



## An Invitation to Rethink Early Childhood Learning



*Developed in collaboration with key partners from across the province, the new Early Learning Framework is an opportunity to rethink how we can better support the early learning experiences of children from birth through age eight.*

In 2008 the Ministry of Education published the [first B.C. Early Learning Framework](#), which served to broaden the dialogue about early learning in our province. This document described a vision, pedagogical principles and key areas of learning for children from birth to 5 years. It shared an idea of young children as persons with complex identities, grounded in their individual strengths and capacities, and in their unique social, linguistic, and cultural heritage.

Since 2008, there have been significant developments in the social, economic, and cultural context of B.C. that have created new realities for children, families, and communities. These new realities require consideration of concepts, language, and connections that revitalize the thinking about practice.



## A New Vision for Early Learning in BC

Released in September 2019, the revised Early Learning Framework is the culmination of a collaborative process that included early childhood educators, primary teachers, academics, Indigenous organizations, Elders, government and other professionals. Hundreds of people across the province contributed their feedback on drafts of this framework through provincial regional sessions, town hall conference calls, an online survey, advisory group sessions and numerous consultation meetings. Central to these discussions was the acknowledgement that this framework has been, and continues to be, vital to early years practices for educators, children and families in B.C.

One of the many people involved in developing the framework was Alison Bledsoe, an early childhood educator with over 25 years of experience in diverse settings – from front-line childcare worker to non-profit agency manager and her current roles as a consultant and post-secondary educator in early childhood education.

“One of the hallmarks of a profession is having a shared body of knowledge that you can work from, whether that be guidelines, standards or competencies,” says Bledsoe. “For me, this framework is a place where that shared knowledge can come together. This is evidence-informed practice that articulates the intention behind what we do. But a shared body of knowledge and practice does not mean ‘the same.’ There is no singular way to be an early child educator, just as there is no singular way of being a child or family. The heart of the framework is the honouring of diversity and multiple perspectives.”







This emphasis on multiple perspectives is integral to the framework – and reflects the reality of the many spaces in which young children and their families learn and thrive across BC. These include for-profit and not-for-profit childcare centres, preschools, school-based programs like StrongStart BC and many other early year programs. The framework supports those who are working with children in these diverse settings. It is also intended for educators and post-secondary students in early childhood and elementary education programs, primary school teachers, principals and vice-principals, communities, governments and families.



## What's New in the Framework

Many elements of the framework have changed from the 2008 document. The most notable are:

- an expanded focus on children from infancy to the age of eight (previously to the age of five)
- an emphasis on reconciliation and Indigenous worldviews
- a greater focus on inclusive practices through discovery and inquiry as well as attending to place and history
- stronger connections with the new K-12 curriculum, core competencies and primary program principles
- an integration of theory and practice
- updated inquiry questions that address all early learners



As Bledsoe explains, this is a framework, not a prescriptive rule book:

*“The framework is really an invitation to reflect and question. And let’s face it – most days the work in early childhood learning environments is frenetic and that makes it challenging to carve out the time to be reflective about our practice. Facilitated spaces and resources like this framework are important tools for us to accept the invitation and continue being thoughtful about what we are doing, how we are doing it and why we are doing it.”*

To that end, the framework includes a series of *living inquiries* (formerly known as “areas of learning”) and *pathways* (previously known as “learning goals”). Resources throughout the framework encourage critical reflection on practice.

Pathways for Engaging with Others, Materials, and the World	
Pathways	Critically reflective questions
Local community connections	<p>How might families, community members, Elders, and intergenerational knowledge holders be welcomed to enrich children’s theories?</p> <p>How can children’s theories be made visible to the broader community? What local partnerships might I find that would be helpful?</p> <p>How can I connect or reconnect to local Indigenous communities?</p> <p>What relationships in the community could be cultivated? (Think about gardens, hospitals, seniors’ organizations, farms, galleries, museums, academic institutions, industry, or cultural organizations.)</p> <p>How might my setting become a place of gathering for cross-generational learning?</p>

“The way the document is set up – with pathways for engaging and looking critically at practice and a series of reflective questions – is intended to support and inspire people to think about their current practice and be curious about other ways of doing things,” says Carol Johns, a recently retired Kindergarten teacher who was one of the primary educators asked to review the draft framework.



## Ensuring Smooth Transitions

The framework's alignment with the redesigned BC curriculum – and its extension beyond Kindergarten to include children in grades 1 through 3 makes it relevant for all K-12 educators, and in particular those who are connected to the primary years program.

Says Johns:

*“One of the real strengths of this framework is its expanded focus from birth to age eight, which includes the early primary years, and looking at how we can make that transition smoother. That’s partly achieved with the philosophical alignment between the Early Learning Framework and the Core Competencies and pedagogy of the new curriculum. The embedding of the First Peoples Principles of Learning in the framework is also an inspiring and important link between the early years and primary years.”*

Research shows that continuity in pedagogy between early learning and primary school supports children's successful transition. Bledsoe sees this as one of the key benefits of the framework. “It bridges the shared knowledge and shared practice between community and schools in what has often been siloed educator roles,” she says. “This has the potential to better support children and families in their transition from community-based to school-based education, and ultimately offers the potential to positively impact everyone involved.”

Both Johns and Bledsoe are clear that the power of the framework will come from its implementation and use. “A framework is essential, but a document alone is not enough,” says Bledsoe. “We need to be thoughtful about the strategies that will support the vision of the framework.”

In some ways, this is more challenging for the early learning community than it is for the community of educators in K-12 given the diverse range of learning environments. For Bledsoe, this emphasizes the vital importance of working within the specificity of your local context. “Each child is unique. Children grow up within families, families grow up in communities and all communities are different. That’s the beauty of BC. And it means we can’t have one provincial roll-out strategy. We need to look at the local context and ask ‘what will make a meaningful difference here? Tell me where you are at and what would be helpful? And how does this invitation to engage with the framework fit with your needs and those of your students?’”



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## Learn More

- › Read the [new British Columbia Early Learning Framework](#)
- › The framework is supported by two companion guides: [Play Today: BC Handbook](#) explores play-based learning for grades K-3 from a practical, research-focused lens; [Let's Play!](#) is full of activities for children and caregivers to play and learn together.
- › The new Early Learning Framework aligns with [Child Care B.C. Caring for Kids, Lifting Up Families: The Path to Universal Child Care](#) in which the Province committed to doing more to integrate child care and education.