

Excerpts from “How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years”

The environment as educator. The environment plays a key role in the quality of children’s exploration and play. Indoor and outdoor spaces, materials, and furnishings (including how they are positioned), accommodations to ensure equitable learning opportunities and participation for children with special needs, as well as the general design of the space, and the organization of time, all have a significant influence on children’s level of engagement and the possibilities for in-depth exploration and learning. – pg. 36

“A lack of clutter [as well as] thoughtfully organized, rich open-ended materials invite the children to make relationships, and to communicate their ideas in many ways ... It is not merely a matter of decorating. The arrangements of materials should invite engagement, meaningmaking, and exploration. Thinking of ‘aesthetic’ as being the opposite of ‘anaesthetic’, a shutting down of the senses, may help with appraising the environment in a richer way.” - Callaghan

Children benefit significantly from having long periods of time to explore in environments equipped with interesting, open-ended materials that can be used in many ways, inviting investigation and complex play. – pg. 36

Assess the type of toys and materials available in your program and consider replacing those that limit exploration (e.g., single-purpose toys) with “open-ended” materials that can be used in many ways (e.g., for infants: objects that encourage exploration of questions such as, “How does this feel, sound, taste, move?”; for toddlers: materials to help them explore questions such as, “What parts does this have? What can I make it do?”; for preschoolers: materials that encourage construction and exploratory questions such as, “How does this go together?” “What can I make?”; for older children: opportunities to encourage representation of their thinking and ideas through various mediums). – pg. 37

“Communication also happens through creative expression. When children manipulate materials, explore music and movement, create symbols (e.g., mark-making), and engage in imaginative expression (e.g., visual art) and dramatic play, they are communicating. Creating and designing fuse together the cognitive, emotional, and physical domains – thinking, feeling, and doing. Encouraging the creative expression of ideas, feelings, and interpretations using a variety of materials also helps solidify children’s learning, enhances their creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills,⁷⁷ and strengthens their memory and sense of identity.” - Callaghan