

In Response to Consultations on the *Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program*

The *Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program* (Draft 2010) has been in draft form for the first two years of implementation of the Full Day Kindergarten program, during which time the Ministry of Education has been accepting informal feedback. This response is written as part of the formal two-part review process being conducted by the Ministry. Consultation feedback is being solicited from Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten (FDELK) teams, school administrators, parents and other stakeholders. For more information, please visit www.curriculum.org/edu/kindergarten (ID: survey2011 Password: kindergarten123)

This critical phase of reviewing and revising the *Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program* (Draft 2010) provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on the document's strengths and areas for improvement. Overall the program document has provided an important foundation and guidance to support FDELK educator teams in their new collaborative roles. The document builds on and brings together practices from the disciplines of education, and early childhood education.

There are a number of revisions proposed by the Ministry, based on their preliminary feedback. The purpose of this response is to highlight some key aspects.

Language:

The Ministry of Education proposes updating language in the document to ensure terminology and educational practices align with those in Early Childhood Educator (ECE) and Ontario teacher training programs. The Atkinson Centre strongly agrees with this strategy. Clear messaging and greater consistency throughout the document will reduce misunderstanding, and help promote further cohesion in the FDELK teams. One example noted by the Ministry is the interchangeable use of Early Learning Kindergarten (ELK), Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) and Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDELK) leads to confusion.

The Atkinson Centre recommends that the document's current terminology that appears to commodify children's learning be removed, and request that phrasing such as 'capitalize' and 'innovate' be replaced with terms such as 'encourage' or 'engage'.

The Learning Environment:

The learning environment is a core component of the Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program, and should therefore be a key element of each section. Consistent with the Ministry's current direction, the Atkinson Centre agrees that a section facilitating team reflection and discussion related to the learning environment would be beneficial. Aspects of the learning environment should be embedded throughout the document.

A positive socio-emotional learning environment is invaluable in supporting children's self-regulation. For example, environments that are noisy, excessively busy with colourful materials or an over-abundance of materials can be hyper-stimulating and frequently overwhelming for young children. Healthy, calm, environments promote improved self-regulation and support children's learning and development.

Contexts for Learning: Literacy and Numeracy

The Ministry has proposed that literacy and numeracy be embedded in all aspects of the program, and recommends a number of document revisions to communicate how FDELK teams may do this. While supporting the proposed integration of literacy and numeracy throughout the program, the Atkinson Centre wishes to ensure that a holistic approach to children's learning is emphasized throughout the document. For example, the importance of children's learning through play; the value of an inquiry-based approach; the significance of participatory and experiential learning; and the benefits of building on children's interests all support literacy and numeracy rather than a focus on following educator-led themes.

Finally, while the *Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program* promotes a universal approach to program implementation, it needs to emphasize that programs and pedagogical practice should reflect the diversity and individuality of the children, community, and FDELK team members. Images, illustrations and exemplars that portray effective practice are helpful tools to demonstrate how something may be done, but cannot be perceived as the best or only practice. The Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program provides an opportunity to develop a broader understanding of the complexity and richness of diversity and the need to embed learning experiences for children that are meaningful and connected to their everyday lives.

– Sinéad Rafferty, Atkinson Centre Intern

For more information on this topic, as well as about the Atkinson Centre, please visit:

www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson