

WHY PLAY?

Play is how every child learns, regardless of age. It is instrumental for the emotional, social, cognitive and physical growth, and overall well-being of the child. Play is not a luxury or a whim, it is what children need as part of their primary school day in order to learn effectively. The gift of play is that when we embrace play in school, we restore joy and enthusiasm for both teaching and learning.

ETFO has long supported the position of play-based learning as essential for children in all elementary grades. Play strengthens non-cognitive skills such as persistence, motivation, and self-esteem, and promotes individual and societal success. The qualities developed through play are the same as those required to succeed in school. Come and join us as we look into the primary classroom and observe children playing to learn. Rediscover for yourself the gratifying sound and look of children engaged in play to learn.

Simply put, play is the most natural method of learning the most consequential curriculum content. Play is not an add-on to the school day, but rather an effective way of addressing skills and concepts that cut across all areas of curriculum. It extends the curriculum and supports the learning that takes place through instruction.

The balance between teacher-directed instruction and self-directed play shifts as children advance through the school system. As they mature, students are increasingly able to take advantage of instruction however, they still benefit significantly from self-directed learning through play.

Educators actively support student learning with purposeful planning and decision-making before, during, and after play. Educators dedicate time and effort to make informed decisions about how to organize the classroom and which materials to make available to optimize learning through play.

By planning time for children to play freely, educators are able to observe children and gain valuable insight into their choices, interests and needs so as to determine the best strategies for addressing individual and group challenges.

There are numerous challenges to the implementation of play-based learning in the primary grades. Perhaps the greatest challenge of all is the intense stress on academic learning, to the exclusion of instruction-through-play. This demand for achievement at all costs is currently pressing on our children, and pressuring our educators to deliver curriculum in a formal, didactic instructional way. At the same time, educators know the value of play for fostering, motivating and sustaining learning.

To successfully support classroom learning, educators have to take charge and actively engage in the learning process alongside their students, taking risks with play-based learning and persevering a meaningful process of inquiry in the delivery of curriculum. Playful, joyful learning for all!

