



3.1

Holistic Play-Based Goals



We cannot consider one aspect of a child’s care, play, learning, and development without considering the whole context of family, social, and cultural practices and traditions and the early childhood community.

Everything children do has meaning for them. Curriculum decisions in early learning and child care begin with children.

3.1 Holistic Play-Based Goals

The holistic play-based goals of Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework have been adopted from the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*.¹ As developers of the Alberta curriculum framework, we discovered through the development and advisory process that New Brunswick’s carefully researched goals, grounded in a socio-cultural perspective of early learning, resonate with what we want for children in Alberta.

We use the terms “holistic” and “play-based” to describe the Alberta goals. The word **holistic** means that we always consider the whole child in our work—intricately entwined in relationships, in play, in learning, and the environment. Children’s care, play, learning, and development are always considered within the context of family, social, and **cultural practices** and traditions and the early childhood community. The word **play-based** brings attention to the central role of play in curriculum **meaning making**. Children’s **play** is central to this curriculum framework as an active, exploratory, creative, expressive process, deeply embedded in children’s everyday experiences and through which children participate in, learn about, and actively make sense of the world.

Everything children do has meaning for them.

Curriculum decisions in early learning and child care begin with children. These goals help early learning and child care educators think about and describe what children are experiencing in the early childhood environment and consider further possibilities that can enrich children’s care, play, learning, and development. In addition, the goals provide educators with a common professional language as they share the stories of children’s experiences with families and colleagues.

The four holistic play-based goals can be used to reflect on and interpret the experiences of children, including infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Each goal is expanded into three facets—aspects of the broader goal. Each goal facet is further expanded into a list of descriptors. Goal descriptors can be used to describe what children are doing in their care, play, learning, and development. In this way, educators can begin to talk to one another and to families about children’s experiences using a common language. Along with the descriptors is a section called “For Reflection.” The questions and prompts are



intended to support reflection and planning. These questions and prompts are intended as starting points. Educators may have further questions and wonderings that emerge from their own understanding and relationships with children and families.

Although each goal provides a frame for thinking about care, play, learning, and development there is an overlapping and integration of the goals. When educators use the goals to describe children's experiences, the relationships and connections between them are immediately obvious, for example, how play and playfulness contribute to well-being. The holistic nature of the goals means that one cannot be considered in isolation from the others; they are integral to children's daily experiences.

Each of the goals—**Well-Being, Play and Playfulness, Communication and Literacies, Diversity and Social Responsibility**—are briefly described below.

Well-Being expands into three facets: emotional health and positive self-identity, sense of belonging, and physical health. This goal helps educators to see and describe how children develop a sense of themselves, a sense of belonging as citizens, and a sense of place: "Who am I? How do I belong?" As well, this goal helps educators to see how children develop an understanding of their health, safety, and physical abilities.

Play and Playfulness expand into three facets: imagination and creativity, playful exploration and problem solving, and dizzy play. This goal helps educators to see many ways that children use imagination, creativity, exploration, and problem solving in their participation in active and **agentic** play and learning. Dizzy play is a relatively new term used to describe the important learning and development that happens for children when they create disorder and reorder within playful experiences. Elements of dizzy play are present in experiences such as rough and tumble play, full body exploration, and humour and language play.

Communication and Literacies expand into three facets: communicative practices, **multimodal literacies**, and literate identities with/in communities. This goal helps educators to see the many diverse communication processes that children use to express their ideas, including spoken languages and non-verbal gestures. Multimodal literacies describe the many ways

Katie, an educator, explains, "The goals helped me to see what the children are already doing and to consider further possibilities."²



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– Brittany, ELCC Educator³



possible to express and represent ideas, thoughts, and feelings and include language, art, music, math, movement, and dance. As well, communication and literacies are deeply embedded in social and cultural practices, stories, popular culture, media, and digital technology.

Diversity and Social Responsibility expand into three facets: inclusiveness and **equity**, democratic practices, and sustainable futures. This goal helps educators to see children as citizens—members of a diverse community who have caring relationships and responsibility for both the social and physical world. This goal also provokes educators to consider and guide opportunities for children to participate in democratic practices that involve making decisions, expressing opinions, and speaking against perceived injustices, as well as to nurture ethical responsibility for and stewardship of our environment.

Using the Curriculum Framework Goals to Interpret Children’s Experiences

As we developed the Alberta curriculum framework, we engaged with educators in curriculum meaning-making dialogues beginning with documented moments of children’s experiences. When educators use the curriculum goal descriptors to interpret what children are already doing in their play, they express appreciation for a language that describes what they sense about children’s play and active learning processes. “I have always known that children’s play was important; now I have the words that help me to explain to families and visitors what the children are doing in their play.”³ The following examples illustrate what an educator might observe a child doing, how she might look to the curriculum framework goals as an interpretation, and what next steps might be considered for planning.



Observation of a child at play (Observing and Documenting)	What does it mean? (Reflecting and Interpreting) Goal, facet, and descriptors	Possible next steps (Planning and Taking Action)
<p>Khalil picks up a rock and tosses it into the kiddie pool that is filled with water. He repeats this process again and again. With each toss of a rock, he watches it splash. He selects a tiny pebble and tosses it, watching the plop it makes as it passes through the water surface. He selects a larger rock that fills his palm. Again he tosses it and watches the splash that it makes. He selects another larger rock and smiles as he watches the splash that it makes.</p>	<p>Goal: Play and Playfulness</p> <p>Facet: Playful Exploration and Problem Solving</p> <p>Descriptor: Children learn about the properties of objects through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •• playfully exploring and investigating the properties of objects •• experimenting with action and reaction, cause and effect 	<p>Additional materials are collected that promote further exploration, both challenging the size-splash relationship, as well as provoking wonder about the concept of floating and sinking. Time and space are provided for further exploration.</p>
<p>Greta finds a caterpillar on a bush. She carefully picks it up and places it in the palm of her hand. She runs to her friend who is playing in the sand nearby. "Look what I have," she exclaims, with her hand stretched out toward her friend. A small group gathers around her to look at her find. She explains, "It's a baby. When it grows up it will be a beautiful butterfly." Zeb seems excited for his turn. Greta assures him, "You can hold it in two minutes." Zeb seems pacified by Greta's promise.</p>	<p>Goal: Diversity and Social Responsibility</p> <p>Facet: Sustainable Futures</p> <p>Descriptor: Children develop a sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •• bringing all their senses to exploring nature •• taking pleasure in natural beauty •• connecting to and respecting the natural world 	<p>Photos are taken of the caterpillar and the children. These images are printed and displayed along with pastel crayons and paper on one table and on another table an image is provided along with plasticine. The educators wonder if the children will create images of a caterpillar as well as images of the caterpillar's butterfly or moth phase.</p>



Co-inquiry is a learning and research process that helps educators to co-construct knowledge with children. It involves observation and documentation, reflection and interpretation, and planning and taking action.⁴

As educators, your work with the curriculum framework goals, facets, and descriptors can deepen your understanding of each child. In turn your insights of each child, as an active and agentic social learner, help you design **responsive care**, play, and learning environments. Each child is a mighty learner who is actively engaging his or her dispositions to learn—playing, seeking, participating, persisting, and caring. As well, as you work with the curriculum framework goals, you may begin to imagine further possibilities for nurturing and strengthening each child’s dispositions to learn.

The early learning and care framework can guide a way of being with children—a way of thinking about what children know and can do and want to be doing; and what you can do to extend and expand children’s participation with others and within a responsive play and learning environment. Your role as co-learner, co-researcher, co-imagining possibilities alongside children is supported when you use the curriculum framework as an interpretive tool—an informed perspective to help you understand what children are doing and trying to accomplish in their play, learning, development, and in care routines.

As a co-learner, you observe, document, and think about what children are doing with materials, ideas, and others. As a co-researcher, you gather insights and information and use the curriculum framework goals to reflect on and interpret what you understand about what children are experiencing. The process of observing and documenting and reflecting and interpreting supports your planning and taking action in ways that can expand, extend, and enhance children’s engagement with ideas, materials, and others. As a co-imaginer of possibilities, you may work with families or colleagues to take action through designing of play spaces, gathering materials, or planning a visit into the community that enhances the children’s experiences.

The process of observing and documenting, reflecting and interpreting, and planning and taking action is introduced here as a **co-inquiry** process.⁴ The co-inquiry process supports you in your role as co-learner, co-researcher, and co-imaginer of possibilities. It is a process that is made visible through documentation and **learning stories** that highlight children’s daily experiences.



Observing and Documenting

Being curious about what children are doing and wanting to accomplish in their play, learning, and development situates you as a co-learner alongside them. Your recorded observations might be an assortment of many different forms of documentation, such as photos, video, audio recording, anecdotal notes, and collected artifacts made by children and/or scribed words expressed by children. As you revisit and reflect on your documentation, you might begin to see patterns in children's play, such as continued interests, repeated use of objects, common play groups. As well, you may notice and name particular dispositions to learn that a child demonstrates in care, play, learning, and development.

Reflecting and Interpreting

Reflecting on your observations and documentation may cause you to have further questions. You may begin to wonder: How are other children using this play space? In what other situations does this child explore her persistence? What other natural materials will encourage seeking for these children? What other materials would nurture his participation in play? In what other ways does this child demonstrate her caring for others? Thinking about what you saw children doing and trying to accomplish, what surprised you? You may have questions for the child's family or your colleagues regarding how a child is approaching particular ideas, materials, and social play experiences.

The curriculum framework goals can be used to interpret your observations of the children's play, learning, and development. As a co-researcher you may also gather insights from families and colleagues to help you understand more deeply what children are doing or trying to accomplish in their play, learning, and development. Consider an article you read recently about this or connect this to a workshop you attended. Seeking additional information and insights from children, families, and colleagues, workshops, professional journals and books, and conferences can help you to further understand your observations and reflections of children's experiences and your curriculum decisions.



Planning and Taking Action

Your observation and documentation and reflection and interpretation inspire further experiences that invite children to pursue their ideas and theories, challenge ideas, explore, invent, create, and play in active ways that engage their senses and whole body movement. Co-imagining possibilities is made more dynamic as you invite the children, families, and colleagues to invent and create further opportunities to expand on children's experiences. Your curriculum decisions are made visible in the design of a responsive play and learning environment and the design of care routines, as well as your interactions with children and families.

The various forms of documentation mentioned above, as well as learning story documentation, are tools that help you to create a history of what has taken place in the early childhood community and, also, are tools for reflecting on your curriculum decisions. The curriculum goals help you to see what children know and can do, as well as consider further possibilities for their care, play, learning, and development. At the same time, the goals provide you with a professional language to describe what children know, do, and want to do. The **Reflection and Planning Guide** can support your reflection on the co-inquiry process in the design of the care, play, and learning environment and for further information regarding documentation and learning-story documentation, visit flightframework.ca.

As you work with children and make meaning of what they are doing and want to be doing, the curriculum framework goals support you to observe and document, reflect and interpret, and plan and take action for further possibilities. As you work with these goals, you may begin to see your own areas of strength. You may also see areas and possibilities that you might not have considered previously, such as engaging children in caring for the natural world, or inviting family stories, or looking for opportunities in the community to plant with the children. We encourage you to always begin with the children and to use the goals in ways that help you to see what is and what might yet be.



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The following material, pages 91–114, is reprinted with permission from Section Two of the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Care—English*, “Goals for Early Learning and Care.”¹



Well-Being

Children experience safe and caring environments where their emotional and physical health, positive identities, and sense of belonging are nurtured and protected.

This goal has three facets:

- Emotional Health and Positive Identities
- Belonging
- Physical Health



Play and Playfulness

Children experience open and flexible environments where playful exploration, problem solving and creativity are encouraged and purposefully planned.

This goal has three facets:

- Imagination and Creativity
- Playful Exploration and Problem Solving
- Dizzy Play



Communication and Literacies

Children experience intellectually, socially, and culturally engaging environments where their communicative practices, languages, literacies, and literate identities are valued and supported.

This goal has three facets:

- Communicative Practices
- Multimodal Literacies
- Literate Identities With/In Communities



Diversity and Social Responsibility

Children experience socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments in which consideration for others, inclusive, equitable, democratic, and sustainable practices are enacted, and social responsibility is nurtured.

This goal has three facets:

- Inclusiveness and Equity
- Democratic Practices
- Sustainable Futures

