

Intentional Thinking

A Note From Your Pedagogical Leader

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Hello Families,

Special points of interest:

- *We have hired a new Artist in the Centre!*
- *Processed-focused art experiences better support children's social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive development.*
- *Open-ended art experiences also give children the opportunity to predict, plan, and problem-solve.*

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Welcome to Intentional Thinking! This is a fairly new monthly publication put out by the CCLC's Pedagogical Leader. In case you missed the first few issues and have not yet met me, I have included some introductory information to fill you in.

In the fall of 2016, the Child Care and Learning Centre began developing a pedagogical leadership position— first as a pilot project and then as a permanent position in the winter of 2018. The first question most people ask is, "What is a Pedagogical Leader?". Pedagogy is the study of how learning takes place, including the philosophy and practices that support it (Coughlin & Baird, 2013). A Pedagogical Leader supports an early learning and care organization in developing their philosophy, knowledge, and practices related to early learning.

This position is an additional investment that the Centre has chosen to make to ensure that our early learning and care programs are of the

highest quality. Pedagogical Leaders are usually employees of larger organizations, such as municipalities, and tend to work in many different Centres at once. The CCLC's choice to employ its own dedicated Pedagogical Leader is a strong statement of its focus on quality.

Over the last two years in this position, I have been behind the scenes supporting many of the Centre's developments and initiatives. Within this role, I work closely with our Educators to support reflective practice, intentional choices, and ensure that we stay on the cutting edge of early learning. I also instruct the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition's third year undergraduate practicum course

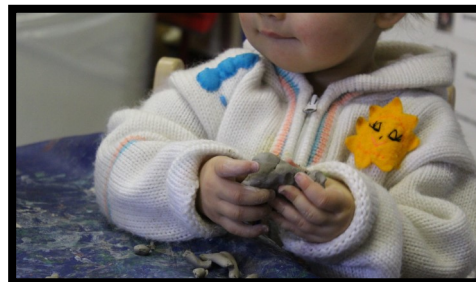
that is based in the CCLC.

At the CCLC, we recognize that partnerships with families have a tremendous impact on children's learning and development. My goal with this publication is to engage you as partners by helping to explain some of the choices our Educators are making within their programs and to share some of the research within the field of early learning that has influenced us.

I am always happy to connect with families, so please feel to reach out at anytime.

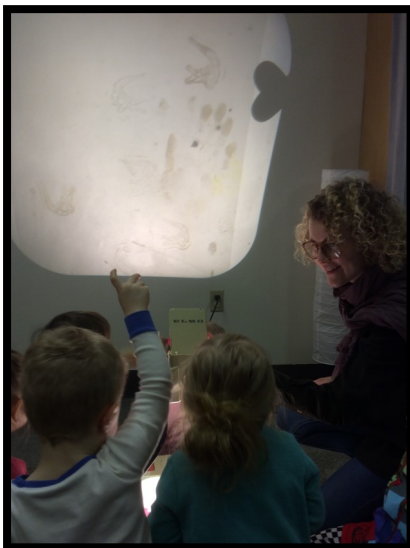
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Introducing our Artist in the Centre

Last year, Valerie, our Director, and I were fortunate enough to be able to attend the **Ontario Reggio Association's Canadian Study Tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy**. We were thrilled with the learning experience and opportunity to see the Reggio Emilia Approach in action. One aspect that we were particularly interested in was the idea of having trained artists within early learning settings, something that is a common practice in Reggio Emilia. While attending the study tour, we were able to see the positive and exciting addition that an artist could make within an early learning setting, particularly in the different perspective and specific studio art knowledge that they could bring. We realized that we had a wonderful opportunity to create a new connection within our University of Guelph community by offering a new Artist in the Centre position to a student within the School of Fine Art and Music. This position would allow us to have an expert within the Centre with specific Studio Art training and would offer a valuable experiential learning opportunity to an undergraduate student. Shortly into the Fall semester, we hired our first Artist in the Centre, Kathleen.



Kathleen comes to us in her last year of her undergraduate degree. She is completing a Bachelor of Applied Science in the Child, Youth and Family program with a minor in Study Art. She has interest in many art media and has most recently been exploring etching. Kathleen has been working in the Centre since the beginning of November and has been making many connections across the classrooms. It is very likely that your child's classroom has had contact with Kathleen in some way— perhaps you have even read some documentation about it! She has helped the materials within our Art Studio be brought to life within our classrooms and is currently engaged in explorations using clay, pastel, paint, and wire.



PROGRAMMING SPOTLIGHT

Process vs Product: The Importance of Quality Art Experiences in the Early Years

It is critical to incorporate the arts within early learning programs as they support children's development across many domains. Children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development are all supported through art experiences.

Creative experiences with children can typically be organized into two categories: process-focused or product-focused. *Process-focused art experiences* allow children to independently explore a variety of art media in a way that sparks their curiosity and wonder (e.g. exploring and creating with clay, setting up a variety of paints and paintbrushes at an easel with no directions, etc.). Alternatively, *product-focused art experiences* involve the creation of a specific product with art materials through teacher direction (e.g. a child creating a bus from specific cutouts supplied by the teacher). Process-focused art experiences are much more open-ended and, as such, offer many more opportunities for supporting children's learning and development (Bongiorno, 2014; Maynard & Ketter, 2015; Pelo, 2017).

Characteristics of Process-Focused Art Experiences


- There are no step-by-step instructions.
- There is no sample for children to follow.
- There is no right or wrong way to explore and create.
- The art is focused on the experience and on exploration of techniques, tools, and materials.
- The art is unique and original.
- The experience is relaxing or calming.
- The art is entirely the children's own.
- The art experience is a child's choice.
- Ideas are not readily available online.

Characteristics of Product-Focused Art Experiences

- Children have instructions to follow.
- The teacher created a sample for children to copy.
- There's a right and a wrong way to proceed.
- There's a finished product in mind.
- The children's finished art all looks very similar.
- The children may experience frustration.
- The teacher might "fix mistakes".
- The whole class or group of children took part in an art project at the same time.
- Patterns and examples are readily available online.

(Bongiorno, 2014)

In thinking about the experiences we want to provide the children within our early learning programs, we make an intentional effort at the CCLC to provide many more process-focused art experiences, as opposed to product-focused experiences. For example, you will frequently see the children openly exploring with a variety of art media. We want to provide children with experiences that will empower their natural curiosity, offer the freedom of self-expression, support the development of their confidence, and provide the chance to explore and experiment. These open-ended art experiences also encourage children to predict, plan, and problem-solve.



“In the early childhood classroom, educators and children gather around materials to investigate, negotiate, converse, and share. A block of clay, a brush, pots of paint, a brilliant sheet of paper, a heavy rectangular wooden block, a thin piece of willow charcoal—materials beckon and pull us in. They live, speak, gesture, and call to us. Materials can evoke memories, narrate stories, invite actions, and communicate ideas.”

(Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, & Kocher, 2017, p. 1)

To support this learning and development, we have been making an effort to expand the types of art materials we have available within our programs and are constantly considering new materials that could provide a more varied experience. Over the last couple of years, we have expanded our use of clay, oil pastels, soft pastels, watercolour paints, acrylic paints, wire, and charcoal. We have also looked beyond the materials typically used within early learning settings and invested in more artist-quality materials. We strongly believe that children are incredibly capable and deserve the proper tools to be able to express their ideas, thoughts, and opinions.



Tips for Providing More Process-Focused (Open-Ended) Art Experiences:

(Bongiorno, 2014)

- ⇒ Approach art like **open-ended play**—for example, provide a variety of materials and see what happens as the child leads the art experience.
- ⇒ Make art a **joyful experience**. Let children use more paint, more colors, and make more and more artwork!
- ⇒ Provide **plenty of time** for children to carry out their plans and explorations.
- ⇒ Let children come and go from their art **at will**.
- ⇒ **Notice and comment** on what you see: “Look at all the yellow dots you painted”.
- ⇒ Say **YES** to children’s ideas!
- ⇒ Offer new and **interesting materials**.
- ⇒ Play **music** in the background.
- ⇒ Take art materials **outside** in the natural light.
- ⇒ Remember that it’s the **children’s art**, not yours!