

Early Years Engage - Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) 2025-2026

Information Guide & Appendices

[Click here to jump to the Quality Improvement website](#)

Click **Appendix 1** to download a copy of the working / submission document

Preface

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager, Children’s Services plays an important role in supporting capacity building and quality improvement for the Early Years and Child Care (EYCC) System. Children’s Services has expanded support to the Early Years community as we continue the journey towards continuous quality improvement in Waterloo Region through Early Years Engage. Based on a Total Quality Management (TQM) model, together we will work toward continuous quality improvement in the early years system, to embed quality into all organizational practices, processes and outcomes, at both the system level and program level.

The Total Quality Management (TQM) model is comprised of the following key elements:

- Total** Quality Management involves everyone and all processes
 - Quality** The degree to which the service meets or exceeds children and families’ expectations
 - Management** How the organization will support staff to achieve expected outcomes and enhance their daily practice
- (Total + Quality + Management = Total Quality Management)**
- TQM** A way of thinking about continuously improving the quality of practice, processes and outcomes.

Source: European Public Administration Network, Common Assessment Framework

The Region of Waterloo recognizes that programs will be at different points as they continue on this quality journey, but that all programs¹ are moving in the same direction. “Our Vision for Quality in Waterloo Region” (“Our Vision”) 2017 used to guide the development of goals and work plans, remains an important resource for the Early Years Engage process.

The 2025-2026 Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQI), continues to focus on the [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#) six pedagogical approaches, and the system priorities identified in the [Region of Waterloo Children's Services - Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2022-2026](#) as the sector undergoes transformational changes.

¹ The Early Years Service System includes all Early Years programs and services that have a Service Agreement with Children's Services: licensed centre-based child care programs, licensed home-based child care agencies, special needs resourcing agencies (KidsAbility, KW Habilitation Services and Family and Children's Services), and in 2018, the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres

The Early Years Engage – CQI Plan is designed to strengthen the quality of the early years system by ensuring all programs are grounded in the six pedagogical approaches and a shared understanding of children, families, and educators.

“Continuous Quality Improvement is a process to ensure programs are systematically and intentionally improving services and increasing positive outcomes for the children and families they serve. Continuous Quality Improvement is a cyclical, data-driven process. It is proactive, not reactive. A Continuous Quality Improvement environment is one in which data is collected and used to make positive changes—even when things are going well—rather than waiting for something to go wrong and then fixing it.” Smith, 2013, p.1

In the Region of Waterloo's Children's Services System Plan, high quality programs include both structural and process quality, which are associated with immediate and long-term positive outcomes for children and supports consistency of quality across Early Years and Child Care programs.

Structural Quality Includes:

- Purposefully designed child-centered indoor and outdoor environments equipped with open-ended materials.
- Small group sizes for children and high educator to child ratios.
- Well trained Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs).
- Good working conditions for educators, resulting in low turnover.
- Educators regularly engage in continuous professional learning, reflective practice, and collaborative inquiry to expand their knowledge and skills and support continuous quality improvement.

Process Quality Includes:

- Cultivating authentic, caring and responsive relationships between children, educators, and families.
- Engaging children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry.
- Nurturing children's belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression every day.
- Supporting children's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development.

- Welcoming families and providing opportunities for meaningful participation.
- Recognizing and responding to diversity, inclusion, and equity.
- Educators are co-learners learning with and from children.
- Children’s learning and thinking is made visible.

The Early Years Engage - CQI team is invested and committed to building connected relationships with programs in moving quality forward. The Early Years Analyst will collaborate and engage in a variety of activities (i.e. reflective conversations, site visits, networking, sharing of resources etc.) to support your programs’ CQI Plan.

The Early Years Engage – CQI Plan invites you to re-imagine quality through the six pedagogical approaches as outlined on page 16 of *How Does Learning Happen?*

1. **Responsive Relationships** - Establishing positive, responsive adult-child relationships;
2. **Learning Through Exploration, Play, and Inquiry** - Providing inclusive learning environments and experiences that encourage exploration, play, and inquiry;
3. **Educators as Co-Learners** - Engaging as co-learners with children, families/caregivers, and others;
4. **Environment as Third Teacher** - Planning and creating environments as a “third teacher”;
5. **Pedagogical Documentation** - Using pedagogical documentation as a means to value, discuss and make learning visible;
6. **Reflective Practice and Collaborative Inquiry** - Participating in ongoing reflective practice and collaborative inquiry with others.

“Thinking about pedagogy provides a new way for educators to consider their work. It helps educators to:

- *Look more carefully at **what** they do each and every day;*
- *Think about the **why** of their practice;*
- *Understand more deeply **how** their actions have an impact on children and their families.”*

Guidelines for Completing your Early Years Engage - Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Plan

All educators are responsible to be committed, involved, and engaged in the CQI Plan (**See Appendix 1**). Educators develop and expand their practice by reflecting with other educators, children, and families about the children's growth, well-being, and learning.

For 2025-2026, programs are required to commit to **one** pedagogical approach from HDLH? on their CQI Plan. Based on feedback from the early year's community, we are continuing with **one** approach. This will provide an opportunity to continue to dig deeper into your program's chosen approach.

New: You are invited to reflect on the initiatives that have been rolled out in the community to support your pedagogical commitment and/or the actions taken towards your approach. Some of these initiatives include:

- Infant and Early Years Mental Health
- Rainbow Families Book Bundles
- Illuminating Care
- Creating a Culture of Reflective Practice
- Equity and Inclusion Policy and Commitment

Part 1 Begins on July 1st:

1. **Gather** evidence/data to support the creation of CQI Plan:
 - All educators **must** individually complete the **Accomplishments and Challenges Tool** that reflects on the six pedagogical approaches. This process may assist you in choosing your program's pedagogical approach (**See Appendix 2 - EYE Accomplishments and Challenges**)
 - Please **have these available** for your Early Years Analyst to see during site visits
 - Review your learnings from your 2024-2025 CQI Plan
 - Collect family / educator / child feedback (i.e. survey results, observations, conversations, and polls)
 - Collect information through self-selected assessment tools (**See Appendix 5 - Assessment Tools List**)
 - Collect any additional evidence; documentation, learning stories*, artwork, photographs, responses to reflective questions, staff meeting minutes, conversations and testimonials, etc.

2. As a team, **Share, Summarize and Reflect** on all the evidence/data gathered in Step 1 as they relate to the six pedagogical approaches. Resources to support this work are available in the appendices.

Why? - Think about the 'why' of your practice.

“A process of critical reflection, learning and growth is the basis of high-quality programs that continuously improve and create context that are meaningful for children and families/caregivers they serve.” (HDLH? p. 20)

- **See Appendix 3** - Self-Reflection Tool through the HDLH? Lens
 - **See Appendix 4** - Team Engagement Tips
3. As a team, **commit** to **one** pedagogical approach from HDLH? and select the approach from the drop-down menu on the CQI Plan.
 - Early Years Analysts invite programs to be reflective.
 - Share at least one piece of data (**evidence**) that supports the rationale for your pedagogical approach commitment.
 - Share **Why** this approach is important to the team's practice
 - Each pedagogical approach impacts other pieces of practice and the focus is really on HDLH? as a whole
 4. **Complete** Part 1 of the CQI Plan – this Submission should include:
 - Reflection to the **Why** question
 - The completed chart with all centre staff
 - Any **reflections** on the **actions taken**, up to this point

Submit Part 1 on or before **November 30, 2025**



Submit as WORD Document

Reminder: Please submit your CQI Plan to qualityinitiatives@regionofwaterloo.ca

Part 2 - The Journey Continues...to June 30

5. Early Years Engage invites the team to continue **tracking** their quality journey on **Appendix 1 - CQI Plan**, by **continuing to reflect** on their actions, learning activities and experiences.
6. **Continue** to collect supporting evidence; documentation, learning stories, art work, photographs, responses to reflective questions, staff meeting minutes, conversations and testimonials etc. as your work progresses to reflect and celebrate.
 - Save this evidence in your Early Years Engage Portfolio
 - Share this collection of evidence with your Early Years Analyst during visits
7. **Complete** Part 2 of the CQI Plan – this submission should include:
 - **Reflections** on the **actions taken** throughout the year
 - The completed **Reflective Summary**:
 - The “So What” and “Now What” reflection questions
 - A reflection question on how your program fosters reconciliation*, equity, diversity and inclusion
 - **Note: Not applicable to Indigenous-led organizations*
 - The completed chart with the names of all staff

Submit (Part 1 and) Part 2 on or before **June 30, 2026**.



Submit as WORD Document

Reminder: Your submission must be sent to qualityinitiatives@regionofwaterloo.ca

References:

Document Number: 4704594

Document Name: EYE CQI Plan - Full / Instructions and Appendices

Version: 3

References and additional resources on pedagogical approaches are available on the Ministry of Education website, at www.ontario.ca/edu or [How does learning happen: Ontario's pedagogy for the early years | ontario.ca](http://www.ontario.ca/edu/how-does-learning-happen)

The Region of Waterloo's Children's Services 2022-2026 EYCC Service System Plan can be found at <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regional-government/families-and-children.aspx>

Appendices:

[Appendix 1 - EYE Continuous Quality Improvement Plan \(CQIP\)](#)

Appendix 2 - The Accomplishments and Challenges Tool

Appendix 3 - Self-Reflection Tool through the HDLH? Lens

Appendix 4 - Team Engagement Tips

Appendix 5 - Program Self - Assessment Tools Options

Appendix 6 - Info Graphics

Appendix 2 - EYE Accomplishments and Challenges



EYE Accomplishments and Challenges Tool

Completion and submission of the EYE Accomplishments and Challenges Tool is **mandatory** for all early years professionals. It is designed to support engagement in reflective practice and collaborative inquiry. The data gathered from this tool will help to guide the Early Years at both a system and program level. Continuous learning and growth is important for early years professionals. Early Years Engage is a Continuous Quality Improvement Program that is centered on this belief. All professionals are invited to identify their accomplishments and challenges in relation to the six pedagogical approaches, as outlined in *How Does Learning Happen?* The six pedagogical approaches are summarized below based on key documents from the Early Years sector. It is suggested that this tool be completed independently by educators followed by a group dialogue during the planning phase of the Early Years Engage Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQI).

See Appendix 3: Self-Reflection Tool through the HDLH? Lens, this tool was designed by the PRC to support an individual reflection of the six pedagogical approaches in HDLH? and may be a helpful step in completing prior to the EYE Accomplishments and Challenges Tool.

- 1) **Responsive Relationships** – Strong, positive relationships contribute to healthy child development and are necessary for children’s well-being and learning. Educators also create and maintain positive relationships with families and educators to support the growth, well-being, and learning of children.
- 2) **Learning Through Exploration, Play, and Inquiry** – Programs are most effective when the content of learning is focused on supporting the development of strategies, dispositions, and skills for lifelong learning through exploration, play, and inquiry. Play and academic work are not distinct categories, when children are playing, they are learning.
- 3) **Educators as Co-Learners** – Educators today are moving from the role of “lead knower” to that of “lead learner” (Katz & Dack, 2012, p. 46). In this role, educators are able to learn more about themselves, the children, families, caregivers and others in the community as they learn *with* them and *from* them.
- 4) **Environment as Third Teacher** – The learning environment comprises not only the physical space and materials but also the social environment, the way in which time, space, and materials are used, and the ways in which elements such as sound and lighting influence the senses.
- 5) **Pedagogical Documentation** – The process of gathering and analysing evidence of learning to “make thinking and learning visible.” Pedagogical documentation is not about finding answers, but generating questions.
- 6) **Reflective Practice and Collaborative Inquiry** – Educators develop and expand their practice by reflecting independently and with other educators, children, and families about the children’s growth, well-being, and learning.

Directions: After completing the table below, circle which **one** approach stood out for you. Bring this information into the team CQI planning time discussion.

HDLH? PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES	ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/ AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT
Responsive Relationships		

HDLH? PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES	ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/ AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT
Learning Through Exploration, Play, and Inquiry		
Educators as Co-Learners		
Environment as Third Teacher		
Pedagogical Documentation		
Reflective Practice and Collaborative Inquiry		



Appendix 3 - Self-Reflection Tool through the HDLH? Lens

Self-Reflection Tool through the HDLH? Lens

Purpose: The Self-Reflection Tool through the HDLH? lens was designed by the PRC to support an individual reflection of the six pedagogical approaches in HDLH? This may be a helpful step before completing the EYE Accomplishments and Challenges Tool.

Directions:

1. Reflect on each of the six pedagogical approaches by reading through the statements listed below it. Imagine your early learning program, your environment and the people who are part of your organization’s community.
2. When you have read the statements in each pedagogical approach, rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 “needs improvement” and 5 “being excellent”.
 - a. The rating is only for you to see as this meant to be a personal self-reflection. Sharing your overall focus areas will help you and your team prepare a focus for the Early Years Engage – Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP).
3. NEXT STEPS - listed below the chart.

Six Pedagogical Approaches Reflection Statements	Self-Reflection Score 1-5
1) Establishing positive responsive adult-child relationships	
I get to the child’s level for face-to-face interactions	
I use a pleasant, calm voice and simple language while making eye contact	
I provide warm, responsive physical contact	
I follow the child’s lead and interest during play	
I help children understand my expectations by providing simple but clear explanations (not by directing)	
I take the time to engage children in the process of resolving problems and conflicts, rather than reiterating classroom rules	
When children’s behavior is challenging and disruptive, I think about where and how they might have more success and redirect them there	
I foster thoughtfulness and caring by listening to children and by encouraging them to listen to others and share ideas	
I am genuine in acknowledging children for their accomplishments and effort by clearly saying what it is they have done well	
Ministry of Education. (2013). <i>Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children</i> . Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer.	

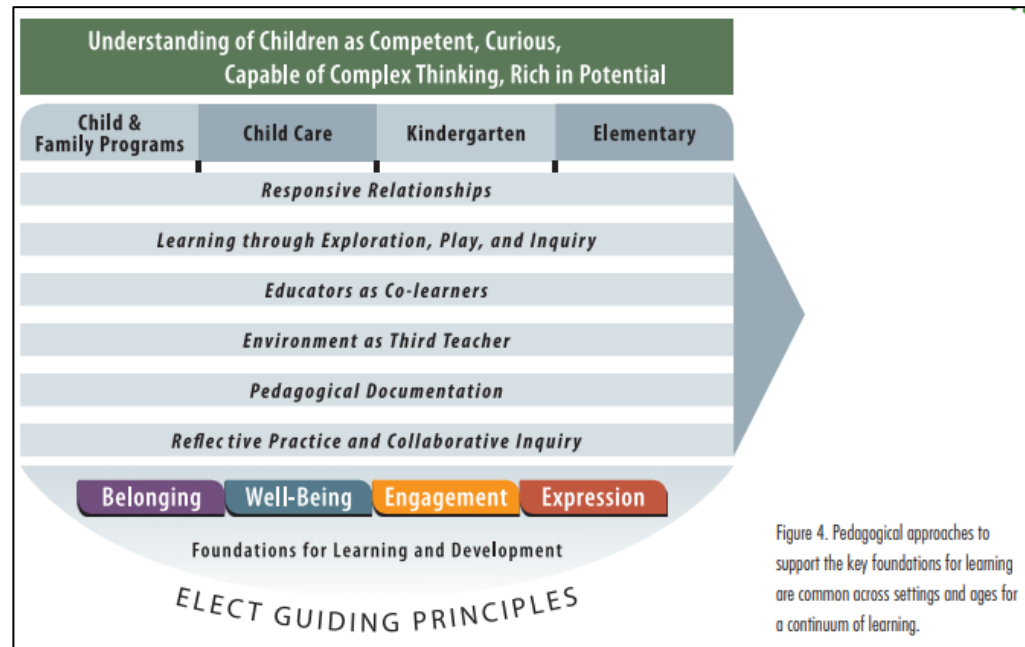
Six Pedagogical Approaches Reflection Statements	Self-Reflection Score 1-5
2) Providing inclusive learning environments and Experiences that encourage exploration, play and inquiry	Self-Reflection Score 1-5
All children are equally thriving	
Children have a chosen direction of activity or play	
Children able to engage in risk play	
I support risky play	
My program emphasizes exploration and play that engages the body, mind, and senses in both outdoor and indoor environments	
The environment is adjustable	
The children can engage in play for an extended period	
The material in my room is exciting, interesting and draws the children in	
I set up provocations for children that are exciting and interesting	
I use thought-provoking and open-ended questions	
The materials and experiences offered to children promote genuine creativity	
I share the individual program plans with all staff	
I follow the recommendations from resource consultants or therapists	
3) Engaging as co-learners with children, families/caregivers, and others	Self-Reflection Score 1-5
I believe children and families' ideas bring value to my program	
I use pedagogical documentation to share children's learning and seek out input and ideas from children, families, and colleagues at your program	
I communicate with families and invite their perspectives into the children's play and learning	
Children have the freedom and autonomy when expressing themselves and using creativity	
My relationships are consistently reciprocal	
I recognize how children communicate through their emotions and their play	
I listen to the children's words and actions	
I support children find the meaning and language for what they are doing, what they encounter and what they experience	
My team and I build on the unique characteristics of families and weave them into our program	
4) Planning and creating environments as a "third teacher"	Self-Reflection Score 1-5
I carefully consider the combination of materials you put out for children	
The materials that my team and I provide stimulate and foster children's sense of wonder and imagination	

Six Pedagogical Approaches Reflection Statements	Self-Reflection Score 1-5
The physical environment promotes a desire to learn or ask questions	
Any barriers that may exist, that are in the way of children's exploration are prevented and eliminated	
The materials are rotated when children become tired/bored of the materials in their play spaces	
The structure of the program (including routines and transitions) is set up to allow children to make choices	
I consider all families when designing my space, including adding material – honouring culture, diversity, and equity	
Children feel as though they belong in the space	
Children see themselves and their family's uniqueness in the space, including books, items on the walls, and items on the shelves	
5) Using pedagogical documentation used as a means to value, discuss, and make learning visible	Self-Reflection Score 1-5
Evidence of a learning process exists in the pedagogical documentation	
Documentation raises questions about children's thinking	
Documentation invites the reader into the children's thinking and theories they are developing	
Documentation is used to help deepen the learning and extend learning	
Our method of pedagogical documentation includes the process with a beginning, a middle and an end	
When doing pedagogical documentation, I include multiple perspectives (children, families, colleagues)	
Both myself and the children revisit the documentation often	
6) Reflective practice and collaborative inquiry	Self-Reflection Score 1-5
I often reflect on how I could improve my program (design, materials, curriculum, my relationships at work...)	
I am a curious person	
I often reflect on how I can create meaningful experiences for the children in my program	
I often wonder about what the children are thinking, what their big ideas are, what theories they are testing out	
I often find myself questioning the way things are done in my program	
I engage with others in critical reflection to make meaning out of children's behaviours, play, inquiry	
I am open and flexible	
I have a growth mindset	
I participate in professional learning opportunities by engaging in workshops, reading articles and books on pedagogy, listening to podcasts and engaging in important conversations about pedagogy	

NEXT STEPS:

Look at the far-right column. Which pedagogical approaches did you rate yourself the lowest in? What is something you could do to increase this number? Choose **one** pedagogical approach that you would like to improve on and share this information with your supervisor/team when creating the Early Years Engage – Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP). This information will help with your programs pedagogical focus selection. The CQI Plan is designed to be an emergent process where actions are completed throughout the year together with your team.

The Region of Waterloo, Children's Services would like to acknowledge the development of this self-assessment tool by the Professional Resource Centre to support the work of Early Years Engage.



Appendix 4 - Team Engagement Tip Sheet from the PRC

Team Engagement Tip Sheet

What is Team Engagement? Team engagement can be described as the level at which employees feel mentally and emotionally connected to their employers, co-workers, and organization.

<p style="text-align: center;">Promote Active Listening</p> <p>Back-to-Back Drawing. Split your group into pairs of "listeners" and "speakers". The speaker will draw an image and describe it to the listener to draw, but the listener cannot speak. The goal is to draw the same thing without seeing each other's paper!</p> <p>Active Listening. Use random materials found in your space, like chairs, bottles, or boxes, to create an obstacle course. Divide your group into pairs, with one partner blindfolded. The other partner must guide that person using only verbal instructions from one end of the course to the other without hitting any obstacles.</p> <p>The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace. Identify the five languages of appreciation to make your work environment more encouraging and productive. (Google Search)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Visions and Philosophies</p> <p>Determine Your Team Values. Have each person pick their top three values and explain why. Get inspired by new perspectives and learn more about your team members.</p> <p>16 Personalities. Take this short test to determine you and your teammate's personality types. Learn what drives, inspires, and worries different personalities and build more meaningful relationships with your team.</p> <p>https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test</p> <p>Make Up a Scenario. Create a scenario that your employees may encounter at work. Have your team describe how they would overcome any challenges or barriers they may face in the workplace.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Gathering Voice</p> <p>Successes, Challenges, and Wishes. Post some chart paper and ask your team to use sticky notes to write down things they feel are successes, something they find challenging, and what tools they wished they had to aid their role.</p> <p>Construct A Memory Wall. Share your favourite stories or memories using sticky notes to encourage engaging and authentic conversations.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Team Wellness</p> <p>Yoga or Mindfulness Session. Take a breather and practice some yoga or mindfulness exercises to support your team's overall well-being.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• https://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started/• https://www.mindfulleader.org/meditate-together• https://yogawithadriene.com/free-yoga-videos/

<p style="text-align: center;">Reflective Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What characteristics do you most admire about your co-workers? • How do you recognize when you are stressed? • What is one misunderstanding that has happened to your team recently? How was it resolved? • Think of the last meaningful “thank you” that you received. What was it? • Where, outside of work, do you get your best ideas? • How do you work together to build stronger team cohesion? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Staff Meeting Icebreakers</p> <p>The Perfect Square. Team members must work together to create a perfect square with a rope while completely blinded. Work together and use your communication skills to collaborate and have some fun!</p> <p>Shipwrecked. Imagine you and your team have crashed on a deserted island in the middle of the Pacific. You have just a few minutes to salvage some items from the wreckage before the whole plane burns down. What will your team choose?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Visionary Director: A Handbook for Dreaming, Organizing, and Improvising in Your Center (3rd ed.) - Written by Margie Carter, Luz Maria Casio, and Deb Curtis • Creating Communities in Early Years Settings - Written by Debbie Chalmers • Coaching with Powerful Interactions: A Guide for Partnering with Early Childhood Teachers - Written by Judy Jablon, Amy Laura Dombro, and Shaun Johnsen • Pathways to Constructivism: A Self-Directed Guide For Educators - Written by Ellen Jacobs, Goranka Vukelich, and Nina Howe • Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together, and Others Don’t - Written by Simon Sinek • Learning to Lead (2nd ed.) - Written by Debra Sullivan <p><i>The Region of Waterloo, Children’s Services would like to acknowledge the development of this Team Engagement Resource by the Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre to support the work of Early Years Engage.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Staff Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Another Webinar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tips to help educators identify and communicate their emotions ○ https://childrenandyouthplanningtable.ca/not-another-webinar/ • Educators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Practical resources to support mental health and well-being ○ https://smho-smso.ca/covid-19/educators/ • Practice Guidelines on Communication and Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contains information to assist in working through challenging conversations ○ https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/PG_Communication_and_Collaboration_Section1.pdf ○

Appendix 5 - Program Self-Assessment Tools Options



Is your program looking for an Assessment Tool to support your pedagogical inquiry? There are many options available.

One of the Quality Initiatives Early Years Analysts would be happy to assist you with selection and access.

Here is one tool that we have been reviewing. It is fully available online and available in both English and French.

Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI) (English and French) <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/community-partners/early-learning-child-care-partners/assessment-for-quality-improvement-aqi/>

Appendix 6 - EYE Info Graphics



The Total Quality Management (TQM) model is comprised of the following key elements:

Total	Quality Management involves everyone and all processes
Quality	The degree to which the service meets or exceeds children and families expectations
Management	How the organization will support staff to achieve expected outcomes and enhance their daily practice
(Total + Quality + Management = Total Quality Management)	
TQM	A way of thinking about continuously improving the quality of practice, processes and outcomes.



Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP)

Change and progress is viewed as a continuous cycle with four basic steps: Gather, Reflect, Commit and Action. The Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP) is a tool that supports EYCC programs to move forward together.

"Thinking about pedagogy provides a new way for educators to consider their work. It helps educators to:

- *Look more carefully at the **what** they do each and every day;*
- *Think about the **why** of their practice;*
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How Does Learning Happen?, p. 16.

