



3.2

Children's Dispositions to Learn





3.2 Children's Dispositions to Learn

The notion that children learn every day through every situation is a central idea in *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework*. Within this curriculum framework, in consultation with educators and parents, we identify five dispositions to learn: playing and playfulness, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. Children demonstrate these dispositions to learn¹ through their play and living in early childhood communities. These dispositions are often used to describe a child or children: "He is so caring," "They are playful friends with one another." In early childhood research, children's dispositions to learn are recognized as a foundation for/in learning and for developing later school-based learning competencies.² In this curriculum framework, dispositions to learn³ are understood as:

- coming from within each child and emerging over time.
- inclinations that educators and others can nurture, strengthen, or diminish through our everyday interactions with each child in the social context of learning and living.
- inclinations that each child draws upon in both new and familiar learning experiences.
- having culturally specific meanings and value revealed through family, social, and cultural practices and traditions.⁴

The rationale for nurturing each child's dispositions to learn recognizes the experiential learning processes unique to each child. Noticing and naming each child's dispositions to learn acknowledges and values each child as a learner who is already playing and playful, seeking, participating, persisting and caring. When you, as an educator, notice and name each child's dispositions to learn, you encourage his or her learner identity for today and the future.

Dispositions to learn are situated in the context of care, play, and learning and therefore are expressed as active verbs,⁵ as well as from the perspectives of "I/we." The "I" refers to each member of the learning community as unique—each child, family member, and educator who also draw upon these dispositions to learn. The "we" reflects the notion that children, educators, and families **co-construct** knowledge and learning together and within a context of the learning environment including time, space, materials, and our modelling,



participating, and interacting with children in our care, play, learning, and development. We use the combination “I/we” intentionally to remind us that care, play, and learning are always both individually and socially constructed. For example,

I/we are playing and playful

I/we are seeking

I/we are participating

I/we are persisting

I/we are caring

Dispositions to learn are not taught to children; however, what educators do matters. When you respond to each child’s dispositions to learn—extending and expanding their playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring, you value and acknowledge each child’s learning potential. In this way, you create a **responsive care**, play, and learning environment that encourages the many ways that children explore and create. Documenting each child in daily experiences makes visible their dispositions to learn in ways that can engage the children and their families in meaningful conversations about not only the outcome of learning events but, more importantly, the processes and qualities of being a learner.

The following five dispositions to learn reflect the image of the child described within this curriculum framework—the image of a capable, strong, and resourceful child who is an **agentic** and active learner—**a mighty learner and citizen**. The descriptions of each of the dispositions to learn include a sample narrative to highlight everyday experiences where children are demonstrating playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. Each narrative includes a sample of an educator’s on-the-spot curriculum decisions that respond to the child or children in ways that nurture their dispositions to learn, and include reflective questions for you to consider how you can provide experiences for children that support their playing and playfulness, as well as their opportunities for seeking, participating, persisting, and caring to flourish.





3.2.1

Playing and Playful

I/we are inventing, creating, and imagining.

I/we are creating and testing theories.

I/we are telling and directing narratives and stories.

I/we are exploring and representing our knowledge using multimodal literacies.

I/we are taking risks in/for learning.





3.2.1 Playing and Playful

I/We Are Playing and Playful

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice, and name for children their disposition to play and be playful. Playfulness with ideas, thoughts, and materials strengthens children's flexible and fluid thinking and supports their creativity. Children use play as a means to explore and make meaning of the world. The disposition to play and be playful is revealed in the way that children are inclined to play with ideas, thoughts, and feelings often within the imaginary worlds they create with others and with materials. Children's playing and playfulness can be nurtured and strengthened through experiences of active participation with others, and with natural, real-world materials that provoke imagination, creativity, innovation, problem solving, personal narratives, and story development in diverse and unique ways.

The socio-cultural perspective for learning situates you as an active and sensitive co-player with/in children's play.¹ When you thoughtfully join children's play in ways that maintain their leadership, you gain insights through your close observation and can respond to children's ideas, theories, and conflicts that arise in their play. The insights you provide by participating and observing children's play influence your planning and reflection, in ways that deepen their playing and playfulness with others and/or ideas. As well, when you model your own playful disposition, you communicate that playing and playfulness are valued dispositions to learn in the early childhood community.



Sample Narrative

Niko arrives early Monday morning. He excitedly reports the adventure his family had on the weekend. They had taken a ride on the newly opened Light Rapid Transit from one end to the other end. Niko reports, "It goes into a tunnel and over a bridge and into another tunnel and then out the tunnel. It goes almost to my home. I get to ride it every Thursday when Nana picks me up."

Niko spends his day in block play. He stacks the blocks in a rectangular shape. He takes on the role of driver. Others join his play as passengers. He tells them when to get off. He tells them when he has stopped the train for them to get on. He passes out tickets and makes announcements when he stops, "Stopping at University. Have a great day."

Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator

An educator joins Niko's play for a time during the morning. She is taken with the excitement and knowledge that Niko demonstrates in this play. He knows about tickets, stopping for passengers, that there are different stops for the LRT, and that passengers and drivers are important roles. She remembers Niko's description of the tunnels and stops. She gathers materials that she thinks will extend and deepen his play experience. She talks with her colleagues to plan further.

By Wednesday, she locates a large box to create a tunnel in the block area. She opens both ends of the box and supports the shape with blocks on each side. When the children arrive that morning, their LRT play continues to evolve with the addition of the tunnel.

By supporting their play, she has strengthened their playing with ideas, roles, and concepts of the world around.

For Reflection

- Think about how the environment supports children's playing and playful ideas. Think about how the open-ended materials and space support their imagination and creativity. How might time and routines be made more flexible to support social play, exploration, and invention through play?
- What do you see as playful about the educator's response? How do you express your playful nature with children?

- Think about the role you take in children's play and how that supports their playing and playfulness. How do you use your observations about children's playing and playfulness to extend and expand their play and learning and reflect on your participation in their play and learning?





3.2.2

Seeking

I/we are questioning.

I/we are exploring with all our senses.

I/we are wondering and are curious.

I/we are solving problems in our play and learning.





3.2.2 Seeking

I/We Are Seeking

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice and name each child's curiosity as she or he explores the world around. When you value children's seeking dispositions, you provide the experiences that engage children's wondering, questioning, and theory-building potential. Early learning is an active process and, therefore, planning and provisions that strengthen children's inquisitiveness involve experiences that engage all of their senses and whole body in exploration.

When you provide a range of open-ended materials and social play spaces inside and outside for children to actively engage in seeking, wondering, questioning, and exploration, you nurture children's natural inquisitiveness and curiosity.

There is a significant relationship between a child and other children, and each child and you, with/in learning processes that involve seeking, curiosity, wondering, and questioning dispositions. As well, play and learning experiences that invite sharing ideas, collaborating and debating, nurture the disposition to seek through the quest for multiple perspectives, ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Children are keen observers of the significant people in their lives. When you model your own disposition to seek by wondering, asking questions, and sharing your theories, children learn that the disposition to seek is valued in the early childhood community. As well, when you participate alongside and with children as co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginers of possibilities, you observe, listen, and reflect on their playing and learning experiences. In this way you are seeking a deeper understanding of each child through their playing and learning—each child as a mighty learner and citizen of the early childhood community.



Sample Narrative

The toddlers watch out the window at the leaves blowing across their play yard.

Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator

The educator observes the toddlers as they notice the blowing leaves. Their observation takes shape in the planned experiences for the day. The educator gathers a range of materials to explore flying and falling inside as well as outside. She offers the toddlers feathers, leaves, paper pieces, and ribbons, as well as some heavier objects such cardboard and recycled plastic objects. She stays close and throws the objects up and watches each of them fall. The toddlers are drawn to her and her use of the materials. Each of the children chooses objects to throw into the air. She describes what happens. The toddlers repeat her words, "Fly, fall, blow, gentle, fast..."

To deepen the children's inquisitiveness about wind and movement, the educator ties those same materials to rings that the toddlers can hold. Outside, the toddlers watch the materials blow in the wind; they let go of the rings and watch them fall to the ground.

The toddlers' play continues inside, as the rings with the tied materials are tied to a blowing fan.

For Reflection

- How do you invite children's questions and curiosity through active whole body and sensory experiences?
- Think about how the educator engaged with the toddlers in their learning and play and exploration. What do you think she understands about how these children express their seeking and questioning behaviours?
- Why do you think she moved the experience from inside to outside and inside again?
- How can you use the insight from this example in your setting and with your group of learners, in ways that will extend the children's curiosity, wondering, questioning, and seeking about their world?
- Think about how you can help children explore their own questions in active whole body and sensory play and learning for themselves and others.





3.2.3

Participating

I/we are engaging with others.

I/we are listening to others, and sharing ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

I/we are negotiating, taking turns, and observing.





3.2.3 Participating

I/We Are Participating

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice and name how each child participates in his or her own way. Valuing children's unique ways to participate, you ensure each child's equitable participation in play and learning. As an educator, you provide many opportunities for children to observe, debate, collaborate, negotiate, and express and share their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and questions with one another in many ways—both non-verbal and verbal.¹ You support children's participation with others as you notice and name, model and invite each child's unique ways to communicate and participation in play and learning experiences.

You have a crucial role to facilitate **equity** of participation in care, play and learning for each child. When you support children's social learning opportunities by facilitating each child's efforts to observe, share ideas, be heard, solve problems, and participate, you support their participation in play and learning. When you support the many ways that children participate and attend to every child's voice—the loud, the soft, and the silent, you strengthen each child's disposition to participate by acting on questions such as, "How can I help her to share her thoughts, feelings, and ideas with others?" "How do I interpret and respond to the diverse ways that children participate in the early childhood community?" "How do I model fairness, equity, and inclusive attitudes in the early childhood community?"



Sample Narrative

In the preschool playroom, many of the children are involved in block play that supports their imaginary story-play of travelling to outer space. The children have created a spaceship with seating for passengers, as well as two spaces for drivers of the spaceship. The children have a range of objects that represent space rocks, air packs, luggage, and food items.

Sasha stands at a table near the block play. He is watching the play while he absently rolls a rolling pin back and forth on the surface of the table. Not evident to an uninformed visitor, this child has limited verbal language.

Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator

The educator watches the group play for some time. He is also watching the child who is standing at the table outside of the group play. Understanding that Sasha benefits from observing his peers, the educator considers how to support him to move from an observer to an active participant in the play.

Thinking about transitional objects as helpful to mediate one's movement between spaces, he gathers a basket of play food and approaches Sasha standing at the table. "I want to go for a ride to the moon, but I am nervous. Please come with me." Sasha looks up at his educator and smiles his willingness to join him. Together they move into the block play and offer, "We would like to go to the moon. We brought lunch with us?" After a slight hesitation, tickets are offered and the two are helped to the seats in the spaceship. The play continues as Sasha sits stiffly on the block chair. As the travel, landing, and moon exploration play continues his body relaxes.

The educator remains part of the play throughout, interpreting Sasha's verbalizations and body language for the other children. All the players are learning that communication takes many forms. As well the children learn about Sasha's desire to be a participating player in the social play with them.

For Reflection

- What image of the child do you think this educator holds? How does that image connect to the role he enacts through this experience?
- Why do you think the educator's used the basket of food to enter into the children's play?

- How long do you think the educator remained part of the children's play? How can you help all children communicate their ideas with others in their play and learning? Think about how you notice and respond in situations when children are silenced by adults or peers.
- In what way does this example reflect how you see your role in the playroom you share with children?





3.2.4

Persisting

I/we are continuing through challenges and/or difficulties.

I/we are trying new strategies.

I/we are asking for help.

I/we are striving to reach our own goals.





3.2.4 Persisting

I/We Are Persisting

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice, and name for children their disposition to persist with their ideas. Children will often demonstrate their disposition to persist with experiences that are both interesting and intellectually engaging to them. Children persist when they are able to pursue their own questions and theories in play. Independently and with others, when children are exploring materials and ideas that are interesting to them, they demonstrate focused attention that matches their level of interest and as they strive to reach their own goals in learning and development.

The kind of experiences that you provide to mindfully and creatively engage children's disposition to persist are often experiences that engage them to create and test theories, ask questions, and gather information about topics of interest. As well, when children ask for help as they pursue interesting concepts, you understand that this is another way children persist. Learning environments that offer open-ended materials, space for social learning, and time for appropriately challenging inquiry nurture children's disposition to persist through asking questions of why and how, trialing and testing theories, sharing ideas, and/or telling stories.

You model and encourage persistence as a disposition to learn in the way you talk about your own trials, your own wondering, and your own questioning pursuits.



Sample Narrative

The children and educators of the preschool room begin the midmorning transition, tidying the playroom of the early morning play experiences and dressing for outdoor play.

Caleb, having just arrived a short time ago, expresses his disappointment, "I don't want to go outside!" Caleb had been enjoying bathing the dolls in the soapy water at the water table. He continues to bathe the dolls as the other children dress for the crisp autumn weather.

Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator

Recognizing Caleb's engagement with the dolls, the educator locates a doll stroller. The educator knows that Caleb is interested in baby play since the arrival of his baby sister. She also knows that Caleb enjoys outdoor play as well. The educator understands Caleb's resistance to end his doll play as a desire to persist with his ideas longer. To support Caleb's disposition to persist with the doll play, the educator considers ways that can support him to pursue his play and even extend his doll play in the outdoor environment.

"Caleb, I heard your doll say that she wants to play with the wagons, fallen leaves, and sand outside. I found this stroller. What do you think if we dress her to keep her warm today? I think she would like to play outside now that she has had her bath. She will probably get dirty again and need another bath when she is finished playing outside."

Caleb stops his protests and considers this idea. He helps to dress the doll and places it in the stroller. He then puts his own boots and coat on.

Caleb is learning that he has time to pursue his ideas in this environment. His disposition to persist with his play and learning is supported through the educator's willingness to help him continue his play ideas in both indoor and outdoor play spaces.

For Reflection

- Think about how materials, space, and time offer children opportunity to explore and build theories to investigate, independently and with others. Think about how the schedule interrupts children's persistence and perseverance with ideas and creativity in play.
- What might this educator believe about children's play and learning? What might be the outcome of this educator's decision to allow indoor toys outside?

- How can children be supported to pursue their ideas, play, and learning when routines and schedules get in the way of their disposition to persist? What is your role in supporting their persisting behaviours?
- How do you model and demonstrate your own persistence, ask your own questions, and wonder aloud with children in play and learning?





3.2.5

Caring

I/we are helping.

I/we are caring about our families,
one another, and ourselves.

I/we are caring for the world and living things.





3.2.5 Caring

I/We Are Caring

As an early learning and child care educator, you observe, notice and name the many ways that children care for family and friends in group situations. You understand that caring is learned within respectful and reciprocal relationships. Through being cared for and through seeing caring attitudes and behaviours in others, children learn about many ways to care for self, others, materials and the environment. When you observe, listen, and reflect on ways that caring can be enacted, you are better prepared to acknowledge and nurture each child's disposition to care.

You and your colleagues model caring attitudes through your actions and interactions with families, with colleagues, and with children. You know how attuned children are to the actions of adults, how adults care for others, and how adults care for the environment. When diversity and differences are respected through flexible routines and transitions and diverse learning experiences, children learn that diversity and differences are valued with/in the learning community. When you approach routines in flexible ways to accommodate the time it takes for a child to help another child, children learn that they can actively care for one another. When you notice and name children's efforts to care for the environment and materials, living things and others, and help children to take positive actions in equitable ways, children learn that their concerns are valued and that their actions can have a positive influence in the community, locally and globally.



Sample Narrative	Your Role as Early Learning and Child Care Educator
<p>The children notice the prints in the snow. They talk about what animal might have left the prints they have been seeing.</p>	<p>The educators respond to the children's excitement. An educator wonders aloud, "I wonder why the hare is visiting our play yard."</p>
<p>Later in the day, Raj is observed as he watches out the playroom window and sees a hare hopping across the play yard. His excitement draws many of the children to the window, but they are too late—the hare has already disappeared under the fence. The children conclude that the hare is the animal visitor leaving prints in the snow.</p>	<p>Raj declares, "He is looking for food." This response reveals what he understands about the physical needs of living things.</p>
	<p>The educator inquires further, "What do you think he might eat?"</p>
	<p>With help from the educators, Raj along with several of his friends make a list of possible food items and then make plans to collect the food.</p>
	<p>The following day, the educators and the children place the selected food outside, near the window and under a tree. The children have selected the place for the hare to eat declaring, "He will be safe by the tree branches."</p>
	<p>Over many days, the children watch for their new friend. They replenish the food that continues to disappear. Surprised, they have learned that the hare likes fruit more than carrots. They are eager to read many informational books to learn more.</p>
	<p>The educators recognize that this experience is connected to the children's disposition to care. By responding positively, and supporting the children's ideas, they support and strengthen the children's caring attitudes and learning about living things.</p>

For Reflection

- What do you think the educators might have to suspend in the way of planned experiences to follow the spontaneous interests of young children?
- In what ways do you think adult ideas of caring overshadow children's natural disposition to care?

