



The Power of DECEs in Kindergarten

→ Valuing expertise in early years education

“Early childhood educators (ECEs) are trained in early childhood development. They understand and implement the kindergarten curriculum, focusing on age-appropriate planning that promotes each child’s physical, cognitive, language, emotional, social and creative development well-being.”

– Ontario Ministry of Education (ontario.ca/page/kindergarten)

Designated early childhood educators (DECEs) play a vital role in fostering young children’s development and enhancing the overall learning experience of Kindergarten.

DECEs enrich Kindergarten by providing specialized knowledge of early childhood development, developmentally appropriate practice, play- and inquiry-based learning, and social and emotional development to name just a few. As described in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s 2026 **Kindergarten curriculum** document: “Teachers and early childhood educators work together to plan and implement the program and to maintain a healthy physical, emotional, and social learning environment. They collaborate in observing, monitoring, and assessing the progress and development of the children in Kindergarten and in communicating with families.”

The qualities and skills that DECEs bring to Kindergarten assist in creating safe and nurturing classrooms where children can explore, grow, and flourish. Through their specialized knowledge and collaborative efforts with teachers, DECEs significantly contribute to creating a rich, supportive, and effective learning environment in Ontario’s Kindergarten classrooms.



Contributions of DECEs in Ontario Kindergarten Classrooms

Early childhood development – Early childhood educators have an extensive understanding of early childhood development, grounded in both theory and practice that allows them to create supportive, developmentally appropriate learning environments. Their expertise enables them to respond effectively to each child's unique needs, and to foster growth through intentional teaching and nurturing relationships

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) – DECEs use their expertise in child development to design age-appropriate learning experiences that inform each child's optimal development and learning. The DAP approach centres on creating a learning environment that is both stimulating and responsive to children, fostering their social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth.

Play- and inquiry-based learning – DECEs' nuanced understanding of the many ways that children learn and how this is revealed during play allows them to intentionally plan and design play-based learning opportunities, which are central to the Kindergarten program. This approach is foundational to the 2016 Kindergarten Program document, which emphasizes learning through relationships and inquiry. Additionally, DECEs adopt an inquiry stance of questioning and wondering alongside the children.

Social and emotional development – DECEs play a critical role in helping children develop social and emotional skills. They use their understanding of self-regulation to better understand the individual differences in children and respond accordingly. They support children's social and emotional development through documenting strategies, modelling problem-solving, and highlighting positive choices.

Observation and assessment – DECEs engage in meaningful assessment by observing, listening, and asking thoughtful questions to document and interpret each child's development and learning progress. These observations inform planning for learning and effective communication with parents.

Building strong relationships with families – DECEs are skilled at establishing positive relationships with families and developing a feeling of trust and collaboration. They engage in ongoing, regular communication to share their insights and to build meaningful partnerships with families.

Kindergarten is better thanks to the countless contributions of ETFO's DECEs!

Contact your local representative if you are unsure about any information contained in this document. Your collective agreement might also provide clarification.

