Importance of Play

Spontaneous play is natural and healthy for children. Children learn best through play. Through play, all areas of a child’s development can be enhanced. Play positively supports children’s social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language and literacy skills, is essential to a child’s overall healthy development (Ginsburg, 2007; Packer Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002) and enhances self-regulation. Daily physical and active play for children is recommended by the Canadian Paediatric Society (Grenier & Leduc, 2008), to foster optimal development. The right to play is also recognized for all children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2009) states that “play offers a key way to support the learning of whole children in developmentally appropriate play” (p23). Play, therefore, is an important vehicle that promotes children’s school readiness or preparation for school.

Stages of Play

Since the 1800s, the play of children has been the focus of considerable study. One aspect of play, the various stages of play through which children progress, has been observed and recorded extensively. Mildred Parten (1932; 1933) categorized the stages of play in pre-school children.

In her famous study, Parten (1932) developed six categories of social participation among preschool children. Her play categories are still actively used by educators today. They include:

1. Unoccupied behaviour - not engaged in any activity
2. Solitary independent play - child playing alone, no other children within 1 meter (3 feet)
3. Onlooker behaviour - child observing others play but not joining in
4. Parallel play - child playing next to others without verbal interaction
5. Associative play - verbal interaction, but few attempts to organize the play situation
6. Co-operative or organized supplementary play - each child taking an active role to plan and structure the play situation while collaborating with each other.
Parten found that with increasing age, the children tended to participate in more social forms of play. Younger children tended to engage in more unoccupied behaviour, onlooker behaviour and solitary play, while older preschoolers engaged in more cooperative play.

Sara Smilansky is known for her four stages of play. These play stages are considered to reflect a child’s cognitive development. Smilansky’s four stages consist of:

1. Functional play (also called practice play)
2. Constructive play - children create or assemble a structure or object
3. Dramatic or symbolic play
4. Games with rules

Functional play includes the investigation of the properties and functions of objects through sensory motor exploration. When we are introduced to a new medium like clay for the first time we all may pinch, poke and pull apart the clay in functional play. When children are “stuck” using functional play and do not move with time and experience from pinching, poking and pulling clay to rolling it and forming shapes and eventually creating objects then it may be time to intervene.

Play can also be classified into play behaviour that corresponds to some developmental domains, although there is always considerable overlap:

- Locomotor play - physical
- Social play - social/emotional
- Pretend play - social/emotional
- Object play - cognitive
- Language play - language and literacy

(Smith & Pellegrini, 2008)

It has been found that children engage in increasingly more complex stages of play as they get older. Rubin, Watson & Jambor (1978) found:

- Infants engage in solitary-functional play
- Toddlers engage in parallel-functional play
- Preschoolers engage in associative play, constructive play and dramatic play
- Four- and five-year-olds engage in cooperative-constructive play, socio-dramatic play and begin to play games with rules
- Kindergarten and school-age children engage in elaborate cooperative-constructive play, socio-dramatic play and games with rules
There are times when individual children choose solitary play. A master lego builder, for example, may want the concentration allowed in solitary play. When day after day is spent in solitary play, and play seems “stuck,” adults should extend their observations to determine if:

- The child is being isolated by peers
- The child has some emerging interest and social skills
- The child chooses to play alone
- The child needs some assistance to move beyond the present form and level of play

Benefits of Play in Children’s Development

As an essential part of childhood, studies have shown that play has a positive impact on children’s overall development. The positive benefits of play on a child’s social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language and literacy development have been well documented (Ginsburg, 2007; Pronin Fromberg, 2002; Roskos & Christie, 2000; Zigler, Singer & Bishop-Josef, 2004).

◆ What are some of the benefits of play for young children?
- Play enhances children’s creativity and problem-solving (Smith & Simon, 1984).
- Play contributes to the development of self-regulation and social skills such as turn-taking, collaboration and following rules, empathy and motivation (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Krafft & Berk, 1998).
- Children, who engage in social and dramatic play, are better able to take others’ perspectives, and are viewed as more intellectually and socially competent by their teachers (Connolly & Doyle, 1984; Sawyer, 2001).
- Outdoor play helps to promote children’s physical well-being, attention, conflict resolution, coordination, muscle development and healthy weights (Clements & Jarrett, 2000; Council on Physical Education for Children, 2001; Fjortoft, 2001; National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, 2002).
- Adding literacy-related materials to dramatic play centres, increases reading and writing activities and use of more varied language (Bagley & Klass, 1997; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Stone & Christie, 1996).
- Children, who play out events in a story, have improved story comprehension and develop a stronger theory of mind (i.e., the understanding that others have different feelings, thoughts, views and beliefs) (Pellegrini & Galda, 1980).
- Positive links between children's dramatic play and early reading achievement have been found (Pellegrini, 1980).
School Readiness

What is School Readiness?

In recent years, areas such as school readiness and school transition have received considerable attention. Even the terminology is not consistently defined. Generally in Ontario professionals use the following terms:

◆ ‘Transition to school’ is the terminology used for programs that prepare children to move to a more formal setting. It usually includes three- to five-year-olds and includes three different types of programs.

◆ **Preschool** is a play-based setting that supports learning for two- to five-year-olds. Preschool programs can be formal or informal and are offered through a variety of public and private organizations. Preschool is not mandatory and may have fees associated with participation.

◆ **Junior Kindergarten (JK)** is usually, but not always, offered in a school-based setting to support the beginnings of curriculum-based learning. Children are usually three or four years old at entry to JK and four or five years old by completion of a JK program. JK is publicly funded and attendance is voluntary.

◆ **Senior Kindergarten (SK)** is offered in a school-based setting in all schools across Ontario as a publicly-funded ‘transition to school’ program for four- and five-year-olds (at start of school-year). SK is a mandatory program in Ontario.

◆ **Full-Day Kindergarten** was introduced in Ontario schools in 2010. Both JK and SK are now offered as full-day programs across Ontario.

◆ ‘School readiness’ or ‘being prepared for school’ is the terminology used to indicate that a child is ready to enter Grade 1. Children entering Grade 1 are usually five or six years old in Ontario.
School Readiness

Section 4 School Readiness Through Play

◆ In the report: *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, Charles Pascal (2009a p5) sets the goals for every child in Ontario to enter the primary grades:
  - “Healthy and secure
  - Emotionally and socially competent
  - Eager, confident and successful learners and
  - Respectful of the diversity of their peers.”

A child’s ability to learn depends on how well she has mastered the art of self-regulation. Posner & Rothbart (2006) show that there is a sensitive period, when self-regulation can be enhanced, between the ages of three to five. During this time, the area of the brain that supports the development of self-regulation, experiences a major growth spurt. While self-regulation continues to develop into adulthood, having acquired age-appropriate self-regulation by the time a child enters formal schooling, will benefit her learning trajectory. Following directions, staying on task and managing emotions and social situations are the skills that will allow the child to focus on her academic activities. Self-regulation develops well in an environment that provides;

◆ Opportunities for playful learning by stimulating the child’s imagination and curiosity
◆ Caregivers that respond to the child’s cues warmly, sensitively and consistently

Children, experiencing circumstances that do not encourage healthy development and developmentally-appropriate play, will greatly benefit from early interventions, before brain processes have become entrenched (Tierney & Nelson, 2009). The fundamental neural pathways for the development of self-regulation are more difficult to acquire after the age of six. The foundation, therefore, must be laid in the early years (Shonkoff & Philips, 2009).

Factors Affecting School Readiness

◆ School readiness consists of three areas:
  - The child’s readiness for school
  - The school’s readiness for children
  - The family and community’s ability to support healthy child development (High, 2008)

Professionals can play a role in enhancing the readiness within all three areas.
Two primary factors have been noted to promote the individual child’s school readiness:

- Participation in quality early childhood education and care programs is an important factor that promotes school readiness (Boethel, 2004; Zigler & Styfco, 2003) and has been linked to the following improvements:
  - Language development, early literacy and numeracy skills (Barnett, Lamy & Jung, 2005; Berlinski, Galiani & Gertler, 2006; Magnuson et al., 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)
  - Self-esteem, behaviour skills and attention skills (Barnett, 1995, 2004; Berlinski, Galiani & Gertler, 2006; McCall, Larsen & Ingram, 2003)
  - High-quality early childhood programming has also proven to be particularly effective for children from high-risk, low-income families (Barnett, 2008; Magnuson et al., 2004; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). High-quality programs encourage age-appropriate play-based learning

The 2013 research report, Starting Early: Teaching, Learning and Assessment, released by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), reported that “students with low Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores - i.e., those in the vulnerable or at risk groups - were much less likely to achieve the provincial standard on the Grade 3 EQAO reading, writing and mathematics assessment than those with high EDI scores - i.e., those students deemed to be ready or very ready in kindergarten.” (Calman & Crawford, 2013). (The EDI is a questionnaire, developed at the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University that measures five core areas of early child development that are known to be good predictors of education, adult health and social outcomes.) Despite this fact, amongst the students that were identified as vulnerable for language and cognitive development in kindergarten, 30% achieved the provincial standard in Grade 3 for reading and 44% for writing. Results for the students that were identified as at risk were even stronger, with 49% and 60% achieving the provincial standard in Grade 3 for reading and writing. This suggests that early assessment, support and intervention are critical to a child’s academic success. This report can be found at: www.eqao.com/en/research_data/Research_Reports/DMA-docs/starting-early.pdf#search=starting%20early.

- The direct involvement of caregivers in their child’s early learning and development also enhances school readiness. Research has demonstrated that active involvement of caregivers in the child’s preschool program improves her success in school (Jordan & Rodriguez 2004). Children from low-income families, not surprisingly, benefit significantly from programs with caregiver engagement (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).
Unfortunately, not all children arrive at school with the same types of positive early experiences. There are a number of issues which contribute to a child’s lack of school readiness and may need to be addressed. They include:

- Issues related to preschool programs – insufficient number, cost, wait lists
- Income-related factors including poverty, overcrowding in the home, lack of parental education or inability to provide school transition resources
- Parenting factors including coping strategies, mental health issues or lack of understanding of the importance of school transition programs
- Child factors including lack of social skills, physical activity or the impact of media overuse (e.g., television, internet)
- Insufficient access to safe spaces where children can play or insufficient play structures or equipment
- Lack of awareness or resources to support children’s play
- Lack of consensus of the “school readiness” definition across disciplines (e.g., health, education, social services)
- Lack of support services, such as literacy programs for newcomers

(Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2009; National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, 2008)

All areas of a child’s development need to be nurtured through learning-based play, in order to enhance school readiness. Considering that school readiness indicators are all interconnected, support in one area can positively influence other domains. For some additional ideas of ways to enhance healthy child outcomes, view Ways to Support School Readiness through Play in this section as well as Section 6, Frequently Asked Questions (Supporting All Children). Health and physical development, social and emotional development, language development, cognition and approaches to learning should be considered when promoting a child’s school readiness (High, 2009).

- When a child is engaged in play with caregivers and other adults in a warm and responsive relationship, she will develop qualities that will help her succeed in school:
  - Strong oral communications skills
  - Confidence
  - The ability to make friends
  - Persistent, creative problem-solving
  - Task completion
  - Curiosity
  - Eagerness to learn
In homes and early learning programs, where security forms the foundation for exploration and learning, each child learns a number of things that increases her readiness to learn:

- Increased awareness of and modification of emotions
- Ability to focus and shift attention
- Ability to control impulses, tolerate frustration, delay gratification
- Ability to relate to others

All children are unique with strengths that provide a foundation for facing the challenges that emerge as they grow and develop. The skills and experiences listed here will vary because of individual differences, diverse early learning experiences and the context in which the skills emerge. The lists below can be seen as a background for school entry but not an inventory that fits all children the same way.

To assess each child’s unique development when preparing to enter JK or SK, view Section 3, Children’s Development (Preschooler Development by Age and Domain).

Health and Physical Development

As one aspect of school readiness, the area of health and physical development covers a wide range of important indicators. First and foremost, a child’s basic needs must be met, including the provision of healthy food and adequate sleep. Children are unable to maximize the learning experiences within an educational setting if they are constantly hungry or tired. A child’s fine and gross motor skill development also affects school readiness. For example, if a child is unable to hold a pencil properly, future writing skills are impacted.
School Readiness

Section 4  School Readiness Through Play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health and physical domain</th>
<th>Where to find more information</th>
<th>Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child’s readiness to learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Healthy and adequate nutrition | Section 3                      | • Eat according to *Eating Healthy with Canada’s Food Guide*.  
• Have breakfast before school. |
| Adequate sleep | Section 3                      | • Have a regular bedtime and getting up routine.  
• Have a nap or quiet time with books or quiet toys during the day. |
| Physical activity and active play | Section 3                      | • Be physically active for at least 60 minutes throughout the day.  
• Engage in active play both indoors and outdoors.  
• Watch less than two hours of TV or computer screens per day. |

For ideas and strategies see: www.haveaballtogether.ca

| Hearing | Section 3                      | • Have passed hearing screening shortly after birth.  
• Have a hearing check if there have been any concerns, such as frequent ear infections, prematurity, antibiotic use or language difficulties.  
• Enjoy and use music, rhymes and repetition. |
| Vision | Section 3                      | • Complete a vision screen by the age of one, even if no obvious concerns exist.  
• Visual deficits that are not corrected early can compromise a child’s learning and may not be noted easily.  
• Enjoy exploring a variety of art forms, colours and other visual experiences. |
| Dental health | Section 3                      | • Brush and floss teeth daily under the supervision of an adult.  
• Visit a dentist regularly. |
## Section 4 School Readiness Through Play

### Health and Physical Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health and Physical Domain</th>
<th>Where to find more information</th>
<th>Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child’s readiness to learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Physical health            | Section 3                     | • Have all required preschool immunizations.  
                                |                               | • Have a complete physical examination by the child’s primary health care provider prior to starting school. |
| Mental health              | Section 2, Section 5          | • Spend time in a nurturing environment without undue stress.  
                                |                               | • Have developed secure attachments with adult caregivers.  
                                |                               | • Have access to factors that promote resilience. |
| Motor skills               | Section 3                     | • Have reached the age-appropriate gross and fine motor skills.  
                                |                               | • Have the opportunity to use both gross and fine motor skills in a variety of play situations. |

### Self-care Skills

Self-Care Skills are also important for school readiness as the child takes a large step towards future independence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-care and Safety Skills</th>
<th>Where to find more information</th>
<th>Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child’s readiness to learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Dressing                    | Section 3                     | • Dress and undress self without help depending on age.  
                                |                               | • Be able to do most buttons and zippers.  
                                |                               | • Put on shoes, may not be able to tie laces.  
                                |                               | • Have the opportunity to practice dressing with a variety of dress up clothes. |
| Feeding                     | Section 3                     | • Be able to open lunch and snack containers.  
                                |                               | • Feed herself, finish most meals. |
| Toileting                   | Section 3                     | • Be able to tell an adult when she needs to go to the washroom.  
                                |                               | • Go to the washroom independently.  
                                |                               | • Wash and rinse hands safely and independently. |
| Help-seeking                | Section 3                     | • Ask for help.  
                                |                               | • Tell an adult if she is upset or sick. |
| Safety                      | Section 3, Section 5          | • Know her first and last name.  
                                |                               | • Know her address and telephone number (more likely for five-year-olds). |
### School Readiness Through Play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-care and safety skills</th>
<th>Where to find more information</th>
<th>Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child’s readiness to learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General safety</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>✷ Know how to follow instructions and routines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section 5</td>
<td>✷ Pay attention to instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe play</td>
<td>Section 5</td>
<td>✷ Use appropriate safety precautions during play (e.g., wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, use rounded scissors when cutting).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to and from school safely - by bus</td>
<td>Section 5</td>
<td>✷ Know the safety rules of riding a school bus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✷ Complete a practice ride if possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to and from school safely - walking</td>
<td>Section 5</td>
<td>✷ Walk with an adult or older sibling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✷ Know not to talk to strangers, not to get into a stranger’s car and where to go for help if someone approaches her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✷ Complete a practice walk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to and from school safely - by car</td>
<td>Section 5</td>
<td>✷ Walk from car to school or school to car observing safety rules and precautions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✷ Cross the road with an adult or older sibling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social/Emotional Development

When children are socially competent and emotionally healthy, they function well within the social parameters of a classroom setting. They interact easily with others, share materials, express their feelings, work well in group settings and develop positive relationships with peers and adults. A positive sense of well-being will contribute greatly to a child’s school readiness (National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, 2005). Social and emotional development is fostered in reciprocal and cooperative play (e.g., turn taking, sharing, dramatic play, games with rules).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Domain</th>
<th>Where to find more information</th>
<th>Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child’s readiness to learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playing with other children</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>• Take turns and share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Play alongside and cooperatively with other children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution and problem-solving</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>• Express feelings, wants and needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use self-regulation strategies to deal with highly emotional situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Begin to identify consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping skills</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>• Follow a routine (e.g., set out placemats for snack time, put on gym shoes and line up for gym)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use some pro-social behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>• Begin to see things from another’s point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Be able to describe what another person might be feeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with adults</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>• Be able to pay attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Make eye contact while talking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emotional skills can be enhanced through social play, reading and discussion of stories. Active play and physical activity also increase self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Domain</th>
<th>Where to find more information</th>
<th>Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child’s readiness to learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Self-concept              | Section 3                      | - Have responsibilities for some personal, family and group routines (e.g., feeding a pet, setting the table).  
                               |                                                | - Use some positive social comparisons and personality traits to define herself (e.g., “I am strong; I can climb better than my sister”). |
| Self-awareness            | Section 3                      | - Begin to understand that she is separate from others and that others live and think differently. |
| Self-esteem               | Section 3                      | - Understand that she has some areas of strength.  
                               |                                                | - Complete tasks and show pride in her accomplishments. |
| Self-expression           | Section 3                      | - Have an expanding vocabulary to express her emotions.  
                               |                                                | - Begin to understand that she can feel mixed emotions at times. |
| Self-regulation           | Section 1  
                               | Section 3  
                               |                                                | - Use self-talk and other strategies to regulate her emotions.  
                               |                                                | - Respond to inductive justice (i.e., making a child aware of the feelings or harm she has caused by her misbehaviour) by displaying pro-social behaviour. |
| Positive attitude towards learning | Section 4                      | - see Approaches to Learning in this section |

Language and Early Literacy

The development of language and literacy skills begins at birth, and is influenced by a wide range of factors, including the vocabulary used at home, early reading and opportunities to play.

Oral language is the foundation for future literacy skills. A rich vocabulary and well-developed expressive language skills are essential for literacy development. Any delays in the development of a child’s language skills need to be addressed quickly by caregivers and professionals.

The age at which children learn to read varies greatly. Some children begin to read at age four, while others don’t develop reading skills until age six or later. Children pass through several stages of reading, writing and spelling development, as they move along the continuum of literacy development. For more information on these stages see:

- The Hanen Centre at www.hanen.org for information and programs to support oral language delays
- Speech and language milestones, as well as talking tips, are provided at www.speechdelay.com

Language and early literacy consist of four areas: attention, receptive language, pre-speech and expressive language and pre-literacy skills. These are closely interrelated with hearing, social, emotional and physical development. For more information on all language and early literacy milestones view Section 3, Children’s Development (Preschooler Development by Age and Domain).

Reading/Writing Continuum

In May 1998, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA) came out with a joint position statement on reading and writing expectations for young children. The continuum spans from preschool to the third grade. The first two phases are listed here (NAEYC, 1998, p. 15):
## Section 4: School Readiness Through Play

### Phase 1: Awareness and exploration
**(goals for preschool)**
- By entry in Senior Kindergarten children should have achieved the following skills:
  - Children explore their environment and build the foundations for learning to read and write.
  - Preschoolers can:
    - enjoy listening to and discussing storybooks
    - understand that print carries a message
    - engage in reading and writing attempts
    - identify labels and signs in their environment
    - participate in rhyming games
    - identify some letters and make some letter-sound matches
    - use known letters or approximations of letters to represent written language

### Phase 2: Experimental reading and writing
**(goals for kindergarten)**
- By entry in Grade 1 children should have achieved the following skills:
  - Children develop basic concepts of print and begin to engage in and experiment with reading and writing.
  - Kindergartners can:
    - enjoy being read to and themselves retell simple narrative stories or informational texts
    - use descriptive language to explain and explore
    - recognize letters and letter-sound matches
    - show familiarity with rhyming and beginning sounds
    - understand left-to-right and top-to-bottom orientation and familiar concepts of print
    - match some spoken words with written ones
    - begin to write letters of the alphabet and some high-frequency words

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- View Section 3, Children’s Development (Development by Age and Domain) for information pertaining to language and early literacy
Cognition and General Knowledge

As children are exposed to new experiences and learning opportunities, their understanding of their world expands. A rich and stimulating environment will enhance a child’s learning and interest in further inquiry. Cognitive development encompasses many aspects, such as “language and literacy, mathematical knowledge, scientific thinking, the arts, music and other vehicles for knowledge acquisition, creative expression, reasoning and problem solving” (National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, 2005, p. 68).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Domain</th>
<th>Where to find more information</th>
<th>Developmental skills and healthy habits that will enhance the child’s readiness to learn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive skills</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>Have reached the age-appropriate, cognitive developmental milestones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• general</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emerging skills should include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Questioning</td>
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<td>• Critical thinking</td>
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<td>• Problem-solving</td>
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<td>• Spatial abilities</td>
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<td>• Observation</td>
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<td>• Categorization</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicating findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy skills</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>Have acquired the age-appropriate numeracy skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>Be able to focus on a task or situation for more than a few minutes.</td>
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<td>Be able to shift attention to a new situation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Return attention to task or situation easily following a brief distraction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory and recall skills</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>Increasingly use descriptive words to tell about past events or experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use memory of past experiences to construct or plan for new and future experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working memory</td>
<td>Section 1</td>
<td>Increasingly use working memory to keep in mind information while adapting to changes in play or real life situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use working memory to solve some problems and simple science experiments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School Readiness Through Play

Approaches to Learning

Caregivers can help the child develop approaches to learning and skills that will help her be successful at school. Children need:

- Routines
- A quiet place for reading and homework
- Books and literacy aids suggest: (e.g., paper, crayons and pencils) to encourage preliteracy
- Space and props to stimulate play
- Reciprocal play with nurturing adults

The following skills should be encouraged when observed in play as they will be transferred to academic tasks later:

- Curiosity
- Engagement
- Enthusiasm
- Attention
- Persistence
- Problem-solving
- Task completion
- Reliability
- Organization and planning
- Time management
- Risk-taking while using safety precautions (e.g., practicing swimming without floating device while adult is at arm’s length)
- Self-direction and initiative
- Ability to work independently
- Collaboration with others

(National Education Goals Panel, 1998)

View Section 3, Children’s Development (Development by Age and Domain) for information pertaining to cognitive development


School Readiness through Play

Ways to Support School Readiness through Play

School readiness is comprised of many different and interconnected factors. We can support children’s school readiness by encouraging children to explore the world around them through play. We can also support the development of public policies that ensure schools are ready for children, and that communities support healthy child development. The goals of healthy public policies should be:

- All children have access to high-quality early learning and care environments with high-quality professionals
- All families have access to a wide range of social supports within their community, such as dental and medical care, child and family programs, and more. The need is especially acute for families who live in poverty or families who are unfamiliar with the resources that may be available to them
- Professionals working with children from zero to six continue to seek out free or subsidized programs, resources or services to support children and families in need
- Schools are part of the community hub that supports healthy child development and each child’s transition to school
- Schools are ready for all children and continue to support healthy child development of the whole child.

Here are some strategies for professionals to support and promote school readiness:

- Build a strong rapport with caregivers
- Encourage positive adult-child interactions and relationships
- Promote the creation of a nurturing, rich, and stimulating early learning environment for children and families
- Plan activities to involve caregivers regularly in their child’s learning and development
- Lend toys, books, and videos to families; work to establish toy-lending libraries in your community
- Continue to provide outreach to families in your community, especially to those who may be harder to reach; support and refer to family home visiting programs such as Healthy Babies Healthy Children
- Encourage caregivers to read to their children on a daily basis; encourage caregivers to listen to children read to them on a daily basis (even if it is “pretend” reading)
Encourage caregivers to set up a centre in their home with materials that promote school readiness through various types of play.

Encourage participation in and provide information about:
- high-quality early learning and care programs
- parenting programs
- public library programs
- parent support networks and programs
- family literacy programs
- prenatal care programs
- informal and formal networks and playgroups

Continue to support adult and family literacy, as well as English-language learning for newcomers to Canada (e.g., LINC programs - Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada).

Sign up for the Welcome to Kindergarten program (www.thelearningpartnership.ca/what-we-do/student-programs/welcome-to-kindergarten) which provides a literacy resources bag and workshop for caregivers to help support readiness for school.

Create partnerships with schools, early years and early learning centres, community and health care agencies and neighbourhood centres to help provide supports for and resources about:
- prenatal care
- mental health care
- nutrition and food banks
- vision, dental and medical care
- health and immunizations
- emotional/behavioural concerns
- shelters
- subsidized housing
- early intervention
- employment or job retraining

Plan or participate in family resource fairs.

Promote programs that provide universal screening such as hearing and vision screening programs.

Ensure that resources provided to families are LGBTQ friendly as well as culturally sensitive. When possible, translate the resource or provide translation services for families where English is a barrier.

Help families make requests for additional service, if help is needed with the process.
Promote the availability of workshops and training programs in your community for caregivers and service providers.

Ensure a constant flow of communication with caregivers through the use of discussions, newsletters, brochures, email or other ways to keep them informed.

In the absence of funds, seek out donations or sponsorship to help fund some of your community initiatives (e.g., breakfast programs).

Encourage play at home and in early learning and care settings in your community.

Ensure your community provides safe spaces and opportunities for play (Florida Head Start State Collaboration Office, 2002; Maryland State Department of Education, 2002; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2002).

Professionals can encourage families to promote healthy child development that supports readiness to learn in all children from birth on by using not the three “Rs” of “reading writing and arithmetic” but the five “Rs” of early playful learning:

- Reading together
- Rhyming, playing, singing and physical closeness
- Routines and regular times for eating, playing and sleeping
- Rewarding children with praise for any success
- Reciprocal, nurturing relationships

(High, 2008)