

# BOOKLET

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FORUM

PLAY TO LEARN

FEBRUARY 2026



# Child Led Learning

## Raising Confident and Curious Learners

Child-Led Learning focuses on creating an environment where children are active participants in their learning experiences. Through well-planned play opportunities, children are encouraged to think, explore, and engage with the world around them in meaningful ways. Learning is shaped by children’s ideas and interactions, while teachers create supportive conditions that help learning grow naturally. This approach values children’s voices and supports their overall development in a balanced and enjoyable way.

### Why It Matters

- Build confidence through choice and decision-making.
- Encourages curiosity and love for learning.
- Develops problem-solving and social skills.
- Supports independence, creativity, and self-expression.

### Examples



#### **Blocks**

Children decide what to build; teacher asks: “How can you make it stronger?”



#### **Role-Play**

Children choose themes and roles.



#### **Outdoor Play**

Exploring sand, water, or leaves.



#### **Art**

Selecting materials to create freely.

### Teacher’s Role

Observe, provide resources, guide gently, and document learning. Teachers encourage children to make choices, explore ideas, and reflect on their experiences.

### Key Message

Child-led learning empowers children to make choices, follow their interests, and take ownership of their learning. Through purposeful guidance and rich play opportunities, teachers enable children to develop independence, creativity, problem-solving skills and a lifelong love of learning.



# Creative Learning Environment and Outdoor Space Fostering Exploration, Creativity, and Curiosity

A creative learning environment is designed to inspire children to explore, imagine, and learn through play. Indoor and outdoor spaces provide opportunities to interact with materials, peers, and nature in meaningful ways.

## Children in a creative learning environment:

- Experiment, try new ideas, and take risks.
- Observe and interact with plants, animals, and natural elements.
- Collaborate and communicate with peers.
- Develop curiosity, problem-solving, thinking, and social skills.

## Examples of Creative Learning



### Art Corners

Freely choose materials to paint, draw, or build.



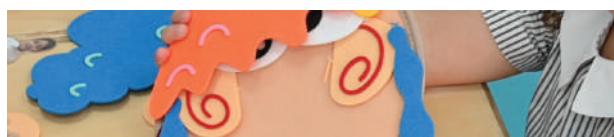
### Science & Discovery Areas

Magnifying glasses, plants, water play encourage exploration.



### Outdoor Play

Sand, water, climbing structures, and gardens promote physical skills and curiosity.



### Loose Parts Play

Recyclables, blocks, and fabrics inspire creativity and problem-solving.

## Teacher's Role

- Observe and support children's ideas
- Introduce new materials or provocations to spark curiosity
- Encourage collaboration and reflection
- Document learning experiences for planning and assessment

## Key Message

Rich, flexible indoor and outdoor environments allow children to lead their learning, explore safely, and express creativity. Teachers play a vital role in guiding and supporting children to become confident, curious, and motivated learners.



# Exploring Different Types of Play to Support Learning Enhancing Development Through Play

Play is a fundamental way for young children to learn. It supports cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Providing a variety of play experiences allows children to explore, experiment, and grow holistically.

## Types of Play and Learning Connections



### Physical / Active Play

**Examples:** Jumping, hopping, climbing, balancing

**Learning:** Counting jumps or steps develops early numeracy. Moving strengthens body awareness and coordination.



### Role Play / Imaginative Play

**Examples:** Drawing, painting, music, role-play (shop, doctor, home)

**Learning:** Creating patterns supports math concepts. Acting out stories enhances language, communication, and sequencing skills.



### Constructive / Building Play

**Examples:** Blocks, LEGO, puzzles, stacking cups.

**Learning:** Counting, measuring, and comparing builds numeracy and spatial reasoning. Planning develops problem-solving skills.



### Sensory / Exploratory Play

**Examples:** Sand, water, playdough, tactile bins.

**Learning:** Filling, pouring, and sorting teaches measurement, volume, counting, and categorization.

## Key Message

Free and guided play helps children learn naturally while developing confidence, curiosity, and essential skills. By connecting play to counting, sorting, measuring, and problem-solving, teachers make early numeracy and other learning meaningful, fun, and engaging.



## Literacy and Numeracy Through Play

### Developing Early Reading, Writing, and Math Skills

Play provides meaningful, hands-on experiences where children can develop foundational reading, writing, and math skills naturally. By embedding learning into playful activities, abstract concepts become concrete and engaging.

### Literacy Through Play

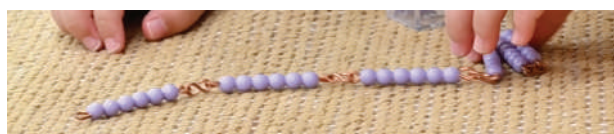
- **Storytelling & Role Play:** Acting out stories improves vocabulary, comprehension, and sequencing.
- **Drawing & Writing:** Labeling pictures, writing letters, or creating signs in pretend shops promotes early writing and letter recognition.
- **Rhymes & Songs:** Singing and chanting support phonological awareness, listening, and memory.

### Numeracy Through Play



#### Sorting & Classifying

Grouping toys by color, size, or shape introduces patterns and categorization.



#### Counting Games

Counting blocks, beads, or steps develops number sense.



#### Games with Rules

Board or group games strengthen counting, turn-taking, and problem-solving.



#### Sorting & Classifying

Grouping toys by color, size, or shape introduces patterns and categorization.

### Teacher's Role

- Provide materials and play scenarios that embed literacy and numeracy concepts.
- Observe and extend learning with open-ended questions.
- Encourage discussion, writing, and counting during play.

### Key Message

Integrating literacy and numeracy into play makes learning meaningful and fun. Children build essential reading, writing, and math skills while exploring, creating, and developing confidence and curiosity.



## Quality Communication to Support Learning Enhancing Language and Social Skills

Effective communication is essential in early childhood education. Quality interactions between teachers and children, as well as among peers, support learning, language development, and social-emotional growth.

### Why It Matters

- Develops vocabulary and language skills.
- Encourages active listening and expression of ideas.
- Supports social interactions and collaboration.
- Strengthens critical thinking through discussion and questioning.

### Examples of Communication-Rich Activities



#### **Storytelling and Discussion**

Children retell stories, answer questions, and share ideas.

#### **Role-Play**

Children engage in conversations while acting out different roles.

#### **Circle Time Conversations**

Group discussions about experiences or daily events.

#### **Questioning During Play**

Teachers ask open-ended questions to extend thinking.

### Teacher's Role

- Model clear and positive communication.
- Listen attentively and respond thoughtfully.
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage thinking and language use.
- Create an environment where children feel safe to express themselves.

### Key Message

Quality communication nurtures confident, expressive, and socially competent learners, enhancing both learning and personal development.



# Supporting Children of Different Needs

## Inclusive Learning for All

Inclusive learning ensures that all children, regardless of abilities or needs, can fully participate in play and learning. Teachers adapt the activities, materials, and environments so every child feels valued, capable, and engaged.

### Strategies to Support Different Needs

#### Adapt Materials

Use larger blocks, textured toys, or visual aids for physical or sensory challenges.

#### Differentiate Instructions:

Provide clear, simple instructions with gestures, demonstrations, or peer support.

#### Flexible Play Areas:

Ensure spaces accommodate mobility aids and sensory preferences.

#### Pairing & Grouping

Encourage collaboration between children with different abilities to promote social learning and empathy.

#### Visual & Auditory Supports

Use picture schedules, symbols, or songs to support understanding and routine.

### Examples in Play



**Sensory Play:** Water tables or tactile bins for diverse sensory engagement.



**Role Play:** Props or gestures allow all children to participate.



**Creative Play:** Art and music activities offer multiple ways to express ideas.

### Teacher's Role

Observe each child's needs, provide support, encourage participation, and adapt activities. Create a safe, welcoming environment where children feel confident to explore, interact, and learn.

### Key Message

Inclusive play-based learning allows every child to grow, explore, and develop. With thoughtful adaptations, teachers help children of all abilities become confident, curious, and capable learners.



# Holistic Development in Early Childhood Education

## Nurturing the Whole Child

Holistic development focuses on nurturing all aspects of a child's growth: cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and creative. Children learn best when their whole being is supported, not just academic skills.

### Key Areas of Development

#### Cognitive

Encourages thinking, problem-solving, memory, and understanding through exploration and play.

#### Emotional

Supports recognition and expression of feelings, resilience, and self-confidence.

#### Social

Promotes cooperation, empathy, communication, and teamwork.

#### Physical

Strengthens fine and gross motor skills through active and sensory play.

#### Creative

Stimulates imagination, expression, and innovation through art, music, and role play.



### Strategies to Support Holistic Development

- Provide diverse play experiences that integrate learning across domains
- Observe children and respond to their interests, strengths, and needs
- Encourage collaboration, problem-solving, and self-expression
- Use indoor and outdoor spaces for active, creative, and sensory experiences

### Teacher's Role

Design environments and activities that nurture the whole child. Guide learning through observation, support, and reflection to help children build confidence, curiosity, and well-rounded skills.

### Key Message

Supporting holistic development ensures children grow as capable, confident, and balanced individuals. Nurturing every aspect of a child lays the foundation for lifelong learning and well-being.





## Conclusion

Play is not simply an activity for young children — it is the foundation of how they think, explore, communicate and grow. Through child-led learning, rich environments, purposeful play, meaningful communication, inclusive practices and holistic development, early childhood settings create the conditions for confident, curious and capable learners to thrive.

Teachers play a powerful role in shaping these experiences. By observing children carefully, responding to their interests, providing thoughtful guidance and creating safe, stimulating spaces, educators enable learning to unfold naturally and joyfully. Every interaction, environment and learning opportunity contributes to building children's confidence, independence and love of learning.

As we continue to strengthen early childhood practice across Bahrain, this booklet serves as a shared reference to inspire reflective practice, collaboration and continuous improvement amongst teachers.

Together, we can ensure that every child experiences high-quality, play-based learning that nurtures their full potential and prepares them for lifelong success.