional reflection and ways to put into practice the core principles of the framework.





Principles

of Early Learning

Principles of Early Learning

The principles below draw on contemporary theories and research evidence that support early childhood education practices. They are focused on children's optimal development and encourage joyful and engaging approaches to learning in the context of the learning goals for children from birth to eight years old.

These principles reflect what we know about how young children learn and develop. They are relevant to children of all abilities and cultural backgrounds and may be applied to all educators and care providers in early learning and child care programs. The principles of early learning include:

- Holistic Development
- Reciprocal Relationships
- Partnerships with Families and Communities
- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Anti-racism
- Critical Reflection

Holistic Development

Holistic approaches to early childhood development recognize the connections between mind, heart, body, and spirit. When educators take a holistic approach, they pay attention to children's physical, personal, social, emotional, linguistic, cultural, and spiritual well-being, as well as cognitive aspects of learning. While educators may plan or assess with a focus on a specific outcome or component of learning, they see the interconnectiveness and integration of children's learning. They recognize the connections between children, families, and communities, as well as the importance of reciprocal relationships and partnerships for learning. Educators also recognize the **intersectionality** of children's social and cultural identities, and how those identities may influence the way in which they navigate the world.

"Right now, you're made of four different areas—mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. You cannot exist if you take one of those areas away. [...] if you're not happy right now, it's because one of those areas is not getting attention."

—Jeff Ward, "What is the Medicine Wheel?" (2019)

Educators see children's development as a social activity and value collaborative learning and community participation. Supporting **social-emotional development** is an essential focus for educators who understand that most human learning is a social activity. Integrated, holistic approaches to educating and learning also focus on children's connections to the natural world. Like the many cultural groups whose lives are guided by their spirituality and connection to others, educators who implement the framework develop children's capacity to understand the interdependence between people, plants, animals, the sea, and land. As educators do this, they also ensure children make connections to nature and the natural world and learn to respect the **natural environment**.



When people's culture describes the importance of spirituality, relationships with others, and community as central to their life, they view life through this holistic lens. For example, the Mi'kmaq welcome a newborn as *pisagnatkwej*, meaning a spirit, a human; African Nova Scotians /African ancestry affirm children as wonderful creations endowed with gifts and talents that must be nurtured through individually and collectively confirming experiences; and Acadian and Gael people identify children by their given names followed by their **parent's**, grandparent's, great-grandparent's names, and so on. The languages of these historic cultures influence world views and illustrate holistic approaches to child-rearing and family values. When children experience these and other holistic traditions, they develop a deep-rooted sense of connectedness with and pride in their family, culture, and community (Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia 2019).



 **PISAGNATKWEJ**

<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/pisagnatkwej.mp3>

Educators who incorporate the principle of holistic development to their practice recognize and value strong familial and cultural connections and relationships for all children.

The framework acknowledges these historic cultures and recognizes the diversity of cultural realities in Nova Scotia. See the Appendix, “Cultures of Nova Scotia” to learn more.

Reciprocal Relationships

Nurturing and responsive relationships in the early years build resilience and support optimal learning and brain development in young children. Brain growth is staggering in the first year of life, with 700 new synapses formed every second. “Although the brain continues to develop and change into adulthood, the first 8 years can build a foundation for future learning, health and life success.” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2023)



The notion of relationships as a means of ensuring the success of children and families is not a new idea. In the context of early learning and child care, educators, children, and families prosper within programs that foster authentic relationships and care for one another.

Reciprocal relationships are mutually beneficial interactions between adults and children. They occur when adults observe and read children's signals and communication, and then respond with understanding. They give children a feeling of being cared for and cared about. They build a sense of belonging for all—children, families, educators, community members, and other partners.

From a holistic perspective, the framework acknowledges children's interdependence with others and with nature—and the importance of these relationships to children's identities. Positive, caring, and responsive relationships are crucial to a child's developing sense of self: they shape who children are, and who they become. They provide a foundation for the positive social-emotional development skills children need to effectively communicate their needs and feelings. They serve as a basis for children to recognize, form, and maintain respectful and healthy relationships with others and the world around them.



Educators recognize that

- relationships are fundamental to the development of the whole child and are the foundation for all learning
- investing time and energy into caring and respectful relationships fosters positive outcomes and reduces many challenges (Joseph and Strain 2019)
- a sense of belonging is integral to everyone: that children belong to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood, their wider community, and the Earth.



"Building Positive Relationships with Young Children" (National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations 2019) provides a range of relationship-building strategies for educators. <https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/building-positive-relationships-with-young-children.pdf>



When educators provide and foster reciprocal and responsive relationships, they help children grow strong and healthy identities. Educators who value reciprocal relationships continually reflect upon how their personal experiences, biases, and culture impact their relationships with children, adults, and the natural world around them. They are open to receiving feedback and listen to the voices of children and adults. They proactively develop and maintain collaborative relationships with colleagues and external professionals. They commit to continuous professional learning and reflection to evolve their practice.

Educators take care to ensure indoor and outdoor environments are safe, cared for, and sustainable. Children's early experiences and relationships, including where they live, play, and grow, affect their development for years to come. The early years set the path for children's sense of place and well-being, and capacity to establish relationships with others. Children benefit when families, educators, and other professionals work together. Respectful, collaborative partnerships ensure families feel empowered to participate in the early learning and care programs that support their children; these partnerships between educators and families contribute to a child's positive learning and development.



Partnerships with Families and Communities

Families are children's most influential teachers. Building genuine and respectful relationships with children's families helps educators bring diversity and familiarity into children's indoor and outdoor learning environments. These relationships turn into partnerships when educators, families, and communities work together to support children's learning and growth.

Partnerships with families are based on understanding each other's expectations and attitudes, acknowledging the impact of each partner. In early learning and child care programs, partnerships have the benefit of coordinating the efforts of families and educators through non-hierarchical, collaborative relationships. They build on the strength and trust of each other's knowledge (Rodd 2013). Rodd states that "a partnership approach to family engagement stresses collaborative rather than joint activity and engages families on their own terms and at levels suitable for their priorities, commitments, and circumstances." An educator who engages families in partnership empowers them to have a say in—and control over—their lives, enabling them to build stronger and more trusting relationships with educators. "Genuine partnerships evolve when early childhood educators and families work together as informed contributors and collaborative decision-makers, rather than when families are simply visitors, helpers, experts or fundraisers." (Rodd 2013, 222)



“Children feel more secure in their child care setting when they see their family members and their child care practitioner in a respectful relationship. They also learn social and communication skills by observing the adults around them talking and solving problems together”.

—Betsy Mann, “Building Partnerships with Families” (2008)

The framework supports this balanced approach to partnerships with families. The shared vision for children’s learning and holistic image of the child relies on these partnerships that are based on accountability, communication, truth, trust, reconciliation, and equity. In these partnerships, educators:

- are accountable to the principles of inclusive education
- collaborate and work with families to help them feel welcome
- empower families as key decision makers regarding programming and/or support for their child
- work with families to understand their preferred ways of collaborating
- share knowledge and resources that support the well-being and learning of children

When guided by this principle, educators are fully invested in developing partnerships with families and communities. They recognize the value of bringing other early childhood professionals and community members to these collaborative relationships to further enhance children’s learning. An educator who invests in collaborative partnerships ensures children see themselves and their families’ culture, language, and needs represented within the indoor and outdoor learning environments and resources. They ensure children with additional needs including developmental, social, economic, cultural, or linguistic challenges are provided with daily opportunities to actively engage in quality early learning experiences. When educators extend partnerships with families to also include individuals and other members of their community in their program, they show respect for the value of children and early learning and child care in society.

It is through the development of respectful and collaborative partnerships with families and communities that educators put other framework principles into action. Partnerships contribute to children’s—and each partner’s—sense of being seen, respected and heard, of acceptance, and of belonging.

“Building Partnerships with Families” (Mann 2008) was developed through the Canadian Child Care Federation and provides a range of strategies for strengthening relationships with families.
https://cccf-fcsge.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RS_86-e.pdf



Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Anti-racism

The framework recognizes that educators often interact with families who do not resemble their own. It acknowledges that educators need a responsive and deep appreciation of families, including families belonging to equity deserving communities. This appreciation allows educators to design programs where children who are Mi'kmaw/Indigenous, Acadian/Francophone, African Nova Scotian/ African ancestry, Gaelic, **2SLGBTQIA+**, newcomers, and children facing accessibility barriers and their families feel included and empowered as essential decision makers in their education and success.

"We must bring a deeper understanding and heightened awareness to our work so that children grow up in our programs with strong self and family identities, an appreciation for differences, and a desire for fairness."

—Margie Carter and Deb Curtis, *Art of Awareness: How Observation Can Transform Your Teaching* (2022)



Inclusion in the context of the framework means:

- respecting children's social, cultural, and linguistic identity
- respecting children's gender identities, family circumstances, and home community
- committing to eliminate barriers to inclusion that negatively affect children with disabilities, and individual access needs, including neurodiverse and Deaf children
- ensuring children's experiences, personality, temperament, learning approaches, and voice are recognized and valued
- ensuring children have equitable access to resources and opportunities to participate and to demonstrate their learning
- ensuring children engage in and are empowered by meaningful and responsive learning experiences
- ensuring children have opportunities to learn to value and express differences



Educators take the first step towards making their interactions with children and families more equitable when they recognize these aspects of inclusion. They must then take steps to validate differences like temperament, personality, approach to learning, ethnicity, race, and socio-economic background through everyday experiences and take continuous action to evolve their practice and programs to address inequities as they are identified: “Educators supporting **inclusive practice** critically reflect on their practice. They question with other educators their practices and their attitudes toward differences. They acknowledge bias and **prejudice** in themselves and others and work effectively to intervene in situations of discrimination.” (Allen et al. 2020, 9)

Equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible, and anti-racist early learning and child care

programs, where each child and their family can participate, provide opportunities for children to demonstrate their unique learning. At the same time, they learn to embrace each other's differences and similarities. Educators instill pride, connection, and awareness within the children, their families, and themselves when they value each other, engage children in **social justice** in age-appropriate ways, and demonstrate respect and care for their broader community.

Educators also examine their own views on children's learning, particularly with children identified as facing inclusion barriers related to disabilities, or social emotional, developmental, cognitive, mental, physiological, linguistic, or other unique challenges. Educators who implement the framework cautiously reflect on their own assumptions about individuals' abilities and challenges. Disability does not refer solely to a characteristic of a child, but also to an interaction between a child and their environment. This is a social model of disability where educators recognize that children thrive when their experiences are recognized and valued, and the learning strategies and environments are tailored by educators to meet their needs. In this model, educators see challenging behaviour from children as signaling a need yet to be met. Educators implementing the framework recognize and seize opportunities to listen, problem solve, and learn together.



An educator's commitment to families is expressed through their commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism. Educators believe in every child's capacity to succeed while also being respectful of each child's life circumstances and abilities. Educators recognize that some children and their families must contend with several societal barriers. Valenzuela, Crosby, and Harrison (2020, 840) noted that "families marginalized across multiple demographic intersections such as race/ethnicity, class, and immigration status are especially vulnerable." People who are members of historically underrepresented and underserved communities (for example, Mi'kmaw/Indigenous, Acadian/Francophone or other minority language speaker, African Nova Scotian/African ancestry, Gaelic, 2SLGBTQIA+), or geographically isolated communities, may not have access to the same opportunities as those who are members of dominant cultural communities.



A commitment to equity requires that educators acknowledge how they might be perceived by others and the impact of that perception. The Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators (OCECE) advises educators to recognize the perceived power that may be associated with their role in relation to families who have been historically disadvantaged. Educators should be transparent in their communications with families and recognize that families may be hesitant to disclose information, especially if they are uncertain or uneasy

about the relationship between themselves and the educators. Growing a trusting relationship takes time, respectful contact, and thoughtful, intentional communication—offering encouragement and support by responding appropriately to the ideas, concerns, and needs of children and families (College of Early Childhood Educators 2020).

It is important that educators create indoor and outdoor early learning environments that are gender inclusive, and that they avoid making gender-based assumptions about children and how they play. Kroeger, Recker, and Gunn (2019, para. 4) state that “gender-inclusive spaces allow children to easily move between roles or materials commonly regarded as male or female without any gendered expectations or barriers.”

Seeing a child as capable and full of potential also means trusting their choices when it comes to materials, play, self-identification, and expression. Educators foster a gender-inclusive environment to support an anti-bias atmosphere, one in which all children can explore and grow, creating space that promotes equity, safety, and respect for all members of a classroom community (Kroeger Recker, and Gunn 2019). Through this exploration, children become central actors in the process of dismantling the inequitable, gender-based systems that continue to exclude and harm people. Through this exploration, children create more space and freedom to be themselves.



A commitment to equity and inclusion also requires educators to take action to learn about Canada's **shared history** with Indigenous Peoples. Educators ensure these principles are valued and promoted program-wide, among families, and in the community. The Truth and **Reconciliation** Commission (TRC) emphasizes the role of education departments and systems to educate all children about the historical lived experiences of Indigenous people, specifically the trans-generational trauma caused by residential schools which impacted children, families, and communities. With the last school closing in 1997, over 150,000 children, some as young as two-years-olds, were forcibly removed from their homes, their families, and their communities and placed in residential schools. As emphasized in the TRC report, educators have the responsibility to learn the truth about residential schools and their impacts while also acknowledging and respecting the resiliency of Indigenous peoples. Educators share in society's collective responsibility to repair, heal, and ensure that children and families have a promising future.



Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf



Indigenous Continuing Education Centre, First Nations University of Canada
<https://www.fnuniv.ca/icec-home/about-icec/icec-courseofferings/>

Equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism require educators be linguistically and culturally responsive to children and families. This is outlined in the Practice in Early Learning section of the framework, as an essential aspect of every educator's practice. To ensure this and all framework principles are put into practice requires educators to continuously and intentionally reflect on what they know, how they do their work, and what can be done differently in the future. Critical reflection together with current, evidence based learning on equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism best practices must be a priority for educators, pedagogical leaders, and administrators. Its value as a positive influence on the quality of children's learning must be shared with families. When the time and space required for critical reflection is valued and respected by all, everyone involved benefits.

Critical Reflection

*Critical reflection, a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of **philosophy, ethics, biases, and practice**, enables educators to become intentional, effective, and confident in their work.*

Reflective practices encourage insights, feedback, and conversations with all families. Educators listen carefully to what is being shared and ensure that the safety, well-being, and care of their children remains at the forefront. This collaboration requires trust among educators and families; reflection not only enriches educators' practices but builds a culture of respect among all who are involved in children's lives.

Within African Nova Scotian and communities of Black African ancestry, reflective practice is valued and exemplified in the Sankofa Principle. "Sankofa" is derived from the Akan Twi and Fante languages of Ghana, loosely meaning "to retrieve." The concept is represented by the Sankofa bird, with its feet facing forward and its head turned to retrieve an egg on its back. The Akan tribe in Ghana believe the past serves as a guide for planning the future: that as time marches forward there must be movement and new learning, but the knowledge of the past must never be forgotten.



SANKOFA

Sankofa (SAHN-koh-fah)

The translation of Sankofa—a word and symbol from the Akan tribe in Ghana—is understood as: “it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.”

The importance of reflective practice by educators working in early learning environments has been emphasized in almost every early learning curriculum framework developed over the past 20 years, across Canada, and around the world.

Critical reflection, a deeper form of reflective practice, allows educators to make sense of interactions and experiences between people and with the environment around them. Critical reflection provides educators with specific information that allows them to assess their practice and improve the quality of children's learning.

Through their own reflective practice, educators gather information and gain insights that support, inform, and enrich decision making about children's learning. As professionals, they examine what happens in their programs and reflect on what works well and on what they might change both individually and with colleagues. When educators regularly think critically about their interactions and actions throughout the day, at the end of their day, and when they plan for upcoming actions, they ensure the best outcomes for children and their families.

Critical reflection also contributes to professional learning for educators: "As a form of ongoing professional learning, engaging in reflective practice honours educators' professional knowledge and experience and the time needed to acquire and apply relevant and meaningful new learning in practice" (College of Early Childhood Educators 2017, 3). This new learning may be pursued through individual study, professional development for staff, or regional or provincial opportunities with each opportunity building on previous knowledge and helping educators make new connections to develop continuity of lifelong learning.



Educators continually seek ways to grow and build upon their professional knowledge and share their insights with colleagues in various types of learning communities. Rodd (2013, 217) noted, "reflective practice initiates and reinforces a cycle of ongoing learning during which early childhood educators are challenged to become more open in their thinking, to learn from professional experience, and to become more flexible and adaptable in their practice." Reflective practice encourages educators to be co-learners with children, families, communities, and other educators in early learning and child care programs, and school-based programs.



Reflective

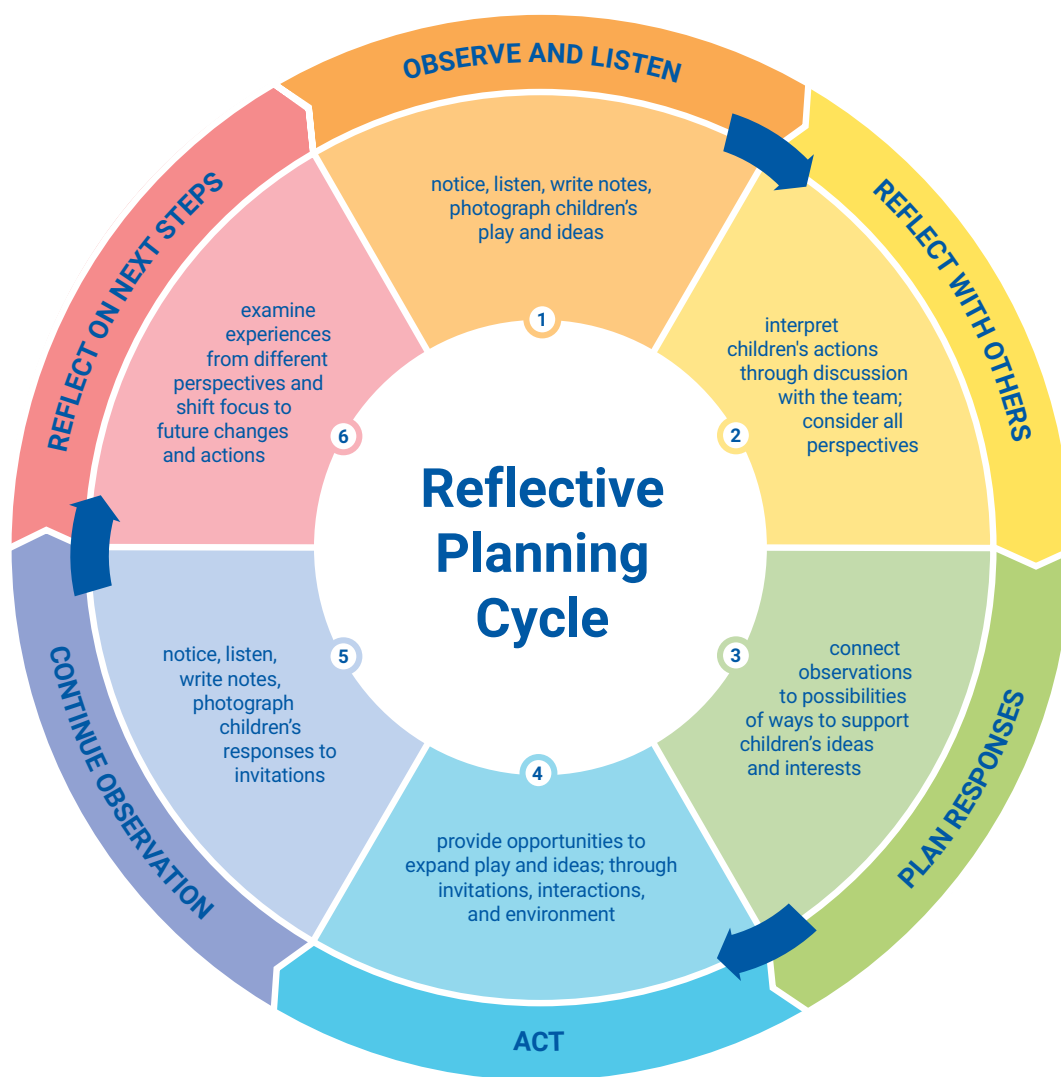
Planning Cycle

Reflective Planning Cycle

In *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), Donald Schön identified three types of reflective practice: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action:

- Reflection-in-action occurs naturally and continually during the day with children. When an educator spots a three-year-old climbing to the top of the slide, reflection-in-action considers whether the child has ever done this before, or whether the educator should move closer to the slide.
- Reflection-on-action occurs after the fact, when educators reflect on the activities and interactions of the day, and question whether a situation may have been handled differently, or what new insights were gained as a result of children's interactions with each other or with adults. Such reflection can be done alone or in conversation with other educators.
- Reflection-for-action describes deeper reflection, which involves closely examining all aspects of events and experiences from different perspectives. Educators often frame their reflective practice within a set of overarching questions, developing more specific questions for specific areas of inquiry. This critical reflection considers the educator's image of the child and the values they hold, which are framed against the present set of experiences and circumstances, with an eye toward future changes or actions.

An active climate of professional inquiry is established when educators and those with whom they work are involved in an ongoing cycle of review, examining current practices, reviewing outcomes, and generating new ideas. Critical reflection encourages deeper thought and opportunities to identify, question, and challenge our assumptions and biases about children, families, communities, and other educators. It is in this cycle of deepened reflection where broad issues relating to curriculum, quality, equity, inclusion, and children's well-being can be raised, explored, and debated. The Reflective Planning Cycle, represented below, is the process educators follow in planning, documenting, responding to, and supporting children's learning as they implement the framework.



Reflective practice, when it is applied to an educator's role in children's learning and assessment, allows the educator to examine their own views and understanding of pedagogical theory, research, and practice. This brings each child, their family, and their unique experience into focus, and highlights that both educator and child are in a constant process of learning and growing.



Reflective Planning Cycle Poster
https://www.ednet.ns.ca/earlyyears/documents/providers/ccr_reflective_planning_cycle_poster_en.pdf



Critical reflection can help educators to be more intentional in supporting children's holistic development, developing relationships with children, families, colleagues, and communities, and ensuring equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism are embedded in early learning and child care programs.

Educators are encouraged to consult "Supporting Children's Optimal Learning: Learning Goals and Objectives" in the *Educator's Guide* to learn more about using the Reflective Planning Cycle in practice.





Practices

in Early Learning

Practices in Early Learning

Principles provide the foundation for professional practices. Practices in early learning nurture a sense of belonging, safety, and well-being through the recognition, validation, and affirmation of the cultural and social contexts of each child, their families, and their communities. This commitment underpins every practice that educators use to facilitate learning, including:

- Responsiveness to Children
- Linguistic and Cultural Responsiveness
- Play-Based Learning and Intentionality
- Inclusive Learning Environments
- Authentic Assessment
- Continuity of Learning Experiences

Responsiveness to Children

When educators are responsive in their practice, they support the growth and learning of each child in all areas of development. Educators value and are responsive to all children's interests and ideas, competencies, individual needs, personality and temperament, and approaches to play.

This knowledge of each child forms an important basis for curriculum decision-making. In response to children's evolving ideas and interests, educators assess, anticipate, and extend children's learning via open-ended questioning. They also provide feedback, challenging children's thinking, and guide their learning, while making use of spontaneous teachable moments to scaffold children's learning.

Educators who prioritize responsive relationships with children consistently provide emotional support adapted to each child's emotional and social needs. They support children to develop the skills, understanding, and confidence they need to interact positively with others. They help children to learn about their responsibilities to self, each other, and to Earth. Children learn how to be empathetic when their own emotions and views are validated.

"I have never encountered any children in any group who are not geniuses. There is no mystery on how to teach them. The first thing you do is treat them like human beings and the second thing you do is love them."

—Dr. Asa Hilliard (Foundation for Child Development 2022)

Responsive learning relationships are strengthened as educators and children learn together and share decisions, respect, and trust. This is at the heart of what enables educators to respectfully enter children's play and ongoing projects, stimulate their thinking, enrich their learning, and optimize their potential. Educators further strengthen the responsiveness of these relationships when they connect children's lived experiences, cultures, and languages to their learning and sense of belonging.



Linguistic and Cultural Responsiveness

Linguistic and cultural responsiveness is much more than being aware of different languages and cultures. It is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Educators are responsive to each child's linguistic and cultural identity by recognizing, respecting, and intentionally planning learning to include their:

- strengths and challenges
- lived experiences
- home and spoken languages
- culture and ways of being and knowing

They use culturally responsive, anti-racist approaches to provide culturally safe spaces for all children and adults. Linguistically and culturally responsive educators recognize that children are influenced by their families and community. Families will have varying ideas and understandings about how children learn and develop based on their cultural and lived experiences. It is important, therefore, to be respectful of this uniqueness and talk with families about how to integrate these linguistic and cultural experiences into the early learning and child care program. There is an opportunity for educators to create indoor and outdoor learning environments that reflect the many languages and cultures of the children and families with whom they work. "It is premised on the understanding that children learn culturally valued knowledge and skills in the course of their daily lived experiences in familiar and community contexts" (Massing 2013, 6). Educators engage in these languages and cultures in meaningful ways that go beyond superficial or stigmatizing perceptions of difference; they mindfully hold on to the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism as they infuse their programs with language and culture.

When educators incorporate the elements listed above into their pedagogy, children develop a positive sense of identity and belonging. Educators who label materials within the learning environments build children's vocabulary and create a bridge between their home language and the program language. When educators communicate using visuals and body gestures, children are confident and show agency in their learning. Educators who intentionally and proactively involve families in the early learning and child care program ensure children's home language and culture are reflected in the indoor and outdoor learning environments.



In doing so, educators show that they value diversity, and understand, respect, and honour differences. They demonstrate an ongoing, everyday commitment to developing their own cultural responsiveness in a two-way process with families and communities. Educators view culture and family as central to children's lifelong sense of belonging and success. Educators also seek to promote children's linguistic and cultural responsiveness.

Linguistically and culturally responsive educators

- are aware of their own world view
- recognize and address their biases and assumptions
- utilize anti-racist and anti-bias practices to ensure linguistically and culturally safe spaces for all children to learn and develop
- gain knowledge of different languages, regional dialects, cultural practices, historical perspectives, and world views
- develop positive attitudes toward, and appreciation of, linguistic and cultural differences
- develop skills for communication and interaction across cultures and **heritage languages**
- acknowledge and respect the uniqueness of each child

The Appendix, "Cultures of Nova Scotia," provides information that supports educators working with Nova Scotia's children and families in further developing the linguistic and cultural responsiveness of their practice.



Scan the QR Code to discover the connection between pedagogy, language, culture, and identity in a minority francophone setting.
<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/psp/equity-inclusive-education/pedagogy-minority-francophone-setting>

Educators who practice linguistic and cultural responsiveness prepare children to engage competently in the social realities of their world. As educators provide children with relevant, intentional, and play-based opportunities, they prepare them to successfully engage in learning in the years ahead and be positioned to excel in future life.



Play-Based Learning and Intentionality

Play is a naturally occurring and freely chosen activity in which children are self-motivated. It is characterized by imagination, exploration, delight, capriciousness, and a sense of wonder. It reflects the unique experiences of children, and the various ways children express their ideas and feelings, and come to understand themselves, others, and their world.

In play, a child learns. They discover, create, improvise, and imagine. They experiment with the world, discover how things work, and learn to interact with others. When children engage in play, they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking, and build new understandings. To optimize children's learning, educators engage in intentional—deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful—planning and implementation of learning experiences responsive to each child's abilities and challenges.

Play-based learning and intentionality is influenced by the educator's image of the child. It is guided by professional knowledge of how children learn and develop and is shaped by reflective practice. This type of early childhood education uses approaches that allow

for the co-construction of knowledge between children and educators. This process of co-constructing knowledge results in new knowledge and meaning, rather than facts. Similar to the Mi'kmaw guiding principles of Etuaptmumk or Two-Eyed Seeing, co-constructing learning through play values and affirms individuals' experiences and knowledge from the perspective of both the children and the educators. To learn more about Mi'kmaw ways of being and knowing including Etuaptumumk, refer to the Inclusive Learning Environments section of this document.



Play is an opportunity for self-discovery that extends to intentionally planned indoor and outdoor environments as well as interactions with children. Intentionally planned learning environments allow children to put themselves in different roles and experiment with alternative versions of themselves. Educators practice intentionality when they design the layout of the learning environments, choose what types of materials are included, and decide how the materials are made available to the children. They also demonstrate this quality when they make responsive adjustments to the schedule of daily routines—including the length of time provided for activities, how **transitions** are made, the balance of active and quiet times throughout the day, and when children need to eat.

Playful exploration, within purposefully planned environments rich in social-emotional awareness and supports is where children also develop empathy, acceptance of other perspectives, and develop confidence. Play provides a context to scaffold learning that is freely chosen by the child and allows for the expression of personality and individuality. Educators understand that when they intentionally step back to observe and document children's uninterrupted play, they are better able to discover children's interests and abilities and can better assess their development and learning as well.

Educators understand that play promotes positive dispositions toward learning and provides infinite opportunities where children

- ask questions
- grow and establish genuine relationships and friendships
- build competencies in all areas of development
- build language and communication
- connect prior experiences with new learning
- develop a sense of well-being and freedom
- develop their curiosity, creativity, and storytelling
- develop social-emotional competencies
- enhance their desire to know and learn
- expand their reasoning skills and engage in critical thinking
- learn and appreciate their cultural identities
- learn to explore the natural world and protect the environment
- negotiate with others, reach agreements, and respect agreements
- resolve conflicts
- solve problems



Play enhances the development of **self-regulation** by encouraging children to consider the perspectives of others and learn to negotiate during times of disagreement and discomfort. With the support of educators and other adults, children effectively build their self-esteem as they learn to feel comfortable with expressing both positive and negative emotions. This happens when educators intentionally create indoor and outdoor learning environments that encourage children to explore, take risks, solve problems, create, and construct.

Educators take time to work with children to model and promote positive ways to relate to others, actively support the inclusion of all children in play, help children recognize when play is unfair, and offer constructive ways to build caring, fair, and inclusive learning communities. Children learn to establish boundaries and take ownership of their bodies and possessions through play, which helps to establish their sense of self-worth. At the same time, children learn to appreciate the personal space, belongings, and boundaries of others.



Educators who engage in intentional practice have specific knowledge of how children play, learn, and develop. They not only have a repertoire of strategies to use with all children, but they also understand when and how to use them appropriately. Intentional educators recognize that play-based learning occurs in social contexts and that interactions and conversations are vitally important for learning. Educators use consistent routines and meaningful and intentionally planned experiences to interact with children, demonstrate commitment to them, and create responsive relationships. Educators also recognize spontaneous moments as they occur and use them to build on children's learning. In these moments, educators assess how they might enter a child's play and offer an idea, ask a question, or suggest an additional item to facilitate learning and enjoyment.

Educators recognize that their mindful participation in the play of children may have positive benefits for everyone. Educators can sense the joy and creativity that is generated when they play with children; how it can strengthen relationships and expand their understanding of children's learning. Educators are aware of the potential physical and mental health benefits adventurous play has for children; that, through age-appropriate vigorous and adventurous play experiences, children learn about abstract concepts like excitement, fear, safety, and risk.

Consult the *Educator's Guide* for concrete examples of play-based learning and intentionality.



Inclusive Learning Environments

Indoor and outdoor learning environments are welcoming spaces when educators reflect and enrich the lives and identities of children and families participating in the program and respond to their interests and needs. Environments that embed the languages, cultural identities, knowledge, and experiences of children facilitate the development of broader language skills, increase cultural awareness, and build respect and appreciation for all differences.

Supportive learning environments are vibrant, flexible, and responsive to the interests, identities, abilities, and temperament of each child. They are also inclusive when educators ensure that language, culture, and community are continuously represented in sustained, authentic, and intentional ways. Consistent routines and schedules, which include transitions being planned and implemented in proactive ways to minimize stressors, distractions, and challenges for children, are also regularly considered by educators.

“High quality inclusive ECEC programs have three key components: they are accessible to all children and their families; they are designed and carried out with consideration for the unique needs of each child; and they include ongoing evaluation of programs to ensure full participation.”

—K. Underwood and E. Frankel in “Everyone is Welcome: Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care” (Underwood 2013)

Environments include the design of the physical space both indoors and outdoors. The design includes the furniture and materials available, the routines and schedules, and the time allowed for children to freely explore, extend their play opportunities, and sustain their learning. The early learning environment has been identified by several early childhood education proponents, such as Loris Malaguzzi and Maria Montessori, as a key feature in children’s learning.



For example, Loris Malaguzzi, the founder and director of the renowned municipal preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, defined the **environment as the third teacher**. In Reggio Emilia schools, the environment is well-planned, flexible, and has the potential to "... shape a child's identity as a powerful player in his or her own life and the lives of others." (Biermeier 2015). Similarly, Maria Montessori described the importance of the "prepared environment," where both the educators and the child are influenced by the learning environment. The role of the educator is to observe children's interaction with the environment, and continually modify the learning environment based on those **observations**.



Inclusive environments support all aspects of children's learning and invite conversations between children, educators, families, and the broader community. They promote opportunities for deepening shared thinking and collaborative learning. Educators encourage children and families to contribute their own ideas about the indoor and outdoor learning environments. They support engagement by allowing time for meaningful interactions, providing a range of opportunities for individual and shared experiences, and finding opportunities for children to contribute to and learn from their local community. Inclusive indoor and outdoor environments also offer opportunities to consider the meaning of sustainability, promote children's understanding about their own responsibility to care for the environment, and foster hope, wonder, and knowledge about the natural world.



Outdoor learning spaces, in all seasons, are critical environments for early learning. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. Play spaces in natural environments include all living beings and non-living beings such as plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water, and other elements from nature. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery, and connection with nature.

Although learning materials easily found in nature such as sticks, rocks, and leaves are usually familiar, and seemingly simple, they enhance children's learning when introduced in novel, interesting, and thought-provoking ways that allow for more complex and increasingly abstract thinking. For example, the use of these **loose parts** encourages creativity and open-ended learning, allowing children to choose their own play and expand play options as well as the complexity and variability of play (Dietze and Kashin 2012). Recent research points to loose parts play as a key aspect of supporting **physical literacy** development of children (Houser et al. 2019).



See "Learning Goals in Practice: Loose Parts" (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2021) for concrete examples of play-based learning and intentionality. https://www.ednet.ns.ca/earlyyears/documents/providers/ccc_doc_loose_parts_en.pdf



Educators further enhance children's connection to the outdoor learning environment when they respect, value, and weave in Mi'kmaw world views, beliefs, and knowledge about the land, water, and sky around them. Educators who practice **learning from Wskitqamu (Mother Earth)** provide children with authentic opportunities to learn about science, language, culture, environmental sustainability, and the four values of Netukulimk: Respect, Relationship, Responsibility, and Reciprocity. When educators include Mi'kmaw storytelling and Elders in their early learning and child care programs, all children gain a deeper understanding, respect and appreciation for, and spiritual connection to the animals, the land, and all of Wskitqamu around them.



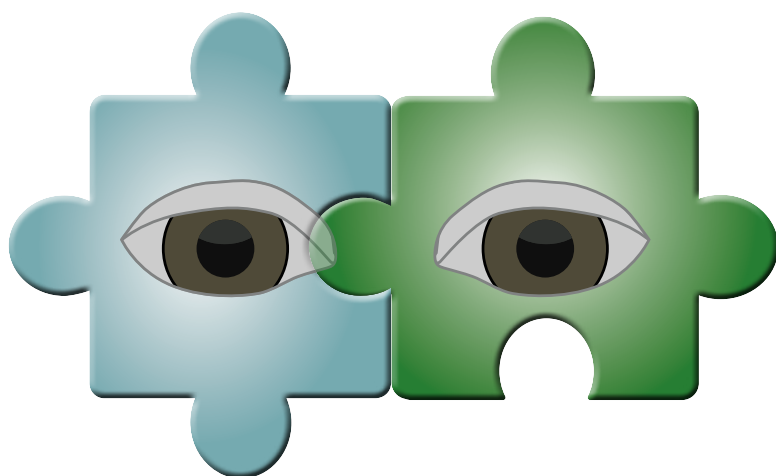
Where The Wild Things Blow

*I want my children to smell of forest
permanent balsam on their heels
spruce boughs scattered on their floors
instead of carpet
their windows plagued with cracks
where wild things blow*

—Shalan Joudry, 2014

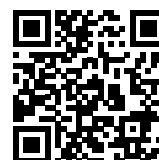
Netukulimk is at the heart of the Mi'kmaw knowledge system. It speaks to the Mi'kmaw way of life, namely that all human beings have the responsibility to look after one another in environmentally sustainable ways. This includes the land, the water, the sky (air), and all of nature.

Etuaptmumk or Two-Eyed Seeing (E/TES) is a Mi'kmaw guiding principle that means learning from multiple perspectives. It encourages all of us to use both the insights from Western knowledge and the insights from Mi'kmaw knowledge to obtain a richness of understanding that we otherwise could not achieve. E/TES recognizes that we need to use both these knowledge systems, for the benefit of all.



ETUAPTMUMK

<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/etuaptmumk.mp3>



NETUKULIMK

<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/netukulimk.mp3>



Scan the QR code for printable Etuaptmumk and Netukulimk one-pagers. <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/etuaptmumknetukulimkpostersen.pdf>



See "Mi'kmaw Ways of Being and Knowing", prepared by respected Mi'kmaw Elder and Educator, Jane Meader, to discover how Indigenous knowledge and teachings, along with nurturing environments, support children's holistic development. <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/mikmawwaysofbeingandknowingen.pdf>



Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment measures children's skills and abilities by observing children's strengths in performing real-life everyday activities. Authentic assessment approaches are part of an ongoing cycle that includes observation and documentation to assess children's development and learning. These approaches allow educators to observe children in their own play environments, exchanges, and relationships with peers, children, and adults. Educators talk with children and understand how each child thinks, plans, and understands. This framework refers to authentic assessment to capture the broad range of strategies used in early learning and child care programs.

Authentic assessment provides opportunities to reflect on pedagogical practices and the appropriateness of indoor and outdoor learning environments. It involves communicating with families, giving context to observations, and fully understanding children's development holistically. For example, sharing observations with families may touch on a child's social, physical, and cognitive development by providing an analysis of how a child approached the activity, rather than sharing information about only one specific area of development.

Educators who adopt authentic approaches to assessment partner with families, children, and other professionals to effectively plan for children's current and future learning. They gather information from, and share concerns with, families about children's development. Authentic approaches to assessment provide educators with information needed to identify children who may need additional support to achieve learning objectives, plan with intentionality, and assist families in accessing support. Educators practice authentic assessment when they communicate children's learning and progress through various types of **pedagogical documentation**.

"Documentation [is] an act of caring, an act of love and interaction ... both the teacher and the children are learners."

—Carlina Rinaldi, "The Relationship between Documentation and Assessment" (2004,1)



Educators use pedagogical documentation to ensure their practice is responsive, reflective, and intentional, and—together with children, families, and others—to follow, understand, and value their individual journeys of learning.

“Pedagogical documentation invites us to be curious and to wonder with others about the meaning of events to children. We become co-learners together; focusing on children’s expanding understanding of the world as we interpret that understanding with others. We document not merely to record activities, but to capture the stories and events so that we might study and interpret their meaning together.”

—Dr. Carol Anne Wien, (Wien 2013, 28).

Documentation happens when educators take notice, value, and share children's ideas, thinking, questions, words, actions, and work with a wider community.

In *Pedagogical Documentation in Early Childhood: Sharing Children's Learning and Teachers' Thinking* (2023, 27), Stacey describes documentation as a multi-level process that includes:

- display
- documentation
- pedagogical documentation

"Display is a simple mounting of photographs and/or children's work, perhaps on a classroom wall or in a hallway. The intention is often to share the results (products) of children's endeavours in the classroom or perhaps on a field trip. This is not documentation—yet!! But it has the potential to begin the journey of documentation."



"Documentation includes text, photographs, examples of children's processes as they explore and learn, any important small pieces of dialogue between children and educators, or anything that makes children's thinking and ideas come to life for the viewer. The focus is not on products the children have made, but on their process—sometimes tangled and messy—that helped them achieve what they wanted to do. Ideally, the collaboration between children and educators will be made visible."

"Pedagogical Documentation takes the process a step further. It includes all the graphic content mentioned above—photos, notes, children's work, teachers' roles, conversations, and so on—but the material becomes a springboard for the teacher and teaching team's further reflection and learning. The process of documentation becomes pedagogical—a study of the learning taking place—when we try to understand the underlying meaning of the children's actions and words, describing events in a way that makes our documentation a tool for collaboration with others, further learning, teacher research, and curriculum development."



Documentation serves to communicate with all who participate in the education process—about what is happening, what children are expressing, and what is being experienced in the program. It serves to learn more deeply and to reflect more complexly on what educators do with children. In the process of documentation, educators are communicating, in a concrete way, that what the children are doing is important and worthy.

Educators implementing the framework use assessment tools and documentation methods that align with the framework's practices and principles, and that provide the best evidence of children's learning and development. It is through this authentic assessment that educators can ensure continuity of learning experiences.

See "Pedagogical Documentation" in the *Educator's Guide* for more information on documenting and assessing children's learning.

Continuity of Learning Experiences

In early learning and child care, continuity of learning is the continual and responsive building upon children's knowledge and skills and includes the intentional planning for the continuation of learning from one environment to another. Continuity of learning focuses on engaging, connecting, and building relationships, and places children, their families, and their experiences at the center. It creates familiar experiences moving from one context to another and opportunities for children to build on, apply, transfer, and adapt their learning to support successful transitions.

Children bring family and community to their early learning and child care programs. When educators build on children's prior and current experiences, it helps children feel secure, confident, and connected to what is familiar. This sense of security facilitates continuity in two equally important aspects of learning in the early years: the continual progression of children's skills and capacities along a developmental continuum; and the seamless continuation of children's learning between different environments. Educators who intentionally plan for both instances of continuity promote children's learning success.



Continuity of children's learning requires educators to know each child including their interests, fears, temperament, and capacities as well as their lived experiences, languages, culture, and community. Equipped with this knowledge of each child, and in combination with open and reflective communication and collaboration with families, other educators, and professionals, educators are responsive to children's individual needs. They provide learning experiences that allow children to practice what they have previously learned while strategically scaffolding or bridging the way to new and more challenging learning goals and objectives.

For continuity of learning between different environments, it is key to help children transition easily between home, child care programs, age groups, pre-primary classrooms, and elementary schools. Different places and spaces have their own purposes, expectations, and ways of doing things. In partnership with families, educators ensure that children have an active role in preparing for transitions. They assist children in understanding the traditions, routines, and practices of the programs to which they are moving to and feeling comfortable with the process of change. As children make transitions to new programs (including school), educators prioritize time to work collaboratively and share information with children's families, new educators, and other professionals to ensure successful transitions and build on children's earlier learning.

Ideally, this entails an intentional and well-thought-out plan to ensure a smooth transition from one setting to another. This plan should incorporate time for the child and their family to meet the new educators and visit the setting prior to formally starting. Children also need to have a voice in this process, which means including them in the planning of transitions. Children will be more successful in moving through transitions when they observe their educators and families collaborating regularly throughout the process.



Learning

Goals and Objectives

Learning Goals and Objectives

The framework is based on goals and objectives that are consistent with Nova Scotia's vision for children's learning and the image of children as capable, confident, and curious learners. The goals and objectives are supported by every educators' practice – their pedagogy, curriculum, and strategies.

Learning goals provide a structure for early learning practice, guide educators' reflections and critical thinking, and form the basis for the authentic assessment of children's learning and holistic development.

The four learning goals are:

- Well-being
- Discovery and Invention
- Language and Communication
- Personal and Social Responsibility

Learning goals relate to the early learning and child care program's broader aim for children's learning. Goals allow educators to identify and assess each child's knowledge and experiences over an extended period of time.

Educators know that children take different pathways to achieve their learning goals. They understand that early learning involves much more than these general reference points. They recognize and celebrate not only the giant leaps that children take in their learning but the small steps as well. These smaller yet equally relevant advancements in learning made by children along the way are outlined in the framework as learning objectives.

Learning objectives are specific statements that describe how educators will know that overarching goals have been met. Educators plan for the intentional building upon and scaffolding of these shorter-term objectives to support each child's individual learning goals. When educators identify, observe, and document measurable results or outcomes of this learning (e.g., children's actions and behaviours), they are able to reliably assess and communicate children's overall learning and developmental progress to families, educators, and other early childhood professionals.

Educators are responsible for knowing children as they are known in their families and communities, tapping into that rich mix of skills, abilities, and experiences to enrich the nature and types of strategies that bring the goals and objectives of the framework to life.

These learning goals and objectives open opportunities to collaborate with children and families on how to best address their identities, values, and experiences.

Just as each child brings a unique blend of interests, ideas, questions, and cultural influences into early learning and child care programs, so do educators. They bring their own expertise, creativity, specific interests, and cultural traditions. Over time, educators can reflect on how children have developed, how they have engaged with increasingly complex ideas, and how they have participated in increasingly sophisticated learning experiences.

The *Educator's Guide* provides numerous examples of measurable outcomes and practical strategies used by diverse educators to support the ongoing learning goals and objectives of the children in their care.



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



It is recommended educators regularly refer to the *Educator's Guide* to engage in critical reflection about the children in their early learning and child care programs. This will assist educators to create inclusive environments that are welcoming and interesting, and that support children's optimal learning, well-being and sense of belonging. <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/nselcfeducatorsguide.pdf>

Well-being

Well-being is a holistic concept that focuses on children feeling safe, happy, valued, confident, and healthy in all aspects of their development from birth. For children, well-being implies that they are loved, respected, protected, and supported by their families and communities.

Children's well-being is affected by all their experiences within and outside of their early learning and child care programs. Educators know that when they attend to children's well-being by providing warm and trusting relationships, they are supporting children's learning and development. Educators understand that it is essential to ensure predictable and emotionally safe environments for children, that provide affirmation and respect for all aspects of their physical, emotional, social, cognitive, linguistic, creative, and spiritual needs. By acknowledging each child's cultural and **social identity**, and responding warmly, positively, and sensitively to their emotional states, educators foster a sense of belonging. This gives children confidence, a feeling of security, and a willingness to engage in learning. As children experience being cared for by educators and others, they become aware of the importance of living and learning together with others as part of a community.

Children develop their own well-being and confidence as they learn more about healthy lifestyles, emotional well-being, and healthy social relationships. As children become more independent, they can take greater responsibility for their health, hygiene, and personal care. They become mindful of their own and others' physical, cultural, and emotional safety. Intentional and responsive routines provide opportunities for children to learn about health and safety. Educators understand that good nutrition is essential to healthy living and enables children to be active participants in play. They are responsible for providing many opportunities for children to experience a range of healthy foods including those from their culture.

The state of children's well-being influences the way they interact in their environments. A strong sense of well-being provides children with confidence and optimism to develop new friendships, interact with groups of other children, participate in new types of activities, and measure and calculate reasonable risks. It also influences children's readiness to persevere when faced with unfamiliar and challenging learning situations and creates opportunities for success and achievement.

Outdoor play is an integral factor in supporting the well-being of children every day. Being outdoors facilitates the development of friendships, a sense of place and belonging, being connected with nature, and health benefits (Louv 2010). Educators who provide children with opportunities to experience active outdoor play in nature recognize the value of **risky play** in building confidence, independence, and resilience (Outdoor Play Canada 2019).

Learning objectives supporting the goal of well-being include:

1. children feel safe, secure, and supported
2. children become strong in their social, emotional, linguistic, cultural, and spiritual well-being
3. children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical well-being
4. children develop knowledge and confidence in their own identity
5. children build the capacity and skill to observe and develop awareness and respect for the well-being of others



Discovery and Invention

When children are in an open and flexible learning environment, they develop curiosity, persistence, and creativity. This occurs as children explore, investigate, and test the world around them from infancy. They can adapt what they have learned from one context to another. Educators recognize children's competence and capability to interact with their indoor and outdoor environments to discover, problem solve, and create new ways of learning and playing. Children invent new possibilities—a rock may become a truck, a tree may become a house, and a line of chairs may become a train. Creativity allows children to create their learning environments over and over, indoors and outdoors, and in different ways.



An adaptable learning environment supports children's increasing confidence to take responsibility for their own learning, regulate themselves, and contribute to their social environment. Offering opportunities for hands-on investigation deepens each child's understanding of themselves and encourages their engagement with whatever captures their interest. The process of discovery initiates experiences and develops a sense of self to learning—their ways of seeing the world.

"As children engage with the world they delve into inquiries, generate new ideas, solve problems, and build theories of people, places, and materials. These engagements can be vibrant, exhilarating, and noisy, or they can be quiet, focused, and solitary. Providing time, space, and materials rich with possibilities for experimenting, imagining, and transforming allows children to create and explore in diverse ways based on their interests."

—British Columbia Early Learning Framework (2023, 75)

Throughout this process of discovery, invention, and play, educators use their knowledge of individual children to create experiences and environments that optimize each child's learning.

Learning objectives supporting the goal of discovery and invention include:

1. children develop curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, and imagination
2. children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesizing, researching, and investigating

Language and Communication

Language and communication are two related but distinct concepts that are connected to all areas of learning. Language is the systematic use of a set of signs such as letters, numbers, symbols, sounds, words, sentences, and visual representations to convey meaning, emotions, and needs. Communication is the process of expressing and receiving information through language (MacKenzie McCuaig, and Lee 2023).

From birth, children communicate. They use gestures, behaviours, facial expressions, sounds, language, assisted communication, and other tools to connect with others.



Educators, families, and other responsive listeners support the development of language and communication throughout early childhood when they give words to a baby's gestures, rephrase toddlers' expressions into full sentences, allow a child sufficient time to respond to questions, and encourage children to take turns when participating in social conversations.



Educators understand that children are social beings who are intrinsically motivated to exchange ideas, thoughts, questions, and feelings. They know children use a range of tools and media—including music, dance, and drama—to express themselves, connect with others and extend their learning. They make space for each child's unique expression of their language, culture, and community, recognizing that this space allows each child to strengthen their sense of self.

Children's use of their first language underpins their sense of identity and their conceptual development. They feel a sense of belonging when their language, interaction styles, and ways of communicating are valued. Children who hear both their own language and the languages of other children begin to learn about the rhythms and sounds of all languages; in turn, they cultivate a sense of personal attachment to their own language which contributes to their sense of linguistic and cultural identity.

This extends to children who might use other equally vibrant and dynamic forms of language to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings—particularly children with disabilities, challenges with communication, or who are learning to speak a language other than English, such as French, Gaelic, or Mi'kmaw. Educators understand that children communicate with more than their words, they communicate with body language, gestures, and vocalizations. Their constructions with blocks, artwork, playdough figures, and pretend play scenarios all provide information about their current development, interests, abilities, as well as convey how they interact with their learning environment and each other.

Educators support language development and communication in these situations when they intentionally provide opportunities for children to express their ideas, ask questions, and share stories. Educators promote children's use and comprehension of language with visuals including photographs and symbols, **texts**, and words. When children are encouraged to re-tell an event, describe a painting, or explain what is happening in a story, they practice sequential thinking and reasoning, listening and speaking, and eventually reading and writing. These methods of expression and communication facilitate children's use of language (i.e., **literacy**), which helps both educators and families learn about children's thinking, their ideas, and who they are.

Learning objectives supporting the goal of language and communication include:

1. children interact verbally and nonverbally with others
2. children engage with a variety of texts and gain meaning from them
3. children express ideas and make meaning with a variety of media
4. children begin to understand how symbols and patterns work
5. children use technology, with guidance, to access information, investigate ideas, and express their thoughts
6. children communicate in individualized, meaningful ways such as using sign language, augmentative and alternative communication strategies and/or using their heritage and family languages
7. children cultivate language skills in French, one of Canada's two official languages, and deepen connections to Acadian and Francophone language, culture, and heritage in official-language minority communities (OLMC)





Personal and Social Responsibility

From infancy, a child's relationships and experiences begin to influence the development of a uniquely personal and communal sense of identity. Identity is not fixed at birth but is shaped by a child's family and community, interactions with others, culture, language, and experiences. Children who grow and develop in safe, secure, responsive, and consistent environments are more likely to develop the confidence to explore their environment and seek out new experiences. Children and families who are respected for their ideas, competencies, and aptitudes, develop a sense of themselves as competent individuals. Infants and toddlers begin to develop a sense of personal responsibility when they learn to feed themselves and recognize their belongings.

Throughout the early years, children develop their individual and collective identities, understand how they relate to others, and draw from their everyday experiences to enhance their play through authentic and holistic learning. Participation in high-quality, inclusive, play-based early learning and child care programs gives children the opportunity to test out different roles and identities, such as taking turns being a member of various types of families, exploring diverse cultures and traditions with materials, and understanding and appreciating other perspectives. Opportunities like these foster an anti-racist, anti-bias environment for all children.

Interactions with other children and adults provide opportunities to learn how to respect all living and non-living things within Wskitqamu (Mother Earth), listen to other opinions, promote one's ideas, and resolve conflicts. Indigenous teachings remind us that outdoor play cultivates responsibility we have to treat Wskitqamu and all her beings with respect and allows children to experience their natural environments in a first-hand and concrete way, and to understand their roles and responsibilities in taking care of our world.

"If we are going to grow good citizens, then let us teach reciprocity. If what we aspire to is justice for all, then let it be justice for all of creation."

—Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2015, 142)

Helping children develop strong personal and collective identities, awareness, and a sense of responsibility means educators spend time collaborating with families, developing skills and strategies to help children regulate their emotions, problem solve, and communicate with others. Educators understand their own responsibility to model respect for children, families, and each other as professionals. They also understand the importance of creating inclusive environments that respect diversity and support all children to participate in activities regardless of their skill level or development.

Educators recognize the value of introducing the concept of fairness through developmentally appropriate and relatively uncompetitive play. This play builds children's self-esteem and confidence while also building an awareness of the differences between what is fair and what is equitable, and barriers to accessibility for all. By the time children are in their early school years, they are able to create rules for fair play, and modify and re-shape those rules in consideration of fairness to the group, or to ensure that all children have a chance to be included. Participation in games with teams encourages a sense of fair play for all and a sense of responsibility to the team.



Learning objectives supporting the goal of personal and social responsibility include:

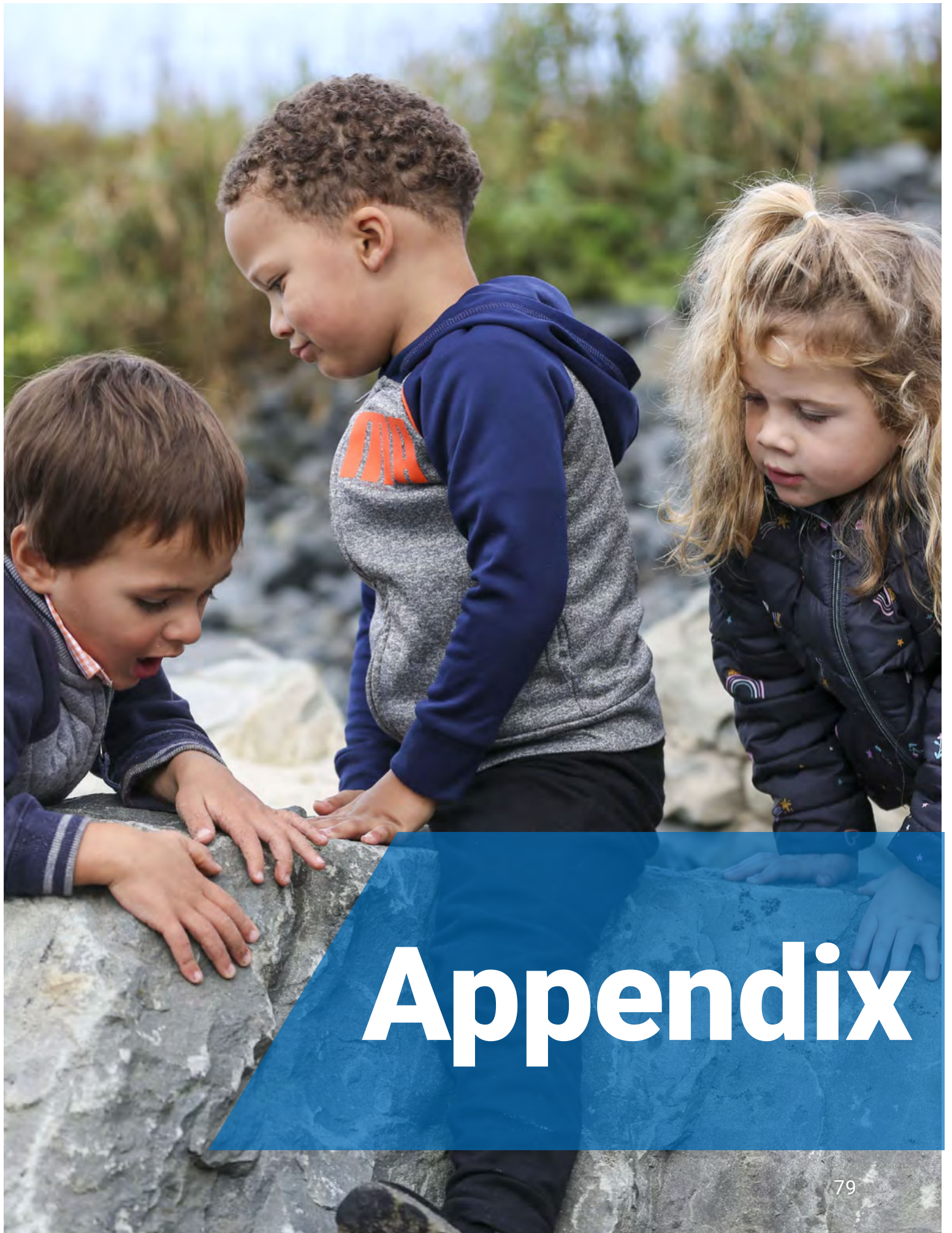
1. children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy, and respect
2. children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities, and how they can actively participate in them
3. children respond to diversity with respect and pride
4. children become aware of fairness, equity, and social justice
5. children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment
6. children connect with the Mi'kmaq through their language, culture and teachings of Netukulimk



While this framework provides an overview of how children learn and the educator's role in that journey, EECD recognizes the important role self-reflection and reflecting with others has on the quality of professional practice. The framework's accompanying *Educator's Guide* is intended to further guide educators along this professional journey.

Referenced throughout this document, the *Educator's Guide* serves as a practical tool for educators, both individually and as part of their professional community, to better understand and implement the framework principles and practices. It is designed to support putting the framework into action through observation, reflection, critical thinking, and inquiry.

Complete with local examples and photos of early learning and child care in action, strategies to consider and implement in practice, and examples of how educators can link their work with children to learning goals and objectives, the *Educator's Guide* has been developed by and for the diverse landscape of Nova Scotia and the educators, children, families, and communities that share this land.



Appendix

Appendix

Cultures of Nova Scotia

This section was developed by contributors from the early childhood education field, EECD, and other provincial government departments. It provides brief histories and contexts of four major cultural groups in Nova Scotia: the Mi'kmaq, Acadians, African Nova Scotians, and Gaels, as well as the context of Newcomers to the province.

The Mi'kmaq

The Mi'kmaq, or *L'nu 'k*, (Mi'kmaw and *L'nu*, singular) are the original people of Nova Scotia and remain the predominant Indigenous group within the province. The Mi'kmaq refer to themselves as *L'nu'k*, meaning the people or the people who speak the same language. Nova Scotia is within the traditional, ancestral land of the Mi'kmaq, who, since time immemorial, have lived and prospered on this land. Mi'kmaq have been rooted in *Mi'kma'ki* for over 13,500 years. For centuries, Mi'kmaw people moved through the land, utilizing, and understanding the richness of *Mi'kma'ki*—its plants, animals, watersheds, interconnected river systems, and the geology that forms the landscape.

Mi'kmaq lived in large family clusters along the shores during the warmer months, harvesting marine life and vegetation. During the winter months, they would move inland along the watersheds and major water systems, in smaller groups. The Mi'kmaq have a strong ecological relationship with the land and all that is *Wskitqamu*. Today, there are 33 First Nation communities in the Maritimes, with 13 communities here in Nova Scotia.

Mi'kmaw Communities

Within Nova Scotia



Mi'kmaw Language and Education

Mi'kmaw people see the language as a “living spirit” that must be cared for. According to Mi'kmaw cultural teachings, everything has a spirit, a purpose, and deserves respect, including animals, plants, and non-living things. It is important to acknowledge that the Mi'kmaw language is verb based, which means everything is in movement. Because it has derived from the immediate relationship the Mi'kmaq had with the land and all that connected to it, Mi'kmaw is not a language spoken anywhere else in the world.

Mi'kmaw education is holistic in nature and unifies language, knowledge, and culture. Consciousness and identity are at the heart of the Mi'kmaw language. There is no disconnect between language and culture; culture is embedded in the language. Promoting the understanding and expressions of the Mi'kmaw worldview using the Mi'kmaw language is crucial. Mi'kmaw ways of being and knowing share that each person is their own entity, and is on their own journey of learning and understanding. It is believed that each person has a learning spirit that must be nurtured in a way that works for the learner, and that each learner has the right and responsibility to engage in learning. It is believed that each person has four aspects of Being: a physical self (body), a cognitive self (head), an emotional self (heart), and a spiritual self (spirit). Holistic education in Mi'kmaw communities ensures that all parts of the child are nurtured.

The land of the Mi'maq encompasses what is now known as Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, parts of New Brunswick, Québec, Newfoundland, and Maine. *Mi'kma'ki* is made up of seven districts, each district identified based on features of the landscape. For instance, the district of *Sipekne'katik*, meaning where the ground nut/wild potatoes grow, encompasses one of the largest river systems in modern-day Nova Scotia, the Shubenacadie River. The river runs from the Bay of Fundy through to *Kjipuktuk*—meaning great harbour, known now in English as Halifax.



MI'KMAQ
<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/mikmaq.mp3>



L'NU 'K
<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/lnuk.mp3>



MI'KMA'KI
<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/mikmaki.mp3>



SIPEKNE'KATIK
<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/sipeknekatik.mp3>



KJIPUKTUK
<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/mp3/kjipuktuk.mp3>

We Are All Treaty People

The first visitors to Mi'kma'ki were officially recorded in 1549. During **colonization**, Mi'kmaw life was disrupted in many ways, including the immediate depletion of access to resources including animals, plants, trees, and space. In the event of claiming space, the British Crown entered into treaty with the Mi'kmaq. A "treaty" is a formally concluded and ratified agreement between distinct groups of people. The signed Treaties of the 1700s affirm the Mi'kmaq as their own nation. Through these Treaties, the British Crown was given the right to establish townships, while the rights of the Mi'kmaq to carry out their lives without the infraction nor infringement of the British Crown was affirmed. As such, all beneficiaries would live in peace and friendship. We are all treaty people with obligations, rights, and expectations.

Acadians

The Acadians of Nova Scotia have a unique place in this province's history. They are descendants of the first permanent French settlers in North America, having arrived with Samuel de Champlain in Port Royal in 1605. In July 1755, approximately 6,000 Acadians were deported from mainland Nova Scotia, mainly for refusing to take an oath of allegiance to the British Crown. Most were captured and sent by ship to colonies along the Atlantic Coast. However, some were imprisoned in Halifax, others were sent to France, and a small number went into hiding or spent many years wandering. By 1764, Acadians were permitted to return to what was then Acadia but had to settle on lands that were not taken by the British settlers. Today's Acadian communities are located mainly in Digby, Yarmouth, Inverness, Richmond, Antigonish, and Halifax counties. Though geographically isolated and surrounded by English-speaking majority language communities, Acadians were, and continue to be, steadfast in protecting and preserving their distinct French language in the face of assimilation.

From the mid-1800s, Acadian children were permitted to attend bilingual schools where they were taught in their home language but using English books and other learning materials. Consequently, many Acadian children (and later, adults) over several generations were able to speak their home language but unable to read or write it. Acadian families recognized the impact the bilingual education system was having on their language, their culture, and their identity, and began advocating in earnest, along with other Francophones from across Canada, for true French-language education. Eventually, in 1969, the federal government proclaimed the *Official Languages Act* which gave French-language minorities in Canada official rights to services in their home language.

Acadian Communities

Within Nova Scotia



In the 1970s, French-language early learning and child care programs started to be developed in various Acadian-Francophone minority language communities across Nova Scotia. Since that time, they have played an important role in the communities and in promoting the value of language and culture in all aspects of the child's life at home, at school, and in society. The integration of the majority of these French early childhood centres or *centres de la petite enfance* within French schools has become a fundamental catalyst to provide the official language minority communities with equitable access to high-quality education.

In 1982, Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* became a major stepping stone in the advancement of French-language minority education in Canada. Eventually, in 1996, the Government of Nova Scotia created a single school board to manage all Acadian and French schools for the entire province—the *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial* (CSAP) and, in October 1999, the government replaced the existing bilingual school system with a French-first-language school system. In 2004, the Province of Nova Scotia enacted the *French-language Services Act*, giving official status to the delivery of French-language services by the public service. The French Early Years Centre and the CSAP's allocation of space for many early childhood education programs, including their own 4-year-old language acquisition program, *Grandir en français*, are positive indicators of restorative progress for the French-language education of Acadian children, their families, their communities, and the Acadian Nova Scotian identity.

Since 1992, the *Centre d'appui à la petite enfance en Nouvelle-Écosse* (CAPENÉ) has played a leading role in addressing these specific needs by providing educators the knowledge, training, and resources in French necessary to offer linguistically and culturally responsive early learning and child development programs and services in Acadian and Francophone and Francophone families, from the prenatal period and beyond, to raise healthy, happy children with strong cultural and linguistic identities. This has been possible through the expansion of *La Pirouette*, a community-based French-language family resource centre in

several French minority-language communities across the province, and key partnerships with other local and provincial Acadian and Francophone community groups.

With French recognized as one of Canada's two official languages, the intentionality of linguistically responsive pedagogy is particularly relevant for Acadian and Francophone children in French minority-language communities. Educators in these programs must take additional and substantial measures to ensure their pedagogy supports the language rights of Acadian and Francophone children, protects and promotes the development and vitality of the French language, and reinforces linguistic security in an English-dominant world. Like the *Official Languages Act* of Canada, culturally responsive pedagogy in "programs aimed at early childhood development form an integral part of the pathway (the so-called 'continuum') in minority-language education. Access to quality childcare services in one's own language is an essential contribution to promoting language learning and use among children, preparing them for school, and anchoring them in a linguistic, cultural and identity path specific to their community." (Canadian Heritage 2021).

In the context of Nova Scotia's minority-language communities, it is important children develop a positive relationship with the Acadian culture and the French language. High-quality French-first-language early learning and child care programs and environments build strong cultural identities for not only today's children but for future generations as well. By understanding that the acquisition of language, knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits begins at birth, French speaking educators are in a unique and ideal position to counteract the assimilation of the Acadian/French language and culture. When they effectively address the specific cultural and linguistic needs of Acadians, educators become instrumental in the upsurge of Acadian speakers' confidence, pride, and sense of belonging to a larger and stronger global **Francophonie**.

Go to these links to discover more about the specific circumstances, challenges, and needs around the linguistic security of Acadians and Francophones in French minority-language communities.



Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 23 – Minority Language Educational Rights <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/art23.html>



Nova Scotia's French-language Services Act
<https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/frenchla.htm>



Early Childhood: Fostering the Vitality of Francophone Minority Communities
<https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/publications/studies-other-reports/2016/early-childhood-fostering-vitality-francophone-minority>

African Nova Scotians

The people of Black African Ancestry have a rich and distinguished legacy with deep roots within the province of Nova Scotia that spans more than 400 years. They were part of the earliest non-indigenous settlement of our province and, as one of the earliest settler cultures, African Nova Scotians continue to contribute to the diversity and infrastructure that defines Nova Scotia today. Their history is woven into the very fabric of Nova Scotian culture. They represent a myriad of ethnicities, cultural experiences, and knowledge. Across the province there are more than 48 distinct and established communities. Many of Nova Scotia's historical Black communities can trace their multi-generational, multi-ethnic histories beyond nine to ten generations.

African Nova Scotian Communities

Within Nova Scotia



Each African Nova Scotian community is distinct and is characterized by a collective sense of history, identity, and culture. People of African ancestry were and continue to be invested in enhancing the well-being of children and families and in developing an autonomy that would enable members to thrive economically, educationally, spiritually, and communally.

African Nova Scotian heritage extends from the early founding years of this province to those Black Africans who came with the Portuguese fishing fleets. The earliest recording of a Black African Nova Scotian presence references Mathieu Da Costa who arrived in Port Royal in 1604 with Samuel De Champlain and the De Mont Expedition. His credentials were interpreter/explorer and pilot, which indicates his expertise in navigating the waterways and the language of the people residing in Mi'kma'ki.

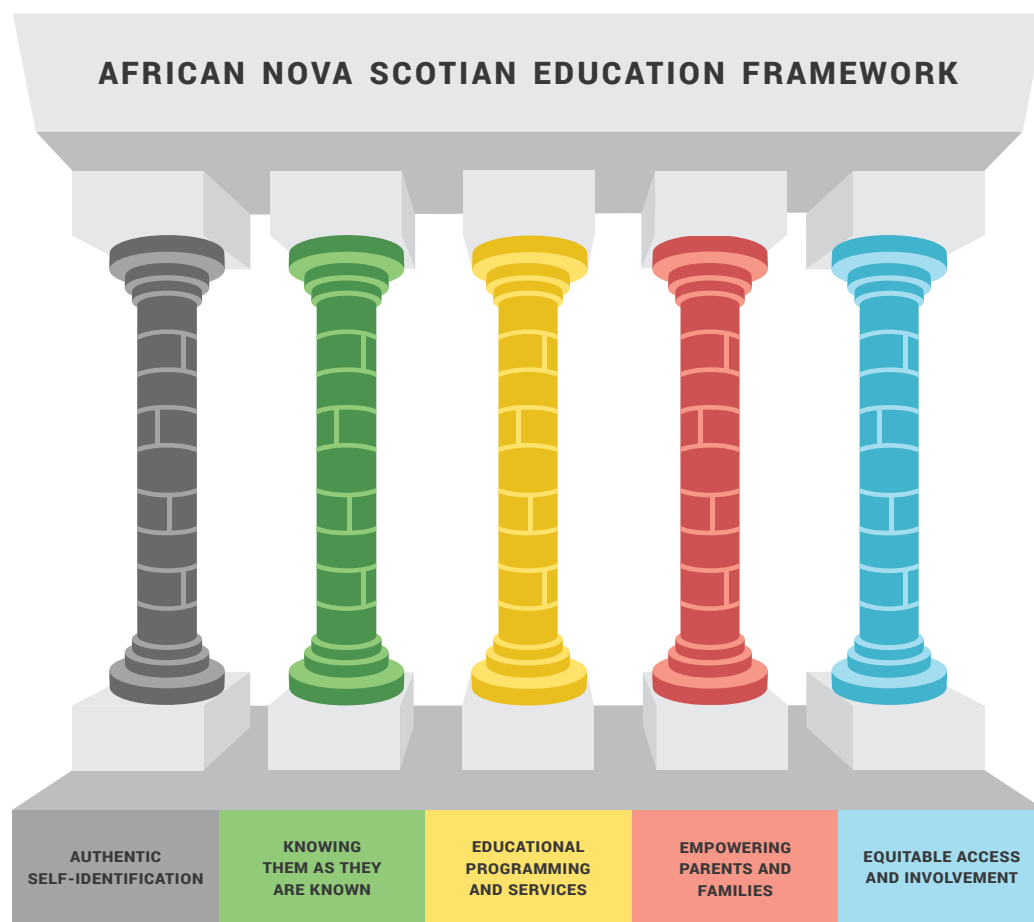
The anecdotes and cultural realities of the Black community are echoed through the fabric of this multi-ethnic history of generational living. Family structures embrace the beauty of intergenerational understandings of family with relationships existing within, across, and beyond ancestral lineage. Houses and communities reflect the solidarity and uniqueness of their members.

Within many historical African Nova Scotian communities, spirituality remains a foundational tenant within systems of beliefs. Like their counterparts in other diasporas, parents, and families view themselves as holistic, being comprised of spirit, body, and mind. Spiritual understandings may be defined in many ways, but a central organizing construct is the belief that individuals are created and empowered with potential and purpose. One of the oldest organizations within the African Nova Scotian Community is the African United Baptist Association (AUBA). The Black church in the African Nova Scotian community has been a formidable institution of resistance and leadership and is an example of transnational hybridity that combines vestiges from many traditions including but not limited to Southern American Baptist, African Orthodox, Moravian, Anglican, Pentecostal, interdenominational, Protestant, Catholic, and African forms of worship.

Like most cultures and specifically those within the African diaspora, music is regarded as a linguistic art that can tell the stories of soul and spirit. Whether it be the endurance of “the shout” in Baptist churches, or the oral power of Elders who could memorize and recite hymns, music provided and continues to provide Black communities with a vehicle of solidarity and empowerment. Black communities also utilize music because of its popularity and influence, to express the “unsayable” and engage in politics of resistance. The words in the music are tantamount to fighting for freedom full citizenship, and the materialization of equity.

The quest for just, inclusive, and equitable access to educational opportunities has remained a focused priority for the Black Nova Scotian communities. African Nova Scotian parents, communities, and families hold high expectations of Nova Scotia’s public education system and want access to the same opportunities that other parents and children experience. The *African Nova Scotian Education Framework* (ANSED) was developed by the African Canadian Services Branch within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to address the systemic power structures and inequities that exist and create barriers for African Nova Scotian/Black children within Nova Scotia’s public education system and move the system forward in fulfillment of its commitment to inclusive education. ANSED is comprised of 5 key pillars: Authentic Self-Identification, Knowing Them As They Are Known, Educational Programming and Services, Empowering Parents and Families, and Equitable Access and Involvement.

African Nova Scotian families play a large role in helping their children excel and succeed, especially when opportunities and spaces are accessible and available. Early childhood programs in Africentric communities align with ANSED's five core pillars that promote the success of children, families, and communities in various aspects of life, including education. African Nova Scotians believe in a holistic approach that encourages children to be their authentic selves within their own culture and race which is significant to the body, mind, and spirit. African Nova Scotians also believe that all Black children should be known in a way that values their identities, families, languages, and communities, thus allowing them to thrive in areas both inside and outside of education. Being in a blended environment where they are nurtured and can learn with explicit, intentional, purposeful, inquiry-based, and structured play allows children to freely explore and re-define their identities. Additionally, creating anti-racist and anti-biased education programs and systems enables Black children to be themselves and feel secure in their identities, allowing them to be proud of who they are without feeling as though they need to be someone else to thrive. Early childhood programs offer opportunities and authentic partnerships that value and empower their families and communities, understanding that parents are already interested and engaged in their children's education.



Gaels in Nova Scotia

From 1773 up to the 1850s an estimated 50,000 Gaels from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland arrived in Nova Scotia. Gaels settled along family and religious lines in Nova Scotia—this phenomenon of uprooting whole communities and relocating in the New World context became referred to as chain migration. Settlement occurred in Colchester, Pictou, Antigonish, Guysborough, Inverness, Richmond, Victoria, and Cape Breton counties. For the majority, Gaelic would have been their only language.

Gaelic language and its cultural expression, family, relatives, the broader community, and the Christian faith, are what Gaels valued most and it is these aspects that sustained immigrant Gaels through many challenges in the Nova Scotia context. The Gaels' presence as a people through language, culture, and identity underpinned the social and economic fabric of communities in the province's eastern districts and throughout Cape Breton Island. It is estimated that by the later 1800s, there may have been as many as 100,000 Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia.

Gaelic Communities

Within Nova Scotia



It is estimated that over two dozen Gaelic dialects were introduced into Nova Scotia; thousands of fiddle and pipe tunes were composed; regional step-dance styles, such as Mabou, Iona, and Glendale, thrived; thousands of songs—some brought over from Scotland and others composed here—were shared; over 300 place names; thousands of personal nicknames; and between 1791 and 1902; there were one dozen different Gaelic publications initiated.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Gaels experienced marginalization and exclusion as their language was not supported in official institutions, like the government, churches, universities, and public school programs in the province. This resulted in significant loss of Gaelic language and cultural expression and severely eroded the collective Gaelic identity.

While the reasons for language, cultural expression, and identity loss are complex, evidence reveals how low status for Gaelic language directly impacted the loss of cultural expression and identity across Gaelic settlement districts in the province.

UNESCO's position on language loss reflects, in large measure, the experience of Gaels in Nova Scotia:

“Cultural/political/economic marginalization/hegemony. This happens when political and economic power is closely tied to a particular language and culture so that there is a strong incentive for individuals to abandon their language (on behalf of themselves and their children) in favor of another more prestigious one. This frequently happens when indigenous populations to achieve a higher social status, have better chance to get employment or are forced to in school, adopt the cultural and linguistic traits of a people who have come to dominate them through colonization, conquest, or invasion.”

—The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages (Austin and Sallabank 2011, 21)

During the 20th century, efforts by the Gaelic community and changes in societal attitudes allowed for greater appreciation, acceptance, and inclusion of Gaels' language and cultural expression in communities, institutions, and government. These efforts and changes led to the creation of *Comhairle na Gàidhlig* (the Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia) in 1990 and the Office of Gaelic Affairs in 2006. The 2016 Canada Census showed there were approximately 2000 Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia and 51 percent of the population indicated Gaelic heritage and identity connections (2016 Canada Census). Over time, social and economic reasons caused some Gaels to migrate, so today there are Nova Scotians who claim Gaelic background in almost all regions of the province.

Nova Scotia's Office of Gaelic Affairs' Gaelic-language and cultural programs assist with language acquisition and use, cultural mentorships aimed at reclaiming a Gaelic group identity in the province, and raising greater awareness, appreciation, and understanding of Gaels. Today, Nova Scotia is the only jurisdiction outside of Europe where a Gaelic language, culture, and identity have been passed down from generation to generation in the community.

Newcomers

A diverse and growing population will continue to change and enrich communities across Nova Scotia. It will also have an impact on early learning and child care programs. These programs provide essential support and resources for all Nova Scotians, including newcomer families. Programs may see an increase in the number of newcomer children in attendance—for families, these programs help children adjust to their new lives and are foundational to building community connections.

Social and economic realities sometimes mean families will become mobile: relocating for employment, education, or other opportunities. Depending on circumstances, these relocations may be long or short-term. In some cases, temporary living arrangements become necessary when families are fleeing unsafe conditions. Newcomer families may rely on others like close friends or other support systems in the community for assistance. This could include programs and services such as early learning and child care programs, parenting programs, early intervention services, health care professionals, family resource centres, and recreational activities. These programs and services can assist a family in their efforts to provide for their children's healthy development and well-being, both typical and those who require additional support (Brown et al. 2020).



Educators must find ways to welcome and support newcomer families and use innovative new approaches, resources, and strategies to engage and collaborate. Building healthy relationships and establishing safe, inclusive early learning and child care programs and practices is essential. Working with and supporting newcomer families also brings with it many exciting opportunities for educators with respect to expanding their own knowledge and learning. Discovering and sharing the contributions made by newcomer families is an important step in recognizing Nova Scotia's evolving cultural footprint.

Scan the code to learn about challenges and opportunities in the process of adapting to a new country.

"Adaptation and Acculturation"
(Caring for Kids New to Canada website)
<https://kidsnewtocanada.ca/culture/adaptation>



Glossary

2SLGBTQIA+: An acronym for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and a plus sign to represent additional sexual orientations and gender identities.

accessibility: “A human right that involves prioritizing the prevention and removal of structural, systemic, and individual barriers that prevent equitable access to learning, environments, delivery and receipt of programs and services, information and communication, and employment. It prioritizes the knowledge and leadership of marginalized communities. It must be designed for the meaningful participation of all learners, and ensure policies, programs, practices, and services are inclusive, flexible, and responsive”. (Education Standard Development Committee 2020)

agency: The capacity of individuals to have the power and resources to fulfill their potential.

anti-bias: An approach to the planning, design, and implementation of curriculum, policy, and practice that increases understanding of differences based on gender, age, body size, disabilities, ethnicity, language, race, religion, socio-economic status, etc.; values respectful and equitable treatment of all people; and challenges bias, discrimination, and injustice when it occurs.

anti-racism: An approach to curriculum planning, design, and implementation of curriculum, as well as policies and practices, particularly interactions and relationships, that is meant to prevent racism (i.e., unfair or harmful treatment of people based on their race) and promote racial equity.

authentic assessment: A form of assessment that measures children’s skills and abilities by observing how children perform in real-life everyday activities. It is carried out by observing and documenting children’s play experiences and interactions with peers, and educators’ conversations with families, other educators, and early childhood professionals.

belonging: The experiences of security, inclusion, respect, and competence in a group setting.

bias: A natural inclination for or against an idea, object, group or individual. It is often learned and is highly dependent on variances like a person’s socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, educational background, and life experiences.

care provider: A person approved by an agency to provide a family home child-care program in their home.

co-construct: A learning process that takes place in a social context as children interact with educators, other children, and materials as they work together in partnership. The process emphasizes the importance of social relationships in children's early learning.

colonization: The action or process of taking control of people, land, and waters by an outside entity who then occupies the land, extracts its values, and dominates the people.

culturally responsive: A process reflecting and celebrating our diverse society and allowing children to develop and learn while experiencing a sense of belonging and respect.

curriculum: In early childhood education programs, curriculum means the sum of experiences, activities, and events that occur within an inclusive environment designed to foster children's well-being, learning, and development. This implies collaboration between educators, children, families, and communities.

dispositions: Enduring habits of mind and action; a tendency to respond in characteristic ways to situations.

diversity: Differences and unique qualities that each person brings to the early learning setting such as their culture and ethnicity, values and beliefs, language(s), abilities, education, life experiences, socioeconomic status, spirituality, gender, age, and sexual orientation.

early childhood educator: An adult who has an early childhood education diploma or degree from a post-secondary institution.

early childhood professional: An individual with specialized education, training, or experience in supporting children's learning and development.

early learning: A natural, holistic, and exploratory process that children engage in from birth and that lays the foundation for later learning, whether formal or informal. Early learning is a part of early childhood development.

early learning and child care programs: Programs that provide play-based early childhood education for children under age 12, including provincially regulated early learning and child care centres and family home child care as well as pre-primary.

early learning environment: A complex and intentionally planned indoor or outdoor space, such as a home, playground, child care centre, pre-primary program, community centre, public place, or natural setting, that focuses on nurturing healthy relationships between children, families, and educators through the provision of diverse opportunities for learning and development, and is supported by consistent and responsive schedules, routines, materials, and other resources.

environment as the third teacher: A concept used in early childhood education, where the environment provides children with a sense of beauty, allows for an organization of time, presents materials and activities for learning, provides space for play and exploration, encourages friendships and relationships, allows for privacy, recognizes diversity, and welcomes families.

equity: The principle of proportional fairness; a belief that seeks to eliminate challenges caused by biased or unfair policies, programs, practices, or situations that contribute to a lack of equality in educational performance, results, and outcomes.

ethics: The beliefs, values, and principles that govern human behaviour, conduct, judgement, and decision making in terms of right or wrong, just or unjust.

family: A person or the people primarily responsible for the day-to-day care of children and taking on the commonly understood parenting role (e.g., guide, nurture). This includes members of biological or adoptive families, step-families, foster families, legal guardians, or extended family such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

framework: An established set of values, principles, goals, and objectives that guide practices and encourage a shared sense of purpose and communication.

Francophonie: “... all peoples and communities anywhere in the world that have French as their mother tongue or customary language. The term can also refer to the wider, more complex network of government agencies and non-government organizations that work to establish, maintain and strengthen the special ties among French-speaking people throughout the world.” (Pelletier and Laurendeau 2021)

gender: “The socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities of girls, women, boys, men, non-binary and gender-diverse people. Gender influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and how power and resources are distributed in society. Although gender is usually conceptualized as binary (girl/woman, and boy/man), there is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience, identify, and express it.” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research 2023)

heritage language: Heritage language is the language a person regards as their native, home, or ancestral language. This includes Indigenous and newcomer languages. (Baker and Wright 2021)

holistic: An approach to early learning that encompasses the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and creative development of a child. This approach focuses on the development of the whole child, rather than only concentrating on individual components.

inclusion: The consideration of all children's social, cultural, and linguistic diversity, such as approaches to learning, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances, and geographic location, in curriculum decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure that all children's experiences are recognized and valued, that all children have equitable access to resources and participation, opportunities to demonstrate their learning, and that they learn to value difference.

inclusive practice: The belief that all individuals have equal worth and rights, and which actively promotes acceptance and participation of all children and families in their programs. This type of practice provides different and appropriate learning support according to children's strengths, needs, interests, and backgrounds.

infants: Children who are younger than 18 months.

inquiry: A disposition for learning, also described as wonder, curiosity, and imagination; a tendency to try new ideas and take on challenges.

intentionality: A form of teaching that encourages educators to be deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful in their decisions and actions. It is the opposite of rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have always been done that way.

intersectionality: Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the term intersectionality refers to an understanding that individuals can experience discrimination and adverse impacts based on different disabilities, marginalized identities, circumstances, and experiences that interact or overlap.

learning from *Wskitqamu* (Mother Earth): A form of education based on Mi'kmaw knowledge, teachings, and beliefs that teach humans to live in harmony with respect for the Earth and all living and non-living beings.

learning goals: The general skills, knowledge, or disposition prioritized for a child's optimal learning and holistic development, achieved through successful progression through smaller, more specific, and increasingly more complex reference points (i.e., learning objectives).

learning objectives: The specific skills, knowledge, or disposition a child must learn through play as they progress towards successfully attaining an overarching goal. Learning objectives are supported by intentional educators and inclusive environments and are planned in collaboration with children and their families.

learning strategies: The pedagogical techniques and practices employed by educators to engage children in the process of learning.

literacy: The capacity, confidence, and disposition to use language through listening, reading, talking, viewing, and writing using a wide range of modes of communication including dance, drama, electronic-and print-based media, movement, music, storytelling, and visual arts.

loose parts: Materials that can be moved, taken apart, lined up, and put back together in multiple ways to encourage creativity and open-ended learning.

natural environments: Environments that include natural elements such as plants, soil, and water. These may be human made (e.g., gardens, nature playgrounds, and urban parks) or wild and naturally occurring (e.g., wooded areas, meadows, and beaches). (Tremblay et al. 2015)

observation: The ongoing process of watching, listening, and being aware of children's behaviour, emotional state, interests, abilities, and patterns of development, to meet the needs of children and evaluate their development and learning.

parent(s): A person or the people primarily responsible for the day-to-day care of children and taking on the commonly understood parenting role. The term parent refers to biological or adoptive parents, stepparents, legal guardians, or extended family such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

pedagogical documentation: A systematic strategy for collecting information on the behaviour, emotional responses, interests, abilities, and patterns of development of an individual child or a group of children within a learning environment or aspects of that environment. Methods may include participant observation, portfolios, learning stories, developmental screening tools, checklists, anecdotal records, and daily recordings.

pedagogical leader: An educator with a disposition to positively influence children's and colleagues' learning and whose professional behaviour includes, but is not limited to, the promotion of reflective and responsive practice, fostering family engagement and inclusion, supporting curriculum planning and authentic assessment, and using data to evaluate the learning program and environments.

philosophy: A statement that identifies the fundamental beliefs, values, and ideals that are important to individuals such as directors/supervisors, educators, families, and communities, and is the basis for making decisions and setting a vision for the future.

physical literacy: An understanding of the value of being motivated, confident, skilled, and knowledgeable about physical movement and being engaged in physical activities on a regular basis.

play: A naturally occurring and freely chosen activity in which children are self-motivated. It is characterized by imagination, exploration, delight, capriciousness, and a sense of wonder. It reflects the unique experiences of children, and the various ways children express their ideas and feelings, and come to understand themselves, others, and their world.

play-based learning: A context for learning through which children organize and make sense of their social worlds, as they actively engage with people, objects, and representations.

practices: The ways educators put early learning principles into action.

prejudice: A preconceived judgement or opinion; an adverse opinion or learning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge.

pre-primary: A universal, play-based program that is part of the public school system and taught by educators. The program is for children in the year before they start school and welcomes children and families into the school community by supporting children's development and laying the foundation for school success and lifelong learning.

principles: A foundational belief that guides how educators approach early learning.

reconciliation: An ongoing individual and collective process of establishing and maintaining relationships. Reconciliation involves repairing damaged trust with apologies and commitment to concrete actions for societal change.

risky play: Thrilling, adventurous, and exciting play that may include the possibility of physical injury. Types of risky play include play at height, speed, near elements (e.g., fire, water), with real tools, rough and tumble play (e.g., play fighting), and where there is potential for disappearing or getting lost. (Sandseter 2007)

self-regulation: The ability to recognize, control, and adapt one's thoughts, feelings, and actions in different situations.

shared history: The concept that two different groups share a part of history which continues to evolve and influence how they interact.

skills: The specific processes, abilities, and competencies that exist within each area of development, and form the foundational pathways for learning and health that emerge early and are elaborated over time.

social-emotional development: The process of learning to manage feelings and interact with others.

social identity: The part of the self we have in common with others, derived from our membership in groups. A positive sense of social identity helps children feel worthy and capable.

social justice: Action against unfair and biased policies and practices that create barriers, or disadvantage people, in relation to equity, access, participation, and rights; addressing issues of equity so people who do not typically have access to quality life experiences are treated more fairly in areas such as housing, health care, child care, and education. Social justice can be understood as the opposite of discrimination.

social pedagogy: Refers to understanding, approaching, and supporting children's development and education from a social perspective (e.g., strength-based, responsive relationships and experiences, values individuals and communities, validates diversity, builds and bridges understanding and knowledge, respects linguistic and cultural identities).

spiritual: A range of human experiences including a sense of awe and wonder, and an exploration of being and knowing.

texts: Items that are read, viewed, listened to, and created to share meaning. Texts can be print-based, such as books, magazines, and posters, or screen-based, such as websites and DVDs. Many texts are multimedia and integrate images, written words, and sound.

toddlers: The Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Regulations define toddlers as children who are between 18 months old and 35 months old, inclusive.

transition: The time or movement between two separate activities or events (e.g., home to child care, learning environment to washroom, child care to public school).

vision: A main purpose and long-term goal.

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