

CMEC STATEMENT ON Fostering Lifelong Learning in the Early Years

In April 2008, the provincial and territorial ministers of education released *Learn Canada 2020*, a joint ministerial declaration presenting the four pillars of quality lifelong learning opportunities for all Canadians. The first pillar, **Early Childhood Learning and Development**, states that “[a]ll children should have access to high quality early childhood education that ensures they arrive at school ready to learn.”¹

CMEC interprets school readiness as children being ready for the complex challenges of a future full of new and unpredictable social, economic, and ecological situations and NOT just ready for school. Furthermore, children are ready to learn starting from birth, and schools must be ready to engage ALL children at any given stage of their development. To achieve these goals, the *CMEC Statement on Fostering Lifelong Learning in the Early Years* emphasizes the early years as a critical learning period for children to develop the foundational competencies, attitudes, skills, strategies, and knowledge that they will need to succeed throughout their lives. Contemporary thinking about school readiness has shifted.



“When children are engaged in purposeful play, they are discovering, creating, improvising, and expanding their learning.”

— Council of Ministers of Education, Canada,
CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning (2012)

1 Learning is a lifelong process

We have shifted from focusing on early learning and development solely as preparation for school to focusing on equipping children in a variety of ways so that they may discover their abilities, talents, and resources in the present and the future. Learning begins at birth and continues over a lifespan. Science has demonstrated that the early years are critical in brain development; from birth onward, children’s experiences and opportunities contribute to building a strong foundational skill set for life. During this period, children begin to see themselves as capable, lifelong learners and doers.



2 Lifelong learning is the responsibility of families, educators, and communities

We have expanded our focus on the individual child to include families and communities. Children learn about themselves and the world in which they live through interactions with others, and as they do so they are in the process of forming their self-perception. Developing a healthy self-perception is supported by responsive relationships, effective communication, and partnerships between and among parents, families, educators, caregivers, and communities. Learning possibilities are boundless, and as Canadians, we recognize that learning should be culturally responsive and include knowledge from Indigenous and other cultural traditions.

“Education is a lifelong journey whose destination expands as you travel.”²

— Jim Stovall, *The Ultimate Gift*

Play is the way

Research demonstrates that high-quality early-learning programs equally incorporate all areas of development in an inclusive and holistic manner. Moreover, children who participate in quality early-learning programs do better later in life in terms of educational attainment, employment, and income. The effectiveness of these programs is predicated on opportunities for play and inquiry. As noted in the *CMEC Statement on Play-*

Based Learning (2012), it is important to encourage play as a tool for children’s learning to foster and promote the global competencies that are integral to flourishing in today’s as well as tomorrow’s world.³ Such attributes include self-regulation, communication, responsibility, compassion, creativity, and problem solving.

The *CMEC Statement on Fostering Lifelong Learning in the Early Years* acknowledges that lifelong learning is critical to success in today’s fast-paced world. It is nurtured in the earliest years when children and families have access to a range of high-quality, play-based early-learning experiences. These experiences set the stage for future learning, health, and well-being, and combined, they support our children for their future.

¹ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2008). Retrieved from <https://cmeC.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/187/CMEC-2020-DECLARATION.en.pdf>

² Stovall, J. (2001). *The Ultimate Gift*. Colorado Springs, CO: RiverOak Publishing, an imprint of Cook Communication.

³ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2012). Retrieved from https://www.cmeC.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/282/play-based-learning_statement_EN.pdf