


A photograph of two young girls sitting inside a colorful tent. The girl in the foreground is a Black girl with her hair in two braids, wearing a purple shirt over a yellow one. The girl behind her is a white girl with dark hair, wearing a pink and white striped shirt. The tent has blue, yellow, and green panels. The photo is framed by a white dotted border.

2014

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An Introduction to
How Does Learning Happen?
Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years

For Leaders

As a leader in an early years program, you might be asking yourself . . .

- How can I ensure that the environment of the program provides high-quality experiences for children, families, and educators?*
- How can I foster the kinds of relationships within our program that best promote children’s learning development, health, and well-being?
- How can I do more to support educators in their work with children?

How Does Learning Happen? guides you through these and other important questions.

How Does Learning Happen?

is an exciting resource developed to promote a shared understanding of what children need and what can be done to help them grow and flourish. It is **not** a checklist of tasks to complete or a template for a

“one-size-fits-all” approach, and it is **not** a rating scale for measuring quality. Rather, *How Does Learning Happen?* describes effective practices and emphasizes how important positive relationships are to the success of early learning programs. It is meant to promote deeper reflection about the work you do as a leader to support quality in early years programs. This brief guide introduces you to the ideas in *How Does Learning Happen?*



* In this guide, the term “educator” refers to all those who work with children and families in early years programs.

What do *quality* and *pedagogy* mean in *How Does Learning Happen?*

The term **quality** means different things to different people. In *How Does Learning Happen?*, quality refers to the kinds of programs that, according to research and practice from around the world, contribute to positive experiences and outcomes for children.

The term **pedagogy** refers to the process of understanding and supporting learning.

Pedagogical approaches that support quality programs are those that:

- build positive and responsive relationships;
- focus on children’s social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive development in a holistic way;
- provide environments in which children learn through exploration, play, and inquiry;
- encourage self-reflection, discussion, and ongoing collaboration and learning among educators;
- engage with families, and value their strengths, contributions, and unique perspectives; and
- use pedagogical documentation to study, interpret, make visible, and help inform children’s learning and development.

These pedagogical approaches support children as they learn along a developmental continuum, and allow for smoother transitions from one program to another – for example, from child care and family support programs to kindergarten, elementary school, and beyond.

What is a pedagogical leader?

Anyone can be a pedagogical leader. Pedagogical leaders support educators in applying pedagogical approaches and practices. They work alongside other educators to both guide and study the learning and teaching process. They help create a culture of curiosity, openness, and trust that focuses on how learning happens for both the child and the adult. Pedagogical leaders are less concerned with answers and more interested in questions. They don't tell others what to do, but rather help them make connections and form interpretations – that is, they help them make meaning of their own thinking. The quality of experiences in an early years program improves when leaders and educators are continuously thinking and reflecting **together**.

For some great examples of how to be a pedagogical leader, see the research brief “**Pedagogical Leadership**”, in *Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children*, available on the Ministry of Education website, at www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/excerpts.html.



What will I find in *How Does Learning Happen?*

1. An Understanding of Children, Families, and Educators

The way we view others influences how we interact with them. *How Does Learning Happen?* promotes a shared view of children, families, and educators – and the relationships between them – that will help shape all aspects of your early years program. Specifically:

- When we see **children** as competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential, we value and build on their strengths and abilities.
- When we see **families** as experts who know their children better than anyone else and have important information to share, we value and engage them in a meaningful way.
- When we see **educators** as knowledgeable, reflective, resourceful, and rich in experience, we value the experiences and environments they create for children.

Adopting these perspectives in the policies, procedures, and practices of the program can help you work towards the goals for children and expectations for programs set out in *How Does Learning Happen?*

2. Foundations, Goals, and Expectations

How Does Learning Happen? sets out goals for children and expectations for programs, organized around four foundations that are central to children's learning and growth. The goals for children provide a basis for thinking about and creating the kinds of environments and experiences that are meaningful for children. They are not meant to guide evaluation or assessment of children's development but rather to guide practice, by articulating a vision that programs can strive towards every day. The expectations for

programs provide ideas and examples of ways in which programs can move towards realizing the goals for children. Detailed descriptions and examples can be found in the “**Foundations for Learning**” section of the document.

Foundations	Goals for Children	Expectations for Programs
Belonging	Every child has a sense of belonging when he or she is connected to others and contributes to their world.	Early childhood programs cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults, and the world around them.
Well-Being	Every child is developing a sense of self, health, and well-being.	Early childhood programs nurture children’s healthy development and support their growing sense of self.
Engagement	Every child is an active and engaged learner who explores the world with body, mind, and senses.	Early childhood programs provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry.
Expression	Every child is a capable communicator who expresses himself or herself in many ways.	Early childhood programs foster communication and expression in all forms.

3. Questions for Reflection

Ideas and inspiration happen as we reflect on our practice. Critical reflection involves not only questioning and rethinking our actions, but also considering whether they make sense in the light of research, theory, and what we know about the children and families in our program. *How Does Learning Happen?* provides questions that encourage critical reflection to help leaders and educators work towards the goals for children and expectations for programs.

What about ELECT?

Throughout Ontario, many programs have explored how to embed the principles of ELECT (*Early Learning for Every Child Today*) and an understanding of child development into their practice. *How Does Learning Happen?* builds on the important work that's been done so far. It incorporates what we have learned from ELECT and the ways it has been applied in programs and practices across the province. *How Does Learning Happen?* takes what we know about child development and adds new perspectives on the approaches that best support children's learning, development, health, and well-being.

Key sections of ELECT are in *Excerpts from "ELECT"*, which can be accessed at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/excerpts.html.

How will this resource support me in my leadership role?

Leadership is a critical element of a quality early years program, and your commitment to putting *How Does Learning Happen?* into practice is essential. As a leader in the early years, it is important for you to reflect critically on your own practices, try new ideas, and act on what you learn. Strong leadership means more than performing the day-to-day administrative functions of the program; it also means being more intentional in establishing, maintaining, and supporting strong relationships and ongoing discussions with and among colleagues and educator teams, children, families, and community partners.

The following chart contains examples of ways you can support the goals for children and the program expectations described in *How Does Learning Happen?*



Relationships with:	Leadership Opportunities
Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for continuous professional learning (e.g., at team meetings, set aside time to discuss sections of <i>How Does Learning Happen?</i> or to share a video, photo, or article). • Help others become pedagogical leaders by nurturing their curiosity and interest in learning, and encouraging them to ask questions and explore new ideas and practices. • Support educators in building relationships with one another (e.g., develop protocols that encourage educators to reflect together during everyday practice).
Children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that practices and policies foster ongoing interactions and communication among educators, children, families, and leaders (e.g., make time and space for conversations, reach out to families through blogs or e-mails). • Invite parents to participate in and contribute to the program on an ongoing basis, and always make them feel welcome (e.g., invite families to join children and educators in planting a garden, painting a wall, or doing crafts).
Partners and other programs in your community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out opportunities for professional learning with community partners (e.g., invite colleagues from another program to participate in joint team discussions). • Facilitate connections among community partners to find opportunities for children to make contributions and feel included (e.g., children's artwork could be displayed in local community settings).

How can I get started?

As a leader, *How Does Learning Happen?* can help you build quality environments and experiences for both children and educators, and strengthen connections with families. To get started, ask yourself some of the following questions, and talk about them with your team, colleagues, and community partners:

- What changes could we make in our program that would reinforce the view of the child as capable, competent, and curious?
- How do our policies, procedures, and practices reflect and support the goals for children and expectations for programs described in *How Does Learning Happen?* What areas may need some rethinking? Why?
- How can I support our educator team in putting *How Does Learning Happen?* into practice?
- How can I learn more about the role of a pedagogical leader and support others in becoming pedagogical leaders?
- How can I deepen families' engagement with the program and with their children's learning?
- If I could do one thing today to help support others in using *How Does Learning Happen?* in our program, what would it be? Why?



Where can I learn more?

Professional resources such as the following are available to support you and your team in critical reflection and continuous learning:

How Does Learning Happen?

www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/HowLearningHappens.pdf

Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children

www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/research.html

Includes research briefs and videos on topics such as pedagogical leadership, environment, self-regulation, brain development, pedagogical documentation, inclusion, and parent engagement.

Excerpts from “ELECT”

www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/excerpts.html

Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) (full document)

www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/continuum/continuum.pdf

Early Learning Framework website

www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/

Includes videos, photos, and highlights of the principles of ELECT.

For other relevant information and resources, visit the Ministry of Education website at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/index.html.

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