

Learning through Play

VIEWING GUIDE

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Introduction

The *Learning through Play* DVD, created by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, features Nova Scotian teachers and students working together to achieve curriculum outcomes in a variety of classroom environments.

Within the public school system, play is often considered appropriate only for younger learners. While this DVD illustrates the significance of play through the interactions of young learners with one another and with their teachers, we must not lose sight of the fact that all people play to learn. We all play as we tinker, explore, experiment, negotiate, plan, "get our hands dirty," and "try it out."

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development identifies learning through play as an essential life experience. Through play, children have valuable opportunities to interact with others in a variety of social settings and to use language meaningfully as they explore, plan, practise, imagine, experiment, manipulate, dramatize, negotiate rules, pose and solve problems, and construct new knowledge.

This DVD focuses specifically on the role of play in grades primary–2 classrooms. As demonstrated by the teachers and students in the DVD, play is an integrated and ongoing part of effective learning experiences. Play takes place throughout the instructional cycle, in whole-group, small-group, paired, and individual interactions. Play happens spontaneously as well as through careful and knowledgeable planning. In addition to classroom work, the DVD also features individual interviews with classroom teachers, as well as a full-group debrief discussion with participating teachers.

The *Learning through Play* DVD showcases six classrooms that represent a cross-section of schools and teachers from across the province. We will see teachers supporting play both in demonstration classrooms and in their own classrooms across a wide range of curriculum areas.

This viewing guide can be used by individual teachers, small groups, or an entire staff as they work their way through the DVD. It provides a brief synopsis of each segment and includes guiding questions for discussion and consideration.

Using the DVD

Whether the DVD is used for personal professional learning opportunities, in staff meetings, by professional learning communities, or with grade-specific groups, teachers will use the resource to suit their purposes and needs.

Following are some suggestions for viewing the DVD:

Before Viewing

- Decide on a question to consider and view the segment with it in mind.
- Decide on a point of view (student or teacher) and watch the DVD from that perspective.
- As a group, select a single question on which to focus throughout the viewing.
- Decide on a particular issue or “burning question” of your own and watch the DVD with that as your focus.
- Choose one of the Principles of Learning or quotes from pages 7–10 and watch the segment through that lens.

During Viewing

- For longer segments, stop the segment several times and discuss a particular point or observation.
- In partners, use a reciprocal strategy to discuss what has been seen so far. One person speaks first and the partner adds to the conversation without repeating. Partners alternate who speaks first as the segment is stopped several times.
- Use a T-chart, such as the example below, to track your thinking.

After Viewing

- Use specific discussion questions in small groups who might then report to the whole group. What are the most significant assessment issues for the whole group at this particular time?
- Select several discussion questions that represent the most significant issues for the whole group at this particular time.
- Identify the key messages from the segment before using the discussion questions.

What Resonated with Me	
In the interviews	In the classrooms

Learning through Play DVD, Disc One

Segment	Highlights	Time
1. Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overview of the role of play • definitions of play • play and learning • bringing parents on board • examples and illustrations of a range of play opportunities • the balance between self-initiated and teacher-directed play 	15:21
2. Play and Oral Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the critical role of play in the development of oral language • one teacher's journey from a quiet classroom to a play-based environment • finding opportunities for play and playfulness • examples of students' learning through play through self-directed activities • examples of students' learning through play as a result of careful planning and direction by the teacher • teachers supporting oral language opportunities as part of the learning experience • reflection, sharing time, and oral language 	16:18
3. Assessment through Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrating learning in many ways • finding opportunities for assessment • the importance of observation • planning for self-assessment and reflection opportunities • having an assessment plan • using assessment to plan for instruction 	14:43

Learning through Play DVD, Disc Two		
Segment	Highlights	Time
4. Planning for Learning through Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing routines • maintaining, revisiting, and extending routines • building stamina and creating independence • play-based learning within a learning outcomes framework • backward design (beginning with the end in mind) in a play-based environment 	10:54
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing effective learning zones • differentiation through play-based experiences • balancing formal instruction and student choice • the teachable moment • the role of the administrator
5. Play throughout the Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unique role of play in a variety of curriculum areas • play in mathematics and science • similar experiences in demonstration and the teachers' own classrooms • effective teaching through play 	12:16
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • play and playfulness in English language arts • cross-curricular or integrated experiences

Thinking about a Play-Based Environment

In the *Let's Talk about ... Learning through Play* pamphlet (2013), and through the resources it provides for classroom teachers, the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development endorses the big ideas derived from research and proven sound practices that frame play-

based learning. This DVD highlights rich examples of what these grounding principles look like in grades primary–2 classrooms. The resources highlighted on the following pages include key information for play-based learning.

Explorations: Learning through Inquiry and Play

- Children's natural curiosity and inquisitiveness leads them to explore their environment and materials, and to build relationships with others.
- Young children develop at different rates and in different ways, and benefit more from learning experiences when they have strategies for regulating their own behaviour.
- Through play, children learn a range of concepts and skills that contribute to their emotional, social, physical, aesthetic, and cognitive development.
- Children learn by sharing discoveries, creations, and questions, and by listening attentively to others.
- Teachers as researchers observe, document, assess, and confer to plan meaningful experiences and activities that emerge from and connect to children's play.
- We learn about children's interests, abilities, and knowledge through frequent observations of them at play.
- Responding to children's play by asking open-ended, inquiry-based questions and offering supportive prompts can lead children to make powerful connections while promoting an emergent curriculum.
- Strong, inclusive, and respectful partnerships with families and extended communities contribute to a rich environment and learning experiences.
- An environment with varied learning areas and interesting materials invites and supports children to explore, investigate, and wonder.

Source: *Explorations: Learning through Inquiry and Play* (Lalie Harcourt and Ricki Wortzman, 2012, 3)

CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning

"There is now evidence that neural pathways in children's brains are influenced and advanced in their development through exploration, thinking skills, problem solving, and language expression that occur during play."

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

Evidence suggests that learning through play is intrinsically valuable, and its importance in school is critical. Play-based learning opportunities need to be carefully and strategically planned to create dynamic and challenging learning experiences that are intentional in nature. This planning involves teachers' acute awareness of curricula and of creating the school environment and related instruction to meet varying learning outcomes through vibrant, authentic, and engaging means. When children are playing, children are learning, and their natural sense of wonder and curiosity is being satisfied!

(The full text of the CMEC statement can be found at www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/282/play-based-learning_statement_EN.pdf.)

Play to Learn: Building Literacy Experiences in Young Learners

Types of Play

- **Functional play:** “Children create, become, and enter imaginary worlds as they choose to find ways to explore varying episodes that mimic real life. Functional play is sometimes known as ‘practice play.’ As children learn new skills, even ones as basic as running and jumping, they will perfect these skills through practice.”
- **Constructive play:** “Constructive play involves making, building, and creating based on ideas. It is a manipulation of objects, with the goal of creating something new or imagined, as well as putting things together to make representations of reality.”
- **Symbolic or dramatic play:** “The art of dramatic play happens when children engage in symbolic representation such as using a spoon as a brush ... When the play corresponds to ideas about how to act in our world, it becomes known as ‘socio-dramatic’ play.”
- **Rough and tumble play:** “Combining aspects of both functional play and dramatic play, this form of play accompanies the pretend play. Particular to boys, it is often seen as wrestling or pretending to be someone else, like a superhero. Playing heroes and victims, children learn to negotiate the roles and choices that they make in real life.”
- **Games with rules:** “Playing with rules means that the child has to acknowledge and accept the rules and conform to the structure of the play ... Children struggle with these types of games, as their natural desire is to come up with their own rules ... This type of game playing encourages negotiation and team building.”

(Anne Burke, 2011, 18–21)

Principles of Learning

The Nova Scotia public school program outlines seven big ideas, derived from research and proven best practices that should form the framework for instruction and assessment. This DVD highlights rich examples of what these principles look like in grades primary–2 classrooms, with a particular focus on the role of play as a vehicle for learning. Keep the Principles of Learning and the specific segment titles in mind while viewing each segment. Use the table below to record strong examples of where these seven principles might be highlighted in the DVD.

Principles of Learning	Observations and Evidence
<p>1. Learning is a process of actively constructing knowledge.</p> <p>Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• create environments and plan experiences that foster investigating, questioning, predicting, exploring, collecting, educational play, and communicating• engage learners in experiences that encourage their personal construction of knowledge, for example, hands-on, minds-on science and math; drama; creative movement; artistic representation; writing and talking to learn• provide learners with experiences that actively involve them and are personally meaningful	

Principles of Learning	Observations and Evidence
<p>2. Students construct knowledge and make it meaningful in terms of their prior knowledge and experiences.</p> <p>Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • find out what students already know and can do • create learning environments and plan experiences that build on learners' prior knowledge • ensure that learners are able to see themselves reflected in the learning materials used in the school • recognize, value, and use the great diversity of experiences and information students bring to school • provide learning opportunities that respect and support students' racial, cultural, and social identities • ensure that students are invited or challenged to build on prior knowledge, integrating new understandings with existing understandings 	
<p>3. Learning is enhanced when it takes place in a social and collaborative environment.</p> <p>Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that talk, group work, and collaborative ventures are central to class activities • see that learners have frequent opportunities to learn from and with each other • structure opportunities for learners to engage in diverse social interactions with peers and adults • help students to see themselves as members of a community of learners 	

Principles of Learning	Observations and Evidence
<p>4. Students need to continue to view learning as an integrated whole.</p> <p>Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plan opportunities to help students make connections across the curriculum and with the world outside and structure activities that require students to reflect on these connections • invite students to apply strategies from across the curriculum to solve problems in real situations 	
<p>5. Learners must see themselves as capable and successful.</p> <p>Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide activities, resources, and challenges that are developmentally appropriate to the learner • communicate high expectations for achievement to all students • encourage risk-taking in learning • ensure that all students experience genuine success on a regular basis • value experimentation and treat approximation as signs of growth • provide frequent opportunities for students to reflect on and describe what they know and can do • provide learning experiences and resources that reflect the diversity of the local and global community • provide learning opportunities that develop self-esteem 	

Principles of Learning	Observations and Evidence
<p>6. Learners have different ways of knowing and representing knowledge.</p> <p>Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize each learner’s preferred ways of constructing meaning and provide opportunities for exploring alternative ways • plan a wide variety of open-ended experiences and assessment strategies • recognize, acknowledge, and build on students’ diverse ways of knowing and representing their knowledge • structure frequent opportunities for students to use various art forms—music, drama, visual arts, dance, movement, crafts—as a means of exploring, formulating and expressing ideas 	
<p>7. Reflection is an integral part of learning.</p> <p>Therefore, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenge their beliefs and practices based on continuous reflection • encourage students to reflect on their learning processes and experiences • encourage students to acknowledge and articulate their learnings • help students use their reflections to understand themselves as learners, make connections with other learnings, and proceed with learning 	

DVD Viewing Details

Segment 1 Synopsis: Introduction

" ... play and academic work ... are inextricably linked. 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

Cross Curricular Work—all through the lens of a play-based curriculum. Our featured teachers also discuss ways in which they establish routines, select materials, and infuse playfulness into everything they do. The teachers discuss the importance of play-based learning and their decision to make play an integral part of the learning experience for their students.

In this segment, we introduce the major topics for our DVD—Oral Language, Planning, Assessment, and

A Learning Zone is an open-ended, creative space where children experience learning along a continuum. A Learning Zone introduces children to curriculum content within a developmental framework. The Learning Zone becomes a safe place to think, ask questions, and make mistakes; it offers a continuous zone of proximal development where learning is facilitated by the classroom teacher.

In the segments of this DVD, we will observe and discuss a range of learning experiences, within and outside of learning zones; and through the engagement of the students, we will see play-based learning in action.

Guiding Questions

1. What key messages about play did you find in the words of the featured teachers?
2. Karen shares her belief that play is the most natural way to learn. How do you see this modelled in the DVD, and how is this statement related to your practice?
3. In this segment we see students and teachers involved in a variety of play-based learning opportunities. What types of routines and classroom environments must be in place for play-based learning to happen?
4. Discuss the range of play-based learning opportunities shown in this segment. Discuss the learning potential.
5. How do the teachers in this segment set up or encourage the various play scenarios?
6. Using the *CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning* quotation, discuss how you see students embodying these words.
7. Discuss where in this video segment you saw evidence of the Principles of Learning in action.

Learning Zone, Example 1*

Learning Zones	Materials, Space, and Furnishings	Child Development Focus
<p><i>Discovery</i> The Discovery Zone incorporates learning resources specific to science, mathematics, problem solving, thinking and reasoning, and books to discover, explore, and wonder.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • camera • display area and shelving • light table • overhead projector (light/shadow source) • sand table • table and chairs • water table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communication skills and general knowledge • emotional maturity • language and cognitive development • physical health and well-being • social competence

*Related Curriculum Areas

- science
- mathematics
- English language arts
- social studies

Segment 2 Synopsis: Play and Oral Language

“... there are few activities that promote oral language development better than free play. Play supports the development of the whole child, especially his or her ability to communicate, collaborate, negotiate, ask and answer questions, give and act on commands, and otherwise connect with others.”

—Lori Jamison Rog, *Play-based Learning*, 2011

Talk is critical to learning. Classroom environments rich in such opportunities are places where learning happens—for both students and teachers. Through talk, students explore and share their understandings. Oral language helps students to extend their

understandings into reading and writing. Play-based learning offers many diverse ways for students to use talk as a vehicle for learning.

In this segment, teachers share and demonstrate tips, tools, and techniques for embedding and encouraging talk opportunities within every learning experience. We will see students problem solving, planning, playing games, and sharing their learning. Our teachers discuss both the incidental and deliberately structured opportunities they provide for their students.

Guiding Questions

1. What key messages about the relationship between oral language and play did you find in the words of the featured teachers?
2. Andrea shared her journey from a more quiet and teacher-controlled environment to a play-based one. Discuss how her experience relates to yours.
3. In this segment we see students moving towards making up and adjusting rules and procedures (e.g., Chinese checkers). Discuss the results of their actions.
4. Discuss how the teachers in this segment encourage and extend the students' oral language development through their instruction.
5. Discuss how the teachers in this segment encourage and extend the students' oral language development through their selection of materials.
6. As you view Karen's spelling activity, consider the variety and number of outcomes that are achieved through this playful experience.
7. Discuss the similarities and differences between the boys and girls in the building-blocks activities. Consider the learning that is taking place.
8. Discuss the oral language you hear during the various examples in this segment. What routines, procedures, and expectations are in place for this to happen?
9. Discuss the role of reflection in oral language development. How do play-based experiences enhance reflection and sharing?
10. Discuss where in this video segment you saw evidence of the Principles of Learning in action.

Learning Zone, Example 2*

Learning Zones	Materials, Space, and Furnishings	Child Development Focus
<p>Construction The Construction Zone incorporates opportunities for building and designing a variety of structures and related accessories to incorporate within or outside structures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blocks (such as wooden, plastic, interlocking, architectural) • shelving • carpeted, large floor area • accessories (such as people, vehicles, and ramps) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social competence • emotional maturity • physical health and well-being • communication skills and general knowledge • language and cognitive development

*Related Curriculum Areas

- mathematics
- social studies
- English language arts
- science
- health education

Segment 3 Synopsis: Beginning the Assessment Process

"If we agree that play is fundamental to the development and educational success of our students, then the challenge becomes how to bring play into a formalized curriculum, where skills are seen as the focus to future achievement."

—Anne Burke, *Play to Learn: Building Literacy Experiences in Young Learners*, 2011, 14

"Explicit instruction and practice can coexist quite peacefully with unstructured play ..."

—Lori Jamison Rog, *Play-based Learning*, 2011, 31

Planning for effective learning involves a number of important factors. With a learning outcome framework, we plan with the end in mind. We begin with the outcomes and then organize inviting classroom environments and materials that support student learning. Rules, routines, and expectations are established, and are often the key to success.

The gradual release of responsibility model is often used as teachers introduce and invite children to practise routines, procedures, and certain types of learning experiences. At other times, this model does not apply as students create and practise their own learning experience without the modelling or demonstration by an adult.

In this segment, our teachers discuss and demonstrate how they establish routines, integrate outcomes into a play-based curriculum, set up and manage flexible and varied learning zones, and ensure a balance between choice and more formal learning opportunities.

This combination of routines, careful planning, use of engaging materials, and effective teaching helps students become highly engaged in their own learning. Through this engagement, they develop stamina and the ability to self-regulate. As they move toward developmentally appropriate independence, we see students taking responsibility for their own learning and for the environment in which this learning occurs.

Guiding Questions

1. What key messages about planning did you find in the words of the featured teachers?
2. Choose several classroom vignettes and discuss the types of routines that have been established to make the play experiences successful.
3. Discuss how the routines lead to age-appropriate independence for the students.
4. Discuss the types of learning you observe and the outcomes that the students achieve through their play.
5. Discuss the variety of learning zones shown in the DVD.
6. Discuss the features and materials that made the learning zones inviting for students.
7. Amber speaks of how a commitment to support play-based learning benefits the entire school. Discuss why this might be so and how you see play-based learning impacting your school.
8. Karen talks about how she balances formal instruction with expanding choices for her students. Discuss where this is illustrated in the DVD.

9. Share and discuss how you balance choice and more formal instruction.
10. Discuss the issues of stamina and self-regulation and where you see evidence of increasing stamina and self-regulation in these young learners.
11. Discuss ideas from the DVD, as well as from your own experience, for “planning with the end in mind” through play in a learning outcomes framework.
12. As you view Adrianna’s cupola activity, consider the variety and number of outcomes that are achieved through this playful experience.
13. Discuss where in the video segment you saw evidence of the Principles of Learning in action.



Segment 4 Synopsis: Assessment through Play

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.”

—Plato (Burke 2011, 25)

Assessment is defined in Nova Scotia’s *Public School Programs* (EECD 2013) as “the process of gathering information on student learning.” In *On Solid Ground: Strategies for Teaching Reading K–3*, Sharon Taberski (2000, 80) reminds us that “the whole purpose of assessment is to find out what children do well and what we need to teach them.” We know that in effective classrooms, assessment happens every day

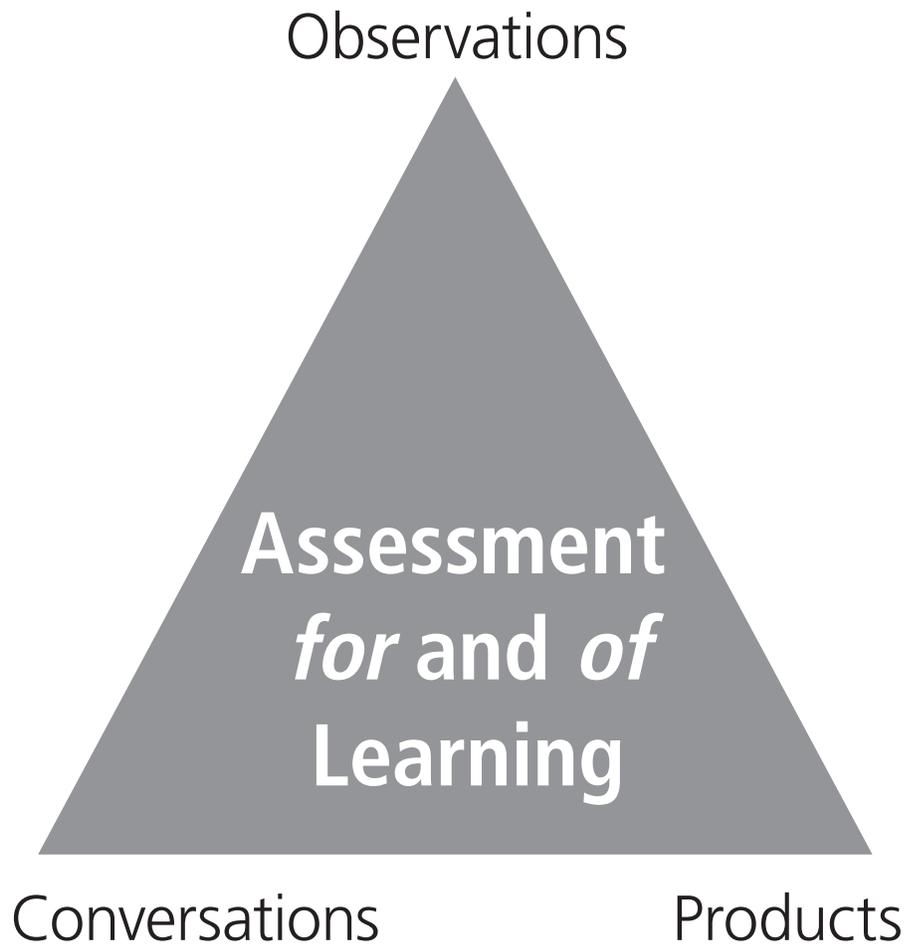
in a variety of ways. A play-based classroom offers unique and varied opportunities for teachers to understand and support their students as learners through a variety of assessment approaches.

In this segment, we see the teachers using forms of assessment ranging from more formal tools to prompts, observations, self-assessment, and a variety of other ways that help students demonstrate learning. The teachers also share their strategies for organizing and documenting their assessment data.

Guiding Questions

1. What key messages about assessment did you find in the words of the featured teachers?
2. How does play enrich the assessment process?
3. Discuss the types of learning you observe and the outcomes that the students achieve through their play.
4. Discuss the quality and purpose of effective observation skills in assessment and planning in a play-based classroom.
5. Discuss the importance of self-assessment as you see it demonstrated in this segment.
6. Discuss the variety of assessment opportunities highlighted throughout this segment. How might these assessments lead to effective instruction for the students involved?
7. Discuss how the featured teachers plan for assessment and how this practice resonates and compares with your own.
8. Anne Davies, in her book *Making Classroom Assessment Work* (2011), talks about three major components of assessment—conversation, observation, and product. Discuss the roles of these components in a play-based environment, using examples from the DVD and/or your own classroom.
9. Discuss where in this video segment you saw evidence of the Principles of Learning in action.

Triangulation



Segment 5 Synopsis: Play throughout the Curriculum

Play and formal curriculum areas are not mutually exclusive, but work together to enhance student learning. Play is present in all curriculum areas and makes a significant contribution to learning. The combination of hands-on experiences, rich materials, thoughtful planning, and artful teaching supports and engages learners across the range of curriculum areas.

In this segment, we see how teachers offer engaging learning opportunities in the specific areas of English language arts, mathematics, and science with links to social activities and the arts. In addition, we see cross-curricular teaching and students choosing their own learning opportunities.

Guiding Questions

1. What key messages about play-based learning across the curriculum did you find in the words of the featured teachers?
2. How does play enhance learning across the curriculum?
3. Discuss how Margaret and Lisa prepare their students to use the learning zones, while maintaining an attitude of playfulness.
4. As you view Margaret and Lisa's work, consider the variety and number of outcomes that are addressed through these playful experiences.
5. Discuss the many features of effective teaching you observe in this segment, and where play fits within this teaching.
6. Adrianna and Andrea teach slightly older students. How are the attitudes of playfulness the same, and where do they differ from the classrooms of younger students?
7. Discuss the opportunities for play and playfulness that our teachers find in their English language arts lessons.
8. Discuss the examples of cross-curricular integration that our teachers demonstrate. What makes these lessons playful and engaging?
9. Discuss the issues of stamina and self-regulation and where you see evidence of increasing stamina and self-regulation in these young learners.
10. Discuss the learning that happens when the students return to the learning zones to choose their own activities.
11. Discuss where in this video segment you saw evidence of the Principles of Learning in action.

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