

Intentional, Play-Based Learning in Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK)

The Question:

As an instructional leader, how can I support implementation of intentional, play-based learning among FDK educator team(s) and staff?

The Answer:

There are five important elements to consider:

1. Understanding intentional, play-based learning;
2. Establishing an optimal early learning environment;
3. Supporting the FDK educator team;
4. Making learning visible;
5. Communicating with families and the community.

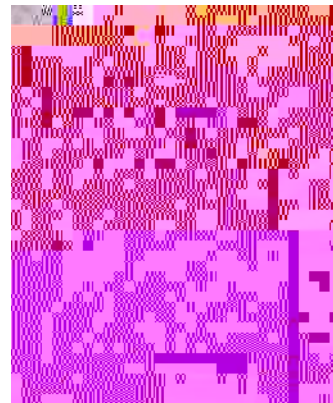
1. UNDERSTANDING INTENTIONAL, PLAY-BASED LEARNING

It has long been acknowledged that there is a strong link between play and learning for young children, especially in the areas of problem solving, language acquisition, literacy, numeracy, and social, physical, and emotional skills.

The Full-Day Early Learning - Kindergarten Program, (Draft 2010-2011)

Young children explore their environment and learn about their world through the process of play-based learning. Effective FDK classrooms use play to further children's learning and inspire a high level of engagement and curiosity in all areas of the program. Some features include:

- x large blocks of time dedicated to intentional, play-based learning in the flow of the day;
- x allowing children to be "in charge" of their play;
- x hands-on, inquiry-based learning experiences that foster exploration, problem solving, discovery and dramatization;
- x intentional planning of learning opportunities based on observation of children's development and interests;
- x classroom materials that are meaningful, inclusive, open-ended and change over time to reflect the ideas



and questions children are exploring;

- x opportunities for whole class, small group and individual learning;
- x representing children's thinking and learning in diverse ways; and
- x embedding literacy and numeracy experiences in play scenarios.

2. ESTABLISHING AN OPTIMAL EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The effective use of time, space and materials is an important consideration in establishing optimal early-learning environments that foster purposeful play-based learning. School leaders can support this by:

- x encouraging the use of all available space in the school and the outdoors as places for inquiry and learning;
- x reviewing furniture needs and removing clutter to maximize space for children;
- x aligning the purchase of classroom resources and materials with play-based, inquiry learning;
- x promoting the use of natural materials from the environment;
- x viewing the environment as a teacher with a deliberate design of learning areas;
- x ensuring documentation reflects children engaged in play and display their learning and thinking;

- observation and documentation during play;
- x providing new technologies for capturing and documenting children's learning;
- x organizing visits to other FDK classes that demonstrate effective use of space, time and materials;
- x facilitating the sharing of resources among classes to optimize experiences for all children; and
- x considering the flow of the day in FDK when developing the timetable for the school.

Early childhood settings can help to change the daily lives of children and their families.

Early Learning for Every Child Today, 2007

3. SUPPORTING THE FDK EDUCATOR TEAM

In a play-based early learning program, educators make thoughtful, intentional decisions by:

- x planning for play throughout the day;
- x choosing materials and organizing the learning environment to promote different forms of play;
- x co-constructing learning with children, capitalizing on their interests and needs;
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