



LEARNING THROUGH PLAY AND INQUIRY: TWO KINDERGARTEN UNITS

Living Things and their Environment

In this inquiry unit¹, children explore living things and their reciprocal relationship with their environment through learning centres, Read-Alouds and discussions. They observe closely, experiment and communicate their ideas, while applying and reinforcing their understandings through play-based learning².

Wonder-Full

In this inquiry unit, children learn to ask meaningful questions, observe closely, form hypothesis, explore how to find answers to their questions, and communicate their ideas. They apply their new knowledge while constructing their own zoos, creating underwater environments, and working at the Zoo Vet and Marine Biologist Dramatic Play centre.

¹ The Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program curriculum states that children have “an interest in exploring and investigating to see how things work and why things happen. Children have an innate sense of wonder and awe and a natural desire for inquiry.” (14) However, the document also recognizes that educators must guide children in learning through inquiry, integrating inquiry skills in interesting units, explicitly teaching skills, and providing meaningful practice opportunities (15). Elements of children’s inquiry include, **Initial Engagement** (noticing, wondering, playing), **Exploration** (exploring, observing, questioning), **Investigation** (planning, using observations, reflecting), and **Communication** (sharing findings, discussing ideas).

² Play is one of the primary vehicles through which young children learn. Literacy and numeracy, motor skills, higher order thinking, oral language, social skills, and emotional regulation are all developed through play. Play may be individual or social, and may include an element of pretend. It is inherently differentiated, meaningful and purposeful, engaging and enjoyable, and self-directed. As educators, it is our role to provide daily opportunities for play based learning. When planning these opportunities and the objects children will interact with, we allow for multiple entry points, multiple intelligences, and open ended play that will be purposeful and meet the developmental needs of each child. We consider learning goals that may, but are not required to be achieved through the opportunities we provide. During play, we interact with the children listening, observing, and helping to extend their understanding by asking questions, as well as presenting new vocabulary and ideas in an unobtrusive way.