



Niagara Children's Planning Council

December 2014 News Digest

If you have news or information you would like to share in the January Niagara Children's Planning Council News Digest, please email it to zach.dadson@becniagara.ca by December 31, 2014

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ONTARIO EARLY YEARS CENTRES:



Making a Difference for
Children & Families in Niagara



NEWSLETTER - Winter 2014

Engagement Belonging Expression Well-Being

Children's early learning experiences, with others and their environment, lasts a lifetime. Early Years programs play an important role in supporting children's learning, development, health and well-being.

Multiple studies tell us that young children grow when they participate in programs where the adults are caring and responsive to them. Research continues to show us that children thrive in programs that focus on active learning through exploration, play and inquiry.

Purposeful, play-based early learning sets the stage for future learning, health and well-being (Ontario Early Years Policy Framework, 2013).

Families are more likely to be drawn to programs where the team welcomes and engages parents / caregivers and their children as valued participants who contribute to the program. Program staff engage in reflective



practice in order to support the implementation of our early learning programs. There is perhaps no relationship that holds greater responsibility or reward than the respectful and responsive relationships we develop with children (*How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014*).

We believe that children are competent, are capable of complex thinking, are naturally curious and rich in potential. Keeping our focus on the children first and foremost, our programs cultivate

caring relationships that create a sense of **belonging**, nurture healthy development and **well-being**, provide environments and experiences that **engage** children in meaningful play, and foster communication and **expression**.

The stronger our partnerships and the deeper and more valuable our connections, the greater the benefit...it's an investment that allows us all to grow.

What is an OEYC?

Ontario Early Years Centres are places where:

Children (birth to age 6)

- Play and learn with their parents / caregivers
- Explore materials and experience activities to stimulate and support development in all areas
- Interact and play with other children

Parents, Grandparents, Caregivers

- Participate in activities with the children in your care and enjoy play-based early learning together
- Interact with your child and program staff
- Attend workshops to better understand child development and learn parenting tips
- Receive answers to questions
- Obtain support and guidance related to concerns
- Meet other parents and caregivers
- Borrow resources from the Resource Room / Library
- Learn about other early years services

Everyone is Welcome
Variety of Locations - Flexible Hours
No Fees for Programs

Engagement

“Optimal conditions for learning occur when we are fully engaged.” Gopnik, 2009



Ontario Early Years Centres strive to create environments where children and parents are fully engaged in their learning through play, exploration and inquiry. A team approach is taken between educators, parents and caregivers that values children’s ideas, strengths and needs to create an atmosphere where children are engaged in intentional play that has meaning to them. This develops problem solving, creative thinking and innovation skills which builds children’s confidence as learners and valued citizens.

“Optimal conditions for learning occur when we are fully engaged. For children, this happens in play that evolves from a child’s natural curiosity – active play allows children to explore with their bodies, minds and senses, stimulating them to ask questions, test theories, solve problems, engage in creative thinking, and make meaning of the world around them (Gopnik, 2009).

Photos and documentation make learning visible and display the importance of relationships, highlighting a community where everyone is engaged in the process of learning.

Children have opportunities in our centres to play in a variety of settings with different materials and people. In the photos a child used magnetic building toys on a metal radiator and created what he called his “water tank”. The water tank had many pipes for the water to go through and a container for the water to drain into. The child was given the space and time to build his own invention and his mother and an educator acknowledged the value of his discoveries. The child requested supplies to create a model of his larger project. The educator

encouraged this knowing the child was very motivated to make things to take home to show his older brother and father. Taking the project home created another opportunity for engagement as he shared the story of his water tank with the rest of his family which built his confidence and pride in his achievement to spark further exploration at home.

We create optimal learning experiences for all children by listening to their unique ideas allowing time for these ideas to develop. We share in their discoveries and experiences that foster a celebration of each child as unique individuals with the capacity to develop to their full potential.



Gopnik, A (2009). The philosophical baby: What children’s minds tell us about truth, love and the meaning of life. New York: Picador



Belonging

In OEYC's, adults and children are able to forge relationships and make connections with others. The following pictures display examples of some of these connections during the children's play.

During group time, everyone was invited to examine a snake skin. The children were encouraged to express how they felt about this experience with each other, and the adults in the room. How did it feel? What words described it? Where was the snake? Together



they talked about feelings of curiosity and discovery. All thoughts and opinions were talked about and welcomed. Those who chose not to touch it were still encouraged to talk about what they were seeing.

It is well known that children need to feel a sense of belonging. Belonging can mean that a child feels comfortable and loved while a parent acknowledges acts on their physical and emotional needs. They do this by engaging them in play or in this case reading together.

In this photograph we see Jade reading to her daughter Iris as baby Finn sleeps. Iris loves reading together with mom and you can see she is snuggled close to mom with her arm on her shoulder. She appears to be comfortable and interested in the story. You can see by their body language and eyes that they are fully engaged in the story. We see a close bond in the physical connectedness of Mom, Iris and baby brother. The family in this photograph portrays an overall sense of belonging.



As we respectfully acknowledge that every child is a capable communicator who expresses himself or herself in many ways, the staff members of Niagara's OEYCs create early learning opportunities and environments that foster communication and expression in all forms. It is important that we value and protect all children's first language and/or traditional language and culture, and promote second-language acquisition in our centres.

Expression



Maman, Rosanne, is showing respect for, and is interested in, what Sébastien has to say – regardless of how he communicates. Through reciprocal communications, they are building a sense of connection. While Sébastien may have initiated the conversation, Roseanne is strengthening his sense of autonomy by giving her son a voice while engaging in an authentic "conversation" with him. Participating in the many opportunities for parent/child engagement at the OEYC, and being aware of and understanding the many languages of children, parents and caregivers gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the time they spend with their children.

When children are given the opportunity to express their ideas, feelings and interpretations by using a variety of materials, they are solidifying their learning, enhancing their creative problem solving and critical thinking skills as well as strengthening their memory and sense of identity. Manipulating materials, exploring music, creating symbols and using their imaginations for expressing themselves are all methods of communication for young children. When caring adults are aware of, and understand and respond to, the many languages of children, children gain a sense of competence and autonomy. Asking for and considering children's ideas can be beneficial to their language development.

The OEYC early learning environments provide opportunities for children and their parents / caregivers to explore language and literacy through play – opportunities for thinking, feeling and doing.



Well-Being

Children are constantly learning through their experiences and it happens right from birth. Research has proven that children in their early stages of life learn, and are influenced from their experiences with others, and the environment that they are exposed to. Children on a daily basis should experience belonging, well-being, engagement and expression.

Well-being for children is developing a sense of self and healthy attitudes both physically and emotionally. Childhood education programs which nurture children's healthy development, allows children to express themselves in a way that they feel confident. The Ontario Early Years Centres take well-being of children seriously. We strive to provide an inclusive, welcoming environment in which parents and children feel safe, comfortable, and have a sense of belonging.

Children thrive in programs where



they can engage in vigorous physical play in natural outdoor spaces and feel emotionally connected to their surroundings. The Early Years Centres within Niagara encourage opportunities for outdoor play and exploration. For example, Heartland Forest is an excursion that we invite families to take part in. It is a time for caregivers and their children to spend time outdoors, exploring nature's beauty. Children love being outdoors, seeing the scenery, hearing the forest under their feet, and looking for hidden treasures. Children become so excited finding snails, frogs, and the tops to the broken acorns. The changing of the seasons has occurred from one trip to the next. We have witnessed such beauty, everyone is in awe. It is wonderful to hear the children's many explanations about the changes, and why they occur.



Natural environments are great for the well-being of children and encourage them to discover with all of their senses. They are becoming engaged in the environment, and learning to discover the area around them. Children's imagination, while outside, can be endless. Playing freely outdoors brings out children's creativity and spontaneity. It is a learning experience for all involved. Being outdoors promotes well-being enabling children to incorporate a healthy lifestyle while being active outside, as well as a sense of responsibility, and care for their environment around them. Being outdoors is a great way to be active and have fun with everyone involved.

www.ontarioearlyyears.ca

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