



*Play is the highest form of research*  
- Albert Einstein



**cmeec**

Council of  
Ministers  
of Education,  
Canada

Conseil des  
ministres  
de l'Éducation  
(Canada)

## CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning

At the recent World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, organizers, keynote speakers, scientists, experts, and political figures underscored the enormous benefits of early learning.<sup>1</sup> CMEC agrees with this position and believes that purposeful play-based early learning sets the stage for future learning, health, and well-being.

### *Learning through play is supported by science.*

The benefits of play are recognized by the scientific community. There is now evidence that neural pathways in children's brains are influenced and advanced in their development through exploration, thinking skills, problem solving, and language expression that occur during play.

Research also demonstrates that play-based learning leads to greater social, emotional, and academic success. Based on such evidence, ministers of education endorse a sustainable pedagogy for the future that does not separate play from learning but brings them together to promote creativity in future generations. In fact, play is considered to be so essential to healthy development that the United Nations has recognized it as a specific right for all children.<sup>2</sup>

### *Learning through play is supported by experts.*

Learning through play is supported by early years experts. Lev Vygotsky identified play as the leading source of development in terms of emotional, social, physical, language, or cognitive development. Psychologist David Elkind that "play is not only our creative drive; it's a fundamental mode of learning."<sup>3</sup> Such experts recognize that play and academic work are not distinct categories for young children: creating, doing, and learning are inextricably linked. When children are engaged in purposeful play, they are discovering, creating, improvising, and expanding their learning. Viewing children as active participants in their own development and learning allows educators to move beyond preconceived expectations about what children should be learning, and focus on what they are learning.

<sup>1</sup> CMEC –Canadian Delegation Report from the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, Moscow, Russian Federation, September 27–29, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> "Fact Sheet: A Summary of the Rights Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child," Article 31. Retrieved on February 11, 2010 from [http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Wood, E. (2004). "Developing a pedagogy of play." In J. Cullen (Ed.) Early childhood education: Society and culture. London, UK: Sage.

### *Learning through play is supported by children and parents.*

Learning through play is supported by children. It is their natural response to the environment around them. When children are manipulating objects, acting out roles, or experimenting with different materials, they are engaged in learning through play. Play allows them to actively construct, challenge, and expand their own understandings through making connections to prior experiences, thereby opening the door to new learning. Intentional play-based learning enables children to investigate, ask questions, solve problems, and engage in critical thinking. Play is responsive to each child's unique learning style and capitalizes on his or her innate curiosity and creativity. Play-based learning supports growth in the language and culture of children and their families.

### *When children are playing, children are learning.*

Given the evidence, CMEC believes in the intrinsic value and importance of play and its relationship to learning. Educators should intentionally plan and create challenging, dynamic, play-based learning opportunities. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have always been done that way. Intentional teaching involves educators being deliberate and purposeful in creating play-based learning environments — because when children are playing, children are learning.

#### FROM THE EXPERTS

Play lies at the core of innovation and creativity. It provides opportunities for learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive. Play and academic work are not distinct categories for young children, and learning and doing are also inextricably linked for them.  
(Ontario Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program, 2010)

In play, children represent and transform the world around them, providing other children and adults with a window into their thoughts and perceptions, and often helping adults to see the world in new ways.  
(BC Early Learning Framework, 2008)

Play expands intelligence, stimulates the imagination, encourages creative problem solving, and helps develop confidence, self-esteem, and a positive attitude toward learning.  
(Dr. Fraser Mustard)



*Almost all creativity involves purposeful play*  
- Abraham Maslow