# MEETING EARLY CHILDHOOD NEEDS

Original text in French

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM
for educational childcare services







LES PUBLICATIONS DU QUÉBEC

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# MEETING EARLY CHILDHOOD NEEDS

## Québec's educational program for childcare services

(2019 version)

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We hope you find this guide interesting and informative!

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# A message from the Minister



As Minister of Families, I am excited to present the 2019 version of the *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* educational program. The time from birth to school age is a critical period in children's development, as this is when the foundation is set for their lifelong learning. And because educational services are where this learning first begins, they play an essential role.

For the third edition of this educational program, findings from recent research on early childhood development and intervention have been added. I am confident that the young children in our educational childcare services will benefit from enhanced educational practices as a result.

I would like to thank our partners and everyone who contributed to the new and improved *Meeting Early Childhood Needs*. You have helped create an indispensable resource that provides a unified strategy for ensuring that young children in Québec receive care that is continuous, consistent and of high quality.

The educational success of all children in Québec is a top priority for our government, and we are committed to improving the quality of our educational childcare services. If we act early and work together, we can help every child reach their full potential.

Mathieu Lacombe

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# Introduction

Providing early childhood education is an enormous responsibility, as the early years of a child's life are especially important for their healthy development and future well-being and success. Research in the fields of education, psychology and neurology attests to how the experiences we have as young children can shape our ability to adapt to situations, be contributing members of society and respond to challenges. It is therefore critical to understand the effect that high-quality educational interventions with young children and their families[i] can have, on both the children themselves and society as a whole.

Research shows that the quality of education in educational childcare services (ECSs) has an impact on development outcomes for young children,[1] and especially for those that are the most vulnerable.[2] ECSs that provide high-quality education promote young children's cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical and motor development.[3] Some studies have also found that high-quality care and relationships in early childhood, whether provided by parents, families or educational services, are associated with better physical and mental health, fewer behaviour problems, and greater long-term educational and social success,[4] which is why they are so important to focus on.

## OUR EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES' TRIPLE MISSION

The mission of Québec's ECSs is threefold:

- Ensure the health, safety and well-being of the children in their care.
- Provide an environment that supports young children's overall development.
- Help prevent overall developmental difficulties and promote the social inclusion of all children.

Early childhood is a special time, when overall development and well-being are top priorities. Every child and their family should be able to access an ECS that provides a welcoming, positive, respectful and appealing environment where children can grow, thrive, and explore the world around them.

Our ECSs' threefold mission also involves implementing the strategies necessary to properly prepare children for school and life.

*Meeting Early Childhood Needs* is grounded in the values of respect for oneself, others and the environment, equality, sharing, solidarity, peaceful conflict resolution and diversity. ECSs are encouraged to embody, advance and promote these values.

i In this program, the word "family" includes foster families, grandparents and extended family members who have a relationship with an ECS.

## Ensuring children's health, safety and well-being

ECSs provide warm and responsive caregiving to ensure young children's well-being. Educators and home educational childcare providers (HECPs) see each child as an individual with their own way of learning and developing. They provide basic care that is adapted to each child. They treat children with respect and kindness, no matter what kind of challenges or difficulties they are experiencing, and view these as opportunities for learning and development. They let the daily schedule be flexible so they can adjust it to each child's unique rhythms and prevent the child from seeing the ECS as a source of negative stress. They work together with parents and non-parent caregivers,[ii] and sometimes with extended family members, taking into consideration family and cultural differences.

ECSs also ensure young children's health and safety by following the safety and quality requirements of such standards as the *Educational Childcare Act* (ECA) and the *Educational Childcare Regulation* (ECR). They implement the recommended public health measures to reduce the spread of infections. They look out for young children's physical and mental health and provide a learning environment that is challenging enough to help the children achieve their full potential.

ECSs ensure that this environment also helps children develop healthy lifestyles and adopt behaviours that have a positive effect on their health and well-being.




ii In this program, the words "parent," "father" and "mother" are used to also refer to non-parent caregivers such as grandparents.

## Providing an environment that supports young children's overall development[iii]

The term "overall development" refers to the particular way a young child develops their abilities in every domain[iv] (physical/motor, social/emotional, cognitive, language) at the same time. Overall development also refers to the effect these domains have on each other. For example, when a young child speaks, that falls under language development, but it also makes it easier for them to connect with others, which is key to social development. The ability to move and manipulate objects is part of physical/motor development, and it is essential for exploring and experimenting, which promotes a young child's cognitive development. Development in one domain helps children develop in other domains.

Québec childcare settings are educational services that offer appropriate experiences for young children regardless of their stage of overall development. ECSs follow procedures and educational practices that let children develop in every domain at their own pace.

ECSs support young children as they gradually adapt to life in society. They encourage socialization, the process through which children gradually come to understand the rules, norms and values of their society. Educators and HECPs help children learn to develop positive relationships with their peers and express their opinions and ideas, so they can find their place within a group and be a contributing member. They also help children understand their feelings and how to manage and express them in socially acceptable ways.

iii Under section 5 of the ECA, in order to ensure the provision of educational childcare services, the educational program applied by an educational childcare provider must be aimed at: fostering children's overall development, enabling them to develop, at their own pace, all facets of their person, particularly their emotional, social, cognitive, language, physical and motor development; helping children gradually adapt to life in society and integrate a group harmoniously; and fostering children's educational success, particularly by facilitating their transition into the school system. The educational program must also include promotional and preventive elements aimed at providing an environment conducive to the acquisition of healthy lifestyle habits, healthy eating habits and behaviours that have a positive effect on the children's health and well-being.

In applying the program, educational childcare providers must take into account the children's environment.

The Government determines, by regulation, any other element or service to be included in the educational program. It may, in the same way, prescribe a single program applicable in whole or in part to the educational childcare providers it determines and provide for program equivalencies.

iv In this document, the term "domain" is equivalent to the term "dimension" that was used to refer to the different aspects of early childhood development in the previous version of Québec's *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* educational program for childcare services.

### Development or learning?

**In this educational program, you will often see the term "learning" used alongside the term "development." Essentially, learning is specific to a goal or task, while development is a much more holistic concept. Development is a long-term process, while learning takes place over the medium term as a person interacts with others and their physical environment. Development and learning are thus closely intertwined.**



## Helping prevent overall developmental difficulties and promoting the social inclusion of all children

ECSs play a prominent role in detecting difficulties in children's overall development and promoting the social inclusion of all children. Like everyone else, ECS educators, managers, HECPs and childcare assistants are required to report any suspected violence, neglect or abuse of children. They work with the child's parents (where possible), health and social services establishments, and community organizations to fulfill their responsibilities.

ECSs provide equal opportunities for every child to flourish, regardless of their ability or social, economic, cultural or religious background. As educational services, they promote gender equality, think critically about their educational activities and are careful not to perpetuate gender stereotypes.

ECSs promote the social inclusion of children with particular needs in everyday activities so they can grow and develop along with their peers. Various forms of financial assistance are available to ECSs.

While ECSs have the right to refuse clients, Québec's Charter of human rights and freedoms prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. ECSs are therefore expected to make reasonable efforts to accommodate a child with disabilities if their parents wish to enroll them in the ECS. Inclusion benefits not only children with disabilities and their families, but also other children at their ECS, educators and HECPs.[5]

## The benefits of inclusion

In ECSs, [Translation] “children with disabilities, who typically have to put in more effort to perform a particular task than other children do, are often motivated to make this effort when they are able to take part in activities with their peers.[6]”

When children at ECSs who do not have particular needs interact with kids who do, they realize that [Translation] “[not all people] do things the same way and that everyone has their unique strengths and needs. Over time, this gives them a healthy and constructive attitude and they become more mindful of others.[7]”

[Translation] “Many parents see the fact that their child starts to interact with, play with and enjoy the company of children with disabilities at a young age as a benefit [of inclusion].[8]” [Translation] “Educators who understand the important role they play realize that they can use their creativity and knowledge about child development to solve practical problems and motivate the child [being included] to achieve the goals set for them.[9]” [Translation] “All children benefit from the new skills their educator acquires in order to meet the specific needs of children with disabilities. The resourcefulness they must show to adapt their educational interactions and activities is beneficial for the entire group.[10]”



## OBJECTIVES OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

*Meeting Early Childhood Needs* exists to ensure that the education provided by ECSs is of high-quality, that the educational approaches used in educational services are coordinated, and that educational interventions with young children and their families are consistent.

### Quality of education

The primary purpose of this program is to ensure the quality of ECSs in Québec. The program is grounded in theory and follows five guiding principles.

**The guiding principles of the educational program**

- **ECSs and parents need to be close partners in children's healthy development.**
- **Children learn through play.**
- **Children are the main agents of their development.**
- **Every child is unique.**
- **Child development is a comprehensive, integrated process.**



In early childhood education, the educational strategies and methods used must be respectful of and adapted to the way each child learns and develops. In addition to describing some developmental milestones in early childhood, *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* provides general guidelines for approaches based on overall development and active learning.

The healthy development of young children in ECSs hinges on the quality of their educational interactions with educators and HECPs. Therefore it is critical to recognize the work these people do and how important their role is, and to provide them with support so they can enrich their teaching practices on an ongoing basis.

## Coordinated educational practices

Applying this program's educational guidelines in ECSs will ensure that the legislative and regulatory requirements for educational programs are fulfilled. It will also help ensure that the educational practices used at ECSs across Québec are coordinated. Young children who switch from one educational childcare service to another should have comparable experiences at both.

## Consistent care

The Ministère de la Famille works closely with other government ministries to ensure that young children receive consistent educational care. This program is thus in line with the educational vision of the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur's educational programs for four- and five-year-olds enrolled in Québec schools.[v] It has also been designed to be consistent with the care provided by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux's integrated perinatal and early childhood services.



v Preschool Education Program for 4-Year-Olds: [http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PFEQ/Prescolaire_4ans_en.pdf].

Québec Education Program, Preschool Education: [http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/education/jeunes/pfeq/PFEQ_programme-prescolaire_EN.pdf].

## USING THE GUIDE IN REAL LIFE

This version of the *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* program has been developed in the same educational perspective as the previous two versions. It is informed by and builds on the foundational theory and guiding principles set out in *the Programme éducatif des centres de la petite enfance* (1997) and *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* (2007). The guide also provides some examples of how it can be used.

*Meeting Early Childhood Needs* is based on recognized practices in early childhood education and development. It is a consensus-based guide for all Québec ECS workers, created in collaboration with representatives from ECSs and early childhood education training and research professionals.

ECSs can use the educational guidelines in this document as the basis for their own educational program and adjust them to suit their specific childcare setting. All regulated ECSs must submit an educational program to the Ministère de la Famille or their local coordinating office for HECP in order to receive or renew their ECS permit or recognition.

Managers (childcare managers and assistant managers and HECPs) and directors (members of the board of directors for childcare centres and coordinating offices for HECPs)[vi] can use *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* to inform their decision making based on recognized criteria in early childhood education. When ECS managers use this program to, for example, select materials that suit the needs of the young children in their care, decide how their facility should be set up, choose professional development opportunities for staff and arrange work schedules, they are making a real investment in the quality of education they provide.

*Meeting Early Childhood Needs* is also an intervention guide for educators and HECPs. It provides key information about the best educational practices to support the healthy development of young children and the theory underpinning these practices.

Lastly, *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* is a training and coaching tool for pedagogical support and training professionals in early childhood education. It provides a shared foundation that can be used as the basis for initial training and professional development.

This program is thus designed for everyone who shares the responsibility of providing quality educational services to young children and their families.

vi For brevity, the rest of this document will only use the term “manager” when discussing support for the implementation of the educational program, as this is part of managers’ day-to-day responsibilities.

Chapter

# 01

# Theory

# Overview

Keeping their knowledge about child development and early childhood education up to date is one step that ECS staff and HECPs can take to perform their jobs as educators to the fullest of their capabilities. In order to meet children's needs, ensure their health, safety and well-being, properly support their overall development and socialization and help them achieve a healthy lifestyle, you need to understand how they develop. There are many different schools of thought on the matter. *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* draws on a few select theories that are both widely scientifically recognized and particularly useful for guiding educational interventions with young children.

The theory behind this program is grounded in a humanistic perspective on personal development, an ecological model and attachment theory, as well as an assortment of theories grouped in this document under the heading of guided active learning. This theoretical basis reflects the way the experiences that children have while interacting directly with their social and physical environment shape their later development into adulthood.

## Humanism

Humanistic psychology holds the view that children are unique individuals who are born with a sense of curiosity and a natural desire to learn. From this perspective, an adult supporting a child's development trusts that the child is capable of achieving their full potential.

## The ecological model

According to the ecological model, also known as ecological systems theory or the bioecological model, a child's development is influenced by both their personal characteristics and their environment. An environment is made up of interconnected systems that vary in how close they are to the child. This includes immediate and extended family, educational services and neighbours, as well as more distant systems such as the resources available to the child in their community, societal beliefs about education, and policies for children and their families.

## Attachment theory

Attachment theory posits that the quality of the relationship between a young child and their first caregivers is crucial to their development. The child, who is just learning to explore the world around them, feels emotionally safe in a warm, stable relationship where the adult responds appropriately to their needs, distress signals and feelings of discomfort. In ECSs, this occurs when educators and HECPs create the conditions for a meaningful emotional relationship to be developed with the child, one where their well-being is ensured and their development is supported.

## Guided active learning

This concept was born out of theories describing the mechanisms by which children develop and learn by interacting with their social and physical environment. Educators and HECPs play a vital role in supporting children who are actively engaged in their learning, based on their stage of development, needs and personal interests.

## 1.1 HUMANISM

Any educational program must begin by deciding how children are to be viewed. This program was developed from a humanistic perspective[vii] that [Translation] "sees people as 'open-ended' beings, whose nature is not predetermined and immutable and who are capable of change, transformation and improvement.[11]"

Most of a young child's learning occurs because they have the ability and motivation to learn and grow. They feel naturally compelled to learn about the world they live in and have an innate impulse to communicate, construct, inquire and express their thoughts in finer form.[12] That being said, their ability and motivation to learn can stand to benefit from the support and encouragement of an adult.

The humanistic school of thought in psychology encourages adults to trust in the child's ability to achieve their full potential and suggests that educational activities should focus on the child's skills, needs, curiosity and creativity rather than always consistently teaching the information with no consideration for the child's interests and stage of development. When taking a humanistic approach to personal development, educators and HECPs adapt their teaching to every child and group of children in their care.

According to the humanistic perspective:

- Educators should always have a positive and benevolent view on children.
- A distinction should be drawn between a person and their actions.
- Educators should provide experiences and offer options so that children feel responsible for their success.
- Educators should facilitate learning so that children can succeed.[13]



vii Some of the humanists that have had a significant influence on education in Québec are John Dewey (1859–1952), Carl R. Rogers (1902–1987) and André Paré (1938–).

## 1.2 THE ECOLOGICAL MODEL

The biological characteristics a child is born with, their immediate environment and the wider physical, socio-economic and cultural context of their life have an effect on how that child develops, as Figure 1 illustrates (page 14). All these factors are closely interrelated and influence each other. A child's development can also be shaped by such phenomena as changes that occur over time and transitions that the child experiences.

Every child is born with their own unique temperament and biological composing. Their personality is then formed as they interact with their social and physical environment, and this affects their development. As well, the child's temperament, strengths, specific needs and other characteristics have an impact on the people around them.

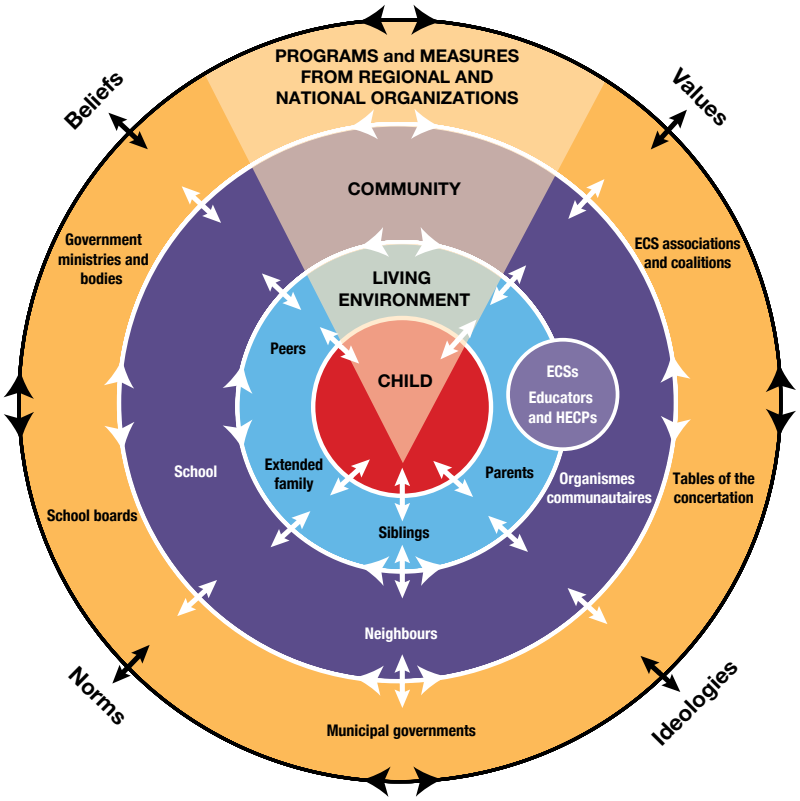
A young child's world mainly revolves around their immediate and extended family. The social and physical environment that their family exposes them to and what the family models provide the child's first context of development. Their immediate family's size and structure, general atmosphere, rules, way of managing conflict and parenting skills are some of the variables that can have a significant and long-lasting impact. Their ECS educators or HECPs are also part of the young child's environment, and the relationships these professionals form with the child's family can also contribute to their healthy development.

Other determinants of a child's development include the ECS they go to, the neighbourhood they grow up in, their family's network of friends and the community organizations their family has access to. The various organizations that work with young children and their families also interact with each other to provide a quality context of development. For example, a child's ECS, school and family might work together to get the child ready to transition into the school system and help them adapt to a new educational setting.

The missions and values of regional and national organizations that focus on early childhood development (such as certain government ministries, ECS associations and coalitions, and community organizations) also have a significant influence on early childhood experiences. Consistent and coordinated action by these organizations make it possible for each child to achieve their full potential.[14]

Lastly, the type of behaviour that is considered acceptable in the society that the child lives in and that society's expectations of young children also influence their interactions, which in turn affects their development.

## Figure 1 – The ecological model[viii]




Source: Diagram adapted from an illustration by Paul Boudreault, inspired by the ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), accessed February 2016 via [https://www.psychotherapie-psychodrame.be/2016/02/03/modele-ecosystemique/].

### "Child" system

*To support the overall development of the toddlers in her care, Valérie interacts with them one-on-one or in small groups of two or three. This enables her to better meet their needs, which can differ widely from one child to another.*

### "Living environment" system

*When he chats with a child's parents on a day-to-day basis, Jérôme learns valuable information about the child, such as their social and cultural background, their preferences, the best ways to calm them down, and the things they do and the progress they have made at home. He explains to the parents what he does to help the children come together as a cohesive group and become more independent. He lets them know about the changes he has seen in their child's development and describes any new behaviour he has observed. Jérôme sees himself and the parents of children in his care as a team, working together to support the children's development. When an issue comes up, he consults with them to try to understand the situation and find solution.*

viii The ecological model is mainly inspired by the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005).

### "Community" system

***Children develop best in communities with a high level of social cohesion, in which:[15]***

- ***The community members work together to resolve issues.***
- ***The adults are able to model appropriate behaviour for the children.***
- ***People are happy to help each other out.***
- ***The adults in the community can be trusted to keep the children safe.***
- ***Neighbours and other community members can look after a child if a parent is unavailable.***

***This is why the manager of the ECS where Valérie and Jérôme work sends out information to parents about family activities in their area. She also organizes activities where parents can meet and invites community organizations to come promote their services, so that the parents can expand their social networks and the neighbourhood can become more cohesive.***

## 1.2.1 Protective factors and risk factors

Some factors and situations are likely to support a child's development. These are protective factors. Examples of protective factors include educational practices that are warm, consistent, predictable and sensitive to children's needs and that make them feel emotionally safe. Promoting a young child's healthy overall development is also a recognized protective factor.[16] An educational setting that provides quality services can decidedly be considered a protective factor.[17]

Other situations may compromise a child's healthy development. This occurs when risk factors outweigh protective factors in terms of frequency, intensity or duration, whether with respect to the child themselves or the systems that form their environment. If the child has a disability, illness or specific condition or has experienced abuse or neglect, or if one of their parents has a low level of education or a mental health condition, these are considered risk factors. Poor quality of education in an ECS can also be a risk factor.[18] The accumulation of risk factors is especially likely to adversely affect a young child's development.[19]

Protective factors can offset, or at least lessen, the negative impact of risk factors. For example, a child may experience neglect at home but still be able to develop stable, secure and quality relationships with their extended family, friends' parents or ECS professionals. Likewise, if a child has a disability, but their ECS has a solid relationship with their parents and can help them receive services that meet their needs (whether from public, private or community organizations), that can help establish protective factors.

Most children are exposed to one or more risk factors at some point during their development. But if they also have a family member, educator, HECP or other person they can turn to when faced with a difficulty or situation that poses a threat to their development, that can help them stay (or get back) on solid ground.[20]

## 1.3 ATTACHMENT AND MEANINGFUL EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Attachment[ix] is an enduring emotional bond formed as the result of regular and frequent interaction between a child and the adults who take care of them most often: their mother, their father and/or a non-parent caregiver. These adults' responsiveness to the child's needs has a deep impact on this bond and on the meaningful emotional relationships the child forms with other adults around them.

### 1.3.1 Attachment

[Translation] "Attachment theory was essentially developed around the mother/child relationship. At the time, the father was considered an additional attachment figure, often seen as a playmate that the child could trust. Research now shows that a father's level of involvement in a child's care and education can make him just as important an attachment figure as the child's mother.[21, 22]" Grandparents and other family members also play a prominent role in a young child's education. Because every family's situation is unique, the term "attachment figure" is sometimes used in the plural in this document.

According to attachment theory, infants are born knowing a set of behaviours that includes crying, screaming and sucking, which they use to seek proximity to adults who will protect them and ensure their survival.[23] If an infant is frightened, hurt or hungry, they will signal their distress through these behaviours. In response, they will receive care and attention from an adult. Between approximately 6 and 9 months of age,[x] the child will start to show a preference for the people who take care of them most frequently.[24] These people become the child's attachment figures and provide a secure base for them.

The attachment figures' level of sensitivity to the young child's behaviour has a strong impact on the quality of this special relationships they have with them. This is demonstrated by responding to the infant's needs in a timely fashion, correctly interpreting their signals and giving them the right amount of stimulation, and generally responding in a caring and consistent manner. These relationships are also marked by the child's personal characteristics, including temperament, and the specific situations they experience as part of the family.

Once the child feels that they will receive comfort, protection and care from their attachment figures when they express distress, they gradually develop a secure attachment to those figures. However, the child may develop an insecure attachment if their needs are not met in a timely, consistent and caring manner.

ix Attachment theory is mainly, but not exclusively, associated with the work of John Bowlby (1907–1990) and Mary Ainsworth (1913–1999), and is considered one of the most important advances in psychology of the 20th century.

x This age is given for illustrative purposes only. Every child develops at their own pace.

### 1.3.2 Other meaningful emotional relationships

Just as they form attachment bonds with the adults who take care of them most often, children develop meaningful emotional relationships with other people around them, such as grandparents and educators, if these people respond in a caring and sensitive way to their needs. Meaningful emotional relationships may also be referred to as "secondary attachment relationships" or "meaningful relationships." They supplement the attachment relationship but do not replace it.

A meaningful emotional relationship with a child is formed in the same way as a secure attachment relationship: through frequent contact with caring, consistent, respectful adults who are able to figure out what the child needs and respond appropriately in a timely manner, in tune and patient with the child's rhythms, and adjust their behaviour to the child. Research also shows that children who have a secure attachment relationship will more readily form meaningful emotional relationships with other adults.[25]

### 1.3.3 Attachment and development

When young children feel secure in the knowledge that they can get help if they encounter difficulties, they are able to pull away from their attachment figure to explore the world around them, develop and learn.[26] Secure attachment is therefore vital for a child to unleash their innate sense of curiosity, take action and risks, and seek out new experiences, leading them to explore their environment and gain independence.

A child who has an insecure attachment relationship, on the other hand, may find it difficult to engage in play or to be separated from their attachment figure to explore their social and physical environment, as they are not assured that this person will always be there or provide support when they are needed.

#### Identifying the needs behind children's behaviour

**Sometimes a child will behave in a way that suggests that they have an insecure attachment relationship, and they may also seem uncomfortable in other situations. While it does not belong to the educator to determine what kind of attachment relationship the child has, they can figure out what the child's needs are, based on their behaviour, and interact with them in a way that helps them feel emotionally safe.**



### 1.3.4 Attachment and educational childcare services

When a child first goes to an ECS, it is often the first time they are repeatedly separated from their parents for several hours at a time. The amount of separation anxiety the child experiences varies, depending on their relationship with their attachment figure. Parents face their own challenge in that. They need to learn to trust the educator or HECP and eventually accept that they will form a meaningful emotional relationship with their child.

***Mireille gives parents the option of gradually integrating their child into her care. In the first phase, the child and one of their parents spend time at the ECS together, staying longer each time. In the next phase, the child goes to the ECS by themselves without their parents, and every day they stay there longer. The child sees their parent leave and come back and gradually comes to understand that they will be there to pick them up at the end of the day, no matter what. The time it takes for a child to become fully integrated varies, depending on the child and family.***

The role of HECPs and educators in a young child's life is different than the role their parents play. They have to maintain a certain emotional distance when they are with the child, while still being sensitive and caring, and they have to make it possible for every child in their care to form a meaningful emotional relationship with them, regardless of the child's characteristics.[27]

***To help the children in her care feel emotionally safe, Mireille interacts with each one in a caring manner and gives verbal and non-verbal indications that she is there for them. She shows respect and empathy for their feelings. She encourages them to develop respectful, healthy relationships with each other. She shares special moments with each child while they are in her care.***

To help children and parents successfully transition to a new setting where they are separated from each other, educators and HECPs can create the conditions for the child to feel safe at their ECS. The meaningful emotional relationship that the child will be able to form with the educator or HECP will help them continue to feel safe when their parents are not there. While the child's need for physical contact will lessen over time, the reassuring presence of an adult they can turn to will remain important throughout their early childhood.[28] The child's level of emotional comfort at the ECS will therefore be informed by consistent educational activities and staff, and although the other children at the ECS do not necessarily play a protective role, their consistent presence will help the child feel safe. Young children also feel freer to learn, develop, and explore the social and physical environment of the ECS if they feel able to predict what will happen next and they know that there is an adult they can count on to attend to their needs if they run into a challenging or threatening situation.

*Mireille has set up routines and rituals throughout the day to help children understand how time is passing and anticipate upcoming activities, which also helps them feel emotionally safe. She specifically makes sure to plan how she will transition between activities to ensure that everyone is in a positive state of mind.*

*Personal care routines are a special time where Mireille gives the child her full attention, while keeping an ear or eye out in case other children need her. She lets the child move at their own pace, interacts sensitively with them, and lets them know what she is about to do next.*

Educators and HECPs should form a trusting professional relationship with parents, based on constructive interactions that are focused on the child and their development. A healthy relationship between the parents and the ECS team will help the child form a meaningful emotional relationship with the adults who take care of them at the ECS. The more the child feels that their parents trust the ECS team, the easier they will find it to form a trusting relationship with them while staying loyal to their parents.

*When a child is dropped off and picked up by their family, Mireille makes sure the children and their family know she is there to talk to. The materials she provides for the children during these transition periods can be used to play independently. Mireille watches over all the children and chats with the parents as they arrive at the ECS. She helps children with separation anxiety say goodbye to their parents in the morning and leave the ECS at the end of the day, and she lets them bring a special object from home for the transition.*



## 1.4 GUIDED ACTIVE LEARNING[xi]

[Translation] “Active learning is a process in which a child, by acting directly on objects and interacting with people, ideas and events, constructs a new understanding of the world around them.[29]” The young child [Translation] “develops their knowledge and understanding by comparing their perceptions to those of their peers”[30] and the adults in their lives. From this perspective, a child’s development and learning are closely tied to their interactions with others. Interactions and conversations between adults and children and between children and their peers take on critical importance in helping children achieve their full potential. In an educational setting based on active learning, educators and HECPs help each child in their care based on their specific traits.

We have added the word “guided” to emphasize the importance of the educational actions that educators and HECPs take to support children in their active learning. This approach provides a great deal of leeway for children to make their own choices and decisions to adapt their learning to their tastes, with instructional scaffolding, which is the active presence of an adult supporting the child’s learning as they become ready, and sometimes providing a bit of help, as the foundation. This educational relationship provides a rich, diverse learning environment, which helps children find the process engaging and encourages their love of learning.

Play is the main means by which children explore, experiment, express themselves and develop. It provides a way for them to be active in their learning. When young children play, their overall development is fostered, as every developmental domain is engaged in order to carry out their activities.[31] Play is essential to young children’s well-being and happiness, but it also provides a privileged development context and drives their motivation to learn.

The routines and transitions through the day at ECSs also provide opportunities for active learning that are essential to building functional independence (eating, getting dressed, hygiene, etc.) and a healthy lifestyle.



xi Active learning refers to one of the constructivist theories of intelligence developed by Jean Piaget (1896–1980). Guided active learning is based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) regarding the development of intelligence and the researchers who have continued his work in the area of social constructivism, specifically interactionist theory.

### 1.4.1 One group, many individuals

The children in an ECS group will each be substantially different from each other. If, as the ecological model asserts, a child's development is affected by many factors, it follows that each child will have their own unique personality traits, abilities, preferences, needs and family experiences, all of which must be taken into consideration in order to actively engage the child in their learning.

This is where a child's parents can provide valuable information to help educators and HECPs decide which educational activities are best to ensure the child's optimal development. Talking to the child's parents can also be a way to check whether the practices used at home are consistent with the practices at the ECS.

### 1.4.2 Actively engaged children and adults

The adults who provide guidance to children in active learning-based education must be able to observe the children and have intentional (planned) interactions with each of them individually at appropriate times. The adults also set learning goals, such as increasing a child's vocabulary or helping a child learn to behave appropriately, that can then be supported by games and regular activities. This is the educational intervention process, which will be explained in Chapter 3.

***Sophie is starting to be able to stand and walk more steadily. When she got to the ECS today, Juan placed some objects in the hallway so Sophie could check them out as she walked by. She particularly enjoyed seeing the squishy ball move when she accidentally kicked it, and repeated the action several more times before picking it up and tossing it to the educator.***

Interacting in small groups gives children ample opportunity to do things like speak, listen, express their opinion, share ideas, and find creative solutions that work for all their play partners.[32]

***On warm summer days, Nicoletta and Solange like to take the children picnicking in a local park. They prepare by discussing what they should take for sun protection, for food, and for playing in the water and sandbox. They make a list of everything they need as they talk. Before they head out, each child selects one or two things to carry in addition to their towel and hat. Nicoletta reads the list out loud to make sure they do not forget anything. During the picnic, Nicoletta and Solange watch the children play. When the afternoon is over, they talk to each child about what they did, what kind of problems they encountered and how they solved them, and they write this information down in a notebook to tell the child's parents.***

Moments of calm and solitude are good times for children to develop their logical reasoning, use their creativity and consolidate their new knowledge. Supporting children in their learning means discerning between when it is beneficial for them to take these breaks and when they are having difficulty engaging in play, which can be managed through adult intervention. An adult can tell the difference based on their familiarity with the child and their unique qualities and adapt their educational activities to meet the child's specific needs.

Educators and HECPs can also schedule out activities for the children in their care, but child-initiated play should not be restricted solely to transition periods. Educational activities promote active learning when the children in care see a connection to their specific interests and are given options. For example, an observant educator or HECP will notice when children are curious about construction and use their questions as an opportunity to explore the topic through discussions about the children's knowledge, interactive reading, arts and crafts, building games, and so on.

An educator or HECP who is attuned to how young children develop in each developmental domain of early childhood can observe and assess what stage a child is currently at. They can also use this knowledge to anticipate the next stage, see where their progress is going, and target their zone of proximal development to support them in their progress. The adults provide scaffolding, which is a minimum of assistance in the form of dialogue and interactions, to help the child accomplish a task that they cannot perform on their own. This support is withdrawn once the child is able to perform the task independently.[xii] If an adult provides this support when the time is right, without anticipating the child's learning, this will help the child achieve their full potential.

***When an adult lays out a toddler's snowsuit for them to put their legs through and holds the sleeves out for them to push their arms through, they are scaffolding the child's learning. They are performing the task together so that the child will eventually be able to perform it on their own. Similarly, an adult could suggest that a child who is having trouble with a puzzle look at the shapes and colours of the pieces, and if a child is in charge of setting the table, they could discuss the relationship between the number of children in the group and the number of place settings needed.***

To support the children's active learning, educators and HECPs organize each day so that the children know what to expect, based on the children's needs. They plan experiences that respond to the children's wide range of interests and give them as much room as possible to act of their own accord. They provide interesting learning materials that are appropriate for each child's ability level and foster development across all domains, so that they have options and the environment is diverse and appealing. They interact with the children with intention, based on the developmental needs they identify from observing the children every day.

xii This approach is based primarily on Vygotsky and Bruner's work on scaffolding and the zone of proximal development.

*Antoine's family got a puppy over the weekend. It is all he wants to talk about when he gets to the ECS, and his interested peers pepper him with questions. Hoda sees their interest and takes the opportunity to add new items to the make-believe play area: stuffed animals, food bowls, small towels to stand in for dog mats, and a cardboard box that the children will likely use for a doghouse. Antoine needs no persuading to go play in the area and show the other children what he now knows about caring for pets. Over the week, their conversations turn from cats and dogs to birds, fish, reptiles… and elephants. Hoda asks the children questions about how these animals are similar and different, and suggests that they choose books about pets for their pre-nap storytime.*

Lastly, do not underestimate the way the behaviour of adults and other children can influence a child's development. Young children learn a lot by observing the people around them. Children weigh the consequences of the behaviours modelled for them and choose to imitate those that they see the benefits of. Educators and HECPs should therefore keep in mind that the behaviour they model through their day-to-day actions may be the most important educational work they do. To support the learning that young children acquire from modelling, adults should conduct themselves the way they want the children in their care to behave.[xiii].



xiii These considerations are based on Bandura's theory of vicarious experiences and learning through modelling.

## 1.5 SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL SAFETY AND ACTIVE LEARNING THROUGH DEMOCRATIC TEACHING

Three main styles of intervention are used by both parents and educators/HECPs to interact with young children: democratic, authoritarian (autocratic) and permissive (laissez-faire).

With the democratic teaching style, a positive environment in which children feel respected and supported is fostered at the ECS, which makes it possible for the children to form meaningful emotional relationships with the adults caring for them. This teaching style promotes independence, active learning and self-confidence in the children, as well as healthy relationships with their peers.

***In the Ladybugs group under Amélie's care, the four-year-olds divide up their responsibilities every week. This time, André gets to choose his task first. He immediately grabs the "water the three plants" picture and places it under his name. Maria and Charly choose to set the table for lunch. Sébastien will turn the lights on and off when the group enters or leaves their room. Élisabeth will hand out mats before naptime. Sharon will put the pictures illustrating the weather for the day on the calendar. Cédric will ring the bell when it is time to switch routines, at Amélie's command. The children take up their duties with pride and often tell their parents about it. Amélie has observed that these tasks not only teach the children to be independent, but also make them feel like they each play an important role in the group.***

In the democratic teaching style, the adults share power with the children, taking their age and abilities into account as well as the specific situation and circumstances. The adults give the children choice insofar as they are capable: for example, they can make decisions about what games to play, who to play with, what responsibilities they take on, how much food they want to eat at snack time and mealtime, or how the room should be set up. The adults provide the children with support when they have issues that need resolving. The democratic teaching style also lets children voice their needs and objections and challenge or debate their situation. In democratic teaching, mistakes are seen as opportunities to develop and learn.



*One morning in early fall, Rose hears the children in her care talking about the berries they picked with their families. She takes the opportunity to tell them about the fall cultural celebration week that is coming up, when the First Nations in their community practice their traditional ways. The discussion leads the children and Rose to choose new learning materials for their outdoor make-believe play: baskets for gathering fruit, and pebbles that Rose suggests painting and varnishing to look like berries. They spend a long time looking for items to use as rifles for hunting small and big game. Eventually, Rose decides to help the children make rifles out of cardboard. Over the next few days, Rose is amused to notice that when the children are finished playing, they prepare a feast together around an imaginary fire.*

The democratic teaching style requires clear and consistent rules, to achieve a balance between children's desire for freedom and need for security. Best practices for this teaching style include having specific expectations for each child, giving instructions that the children understand, establishing routines and time-marking activities, and helping children manage their emotions and resolve conflict.

*The children at Henriette's home childcare facility are getting ready to go outside before lunchtime. Everyone is moving about. The children have become very familiar with the routine that Henriette established to make this time a strong learning opportunity. She adapts her expectations and instructions to each child depending on their abilities.*

*Kevin and Albert are the oldest; they are the last ones to get dressed since they can do it the fastest. Henriette focuses her attention on 14-month-old Caroline. She encourages her to do everything she is able to do by herself to perform the task. Caroline has started to get used to this routine, and she repeats Henriette's brief instructions back to her as best she can: "Put your legs through the pants. Stick your feet out; there you go! I have your boot here. Put your foot into the boot, please. Now the other one. Can you stand up? Slip your arms under the suspenders..." Henriette also looks over at the toddlers and gives them the help they need. She points to the pictures she has put up for them showing each step in the getting-dressed process. She will help them more directly in a few minutes. When the younger children are almost finished, Henriette calls out to the two oldest children that it is time for them to get ready now. The instructions she gives them are more complex: "You can get dressed now and pick up the toy box, and meet me by the door. I'll help you with your zippers if you need me to."*

Educators and HECPs can also interact with the parents democratically, in the sense that they can interact with them in a way that is egalitarian and focused on achieving the common goal of promoting the young child's development. However, any decisions made within the scope of the educator or HECP's relationship with parents are limited to a certain extent by the requirements of group life in the ECS.

The biggest challenge for educators and HECPs using the democratic teaching style is often limiting their need for control and letting children experience the world through their own actions, choices and decisions.

***François is an educator. He shares the decision making with the infants in his care based on his observations of them. His actions are guided by their levels of enthusiasm, boredom, energy and tiredness. Today, the energy in the facility is electric, and François has put on some upbeat music so the children can dance their energy out. Yasmine, however, has opted to sit off to the side playing with nesting cups. A little while later, she hands François a book, and he sits and reads to her in the cozy corner. The children in his group are not speaking much yet, but François pays attention and they quickly learn how to make themselves understood.***

With an authoritarian teaching style, the adult is overwhelmingly in control of the group's activities, schedule and set-up, and they choose activities that allow them to maintain control. The adult shows the children the process to follow in order to achieve the goals that the adult has set for them. In this teaching style, children have few opportunities to act on their own, make their own decisions or engage in play that is aligned with their personal interests.

With the permissive teaching style, the children are in control. The adult lets them do what they want, and their schedule is flexible. The adult only steps in when the children ask them to or if order needs to be restored. The adult does very little to support children's development through play.

Intentionally or not, many adults switch from one style to another several times in a single day, which can cause children to feel insecure and unable to anticipate what is expected of them. Consistently using the democratic teaching style, on the other hand, promotes the children's sense of independence, emotional safety, engagement in play, and motivation.

## How's our ECS doing?

- Are the managers and staff at our ECS familiar with the theory behind the *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* program?
- Does our ECS promote humanistic values?
- What steps have we taken to help each child form a meaningful emotional relationship with our educators, HECPs and childcare assistants?
- Does our ECS take part in local and regional early childhood collaboration projects?
- How can we promote the virtues of active learning for children? What arguments and points can we use to explain the benefits of active learning to parents?



Chapter

# 02

# Aspects of quality of education in ECSs

# Overview

The aspects of quality of education in ECSs[xiv] can be broken down into two main categories: structural quality and process quality. Structural quality refers to a set of variables that indirectly influence process quality, such as adult-to-child ratios, group size and educator training, which are governed by regulation. In this guide, we will discuss process quality, which refers to the aspects of day-to-day life in an ECS that shape a young child's experience of it. There are four aspects of process quality:

- The educator or HECP's interactions with the child.
- The experiences a child has at the ECS[xv].
- How the facility is set up and the materials that are available.
- The educator or HECP's interactions with the parents.



xiv This chapter is based on the 2014 Grandir en qualité quality of education observation scales, except for the section about educator-child interactions, which is based on and inspired by Gilles Cantin's French translation of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a tool used to observe interactions between teachers and children in the classroom.

xv "The experiences a child has" is used in this guide instead of "structuring of activities," which was used in the previous version of the *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* educational program. Because the word "activity" is often understood to refer to an "organized and closely supervised activity," we have used "the experiences a child has" as it more accurately describes the range of experiences that a child has in a day (including child-initiated play, activities organized by adults, play in activity areas, routines and transitions, and basic care).

## 2.1 THE QUALITY OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN EDUCATORS OR HECPs AND CHILDREN

Early childhood specialists agree: the component of quality that is most critical for early childhood development is the interaction between the educators or HECPs and the children. As we saw in the section on attachment, the bond between a child and the adult in charge, and the way that adult interacts with the child and their group, has a substantial impact on their emotional safety, their feeling of belonging to the group, and their motivation and engagement in learning.

Educators and HECPs who have high-quality interactions with children also work to ensure that the childcare facility layout, play materials and experiences that the children have at the ECS are aligned with the specific learning goals for the children in their care. They are able to have constructive interactions with parents that are focused on the child and their development.

### 2.1.1 Emotional support

In their interactions with children, educators and HECPs endeavour to provide the emotional support that the children need in order to adjust to the ECS and be happy. The adults foster a positive environment within the group under their care through respectful relationships, a playful and enthusiastic attitude, and positive communications marked by a sincere interest in each child. The adults' physical proximity to the children, the activities they take part in together, and their verbal and non-verbal ways of showing affection are all factors in fostering a positive environment.

Adults also provide emotional support by being sensitive to children's feelings, deciphering their emotions and offering them comfort and help, as outlined in attachment theory. Adults who are sensitive and responsive to children's needs can anticipate when a child might experience difficulty and take action to prevent this from happening.

Emotional support also requires seeing things from the children's point of view, similar to the democratic teaching style described in Chapter 1. This means that adults take each child's experience into consideration. They are sensitive and attentive to the children's signals, verbal and non-verbal communication, and individual rhythms. They ask for input from the children, and the children's feedback, whether expressed through words or actions, is taken constructively. Educators and HECPs explain their decision making when it diverges from what the children think should be done. They also assign the children tasks that align with their abilities and interests and help them complete them.

### 2.1.2 Integration into group life[xvi]

Educators and HECPs help young children integrate into life in the group based on their needs and abilities. They help the children learn proper behaviour and resolve conflicts in a developmentally appropriate way. In their interactions with the children, they encourage them to be engaged in the group and feel a sense of belonging.

Adults also ensure that every part of the day goes smoothly so that the available learning time can be maximized. They provide different play areas and items, such as a calendar and pictures representing the time of day, to help children gradually understand where they are in time and space. They have rules and give instructions that are adapted to the children in their care. They use an inclusive approach, one that

xvi In the CLASS, the term "classroom organization" is used instead of "integration into group life."

is planned so as to take the needs of all the children, including children with disabilities, into account from the very outset.[33] When adults openly acknowledge their mistakes and struggles and describe what they will do to remedy the situation, they help the children see these moments as learning opportunities.

Furthermore, with proper planning, adults can prevent the children's learning opportunities from being interrupted, minimize the time needed to complete organization tasks while the children are present, and embed engaging learning opportunities into transition points.

### 2.1.3 Instructional support

Educators and HECPs also provide instructional support for children in every developmental domain. They have conversations with the children, clearly describe the strategies[xvii] they are using, listen to the children attentively, help them make their ideas come to life, and encourage them to participate, persevere, cooperate and be independent. Through their interactions with the children, they promote the development of their language and motor skills, as well as their ability to form healthy relationships with their peers, reason, explore, experiment and create. Adults help the children plan their play by encouraging them to identify what they want to do. They also encourage the children to think back on what they have accomplished and the strategies they used to get there.

Adults also provide instructional support in order to get young children interested in and excited about reading, writing and mathematics through developmentally appropriate play (such as make-believe play) and day-to-day activities (such as preparing a recipe or message) for each child and group. When children are introduced to reading, writing and mathematics through these kinds of tangible experiences, it helps them understand an array of important concepts and ideas.

xvii Strategy: the means used to achieve a goal.

### Discovering the joy of reading together

No library, however well-stocked, can make a young child discover the joys and benefits of reading on its own. The child also needs someone to engage with them about the books available to them.

When an educator or HECP and an infant read a book together, it is an immersive, shared experience, during which the child will point at illustrations, turn the pages and respond to the adult's comments with babbles. This experience helps children develop an interest in reading from an early age.

When an educator or HECP reads to a toddler or preschool-age child, the child can ask questions about the illustrations and story, put parts of the story into their own words to make sure they understand, make connections with what they already know, and so on. These interactions make introductory reading and writing activities compelling to the child.



When an adult has a thorough understanding of early childhood development, and specifically how each child in their care is developing, they can interact with each child in a way that takes into account their zone of proximal development and what they are able to do with some help, and set goals that are just challenging enough for them. The adult can also join when the children are playing and make their play more complex. Instructional support is essential for every child to thrive, achieve their full potential, and be a successful student in the future.

***When Olivier, an educator, plays with one-year-old Nam, he pays attention to the look on his face and the gestures he makes. He lets the child lead the play and helps him do what he wants to do, giving him all the time he needs to use all his senses to explore.***

***Olivier notices that even the slightest sound will grab Nam's attention. He uses some nearby toys to make and describe noises, which Nam greatly enjoys. Right after that, Nam grabs some plastic rings and blocks and strikes the floor with them to make his own percussive sounds.***

## 2.1.4 Support for educators' interactions with children[xviii]

It is tempting to think that the quality of educator-child interactions depends solely on educators' interventions, but this is not the case. The quality of these interactions depends on a number of factors that go beyond an educator's interpersonal skills, expertise and knowledge. Their ability to leverage their skills to the fullest is related to the quality of their work environment and the support they receive.[34]

xviii This aspect, like all the aspects regarding managers' contributions to the implementation of the educational program for childcare services, mainly applies to ECS facilities, as HECPs are responsible for their own management. However, the considerations discussed may be relevant to HECPs' responsibilities regarding childcare assistants in their employ.

Time management is one key to quality interactions. The quality of interactions with children can be positively or negatively affected by when educators work, take meal breaks or change shifts. Thus, if there is absolutely no flexibility in educators' meal-times, for example, even the slightest delay will result in stress for both the educator and the children in their care. If managers acknowledge the difficult and uncomfort-able positions that a lack of flexibility puts both children and educators in, they can work with their team to find creative solutions to support the quality of these essential interactions.

## 2.2 THE QUALITY OF THE EXPERIENCES THAT THE CHILDREN HAVE

The educational program applies as soon as a child arrives at the educational setting in the morning and continues throughout the day. The playtime, routines and transitions fit together, and each one is a moment that contributes to early childhood development. The quality of the experiences that the children have at their ECS depends on how the day is adapted to their group and the variety and richness of the experiences they are given.



### Screen time in ECSs

Since 2014, the Institut national de santé publique du Québec has recommended that ECSs avoid having children use screens of any kind, since they already use them at home, and likely for many more hours than is recommended.[35]

Young children develop by interacting with their environment. The time they spend in front of a screen is usually passive, and they are not free to explore. Excessive TV or computer time has been shown to have adverse effects on children's cognitive, language, physical and motor development, sleep, concentration, short-term memory and school readiness.

"Infants younger than age 2 do not learn well from digital media. At that age, they have a limited understanding of what they see and hear on a screen.[36]" Screen time does not have any health or learning benefits for children under 18 months. When children are [Translation] "between 18 and 24 months of age, parents who wish to can start to introduce screens. However, they must choose high-quality programming and apps, and the children must be supervised by an adult who can help them understand what they are seeing on screen.[37]"

Screen time for children 2 to 4 years old should be limited to one hour per day. Keep in mind that if children are in the same room as a screen, they may be allured by the light coming off the screen and not feel compelled to spontaneously explore their environment.

These guidelines do not apply if a child uses a screen for social interaction and communication as recommended by a health care provider.

It should be noted, however, that an ECS provider may only use a television or other audiovisual equipment if their educational program requires it.[xix]



## 2.2.1 A schedule adapted to young children's rhythms

Young children need time to play, express themselves, eat, sleep, understand, explore, experiment, make decisions, move around, relax, resolve problems and conflicts, and time to do nothing at all. ECS teams and HECPs are encouraged to pay particular attention to how the day is progressing and be flexible in adjusting their schedule to the children's rhythms. At ECSs, a sometimes excessive amount of time can be spent waiting around. Properly planning your day can help limit this. In ECS facilities in particular, the team usually needs to come together to decide how to adjust the schedule for the day to best meet the needs of the children and adults. Splitting up certain spaces and work schedules can sometimes make it very difficult to adapt the day's schedule.

xix Section 115 of the ECR provides that we expect that « an educational childcare provider may make available to children a television, computer, tablet computer or any other audiovisual equipment only if its use is part of the educational program and occurs sporadically, without exceeding 30 minutes in a same day. Their use is however prohibited for children under 2 years of age. »

**Personalized routines**

**It is a good idea to plan an infant's experiences around their care rituals and routines based on their individual rhythm.**

Much of the day is spent on play, as this is the best way for young children to learn. Child-initiated play is also a prime vehicle for promoting active learning.

The daily schedule should include at least 60 minutes of outdoor play.[xx] Spending time outdoors promotes active play, gross motor skills and contact with nature and gives children different sensory experiences as the seasons change. Educators and HECPs should support children's learning when they are playing in the playground or in a park, like they would for indoor activities at an ECS facility.

### 2.2.2 Child-initiated play

When children are given periods of play where they are in control (child-initiated play and free play in activity areas), they enjoy playing more and are more engaged in their learning. Having these periods of free play promotes children's curiosity, independence, socialization and ability to solve problems that come up during play, and is vital to their overall development.

Prioritizing child-initiated play at ECSs can help prevent children from feeling a pressure to perform that can be detrimental. No matter what time they are dropped off at and picked up from the ECS, every child in the group should have opportunities to initiate their own play every day, for a long enough time that they can engage in more complex play.



xx Section 114 of the ECR provides that, unless prevented from doing so by inclement weather, "an educational childcare provider must ensure that the children are taken outdoors at least 60 minutes every day to a safe place where they can be supervised, unless there are conditions that compromise the children's health, safety or well-being".

## Free play in activity areas

There are three steps to playing in activity areas for children over 18 months. The first is planning, where the child chooses an activity and decides what they want to accomplish (What do I want to create?), their play partners (Who do I want to create with?), and their action plan (How do I want to proceed? Where should I do this? What do I need? etc.). Like in the reflection step that comes later, the extent of the child's planning varies depending on their age. The adult in charge can also provide assistance at the planning stage. Even toddlers can plan their play by responding to the adult's questions with a word or gesture.[38] For preschool-age children who have started to include elements of real life in their creations, drawing could be a good way to plan their play.

The second step is actually doing the activity. When playing in activity areas, multiple children can do the same activity or use the same materials even if they are not playing together. The child is free to move around or play with some limitations; for example, they must treat others and materials with respect and follow instructions. They can decide to change or expand what they initially set out to do, after seeing how their peers are playing, for instance. They are the one who decides when the activity is over. Some children may play in activity areas for a long time, while others, especially younger children, may spend a relatively short amount of time.

In the final step, after the free play in activity areas, the child will reflect on or assess their play. This is when they can take stock of what they have learned and think about how the activity they chose played out. The reflection process helps the child develop their vocabulary, sense of observation, and memory and analysis skills,[39] and it builds their confidence in their problem-solving abilities, even at a very young age. The adult can ask the child to recall what they did while playing and say what parts they enjoyed, the materials they used, what new things they discovered, and the solutions they found to resolve issues. The reflection exercise can be done individually, or it can be done as a group if several children were involved in an activity or if the adult wants to encourage them to listen and communicate with each other. The adult gives each child as much time as they need to express themselves, and can use a turn-taking system for older children.



*During the child-initiated play period, Karine steps in when the children ask her to or when she thinks she can add something to their learning experience. She is careful not to bother them when they are concentrating on a task or immersed in their interactions.*

### 2.2.3 Organized activities

Activities organized by educators and HECPs can also be included in the daily schedule. However, each child should have the option to refrain from participating. These activities promote active learning if they are planned around the children's interests and their current and developing abilities and if they are open-ended, meaning that the children have options and the activities can be completed in a variety of different ways.

Organized activities can include project-based activities, interactive reading, group discussions, learning nursery rhymes and songs, and free-choice time in activity areas, as well as the time children spend reflecting on their experiences. Teaching children chores, like putting away their toys after playing and putting their mat on the floor at naptime, and hygiene practices, like washing their hands and face, is also considered an organized activity.

#### Project-based activities

**A project-based activity is organized by an adult based on the children's interests (farm animals, boats, etc.), a real-life situation (a child lost a tooth, is back from a trip, etc.) or a current event (a holiday, season, snowstorm, etc.). It is semi-structured and engages the children's skills and knowledge, promoting their overall development. The children and the adult work together to plan the project and exchange ideas throughout the process.**

**A project-based activity starts with the educator or HECP introducing the scenario (for example, by bringing a pumpkin to the facility and asking the children what they know about Halloween traditions), and the children's suggestions (carve the pumpkin, paint the pumpkin, clean off the seeds and use them in a collage, plant the seeds in the ground and water them, etc.) are incorporated into the project. Once it is completed, the children reflect on the process and what they created or accomplished.**



#### Reflecting on the experience

**There are many ways an adult can prompt the children to reflect on their experience and what they learned. For example, they could show photos of them in action, what they made, or the items they played with.[40] Depending on their language skills, the children could also express their thoughts by miming or moving around the room.**



### 2.2.4 Routines and transitions

Every day at an ECS is full of routines, such as personal care routines, mealtime, snack time, naptime, cleanup, drop-offs and pickups. These are special times where each child has contact with the adult taking care of them. Over time, rules are worked into these daily routines (saying thank you, putting toys away, etc.), and this introduces the children to many of the rules of life in society. These routine moments are also key opportunities for the children to explore and experiment with actions related to getting dressed, eating, and so on, and provide a major way for children to become more independent.

Transitions, meanwhile, help children move from one part of their day to the next, typically when there is a change in location, educator or activity. These pivotal moments are particularly important when dealing with a group of children, as the children are likely to become restless during transitions. If the transitions are well-organized and sometimes include games and the children know what is going to happen, they can promote the children's development and well-being.

***Isabelle has made up a song about feeling sleepy, yawning, rubbing your eyes, and needing to sleep. When she sees one of the infants in her care getting sleepy, she picks them up and sings this song to them softly while she carries them to the sleeping room. This ritual builds the children's language skills, helps them recognize when they are getting tired, and makes them feel safe enough to fall asleep soundly.***

***When the toddlers in Nadine's care go into the lunchroom, they practice the steps to a traditional Indigenous dance with great enthusiasm. Nadine uses these transitions as an opportunity to develop the children's sense of rhythm and accompanies them on a drum.***

### 2.2.5 Support for the quality of the experiences that the children have

Again, the decisions of the ECS management team have an impact on the quality of the experiences that the children have at ECSs. When ECS managers show leadership, they can give the children greater access to a suitable outdoor play area, neighbourhood and community resources such as libraries, parks and wading pools, and businesses that may be of interest to the children, such as bakeries, public markets and farms. They are also in a good position to connect with seniors groups, farmers groups and firefighter organizations that can deepen the children's learning and help them feel connected to their community.

Expectations regarding the children's experiences and, in some cases, the outcomes (the art they produce, specific learning goals, etc.) should also be discussed with the educators, keeping in mind the principles of this educational program, and shared with the parents. Ideally, the children will receive consistent and positive messages about their experiences in the ECS.

*At transition times, the children in the four-year-old group sing or recite nursery rhymes while changing rooms. This develops their phonological awareness, meaning their understanding that words are made up of one or more sounds.*

## 2.3 THE QUALITY OF THE FACILITY LAYOUT AND THE MATERIALS THAT ARE AVAILABLE

A properly set up facility makes an ECS a functional, safe, welcoming and friendly place to be. If the materials available to the children match their level of development in every domain and align with their interests and needs, they can support the children's learning and promote their overall development.

### 2.3.1 A comfortable, welcoming environment

Young children spend several hours a day at their ECS, and the way the space is typically set up has an impact on their well-being. A good ECS has proper ventilation, sufficient natural light, an appropriate room temperature and floor temperature, and controlled noise levels to ensure the comfort of the children and adults.

Decorating the ECS adds to the quality of the environment. Depending on the room, walls can be painted in neutral or exciting colours. To keep the physical environment both welcoming and soothing, try not to overly clutter the walls with the children's creations, family pictures, stories and drawings.

The ECS facility should be designed to make the children feel safe. A quiet, protected area with soft cushions, cuddly toys like stuffed animals, blankets and dolls of different genders provides a place for them to go when they need some time for themselves. Spaces for infants should be defined by partitions or furniture dividers within a large room so that the infants can be supervised at all times. An enclosed space contributes to their well-being.

**Infant play areas**

**"Soft play" and "motor play" areas are especially well suited to infants' needs.**



Children need to have a variety of experiences, especially in the summertime when they spend longer periods of time playing outdoors. The ECS premises and the materials available to the children outdoors should be organized so that they can learn in every developmental domain.



### 2.3.2 Healthy and safe facilities and materials[xxi]

The facility layout and the play materials chosen (books, toys and regular objects) should nurture children's independence and minimize limitations so they are free to act on their own and take the calculated risks they need to in order to learn. For safety purposes, there should be no furniture or other items in poor condition that could cause injury or illness.[xxii]

To accommodate children with particular needs, managers and HECPs can seek the support of an occupational therapist in the health and social services network, who will perform an assessment and make recommendations for adapting the facility, equipment and materials (wall-mounted bars, accessible washrooms, wheelchair-accessible entrances, sound modifications, etc.) to meet the needs of children with motor, visual and hearing disabilities. These adaptations will make it easier for children to interact with their social and physical environment, which is essential to achieving their full potential.

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xxi The documents *La santé des enfants en services de garde* and *La sécurité des enfants en services de garde*, published by Les Publications du Québec, are valuable tools that can be used to ensure the health and safety of children in ECSs.

xxii Section 38.1 of the ECR states: "A permit holder must ensure that all equipment, furnishings and play materials on the premises are kept clean, in good condition or repaired so that they may be used as originally intended and disinfected regularly when the children are absent. The permit holder must also ensure that they are used safely and do not present any potential dangers by reason of their nature, the place where they are used and the presence of children." Section 92 states: "A home childcare provider must ensure that the equipment, furnishings and play material used are kept clean. The provider must also keep them in good condition or repair them so that they may be used as originally intended." Section 97 states: "A home childcare provider must ensure that any climbing apparatus, swing, slide or similar equipment installed outdoors has smooth surfaces with no sharp edges, is safe and is installed according to the manufacturer's instructions." Section 103 states: "A childcare provider must ensure that toys are safe, non toxic, washable, robust, suitable for the age of the children and in proper operating condition, and comply with the safety standards prescribed by the relevant regulation under the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act (S.C. 2010, c. 21)."

### 2.3.3 Variety, flexibility and accessibility

A play space should be designed to inspire young children to be curious and engage in a wide variety of types of play. It should be set up to accommodate group activities and let children use their gross motor skills. Different play areas or corners can be stocked with materials for a particular kind of play, such as make-believe play props, building toys and figurines, arts and crafts supplies, manipulatives and table toys, and introductory reading and writing materials. Letting the children bring materials from one play area to another (for example, bringing toy cars over to where the building blocks are) also gives them more opportunity to engage in increasingly complex levels of play.

The play areas should be placed to complement each other and be easy for the children to move between. For example, the arts and crafts area should be near the sink. The make-believe play area, where children will be moving around and talking a great deal, should be far away from the reading and writing area and the manipulatives and table toys area, which benefit from a quieter environment.

In home childcare facilities, play materials can be stored by type of play in bins or baskets, which can be used to create temporary play spaces.

Setting up play areas allows children to see all the areas at once, letting them choose where to play based on what piques their interest. It will also lead the children to naturally split up into smaller groups of two, three or four, which encourages them to interact with each other.

Furniture and items such as tables, chairs, bean bag chairs, rolling storage cabinets with locking wheels, mats, cushions and sheer curtains can be used to divide a room into different play areas. A well set up facility lets the children move about and around and is flexible enough to be modified if necessary. Parents of children who have particular needs, including children with disabilities, are often able to suggest indoor and outdoor modifications that can help their child be more socially included at the ECS. The furniture in the facility must be arranged so that the adult can watch over and quickly find each child no matter where they are.

#### A flexible space

**In small ECS facilities, using furniture that is both safe and movable (such as rolling storage cabinets with locking wheels, storage bins and carts, mobile motor play and make-believe play sets, and portable folding screens, room dividers, whiteboards and tables) creates a flexible space that can be more easily rearranged to accommodate different child groupings.[41]**



At high-quality ECSs, most of the play materials are provided by the ECS for the children to choose from, play with and put away.[xxiii] The play materials should be suitable for children of different levels of development within the group and support their physical/motor, emotional/social, cognitive and language development.

There should be enough play materials for all the children, and a variety of materials should be available. New play materials should be introduced regularly to keep the children interested. The play materials should also reflect cultural diversity and diverse family structures and meet the specific needs of each child.

The play materials that best support children's overall development and inspire their creativity are versatile, meaning they can be used in a variety of ways across different play scenarios and age groups. Building blocks, plastic lids, nesting cups, empty boxes, sand, handkerchiefs, arts and crafts supplies and make-believe play props and costumes are examples of play materials that children can use in various imaginative and inventive ways. On the other hand, children tend to quickly lose interest in toys like model trains, which simply run on the same track over and over and offer limited possibilities for play.

Lastly, ECSs should provide play materials that can be enjoyed by children regardless of their gender and do not perpetuate gender stereotypes, meaning biased generalizations based on gender. The *Les livres et les jouets ont-ils un sexe?* scorecards, created by Québec's Secrétariat à la condition féminine for ECSs, can be used to select neutral materials that meet the diverse needs of young children.




***Ginette is the manager of an ECS, and she wants to make sure that the materials and books provided to the children in her care do not perpetuate stereotypes, particularly gender stereotypes. At her ECS, there are no pink toys "for girls" and blue toys "for boys." The make-believe play areas are designed to appeal to children of all genders, and the children are much more interested in playing in those areas than they were before. Providing toys that are not gender-specific shows the children that they are respected as unique individuals.***

xxiii Section 35 of the ECR states that a permit holder must have, for the children receiving childcare, "games and educational material relevant to the educational program and suitable to the age and number of the children; […] and storage within the reach of the children for games and material."

### 2.3.4 A suitable workspace for the staff

ECSs are workplaces. In order to have a high-quality facility layout and materials, some key elements must also de present for educators, so they have a pleasant and productive workplace, which may include adult-height chairs and sinks, lockers to keep their personal belongings safe, sturdy stepladders, storage space for heavy objects below shoulder height, comfortable places to write, and rocking chairs.

### 2.3.5 Supporting the quality of the facility layout and materials

ECS managers are responsible for acquiring the play materials that the educators decide are most appropriate for the children in their care. Managers can take steps to acquire high-quality materials at a lower cost: for example, they can reach out to resources in their community to find gently used games and toys, arts and crafts supplies and make-believe play props. They also play a primary role in the ECS's design, making key decisions about how the walls should be painted, how the facility should be laid out, how the kitchen should be set up, and so on. Their contribution to the quality of the facility layout and materials is essential.

***ECS manager Jean-Marc and his team are concerned about sustainable development. They performed an environmental assessment of their current practices and modified the facility to make it more energy-efficient. Jean-Marc joined a group for ECS managers who have taken similar initiatives for support and inspiration. He also has access to a library of actions, activities and resources that his ECS can use and an online sustainable development management platform.***

## 2.4 THE QUALITY OF THE EDUCATOR OR HECP'S INTERACTIONS WITH THE PARENTS

[Translation] "Within the ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the quality of the relationship between parents and educators has been increasingly cited as a significant indicator of the quality of the services provided to the child. Empirical research attests that there is a connection: for example, a positive correlation has been found between more frequent parent-educator communication and overall quality of childcare services (Ghazvini and Readdick, 1994).[42]"

The quality of an educator or HECP's interactions with a young child's parents is based on the mutual trust built with them over time. This is especially important when the child first starts going to the ECS, as that is when the child and their family are transitioning to a new environment. To foster positive interactions, the ECS team should show openness to and respect for diverse family and cultural backgrounds and use a variety of communication methods to meet the parents' needs.

The family-centred approach[xxiv] provides several ideas for how educators, HECPs and ECS managers can foster a genuine partnership with parents to support their young children's healthy development. These ideas encourage close collaboration between the adults who look after the children day in and day out. In order to have constructive interactions, caregivers must [Translation] "recognize and respect one another's knowledge and expertise; share information through two-way communication; share power and decision making; acknowledge and respect diversity; and create extended networks of support."

In Chapter 4, we will discuss the five guiding principles of the educational program and go into more detail about educator and HECP interactions with parents and the aspects of quality.

### 2.4.1 Supporting interactions between educators and parents

Making parents feel welcome at the ECS, building a trusting relationship and forming a genuine partnership starts the moment you first have contact with them. ECS managers have a strong influence on how comfortable the parents feel and the opportunities they have to participate in meetings, events and committees. If the managers foster a cooperative relationship with the parents, they can in turn ensure that the relationship between the parents and the educators is positive and constructive. The ECS's practices will naturally be shaped by the managers' expectations regarding the quality of the educators' interactions with parents. If the ECS's high standards are clearly communicated, these expectations can have a very positive impact for families and their young children's development.

Managers also play an important role in informing the parents of the ECS's educational program and the best practices in early childhood development that are followed at the ECS. They are the main point of contact with the parents and must ensure that, among other concerns, they are aware of the academic pressures that may lead some of them to push to ramp up their children's learning and of the adverse effects such pressure can have on children. Managers are valuable allies to educators in their relationships with the parents of the children in their care.

xxiv The "ideas" of the family-centred approach refer to the five principles set out by Keyser in 2006 and outlined in CANTIN, Gilles and Carole MORACHE, *Trousse partenariat : des outils pour l'enseignement de la compétence à établir une relation de partenariat avec les parents en éducation à l'enfance*, Montréal, Université du Québec, 2015, p. 13. That document for educators inspired the content in this new version of the *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* educational program regarding this component of quality and the guiding principle that "ECSs and parents need to be close partners in children's healthy development." The word "ideas" is used in this guide to avoid confusion with the five guiding principles of the educational program.

## How's our ECS doing?



- What steps has our ECS taken to encourage high-quality interactions between the educators or HECPs and the children?
- How do we manage our schedule in a way that lets the children move at their own pace?
- Is our staff comfortable with the work schedule?
- What causes the most stress for the staff and the children on a day-to-day basis?
- What evidence do we have that the children have a wide range of experiences?
- In what ways are the expectations of the parents and/or management aligned with the ECS's educational practices?
- What kind of relationship does the ECS have with community resources that may contribute to the children's development?
- What other organizations and businesses could give the children valuable new experiences?
- How are our routines and transitions structured to serve as meaningful learning opportunities for the children?
- How often are the facility layout and materials reviewed to ensure they meet the children's needs?
- How can the facility layout and materials be changed to better meet the needs of the educators and adults who work at the ECS?
- Does the ECS provide a variety of age-appropriate materials of sufficient quality that do not perpetuate gender stereotypes?
- What physical resources are available to us free of charge?
- Is the facility welcoming, comfortable and aesthetically pleasing?
- How does the ECS team interact with parents to promote each child's development?
- Do families feel welcome at the ECS?
- What kind of opportunities do families have to take part in activities?
- Have we thought of ways to make it easier for parents to participate in meetings with their child's educator and in child development workshops?
- How do we make sure that parents have ample opportunity to talk about their child with the child's main educator?

Chapter

# 03

# The educational intervention process

# Overview

The educational intervention process is the means by which educators and HECPs choose, plan and carry out their educational actions based on their observations, and then assess and adjust their actions. They use this process to support the overall development of each young child at their ECS. The educational intervention process is essential to planning and setting appropriate learning goals in an active learning environment. This process is followed for each of the aspects of quality covered in the previous chapter and is made up of the four following steps.

## Observation

In this step, educators and HECPs get to know the current and emerging preferences, needs, abilities and level of development of each child in their care and of the group as a whole. They use the information they collect to focus and adjust their actions and to feed discussions with the children's parents. They use various tools to keep written records of their observations so they can be more easily analyzed and interpreted. These records are maintained for each individual child so that helpful information can be found quickly, especially if a child has particular needs or traits.

## Planning and organization

In this step, educators and HECPs interpret their observations and use them to plan the most appropriate ways they can support the children's overall development, both in play and in routines and transitions. They also organize their materials and prepare the physical environment so that the time the children spend at the ECS is as pleasant as possible.

## Educational action

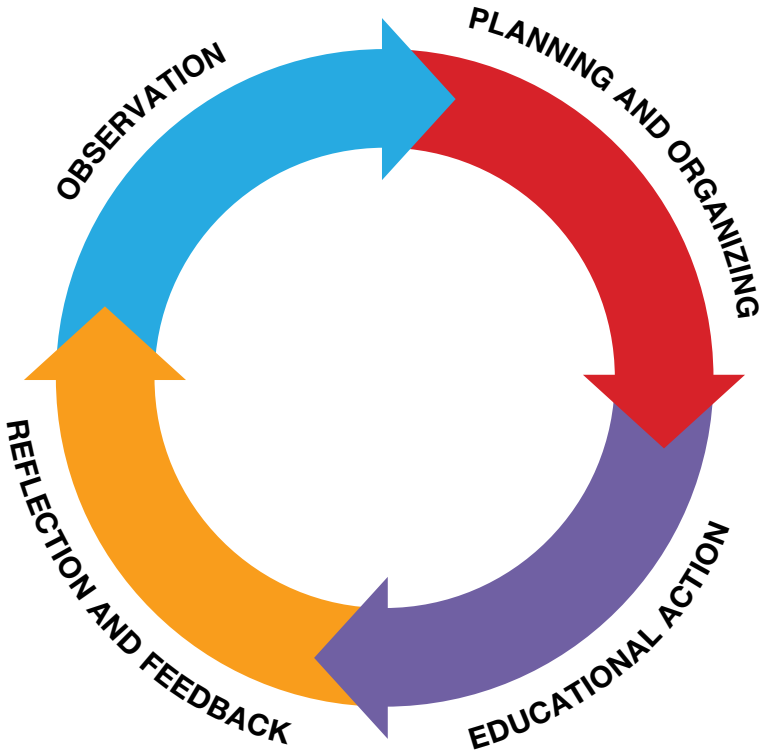
In this step, educators and HECPs take the educational actions they have planned. These educational actions are intentional, meaning they are the result of deliberate decisions made by the educators and HECPs based on their observations and planning.

## Reflection and feedback

In this step, educators and HECPs assess the measures they have taken to ensure the children's overall healthy development. They do this by reflecting critically on the previous steps of the intervention process (observation, planning and organization, educational action) so they can adjust their educational practices if necessary. This step in the process is essential to continuously improving the quality of the educational services provided to children and their families. It is also a way for educators and HECPs to get better at what they do and more effectively meet the needs of young children.

## 3.1 SUPPORTING ACTIVE LEARNING THROUGH THE EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION PROCESS

**Figure 2 – The educational intervention process**




The educational intervention process is critical to promoting active learning in early childhood. Unlike in the school system, where all children in a group are taught an established curriculum from primary school onward, active learning, as previously noted, involves providing guidance that is well suited to the way each individual child learns and develops. Active learning is a form of educational intervention that engages young children in the learning process by focusing on their interests, level of development, strengths and needs.

While it may seem counterintuitive to carefully plan your educational actions while also giving children plenty of freedom, these ideas are easily reconcilable if your educational practices are underpinned by the educational intervention process. In active learning, children have the freedom to decide from the choices they are given. Educators and HECPs use the educational intervention process to ensure that the choices they give the children about their play experiences, activities, transitions and routines engage their interest and foster an enjoyment of learning. When determining which choices to offer the children, educators and HECPs have to take into consideration the level of development of each individual child and of the group as a whole, in every domain of development.

That being said, it is difficult for children to show interest in something they are never exposed to. This is where adult caregivers play a particularly important role in education, by shaping the children's play experiences around their interests and curiosity while ensuring they meet their learning needs.

***Mila, an HECP, uses the educational intervention process with a three-year-old girl to set a learning goal to increase the girl's vocabulary and put her plan into action when she has the opportunity. Her day-to-day work is guided by this plan. She has decided that whenever the girl is curious about something, that is a good opportunity to describe what she has noticed. When the girl is fixated on the neighbour's cat, Mila describes how the cat is moving, and at snack time, she describes the food that the girl is happily enjoying. When the girl is speaking, Mila takes care to pay attention and give her all the time she needs.***

***Mila also uses the educational intervention process to come up with a project-based activity about what ants do when they go underground, inspired by the four-year-olds she overheard excitedly talking about the subject outside. Her goal is to encourage the children to read and write, so she starts off by picking out a book about bugs and asking the children for their questions, comments and suggestions. She provides them with written materials, like non-fiction books about ants. She lets the children guide her teaching, instead of doing activities from ready-made resources that have little information about what the children are actually interested in: what ants do in their underground homes.***

Early childhood development follows a relatively predictable order or sequence, but it is not a linear process. Each child progresses at their own pace. Appropriate support for a young child's development should balance the child's individual needs with the needs of the group.

Thus, in order to give each child what they need to develop in a healthy way, educators and HECPs need to get to know the child well and understand where they are at in their development and the processes at play in that stage of development. They can then plan their educational actions based on what they know. In the last step of the process, reflection and feedback, they verify whether the goals of their learning actions were met and continuously improve their actions.

The purpose of the educational intervention process is to support children's development and ensure their health and safety on a day-to-day basis. It is not to correct the children's behaviour.[xxv] "Intervention" is used here in the broad, non-specialized sense of the word.

The educational intervention process is made up of several steps that repeat. Depending on the situation, it can take a few minutes or several days to go through the process. When an educator or HECP pays attention to the children in their care and is there to provide support during playtime, routines and transitions, they are observing the children. They analyze their observations and use them to plan their educational actions around a learning goal; if the children are in the middle of make-believe play, the educator or HECP could select materials that the children can use to make their play more complex (planning and organization), make these materials available to the children at the right moment (educational action), and assess the impact of their

xxv This caveat is taken from phase 3 (educational intervention) of the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance's BRIO campaign for professional development on the educational program.

educational action on the children's play experience (reflection and feedback). Their assessment will raise new questions or concerns, and the educational intervention process will start all over again.

The educational intervention process can be deployed quickly in the moment, but it can also be planned out over a longer time frame. For example, an adult may want to ensure that the infants in their care are consistently sharing their toys. They can identify the children's strengths and needs in relation to this goal and use this information to plan their educational action.

The educator or HECP will decide on the best times to observe how each individual child interacts with others. They will also decide which tools they need to keep a record of this information. The observation period may last for several days if the educator or HECP wants to pay close attention to how the children act in different play situations. They will analyze the behaviour they observe in the children and interpret the results of their observations.

Based on their interpretation, they will then plan how they will interact with Sandrine to develop, for example, her ability to use a word or gesture to express that she wants to use a toy that another child is already playing with. They will also plan how they will interact with Jérémie, who throws a tantrum anytime someone suggests sharing with him, so he can learn how to better negotiate with the other children and express his feelings. Interpreting their results may lead them to reconsider how they organize their materials, and they may decide to borrow some particularly popular toys from another group so they have duplicates for the children in their care to play with. They could read an interactive story that teaches the children what "taking turns" is all about. They could try using a timer or hourglass. Finally, in the reflection and feedback step, they will assess each educational action they took to see which ones were most helpful.

The educational intervention process does not always start at the observation step. It may start when the educator or HECP is planning and organizing experiences for the children or carrying out an educational action. It is also not uncommon for it to start at the reflection and feedback step, when questions and concerns usually come up.

The educational intervention process is meant to support the quality of ECSs and the well-being and development of the children in their care. It also provides a tangible framework for addressing the diverse and evolving needs of young children and their families in a professional way.



## 3.2 OBSERVATION

Observation is a crucial part of an educator or HECP's work. It is not an easy task, but educators and HECPs who do it find it essential for defining appropriate educational actions and learning goals for each child and group of children. Observation requires educators and HECPs to think critically about their perceptions of the children in their care and their families, and good planning is needed to fit it in among their other duties. They may need to sometimes adjust the schedule for the day so they have the time they need to observe the children. In a high-quality ECS, observation is an ongoing practice.

### 3.2.1 The power of observation

The purpose of observation is to get answers to the questions that come up for an educator or HECP when they interact with the young children in their care. These questions will always be changing[43]: they will become more specific as the educator or HECP gets to know the child and the group in their care better, and they will change as the child progresses in their development. The information gathered at the observation stage will then feed into the planning process.

The educator or HECP's observations give them the knowledge they need to adapt their interactions to meet the needs of each child, as well as to set learning goals that will help the children integrate into group life and support their learning.

The areas of focus in the observation stage fall into the four aspects of quality outlined in the previous chapter. Observation helps educators and HECPs get to know the children in their care well. It can be used to identify potential challenges that the children are having and understand when and where these issues arise. It helps ensure that the facility layout and the materials available to the children are appropriate and safe and that they are given a variety of interesting experiences. Educators and HECPs also use observation to get a sense of the dynamics within the group, meaning the roles that each child plays and how the children interact with each other. They think about their own interactions with the children and the reactions they get to their educational actions. Observation also helps educators and HECPs maintain a dialogue with parents that is focused on the child and based on facts about their interactions rather than feelings.

Observation should not be confused with supervision. Educators and HECPs supervise the children in their care throughout the entire day so they can ensure the children's safety and immediately intervene when the situation calls for it.[44] Observation, on the other hand, is meant to monitor the children's progress and plan developmentally appropriate experiences for each child.

### 3.2.2 The observation process

Sometimes an educator or HECP can observe the children in their care without intervening because another adult, such as an intern, is there to do so. However, it is more common for the adult in charge to do the observing.

In order to determine the question they want to find answers to, educators and HECPs can narrow the focus of their observation to specific ideas. Here are some examples of questions they can ask themselves to define the goal of their observation:

- Who? Which infant in my group is at a high enough stage of physical and motor development to bring their toys back in after playing outside (with a bit of help)?
- What? Which rules and instructions create a more harmonious experience for the children in my care? Which ones are unnecessary? What do the children talk about and what are they interested in?
- When? At what point during the day is Léonie able to concentrate the best?
- Where? In which play areas do the children engage in the most active play? What areas could be rearranged to encourage more active play?
- How many/much? How many times does Joseph act like this during the day?
- How? How is this child, who has a hearing disability, able to engage in make-believe play with the other children in the group?

To make observation part of your daily practice, it is a good idea to plan who and what will be the focus of the observation and when and where it will take place. Once this is decided, you can choose the best tools to use to capture the information you learn. Like for the educational intervention process as a whole, observation can be a spontaneous activity.

There are many ways to organize your observation notes: notebooks, anecdotal records, logbooks, daily reports, observation charts, infant activity logs, topic-specific observation sheets, etc. The tool you choose depends on the child's age, the type of observation being made and the goals of the observation, as well as your personal preference.

Some observation tools are better than others for capturing the nuances of the situations described. For example, a checklist can be rather limiting in that it does not provide space to record the subtleties of what you have observed, but you can still round out the completed checklist with written comments on the side.

#### Anecdotal records

**Anecdotal records are an example of an open-ended observation tool. The educator or HECP provides a specific and concise description of the observable facts of a situation, such as the behaviours that demonstrate the child's skills, efforts and challenges, as well as the context of the child's actions. Anecdotal records are also used to keep notes about particular events or unusual activities.**



***To determine eight-month-old Emma's level of physical and motor development, Alexandra observes her gross motor skills: for example, the movements she does when sitting, how she moves herself toward an object and how she handles the object in that position. At snack time, she can take a closer look at Emma's fine motor skills, such as when she grasps food using her thumb and index finger.***

***When three-year-old Charly starts attending the ECS, Alexandra decides to observe the child for several days in order to get a better idea of his interests. She needs an observation tool she can use to write down which play areas, materials and books Charly chooses and the indoor and outdoor activities he takes part in as it happens. She may also want to record how much time Charly spends on each activity and the context surrounding his decision (what time of day it was, whether his peers were there, etc.).***

To keep their observations as objective as possible, educators and HECPs should only record the children's behaviours; their observable actions or reactions that can be measured in terms of frequency.[45]

People see the world through filters that can colour the way they view children, such as prejudice based on gender, cultural origin or socio-economic background. Such biases can be mitigated by questioning your own perceptions and sticking to the facts of what you are observing. The humanistic school of psychology, described briefly in Chapter 1, sees people as continually evolving. Thinking about children this way can help you observe them with respect, an open mind and no value judgment.

In addition to the data you gather through observation, you can gain insight from your interactions with the children's parents and from the often spontaneous answers that the children give to questions they are asked.

You may also want to complement your observation notes with photos and videos of the children in action (with their parents' permission) and samples of their work, such as their drawings, modelling clay sculptures and building projects. This type of documentation provides evidence of the children's learning process that can be discussed with the children and shared with their parents. It is a useful method for planning meaningful learning experiences with children and celebrating their progress.[xxvi]

Contextual information is important for analyzing and interpreting observational data. Describing when a behaviour occurred (time, date, time of year), the circumstances (location, materials, which peers and adults were present, etc.), what happened before and after, and the consequences of the behaviour will help you make sense of what you observed.[46]

xxvi Documentation is central to the Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasizes children's active learning.

### Clearly written observations

**Observations should always be clearly written so they can be easily understood when you or another person refers to them later.**

Contextual information can be valuable when you need to decide on effective, targeted interventions to use. If you want to change a child's behaviour, for example, if they are biting others, understanding context can help you see when exactly previous incidents have occurred, which you can use to plan and implement strategies to ease the discomfort that the child is expressing. For example, you could suggest other ways they can get what they want, adjust the schedule for the day, or make the play area bigger.



## Analyzing and interpreting observations

Simply collecting observational data is not enough to move on to the planning and organization step of the educational intervention process. The data must be analyzed and interpreted in order to understand what they mean.

Analysis is the process of studying a set of observations in order to break them down into smaller parts so they can be explained. It is a good idea to first look at all the data gathered and separate objective facts (e.g., "Alice played by herself for all of morning playtime") from judgments that should be reframed or disregarded (e.g., "Alice was not very sociable this morning").

After that, the observations can be sorted into groups based on what information is needed to answer the original question. For example, observations could be sorted[47]:

- By category or topic: For three-year-old Charly, this could be the main developmental domains that he explores when playing, what he experiences and learns through play, how much time he spends in different play areas, etc.
- By similarities and differences: Which games Charly is most and least drawn to, which children he usually plays with and which children he rarely or never plays with, which developmental domains are or are not nurtured, which games Charly plays for several minutes at a time and which ones he loses interest in quickly, etc.
- By the antecedents and consequences of a behaviour: The context surrounding Charly's play decisions (such as which children are already in the play area and what materials are available), Charly's post-playtime remarks, etc.

Based on your analysis, you can then interpret your observations. Using all the clues uncovered in your analysis, you can get a better understanding of the children's experiences and think about what you can do to enhance their learning and ensure their well-being. For example, you might look at which games and activities Charly spends the most time on and think that they are closely related to his current interests and developmental needs. Knowing which key developmental indicators[xxvii] he is practicing will help you determine his level of development within a particular domain. In some cases, it is worth verifying your interpretation by drawing connections between the data from your observations and information you receive about the child from their parents or other adult caregivers at the ECS.

The literature on early childhood development can help you clearly identify and understand a situation so that you can interpret it correctly. Studying theory can also help you think ahead to what a child will be learning next, so you can plan and organize the most appropriate educational actions to support them. In recent years, early childhood developmental continua have been created so educators and HECPs can set positively challenging learning goals for each child in their care based on appropriate expectations.

xxvii The HighScope educational program identifies a number of experiences in which young children naturally engage in every developmental domain, known as "key developmental indicators."

## 3.3 PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION

Educators and HECPs draw on their observations and their ECS's educational program guidelines to plan the educational actions they take on a day-to-day basis.

At the planning step, educators and HECPs set learning goals to support the unique learning needs of the children in their care, taking into consideration each child's preferences, natural sense of curiosity and level of development, based on the educator or HECP's analysis of their observations. This inclusive approach makes it possible for every child, including children who have particular needs or disabilities, to engage in activities in ways that are appropriate to their abilities, make them feel engaged and motivated to learn, and help build their self-confidence.

In an active learning environment, planning cannot be limited to organizing a number of thematic activities. Instead, the adult directly responsible for a group of children should plan their activities shortly beforehand and adjust their plan from day-to-day. The learning goals in their plan should primarily be decided on based on their interpretation of the observational data collected in the previous step of the educational intervention process.

The facility layout also requires planning and organization. Doing so guides the educators' and HECPs' interactions with the children and enables them to make decisions that will help them build partnerships based on mutual trust with each of the children's families. Proper planning and organization make it easier to manage each day as it unfolds and create smooth transitions between activities. Preparing the materials and the experiences that the children will have ahead of time will avoid unnecessary waiting and lets the adult be available to interact with the children. Groups of older children can help out with the preparation, which enhances their learning and gives them an opportunity to practice their planning skills.

Ideally, early planning should be flexible enough to easily take advantage of the unexpected developments that will undoubtedly arise (the children showing great interest in an activity and wanting to keep doing it, weather changes, a new child joining the group, etc.) and seize any learning opportunities that may present themselves.

***[Translation] "After seeing Félix and Tania playing with marbles, Nathalie decided to bring them marbles of assorted sizes and colours, which prompted the children to spontaneously sort them.[48]" Nathalie also planned to ask them how they were going to sort the new marbles. This shows how in addition to preparing materials that the children showed an interest in and that met their developmental needs, she was prepared to engage the children in a discussion to support and complexify their play experience if necessary.***



## 3.4 EDUCATIONAL ACTION

The third step in the educational intervention process is to implement the decisions made in the planning and organization steps. Like the previous steps, the educational action step pertains to the educators' and HECPs' interactions with the children and their parents, the way the facility and materials are set up, and the experiences that the children have.

As discussed in Chapter 2, educators' and HECPs' interactions with the children in their care serve to foster a positive environment, help the children integrate into group life, and support the learning of each individual child and the group as a whole, based on learning goals set in the planning stage. Educators and HECPs use a democratic teaching style to interact with the children, which helps the children feel emotionally safe, be actively engaged in their learning and feel a sense of belonging within the group. Interacting with children in this way is central to an educator or HECP's educational actions, which are based on their knowledge of the children in their care and the stages of early childhood development.

Some examples of educational actions that could be taken in interactions: The adult in charge could make sure to have some one-on-one time with every child in their care in order to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with them (emotional support). They can introduce a new procedure, such as assigning responsibilities to each child in the group, to build their sense of independence (integration into group life). They can also take actions that address the developmental needs of all of the children in the group, subgroups of children, or individual children (instructional support). The adult in charge can take the planned educational actions to support the children's learning, which could include asking questions and making remarks to an infant showing interest in an illustration, helping a subgroup of children find a solution to advance their play, or using more complex words when interacting with the group.

For the facility layout and materials, the adult in charge may take the educational action of providing new materials to the children: for example, they could add brightly coloured scarves for them to throw and grab, or swap out some of the toys in the make-believe

play area for fruit and vegetable shop-themed materials to encourage discussions of healthy eating. They could rearrange the facility around a particular learning goal: for example, they could set up an area where children can go if they need some quiet time, or make some room for a creative dance area.

The educator or HECP can also take educational action on the experiences that the children have. For example, they could help individual children reflect on their experiences in the play areas, focusing particularly on the concept of time. They could show the children new materials they have added to the make-believe play area or explain a new activity to them, encourage the children to look at objects through a magnifying glass, and interact with them while they do the activity.

Educational action based on observation and planning is highly likely to align with the children's needs, strengths and preferences, because it is done conscientiously and deliberately. Everyone in the early childhood field has their own personal traits, interests and concerns. An educator with an interest in the arts or physical activity will likely have many ideas about how to engage children in their area of interest, and the children will benefit greatly as a result. However, they should be careful not to neglect other, equally essential areas of development. Using the educational intervention process to think about their educational practices can help educators and HECPs avoid this trap.

## 3.5 REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

The fourth and final step in the educational intervention process is reflection and feedback, in which educators and HECPs take stock of the educational actions they have taken. This is also an opportunity to see whether their observations were accurate, and their planning and organization was appropriate.

The reflection and feedback step is critical to ensuring that young children and their families receive quality educational services, as it is in this step that educators and HECPs assess their practices and determine which educational actions are working and should be maintained, which ones have not produced the desired results and should be modified or eliminated, and whether any new actions need to be implemented.

In this step, educators and HECPs take some time to think back on and describe the educational actions they took and how they impacted the children involved. They examine their thoughts and feelings about what happened and weigh the pros and cons of their educational actions. They identify what they could have done differently to achieve a better outcome and what they should do if a similar situation arises in the future.[xxviii, 49]

The reflection and feedback step encourages educators and HECPs to critically assess their reactions, automatic reflexes and spontaneous responses, because when you work in education, the biggest tool in your toolkit is *you*. For example, if you want to properly help a young child expand their language skills, you need to be patient, let them speak and listen to them. Depending on their personality and experience, one educator or HECP may find this easy to do, while another will have to make a special effort to let the child speak at their own pace and listen to them until they are finished.

Questions like the following can help you begin the reflection and feedback process. Each situation will raise different questions:

- How were the educational actions I took based on my observations consistent with the learning goals I set?

xxviii These considerations are based on Gibbs' (1988) model of reflective practice.

- Did the experiences and materials I gave the children help them gain knowledge or acquire new skills? If so, what/which ones?
- Which interactions helped each child build a meaningful relationship with me? Which of my interactions with the children helped them feel a greater sense of belonging to the group and to the ECS?
- Which experiences at the ECS and play materials were developmentally appropriate for the child, subgroup of children or entire group of children in question? Did they align with their interests? Did they help the child(ren) nurture multiple developmental domains? Did they give the children opportunities for enrichment?
- Did the children express new interests, ask questions or show curiosity about something? What did I do differently in response?
- How could I make this play situation go more smoothly?
- Was everyone in a positive state of mind during the activity? Was there any conflict between the children? How was it resolved? Which children were involved? How can some of these conflicts be prevented?
- How can I build on what we just did to enrich the children's experiences in the days ahead?
- Which spontaneous reactions do I need to temper so I can apply the principles of my ECS's educational program to real-life situations?
- What documents should I look at to enhance my educational actions (on conflict resolution, emotional regulation in children, introductory reading and writing activities for three-year-olds or mixed-aged groups, etc.) or deepen my understanding of child development?
- How did my attitude, presence and actions positively impact how a typically difficult transition went?

As previously noted, the reflection and feedback process will raise questions that can be targeted to guide new observations and take the most suitable educational actions. This step in the educational intervention process therefore gives educators and HECPs the opportunity to assess and adjust the set of factors that influence the well-being and development of each individual child and of the group as a whole.

The reflection and feedback process is the step in which the educator or HECP's plans for interacting with a child who has a disability and integrating them into the ECS are reviewed and adjusted. It is also the step in which they think of ways they can give the child's parents the support they need to get a recognized professional to perform an assessment that will give them a better understanding of some of the child's needs and characteristics, if they have not already done so.

An outside specialist can give the child's parents and the ECS valuable advice for supporting the child's development and integration into group life. The specialist can also give their opinion and recommendations so the ECS can apply for an additional allowance to help the child integrate into the ECS, if the child is likely to face obstacles in doing so.

While educators and HECPs can do the reflection and feedback step on their own, it will be more effective if they involve their pedagogical support officer or colleagues. A collaborative reflection and feedback process will help ensure that the educational interventions used with the children are consistent, not only between staff working different shifts at the ECS, but also between all ECS groups. The ECS's educational actions will be better coordinated as a result.[50]

**Feedback: A valuable tool for continuously improving your practices**

[Translation] "[T]o reflect means to think critically […].[51]"

Feedback is [Translation] "information about a past action or situation that is used to control, prevent or correct the action or situation, either immediately or in the future.[52]"



## 3.6 HOW THE EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION PROCESS HELPS WITH KEEPING CHILDREN'S EDUCATION RECORDS

It is a good idea for educators and HECPs to hold onto the information they collect about their observations of each child, their analysis and interpretation, and the educational actions they take to better meet the child's needs. Among other things, this information can be used to keep the child's education record, as prescribed by the ECA. The education record is a means of communication that serves to help parents keep track of their child's development, help educators and HECPs detect when the child may be having difficulties, and help the child make successful transitions, including into the school system.[xxix]

xxix Section 57.1 of the ECA states that an "educational childcare providers must keep an education record for each child to whom they provide childcare.

Among other things, education records include information concerning the child's development, information allowing better early detection of any difficulties the child may encounter and information facilitating the child's transition into the school system.

No information contained in the record may be communicated to a third party without the consent of the parent of the child concerned, except in the case of a home educational childcare coordinating office acting within the scope of its functions or an inspector authorized under section 72. The record is given to the parent when the childcare services are no longer required.

The Government determines, by regulation, the elements comprising the education record, the medium to be used and the standards for keeping, using, storing, reproducing and communicating the information it contains."

## 3.7 SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION PROCESS

The educational intervention process should be recognized as an ECS-specific skill. ECS managers and educators share responsibility for putting the process into action with every group of children in their care.

Accordingly, they can arrange the educators' duties and, in some cases, group the children together during particular shifts in a way that makes it easier for the educators to observe, plan and organize and to take educational actions that support the children in their play. They can also set aside regular times for reflection and feedback. Some tasks may need to be modified to allow more time for these steps.

The steps of the educational intervention process should be included in the agenda for team meetings so that team members can discuss their successes and the challenges they are facing in implementing the process. In informal discussions about the children, managers and staff can share their observations, the activities they have introduced in response, and their assessment.

Educators and HECPs can also schedule the day so there is time for each step in the process and use it to talk about their work with the children's parents.

### How's our ECS doing?



- Is the educational intervention process being implemented? What situations demonstrate this? What are the obstacles? What would make it easier to implement the process consistently at our ECS?
- How much importance is given to observation of the children? How do we arrange our practices to make observation possible? How is the observational data recorded? At what point do we stop observing and start interpreting the data?
- What evidence do we have that we use the observational data to improve our interventions with each individual child and the group as a whole?
- Is our planning based on predetermined themes and activities, or does it take into account the children's personal interests, needs and sense of agency?
- Is the reflection and feedback step used to continuously improve the quality of education?
- How do internal team discussions contribute to the reflection and feedback on the educational actions that are taken?

Chapter

# 04

# Guiding principles

# Overview

The five guiding principles of the educational program are based on the theory presented in Chapter 1. These principles are followed with respect to the aspects of quality of education (see Chapter 2) and applied through the educational intervention process (see Chapter 3).

All five guiding principles are of equal importance. The first principle concerns the collaborative relationship between an ECS and a child's parents. The four other principles relate more specifically to early childhood development and the way children learn.

## ECSs and parents need to be close partners in children's healthy development

Supporting a young child's overall development is a joint effort between the parents and the educators or HECPs and, if applicable, the directors and other ECS staff. This partnership, based on mutual trust, offers the child reassurance and helps them build a meaningful emotional relationship with the adults who take care of them in their parents' absence. A collaborative relationship also makes it possible to adapt the educator or HECP's interventions to each child in an ECS group.

## Every child is unique

Having a thorough understanding of each child in their care and how they are developing enables the adult to recognize and respect each child's unique characteristics, rate of development, interests and needs.

## Children are the main actors of their development

A young child is most likely to achieve their full potential when they are the main actor of their development and can initiate play, make suggestions that are taken into account at the ECS, and take part in decision making.

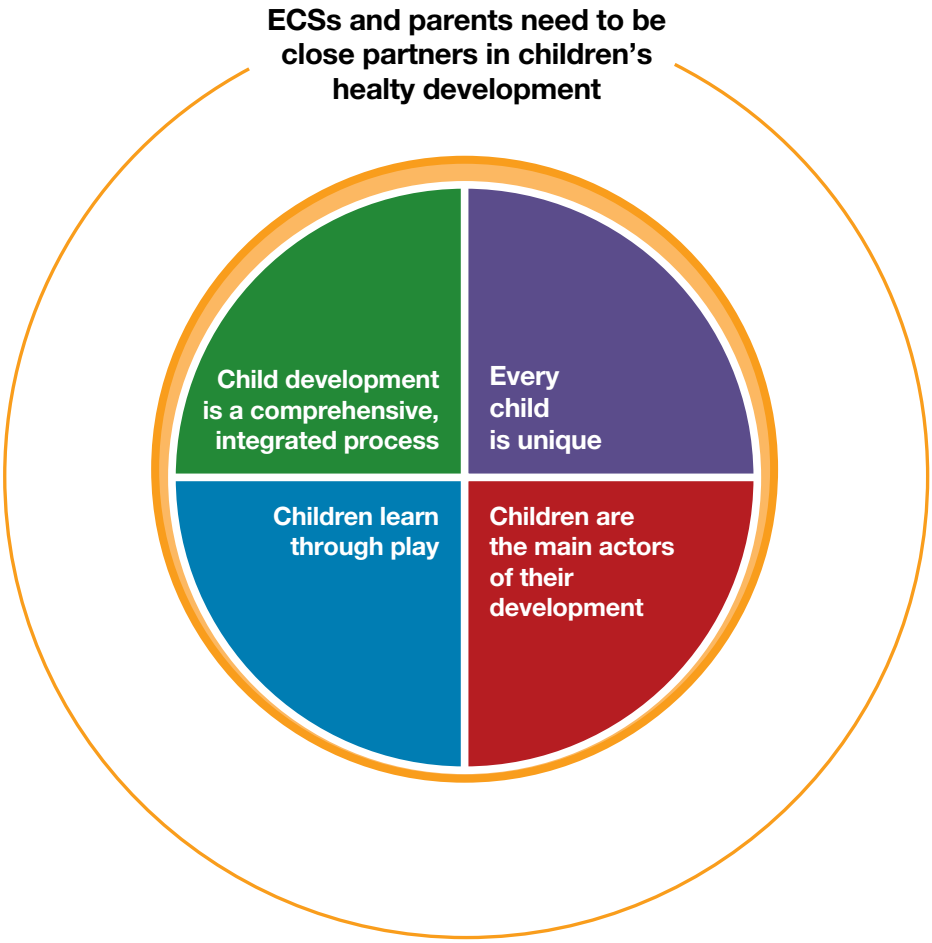
## Children learn through play

Play is the way children learn and develop. When educators and HECPs help children harness the full potential of the play they initiate, they are supporting the children's overall development.

## Child development is a comprehensive, integrated process

A young child's development is a comprehensive process that involves all developmental domains at the same time (physical/motor, language, social/emotional, cognitive). All of these domains interact and come together to form a whole: the child.[53]

**Figure 3 – The guiding principles**




## 4.1 ECSs AND PARENTS NEED TO BE CLOSE PARTNERS IN CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Given its importance, we will begin this chapter on the guiding principles of the educational program by discussing the partnership between ECSs and parents. The other principles require the valuable contribution of parents in order to be fully applied.

[Translation] "A partnership is a joint effort by the professional and the family to work toward common goals. This relationship requires shared decision making and responsibility, mutual trust and respect (Dunst, Trivette and Snyder, 2000). Partnership fosters a high-quality parent-professional relationship (Dunst et al., 2007).[54]" The trust needed for this kind of relationship is built gradually over time.

Research has shown that collaboration between ECSs and parents has a positive outcome for parents, educators and HECPs, and children.[55]

Parents are able to confidently leave their child with an external caregiver if they see them as a critical partner in their child's education. When asked about their child, they will provide information such as what they are like, what is important to them, what they are into, and what makes them feel scared and unsafe. Over time, as they gain

greater trust in the ECS staff and managers, they may feel more comfortable describing their family routines and experiences, which will help the ECS adapt its interventions to the child.

A positive, constructive relationship with a child's parents supports educators' and HECPs' interactions with the child, which increases their confidence in their work and job satisfaction. Talking to parents allows them to have a better knowledge of what each child are doing when they are not at the daycare, making it easier to implement consistent interventions.

If specific communication strategies are needed with a child, the ECS and the parents can work together to coordinate their strategies, which reinforces the child's learning and makes it easier for the adults to communicate with them.

The way the ECS responds to the young child's needs benefits from the parents' contributions. Their partnership helps the child feel safe with the caregivers at the ECS when their parents are not there. It creates an emotional environment that is conducive to learning and provides a model of a healthy relationship.[56]

***Toilet training, for example, requires coordination between the young child's home and the ECS in order to make it a constructive experience. The decision to start toilet training must be mutually agreed upon by the parents and the educator or HECP. The right time to start toilet training depends on the child's level of physical and psychological maturity and the adults' ability to support the learning process. Without this collaboration and mutual understanding that gives primary consideration to the family's limitations, but also to the ECS's limitations, it is difficult to be respectful of the child and their needs.***

### ECSs: Making the first move

A partnership between an educator or HECP and parents should not be forced.[57] [Translation] "The educator [or HECP] is the one who sets the stage for a trusting, collaborative relationship with each family.[58]" The ECS directors play a major role in creating the conditions for this relationship to develop by making key decisions, showing openness and making families feel welcome, showing confidence in their educators, and helping them build the skills they need to be partners to parents.



### 4.1.1 Parents: A child's first educators

When a young child enters an ECS's program, they are also bringing their parents, grandparents and extended family into the fold. These are the most important people in the young child's life, and they sometimes play a central role in their education. Their beliefs and behaviours directly shape the child's experience and influence their development.[59]

The roles of parents and of responsible adults at ECSs are similar in many ways, as both are required to provide care, ensure the child's health and safety and support their overall development within the framework of a meaningful relationship. However, the educator or HECP's relationship with the child is a professional one. They are responsible for the child for a limited amount of time, and their responsibilities are shared with other adults, especially at ECS facilities. Unlike parents, while educators and HECPs have to be engaged with the children, they also have to maintain a certain emotional distance. They are impartial and avoid discrimination in their interactions with the children. As well, in ECSs, their interactions are organized around learning goals and take place in a group setting.[60]

Parents, on the other hand, are responsible for their child every single day and on a long-term basis. They interact with the child one-on-one, usually spontaneously, and are not required to be impartial, and their special bond with their child is typically emotionally intense.

To maintain a professional relationship with parents, educators and HECPs need to recognize the limitations of their role and take the necessary action to make the child's education a common project.

[Translation] "The way educators [and HECPs] see children's parents […] greatly influences the nature of their relationships with the children's families.[61]" The assumptions listed below are consistent with the humanistic perspective underpinning this program and should be adopted at ECSs. Educators and HECPs may find that they want others to see them this way as well.

1. All people are basically good.
2. All people have strengths.
3. All people have different but equally important skills, abilities and knowledge.
4. All people need support and encouragement.
5. All families have hopes, dreams and wishes for their children.
6. Families are resourceful, but all families do not have equal access to resources.
7. Families should be assisted in ways that help them maintain their dignity and hope.
8. Families should be equal partners in the relationship with service providers.[xxx]

xxx These are the eight assumptions behind Iowa's Early ACCESS program, as reported by Keyser (2006) and used by Gilles Cantin, Carole Morache et al. (2015) to introduce the family-centred approach framework on page 14 of *Trousse partenariat*.

It is very important that parents feel welcome at the ECS, and this depends primarily on the reception they receive from every member of the ECS's staff and its directors. Parents can access the premises of their child's ECS at any time[xxxi] , which helps build their trust in the ECS. However, ECSs can ask parents for their cooperation, not to limit their access to the premises, but to prevent them from distracting the children at sensitive times like naptime and mealtime.

### 4.1.2 Discussing children's active learning and play with their parents

Talking to a child's parents gives them and the educator or HECP a shared understanding of the care that the child receives at the ECS and at home, their physical condition and their mood. Play, the learning that play offers and the child's development should be included in these discussions. When parents are aware of the critical importance of play activities in early childhood and what kind of support their child receives in play, they can understand the value of the educator's or HECP's educational interventions.

Educational approaches based on active learning focus more on the learning process than the outcome. Let's say a child draws a picture, and they have a lively conversation with the educator about what they learned while drawing it. The educator helps them think back on the steps they followed to produce the drawing and asks them about the colours and shapes they used. She also shows the child the photos she took of them while they were drawing. She will probably be eager to put the drawing the child is so proud of on display. What the educator does not do when following these kinds of educational approaches, however, is give the child step-by-step instructions she came up with to replicate something that the child is not able to draw yet. Instead, her practice places a strong emphasis on the child's agency, rhythm and sense of play.

This type of information is essential to share with parents who are not aware of the benefits of active learning for their child's development. It is important to talk to them about the principles of the educational program and the many types of learning



xxxi Under section 98 of the ECR, "an educational childcare provider must allow the parent of a child to have access at all times to the childcare premises or residence, as the case may be, when the child is present."

experiences that the children have at the ECS, including play. Once the parents understand this, they are better equipped to share information that educators and HECPs can use to interact with the child. Parents who are encouraged to be involved in their child's development are highly likely to remain involved during their future schooling, which is a determinant of academic success.

Parents can also be informed that the interventions made based on the guidelines of the *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* educational program are consistent with the interventions made under the preschool education program for four- and five-year-olds in Québec schools.

***The educators now post a short description at the end of the afternoon of what happened while the children were playing: the questions that came up, the topics that grabbed their interest, the problems they encountered and the solutions they found. This information can often be a conversation starter for parents with their children and inspire them to ask questions and make suggestions to the educators.***

### 4.1.3 Key ideas for fostering collaboration with parents

The key ideas to implement in order to foster a collaborative relationship between ECSs and parents are generally agreed upon, but ECSs should pay special attention to them on an ongoing basis so they can be put into action day in and day out. These ideas are drawn from the family-centred approach.[62]



## Recognize one another's knowledge and expertise

[Translation] "In the family-centred approach, parents and educators are partners who recognize each other's expertise and each contribute their own complementary knowledge to ensure the child is receiving proper care (Cantin, 2008).[63]" Parents are the experts on their children. Educators and HECPs should use the essential information that the parents bring to the table to ensure the child's needs are met in their care.

If the child attending the ECS has particular needs, it is especially important for parents and educators/HECPs to recognize each other's knowledge and expertise in order to ensure that the care the child receives is consistent between their home and the ECS and focuses on their strengths.

ECS staff and HECPs can show parents that they recognize their expertise by being open and accepting of the family's experiences, being genuinely interested, and treating them with respect, dignity, honesty and empathy. This principle highlights how mutual trust is essential to true collaboration. ECSs are always concerned about the trust that parents have in their educators or HECP. But are parents likewise concerned about the trust that educators and HECPs have in them?

To answer this question, the ECS team or HECP can compare the perceptions of parents that they currently hold with the perceptions that would be better to hold for the well-being of the young children in their care. Thinking about it this way can help them adopt the values (respect, trust, openness, etc.) and attitudes they need to build a relationship based on trust, which will be mutually rewarding for the parents and the ECS.

Educators and HECPs can also help parents cultivate their parenting skills. Parents often see educators and HECPs as people they can go to for input on some aspect of their child's development.

***Manon manages a daycare centre. She decided to approach the idea of working in collaboration with parents by having the educators at her ECS talk about their experiences as mothers. Through their discussions, her team was able to intimately understand the importance of recognizing and drawing on parents' expertise. By drawing on their experience as the experts on their own children, rather than their experience as educators, her staff realized how much the parents' knowledge could bring to their interventions at the ECS.***

## Share information through two-way communication

Research shows that the frequency of back-and-forth discussions and communications between parents and ECSs is associated with benefits for children and their families. Two-way communication enhances the quality of educators' and HECPs' interventions with children, as they are more sensitive to the children's needs and are able to provide greater support. As explained in Chapter 3 on the educational intervention process, conversations with parents can help educators or HECPs decide what to focus on in their observations, which play materials to make available, which activities to organize, which interventions will make the child feel safe at the ECS, and how they can encourage the children to take turns speaking during group discussions, to name some examples. Researchers have also found parents come away from these conversations showing more respect for their child and providing more cognitive

stimulation. Hearing about how their child is progressing in their development and learning on a regular basis likely contributes to these positive effects. [Translation] "Furthermore, parents feel more confident in their abilities and supported in their role as parents.[64]"

If a child has particular needs or a disability, these discussions can also provide an opportunity to share best practices from professionals in the health and social services network who work with the child.

Instead of using the same one-on-one communication strategy with every family, educators and HECPs are advised to find the best way to communicate with each child's parents.[65] For some parents, communicating through a daily agenda might work well, while others will not find the time to read it or write in it and would prefer to consistently speak face-to-face at the beginning or end of the day, discuss through email or schedule a phone meeting. One-on-one communication regarding basic care, play and overall development are important for the child, but as we have seen, they are important for the parents and educators/HECPs as well.

In addition to one-on-one communication, group communication lets all the parents know what experiences their children are having at the ECS. This information is displayed on a bulletin board during group meetings or shared through different kinds of messages. Many parents appreciate receiving this information in the form of documentation such as photos of the children in action and their creations with comments from the educator or HECP, as discussed in Chapter 3 on the educational intervention process.

It is also a good idea to provide an avenue for parents to send out their own group communications, such as birth announcements and invitations to activities they are organizing that may be of interest to other families.

These strategies allow for two-way communication if the parents and educators or HECPs are both able to share their ideas and comments, ask questions and suggest solutions. The context in which these strategies are used must be taken into account to make it easy for the parents to share information, especially if confidential information needs to be disclosed. Certain decisions about the facility layout and work schedules, for example, can be made to facilitate two-way communication between parents and educators or HECPs at the ECS.[66]

***An ECS manager and his team prepared a questionnaire to help new children become more easily integrated into their facility. Depending on the family, the questionnaire is filled out either during a meeting at the ECS or at home, and the educator will sometimes fill out the questionnaire during a discussion with the family. The team decided to add a few questions about the parents' expectations of the educator and the ECS in order to get to know them better, address their needs and encourage two-way communication.***



## Share power and decision making

With this idea, parents and ECSs are encouraged to [Translation] “work together, in a mutually respectful manner, to find the best ways to support the child that recognize the specific nature of their collective environment and home environment.[67]”

The child stands to benefit the most from their parents and the ECS team sharing power, as the attitudes and interventions of their adult caregivers, both at home and at the ECS, will be more tailored and consistent. When parents and educators or HECPs share power, they are able to discuss their perceptions, methods and values, which helps them deepen their thinking and develop their skills.

Power and decision making can be shared on an individual basis to identify appropriate intervention strategies for each child, but can also be shared with the group as a whole. Parents can sit on committees, be invited to share their input in a variety of ways, and take part in ECS activities.

## Acknowledge and respect diversity

With this fourth idea, educators and HECPs are [Translation] “encouraged to show acceptance and respect for the values and customs of all families.[68]” ECSs welcome many different types of families, from nuclear families, separated families and stepfamilies to LGBT families and lone-parent families. Some are immigrants or the descendants of people who immigrated from different parts of the world at various points in time. Their socio-economic and socio-cultural diversity is both a gift and a challenge for ECSs.

### A welcoming place for children…and families

**[Translation] “ECSs are a welcoming place for many children of newcomer families in Québec. They help both children and parents adapt and integrate into Québec society. […] They are where [some] make their first connections with people in their new home and other children of diverse ethnic and social backgrounds.[69]”**

## Family diversity in Québec

In Québec in 2016:

- 64% of families with minor children were "intact" families, meaning that the children live with both parents (whether biological or adoptive).
- 25% of families with minor children were lone-parent families. Of those families, 76% were headed by lone women and 24% were headed by lone men.
- 11% of families with minor children were stepfamilies.
- 0.2% of families with minor children were LGBT families.
- 20% of families with minor children were immigrant or non-permanent resident families. The breakdown by Québec administrative region is as follows:
  - Montréal: 59%.
  - Montérégie: 13%.
  - Laval: 12%.
  - Capitale-Nationale: 4%.
  - Other regions: 12%.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Canadian census, compiled by the Ministère de la Famille based on data from tables 1 and B1 of custom orders CO-1893 and CO-1900.

- In Québec in 2010, an estimated 25% of children under age 6 had experienced at least one transition related to separation or blending of families.[70]

For up-to-date statistics, visit this website: [https://statistique.quebec.ca/en/recherche?sujet=families-households-and-conjugal-status]



***At the ECS where Nam works, special attention is paid to representing the diversity of the families that the ECS welcomes. The educators are encouraged to hang up photos of all the children's families in their group's room. The ECS decor includes two posters that show an LGBT family and a lone-parent family. Nam chooses books for the children that introduce them to different cultures and family structures.***

With that in mind, showing openness, unconditional respect, sensitivity to the family's experiences, as well as a sincere desire to meet the needs of every child and adapt to each family's situation, makes it possible to build a constructive relationship that supports the healthy overall development of young children.

Not all families have the same needs or challenges. Some children experience significant changes or difficult events in the first few years of their lives that the ECS should take into account. If a parent is sharing custody of their child, for example, or a child is affected by a death, separation or redial of their family, the ECS staff should respond sensitively in a way that is appropriate to the family situation. It is therefore important to interact with each family in a way that is respectful of their circumstances while meeting the needs of the children in their care, their parents and the ECS staff.

## Every family is unique

**Just as every child is unique (a guiding principle that will be discussed later in this chapter), every family is unique as well. The educational practices that educators and HECPs use should therefore be informed by each family's specific characteristics and their expectations, concerns, availability, limitations and contributions, so they can foster the collaborative relationship to allow a better support to the child's development.**

**Every family has their own ways of taking care of their children, and parents use different models of division of childcare and labour that may change over time and depending on each parent's professional demands. Fathers are equal partners with mothers in parenting, and ECS staff and HECPs should consider them as such.**



Every family has their own culture. "Culture consists of the historically accumulated knowledge, tools and attitudes that pervade the child's proximal ecology […]"[71] "Parents' ideas and practices related to child care and development are naturally shaped by culturally constituted 'received wisdom.[72]"

In early childhood education, some broad goals are shared across cultures, such as promoting children's well-being, giving them the skills they need for their future economic survival, and passing on the values of their culture of origin. However, practices may differ, whether the community is ethnically homogeneous or diverse.

These differences are particularly seen in feeding practices, sleeping arrangements, verbal interactions, eye contact and interactions between young children and adults.[73] These practices are part of a young child's daily life, both at the ECS and at home, and they may lead to a clash of values. In these sensitive situations, families and educators/HECPs can find common ground by talking to each other. Educators and HECPs should make sure that the child does not suffer as a result of this clash of values by keeping the conversation with the family focused on the child's developmental needs.

At ECSs, children have rich experiences of Québec culture, their own culture if it is different, and the cultures of everyone they interact with. If educators and HECPs encourage parents to talk about their language, culture and values, they will gain a true understanding of their families and avoid stereotyping.[xxxii] They can also use this information to come up with meaningful activities that get the children to think about what all people have in common and what people from diverse backgrounds do differently.

xxxii Stereotype: [Translation] "A preconception, like a cliché, imposed on the members of a group." Source: [http://gdt.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/ficheOqlf.aspx?Id_Fiche=17585811, consulted May 9, 2016].

[Translation] "Stereotypes are therefore fixed and simplified ideas that are created when the behaviour of a few individuals is generalized to an entire group. This involves ascribing specific characteristics to a person solely because they belong to a particular culture." Source: [https://www.uni-giessen.de/fbz/fb05/romanistik/sprx/frz/pers/moureaux/proj/seminar/g1-introduction/G1-stereotypes].

### Culture and language as central to identity-building

**"Children should be recognized as citizens with equitable rights to live and learn in society. Their powerful drive to learn and to belong is inextricably linked to their emerging identities as members of social, cultural, linguistic, economically diverse and geographic communities. Language and culture are important elements of children's unique identity and programs should promote a sense of pride in their linguistic and cultural heritage. It is recognized that for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) children, early years success is directly linked to early cultural, family and community experiences and exposure to their first language.[74]"**

**This statement is true for all young children.**



***When a new family starts attending her ECS, Armande encourages the parents to bring an item that reflects their particular culture, if they can. The hats, mixing bowls, chopsticks and traditionally patterned scarves they bring are shown to the children and added to the make-believe play areas. With the parents' help, Armande also puts together a collection of music from Québec and other cultures for the young children to have fun dancing to.***

## Create extended networks of support

With the last idea, [Translation] "the family-centred approach encourages ECSs to create extended networks of support around families.[75]" There are a variety of ways that parents seeking to connect with each other can meet, build relationships and provide each other with support. These can include group parent meetings held at the beginning of the year, or discussion groups for parents on topics of interest to them organized in collaboration with early childhood advisory committees and held at the ECS facility. Having a strong social network they can rely on is a protective factor for children and their families.

ECSs are also good places to share information about a wide variety of resources, from community and municipal resources and cultural and recreational resources to health and social services resources and financial resources. ECSs can therefore play a key role in promoting events from any organization that works with families in their community.

Again, in order to maintain a collaborative relationship, those who are most directly affected should be consulted so that the best ways of sharing information and encouraging families to connect can be identified. When ECSs create accessible, visible communication avenues for families to use, extended networks of support that can help ease the isolation that many parents experience will develop on their own.[76]

### Creating a document to guide your diversity efforts

For ECSs located in areas that are home to families from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is a good idea to develop a diversity policy. This policy will guide the ECS's educational interventions and their relationships with families so that it can provide experiences that meet the children's needs in way that is culturally sensitive and consistent with the ECS's educational program. The Ministère de la Famille has created a guide to help ECSs develop their diversity policy, entitled *Guide pour l'élaboration d'une politique d'intégration des enfants de nouveaux arrivants et de gestion de la diversité dans les services de garde éducatifs.*[77]



***A home childcare facility put up a bulletin board where families can post any information they think may be of interest to the other families. Parents have used the board to find someone to trade winter boots with and to invite the other children to Sophie's birthday party, and Kim, the HECP, has used it to ask parents to bring in any paper towel or toilet paper rolls they have lying around. Flyers for local family events are also posted on the bulletin board.***

Working together as partners is one way that ECSs and parents can put into practice some of the guidelines set out in the theory underpinning this program. Thus, in keeping with humanism, the first guiding principle of the program emphasizes the mutual trust that must be fostered between the ECS team and the parents. This mutual trust helps the child feel safe and form a meaningful emotional relationship with the educators or HECP, as posited in attachment theory. This priniciple focuses on the child, their family environment, their educational environment and their community, as set out in the ecological model. Working in collaboration with parents helps provide protective factors for the child's development at the ECS and at home, by promoting the parents' well-being and encouraging them to participate in the child's development, and by helping the family expand their social network and make connections between the different systems. Lastly, working in collaboration with parents contributes to the child's active learning by providing more knowledge about the child and making it possible to adjust the ECS's interventions to them.

On a final note, there are decisions that management can make to facilitate the building of relationships between educators, HECPs and childcare assistants, and parents, such as decisions about work schedules, staff training, and setting up a variety of suitable avenues for communication.

## How's our ECS doing?

- How are the children's parents and their parenting practices perceived? How closely do the members of our education team adhere to the assumptions listed on page page 66?
- Would we, as parents, be comfortable with an ECS that interacts with families the way we do?
- What are some examples of how this guiding principle is followed at our ECS?
- What are our strengths when it comes to communicating with parents?
- What are the challenges we have when it comes to communicating with parents?
- How would our approach to communicating with parents need to change in order to fully leverage our interactions to support their children's development?
- How do we work in collaboration with the parents of a child who is having difficulties?
- How do we work with parents who do not share some of the values promoted at the ECS?
- What kind of one-on-one or group consultations with parents could help us better meet their needs?

## 4.2 EVERY CHILD IS UNIQUE

As discussed in the previous chapter, children's overall development follows more or less the same stages, which each child progresses through at their own pace. The section on the ecological model also showed how every child has characteristics that are affected by hereditary or genetic factors (sex, height, etc.), and others that are determined by environmental factors (such as economic, cultural, educational and social conditions). Every child is a unique human being due to the specific combination of hereditary and environmental factors that shape their development.[xxxiii]

Putting the "every child is unique" principle into practice means making an effort to understand each child's personal reality and respect their individual and family characteristics and differences. It means supporting their progress by tapping into their natural curiosity to further their development. It means being patient with their rate of development and letting them go deep on exploring and experimenting with things that interest them. It means showing genuine interest in who they are, how they live and what they like. It means interacting with them without regard to the stereotypes associated with their gender, appearance or cultural origin, and deconstructing such stereotypes when they are perpetuated by the children, including by pointing out that these kinds of statements are unfair. It also means providing the child with new

xxxiii German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852) was the first to emphasize the importance of recognizing that each child is unique, and many early childhood education approaches since then have followed suit.

experiences to nurture their curiosity and expand their interests. Adult caregivers at ECSs who do this give the child a sense of emotional security and the support they need to develop.

***Camille is used to overt displays of affection in her family, which is why she asks the educator for a special moment of contact when she arrives at the ECS in the morning. Aaron, on the other hand, simply says "hello" and heads straight for the toys. The educator sets her learning goals for each child based on where they are at. She takes the time to give Camille a hug and ask her how her evening was, which supports both her emotional development and her language development. After that, she turns her focus to Aaron and observes him to decide whether it is better to interact with him now or wait until snack time to ask him about how he was playing.***

ECS staff should not expect every child to always do the same thing at the same time. The educational intervention process outlines the steps needed to provide each child with personalized support within the larger group setting. Regular communication with parents is a prime way to intervene with the child based on learning goals that are adapted to each child.

It is important to also see children who have particular needs, impairments or disabilities as unique individuals just like any other children. The facility, materials and interventions can be adapted to meet their particular needs. Interactions with these children's parents are generally more frequent, particularly while adjustments are being made. Following this guiding principle thus leads educators and HECPs to think about children with particular needs in the same way as any other children in their care.



*When Thomas takes part in a game by crawling instead of jumping due to a disability, nobody bats an eye. The group enthuastically encourages Thomas to move in the best way for him! Léon, their educator, always makes sure that every child is able to participate in the activities he organizes, no matter what their particular needs are.*

*With the help of a speech language pathologist from the integrated health and social services centre (CISSS), an ECS educator made a set of vocabulary development picture cards to make it easier to communicate with three-year-old Lucas, who has a language delay. To the educator's great surprise, the picture cards have also helped with Suzie's language development, even though she does not have a language delay.*[78]

Putting this guiding principle into practice on a day-to-day basis may seem unrealistic to those who organize and lead most of the activities at their ECS or who prefer to use the ready-to-go activities available from many websites and other resources. An approach that is consistent with this educational program requires planning how to support each child based on your analysis of your observations. These observations are made one child at a time, and the observation schedule is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of the individual children and the group as a whole as these needs emerge from day-to-day. This principle should also guide how the children's education records are kept. When preparing education records, educators and HECPs should keep each child's rate of development in mind and avoid comparing the children.

## How's our ECS doing?

- How do we embody this guiding principle? What do we do to understand and recognize each child's unique qualities?
- What strategies do we use to closely monitor each child's development?
- What do we do to accommodate children with particular needs and help them achieve their full potential?
- If we develop a disability inclusion policy, what should it include?
- How do we follow this principle when preparing a child's education record?



## 4.3 CHILDREN ARE THE MAIN ACTORS OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT[xxxiv]

Young children are unique, and most of their learning occurs because they have the natural ability and intrinsic motivation to learn and grow. Children learn through action, by exploring, interacting, observing, imitating and listening: their thinking is structured by what they feel, see, hear, touch, smell and taste. Growth and development is thus an essentially active process, and children are the main actors of this process.

The word “main” indicates that, although the child is in charge of their learning, other people, including their parents and the adults they interact with at ECSs, are intimately involved in their development. A child’s learning and development is primarily a social experience that involves meaningful interactions between children and adults and between the children themselves.

If you avoid structuring every minute of the day, you might be surprised by the creative ways that children will use new materials.[79] Their ability to learn through their own initiative also provides a wide range of learning opportunities. When every day follows a predetermined schedule based on, for instance, the abilities typically expected of their age group, without any consideration for their individual rhythms, interests and unique qualities, young children learn less.[80]

As described in the chapter on the theory of this program, the democratic teaching style gives children as much room as possible to make their own choices and decisions. In an active learning environment, children initiate play based on their interests, select and decide how to use the materials, use all their senses to explore, transform and combine the materials as they see fit, while talking to each other (or communicating non-verbally).

Educators and HECPs support the children’s learning without telling them what to do or how to do it. Instead, they encourage the children’s sense of agency and discovery to preserve their natural motivation and nurture a love of learning, and also seize learning opportunities as they arise. The adults observe the children playing and plan experiences for them based on the themes that arise, in order to prolong and complexify

xxxiv This basic principle replaces "The child is the primary agent of his development.

their play. They are careful to interact with the children in a way that does not deter them from continuing an activity that is going well, instead providing assistance if they need it. As discussed in Chapter 2 on the aspects of quality of education, educators and HECPs provide a diverse range of appealing materials and organize the day and the learning space in order to meet children's needs. From time to time, they may also organize activities that give the children options and deepen their learning.

Seeing children as the main actors of their development requires flexible, open-ended planning and a degree of tolerance for uncertainty, as it involves continually adapting to the young children's changing needs.

The experiences that lead children to plan their play, put their plan into action and reflect on what they did, such as free play in activity areas, contribute greatly to making each child the main actor of their development. In these experiences, they are unequivocally responsible for their learning.

***There's a whirl of activity at Louise's ECS. The children have made a whole plan for how they want to decorate the place for the holidays. The educator quickly gathers the materials needed and gets ready to work with a smaller group of children on making garlands. The children are very excited about the project and ask some interesting questions: Do we need to leave out cookies for Santa Claus at the ECS? Does he visit places that are closed for the holidays? The children and the educator decide to write a message for Santa Claus together that he can read if he visits the ECS, explaining that they are away from the facility for the holidays, but rest assured they will be sound asleep in their beds at home on Christmas Eve.***

***Angélique listens to the infants in her care talking and makes sure they take turns. When William starts to babble and shake his legs around, the educator comes over to him and shows through her behaviour that she is listening. Once he is quiet, she talks to him quietly, repeating the sounds he made, then stops talking so the baby can speak again. In this way, Angélique is following the baby's lead to support his language development.***

## How's our ECS doing?

- How often are the children encouraged to make suggestions and find the answers to their questions?
- Under which circumstances do we share decision making with the children?
- How do the children behave when they are encouraged to follow their own initiative?

## 4.4 CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH PLAY

In childhood, play and learning are intimatedly connected: play provides opportunities to learn and requires effort from the children. Although children take it very seriously, play happens in a joyful environment in which spontaneity, fun, laughter, gentle teasing, playfulness and creativity are encouraged. Some researchers believe that the reason why humans have an extended period of childhood is so we have time to play.[81] Children are highly motivated to play because they generally enjoy it, which makes it a particularly powerful way to support their learning and development.[82]

Play is any [Translation] "physical, mental or social activity that is freely, voluntarily and spontaneously pursued for pleasure by a child.[83]" For young children, play is the best way to explore, understand, imagine, change and master the world around them.

As discussed in the theory in Chapter 1, children's natural ability to play by exploring the world around them is closely linked to the care they are given, their emotional safety and the attachment process. [Translation] "Children are more likely to want to play when their physiological and emotional needs are met.[84]"

### Play: A need and a right

**[Translation] "The importance of play to children's well-being is widely recognized by international organizations such as the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).[85]" The Canadian Council on Learning also issued a statement in 2012 on the importance of play to interventions supporting young children's overall development.[86] All children need to play and have the right to do so.**



Research on play has found a number of characteristics that distinguish it from other human activities. Play is:[87]

[Translation]

- "Intrinsically motivated[xxxv].
- Controlled by the players.
- Nonliteral (not real).
- Free of externally imposed rules.
- Characterized by the active engagement of the players".

### 4.4.1 The importance of play to young children's overall development

[Translation] "When young children play, their overall development is promoted, as every domain of development is used to carry out their activities.[88]" [Translation] "Children's play also serves as a context for meaningful learning.[89]"

#### Physical/motor development

Play, particularly active forms of play involving movement, is key to young children's physical and motor development. Through play, young children become interested in the world around them and use all their senses to explore it, practice their motor skills, and act on their environment by manipulating the objects that arouse their curiosity. When playing, children take calculated risks, test their limits and gain more independence every passing day. They also learn to control their actions when playing with their peers.

#### Social/emotional development

Play is essential to emotional development in early childhood. It promotes children's independence and sense of pride. Because play lets children put their ideas into action and learn new skills, it builds their confidence and self-esteem. Play is not a source of stress for them, even when they put a great deal of effort into it and treat it with the utmost seriousness.[90] When children play, they face their fears and have an outlet to release their tension and frustration.[91] Play at ECSs supports children's emotional development and helps them feel emotionally safe.[92]

Play is critically important to children's social development, in part because it encourages interaction. [Translation] "As children get older, they play more with their peers, and in doing so develop the skills to form healthy interpersonal relationships […]"[93] In play, children act out and try on the different roles and behaviours they see the people around them have (mother, father, doctor, educator, shopkeeper, etc.). Play gives children a strong motivation to acquire the skills to resolve interpersonal conflict and a context in which they can develop these skills. Because play is only play if it is freely consented to, players who are in disagreement must find a middle ground if they are to play together.

xxxv Intrinsic motivation: Motivation driven by the child's own interest or attraction rather than external positive reinforcement such as rewards or praise.

## Language development

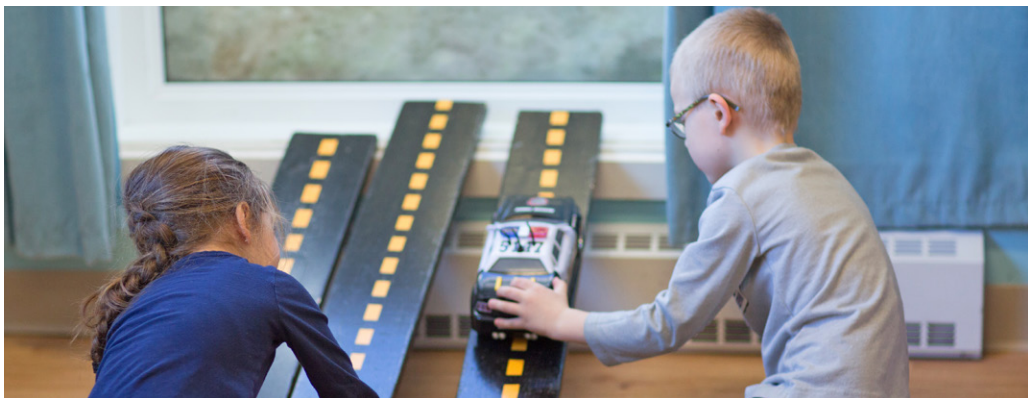
Play provides a wealth of opportunity for children to develop their language skills, as it encourages interaction and communication. In play, children can express their ideas and identify their tastes and preferences. They learn new words from their peers (for example, “My family calls it supper, but Rosalie’s family calls it dinner”). Educators and HECPs help expand the children’s vocabulary based on real-life scenarios when they name what the children are doing while they play, and if the play is active, they are more likely to remember the words they learn. They can use word games, nursery rhymes, songs, musical-sounding words and so on to teach children about the sounds that make up words and sentences.

## Cognitive development

Play appropriately stimulates young children’s cognitive development. When they are playing, their minds are focused on the process rather than the end goal of the activity. That is one reason why play puts children in an ideal state of mind to learn and create. For example, if a child decides to sort some toy cars by colour, it is the act of sorting that is important, not the actual groups they sort the cars into. Since the end goal is considered secondary in play, there is no fear of failure, and players feel free to experiment with new ways of doing things.[94]

While child-initiated play is free of externally imposed rules, there are rules that the player(s) themselves come up with:[95] for example, perhaps they need to kick the ball to make it go as far as possible, use building blocks to make the structure they are picturing in their head, or stay in character for the duration of the make-believe play. The rules for formal rule-based games such as lotto games and Snakes and Ladders, meanwhile, can always be modified as the players see fit. It takes conscious effort to keep the rules of a game in mind and follow them, which requires players to use their working memory.

By encouraging children to slow down, be flexible and adhere to a structure in a maximally enjoyable situation, play helps them acquire other executive function skills. Play is ripe with opportunities for them to practice their high-level reasoning and problem-solving skills, pursue creative initiatives[96] and use their imagination. The play spaces and materials and support provided for children at ECSs make play a stimulating, demanding, compelling and creative activity that is well-suited to helping each child achieve their full potential.



### Playing to prepare for school

**[Translation] "It is particularly important to be cautious when it comes to the educational approaches used in educational childcare services and preschool education, and in any activities devised with young children in mind. In an effort to ensure children are better prepared for school, play is sometimes being replaced by activities that focus more on teaching a curriculum than on addressing each child's learning and developmental needs. This approach may adversely affect the children's school readiness and in some cases exacerbate social and emotional issues.[97, 98] The fear of failure that some children have when faced with a task that is above their level of ability can leave them feeling stressed. Play is the best way for children to relieve stress, so to see playtime being reduced is cause for concern.[99]"**



## 4.4.2 Forms of play

There are many different ways that play can be categorized. The four forms of play proposed by Piaget are still relevant today: functional play, make-believe (or symbolic) play, constructive play and games with rules. Each type of play contributes to children's overall development, which should encourage ECSs to provide a wide variety of play opportunities.

### Functional play

Functional play, the first type of play that children engage in, involves repeating an action or activity several times, such as waving their hands, grabbing their feet, grasping and throwing an object, hitting the object on the ground to make a sound, and jumping down off a stool. Functional play is enjoyed by children as they repeat the actions and movements until they are mastered.

The repetitive movements that babies make and the complex hand games that children engage in on the playground fall under functional play.

### Make-believe play

[Translation] "Make-believe play is an expression of symbolic function.[100]" This occurs when a young child understands that an object exists even when they cannot see it, an ability known as "object permanence." In make-believe play, an imaginary situation is created, and in more advanced levels of play, one or more roles (performed either by the children themselves or using toys) and rules are devised by the player(s).

[Translation] "Make-believe play emerges between 18 months and 2 years of age, when children start pretending to do an action they have seen in their lives outside of its usual context (pretending to sleep, eat, etc.). Deferred imitation makes it possible for a child to evoke an absent model (an action, their mother, their father, a character, an animal, etc.). They therefore accommodate their reality by imitating it as they perceive it. This occurs when they play "pretend," assigning roles to objects and to existing or imaginary characters, which helps them assimilate their reality. Once they are able to do this, their pretend play becomes increasingly complex.[101]"

At the first level of make-believe play,[xxxvi] children imitate actions in isolation, out of their everyday context; do not consider the usual order of actions (for example, they might

xxxvi These four levels of play come from the work of Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong (2009) on Lev S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of early childhood development.

pretend to dry the dishes before pretending to wash the dishes); use realistic objects (real-life objects or miniature objects); choose their actions based on the objects available to them (for example, they might imitate a firefighter if they have the helmet); and are not yet naming roles or establishing rules.[102, 103]

At the second level of make-believe play, [Translation] "children combine a few actions together into a simple, repetitive scenario; perform actions from their regular life; name the roles they play and tell others what actions they are doing; are not thinking about rules; and play for a short period of time with a small number of their peers.[104, 105]"

At the third level of make-believe play, [Translation] "children choose and describe their roles before the play starts; interact with other characters; stage longer and more varied play scenarios; draw inspiration from their real life; follow the rules set for the scenario; and are capable of metacommunication,[106, 107]" meaning they are able to talk about the game and communicate with the other children while they are playing.

### Fuelling a love of learning through make-believe play

**[Translation] "Make-believe play naturally prepares children for school and life in a way that respects their uniqueness. Play provides opportunities to interact with others, and thus to think about their interactions, experiment with their behaviour and gain social skills […] Play scenarios that are inspired by what the children like fuel a love of learning, and get them excited for school.[108]"**



Around age 5, make-believe play at the fourth level becomes more complex, with the inclusion of symbolic actions and representations. For instance, a pot lid could stand in for a flying saucer, or a child might hop up and down to intimate the vibrations of a moving vehicle. This level of play is considered "mature" when the following criteria are met:[109]

- Language is used to imagine a scenario.
- Complex themes are closely related. For example, on the way to the zoo, a character falls and has to go to the hospital.
- The roles are complex and multifaceted. For example, a mother takes care of her baby before work, goes to work, then comes back home, where she makes a cake for Valentine's Day.
- The play scenario spans a long period of time, sometimes several days.

***The "big kid" room at France's facility is bustling these days, and for good reason: many of the children in this group have gotten involved in a large make-believe play scenario that started several days ago, after they got to watch the construction on a street adjacent to the ECS. This outing got the children asking questions, and the educator decided to gather up a variety of materials so they could make their own construction site. These kinds of excursions give the children a shared experience outside of the ECS, which often gives them new ideas.***

Make-believe play provides opportunities to stimulate every domain of a child's development. [Translation] "The child refines […] their language skills and learns how to coordinate their actions with others. They call on their cognitive abilities to solve problems, they use their fine motor skills to button up their costume or tie their shoes, and they gradually build their identity as they express their concerns.[110]"

### Constructive play[xxxvii]

Constructive play is any form of play that involves assembling objects or materials of various types, shapes and colours. This includes puzzles, building blocks, and any activity using arts and crafts supplies (drawing, painting, collaging, clay modelling, assemblage, etc.). Constructive play involves manipulating objects and materials in order to create things.

***At Rosemary's facility, the children always have access to a big box full of assemblage and collaging supplies. This morning, Yan and Corine were looking in the box for supplies to make a boat. When they asked, the HECP gave them some glue and tape they could use to put together the boat parts that they made out of cardboard.***

### Games with rules

Games with rules (marbles, board games, hide-and-seek, etc.) are played in groups of at least two and require the players to follow certain rules. Children can play by the usual rules, but they are also likely to modify the rules and make up new ones. What matters is that the children follow the rules that they have agreed on, whether they are made up or not.

## 4.4.3 Social interaction during play

The social organization of play among young children, meaning the way the children interact with each other in play, changes as they get older. The different categories used to classify social organization of play are described below. The age ranges provided are only a general guideline. It should be noted that children build on their existing knowledge of the forms of play, as they will engage in new forms as they continue to engage in the forms that are familiar to them.

### Solitary play (birth to adulthood)

The child is not engaged in any specific activity, but is aware of what is going on around them. They play alone to satisfy their own needs, with their own toys. They are engrossed in what they are doing.

### Onlooker (spectator) (birth to around 2 years)

The child watches what the others are doing and imitates the behaviour they observe, but does not join in the play.

### Parallel play (around age 2 and up)

The child accepts the other children's presence and plays next to them. They use the same kinds of toys, but do not share them. They become more comfortable around their peers while remaining highly focused on their own play.

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xxxvii Some authors also use the expression « assembly game »

### Associative play (around age 3)

The child plays with a peer in that they interact and share toys, but they are not working toward a common goal. They may discuss their ideas or trade toys, but they each have their own goal.

### Co-operative play (around age 4 to 5)

The children play in groups to achieve a common goal. They assign each other roles and the play takes the form of a scenario.

### Chasing and play-fighting

**"In the last decades, the opportunity for children for freely-occurring play has eroded due to an increase in structured activities (e.g., sports, music, dance lessons) and an increasing intolerance for anything that may be construed as aggression. Because of the risk of accidental injury or perceived opportunities for abusive contact, rough-and-tumble play (RTP) – which comprises both chasing and wrestling – has been the form of play most severely curtailed.[111]"**

**There is a growing consensus among researchers that play-fighting has all the characteristics of play rather than aggression, and that children benefit from play-fighting in multiple ways:[112]**

- **"[In play-fighting,] children learn physical [and motor] skills. They also learn how their bodies move and how to control their movements.**
- **"They also develop language skills through [verbal] and nonverbal communication, including the ability to perceive, infer and decode.**
- **"Children develop social skills through turn taking […] negotiating, and developing and maintaining friendships […].**
- **"[Play-fighting] […] provides an opportunity for children to take healthy risks.[113]"**

**Instead of banning chasing games and play-fighting, it is recommended that educators and HECPs ensure that the play remains fun for the children and mutually respectful. It is also recommended that educators and HECPs manage play-fighting to minimize the potential for physical and psychological injury by modelling appropriate behaviour, preparing both the indoor and outdoor environment, implementing rules with the children regarding play-fighting, and supervising the play-fighting so they can intervene when necessary.[114]**



### 4.4.4 Supporting children's play

The educational approach taken in this program fully harnesses the potential that play can offer to support children's overall development, no matter what their needs and characteristics are. This requires adult caregivers to sometimes hold back and sometimes be more involved in the action, but always be interested and attentive.

[Translation] "Supporting play requires ongoing observation in order to enhance the child's play experience by providing new elements, play items, materials, questions and vocabulary words for them to learn from. Supporting play therefore requires adults to be creative and provide assistance in unobtrusive ways, have a thorough understanding of the stages and many facets of early childhood development, and base their actions around learning goals. [In this situation, the child is actively involved in their development and the adult plays a mediator role].[115, 116]"

In active learning, one of the educators' and HECPs' main tasks is to support young children in child-initiated play using the educational intervention process. This requires them to step back and observe the play when the children are focused on it and encourage them to find their own solutions to the problems they encounter. When appropriate, it also involves scaffolding the children's learning as they play based on their observations and stepping in to keep the play going, make it more complex, or talk to the children to provide support or help them see how their abilities have grown. [Translation] "It means being present and available, without curbing the child's impulse to explore.[117]"

Supporting infants' play may mean interacting with them directly as they partake in functional play, such as by taking an object that the child is holding and then giving it back. Educators and HECPs can also [Translation] "name the baby's feelings, objects, noises and the movements they are learning to make, or talk to them to help them solve problems.[118]" Other interventions may be indirect, primarily focusing on the environment and materials.

Research has found that the following interventions help children reach higher levels of play:

- "Make sure children have sufficient time for play.
- "Provide ideas for themes that extend children's experiences and enrich the play.
- "Choose appropriate props and toys.
- "Help children plan their play.
- "Monitor the progress of play.
- "Coach individuals who may need help.
- "Suggest or model how themes can be woven together.
- "Model appropriate ways to solve disputes.
- "Encourage children to mentor each other in play.[119]"

[Translation] "Young children's play is punctuated by periods of rest or breaks. They have the capacity to self-regulate and switch between activity and recovery. Respecting this capacity gives them a sense of inner security.[120]"

Children who have little play experience may need someone to model it for them. Educators and HECPs can provide this essential support through their actions, questions and suggestions.

At ECSs, children have opportunities to play with others under the adult supervision of early childhood development specialists who can guide their play experience and make it an unparalleled medium for learning.

## How's our ECS doing?

- How do we show that play is valued in our infant groups? Our toddler groups? Our preschooler groups?
- In general, how much time do the children in each age group have to start and carry out a play activity? Is it enough time? Why?
- How do we convey to parents how important play is to their child's development?
- Are the children able to repeat their functional play actions as many times as they want?
- What criteria do we use to select materials and props for the infants to play with?
- What criteria do we use to select materials and props for the make-believe play area?
- Do the older children engage in mature make-believe play? What could we improve to encourage them to engage in it more?
- How often are new materials added to the block play area to pique the children's interest?
- Are the children able to do creative arts activities during play periods? What materials do we give them to create images, sculptures and play props?
- When they play games with rules, what kind of support are the children given to ensure the rules they establish are followed?
- Are we, as a team, in agreement on whether chasing and play-fighting are okay and how these activities should be handled? What could we do to come up with a plan and communicate our new practices to the children's parents?

## 4.5 CHILD DEVELOPMENT IS A COMPREHENSIVE, INTEGRATED PROCESS

A young child's development is a comprehensive process that involves all developmental domains at the same time (physical/motor, language, social/emotional, cognitive). All of these domains interact with each other. Depending on the child's interests, the activities they do and the environment they grow up in, these domains affect the child's development to varying degrees.[121]

The richness of every experience a young child has can potentially introduce them to new sensory perceptions, ways to move, feelings, interactions, questions, insights, and forms of expression that are worth exploring. [Translation] "The fact is, we all lead integrated lives, and every experience we have affects our development. But through biological maturation and learning […] we gain the ability to focus our attention on tasks that require more of us [in some way].[122]"

Physical and motor development allows a child to more easily explore their environment, which in turn enhances their cognitive development, in particular by making them more familiar with the characteristics of objects. A child's cognitive development is supported by the people around them: adults and more experienced children who help them explore and learn and serve as models. Cognitive development thus requires social interaction, which also affects children's emotional development (sense of security, confidence, self-esteem, etc.), making them more prepared to interact with their physical and social environment. Language development makes it easier to communicate with others and gives them the tools to think and reason at a more sophisticated level. For example, if they understand the difference in meaning between the words "similar" and "different," that opens the door for them to compare objects based on a wide range of criteria (size, shape, colour, etc.). Every domain contributes to the young child's development through a comprehensive, integrated process.

Similarly, children develop their spatial awareness of the features of their environment through their body; for example, they might use their sense of sight and movement to tell how far away a certain toy is. The actual concept of distance is learned through cognitive development, and words associated with the concept (such as "near" and "far") develop their language skills.

Understanding the importance of how the domains of development relate to each other, as well as knowing the components of each domain, is critical if we want to give children the opportunities, materials and guidance they need to support their overall development. These components are listed in the table below and will be described in the next chapter.

| Developmental domains | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Physical/motor development** | **Cognitive development** | **Language development** | **Social/ emotional development** |
| Health and safety<br>Food<br>Sleep<br>Hygiene<br>Sensory development<br>Body schema<br>Gross motor skills<br>Fine motor skills | Attention<br>Memory<br>Symbolic function<br>Categories and concepts<br>Reasoning<br>Early basics of math<br>Early basics of sciences | Prelinguistic language<br>Spoken language<br>Early basics of reading and writing<br>Writing development | Attachment<br>Temperament<br>Self-concept<br>Identity<br>Emotional skills<br>Social skills |

### 4.5.1 Sequence and processes

[Translation] "Under normal conditions, the sequence of development is the same for all children, and is therefore predictable.[123]" Children go through the stages of development in roughly the same order. For example, infants learn to roll over before they master sitting, can understand a few words before they are able to pronounce them, and play next to other children before they start to play with them.

Particular processes are also at play in a child's development. Some of the things they learn set them up for more learning: for example, when a young child is able to point at an object that the adult has named, that sets the stage for them to eventually be able to say the word themselves. Children acquire abilities and knowledge in order from the simplest to the most complex, starting with simple associations. When they put on their rubber boots, they grab the sleeve of the raincoat next to them and get ready to put it on. They know that it is time to get dressed to go outside, and when they see the rubber boots, they know that means they will probably need a raincoat. Their reasoning skills slowly become more sophisticated to the point where they say "outside" when they see their educator bring out everyone's outerwear, establishing cause and effect: the clothes have been brought out so they can put them on and go play outside.

[Translation] "Young children […] also develop their thinking based on concrete, observable, perceptible phenomena"[124] and gradually acquire abstract thought, which makes it possible for them to understand that written symbols, letters and numbers are a way of representing spoken language. Similarly, children recognize objects and people they have already seen, and later acquire the ability to recall or remember them when they are not there, with the help of cues.[125]

### 4.5.2 An individual trajectory

While the sequence of development is universal, children go through the processes in each developmental domain at their own rate. All children learn and grow at their own pace depending on the genetic traits they inherited from their parents and their particular experiences.[xxxviii]

A child might do a particular action over and over again and make great strides in one domain of their development, but be much less active in another domain. How eager and focused the child is on certain tasks and games offers clues about the stage of development they are in. If the child starts to lose interest in what they are doing, the educator or HECP can use this information to help them move along to the next stage of development, within their zone of proximal development, and support them as they take on a new challenge.

As a young child develops, they will make progress, experience plateaus in a particular domain and appear to be stuck, and take steps back in development that may make it seem like they are regressing in their learning. For example, a toddler might go back to walking on all fours when the HECP takes in a new infant, or a child might have trouble self-soothing like they usually do when they go down for a nap if they have started sleeping in a bigger bed at home. Development is thus not a continuous or linear process, and not all children follow the same pattern.

In early childhood, when children are changing at a rapid pace, the few months that separate children within one age group often represent big differences in development, which is essential to keep in mind. In order to properly support the children's overall development, ECSs should have individualized experiences and expectations for each child.

### 4.5.3 Overall development and creativity

Creativity is specifically associated with cognitive development. However, it plays a part in every developmental domain and supports young children's day-to-day explorations and experimentations. Among other things, it facilitates and improves children's problem solving, adaptability and self-expression.[126]

Creativity is the ability to find one's own, unexpected response to a problem or situation and make new connections between things one already knows. Keep in mind that what might seem like an ordinary response from an adult perspective is often unexpected to a young child. Creativity allows a person to think outside the box, that is, they expand their understanding to include new perspectives when confronted with new information, or they look for multiple solutions to a specific problem. Creativity is part of every person's development and learning. Some consider creativity a uniquely human way of thinking, knowing and making choices,[127] and some see it as an ability that is essential to adaptation and survival.[128]

xxxviii Piaget observed that children move through a series of stages of intellectual development, and according to his explanation, children progress from one stage to the next as they reach the required level of maturity. The work of Vygotsky and others revised Piaget's explanation to add that a child's interaction with their social and physical environment plays a critical role in their learning and development.

It makes sense to talk about creativity when discussing early childhood educational services. Drawing, painting, clay modelling, dancing, make-believe play, playing with puppets, singing and playing musical instruments are forms of artistic expression that make up a significant portion of the schedule at these facilities. As well, children are constantly faced with new knowledge and new experiences, in both their regular lives and in play, which cause them to change the way they see the world and come up with new ways of doing things.

In general, young children are good explorers,[129] and they are often required to solve problems during play: Which way do I turn this block so it goes in the box? How do I wrap this fabric around this teddy bear so I can make him a sweater? What object should I use to dig a tunnel in the sandbox? What character should we add to our play scenario so Luigi can join in?

***Évelyne and Mathieu, age 4, both want to play with the new truck that the HECP brought yesterday, and they spent a long time in the figurine area this morning trying to resolve their dispute. Their HECP asked: "Can you think of a way you can both play with the truck?" Using their creativity, the children eventually come up with a solution: Évelyne's figurine would be driving the truck, and Mathieu's figurine would be the navigator.***

Creativity can be encouraged and nurtured, just as it can be stifled and snuffed out. In active learning, providing experiences and versatile materials that can be used in different ways gives children the opportunity to explore their creativity. A democratic teaching style also supports children's creativity, as they are encouraged to share their ideas and suggestions and see them implemented.

To teach children to value and foster creativity, it is recommended that adults:[130]

- Encourage and accept constructive noncomformist behaviour.
- Take children's questions seriously and tolerate errors.
- Help children learn to cope with frustration and failure.
- Reward the courage to risk getting things wrong as much as getting the right answer.

Some interventions, on the other hand, can hinder creativity by imposing comformity:[131]

- An overreliance on extrinsic reinforcement (such as rewards and praise) instead of self-evaluation.
- Too much structure, which requires conformity, or too little structure, which requires children to exhibit a higher level of autonomy than they are capable of.
- Time constraints, which make children rush their work to meet the schedule imposed on them.

*When the children in her care show her their drawings, Lysa-Marie, an HECP, has started showing the children what they have drawn. She takes a few steps back and holds the picture up and down, so the child can look at it from a distance and evaluate their work themselves: "What do you think of your drawing?" She asks the child about their process: "Can you tell me what you were doing when you drew this picture?" When she comments on the children's creations, she gives specific feedback that touches on how children's drawing skills develop during early childhood: "You used a lot of colours to make this drawing." "I see a lot of straight lines and some circles. There's some movement there!" "You took the time to colour in some of the shapes. That must have taken a lot of patience!"*

*When Samir brings out the puppets and puppet theatre for the four-year-olds in his group, he words his instructions carefully. Usually, the children prepare a sketch in teams and put it on for their peers at the end of the play period. Today, he suggests that they make up a story that has a beginning and an end. This constraint helps the children organize their creative work. A few minutes before the play period ends, Samir takes some time to ask the puppeteers what they have come up with and suggest that they rehearse the sketch once or twice before their performance.*

### 4.5.4 Executive function skills

Neurological research in recent years has revealed the importance of helping young children acquire the specific skills needed to voluntarily control their thoughts and actions. Executive function skills, which are mental flexibility, inhibition, working memory and planning, begin developing in the first few years of life and continue to develop throughout childhood and adolescence.[132] These skills are engaged [Translation] "in novel situations for which either no routines exist or the existing routines are not suitable.[133]" Executive function skills are responsible for goal-directed behaviour.[134]

Executive function may be associated more specifically with cognitive development. Like creativity, executive function skills are used in every aspect of a child's life and there are opportunities to improve them in every developmental domain. These skills are briefly described below.

Executive function skills are not taught, but they can be supported in early childhood through intentional educational interventions that use play, storytelling, music, dance and so on, without requiring specialists or particular materials.[135] Supporting young children as they gradually build their executive function skills requires a deep understanding of early childhood development and realistic expectations considering each child's level of development.

## Mental flexibility

[Translation] "Mental flexibility refers to a child's ability to switch perspectives or the focus of their attention to something else relatively easily and quickly and to flexibly adjust to the demands of their environment (Diamond, 2009). For example, a child will be capable of recognizing their educator's or teacher's expectations of them in a particular situation and determine whether their behaviour is appropriate or not. The child will also be able to adapt to change during transitions (for example, from free play to snack time): they may stop playing to go wash their hands and sit at the table to eat their snack.[136]"

Mental flexibility enables a person to incorporate a fresh perspective into their understanding when they learn new information and try different strategies to resolve an interpersonal conflict.[137] Mental flexibility requires processes that are associated with creativity.

***Louna wants to open a padlocked box. She tries to force the lid off, shakes the box, hits it with a stick, and then goes to find the educator and ask for the key.[138] Her mental flexibility is engaged, as her first solution did not work and she is trying several other strategies.***

***An educator is in a hurry to get the children back to the ECS, and accidentally puts the head of the "snake" (a fabric rope with handles that the children hold when they go walking as a group) at the back of the line. One child, Sergey, cannot imagine a snake going backward, even in a rush, and categorically refuses to walk forward.***

***The educator can use the educational intervention process to find strategies that will help Sergey develop his mental flexibility during playtime and story time.***

## Inhibition

Inhibition is used to filter and control our thoughts and impulses, and to resist temptations and habits so we can think before we act.[139] Inhibition is the ability to voluntarily override one's spontaneous reactions in order to do what is appropriate or expected and avoid acting in a way that is not permitted.[140]

### A skill that is crucial for learning

**[Translation] "Many studies show that the ability to control one's actions and attention, known as inhibition, is […] a determining factor in a child's academic success.[141]"**



Focusing and maintaining one's attention in order to achieve a goal requires resisting distractions. Inhibition is also involved in the self-regulation[xxxix] of one's emotions and behaviour to be more socially acceptable. Young children need to be able to do this in order to wait their turn to speak, for example, or hold themselves back from hitting a peer who has accidentally pushed them.

***[Translation] "During arts and crafts time this morning, Milo felt some paint get on one of his cheeks. His immediate reaction was to grab his paintbrush and raise it to throw some paint back. He then asked the child next to him, "Was that an accident?" The suspect answered, "It wasn't me; it was the paintbrush that splashed you." Milo put his face close to the paintbrush and said, "Watch out, paintbrush, or I'll splash you back!"[142] Milo's HECP shared this anecdote with his parent to illustrate his development, and it is a good example of the importance of inhibition to healthy interpersonal relationships. Instead of flying off the handle, five-year-old Milo held himself back and took a second to ask his playmate what happened. This constructive reaction also shows that he has reached the level of development needed to consider that other people may have their own reasons for doing things.***

## Working memory

Working memory is a type of memory that allows a person to remember and use information, instructions, strategies and other things. Working memory helps young children plan their make-believe play; for example, it helps them remember which characters they are playing and which scenarios they have decided to act out. Working memory is critical to making sense of any event that unfolds over time, as that requires keeping in mind what happened earlier in order to relate it to what comes later.[143]

***When they play lotto games together, Sabin and Sophia are using their working memory. They have to remember which pictures are on which cards as they turn them over so they can find as many matches as possible. They also have to adjust the information they are holding in their memory when a matched pair of cards is removed from the game. In order to win the game, they must practice inhibition so they do not tell the other players which cards have the same picture before it is their turn.***

## Planning

[Translation] "Planning is a skill that is […] associated with the act of anticipating future events in order to devise a strategy to achieve the desired objective (Baughman and Cooper, 2007).[144]" Planning therefore enables a person to identify the steps that must be carried out in order to complete a task. It helps give them the ability to solve problems, as it requires them to imagine the impacts of different solutions to a particular problem and choose the best option. When an adult lets an infant know that they are going to pick them up and take them over to the changing table to change their diaper,

xxxix Self-regulation refers to the ability to tame and cope with one's emotions. When a toddler goes to their educator at their ECS for comfort when they miss their parents, they are engaging in self-regulation in order to manage their emotions.

they make it so the child can anticipate what is coming by using a skill that is essential to planning: being able to situate events in time in relation to each other (what happened earlier and what happens next).

***The children are having a lively discussion as they get ready to play outside. Johanne, their HECP, listens in on their conversation, and realizes that they are talking about the chasing game they played in the yard yesterday and the new rules they want to follow when they play it today. The children are planning their play. Once they are back inside, Johanne will make sure to get a discussion going for them to reflect on their experience.***

According to some authors, executive function skills are tied in with a child's ability to engage in play and the experiences that interest them, as is encouraged by active learning-based educational approaches. From this perspective, the older a child gets, the greater their ability to maintain focus and resist distractions, and the more capable and eager they are to learn.[145]

Children build their executive function skills through meaningful social interactions with their parents and other adults, including at ECSs, and enjoyable experiences that gradually become more demanding.[146] Mental flexibility, inhibition, working memory and planning are highly interrelated.[147]

## How's our ECS doing?

- How do we show that the children have opportunities to develop in every domain?
- Does our team focus on some domains more than others?
- How do we show that we welcome and encourage the children's creativity?
- How do we support the children's creativity in every developmental domain?
- What experiences do the children have at the ECS that help develop their mental flexibility, inhibition, working memory and planning skills?
- How could we be better equipped to support the children in their development of executive function skills?
- What could we do to help parents understand the importance of executive function skills and the experiences that help children develop these skills?

Chapter

# 05

# Developmental domains

# Overview

Child development is a comprehensive process that involves all the developmental domains: physical/motor, language, cognitive, and social/emotional. All of these interact to varying degrees, based on what the child has learned and experienced, their interests and the environment in which they are being raised.

Educators and HECPs can encourage a child's overall development by providing, among other efforts, a variety of educational experiences suited to each child's age and needs. These should include support for the following developmental domains:

## Physical and motor development

Health and safety, physiological needs (food, sleep and hygiene), sensory development, body schema, gross and fine motor skills.

## Cognitive development

Attention, memory, symbolic function, categories and concepts, reasoning, early basics of math and sciences.

## Language development

Prelinguistic language, spoken language, early basics of reading and writing, writing development.

## Social and emotional development

Attachment (building meaningful emotional relationships), temperament, self-concept, identity, emotional skills, social skills.



## 5.1 PHYSICAL AND MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

The body is the entryway for a young child's overall learning and development. The child uses their body to make contact with their environment, both physical and social, and to explore the world around them.

When a child touches, hears, sees and moves around, they feel sensations in their body and gradually develop their perception. As they do so, they gain reference points in their environment, and react to and interact with it. The ability to manipulate objects is also an important skill for physical and motor development. In fact, children do not tend to develop the ability to reason without concretely manipulating objects until early elementary school.[148]




Motor disabilities have a highly variable effect on a child's development, depending on their severity. While some developmental sequences may be highly altered, or even absent, for example, some children never crawl, all children have physical and motor development that is connected to their sensory development.[149]

### Focusing efforts on healthy lifestyles

**To help give children healthy lifestyles during the first years of their lives, the Ministère de la Famille and its partners developed the *Gazelle and Pumpkin* framework for creating environments that support healthy eating, active play and motor development in educational childcare services. The earlier children learn to enjoy moving around and eating healthy foods, the greater and longer-lasting the benefits will be.[150]**

### 5.1.1 Physical development

The section on physical development addresses issues of health and safety. It also discusses a child's experiences and hereditary characteristics, and meeting their physiological needs for food, sleep and hygiene. In this program, sensory development is considered an aspect of physical development as well.

### Healthy lifestyles

Supporting children's physical development means creating an environment that encourages healthy lifestyles, in compliance with ECA requirements. The joy of movement and the benefits it brings merit particular attention when working with young children, right from the earliest age. Independent sleeping at naptime is also part of a healthy lifestyle that ECSs should support. ECSs can also help young children develop healthy relationships with food by using best practices regarding meals and new foods. Childcare services should be a setting where healthy lifestyles are modelled.



## Health and safety

HECPs and educators are entrusted with ensuring that children are kept safe and healthy at their ECS. Safe and hygienic rooms and supplies give children a setting where they can freely play as they wish. Very young children will use their mouths to explore objects within reach that attract their curiosity. Regularly disinfecting play materials will allow children to freely explore their surroundings without health risks.

***Mylène, an HECP, is always concerned about the health, safety and wellness of the children in her group. On some winter mornings, she places the children on blankets while the floor warms up. She stays in the kitchen while the children are eating, so she can react quickly if one of them starts to choke. She uses gloves and diaper changing supplies to avoid contaminating herself or the children.***

***Sébastien contributes to the calm atmosphere of his room by putting tennis balls on the furniture legs and putting up pictures reminding everyone that it's important to keep their voices at a reasonable volume. When he arrives in the morning, he makes a quick visual inspection to make sure that the curtain cords are safely wrapped up, outlets are protected and no dangerous objects are in reach of children. As part of an early science activity, he keeps a year-long growth chart of the height and weight of the preschoolers in his group. This means he can weigh the children regularly (so that acetaminophen can be administered if needed) as part of an experience that has meaning for them.***

When they manipulate toys, young children hit them against the ground, throw them and use them in all kinds of ways they are not designed for. As they develop their independence, children try out assorted tasks such as carrying large objects, taking a toy placed high above them or riding a tricycle. All of these involve calculated risks. Accordingly, play materials should be both sturdy and attractive, with no elements that could injure children.

ECSs can protect the health of the children in their care by doing things like following protocols for giving medication, using sunscreen, locking away dangerous products, taking care when using any hot liquids around children and making a plan for responding quickly and effectively if a child shows signs of an allergic reaction.

***Véronique adjusts the lighting in her room throughout the day, depending on the needs of the moment. She has arranged the room to have a large free space so that her toddlers can move around freely and safely. When she is absent, her replacement starts her day at the ECS with the manager, who shows her the safety guidelines, including the allergy instructions for children in the group that she will be responsible for.***

While a child's environment must be safe, it is also essential that it allow the child to take risks. A gentle ramp installed in a room for infants, for example, gives them chances to practice their balance, even though they may fall a few times before they master walking on an incline.

## Food[xl]

Healthy eating can be defined as "eating practices and behaviours that are consistent with improving or maintaining a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease.[151, 152]"

Healthy food habits should be instilled in children from birth on. "Growth during childhood […] is strongly influenced by diet. Several nutrients are necessary, for example for bone growth and muscle renewal. Healthy eating also improves children's ability to learn.[153]" The quality of the food that a person eats in early childhood has significant long-term effects on their eating habits, partly because it is during this time that food preferences develop.

An ECS should offer sufficient quantities of a variety of highly nutritious foods to infants and children. Midday meals should follow the guidance of *Canada's food guide*,[xli] and snacks should consist of a vegetable, fruit or whole-grain food and a food that contains protein. It is also important to encourage children to drink water regularly, to help them stay well hydrated.

***Throughout the day, Myriam regularly offers water to the toddlers in her group. She talks to the parents to determine what foods are new to the children, so that she can prepare meals that have a balance between familiar and unfamiliar foods. She uses a nursery rhyme to signal to the children that snack time is coming, to help them transition from one activity to another.***

xl *Gazelle and Pumpkin*, a framework for creating environments that support healthy eating, active play and motor development in educational childcare services, was developed by the Ministère de la Famille and its partners to help childcare services support healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating.

xli *Canada's food guide* is a series of tools and resources available at the following address: [https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/].

HECPs and educators should serve meals in a warm, comforting and respectful atmosphere, to make them into a pleasant time that is conducive to interaction. [Translation] "Eating slowly, taking their time and chewing thoroughly encourages digestion and helps a child participate more in the meal […].[154]" It is important that adults respect signs that a child is full, and help children to recognize those signs themselves. It is also a good idea to use a variety of strategies to encourage children to discover foods (using all five senses when the child tastes a food, making recipes, making educational visits to a grocery store, farm or bakery, etc.) to support them in developing healthy eating habits. And, of course, patience is always vital when it comes to getting children to accept new foods. You may have to introduce the same food 8 to 20 times, or even more, before a child agrees to try it.

### Supporting a healthy relationship with food

[Translation] "It is […] better to avoid any kind of negative interactions during meals, such as showing exasperation […] or reprimanding a child. Insofar as possible, it is better to keep a calm and positive attitude and avoid speaking of the baby's whims or aversions, since they are often merely temporary behaviours.[155]"



***Romy, an infant educator, interprets each child's cues so she can adapt to their pace when she feeds them. She makes sure that the child eats enough, but lets them eat with their hands and experiment with the spoon. Every week, she introduces the children to a different fruit or vegetable, guiding them to explore it with all five senses.***

***During meals, Yves talks with the preschoolers in his group about signs that you're feeling full, to help them recognize those signs themselves. He has set up a system that allows children to take their snacks independently when they're hungry, to avoid interrupting all the children's play at the same time. At the ECS, children can take however long they want to eat. Those who finish their lunch sooner can play quietly before naptime.***

## Sleep

Sleep plays a major role in the physical and mental health of young children, and is critical to their ability to learn and consolidate information in their memories. Sleep affects emotional regulation, which helps children build healthy relationships with their peers, resolve interpersonal conflicts and invest in play. Furthermore, growth hormones are secreted during deep sleep.[156]

For young children, naps are a vitally important supplement to the night's sleep. For children under four, a nap is part of their "biological clock."

Sleep needs are connected to nervous system maturity. There is no ideal sleep duration during early childhood, although there are some general guidelines. Nap length may vary greatly from one child to another.

**Approximate nap duration in early childhood[157]**

| Age (approximate) | Nap(s) |
|---|---|
| 3 to 6 months | 3 or 4 per day |
| 6 to 18 months | 2 per day (around 3.5 hours) |
| 18 months to 3 or 4 years | 1 per day (around 2.5 hours) |
| 4 to 6 years | Nap or period of rest depending on the child's needs |

To ensure that a young child gets enough sleep at an ECS, educators and HECPs must pay attention to the child's individual sleep rhythms and signs of sleepiness (rubbing the eyes, nose or ears; yawning; dreamy demeanour; tearing up; heavy eyelids; shivering; etc.). If they see these signs, they should put the child down to sleep, even if, in groups of children over 18 months, it is not naptime yet.

***The parents of Zackary's group of children filled out a short questionnaire to give him information about family habits regarding naps. This helps Zackary tailor his efforts to the needs of each infant in his group. He watches for signs of sleepiness, and uses that to pick the right time to put each child down for a nap. When they wake up, the little ones are expected to bring him their shoes so he can help them put them on.***

It is important to encourage children to fall asleep on their own and to self-soothe with a familiar object, stuffed toy, small blanket, pacifier, etc., if necessary. By helping build children's ability to sleep alone at naptime, ECSs support them in learning to do the same at home.

### The importance of self-soothing

Research does not support the notion that napping during the day at an ECS prevents a child from going to sleep that night at home.

The Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development found that the vast majority of children who have difficulty going to sleep at night or who wake often during the night have not developed independence in sleeping; they have not learned to "self-soothe.[158]"

Parents can give an ECS invaluable information about what helps a child calm down at naptime.



***Irma talks with the toddlers in her group about various ways to self-soothe before sleep, such as rolling up in a small blanket, snuggling up with a beloved stuffed animal or doll, etc. At the start of the year, she reminds the children every day that she will be right nearby all through their naptime, to reassure any of them who are worried. The children in her group have learned to get up from their naps as quietly as possible so they don't wake up others who are still sleeping.***

Sleep specialists recommend working to avoid creating a negative relationship with sleep in older children, who may no longer feel the need to take a nap. They recommend encouraging older children to rest and play quietly rather than enforcing a mandatory nap.

Ideally, children will wake on their own, or with gentle ambient sounds when they are in a light phase of sleep.

***Sophie conducts deep breathing exercises with the four and five year olds in her group, to help them rest during naptime, even if they don't sleep. She did a project-based activity with them on the sleep patterns of baby animals, to help them learn about the importance of good sleep. When a child has slept poorly, Sophie puts out a mattress and invites the child to use it to rest if they feel a need to.***

## Hygiene

Providing hygiene care to children, such as changing diapers or washing the hands or face, is a useful opportunity for building meaningful emotional relationships with each child. It also offers educational opportunities, including for language learning. Educators and HECPs can show sensitivity by announcing what they are about to do in advance, acting gently, adopting a warm and friendly attitude and tone of voice, meeting a child's emotions with empathy, speaking constructively about children's bodies and adjusting to a child's pace. This enables children to use these emotional situations to build meaningful emotional relationships with their educator or HECP.

Hygiene acts are also an important part of learning for young children, and help them to develop independence.

*Léa, an infant educator, washes her hands before and after meals, when returning from outdoors, after going to the toilet and changing diapers, after messy activities and after wiping a child's nose. She tells a child when she is going to touch them before she does so, such as when she's changing their diaper. The children in her group who are able to do so can participate in changing their diapers (holding the clean diaper, raising their hips, climbing onto the changing table, etc.).*

*Mickael helps his toddlers to memorize the actions involved in washing their hands, including by using a nursery rhyme to remind them of the steps. He reminds them to wash their hands several times a day.*

*The children in Amina's group wash their mouth in front of a mirror after a meal. She has suggested that they invent dance movements by exaggerating the movements of their hygiene routines at home (washing the face, brushing the teeth, combing the hair, etc.). This unusual, spontaneous choreography delighted the children.*

## Sensory development

Sensory development is connected to the development of the child's senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. A child engages with the world around them through their sensory perceptions of colours, shapes, sounds, scents, flavours and textures. This means that it is important to give them materials that stimulate their senses and encourage sensory exploration. Sensory development is also encouraged by voices, physical contact and constant interaction both between children and between children and adults.

Kinesthetic awareness means awareness of one's position in space (for example, whether one is lying down, sitting or standing). It guides a child's movements by giving them the information they need about the precision, speed, strength, coordination or balance that a situation demands. A child gradually discovers their body's range of actions and possibilities, and little by little refines their control over their body and its movements.

Note that some children may react in unexpected ways to various kinds of sensory stimulation. They might overreact, or not react at all. For example, a child may show a hypersensitivity to physical contact or food texture.

| Examples of educational activities and educational supplies to support sensory development | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Educational activities** | **Supplies** |
| **Scents** | Have children smell foods, notice scents: flower scents, sunscreen, dead leaves, woodsmoke, damp earth, etc. | Scented satchets, foods, scent jars for guessing games, etc. |
| **Textures** | Have children touch objects with different textures, name characteristics of the textures of different objects | Cushions, rugs of various textures, fuzzy objects, fur, natural materials, modelling clay, etc. |
| **Colours** | Provide supplies in varied colours,[xlii] comment on the colours of objects, ask about children's colour preferences | Coloured cellophane, prisms, pencils, colourful posters and decorations, fingerpaint, liquid paint or paint sets, etc. |
| **Sounds** | Provide opportunities to make and listen to sounds, sing and recite nursery rhymes with children, modulate your voice when playing with them | Small bells, mobiles, rattles, musical instruments, recorded music, etc. |
| **Flavours** | Provide children with broader taste experiences by offering them a variety of foods, having them describe their perceptions of flavours, interpreting their expressions when they try a new food, asking them about new sensations when they discover a food | Foods, beverages |

xlii The Ministère de la Famille urges ECSs to avoid toys in stereotyped colours (pink kitchen equipment for girls, blue scientific instruments for boys, etc.) that can help to instill the perception that tasks are divided by sex.

### 5.1.2 The body schema

[Translation] "The body schema refers partly to the awareness of one's body in motion or in stillness, and the place it occupies in space. More precisely, it entails awareness of the body's motor potential (agility, flexibility, speed, etc.), its expressive possibility (mimicking, gestures, attitudes, etc.), its morphological limits (height, for example), its positions and its movements.[159]" The body schema also refers to the awareness of all the movements that a body and its component parts can make.[160] Some authors also include the ability to name, recognize and identify parts of the body in this aspect of physical and motor development.

[Translation] "Through their sensory and motor experiences, the child constructs a mental representation of their body, their body schema, and learns to situate themselves in space.[161]" Some authors consider that by the age of three and a half months, children are sensitive to the overall shape of their body and how the parts of the body are arranged relative to each other.[162] [Translation] "Knowing the [names of] body parts and representing them is one of the first symbolic concepts a child begins to understand.[163]"

***Loraine plans her educational approach for each infant in her group to support development of their body schema. She takes every reasonable opportunity to describe a child's gestures during play, naming the parts of the body that they're using. During hygiene care, she gently touches the child and names their body parts. She also asks children to point to the major body parts of characters in a picture book.***

***An educator describes the facial expressions of the toddlers in her group, and names the emotions she sees there. When the group goes outdoors, she does short activities with them, encouraging the children to imitate simple movements and invent their own. She also has put props for playing hospital in the make-believe play area and asks the children about the body parts they treated when they talk about the activity afterward.***

***An educator suggests to the four and five year olds in his group that they sculpt a character. Afterward, he helps them locate the character's joints.***

***He asks the children to find words that rhyme with the words for each body part, so that together they can create a silly nursery rhyme with accompanying gestures.***

***Around Halloween, he suggests that the children figure out all the possible ways they could wear a big scarf and then pick one to create a character.***

### 5.1.3 Motor development

Motor development involves the acquisition and evolution of motor functions, including both large movements of the body (gross motor skills) and small movements of the hands (fine motor skills). Motor skills progress rapidly in childhood. A child acquires them through practice and repeated movements, at the pace their physical maturity allows.

#### Gross motor skills

Gross motor skills involve large movements that engage the entire body. Early childhood is when "gross motor skills are developed, i.e. when the basic skills of movement (throwing, catching, kicking) and locomotion (crawling, walking, running, etc.) are developed. During early childhood, it is essential to focus on developing these skills first, in order to lay the groundwork for the development of fine and more complex motor skills, such as handling a brush or using scissors. Gross motor skills and good muscle tone allow children to discover how they can act and interact with their environment and improve their understanding of reality. Muscle tone is also a prerequisite for proper dissociation of the head, torso and arms, which is necessary for activities involving fine motor skills.[164]"

#### Laterality

**Around age 4 or 5, children develop laterality in motor skills. As a child practices gross motor functions and large body movements, they start systematically using one side of their body more than the other. Gradually, the child is revealed to be right-handed or left-handed.**

**Laterality is essential for success at various skills connected to reading, writing and mathematics, such as recognizing the direction of written text or of the circle arcs that make up letters and numbers. This means that supporting a young child's development of gross motor skills is a way to prepare them for school success later.**



***Charles-Émile encourages curiosity in the infants in his group by frequently providing them with new toys. He places the toys where the babies must crawl to get them. Sometimes, Charles-Émile makes sounds above the head of a child lying on their stomach, to encourage the child to lift their head.***

Active play is play in which children move at low, medium or high intensity, and is an excellent way to support their motor development and help them to have healthy lifestyles. An ECS can encourage active play by providing children with suitable materials within reach and space to move around in, and by going outdoors with them often and encouraging interactions with educators and HECPs. Movement can also be allowed during and integrated into transitional periods (for example, going from one place to another in a more energetic way), or used as a ritual to calm down before meals or during group discussion periods or activities that require a great deal of attention, such as getting dressed. The important thing is that children learn to desire and enjoy movement.

### Active play

Research shows that young children no longer spend enough time being active to achieve full development or the short-term and long-term benefits of physical activity.[165] Caregivers at an ECS must pay particular attention to the setup and the supplies provided to ensure that children have sufficient opportunities to get out their energy in active play, whether outdoors or indoors.[166]



*When the toddlers in her group run around wildly in play, Louiselle places a soft mat against the wall to help the little ones stop. She calls each child to come sit down for a snack based on the speed they're moving, starting with the slowest. This week, she set up a simple game of hopscotch in the yard, so that the children in her group can explore jumping as they play.*

Remember that adults are models for the children in their care, and their actions have a great deal of influence on young children. Children can only benefit from seeing adults who not only are active, but also enjoy being active and show that enjoyment.

*To support the development of gross motor skills, Nadia organizes her make-believe play area around settings that encourage big body movements, such as the circus, water sports or the Olympic Games. She acts as a model by showing two interested children how to jump rope. She reminds children of the importance of pushing on the ground with their ischia, the bones of the rump that you feel when sitting down, so that they can stay in a comfortable posture throughout the discussion time in the morning.*

## Fine motor skills

Fine motor skills are those that involve small movements of the hand (or sometimes foot) in order to pick up or catch small objects, string beads, cut paper, paint or draw, etc.[167] As mentioned above, gross motor skills are necessary for the development of fine motor skills.

A child uses fine motor skills when they manipulate an object, for example when playing with blocks, and when they carry out daily tasks such as getting dressed or washing their hands. Make-believe play offers many occasions to use these skills in dressing up and in imitating the motions of adults who are cooking, writing, cleaning, etc. Fine motor skills are also used in activities of artistic creation such as drawing, painting, sculpting, assembling, cutting, sticking things together or playing a musical instrument.

*Sarah, an HECP, gives an object to an infant, then holds out an open hand for the child to give it back. She repeats this game multiple times. The infant is not yet old enough to move around, so she carries them over to objects that attract their curiosity, and lets them manipulate the objects as they like. At snack time, she provides foods cut into pieces that the children can manipulate as they eat.*

*Frank, an educator in a toddler group, places blocks of varying sizes and colours near small figurines so that children can play with both at the same time. During play periods, he provides them with crayons, paper and modelling clay. He also organizes and supervises small-group activities like fingerpainting and collage making. He verbally supports children in using utensils during meals.*

*To support the preschoolers in her group in developing fine motor skills, Emma helps them make finger puppets and encourages them to play with the puppets as they create their own stories. One morning, as a surprise, she dressed several stuffed animals before the children arrived. The little ones had fun using their fine motor skills to undress the toys and dress them again.*



### 5.1.4 Executive function skills, creativity and physical and motor development[xliii]

Responsive interactions with educators and HECPs help children to control certain spontaneous reactions (for example, not pushing another child to sit down on the same stool as them), use their working memory (for example, remembering the sequence of gestures needed to make soap bubbles), exercise mental flexibility (for example, stopping their play to go to their parent at the end of the day) and plan (for example, using supplies to construct a goal in the yard).

Some physical and motor experiences are particularly fruitful opportunities to use executive function skills. Gestures that go along with songs and nursery rhymes, for example, support executive function skills by helping young children anticipate what's coming next. Gradually, they get used to planning ahead. In games of hide and seek (with objects or people), an infant has to look for an object that was hidden in their presence. They must use their working memory to remember what their partner did to hide themselves or the object. They might also be asked to take turns making a motion, such as imitating a simple gesture (sweeping, putting an object in a box, etc.), to practice their working memory (remembering the movement) and their capacity for inhibition (waiting their turn).

Toddlers also use executive function skills when performing increasingly complex songs and nursery rhymes and the gestures that go along with them. In active play, toddlers concentrate and sustain attention to achieve their goals (climbing the steps of a slide, for example), inhibit some spontaneous actions (for example, ensuring that one foot is stable on the ground before taking another step when playing balance games) and explore different ways of doing something when their first attempt does not work (manipulating a cap in various ways to put it on their head).

When a preschooler is given a variety of opportunities to test their physical and motor limits, such as navigating obstacles along a path or playing a game that encourages complex movements like galloping or keeping one's balance, they are also benefitting from the opportunity to develop their executive function skills. Games that require children to interrupt their movement at a signal or to slow down, exaggerate or speed up their movements all use executive function skills. So do situations where the child uses deep breathing and relaxation to calm down and concentrate (ideally by themselves).

Opportunities to improvise in music and dance let young children use their skills to create something new that is all their own. Dancing freely, imitating peers' gestures or animals' movements, acting out a falling autumn leaf, inventing movements by exaggerating everyday gestures and making sounds with their voices or body parts are all opportunities for children to be inventive. Children can also help come up with more ideas to explore ways of moving that interest them.

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xliii The content of this section is largely inspired by the following documents produced by Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child: *Executive Function Activities for 6- to 18-month-olds*, *Executive Function Activities for 18- to 36-month-olds* and *Executive Function Activities for 3- to 5-year-olds*, accessed April 6, 2017 at [https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/activities-guide-enhancing-and-practicing-executive-function-skills-with-children-from-infancy-to-adolescence/].

### 5.1.5 How physical and motor development affects other developmental domains

**Physical and motor development affects:**

**Cognitive development**, because as a child's ability to manipulate objects and move themselves grows, so do the child's observation and attention skills, and they encounter more opportunities to observe cause and effect, solve increasingly complex problems and develop their knowledge and understanding. Young children have concrete thinking, meaning that their thoughts are generally sparked by what their senses perceive.[168] A young child's sensory experiences contribute to their cognitive development, and, as we saw above, physical and motor development provides any number of possibilities for supporting executive function skills.

**Language development**, because a child's progress in producing sounds is mainly determined by their physical development.[169] Also, a child will adopt the vocabulary used by those around them to describe their body and its movements, which contributes to their language development.[170]

**Social and emotional development**, because a child's sense of self is rooted first and foremost in their discoveries about their body.[171] Children take pride in the physical independence they gradually gain by moving around and doing things for themselves, and that supports their confidence and self-esteem. Also, the child's developing motor skills enable them to approach peers, imitate their gestures and the gestures of the adults around them, interact with them and coordinate their own gestures with those of their peers and the adults around them. A child's ability to adjust their actions and movements with the people around them helps them learn how to get along with others.



### 5.1.6 Best practices for supporting physical and motor development

The table below summarizes the guidelines from the reference framework for creating environments that support healthy eating, active play and motor development in educational childcare services.[172] We have added an item about fine motor skills.

| In an ECS that supports young children's physical and motor development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| Infants are given milk safely, in ways that respect their parents' choices. | "It's time to drink the milk your mom brought this morning. You're really hungry! Yes, yes, I'm going to give you your bottle." |
| The ECS uses educational strategies that encourage children to develop healthy eating habits, a positive body image and a healthy relationship with food. For example, educators and HECPs are positive models: they help children recognize when they are hungry or full; let children choose between foods and choose how much they want; do not use food as a reward, punishment or consequence; sometimes prepare food with the children; etc. | "Are you chewing on your hand? Looks like you're hungry." "Are you still hungry? Let's wait a little bit to see if your tummy is full before you have any more, okay?" "What fruit do you want to eat this morning?" "Do you want me to put some rice on your plate?" "Yes, Erico, Sylvana can have dessert, even if she didn't eat the rest of the meal." "Today, we're making a nice salad for snack time. Look, I have a bunch of fruit in my basket. Do you know these kinds of fruit?" |
| Meals are used to encourage healthy eating and the discovery of new foods. For example: the atmosphere is calm, children are encouraged to talk to each other, there is enough time to eat, children don't have to wait too long, children are introduced to the rules of courtesy around meals, adults who eat with children are positive models, etc. | "Laurence and Charly have set the table, the food is hot, everything is ready. Cédric, can you ring the bell to let everyone know it's time to put our toys away and wash our hands?" "Now that everyone is served, I'd love to hear about the games that all of you played this morning. Esteban, can you tell us about the funny sounds you were making while Charlène was pushing the truck?" "Okay, everyone is served, so now we can eat!" |

| In an ECS that supports young children's physical and motor development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| A variety of highly nutritious foods is offered to the children, in sufficient quantity; the usual selection of foods does not include foods or drinks with low nutritional value. | "We have lots of colours on our plates, did you notice that? Carrots are… orange, peppers are… green, cauliflower is… white, and veggie sausages are… brown." "Who wants a cup of nice cold water?" "For Yasmine's birthday, I made us all some yummy fruit with chocolate dip!" |
| Children have many opportunities for active play throughout the day. | "You can all stand around the table to play this game, it's easy." "I've cleared the centre of the room. Who wants to dance?" "Who wants to help me put the chairs back around the table?" "We were all really focusing on that great book! Do you want to get some exercise now? Who has an idea for an exercise we can do with our legs (our arms, our heads, our torsos, etc.)?" |
| Active play is encouraged through fun experiences with challenges. | "We're going to make an obstacle course! Do you have any ideas for obstacles where we go over something? Under something? Around something?" "I brought a great big blanket today, and I'm wondering what game we could come up with using it. Do you have any ideas?" "Our Manou really impressed us this morning when she tried going up the ramp all by herself!" |
| Playing outside as often as possible is incorporated into the daily routine, every day. | "After naptime, a little walk to the park will do us good. When we come back, you can finish what you started when you were playing in the sandbox this morning." "When the weather's nice, we have our snack outside, and I take the opportunity to do activities that are too messy to do indoors, like fingerpainting on a big surface, playing with water with food colouring in it or potting plants." |

| In an ECS that supports young children's physical and motor development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| Children's fine motor skills are supported by activities that give them choices and encourage creativity (supplies for drawing, painting, collages, clay sculpture) or reasoning (collecting small objects to make them into series, for example). | "Do you want to eat with a spoon or a fork?" "If you want to play quietly, you can pick the arts area or the play table. I brought some new boxes full of surprises, if anyone's interested in that…" "It's really hard to use scissors! Do you want me to hold the paper while you cut it?" |
| Rooms are organized and supplies chosen to support physical and motor development. For example, small supplies for play (balls, hoops and boxes of various sizes, etc.) are always available indoors to support children's fine motor skills. During outdoor play, seasonally appropriate supplies such as sand, water, tricycles, shovels, sleds and toys on wheels encourage children to move around. Other toys and supplies can be added based on the children's suggestions and interests. | "I see that you're getting better and better at rolling and catching that ball." "I was thinking about what we talked about yesterday, so I brought some cardboard that we can use to make airplanes. You can try flying them out in the yard in a little while." "It's really cold today. Who wants to help me shovel so we warm up?" |

## How's our ECS doing?

- What conditions enable children to engage in active play? How can we increase the time they spend in active play?
- When playing outside, do we guide and support children in learning the same way we do inside the ECS?
- What supplies do we provide to support children's sensory development?
- How do we evaluate mealtimes in our childcare service? Are they pleasant times for children and staff? These are major points in the day for children, so should we implement ways to improve them?
- Does the food we provide at our ECS match the recommendations in the *Gazelle and Pumpkin* reference framework?
- How could we improve in terms of helping children explore a variety of different tastes?
- What resources in our community would help us support children in adopting healthy eating habits?



## 5.2 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

[Translation] "Cognitive development involves how a child acquires knowledge and understands the world around them.[173]" There are many theories of cognitive development, and access to new technology and new methodologies has led to a host of further discoveries.

Given that, cognitive development and its component parts could be framed in any number of ways. We have chosen to use attention, memory, symbolic function, conceptual development, reasoning and the basics of mathematics and science to succinctly describe cognitive development in the terms that are most useful for ECSs' educational interventions.

### Not only acting, but also thinking about those actions

**[Translation] "When a child acts and reflects on those actions, it supports the development of their thinking and understanding abilities.[174]"**



Jean Piaget conceptualized a child's cognitive development as comprising a series of stages that the child ascends like a stairway, one step per stage. Today's research, however, shows that cognitive development is not a linear process by which the child completely abandons one way of doing things in favour of another. Instead, a young child uses a variety of strategies from their growing repertoire in order to achieve their goals.[175] A better metaphor for today's understanding of overall development and specifically cognitive development might be an image of successive waves overlapping each other,[176] or a continuum of development.

Below is a list of some characteristics of the way young children think, as identified by Piaget. These remain useful, and are essential to understand to be able to adequately support children's cognitive development. Young children:

- Think in concrete terms, meaning that thoughts are initially sparked by what their senses perceive.[177]
- Initially understand things only from their own point of view (egocentrism); for example, Philippe, age 3, has trouble understanding that his father is also a son, since he thinks about people in terms of their roles toward him.[178]
- Tend to attribute life and agency to objects and phenomena (animism);[179] for example, a child might believe that the sun is alive since it moves in the sky.[180]
- Only focus on one aspect of a situation (centring); for example, for Kim, age 3 and a half, taller children are necessarily also older.[181]
- Are not aware of their own inconsistencies and are not bothered by being inconsistent or contradicting themselves.[182]

Young children learn through doing, by making direct contact with people and objects. Since children with disabilities such as intellectual disabilities may be more limited in their ability to explore their environment and manipulate objects, they may potentially be slower to concretely explore their environment. Accordingly, some cognitive skills may develop later.[183] It is important for educators and HECPs to provide each infant with stimulation, to focus on their strengths and abilities and to adapt their environment as needed so that the children can get more control over their environment.

### 5.2.1 Attention

Attention is the "ability to focus on a person (e.g., mom, baby brother), object (e.g., toy elephant) or activity (e.g., feeding time, playing soccer) for a certain period of time. It relates to the ability to learn and remember (i.e., recall the location of a person or an object).[184]" "To retain information, you must first pay attention to it,[185]" which is why memory and attention are so closely linked.

A child's attention span lengthens as their ability to resist distraction grows. The child learns gradually to inhibit the reflex to shift their attention when a noise or movement bothers them. They become able to concentrate on a task for longer and longer periods.

> ***Marie-Claude, an HECP, regularly presents new and brightly coloured toys to the infants in her group, so that they can devote their full attention to exploring them. When changing diapers, she captures a child's attention by conversing with them, speaking to them and then listening attentively to the sounds and words they make. These one-on-one moments are wonderful opportunities to observe the children's changing abilities.***

The more visual and auditory distractions there are, the less young children are able to concentrate. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that ECSs keep ambient noise to a minimum and avoid cluttering the space and overdecorating the walls.[186] However, it is also important to remember that items placed in the ECS environment to support learning, such as posters with letters or numbers, contribute to child development. Decoration and learning support items should be chosen to sustain children's interest without distracting them.

> ***Manon cuts down on the sources of distraction in her room by limiting the number of decorations on the wall. She regularly changes the posters and children's drawings that she has up, so that she can select them based on the children's constantly evolving interests.***
>
> ***In her room, the older children have small group conversations in the mornings (rather than with the whole group), so that conversations match their attention spans.***

*Renaud sometimes directs questions to one particular child during interactive reading. This helps keep his group of preschoolers alert throughout the activity. He names the strategies the children use to stay attentive (coming closer to hear clearly, looking at the person who's talking, finding a quiet place in the room to look at books) to help them consciously notice and apply those strategies. He plans activities that require them to follow new instructions for the morning, since he has noticed that the children in his group are more attentive at the start of the day.*

### Joint attention

Around 12 months of age,[xliv] a child becomes capable of using joint attention, or looking at what someone else is looking at or showing them.[187] [Translation] "This skill is the basis of social interactions, language acquisition and empathy.[188]"

## 5.2.2 Memory

[Translation] "Memory plays a critical part in overall cognitive functioning.[189]" [Translation] "From very early on, babies are able to remember what they have done.[190]" [Translation] "Their memories are not as effective as those of older children, however, because young children tend to focus on the details of an event, which are easily forgotten, whereas older children and adults generally focus on an event's essential parts.[191]" Infants are better at remembering something when they are in the same context,[192] in the same place, in the same position, with the same people, etc. A certain degree of stability in the ECS, therefore, not only supports the child's emotional development, as mentioned in the section on attachment, but also supports their memory, which is crucial for cognitive development.

The rarity of an event, the emotions it inspires and the active participation of the child are highly important factors in creating lasting memories.[193] Furthermore, [Translation] "young children often are better at remembering things they have done than things they have seen.[194]" An even greater factor in a child's ability to remember an event is how their parents, educators or HECPs talk about it with them after it happens.[195] This means that talking with children and revisiting the experiences they had at home and at their ECS enable them to name events and help them store those events in their memories ("What did you do during playtime?") and provide opportunities to focus on specific aspects ("What did you build? What other things did you use? What was hard for you? How did you solve the problem?"). This helps the child remember what happened and enriches their memories of it.

xliv This age is given for reference only, since every child develops at their own pace.

*Marie-Line observes that the children in her preschool group are increasingly likely to call upon prior knowledge and things they have already learned when she raises a topic with them. Since the start of the year, she has regularly asked them questions such as, "Have you heard of…?", "Have you done…?" or "What do you know about…?" Today, when she said that she would like to talk with them about water, Stéphanie asked to speak and said that she liked drinking water, Edmond talked about his swimming skills and Judith explained that water is important for washing.*

*Alice announces the different stages of the day (meals, naps and outdoor play) with nursery rhymes to help the infants memorize them and help anchor them in time. She names the objects that a child is manipulating and describes their gestures. She knows that this repetition, coupled with the child's actions, will help them memorize new vocabulary.*

The memories that children retain about an experience are also very useful to them in terms of memorizing and revisiting things they learn.

Memory can be divided into three categories: sensory memory, working memory and long-term memory.[196]

**Sensory memory** is a temporary storage of all the sensory input a person perceives. This information is erased from memory if it is not used.[197]

**Working memory** comes into play when information that has just been perceived (for example, an instruction) or recovered from long-term memory (knowledge acquired previously) is used to carry out a task. As we have seen, this is an executive function skill that allows someone to keep a certain number of things available in their memory so they can use them. Furthermore, "some tasks become so familiar that they can be carried out on autopilot, freeing up space in the working memory.[198]"

*When Victor gives a new instruction to the toddlers in his group, he catches their attention and repeats it as many times as necessary to help them preserve it in their working memory. He also supports the children in developing their memories by chatting with each of them about things that happened at home that their parents have described briefly for him.*

**Long-term memory** has unlimited space. It lets a person preserve information in their memory in a lasting way, and recover that information for use as needed.[199]

### 5.2.3 Symbolic function

Symbolic thought is what allows us to use a symbol to mentally represent an object, person or situation that is not currently present.[200] Words, images, pictograms and numbers are all symbols. Toddlers who have acquired the symbolic function can substitute one object for another when playing (for example, using a branch as a horse). With the symbolic function, children move from imitation to action[201] and create increasingly complex play scenarios, as we saw in the section on play.

Drawings, like words, are symbolic representations. A child must acquire the symbolic function before they can have the urge to represent things they know and then the ability to do so. Of course, this does not prevent them from scribbling. We will examine this topic in more detail in the section on language development.

### Using language to organize thoughts

**[Translation] "Words, whether spoken or written, are the most common symbol and probably the most important one for thought.[202]" Language is a critical part of cognitive development, because it enables a person to label and organize their thoughts.**



[Translation] "When they acquire the symbolic function, a child is able to remember past events and anticipate future ones.[203]" However, "to ensure that toddlers build [this] capacity […] adults must demonstrate and provide verbal support for them. One way to do this is by playing with children as the substitution is modelled,[204]" showing children the use of one object to represent another.

***An educator hides an object in an opaque bag and asks the infant to look inside and find it. Then she takes the object and pulls it out of the bag, exclaiming, "Here it is!" She repeats this process with the child in different contexts, with different objects and various containers, to help them develop object permanence. Object permanence is the understanding that an object or person continues to exist, even when the child does not see them.***

***Malik takes advantage of Léanne's interest in animals to support her in acquiring the symbolic function. When the beaming toddler shows him a photo of a puppy that she found in the box of collage supplies, he invites her to look for other pictures of dogs around the room with him. Together, they collect three picture books and two stuffed animals, and find a dog in a picture on the wall. Malik completes the collection by writing the word "dog" on a piece of paper.***

***Régine, an HECP, plans to talk about safety symbols with her older three children while the younger ones finish their nap. Before lunch, she takes all of the children in her group on a walk around the neighbourhood. She asks them about their understanding of traffic signs they see along the way (stop signs, traffic lights, one-way signs, etc.) to draw out their prior knowledge. She will use similar questions soon when she introduces Mégane, Léo and Louis-Jérôme to the symbols for "poison," "flammable" and "explosive."***

### 5.2.4 Categories and concepts

A concept is a general, abstract representation of the reality of an object, situation or phenomenon, based on similarities (shape, colours, size, use, etc.).[205] Words are symbols, as we have said, but they are also concepts. For Sophie, age 2, the concept of "banana" is easier to understand than the concept of "fruit," which refers to a wide range of objects of different shapes, colours and tastes. She builds an understanding of the concept of fruit as she hears the term used to refer to the colourful and sweet foods she eats every day. Adults tend to use narrower and more concrete categories (such as the category "dog") to explain larger and more abstract categories (such as "pets"): pets are animals that people keep in the house with them, like dogs. [Translation] "Through this cognitive ability to categorize, very young children gradually develop their abstraction capability,[206]" meaning the ability to think without acting concretely. Making groups and categories makes it easier to memorize the vast amount of information perceived on a daily basis.[207]

***The educator places large posters at eye level for the infants in her group. When she has a moment with an infant who seems interested by the poster, she asks them to point out things in the picture as she names them. She also supports the children's conceptual development during tidying up, by asking them to put toys away in bins labelled with pictograms and words.***

When young children try to understand the world around them, they begin with the three broadest categories: inanimate objects, people and other living things.[208] As their ability to recognize similarities and differences (their ability to classify)[209] grows, they refine these categories based on additional features. A "sparrow" thus is part of the category "birds," in addition to being an animal and an "other living thing." The sparrow might also be connected to the categories "wild animals" and "animals with feathers" or "animals that fly," once the child has integrated those categories into their understanding. However, until they are somewhere between five and eight years old, children are unable to move from one category to another to classify the same object.[210]Young children spontaneously classify, sort and order objects to compare the ways that the objects are similar and different, which helps build their understanding of various concepts.

Children also have the ability to generalize. "One example of such generalization is when a toddler learns that different objects can serve the same function: you can drink from a cup, a mug, or a bottle. Another example is when a toddler starts using the same object in different situations: having learned to put her socks on, Trisha proceeds to put socks on her teddy bear and on the legs of the chair, and even attempts to put socks on the cat!"[211]

The ability to generalize also allows a child to make inferences, "the act of passing from one proposition, statement or judgment considered as true to another whose truth is believed to follow from that of the former.[212]" Maude has played with a ball, and she knows that it bounces. Based on this knowledge (a proposition considered as true) she makes an inference that allows her to anticipate the motion of another ball when she sees it. The ability to infer is supported by reasoning, which we will discuss in the next section.

***Two toddlers, Sacha and Adrien, have gathered some balls and are having fun rolling them. When they lose interest in the game, their HECP joins them and suggests that they try to roll wooden cubes and other objects. Intrigued, they experiment with all the objects they can get their hands on. Looking back on this experience convinces them that circular objects roll much more easily than others.***

Games of classifying objects by matching them (distinguishing similarities and differences in order to match two identical objects), identifying simple relationships (associating different objects based on a shared characteristic) and grouping them (identifying shared characteristics to create a set) are essential for young children to develop their cognitive skills. Interestingly, they will do these crucial experiments spontaneously and of their own accord.

***In Carole's group, it's four-year-old Simon's turn to be the mischief-maker before he joins the others for naptime. He mixes up the shoes of the children in the group, moves blocks from one basket to another and puts all the tools for make-believe play in one compartment. Carole and the other children in the group will have plenty of work to do to put everything back, and they will use their classification skills to do so.***

### 5.2.5 Reasoning

[Translation] "What we call 'reasoning' is a collection of cognitive processes that allow us to draw conclusions from experiences, facts and premises. Reasoning is used for various purposes: to make decisions, solve problems, assess an argument, test a hypothesis, etc.[213]"

#### Causal reasoning

Causal reasoning is the ability to connect cause and effect. This is the first type of reasoning that a young child uses. [Translation] "In the first two years of life, a child develops the ability to connect cause and effect through experiences with the people around them.[214]" When an infant cries and one of their parents reassures them, they are already beginning to understand that their actions produce effects.[215]

Often, a child may create an erroneous causal link between two events that simply happened to occur close together. For example, Milène might conclude that her parents decided to get divorced because she quarrelled with her sister.[216] However, "when young children are tested in situations that are comprehensible to them, research shows that they are able to correctly connect causes with effects.[217]" Further evidence for this is how frequently children use terms like "because" or "so."

*When other people come to her room, Isabelle takes the opportunity to encourage the infants in her group to predict events. When Rose, the cook, arrives with the snack, Isabelle asks the children, "Now that Rose has brought us fruit and milk, what should we do?" When a child's parent arrives at the end of the day, she says, "There's a mommy/daddy at the door. What's going to happen?"*

A young child begins to explore cause and effect by repeating an action in order to produce a result (for example, hitting a block against the ground to make a noise). Next, they try different actions that cause a given result (attempting to open containers, drawers, boxes, jars, etc.), followed by exploring possible causes for actions, occurrences or behaviours (looking for the source of a sound or pushing different parts of a noise toy to create other sounds). Finally, the child demonstrates an understanding of the fact that actions, occurrences and behaviours have specific causes (for example, walking carefully when carrying a glass of liquid).[218]

Causal reasoning can also significantly impact behaviour, because sometimes a young child will repeat an inappropriate behaviour simply to confirm whether it gets a consistent reaction from their adult caretaker.[219] When this happens, it is important to understand that the child might want to confirm the existence of a cause-and-effect connection between their action and the adult's reaction, without necessarily intending to disobey.

Causal reasoning helps a child to acquire concepts, since it enables them to attribute characteristics to actions, objects, occurrences and behaviours.[220] For example, Sophie has a more refined understanding of the concept of "paper" after she observes that when she manipulates it (cause), she can tear it easily (effect). She can now integrate the category "fragile" into her understanding of what paper is.



*When three-year-olds Béatrice and Mathieu ask Marie, an educator, if their toy baby bottle contains real milk, she answers them with questions: "What could we do to figure that out?" "What makes you think that it's real milk?" "Do we put the little baby bottle away in the same place as the milk we drink at snack time?" and so on. By doing so, she helps them develop their ability to reason.*

### Reasoning depends on the level of cognitive development

A child's ability to reason is connected to their level of cognitive development, which can sometimes lead them to make "mistakes." How should you react? Although you don't need to approve or disapprove of the child's response or reasoning, it is essential to take an interest in their efforts to think about the situation.[221] Depending on the details, you might do the following:

Invite the child to explain their reasoning: "What makes you think that…?"

Rephrase the child's answer: "You think that…"

Ask a question that leads the child to call upon previous knowledge: "Does this remind you of anything?"

Invite the child to try another way (if possible): "How could we check?"

Encourage the children to discuss their points of view with each other. "You think… and Katya thinks…"

If the child continues to insist on their incorrect response, don't use your authority as an adult to convince them.[xlv]



## Problem solving

When young children encounter an obstacle to achieving a goal of theirs, they must use problem-solving strategies to resolve the difficulty, just as adults do.[222] Young children [Translation] "use an extremely wide range of strategies to solve what are, for them, genuine problems, […] strategies that shift considerably as the child grows and acquires more experiences.[223]" Mental flexibility, which we discussed in the section on executive function skills, plays a significant part in a child's perseverance when they need to solve a problem.[224] It allows the child to transition from their current activity (building a tower of blocks) to an action intended to solve a problem (preventing the tower from falling when a fifth block is added). Creativity is directly linked to the ability to think of multiple solutions to a single problem in order to apply the most appropriate one.

All day long, young children run into obstacles to the goals they want to achieve. As they try to solve these problems, including interpersonal conflicts, they are aided by their experience, their ability to draw on long-term memory for things that might be useful in solving a problem (knowing, for example, that a key can be used to unlock a door) and their ability to ask a more experienced person for help.

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xlv These suggestions are avenues developed by Devries and Kamii (1981) and cited by Gilles Cantin in the document *Des stratégies à mettre en œuvre dès la petite enfance pour soutenir le développement du raisonnement et de la numératie* [Strategies to implement in early childhood to support the development of reasoning and numeracy], Colloque Québec-Strasbourg, 2008.

It is important to remember that young children often need to inhibit (executive function) a spontaneous response (if it's snowing, it's so we can play outside), in order to move on to logical reasoning based on knowledge (snow falls when it's cloudy, in winter). This inhibition ability develops through experiences that are meaningful to the child. It is also important to remember that [Translation] "what a child verbalizes reflects their understanding in that moment.[225]"

***Anne regularly leads activities with her group of preschoolers that provide them with opportunities for problem solving. She hung a sheet in her room and put a lamp behind it to introduce the children to shadow play. On the first day, the children mostly explored the way their shadows changed size as they went toward or away from the light source. Next, Anne provided them with a collection of costume props and other supplies, visible only as dark silhouettes when viewed in shadow play form. This was all it took to spark an explosion of ideas in the children's minds. The children had to exercise their creativity to find and test solutions in order to create the effects they wanted (a superhero cape, a witch's long nails, bunny ears, etc.).***



### 5.2.6 Early introduction to mathematics

"Over the last four decades, it has become increasingly clear that children's everyday (informal) mathematical knowledge is an important basis for learning school (formal) mathematics.[226]" [Translation] "A young child's first experiences in numeracy[xlvi] are key to their later educational success.[227]"

Knowledge of mathematics is not limited to numbers. It also involves geometric shapes, measuring and organizing space and time, and the vocabulary used to speak about mathematical concepts. Everyday life is full of opportunities to support a child's early introduction to mathematics. For educators and HECPs, it is especially important to know how to recognize those opportunities in order to take advantage of them.

Young children are capable of learning simple things on their own, but manipulating objects is not, by itself, enough to introduce them to early concepts of mathematics. Support from adults is what provides them with scaffolding to learn more complex concepts, in mathematics as in all other domains. As we have seen with the theoretical foundations of active learning, it is through interactions, including conversations, that an adult deliberately provides a little bit of help to enable a child to do something they cannot do alone, to learn things in their zone of proximal development.

#### Numbers

One of the major concepts of mathematics is the idea of using counting to find the number of objects in a collection.[228] Recent research into early introductions to mathematics have shown that children are capable of intuitively processing information about quantities from their first few months of life.[229] However, that ability is limited to differentiating quantities by comparing two small groups of objects (two or three items) and comparing two very different groups of objects (for example, when the larger group contains twice as many items as the smaller one). It has not yet been established whether this early ability is associated with understanding of mathematics per se.

Infants and toddlers can be introduced to concepts of quantity using appropriate vocabulary, such as "lots of," "a little," "less" and "more." In the context of everyday situations in which it is useful to know the number of items, older children can be introduced to how to count, with the following features[xlvii]:

- Stable order: Number words are always used in the same order.
- To be able to count objects or people, the numbers must be listed in order: 2 always comes after 1 and before 3. Therefore, children need to memorize the unchanging sequence of numbers.
- One-to-one correspondence: One and only one number word can be assigned to an item being counted.
- For example, when you count a set of objects, you assign one number to each object. If you count the same object twice, the final count will be wrong.
- Cardinality: The last number word used in a counting sequence indicates the number of items in the set.
- For example, if I need to count a group of five tokens, it's the last token that I count (token number five) that indicates how many there are.

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xlvi The term "numeracy" refers to "the ability to understand and use [mathematics] in daily life, at home, work or school." (*source: National Numeracy*, https://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/what-numeracy)

xlvii This list is drawn from Gelman and Gallistel, 1978, and cited in: Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network and Canadian Child Care Federation, *Foundations for Numeracy: An Evidence-based Toolkit for Early Learning Practitioners*, 2010, p. 14.

- Abstraction: The things being counted might be different kinds of objects.
- For example, if asked, “How many things are on the table?” we might respond with a number corresponding to a varied collection of objects consisting of a pencil, a book and two fruits, for a total of four objects.
- Order irrelevance: Items in a group can be counted in any order.

The sequence of numbers is unchanging (1, 2, 3, 4, …), but the order in which objects are counted can vary. In our earlier example of objects on a table, one might count the fruit first, then the book and the pencil, or one might begin with the book, continue with the fruit and finish with the pencil. Either way, one will get the same quantity and the same final number.

***When the infants in her group are playing outside, Noémie introduces them to the concept of quantities as they play with dead leaves. When she gathers a big armful of leaves, she talks about "lots of leaves," and when she is only holding a few leaves in her hands, she says "a few." When the children are jumping into the pile of leaves heaped on the ground, she says with dramatic expressiveness, "lots and lots of leaves!"***

## Geometric shapes and measurement

Exploring shapes is part of geometry. “Geometric shapes can be described, analyzed, transformed and composed and decomposed into other shapes.[230]” Young children are exploring the rudiments of geometry when they do things like classify shapes based on their characteristics (colours, shapes, sizes, etc.) or assemble different shapes to make pictures.[231]

Measuring means evaluating dimensions. Among the many terms used to describe dimensions are words like “big,” “little,” “long,” “wide,” “deep,” “far” and “near.” Dimensions can be measured with standardized units (centimetres, litres, kilometres, etc.), but also with different units of measure like your own foot or hand or the length of an object.

***When the toddlers in her group are playing in the sand, an educator comments on the size of the pails or how much sand each can hold.[232] She often joins a child in playing, and uses the opportunity to compare amounts.***

Games involving assembling things are useful for introducing measurement. They provide opportunities to measure real-life objects, often as part of problem solving. (How can we make sure that both wings of the airplane that Réginald is making are the same length? How big a door should we cut into this cardboard box so that the figurines can go through it?) Physical or motor experiences can also support a child's understanding of the concept of measurement (for example, comparing how far children have jumped by looking at the tracks left in the sandbox, or getting children to use blocks to make several buildings of the same height).

## Spatial thinking and orientation in time

Spatial thinking refers to the concepts, tools and processes used to understand, concretely or through visualization, our position in and movements through space, and those of objects.[233] Spatial thinking is what enables young children to orient themselves in an ECS, put on a sweater the right way around and understand instructions with a spatial component (such as "Sit down beside Victor" or "Put your coat inside your cubby, please"). This is an important aspect of cognitive development. It has many associated concepts: above, below, high, low, in the middle, next to, facing, in front of, behind, etc. To a significant degree, young children demonstrate their spatial understanding through their understanding of geometric shapes and their ability to solve puzzles.

Time is another aspect of cognitive learning in early childhood. As a young child's memory develops, they become able to locate events chronologically, based on their order in time. This entails concepts such as "before," "after," "during," "earlier/later," "in a moment," "yesterday," "tomorrow," "soon," etc. The rhythm of the day at an ECS and the key events that punctuate it (meals, naptime, outdoor play, etc.) provide a fertile ground for developing an understanding of time. Revisiting a child's games and experiences helps them to order events in time in order to talk about them, which encourages them to use the appropriate vocabulary.

***Charles took out the paints this morning and showed the subgroup of preschoolers who had chosen this activity how to change colours without mixing them. In explaining the four steps to follow: 1) dip your brush in the water, 2) wipe it gently on the edge of the cup of water, 3) swirl the»brush in the paint colour of your choice, 4) paint on your paper. He is reminding them of the consistent order of number words.***

***He often refers to the large clock to give the children indications of time: when the big hand is pointing to the 6, it will be time for us to sit down for lunch.***

***He has found several numbered game boards (a version of Snakes and Ladders, for example) to support the children's counting abilities. Some of the games are always available in the room, while others can be borrowed by the family of a child who is particularly interested.***

### 5.2.7 Early introduction to science

[Translation] "A young child who does what comes naturally is a budding scientist.[234]" A child's hands-on activities are the roots of an early introduction to the sciences. Gradually, with the emergence of their capacity for symbolic thought, the child starts to make and test hypotheses.[xlviii]

An early introduction to science is first and foremost an introduction to the scientific method, to help guide a child in seeking answers to their questions. When Alexandra asks, for example, if caterpillars really turn into butterflies, an adult might simply answer, "Yes." However, the adult could instead support Alexandra's learning by conversing with her and suggesting that she observe a caterpillar, if possible, or look for sources of relevant information to find a satisfactory answer. In doing so, the adult is also helping to build Alexandra's confidence in her own ability to find answers.

A young child's introduction to science could involve both living and non-living things, such as characteristics of plants and animals or changes they observe in nature.

Adults' attitudes are the greatest determining factor in a young child's discovery of science, and people who do not have a great deal of scientific knowledge can still support children in this domain.[235] In fact, it can actually be helpful for educators and HECPs to not know all the answers, because that helps them to avoid explaining and demonstrating phenomena.[236] [Translation] "An educator [or HECP] who knows how to share their own curiosity with the child is certainly more effective than one who knows all the answers and does not let the child look for them.[237]"

***Pierre, age 3, notices young shoots emerging from the lawn in spring. His HECP, Agathe, asks him, "What do you think that itty bitty plant will turn into in a few days?" This invites him to make hypotheses. If she suggests that he observe the plant's changes from day-to-day, and if she records the observations that Pierre makes aloud to her, she will be supporting him in testing his hypotheses. When she discusses this experience with him and gives him opportunities to talk about it with his peers, Agathe is helping him to store what he has learned in his long-term memory. She can also refer to this learning sequence when an opportunity arises to discuss a subject related to plant growth (for example, bananas ripening).***

***Marie-Josée sees that Florence and Olivia are throwing the airplanes they made and trying to make them fly. Florence seems discouraged by the fact that her airplane is crashing to the ground without gliding at all, while Olivia's plane is gliding in the air a little longer. Marie-Josée talks to the two girls about the differences in how they made their airplanes and the differences in their flight. This leads them to plan changes they could make to improve the planes' performance (keeping weight down, using the lightest paper possible, making the wings larger, etc.). By doing this, the educator is working to make the children's play more complex, encourage them to persevere and support their introduction to science.***

xlviii Hypothesis: supposition, attempt to explain something.

### 5.2.8 Executive function skills, creativity and cognitive development

As we said in the section on overall development, creativity and executive function skills are part of cognitive development. Some aspects of cognitive development, such as attention, memory and reasoning, require a person to concentrate on something specific while ignoring distractions and spontaneous responses, in order to accomplish a task or find a logical solution to a problem.

Creativity and mental flexibility require the opposite. To come up with a variety of options, a person needs flexibility and freedom of thought and the ability to take different approaches when thinking about something.

Cognitive development includes both of these complementary tactics. An educator or HSP who understands the distinctions between them will have an additional tool available to help them provide children with rich and varied experiences.

### 5.2.9 How cognitive development affects other developmental domains

**Cognitive development affects:**

- **Physical and motor development**, because the more a child's cognitive capabilities develop, the better equipped they are to judge their physical and motor ability to carry out an action ("Is my leg long enough to reach this bar of the jungle gym?"). Also, as a child's attention span grows, they become increasingly capable of doing things like keeping their balance, copying a sequence of movements, controlling their movements to slow themselves down, drawing a closed shape, etc. Exploration of their environment increases a child's physical and motor skills, and thinking about their movements leads them to find different ways to do things.[xlix]
- **Language development**, because it leads a child to translate their thoughts into language. A child's cognitive growth results in more nuanced thinking and stimulates learning of new concepts (words).
- **Social and emotional development**, because developing cognitive abilities are a source of pride for a child and enable them to understand certain ideas connected to their emotional development (for example, their identity in relation to their family and community). The more a child's cognitive development grows, the more the child is capable of observing, anticipating, imitating, negotiating, asking questions, making arguments and finding solutions to interpersonal conflicts when interacting with others.

xlix The term "psychomotor development" is commonly used in early childhood education; it refers to actions that allow for thought, which is omnipresent at that stage.

### 5.2.10 Best practices for supporting cognitive development

| In an ECS that supports young children's cognitive development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| Educators and HECPs look at young children as people who want to make sense of the world they're growing up in, discovering and exploring. | "I can tell you're curious. You want to know what's in this box." "Your daughter seems to have figured out that plants need water to survive. A little while ago, she brought a container near the plant and pretended to give it a drink, saying, 'Thirsty.'" "I know you want to see if the carrot will break when it falls to the ground. But remember, food needs to stay on your plate. After naptime, you can try dropping all the toys you want." |
| Strategies that encourage cognitive development. For example, educators and HECPs support children in thinking and reasoning by conversing with them and inviting them to ask questions; they organize the day to ensure that children have time to explore and experiment on their own initiative; they take the steps necessary to allow children to pick up play where they left off; etc. | "What do you think the bear in the story is feeling right now?" "Here's something funny! Three of us have striped shirts today. Do you know who I'm talking about?" "I brought some magnifying glasses. What do you think they're used for?" "I need four white pieces of paper. Can you bring them to me?" "How many days until we go pick apples?" "Can you put these containers in order from smallest to biggest?" "It's your turn to roll the die. How many squares do you need to move your piece?" "When we're playing store, what can we use as money?" |

| In an ECS that supports young children's cognitive development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| Strategies that support creativity in particular. For example, educators and HECPs actively offer supplies for open play and arts and crafts, and children can use those supplies in a variety of ways; they recognize children's innovations and call on their imaginations; they support children in looking for solutions for problems or interpersonal conflicts without imposing their own; they encourage children to invent movements, songs, stories, etc. | "Great idea! Let's try that." "If you want to make a Valentine's Day card for a friend, you can come with me to the art area." "You've decided to move around on your back? Good idea, that's very creative. You're the only one who's thought of that one!" "Let's think a little longer. Are there any more suggestions for ways to decorate our room for spring?" |
| Facilities are organized and supplies selected to support cognitive development. For example, educators and HECPs provide children with plenty of varied supplies (nesting and stacking toys, blocks, sets of objects, measuring supplies, telescopes, numbers, non-fiction books, etc.); they decorate the room with written material with words and numbers; they arrange the room to help increase young children's attention spans; etc. | "That's a tiny little thing you're looking at. What tool would help you see it better?" "Do you think that the bean we planted in soil will grow any differently than the one we planted in sand?" "I put up a little screen to set the reading corner apart a little more." "Yes, that's right, the red ring goes on top of the orange ring. You've put them all in the right order!" "Let's try a guessing game. I've got some things that all go together, except one. Which one doesn't match the rest?" |



## How's our ECS doing?

- What experiences do the children have in our ECS that support their cognitive development? What could we do to better support this developmental domain?
- How could we better organize the ECS to help increase the children's attention spans?
- In what contexts do the children use their knowledge of and skills in numbers and assessing quantities?
- What activities, projects and experiences have been planned to support the children in an early introduction to science?
- Do we make an ongoing practice of introducing the children to the early basics of science? What could we do to make it more habitual?
- What criteria do we use to select play materials that are appropriate for the cognitive development of infants? Toddlers? Preschoolers?

## 5.3 LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

[Translation] "Language is what allows human beings to create and acquire the elaborate communication systems we call 'languages' […].[238]" Communication using abstract, symbolic language. that is, a language that allows someone to speak of past events and absent things and people, is behaviour unique to human beings.[239]

Without being specifically taught, but simply by interacting with others, children around the world acquire their first language, the language that their family speaks.[240, 241] Around age 5,[l] a young child has already mastered the structures of their first language, whether spoken or signed,[li] even though their vocabulary and ability to express themselves are less developed than an adult's.[242] [Translation] "All humans except those with severe disabilities have language abilities.[243]"

Language is not just a means of communication. It is also [Translation] "an instrument of social identification, and one that transmits a great deal of information beyond just the meaning of the words. When someone talks, the way they express themselves provides information on their sex, approximate age, place of origin and social class.[244]" A child's first language contributes a great deal to forming their social identity.

Every one of the thousands of languages spoken around the world is based on a complex system of rules for combining sounds to make words, combining words to make sentences and combining sentences to make narratives.[245] This enables speakers to use a finite set of words to create an infinite number of sentences to express an infinite number of ideas.[246]

l Information about children's ages is given for reference only, since every child develops at their own pace.

li This refers to sign languages used by people who are Deaf and hard of hearing.

### The varying pace of language acquisition

**[Translation] "Above all, any adult who cares for children must be aware that different children go through the various stages of language acquisition at wildly different times. Some children are speaking intelligibly at 18 months, while others [...] do not speak clearly until age 3.[247]" This warning underscores the importance of adopting individualized interventions for young children and adjusting your interventions to what they are ready to learn.**



Language learning is extremely complex. [Translation] "A child must perceive the sounds they hear, extract the meaning of the word formed by those sounds in context, produce the same sounds and store all this information in their memory.[248]" This means that a child uses their cognitive skills heavily while learning to speak.[249]

This section on language development addresses the development of prelinguistic language (the sounds and movements that babies initially experiment with), learning oral language and early introductions to reading and writing. It is important to remember that [Translation] "the initial skills for reading and writing develop in parallel with language skills.[250]" Graphical development (the child's progress in drawing) is also part of this section, because of its expressive value and its relevance to preparing the young child for writing.

Language, whether spoken or written, has two components: receptive language, which is language that a person hears or reads and understands, and expressive language, which is the language a person produces via speech or writing.

### The importance of a language-rich environment

**In some families, non-verbal communication is used more than verbal communication. Such families may have difficulty with the content of this section, which encourages an environment where children hear a great deal of speech and have many opportunities to speak themselves. The importance of language development to school success is well known. This means it is essential to support young children in developing language skills, which are a significant part of preparation for school, while still respecting the culture of their community and their first language. The practices given in this program are best practices for all children. It is also helpful to educate parents on the importance of language development, so that ECSs' efforts and family efforts can be consistent.**



### 5.3.1 Prelinguistic language

Before a young child is able to speak, they use their voice, facial expressions and gestures to communicate with the people around them. These actions constitute a language of their own, a prelinguistic language.

#### Distinguishing the sounds of their first language

In the 26th week in utero, a fetus has already begun to react to its mother's voice, and to other stimuli such as her heartbeat and movements.[251] A baby first learns to distinguish speech from the other sounds they hear.[252] In doing so, they come to prefer that voice and its language (their first language) to all others they may hear. They identify their first language from its rhythms, melodies, intonations, etc. The infant's ear is thus primed to distinguish the basic phonemes of their first language,[253] the smallest units of sound represented by letters (o, l, r) or groups of letters (ch, ai, ng, etc.). [Translation] "Long before a child is capable of connecting sound to meaning, they are able to recognize sounds they hear often, such as their name.[254]"

#### Producing sounds

A newborn's cries are its first and only means of communication.[255] After birth, these cries shift gradually into a variety of types. They alert the adults caring for the child, who for their part learn to distinguish whether a given cry signals hunger, tiredness, pain or anger. Soon, the infant laughs and burbles, expressing happiness through undifferentiated sounds made at random. Then, as they come to understand that their sounds, smiles and laughs get responses from adults, the child learns to "converse" and to imitate the sounds produced by a conversational partner with more and more accuracy.[256]

Babbling, which is the repetition of a sound composed of a consonant and a vowel ("amama," "dadada," etc.) gradually comes to resemble words more and more closely, until the young child pronounces their first words.[257] Babbling lets the child practice pronouncing the sounds of a language.[258]



A young child's capacity to communicate intentionally manifests when they begin to speak in turn, alternating between producing sounds and listening to the other person.[259] They watch silently and intently as the other person speaks to them, and make a series of sounds in turn as soon as the other person stops speaking.

> ***To support the language development of the infants in his group, Simon enthusiastically imitates their burbling and babbling after they 'speak'. He stops to let them take a turn as soon as they start to make sounds again. His attitude shows them that what they're expressing is important to him.***

## Gestural communication

Infants also use gestures to communicate, such as lifting their arms to ask to be carried, pointing to an object to be given it or looking at the same place as the person speaking to them in a joint attention context. They also adopt certain conventional social gestures, such as [Translation] "waving the hands to express 'goodbye,' nodding the head to say 'yes' or shaking the head to say 'no,' clapping their hands to express joy, etc.[260]"

### Joint attention and pointing

Effective communication requires both partners to be talking about the same topic. Joint attention and pointing are good ways to help infants and adults pay attention to the same thing, which is crucial for mutual comprehension.

Joint attention is first established by the parent, when they follow an infant's gaze and comment on what they're looking at. Around 6 months of age, a child becomes capable of following another's gaze to look at the same object. Around 9 months, the child is generally able to look at something a person is pointing at, rather than looking at the pointing finger.

Around age 2, the child begins to deliberately point to obtain an object and to share their interest in an object with someone else. The child also uses this to get information, which some people consider a request for support.

For some authors, pointing is [Translation] "the platform on which linguistic communication rests, preparing the child for […] language acquisition.[261]"



*Éliane, an HECP, takes every opportunity to show the infants in her group that she understands what they're trying to communicate to her. When Gabriel stretches his arms toward the stuffed animal on the table and opens and closes his hand, she says to him, "I see, Gabriel, you want your stuffed animal. I'll get it for you." Interactions like this encourage the children to use gestures to communicate.*

*Simon spends plenty of time chatting individually with the infants in his group. He names the objects a child is pointing at or playing with, and he plays with and points to them in turn, doing his best to invite joint attention to the extent that they're capable of it. He names the people who come into the room, the objects they're carrying and the reasons they've come; he names the emotions that the children show with their facial expressions, body language and gestures.*

[Translation] "Symbolic gestures, such as blowing to say that something is hot, often appear at the same time as a child's first words, and function in a similar way. Such gestures show that before a child is able to speak, they understand that objects and concepts have names, and that symbols can be used to refer to all the objects and events in the child's daily life.[262]" There is a positive correlation between the number of communication gestures an infant uses and the future development of their vocabulary.[263]

*Young Alice used to signify that she had finished her meal by energetically shoving her bowl away, usually making a considerable mess. Her educator decided to show her a simple gesture meaning "done." Alice now uses that gesture at the ECS and at home, to the relief of the adults around her, who hurry to clear the bowl away in response to her gesture.*

### 5.3.2 Oral language

Receptive language precedes expressive language. In other words, young children understand words before they are able to pronounce them. A child usually produces their first words around the age of 11 to 14 months, at which time they usually already understand around 100 words.[264] From then on, language (oral or written) will be a lifelong [Translation] "tool for thought and learning.[265]"

#### Proto-words and first words

In order to be able to understand a word, a child must be able to distinguish it from all the other words in the statement the word is part of, in order to then apply meaning to it. The context in which the word is spoken gives the child important clues that enable them to infer its meaning. This means that an infant who hears "Do you want a piece of banana?" will be better equipped to understand what's expected of them if they are seated at the table, rather than in the middle of playing with blocks. [Translation] "The frequency of occurrence and repetition of the same word in different contexts helps a young child understand that it is a word,[266]" and gradually to grasp its meaning.

Eventually, an infant may babble a full series of sounds resembling a sentence, with a start, a finish and intonations, in response to someone speaking to them. Next, as their receptive and expressive vocabulary grows, they will use proto-words, or [Translation] "a collection of juxtaposed sounds referring to a specific object,[267]" which they use consistently until they learn the correct word. "Gaga" might be used instead of "milk," for example, in a baby's special vocabulary.

At first a child pronounces the words they know, generally nouns, only approximately; it is not until age 4 or 5 that they develop the ability to pronounce certain consonant pairs. They may use a single word to express an idea. For example, when a child says "ball," they may mean that they want the ball or that they are asking their educator to play ball with them. The word "cat" might be used to refer to all four-legged, furry animals,[268] as children broaden the meaning of some words based on what they need to communicate. Conversely, children may also narrow the meaning of a word.[269] The word "cup" might mean their own cup and no others, showing the child's partial understanding of the terms in question.

A young child also uses simplification strategies to enable them to pronounce difficult words. A child might omit a syllable (for example, "nana" for "banana") or substitute one sound for another (for example, "liberry" instead of "library"). Sometimes children rearrange the parts of a word[270] (for example, "pasghetti" instead of "spaghetti").

The quality and quantity of the language a child hears affects their language development. This means that [Translation] "it is extremely important that adults use correct pronunciation […] around a child.[271]" One appropriate way to support infants' language development is to use simple words and short sentences, sometimes accompanied by gestures.[272] As the child grows, adults should use more varied vocabulary and more complex sentences. Educators and HECPs who are available, sensitive and attentive are particularly well equipped to help understand what children are trying to say and encourage them to express themselves. Parental input is also vital for understanding their pronunciation of some words and the meaning of their proto-words.

***When Mylène addresses the infants in her group, she, like most adults, spontaneously uses "baby talk." She always uses the correct word to make sure she's modelling appropriate language use. However, she amplifies her intonations, speaks slowly, exaggerates the sound of vowels, uses short sentences, and often repeats herself. This way, she draws the infants' attention to the distinctive characteristics of language sounds.[273]***

***Alix looks attentively at the toddlers in his group when he addresses them, so that he can use their facial expressions to identify words they don't understand. He uses concrete examples to support their comprehension. This morning, when he announced that the snack would include oatmeal, he realized that only two children seemed to know what he was talking about. During snack time, accordingly, he returned to the word "oatmeal" while the children were eating, and discussed hot and cold cereals with them.***

*Kerline, an HECP, memorizes and uses some common words in the first languages of the children in her group, when their families speak languages other than English or French. This is one of the ways that she welcomes families with open-mindedness and respect for their culture.*

### Learning two languages

Not so long ago, learning two languages was considered to be a disadvantage for children.[274] Today, we know that that is not the case. Bilingual children have a smaller vocabulary in each language than children who are exposed to only one first language.[275] However, when both languages are taken into account, they know the same total number of words. Furthermore, between 4 and 8 years of age, bilingual children demonstrate greater problem-solving skills.[276]

For many reasons, it is important for a child learning a second language in an ECS to learn their first language as well. For one thing, it is through their first language that a young child first learns to understand and deal with their emotions.[277] A solid understanding of that language helps them communicate with their family, which is a protective factor for the child.[278] Additionally, a child's social identity develops through learning their first language and contact with their culture.



## Sentences

Around the age of a year and a half, when the child has an expressive vocabulary of 50 or so words, we see an explosion in their vocabulary.[279] The child perceives [Translation] "clearer and clearer distinctions between the various phonemes that make up words.[280]" Familiarity with their language's phonology grows, above all, through contact with adults' pronunciation.[281] The child begins to combine two words to express an idea, such as "Mommy sare" to say "Mommy share,[282]" in telegraphic speech.[283] As their sentences get more complex and they begin to use things like determinants and adjectives, the child becomes able to express the meaning of their thoughts more precisely (semantics).

The child also becomes more and more attentive to syntax, or the order of words in a sentence. They gradually realize that a word can take different forms (morphology) and begin to use verb agreement.

With practice and experience, a young child also increasingly understands language use in different social contexts (pragmatics). Eventually they will be able to use language to ask questions, ask for help, explain their ideas, greet people, console others or make them laugh, and so on. They will also understand that they can express themselves more familiarly with children they know than they should with adults they do not know.

[Translation] “Between the ages of 3 and 5, a child makes considerable progress in language. Their pronunciation of sounds grows more precise. They have a greater number of words available, and their sentences grow more complex.[284]” The child also has an increasing understanding of the intentions of the people speaking to them. [Translation] “In educational contexts, the fact that there are many complex and diverse opportunities to interact with others encourages the development of the child’s communication skills.[285]”

To support children’s oral language development, educators and HECPs can:

- Discuss the child’s language progress with the parents, along with ways to support the child’s learning.
- Model language use for children and use rich and varied vocabulary in their interventions.
- Take every opportunity to name objects, persons and events that occur in the ECS, without “invading” the children.
- Use the same word in different contexts to support children’s understanding of it.
- Repeat children’s words with the correct pronunciation, without distracting them from their intended communication by asking them to correct themselves.
- Rephrase what a child has said to reflect their understanding of the statement.
- Ask children open questions,[lii] if their level of development allows, to encourage them to try to give a more complex answer.
- Give children plenty of opportunities to speak and let them take the time they need to express themselves, in the context of individual interactions.
- Plan language-rich experiences, such as ones that focus on songs, nursery rhymes and reading picture books and stories.
- Organize an attractive area for make-believe play, and renew it regularly to keep children interested in playing there, since make-believe play gives them lots of opportunities to talk with their peers.
- Plan to frequently revisit experiences children have had at the ECS.
- Etc.

lii Open questions are questions that invite a multi-word answer. They often begin with “how,” “why,” “where,” “when,” etc.

### Private speech

A child engages in private speech when they speak to themselves aloud, without addressing another person. Some researchers interpret private speech as a way for the child to plan and self-regulate their actions toward achieving a goal.[286] If this is true, then private speech is directly linked to the development of executive function skills. It is an intermediate step between a child's response to an external question from an adult, which is often used to guide and regulate the child's behaviour and attention, and silent, internal thought.[287] It's as if the child is giving themselves instructions aloud about their own thoughts and behaviour and how to solve problems they run into. During this process of taking ownership of their own language, the child gradually develops their capacity to think in language.[288]



*Béatrice has realized that young children are very talkative when telling her about their experiments with "land art," creations made in nature with things from the surrounding environment (leaves, pebbles, branches, pinecones, flowers, etc.). When she sees that some of them are interested in natural objects, as inevitably occurs, she suggests that they make a picture or a sculpture on the grass outside the ECS. She takes them on a walk to gather materials for their creations, then suggests that they organize the items they have collected into a picture. Discussing this experience later, whether individually or in a subgroup of children, leads them to talk about the objects they used, spatial relationships between objects (beside, over, below, etc.) and, for older children, the things represented in the art (a person, a house, a boat, etc.). She photographs the art and shows it to the parents to appreciate when they arrive at the ECS at the end of the day.*

*Dounia's group of four-year-olds is working on a big project to put together a party that will mark the end of several children's time at the ECS. Each child has memorized a few sentences about hat they enjoyed most at the ECS. These will be recorded and used as a soundtrack for a slideshow of photos taken throughout the year. During the party, Dounia will have the pleasure of sharing a few particular gems she has jotted down with the parents: amusing things the children have said that reflect both their view of the world and their language learning.*

*Philippe decided to introduce his four-year-olds to guessing games when an opportune moment presented itself as they waited for lunch time. The children enjoyed guessing words that he had come up with clues for. Some children later started to imitate a televised game show in the make-believe play area, taking turns to pose their own guessing games to each other.*

### 5.3.3 Early introduction to reading and writing

Learning to read and write begins very early. Between 0 and 6 years of age, a child learns most of the skills required.[289] "Children with positive early language experiences develop literacy skills, which in turn contribute to language growth.[290]"

We have seen that a child's vocabulary grows extremely rapidly during early childhood. This is, to a significant degree, what the child uses as the basis for decoding words once they begin to formally learn to read. So, a child who knows the word "cap" will have an easier time decoding that word from the sounds of its component letters, compared to a child who only knows the word "hat" for any piece of clothing worn on the head.

Children learn new vocabulary through verbal interactions with others, but also through their experiences with literature (reading stories, for example), during which adults explain the meaning of words that the child does not yet know. However, a large vocabulary alone is not enough to prepare a child to learn to read and write. Another part of a child's early introduction to reading and writing comes through exploring the uses of writing, phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle and spontaneous writing.

> ***All educators at this ECS have worked to enrich the interactive reading experiences they provide the children. Now, depending on the age of their group, educators draw more attention to the books themselves, their covers, their titles, the number of pages, the name of the author, the direction of reading and the delicate gesture of turning a page. Educators now ask the children a greater variety of questions about things like the vocabulary, the characters' emotions, details of their clothing, indicators of time in the illustrations and text, and so on. The children also learn to differentiate the writing from the illustrations. These new practices are exciting for the staff as well as the children.***

#### Uses of writing

The uses of writing are the various functions that written text can serve. To entertain ourselves, we read stories, tales and poems; to stay informed, we read magazines and newspapers; to refer to information that's more than we can store in our memory, we use lists, address books, notes, etc.; to learn and understand, we read non-fiction books, atlases, encyclopedias, school workbooks, etc.; to communicate and express ourselves, we write cards, letters, emails, etc.; we write to create stories, plays, songs and nursery rhymes; we use writing to help us plan games and activities, what to bring to a picnic, our meals for the week, grocery lists, etc.

***Educator Ariane has assigned each infant in her group a pictogram, chosen with help from their parents, which represents an object they care about. This pictogram is used for various purposes, including as a memory aid for taking turns. At the start of the year, she always pairs the pictogram with a photo of the child. Some months later, most of the children recognize their pictogram without needing to check the photo. This is one way that Ariane supports the children in acquiring the symbolic function.***

As a child discovers the various functions of writing, they discover a whole world of possibilities. They [Translation] "become increasingly curious about this communication tool. They try to use it, and ask questions about written symbols such as the letters of the alphabet.[291]"

A young child becomes familiar with the functions of writing in part through contact with adults who model reading and writing: their mother, father, older brothers and sisters, grandparents and, of course, their educator or HECP. At ECSs, written material can provide concrete examples of how writing is useful in daily life: children's names identifying their personal spaces, labels used to organize supplies, a variety of books (many of them relevant to the child's interests), posted reminders about dietary allergies, etc. It can be helpful to show toddlers and preschoolers how useful this written material is, and for educators to demonstrate their use of writing at various points of the day or when carrying out various tasks.

Some ECSs organize a writing area with a table, chairs, a board and chalk, paper, a variety of crayons and pencils, erasers and modelling clay (for using long pieces to trace shapes). Written material can also be put in the make-believe play corner, to match its current theme, and in any other play area.

To help children understand the functions of writing, educators and HECPs can also suggest that they write down messages or information dictated by the children, such as when making a card for someone, creating a story or song, or collecting ideas as part of a project-based activity.

***Edgar always keeps a notebook and pencil in his shirt pocket. He uses them to jot down observations about the children, messages he wants to pass on to their parents, and their ideas and suggestions. The children are used to seeing him writing, and often ask him about it. Accordingly, Edgar is not surprised when Laurie-Ann asks him to write down in his notebook that her birthday will be here in five sleeps, or five days. He is happy to comply, and reminds her that her birthday is a very special day that's already written down on the calendar.***

***In Suzelle's group, the older preschoolers are making their snack, a fruit kebab sprinkled with grated coconut. Hanis is thrilled by his delicious mixture, and really wants to make sure he remembers how to make it. Suzelle, his HECP, offers to write down his recipe so that his parents can read it to him when he wants to make it again at home.***

## Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness includes the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds of larger units of language, such as words and syllables, and of the smallest units, phonemes.[292]

Young children show phonological awareness by their interest in the sounds of words, independent of meaning.[293] For example, they notice rhymes like “bed” and “bread,” and identify words that start with the same sound, like “daddy” and “doggy.” They amuse themselves by substituting one sound for another in a word, such as “bubblebum” for “bubblegum.[294]” An ECS can use nursery rhymes and songs and compare the sounds that make up words, to help children develop phonological awareness.

***In Stanley’s group of preschoolers, snack time is often a favourite time for playing with words. Currently, they’re making all sorts of comparisons with the names of foods. The J sound in the word "orange” led them to discuss the first names of their aunts and uncles, after Liane said that her uncle Roger’s name has the same sound in it.***

***Juliana makes the children in her group laugh when she invents nursery rhymes and rhyming songs with them, based on details about each child:***

***"Keira likes to play the drums,***
***She likes apples, pears and plums,***
***She says yum, yum, yum!”***

***This way, Juliana helps them recognize their tastes and interests, which are part of their identity, while supporting their phonological awareness.***

The English alphabet contains 26 letters. These 26 letters represent 44 phonemes, or 44 different sounds. When a child is learning to read in school, they will use their knowledge of these small units of language to decode words.

***When educator Marie-Hélène is interactively reading a book that her children know well, she sometimes stops after the first sound of a word to let the children finish it. This helps to keep their attention as well as to increase their awareness of phonemes.***

## The alphabetic principle

[Translation] “In order to learn to read and write in an alphabetic writing system, a child must understand that the sounds of spoken words can be represented using symbols (that is, letters).[295]” Learning the alphabetic principle, then, does not mean knowing how to recite the 26 letters of the alphabet, but rather grasping the connection between the sounds that make up spoken words and the letters used to write them. A child can comprehend how the alphabetic principle works from knowledge of only a few letters. They will learn it, however, when they are sufficiently interested, and with adult support and guidance.

To understand a letter, the child must learn its shape, its name and its sound. The

name of the letter “a” is the same as one sound it makes, but it also has other pronunciations. The name of the letter “b,” on the other hand, is said “bee,” but that “ee” is not part of the sound of the letter. In their last couple of years at an ECS, a child can be introduced to the idea of associating some phonemes with letters that are significant to them, such as the letters in their name and their family’s names.

***When Caroline uses name labels for her group of preschoolers, such as when they’re choosing their responsibility for the week, she takes the opportunity to talk with them individually about each of the letters in their first name and the letters’ shapes, names and sounds. When relevant, she also points out the capital letter at the start of the word. Since the children have a wide range of language abilities, these one-on-one conversations also give her a chance to observe and support each child’s early reading skills based on their specific needs.***

***When all the children in Albert’s group began to include characters when drawing, Albert started offering to write the title of the picture at the bottom of the page. He writes each letter slowly, saying its name and sound, and pronounces each syllable as he writes it. The child writes their first name at the top of the picture using real letters, invented letters or a»mixture of the two.***

## Spontaneous writing

Before a young child is able to write letters correctly, they may draw writing-like lines on a page. Some known letters will be included in this “writing.” Some researchers have suggested that “encouraging young children in these writing attempts is a way to encourage the acquisition of written language before they receive formal, systematic instruction.[296]”

Accordingly, a printed version of the alphabet might be posted on the wall near where children are most likely to try experimenting with writing, to help them familiarize themselves with it. ABC books can be placed among the other books. Children can also be given modelling clay, chalk for drawing on the pavement and sticks for drawing in soil or sand, to encourage them to write spontaneously.

As they experiment with drawing, painting and modelling, a young child develops the basic skills they will later use in formal lessons on writing fluidly. They should be given many opportunities to try arts and crafts, both for the fun of it and to support their development and prepare them for school.

***To help give the four-year-olds in her group an early introduction to reading and writing, Éloise puts written materials (books, picture books, catalogues, brochures, etc.) and writing tools (paper, pencils, paper clips, envelopes, an old keyboard with the cord removed, etc.) in the make-believe play area. These items are intended to mimic the office of a daily newspaper. This week, she will be able to confirm whether they interest the children, with a project-based activity for a special issue on national parks. She planned this after Jacques' father talked to her about reading the sports pages with his son on the weekend.***

***Éloise uses lots of creativity when she reorganizes the make-believe play area, in order to familiarize the children in her group with reading, writing, mathematics and school. She asks the children for ideas as well. In the past, she has put together a post office, a train station, a library, a toy store and a scientific laboratory.***

### 5.3.4 Graphical development[liii, 297]

A child who is given opportunities to draw between the ages of 1 and 5 develops in all domains simultaneously. Drawing uses fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, as well as cognitive skills (to find the gestures needed to draw lines and shapes and organize the drawing on the page). A drawing constitutes a language in and of itself, and the child uses it to express what they deem important, thereby encouraging social and emotional development.

#### Scribble stage

The "scribble" stage is the first stage of graphical development. It begins when the child draws their first line on a piece of paper and ends with the appearance of the big-headed "tadpole" figure that heralds the beginning of the child's attempts to draw people.

The scribble stage can be broken down into several phases. An infant familiarizes themselves with a crayon as they do with any other object, by manipulating it, looking at it, tasting it and sometimes listening to the noise it makes when striking a surface. When the child draws for the first time on a paper surface, they are simply doing a motor activity and creating uncontrolled scribbles. They are using the tool in a physical way, without yet grasping the visual result. Next, the child notices the lines the crayon leaves on a paper or other surface. They have now discovered the effect of their action. The child creates controlled scribbles during the period when they begin to voluntarily organize their picture and choose where to leave marks. The pleasure of motion is now accompanied by resolutely visual exploration.

liii The content of this section is primarily drawn from Isabelle Mercier-Dufour's work *L'évolution graphique des enfants de 2 à 14 ans* [Graphical development in children ages 2 to 14], Catholic School Commission of Quebec and Association québécoise des éducateurs spécialisés en arts plastiques, 1984.

Next, a young child's graphical vocabulary incorporates proto-shapes. Their increasingly controlled lines become scattered with zigzags and spirals that skirt the sparse lines on the page. Soon, the child acquires sufficient control over their gestures to draw lines whose ends meet and create closed shapes. The child continues to explore by combining these forms in twos, then threes, for example by inserting crosses into rectangles and circles into squares, or even drawing them side by side to form so-called "compounds."

Children frequently draw circular compounds, called "mandalas." These involve rays around circles and ovals. After much trial and error, they lengthen two rays to create legs, and draw eyes and a mouth in the circle. The child has now managed to create their first character, a tadpole figure.

## Pre-schematic stage

The tadpole figure, with its huge head and stick legs, grows more complex as the child experiments with human representation in the pre-schematic stage. They group geometric forms to draw things that are meaningful to them. Since their earliest experimentation with drawing, the child has chosen colours to suit their taste rather than to match objective reality, and that continues to be true. The elements they draw float on the page, varying in size according to the child's level of interest. They also explore depictions of objects.

This relatively new ability to draw and combine closed shapes is one of the abilities necessary for writing letters.

### Colouring books?

**One cannot make a young child draw spontaneously if they have not yet discovered drawing for themselves, spurred by their explorations and the pleasure of seeing gestures transform material. Interventions such as giving the child colouring books or having them assemble precut shapes to make a snowman, witch or rabbit are not ways to respect their graphical development.**

**A child can certainly explore cutting out and colouring using shapes they make themselves. Their educator or HECP can provide them with useful material (fat crayons, markers, paints, etc.), put words to their discoveries, show interest in their graphical development and help their parents to take an interest as well.**



***To encourage her group of four-year-old boys to draw, Paule has added a series of magazines about automobiles, a topic of great interest to them these days, to the art corner. Paule avoids giving them a single model, which they would tend to want to copy without great success. Instead, she provides them with several, ideally photos, and gives them plenty of time to draw inspiration from them.***

*Clara provides her group of preschoolers with drawing supplies and suggests that they use them to plan their free activity, a project-based activity, a block structure or anything else. Drawing helps them reflect on what they want to accomplish, and is a very useful tool to help them retrace their initial intention when revisiting their experiences later. Parents are often surprised to see how much meaning is imbued in their child's mysterious lines.*

### 5.3.5 Executive function skills, creativity and language development

Language seems to play a critical role in the development of executive function skills.[298] As we discussed earlier, private speech helps a child to plan and self-regulate their actions to achieve a goal. Working memory is also essential for language development because, in any situation that takes place over time (such as a conversation or interactive reading of a story), it allows a child to remember what happened earlier (for example, a question asked or the start of the story) in order to connect it to what follows (the answer to give or the story's twists and turns).[299] Language helps children name their thoughts and actions, think about a topic, plan and remember that planning.[300] Language skills also help a child to understand and follow increasingly complex rules both for games and for regulating their behaviour.[301]

All conversational experiences are relevant for supporting a young child's executive function skills via their language development. This includes make-believe, chatting, interactive reading, creating stories, planning activities or projects and revisiting activities later.

Appropriate exercises to support language development include many that encourage children to exercise creativity, which is itself directly associated with mental flexibility.

### 5.3.6 How language development affects other developmental domains

**Language development affects:**

**Physical and motor development**, because it supports children's ability to understand instructions about their bodies, movements, functional autonomy (handwashing, getting dressed, etc.) and physical safety.

**Cognitive development**, because as a child's vocabulary grows, they become more and more able to make connections between things they know; the more precise their vocabulary is, the more precise their understanding can be. Also, language development calls upon the child's ability to use symbols, which is a component of cognitive development.

**Social and emotional development**, because it helps the child use words to express their personality, interests and unique family culture. Language development helps the child communicate intelligibly and in a socially acceptable way, and helps them use speech in their interactions with others, including to resolve interpersonal conflicts.

### 5.3.7 Best practices for supporting language development

| In an ECS that supports young children's language development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| The educator or HECP values children's self-expression in all forms. | "I can tell you're curious. You want to know what's in this box." "Your daughter seems to have figured out that plants need water to survive. A little while ago, she brought a container near the plant and pretended to give it a drink, saying, 'Thirsty.'" "I know you want to see if the carrot will break when it falls to the ground. But remember, food needs to stay on your plate. After naptime, you can try dropping all the toys you want." |
| Strategies that encourage language development. For example, educators and HECPs give children lots of opportunities to speak, listen to them attentively, use correct language, support children in enriching their vocabulary by repeating words in various contexts and explaining them at need, etc. | "I can see you're hungry. Your bottle is coming! While we wait, let's sing your favourite song!" "What props could we put in the make-believe area so we can play magicians?" "Yes, it's a joke, it's not true. Léo said that to make us laugh." "What a fun word you've just made up! Blanket-go-seek, a little blanket to hide under!" "I showed your daughter how to say 'done' by rubbing her hands together vertically. It's really useful when she's done eating." |
| Strategies for supporting an early introduction to reading and writing. For example, children see various uses for writing at the ECS; they have opportunities to play with words and become familiar with the letters; they participate in rich and energetic interactive reading sessions; they can create texts by dictating to adults who work with them and can practice spontaneous writing, etc. | "I'm afraid I might forget to tell this to your parents. I'm going to make a note so I can read it to them when they get here. Okay?" "Tomorrow morning, we'll look in the library for a book on snails so we can find the answer." "Our new friend has a nice long name, É-li-sa-beth." "Arthur chose the story today. If you want, we'll read the one you chose after you get up from your nap, just the two of us." |

| In an ECS that supports young children's language development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| The facility is organized and supplies are chosen to support language development. For example, written material is available in the room and writing supplies are placed in toddlers' and preschoolers' play areas. There is a library with a wide range of books that are replaced regularly and relevant to children's interests, etc. | "You can look at the pictures on the bins to pick where to put away these figurines." "Great idea! I'll go see if the Sweet Peas group has another telephone that we can borrow." "Look, we can roll the modelling clay to make long sausages, coils. Then we can use them to draw or write on our napkins. Who wants to try?" |

## How's our ECS doing?



- What methods do we use to support the language development of infants? Toddlers? Preschoolers?
- How does the way in which the day is organized encourage conversations between children and adults, and conversations between children?
- Is the work organized to allow staff to concentrate on each child and talk with them during personal care and hygiene?
- How could we make better use of make-believe play areas to encourage all our children of any gender to play there?
- What projects, activities and experiences have been planned to support an early introduction to reading and writing?
- Are the children's experiences with arts and crafts at the ECS appropriate for supporting their graphical development?
- How do we work with parents to support their child's language development to the best of our abilities?
- Could we do a better job of explaining to parents how we work to give children an early introduction to reading and writing?

## 5.4 SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT[liv]

A young child is, above all, a social being who develops in contact with others. Their social development and their emotional development are tightly linked.

As we saw in the chapter on the theoretical foundation of this program, a young child's social and emotional development are based on their attachments to their parents and their meaningful emotional relationships with other adult caretakers.

Social and emotional development are associated with the child's temperament and self-concept, which enables the child to see themselves as a unique being and distinct from others. Constructing an identity and the basis of healthy self-esteem are also part of a child's emotional development, and so is developing independence, confidence in their ability to learn and motivation to explore their social and physical environment.

This developmental domain also involves a child's emotions and their growing ability to express, understand and regulate those emotions, and their social skills.

### What about moral development?

**Moral development is founded upon a person's cognitive, social and emotional development, but it is not until age 6 or 7 that a child begins to distinguish right and wrong based on their actions' effects on others. Through age 5, the child's actions are instead based on the positive or negative consequences that something will have for themselves.**

**A young child's worldview does not yet include moral thinking, but can still be used to gradually instill an understanding of social conventions. As social development leads a child little by little to consider other people's perspectives, it prepares the way for their later moral development.**



### 5.4.1 Temperament

"Temperament consists of the individual differences in emotion, motor activation and attentional reaction to stimuli.[302]" It "is shaped by both genetic and environmental factors.[303]"

Temperament includes characteristics connected to reactivity, how a child reacts to new things, their ability to adapt to a changing situation and their mood.[304] It also involves a child's ability to self-regulate, or their ability to control their impulses, concentrate and focus their attention[305] and adapt to new things, as well as their ability to calm and deal with their emotions.

liv Many authors use the term "socio-emotional development" or "social-emotional development" when discussing social and emotional development.

*Viviane, an infant educator, makes notes on the day's schedule and the personal care to be given to each child, to help her plan and communicate with parents. This information is also useful for her file, which she updates regularly in order to support her replacement on days when she is absent. She has included a section on the temperament of each child, to help avoid certain difficult situations. This way, her replacement will know that, for example, Julien is likely to react strongly to the fact that his educator is absent and a stranger is present, but she can help mitigate this reaction by using his favourite truck to distract his attention. She will also know to keep an eye on Mathilde, especially during arrivals and departures, because the little girl loves to seize every chance to explore outside the room.*

All temperament traits have positive and negatives aspects depending on the context in which they manifest.[306] For example, a child who has low-key reactions when distressed or pleased is seen as easy to teach, which can be gratifying for them. However, they may have more difficulty in making their needs understood, compared to a child who expresses themselves more strongly.

### A caring approach with all children

«[Translation] "Some children have the ability to attract an adult's attention more easily than others […]. Others are more shy in their approach to attracting an adult's gaze or attention. It is important to be attentive and caring with all the children, both the ones who are easy to notice and the ones who are easy to overlook. For the latter, what does it mean to be part of the group? Wanting to be different, unique, not like others, is not a pathology in and of itself.[307, 308] A child who experiences being stigmatized, classified, categorized, measured and observed can have significant resulting difficulties.[309]



*At the ECS that Émerik goes to, he finds the support he needs to assert himself more and more and take his place in the group. After watching the children interacting on several occasions, his HECP, with guidance from the technical and pedagogical support officer from her coordinating office, has planned some educational activities to support Émerik, who at three years old has a hard time interacting with his peers. She has also planned educational activities with the other children in the group, especially for when they refuse to let Émerik join their games.*

A person's personality develops throughout their whole life, based on their temperament and on their experiences over the years.[310]

The personality of the child's adult caretaker and the temperament of the child (the foundation of their future personality) are equally critical in shaping their interactions. An adult's personality might enable them to easily adjust to one child, but can lead to difficulties when adjusting to another. The important thing is for the adult to be aware of the issue, so that they can respond appropriately to each child's needs, including those of children who are not their ideal match.

***Arnaud has a very energetic personality. He is aware of his own tendency to rush the toddlers in his group, most of whom have a calmer temperament and prefer a slower pace. Arnaud regularly reflects on his practices and attitudes, to make sure that he is adjusting to each child and giving them a framework that respects their temperament.***

### 5.4.2 Self-concept[lv]

[Translation] "Self-concept includes all of a person's perceptions of themselves. It is a complex collection of perceptions that also includes self-esteem and self-confidence. Through their own experiences and the perceptions of others, children learn to recognize the things that specifically characterize them and the differences between themselves and others. Gradually, they develop an increasingly accurate and realistic view of their strengths and weaknesses.[311]"

An infant first learns to be aware of themselves by moving around, as parts of their body happen to come into their field of vision.[312] Through their physical and motor experiences, as they take control of their body and as their body schema develops, a child gradually comes to understand that they are different than the people and objects around them. When they acquire object permanence, [Translation] "the child becomes […] fully aware that they are a full-fledged individual, and attempts to identify the characteristics that distinguish them from others.[313]"

[Translation] "Children mould their self-image by watching and listening to their parents, and above all by observing and sensing their parents' pride or disappointment in them.[314]" This self-image is also shaped by the gaze of the educators and HECPs who care for the child at their ECS.

As we saw in the section on attachment, a child's trust that adults will be able to understand and fulfill their needs enables them to explore more of the world around them. As they explore and learn, they gradually build their trust in their own abilities. An adult can support the growth of a child's self-confidence by specifically naming a child's successes, questions and problem-solving strategies; applauding their perseverance and effort in using new skills; helping them do things they are not yet capable of doing alone; and otherwise supporting the child's emotional development through a scaffolding process.

lv Self-concept is also called "self-awareness" by some authors.

***Audrey, an HECP, values the play of the infants in her group and uses scaffolding to support them in it. She encourages them to test their ideas, and plays the role they suggest for her or joins their game by imitating them when she feels that stepping in will allow them to prolong their play and add more complexity. Her encouragement and congratulations are genuine. She specifically describes the attitudes and actions that she's praising, such as curiosity or perseverance, so that the children will understand why she is pleased. She knows that sprinkling expressions like "Bravo!" indiscriminately is not credible, even for very young children.***

***To help the four-year-olds in her group develop their confidence and self-esteem, Christine documents what they have learned. When she revisits their experience and refers to their creations, photos taken while they were working and notes she made on things they said, she is helping them to recognize their progress and the methods they chose to reach their goals. By conversing with their educator, the children become aware of their developing skills, and take their first steps toward the process of "metacognition," or reflecting on what they have learned.***

[Translation] "Self-esteem is a person's assessment of themselves and their value as a human being.[315]" It is [Translation] "an essential protective factor against a child's difficulties in learning and adaptation.[316]" It is built on the foundation of a child's self-confidence, and emerges after a child is capable of self-assessment. However, this self-assessment is largely based on how the child is seen by the adults who are significant to them. It is therefore essential that those adults understand how young children develop, so that they can have realistic expectations, provide the child with experiences that match their abilities and support their self-esteem.

Self-esteem continues to evolve throughout a person's life, and may vary by developmental domain. For example, a child may have high self-esteem regarding their social and relationship abilities, but a much lower assessment of their motor skills. Above all, good self-esteem entails having an accurate idea of one's strengths and difficulties.

Independence is closely connected to confidence and self-esteem. It [Translation] "refers to all the skills that the child develops to allow them to make choices and decisions, which helps them to become a confident, responsible person at ease in their own skin.[317]" [Translation] "When an adult allows a child the independence to explore, discover and learn on their own, that adult is helping the child to develop good self-esteem. The child learns through this experimentation that they are capable of reaching goals they set for themselves: turning onto their bellies, eating on their own, piling up blocks and, later, passing a tricky exam!"[318]

*Karim expresses his pleasure at spending time with the toddlers in his group in a variety of ways. With encouragement (for example, "Victoria, you almost made it up onto that bench! Try one more time!"), warm physical contact, smiles and complicit winks, he lets them know with certainty that he values their well-being.*

[Translation] "It is the adult's responsibility to ensure they do not give the child a negative self-image.[319]" ECSs should use positive reinforcement (using words, gaze or gestures to highlight efforts and successes) rather than punishment or consequences. It is also important to [Translation] "avoid negatively indicating behaviours and attitudes connected to development.

For example:

- Around 0 to 9 months: crying, shouting, wanting attention, etc.
- Around 9 to 18 months: digging, mispronouncing words, touching everything, etc.
- Around 18 to 36 months: saying "no," wanting to decide everything, yelling, etc.
- Around 3 to 6 years: making things up, inventing things, playing guns, etc.[320]"

### 5.4.3 Identity

Identity is how a child perceives themselves and can describe themselves to answer the question, "Who are you?" This identity is both individual (what makes me a unique individual) and social (what characteristics do I share with various groups).

[Translation] "Human beings are social creatures by nature. We need to belong to a group, rely on others, feel that we are part of a network of relationships.[321]" [Translation] "All our lives, [we] are divided, sometimes even torn, between two forms of recognition, both of them required to develop and maintain self-esteem: recognition of identity (our uniqueness) and recognition of conformity.[322]"

Identity has emotional and social aspects, but also a physical and motor component relating to the body schema and the image the child constructs of their own body. There is also a cognitive component, involving the knowledge and experiences the child uses to build their self-concept.[323]

[Translation] "Numerous researchers and philosophers have come to the same conclusion: identity is not static or fixed, but dynamic and multifaceted. It is an active process. it is never definitive, but is a personal fusion of past and future, fact and fiction, creatively reformulated within an ever-changing story.[324]" This perspective echoes that of humanistic psychology, one of the foundations of this program, which holds that human beings are capable of transformation.

## Personal identity

In the first months of life, an infant learns that they are a whole being, distinct from others. Little by little, a toddler becomes fully aware that they are a full-fledged individual, and tries to identify the characteristics that distinguish them from others.[325] Around the age of 2,[lvi] [Translation] "to make themselves heard (not to rebel against adults), a child seeks to master their environment by attempting to express choices and preferences, assert themselves and disagree.[326, 327]"

As a preschooler, around the age of 3 or 4, a young child describes themselves using concrete and observable characteristics associated with physical attributes (I have brown eyes), physical abilities and skills (I can jump really high and do somersaults), psychological traits (I'm always cheerful) and preferences (I love my dog).[328] This shows the importance of giving children the opportunity to make choices and encouraging them when they take initiative, because this is how they discover what they like and build their individual identity.

## Social identity

A young child's social identity is determined by the extent to which they see themselves as part of various groups: a family, an ECS group, boys or girls, etc. Social identity is closely connected to the child's feeling of belonging in these groups. They gradually integrate the culture of the groups, meaning the shared system of meaning that includes values, beliefs and ways of seeing things, expressed through daily interactions with language, behaviour, clothing, attitudes and practices.[329] Some authors[lvii] hold that it is primarily through this cultural transmission that a child develops and learns in all domains.




lvi Ages are given for reference only, since every child develops at their own pace.

lvii Here we are referencing in particular the work of Vygotsky and Bruner.

A young child is first and foremost part of a family whose traditions they take part in. Noémie's family organizes a big family get-together every winter for ice fishing; Jean's family celebrates every Friday with pizza; Kim's family prepares all kinds of food for Chinese New Year. A child's family uses a particular vocabulary at home, and sometimes a language other than English or French; some things are considered very important and others less so. For example, William's family celebrates Mother's Day in style, whereas Adèle's family considers it a holiday invented to sell things.

Children's family traditions vary in their similarity to the culture of their ECS. However, the child still needs to feel as if they belong to both their ECS and their family. Over time, they will also identify with a group of friends, a sports team or a profession, as they develop their feelings of belonging. An ECS must regard children's family traditions with full respect, even if those traditions are quite different from the culture of the ECS.

***The four-year-olds in Jollène's group showed great interest in business cards when she showed them the file folder she uses to collect their creations to show them to the staff of their future schools. Jean-Michel asked why there were four small slots in the folder's cover page. After the educator explained, he shouted, "We're going to kindergarten, so we're going to need business cards!" The idea spread rapidly to the other children. Their HECP is attentive to their suggestions, so she needed no further urging. She immediately started a project-based activity for the older children in the group to develop and print their own business cards. In doing this, Jollène is supporting the development of their identity as future schoolchildren and helping introduce them to writing.[330]***

Experiences that all human beings share can be used to help teach children about what we all share: we are all part of a family, we all grow up, prepare and eat meals, sleep, play, engage in hobbies, move around, celebrate occasions, etc. One way to begin is by showing interest in the different ways that children have encountered these shared experiences in their families.

Some children must adapt to diverse cultural contexts with greatly different values. For example, if a child comes from a family that highly values the interdependence that has enabled them to survive, they may have difficulty in an ECS that values independence more. If educators or HECPs act in partnership with parents, they will be able to discuss different values in play and mutually adjust.

***At home, Rachid is constantly held by the adults around him, in keeping with the customs of his family. At the ECS, he has great difficulty when his educator Dorothée puts him on the ground to take care of another child. Dorothée has spent a long time discussing the situation with Rachid's parents to figure out how to make the group context work for him without neglecting his needs. Gradually, both sides make changes in their interactions with the infant. Dorothée carries Rachid in a baby carrier when he arrives at the ECS, but she puts him down near his peers as soon as he shows interest in what they're doing or the toys they're playing with. Then, she continues to give him positive attention, using smiles and winks to let him know that she's available and attentive. At home, Rachid's parents have asked the members of their family to carry him around less, but to give him plenty of interaction when he's on the ground or in his chair.***

It is extremely important for young children to develop a sense of belonging to their ECS group. Rituals (a song to bring everyone together in the morning, a routine for calming down before naptime, a rallying cry at the end of outdoor play, etc.), a dedicated space for each child's belongings, the ability to participate in daily tasks and be entrusted with responsibilities, and collaborative experiences that need everyone's participation (parachute games, for example) help instill this sense of belonging. A positive atmosphere and a feeling of kindness and caring at an ECS, two ways of providing emotional support, will also help children feel as if they belong.

An ECS can also help a child's sense of belonging in their community by inviting community members to do activities with the children, providing opportunities for the children to visit age-appropriate places or stores that may interest them, welcoming adults to talk about the work they do, posting information about activities for families in the community, etc.

### Indigenous identity

Identity is especially important for the healthy development of Indigenous children, since community and feelings of belonging are central to their cultural beliefs.[331]



## Gender stereotypes: Obstacles to deconstruct

A stereotype is a preconceived idea, a belief that is wrongly attributed to an entire group of people. The gender stereotypes people attribute to boys and girls are not innate characteristics that the baby is born with; instead, they are constructed through the child's day-to-day interactions with the people around them. For example, there are still commonly held preconceived notions that girls are quiet and boys are turbulent, or that girls are more inclined to express themselves verbally and boys physically. Stereotypes accentuate the differences between genders and impose gender-based limitations on what a person should be able to do or think.

Some hypothesize that the differences in school success between boys and girls may be due to conforming to gender stereotypes. Expectations for girls are often based on the stereotyped characteristics attributed to them, which are ones that are conducive to language learning and the development of social skills. Boys, on the other hand, are expected to be less skilled in those domains, and those expectations can limit their opportunities to develop the necessary skills for adapting smoothly to school.[332]

To prevent stereotypes from affecting the education they give the children in their group, educators and HECPs should:

- Choose gender-neutral toys and supplies (avoid pink and purple toys aimed specifically at girls)
- Assign tasks and responsibilities without regard for traditional roles (for example, rotate tasks so that girls are also asked to move heavy objects and boys do cleaning)
- Provide positive reinforcement for characteristics and behaviours commonly attributed to the other gender (for example, mention boys' ability to concentrate and their language skills, or girls' physical strength and energy)
- Deconstruct gender stereotypes with children when they are relevant to situations encountered at the ECS (for example, help the children to think about the impacts of their attitudes when they refuse to let one of their peers join a game because of their gender)



*Marc is very proud to hear the children in his group stand up for their right to play any game, regardless of their gender, when they are outside with other children at the ECS. When he had to address the subject with them after a conflict in which the boys refused to let the girls into the construction games corner, he never imagined that soon the children would themselves be defending the right for boys and girls to have equal access to play.*

### 5.4.4 Emotional skills

Emotions are reactions to positive or negative experiences in everyday life. They have psychological and physiological characteristics, and often do not last long. Emotions give us information about our internal state and help us assess situations and events we encounter. For example, they give us information about what is going well, warn us of possible dangers, or tell us when we are uncomfortable. They identify to what extent our needs have been met (or not met). The emotions we feel are there to help us use and direct adaptation strategies and meet our own needs in both positive and negative situations. According to many researchers, [Translation] "the primary function of emotions is to signal to others, and to the child themselves, whether they should change or continue their current behaviour in order to reach a given objective.[333]"

Between 0 and 5 years, a child learns an enormous amount about emotions, both their own and those of others. Through contact with the people around them, a child gradually develops their ability to express, understand and regulate emotions. Emotional skills are important in their own right, but also help to ensure good social interactions through the use of specific skills like listening, cooperating, asking for help at the right times, joining ongoing interactions and negotiating.[334] A child's acquisition of these social skills is affected by their temperament and experiences.

#### Expressing emotions

A young child initially expresses and learns to identify the basic emotions: happiness, fear, disgust, anger, surprise and interest. As the child acquires the self-concept and becomes able to understand that they are a full-fledged being, they experience more complex emotions, such as discomfort and jealousy. When they are able to judge their actions according to the rules, standards and goals they are taught, they may feel embarrassment, shame, guilt or pride.[335] They also realize that sometimes they feel multiple emotions at once. They might feel both sad and angry, for example, when their educator or HECP is temporarily replaced by another.

[Translation] "Children must learn to communicate their emotions in accordance with the rules and conventions of their family or social groups […]"[336] For example, expressing anger at the behaviour of the adult who is taking care of them will not be welcomed in the same way that expressing joy at sharing a game with a peer is. Family culture deeply influences how a child learns to express their emotions.

Adult expectations about how a child will express emotions are sometimes stereotyped, that is, predetermined based on their gender, cultural origin or other characteristics. Educators and HECPs who are aware of this phenomenon can help children to develop a variety of emotional regulation strategies rather than strategies constrained by stereotypes.

For example, educators and HECPs can support the children in their group in expressing emotions by being attentive and sensitive to their experiences and needs, decoding their emotional states, drawing connections to emotions they have felt in the past, and naming their own emotions and expressing them in appropriate ways.

***Charlotte plays emotion-guessing games with the preschoolers in her group when there is a lull in the day's schedule. "I have tears in my eyes and my heart feels heavy. What feeling do you think I'm having?" "I want to yell, I'm frowning my forehead and my cheeks are red. What feeling do you think I'm having?" "Who wants to imitate an emotion?" "What do you think might have happened to make Daryll feel the way he's pretending to feel right now?"***

***The educator also reacts positively to children when she sees them observing their peers to decide how to react. "I see that you're waiting for Arthur to look at you so you can ask to play with him. Is that right? That's a great idea. He looks really interested in what he's building, he's really concentrating!"***

## Understanding emotions

Young children are seeking to understand their own behaviour and that of others. Emotions provide them with essential information for interpreting behaviours and guiding interactions.[337] Understanding emotions [Translation] "uses the child's ability to perceive, decode and interpret their own emotions and those of others. This also includes the ability to identify potential triggers and probable causes of emotional reactions.[338]"

A child first uses receptive vocabulary (the vocabulary that they understand) to associate a word they hear ("happy," for example) with their own feelings or a facial expression they observe. Gradually, a toddler learns to name the emotions they feel or observe in others. As with their overall language skills, their ability to understand emotion-related vocabulary outstrips their ability to produce that vocabulary.[339]

***Mélissa, an HECP, uses words to mirror the emotions of the infants in her group. She also exaggerates her facial expressions and adjusts her voice to reflect what an infant is experiencing. In doing so, she helps introduce them to emotional vocabulary, while also letting the infant know that she understands what they are feeling and is sensitive to it.***

***When Simon is doing interactive reading with the toddlers in his group, he asks the infants about the emotions they recognize on the faces of the characters. He also draws connections to situations they've encountered at the ECS or at home that inspire a similar emotion, helping the children to refer to their prior experiences for better understanding.***

Around the age of 4 or 5, a child begins to make cause-and-effect connections between situations and the emotions they inspire. These connections are also part of their cognitive development. Around the same age, the child comes to understand that memories can also lead to emotions. For example, a photograph of a pet who died some time ago can cause sadness.[340]

## Regulating emotions

Young children gradually move from emotional regulation (the ability, supported by adults, to deal with emotions and change them) to self-regulation (the ability to regulate their own emotions themselves).[341]

[Translation] "Emotional regulation must first be understood from the point of view of the individual who is managing their emotions, specifically in terms of their own ends.[342]" For example, a young child who deliberately uses yelling to get what they want is probably doing so because this strategy allows them to achieve their ends in certain situations, even though their ECS would not approve of it.

When an adult picks up a crying child to help calm them, distracts them from their anger at not being allowed to go outside by giving them an object to play with, or explains why they cannot climb onto the chest of drawers even if they find it a wonderfully exciting idea, the adult is helping them regulate their emotions.

A young child can manage their emotions by self-soothing. When Marion's parent leaves in the morning, and she comforts herself with her little blanket and stuffed animal, she is self-soothing. A child can also change how they are expressing an emotion. For example, they might smile in a situation that makes them anxious, in order to convince themselves and others that they are happy.[343]

Problem-solving strategies are often the basis for emotional regulation. A child might give up on their objective (stop trying to climb up the inside of the slide, for example), change their objective (choose another partner to play with), choose a new objective (join a group that's having a race) or change their interpretation of the situation's causes (telling themselves that they didn't want to slide, anyway!). Some children also try to change or avoid a situation in order to avoid overstimulating themselves. For example, Gilbert is sensitive to noise, so he turns off the sound of his audio device or moves away from the group when they start dancing.

The ability to resolve interpersonal problems is also a useful way to regulate emotions, since it enables the child to find compromises and different options. For example, when Marie-Claire realizes that she will have a hard time persuading her partner to let her be the one to play the good fairy, she suggests adding a princess to the scenario, since she will be happy to play that role. She could also have asked for an adult to help, acted aggressively or been more insistent. As these examples show, play provides rich opportunities for emotional self-regulation. Nonetheless, children will often need support throughout early childhood to develop these abilities.

It is important to remember to accept a child's emotions. Emotional regulation should not be taken to mean suppressing emotions or being silent about them.

### Educational intervention processes for supporting self-regulation

[Translation] "A child needs to love and be loved. If they're expressing themselves with disruptive behaviour, that's because there's something that they're having a hard time dealing with, even if it's just an excess of emotion, be it positive or negative.[344]" Such disruptive behaviour[lviii] might be due to a lack of knowledge (for example, not knowing how to react in a given situation) or a lack of ability (knowing what is expected, but not knowing what to do to meet those expectations). An educator or HECP can only conclude that a child is acting out of a desire to defy authority if they are completely certain that the child who is behaving disruptively knows what they should do and has demonstrated their ability to do it.[345]

An educational intervention process is essential support for a child who is having difficulties regulating their emotions (note that a shy or withdrawn child can also have difficulties regulating their emotions, even if their difficulty is less immediately apparent) or disruptive behaviour. Observing the child will shed light on what happens before the behaviour (its antecedents), the behaviour itself and its consequences for the child and others. Furthermore, these observations must be interpreted in light of the child's level of development.



### Self-regulating attention and behaviour as well

Regulation and self-regulation apply to attention and behaviours as well as to emotions. Just as children learn to use various strategies to deal with their emotions, they similarly become increasingly able to regulate their attention and their behaviour, first with adult assistance and then independently.



## 5.4.5 Social skills

Social skills are skills that children develop in order to build satisfying relationships with their peers and the adults around them. As a child acquires social skills, they become more easily able to adapt to the variety of situations that they encounter in life.[346]

A child's temperament, their image of themselves (self-concept), aspects of their personal and social identity and how they express, understand and regulate their emotions all play significant roles in the acquisition of social skills.

lviii A disruptive behaviour is repetitive and negative. It reveals a child's discomfort, a problematic situation or an unpleasant feeling.

## Awareness of others

From their earliest months of life, a child has behaviours that demonstrate an awareness that other people have their own thoughts. Gradually, the child develops what is called a "theory of mind" about these thoughts: [Translation] "a theory that explains how other people think and what they want or believe.[347]"

When a child seeks joint attention from an adult, for example by pointing to a desired object, it shows that the child is aware of a part of their mental state (i.e., attention) that can be focused on people and things.[348] A toddler gradually understands that their peers and the adults around them have different mental states from their own. Sometimes, they see things the toddler does not, feel emotions the toddler doesn't, etc.[349] Around the age of 2 or 3,[lix] a child starts to adapt how they play or speak based on the other children they are playing with. Around age 4, the child has fully acquired the ability to develop a theory of mind.[350]

The awareness that other people have thoughts, and that sometimes those thoughts diverge from one's own, is of critical importance to a young child's social development. It helps them to find solutions to interpersonal conflicts that account for another person's point of view, and paves the way for empathy, prosocial behaviour and working together.[351] Before they acquire this awareness, children commonly behave in ways that could be described as egocentric simply because they assume that others understand their intentions.[352] For example, when a conflict breaks out after three-year-old Alona flings herself into the pile of dead leaves that Gabriel had heaped up, she is unaware that Gabriel did not understand that she just wanted to join in the game.

Supporting a child in acquiring a theory of mind could take the form of asking questions and providing explanations about people's differing expectations, which are often the root of interpersonal conflict. Educators and HECPs can also act as models, verbalizing their understanding of children's emotional states.

## Social rules to live by

Along with the family home, a child's ECS is one of the first settings in which they learn society's rules of behaviour. In an ECS, children are gradually introduced to social conventions such as greetings and goodbyes, polite words like "please" and "thank you," taking turns when speaking, and so on. Other important attitudes and behaviours include respecting the supplies provided to them at the ECS, eco-friendly actions (such as reducing waste, reusing and recycling), helping each other and providing the mutual support necessary for group cohesion. It is important to draw attention to these attitudes and behaviours to help young children build healthy and respectful relationships with each other.

One useful way to organize group life at an ECS is to provide children with a limited number of instructions that are clear, concrete, consistent and positive ("Stay sitting down, please" rather than "Don't get up," for example, or "Draw on the paper" rather than "Don't draw on the table"). When these instructions are repeated regularly and applied consistently, they help young children understand what is expected of them. However, it is important to evaluate your instructions and expectations to make sure that, insofar as is possible, they do not make it harder for children to take initiative.

lix Ages are given for reference only, since every child develops at their own pace.

*Solange decided to talk with the four-year-olds in her group about what she expects in order to allow them to engage in play-fighting and chasing games at the ECS. She discussed the differences between a real fight and a game with them, and observed that the children knew how to differentiate between the two. The children also suggested that play battles should only be allowed outside, because of the noise it sometimes involves and the space it requires. Solange has had to give up on reserving certain time slots for this activity, since she sees that it doesn't hold the same appeal for all the children. Over the next few weeks, she watches the children attentively as they play-fight. She observes that they have established their own rules and are succeeding in following them most of the time.*

## Peer relations

[Translation] "Research has shown that not only are babies attracted to other babies, but that they need peers to develop social skills.[353]" Peer interactions (both positive and negative) before a child is old enough for school help them build skills for interacting with others.[354]

Even in their first few months of life, children are already interested in their peers. As we saw in the section on play, first they observe what their peers are doing, without trying to play together. Next, they imitate others at play and have fun playing in parallel. Toddlers sometimes show a marked preference for a particular other child in the group, associated with them based on shared characteristics or interests. [Translation] "To them, the most important parts of friendship are doing activities together, enjoying each other's company, helping each other and, to a lesser extent, living near each other, [etc.].[355]"

### Developing social skills through play

**"In the preschool years, peer play is a natural and dynamic context for reinforcing the acquisition of important social competencies in these children, and interventions that are interwoven within this context have emerged as the most effective means for improving the peer interactions of these children.[356]"**



"There are a number of emotional, cognitive and behavioural skills developed in the first two years of life that help promote positive peer relations. These include managing joint attention, regulating emotions, inhibiting impulses, imitating another child's actions, understanding cause-and-effect relationships, and developing language skills.[357]"

Children who show their discomfort in the form of aggression, hyperactivity or social withdrawal are often at higher risk of peer rejection.[358] It is important to guide them in regulating their behaviour to help lower the risk of such rejection. Some conflicts between children can also be prevented by various interventions and organizational approaches.

## Resolving interpersonal conflicts

[Translation] "In educational contexts, children frequently face conflicts with their peers.[359]" As their cognitive abilities grow, they build their social skills, including skills for conflict resolution, through rich interactions in diverse contexts.[360]

Adults can guide children in seeking solutions to interpersonal conflicts. Depending on the abilities of the children in their group, an educator or HECP might:

- Quickly demonstrate that they are attentive and available to respond to the situation, establish calming contact with the children involved and comfort them if needed
- Mediate in a way that is appropriate for the children's age, their skill at conflict resolution and the complexity of the conflict, if their help would be useful
- Make sure that each child involved gets a chance to explain their perspective and feelings
- Make sure the children are able to articulate solutions, or suggest some options for solutions
- Give the children the option of choosing a solution to the conflict that works for them
- Act as a model so the children understand the behaviour expected of them
- Support the children in putting their chosen solution(s) into practice[361]

## Prosocial behaviour

Starting around the age of 12 months, children develop the capacity to help others, and do so spontaneously in various situations.[362] This behaviour is not connected to adults' expectations or to a desire to look good.[363]

[Translation] "A child begins to demonstrate empathy starting around age 2. This empathy logically leads to prosocial behaviour, in the form of voluntary behaviours toward others intended to benefit those others.[364]" Prosocial behaviour includes helping, taking turns, sharing and comforting.[365]

In ECSs, the smallest interactions between educators or HECPs and children are suffused with important qualities like empathy and a sense of community.[366] Adults who care for children who show prosocial behaviour tend to have certain practices and traits in common: they have consistent expectations, act warmly and courteously, and automatically show their respect for everyone in the facility, including their colleagues, the parents and, most importantly, the young children in their group.[367]

*After Sylvain reads a piece written by Christine Schuhl, head editor of the French journal Les métiers de la petite enfance, about the "gentle violence" inflicted on children, he engages in some deep reflection on his own practices. He remembers situations in the course of his normal work at the ECS when he has spoken to a parent about their child in front of the child, without involving them in the conversation; overloaded the day's schedule and disrupted the flow of the children's day; touched children without informing them first; used joking nicknames that the children don't understand; etc. Now, Sylvain is sensitive to the negative messages that these apparently unremarkable little actions send to children. At the next team meeting, accordingly, he opens a discussion on the subject to help build a nurturing culture at his ECS.*

*Catherine's education was very authoritarian, and she knows that she has a tendency to copy that style when working with her group. She works to override her reflexes and, whenever possible, to use a democratic intervention style instead. She has come up with a system to assess how much she wants her children to follow her instructions. "Red" instructions are ones that children absolutely must follow to protect their health and safety. Red instructions include waiting for the signal to go outside, washing their hands, being quiet during naptime so as not to wake up others who are sleeping, etc. She gives children time to get used to "yellow" instructions, like "Put every toy and game away in its bin," "Raise your hand when you want to talk," and "Walk in single file in one line, please." "Green" instructions are those that she no longer uses in her interventions, because they aim to control the children rather than to meet their needs: "Wait silently until I come help you," for example.*

### 5.4.6 Executive function skills, creativity and social and emotional development

Social and emotional development is a developmental domain rich in opportunities to support young children's creativity and executive function skills. In the section on executive function skills, we saw that inhibition is part of self-regulating emotions. Tasks involving planning also use the ability to anticipate someone else's reactions, observe signs of their emotions and act in ways that will alter that emotional reaction. A child's mental flexibility helps them embrace unexpected solutions to interpersonal problems and conflicts. Working memory is used to follow instructions given by an educator or HECP.

Games in which an adult interacts with an infant seated in their lap (for example, making their hand into a spider coming to tickle the infant) help the child learn to anticipate what will happen next, which is the first step toward planning. Singing or chanting nursery rhymes that end with a big finish ("Clippity cloppity CLOP!") help children learn to inhibit their impulse to jump immediately to the most exiting part.

Make-believe games are especially useful for exploring emotions. Children can replay situations they have experienced and imitate behaviours using increasingly complex invented scenarios.

Social and emotional development should be addressed through activities that call upon children to express themselves and use creativity. Drawing reveals children's tastes, and that helps to build their identity. A child's progress in this developmental domain is easy to assess, and lends itself well to discussions with them about what they have learned. For example, a child might have started to use a variety of colours instead of only one, fill in shapes after drawing the outline, draw curves and zigzags and straight lines, etc. Drawing can also be a way for a child to spontaneously express certain emotions. "Do you want to draw how angry you feel? What colours would you pick for that?" This can be part of self-regulation.

When a child creates a collage with magazines, it gives him access to figurative representation and allows him to express his tastes and interests. Interactive reading time and creating stories are both great opportunities for discussing emotions with young children. Dance and music are also excellent ways for them to express their emotions.

### 5.4.7 How social and emotional development affects other developmental domains

**Social and emotional development affects:**

**Physical and motor development**, because it helps a child to take calculated risks, ask for help when necessary and develop appropriate attitudes toward their peers, including play partners.

**Cognitive development**, because it helps a child consider other points of view, recognize their errors in reasoning, choose another child's suggested solution if it is better than their own, persevere in a difficult cognitive task and feel confident in their ability to solve problems they encounter.

**Language development**, because it helps a child express themselves verbally without fear of ridicule and helps them put emotions, both their own and others', into words. When a child interacts with peers, they have a multitude of opportunities to speak, negotiate and learn and use new words.

### 5.4.8 Best practices for supporting social and emotional development

| In an ECS that supports young children's social and emotional development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| Educators and HECPs build meaningful emotional relationships with each child in their group. | "Hi Milène! You're here early this morning. I'm happy I get to spend a little time alone with you!" "Come here, Sabin, I'm going to pick you up. I can see that you're feeling really sad!" "Alejandro, let's go over to the bench so I can help you get dressed to go outside. Can you hold your hat, please?" "Even if it's very, very quiet, Marie, I'll be in the room the whole time you're napping, don't worry." "Sonia, you can move a little bit further away if you don't want to play with us. Just try not to make too much noise, okay?" |
| The ECS values diversity. | "We have a whole bunch of different instruments here that come from different countries. Have you heard a bongo before?" "Clara, you just got home from a trip you took to visit family. Let's look through the photos your daddy brought." "Zofia's mommy loaned us this wide belt for our make-believe area. It's so pretty! Zofia, can you show us how to wear it?" "Of course you can make two cards. One for each daddy." |
| Educators and HECPs support the children in their care in the development of their identities. | "You really love carrots, Kaya! I see how much you enjoy eating them." "Is that a new shirt? It's red, so you must have been the one to pick it out." "Hunting season has begun. Do you know people who go hunting?" "Is everyone here? It's time to come together! Good morning, everybody, let's start the day!" |

| In an ECS that supports young children's social and emotional development | |
|---|---|
| **What we see** | **What we hear** |
| Educators and HECPs use educational strategies that encourage young children to develop social and emotional skills. | "Ellie, hold on! I'm coming to help you two work this out." "When you have the talking stick, it's your turn to talk. But when you don't have it, it's important to listen." "I see that you're sad. You want to play with the figurines too. While you wait for your turn with them, do you want to read a story together?" "I really appreciate how you put everything away today." "Xavier, you can put the toys you're playing with into this box, so you can find them when you come back from the toilet." "Who has an idea for a story where somebody gets really, really mad?" |
| The facility is organized and supplies are chosen to support the social and emotional development of young children. For example, a cozy corner with soft toys, blankets and pillows is set aside so that children can withdraw to it when they feel the need. A rocking chair lets educators and HECPs rock the children. Photos of children's families are placed at child height along the wall, etc. | "Can you tell me about the people in your family? Who am I looking at in this photo?" "Andrelle, you can go to the cozy corner if you want. I think the pink elephant might help you find where your smile went." "I thought you might like to play hospital, since we've been talking about that a lot since Jeanny's little sister was born." "I see you noticed that the make-believe area has changed. You'll like the new things I put there, Nathan. There's everything you need to go fishing and camping!" |

## How's our ECS doing?

- What opportunities do children get to develop their personal identity?
- How do we encourage children to feel like they belong in the ECS and in their community?
- What more could we do to show that we value diversity?
- Do the children have enough opportunity to resolve interpersonal conflicts on their own?
- Do we use enough positive reinforcement?
- What things or situations are obstacles to a positive atmosphere in the groups?
- Does the concept of gentle violence resonate in our educational setting? What steps do we take to avoid doing this gentle violence to the children?

Throughout this chapter, we have seen that the various developmental domains influence each other, since child development is a holistic, integrated process. At various points, we have also discussed the fact that development is affected by both genetic factors and the child's experiences, and proceeds at a different pace for every individual. Given that, how do we determine whether a child's development is normal, or if they are delayed in a particular developmental domain?

The educational intervention process entails observing and planning, taking actions based on those observations and plans, and subsequently assessing those actions. As such, it is extremely useful for detecting when children at the ECS are having difficulties. Theoretical references such as continua of child development are especially helpful when analyzing observations. However, it is important to remember that testing, unlike initial detection of an issue, requires specialized knowledge that educators and HECPs generally do not possess.

When educators and HECPs implement measures to help a child in difficulty, and those measures are unsuccessful, they should be supported by their management, coordinating office for HECP or technical and pedagogical support officer. Working collaboratively with parents enables ECSs to get a better understanding of a child's difficulties and the situations in which they encounter them. If necessary, an ECS can help parents to get the services their child needs.

A child who has good overall development in early childhood, along with experiences that help them become familiar with school before attending one, is a child who has all the odds in their favour for a seamless educational transition and future school success. The transition between an ECS and school is a critical time for the child's future educational success, so ECSs, parents and schools should work together to make it as smooth and easy as possible.

# Conclusion

In this educational program, the child is considered to be the main actor of their own development. They explore their identity and develop their abilities primarily through play. It is important that, between the ages of 0 and 5, the child have varied experiences in every developmental domain, since each domain affects all the others and involves specific kinds of learning. Support for a child's overall development is a protective factor that increases the child's likelihood of school success later in life.

An ECS is a place that meets not only children's needs, but also the needs of their families. When there is genuine partnership, everyone's contributions are recognized and respected, and an ECS team can truly share the responsibilities of a child's first educators, their parents.

Educators and HECPs have a responsibility to nurture every child's natural curiosity, instill in them a love of learning and get them involved, since engagement is the foundation of efforts to learn. The program's educational interventions demand great sensitivity to a child's experiences and needs, what they are communicating and what they are currently learning.

*Meeting Early Childhood Needs* is not a collection of firm answers and fixed parameters. On the contrary, it invites people working in early childhood education to engage in ongoing reflection on young children, child development and how best to guide and support them throughout their time at an ECS. It is a helpful tool for the quality improvement process that the ECS network and its partners are already engaged in.





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# 2019 EDITION OF THE *MEETING EARLY CHILDHOOD NEEDS* EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

This educational program is a consensus based working instrument designed for educators and home educational childcare providers (HECPs). It is intended to enrich their educational practice in an ongoing fashion, and consequently to support the healthy development of young children.

This updated version incorporates the latest advances in early childhood research but remains consistent with the previous edition of the program.

In this edition, you will find:

- Expanded content
- New concepts
- Many example boxes, to provide a shared reference of situations encountered in an educational childcare service (ECS)
- Information boxes, to deepen the reader's understanding
- Reflective questioning boxes, to encourage educators and HECPs to critically examine their own practice

Uses of the program include:

- Reference framework
  - ✓ ECSs can draw on it when developing their own educational program, implementing the *Meeting Early Childhood Needs* program in ways that make sense for their particular facility.
- Training tool
  - ✓ It provides a shared foundation to build on when developing initial and continuous development training.
- Intervention tool
  - ✓ It lays out essential guidelines on relevant theory and important educational practices to support young children in their development.
- Management tool
  - ✓ It enables managers and administrators to base their decisions on criteria that are widely accepted in the field of early childhood education, both for decisions about applying their educational program and decisions about concrete investments in the educational quality of their ECS.

Enjoy!