



Curriculum Framework Supports

The Curriculum Framework Supports project enhances Early Learning programs in Alberta by providing pedagogical partner guidance for implementing the Flight Framework curricular concepts. Adopting and supporting the implementation of Flight was listed as one of the top 4 actions in the **Play and Grow Report** as Flight presents a mindset around early learning and child care that aligns with the flexibility, emergent ideas, child-centred, exploratory approach required for working outdoors with young children.

The **Play and Grow Report** identified 4 focus areas for increasing outdoor play in Alberta ELCC programs.

The Curriculum Framework Supports project aligns with:

- **Responsive Environments - Time**
- **Responsive Environments - Space**
- **Responsive Environments - Materials**
- **Practice of Relationships**

TIME

Alberta's Early Learning and Childcare Regulations do not specify required outdoor time. Other provinces like Ontario and British Columbia state in regulations and directives a required amount of outdoor time.

How would prescribing a set amount of outdoor time for programs impact routines and schedules for children's play and care needs? What is the balance that educators need to find here? Flight asks: "What would happen if "clock time" did not determine your daily experience? What would happen if children's internal rhythms determined your daily routines?" We heard from educators that there are real challenges in achieving this, specifically in the outdoor space.

Why are programs challenged to spend long periods outside?

- Regulations do not require a set amount of time outdoors.
- Indoor space is prioritized over outdoor space.
- Scheduled lunch time, staff breaks, and other responsibilities indoors.
- Rooms have to rotate through using the outdoors space due to limited space.
- Care routines like diapering, toileting and hand washing take educators and children back inside.

"I have no one to cover me as a dayhome provider on a tight schedule due to school drop off and pickups."

– Level 3 Dayhome

Educator, Medicine Hat

How to support programs in increasing outdoor time?

- Examine schedule of flexibility to allow longer periods outdoors.
- Support exploration beyond the attached play space into nearby parks and natural spaces to allow for more time outside.
- Set an annual program goal focused on increasing the percentage of daily planned experiences for the outdoor space as a way to support increased outdoor play time.
- Encourage programs to add how the outdoor experiences support the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical needs of children in their program plan.
- Advocate for an amount of outdoor time to be included in regulations.
- Add an amount of outdoor play time to the program plan.

Responsive Environments

Space

Flight asks: **“How do you create spaces for/with children, as individuals and group members, including both healthy and flexible indoor and outdoor spaces? Do they inspire imagination and possibilities?”**

When providing these spaces, Flight states that **“Educators must also consider familiar and novel spaces that can ignite possibilities”**. With the right mindset, the outdoors is a novel play space, providing new opportunities as the weather and ecosystem change. Educators face challenges in creating these healthy, flexible spaces.

Why do educators face challenges in creating a responsive outdoor space?

- Regulations only require a certain amount of outdoor space (the least amount in the country) and only for 50% of the facility capacity.
- Programs have marginal, uninspired spaces outdoors like rooftops or fenced off parking areas lacking natural elements.
- Less time spent outside therefore not the focus of planning and design.
- Limiting mixed age groups in the outdoor space decreases the time available for each room to be outside.

How can we support educators with the spaces they have?

- Encourage loose parts in the outdoor environment, it is a low cost, open-ended way to add variety and opportunity to the space regardless of the location.
- Add natural elements like planters for example and introduce natural loose parts like leaves, sticks and rocks.
- Include the outdoor space in program plans and consider how the space will meet the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical needs of children.
- Support the exploration of spaces beyond the fence that may offer more opportunities for space and play.
- Enlist an ARCQE coach to conduct an outdoor play workshop for educators and families to support ideas for increasing play experiences for children.
- Consider connecting the indoor and outdoor environment by extending children’s interests to the outdoor space.
- Build confidence with PD around managing groups beyond the fence.
- Enlist an ARCQE coach to facilitate an assessment review of the outdoor play space using the POEMS rating tool.

“I would just love it if we could get more space to play outside as the kids are bored in our little space already.”
— Level 2 Educator

Materials

When engaging with materials, children reveal their thinking and feelings to the educators and the other children. Flight describes the ability to figure out the right number of materials and how to organize them as an “art”. Refining your art requires practice and creativity, which happens over time. The outdoor space may not receive the same amount of attention as the indoor space when educators have limited planning time, reducing the development of the ‘art’ of materials in the outdoor space.

“I would just love it if we could get more space to play outside as the kids are bored in our little space already.”

— Level 2 Educator

Why are materials limited in the outdoor space?

- Lack of planning time to consider new outdoor materials.
- Prioritization of the materials indoors.
- Programs have marginal spaces outdoors like rooftops or fenced off parking areas that lack naturally occurring loose parts like sticks and leaves.
- Focus of the outdoor space is on physical activity instead of seeing it as complete learning environment.
- Unsure of safety of loose parts and other materials.
- Fear that licensing or health will not allow new materials.
- Not enough time to tidy up the space between different rooms using it.

How can we support educators in using novel materials outdoors?

- Encourage loose parts in the outdoor environment, it is a low cost, open-ended way to add variety and opportunity to the space regardless of the location.
- Add natural elements like planters for example and introduce natural loose parts like leaves, sticks and rocks.
- Support the exploration of spaces beyond the fence that may offer more opportunities for natural materials.
- Build confidence with PD around managing groups beyond the fence.

Practice of Relationships

“Each child’s care, play, learning, and development are nurtured as educators work within a practice of relationships, appreciating family, social, and cultural practices and traditions and embracing a strong capable image of the child, as a mighty learner and citizen.”

– Flight Curriculum Framework

Three relationships were identified by the participants in the project as key to supporting more outdoor play:

1. Mentorship relationship was suggested by coaches and researchers as necessary for the success of programs looking to advance the quality of their outdoor play program as it allowed a means to model, support, and show the value of outdoor play done well.
2. The educator-family relationship was important to make families feel welcome, which may help to increase feelings of belonging and decrease challenging behaviours in some children.
3. The child-community relationship is developmentally important, but it also helps promote and normalize the community as a space where children belong rather than just in their childcare centres.

Mentorship interactions help to create new skills, but the ongoing relationship helps to align values that support outdoor play and create sustained behaviour change.

According to one researcher who specialized in ECE behaviour change, the “biggest bang for your buck” comes from a combination of education and mentorship that, when both are in place, you can align the program and educator values with outdoor play. “Educators getting in touch with why they want to be outdoors and why they want to be out there with children...if you can really get educators to buy in and want to foster a healthy relationship between children and outdoor spaces, then all the rest will just fall in place with on-going mentorship.”

Parents are often portrayed as a barrier to their child/children spending time outdoors. Parents may not value time outside. They may not think some weather is appropriate to play in, or they may not know how to properly prepare their children to be outdoors. A deeper understanding of family beliefs, experiences, and values around being outside, will help educators share relevant information about outdoor play.

Exploring and engaging with the community enhances children’s sense of belonging to that community and can provide unexpected play opportunities. Including community members and elders in programs also helps to foster community connection. Coaches also identified the benefits of looking at what relationships they could build within the community, to find ways to bring in community expertise. This can create a reciprocal relationship that can help further strengthen the child’s sense of belonging to family and community. Stories shared by educators about their experiences with children in the community were limited, but those we heard only reinforced the need for educators and children to explore beyond their licensed space.

Mentor Relationship

Family Relationships

Child-Community Relationship



Resources – Responsive Environments

- Rusty Keeler, Landscape Architect <https://rustykeeler.com/inspiration/>
- Outdoor Loose Parts 5 Materials to Spark Imagination and Curiosity <http://getoutsideandplay.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Outdoor-Loose-Parts-Get-Outside-and-Pla.pdf>
- Outdoor Loose Parts Storage Ideas <https://getoutsideandplay.ca/outdoor-loose-parts-storage-ideas/>
- Pop-up Adventure Play Resources and Research for Loose Parts: <https://www.popupadventureplay.org/resources-and-research/>
- A Walking Curriculum for the Early Years <https://outdoorlearningstore.com/product/a-walking-curriculum-for-the-early-years/>
- Outside Play ECE on-line tool <https://www.outsideplay.org/tool-microsites/early-child-education-home>



Resources – Practice of Relationships

- Dressing for the Weather <https://getoutsideandplay.ca/dressing-for-the-weather/>
- Jacket Racket Calgary <http://jacketracketcalgary.com/>
- Affordable adult snow pants: <https://getoutsideandplay.ca/perfect-snowpants/>
- Outside Play Interactive Parent Toolkit: <https://www.outsideplay.org/tool-microsites/parent-tool>
- Canadian Paediatric Society Position Statement Healthy development through outdoor risky play: Navigating the balance with injury prevention: <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/outdoor-risky-play>
- Adults Role in Outdoor Play: <http://southshoreconnect.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Adult-Role-in-Outdoor-Play-Infographic-8.5x11.pdf>
- A Walking Curriculum for the Early Years <https://outdoorlearningstore.com/product/a-walking-curriculum-for-the-early-years/>
- Child and Nature Alliance Guide for Bringing Learning Outside: https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/T.O_9_EN_A-Teachers-Guidebook-for-bringing-learning-outside-1.pdf



*This research was done by
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