

The Kindergarten Program

The Question

“As an instructional leader, how can I support the implementation of the Kindergarten program?”

The Answer

There are five important elements to consider:

1. Understand play-based learning and the “inquiry stance”
2. Understand integrated learning in the four frames
3. Link learning and assessment
4. Support the Kindergarten educators
5. Communicate with families and the community

1. Understand play-based learning and the “inquiry stance”

[Among] pedagogical approaches, ... play-based learning emerges as a focal point, with proven benefits for learning among children of all ages, and indeed among adolescent and adult learners.

[The Kindergarten Program](#) (2016), p. 12

Children are innately curious and are naturally inclined to explore, manipulate, build, create, wonder, and ask questions. Play is an ideal vehicle for enabling children to work out their ideas and theories and use what they already know to deepen their understanding and further their learning. In other words, they move through the world in what might be called an “inquiry stance” – a mindset of questioning and wondering. In effective Kindergarten classrooms, educators adopt this mindset alongside the children to support their play-based learning. Key components of this approach include:

- recognizing play as a child’s right, and as essential to the child’s optimal development;
- viewing all children as competent, curious, capable of complex thinking, and rich in potential and experience;



- allowing children to be active contributors in their learning and to use their natural curiosity to explore, play, and inquire;
- co-constructing a learning environment that reflects children’s interests and needs; inspires joy, awe, and wonder; and promotes learning;
- recognizing the role of assessment in supporting a child’s learning and autonomy; and
- furthering children’s learning by responding to, challenging, and extending children’s thinking, exploration, and inquiries during play.

2. Understand integrated learning in the four frames

In the Kindergarten program, four frames, or broad areas of learning, are used to structure thinking about learning and assessment. They are designed to support the way children’s learning naturally occurs during play and inquiry, and they focus on aspects of learning that are critical to development.

The four frames are:

- Belonging and Contributing
- Self-Regulation and Well-Being
- Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours
- Problem Solving and Innovating



The overall expectations for the Kindergarten program are connected to the four frames. Expectations are associated with the frame to which that expectation most closely relates, and some expectations are connected to more than one frame.

School leaders can support educators in delivering the program by:

- encouraging educators to think of learning in terms of integrated frames rather than specific subjects;
- encouraging educators to provide large blocks of time for integrated play-based learning through an inquiry stance during the flow of the day;
- encouraging educators to explore the overlap among frames and the relationship between and among expectations;
- giving educators time to become familiar with the four frames and the organization of expectations;
- reflecting with educators on how a co-constructed learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, supports learning in all four frames; and
- supporting an inquiry stance and reflective practice in educators regarding their own learning and the learning of the children.

Assessment is the key to children’s learning in Kindergarten. It takes place concurrently with instruction and is an integral part of learning.

The Kindergarten Program (2016), p. 36

3. Link learning and assessment

Assessment in Kindergarten is the process of gathering and interpreting evidence that accurately reflects the child's growth in learning in relation to the knowledge and skills outlined in the four frames. Educators continually assess children's learning as they interact with them in play and inquiry and use this information to help make thinking and learning visible to the children.

School leaders can support educators by promoting the use of strategies such as:

- documenting what is seen and heard as children engage in play and inquiry;
- noticing and naming the learning as it occurs or when reflecting together on documentation;
- offering feedback to children as learning occurs in order to clarify, question, and go deeper in the learning; and
- reviewing and reflecting on their documentation of children's thinking and learning with the children and their families.

Strategies such as these help educators to link learning and assessment to create a picture for children of what and how they are learning and support them in moving forward, no matter where they are in their development.

4. Support the Kindergarten educators

In a developmentally appropriate play-based program, educators facilitate children's learning in a variety of intentional ways, including by:

- maintaining the image of the child as a competent, capable learner and engaging in assessment using an "asset lens" (i.e., by focusing on children's strengths and abilities and responding to their needs and opportunities for deeper learning);
- using their knowledge of program expectations and child development to plan for learning in all four frames throughout the day;
- thinking in terms of integrated learning rather than subject-specific learning;
- seeing children as collaborative partners and co-constructing learning with them to build on their ideas, theories, and interests and reflect their needs;
- asking questions that provoke further discussions and expand and enhance play;
- responding to, challenging, or extending play; and
- observing and documenting children's thinking and learning as they engage in play and inquiry.

School leaders can support Kindergarten educators by:

- facilitating opportunities for sharing effective practices and classroom experiences through professional learning conversations or more formal collaborative inquiries;
- allowing time for educators to become familiar with the curriculum and to adapt their assessment practices accordingly;
- encouraging educators to take risks by trying one new element at a time until a focus on learning and assessment in the four frames is embedded in their practice;
- visiting classrooms to observe integrated learning in action and interacting with children, educators, and families;

- periodically meeting with all Kindergarten educators and using the Questions for Reflection, Educator Team Reflections, and Links to Resources embedded in *The Kindergarten Program* to support collaborative reflection on current practice;
- providing educators with information and professional learning opportunities on an ongoing basis;
- inviting board program or curriculum staff to provide clarification, support, and guidance, as required; and
- modelling a commitment to the vision of Kindergarten as a collaborative learning environment.

5. Communicate with families and the community

Communication is key to successful implementation of a play-based program. School leaders can encourage educators to communicate information about learning and assessment in the four frames to parents¹ and the community by:

- inviting parents and community members to participate in Kindergarten classes;
- organizing opportunities for parents to learn more about what happens in Kindergarten;
- talking with parents informally on the playground, in hallways, or as other appropriate opportunities arise;
- meeting with families to reflect on the documentation of children’s thinking and learning;
- providing examples of prompts parents can use to talk with their children about their learning at school;
- ensuring open lines of communication using school websites, e-mail updates, and translated newsletters;
- using clear and concise wording in key messages to support understanding of play-based learning and the four frames; and
- helping families understand the information about learning and assessment in the four frames as provided in the Communication of Learning reports.

To support assessment ... [and] evaluation, ... Kindergarten educators develop and maintain a collaborative, complementary, and reciprocal relationship with children and their families.

[*Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum*](#) (2016), p. 5

References

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2016). *The Kindergarten program*. Toronto: Author.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2016). *Growing success – The Kindergarten addendum*. Toronto: Author.

ISSN 1923-9653 (Online) © Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2017

¹ The word *parents* is used in this document to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s). It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.