

**Osaka YMCA International School**  
**Early Childhood Educational Philosophy**



At Osaka YMCA International School (OYIS) we believe that quality early childhood education begins with the child. We believe the child should be at the centre of everything we do as educators. Our image of the child is grounded in respect for the individual, encouragement of personal interests to drive learning, and acknowledgement and development of individual children's skills and competencies.

**Our image of the child**

*A child is inquisitive, curious, and playful.*

*A child is enthusiastic, imaginative, and creative.*

*A child is active, loving, unique, and emotional.*

*A child is a capable learner and teacher.*

*If we see a child who is inquisitive and curious, we see a teacher who provides opportunities to let them wonder and an environment which allows this.*

*If we see a child who is imaginative, we see a teacher who is creative.*

*If we see a child who is playful, we see a teacher who appreciates spontaneity and facilitates time for play.*

*If we see a child who is happy, we see a teacher who establishes strong relationships with children and who is caring.*

*If we see a child who is enthusiastic, we see a teacher who understands the importance of encouraging children's interests.*

*If we see a child who is loving, we see a teacher who creates a safe environment.*

*If we see a child who is unique, we see a teacher who respects individuality.*

*If we see a child who is capable, we see a teacher who empowers individual student's abilities.*

*If we see a child who is active, we see a teacher who is balanced in creating rich environments in and out of the classroom.*

*If we see a child who is teacher, we see a teacher who is a learner.*

*If we see a child who has rich potential, we see a teacher who encourages student learning.*

## Our beliefs about Early Childhood education

At OYIS we believe children learn through *play*. We believe play provides a meaningful context rich with opportunities for children to develop and thrive with the support of five foundational pillars: *environment, belonging, engagement, expression, and well-being*.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p.7)

### *Environment*

*Environment* refers to both the physical and social environments the child experiences.

The *physical environment* includes such features as school buildings and grounds, routes to and from the school, and materials and equipment to support learning. The physical environment can affect both conditions for learning and student well-being. OYIS believes a healthy physical environment includes clean and accessible facilities, outdoor shade structures, a play environment that includes opportunities for physical activity and open spaces in a naturalised manner as much as possible, the availability of healthy food choices, and the safe and secure storage of potentially dangerous items such as cleaning products.

A supportive *social environment* enables children to achieve their full potential in a climate of safety and support. The social environment emphasizes the importance of acceptance, inclusion, and respect amongst students, teachers, and parents and caregivers. Formal measures such as school-home communication policies, behaviour management policies and practices, and learning support policies and procedures, as well as informal measures such as respecting and supporting student choice, and providing opportunities for positive social interactions, can foster a safe and supportive social environment.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.4)

### *Play*

Play is essential for young children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and brain development. Play provides valuable opportunities for both academic and social learning, and encourages children to develop communication, self-management, research, thinking, and social skills.

Play challenges children's thinking, encouraging them to solve problems, manage conflict, and demonstrate creativity.

Play allows children to construct meaning in social contexts as they develop a *theory of mind*, that is, an understanding that everyone is an individual thinking being, and that one's own ideas, feelings, and worldview are not necessarily the same as other people's.

(Astington and Edward, 2010)

There are different types of play that children learn through:

- *object play*: children explore objects, learn about their properties, and manipulate and use them for new functions
- *pretend play* (either alone or with others): make-believe, fantasy, symbolic, and dramatic play, where children experiment with different social roles
- *physical or rough-and-tumble play*: includes free play, as well as organised physical play and games
- *guided play*: children actively engage in pleasurable and seemingly spontaneous activities under the subtle direction of adults

(Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff, 2008, p. 1)

OYIS provides children with developmentally-appropriate, purposeful play experiences, both student-led and teacher-prompted, in order to encourage skill development, engagement, and interest.

### *Belonging*

Children at OYIS develop a strong sense of belonging as they build relationships with the entire OYIS community - class peers, students in other grades, teachers and other adults and, of course, their own family.

Learning experiences at OYIS highlight and explore children's relationships with the world around them, including people and places, and connections to home and family.

Children's interests are inquired into and explored collaboratively, with other children and the significant adults in the life of the children working together to provide a wide variety of learning experiences. These high-quality interactions between adults and children during the early years are essential for a meaningful learning experience.

As our students' experiences at OYIS may be their first social interactions outside the home, it is important for children to feel a sense of belonging which will, in turn, allow them to develop a range of social and communication skills, learn about different relationships and the roles within them, and begin to understand their place in the world.

### *Engagement*

Children learn best when they are engaged in learning experiences that are based on their interests and abilities. From these starting points, children can construct knowledge and understanding, and develop and consolidate their skills within authentic contexts that are relevant to their lives.

To ensure children are engaged in their learning, it is essential that learning experiences and inquiries grow from and are connected to their interests. A range of broad questions can be asked about children and their interests, which support teachers as they plan future learning experiences. For example: What naturally and inevitably fascinates children at this age or in this context? What consistently draws children's attention to this concept? What do young children instinctively want to explore physically at this age?

Teachers plan engaging *provocations*, which serve as a 'jumping off' point to spark curiosity and to launch further inquiry. Teachers encourage children to meaningfully engage with a unit of inquiry and its key concepts in the authentic context of the world around them.

Teachers also design, manage, and transform the learning environment, within their means, to encourage interest and engagement, using the environment to anchor, strengthen, and extend children's learning, and to engage them in interacting with the spaces around them.

Teachers and children discover the curriculum together, giving students ownership over their learning. Rather than delivering information to them, the curriculum emerges from individual student interests and levels of readiness, with teachers and children socially co-constructing meaning together to allow students' development of knowledge, skills, and understanding to be consolidated and furthered at an appropriate pace. This allows children to engage in differentiated learning that is tailored to their needs, encourages them to make conceptual connections between ideas, and helps them develop their own understandings.

Children are most engaged when learning occurs within their own individual *zone of proximal development*, that is, at a level that is developmentally-appropriate and allows the student to gradually work towards success and independence.

### *Expression*

We believe young children are able to express their ideas, feelings, and understanding in many ways, even if they have yet to develop verbal or written communication skills.

Symbolic languages such as drawing, sculpting, dramatic play, early attempts at writing, and painting are used to represent children's thinking processes and ideas. As children work through problems and explore ideas, teachers encourage them to demonstrate their understanding using many different representations.

Teachers collect documentation of these expressions of learning as they progress, often through narrative-style *learning stories*. These records of learning are displayed alongside children's work samples and artifacts for the children to observe. This helps children develop self-awareness, reflect on their learning progress, and helps the teachers and children collaboratively plan future learning experiences.

Teachers constantly observe and reflect on learning experiences, collecting and analysing evidence that shows what students know, understand, and can do, including the five elements of the PYP- skills, knowledge, concepts, attitudes and action. This evidence, in turn, influences the learning provocations the teacher plans in order to extend learning.

Childrens' expressions of learning are also showcased in their learning portfolios (please refer to the *OYIS Assessment Policy* for further details on how we share student learning).

### *Well-being*

Well-being addresses the importance of physical and mental health and wellness. It incorporates capacities such as self-care, sense of self, and self-regulation skills.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p.7)

Effective, supportive early childhood education settings ensure students' health is promoted, their emotional well-being is nurtured, all domains of development are acknowledged and addressed equally and appropriately, and children are kept safe from harm.

Physical and emotional student well-being can be assured when the five pillars of the OYIS Early Childhood Philosophy- *environment, belonging, engagement, and expression*- are acknowledged and positioned as priorities when developing and providing early childhood education.

## **Explanation of terms**

NB: all definitions from *Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007*, unless otherwise specified.

**early childhood education**- professional practice which includes the assessment and promotion of the well-being and holistic development of children through the planning and delivery of inclusive play-based learning and care programs within the context of diverse family, school and community groups

**documentation**- the collection of learning stories, observations, language samples, children's drawing and early attempts at writing, etc. for the purpose of demonstrating and sharing evidence of development and learning

**domain of development**- a broad area or dimension of development, each equally important to the child's learning, health and well-being, and including social, emotional, language, cognition, and physical

**emotional well-being-** the degree to which children feel at ease, act spontaneously, show vitality and self-confidence, indicating their basic needs have been satisfied

**experiences-** what children actually do with the provisions professionals make for them. Traditionally called activities, but experiences are broader. They are occasions for learning.

**learning stories-** learning stories are considered assessment strategies inspired by the Te Whāriki, which is the New Zealand Ministry of Education's early childhood curriculum framework based on its policy statement. These stories detail the record and the interpretation of the learning that is taking place for a specific child or a group of children.

(International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2014)

**play-** a naturally-occurring, freely chosen and non-literal activity in which children are intrinsically motivated, characterised by imagination, exploration, delight, and a sense of wonder, that reflects the unique experience of children, and through which children express their ideas and feelings, and come to understand themselves, others and their world

**play-based learning (play-based pedagogy) -** an educational approach which builds upon children's natural inclination to make sense of the world through play, where early childhood practitioners (teachers) participate in play, guiding children's planning, decision-making and communications, and extending children's explorations with narrative, novelty and challenges

**provocations-** provocations are well thought-out events, activities, experiences, acts or questions that activate learning and stimulate a sense of wonder. Provocations are linked to the lines of inquiry designed in the planning phases of the learning process. In thinking about meaningful provocations, teachers must consider children's interest in and natural connection with the intended transdisciplinary theme. If listened to, children can often also contribute to expanding on the provocations around a specific line of inquiry.

(International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2014)

**skills-** specific processes, abilities, and competencies that exist within each domain of development, and form the foundation pathways for learning and health that emerge early and are elaborated over time

**zone of proximal development (ZPD) -** ZPD describes the area between a child's level of independent performance (what he/she can do alone) and the child's level of assisted performance (what he/she can do with support).

(Tools of the Mind, n.d.)

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\*\* please also refer to the [OYIS Assessment Policy 2015-16](#) \*\*