Making Thinking and Learning Visible Through The Learning Environment

Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Video Viewing Guide
How to Use the Viewing Guide

The video, *Making Thinking and Learning Visible Through The Learning Environment* can be watched in its entirety or in segments. The accompanying questions are intended to provoke thinking and discussion before, during, and after viewing.

The Viewing Guide is designed for differentiated audiences and includes reflective questions for Educators (e.g., Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten (FDELK) teams, child care staff, family resource centre staff, other primary teachers), administrators (e.g., principals, child care supervisors) and parents. Administrators and other system leaders have a vital role to play in all aspects of the implementation of FDELK. Engaging administrators and system leaders in reflective discussion will provide educator teams with support in designing programs and learning environments that promote the development of self-regulation skills.

Engaging parents in early learning provides valuable insights and observations that build bridges and relationships between community, home, and school. Insights, perspectives, and shared understanding about the purposes the various elements, (e.g., furniture, materials, centres, documentation, works samples, and flow of the room) in the learning environment will ultimately benefit the children.

The Learning Environment

The learning environment is often referred to as the “third teacher” because when carefully designed it supports and enhances children’s learning and their development of self-regulation competencies. You will hear educator teams describe how the learning environment is flexible and dynamic based on their assessment information. It changes in response to children’s diverse needs, learning, cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. It will also be a reflection of the pedagogy and teaching and learning approaches described and outlined in *The Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program (Draft 2010).*

In this video, the question “What does a FDELK learning environment look like and sound like?” is reflected on and described by educator teams. They share practices they are “repeating,” “removing,” and “rethinking” as they co-construct the learning environment with the children and make learning visible both to the children and adults. Teams from across the province reflect on various and equally-valuable entry points. They demonstrate and describe the impact of co-constructing the space with the children, and of “uncluttering” the classroom space to better accommodate learning through play and inquiry. They discuss their roles in supporting large and small group learning and how their roles change based on the changing needs of the children. The use of the outdoors as an extension of the classroom environment is also addressed.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction

The following information on UDL is taken from Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Instruction and Assessment for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12, Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2011, p.11-20. http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/L4All/L4A_en_downloads/LearningforAll%20K-12%20draft%20I.pdf

UDL was inspired by work in architecture on the planning of buildings with a view to accessibility for people with physical disabilities (Turnbull et al., 2002). Architects observed that the added improvements facilitated access for all users, not just people with physical disabilities. An access ramp, for instance, provides a person using a wheelchair with easier access to a building, but it also makes it easier for a parent with a child’s stroller, a cyclist, or someone using a walker.

This notion soon found its way into education. Instruction that both responds to the characteristics of a diverse group of students and is precisely tailored to the unique strengths and needs of each student can be achieved using the principles and guidelines associated with three instructional approaches:

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- differentiated instruction, and
- the tiered approach to prevention and intervention

Used in combination, **UDL and differentiated instruction** enable educators to respond effectively to the strengths and needs of all students. UDL provides educators with broad principles for planning instruction for a diverse group of students, whereas differentiated instruction allows them to address specific skills and difficulties (Raynal & Rieunier, 1998). The two approaches overlap, sharing certain goals and strategies, such as providing a range of instructional strategies, resources, activities, and assessment tools in order to meet the different strengths, needs, readiness, and learning styles or preferences of the students in a class.

The chart below highlights places in this video where connections to UDL can be seen in the practices of the educator teams. You may wish to read the chapter(s) cited before viewing the video, or as part of your follow-up discussions after viewing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Connections to Learning for All (Draft 2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:25</td>
<td>How teams are rethinking the learning environment</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:10</td>
<td>How rethinking the learning environment impacts learning</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:40</td>
<td>How teams talk and share information about the strengths, needs and interests of the children</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction Chapter 3: Assessment for Learning Chapter 4: Planning Assessment and Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:25</td>
<td>How teams honour the children’s learning and the prior knowledge they bring</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:15</td>
<td>How teams rethink their interactions with the children, the use of commercial materials in the learning environment How teams co-construct the learning environment with the children so it has more meaning for them</td>
<td>Chapter 5: Putting the Pieces Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:20</td>
<td>How teams are rethinking what should be removed from the learning environment and how this impacts learning</td>
<td>Chapter 5: Putting the Pieces Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:50</td>
<td>How teams are rethinking what should be removed from and rethought in the learning environment and how this impacts learning</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45</td>
<td>How children can co-construct the learning environment</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:20</td>
<td>How teams are repeating elements of the learning environment</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>How teams are using the outdoors as the learning environment</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:25</td>
<td>How teams are planning the materials and spaces to make learning visible</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:10</td>
<td>How teams are co-constructing and negotiating the learning environment to include children’s voices and ideas</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23:20</td>
<td>Teams engage in professional learning conversations about the learning environment</td>
<td>Chapter 5: Putting the Pieces Together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Considerations for Viewing

The following considerations are provided to inform and focus your thinking as you view the videos.

Numbers of Children
The groups of children seen in the classrooms may not be representative of the numbers of actual children in the class. Children present in the video had written parental permission to be filmed.

Classroom Space
The space allotted to Kindergarten classes varies from school to school. The classrooms shown represent this variation. The organization of some of the physical environments shown is indicative of the rethinking and removing that has been done.

Resources
The classrooms shown depict a wide variation in resources. The materials and equipment in the classrooms vary based on local contexts and decision making.

Community Partnerships
Many Board teams benefit from community partnerships with organizations such as faculties of education, community colleges, and parent volunteers. Additional adults in the classrooms reflect these partnerships.

Safety
Educators are responsible for ensuring the safety of children, and for encouraging and motivating children to assume responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others. Educators must ensure that children acquire the knowledge and skills needed for safe participation in all learning opportunities both inside the school and in the outdoors. Children must be aware of any required safety procedures and of ways of interacting with each other to ensure that they are not putting themselves or their peers in danger.
Sample Questions for Educator Teams

These sample questions can be used to guide reflection and discussion about the learning environment. You may wish to reference *The Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program (Draft 2010)* (pages 35-36), which focuses on the learning environment.

**Before viewing the video**

How can the classroom reflect the pedagogy and learning/teaching approaches described in the FDELK document?

What does the physical environment (walls, placement of furniture, selection and organization of materials) in early years classrooms say about the beliefs and practices of the educators?

How can children be engaged in co-constructing the learning environment?

**While viewing the video**

How have educator teams engaged children in designing and co-constructing the learning environment? What are the observed and described impacts on learning and self-regulation?

In what ways have educator teams made the room accessible for all children?

What connections are you making with how the educator teams in the video are “rethinking, removing, and repeating” elements of the learning environment?

**After viewing the video**

In what ways does your current learning environment reflect your beliefs about children and their learning?

How will you “rethink” your learning environment to make it richer and more engaging? What role will the children play?

How does “rethinking” aspects of the classroom environment impact learning? What have you observed in your classroom?

How did the teams’ “rethinking” of materials impact children’s learning and make the learning more visible?

What strategies did the educator teams use to engage the children and co-construct the learning environment?
Sample Questions for Administrators

These sample questions can be used to guide reflection and discussion about the learning environment. You may wish to reference The Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program (Draft 2010) (pages 35-36), which focuses on the learning environment.

For additional support, administrators can reference resources from the Ministry’s Administrators Leadership Development site at: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/principalsWanttoKnow.html

Before viewing the video

How can the classroom reflect the pedagogy and learning/teaching approaches described in the FDELK document?

What does the physical environment (walls, placement of furniture, selection and organization of materials) in early years classrooms say about the beliefs and practices of the educators?

How can children be engaged in co-constructing the learning environment?

In what ways do the teams create a rich, engaging, caring, and accessible environment for the children?

What aspects of the learning environment have teams “rethought”?

In what ways have teams involved the children in co-constructing the environment?

While viewing the video

In what ways do the teams create a rich, engaging, caring, and accessible environment for the children?

What aspects of the learning environment have teams “rethought”?

In what ways have teams involved the children in co-constructing the environment?

After viewing the video

What elements of the video were connections for you? What was surprising or a disconnect for you?

What do you consider to be “non-negotiable” with regard to the learning environment in your early years classrooms?

What concerns or issues might your educator team(s) have as they rethink their learning environment? How will you respond to these concerns/issues?

What are the courageous conversations you would facilitate with teams:
- who may not be aligned with practices presented in the video, (e.g., “Reflecting upon your own practices and those practices in the video, what aspect of your current practices are you going to rethink, repeat, and remove?”)?
- who are aligned with practices presented in the video, (e.g., “Reflecting upon your own practices and those practices in the video, what aspect of your current practices are you going to rethink, repeat, and remove?”)?
Sample Questions for Parents and Community Members

These sample questions can be used to guide reflection and discussion about the learning environment. You may wish to reference The Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program (Draft 2010) (pages 35-36), which focuses on the learning environment.

Before viewing the video

What questions do you have about the learning environment?

In your visits to the classroom, what did you see/not see that surprised you or do you wonder about?

While viewing the video

Note: These elements from the video are not intended to be presented to parents in isolation from a facilitated discussion, as many of the terms may be new to parents (e.g., scaffolding, co-constructing). They are intended as a guide for facilitators working with parents.

In what ways do teams create a rich, engaging, caring and accessible environment for the children?

What aspects of the learning environment have teams “rethought”?

In what ways have teams involved the children in co-constructing the environment?

After viewing the video

What aspects of creating a learning environment might be applicable at home as well as at school, (e.g., think about accessibility of materials, kinds and amount of materials)?
Acknowledgements

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch, Ministry of Education, would like to thank the Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten teams, the school administrators, the Board Program Leads, the parents/guardians and the Full-Day Kindergarten children in the following Boards and schools, for allowing us to visit and film in their classrooms, and for sharing their learning with others across the province.

Greater Essex County District School Board
Belle River Public School

Halton Catholic District School Board
St. Luke Elementary School

Halton District School Board
Mohawk Gardens Public School

Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
St. Lawrence Elementary School

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
Prince of Wales Elementary School

Lakehead District School Board
Westmount Public School

Kenora Catholic District School Board
St. Louis School

Near North District School Board
Marshall Park Public School

Ottawa Catholic District School Board
Our Lady of Wisdom School St. Elizabeth School

Peel District School Board
Marvin Heights Public School

Rainbow District School Board
Landsdowne Public School
Princess Anne Public School

Sudbury Catholic District School Board
St. Raphael School

Toronto District School Board
Pape Avenue Junior Public School

Waterloo Region District School Board
Floradale Public School

Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch
Ministry of Education
2012