



Understanding and Leading *Capable, Confident, and Curious:* Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework

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A user guide for directors, pre-primary managers, and other pedagogical leaders, as they support staff in engaging with the framework in their everyday practices.

MODULES 1 AND 2

Understanding and Leading *Capable, Confident, and Curious*: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework

Introduction

Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework is important and exciting for many reasons. Frameworks, rather than telling you what to do and how to do it, are guidelines. They remind you of your knowledge base and how to translate your knowledge into what are globally recognized as wise and innovative practices.

"Early learning and child care curriculum frameworks embrace children's everyday experiences as the foundation for curriculum ... in early childhood, curriculum is integrated, emerging from children's fascination with the world and what is meaningful for them."

(Makovichuk et al. 2014)

Frameworks also provide consistency. When you have a shared vocabulary and vision for children, you and your staff can work together, sharing ideas and approaches, knowing that across the province—while not providing the same programs—you are sharing the same positive goals for children. You can become, through this shared framework, a province-wide community of practice where early childhood educators, leaders, and families understand how children learn and provide exciting and innovative ways for children to engage with their world.

This guide is a pathway to help you engage and support your staff as they use and implement the curriculum framework and its accompanying educator's guide. This users guide is a resource, rather than a recipe or checklist and allows for flexibility in how the framework is implemented and applied.

Possibilities for Use

Depending upon your early years setting, and your staff and their experiences, you may choose to

- Hold regular team meetings about the framework.
- Have meetings or training sessions to provide for more informal discussion and exploration.
- Revisit key concepts as new staff join your team or when you discover that certain aspects of the framework need further exploration for staff to feel comfortable applying them in their everyday practice.

Contents and Structure of this Package

Each module has items for you and your staff to read before your meetings. These provide background information about key topics, talking points, and connections to the framework. Both of these modules also include

- **Reflection questions**

To help explore each topic. If these are given out in advance of the meeting, educators will have an opportunity to reflect on their own practices and be better prepared to engage in discussions.

- **Background notes**

To support pedagogical leadership. Your group will have different levels of experience and training. The reflection questions and exercises will support you in supporting them on their learning journey.

- **Suggested questions and group exercises**

To make the framework real. Staff may choose to bring their own examples to the discussion, such as photos, notes, and documentation.

- **Instructions for 'deciding on an action'.**

To provide a variety of ways to move forward. All opinions should be heard and taken into consideration.

- **PowerPoint presentation**

To use when presenting the modules; you can use any or all of the slides.

Points to Consider Before Beginning

- Time is precious and in short supply. Meetings should be carefully planned and have room for discussion and idea sharing.
- Whichever topic is under discussion, its relevance to families and children should be considered.
- Do not avoid challenges and concerns as they arise. This is the place to discuss them openly and search for possible solutions, together. Remember that adult learners can sometimes be anxious about change. Try to support, reassure, and acknowledge your staff's previous knowledge, experiences, and successes.
- Share information, such as professional development resources, readings, and blogs as they relate to the topic.
- Reach an agreement with your staff about how your meeting or learning times might be used. What works best for them?
- Remember to have fun and engage in active learning! Find a balance between talk and action.

Preparing for Meetings

As the leader of the meeting or training session, you should

- Be familiar with the framework and its educators' guide, as well as the specific topic for the meeting. Be prepared!
- Provide an ice-breaker to loosen up your staff's thinking and help them leave the workday behind.
- Decide on the method of delivery: PowerPoint? Discussion? Hands-on? All three?

- Offer a way for staff to provide feedback or evaluate the training. Questions you may want to ask: What was understood? Enjoyed? Created confusion? This information will guide your next steps.
- What might your next steps involve? This depends on your staff's reactions and remaining questions. If there is a particular concept that your staff want more information about or need further clarification on (e.g., applying their Image of the Child to their environment), it would be a good idea to read about and explore it as a group or hold a workshop on this particular aspect. Your site coordinator or consultant can help set up further learning opportunities.

Staff should

- Read the information provided beforehand.
- Come with questions, opinions, and ideas, and be prepared to share.
- Bring an open mind and their curiosity!

Pedagogy refers to the holistic nature of an educator's professional practice ... pedagogy encourages educators to ask questions—about what they do and why—and what impact their decisions have on how children learn. Pedagogy informs decision-making and facilitates learning in a rich and inviting child-centred environment.

Module 1: Pedagogical Leadership

"Pedagogical Leaders demonstrate credible knowledge of the teaching and learning process and draw on those principles to guide individuals and groups."

(Coughlin and Woodburn 2016)

This module addresses the following questions:

- What makes someone an effective pedagogical leader?
- How does a pedagogical leader work through growth and change in positive ways?
- How does a pedagogical leader encourage innovative practices?
- How does your early years setting and the people who work there put your goals, inspiration, and philosophies into action? How do these actions link to *Capable, Confident, and Curious*?

Background Information

Anyone within your organization with a deep understanding of early childhood learning and development may one day hold a leadership position. They may become a program lead, director or assistant director. Perhaps there are educators who are already informal leaders and mentor others in your workplace.

Pedagogical leaders know that adults learn best

- When they are interested and engaged.
- When their prior knowledge and expertise is acknowledged, respected, and used.
- When they have opportunities to discuss and reflect with others.
- When a culture of continuous growth is present and embraced within the organization.
- When growth, even very small steps, is recognized.

Protocols are available to support reflective thinking and inquiry. They are systematic ways of approaching tasks, routines, and decision-making. The reference list in this package will assist you in creating protocols for your setting that encourage reflection and discussion, which lead to deeper thinking about your work, decision-making, ways of being with children, and overall professional growth.

Parallel Practice

Parallel practice occurs when you, as leaders, model with your staff the ways in which they might engage with children, such as providing children with experiences with materials, enough time to think about their actions, and documentation of their learning events.

According to Coughlin and Baird (2013), debriefing after professional learning is important because it offers the opportunity to deconstruct what happened, how it felt, and how it applies to your everyday work with children. Therefore, in this package you will see activities for adults that parallel ways that they might work in their early years setting.

Reflective Questions

As a starting point, it helps to consider some questions. Which ones are a good fit for your staff? You might want to provide one or two of these questions out in advance of the meeting. This gives your staff time to reflect and be ready to participate in discussions.

- How do you define a pedagogical leader? What makes them different from administrators?
- From your own experiences, think about someone you consider a good pedagogical leader. What makes them a good leader (e.g., disposition, leadership style, methods of supporting and encouraging)?
- What difference does a pedagogical leader make to an early years setting?

Possible Activities

(NOTE: See PowerPoint and handouts for additional activities.)

The activities that you select depend on your staff's contexts, such as their previous experiences, roles within their settings, and comfort levels with leadership. You may want to

- Divide into small groups of three or four. From a selection of random and curious objects, each person selects an object that represents their idea of leadership. Each person explains why they chose this object. This assists people in articulating their thoughts about leadership.
- Play a ball game. Stand in a circle with six to eight people per circle. Provide enough balls for each person (or most people) to have one. Start with one ball for one person, who throws to the same person each time. Facilitator keeps adding balls one at a time, until everyone has a ball. What happens when you continue throwing the balls? What happens when you take someone out of the circle? This activity introduces the idea of interdependency, cooperation, multitasking, and team building.
- Arrange photographs (provided by facilitator) around the room. Each staff member chooses to stand near the one that most represents their idea of pedagogical leadership and explains why they made their choice. This activity introduces the idea of metaphors, where one thing stands for another. It may also help to clarifying staff members' leadership preferences and style.

Remember to debrief after all activities. You may want to ask, "How did it feel?" and "How does this apply to your everyday work?"

CONNECTIONS TO THE FRAMEWORK

Reflective practice and relationship building are foundations of the curriculum framework. These concepts apply to both leaders and staff.

For leaders, it means being intentional when you are supporting relationships with staff, families, children, the community, and colleagues outside of your own setting.

You can also be intentional by supporting your staff in pursuing continuous professional learning, supporting others to become leaders, and by nurturing and modeling curiosity.

You can model decision-making through your own reflective practice (i.e., discussing issues deeply with your educators before making decisions for your setting), just as you carefully think through children's ideas before making curriculum decisions.

NEXT STEPS:

Putting pedagogical leadership into action

- Develop protocols that work as tools to guide your staff through change and innovation.
- Read “A Thinking Lens for Learning Together with Children” by Ann Pelo, Margie Carter, and Deb Curtis; a copy of the article is included with this package.
- Think about the idea of “What? So What? Now What?”
 - **What?** What is happening in your classroom practice or setting as a whole? You may identify a challenge, or something that you would like to learn more about.
 - **So what?** Why is this issue challenging or puzzling or important? Identify why this issue matters. Try to understand it by talking together and digging deeply into the topic.
 - **Now what?** What can you attempt? What is one small change that you can make? Examine the difference that this change makes and what areas may need some rethinking? Why?
- Create a community of practice within your setting. This could be a group that has a particular interest that they want to explore further, or a group of lead teachers that want to have a place where they can freely share the challenges and successes that occur in their work (see handout for further information on communities of practice).
- Use notes or photographs to document changes that occur as a result of leadership support and teacher innovations. Bring these notes to your staff meetings as a starting point for discussions and to celebrate successes.

NOTES

Module 2: The Image of the Child

This module addresses the following questions:

- What is your Image of the Child?
- Why does your image matter?
- How does your image and practice align with the framework?
- What difference does your image make to your daily practice?
- How does the Image of the Child influence the role of an educator or leader?

Background Information

Capable, Confident, and Curious is based on an Image of the Child that sees children as curious, creative, full of potential, capable, and confident. The curriculum framework honours who children are today and who they will become. A person's Image of the Child—and definition of childhood itself—is influenced by that person's experiences, culture, values, and beliefs. A person's Image of the Child is also influenced by their own experiences as a child. People's own experiences shape them.

Across Canada and around the world, educators are examining how their Image of the Child affects their role as a teacher. For instance, the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* (2008, 3) states that:

We all have different images of the child, but we rarely make them explicit in our practice. By examining our practice, perhaps we can gain insight into our image of the child and make this image visible to ourselves as early childhood educators, and to families and children. By making the image visible, we are able to describe and understand in depth our beliefs about children and how those beliefs influence our practices and relationships with children.

There are hundreds of different images of the child. Each one has inside yourself an image of the child that directs you as you begin to relate to a child. This theory within you pushes you to behave in certain ways; it orients you as you talk to the child, listen to the child, observe the child. It is difficult for you to act contrary to this internal image. For example, if your image is that boys and girls are very different from one another, you will behave differently in your interactions with each of them.

(Malaguzzi 1994, 1)

Reflective Questions

(NOTE: See PowerPoint and handouts for more information.)

Before the meeting or training session consider which of the following questions will best suit your staff and where they are on their learning journey.

- What is my Image of the Child? How would I describe it?
- How is your Image of the Child visible in your classroom or practice? If it is not visible, what gets in the way?
- What personal values influence the way you think about children and childhood itself?
- Have your views about children and childhood changed since you've been working with children? How? Why? What has influenced those changes?
- What are your personal views on gender equality, diversity, and sexual orientation? Do they impact your ability to work with children and their families?
- How well do your families understand your early years setting's Image of the Child? What are their Images of the Child? How can you find out?

Possible Activities

(NOTE: See PowerPoint and handouts for more information.)

- Separate into small groups and ask each group to reach a consensus about the qualities and attributes of children and what this means for the role of the teacher. The handout, "List of Child Attributes", may help with this activity.
- Use photographs provided by staff and ask them to pair off to discuss what their chosen photograph represents in terms of their own Images of the Child.
- Ask each staff member to list the ways their classroom represents their Image of the Child. Ask them to consider the environment, relationships, curriculum, and routines. After this, ask them to share this with another staff person who doesn't work directly with them. They should discuss the possible ways that their image can be made more visible. What can they learn from each other?
- Ask staff to discuss in small groups how their own childhood experiences influence what is happening in their own practices.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FRAMEWORK

Early childhood pedagogy is not focused on merely providing experiences for children; it builds on what educators know about how learning happens in children's early years.

Curriculum is co-constructed by children and educators, while learning from families and communities.

When your Image of the Child is held in mind, it helps you to see children as capable and confident. When you have respectful relationships with families, everyone works together to construct curriculum that is relevant to the local context.

Capable, Confident, and Curious allows children to actively construct their own understandings, act independently, and contribute to the learning of others. Children's ideas are welcomed, respected, and valued.

What is pedagogical documentation?

Pedagogical documentation is when you observe children at play, think carefully about what they are doing, discuss your ideas with colleagues, and then document the children's and your own thinking. It helps you make decisions based on children's ideas and strategies. It's documentation that makes thinking and learning visible and is an interpretation of what has happened, rather than simply telling the story. It supports educators' efforts to think deeply about children's actions and make wise decisions.

NEXT STEPS:

Making your Image of the Child come to life

Examine your classroom environment

- What message does it send about your beliefs about children?
- How is independence fostered? Do children have what they need in order to follow their ideas?
- How are children's ideas made visible?
- How does access to materials affect children's choices?

Consider routines

- Do your routines address children's needs?
- How flexible are your routines? What role does the clock play? How are your routines arranged? Why are your routines arranged in this way?
"Old scripts" can be in place simply because no one has examined them and thought about why they are there.

Think about the role of documentation

- If you are using pedagogical documentation, is this taken back to the children to hear their thoughts and reactions? Try taking one or two rough pieces of documentation back to children before it is completed. What do they think? How do they react?
See the sidebar on the previous page for an explanation of pedagogical documentation.

Include families

- How does your Image of the Child include children and their families' cultures, languages, and traditions? Are all families made visible in your setting?
- How can you invite families into your setting in order to participate, access information, and put forward ideas and questions?
- How you encourage families to be partners with you in co-constructing curriculum?
 - Ask for opinions about their children's work in the classroom, perhaps by drawing attention to documentation.
 - Ask for a response when sending information home. This can be digitally, verbally, or in other ways that suit your community.
 - From time to time, celebrate your community's images of children with a special event, and make time for discussion about children's ideas.

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