



## Questions About the Learning Environment



The guiding design principles of the Explozone were founded on key understandings obtained from the “Learning Environments For Tomorrow” program offered by the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The Explozone is a learning environment that seeks to promote and make visible the learning attributes of our 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Most importantly, it is a learning environment where both students and educators can learn from each other.

### 1. What are the guiding principles of the Explozone’s learning environment?

#### A. Collaboration:

- The learning environment is designed to empower collaboration and opportunities for students and educators to mingle and connect.
- It is a flexible space that allows for work in many configuration. (small groupings, large groupings)
- It has an interior and exterior learning space. A large garage door opens up to allow for the learning space to be extended outside.
- All furniture is moveable and on wheels allowing for flexible use of space.
- A cozy seating area is available for learners to use for collaboration or for observation.
- Square mats are used to allow learners to work on the floor if needed.

#### B. New Media Technology:

- The Explozone purposefully intersects traditional media such as books, paper and craft supplies with digital media to allow for dynamic engagement of learners.
- Digital tools available are interactive tools commonly found in the classroom including tablets, laptops and a SMART board to allow for consumption and production of knowledge as well as to empower the use of these tools for interactive communication.
- Digital media tools allow for the learning to extend outside the walls of the Explozone.
- The Explozone intersects regular everyday objects such as glass jars, balls, hammers etc. with STEAM resources such as robotics and Little Bits equipment. The open-ended and “maker” nature of this equipment allows for students to create, tinker and explore areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.

**C. Engagement:**

- The Explozone is a flexible and open learning environment that allows learners to explore, inquire and discover.
- All inquiry based activities promote the use and development of 21<sup>st</sup> century habits of mind with a particular focus on collaboration, critical thinking, creativity and communication.
- Learners are invited to find real-life problems and find ways to resolve these. This allows students to be socially engaged and contributing to the solution of authentic problems.
- All activities focus on hands-on experiential learning to allow for learners to make sense of the questions they ponder and the world they live in.
- Thinking is made visible at the Explozone.
- Activities include challenges, inquiries, demonstrations, simulations, inventions, tinkering, making, sharing, reflecting, solving and presenting.
- Explicit career education is connected to activities in the Explozone to allow learners to make connections between their learning and their post secondary future.
- Community partnerships are promoted and nurtured to enhance student's learning experiences and engagement.

**D. Sustainability:**

- Housed in a “building that teaches” using LEED Gold Standards for environmental sustainability, the Explozone is a place where explicit connections to sustainability issues are made during inquiry based activities and challenges.
- Many inquiry based activities focus on green technology and related careers.
- Many inquiry based activities and challenges promote the integration of environmental concepts in teaching and learning.
- Environmental learning is integrated within cross-curricular challenges to promote an understanding and an appreciation for sustainability issues.
- Activities provide learners with opportunities to experience and investigate the relationships linking individuals, societies and natural surroundings.
- Learners and community partners are engaged in activities that promote critical thinking and where questions can be asked and a sustained and meaningful dialogue can take place.

## **2. Can the activities that are offered at the Explozone be done in my classroom?**

Most Explozone activities, challenges and lessons were created using materials that are low cost, accessible and can be found in a regular classroom setting. Activities created are closely connected to the new BC curriculum and are aimed at promoting inquiry based learning with a focus on developing critical thinking skills. Some STEM related activities may not be reproducible in your classroom if these require the use of robotics or Little Bits equipment.

## **3. My classroom isn't like the Explozone. Why would I want to come to the Explozone?**

Interestingly, a typical classroom has the ability to become a more flexible learning environment. Teachers who come to the Explozone will learn and see first-hand how to reproduce a more flexible learning environment that promotes student engagement and collaboration.

Educators who come to the Explozone (with or without their students) are given opportunities to engage in challenges, tweak and fortify lessons, reflect on their pedagogy and obtain support on the development of inquiry based challenges and implement new strategies learned in their classroom.