

Kindergarten

The Learning Environment

In Kindergarten, the atmosphere that educator teams create is vital to the children's learning and development. When planning the learning environment, the educator team considers how they use the space both inside and outside the classroom; how they use the time throughout the day, and the kinds of materials and resources that they provide for the children.

The teacher and the early childhood educator create a learning environment that is inviting, one in which children feel a sense of belonging. The classroom is a place where children feel safe and comfortable to ask questions, to take risks, and to explore new ideas. The children engage in discussion with each other and with the educator team, to share information, to exchange ideas and to solve problems together. This helps deepen their understanding of the ideas and theories being explored.

The learning environment changes based on the changing needs of the children. Often, the team will plan the learning environment with the children. This may mean that the physical layout of the room changes from time to time, or that materials are removed and replaced with others that better support exploration of new ideas and wonderings. At all times the goal is for the learning environment to support learning for all children by reflecting the diversity of the children, their families, and the community.

When children are actively engaged in the learning environment you might see them:

- making choices about things such as when to have a snack or a quiet time, or what materials to use when building a structure;
- trying new things such as working in a new learning area or trying a new skill;
- managing and planning their time.

...or you might hear them:

- expressing empathy to another child or adult;
- solving a problem by self-talking or talking with other children;
- making suggestions about materials that could be added to learning

A place for wonder, mystery and discovery ...

"We need to think about creating classroom environments that give children the opportunity for wonder, mystery and discovery; an environment that speaks to young children's inherent curiosity and innate yearning for exploration is a classroom where children are passionate about learning and love school." (Heard & McDonough, 2009)
As quoted in the Building Capacity Series, Special Edition #27, *The Third Teacher*, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Ministry of Education,



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Creating conditions and opportunities similar to those in the Kindergarten classroom that support learning at home and in the community:

Some sample ideas:

- Allow children to make choices about things like what to wear to school. This helps children to develop skills of self-regulation which are critical to early learning.
- Support children when they want to try something new or do something in a different way. Encouraging children to think creatively and to reflect on how things are done fosters the development of critical and creative thinking skills.
- Provide materials that can be used in a variety of ways (e.g., plastic containers in a variety of sizes and shapes, scraps of materials and ribbons, natural materials such as pebbles and pine cones, boxes of all sizes, recycled pots and pans, etc.). Materials that can be used in more than one way foster children's imagination and inventiveness.

Talking with Children

Encourage children to talk about the reasons for their choices, their theories, wonderings and questions ("Why is the sky blue?" "Why do worms come out after it rains?"). When adults engage and interact with children, asking questions such as "What do you think?" and "Why do you think that?", it tells children that their thoughts, opinions and ideas have value, encourages thinking, and develops oral language and vocabulary.

Parents as partners in learning:

Ask the educator(s):

Parents are encouraged to share observations or information about their child with the educator team.

- How can I encourage my child to take risks and try new things both at school and at home?
- In what ways do you support children in planning and managing time during the school day?
- What opportunities does the program provide for children to develop self-regulation skills (e.g., allowing children to make choices about when to have a snack and if s/he needs to have a quiet time)? How can we support development of these skills at home?

Ask a child:

- What learning area is your favourite? Why? Which learning area haven't you been to yet? Why?
- In what ways can we do something like this outside of school?
- What materials in the classroom do you enjoy working with? Why?

Learn more

For a list of resources, visit

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/kindergarten/index.html>

Or call:

Toll-free in Ontario,

1-800-387-5514

From Toronto and from outside Ontario,

(416) 325-2929

TDD/TTY

This toll-free number provides accessible information for the hearing-impaired, in both English and French languages

1-800-263-2892

