



2014

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

For Educators

As an educator* in an early years program, you might be asking yourself . . .

- How can I make a difference for children? For families? For my colleagues?
- What does the latest research about children’s learning and development tell us?
- What does it really mean to be a reflective practitioner?
- How can I continue to grow and to feel inspired about my work?

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 positive relationships as critical for quality early years programs. It is meant to promote deeper reflection on how to create places and experiences where children, families, and educators explore, question, and learn together. 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 does *How Does Learning Happen?* mean for program quality?

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 does this resource include?

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 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 your practice 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 measure children's development but rather to guide practice. 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 help guide you in reflection about your practice, whether on your own or in collaboration with a colleague, a staff team, or the children and their families. These questions serve as a starting point for challenging existing practices and acting on the goals for children and expectations for programs.

What does this mean for me?

How Does Learning Happen? doesn't mean doing more but looking at what you are already doing with a different focus. It has entry points and ideas to reflect on as you make decisions in your practice every day. It's about being aware of what you're doing and why you're doing it – for example:

- thinking about how a view of children as competent and capable can be reflected in your environment and interactions;
- keeping well-being, engagement, belonging, and expression at the forefront when planning your program; and
- using pedagogical documentation to learn more about the children in your program and to make their learning visible.

How will stronger connections with families benefit children?

How Does Learning Happen? encourages strong, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with families. Including the child's family in discussions and taking the time to make daily connections with them, whether in person or by other means (e.g., sending notes or emails, posting information on bulletin boards), is critical to the success of an early years program.

When you recognize and build on the strengths of families and the love they have for their children, everyone benefits. Families know their child best and have much to contribute to effective practice in the early years setting. Similarly, your own knowledge and experience as an educator can benefit families in their relationships with their children.

You can share information with families from the Ministry of Education website, to support them in understanding how learning happens. *How Does Learning Happen?*, along with related videos, research, and much more, can be accessed at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/index.html.



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 can I get started?

There are many ways to build *How Does Learning Happen?* into your daily practice. To get started, ask yourself some of the following questions, and discuss them with your colleagues:

- How does my view of children compare with how children are described in the document?

(Turn to the section entitled “**An Understanding of Children, Families, and Educators**” for how the document describes children.)
- What can I do to engage families more on a daily basis?

(Turn to the section entitled “**The Family**” for further information about engaging with families to support children in their learning.)
- How can I learn more about my role as an educator?

(Turn to the section entitled “**The Educator**” to learn more about the central role of the educator in collaborating with children and families to support quality programs.)
- How can I put more focus on the foundations of belonging, engagement, expression, and well-being in my daily practice?

(Turn to the section entitled “**Goals for Children and Expectations for Programs**” for further information on how you can put theory into practice.)
- If I could do one thing today to start using *How Does Learning Happen?* in my 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

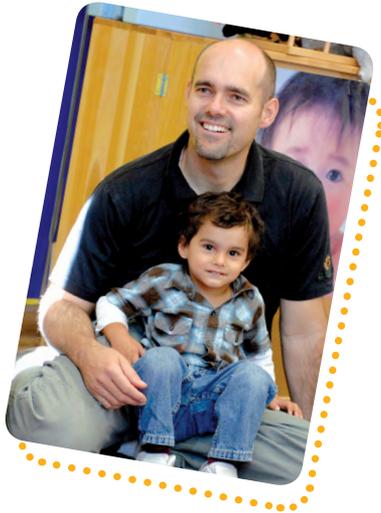
www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/

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.

“When educators engage in continuous learning and questioning, exploring new ideas and adjusting practices, they achieve the best outcomes for children, families, and themselves.”

– How Does Learning Happen?



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