

STARTING PRINCIPLES FOR AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF EARLY CARE AND LEARNING

A work in progress...

For many years, our work has been grounded in a consistent and evolving set of principles that reflect our values, lived experience, professional practice and commitment to women's and children's rights.

Today, these principles are supported by an extensive body of research and are reflected in Canada and BC's obligations under international agreements such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and related General Comment #7 (GC7) on "Implementing child rights in early childhood".

The expansion of BC kindergarten programs provides a critical moment in which to hold BC accountable for complying with its obligations under these agreements.

General Comment #7, issued in 2005 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, responds to the lack of attention most states have given to the rights of children from birth to 8 years of age. It calls on government to recognize young children as holders of rights and early childhood as a critical period for realizing rights. GC7 particularly affirms our principles – with relevant sections highlighted below.

We will use these principles as the lens through which to assess the effectiveness of approaches to integrating the delivery of early care and learning programs so as to uphold these rights.

1. The right of all children to access universal, high quality, publicly funded early care and learning programs is enshrined in legislation. (GC7 5, 12, 22, 28, 31, 32, and CRC Article 18.)
2. Programs are planned, delivered and governed on a democratic, community driven, not-for-profit basis through an integrated system of early care and learning. (GC7 22, 28, 30, 31, 32, 38.)
3. The system of early care and learning advances equity and social inclusion for all. (GC7 8, 11, 12, 36d.)
4. Programs provide play-based, inclusive experiences that meet all children's developmental needs and respect their right to quality of life. (GC7 3, 6, 10, 14, 23, 28, 36.)
5. Programs are designed to meet the needs of the majority of families where parents are in the paid labour force, studying and/or participating in community life. (GC7 15, 20, 21, 29b and CRC 18.3.)
6. Programs are delivered by socially valued and fairly compensated staff with specific education and expertise in early childhood education. (GC7 8, 23.)
7. Programs are adequately funded, stable and openly accountable to the communities they serve. (GC7 10, 15, 20, 38.)

Finally, General Comment #7 affirms our collective responsibility to recognize young children as social actors and to respect and advocate for their rights.