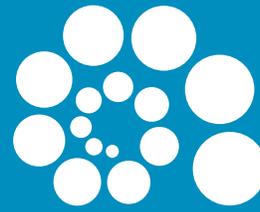


# Practice Guideline



cece  
college of  
early childhood  
educators

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## Pedagogical Practice

Registered early childhood educators (RECEs) are knowledgeable about current learning theories and pedagogical and curriculum approaches that are based on inclusion and inquiry and play-based learning.

- Standard II: B.2, Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2017

*The Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007* describes an RECE's practice as the planning and delivery of inclusive play-based learning and care programs that promote children's well-being, their sense of belonging and overall development. To fulfill these responsibilities, you:

- develop caring and responsive relationships with children and families
- communicate collaboratively with the learning community
- engage in ongoing professional learning to support your pedagogical practice
- generate an environment that fosters curiosity and inclusion

In this practice guideline, the *learning community* consists of children, families and colleagues.

### You can use this resource to help you learn about:

- your professional role and responsibilities related to your pedagogical practice
- the relationship between pedagogy and curriculum
- the significance of inquiry and play-based learning, collaborative relationships and critical reflection
- strategies to guide pedagogical observation, documentation, planning, implementation, assessment and adaptation
- ways to use professional judgment and demonstrate leadership in pedagogical practice

It also provides practical examples, scenarios and reflection questions to help you think about your practice, discuss ideas, test theories and share learning with others in the community.

In your daily practice with children, families and colleagues — the learning community — you create pedagogical experiences that foster the joy of learning.

## About this Publication

Practice guidelines communicate certain expectations of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) as outlined in the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (Code and Standards). Guidelines also highlight how those expectations may be applied in practice. They include recommendations and provide opportunities for self-reflection and professional learning. The Code and Standards, current research and related legislation should be consulted when considering practice guidelines. Practice guidelines support the College's role to promote high standards and continuous professional learning and to govern the conduct of RECEs.

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## Suggestions for using the practice guideline:

- Take your time to review the material and additional resources.
- Focus on areas that are most relevant to your current practice or sections that challenge you.
- Examine a particular segment during a staff or team meeting, or share in a community of practice.
- Actively engage in collaborative discussions to reflect on, challenge and question the complexities of practice.

## What is pedagogy?

The College adopted the definition of pedagogy from *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (2007) and *How Does Learning Happen?* (2014). Pedagogy is the understanding of how learning takes place and the philosophy and practice that supports that understanding of learning. Pedagogical thought is growing in complexity and must consider diverse and changing contexts (Vintimilla, 2019). Across Canada, and internationally, there are growing theoretical and practical discussions that describe pedagogy as a way of being that sparks conversations about life, the environment, community and relationships.

Theories of child development are foundational to early childhood education. They are reflected in legislation and policy, and in your pedagogical practice as you create child-centered and play-based learning experiences with the learning community. Standard II says that RECEs use their knowledge of child development, learning theories and pedagogy when observing, documenting, planning, implementing and assessing inquiry and play-based learning.

As an RECE, you know that childhood is not merely a set of linear, fixed stages; children's development is integrated across a variety of contexts and environments (Standard II). As part of your pedagogical practice, it is important to critically reflect on child development and learning theories to consider what is missing when children and their families are viewed through linear, fixed stages that may not account for race, gender, socio-economic status or religion. Think about how these factors might have an impact on relationships, communities, children, families and colleagues in your learning environment.

When considering your approach to pedagogy, think about other factors that influence your practice, including, but not limited to:

- your cultural beliefs, values, perceptions and biases about:
  - children and how they learn
  - the role of families
  - your role as an educator
- different child development and learning theories
- the unique social contexts and histories of members in your learning community
- social justice issues: children's rights, equity, diversity and inclusion
- Indigenous ways of knowing and being
- the role of the natural environment
- the importance of sharing knowledge and gaining new outlooks
- program plan requirements in your practice setting

## What is curriculum?

Although the terms curriculum and pedagogy are often used together, they are not the same. Curriculum is the content of learning the sum total of environments, experiences, activities, interactions and events designed to foster children's development, learning and well-being.

Pedagogy is the pathway to making curriculum. With a purposeful approach to pedagogy, the curriculum is meaningful for children.

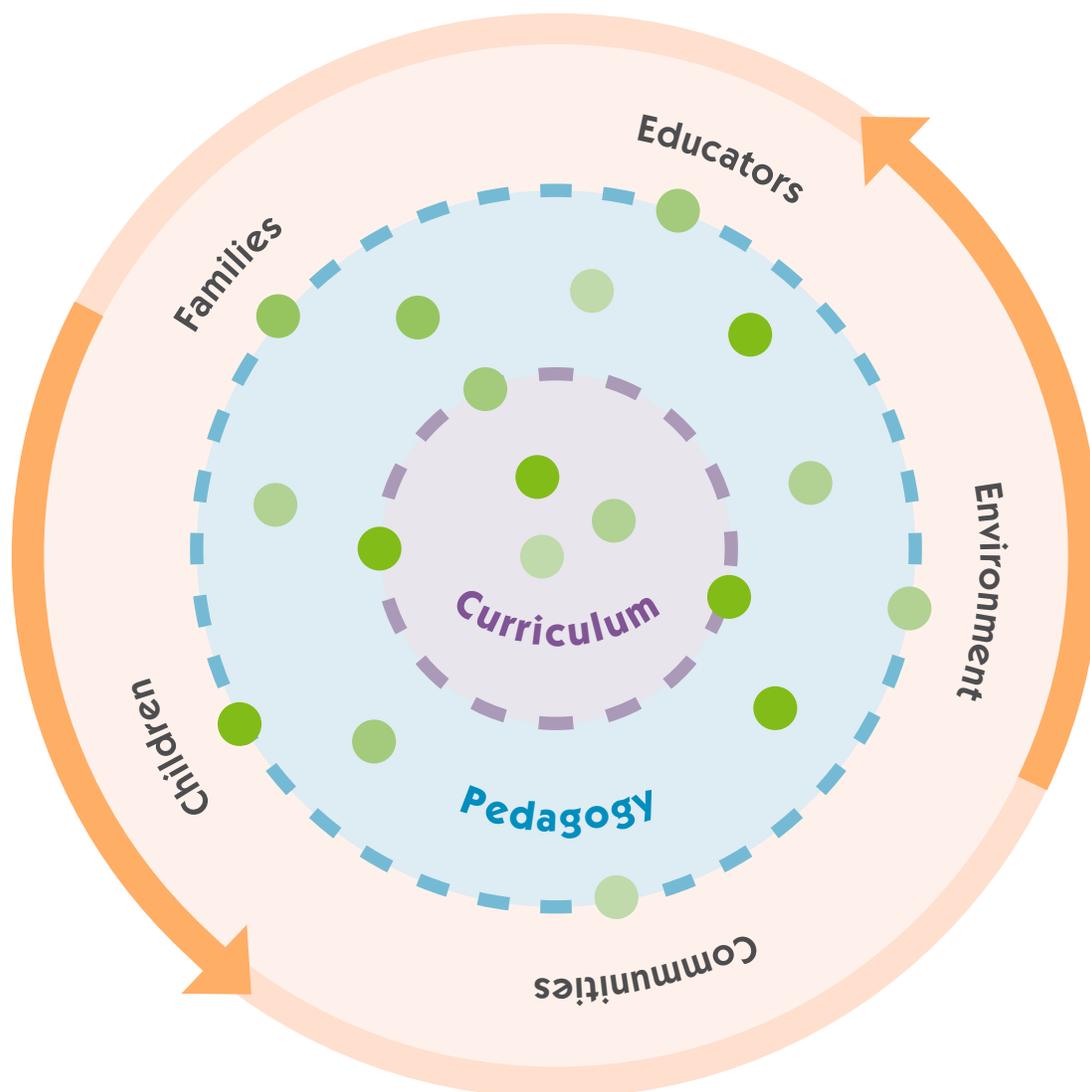


Figure 1: Ongoing process of making curriculum



### Here is an example:

The children look through the window at a bird they have seen daily for the past few days. A child asks, “Why does that bird sit on the same branch in our tree every day?” More questions about the bird and its actions are asked and considered.

The RECEs observe the children’s curiosity and engage with them from a pedagogical approach that stems from the belief that outdoor learning supports children’s understanding of the world around them. The RECEs infer that the children are developing a growing interest in this bird. Through collaborative dialogue, the RECEs and the children decide to go outside to explore. Following the children’s lead, the RECEs choose to go outside, not just because they have an obligation to spend a certain amount of time outdoors, but because their decision also has a pedagogical significance. Before going out, the RECEs and the children discuss what kinds of materials to bring outside. They gather sketching paper, drawing tools, the centre camera and a pair of binoculars so they can inspect and record the bird’s actions. As the children are getting ready to go outside, an RECE asks the children purposeful questions. Together they wonder, “Is the bird looking for food? Is the bird waiting for friends or deciding where to build a nest? Let’s go find out — but we will need to take the back door so we don’t scare the bird away!”

Their collaborative questions, curiosities and interactions are focused around investigating the bird in the natural environment. The children’s interests make the curriculum, which is guided by the RECE’s pedagogical approach. For example, the children make the curriculum by deciding they need to create binoculars to get a closer look at the bird. Together, they begin collecting a variety of natural artifacts and combine them with items they find indoors to make binoculars. In preparation for the following day, the RECE asks two children to examine whether the bird is gathering any food or other materials. Another small group of children decide they want to explore if there are other birds in the area and whether or not the bird has any friends or family.

The next day, children bring materials from their homes that were inspired by family discussions about the bird. As the children and RECEs peer out the window using their binoculars and waiting for the bird to arrive, they ask each other questions and talk about their findings. A child asks, “Where do you think she goes when she is not in our tree?” “Do you think she’ll ever come back?” “How do you know the bird is a she?” The RECE remarks, “We still have more questions, don’t we? Maybe the bird can help us with our questions if it comes back later.”

# Elements of pedagogical practice

This graphic highlights the core elements of pedagogical practice which are:

- child-centred, inquiry and play-based learning
- responsive relationships
- collaborative inquiry and critical reflection

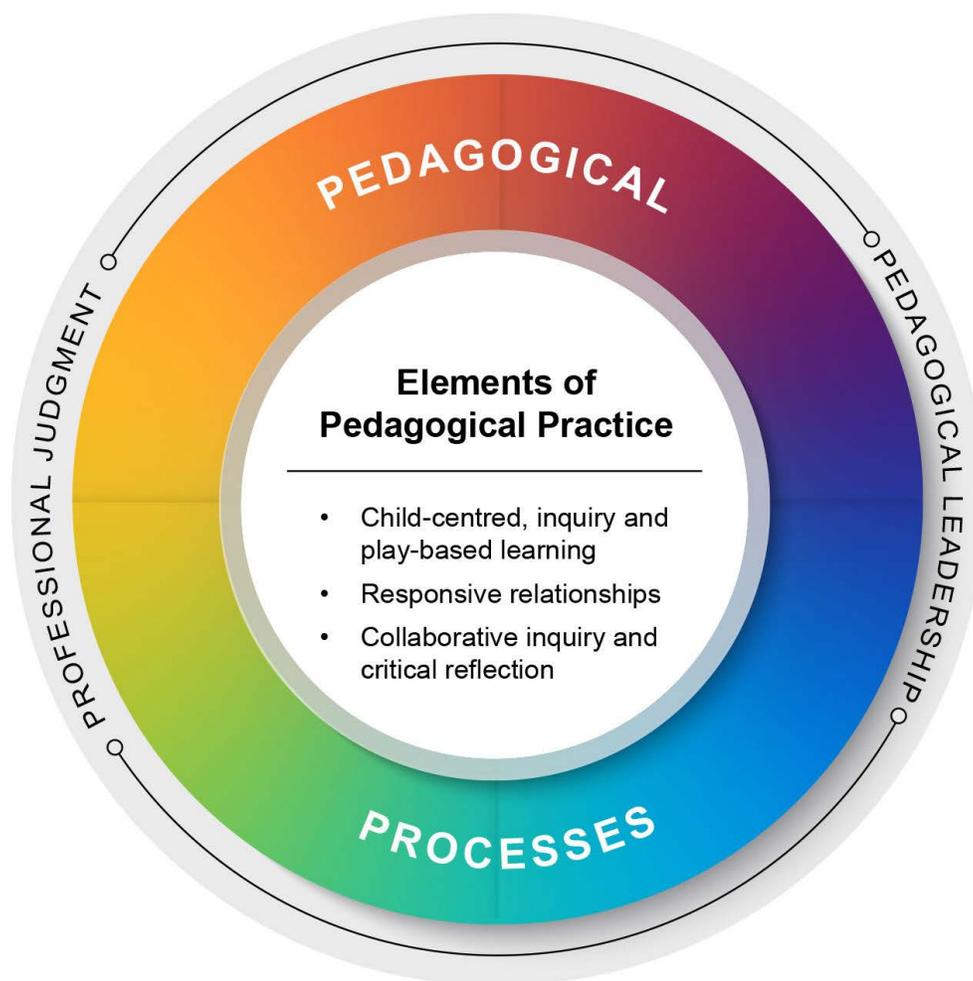


Figure 2: Elements of pedagogical practice

## Child-centred, inquiry and play-based learning

Children’s learning is supported by professionals who, as ongoing learners themselves, understand current research and theories that explore how children learn. With your knowledge and understanding of the significance of child-centred, inquiry and play-based learning, you’re able to plan, create, implement, document, assess and adapt the curriculum based on children’s growing interests and inquiries.

RECEs have ethical and professional obligations to implement play-based learning in certain practice settings as outlined in the Code and Standards. Ontario’s pedagogy for the early years, *How Does Learning Happen?* (2014), states that an educator’s role is not to teach specific outcomes, but to support children to learn through play and inquiry. Inquiry plays a vital role in children’s learning and RECEs value children’s curiosity by being curious themselves.

The importance of play and inquiry is also noted in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016). It indicates that something is lost when teaching models centre on fixed approaches or pre-determined themes geared to a specific set of learning outcomes. This approach excludes children and hinders both their creativity and opportunities to be contributors to their learning. Children need to be truly connected to the content of the curriculum so that they can engage in their communities as active citizens.

By actively listening to children’s ideas and interpretations, and incorporating their contributions into the curriculum you show children that:

- they are capable contributors
- their interests and questions are important
- they are researchers and designers of their pathways to learning
- they are valued

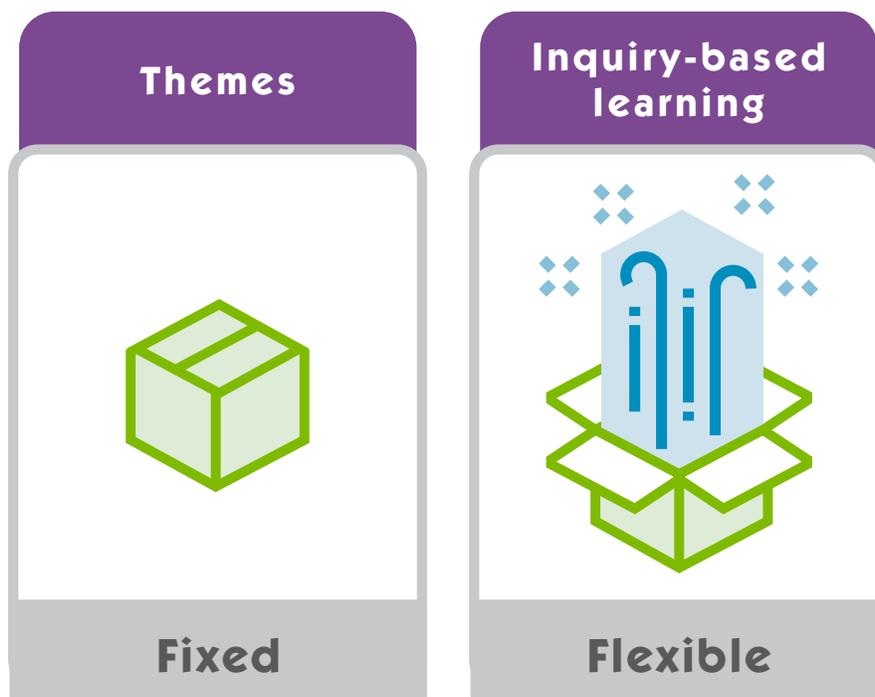


Figure 3: Pedagogical approaches: fixed vs. flexible

## Pause and Reflect

Think about how your own experiences influence the ways that you facilitate play. With colleagues in your practice setting or community of practice, discuss your beliefs about and experiences with play.

- How do your experiences differ?
- How are they alike?

Strengthening your practice is an evolving process that is reinforced through continuous professional learning. With colleagues, read the College's [Practice Note: Play-Based Learning](#) (2018) and reflect on how you:

- observe children's play to determine their interests and make learning visible
- engage with children to extend their thinking and learning opportunities
- create inclusive indoor and outdoor environments with the learning community
- design schedules that allow for uninterrupted and extended periods of play
- communicate the value of play-based learning to families and colleagues [[Communicating the Value of Play-Based Learning](#), 2018]

As an RECE, you recognize and respect the uniqueness and diversity of families and provide meaningful opportunities for them to engage in and contribute to the learning environment and their child's experiences (Ethic B). Knowing that children are best understood in the context of their families, cultures and communities, you actively involve families because you understand they are of primary importance to children's development and well-being. When children, families and colleagues are valued as capable contributors of children's learning, this inclusive approach can be viewed as what Langford (2010) calls a "democratic pedagogical centre" that invites discussions from everyone in the learning community.

## Pause and Reflect

It can be challenging to involve children, particularly infants and toddlers, and families in the program. With colleagues, consider the following:

- How do children and families in your practice setting currently contribute to the program and curriculum?
- Do you believe that children of all ages and their families are capable of contributing? Why or why not?
- With differing commitments and responsibilities, how do you ensure that the ideas of children and families are valued and considered?
- Do you value and respect the unique ways that families contribute? How?

## Responsive relationships

Collaborative relationships with the learning community positively influence pedagogy because they enhance children's sense of belonging, their well-being, learning and development. These relationships are most effective and meaningful when the individuals are committed to respecting equity, inclusion and diversity. Developing and maintaining responsive relationships is one of your primary responsibilities. Get to know members of your community by learning about their interests, beliefs, goals and what matters to them.

Read the College's [\*Practice Guideline: Supporting Positive Interactions with Children\*](#) (2017). With colleagues, reflect on how you support children through positive interactions and relationships with the learning community.

Using a range of communication strategies, you engage positively in your interactions with the learning community. Strong working relationships with colleagues also support children and families. When staff members work co-operatively together, they model respect while cultivating inclusive learning environments where all members of the learning community feel a sense of belonging.

### Pause and Reflect

Consider the ways you cultivate relationships with diverse communities.

- Describe how your pedagogical practice is inclusive of different values, experiences and ways of knowing, being and learning.
- Describe how your pedagogical practice is inclusive of differences in culture, family structure, language, religion, socio-economic status and housing.
- What have you learned from your pedagogical relationships with
  - children?
  - families?
  - colleagues?

Cultivating relationships with the natural world is another important aspect of pedagogical practice. Standard III says that RECEs promote children's physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health and well-being by providing children with daily opportunities to connect with the natural world, year-round.

The land, animals and seasons are valuable teachers.

- What have you learned through your connections with nature?
- How do you support children's learning in natural environments?
- What resources do you need to strengthen your pedagogical practice outdoors?

## Collaborative inquiry and critical reflection

The Code and Standards states that **collaborative inquiry** involves engaging with the learning community in critical reflection to question theory and practice, discuss ideas, test theories and share learning.

**Critical reflection** requires you to consider and challenge the beliefs, assumptions and understandings that frame how you view and respond to children. It is the active process of engaging with difficult concepts, tensions and uncertainties, and changing your practice as a result.



Figure 4: Educator exploring a plant with children

RECEs are ongoing learners who welcome opportunities to engage in collaborative inquiry, which involves the process of critical reflection. Collaborative inquiry can occur:

- spontaneously throughout the day
- through planned discussions with colleagues
- by joining a professional community of practice

Critical reflection can happen in collaboration with others and it also involves the process of self-reflection which, in turn, could lead to deeper collaborative inquiry.

RECEs engage in collaborative inquiry and co-construct knowledge with children and families because they understand that:

- A child's learning and development is integrated across multiple domains and within a variety of contexts that will vary for each child and family.
- Children of all ages are capable, enthusiastic learners with unique personalities, skills and interests.
- When children are stimulated by ideas and materials that are meaningful to them, they are empowered to engage and explore.
- Children and families are key contributors to the learning.

Engaging in collaborative inquiry supports your practice because it reveals new and differing perspectives about pedagogy. It also demonstrates your commitment to ongoing learning (*CPL Portfolio Cycle Handbook; How Does Learning Happen?*, 2014; *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*, 2017, Standard IV).

## Pause and Reflect

How do you engage with the learning community in your practice setting in addition to a community of practice, mentors, mentees and students to support your pedagogical practice?

- Are there any additional resources you need to enhance your approach to pedagogy?
- How can you advocate for resources to support your practice?
- What questions do you have about pedagogy and the process of making curriculum?
- Where can you find the answers to these questions?
- Are you comfortable with not having all the answers?

If, through collaborative inquiry, you become aware of any of the following points, seek out resources and research to guide your professional learning and practice:

- You have beliefs about certain children, families, cultures or communities that might hinder their participation.
- You view children through a single lens of child development, rather than through diverse contexts in which children learn and develop.
- You identify areas for growth in your knowledge and skills related to:
  - pedagogical practice
  - working with a particular age group
  - working in a specific community
  - developing relationships with the natural world

# Pedagogical Processes

This graphic highlights the core pedagogical processes which are:

- observation and listening
- documentation and narration
- planning and implementation
- assessment and adaptation

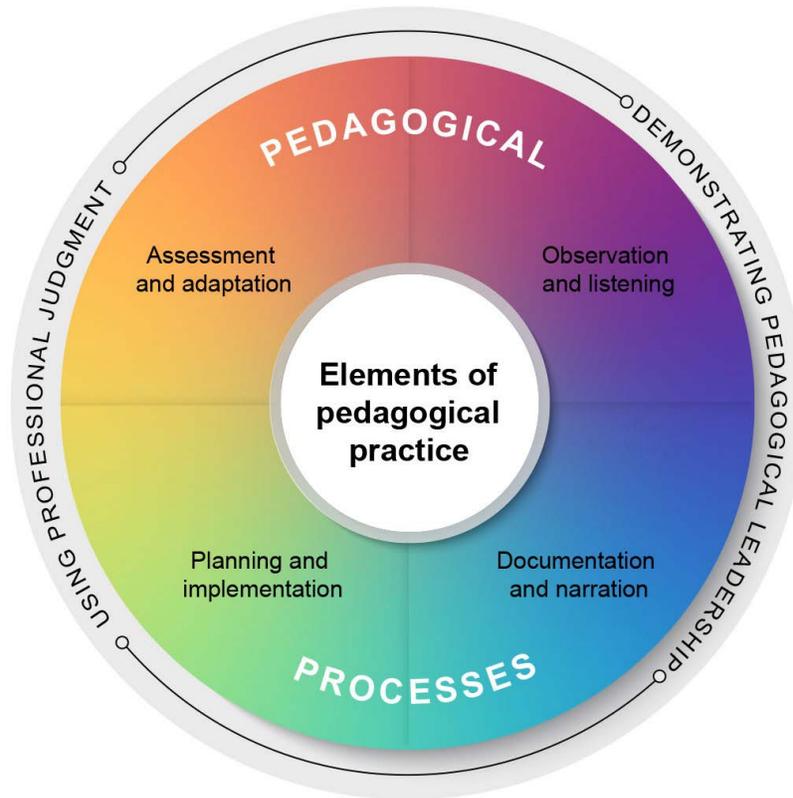


Figure 5: Pedagogical processes graph

Pedagogical processes are supported by the elements of pedagogical practice:

- child-centred, inquiry and play-based learning
- responsive relationships
- collaborative inquiry and critical reflection

The pedagogical processes are also supported by your pedagogical approach. Use the pedagogical processes as steps to guide you in bringing children’s ideas to life in the program. The processes are not necessarily linear; they can change or overlap and, in many ways, be used simultaneously.

## Observation and listening

Observation is a vital component of pedagogical practice. While it can be viewed as a passive activity, observation involves much more than simply watching children and writing down what they are doing or expressing. Actively observing children allows you to identify individual and group needs and interests to inspire the pedagogical approach (Standard II). Pedagogical observation is purposeful and informed by your knowledge, skills and experiences as well as your beliefs, values and biases.

When you think about observation, it may be challenging to know where to begin. Pedagogue Lorenzo Manera (2019) suggests developing a research question to guide your initial observations. For example, observe children with questions in mind, such as:



Figure 6: Children painting outdoors

**In what ways will the children use the wagon?**

**How will the infants use the paint and sponges?**

You might observe children using the materials as expected, or you might discover they use and interpret the materials in unexpected and unique ways. This could lead to more complex research questions such as:

**Is the wagon interesting because it can transport things, because it moves or because using it gives children a sense of power?**

**What is it about painting that appeals to them so much?**

**Are the children interested in the wagon itself or the wheels and other parts that keep it together and make it move?**

**Are they interested in the paint, the texture of the paper or the way the water falls off the brush?**

Listening to children helps you gain an awareness of their interests and ideas. Through an approach that Carlina Rinaldi calls the “pedagogy of listening”, RECEs observe children with intent. This approach invites you to pay attention to the subtleties and nuances of expressions, words, silences, movement, stillness, body language, hesitations, questions and interpretations. You can use pedagogy of listening to create physical and social environments where children’s curiosities are valued, and where they feel comfortable, confident, motivated and respected (Rinaldi, 2005).



Figure 7: Educator with a child in a garden

Supporting children through Rinaldi’s pedagogy of listening requires you to be attuned to the many ways that children communicate with the world around them. With the learning community, look for ways to integrate children’s ideas into the program to expand their curiosity. Remember, children will also create research questions and learning materials with or without support from educators or peers. For children who are non-verbal, actively look at what attracts their attention or what they are reaching for to give you insights into what interests them.

### Pause and Reflect

With colleagues, consider the following reflection questions:

- What does listening mean to you?
- What do you value in a good listener?
- What have you learned by listening to children?
- What are some of the challenges you face with listening?
- What helps you to be a good listener?

Consider how you might respond, or not respond, to the children’s reactions, interests and questions in the following practice examples. How do you know what the children might be interested in? How might you document and extend their learning based on the interactions with their peers and the environment?

## Examples of interactions between children and the natural world

After touching a particularly rugged piece of the tree bark, Anabelle leaps backwards. Her body tightens and she wrinkles her face. She then peers down to inspect her finger while José, another child playing nearby, walks toward her looking at her hand.

**José:** “Are you ok? Is there any blood?”

**Anabelle:** “No, I have no blood but the tree bark pricked me.”

**José:** “Your finger is red but no blood. I wonder if the tree would bleed if it got hurt?”

**Anabelle:** “Me too! I wonder if trees bleed and feel things.”

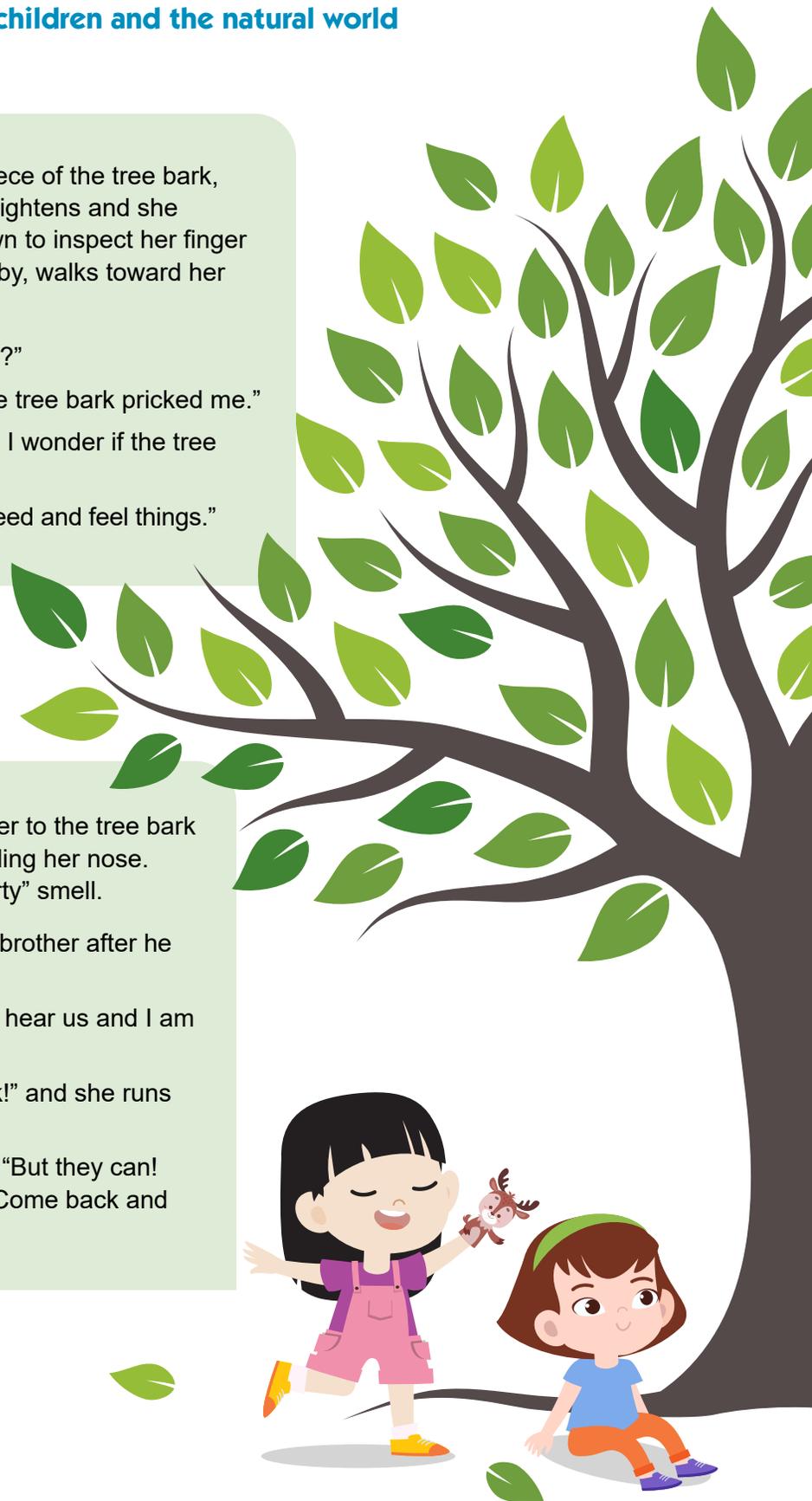
Kayla moves her face closer and closer to the tree bark making a loud sniffing noise and wiggling her nose. She looks at Lily remarking on the “dirty” smell.

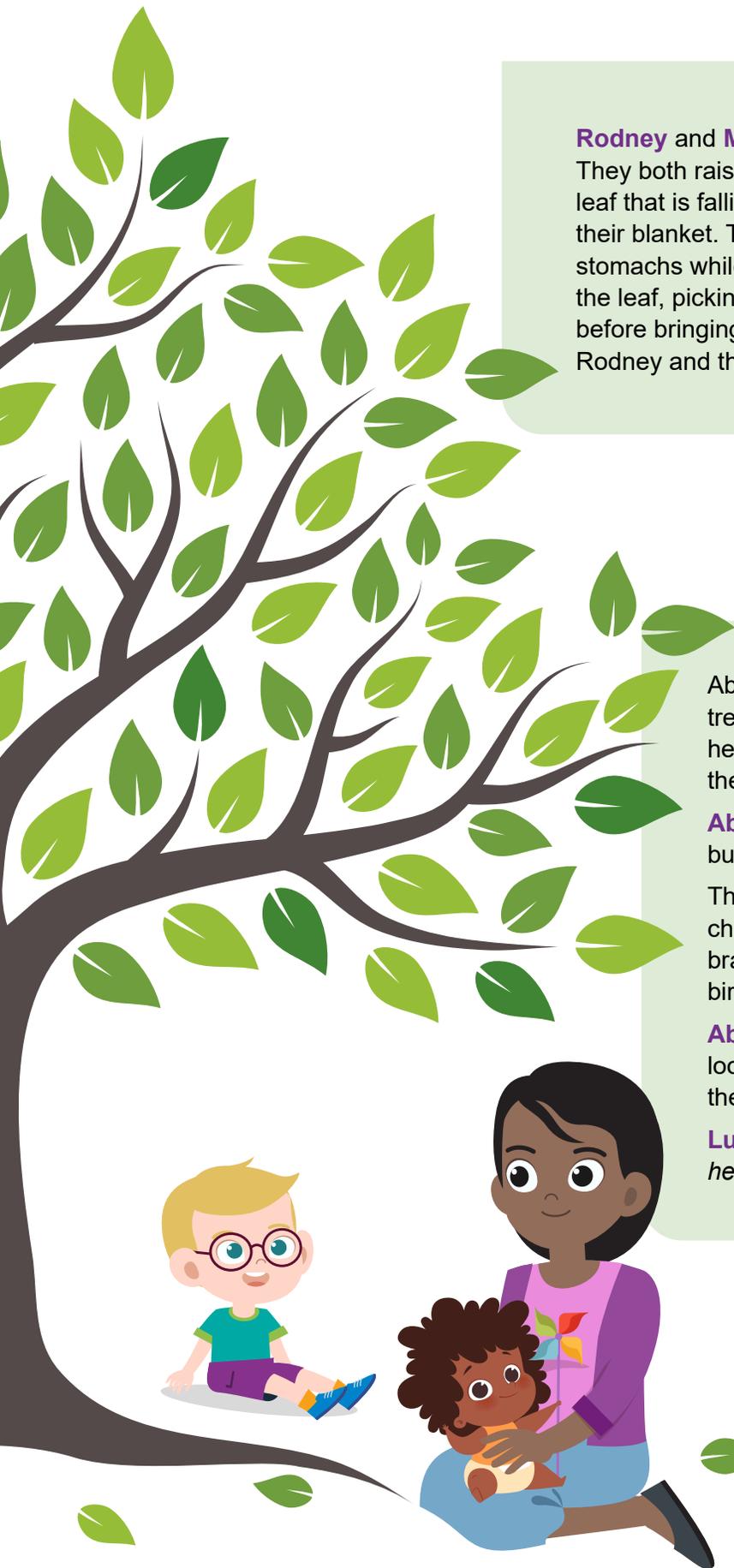
**Kayla:** “Whoa that tree stinks like my brother after he cuts the grass!”

**Lily:** “Shhhhhh, be quiet, the tree can hear us and I am trying to hear what it is saying!”

**Kayla:** “No! The tree can’t hear or talk!” and she runs away laughing holding her nose.

**Lily:** Running after Kayla she shouts, “But they can! Trees listen by using a special code. Come back and let me show you!”





**Rodney** and **Melinda** lie on a blanket under a tree. They both raise their heads and appear to watch a leaf that is falling from the tree to the ground beside their blanket. They bounce up and down on their stomachs while Rodney screams and reaches for the leaf, picking it up and squeezing it with his fist before bringing it toward his mouth. Melinda looks at Rodney and then looks up at the RECE and cries.

Abneet and Alexander stand below the tree taking a sip of water. They tilt their heads back and Abneet points to one of the higher, larger branches.

**Abneet:** “Look Alex, I can see a bird building a nest! Can you see it?”

The nest is hidden from view, but the children peer quietly at the moving branches. **Alexander:** “No, I can’t see a bird.”

**Abneet:** “No, I know neither can I but, look – I see leaves moving and I know it’s the bird making a nest for her eggs.”

**Lucas**, standing nearby: “Who says it’s a *her*? Sometimes the dad makes the nest.”

These examples point to the different ways children express themselves and respond to each other and the environment depending on their age, interests and the physical setting. They point to the importance of giving children ample uninterrupted play time and opportunities to develop relationships with their peers and the land.

Consider these examples and think about how you might use observation and listening to:

- reflect on your beliefs and biases about:
  - children’s capabilities
  - healthy risk-taking during play
  - outdoor learning year-round
- actively engage with children’s interests and questions
- respect the learning processes and theories children generate
- actively involve children of all ages in the development of curriculum
- honour children’s independence and autonomy

In these examples, the children’s interests could inform the curriculum content about many things, including:

- trees and how they grow
- life cycles and how the body works
- emotions, languages and communication
- colours, textures and scents
- gravity, perspective, distance and weight
- ways to respect and care for ourselves, our peers and the natural world

### **Pause and Reflect**

Consider the examples: When would it be important for you to step back, listen to and observe children rather than respond immediately?

- By stepping back and observing, how might you give children the opportunity to be independent and work out complex problems on their own?
- What might be lost if educators react immediately? What might be gained?

Asking children open-ended questions or making simple statements may generate more complex thinking that extends their learning or challenges ideas and beliefs.

- When might be a good time to react and respond to children’s ideas, actions, beliefs and questions? How do you know?

The examples also highlight the significance of sharing and contemplating observations with the learning community. Be sure to include children in these discussions as they will offer valuable questions, observations and interpretations. Invite members of the broader community, such as Elders, youth, volunteers and other professionals, to share their perspectives as well. Depending on their outlook, experiences and values, some members of the community might be more mindful of the ways children communicate using words, while others might notice children's movement, their facial and body language, or their silence. Some may be more attuned to children's developing relationships with the land.

## Documentation and narration

Pedagogical documentation is an ongoing, open-ended and expanding process where you consider the ideas and questions posed by the learning community. Documentation makes learning visible so it's easier to critically reflect upon and discuss with others during the process of making curriculum. Sharing ideas will enhance the program and children's experiences.

Examples:

- Observe and collect notes, journals, quotes, audio, photos and videos of what the children are expressing, doing and paying attention to since not all children are verbal.
- Use learning stories to document a particular activity or an experience (Dietze & Kashin, 2016).
- Invite the children to collect or take photos of artifacts they're interested in. Look at and talk about photos with infants and toddlers.
- Collaborate with the learning community to make learning visible using storyboards, newsletters, plays, songs, storytelling, blogs or online apps.
- Capture educators' ideas about the children's interests and questions.

Presenting children's learning using different modalities, such as photos, storyboards, videos or artifacts, supports different learners and members of the community who may be less familiar with the language spoken at the practice setting.

Pelo and Carter (2018) remind us that documentation is about highlighting 'real' stories about childhood rather than showcasing children's milestones or achievements. When given the opportunity, children will tell stories about their experiences and contribute to documentation. Depending on their age, they may express themselves through their interest level in artifacts, images or videos, or in their response to a song or story. Children can offer detailed interpretations of images or quotes and explain situations that you may not have considered. This is the process whereby children contribute to the process of making the curriculum.



Figure 8: Children examining a beetle outdoors

RECEs engage in dialogue with the learning community to gain new observations, ideas and questions that will generate the curriculum. Documentation may expand to include more images, quotes and other artifacts related to the children's growing interests and ideas. Contributions from the learning community strengthen relationships as members engage in discussions about the complexities of thinking, learning and practice. Dahlberg and Moss remind us that pedagogical documentation creates community (2005).

**Pedagogical narration** is a term that describes a collaborative investigation process that views children and educators as capable researchers who work together to create, share and tell stories that highlight children's learning. Through narration, the learning community becomes involved in the collaborative process of thinking about, not only children's learning, but the complexities of an educator's practice. *Journeys: Reconceptualising Early Childhood Practices through Pedagogical Narration* (2015).

### Pause and Reflect

- How do you document children's learning in order to generate collaborative dialogue with the learning community?
- Consider the ways you respond to children's interests and make learning visible.
  - How are children involved in pedagogical documentation and making curriculum?
  - How could they become more involved?

## Planning and implementation

Once you learn more about the children's interests, you can begin the collaborative, open-ended process of planning and implementing the children's ideas into the program — the process of making the curriculum. One way to do this is to use a variety of materials to intentionally create or adapt indoor and outdoor environments that support children's exploration and learning (Standard II: C. 3). With the learning community, you're able to choose, build, make or find appropriate materials and arrange them to reflect the children's vision. Engage with children's expanding ideas and questions, and continue to document children's evolving thoughts, statements and stories. When the curriculum content stems from the children's vision, they are bound to be inspired.

As children engage in learning, the environment and materials they use may also change and evolve. For instance, children might find pieces of tree bark and bring them inside to closely examine the texture using magnifying glasses and goggles. As they explore the bark, the children might discuss flowers, bugs, a science lab or a campsite. Children might decide to stack the bark to create a log cabin or a campfire. This, in turn, could spark conversations about friction, fire, balance, height and weight or different cooking processes, as well as conversations about teamwork — the possibilities are endless.

To enhance their vision, children may gather new resources and materials in the following ways:

- from other areas in the learning environment
- creating them on their own, with educators or peers
- using their imagination
- through research
- collecting or creating artifacts
- bringing materials from home that were collected or created with their family

As this is happening, you can guide children's thought processes and learning by thoughtfully and intentionally adding materials to the environment and asking children relevant questions. Pedagogical practice is an exciting process: it's a pathway to making meaning and building community.

RECEs know that children are best understood in the context of their families, cultures and communities (Standard I: B.3). Consider the diverse contexts and experiences of the learning community when collaborating to make the curriculum. Think about where members of the learning community live and the experiences they've had. Learn about the languages they speak, the cultural groups they belong to and what they value.

Planning and implementation require time to engage in ongoing collaborative inquiry and critical reflection with others. This time is needed to design and implement quality, inclusive pedagogical practices. RECEs may find it useful to keep and reflect on the original and the evolving observations or program plans as required during the learning process.

### Pause and Reflect

- How do you choose or create the materials for the environment?
- Do children, including infants and toddlers, have opportunities to create, adapt and build materials?
- How do families contribute?



Figure 9: Parent, child and educator having a conversation

## Program assessment and adaptation

One aspect of an RECE's scope of practice is "the assessment of the programs and of the progress of children in the programs" (ECE Act, 2007). Similar to the other pedagogical processes, program assessment and adaptation requires you to assess your approach to pedagogy and make adaptations to the curriculum that stem from children's growing interests. You consider social justice issues such as inclusion, diversity and equity when critically reflecting on and adapting the learning environment and materials.

Adaptations to the environment or the curriculum can either be made on the spot, or you may choose to reflect on, review and consider the whole program to determine future adaptations. If you identify children or groups of children who require an adaptation to support them and their learning, work with the learning community to embed early intervention strategies into the program and environment (Standard III).

A more formal assessment of the overall program might expose the fact that children require more time in the outdoors. Through critical reflection, RECEs may also notice that they need more resources to guide them in implementing programs that incorporate the natural world and, together, they find ways to achieve this.

Refer back to the practice examples on pages 16 & 17 and consider the following:



- When **Melinda** cries it suggests she needs support from the educator who decides to pick Melinda up and move her toward something she seems to be reaching for. Upon reflection with colleagues, the RECE considers whether Melinda might have benefited from interacting with **Rodney** and the environment prior to being picked up. After engaging in collaborative critical reflection, the RECE researches new ways to support infants and adapts her pedagogical practice as a result.
- **Alexander** and **Abneet** plan to climb the tree to test out the strength of the branches. In the moment, the RECE assesses the situation and intervenes by saying "NO! Be careful!" Afterwards, the RECE engages in self-assessment to critically reflect on her decision to stop the children. She determines she was fearful the children would be injured based on her own past experience. After assessing the situation with colleagues, she determines the children's interactions with the environment and each other were safe and that her role was to encourage exploration and respond in a way that supported them to take healthy risks. After reflecting on her beliefs about children's capabilities and her own fears, the RECE found resources to learn more about the importance of reasonable risk-taking and adapted her practice.

### Pause and Reflect

Think of a time when you made a pedagogical decision that you later reflected upon:

- Did collaborative critical reflection support your thinking about this decision?
- After sharing your experience with others, were you introduced to new ideas and approaches?
- If so, how did you adapt your practice as a result?

# Using professional judgment during pedagogical processes

Professional judgment is informed by the Code and Standards, knowledge, experience and reflective practice. In your daily practice, you use professional judgment when making decisions and responding to spontaneous and unpredictable situations. Either in the moment or at the end of the day, reflect on your decisions with colleagues to help you improve your practice. Self-reflection and collaborative discussions with colleagues can inform your use of professional judgment and influence your pedagogical beliefs and approach.

Take a moment to read the College's [Practice Note on Professional Judgment](#) (2018) for additional information and guidance on this topic.

Many factors can influence your professional judgment, and, in turn, your pedagogical practice. Factors may include:

Internal Factors	External Factors
<p>Your:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• understanding of different learning theories</li><li>• interpersonal skills, knowledge and experiences</li><li>• beliefs and biases</li><li>• comfort level with difficult conversations and situations</li><li>• capacity to support children to take healthy risks</li><li>• knowledge and experience working with different age groups</li><li>• ability to recognize when and how to intervene</li><li>• leadership styles</li></ul>	<p>The:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• situation, context and people involved</li><li>• children's age and capabilities</li><li>• interests of each child and the group</li><li>• environment and natural resources</li><li>• relationships among the children and educators, and the environment</li><li>• support from supervisors or administration</li><li>• workplace culture and leadership</li></ul>

## Pause and Reflect

Critically reflect on your beliefs and biases about children, families and colleagues or specific cultural groups. Think about what, who, why, where and how you make pedagogical decisions related to specific children or groups of children.

Consider whether you:

- Monitor some children but engage in collaborative learning with others.
- Find some children's behaviour, vocabulary or appearance more interesting, acceptable or more valuable to observe and document.

How do you address your bias and beliefs in your pedagogical practice?

You're responsible for creating an environment of trust and a feeling of safety, while using professional judgment to support decisions that positively affect children and families. One way you can use your professional judgment is by considering when and how to intervene in children's interactions.

Use your professional judgment to determine when to let children work out complex ideas individually or with peers, and when to participate in their inquiries with comments or questions that can extend and challenge their thinking. The goal is to provide children with nurturing and supportive environments where they have opportunities to solve problems on their own, but not at the expense of safety.

RECEs also use their professional judgment when making adaptations to the environment or curriculum. If, during the collaborative process of program assessment and adaptation, the children adapt the learning environment by moving or stacking materials in a way that impedes how children can move in and out of the space, RECEs discuss this with the children so they can learn and make decisions together about how to implement their vision while generating an inclusive space that is safe and accessible for everyone.

## Pause and Reflect

As you pay close attention to what children are doing and saying, you may witness dialogue that makes you uncomfortable, either among children or between children and other adults. If you hear something that you feel needs a response, consider why you think that and how you can address statements that might be hurtful to someone in the learning community. Do you feel comfortable intervening when something hurtful is expressed?

For example, a child says to another: “No, you can’t play because...  
... you are stupid.” ...you are too young.”

Think about what you might say or how you would engage in dialogue with the children to understand the situation and what they are thinking.

- If you choose not to respond, what message are you sending?
- If you make the choice to respond, what message are you sending?
- Who else do you involve in this conversation? Colleagues? Families?
- What steps does your employer or governing body require you to take?

You also use your professional judgment when making decisions about communicating relevant information with colleagues, families and students. For example, upon reflection, you might see the need to address a situation:

- using face-to-face communication
- electronically by app, email, videoconference or phone
- with everyone involved right away
- with a child individually
- with a child and their family
- at another time following collaborative reflection with colleagues, families and children

# Demonstrating pedagogical leadership

The most important work a leader in this profession can do is to support and promote quality early learning environments for children through pedagogical leadership (Coughlin & Baird, 2013).

Pedagogical leadership is the ongoing practice of engaging with children, families, colleagues and community partners to draw on diverse experiences and collective knowledge to design inquiry and play-based learning experiences for children.

## Pedagogical leaders share leadership

Pedagogical leadership is not the sole responsibility of a supervisor; Standard IV says that all RECEs, regardless of position or title, are leaders. While RECEs work in different practice settings and employment roles, you're all engaging in leadership activities as you practice the pedagogical ideas emphasised in this resource.

Pedagogical leaders value and consider children's and educators' ideas and theories. Engage in ongoing collaborative dialogue with the learning community, and ask questions that generate deeper questions and seek answers and solutions with others. RECEs empower children to be the chief researchers in their own exploration and learning.

Australian research (2009) says that pedagogical leaders need to have the following characteristics:

Characteristics of pedagogical leaders	Related College resources to support your practice
The ability to shape and frame the professionalism of early learning environments.	<a href="#"><i>Practice Guideline: Professionalism (2018)</i></a>
Support inclusion and communicate the importance of high-quality early learning experiences for all children.	<a href="#"><i>Practice Guideline: Inclusion of Children with Disabilities (2019)</i></a>
Contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of learning by engaging in discussions about play-based learning with families and colleagues.	<a href="#"><i>Practice Note: Play-based learning</i></a> <a href="#"><i>Connexions article: Communicating the Value of Play-based Learning</i></a>
Advocate for early childhood pedagogies that value collaboration, relationships, listening, inquiry and play.	<a href="#"><i>#StandardMatter series Standard I: Caring and Responsive Relationships</i></a> <a href="#"><i>#StandardsMatter series Standard II: Curriculum and Pedagogy</i></a>

There are many ways to design inclusive experiences for children and families. Some RECEs work directly with the learning communities using the pedagogical elements and processes. Others may hold formal leadership roles, such as supervisors, administrators and policy makers, and support the learning community by overseeing pedagogical practices, curriculum and programs.

Formal leaders need to think broadly about how their work and roles in the sector meet the expectations in the Code and Standards. RECEs in administrative roles can do this by reflecting on how their education and pedagogical training influences their decision-making and how their specific role supports the practice of others while promoting high-quality early childhood education (Code and Standards, 2017).

RECEs in formal leadership roles can support pedagogical practice by:

- Supporting the development of inclusive programs, philosophies, policies and protocols.
- Engaging in ongoing learning with others, asking questions and being open to new ideas.
- Staying informed about new research and practice trends.
- Enhancing staff engagement and understanding of pedagogy, policy and legislation.
- Conducting formal assessments and seeking appropriate practice resources with staff.
- Matching staff with unique knowledge and skills so they can learn from one another.
- Developing learning experiences for staff that parallel what we want them to offer children (*Think, Feel, Act*, 2013).

## Moving forward in practice

An important aspect of pedagogical leadership is Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) which encourages educators to be thinkers (Pelo & Carter, 2018). As leaders, RECEs understand that learning supports their professional growth, which in turn, improves the quality of the early childhood education programs and services for children, families and communities (Standard IV). In other words, engaging in CPL allows you to expand on or acquire new knowledge, skills, resources and ideas to improve your pedagogical practice. This demonstrates to the public that RECEs are committed to children, families and communities as well as their own learning, leadership development and to the profession itself.



Figure 10: Colleagues collaborating

RECEs collaborate with others to ensure high-quality early childhood education (Standard IV). Pedagogical leaders are part of a community of practice that engages in critical thinking and reflection. Communities of practice can be large or small, in person or online, informal or formal and allow those with different pedagogical leadership skills and experiences to learn from each other.

For example:

- A supervisor in a licensed child care centre or a school principal could draw on the skills and knowledge of an RECE with pedagogical experience to support staff, educators and the overall program development.
- A home-based child care provider, connected to a community of practice, could draw on current research and literature to discuss sector trends and practices to support their pedagogical leadership skills.
- An RECE teaching post-secondary students could attend a conference to learn how to help students understand the complexities of pedagogy, teaching and learning.
- An RECE in a family support program could learn more about what families in their community value and they share their discoveries with others.

Regardless of how you support pedagogy, as an RECE you are a professional and a leader with unique skills and knowledge. Leaders develop relationships and strengthen connections with educators, community members, Elders, children and families, ensuring that all stakeholders are meaningfully involved in the practice setting. Leaders also empower other RECEs — they encourage colleagues and peers to view themselves as professionals, critical thinkers and researchers. Pedagogical leaders bring everyone in their learning community together to provide high-quality experiences for children and their families.



Figure 11: Colleagues having a conversation

## Scenario for reflection

### It's a special occasion!

Grace works with preschool children in a licensed child care centre. Every year, she develops an idea for a Mother's Day gift that the children create. The families have become accustomed to taking something home on this special day so she doesn't want to disappoint them. Grace thought this year's group of children would be interested in making cookies for Mother's Day.

Grace puts the ingredients on the tablecloth, along with measuring cups and spoons so the children can add ingredients and mix the batter. She feels this activity will support children's learning by way of helping them to understand measurement, quantity, taking turns and the science of pouring and mixing different materials. Grace plans to incorporate counting and selecting colours into the activity since several parents have asked her to make sure the children can count to ten and identify their colours in preparation for kindergarten.

The children are invited to join the cooking table in small groups. Grace calls out the names of the children she feels are ready to join. She always chooses children who are playing nicely at the time of the activity because she feels it demonstrates that good behaviour is rewarded. The children sit quietly waiting for their turn to stir in an ingredient. During their turn, they're allowed to stir the mixture for ten stirs. During this turn, the children at the table are asked to count aloud in unison.

While waiting for his turn to mix in some raisins, Tyson glanced over at his friends playing with the building activity that he was called away from and said to Grace: "Why are we doing this anyway? We were building a structure to make sure our farm doesn't get destroyed by the rain." Grace replied: "You can go back to that and your friends soon, Tyson. Right now we are making something to show your mom that you love her. Everyone has to do it, ok?"

Linda, an RECE and new supervisor of the centre, came into the room to see what all of the buzz was about. Linda asked the children what they were doing and one of them said: "Grace is making cookies for us to decorate for our moms." Just then another child chimed in saying, "Yeah, we have to make heart cookies and we're counting and taking turns."

Later that day, Linda asks Grace to share her thought process in the creation of the cookie activity. Grace says that children always like baking and so she bought ingredients for the activity. Grace pauses and says the idea also stemmed from the families, who had been asking her to make sure that the children knew how to count to ten and identify their colours.

Linda said that it sounded like a great idea and she thinks the mothers would appreciate the sentiment. She then challenges Grace to look carefully at how the children might have contributed differently in this activity or to something else entirely. To explain, Linda points out the building centre and the children's mounting interest and engagement in what they were doing with it. Linda feels Grace had missed the mark and suggests ways to involve the children and families in the children's learning.

Linda suggests: “If you do something like this, it would be important to begin the organization process a little earlier in the event the activity needs to be adapted based on feedback from families and colleagues. I’d also like you to consider your ideas about what Mother’s Day means and how it should look. I invite you to be open to other ways of celebrating and involving families.” Grace looks puzzled. Linda clarifies: “Grace, please think carefully about how you are going to include Dani and Marika in this activity: Dani recently lost her mother to cancer and Marika has two fathers.”

### Questions for reflection

Critically reflect on this scenario with colleagues and think about your pedagogical relationships in your unique practice setting.

#### Did Grace value the children’s play, interests and inquiries?

- If yes, how did she show respect for the children’s ideas, their voices and inquiries?
- If not, what was missing in her approach? What might you have done differently?

#### Some children were building a structure at the time of Grace’s activity.

- How would you have valued children as active contributors of their learning?
- How might you have responded to their dialogue about the structure they were building?
- In what ways could you have extended the children’s learning?

#### Grace mentioned that some families were anxious about their children being able to count to ten and memorize their colours.

- How would you respond to these concerns from families?
- Do you feel prepared to discuss the value of play-based learning with families and colleagues?
- How do you balance your responsibilities to provide inclusive pedagogical experiences that stem from children’s interests, while also respecting families’ interests and different beliefs about what and how children should learn?

#### Involving children and families in the content of their learning can be a challenge.

- How do you respond to children’s inquiries and consider them when designing learning experiences?
- In what ways can families become more involved in their children’s learning?
- How do you work with colleagues to ensure that children and families are involved?
- What additional supports do you need?

**Consider the use of language “outcome-based learning” and “adult or thematic content” (i.e. celebrations such as Valentine’s Day, Christmas and Halloween). How could themes or activities that are outcome-based, like baking for Mother’s Day, take into consideration the following:**

- children’s ideas and interests
- families’ ideas and interests
- diverse family structures
- different religions and beliefs
- social justice issues, such as inclusion and diversity
- a range of worldviews and celebrations

**Consider your professional practice and pedagogical relationships with your learning community.**

- How do you know what is important to children and families?
- What opportunities do children have to engage with ideas and materials that are important to them?
- What limits are placed on how children engage with materials, each other and the environment? Who decides the limits and why are they in place?
- How can you create more opportunities for engagement and exploration?
- What would you need to support your practice?
- How do materials in the setting invite investigation, problem-solving and curiosity?

**Consider how Linda demonstrated pedagogical leadership.**

- How would you support Grace, considering where she is in her professional practice?
- In what ways do you mentor others?

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\*[The Centres of Excellence](#) for Early Years and Child Care were established in June 2017 to support professional learning across the early years sector. This initiative came to an end in March 2020. Resources created are archived with the Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory, the Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association Ontario and the Association francophone à l'éducation des services à l'enfance de l'Ontario. AFÉSEO shared two articles with the College: [Qu'est-ce qu'une image de l'enfant?](#) and [L'image du professionnel de la petite enfance](#).

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