

# The Importance of Play-Based Learning in the Early Years

→ A guide to ETFO play-based learning resources

“Play is a developmentally appropriate approach to learning because it allows children to develop and demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a hands-on, child-centred manner.”

– Angela Pyle (*Negotiating a holistic view of play-based learning: A commentary, Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*)

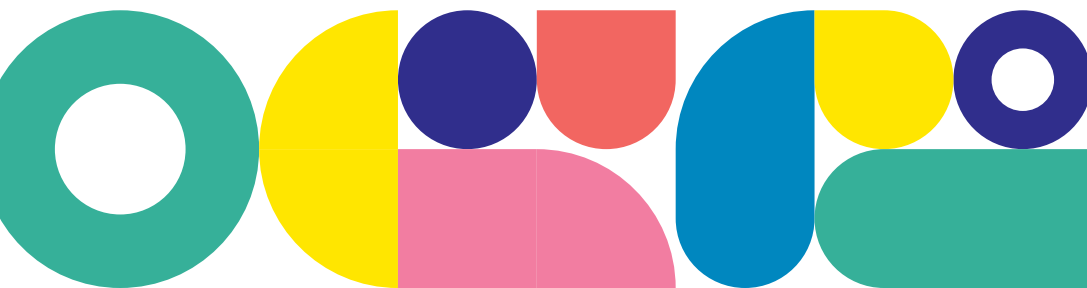
Play-based learning is a foundational approach in early years education that supports the development of young children. ETFO actively promotes play-based learning and its critical role in fostering creativity, well-being, and deep, engaged learning in the early years.

Play gives children a chance to think, problem-solve, be creative, take risks, and practice physical, social, and cognitive skills. It invites children to explore the unknown, have agency over their own learning, and experience joy.

In our Kindergarten classrooms, teachers and designated early childhood educators (DECEs) use their vast knowledge of the many ways children learn and how this is revealed during play to intentionally design purposeful play-based learning opportunities.

“Play-based learning allows students to learn while at play. The continuum of play-based learning varies based on the learning goals, ranging from student-directed play, to guided play, to educator-directed play.”

– Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Curriculum (2026)*



ETFO offers a variety of conferences, resources, and professional learning supports to help Kindergarten and early years educators deepen their understanding of play-based learning:

**Learning in the Early Years workshops:** This workshop series is made available in partnership with 12 locals each year. Topics include: the Kindergarten team partnership; fostering self-regulation; documenting and communicating learning, and others focused on play-based learning.

**Presenters on the Road:** This program delivered in partnership with locals includes a variety of play-focused after-school workshops, such as Early Math Skills and Understanding in Kindergarten, and Play and Play-Based Approaches to Learning that Centre Black Brilliance and Joy.

**Etfopley.ca:** The [etfopley.ca](http://etfopley.ca) website is for members looking to enhance their understanding of best practices in the early years through videos, classroom tours hosted by educator teams, and PLEYChats highlighting members sharing their passion for early years.

**The Early Years Resource Series: These resources** highlighting the importance of play-based learning and the Kindergarten team are designed to be used as advocacy tools. They include information from a variety of sources including ETFO resources and Ministry documents.

**Elementary podcast:** Designed for teachers, education workers, and anyone who wants to know more about public education in Ontario, ETFO's **podcast** includes several episodes featuring play-based learning as a topic. These include *The important role of Designated Early Childhood Educators in Ontario's Classrooms* and *The Value of Play-Based Learning with Kimberly Bezaire*.

**Voice Magazine:** ETFO's member magazine has featured several articles highlighting the importance of play-based, inquiry-driven learning in early childhood education. Full issues are available at [etfovoice.ca](http://etfovoice.ca).

**Playing is Learning:** This free pamphlet (available through [shopetfo.ca](http://shopetfo.ca)) outlines the importance of play as a learning vehicle.

**Thinking it Through:** This ETFO-produced book examines the Kindergarten program through 11 chapters on various topics, including play-based learning. Visit [shopetfo.ca](http://shopetfo.ca) to order.

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