



PROTECTOR OF PLAY™

PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING

journal



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Welcome Protectors of Play™

If you are holding this journal, it tells me something important about you. You care deeply about children, about play, and about your role as an early childhood educator. You understand that play is not just something we do with children, but something we protect, advocate for, and honour every single day.

This journal was created as a space for you to pause, reflect, wonder, and grow. In the busy rhythm of early learning and child care, between routines, documentation, conversations, and caregiving, it can be easy to move from one moment to the next without taking time to reflect on the powerful work you are doing. Reflection is where learning deepens, where advocacy begins, and where our professional voices strengthen.

As Protectors of Play™, we recognize play as a fundamental right of every child. We ground our work in reflective practice, children's rights, and meaningful professional learning experiences; from workshops and conferences, to books, podcasts, blogs, and conversations with one another. This journal is designed to support you in capturing those moments of learning and turning them into intentional action.

There is no right or wrong way to use this journal. Some days your reflections may be neat and thoughtful; other days they may be messy, emotional, or unfinished. All of it matters. This journal belongs to you.

Thank you for the work you do. Thank you for protecting children's right to play. I am so glad you are here.

With playful gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tina Geers". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and 'G'.

Tina Geers (she/her)
CEO Inspired Minds ECC
Playerista | Protector of Play™

How to Use This Journal

This journal is meant to be flexible and responsive - just like play. There is no right or wrong way to move through these pages. You are invited to make this journal your own in ways that support your learning, reflection, and wellbeing.

You might choose to skip sections, revisit pages, or use only the parts that feel most relevant to you right now. Some pages may be completed quickly, while others may unfold over time. Use the QR codes on select templates to access printable copies if you'd like extra pages for reflection, documentation, or team use.

You might use it:

- After attending a workshop, webinar, Pop-Up session, or conference
- While reading a professional book or listening to a podcast
- During or after meaningful moments with children
- As part of a team reflection or community of practice
- For personal reflection and professional goal setting

Feel free to make quick notes, doodle, add sticky notes, or include photos and visual reflections. I have even included pages designed specifically for picture-based reflection. Use the prompts as invitations, not requirements. Reflection is not about completion or perfection.

Educators are welcome to copy, print, and use pages from this journal for personal reflection, team learning, or program use. Commercial reproduction, resale, or redistribution of these materials is not permitted without written permission.

Above all, remember that reflection is a practice. Not a checklist. Move through this journal with curiosity, care, and playfulness, trusting that your learning journey will take shape in its own time.

A Living Practice: Reflection Tools

Scan the QR code to access the template files and printable reflection forms. The QR code provides easy access to these resources so educators and ELCC teams can revisit, print, and use the forms as part of their ongoing reflective practice—individually or as a team.



Words to Reflect On

Language in Play: Exploring Professional Vocabulary

Understanding professional language is a process of learning and reflecting. To support you on your learning journey, consider these terms. What do they mean to you?

Advocacy

Advocacy involves speaking up and taking action to support children's rights, well-being, and learning. In early childhood contexts, advocacy may include protecting time for play, promoting inclusive practices, and raising awareness about the importance of high-quality early learning environments.

Agency

Agency refers to a child's ability to make choices, express ideas, and influence their own learning experiences. When educators support children's agency, they honour children as capable participants in shaping their learning and play.

Child-Focused

Child-focused practice places children's interests, needs, strengths, and perspectives at the centre of learning experiences. Educators respect children as capable individuals whose ideas and choices influence the direction of learning.

Co-Construct

Co-construction refers to the process of building knowledge together. Educators and children collaborate through conversation, play, and shared inquiry to deepen understanding and explore ideas collectively.

Co-Learner

A co-learner is an educator who engages in learning alongside children. Rather than positioning themselves as the sole expert, educators remain curious and open to discovering new ideas together with children.

Words to Reflect On

Language in Play: Exploring Professional Vocabulary

Co-Researcher

A co-researcher explores questions and ideas with children through observation, documentation, and shared inquiry. Educators and children investigate the world together, deepening understanding through exploration and reflection.

Culturally Responsive

Culturally responsive practice recognizes and respects the diverse cultural identities, languages, traditions, and experiences of children and families. Educators intentionally create environments and experiences that reflect and honour these identities while fostering belonging and mutual respect.

Curriculum

Curriculum refers to the experiences, environments, interactions, and opportunities that support children's learning and development. In early childhood, curriculum often emerges through play, relationships, and inquiry rather than predetermined lessons.

Early Childhood Framework

An early childhood framework is a guiding document that supports educators in understanding how young children learn and develop. It provides shared principles, values, and approaches that inform curriculum, environments, relationships, and reflective practice within early learning settings.

Emergent Approach

An emergent approach to curriculum develops from children's interests, questions, and experiences. Educators observe children's play and inquiries and then extend learning through materials, environments, and experiences that deepen exploration.

Enoughness

Enoughness reflects a mindset of recognizing and appreciating what already exists. Within early childhood practice, it encourages educators to value children's capabilities, existing materials, and the learning opportunities already present in everyday moments of play.

Words to Reflect On

Language in Play: Exploring Professional Vocabulary

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning occurs through direct experiences such as exploration, play, experimentation, and reflection. Children learn by actively engaging with materials, environments, and people rather than through passive instruction.

Holistic

A holistic approach to early childhood recognizes that children's learning and development are interconnected. It considers emotional, social, physical, cognitive, and spiritual aspects of wellbeing rather than focusing on a single area of development.

Land-Based Practices

Land-based practices involve learning with and from the land. These experiences connect children to nature, local ecosystems, and Indigenous perspectives that recognize the land as a teacher and a source of knowledge, identity, and relationship.

Open-Ended Materials

Open-ended materials are resources that can be used in many different ways and do not have a predetermined outcome. Items such as loose parts, natural materials, and everyday objects invite creativity, experimentation, and imaginative play.

Place-Based Practices

Place-based practices focus on learning through meaningful connections with the local environment and community. Children explore the places they live, learn, and play in order to build understanding, belonging, and responsibility toward their surroundings.

Play-Responsive

Play-responsive practice occurs when educators observe and respond thoughtfully to children's play. Rather than directing play, educators extend learning by providing materials, questions, and environments that support children's curiosity and exploration. Protectors of Play™ are educators who honour play as a powerful pathway for learning, well-being, and belonging. Through observation, reflection, and advocacy, they protect the conditions that allow play to emerge; time, space, relationships, and responsive environments. Protectors of Play™ trust children's natural curiosity and work alongside them to nurture imagination, inquiry, and discovery.

Words to Reflect On

Language in Play: Exploring Professional Vocabulary

Reflective Practices

Reflective practice involves educators intentionally thinking about their experiences, decisions, and interactions in order to deepen understanding and improve their practice. Reflection may occur individually, collaboratively, or within a community of practice.

Relational

Relational practice recognizes that learning and well-being develop through meaningful relationships. Educators nurture connections between children, families, communities, and the environment, understanding that these relationships support belonging, trust, and shared learning.

Relationship-Based

Relationship-based practice recognizes that learning occurs through meaningful and trusting relationships between children, educators, families, communities, and the environment. Strong relationships support emotional security, belonging, and collaboration in learning.

Rights-Based Practices

Rights-based practice recognizes children as rights holders whose voices, choices, and experiences matter. Grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, this approach respects children's rights to play, participate, express ideas, and be valued members of their learning communities.

Sufficiency

Sufficiency refers to the idea that having what is needed is often enough. In early childhood environments, this can mean valuing simple materials, meaningful experiences, and thoughtful environments rather than excessive resources.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning is an approach that creates flexible learning environments designed to support the diverse needs of all learners. It encourages multiple ways for children to engage, express themselves, and access learning opportunities.

Words to Reflect On

Language in Play: Exploring Professional Vocabulary



In this playful reflection activity, key vocabulary words are written on Jenga blocks and explored through collaborative play. Educators gather in small groups and take turns removing blocks, reading the words aloud, and discussing what each word means to them based on their experiences and professional practice.

As you play, reflect together on how these words show up in your work, noticing similarities and differences in understanding. After the group discussion, share brief explanations or interpretations of each word, inviting others to compare their own reflections with these perspectives.

The activity concludes with a second round of reflection, where educators consider what new insights, language, or wisdom emerged through the process. Educators are encouraged to reflect on how shared vocabulary strengthens professional dialogue, deepens understanding, and supports intentional, play-based practice.

Playful Activity Credit: Cheryl Priest & Suzanne Axelsson

- Advocacy
- Agency
- Child-Focused
- Co-Construct
- Co-Imaginer of Possibilities
- Co-Learner
- Co-Researcher
- Culturally Responsive
- Curriculum
- Early Childhood Framework
- Emergent Approach
- Enoughness
- Experiential Learning
- Holistic
- Land-Based Practices
- Open-Ended Materials
- Place-Based Practices
- Play-Responsive
- Protectors of Play™
- Reflective Practices
- Relational
- Relationship-Based
- Rights-Based Practices
- Sufficiency
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)



To protect play is to honour childhood,
curiosity, and the joy of learning.

~ Tina Geers, Protectors of Play™



Foundations of Reflective Practice

Understanding Early Childhood Pedagogy

What It Is and Why It Matters

Pedagogy refers to the how and why behind our work with children. In early childhood education, pedagogy is the thoughtful, intentional approach educators use to support children's learning, well-being, and holistic development. It is shaped by our beliefs about children, our understanding of development, our values, and the relationships we build with children, families, and communities.

Pedagogy is not a single method or program. Instead, it is a way of thinking, noticing, and responding that guides daily decisions; how environments are designed, how play is supported, how routines are structured, how educators interact with children and our role as educators.

Pedagogy and Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is what brings pedagogy to life. Through reflection, educators pause to consider what is happening, why it is happening, and how their choices impact children. Reflection allows pedagogy to remain responsive rather than fixed.

Reflective practice invites educators to ask:

- What beliefs are guiding my decisions?
- How are children experiencing this environment or interaction?
- How do my actions align with my local early childhood framework?
- What does this moment tell me about children’s learning, wellbeing, and rights?
- How might I respond differently next time?

Reflective practice is what brings pedagogy to life. Through reflection, educators pause to consider what is happening, why it is happening, and how their choices impact children. Reflection allows pedagogy to remain responsive rather than fixed.

Pedagogy is not something we “get right” once; it is something we continually shape through reflection, relationships, and experience. Each thoughtful pause, question, and adjustment is part of growing as an educator and a Protector of Play™.

Pedagogical Quick Check-In

A Moment to Pause & Notice

Today, my practice was guided by: (circle or check)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play-Responsive | <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Framework | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergent Approach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child-Focused | <input type="checkbox"/> Culturally Responsive | <input type="checkbox"/> Experiential Learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship-Based | <input type="checkbox"/> Land-Based / Place-Based Practices | <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Curriculum Outcomes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> UDL | | |

One moment of play I noticed:

What this moment tells me about children's learning or wellbeing:

A question I'm wondering about:

One small pedagogical choice I might try next:



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What Is Reflective Practice?

Reflective practice is the ongoing process of thinking deeply about our experiences, decisions, and actions as educators. It invites us to notice what is happening, question our assumptions, and respond with intention.

Reflection can happen:

- Before an experience (planning and intention)
- During an experience (noticing and responding)
- After an experience (thinking, learning, and adjusting)

Reflection Prompt

What does reflective practice look like in my role and setting?

Play as Professional Practice

Play is central to children’s learning, wellbeing, and development. It is how children explore their world, express ideas, build relationships, and make meaning of their experiences. Supporting play requires intentional environments, responsive educators, and reflective decision-making.

As educators, protecting play means:

- Valuing play as meaningful learning.
- Creating time, space, and permission for play.
- Advocating for play with families, colleagues, and communities.

Reflection Prompt

How do I currently describe the value of play to others?

Play Advocacy Reflection: Protecting Play in Practice

This reflection invites you to notice how advocacy for play shows up in everyday moments.

Today, play was protected when...

What made this decision challenging?

What did the child(ren) gain in this moment?

How might I describe this moment to a colleague, family member, or administrator?

Protecting play often lives in the small, thoughtful choices we make each day.
It is an act of advocacy woven into everyday practice.



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Children's Rights & the UNCRC

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognizes children as rights holders. Article 31 affirms every child's right to rest, leisure, and play. These rights guide our professional responsibilities and daily practice.

[UNCRC Link - UNCRC Rights of the Child](#)

Connecting Children's Rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognizes children as active rights holders whose learning, well-being, and development are deeply interconnected. In early learning and child care settings, children's rights are not experienced in isolation; they are lived through everyday relationships, environments, and play experiences.

Article 31 - Rest, Play, Culture, Arts

Article 31 affirms children's right to rest, leisure, play, and participation in cultural and creative experiences. Play is how children explore ideas, build relationships, express emotions, and make meaning of their world. When play is protected, children's voices are heard, their curiosity is honoured, and their well-being is supported.

Article 28 - Access to Education

Article 28 recognises children's right to education. In the early years, education is not confined to formal instruction. It is rooted in play-based, relational, and experiential learning. When educators support play as meaningful learning, they honour children's right to access education that is engaging, responsive, and developmentally appropriate.

Article 29 - Aims of Education

Article 29 focuses on the purpose of education, emphasizing the development of the whole child—including personality, talents, abilities, respect for others, and respect for the environment. Play creates space for children to develop these qualities naturally, supporting social-emotional growth, creativity, problem-solving, and a sense of belonging.

Reflection

What other children’s rights are connected to a child’s right to play, and how do I see those rights reflected in my practice?

Child Rights Resources

- UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org>
- UNICEF Canada: <https://www.unicef.ca/en>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/>

Advocacy in Everyday Practice

Connecting children's rights to practice invites educators to move beyond viewing play as an optional part of the day, and instead recognize it as a professional responsibility. These rights invite educators to view play not as separate from education, but as essential to it. When we honour children's right to play, we create time, space, and relationships that support curiosity, agency, and well-being. Rights-based practice asks us to reflect on how our routines, environments, and responses either protect or limit play.

Where do I currently see children's right to play upheld?

- Time to play freely
- Flexible routines
- Access to open-ended materials
- Supportive relationships
- Respect for children's ideas
- Making children's learning visible
- Promoting democracy, equity, diversity and inclusion

What Rights-Based Play Looks Like in Practice

Example 1: Protecting Time for Play

An educator notices that children are deeply engaged in building and imaginative play outdoors. Rather than ending play to stay strictly on schedule, the educator adjusts the routine to allow the play to continue. This decision respects children’s right to play by valuing sustained engagement, exploration, and joy over rigid time constraints (Article 3 & 31).



Example 2: Respecting Children’s Voices Through Play

During indoor play, children begin transforming loose parts into a pretend café. Instead of redirecting them to a planned activity, the educator observes, listens, and supports the play by offering additional materials and asking open-ended questions. By following the children’s lead, the educator honours children’s right to express ideas, participate meaningfully, and co-construct their learning through play. (Article 12 & 15)

Example 3: Honouring the Right to Play Through Space & Materials

An educator reflects on how a crowded environment limits children’s play and responds by creating open, flexible spaces with loose parts and open-ended materials. By designing environments that invite movement, choice, and exploration, the educator upholds children’s right to play through space that values agency and engagement. (Article 3 & 29)



Article 31 Reflection

What does honouring the right to play look like in my setting right now?

In what ways do my routines, environments, or expectations strengthen, or unintentionally limit, these rights?



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Advocacy in Action

What is one action I can take to learn more about the Rights of the Child and how they connect to my practice?

- Read or revisit the UNCRC
- Engage in professional learning or discussion
- Reflect with my team or community of practice
- Explore how children’s rights are reflected in my policies and routines
- Share learning with families or colleagues

One small action I can take to strengthen children’s right to play:

How might deepening my understanding of children’s rights strengthen my role as a Protector of Play™?

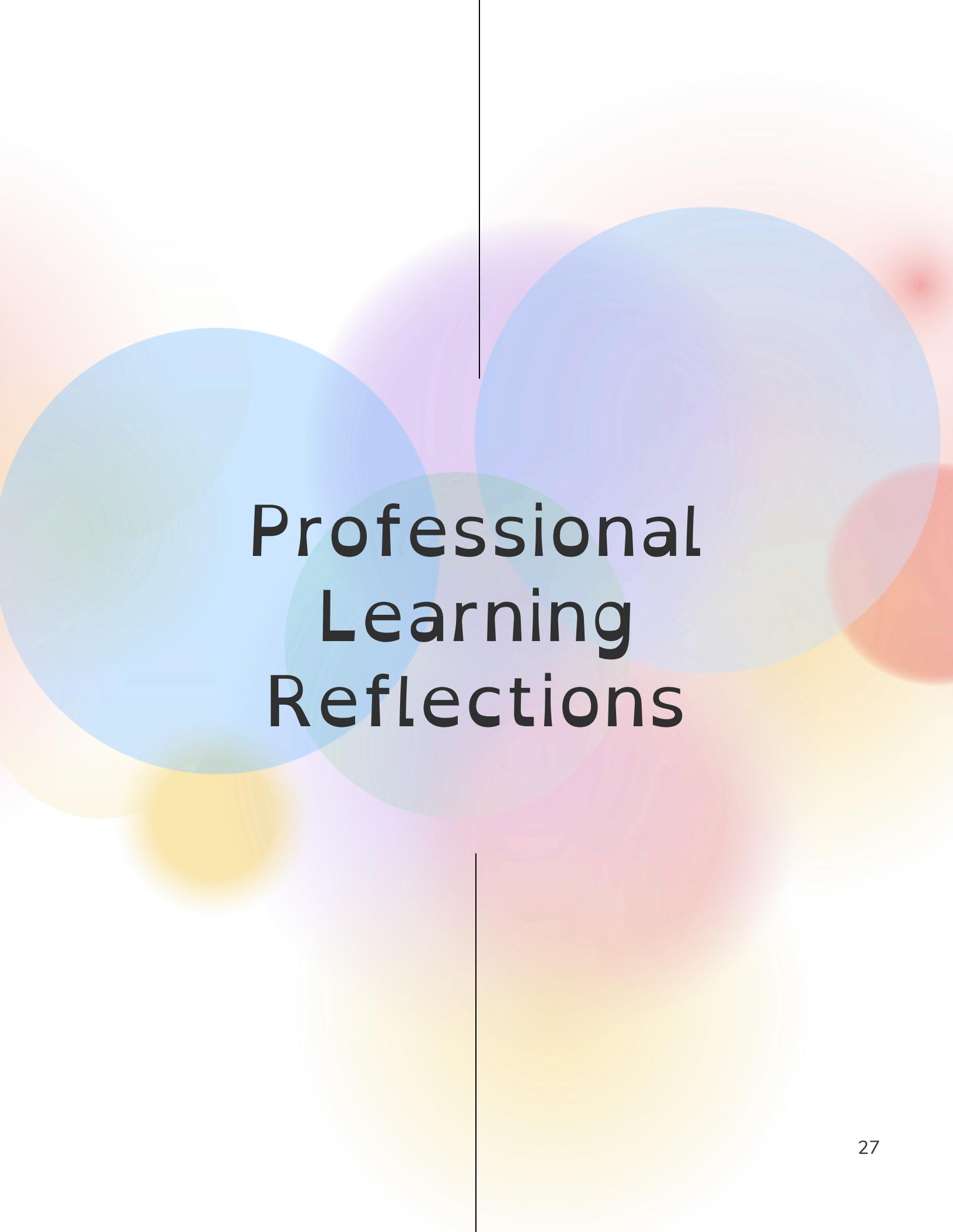


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The teacher must learn to see and hear
what children are doing and saying.

~ Loris Malaguzzi

The background features several overlapping, semi-transparent circles in shades of blue, purple, yellow, and orange. A thin vertical black line runs down the center of the page, passing through the text.

Professional Learning Reflections

Professional Learning Reflection

Learning With Intention as a Protector of Play™

Professional learning experiences play an important role in supporting reflective practice in early childhood education. Workshops, conferences, readings, conversations, and other learning opportunities invite educators to pause, question, and expand their thinking about children, play, and professional practice. When approached intentionally, professional learning helps educators make sense of their experiences, challenge assumptions, and translate new ideas into meaningful action.

For Protectors of Play™, professional learning is not just about participation; it is about critically engaging with ideas that uphold children's right to play and support holistic development. Reflective educators seek learning grounded in credible, evidence-informed, and research-based practice, recognizing that not all information shared in learning spaces reflects best practice.

By choosing professional learning thoughtfully and reflecting intentionally, educators strengthen their professional voice, deepen their advocacy for play, and continue to grow as informed, reflective Protectors of Play™.

Credibility & Alignment

Before, during, or after a professional learning experience, take a moment to reflect on the credibility and alignment of the information being shared.

Reflection Questions

- Who created or facilitated this learning experience?
- What perspectives or voices are represented?
- How does this learning align with what we know about children, play, and development?
- Does this information honour children's rights and wellbeing?
- How does this align with my local early learning and care framework?
- How are the ideas shared supported by research, evidence, or recognized frameworks?
- How does it demonstrate that children are viewed as capable, competent, and active learners?
- Is play respected as meaningful learning and not treated as a reward or add-on?
- How might this learning influence my practice, for better or for caution?

Being a Protector of Play™ means engaging thoughtfully with learning and choosing practices that are informed, ethical, and responsive.

Professional Learning Reflection

Workshops • Webinars • Conferences

Learning Experience: _____

Date: _____

Facilitator/Organization: _____

- Format: Workshop/Webinar
 Pop-Up Workshop (IMECC)
 Online Learning (courses/videos/etc.)
 Conference

Reflect

One idea that challenged my thinking:

One idea that affirmed my practice:

A quote or phrase I want to remember:



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Professional Learning Reflection

Workshops • Webinars • Conferences

Connection to Play

How does this learning connect to children's play?

Action Plan

One strategy or idea I want to try:

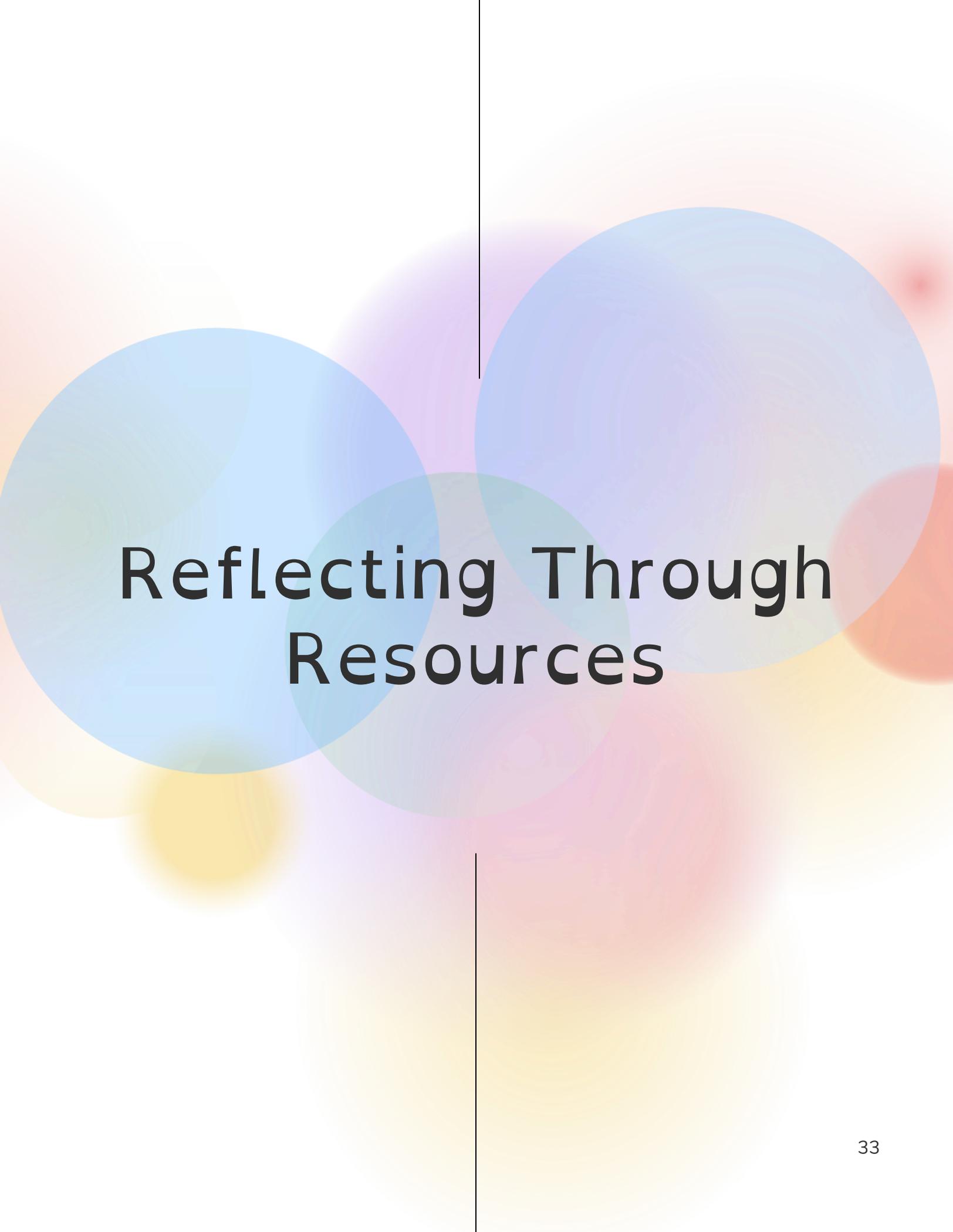
What support or resources might I need?

One question I am still wondering about:



We do not learn from experience...
we learn from reflecting on experience.

~ John Dewey



Reflecting Through Resources

Reflecting Through Resources

Learning That Honours Our Journey



Professional learning does not look the same for every educator. Our time, schedules, access, and financial realities all shape how and when we are able to engage in learning. While formal professional development experiences can be valuable, they do not always meet the evolving needs, interests, or capacities of educators. This is where informal learning through resources becomes an essential part of our ongoing professional journey.

Books, podcasts, blogs, articles, and short videos allow educators to learn in ways that are flexible, affordable, and responsive. These resources can be explored at our own pace, revisited when needed, and chosen based on curiosity rather than compliance. Informal learning honours educator agency and recognizes that growth does not always happen in structured or scheduled spaces.

Through informal learning, we can explore how play is deeply interconnected in ways we had never imagined. Who would have thought that quantum physics, philosophy, or even my favourite fairy books could deepen my understanding of play? These unexpected connections can strengthen our practice, renew our passion, and reshape how we advocate for play.

For Protectors of Play™, reflecting with resources is a way to stay curious, informed, and connected, while honouring our time, our capacity, and our love for learning. Informal learning reminds us that professional growth is not linear, and that sometimes the most meaningful learning happens when we allow ourselves to explore beyond the expected.

Reflecting with Resources

Books • Articles • Blogs

Resource Title: _____

Author / Source: _____

Date Engaged With: _____

What drew me to this resource?

Key Take Aways:

Favourite Quotes:



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Reflecting with Resources

Books • Articles • Blogs

What area of play am I strengthening this month?

- Theory/Research
- Outdoor/Nature
- ELCC Pedagogy
- Advocacy
- Active Play
- Relationships
- Children's Rights
- Environments
- Educator Well-Being
- Other _____

What challenged, affirmed, or extended my thinking?

One idea I want to explore, question, or try:

How does this resource support my role as a Protector of Play™?

Reflecting Through Media

Podcasts • Videos • YouTube

What area of play am I strengthening this month?

- Theory/Research
 - Outdoor/Nature
 - ELCC Pedagogy
 - Advocacy
 - Active Play
 - Relationships
 - Children's Rights
 - Environments
 - Educator Well-Being
 - Other _____
-
-

Credibility Check (Quick Pause):

- Sources are credible and informed (I completed a credibility check)
- Ideas align with what I know about children and play
- I want to learn more before applying this

Whose perspective is being shared in this content?

Does this content reflect a single viewpoint, or acknowledge multiple ways of knowing?

One small way this learning might influence my thinking as a Protector of Play™



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Reflecting Through Media

Podcasts • Videos • YouTube

Podcast / Video Title: _____

Host / Creator: _____

Episode / Video Length: _____

Why did I choose this podcast or video?

Ideas That Stood Out:

Favourite Quotes:



Setting goals is the first step in turning
the invisible into the visible.

~ Tony Robins



Communities of Inspiration

Communities of Inspiration

Learning Together Through Connection



Communities of practice, what we call **Communities of Inspiration**, play an important role in supporting reflective practice and professional growth for educators. These communities bring together passionate individuals who are committed to deepening their understanding, questioning their practice, and moving their professional work forward.

For early childhood educators, communities of inspiration provide space to think alongside others, share experiences, and explore ideas related to play, pedagogy, and children’s rights. Learning in community reminds us that professional growth is

not meant to happen in isolation. It is strengthened through conversation, relationship, and shared reflection.

Communities of inspiration may include early childhood educators, teachers, leaders, researchers, and professionals from related fields who share a common value for play. Engaging with diverse perspectives helps broaden thinking, challenge assumptions, and deepen understanding. When we learn alongside others who value play, our advocacy becomes stronger and more informed.

These communities can take many forms: online or in-person, formal or informal, structured or conversational. Some meet regularly with a clear focus, while others gather around shared interests or questions. Finding the right community takes time and exploration, and it is okay to try different formats before finding what fits your learning style, schedule, and needs.

However you choose to engage, communities of inspiration support educators in reflecting, reconnecting, and growing as Protectors of Play™ together.

Community of Inspiration Reflection

Learning With and From Others

Community Name / Group: _____

Date / Location: _____ In-person Online

Ideas, Questions, or Perspectives That Stood Out:

Whose voices or experiences expanded my thinking? How?

One idea I want to explore further:

What am I noticing about what I need from a community of inspiration?



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Professional learning communities are inclusive groups of people motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other to inquire into their practice.

~ Louise Stoll



**Reflecting on
Indigenous Ways of
Knowing, Land-
Based and Place-
Based Learning**

Reflecting on Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Land, and Place

Walking a Learning Journey

Engaging in Truth and Reconciliation is an ongoing learning journey for educators, one that requires reflection, humility, and a willingness to listen, unlearn, and grow. In early childhood education, this journey invites us to consider how Indigenous ways of knowing and being, land-based practices and place-based pedagogy can deepen our relationships with children, community and the land we learn and live on.

Land-based and place-based pedagogy reminds us that learning does not happen separate from land, history, or relationship. The land is not just a backdrop for play; it is a teacher. Through intentional reflection, educators are invited to notice how children connect with land and place through play, curiosity, movement, and storytelling, and how our own relationships with land influence our practice.

This reflective work asks educators to move beyond surface-level activities and toward meaningful, respectful practice. It encourages us to reflect on our responsibilities as educators, how we honour Indigenous perspectives without appropriating them, and how we create space for children to build their own relationships with land, place, and community. This journey aligns with land-based and place-based pedagogy by centring relationship, reciprocity, care, and respect. These values strengthen play-based practice and support children's holistic learning.

Truth and Reconciliation is not a destination. It is a continual process of reflection, learning, and action that shapes who we are as educators and how we show up for children, families, and communities.

Resources:

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: <https://nctr.ca/>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: [Calls to Action](#)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>

My Journey with Land, Place, and Reconciliation

Reflective Pause

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action remind educators of our shared responsibility to learn about the histories, perspectives, and ongoing realities of Indigenous Peoples, and to reflect this learning in our professional practice. In early childhood education, this work begins with reflection, relationship, and a commitment to ongoing learning rather than arriving at an endpoint.

This reflection invites educators to consider how their learning journey aligns with the TRC Calls to Action related to education, reconciliation, and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems, and how these commitments shape practice with children, families, and communities.

What am I currently learning about Indigenous histories, perspectives, and ways of knowing? (TRC Calls to Action 62 & 63 – Education for Reconciliation)

What gaps, questions, or areas of unlearning am I noticing in myself?

Reflection: My Journey with Land, Place, and Reconciliation

Reflective Pause

How do I acknowledge and honour the land and place where I live and work?

How does my relationship with land influence my teaching, reflection, and sense of responsibility?

What responsibilities do I hold as an educator when engaging with Indigenous perspectives? (TRC Calls to Action 62 – Lifelong learning)



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Reflection: My Journey with Land, Place, and Reconciliation

Reflective Pause

How do I ensure my approach to Indigenous perspectives is rooted in respect, humility, and relationship rather than tokenism? (TRC Calls to Action 63 – Building intercultural understanding and respect)

How do children experience land and place in my setting through play and exploration? (TRC Calls to Action 62 & 64 – Integrating Indigenous perspectives respectfully)

What opportunities exist to deepen children’s relationship with land and place in meaningful ways?

Where can I go to build relationships with Indigenous ways of knowing on my journey of truth and reconciliation?

Creating a Living Land Acknowledgement with Children

Creating a land acknowledgement with children is an opportunity to engage in meaningful, relationship-based learning rooted in place, respect, and listening. When developed thoughtfully, a land acknowledgement becomes a living document; one that grows and changes as children's relationships with the land deepen and as educators continue their own learning journeys with Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

This process centres children's voices, experiences, and curiosity, while encouraging educators to move beyond scripted acknowledgements toward authentic, place-based understanding. The goal is not to "get it right," but to learn together with humility, care, and intention.

A Living Commitment

Revisit your land acknowledgement regularly. As children grow, interests change, and understanding deepens, allow the acknowledgement to evolve. This ongoing process reflects the truth that relationships, with land, community, and Indigenous Peoples, are built over time.

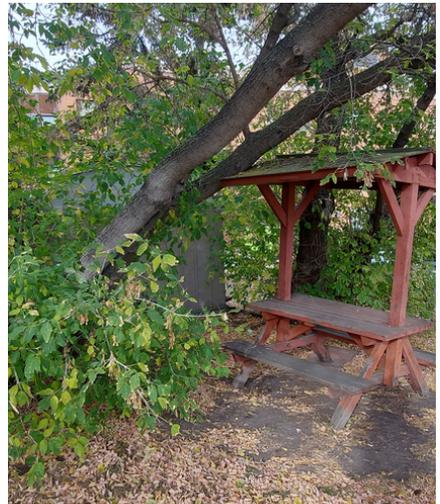
Expression of Gratitude

This land acknowledgement activity was inspired by the teachings of my friend, Elder Sherry Duncan from Treaty 8 Territory, and thoughtfully shaped through ongoing conversations with Indigenous and Treaty early childhood educators across Canada.

Creating a Living Land Acknowledgement with Children

Creating with Children

Educators and children can explore the land and places they know well together: your outdoor spaces, walking paths, playgrounds, nearby parks, or natural areas you visit frequently. Children might take photographs, draw pictures, or share stories about these places that hold meaning for them. These shared experiences can become the foundation of a collective land acknowledgement created within the learning community.



Centring Children's Voices

As educators listen closely to what children notice, wonder about, and care for in these places, children's words, questions, and reflections can become part of the acknowledgement. Honouring children's perspectives recognizes them as capable contributors and emerging knowledge holders whose relationships with the land are meaningful and important.

Learning the Indigenous Peoples of the Land

As part of this shared learning journey, educators and children can learn about the Indigenous Peoples who have lived in relationship with these lands for generations. Including the names of these Nations within a land acknowledgement helps recognize the enduring presence, histories, and ongoing relationships Indigenous Peoples hold with the land.

Using Indigenous Names

Where possible, educators may choose to learn and use the Indigenous names for Nations, communities, and Peoples rather than colonized or imposed names. This practice supports respectful relationships and acknowledges Indigenous self-identification. This learning often unfolds over time and may include seeking guidance from Indigenous sources and community knowledge.

Reflection

How did creating this acknowledgement deepen children's connection to land and place?



The land is the real teacher.
All we need as students is mindfulness.

~ Robin Wall Kimmerer,
Braiding Sweetgrass



Reflecting on Children's *Play*

Reflecting on Children's Play

Honouring Children's Agency Through Play

Children and play are at the heart of early learning practice. To truly understand children's experiences, educators must engage in intentional observation; observing with purpose, curiosity, and openness. Intentional observation moves beyond simply watching what children are doing and invites educators to notice how children are engaging, what they are exploring, and why their play matters.

Through intentional observation and reflection, educators deepen their understanding of children's thinking, relationships, and learning processes. This practice allows educators to use professional language to describe children's play in meaningful ways, making learning visible and supporting reflective, evidence-informed decision-making. Observation becomes a tool for listening to children's voices, rather than measuring outcomes or directing behaviour.

Intentional observation also strengthens play advocacy. When educators can clearly articulate what they see, hear, and understand through children's play, they are better equipped to advocate for play as meaningful learning and a fundamental right. Reflecting on play through intentional observation supports educators in their role as Protectors of Play™, ensuring that children's curiosities, ideas, and voices remain central to professional practice.

Personal Note: Honouring Inspiration

Throughout my professional learning journey as an educator, I have come to meet amazing people who have inspired, and continue to inspire, my practices. One of the most influential people I have had the honour of meeting is Suzanne Axelsson. Through her teachings, discussions and collective reflections, I have built upon my image of a Protector of Play™. My perspective on play, the child and play is influenced by her guidance in her Playarista course, her Substack writings, and my discussions with her. Thank you Suzanne for your playful guidance!

Connect with Suzanne here:

Substack: <https://substack.com/@suzanneaxelsson>

Playarista Course: <https://courses.wunderled.com/playarista-waitlist>

The Role of the Educator in Play Responsive Practices

In early childhood education, the role of the educator is not fixed. Educators move fluidly between different roles in response to children, play, and context. These roles support children's curiosity, ideas, voices, and right to play. These roles are heavily influenced by my learnings and reflections of becoming a Playarista with Suzanne Axelsson.

Educator as Teacher

When educators adopt the role of a teacher, they bring intentionality, professional knowledge, and ethical responsibility to their practice. Within this role, educators thoughtfully design environments, offer invitations and provocations for play, support the development of skills and dispositions, and make responsive decisions that nurture children's holistic learning and wellbeing. This role is not separate from children's experiences of play, but unfolds within relationships, curiosity, and shared discovery.

In practice, this may look like:

- Designing play-based environments that invite exploration and curiosity
- Introducing new ideas or materials at meaningful moments in children's play
- Supporting learning through attentive observation, reflection, and documentation

Educator as Co-Learner / Facilitator

When educators engage as facilitators of learning, they position themselves as co-learners, co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge alongside children. Rather than positioning themselves as the sole experts, educators participate in shared inquiry, curiosity, and relationship-based learning. Within this role, learning unfolds through collaboration, exploration, and the meaningful exchange of ideas between children and educators.

In practice, this may look like:

- Joining children in play and exploration
- Wondering alongside children and exploring questions together
- Asking open-ended questions that invite thinking and dialogue
- Responding thoughtfully to children's ideas, interests, and play
- Co-constructing knowledge through shared play experiences

Educator as Playworker

When educators engage in the role of playworker, they support and protect children’s play by observing, responding, and creating conditions where play can unfold naturally. Within this role, educators remain attentive to children’s agency, autonomy, and their right to play.

In practice, this may look like:

- Allowing space for uninterrupted play experiences
- Respecting children’s choices, rhythms, and ways of engaging in play
- Intervening thoughtfully when needed to support safety, inclusion, or well-being
- Advocating for the time, space, and permission children need to play

Educator Roles in Children’s Play: A Reflective Check-In

Educator as Teacher

I was supporting learning through intention and guidance by:

- Designing or adjusting the environment
- Introducing materials, ideas, or language
- Supporting skill development
- Making professional decisions that supported learning or wellbeing

Educator as Co-Learner / Facilitator

I was learning with children by:

- Following children’s interests or ideas
- Wondering alongside children
- Asking open-ended questions
- Supporting shared inquiry and exploration
- Playing with the children

Educator as Playworker

I was protecting children’s play by:

- Observing without directing
- Allowing uninterrupted play
- Respecting children’s choices and rhythms
- Intervening only when necessary for safety or inclusion

Reflective Pause

Which educator role do I find myself stepping into most often—and which role might I explore more intentionally to protect children’s play?

Roles of the Educator Credit: Suzanne Axelsson

Reflecting on Practice with Children

Date: _____ Context / Setting: _____

What I noticed:

Children were exploring (meaning making):

My Role in the Moment: Educator as...

Teacher Co-Learner / Facilitator Playworker

How can I nurture children's curiosities, honour their ideas, amplify their voices, and uphold their right to play?



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Reflecting on Children's Learning





Considering the play-ecosystem helps us understand the complexity of play that is woven into the fabric of our daily lives

~ Suzanne Axelsson,
The Original Learning Approach

Reflecting on Play Environments

Reflecting on Environments, Planning, and Possibilities

Children's play is deeply influenced by the environments in which it unfolds. When educators intentionally reflect on space, materials, and design, environments become active partners in children's learning rather than static backdrops. Designing for play invites educators to notice how spaces support curiosity, agency, relationships, culture, and identity.

Reflecting on environments encourages educators to move beyond aesthetics and consider how space communicates value. Thoughtful environments invite children to explore, create, collaborate, and make choices. When educators observe how children interact with space and materials, they gain insight into children's interests, ideas, and learning processes. This information guides responsive and emergent planning.

Emergent planning grows from intentional observation and reflection. Rather than following predetermined plans, educators respond to what children are curious about, offering provocations and materials that extend thinking and exploration. Provocations are not instructions; they are invitations that spark inquiry, wonder, and play while honouring children's agency and right to play.

As part of reflective practice, educators are invited to ask: What is this space inviting? Environments communicate messages about movement, collaboration, risk, creativity, and belonging. Reflecting on what spaces and materials invite, or limit, helps educators make thoughtful adjustments that deepen play and learning experiences.

Designing for play is an ongoing, reflective process. Through observing children, reflecting on environments, and responding with intention, educators strengthen professional practice and create spaces that support meaningful, play-based learning rooted in children's curiosities, voices, and rights.

Play Environment Reflection

Date: _____

Learning / Play Space: Indoor Outdoor Shared Other: _____

What does the environment look like right now? (Consider layout, materials, light, movement, and access.)

How are children using this environment?

- Moving freely
- Exploring independently
- Revisiting play
- Creating
- Observing others
- Collaborating

What seems to be engaging children most?

This space currently invites:

- Exploration
- Imagination
- Problem-Solving
- Autonomy & Agency
- Movement
- Collaboration
- Quiet focus
- Creativity

This space may be limiting:

- Choice
- Time
- Access
- Inclusion
- Identity



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Play Environment Reflection

What messages does this environment communicate to children?

One change I might make to better support play:

Materials, layout, or invitations to explore:

How does this environment honour children's agency, voices, and right to play?

Play Advocacy Reflection: Protecting Play in Practice

Date: _____

Where did play show up?

What supported the play?

A moment where I chose play over pressure:

How might I describe this moment to a colleague, family member, or administrator?

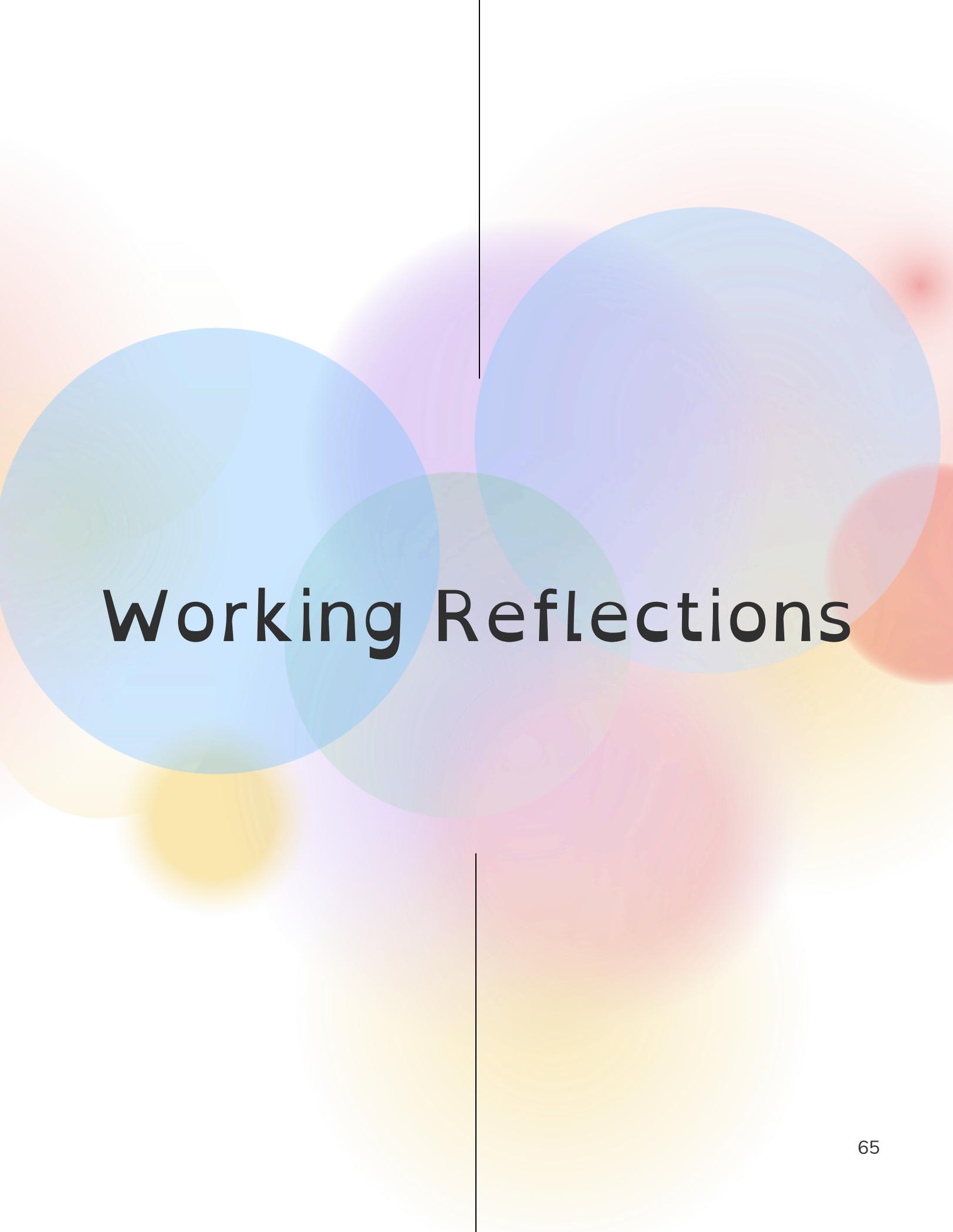


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The environment is a reflection of who
you are in relationship with the children
- as mighty learners and citizens
- and their families.

~ Flight: Alberta's Early Learning
and Care Framework, 2014



Working Reflections

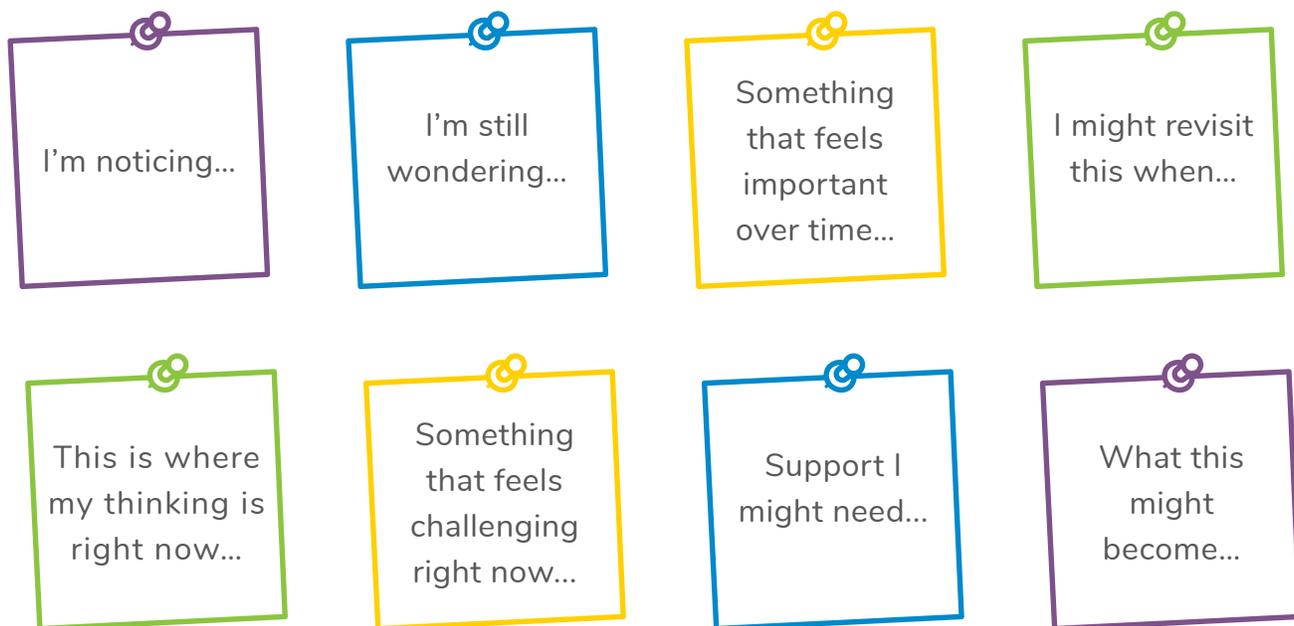
Working Reflections

A Living Part of Reflective Practice

A working reflection is a living, evolving way of thinking. It captures ideas, questions, and observations as they are forming, rather than waiting for clarity or resolution. Working reflections honour the reality that learning, play, and professional practice are ongoing and responsive.

Working reflections can stand alone as a space to record wondering, uncertainty, and emerging ideas. Things like 'sticky notes' and 'napkin doodles' or those 3 AM scribbles we write down our ideas on to get them out of our head so we can sleep! They can also be integrated into other reflective practices, such as observations of children's play, environment reflections, professional learning, or communities of practice, by naming what is still being explored or revisited over time.

Unlike traditional reflections that seek conclusions, working reflections invite educators to pause, notice, and stay curious. They support intentional observation, emergent thinking, and reflective decision-making while allowing practice to unfold naturally. As a living process, working reflections help educators remain responsive to children, strengthen professional judgement, and continue growing as Protectors of Play™.





Action Planning & Goal Setting

Action Planning & Goal Setting

Holding Intentions While Staying Open to Possibility

Thoughtful action planning and goal setting support educators in shaping professional learning journeys that are intentional, balanced, and meaningful. Planning on both an annual and monthly basis helps educators align learning with their values, interests, time, and capacity, while supporting sustainable professional growth rather than reactive decision-making.

At the same time, professional learning in early learning and childcare is not linear or predictable. Some of the most meaningful learning emerges unexpectedly through conversations, observations, new questions, or opportunities that arise along the way. Leaving space for spontaneous learning honours curiosity, responsiveness, and the evolving nature of practice.

To support intentional planning, Inspired Minds ECC event schedules are typically shared 1 to 6 months in advance, giving educators time to plan, budget, and reflect on their professional learning choices. By subscribing to the monthly Protectors of Play™ e-newsletter, educators can stay up to date on upcoming Inspired Minds ECC events, community events, special discounts, freebies and exclusive opportunities created for Protectors of Play™.

By balancing intentional planning with openness to the unexpected, educators create a professional learning journey that is both grounded and flexible. Just as we follow children's learning with curiosity and care, we are invited to approach our own professional growth the same way, trusting the journey while staying open to new possibilities.

Annual Professional Learning Goals

Year: _____

Connection to Play

One area of play I want to deepen this year:

One advocacy goal connected to my learning:

How can I plan professional learning that is affordable, accessible, and sustainable for me and/or my program?

How has my professional learning this year strengthened my role as a Protector of Play™ and my confidence to advocate for play?



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End-of-Year Reflection

Year: _____

Looking Back

What gave me feel a sense of enoughness (self-acceptance of who I am currently as an educator)

A challenge that taught me something important:

A moment that made me smile and helped me remember my purpose as an educator?

Looking Forward

One intention I want to carry forward:

One way I will continue to protect play:



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Monthly Planner

Month: _____

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

What area of play pedagogy am I strengthening this month?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theory/Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor/Nature | <input type="checkbox"/> ELCC Pedagogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environments | <input type="checkbox"/> Active Play | <input type="checkbox"/> Educator Well-Being |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children's Rights | <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Equity, Diversity & |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> ELCC Frameworks | <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Practices |



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Monthly Professional Learning Goals

Month/Year: _____

Book Goal _____

Book Title: _____

Chapter/ Page Goals: _____

Key Take-Aways:

Book Goal _____

Book Title: _____

Chapter/ Page Goals: _____

Key Take-Aways:

Book Goal _____

Book Title: _____

Chapter/ Page Goals: _____

Key Take-Aways:



Monthly Professional Learning Goals

Month/Year: _____

Workshops / Conferences

Event / Session: _____

Date: _____

Key Take-Aways:

Event / Session: _____

Date: _____

Key Take-Aways:

Monthly Reflection

How do these goals support my growth as a Protector of Play™?

Wellbeing & Access Check

Does this learning plan feel balanced and achievable?

- Yes Somewhat I need to adjust



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Action Planning & Goal Setting

General

My Play-Focused Goal:

Why this matters:

Small Steps I Can Take:

Who Can Support Me:

What resources do I need?



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SMART Goals

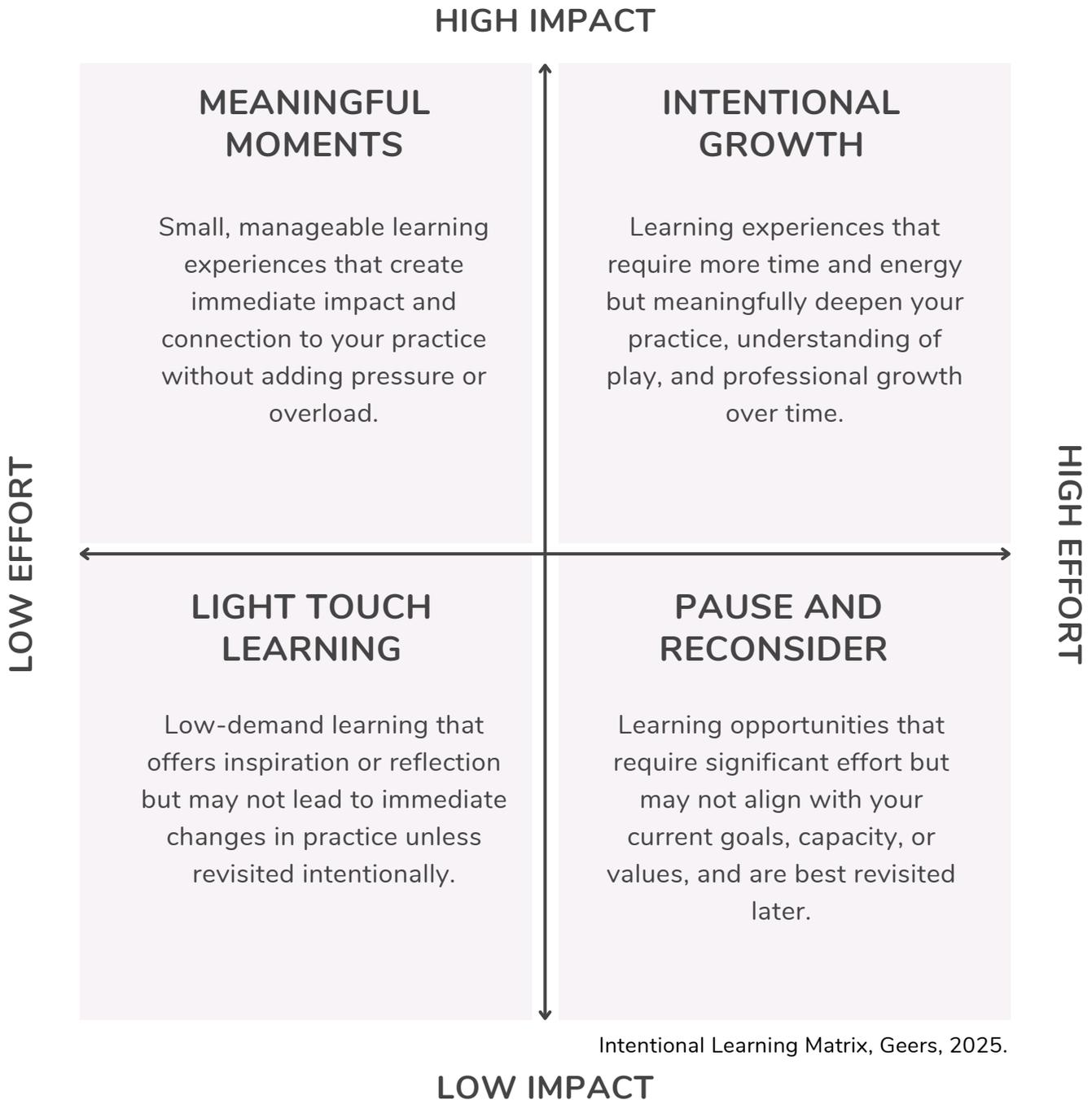
Creating SMART goals helps educators focus their professional learning and make progress in meaningful, manageable ways. Clear goals support growth while respecting time, capacity, and well-being.

S	Specific What do I want to accomplish?	
M	Measurable How will I know when it is accomplished?	
A	Achievable How can the goal be accomplished?	
R	Relevant Does this seem worthwhile?	
T	Time bound When can I accomplish this goal?	



The Intentional Learning Matrix

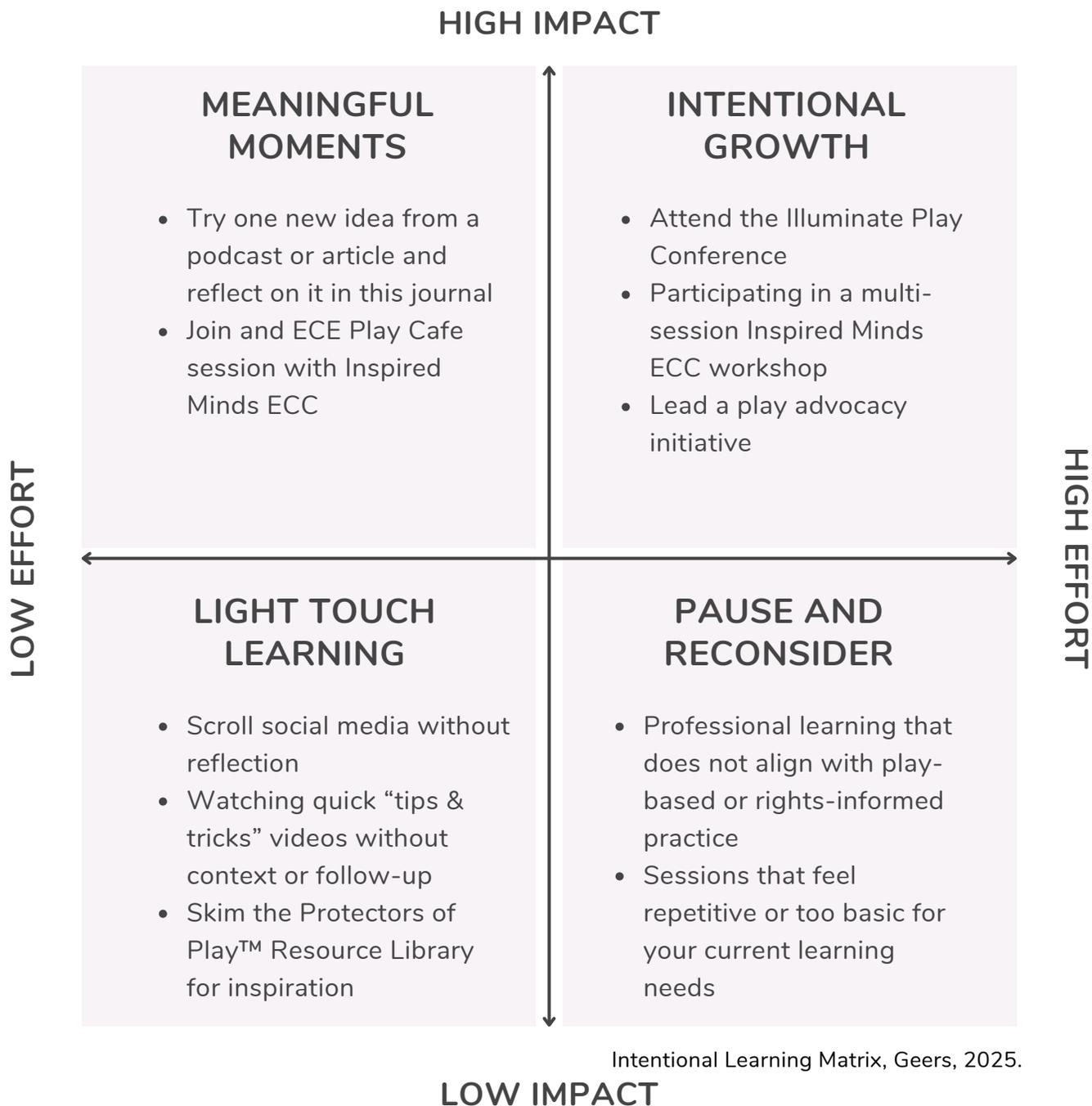
The Intentional Learning Matrix, created by Tina Geers, 2025, is a simple visual tool that helps early childhood educators organize and prioritize goals by considering factors such as impact, effort, or focus areas. Using a matrix supports intentional decision-making, helping educators balance professional learning, wellbeing, and play-based practice in realistic and sustainable ways.



The Intentional Learning Matrix

Gentle Reminder for Educators

Learning can move between quadrants over time. What feels like Light Touch Learning today may become Intentional Growth later—and that’s okay. This matrix is a tool to support choice, balance, and wellbeing, not to judge learning.

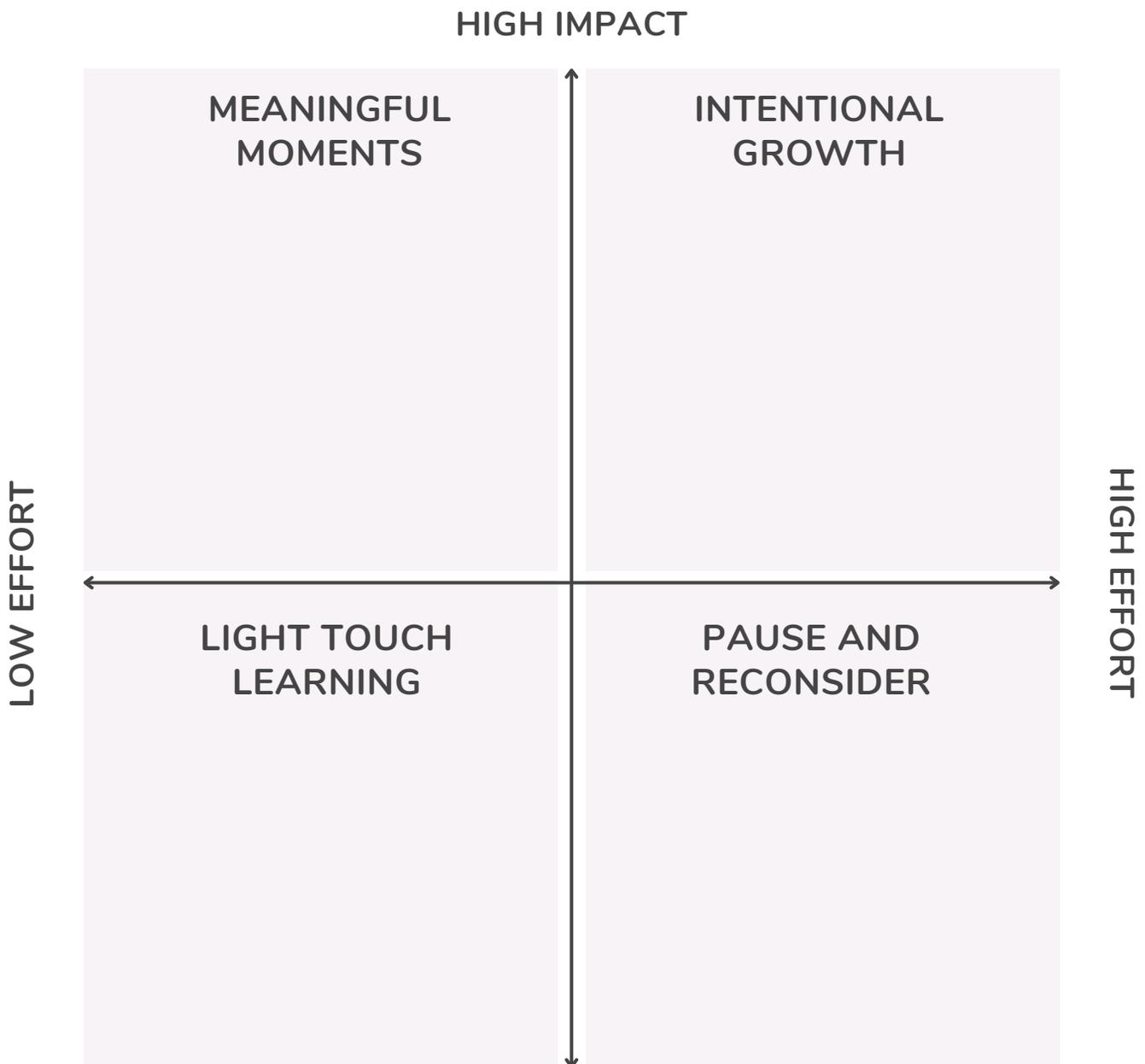


Intentional Learning Matrix, Geers, 2025.

The Intentional Learning Matrix

Reflection Tip

- This matrix supports reflection and choice; revisit and adjust as your learning journey evolves.
- There is no “right” quadrant; only what fits your needs right now.



Intentional Learning Matrix, Geers, 2025.





Key Takeaways & Insights

Key Takeaways & Insights

Turning Learning Into Thoughtful Change

Approaching professional learning with intention helps educators move from inspiration to meaningful practice. Rather than trying to apply everything at once, educators are encouraged to identify one key takeaway or insight, try it in practice, reflect on how it works, and adjust as needed.

Change takes time. New routines, habits, and mindsets require space to settle, for educators and for children. Giving new ideas at least two to six weeks to take shape allows for observation, reflection, and small adjustments along the way. As changes are made, it is important to remain mindful that all change impacts safety. Cultivating physical, mental, and emotional safety supports children’s wellbeing and honours educators’ own capacity as they grow and adapt together.

Capturing Insights

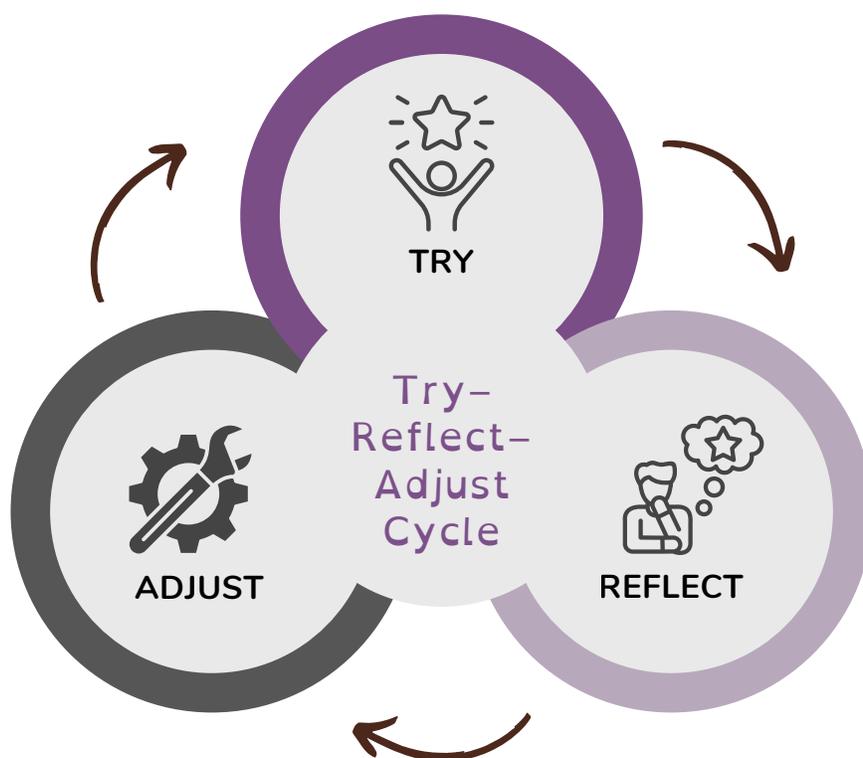
If I could take one sentence from this learning into my practice, it would be...

What do I need to consider to support physical, emotional, and mental safety as I try this?

The Try–Reflect–Adjust Cycle (T.R.A.C.)

Learning in Practice, Over Time

Professional learning becomes meaningful when ideas are explored thoughtfully and revisited over time. The Try–Reflect–Adjust cycle, developed by Tina Geers, 2025, supports educators in making small, intentional changes while honouring children’s learning, wellbeing, and safety.



TRY

- Introduce one new idea, strategy, or change.
- Keep it simple and intentional.
- Focus on how it supports children’s play, learning, or wellbeing.

REFLECT

- Observe and reflect on what you notice.
- Consider children’s responses, your own experience, and the environment.
- Ask: What’s working? What feels challenging?

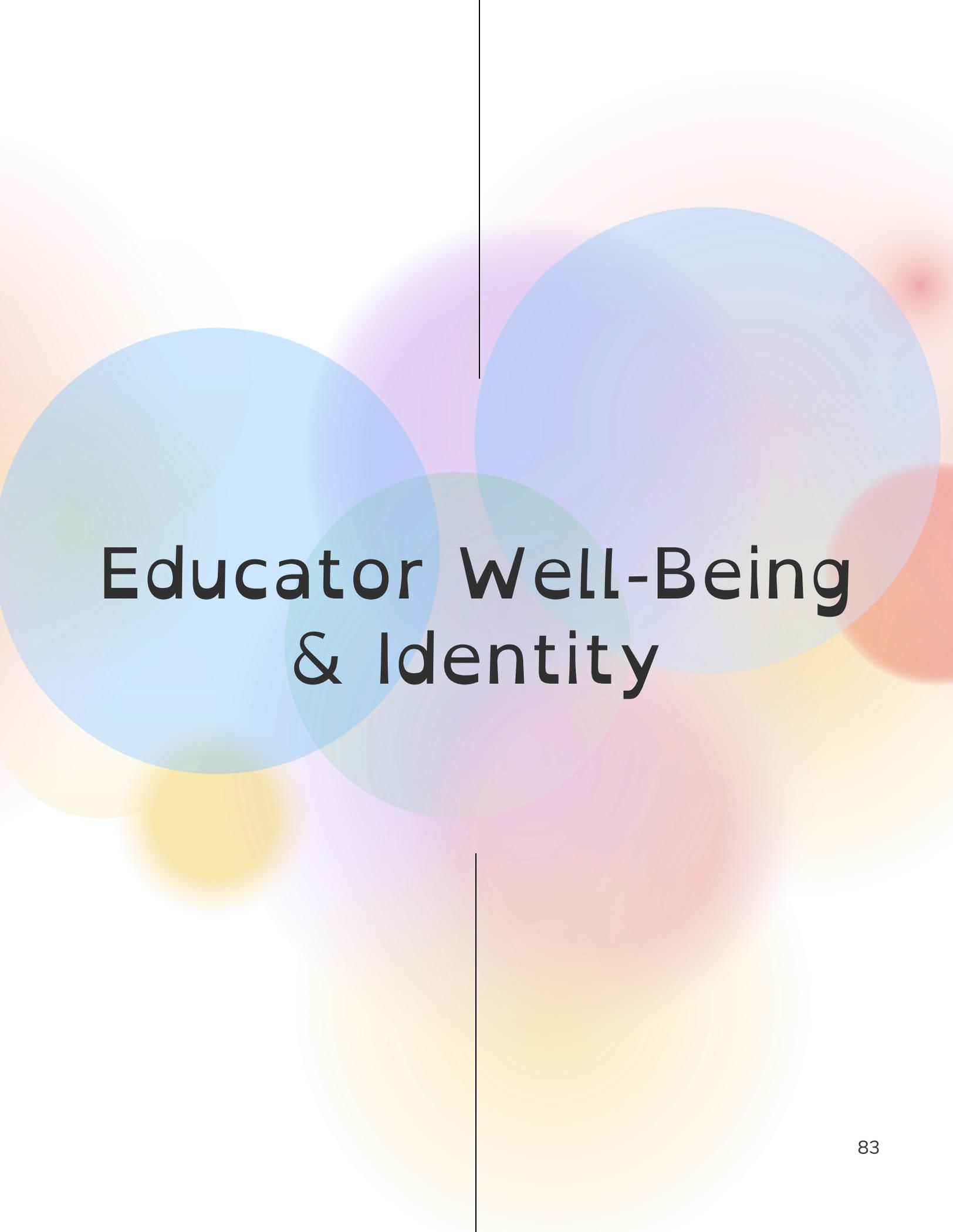
ADJUST

- Make small, thoughtful changes based on reflection.
- Adjust materials, timing, interactions, or expectations.
- Allow the practice to evolve over time.



Play is the work of childhood.

~ Jean Piaget



Educator Well-Being & Identity

Educator Well-Being & Identity

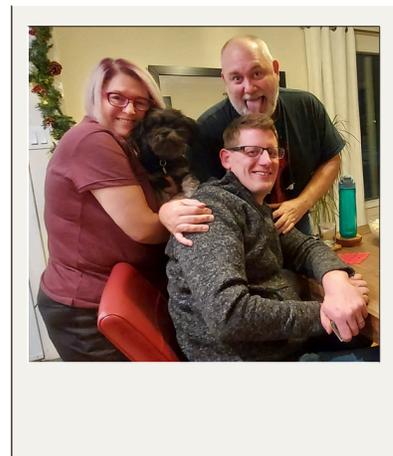
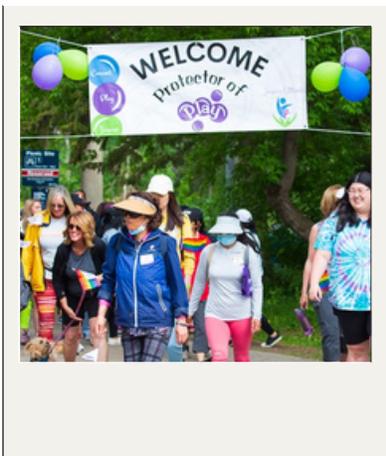
Rooted in Care, Presence, and Slow Pedagogy

Educator well-being is foundational to play-based practice. When educators feel grounded, supported, and resourced, they are better able to be present, responsive, and playful alongside children. Slow pedagogy invites educators to resist urgency and productivity culture, making space for reflection, relationship, and care; for children and for themselves (Moss & Clark, 2001).

Slow pedagogy honours pacing, rest, and intention. It reminds us that meaningful learning and change take time, and that constant doing can disconnect us from joy, curiosity, and purpose (Moss & Clark, 2001). Through reflective practice, educators are invited to notice their energy, capacity, and emotional well-being, recognizing that these directly influence interactions, environments, and decision-making.

Rooted in Care style reflection centres gentleness, compassion, and reconnection. These reflections support educators in protecting against burnout, reconnecting to joy and play, and sustaining themselves in the work over time. Caring for ourselves is not separate from caring for children; it is an essential part of ethical, relational practice and play advocacy.

Credit Reference: Alison Clark & Peter Moss



Educator Well-Being in Practice

Energy, Joy, and Rooted Care

Educator well-being is sustained through small, intentional practices that honour energy, capacity, and connection to joy. Regular energy and capacity check-ins help educators notice when to lean in, pause, or slow down. Protecting against burnout means reconnecting to what brings meaning and playfulness to the work, both with children and for ourselves.

Rooted in Care style reflections invite educators to respond with compassion rather than urgency, recognizing that well-being is cyclical and changes over time. Caring for ourselves is not separate from professional practice; it is foundational to sustaining presence, relationships, and play.

Laughter and Well-Being

When was the last time you laughed? Laughter plays an important role in supporting positive well-being by helping the body release feel-good chemicals, including serotonin (mood regulation), endorphins (pleasure) and dopamine (reward/happiness), which can improve mood and reduce stress. Sharing moments of laughter, whether with children or colleagues, supports emotional connection, relieves tension, and can gently reset energy and perspective, making space for joy, playfulness, and renewed presence in our work.

- When was the last time you had a good laugh?
- What caused you to laugh?
- What TV show/ video makes you laugh the most?
- Who in your family or circle of friends makes you laugh?
- You'll feel silly, but fake a laugh for effect.

Rooted in Care Reflection

Energy, Joy and Care Check-In

Right now, my energy feels:

- Full Steady Low Depleted

My current capacity for change or new ideas is:

- High Moderate Limited

Educator Self-Reflection

What is bringing me joy in my work right now?

What feels heavy, draining, or overwhelming?

What does my body, heart, or mind need more of right now?

Who can I reach out to for support?



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Rooted in Care Reflection

Reconnecting to Play

How am I experiencing play alongside children lately?

- Joyful Curious Distant Rushed Reconnected

When do I feel most present or playful?

One caring adjustment I can make to support my well-being:

One small way I can reconnect to play (with children or for myself):

How can I protect moments of joy in my practice?



Taking care of yourself doesn't mean
me first; it means me too.

~ L.R. Knost

Self-Care as Professional Practice

Valuing Ourselves as Much as Those We Care For

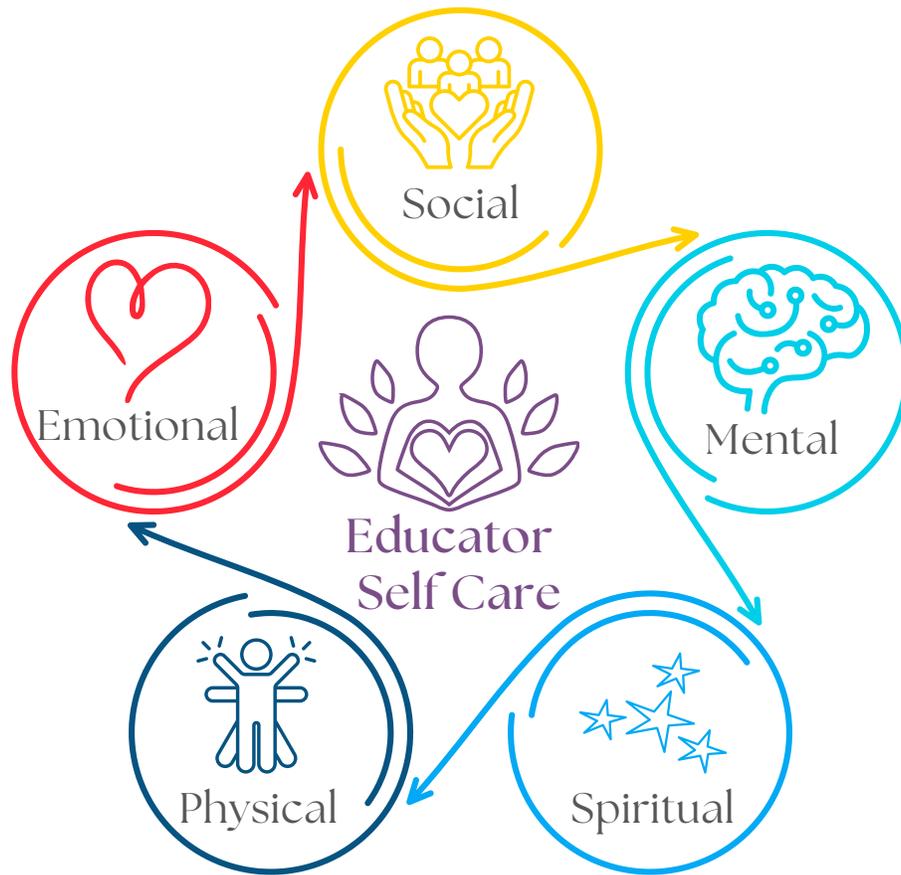
Educator self-care is not one-size-fits-all. Meaningful self-care begins with awareness; recognizing what truly supports you, rather than following Euro-centric or prescriptive ideas of self-care that may not reflect your identity, culture, values, or lived experiences. A culturally responsive approach to self-care honours diverse ways of resting, restoring, and reconnecting.

Self-care may look like quiet time alone, time with family or friends, connecting with pets, being outdoors, engaging in creative practices, or simply slowing down. What matters most is that self-care works for you. Cultivating practices across all five domains of self-care, physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual, is part of our self-care reflective practices. Creating practices that range from brief 15-second moments to multi-day experiences, that supports balance, sustainability, and well-being over time.

As Tina Geers reminds us, “We are equally as important as those we care for.” Educators care for many people every day, and that care deserves to be reciprocated. Engaging in self-care is not selfish; it is an act of restoration that allows educators to bring their best selves to the children and communities they support.

Equally important is building a support network made up of people and spaces that offer connection, understanding, and care. Drawing on the legacy of Diane Kashin, professional friendships among educators are recognized as a vital source of well-being and sustainability. There is a unique bond between educators, one rooted in a shared understanding of the emotional, relational, and complex nature of the work. These connections help educators navigate stress, prevent burnout, and build resilience. This strengthens our capacity to sustain reflective practice and continue our work as Protectors of Play™.

Self-Care Across the Five Domains



Social

- Connect with trusted colleagues or friends
- Join a book club
- Surround yourself with positive people

Emotional

- Name emotions
- Create your own calming kit
- Celebrate small moments of joy or connection
- Forest/Sound Bathing

Mental

- Limit information overload
- Learn a new language
- Watch a documentary
- Sit down with a good book

Physical

- Step outside for fresh air or natural light
- Turn off social media at least 1 hour before sleep
- Stretch, move, or rest when possible

Spiritual

- Spend time in nature or quiet reflection
- Engage in practices that align with your beliefs or values
- Volunteer



Rooted in Care: Gathering Moments of Care

My Self-Care Jar Activity



This activity invites educators to create a collection of self-care practices that bring joy and calm. Write one self-care idea per slip of paper, ranging from 15-second moments to multi-day experiences, and place them into a self-care jar. Aim to include at least five practices for each domain of self-care: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. When you need support, pull a slip and engage in the practice that resonates in that moment, choosing another if needed. Consider creating separate jars for home and work, as self-care looks different in each space. Return to your jar often, adding new practices as your needs, capacity, and seasons of life shift.

Step 1: Reflect

Think about what helps you feel grounded, rested, connected, and supported.
What kinds of care do I need most right now?

- Physical Emotional Mental Social Spiritual

Step 2: Create Your Self-Care Notes

Write short, simple self-care ideas on small slips of paper. These can be 15-second moments, 15-minute pauses, or longer experiences.

Examples:

- Step outside for fresh air
- Read one page of a favourite book
- Call a trusted friend
- Dance and sing to your favourite song



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Rooted in Care: Gathering Moments of Care

My Self-Care Jar Activity



Step 3: Fill Your Jar

Aim to include at least five self-care practices for each domain: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. These practices should reflect what truly supports you, recognizing that self-care looks different for everyone.

Step 4: Use Your Jar

When you feel tired, overwhelmed, or disconnected:

- Choose one note from your jar
- Try the practice with intention

Adjust as needed. Care should feel supportive, not pressured. If the idea doesn't fit your needs in that moment, gently choose another until one resonates.

Reflection

Who can you connect with if you don't have the energy to use your self-care jar?

What would I like to add or change over time?

Noticing Care, Capacity & Possibility

Holding Space for Myself

This week, self-care looked like: (What did I do for myself—big or small?)

Were there times I needed care but didn't take it?

- Yes No Not sure

If yes, what was happening at that time?

- Low energy
 Emotional overwhelm
 Time constraints
 Workload
 Caregiving responsibilities
 Other: _____

How often did I take time for myself this week?

- Not at all
 Once or twice
 A few times
 Regularly

How did this level of care affect me?



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Noticing Care, Capacity & Possibility

Holding Space for Myself

Which self-care domains felt supported this week?

- Physical Emotional Mental Social Spiritual

Which domains might need more care or revisiting?

- Physical Emotional Mental Social Spiritual

What do I notice about my needs, patterns, or capacity right now?

What is one thing I can release or let go of to support my wellbeing right now?

One or two gentle steps I can take to support my self-care next week:

- _____
- _____

**Self-care is not about doing more,
it's about responding with care to what you notice.**



When educators come together to share their stories, ideas, and questions, they build the professional friendships that sustain our work with children.

~ Diane Kashin,
Cultivating Professional Friendships
in Early Childhood Education

Educator Identity & Professional Voice

Recognizing Ourselves as Professionals

Educator identity shapes how we engage with children, families, colleagues, and communities. Recognizing ourselves as professionals means valuing our knowledge, experience, and ethical responsibilities, and engaging in practices grounded in kindness, compassion, equity, and inclusion. Our professional identity is reflected not only in what we do, but in how we listen, respond, and advocate for children, ourselves our profession and play.

Embracing a professional voice includes understanding the rights and responsibilities that come with our role:

- upholding children’s rights,
- engaging in reflective practice,
- contributing thoughtfully to professional communities.

When educators see themselves as capable professionals, they are better positioned to articulate the value of play, speak up for inclusive and equitable practices, and lead with integrity. Strengthening educator identity supports confidence, collaboration, and advocacy, reinforcing our shared responsibility as Protectors of Play™.

Educator Identity & Professional Voice

Recognizing Ourselves as Professionals

Right now, I see myself as an educator who is:

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reflective | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Confident | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocating | <input type="checkbox"/> Curious | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading | <input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compassionate | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting | <input type="checkbox"/> Growing | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated |

Who am I as an educator right now?

The values that guide my work with children and families are: (e.g., kindness, equity, inclusion, respect, play, relationships)

What does being a professional mean to me?

What responsibilities do I hold as an early childhood educator?



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Educator Identity & Professional Voice

Recognizing Ourselves as Professionals

How do I demonstrate kindness, compassion, equity, and inclusion in my daily practice?

A message about play, children, or my practice that I feel ready to share:

How can I advocate more confidently and respectfully for my profession as an early childhood educator? (e.g., through professional language, sharing knowledge about play, engaging in conversations, becoming a member of advocacy or professional organizations, or participating in professional communities, etc.)

When we recognize ourselves as professionals, our voice becomes a powerful tool for advocacy, care, and change.

The background features several overlapping, semi-transparent circles in shades of blue, purple, yellow, and orange. A thin vertical black line runs down the center of the page, dividing it into two halves.

My Protector of Play™ Reflections

My Protector of Play™ Reflections

Living, Learning, and Advocating Through Play

Congratulations! By engaging in this journal, you have committed to deep, meaningful reflective practice; an act that takes intention, courage, and care. Reflection is not passive work; it is powerful, professional work. By slowing down to notice, question, and grow, you are strengthening your practice, your voice, and your impact as an educator. This moment matters. The time you have spent reflecting, wondering, and reconnecting is a celebration of your dedication to children, to play, and to yourself as a Protector of Play™.

As you have come to recognize, being a Protector of Play™ is both a professional commitment and a personal way of being. It means intentionally enhancing your professional practices to advocate for play, uphold children's right to play, and create environments where curiosity, joy, and meaningful learning can thrive. Through reflection, intentional action, and advocacy, you strengthen your ability to protect play as essential, not optional, in early childhood.

This commitment extends beyond professional practice. Embracing play in your personal life deepens your understanding of its value and reminds you that play is not something you add to your days, but something that is woven throughout your life. As a Protector of Play™, you honour play as an integral part of learning, well-being, and belonging for children, educators and yourself.

As you reach the end of this journal, you are invited into one final reflection. One that honours your unique journey as a Protector of Play™. Take a moment to pause and notice how your thinking, practices, and connection to play have grown and shifted. This reflection is not about arriving at an endpoint, but about recognizing how play continues to shape who you are becoming—as an educator, an advocate, and a human who values joy, curiosity, and belonging.

My Protector of Play™ Reflections

What does being a Protector of Play™ mean to me right now?

How am I advocating for play in my professional practice?

How do I invite play into my own life and wellbeing?

One intention I will carry forward as a Protector of Play™:

**Play is not something we do in addition to our lives—
it is part of who we are becoming.**



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When educators become Protectors of Play™, they become guardians of curiosity, wonder, and the right of every child to learn through joy.

~ Tina Geers, Protectors of Play™



Resources, Templates & Infographics

Recommended Reading & Learning Resources

Influential Books on Play and the Early Years

- 180 Days of Self-Care for Busy Educators | Tina H. Boogren | 2019
- A Culture of Agency: Fostering Engagement, Empowerment, Identity, and Belonging in the Early Years | Lisa Burman | 2023
- Balanced and Barefoot | Angela J. Hanscom | 2016
- Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants | Robin Wall Kimmerer | 2015
- Creating a Culture of Reflective Practice: The Role of Pedagogical Leadership in Early Child Programs | Lorrie Baird & Anne Marie Coughlin | 2021
- Cup: A Vibrant Vessel of Learning and Creativity (ROW) | Bridgette Towle | 2018
- Discovering the Culture of Childhood | Emily Plank | 2016
- Encounters with Materials in Early Childhood Education | Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Sylvia Kind, Laurie L. M. Kocher | 2024
- Empowering Young Children: How to Nourish Deep, Transformative Learning For Social Justice | Wendy Ostroff | 2022
- Exploring Young Children’s Agency in Everyday Transitions | Pernille Juhl | 2023
- Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life | Peter Gray | 2015
- From Teaching to Thinking (ROW): A Pedagogy for Reimagining Our Work | Ann Pelo & Margie Carter | 2018
- Honoring the Moment in Young Children’s Lives: Observation, Documentation, and Reflection | Ron Grady | 2024
- Humankind: A Hopeful History | Rutger Bregman | 2020
- Illuminating Care: The Pedagogy and Practice of Care in Early Childhood Communities | Carol Garboden Murray | 2021
- Inclusion Includes Us: Building Bridges & Removing Barriers to Include All Children | Mike Huber | 2023

Recommended Reading & Learning Resources

Influential Books on Play and the Early Years

- Journeys: Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Practices Through Pedagogical Narration | [Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw](#), [Fikile Nxumalo](#), [Laurie Kocher](#), [Enid Elliot](#), [Alejandra Sanchez](#) | 2014
- Just Play: Inspiring Adult Play in Early Childhood Education | Miriam Beloglovsky | 2023
- Kids These Days: A Game Plan For (Re)Connecting With Those We Teach, Lead, & Love | Dr. Jody Carrington | 2020
- Kingdom of Play: What Ball-bouncing Octopuses, Belly-flopping Monkeys, and Mud-sliding Elephants Reveal about Life Itself | David Toomey | 2024
- Learning from Doodoom Aki (Mother Earth) | [Hopi Lovell Martin Phd](#) | 2024
- Let the Children Play: Why More Play Will Save Our Schools and Help Children Thrive | Pasi Sahlberg & William Doyle | 2019
- Lisa Murphy on Being Child Centered | Lisa Murphy | 2019
- Lisa Murphy on Play: The Foundation of Children's Learning | Lisa Murphy | 2016
- Love to Learn: The Transformative Power of Care and Connection in Early Education | Isabelle C. Hau | 2025
- My Play Can Be... | Stephanie Seidler & Anastasia Sikilinda | 2024
- Neuroscience and Play-Based Learning Activities: For the 21st Century Pre-school Children | Adelina Reyes Gotera | 2024
- Not Just Cute: How Powerful Play Drives Development in Early Childhood | Amanda Morgan & Dale C. Farran | 2025
- Nurturing Brilliance: Using Play-Activated Learning to Awaken Children's Potential | Sally Fowler Haughey | 2025
- Play Stories: Using Your Play Memories and Perspectives to Inform Teaching Practice | Katelyn Clark, PhD | 2024

Recommended Reading & Learning Resources

Influential Books on Play and the Early Years

- Raising Awe-Seekers: How the Science of Wonder Helps Our Kids Thrive | Deborah Farmer Kris | 2025
- Re-Storying Education: Decolonizing Your Practice Using a Critical Lens | [Carolyn Roberts](#) | 2024
- Reimagining Heartbreak: An Educator's Journey to Reclaim Whole-Heartedness | [Shelley Brandon](#) | 2024
- Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers (Or Anyone Who Acts Like One) | Deborah MacNamara, PhD | 2016
- Return to Play: Rebuilding Resilience, Risk and Reconnection | Brandi Heather | 2021
- Rethinking Play and Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education: Concepts, Contexts and Cultures | Sue Rogers | 2010
- Rethinking Weapon Play in Early Childhood: How to Encourage Imagination, Kindness, and Consent in Your Classroom | Samuel Broaden & Kisa Marx | 2024
- Revisiting Journeys: Understanding How Children Reflect, Reimagine, and Redesign Their Play and Learning | Miriam Beloglovsky | 2025
- Saving Play : Addressing Standards Through Play-Based Learning in Preschool and Kindergarten | [Gaye Gronlund](#) | 2017
- Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child: Time for Slow Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education | Alison Clark | 2022
- Teaching Where You Are: Weaving Indigenous and Slow Principles and Pedagogies | [Shannon Leddy](#) & [Lorrie Miller](#) | 2023
- Teachers These Days: Stories and Strategies for Reconnection | Dr. Jody Carrington | 2021
- The Brain That Loves to Play: A Visual Guide to Child Development, Play, and Brain Growth | [Jacqueline Harding](#) | 2023
- The Common Worlds of Children and Animals: Relational Ethics for Entangled Lives | Affrica Taylor & Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw | 2020

Recommended Reading & Learning Resources

Influential Books on Play and the Early Years

- The End of Education as We Know It: Regenerative Learning for Complex Times | [Ida Rose Florez Ph.D.](#) | 2025
- The Gift of Playful Learning: A Guide for Educators | [Nadia Kenisha Bynoe](#) & [Angelique Thompson](#) | 2023
- The Happiness Project, Tenth Anniversary Edition: Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun | Gretchen Rubin | 2018
- The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation | [Carolyn Edwards](#), [Lella Gandini](#) & [George Forman](#) | 2011
- The Original Learning Approach: Weaving Together Playing, Learning, and Teaching in Early Childhood | Suzanne Axelsson | 2023
- The Play Prescription: Using Play to Support Internalizing Behaviors | [Aerial Liese](#) | 2020
- The Playful Brain: Venturing to the Limits of Neuroscience | Sergio Pellis & Vivien Pellis | 2013
- The Role of the Pedagogista in Reggio Emilia: Voices and Ideas for a Dialectic Educational Experience | Stefania Giamminuti, Paola Cagliari, Claudia Giudici, Paola Strozzi | 2023
- The Way of Play: Using Little Moments of Big Connection to Raise Calm and Confident Kids | Georgie Wisen-Vincent & Tina Payne Bryson | 2025
- Using Schema Play Theory to Advocate for Free Play in Early Childhood | Heather Bernt-Santy | 2025
- What if We Taught the Way Children Learn?: More Straight Talk About Bettering Education and Children's Lives | Rae Pica | 2020
- Why Play? How to Make Play an Essential Part of Early Education | Rae Pica | 2024

Recommended Reading & Learning Resources

Podcasts

- The Intentional ECE - with Cathy Belgrave
- That Early Childhood Nerd - with Heather Bernt-Santy
- The Play Based Learning Podcast - with Kristen Day
- The Play Well Podcast - Play Scotland
- Liberated Learning - Kisa Marx & Mike Huber
- National Institute for Play
- The Play Well Podcast - Play Scotland

Substacks / Blogs

- Peter Gray – Substack / Blog ~ <https://petergray.substack.com/>
Thought-provoking reflections on play, learning, and children’s autonomy.
- Suzanne Axelsson (Blog, articles, resources) ~ <https://suzanneaxelsson.substack.com/>
Insightful writing connecting pedagogy, play, reflection, and educator identity.
- Play Outdoors (Blog, magazine, resources) ~ <https://playoutdoorsmagazine.ca/>
Outdoor play magazine and blog on outdoor play.

Playarista Course

- Become a Playarista with Suzanne Axelsson:
<https://courses.wunderled.com/playarista-waitlist>

Recommended Reading & Learning Resources

Early Learning and Child Care Frameworks (Canada)

This page highlights provincial and territorial early learning frameworks and related resources that support play, early learning and child care, and early childhood education across Canada. These frameworks provide guiding principles, values, and pedagogical approaches that shape early learning practice within each province and territory. Exploring frameworks and resources within your own province or territory can strengthen community connections and support informed, place-based advocacy for early learning and play.

- Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework
- British Columbia & Yukon: BC Early Learning Framework
- NWT: The Northwest Territories Early Learning Framework
- Alberta: Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework
- Saskatchewan: Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide
- Manitoba: Early Returns: Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework
- Ontario: How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years
- Quebec: Meeting Early Childhood Needs: Québec's Educational Program for Childcare Services
- Nova Scotia: Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework
- New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care
- PEI Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences: The Curriculum Framework of the Preschool Excellence Initiative
- Nunavut: Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework:
- Newfoundland & Labrador: Navigating the Early Years: An Early Childhood Learning Framework

Recommended Reading & Learning Resources

Online Inspiration & Ongoing Learning

- AECPCN – The Play Connection Network ~ <https://aecpcn.org/>
- Active for Life ~ <https://activeforlife.com/>
- Canadian Child Care Federation ~ <https://cccf-fcsge.ca/>
- International Play Association (IPA)
- World - <https://ipaworld.org/> | Canada - <https://www.ipacanada.org/>
- Learning Through Play ~ <https://learningthroughplay.com/>
- Learn Through PLAY (Active for Life) ~ <https://learnthroughactiveplay.com/>
- National Institute for Play – Dr. Stuart Brown ~ <https://nifplay.org/>
- Outdoor Play Canada ~ <https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/>
- Play Scotland (International but Canadian-aligned) ~ <https://www.playscotland.org/>
- Play Wales (International but Canadian-aligned) ~ <https://play.wales/>
- Right to Play Canada ~ <https://righttoplay.ca/en-ca/>
- World Forum Foundation - Early Care and Education ~ <https://worldforumfoundation.org/>

Thank-you!

Protectors of Play™, are you ready to carry play forward with intention and joy?

I'm so excited to be a part of your journey as a Protector of Play™. This process has been truly transformational for me, and it's a joy to share it with you. My hope is that you experience the same sense of wonder, awe, and deep joy as you continue along your own play journey.

Keep playing, stay curious, and enjoy where this path takes you. And please know - you don't have to do this alone. If you'd ever like additional support, connection, or inspiration, I would love to hear from you.

We are protecting play together.



Contact:



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<https://inspiredmindsecc.ca/>



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[TinaGeers](https://www.linkedin.com/in/TinaGeers)

