

Principals Want to Know

A tip sheet for principals that focuses on practical issues faced in schools.

Drawn from existing resources, these tips are designed to support instructional leadership practice.

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Supporting Educator Teams in Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK)

The Question:

“How do I support and reinforce the crucial elements of an effective FDK program: the knowledge, experience and collaboration of the members of the FDK educator team?”

The Answer:

There are five key elements to consider:

1. Vision for the FDK program;
2. Understanding the relationship;
3. Building the relationship
4. Effective communication; and
5. Managing conflict.

1. VISION FOR THE FDK PROGRAM

The model for FDK envisions a classroom where teachers and registered Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) collaborate to provide a well-designed learning program in a safe, inclusive and responsive environment. It recognizes that:

- FDK team members have complementary skills that create a nurturing and stimulating learning environment to support the unique needs of each child;
- ECEs have training in observing, planning and supporting early learning that promotes each child's physical, cognitive, language, emotional, social and creative development and well-being; and
- teachers have training in elementary curriculum, assessment, evaluation and reporting, and child development.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP

While recognizing that a positive and respectful working relationship cannot be codified or universally defined, the roles of the teacher and ECE in an FDK program have certain distinctions.



The legislation governing FDK programs states that teachers and ECEs have an obligation and a duty to cooperate in:

- planning and implementing the program;
- observing, monitoring and assessing the progress and development of the children;
- maintaining a healthy physical, emotional and social learning environment; and
- communicating with families.

What is most important in the relationship among the members of the FDK educator team is not the differences in the roles, but rather the similarities.

- While teachers have a legislative responsibility to report on children's learning, both ECEs and teachers contribute to assessment for, as, and of learning by facilitating experiences that are relevant and meaningful and promote healthy child development.
- While each FDK educator team will reflect the uniqueness of its members, the hallmark of all successful partnerships is an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and open communications.

3. BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP

ECs and teachers will have the benefit of a collaborative and complementary partnership to support children and families in a high-quality, intentional, play-based environment.

The Full-Day Early Learning - Kindergarten Program (Draft 2010-2011)

As educational leaders, school administrators have the ability to support and impact the success of FDK educator teams. Circumstances will vary from school board to school board, depending on varying collective agreements and working conditions, however the spirit of inclusion and invitation can guide the actions of school leaders.

Key strategies to support the development of a collaborative culture in FDK include:

- inviting the team to share information about their roles in the FDK program to help the broader school community become aware of the importance of FDK and this new working relationship;
- ensuring informal and formal discussions include both members of the FDK team and avoiding deference to any one member over another;
- welcoming ECs to participate in all after-school events, such as parents' orientation nights or open houses, while recognizing that there may be no requirement for them to attend; and
- learning more about the nature of a play/inquiry-based early learning program by being curious about how the educator team is creating the learning environment and program.

Ask about a particular learning centre or area, the examples of children's inquiry and learning that are posted around the room, the self-initiated projects and constructions that are underway from a standpoint of being truly interested in learning more about the nature of this new program.

4. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Through modelling effective communication regarding the FDK program, both internally and externally, school leaders can enhance and support relationships among educator team members. Some examples include:

- ensuring that email messages, memos and other communications about the FDK program go to all team members;
- listing all members of the FDK team in newsletters, staff lists and room name plates;
- recognizing and acknowledging the competencies attached to the professional designation of Early Childhood Educator in communication with all staff and the broader school community.

5. MANAGING CONFLICT

Members of the FDK educator team work in close proximity with each other, for extended periods of time, in an extremely busy learning environment; as such, there may be occasional conflicts.

School leaders know that trust and respect are essential to effective communication and conflict resolution. They play an essential role in helping to build that trust and opening up lines of communication to support educator teams in identifying and responding to conflicts as they arise.

Causes of conflict among FDK team members may include:

- different philosophies on approaches to a play-based program;
- varied understanding of the program expectations for FDK;
- concern regarding role differentiation; and/or
- fear of "doing things incorrectly" in implementing a new program.

Successful administrators are proactive in reducing conflict through:

- creating a collaborative culture in which conflict is accepted as a learning opportunity, where it can be openly discussed by those involved, where the goal is a two-sided "open to learning" conversation with a win-win outcome, and where support is readily available when needed; and
- ensuring the work environment is one in which the practice of both ECs and teachers is understood, valued and supported by the whole school community.

REFERENCES

Ontario Ministry of Education (2010). The Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program (Draft 2010 – 2011). Ontario: Queen's Printer.

RESOURCES:

For more information, please refer to *The Open-to-Learning Conversation Webcast* at <http://resources.curriculum.org/secretariat/leadership/>