

## *Kindergarten PLC: Development of a Play in K - Best Practice Toolkit*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The *Kindergarten PLC: Play in K Best Practice Toolkit* intends to pool the knowledge and resources of kindergarten teachers to share with the English Language Community. Ten teachers from the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board met six times from September to February to develop a deeper understanding and share resources about the nature and importance of children's play, especially in the early education setting. The resources are available as an online toolkit that will be available via the SWLSB Early Intervention Team webpage and distributed to all consultants serving the preschool communities of the Quebec English school boards.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Over the course of three months, teachers met as a group to discuss and reflect on best teaching practices for a wide range of topics. A sixth meeting took place in the form of classroom visits between members of the group. In most cases teachers were able to visit multiple classes as participating teachers often taught in schools where there were more than one kindergarten class. Teachers reported that the classroom visit element was one of the highlights of the project.

As part of the project members of the group discussed what the notion of play meant and came up with a definition that everyone agreed with. Using this definition and through the lens of play, the following topics were discussed and reflected upon: classroom management and transitions, the classroom as the third teacher, the teacher as facilitator of play-based learning, gross and fine motor development, and the development of early numeracy, early language, and early literacy skills. Using the QEP and the six competencies of preschool development as our guide, planning for purposeful play and assessment for planning were also examined. Three guest presenters delivered valuable content on the topics of language development, motor skills, and meeting the needs of children requiring adaptations, in particular students with an autism spectrum disorders diagnosis. As with the classroom visits, the members of the group expressed that this was a valuable experience and that they gained rich stores of information to take back to their classrooms and students, and to share with their colleagues.

Project members created lessons, and planned mini-workshop sessions which were to be presented during a board-wide pedagogical day. That content is largely included in the toolkit to be shared with the English education community of Quebec.

### **PROJECT GOALS**

The goal for this project was for teachers to curate best practices for encouraging play-based instruction on the topics mentioned above. Resources and videos to help teachers develop their practice as facilitators of play-based learning were researched, compiled, and published in a toolkit to be shared widely. A secondary goal was for teachers to visit their colleagues' classrooms to expand their own knowledge in a practical experience.

### **PROJECT OUTCOMES**

Over the course of the six meetings the project members became a community of learners and continue to share resources and support each other via the email group created for the project. A survey conducted with the members post-project indicate that they thoroughly enjoyed the process and opportunity to learn from each other, from the professionals that joined us as guests, as well as having the time to research topics of interest to create more playful learning environments for their students.

Several participants expressed that they would have liked more experiences with classroom visits and practical, hands-on learning. Similarly, a comment from one member suggested that hearing from in-school professionals regarding the developmental stages of this age group would be beneficial.

The members worked largely in dyads to curate resources in the form of videos, websites, and content that was then assembled into a document that is aimed to provide support for teachers who desire to create playful learning environments for their students.

The general sentiment from the group was that they felt supported in their learning and would have liked “more” of everything.

### **SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES**

This project experienced a high level of turnover in its membership, from its inception to its realization. Most of the members on the project including the project manager were not on the original application thus the vision of the project may have differed slightly from what resulted in the final outcomes. One member of the project took a leave of absence and could not be replaced. Lastly, the workshop which the project members planned to deliver did not take place and due to unforeseen circumstances, was not rescheduled.

This group of teachers’ classroom practices changed for the better through this project, through the spirit of collaboration and sharing. Enthusiasm from this group about the learning taking place spread before the end of the project, as colleagues from members’ schools contacted the project leader to enquire about participating in similar projects. Indeed, the community created as a result of the project and that continues to grow among this group of teachers is the greatest success of this project, one that will hopefully continue to spread to other schools and classrooms.

### **REINVESTMENT**

A 50-page document on the importance of playful learning in the preschool environment includes content and resources on a variety of topics including classroom management and transitions, the classroom as the third teacher, the teacher as facilitator of play-based learning, gross and fine motor development, and the development of early numeracy, early language, and early literacy skills. The document will be shared with the other English language school boards of Quebec through the DEEN Play – Preschool, Learning and Youth subcommittee. It is also available on the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board Early Intervention Team webpage.

The members of this PDIG worked hard to compile a robust document of resources for teachers on the topic of playful learning. We realise that this document is not exhaustive and encourage interested teams of teachers to continue the work begun here. Some suggested topics not included in this compilation might include: immersion and bilingual classrooms, outdoor and risky play, rough and tumble play, and social-emotional learning.